



THE
MAGICIAN
KING



LEV GROSSMAN

THE
MAGICIAN KING

A Novel

LEV GROSSMAN

VIKING

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Codex
The Magicians

VIKING

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For Sophie

We shall now seek that which we shall not find.

—*Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte D'Arthur*

BOOK I

CHAPTER 1

Quentin rode a gray horse with white socks named Dauntless. He wore black leather boots up to his knees, different-colored stockings, and a long navy-blue topcoat that was richly embroidered with seed pearls and silver thread. On his head was a platinum coronet. A glittering side-sword bumped against his leg—not the ceremonial kind, the real kind, the kind that would actually be useful in a fight. It was ten o'clock in the morning on a warm, overcast day in late August. He was everything a king of Fillory should be. He was hunting a magic rabbit.

By King Quentin's side rode a queen: Queen Julia. Up ahead were another queen and another king, Janet and Eliot—the land of Fillory had four rulers in all. They rode along a high-arched forest path littered with yellow leaves, perfect little sprays of them that looked like they could have been cut and placed by a florist. They moved in silence, slowly, together but lost in their separate thoughts, gazing out into the green depths of the late summer woods.

It was an easy silence. Everything was easy. Nothing was hard. The dream had become real.

"Stop!" Eliot said, at the front.

They stopped. Quentin's horse didn't halt when the others' did—Dauntless wandered a little out of line and halfway off the trail before he persuaded her for good and all to quit walking for a damn minute. Two years as a king of Fillory and he was still shit at horseback riding.

"What is it?" he called.

They all sat for another minute. There was no hurry. Dauntless snorted once in the silence: lofty horsey contempt for whatever human enterprise they thought they were pursuing.

"Thought I saw something."

"I'm starting to wonder," Quentin said, "if it's even possible to track a rabbit."

"It's a hare," Eliot said.

"Same difference."

“It isn’t, actually. Hares are bigger. And they don’t live in burrows, they make nests in open ground.”

“Don’t start,” both Julia and Janet said, in unison.

“Here’s my real question,” Quentin said. “If this rabbit thing really can see the future won’t it know we’re trying to catch it?”

“It can see the future,” Julia said softly, beside him. “It cannot change it. Did you three argue this much when you were at Brakebills?”

She wore a sepulchral black riding dress and an actual riding hood, also black. She always wore black, like she was in mourning, even though Quentin couldn’t think of anyone she should have been in mourning for. Casually, like she was calling over a waiter, Julia summoned a tiny songbird to her wrist and raised it up to her ear. It chipped, chirruped something, and she nodded back and it flew away again.

Nobody noticed, except for Quentin. She was always giving and getting little secret messages from the talking animals. It was like she was on a different wireless network from the rest of them.

“You should have let us bring Jollyby,” Janet said. She yawned, holding the back of her hand against her mouth. Jollyby was Master of the Hunt at Castle Whitespire, where they all lived. He usually supervised this kind of excursion.

“Jollyby’s great,” Quentin said, “but even he couldn’t track a hare in the woods. Without dogs. When there’s no snow.”

“Yes, but Jollyby has very well-developed calf muscles. I like looking at them. He wears those man-tights.”

“I wear man-tights,” Quentin said, pretending to be affronted. Eliot snorted.

“I imagine he’s around here somewhere.” Eliot was still scanning the trees. “Discreet distance and all that. Can’t keep that man away from a royal hunt.”

“Careful what you hunt,” Julia said, “lest you catch it.”

Janet and Eliot looked at each other: more inscrutable wisdom from Julia. But Quentin frowned. Julia made her own kind of sense.

Quentin hadn’t always been a king, of Fillory or anywhere else. None of them had. Quentin had grown up a regular non-magical, non-royal person in Brooklyn, in what he still in spite of everything thought of as the real world. He’d thought Fillory was a fiction, an enchanted land that existed only as

the setting of a series of fantasy novels for children. But then he'd learned to do magic, at a secret college called Brakebills, and he and his friends had found out that Fillory was real.

