

"Now you are relearning. You are learning honesty. I'm sorry to punish you, Matty, but Village is a population of honest and decent people, and I want you to be one of us."

Matty had hung his head. "So you'll beat me?"

"No, your punishment will be no lessons today. You will help me in the garden instead of going to school."

It had seemed, to Matty then, a laughable punishment. Who wanted to go to school, anyway? Not him!

Yet, when he was deprived of it, and could hear the other children reciting and singing in the schoolhouse, he felt woefully lost. Gradually he had learned to change his behavior and to become one of Village's happy children, and soon a good student. Now half grown and soon to finish school, he slipped only occasionally into old bad habits and almost always caught himself when he did.

It bothered Matty greatly, now, having a secret.

Leader had summoned Matty for message-running.

Matty enjoyed going to Leader's homeplace, because of the stairs—others had stairs, though Matty and the blind man did not, but Leader's stairs were circular, which fascinated Matty, and he liked going up and down—and because of the books. Others had books, too. Matty had a few schoolbooks, and he often borrowed other books from the library so that he could read stories to the blind man in the evenings, a time they both enjoyed.

But Leader's homeplace, where he lived alone, had more books than Matty had ever seen in one place. The entire ground floor, except for the kitchen to one side, was lined with shelves, and the shelves were filled with volumes of every sort. Leader allowed Matty to lift down and look at any one he wanted. There were stories, of course, not unlike the ones he found in the library. There were history books as well, like those he studied at school, the best ones filled with maps that showed how the world had changed over centuries. Some books had shiny pages

that showed paintings of landscapes unlike anything Matty had ever seen, or of people costumed in odd ways, or of battles, and there were many quiet painted scenes of a woman holding a newborn child. Still others were written in languages from the past and from other places.

Leader laughed wryly when Matty had opened to a page and pointed to the unknown language. "It's called Greek," Leader said. "I can read a few words. But in the place of my childhood, we were not allowed to learn such things. So in my spare time, I have Mentor come and help me with languages. But . . ." Leader sighed. "I have so little spare time. Maybe when I'm old, I will sit here and study. I'd like that, I think."

Matty had replaced the book and run his hand gently over the leather bindings of the ones beside it.

"If you weren't allowed to learn," he asked, "why did they let you bring the books?"

Leader laughed. "You've seen the little sled," he said.

"In the Museum?"

"Yes. My vehicle of arrival. They've made such a thing of it, it's almost embarrassing. But it is true that I came on that sled. A desperate boy, half dead. No books! The books were brought to me later. I have never been as surprised in my life as I was the day those books arrived."

Matty had looked around at the thousands of books. In his own arms—and Matty was strong—he

could have carried no more than ten or twelve at a time.

"How did they come to you?"

"A river barge. Suddenly there it was. Huge wooden crates aboard, and each one filled with books. Until that time I had always been afraid. A year had passed. Then two. But I was still afraid; I thought they would still be looking for me, that I would be recaptured, put to death, because no one had ever fled my community successfully before.

"It was only when I saw the books that I knew that things had changed, that I was free, and that back there, where I had come from, they were rebuilding themselves into something better.

"The books were a kind of forgiveness, I think."

"So you could have gone back," Matty said. "Was it too late? Had Forest given you Warnings?"

"No. But why would I go back? I had found a home here, the way everyone has. That's why we have the Museum, Matty, to remind us of how we came, and why: to start fresh, and begin a new place from what we had learned and carried from the old."



Today Matty admired the books, as he always did in Leader's homeplace, but he didn't linger to touch or examine them. Nor did he stop to admire the staircase, with its intricate risers of crafted, polished wood that ascended in a circle to the next level.

When Leader called, "Up here, Matty," he bounded up the stairs to the second floor, into the spacious room where Leader lived and worked.

Leader was at his desk. He looked up from the papers in front of him and smiled at Matty. "How's the fishing?"

Matty shrugged and grinned. "Not too bad. Caught four yesterday."

Leader laid his pen aside and leaned back in his chair. "Tell me something, Matty. You and your friend are out there a lot, fishing. And you've been doing it for a long time—since you came to Village as a little boy. Isn't that so?"

"I don't remember exactly how long. I was only about this high when I came." Matty gestured with his hand, placing it level with the second button of his own shirt.

