
7-15-2011

Mythic Circle #33

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Recommended Citation

Hood, Gwenyth E. (2011) "Mythic Circle #33," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 2011: Iss. 33, Article 1.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol2011/iss33/1>

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Mythic Circle #33

MYTHIC CIRCLE

Summer 2011



Titania Tapestry

BG Callahan 2011

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Bonnie Callahan: Front Cover and pp. 40 and 47.
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The Silver Cup

by

Erin Avery

Long ago there lived a wise and kindly king. When his queen died, she left him with three daughters who were all very comely, but the elder two had bad hearts. The youngest was a happy child and knew no wrongdoing, and so her elder sisters scorned her and did all manner of mischief, blaming their younger sister for it all. 'We saw her do it!' they would cry; and since they always took care never to be caught themselves, the King believed their words, and often punished the youngest. As they grew older, the King at last favoured his two elder daughters, but mistrusted the younger one, who slept many nights on a bed bedewed with her own tears.

But one thing follows another, as the saying goes. So one day the two elder sisters said to each other, 'Why do we wait for our father's death to inherit his kingdom when it is almost ours for the taking now? We shall poison the King and blame it on our little sister: as usual, she shall have all the trouble and we shall have all the gain: for no one believes in her goodness now.'

So one day, not long afterwards, the

King sat at table with his three daughters, and they all had a merry time. But it wasn't long before the King grew pale and weak, and for three days he was near death. He would have died too, had it not been for the Fair King who had come to pay him a visit. This was Aroïn, of whom many tales of the Fair Folk tell, but he also comes into some of the tales of men. He gave the King a vial to drink which drew away the disease, and soon after he recovered. In the meantime, the King's cup was found to have had poison in it, and the two elder daughters said: 'Ah, we saw our younger sister put some powder in our father's cup; but she told us it was spice for his wine!'

At these words the youngest daughter wept, for she loved her father and saw now the cruel plan of her older sisters. She denied their words, but was not allowed to speak against them, so her testimony did her no good. But Aroïn saw love, not malice on her face and so, unknown to them all, he looked deeply into her eyes, and the eyes of her sisters as well.

And he was astonished. For he saw only



spite and greed in the hearts of the two eldest daughters, and after that their hands and heart seemed black to him, though outwardly they appeared humble and innocent enough. But in the youngest he saw only a sorrow that would sometimes overpower mirth, yet her heart and hands were like silver. And this troubled the Fair King's mind, so he told their father: 'Friend, I perceive that the truth here is hidden, for some unknown malice is at work, though the evil deed seems clear enough.' And for the friendship between them, he counseled the King to send them all to a hermit he said lived nearby, who had a silver cup. For he said: 'Whoever tells the hermit his name may drink from the cup, and bring back some token from it which shall prove his innocence or his guilt. For the truth is that each of thy daughters stands to gain from thy death, as they are thine only heirs.' And because Aroïn had said that the truth seemed hidden to him, the King agreed to withhold judgment for a time, but he said he would not be surprised to find that the guilty one was none other than his youngest daughter, though it grieved his heart to say it.

So the three daughters were given leave to seek the hermit, but only each alone. At first the two elder sisters were troubled, but they thought to themselves 'I shall do well if I tell the hermit my name is Æla'--that is, if they lied and called themselves by the name of their younger sister whom they knew to be innocent. Thus they hoped to betray her and each other, and each alone to win the favour of their father in order to become sole heir of the kingdom. 'Besides,' they thought, 'who can know the difference?' and they took heart again. Only Æla sought the hermit unafraid, for she knew her innocence and in her heart she hoped to bring back some token of the truth whereby her father would believe in her, and come to love her again.

The eldest daughter was sent out first. She found the hermit as he sat in the door of a little cottage. The hermit saw her too and

said: 'I see some heaviness on thee, child, what is thy name?'