It wasn't what they expected. Fillory was a darker and more dangerous place in real life than it was in the books. Bad things happened there, terrible things. People got hurt and killed and worse. Quentin went back to Earth in disgrace and despair. His hair turned white.

But then he and the others had pulled themselves together again and gone back to Fillory. They faced their fears and their losses and took their places on the four thrones of Castle Whitespire and were made kings and queens. And it was wonderful. Sometimes Quentin couldn't believe that he'd lived through it all when Alice, the girl he loved, had died. It was hard to accept all the good things he had now, when Alice hadn't lived to see them.

But he had to. Otherwise what had she died for? He unslung his bow and stood up in the stirrups and looked around. Bubbles of stiffness popped satisfyingly in his knees. There was no sound except for the hush of falling leaves slipping through other leaves.

A gray-brown bullet flickered across the path a hundred feet in front of them and vanished into the underbrush at full tilt. With a quick fluid motion that had cost him a lot of practice Quentin nocked an arrow and drew. He could have used a magic arrow, but it didn't seem sporting. He aimed for a long moment, straining against the strength of the bow, and released.

The arrow burrowed into the loamy soil up to the feathers, right where the hare's flashing paws had been about five seconds ago.

"Almost," Janet said, deadpan.

There was no way in hell they were going to catch this thing.

"Toy with me, would you?" Eliot shouted. "Yah!"

He put the spurs to his black charger, which whinnied and reared obligingly and hoofed the empty air before lunging off the path into the woods after the hare. The crashing sound of his progress through the trees faded almost immediately. The branches sprang back into place behind him and were still again. Eliot was not shit at horseback riding.

Janet watched him go.

"Hi ho, Silver," she said. "What are we even doing out here?"

It was a fair question. The point wasn't really to catch the hare. The point was—what was the point? What were they looking for? Back at the castle

their lives were overflowing with pleasure. There was a whole staff there whose job it was to make sure that every day of their lives was absolutely perfect. It was like being the only guests at a twenty-star hotel that you never had to leave. Eliot was in heaven. It was everything he'd always loved about Brakebills—the wine, the food, the ceremony—with none of the work. Eliot loved being a king.

Quentin loved it too, but he was restless. He was looking for something else. He didn't know what it was. But when the Seeing Hare was spotted in the greater Whitespire metropolitan area, he knew he wanted a day off from doing nothing all day. He wanted to try to catch it.

The Seeing Hare was one of the Unique Beasts of Fillory. There were a dozen of them—the Questing Beast, who had once granted Quentin three wishes, was one of them, as was the Great Bird of Peace, an ungainly flightless bird like a cassowary that could stop a battle by appearing between the two opposing armies. There was only one of each of them, hence the name, and each one had a special gift. The Unseen Monitor was a large lizard who could turn you invisible for a year, if that's what you wanted.

People hardly ever saw them, let alone caught them, so a lot of guff got talked about them. No one knew where they came from, or what the point of them was, if any. They'd always been there, permanent features of Fillory's enchanted landscape. They were apparently immortal. The Seeing Hare's gift was to predict the future of any person who caught it, or so the legend went. It hadn't been caught for centuries.

Not that the future was a question of towering urgency right now. Quentin figured he had a pretty fair idea of what his future was like, and it wasn't much different from his present. Life was good.

They'd picked up the hare's trail early, when the morning was still bright and dewy, and they rode out singing choruses of "Kill the Wabbit" to the tune of "Ride of the Valkyries" in their best Elmer Fudd voices. Since then it had zigzagged them through the forest for miles, stopping and starting, looping and doubling back, hiding in the bushes and then suddenly zipping across their paths, again and again.

"I do not think he is coming back," Julia said.

She didn't speak much these days. And for some reason she'd mostly given up using contractions.