"Six years," Leader told him. "You arrived six years ago. So you've been fishing for all that time."

Matty nodded. But he stiffened. He was wary. It was too soon for his true name to be bestowed, he thought. Surely it was not going to be *Fisherman!* Was that why Leader had called him here?

Leader looked at him and began to laugh. "Relax, Matty! When you look like that, I can almost read your mind! Don't worry. It was only a question."

"A question about fishing. Fishing's a thing I do just to get food or to fool around. I don't want it to turn into something more." Matty liked that about Leader, that you could say what you wanted to him,

that you could tell him what you felt.

"I understand. You needn't worry about that. I was asking because I need to assess the food supply. Some are saying there are fewer fish than there once were. Look here, what I've been writing." He passed a paper over to Matty. There were columns of numbers, lists headed "Salmon" and "Trout."

Matty read the numbers and frowned. "It might be true," he said. "I remember at first I would pull fish after fish from the river. But you know what, Leader?"

"What?" Leader took the paper back from Matty and laid it with others on his desk.

"I was little then. And maybe you don't remember this, because you're older than I am . . ."

Leader smiled. "I'm still a young man, Matty. I remember being a boy." Matty thought he noticed a brief flicker of sadness in Leader's eyes, despite the warm smile. So many people in Village—including Matty—had sad memories of their childhoods.

"What I meant was, I remember all the fish, the feeling that they would never end. I felt that I could drop my line in again and again and again and there would always be fish. Now there aren't. But, Leader . . ."

Leader looked at him and waited.

"Things seem *more* when you're little. They seem bigger, and distances seem farther. The first time I came here through Forest? The journey seemed forever."

"It does take days, Matty, from where you started."

"Yes, I know. It still takes days. But now it doesn't seem as far or as long. Because I'm older, and bigger, and I've gone back and forth again and again, and I know the way, and I'm not scared. So it seems shorter."

Leader chuckled. "And the fish?"

"Well," Matty acknowledged, "there don't seem to be as many. But maybe it's just that I was a little boy back then, when the fish seemed endless."

Leader tapped the tip of his pen on the desk as he thought. "Maybe so," he said after a moment. He stood. From a table in the corner of the room he took a stack of folded papers.

"Messages?" Matty asked.

"Messages. I'm calling a meeting."

"About *fish*?"

"No. I wish it were just about fish. Fish would be easy."

Matty took the stack of message papers he would be delivering. Before he turned to the staircase to leave, he felt compelled to say, "Fish aren't ever easy. You have to use just the right bait, and know the right place to go, and then you have to pull the line up at just the right moment, because if you don't, the fish can wiggle right off your hook, and not everybody is good at it, and . . ."

He could hear Leader laughing, still, when he left.



It took Matty most of the day to deliver all of the messages. It wasn't a hard task. He liked the harder ones better, actually, when he was outfitted with food and a carrying pack and sent on long journeys through Forest. Although he hadn't been sent to it in almost two years, Matty especially liked trips that took him back to his former home, where he could greet his boyhood pals with a somewhat superior smile, and snub those who had been cruel to him in the past. His mother was dead, he had been told. His brother was still there, and looked at Matty with more respect than he ever had in the past, but they were strangers to each other now. The community where he had lived was greatly changed and seemed foreign, though less harsh than he remembered.

Today he simply made his way around Village, delivering notice of the meeting that would be held the following week. Reading the message himself, he could understand Leader's questioning about the supply of fish, and the concern and worry that Matty had felt from him.

There had been a petition—signed by a substantial number of people—to close Village to outsiders. There would have to be a debate, and a vote.

It had happened before, such a petition.

"We voted it down just a year ago," the blind man reminded Matty when the message had been read to him. "There must be a stronger movement now."

"There are still plenty of fish," Matty pointed out, "and the fields are full of crops."

The blind man crumpled the message and dropped it into the fire. "It's not the fish or crops," he said. "They'll use that, of course. They argued dwindling food supply last time. It's . . ."

"Not enough housing?"

"More than that. I can't think of the word for it. *Selfishness*, I guess. It's creeping in."

Matty was startled. Village had been created out of the opposite: selflessness. He knew that from his studies and from hearing the history. Everyone did.

"But in the message—I could have read it to you again if you hadn't burned it—it says that the group who wants to close the border is headed by Mentor! The schoolteacher!"

