

BOOK ONE:
Moondance

September 1985

*O Fortuna, velat luna
Statu variabilis,
Semper crecis, aut decrecis;
vita detestabilis
nunc obdurat, et tunc curat
ludo mentis aciem,
egestatum, protestatum
dissolvit ut glaciem.*

—*Carmina Burana*

Chapter One

(Susan Whitlow)

The air conditioner was still not working.

Susan Whitlow wiped sweat from her brow before any more drops spotted the papers she was grading. Bad enough to have to come in on a Saturday, but to spend it grading papers in this hellhole of an office without air conditioning compounded the agony to ridiculous levels.

Heaving a great sigh, Susan pushed back her chair and turned off the struggling air conditioner. Her office was not large — a mere cubby forgotten in a corner of the third floor of ancient Purnell Hall — but at least she'd had the presence of mind to pick the office with *two* windows. She wrenched the second open as far as it would go, and winced at the blast of humid air that washed into the room.

Damn, damn. Middle of September already, and summer heat had still not broken. Susan leaned against the windowsill, looked out across tree-spotted grass to the thick growth that led down to the Patapsco River. Aged oaks and an occasional willow soared skyward from tangled leafy underbrush, stirring only a bit in the hot wind. The air hung heavy with humidity and the cloying perfume of honeysuckle.

Susan wiped her face again and reached for a glass of iced tea on the corner of her cluttered desk. The ice had long since melted, and only a few beads of perspiration clung to the outside of the glass — yet warm and diluted as it was, the tea still tasted good. There was a refrigerator in the faculty lounge down the hall...she supposed she should go down and get some more. It would make this grading session go much more easily.

Still she stood by the window. Two students, a boy and a girl, tossed a Frisbee back and forth behind Purnell; now and again their laughter made its way to Susan's ears. The boy was dressed only in tattered gym shorts; the girl wore shorts and a green-and-black Patapsco University tee shirt. Green and black — what had possessed the University to choose such a depressing combination of colors?

For that matter, Susan sighed, what had possessed them to build the school in this benighted location? Oh, Spring and Autumn were beautiful enough, when the entire Patapsco Valley celebrated the age-old rhythms of life all for the amazement and amusement of the young people who frequented the campus. But Winter was treacherous, with ice and snow that could seal off this isolated area, with week after unendurable week of grey clouds and dreary cold rain. And Summer — well, no one had ever claimed to enjoy a Maryland Summer. In mid-June the Chesapeake Bay evaporated, and hung around as humidity until mid-September when it took its place once again. Or so it seemed.

Susan counted by tapping her fingers, the old wood of the windowsill rough beneath them. This was the tenth Maryland Summer she had endured here at Patapsco. Each year she swore it would be the last. And each year, somehow, she found herself staying on another year rather than go through the hassle of finding a new position.

She looked back at her desk, and couldn't help a grin. Face it, girl, one of the reasons you don't move away is that you can't contemplate the immense task of sorting through all

these papers and packing them up to go to another school. There was a stack on top of the file cabinet, laden with a layer of dust, that Susan was sure dated from her Coptic Theology class six years ago. An imposing heap of professional journals awaited indexing under a chair in the far corner — Susan had looked at it faithfully every three weeks for the past five years and had yet to do anything except make it deeper.

She forced herself to sit back down at her desk and face the jumble of loose-leaf sheets that occupied the center of her faded blue blotter. First year Comparative Religion. Susan made it a practice to give an in-depth quiz at the end of the first week of classes, just so she could tell which students were really paying attention and which were trying to get an easy “A.”

Why did this particular heresy continue, that Comp Rel was a cake course? Especially Comparative Religion at Patapsco University, where Susan Whitlow and her fellow faculty members were experts in those particular mystical beliefs usually lumped together as “magic” by the general population?

To be sure, most students who finished her course left with good marks. That was because the uninterested ones, the ones who couldn't meet Susan's high standards, tended to drop the course early in the game. She had already lost twenty percent during the first week — but the quizzes on her desk showed that she could easily afford to lose another quarter of the class.