“Well, if we can’t track the hare we can track Eliot anyway.” Janet gently urged her mount off the track and into the trees. She wore a low-cut forest-green blouse and men’s chaps. Her penchant for mild cross-dressing had been the scandal of the season at court this year.

Julia didn’t ride a horse at all but an enormous furry quadruped that she called a civet, which looked like an ordinary civet, long and brown and vaguely feline, with a fluidly curving back, except that it was the size of a horse. Quentin suspected it could talk—its eyes gleamed with a bit more sentience than they should have, and it always seemed to follow their conversations with too much interest.

Dauntless didn’t want to follow the civet, which exuded a musky, unequine odor, but she did as she was told, albeit at a spiteful, stiff-legged walk.

“I haven’t seen any dryads,” Janet said. “I thought there’d be dryads.”

“Me neither,” Quentin said. “You never see them in the Queenswood anymore.”

It was a shame. He liked the dryads, the mysterious nymphs who watched over oak trees. You really knew you were in a magical fantasy otherworld when a beautiful woman wearing a skimpy dress made of leaves suddenly jumped out of a tree.

“I thought maybe they could help us catch it. Can’t you call one or summon one or something, Julia?”

“You can call them all you want. They will not come.”

“I spend enough time listening to them bitch about land allocation,” Janet said. “And where are they all if they’re not here? Is there some cooler, magical-er forest somewhere that they’re all off haunting?”

“They are not ghosts,” Julia said. “They are spirits.”

The horses picked their way carefully over a berm that was too straight to be natural. An old earthwork from an ancient, unrecoverable age.

“Maybe we could make them stay,” Janet said. “Legislate some incentives. Or just detain them at the border. It’s bullshit that there’s not more dryads in the Queenswood.”

“Good luck,” Julia said. “Dryads fight. Their skin is like wood. And they have staves.”

“I’ve never seen a dryad fight,” Quentin said.

“That is because nobody is stupid enough to fight one.”

Recognizing a good exit line when it heard one, the civet chose that moment to scurry on ahead. Two sturdy oak trees actually leaned aside to let Julia pass between them. Then they leaned back together again, leaving Janet and Quentin to go the long way around.

“Listen to her,” Janet said. “She has so totally gone native! I’m tired of her more-Fillorian-than-thou bullshit. Did you see her talking to that fucking bird?”

“Oh, leave her alone,” Quentin said. “She’s all right.”

But if he was being honest, Quentin was fairly sure that Queen Julia wasn’t all right.

Julia hadn’t learned her magic the way they had, coming up through the safe, orderly system of Brakebills. She and Quentin had gone to high school together, but she hadn’t gotten into Brakebills, so she’d become a hedge witch instead: she’d learned it on her own, on the outside. It wasn’t official magic, institutional magic. She was missing huge chapters of lore, and her technique was so sloppy and loopy that sometimes he couldn’t believe it even worked at all.

But she also knew things Quentin and the others didn’t. She hadn’t had the Brakebills faculty standing over her for four years making sure she colored inside the lines. She’d talked to people Quentin never would have talked to, picked up things his professors would never have let him touch. Her magic had sharp, jagged edges on it that had never been filed down.

It was a different kind of education, and it made her different. She talked differently. Brakebills had taught them to be arch and ironic about magic, but Julia took it seriously. She played it fully goth, in a black wedding dress and black eyeliner. Janet and Eliot thought it was funny, but Quentin liked it. He felt drawn to her. She was weird and dark, and Fillory had made the rest of them so damn light, Quentin included. He liked it that she wasn’t quite all right and she didn’t care who knew it.

The Fillorians liked it too. Julia had a special rapport with them, especially with the more exotic ones, the spirits and elementals and jinnis and even more strange and extreme beings—the fringe element, in the hazy zone between the biological and the entirely magical. She was their witch-queen, and they adored her.