The blind man sighed. "Give the soup a stir, would you, Matty?"

Obediently Matty moved the wooden ladle around in the pot and watched beans and chopped tomatoes churn in the thick mixture as it simmered. Thinking still of his teacher, he added, "He's not selfish!"

"I know he isn't. That's why it's puzzling."

"He welcomes everyone to the school, even new ones who have no learning, who can't even speak properly."

"Like you, when you came," the blind man said with a smile. "It couldn't have been easy, but he taught you."

"He had to tame me first," Matty acknowledged, grinning. "I was wild, wasn't I?"

Seer nodded. "Wild. But Mentor loves teaching those who need it."

"Why would he want to close the border?"

"Matty?"

"What?"

"Has Mentor traded, do you know?"

Matty thought about it. "It's school vacation now, so I don't see him as often. But I stop by his homeplace now and then . . ." He didn't mention Jean, the widowed schoolteacher's daughter. "I haven't noticed anything different in his household."

"No Gaming Machine," he added, laughing a little.

But the blind man didn't chuckle in reply. He sat thinking for a moment. Then he said, in a worried voice, "It's much more than just a Gaming Machine."

"The schoolteacher's daughter told me that her dog has three puppies. I can have one when it's big enough, if I like."

"Isn't she the one who promised you a kiss? Now a dog as well? I'd settle for the kiss if I were you, Matty." The blind man smiled, loosened a beet from the earth, and placed it in the basket of vegetables. They were in the garden together.

"I miss my dog. He wasn't any trouble." Matty glanced over to the corner of their homeplace's plot of land, beyond the garden, to the small grave where they had buried Branch two years before.

"You're right, Matty. Your little dog was a good companion for many years. It would be fun to have a puppy around." The blind man's voice was gentle.

"I could train a dog to lead you."

"I don't need leading. Could you train a dog to cook?"

"Anything but beets," Matty said, making a face as he threw another into the basket.

But when he went in the afternoon to the schoolteacher's homeplace, Matty found Jean distraught. "Two died last night," she said. "They took sick. Now there's only one puppy left, and it's sick, and the mother as well."

"How have you tended them?"

Jean shook her head in despair. "Same as I would for my father or myself. Infusion of white willow bark. But the puppy's too little to drink, and the mother's too sick. She lapped a bit and then just put her head down."

"Will you take me to see them?"

Jean led him into the small house, and though he was concerned for the dogs, Matty found himself looking around as they walked through, remembering what the blind man had asked. He noticed the sturdy furniture, neatly arranged, and the bookcases filled with Mentor's books. In the kitchen, Jean's baking pans, and the bowls in which she mixed dough, were set out, ready for her wonderful breads to be made.

He saw nothing that hinted of a trade. Nothing silly like a Gaming Machine, nothing frivolous like the soft upholstered furniture decorated with fringe that a foolish young couple down the road had traded for.

Of course there were other kinds of trades, Matty knew, though he didn't fully understand. He had

heard murmurs about them. There were trades for things you didn't see. Those were the most dangerous trades.

"They're in here." Jean opened the door to the storage shed attached to the house at the back of the kitchen. Matty entered and knelt beside the mother dog where she lay on a folded blanket. The tiny puppy, motionless but for its labored breathing, lay in the curve of her belly, the way any puppy would. But a healthy pup would have been wiggling and sucking. This one should have been pawing at its mother for milk.

Matty knew dogs. He loved them. Gently he touched the puppy with his finger. Then, startled, he jerked his hand away. He had felt something painful.

Oddly, it made him think of lightning.

He remembered how he had been instructed, even as a small boy back in his old place, to go indoors during a thunderstorm. He had seen a tree split and blackened by a lightning strike, and he knew that it could happen to a human: the flash and the burning power that would surge through you, looking for a place to enter the earth.

He had watched through the window and seen great fiery bolts split the sky, and he had smelled the sulfurous smell that they sometimes left behind.

There was a man in Village, a farmer, who had stood in the field beside his plow, waiting as dark clouds gathered overhead, hoping the storm would pass by. The lightning had found him there, and

though the farmer had survived, he had lost all his memory but for the sensation of raw power that had entered him that afternoon. People tended him now, and he helped with farm chores, but his energy was gone, taken away by the mysterious energy that lived in lightning.

