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Opening extract from

Scrivener's Moon

Written by

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SCRIVENER'S MOON

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SCHOLASTIC

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PROLOGUE



e forded the river as the daylight died and blundered into thick undergrowth between the birches on the far bank. Sobbing with fright and pain he raised his hand to his chest and felt the hard point of the arrow sticking out through his coat. He dared not look down for fear that the sight of it would make him faint, so he shut his eyes and took the bloodied wooden shaft in both hands, and snapped the head off. Pain knocked him to his knees. Groping behind him he found the feathered end of the arrow where it stuck out above his shoulder blade, braced himself, and wrenched it out. He ripped his handkerchief in half and crammed the pieces into the wounds.

He was a stranger in that country; an explorer; a scientist; a soldier of fortune. His name was Auric Godshawk. In years to come, when age had slowed him, he would be king of London, but on this night he was still in his prime; a strong Scriven male in his sixtieth year, the age hardly showing. That must be how he had survived the ambush, he thought. That must be how he had managed to escape into these woods. Black trees, grey sky, the first stars showing. Cold now the light was gone. He wished he'd brought a hat with him, or gloves. He supposed he had left them behind in the inn or camp or wherever it was that he had been when the ambush happened. His memory seemed to be missing vital chunks. He felt as weak as London wine,

and when he looked at his hands they did not seem to belong to him at all; frail, girlish things they seemed, turning blue where they were not crusted with his own blood.

Black trees and a starry sky and his feet crunching through the leaf-litter with sounds like someone munching on an apple. Great Scrivener, what would he not give for an apple?

Then he was lying on his side on the ground and he knew that if he did not rise and make himself go on he would lie there for ever, but he could not rise. He thought of London and his young daughter and wondered if she would ever know what had become of him and he said her name to the night, "Wavey, Wavey," until it made him start to cry.

And it was daylight, and the stink of mammoth was all about him as he opened his eyes. The animals stood around him like shaggy russet hills. Men moved between their tree-trunk legs. They were talking about him in words that he could not catch. He wondered if they were planning to save him or finish him, and he said, "Help me! I can pay you. . ."

One of the men drew a knife, but another stopped him and came and crouched at Godshawk's side. Not a man, he saw now, but a girl, with her long hair escaping in mammoth-coloured curls and tendrils from under her mammoth-fur hat. Weak as he was, Godshawk brightened. He had always had an eye for pretty girls.

"I am Auric Godshawk," he told her. "I am an important man among my people. Help me. . ."

*

He was lying among furs in a nomad tent, and nothing moved except the shadows on the low, curving roof. He was burning hot and he tried to push the furs off but the girl was there and she pulled them back over him and touched his forehead with her hand and held it there and it was so cool and she whispered things to him and the light of a woodstove was on her young face and in her red hair. He had seen her before. He remembered her sitting on a mammoth's back somewhere, watching as he went by.

He tried to speak to her, but she had gone, and now an ugly old man was leaning over him, chanting, singing, humming to himself as he made passes over Godshawk's face and body with a strange talisman of bones and birch-bark and scraps of age-old circuitry, jingling with little bells. He propped Godshawk on his side and scooped bitter-smelling slime out of an Ancient medicine bottle and smeared it into the wounds in his chest and his back and bound poultices of moss over them. *Your Ex-rays have come back from the Lab*, he chanted, and held up a sheet of mammoth-skin parchment so fine that the light of the fire shone through it, and Godshawk could see a childish skeleton drawn there, with red-topped pins stuck in to mark his wounds.

When he woke again the man was gone; the girl was back. He lay watching her. A tall girl, big-shouldered and broad across the hips, not a bit like the willow-slender, speckled Scriven women he liked, but her long autumn-coloured hair was lovely in the firelight and her eyes were very large and dark and she made him remember faintly a few of the pleasures of being alive.

He called and she came to him and when she leaned over the bed with the loose strands of her hair falling down across his face he said, “Kiss me, mammoth-girl. You’d not deny a last kiss to a dying man?”

Her smile was sweet and quirky. She stooped and touched her warm mouth quickly to his cheek. “You are *not* a dying man,” she said.