But Julia’s education had cost her something, it was hard to put your finger on what, but whatever it was had left its mark on her. She didn’t

seem to want or need human company anymore. In the middle of a state dinner or a royal ball or even a conversation she would lose interest and wander away. It happened more and more. Sometimes Quentin wondered exactly how expensive her education had been, and how she'd paid for it, but whenever he asked her, she avoided the question. Sometimes he wondered if he was falling in love with her. Again.

A distant bugle sounded—three polished sterling silver notes, muffled by the heavy silence of the woods. Eliot was sounding a recheat, a hunting call.

He was no Jollyby, but it was a perfectly credible recheat. He wasn't much for drafting legislation, but Eliot was meticulous about royal etiquette, which included getting all the Fillorian hunting protocol exactly right. (Though he found any actual killing distasteful, and usually managed to avoid it.) His bugling was good enough for Dauntless. She trembled, electrified, waiting for permission to bolt. Quentin grinned at Janet, and she grinned back at him. He yelled like a cowboy and kicked and they were off.

It was insanely dangerous, like a full-on land-speeder chase, with ditches opening up in front of you with no warning, and low branches reaching down out of nowhere to try to clobber your head off (not literally of course, though you could never tell for sure with some of these older, more twisted trees). But fuck it, that's what healing magic is for. Dauntless was a thoroughbred. They'd been starting and stopping and dicking around all morning, and she was dying to cut loose.

And how often did he get a chance to put his royal person at risk? When was the last time he even cast a spell? His life wasn't exactly fraught with peril. They lay around on cushions all day and ate and drank their heads off all night. Lately whenever he sat down some unfamiliar interaction had been happening between his abdomen and his belt buckle. He must have gained fifteen pounds since he took the throne. No wonder kings looked so fat in pictures. One minute you're Prince Valiant, the next you're Henry VIII.

Janet broke trail, guided by more muffled bugle notes. The horses' hooves made satisfyingly solid beats on the packed loam of the forest floor. Everything that was cloying about court life, all the safety and the relentless comfort, went away for a moment. Trunks and spinneys and ditches and old stone walls whipped and blurred past. They dodged in and out of hot sun and cool shade. Their speed froze the falling sprays of yellow leaves in

midair. Quentin picked his moment, and when they hit open meadow he swung out wide to the right, and for a long minute they were side by side, coursing wildly along in parallel.

Then all at once Janet pulled up. Quickly as he could Quentin slowed Dauntless to a walk and brought her around, breathing hard. He hoped her horse hadn't pulled up lame. It took him another minute to find his way back to her.

She was sitting still and straight in the saddle, squinting off into the midday gloom of the forest. No more bugle calls.

"What is it?"

"Thought I saw something," she said.

Quentin squinted too. There was something. Shapes.

"Is that Eliot?"

"The hell are they doing?" Janet said.

Quentin dropped down out of the saddle, unslung his bow again and nocked another arrow. Janet led the horses while he walked in front. He could hear her charging up some minor defensive magic, a light ward-and-shield, just in case. He could feel the familiar staticky buzz of it.

"Shit," he said under his breath.

He dropped the bow and ran toward them. Julia was down on one knee, her hand pressed against her chest, either gasping or sobbing, he couldn't tell which. Eliot was bent over talking to her quietly. His clothof-gold jacket had been yanked half off his shoulder.

"It's okay," he said, seeing Quentin's white face. "That fucking civet threw her and bolted. I tried to hold it but I couldn't. She's okay, she just got the wind knocked out of her."

"You're all right." That phrase again. Quentin rubbed Julia's back while she took croaking breaths. "You're okay. I always said you should get a regular horse. I never liked that thing."

"Never liked you, either," she managed.

"Look." Eliot pointed off into the twilight. "That's what made it bolt. The hare went in there."

A few yards away a round clearing began, a still pool of grass hidden in the heart of the forest. The trees grew right up to its edge and then stopped, like somebody had cleared it on purpose, nipping out the border precisely. It could have been ruled with a compass. Quentin picked his way toward it.

