

But ever elusive . . .

"Where are we, witch?" Elhanan asked, his tone turning hostile.

"When we found your precious relic was out of our reach, my part of our bargain was fulfilled. Now you must honor yours."

"Not so, Thaldishman, the hand is not yet beyond our reach." She met his gaze gloatingly—she had yet another trick to play in this game.

"Come, you shall see . . ."

It is a search that will reveal sights strange and wondrous . . .

At this a stiff breeze suddenly came rushing up the stairs from below, passing next to the Thald where he stood at the door, his hair rustling as the draft sped by him. Faint clouds of dust were whipped up from the floor to swirl in the air as the murmuring wind spun about the room. Within a moment, the dust was settling back to the floor, the muttering currents of air stilled, as from its essence two beings took shape before the boat.

They both bore a semblance of humanity, yet the skin of one was white like chalk, and vaguely translucent, the hair upon its head swept back and constantly aflutter as though blown about in a ceaseless gale; while the other's skin was of a pale azure hue and was solid to the eye. Of hair the second being had none, but drifting lazily about its body was a cloudy mass which clung like clothing. Though the face of each was not unlike a young boy's in appearance, no obvious, outward indication of gender could be seen on either of the figures.

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Below them the landscape rushed by at a dizzying speed, they born aloft by the strong arms of the witch's familiars. Within minutes the rolling grasslands wherein Zenobia's tower stood were left behind, and the waving treetop expanses of forest marches were now passing by far beneath their keel, soon to be replaced by flat lowlands, and rocky cliffs and canyons thereafter. The roar of the wind stirred by such flight was thunder in their ears, and neither man nor woman sought to attempt