

of tinsmiths and coppersmiths filled the air like flashes of fire. Even the crows on the roofs were arguing.

Over the noise and bustle, Werfel yelled, "I have been so looking forward to showing you our city!"

He always loved that moment when he passed into the narrow streets and lanes either from the coolness and quiet of a house or from the trenches that led into and out of the heart of Tenebrion. The city's fortress walls were so plain, so blank, and then he would go through a gate — and everywhere, Werfel thought joyously, everywhere there was life.

Brangwain Spurge looked pale. He winced at the noise. He looked ridiculous with the giant, fancy box creaking back and forth on the chain around his neck.

Werfel pitied the poor elf, who was looking so out of place. He sang out cheerfully, "This way!"

Two guards moved to follow Werfel and his guest.

A ring of children gathered around them, peering up at the elf's weird, pasty face.

"Hey, four-eyes!" called a woman in a window. "Werfel! I see you stopped reading those big dull books long enough to actually leave the house!"

"Only to be ambushed by this army of little jerks! Your awful spawn! How many do you have now? Can you remember which ones are yours? The brats are gawping at my guest!"

The woman laughed. "They're just shocked someone as boring as you could actually find a friend!"

Werfel gave a joyous cackle and waved.

As they moved on through the crowd, Brangwain Spurge muttered, "What an awful woman."

It was Werfel's turn to be shocked. "She's one of my dearest friends. Her family is like my family."

"Then why did you mock her for the number of her children?"

Werfel chuckled. "Oh, that! It is an old goblin custom: The closer you are with someone, the more you make fun of them. It is a sign of how friendly you are."

"To say offensive, personal things?"

"If you said them to a complete stranger, they would fight you in a duel to the death." He waved to a young man they passed and called out, "Ugly as usual, Rogbert!"

The young man waved back and sang out with a smile, "My gorge fills with hate for you, you ancient, decayed sack of manure!"

Werfel clapped his hands together. "As you can see, I love the people in my neighborhood very much. I would die for them, to keep them safe. But when we pass beyond this gate, I must hide my smile. The people beyond do not know me."

The city of Tenebrion was built in rings, with tall walls