Lush, intensely emerald-green grass grew over lumpy black soil. In the center of the clearing stood a single enormous oak tree with a large round clock set in its trunk.

The clock-trees were the legacy of the Watcherwoman, the legendary—but quite real—time-traveling witch of Fillory. They were a magical folly, benign as far as anyone could tell, and picturesque in a surreal way. There was no reason to get rid of them, assuming you even could. If nothing else they kept perfect time.

But Quentin had never seen one like this. He had to lean back to see its crown. It must have been a hundred feet tall, and it was massively thick, at least fifteen yards around at its base. Its clock was stupendous. The face was taller than Quentin was. The trunk erupted out of the green grass and burst into a mass of wiggly branches, like a kraken sculpted in wood.

And it was moving. Its black, nearly leafless limbs writhed and thrashed against the gray sky. The tree seemed to be caught in the grip of a storm, but Quentin couldn't feel or hear any wind. The day, the day he could perceive with his five senses, was calm. It was an invisible, intangible storm, a secret storm. In its agony the clock-tree had strangled its clock—the wood had clenched it so tightly that the bezel had finally bent, and the crystal had shattered. Brass clockwork spilled out through the clock's busted face and down onto the grass.

"Jesus Christ," Quentin said. "What a monster."

"It's the Big Ben of clock-trees," Janet said behind him.

"I've never seen one like that," Eliot said. "Do you think it was the first one she made?"

Whatever it was, it was a Fillorian wonder, a real one, wild and grand and strange. It was a long time since he'd seen one, or maybe it was just a long time since he'd noticed. He felt a twinge of something he hadn't felt since Ember's Tomb: fear, and something more. Awe. They were looking the mystery in the face. This was the raw stuff, the main line, the old, old magic.

They stood together, strung out along the edge of the meadow. The clock's minute hand poked out at a right angle from the trunk like a broken finger. A yard from its base a little sapling sprouted where the gears had fallen, as if from an acorn, swaying back and forth in the silent gale. A

silver pocket watch ticked away in a knot in its slender trunk. A typically cute Fillorian touch.

This was going to be good.

"I'll go first."

Quentin started forward, but Eliot put a hand on his arm.

"I wouldn't."

"I would. Why not?"

"Because clock-trees don't just move like that. And I've never seen a broken one before. I didn't think they *could* break. This isn't a natural place. The hare must have led us here."

"I know, right? It's classic!"

Julia shook her head. She looked pale, and there was a dead leaf in her hair, but she was back on her feet.

"See how regular the clearing is," she said. "It is a perfect circle. Or at least an ellipse. There is a powerful area-effect spell radiating out from the center. Or from the foci," she added quietly, "in the case of an ellipse."

"You go in there, there's no telling where you'll end up," Eliot said.

"Of course there isn't. That's why I'm going."

This, this was what he needed. This was the point—he'd been waiting for it without even knowing it. God, it had been so long. This was an adventure. He couldn't believe the others would even hesitate. Behind him Dauntless whickered in the stillness.

It wasn't a question of courage. It was like they'd forgotten who they were, and where they were, and why. Quentin retrieved his bow and took another arrow from his quiver. As an experiment, he set his stance, drew, and shot at the tree trunk. Before it reached its target the arrow slowed, like it was moving through water instead of air. They watched it float, tumbling a little end over end, backward, in slow motion. Finally it gave up the last of its momentum and just stopped, five feet off the ground.

Then it burst, soundlessly, into white sparks.

"Wow." Quentin laughed. He couldn't help it. "This place is enchanted as *balls!*"

He turned to the others.

"What do you think? This looks like an adventure to me. Remember adventures? Like in the books?"

“Yeah, remember them?” Janet said. She actually looked angry.
“Remember Penny? We haven’t seen him around lately, have we? I don’t want to spend the rest of my queenhood cutting up your food for you.”

