

# The Silver Door



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## MIDSUMMER DAY

**T**he sorcerer Olt was dead. The island of Dorne was free of his tyranny at last. As the sun rose on Midsummer Day, Oltan city seethed with rejoicing people. Olt's red banners lay trampled in the narrow streets. The dread stone fortress that for so long had glared over Oltan bay and out to the Sea of Serpents was a smoking ruin.

Olt had boasted that he would live forever, but Midsummer Eve had proved him wrong. Now, wild with relief and joy, most people were giving little thought to his other great boast — that his power threw a charmed circle around Dorne, protecting it from invasion by the Lord of Shadows in the west.

And Rye, the boy who had ended the tyrant's reign of terror, was not thinking of Olt at all. Invisible beneath a magic hood that concealed him and everyone he touched, Rye was slipping quietly out of the smoke-filled

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city. The three he had saved from a terrible death — his friend Sonia, his brother Dirk, and Dirk's sweetheart, Faene of Fleet — were by his side. His mind was fixed on home.

As the sun climbed higher and the hours passed, some drinkers in the packed taverns of Oltan began to wonder why Olt's conqueror had not yet appeared among them, to claim their thanks. Others thought they knew and, over brimming tankards, loudly shared their views with anyone who would listen.

The hero of Midsummer Eve, these wise ones said, was on his way back to the east coast of Dorne, to report the success of his mission. The east was wild and barren, but there, it was rumored, Olt's exiled younger brother had established a stronghold seven years before. If a boy with blazing red hair and magic at his command had not come from the exiles' camp, where had he come from?

So the wise ones said — with perfect confidence, too. They would have been astounded to learn that Rye and his companions were in fact moving swiftly toward Dorne's center, sped by a charmed ring, their goal an ancient walled city deep within the forbidden Fell Zone. The people of Oltan had never heard of Weld. They did not dream that any such place existed. As far as they knew, the dark forest at Dorne's heart sheltered only monstrous beasts and the strange, magic beings called Fellan, who were best left well alone.

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Only the four who had fled the city at first light could have told them differently, and it was far too late for that. By late morning, Rye, Sonia, Dirk, and Faene were already halfway to the Fell Zone and entering the deserted town of Fleet.

Rye, Dirk, and Sonia were anxious to reach the Fell Zone well before nightfall, but they had broken their journey for Faene's sake. Faene knew that her people had fled Dorne. She knew that her town had been abandoned. Still, she could not pass it without a glance. She wanted to visit her parents' grave. She wanted to say good-bye.

Fleet was a sad place now. A message of farewell had been scrawled on the sign that had once welcomed visitors. The horse fields were deserted. The graceful houses with their tall chimneys were closed and shuttered. The Fleet clinks, the little creatures whose ancestors had long ago hollowed out mighty rocks to make those chimneys, chattered in empty fireplaces, wondering where the people, and the people's tasty food scraps, had gone.

The courtyard garden in the Fleet guesthouse looked as peaceful as when Rye had first seen it. The bell tree in the center stretched its branches over Faene as she knelt by the long, flat stone that marked her parents' resting place.

As Rye gazed at the tree, pictures of home crowded his mind. His mother tending her beehives.

His brother Dirk, home from work on the Wall, shouting a greeting as he swung through the garden gate. His other brother Sholto in the house, bent over his books after a long day helping Tallus the healer. Himself, the youngest, yawning over schoolwork in the shade of the bell tree that all his life had marked the passing of the seasons with its blossoms, new leaves, golden fruit, bare brown branches . . .

That tree was gone — destroyed by the ravenous winged beasts called skimmers that flew over the Wall of Weld every night in summer, to hunt warm flesh.

Rye touched the sturdy stick he carried in his belt. It was all that remained of his family's bell tree — all that remained of his old life.

His eyes stung. Looking hastily away from the tree, he caught a glimpse of the kneeling Faene and blinked back his tears. What was he thinking of, giving way to self-pity when Faene had lost so much?

There was no point in mourning his old, safe Weld life. Like the family bell tree, that life was gone — and gone for good, unless the skimmer attacks could be stopped.

For seven long summers, Weld had been a place of fear. Thousands of people and animals had died. Homes and crops had been destroyed. And the Warden of Weld had been exposed as the timid, stubborn leader he was. Only after there had been riots had he acted, challenging Weld's heroes to go beyond the Wall and seek the Enemy who was sending the skimmers.

Hundreds of brave volunteers had answered the Warden's call and left the city. None had returned. All had been declared dead — including Dirk and Sholto.

*But I found Dirk, Rye thought, glancing at his brother, whose eyes were fixed on Faene. Now Dirk, Sonia, and I will find Sholto. And this time we will find the source of the skimmers as well.*

He pushed away the doubts that had begun to shadow his mind whenever he thought of Sholto. Since leaving Weld, he had not dreamed of Sholto once. And it had been his vivid dreams of both his brothers that had convinced him they were alive, somewhere outside the Wall.

*Sholto still lives, Rye told himself fiercely. Sholto is clever and as agile as Dirk is strong. It means nothing that I have not dreamed of him lately. My mind has been full of other things. So much has happened. . . .*

He raised his hand to the little brown bag hanging by its faded cord around his neck.

*We were given this in trust for you, the Fellan Edelle had said when she showed him the bag. It contains nine powers to aid you in your quest.*

Rye knew the Fellan had mistaken him for someone else, but by now, he felt no more than a tiny twinge of guilt for accepting the powers. Without them, he would never have been able to save Dirk, Sonia, and Faene. Fingering the bag, feeling the familiar tingling of the magic inside it, he thought about the powers he had discovered so far.

