Julia opens the metal box. l see a row of little squares. Green, blue, red, black, yellow, purple, orange: the colours seem to glow. She pulls out a brush with a thin tuft of a tail at its end, She dips the brush in water and wets the paper, then taps at the red square. When the brush meets the damp paper, pink petals of colour unfurl like morning flowers. Julia touches yellow, then blue, and there, suddenly is the green of a freshly woven nest.

She scowls. "It's not right," she says. She glances over her shoulder at me. I try to look encouraging.

Julia starts to crumple up the paper, then reconsiders. Instead she slides it into my cage at the spot where my glass is broken.

"Here you go," she says. "A Julia original. That'll be worth millions someday."

Gingerly I pick up the paper. I do not eat a single bite of it.