'Æla', she replied, and she told him all about the poisoning of her father and how she came to seek the hermit in order to save her life. So the hermit gave her to drink from the silver cup. 'Justice be done thee,' he said. 'Drink all of this cup, and at the bottom shall appear a sign for the fruit of thy words; a true token that shall prove thee.'

Thereupon she drank all the wine that was in the cup. For a moment the taste was good; but it quickly changed and turned her stomach like vinegar. When this passed, she looked into the cup and there at the bottom lay a perfect pearl. 'Behold thy words!' said the hermit; but by that time the maiden was off, the precious thing clutched tightly in her hands, with never any thanks nor farewell wishes for the hermit.

Not long afterwards the second sister set out, and she found the hermit wandering in the road. She pretended to be as innocent as a dove, though she was no less guilty than the eldest who first spoke with the hermit. The holy man said to her: 'I see some heaviness on thee, child, what is thy name?' 'Æla', she answered, and like the eldest had done, she told him all about her father's poisoning and that she sought the holy man to save her life. And the hermit gave her to drink from the cup. As with the elder sister before her, it tasted sweet at first, but soon turned her stomach bitter. Yet when the sickness passed she looked into the cup and, behold! another pearl was at the bottom. The hermit said: 'Behold thy words!' but she too ran off without even thanking the old man.

Thus it was that both wicked sisters thought they had fooled the hermit by using Æla's name, and they said to themselves: 'Have I not received a pearl for all my trouble?' And too, each thought the hermit would now disbelieve Æla when she told him her name, and hoped to obtain a curse thereby for their younger sister.

Now when Æla set out she found the hermit kneeling at prayer in a little clearing, deep in the forest. 'Hail holy father!' she said, and he returned her greeting. Then he said: 'I see some heaviness on thee, child; what is thy name?'

'Æla,' she replied.

'What troubles thee, Æla?' he asked. And there she told him all her troubles, how she was often punished by her father for things she never did. Her heart was open before the holy man, who sat still and listened quite to the end of her words without saying anything, nor did he look in the least unkindly at her for the tale she told.

But when she finished, he stood and said: 'Justice be done thee. Drink all of this cup, and at the bottom shall appear a sign for the fruit of thy words: a true token that shall prove thee.' Then she drank from the cup as her sisters had done. At first, and only for a moment, the taste of the wine was very strong; but she endured it until it sweetened and warmed her. Then it was as if a heavy burden had been lifted from her, and she laughed with a happy heart as she had not done for many a year. Then she looked into the cup and at the bottom was a thorn as big as her thumb.

'Behold thy words!' said the hermit, and she was glad, for she took the thorn as a sign of her vindication. Then Æla thanked the old man with all her heart, for she did not yet know about the fair tokens her sisters had received. Then she asked what good thing she might do for the hermit, for she was grateful that he was holy enough to have such gifts to give her. 'I have no need,' he replied, 'but one day I may ask a boon of thee. For now, fare well.' And so at that she left him with a spring in her step and a new light on her face, promising him that, one day, whatever he might ask of her he should have, if it was within her power to give.

Soon after, like her sisters before her, Æla returned home again. The day of the King's judgment drew near, and all the sisters met in

the King's High Hall. The King was solemnly seated on his throne, and Aroin stood at his right hand. The whole Court was present, and a great number of people besides. When all were assembled the King commanded his daughters to show forth their tokens all at one time, and so they did. But when it was seen that the two elder girls had pearls, and the younger one a thorn, the King grew very angry at Æla and she wept bitter tears.

But before he could pronounce judgment on her, Aroin said to his friend: 'Sire, a cup was given thee for poison, and a cup has also brought these tokens. Now, if thy daughters swallow their tokens they shall have fully and truly partaken of their cups, and their doom shall be as complete as thy doom would have been hadst thou fully partaken of thine own cup and had no help from me. And by this, I think, thou shalt see a great marvel.' 'I agree,' answered the King, and each of the daughters were commanded to swallow their tokens. The two pearls went down easily enough, and the two elder sisters smiled in triumph. But Æla choked on her thorn, and had to be supported by two knights standing nearby, for she almost fainted at the pain.