The crystal that gave light and also allowed him to see through solid objects. The horsehair ring for speed. The hood that made him invisible. The sea serpent scale that allowed him to swim in the roughest water . . .

Great powers, all of them — and only Rye could use them, though he could share them with anyone who touched him.

But what of the other charms in the bag — the red feather, the snail shell, the tiny golden key, the paper-wrapped sweet that smelled of honey? Rye still did not know what they could do. He had an idea about one of them, however, and if he was right . . .

“I wish you would tell me how you came by that sorcerer’s bag, Rye,” Dirk said quietly.

Rye jumped as his brother’s voice broke into his thoughts. Dirk had turned to look at him and was eyeing the brown bag uneasily.

“Why will you not tell me?” Dirk persisted. “Did you steal it?”

“Of course not!” Rye protested, feeling the heat rise into his face. “But I swore I would not tell how I came by it, and I cannot break my promise. It is like your being unable to tell Faene about Weld, Dirk, because of the volunteers’ oath of secrecy.”

Dirk frowned. It infuriated him that because of his oath to the Warden it had been left to Sonia to tell Faene about Weld, about the skimmers, about the three magic Doors — gold, silver, and wood — that were the only way through the Wall.

"I swore no oath," Sonia had said. "And even if I had, it would not have stopped me telling you, Faene. After all, we are *taking* you to Weld! It is absurd not to *talk* about it. But Dirk and Rye are very law-abiding. People in Weld are, you will find. They like to follow rules. It is very tedious."

Faene had smiled uncertainly. Her soft blue eyes were wide — and no wonder! Like the people of Oltan, Faene had thought that Dirk, Rye, and Sonia came from the exiles' secret camp in the east. She had been prepared to follow Dirk there. Now she found that his home was an old, forgotten city that could only be reached by traveling through the forbidden forest she had feared all her life.

"But — why do you have to go back into Weld at all?" she had asked. "Why not just begin your search for Sholto and the skimmers from here?"

Dirk sighed. "I considered that. But I wished to see you settled safely in the Keep of Weld before I left you again, Faene. And Rye has persuaded me —"

"The Doors are *magic*, Faene," Rye broke in as the young woman turned her reproachful blue gaze on him. "They could lead . . . anywhere. The golden Door led Dirk here. But I am certain that Sholto would have chosen the silver Door. So to be sure of picking up his trail, we must go through the silver Door ourselves. Do you see?"

Faene looked doubtful. She glanced at Sonia, who cheerfully proceeded to make things worse.

"Of course, we will have to keep our return

secret," Sonia said. "I cannot imagine what the Warden would do if he heard we had brought a stranger through the Wall! He thinks you are all barbarians out here — and everyone else in Weld thinks so, too."

She shrugged at Faene's startled expression. "Of course, we know better now," she went on. "But the Warden will not listen to us. And, more important, he would certainly forbid Rye and Dirk to leave Weld again. He is obsessed with safety and would not allow them to risk their lives a second time. So we will climb up the chimney from the Chamber of the Doors, and I will lead you to a safe hiding place."

"Chimney?" Faene repeated blankly. Dirk scowled at Sonia, who grinned, but wisely said no more.

Faene had been very quiet ever since that conversation, and Dirk, Rye knew, feared that she was changing her mind about going to Weld. Rye suspected, too, that the nearer to the Fell Zone they came, the more Dirk wondered if he should be asking Faene to face its terrors. Dirk's only weapon, the great skimmer hook he had brought from Weld, had been taken from him after his capture in Olt's fortress. He had learned to trust Rye's speed ring and concealing hood. But would they be enough to keep Faene safe?

Looking at his brother's worried face now, Rye was tempted to tell him that the Fell Zone might not be the problem they feared. But as he hesitated, Faene stood up from the grave, Dirk went to meet her, and the moment passed.

It was just as well, Rye thought, following them from the courtyard with Sonia. He had not tested his idea. For all he knew, it was quite wrong. It might have been cruel to raise Dirk's hopes.

As they left the guesthouse, Faene glanced around as if she was searching for something. But there was nothing out of place. Everything was clean and bare. Outside, the stream that ran by the road babbled and sang on its way to the coast. The sound seemed very loud in the silence.

Faene turned to Dirk, her eyes swimming with tears. "I thought they might have left a message for me," she murmured. "Just in case I returned . . ."

Dirk put his arm around her. "They thought you were dead, Faene."

She nodded and pressed her cheek to his shoulder.

Rye turned quickly away and pretended to be interested in the scrawl on the welcome board.



Rye grimaced. The words barely made sense. The untidy writing, with its jumble of large and small letters, looked like the work of an overexcited child.

It was strange. Everything else in the deserted town had been left in perfect order. This sign was the only jarring note.

Something occurred to him. He looked at the words again, more closely. Then he laughed aloud.

Faene's head jerked up. She stared at Rye in hurt confusion. "I am sorry," she said rather stiffly, wiping her eyes. "I am being foolish, I know. But —"

"No, Faene!" Rye cried, stabbing his finger at the board. "Look! Nanion and the others did not forget you. They *did* leave you a message! But they disguised it! They must have felt they had to, for safety. They did not know Olt would die! Read the capital letters — just those!"

Faene blinked at the board.

"F-A-E-N-E . . ." Her jaw dropped.

Dirk whooped. Sonia exclaimed and clapped her hands.

Faene's face was a picture of wondering joy.

"FAENE!" she read. "GO TO FITZFEE."