

Chapter 2: A Single Stone...

The dream came again that night, but something had shifted in the grey.

You are no longer floating alone. The carnelian rests warm and heavy in your palm, and the voice no longer drifts from some unreachable distance. It lives inside the stone and, at the same time, inside the hollow behind your ribs.

"William... I need you. Find me."

He woke with the words still ringing behind his eyes and the carnelian stone heavy against his sternum. The dormitory was dark. Will lay still for three breaths, listening to the [arcana](#) that had lived in his bones since the first dream. It was stronger tonight. Restless. It wanted movement.

He dressed in the dark, staff slung across his back, and stepped into the corridor.

[Elizabeth Voss](#) was already waiting.

She stood at the junction where the Third Rank wing met the main hall, wand held loosely in one hand, thumb resting on the carnelian chip set into the wood. The same type of stone that now warmed against Will's ribs. Her washed-out blue eyes flicked over him once, then settled on the slight bulge beneath his tunic where the stone sat.

"Third Rank Davenport," she said, pleasant as frost. "You're up early."

"Couldn't sleep, Second Rank."

Her thumb pressed harder against the chip. For a heartbeat the two stones answered each other across the corridor — a flicker of heat, there and gone. Elizabeth's eyes narrowed.

"I will be watching you today," she said. Then she turned and walked away without waiting for an answer.

Will exhaled once, slow, and followed the current toward the training yards.

The day moved like every other day until it didn't.

Advanced Practical Arcana was after morning drills. [Master Stahl](#) limped between the practice circles, correcting posture with the end of his staff. The exercise was simple on paper: draw a thread of arcana from the grey, shape it into a stable filament, and hold it without letting the pollution bleed back into the caster. Will had done it a thousand times. Today the current in his body made the grey feel thin, almost brittle. When he reached for it, the filament came too easily. Too clean. When the sequence began, the stone's warmth came without him even needing to ask. Even as others flinched and fought with their threads, Will held his line without visible tremor. There was no ache in his gut or taste of sulfur from the grey magic. It was somehow clean or filtered.

Stahl paused behind him.

“Careful, Third Rank Davenport,” the old instructor murmured, voice pitched for Will's ears alone. “The easiest threads to pull can be the most dangerous to our well-being.”

Will didn't answer. The filament in front of his staff was already trying to pull toward the outer wall.

A grey stew was served for lunch in the usual silence. Elizabeth sat at the Second Rank table across the hall. She never looked at him, but her thumb stayed on the carnelian chip the entire meal.

Afternoon classes. The same grey walls, the same grey sky pressing down. Will moved through it all with the gem's arcana song growing louder in his ribs. Every time he passed a window that faced the outer perimeter, the stone warmed like it was reminding him of a door he had forgotten existed.

By the time the dinner bell rang, his body had already made the decision; he just hadn't admitted it yet.

After just a few bites, Will slipped out using the service passage that ran behind the kitchens. The stone was a live coal against his chest now. The current had stopped asking. It was *pulling*.

He reached the security checkpoint at the inner gate just as Master Konrad Stahl was coming in from an evening errand.

The old man's limp was worse in the damp. His practical staff tapped once on the ferrocrete. Will stepped up to the scanner at the same moment Stahl passed through from the other side.

The lights flared blue, then locked on crimson.

Stahl stopped.

Before either of them could speak, footsteps approached from the inner corridor.

Elizabeth Voss.

She must have been doing evening rounds — or the sudden warmth in her own carnelian had drawn her here. Her thumb was pressed hard to the chip again. Her eyes moved from the flashing scanner to Will's face to the slight bulge beneath his tunic.

“Third Rank Davenport,” she said, voice pleasant and edged with ice. “Out for air. Again.”

Will kept his face blank. The current in his bones was a roar.

Stahl shifted his weight off the bad hip, placing himself slightly between Elizabeth and the scanner. “The grey dust sits heavy tonight,” he said, low enough that only the three of them could hear. “On the stomach. On the machines.”

Elizabeth's gaze flicked to Stahl, then back to Will. The two carnelian stones answered each other again across the checkpoint. The scanner lights stuttered red, then finally steadied to blue.

She did not step aside.

Stahl did not move.

Half a minute of silence followed as Elizabeth mouth twitched and she decided how to proceed. She smile suddenly and met Will's eyes directly. "Something is going on, Third Rank. I'm going to figure it out or find someone who will." Then she turned and walked back into the corridor without another word.

Stahl stepped aside. "Go on," he murmured. "Before the dust gets any heavier."

As Will walked past, Master Stahl held out his staff to stop him as the closest point. "I expect to see you in class tomorrow."

Will could not meet Master Stahl's eyes.

The illusory magic that separated the magi from non-magi was three blocks away. The pull wasn't a suggestion anymore. It was a hand around his ribs, *pulling*. Every step away from the academy made the grey feel thinner, like the world itself was finally willing to let him go. He made it two blocks before stopping in the shadow of a loading dock. He pressed his back to the cold ferrocrete and closed his eyes.