In an instant, the fair garments of the two elder sisters were changed into dirty rags, and they both became as ugly hags. Meanwhile, Æla's garments grew fairer and fairer, and a glimmering brightness shined forth from her face and made her clothes look as if they had been dipped in a sea of sunshine.

When the King saw this he exclaimed, 'But how can this be?'

At these words the elder sisters fell down before him and confessed all their evil deeds, how they had done many mischiefs and blamed them all on Æla; for they had spoken to the holy man, and the power of the cup was still upon them. The King said: 'At last I have the truth', and he knelt at Æla's feet, begging her to forgive his mistrust and past maltreatment of her. And Æla replied: 'Dear father, I do forgive thee, for I have ever loved

thee; besides, how couldst thou have known otherwise?’

With that the King rose up suddenly and said, ‘Yes, how could I or anyone else have known otherwise?’ And straightway he let the sentence of death fall on the two elder sisters, and he would not repent it, not even when Æla herself begged and pleaded with him to spare them. ‘Nay,’ said he, ‘for their lives have been founded on lies and murderous envy: by these they plotted against us both. We cannot risk such treachery again, nor allow it to go unpunished, for it may breed other like troubles as long as these two live, both for us and for any who may chance to fall under their power.’ And so the elder sisters were placed in two barrels bored all over with many holes, and cast into the sea. After this there was a celebration, and the King raised Æla in honour before all the people small and great, and he loved her more than all he had until the day he died, always giving good gifts and fair words to her.

And so it was that the years of bliss Æla had with her father numbered thrice the space she endured unjust punishment. All this time she never lost her beauty nor her youth, for she had given her name to the holy man, and the power of the cup remained upon her. When at last her father died, she inherited his kingdom, for the King never took another wife, and therefore never had any other children. She proved a wise and noble queen, and was remembered for the many merits of her goodness, even to this very day.

But one day not long after her father’s death, the hermit paid Æla a visit. During that time of the year it was her custom to sit on the throne of judgment; and he brought with him two others: Aroin the Fair King, and a man who followed behind with his head bowed, wearing a stained and tattered cloak. ‘I have come to claim a boon from thee,’ the hermit said, ‘as thou promised me long ago.’

‘What shalt thou have?’ Æla answered ‘If it is in my power to give, it is thine.’

‘My desire is that thou wilt have this man in marriage,’ he answered, and he motioned to the bedraggled man. ‘For it is not good to rule alone. He has seen thy beauty from afar and wishes that thou wilt receive his love, and has asked me to speak for him.’

At this the Queen was troubled, for though the young man seemed good of face and gentle of heart, and very hale--indeed, he looked as likely a man as she had ever seen--still, he was wretchedly clad, and she wondered what might come of him. So she said to the hermit: ‘This may not be in my power to do, for I may only wed one who is noble and true of heart. None born for base deeds should approach the throne entrusted to me by my father, and so I ask what kind of man he is, and from what people he comes.’

‘Well hast thou spoken,’ said the man dressed in rags, and he threw off his cloak. And everyone saw that he was richly arrayed, as a mighty prince in past days of high legend, and there was strength and life and joy in his eyes. He strode towards the Queen and said gently: ‘I seek not a throne of power, fair Æla: but only the flower of thy love.’

‘For now thou dost behold,’ answered Aroin, ‘my very son.’ The queen was overjoyed at these words, and a new happiness came into her soul. ‘Now are all my hurts removed and my heart truly healed’ she said, and all those who heard these words wondered at the saying. Then she called for a Feast to be prepared, and the four of them made merry together day and night for many days. Æla and the Fair Prince spoke many happy words together, and each enjoyed the company of the other very much indeed.

They were soon married; Æla lived long in peace all the rest of her days, and had many children and grandchildren besides. When her firstborn son became a man, he was given the throne of his mother: for Æla went to dwell with her husband, in his kingdom, the Fair Land of the Fair Folk; and she lives with him there to this very day.