Remember Alice, she could just as well have said. He remembered Alice. She had died, but they’d lived, and wasn’t this what living was about? He bounced on his toes. They tingled and sweated in his boots, six inches from the sharp edge of the enchanted meadow.

He knew the others were right, this place practically reeked of weird magic. It was a trap, a coiled spring that was aching to spring shut on him and snap him up. And he wanted it to. He wanted to stick his finger in it and see what happened. Some story, some quest, started here, and he wanted to go on it. It felt fresh and clean and unsafe, nothing like the heavy warm lard of palace life. The protective plastic wrap had been peeled off.

“You’re really not coming?” he said.

Julia just watched him. Eliot shook his head.

“I’m going to play it safe. But I can try to cover you from here.”

He began industriously casting a minor reveal designed to suss out any obvious magical threats. Magic crackled and spat around his hands as he worked. Quentin drew his sword. The others made fun of him for carrying it, but he liked the way it felt in his hand. It made him feel like a hero. Or at least it made him look like a hero.

Julia didn’t think it was funny. Though she didn’t laugh at much of anything anymore. Anyway, he’d just drop it if magic was called for.

“What are you going to do?” Janet said, hands on her hips. “Seriously, what? Climb it?”

“When it’s time I’ll know what to do.” He rolled his shoulders.

“I do not like this, Quentin,” Julia said. “This place. This tree. If we attempt this adventure it will mean some great change of our fortunes.”

“Maybe a change would do us good.”

“Speak for yourself,” Janet said.

Eliot finished his spell and made a square out of his thumbs and forefingers. He closed one eye and squinted through it, panning around the clearing.

“I don’t *see* anything . . .”

A mournful bonging came from up in the branches. Near its crown the tree had sprouted a pair of enormous swaying bronze church bells. Why

not? Eleven strokes: it still kept time, apparently, even though the works were broken. Then the silence filled back in, like water that had been momentarily displaced.

Everybody watched him. The clock-tree's branches creaked in the soundless wind. He didn't move. He thought about Julia's warning: some great change of our fortunes. His fortunes were riding high right now, he had to admit. He had a goddamned castle, full of quiet courtyards and airy towers and golden Fillorian sunlight that poured like hot honey. Suddenly he wasn't sure what he was wagering that against. He could die in there. Alice had died.

And he was a king now. Did he even have the right to go galloping off after every magic bunny that wagged its cottontail at him? That wasn't his job anymore. All at once he felt selfish. The clock-tree was right there in front of him, heaving and thrashing with power and the promise of adventure. But his excitement was slipping away. It was becoming contaminated with doubt. Maybe they were right, his place was here. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

The urge to go into the meadow began to wear off, like a drug, leaving him abruptly sober. Who was he kidding? Being king wasn't the beginning of a story, it was the end. He didn't need a magic rabbit to tell him his future, he knew his future because it was already here. This was the happily ever after part. Close the book, put it down, walk away.

Quentin stepped back a pace and replaced his sword in its sheath in one smooth gesture. It was the first thing his fencing master had taught him: two weeks of sheathing and unsheathing before he'd even been allowed to cut the air. Now he was glad he'd done it. Nothing made you look like more of a dick than standing there trying to find the end of your scabbard with the tip of your sword.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. Julia.

"It is all right, Quentin," she said. "This is not your adventure. Follow it no further."

He wanted to lean his head down and rub his cheek back and forth against her hand like a cat.

"I know," he said. He wasn't going to go. "I get it."

"You're really not going?" Janet sounded almost disappointed. Probably she'd wanted to watch him blow up into glitter too.

“Really not.”

They were right. Let somebody else be the hero. He’d had his happy ending. Right then he couldn’t even have said what he was looking for in there. Nothing worth dying for, anyway.

“Come on, it’s almost lunchtime,” Eliot said. “Let’s find some less exciting meadow to eat in.”

“Sure,” Quentin said. “Cheers to that.”