The dream voice was there instantly.

William.

Not a whisper. A presence. It filled the space behind his eyes the way the grey usually did, but this was warm. Alive. It carried the scent of wet earth and something sweet he had no name for.

They felt it. She felt it. You cannot go back.

Will's heart slammed once, hard.

He saw it clearly then — not a vision the stone gave him, but the logical end of the night: Elizabeth walking away from the checkpoint with her wand already warm. Reporting the anomaly. The morning inspection turning into a full search. The stone taken. This horrible grey world winning completely.

The injustice was its own current. It did not care about barriers, or pollution protocols, or the global enchantments that could still find most gifted children. It only cared that a Third Rank who could outshine purebloods in every measurable category was still property of the system that had taken him from parents he could barely remember.

He opened his eyes. The academy walls were still visible behind him.

He could go back. Pretend the scanner had glitched. Let Elizabeth watch him until she found what she was looking for.

Or he could follow the current that had been building since the first dream and see where it actually led.

The stone in his pocket was hot enough to burn through the linen.

He turned his back on the academy and started walking toward the outer ring where the maintenance ladders climbed the old perimeter wall. They were tall. Maybe tall enough to get closer to the barrier.

He was halfway up the first ladder when he heard boots on ferrocrete behind him — not close yet, but purposeful. Elizabeth? She hadn't gone for backup immediately. She had gone to confirm the reading herself first. That bought him minutes, maybe.

The top of the wall was narrower than he remembered from maintenance chores. The city stretched out below in its usual haze. Beyond it, the barrier that kept the grey in and everything else out.

Will stepped to the edge.

The current didn't just pull now. It *sang*.

Jump, she whispered.

He looked around. Five stories down to the service road. The city and its non-magi stretched out around him to one side. Looking up, the barrier churned and thinned as it protected the city from a fire-shower.

He had no plan for this.

The stone didn't care.

He closed his eyes one last time. The dream voice was right there, waiting.

Now, William. Before she comes back with others. Before the grey decides you were never meant to leave.

He opened his eyes.

Far down the wall, a single figure in grey linen was moving fast along the parapet. Elizabeth. Wand out.

Will took the stone in his right hand, his staff in the left. Holding both up, he decided on a lightning spell. Maybe channeling arcana directly through the gem would break the barrier... help him escape... do something big...

Will thought of the words to the lightning spell. A rush of power came to first his right then left arms. They pulled him off the wall slightly. He put his fists together, still tightly holding both his staff and the stone. His body felt warm like after having a rare glass of wine on holidays. Waves of magical energy washed across as a surge began to overtake him. The academy training was starting to loosen from his mind as instinct expanded out from the power of the stone. A vortex beyond was calling to him with a whistling song he'd never heard.

The sound of broken glass exploded in his body. He looked up and could see an opening through the clouds. Stars. His eyes widened as he saw stars for the first time. The gemstone was almost too hot to hold now and so bright it was like a beacon on the wall. He could hear Elizabeth's boots and her breath ascending the ladder behind him.

There is no going back now. I can never go back.

That realization lets your fingers loosen. The rigid academy forms unspool from your mind, and suddenly you are no longer watching yourself make a choice. The world tears open. The gem pulls you over the edge, and you fall through color and emotion.

The flat grey of Myrah is gone; replaced with something violent and alive. Streaks of deep green, wet earth brown, and a blue so sharp it hurts. Your eyes aren't open but you can see everything. You see wild beasts made of energy. You feel arcana that isn't just available with rigid rules, but actually **LIVING** in the air around you. The current is wrapping around you, warm and laughing, pulling you through this place. For one endless moment, you feel the stone in your hand pulse like a second heart.

For the first time you can ever remember, you smile a broad, genuine smile.

Then the color collapses into darkness.

Continue to [chapter 3](#)...

Author's note: the beginning of the next chapter Will landed hard on something that was not stone and not earth. The air that rushed into his lungs was cold and clean and tasted of rain and pine. It burned. He coughed, rolled onto his side, and opened his eyes.

Above him stretched a sky full of stars — real stars, not the smeared grey smear he had known his entire life. Trees. Actual trees. The smell of wet soil and growing things.

He was alive.

He was somewhere else.

And the current in his bones had gone quiet, satisfied.

Will sat up slowly. The carnelian stone was still warm in his pocket, but the frantic pull had eased into something gentler. Almost like a heartbeat that wasn't entirely his.

He looked around at the dark forest, at the impossible sky, at the clean air moving through his lungs like forgiveness.

© 2018-2026 Marcus Davenport. See [Site Notice](#) for licensing info.

From:

<https://home.woodchuckhunters.com/wiki/> - **DavWiki1**

Permanent link:

https://home.woodchuckhunters.com/wiki/story:chapter_2-mdav

Last update: **2026/06/05 11:47**