The Purple Crusade

by
Ryder W. Miller

Robyn looked at his arm, but it was now gone. Robyn could still sometimes feel it. "What a waste it has been for me," Robyn thought.

Robyn had volunteered for the war in The Middle East, the one that had never seemed to be over for at least the last fifty years, but things had not worked out well for him.

Here he was, an injured vet with nothing to show for it, and no prospects. He was willing to give everything, even his life. Why did he chose this? He was so high on pain killers that he was no longer really able to remember. There were special things about America that were worth defending, he thought, but they did not seem so important now. Was he some big hero now? Would people appreciate his sacrifice?

All he could remember now was the pain. He had wanted to be a hero. Some of his family members and friends thought he was a hero, but he wished things were different.

What a strange way to get injured, he thought. His airplane was shot down and his right arm was lost in the process. He was flying the plane low and it malfunctioned. The speed dropped enough for him to be hit by an enemy ground missile. It was not like in the old days where men would face each other in battle. Now it was all about technology, not brawn. War had become far shrewder. There was something corrupt about it. Friends of his thought the war was just about oil. We needed to protect our oil interests, it was argued. That is why he would never play the piano again.

Robyn decided he would try to watch some TV that evening from his hospital bed. There was a movie on about some conflict

during the Middle Ages. He would be on pain killers and would need something to occupy him if he could stay awake. He would be in rehab for some time now. It was not like he needed the time to think. He was just a victim of a unfair universe. Through a malfunction he was now a cripple.

Hell, he thought, he should be glad to be alive. Though the war would probably not end in his lifetime, it was likely that the USA would never be attacked in the foreseeable future. But as for himself, he did not know what he could do. He could just lie around now and try to take his mind off his injury. Later in the evening there would be food and TV Entertainment. Though his body was a mess, it would still be functional in the future and he still had one good arm. Maybe Nurse Teresa could cheer him up. She appreciated his sacrifice, but she was likely to tough love him. She would try to keep him strong. Not a lot of milk and sweetness from her was going to come his way.

He would have his meal late. He would watch television first. Maybe the movie would have those old fashioned medieval battles.

Robyn was about to turn on the TV and Teresa showed up. She was not smiling. "How are you doing," she said wearily, slightly annoyed, but not too tired.

Robyn looked at her and was sad that he was not getting more affection, but then again she had a lot of patients she was responsible for and probably already had a man, or now it could be a woman, that she was in something long term with. "I am okay. Will the TV be working tonight?"

"Yes. Can you still feel pain?"

"Sometimes. The pain killers are kind of fun though."

Teresa looked annoyed. "What would you like for dinner?"

"Why, I would like meatballs and noodles and maybe some carrots and peas."

"Is that one of the selections for tonight?"

"If it wasn't, would I have asked for it?"

"I take care of a lot of people, Robyn. I think we should be able to do that. Happy to see that you are in higher spirits."

"I'm okay, just confused and annoyed, that's all."

"Dinner tonight will be at 7 pm."

"Okay."

"The TV will be working tonight."

"Thank you. Is that movie on? What's it called? 'The Purple Crusade'?"

"I don't know. Do I look like the TV Guide?"

"Sorry, Teresa. Thanks for coming around and looking after me."

"It's a job. Don't get the wrong idea."

Teresa left the room and Robyn lay back to rest. He closed his eyes and thought he would take a nap before dinner and the evening show.

The pain was still with him, but the pain killers made him feel numb and drowsy. Everything seemed so meaningless now, but if he could sleep he could escape it and start fresh.

Counting deer would give him an appetite when he woke.

Robyn awoke in a field. He was startled to find the grass wet. A horse which he guessed was his was near. He looked down at his arm and it was there. In his fist he held a silver sword with a purplish tint.

He did not know where he was, but at the moment he did not care. He squeezed his hand on the hilt of the sword and shook it around in the air. He found that he now had

a smile on his face. The gray horse took a few steps away and gave him a strange look.

"Where am I?" he asked the mare.

The horse did not reply.