Matty had felt this sensation—the one of pulsating power, as if he had the power of lightning within his own self—in the clearing, on a sunny day with no storm brewing.

He had tried to put it out of his mind afterward, any thoughts of the day it had happened, because it frightened him so and made him have a secret, which he did not want. But Matty knew, pulling his hand from the ailing puppy, that it was time to test it once again.

"Where's your father?" he asked Jean. He wanted no one to watch.

"He had a meeting to go to. You know about the petition?"

Matty nodded. Good. The schoolteacher was not around.

"I don't think he really even cares about the meeting. He just wants to see Stocktender's widow. He's courting her." Jean spoke with affectionate amusement. "Can you imagine? Courting, at his age?"

He needed the girl to be gone. Matty thought. "I want you to go to Herbalist's. Get yarrow."

"I have yarrow in my own garden! Right beside the door!" Jean replied.

He didn't need yarrow, not really. He needed her *gone*. Matty thought quickly. "Spearmint? Lemon balm? Catnip? Do you have all of those?"

She shook her head. "No catnip. If cats were attracted to my garden, the dog would make a terrible fuss.

"Wouldn't you, poor thing?" she said sweetly, leaning down to murmur to the dying mother dog. She stroked the dog's back but it did not lift its head. Its eyes were beginning to glaze.

"Go," Matty told her in an urgent voice. "Get those things."

"Do you think they'll help?" Jean asked dubiously. She took her hand from the dog and stood, but she lingered.

"*Just go!*" Matty ordered.

"You needn't use a rude tone, Matty," Jean said with an edge in her voice. But she turned with a flounce of her skirt and went. He barely heard the sound of the door closing behind her. Steeling himself against the painful vibrating shock that he knew would go through his entire body, Matty placed his left hand on the mother dog, his right on the puppy, and willed them to live.



An hour later, Matty stumbled home, exhausted. Back at Mentor's house, Jean was feeding the

mother dog and giggling at the antics of the lively puppy.

"Who would have thought of that combination of herbs? Isn't it amazing!" she had said in delight, watching the creatures revive.

"Lucky guess." He let Jean believe it was the herbs. She was distracted by the sudden liveliness of the dogs and didn't even notice how weak Matty was. He sat leaning against the wall in the shed and watched her tend them. But his vision was slightly blurred and his whole body ached.

Finally, when he had regained a little strength, he forced himself to stand and leave. Fortunately his own homeplace was empty. The blind man was out somewhere, and Matty was glad of that. Seer would have noticed something wrong. He could always feel it. He said the atmosphere in the homeplace changed, as if wind had shifted, if Matty had so much as a cold.

And this was much more. He staggered into his room off the kitchen and lay down on his bed, breathing hard. Matty had never felt so weak, so drained. Except for the frog . . .

*The frog was smaller*, he thought. But it was the same thing.

He had come across the little frog by chance, in the clearing. He had no reason to be there that day; he had simply wanted to be alone, away from busy Village, and had gone into Forest to get away, as he did sometimes.



Barefoot, he had stepped on the frog, and was startled. "Sorry!" he had said playfully, and reached down to pick the little fellow up. "Are you all right? You should have hopped away when you heard me coming."

But the frog wasn't all right, and couldn't have escaped with a hop. It hadn't been Matty's light step that had injured it; he could see that right away. Some creature—Matty thought probably a fox or weasel—had inflicted a terrible wound upon the small green thing, and the frog was almost dead of it. One leg dangled, torn away from the body, held there only by an oozing bit of ragged tissue. In his hand, the frog drew a shuddering breath and then was still.

"Someone chewed you up and spit you out," Matty said. He was sympathetic but matter-of-fact. The hard life and quick death of Forest's creatures were everyday things. "Well," he said, "I'll give you a nice burial."

He knelt to dig out a spot with his hands in the mossy earth. But when he tried to set the little body down, he found that he was connected to it in a way that made no sense. A painful kind of power surged from his hand, flowing into the frog, and held them bound together.

Confused and alarmed, he tried to scrape the sticky body of the frog off his hand. But he couldn't. The vibrating pain held them connected. Then, after a moment, while Matty knelt, still mystified by what was happening, the frog's body twitched.

"So you're not dead. Get off of me, then." Now he was able to drop the frog to the ground. The stab of pain eased.