This one, for example. Susan held the paper closer — when would these kids learn to write in *pen* rather than pencil? She'd never worn glasses before becoming a professor; rotten handwriting and light pencils were at least half the reason that she now had thick plastic lenses perched atop her nose. Or, rather, starting to slide down her nose.

Damn, it was hot!

Susan looked at the phone, almost hidden beneath creeping papers on the left-hand corner of her desk. David was coming

today for an interview regarding his most recent paper — maybe she should call him and ask him to come in early and get the quizzes graded. After all, what were graduate students for if they couldn't take these odious tasks away from the instructor?

She reached for the phone, then withdrew her hand. No, Susan. That's a dirty trick to play on David. Besides, the young man has enough to keep him busy with his own work.

She sat back, contemplating David's progress. Comprehensives at the end of this year...she was sure he would pass. But then what? Patapsco University was the only school in the nation with a Department of Magic — she winced at the popular nickname, but she always had to admit that a certain validity hid behind its semi-scornful tone. Comparative Religion at Pat U was a quite different department from its counterpart at other schools, and somehow she just couldn't see David's extensive knowledge of pagan ceremonies, alchemical speculations, and white witchcraft fitting in too well at Southern Cal or North Carolina State or even Duke. Harvard, maybe....

No, David had to get a job at Pat U. And with Doctor Nacht gone for the second year in a row, the gods knew there was a need for another qualified instructor. Susan, Anton Faring, and Monroe Quaile had been managing so far, but they needed help. All the more so since Monroe, damn him, had announced his intention of going on sabbatical next year.

Back to the quizzes.

When Susan reached for her tea, her hand hit the top of the glass and it fell from her desk, breaking cleanly in half on the dirty linoleum floor and spilling a wide swath of brown tea on the floor and halfway up the wall behind her. Susan tore kleenexes from a box and bent to wipe up the spill with a curse on her lips.

In the shallow puddle, shapes moved.

What?

Leaves swaying in a strong wind. A battered wall of white

and tan stones, covered with ivy. Flames. And a hand with a knife.

Susan shook her head, tore her eyes from the puddle. Tea, forgotten, began to soak into a cardboard carton of old final exams, while Susan stood and looked out the window.

Outside, the humid air hung oppressive and the sun beat down from hazy sky with the intensity of a blast furnace. The Frisbee-tossing students were nowhere to be seen. For the moment, Susan was alone without any living companionship. Even the squirrels that usually dashed through the trees were gone.

What had happened? Why did her knees feel so weak?

You know, a voice said within her.

She clenched her fists and stared toward the river, hidden by a steep slope and the dense curtains of leaves to the south.

Scrying, it was called. To see pictures in standing water. Susan had not practiced the art for, oh, a dozen years at least. Not since she was finishing up her own postgraduate work under Doctor Nacht at the City College.

Witchcraft.

No. It was nothing like that. Susan was falling into the same trap that caught her less attentive first-year students. The mind is capable of a good many things that we don't understand, she repeated to herself, straight from her first class lecture. Sometimes these processes might be so mysterious, so little comprehended, that we give them names like "witchcraft" and "magic" and "extrasensory perception." But they are nothing more than the normal functioning of the human mind, conscious and unconscious, often spurred on by emotional distress or religious fervor. To think that these anomalous events represent the supernatural is the fall for the same delusions that kept medieval science from advancing beyond the stage of copying ancient Greek and Arabic manuscripts.

Pictures in pools of liquid. What was her mind trying to tell her? Something so important, apparently, that it couldn't wait

for the usual thought-laboratory of her dreams.

She heard someone in the hall.

A student? They wouldn't come bothering her on a Saturday, not in the second week of classes. No major papers assigned, no tests about which to bicker, hardly any assignments beyond the usual readings.

One of the students in her Independent Study class? They had barely begun to study Mystery Cults...but Susan had to admit that one of them — Cathy Vovcenko sprang to mind immediately — might already have intelligent questions that might require further discussion.

If so, though, why not wait until Monday's class and share questions with the rest of the group? Cathy knew better than that, after two years in the Comparative Religion program.