Robyn was not surprised that the horse didn't talk, but he was kind of disappointed. Here he was, a knight of sorts, and in such stories there sometimes were horses that knew how to speak. But one could not have everything, he thought.

He looked now over his body and he was in chain mail. It was not heavy enough that he could not walk or swing a sword. There was also a shield on the ground. The horse had bags which he figured would contain food. They were of a lilac color like the clothes he wore. He decided to forage.

But where was he?

He looked around and saw that he was in a field which was bordered by a river on one side and forest on the other. There were some yellow flowers on the field, probably dandelions.

He looked over his body and found that he was not injured. Besides some soil on his chain mail he was clean. The air was still cold so he stretched and shook himself to warm up.

He wasn't sure, but he figured that he probably knew how to ride a horse. He gathered his things off the ground and decided to follow the river South East. There was only one sun in the sky, thankfully. He looked on his personage to see if there was any indication of any rank or name, but there was none. He probably was a nobody.

He lifted himself into the saddle with a smoothness that he did not anticipate. He was happy to feel comfortable in the saddle. He egged the horse to walk south, which she did after taking a drink from the river.

It was a long day riding the horse, but he was surprised that he was not used to riding. Every few hours he needed to get off to stretch. There also was not a lot of food. He was not sure he would know how to find

some food. There was a slingshot of sorts in the bag. He did see a lot of wildlife. There was the occasional deer, and some fish in the stream. There was also some gophers, and squirrels.

He was not sure he would be able to start a fire, but there were plenty of brush and sticks he could use.

The first night he decided he would sleep by the river instead of under the trees. There would likely be less wildlife to bother him. The horse would probably scare most of it away.

Though uncomfortable, what a beautiful land it was. It must be Spring, as suggested by the many flowers he had seen that day. The weather, he figured, was somewhere in the mid 60s. But being outdoors so long was growing uncomfortable. Plus, he still yet did not have any idea of where he was going. He would need to meet some people to get a sense of who he was and where he was going.

But Robyn smiled. It seemed like his wish had come true. He also had his arm back. On his way he would be early next morning. He would wash in the river and on his way he would be.

He was surprised by how empty the land was. He saw the occasional wildlife, even took down a deer for food, but he was usually just on his own. He had found fish in abundance in the stream and birds in the trees, but there were no signs of people for a week so far.

He figured he had landed in a no man's land. Maybe there was some wild beast nearby that had scared all the people off, but he had not seen any signs of them either.

He enjoyed being alone out in nature, but he was irked by the situation. He figured he must be in some Medieval time, by his trapping, but he wanted to know more. Then again maybe he should just remain where he

was to avoid trouble. For some reason he figured trouble would find him anyway.

He took out his sword and swung it, realizing somehow he knew how to use it. His muscles were properly conditioned. He also did not have a problem with the bow when he took down the deer. It may have been someone else's deer though.

After a few more days of traveling south, Robyn found a house along the river. It was made of wood and not painted. The roof looked like it needed work. The owner apparently did not keep it up to standards, but then again he probably was some farmer who was just happy to have a roof over his head. It had been more than a week now along the river and Robyn thought it would be nice to spend an evening indoors, but the owner might not be obliging.

Robyn decided to stay on his horse so the owner would not think about taking advantage of him right away. He aimed his horse to the front door of the house and called out.

Nobody answered, and Robyn decided to investigate. He made his way to the door which was unlocked. There was some light in the inside room, but the house was abandoned. It looked as if someone has just left it without a lot of preparation. There was rotting food in what must have been the storage areas of the pantry. The bed was not made. Most of the clothing was still left in drawers.

Robyn decided not to touch anything if he could avoid it. There was no food that he could use here either.

It seemed as if the house had been abandoned some time ago. He sure would have liked to spend the night on the bed, but this was not his place and he needed to leave it alone. If the owner showed up today Robyn would just explain his situation and say that he was looking for the persons who lived there. This was The Middle Ages or something and he figured they could

understand something of what happened to him. These were the kind of things that happened during these times if he remembered right. When he was from they would not be considered open minded though.