"What was that all about?" Matty found himself talking to the frog as if it might be able to reply. "I thought you were dead, but you weren't. You're going to lose your leg, though. And your hopping days are over. I'm sorry for that."

He stood and looked down at the impassive frog. *Churrump*. Its throat made the sound.

"Yes. I agree. Same to you." Matty turned to leave. *Churrump*.

The sound compelled him to go back and to kneel again. The frog's wide-open eyes, which had been glazed with death only a few moments before, were now clear and alert. It stared at Matty.

"Look, I'm going to put you over here in the ferns, because if you stay in the open, some other creature will come along and gobble you up. You have a big disadvantage now, not being able to hop away. You'll have to learn to hide."

He picked up the frog and carried it to the thicket of high ferns. "If I had my knife with me," he told it, "I'd probably just slice through those threads that are holding your leg. Then maybe you could heal more quickly. As it is, you'll be dragging that leg around and it will burden you. But there's nothing I can do."

He leaned down to turn it loose, still thinking about how best to help it. "Maybe I can find a sharp rock and slice through. It's just a tiny bit of flesh and

it probably wouldn't even pain you if I did it.

"You stay right here," Matty commanded, and placed the frog on the earth beside the ferns. *As if it could hop*, he thought.

Back at the edge of the small stream he had crossed, Matty found what he needed as a tool: a bit of rock with a sharp edge. He took it back to where the wounded frog lay, immobilized by its wound.

"Now," Matty told the frog, "don't be scared. I'm going to spread you out a bit and then carefully cut that dead leg away. It's the best thing for you." He turned the frog onto its back and touched the shredded leg, meaning to arrange it in a way that would make the amputation simple and fast. There were only a few sticky strands of flesh to slice through.

But he felt a sudden jolt of painful energy enter his arm, concentrated in his fingertips. Matty was unable to move. His hand grasped the nearly severed leg and he could feel his own blood moving through its vessels. His pulse thrummed and he could hear the sound of it.

Terrified, Matty held his breath for what seemed forever. Then it all stopped. The thing that had happened ended. He lifted his hand tentatively from the wounded frog.

*Churrump.*

*Churrump.*

"I'm leaving now. I don't know what happened, but I'm leaving now." He dropped the sharp rock and tried to rise, but his knees were weak and he felt

dizzy and sick. Still kneeling beside the frog, Matty took a few long breaths, trying to get his strength again so that he could flee.

*Churrump.*

"Stop it. I don't want to hear that."

As if it understood what Matty had said, the frog turned, flopping itself over from its belly-up position, and moved toward the ferns. But it was not dragging a useless leg. Both legs were moving—awkwardly, to be sure, but the frog was propelling itself with both legs. It disappeared into the clump of quivering ferns.

After a moment Matty was able to stand. Desperately tired, he had made his way out of Forest and stumbled home.



Now, lying on his bed, he felt the same exhaustion, magnified. His arms ached. Matty thought about what had happened. *The frog was very small. This was two dogs.*

This was bigger.

*I must learn to control it*, Matty told himself.

Then, surprisingly, he began to cry. Matty had a boyish pride in the fact that he never cried. But now he wept, and it felt as if the tears were cleansing him, as if his body needed to empty itself. Tears ran down his cheeks.

Finally, shuddering with exhaustion, he wiped his eyes, turned on his side, and slept, though it was still

midday. The sun was high in the sky over Village. Matty dreamed of vague, frightening things connected to pain, and his body was tense even as he slept. Then his dream changed. His muscles relaxed and he became serene in his sleep. He was dreaming now of healed wounds, new life, and calm.

## 6

“New ones coming! And there’s a pretty girl among them!”

Ramon called to Matty but didn’t stop. He was hurrying past, eager to get to Village’s entrance place, where new ones always came in. There was, in fact, a Welcome sign there, though many new ones, they had discovered, could not read. Matty had been one of those. The word welcome had meant nothing to him then.

“I saw it but couldn’t read it,” he had said to Seer once, “and you could have read it but you couldn’t see it.”

“We’re quite a pair, aren’t we? No wonder we get along so well together.” The blind man had laughed.

“May I go? I’m almost done here.” When Ramon ran past and called to them, Matty and the blind man had been clearing out the garden, pulling up the last of the overgrown pea vines. Their season was long past. Soon summer would end. They would be storing the root vegetables soon.

“Yes, of course. I’ll go, too. It’s important to welcome them.”