Susan looked at her watch. Half past noon. David wasn't due until three. Maybe he had come early. If so, he would definitely have to help with the quiz papers. She couldn't cope with his own work until they were out of the way.

There was the slightest hint of a knock, and her door swung forward. Standing at the window, Susan felt a trace of uncertainty grip her stomach. The way the office was set up, she couldn't see who was coming in until they came around the door. The price she paid for two windows. But she had always hated the setup.

"Yes?"

"Doctor Whitlow?" A young man stepped into the office. He wore faded blue jeans with a developing hole in the left knee, an armless tee shirt of some deep blue material. His hair was close-cropped and brown; his arms were long, thin and dusty. As if he had been walking along some of the sandy paths that led down to the river. As he turned to maneuver his way into the office, Susan saw that sweat stained the back of his shirt where it clung to his skin. A pair of Nike tennis shoes, originally white but now dirty beige, hugged his feet without the benefit of socks.

"Who are you?" Susan thought she might have seen the

boy around campus, but wasn't sure. He had the look of the generic Freshman. She was sure that he wasn't in any of her classes.

"Doctor Whitlow, I was sent to find you." He moved toward her; Susan was irrationally comforted that the desk separated them.

"Who sent you?"

He didn't answer, merely took another step. His hands were quite taut, the way a tennis player might casually hold his racket while waiting for an opponent's serve. In fact, something about the boy suggested that he was poised, ready.

For what?

"What do you want?" Susan tried again, taking a step to the right and keeping bookshelves at her back. Outside she heard leaves soughing in a breath of wind, but no movement of air came into the tiny office.

"I need to borrow some of your books. The Breslau Folios. The Kalocsa Codex. And I want access to Doctor Nacht's office."

Susan couldn't believe what she was hearing. Where did an eighteen-year-old find out about the Kalocsa Codex — one of the few remaining authentic grimoires not in Church possession? And what could he do with it, unless he was a student of Medieval Slavic languages?

"Those books are kept in the Special Collections Room at the Library. Why do you want them?"

"I have an interest. And I must have entry to Doctor Nacht's office."

"All of Doctor Nacht's effects are stored away." And damned if I'm going to tell you where, unless I know what it is you're after.

Susan took a breath. "I've had encounters with boys like you before. You've read a little about magic, maybe you've talked with some practicing witches. You know that we have some of the old books here, and you just can't wait to try out some of the spells." She didn't attempt to keep the scorn out

of her voice. "When are you going to grow up? Enroll in Intro to Comparative Religion. You'll learn that all this mumbo-jumbo that has impressed you is little more than the survival of the philosophy and theology of the medieval world. What's your name?"

The boy looked her straight in the eyes. His face held an intensity that Susan had only seen before in young couples deep in love. That sort of intensity always scared her.

The lad's voice was clear and steady. "You do not know what you speak of. Either that, or you're trying to put me off with lies. You and your colleagues have been clever: putting wards on the Special Collections Room to keep out people like me. It will not work, Susan Whitlow." His use of her name gave her a chill in spite of the weather. "No wards survive the death of the person who established them."

Susan took a step forward, reached for the phone. "This has gone far enough. It's not funny. I'm calling Campus Security."

"I do not intend to be funny." He reached for her, and Susan snatched back her hand. The boy took a step to the right, coming around the desk at her. She was trapped between the desk, the wall, and the bookcase. Sweet Goddess, does he really intend to kill me? Some mad cultist, and I'm going to die. Goddess, don't let it happen.

Susan bolted for the window, screaming for help. But as soon as she started, her foot slipped in a puddle of spilled tea and she fell heavily. Something sliced her leg through her stockings — the broken glass that she had neglected to pick up.

The boy jumped at her, moving like a leaping dog; Susan grasped the broken glass, heedless of the slit it cut in her hand, and thrust it at her attacker. She managed to slice his right shoulder, then he slapped the glass away with a powerful motion of his hand.

His face inches from hers, he sniffed like an animal catching a scent on the wind. "You did not set the wards."

“D-David’s idea. After Doctor Nacht left.” Please, please, leave me alone.