There was champagne in one of the hampers, staying magically chilled, or something like champagne—they were still working on a Fillorian equivalent. And those hampers, with special leather loops for the bottles and the glasses—they were the kind of thing he remembered seeing in catalogs of expensive, useless things he couldn’t afford back in the real world. And now look! He had all the hampers he could ever want. It wasn’t champagne, but it was bubbly, and it made you drunk. And Quentin was going to get good and drunk over lunch.

Eliot climbed back into the saddle and swung Julia up behind him. It looked like the civet was gone for good. There was still a large patch of damp black earth on Julia’s rump from the fall. Quentin had a foot in Dauntless’s stirrup when they heard a shout.

“Hi!”

They all looked around.

“Hi!” It was what Fillorians said instead of “hey.”

The Fillorian saying it was a hale, vigorous man in his early thirties. He was striding toward them, right across the circular clearing, practically radiating exuberance. He broke into a jog at the sight of them. He totally ignored the branches of the broken clock-tree that were waving wildly over his head; he couldn’t have cared less. Just another day in the magic forest. He had a big blond mane and a big chest, and he’d grown a big blond beard to cover up his somewhat moony round chin.

It was Jollyby, Master of the Hunt. He wore purple-and-yellow striped tights. His legs really were pretty impressive, especially considering that he’d never even been in the same universe as a leg press or a StairMaster or whatever. Eliot was right, he must have been following them the whole time.

“Hi!” Janet shouted back happily. “Now it’s a party,” she added to the others, sotto voce.

In one huge leather-gloved fist Jollyby held up a large, madly kicking hare by its ears.

“Son of a bitch,” Dauntless said. “He caught it.”

Dauntless was a talking horse. She just didn’t talk much.

“He sure did,” Quentin said.

“Lucky thing,” Jollyby called out when he was close enough. “I found him sitting up on a rock, happy as you please, not a hundred yards from here. He was busy keeping an eye on you lot, and I got him to bolt the wrong way. Caught him with my bare hands. Would you believe it?”

Quentin would believe it. Though he still didn’t think it made sense. How do you sneak up on an animal that can see the future? Maybe it saw other people’s but not its own. The hare’s eyes rolled wildly in their sockets.

“Poor thing,” Eliot said. “Look how pissed off it is.”

“Oh, Jolly,” Janet said. She crossed her arms in mock outrage. “You should have let us catch it! Now it’ll only tell *your* future.”

She sounded not at all disappointed by this, but Jollyby—a superb all-around huntsman but no National Merit Scholar—looked vexed. His furry brows furrowed.

“Maybe we could pass it around,” Quentin said. “It could do each of us in turn.”

“It’s not a bong, Quentin,” Janet said.

“No,” Julia said. “Do not ask it.”

But Jollyby was enjoying his moment as the center of royal attention.

“Is that true, you useless animal?” he said. He reversed his grip on the Seeing Hare and hoisted it up so that he and the hare were nose to nose.

It gave up kicking and hung down limp, its eyes blank with panic. It was an impressive beast, three feet long from its twitching nose to its tail, with a fine gray-brown coat the color of dry grass in winter. It wasn’t cute. This was not a tame hare, a magician’s rabbit. It was a wild animal.

“What do you see then, eh?” Jollyby shook it, as if this were all its idea and therefore its fault. “What do you see?”

The Seeing Hare’s eyes focused. It looked directly at Quentin. It bared its huge orange incisors.

“Death,” it rasped.

They all stood there for a second. It didn’t seem scary so much as inappropriate, like somebody had made a dirty joke at a child’s birthday

party.

Then Jollyby frowned and licked his lips, and Quentin saw blood in his teeth. He coughed once, experimentally, as if he were just trying it out, and then his head lolled forward. The hare dropped from his nerveless fingers and shot away across the grass like a rocket.

Jollyby's corpse fell forward onto the grass.

"Death and destruction!" the hare called out as it ran, in case it hadn't made itself clear before. "Disappointment and despair!"