And he dozed in the warm gloom and dreamed of his daughter Wavey, but for some reason he saw her not as the little girl he’d left behind in London but as a woman nearly as old as him, and woke up weeping, and the girl was there with him again and held his hand.

“I dreamed of my daughter. . .” he tried to tell her. He could not explain. Everything was so strange. It was all sliding. His memories were as slippery as slabs of broken ice on a pond. Something was terribly wrong, and he had forgotten what it was. “My little girl. . .”

“Hush,” she said. “You’re feverish.”

For some reason that made him laugh. “Yes! I am feverish. . . I am *Feverish*. . .”

And it was night and he was alone and he needed to pee, so he clambered out from under the fur covers and the night air was cold on his bare skin and the embers in the woodstove glowed, and as he reached under the bed for the pot he saw a movement from the corner of his eye and looked up, and there was a girl in the shadows watching him.

She was not his mammoth-girl. In his confusion he thought for a moment that she was Wavey, and he started up, and she rose too, but as they walked towards each other he saw that she was a stranger;

a Scriven-looking girl, watching him with wide-set, mismatched eyes, one grey, the other brown. *Poor mite*, he thought, for she was a Blank; the Scrivener had put no markings on her flesh at all. There was an angry star-shaped scar above her breast and as she reached up to touch it he reached up too, in sympathy and understanding, and felt the same scar on his own flesh. Then lost memories started rushing past him like snow and he stretched out his fingers to the girl's face and touched only the cold surface of a looking glass.

His own numb fear looked back at him out of her widening eyes.

"No!" he shouted. They both shouted it; him and the girl in the mirror, but the only voice he heard was hers. "I am Auric Godshawk! I am *Godshawk*!"

But he wasn't. Godshawk had died a long time ago. What remained of him was just a ghost inhabiting the mind of this thin girl, his granddaughter. Her name, he suddenly recalled, was *Fever Crumb*.

And once he knew that, he could not stay. These thin young hands were not *his* hands; these eyes were not *his* eyes; this world was not *his* world any more. With a terrible sadness he let himself be folded down, like an immense and wonderful map being crumpled into an impossibly small ball, and packed away into the tiny machine that he had once planted, like a silver seed, among the roots of Fever's brain.

With his last thought, as he left her, he wondered what had brought her here, alone into the north-country with an arrow through her.

PART ONE

1

THE HOMECOMING OF FEVER CRUMB

10 Months Earlier



ever came home to London in a summer storm, her land-barge bowling up the Great South Road beneath a sky full of rainbows.

The city of her birth had changed in the two years that she had been away. Even the lands around it looked different. The woods which once crowded close on either side of the road had been felled, leaving nothing but grey stumps. New settlements had sprung up on the hillsides; loggers' camps and waystations for the ceaseless convoys of hoys and big-wheeled land-barges which carried timber, steel and pig iron north to London. So she was prepared to find the city altered, but her first sight of it, as her barge grumbled across the Brick Marsh causeways, was still a shock. She stood at the front of the open upper deck, gripping the handrail and squinting into the stormy sunlight and the sharp north wind. She could hardly believe her watering eyes.

The London she had known was gone. On Ludgate Hill most of the old familiar buildings still stood, but they looked odd and isolated, like the last trees of a slaughtered forest. Around the hill's foot, where slums and rookeries once raised their gambrel roofs, there now stretched empty lots, and tumbled mounds

of house-bricks, and rows and rows and rows of pale tents. All that remained of the vanished districts were their temples, like stony islands in a canvas sea, dwarfed by the immense new mills and factories whose chimneys filled the sky above the city with a stormcloud greater and darker than those which were gusting off Hamster's Heath. And even the factories seemed like toys compared with the new London, which squatted motionless and vast amid their smoke. Its immense chassis, broader than the biggest fleet of barges Fever had ever seen, rested on bank after bank of caterpillar tracks. Two decks or tiers of steel and timber were rising on its back, crammed with housing, bristling with cranes, stitched to the sky with scaffolding, the bright, white points of welders' torches shining amid the towering girderwork like daytime stars.