They wiped their dirty hands quickly and left the garden, closing the gate behind them and following the same path Ramon had rushed along. The entrance was not far, and the new ones were gathered there. In the past, new ones had mostly arrived alone or in pairs, but now they seemed to come in groups: whole families, often, looking tired, for they had come great distances, and frightened, because they had left fearsome things behind and usually their escape had been dangerous and terrifying. But always they were hopeful, too, and clearly relieved to be greeted by the smiles. The people of Village prided themselves on the welcome, many of them leaving their regular work to go and be part of it.

Frequently the new ones were damaged. They hobbled on canes or were ill. Sometimes they were disfigured by wounds or simply because they had been born that way. Some were orphans. All of them were welcomed.

Matty joined the crowded semicircle and smiled encouragingly at the new ones as the greeters took their names, one by one, and assigned them to helpers who would lead them to their living spaces and help them settle in. He thought he saw the girl Ramon had mentioned, a thin but lovely girl about their age. Her face was dirty and her hair uncombed. She held the hand of a younger child whose eyes were thick with yellow mucus; it was a common ailment of new ones, quickly healed with herbal mixtures. He could tell that the girl was worried for the child,

and he tried to smile at her in a way that was reassuring.

There were more than usual this time. "It's a big group," Matty whispered to the blind man.

"Yes, I can hear that it is. I wonder if somehow they have begun to hear rumors that we may close."

As he spoke, they both heard something and turned. Approaching the welcoming entrance and the busy processing of the new ones, a small group of people Matty recognized—with Mentor leading them—came forward, chanting, "Close. Close. No more. No more."

The welcoming group was uncertain how to react. They continued to smile at the new ones and to reach forward to take their hands. But the chant made everyone uncomfortable.

Finally, in the confusion, Leader appeared. Someone had sent for him, apparently. The crowd parted to allow him through and the chanters fell silent.

Leader's voice was, as always, calm. He spoke first to the new ones, welcoming them. He would have done this later in the day, after they had been fed and settled. But now, instead of waiting, he reassured them briefly.

"We were all of us new ones once," he said with a smile, "except for the youngsters who have been born here.

"We know what you have been through.

"You will no longer be hungry. You will no longer

live under unfair rule. You will never be persecuted again.

"We are honored to have you among us. Welcome to your new home. Welcome to Village."

He turned to the greeters and said, "Do the processing later. They are tired. Take them to their living spaces so they can have baths and food. Let them rest for a while."

The greeters encircled the new ones and led them away.

Then Leader turned to those who remained. "Thank you, those of you who came to give welcome. It is one of the most important things we do in Village.

"Those of you who object? Mentor? You and the others?" He looked at the small group of dissenters. "You have that right, as you know. The right to dissent is one of our most important freedoms here.

"But the meeting is in four days. Let me suggest that instead of worrying and frightening these new ones, who have just come and are weary and confused, let us wait and see what the meeting decides.

"Even those of you who want to close Village to new ones—even you value the peace and kindness we have always embraced here. Mentor? You seem to be leading this. What do you say?"

Matty turned to look at Mentor, the teacher who meant so much to him. Mentor was thinking,

and Matty was accustomed to seeing him deep in thought, for it was part of his classroom demeanor. He always thought over each question carefully, even the most foolish question from the youngest student.

Odd, Matty thought. The birthmark across Mentor's cheek seemed lighter. Ordinarily it was a deep red. Now it seemed merely pink, as if it were fading. But it was late summer. Probably, Matty decided, Mentor's skin had been tanned by the sun, as his own was; and this made the birthmark less visible.

Still, Matty was uneasy. Something *else* was different today about Mentor. He couldn't name the difference, not really. Was it that Mentor seemed slightly *taller*? How strange that would be, Matty thought. But the teacher had always walked with a bit of a stoop. His shoulders were hunched over. People said that he had aged terribly after his beloved wife's death, when Jean was just a small child. Sadness had done it.

Today he stood erect and his shoulders were straight. So he *seemed* taller, but wasn't, Matty decided with relief. It was simply a changed posture.

"Yes," Mentor said to Leader, "we will see what the meeting decides."

His voice sounded different, Matty noticed.

He saw that Leader, too, was noticing something about Mentor and was puzzled. But everyone was turning away now, the crowd dispersing, people