His eyes closed, then reopened. There was no feeling in them. “Nevertheless, I need power. You have some talents; you are useful to me.”

“Who are you?”

“I am the twin. The Zwilling.” He covered her mouth with one hand. She tasted dirt, sweat, and blood from somewhere. My God, what is he going to do? Rape? Where in hell is Security? Why haven’t they heard me scream?

The boy opened his mouth, bent toward her. Susan tried to cry out, couldn’t.

Then she felt damp breath and unaccustomed warmth at her throat. An instant later, teeth ripped through her flesh and she felt her own blood spurt forth into the hot, humid air.

The boy bit, and bit again, and each time it was knives digging into her unprotected throat and chest. She struggled, but couldn’t throw him off.

Soon enough, the pain was over.

Chapter Two

(David Galvin)

By two o'clock David Galvin was sick and tired of cleaning. His trailer was a moderately small one, three rooms and a bath — how did it get so *messy*?

Dumping grey-brown dishwater down the sink, David smiled. The fact that he hadn't given the place a good cleaning for three months probably had something to do with the four green plastic bags of trash that he'd amassed in this day's straightening-up spell. And some of the things in the refrigerator...well, David was glad that his mother wasn't around to see them. He still shuddered to think of the unidentifiable blue-green mass so carefully wrapped in crumpled tinfoil.

Wiping his hands on a tattered dish towel that needed a good washing of its own, David looked at the clock and swore. His appointment with Susan was only an hour away — and he still had to shower and get his notes together.

He stripped off his tee shirt — Patapsco University, what else, they were only six-fifty in the campus bookstore — and casually let it fall across the back of a dining room chair. He bent to the table, where just two hours earlier he had carefully arranged his typewriter and three stacks of papers

overflowing their manila folders. Damn, he *knew* he wouldn't be able to find anything. This happened every time he cleaned. Where was the most recent draft...the one with all the corrections that Susan had made last time? Ah, there it was...mixed in with a few unfinished letters to the folks in Michigan and a couple of clippings from this morning's *Sun*.

If I don't watch myself, David thought, I'll end up with a desk like Susan's. And then I'll *never* find anything again.

A corner of the dining table, right next to the door, was where David piled things that had to go out with him — less chance of forgetting them if he saw them just before leaving. He left his papers there, laid the phone bill on top of them, and stumbled toward the bathroom trying to untie his tennis shoes as he walked.

One shoe landed on the bed; the other ricocheted and skittered off in the direction of the dresser. David shrugged, and stepped into the bathroom.

He peered into the mirror and ran his hand over his chin. The stubble that grew there was fine and light-colored, but still he had to shave. Briefly, as he did every morning, David considered letting his beard grow. But no, with hair as blond as his, he had trouble enough with just a mustache that no one ever saw; he didn't want to grow a beard that would only look ridiculous.

Ruefully, David looked down at the fine blond hair that covered nearly his entire lanky body. Nothing he could do about it, although one of his girlfriends had teased him about having a nice shiny coat of fur. *That* relationship hadn't lasted too long.

A lukewarm shower felt good after having his hands in hot dishwater for an hour. David soaped his hair and stood for a good long time under the water. He wanted to remember this when he went out into the heat. If his conference with Susan didn't go on too long, he would stop at the pool and get in a half hour or so of swimming before coming back to finish the cleaning.

David smiled, letting water-spray rinse soap from him. The hell with cleaning. He would stop at the Rathskeller after the pool and have a beer or two, watch "M*A*S*H" on the projection TV, and see who he could talk to. He thought he would need a break, after this session with Susan.

After drying himself off David pulled on his gym shorts and a new shirt, found the errant tennis shoe behind the dresser and pulled on both shoes without socks. His hair was still wet; he made do with a few swipes at it with the brush. It didn't matter, by the time he got to campus he would be drenched in sweat anyhow.

Grabbing his paper and phone bill, David opened the door and winced at the blast of heat that met him. Three aluminum steps down, the door slammed shut, and David absently tested it to see that it was shut. Then...he stopped.

What? The heat? The humidity? The smell of evergreen that always hung over the trailer park? The gritty dust that seemed to well up from gravel at his feet?