"The Lord Mayor's demolition gangs have spared the temples," said Fever's father, Dr Crumb. He stood beside her, holding an umbrella over them both and shouting to make himself heard above the hammering of the barge-engines and the hiss of the wind, which was starting to throw big, chilly raindrops in their faces. "He was afraid of stirring up religious trouble. But they will have to be torn down soon; there is wood and metal and salvage plastic in those buildings which the new city needs. . ."

Fever nodded, watching a last ray of sunlight strike the glittery thunderbolt which crowned the temple of the Thin White Duke. As an Engineer she had no time for London's silly gods and their temples, but she still felt sad that those great buildings, which had formed the skyline of her childhood, would soon be gone.

A gust blew Dr Crumb's umbrella inside out and he struggled with it for a moment, then turned away from the rail. "Come, Fever; the weather worsens; let us go inside. . ."

Reluctantly she followed him through the hatch and down the tight twist of wooden stairs. The barge was swaying and jolting as its huge wheels bumped down off the causeway's end on to London cobbles. Fever braced herself against its sudden movements without even noticing. She was used to land-barges. For two years she'd travelled as technician aboard one of them, a mobile theatre called *Persimmon's Electric Lyceum*. Right across Europa, all the way to the island city of Mayda . . . but she did not like thinking about Mayda.

Fever's mother, Wavey Godshawk, London's Chief Engineer, was waiting for them in the barge's comfortable cabin. Wavey was a Scriven; the last of that curious, mutant race, and the Scriven liked to stay inside when it was raining, like cats. "Fever," she purred, when her damp daughter came in, and she brushed Fever's face with her fingers. Fever hated being touched, but Wavey could not help herself; she loved touching the people she loved; stroking them, caressing them, patting them like pets. She wrapped her silky arms around Dr Crumb from behind and rested her long chin on the top of his head, and Fever stood beside them, and they all three stared out through the wet portholes, watching the water droplets wriggle this way and that like blind glass beetles, watching the new city shift and twist behind the rain.

The barge pulled past Ox-fart Circus, where Godshawk's Head had once stood: the giant sculpture

of Fever's Scriven grandfather, whose hollow interior had been home to Dr Crumb and London's other Engineers; the calm, safe home of Fever's childhood. Now there were only tents, and ranks of those crude, wheeled shelters which the northern nomads called *campavans*. But even with its buildings gone, London looked more orderly than it had when Fever saw it last. There was fresh lime scattered in the gutters, and wagons were ferrying waste and sewage to pits on the city's edge. Policemen wearing leather caps with big copper badges strolled in pairs between the tents, or stood directing traffic at the intersections.

They were needed, for on the rubble-paved roads which ran between the camps huge wagons and motorized drays were moving, and at one point the barge passed a line of laden mammoths, which distracted even Fever from staring at the new city for a moment. She had often heard of *Mammuthus novii*; the mighty Hairyphants of northern legend. Ancient texts spoke of mammoths as extinct, but there were whole herds of them in the north-country, so either the Ancients had been wrong, or they had found some way to make the creatures *un*-extinct again, or the mammoths of modern times were a mutation; a tribe of normal elephants in whom some old genetic switch had been tripped by the traumas of the Downsizing, causing them to grow once more those coats of shaggy auburn wool.

"Traders from the nomad lands, come south with tech or copper," her mother said, as Fever watched the animals go by. "London is like a newborn star; it draws in matter from all around. . ."

The barge went lumbering on up Ludgate Hill until it reached the summit, where the old mothballed fortress called the Barbican had once stood. A ramshackle, temporary-looking building made from wood and plastic sheeting sprawled in its place, thrusting out odd wings and annexes in all directions.

"What has happened to the Barbican?" asked Fever.

"Gone," said her mother cheerfully. "It forms part of the new city's Base Tier now."

"So is that big shed the Lord Mayor's palace?"

"Oh no. Quercus lives aboard the new London. That big shed is the new Engineerium."

"And is that where you and Dr Crumb live?"

"Good gods, no! Really, Fever, there would hardly be any point in my being Chief Engineer if I had to live in a *shed*, would there? I have requisitioned quarters for us nearby. . ."