No. Something else.

Magic?

Wrinkling his brow, David turned back to the door and ran his hand over the surface in a design that only he knew. Maybe it was a silly thing to do, but Doctor Nacht had taught him to always keep up protective wards. "This University attracts a good number of crazy people, folks who have dabbled in the Arts and think we can teach them some of the darker spells." That's what Doctor Nacht had always called his studies: the Arts.

David wasn't sure if he believed in the Arts as strongly as Doctor Nacht had. Most of the classical spells were all nonsense — those who knew what they were doing were generally close-mouthed about their procedures. But David knew from experience that there were powers in the world that couldn't be explained by natural science...and it never hurt to be safe. So he renewed his protective wards whenever he went out.

What was going on? Were the undergrads playing around again? Last year Doctor Faring had caught them causing great consternation in the Physics Department, but that had stopped quickly enough with Faring's strict lecture on the proper use of centuries-old manuscripts. Besides, the feeling on this Saturday afternoon was not as focussed as it would be if the undergraduates were practicing things they shouldn't.

Someone else? There was a full coven operating in Carroll County, out near Gamber, scarcely a dozen miles away. All they ever did, however, was to mess around with sympathetic magic to encourage their crops. And those crazy people downtown with their secret meetings at Poe's grave — *they* were hardly capable of creating any disturbance that would reach this far. Patapsco University was, after all, fully twelve miles from downtown Baltimore.

That meant...what? That someone, somewhere, was playing with forces he or she didn't understand. The feeling was like an annoying itch below the threshold of sensation; as David walked out towards Davis Avenue he found that he could easily ignore the heavy feeling in the air. He shrugged. Whoever it was, they would lose interest soon enough, and then he would have peace again.

Davis Avenue was a tiny, winding road that climbed up and down the hills of the Patapsco Valley. David turned right and walked a few hundred paces, waving offhandedly to the woman who delivered the mail. Then he remembered the phone bill, and chased down her jeep as she pulled off to load the boxes of the trailer park.

"Afternoon, David. Hot enough for you?" She wore a red bandanna around her light brown hair, and blue shorts that hugged her ample legs a little too tightly for David's taste.

"Too hot," he agreed. "Think it's going to rain soon?"

"AccuWeather says we might get showers tomorrow. But it's like this all up and down the coast. Don't expect any relief for about a week, they say." The woman fished in her canvas mailsack, pulled out two envelopes. "Here's your mail."

David took the envelopes, handed over his phone bill. "Can you take this for me, Sandy?"

"Sure." She tucked the bill onto the dashboard of the jeep. "Cheer up. Couple of months, you'll wish it was hot again."

David grinned. "I don't think so. I like the cold a lot better than heat."

"No air conditioner in your car?"

"No. That's why I decided to walk to school. Cooler that way."

Sandy nodded sagely. "Don't blame you. Wish I could get A.C. in this this thing. I'm getting too old for this route."

"Never, Sandy."

"I've seen this route go from just a couple of houses to way it is now, takes all day to get the mail delivered. Your school, gets bags and bags. You have no idea. About time I moved up to a clerk job, I think."

David glanced at his watch. Before he could speak, Sandy waved him on. "Go, go on, you ain't got time to listen to an old broad like me complain. Shoulda never let me get started." She heaved herself out of the jeep, pulled a canvas bag up onto her shoulder, and walked toward the trailer park whistling. David gave her a wave, and then set off down Davis Avenue.

Soon enough he came to the Gas and Electric Company's right-of-way, a dirt car path flanked by huge steel towers bearing HIGH VOLTAGE and NO TRESPASSING signs. Ignoring the notices, David stepped over the single strand of wire fence and started down the path. By cutting across BG&E property and through the Levengood farm, he could come into campus the back way and reach Purnell Hall directly rather than having to go around University Drive. Walking, it was definitely the quickest way.