The land-barge turned left on to the street called Bishopsgate and stopped there outside a tall, thin mansion which had once belonged to one of London's richest merchants. A Stalker on duty outside its red front door came smartly to attention as the barge ran out its gangplank and the Chief Engineer and her family disembarked. Servants came out with umbrellas to usher them inside and fetch their trunks and baggage from the barge. Fever found herself in a hexagonal hallway paved with Ancient eye-pods. Carpeted stairs ascended into the rain-coloured light from high windows.

"Welcome, Fever!" said her mother. "Welcome to your new home!"

*

Unlike London, Fever had hardly changed at all. She was a little tanned by the southern sun, but that was already fading. She had grown her honey-coloured hair, but it was pulled back into a bun as hard as a fist at the nape of her neck, so it did nothing to soften that bony, alien beauty. Her eyes, one brown and one grey, had seen foreign lands; her mouth had been kissed; her heart had been broken; but none of those things showed. Apart from the hair, the girl who stared out at her from the antique mirror in her new room was the same girl who had left London two years before. She was back where she had started, and not at all sure that she had the energy to start again.

Outside her window, despite the rain and fading light, the salvage gangs kept working. She studied the gaps between the buildings, half hoping to snatch another glimpse of the mammoths she had seen on the road, but they must be long gone by now; on their way home to their chilly northern hills. She watched a row of townhouses in Clerkenwell collapse into smudges of dust. From the new city came the sound of hammers, and from the door of her bedroom a sudden knocking. Too dazed to say, "Come in," she turned as the door was booted open. A boy in the white coat of an apprentice Engineer entered, carrying a pile of towels.

"Sorry," he said, seeing her there. "I thought you was downstairs, I never meant. . ."

His voice trailed away. He stared at her over the towels, and she remembered him staring at her once before, in a fogbound garden, a gun between them and him holding it. She did not know his name. He was the Skinner's boy. The last time they met, he had killed her.

“Go away!” she said loudly. She was not afraid of him exactly, but she was startled by how much he startled her. The boy took a step back, still holding the towels. There were footsteps on the stairs and Dr Crumb appeared in the doorway behind him, nervous as a bird.

“Oh, Fever, I should have warned you. This is Charley Shallow, my apprentice. I know, I, erm, well, that you two have met. . .”

“I was just bringing her some towels, like you asked,” said Charley, turning to Dr Crumb as if he’d been accused of something.

“Yes, Charley, quite. Thank you. I thought Fever was still downstairs with her mother. I’ll take those. . .”

Fever felt her ears turn red. She had been irrational. A glance at Charley Shallow should have told her that he had changed almost as much as London since she last saw him. He looked less like a boy, more like a young man. His hair was cropped as short as Dr Crumb’s. He had probably been trained in the ways of calmness and rational thought by the Guild of Engineers. “I was taken by surprise. . .” she said, waiting for her heartbeat to return to normal.

“My fault,” Dr Crumb said, manoeuvring Charley awkwardly out of the room. “I should have said something, I am sure I meant to, but. . .”

But how did you tell someone that the lad you’d taken on as your apprentice was the same one who had chased her through the Brick Marsh and shot her with a magnetic pistol? He bustled Charley down to the next landing and said again, “My fault, Charley, mine entirely. Even so, it might be best if we found you some

duties in the Engineerium. Fever has had a troubling time, and I don't wish to upset her. . ."

"You mean I have to move out?" asked Charley, looking as if he had just been slapped.

For a horrid moment Dr Crumb thought that the boy was going to burst into tears. He was an Engineer. He was not used to dealing with emotions. It had not occurred to him that Fever might be unhappy if she knew that Charley was living in the same house. It did not occur to him now that Charley might feel hard done by at being thrown out and made to go and share a draughty dormitory in the Engineerium with a half-dozen other apprentices. "Yes," he decided. "That would be best, I think. Gather your stuff, Charley; Fever can take over your duties here as soon as she has settled in."

And so, on the day that Fever came to her new home, Charley Shallow was cast out of it. Carrying his small trunk of belongings, he set off through the lashing grey rain, while the Stalker that guarded Wavey Godshawk's door watched him go with its unthinking, lamp-like eyes.