The Levengood cows gave no indication of recognizing anything strange in this Saturday's air. Most of them stood peacefully in the shade of various oak and maple trees; two grazed near the fence and moved away when David

approached. The cows didn't like him much. Not that he blamed them, he was always a little hesitant about approaching them too closely himself. Cows were smart animals, David had often thought, and he didn't want them putting thoughts in people's heads. He merely waved as he passed, and cried, "Don't worry, Bossie, I'm just passing through."

Up a small rise, David came out onto the cultivated greenery of the campus. Evett Hall was ahead, a boxlike building that housed the Graduate Departments of Economics and Business. Beyond Evett was Purnell, a somewhat older building of nondescript stone lined with narrow windows fitted with crosspieces of dark wood. David liked Purnell Hall — it was the catch-all of the Graduate School, ten different departments in one three-story building. Comparative Religion was crammed into a forgotten hallway at the south end of the top floor. Dusty offices and a basement held treasures that no man could guess at. Purnell had once been the Administration Building, before Admin moved into their new quarters across University Drive — half the files were still in the basement, dating back to the early seventies when the school was first opened. Raw materials for some future grad student in history, David thought.

Purnell Hall was quiet even for a Saturday. There were a few classes going on, doors open to take advantage of whatever cross-ventilation there was in the old building. David gave sympathetic glances to a few daydreaming English students, and took the elevator to the third floor humming to himself. At least he didn't have to go to *classes* on a day like this. There were some advantages to being the only student in the Graduate Program in his major. He could pretty much set his own schedule.

Elevator doors slid open, and David knew that something was terribly wrong. The sense of magic — of the *misuse* of magic — was strong as smoke at a July cookout. David moved quickly down the corridor, not running but not casually

strolling either. At the end, he paused between Doctor Faring's door and Susan Whitlow's. Both were closed, both felt of this powerful interference.

David made a last attempt to bring rationality back to this Saturday afternoon. Tired, irritated by the heat and the wasted morning cleaning, he was imagining things. He was too sensitive, that was all. There were enough influences around here, God knew, to disturb anyone sensitive to them. Cemeteries, Indian battlegrounds, the old ruined church where two dozen people had died in a boiler explosion. A hot late-summer day, and all the bad feelings in this valley were on the wing down the Patapsco to the sea. And David was just a little more receptive than usual. That was all.

Susan's office was unlocked. He opened the door, and stepped in. He half-expected to see her sitting at her desk grading papers, but she was nowhere. He glanced at his watch: three-oh-six. Susan wouldn't have left when she knew he was coming. Unless she left a note.

David made his way to her littered desktop. Two dozen quizzes from her introductory class — half of them graded, with precise scrawls in Susan's handwriting and customary green ink.

The floor was sticky. David looked down, saw broken glass and the remnants of a puddle of some liquid — tea? And something else, splattered on the linoleum...

Blood.

His heart leapt, and the hairs on the nape of his neck stood up. He crouched, followed blood from desk to window. It was still sticky. Had Susan cut herself, then, and gone to get a bandage? No. The trail led to the window, not the door.

He looked out the window. Directly under the office a body lay on the grass, clothed in a green blouse and red-and-white polyester skirt.

"Susan!" Shouting did no good, David knew even when he saw her that she was dead. He fought to control his stomach, backed away from the window until he bumped into the

desk.

Horror. Hate. Pain. Fear. Something with the eyes of a beast, something that moved with quickness and cunning and a terrifying purpose of its own.

It was out there. Somewhere.

David took a deep breath, felt his heart racing like a runaway locomotive.

Susan, dead. She can't be, he thought wildly, looking at the papers still clutched in his right hand. I was going to talk to her this afternoon.

Oh, God, she taught me so much.

Trembling, he reached across Susan's desk for the phone, dialled Campus Security.

I never even had a chance to tell her how much I learned from her.

Now she'll never know.

As he waited for the call to go through, his eyes fell on a page in her class lectures notebook. "To think that these anomalous events represent the supernatural is to fall for the same delusions that kept medieval science from advancing beyond the stage of copying ancient Greek and Arabic manuscripts."

Poor Susan. How could she have known how wrong she was?

"Security, this is David Galvin. You'd better get someone over to the south side of Purnell Hall right away. And call for the police. There's been a murder."