Farmer "Maggot" appeared to have left his small farm. He did not seem to care that it would now be at the mercy of the elements. Stepping out the door he turned around to look at the building to think if there was anything he should do. There was something curious about the door though. He noticed that there was a nail on the door. He looked at it closely and there was a bit of leather nailed into the door. Maybe someone had left him a message at the front door? Maybe he had to go do something?

Down the river he and his horse would go again. The weather was not that bad, and the early morning sun would warm him up despite the morning dew. The horse seemed to be fine, if she was welcome to stop and eat the grass anytime she wanted to.

During this time Robyn felt elated. Here he was alone in a wilderness of sorts. He had the time to enjoy looking at the birds and wondering about the clouds. The rocks that jutted out of the ground gave him a sense of history. But all good things must come to an end, he figured.

A day later he saw another farm house, but this one was not empty. He could see the smoke from a fire. He decided to take the horse to the front door like last time, but this time someone stepped out of the house.

It was an old lady in rags, but she held a stick in her hand.

"Who might you be?" she demanded.

Robyn decided to answer.

"Why I am Robyn, a traveling, er... knight."

"None of those left in these parts."

"I don't understand."

"Why, there is a crusade. Have you not heard? All the warriors have had to go south."

"What happened to the farmer from the north?"

"He had to go as well."

"Are you here alone?"

"What is it to you? You have to go south with the rest of them. If you don't, they may put an end to you."

"For what reason?"

"They will tell you. You look kind of important with the purple color of yours. You could probably get away with saying that you are someone important. You just need to clean up."

"What of the men folk here?"

"They have had to go also. Just me here and my daughter. Don't be too friendly or we will poke you," she said brandishing a knife.

"Don't worry."

"Who are you anyway?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"I have heard all sorts of things."

"I am named Robyn."

"You're needed Robyn, down south. Over the great waters they will take you."

"What am I needed for?"

"Do you expect me to know? You will find the land empty. All but the woman and children have gone."

"What if I don't go?"

"You will be arrested. All must go?"

"What for?"

"You will find out in the south. There are five kings around here who don't all agree, but when one says something we all have to listen or else!"

Robyn was taken aback. He had gotten what he wanted or so it seemed: the chance to shine in personal combat. This did seem better than being a cripple. He decided to go south and see what he could find out.

"Thank you for answering my questions," he said.

"I only answered what I could. Stay for a meal."

"Thank you but I am not hungry."

"Take something with you?"

"Okay."

The lady gave Robyn some food, mostly fruit and vegetables, but also some dried meat. [G4] He put in his bag. The horse seemed happy having decided to take a rest on the lawn after eating some grass. Robyn figured he should go and meet his destiny. Apparently they needed soldiers.

On his way south over the next few days he saw a few more abandoned farms. The spiffier than many who had left before him. In town, not in the village, he would find out what had transpired.

After a while there were men. Most looked at him with anger: in most areas he was out numbered. They did appear to be working in collusion. Some of them had shields and armor.

"Who might you be?" one asked him when he reached the center of the village.

"Why I am Robyn the Purple," he said trying to add to his mystique. He knew he would be different in a lot of ways and he sought to distinguish himself.

"You are late in the arriving," another man returned.

"What do you mean?"

"There is a war going on, you idiot. Every available man is needed."

"So why haven't you gone?" Robyn asked.

"I have gone already. We have gone already. It is your turn."

"What is this about?"

"How could you not know what this is about? It is about protection. It is about honor. If we do not go there, they will come here."

"Who will come here?"

"Why, one of the other kings. This is the land of King Parod. Those kings, they don't

whole country side seemed abandoned excepted for the occasional woman or child. Most were not friendly. One even said that he did not belong here.

"How far is the nearest town?" he had asked one.

"A few days south," he heard someone yell.

After a few days there were more farms and houses. He apparently had walked out of the wilderness to civilization. Women and children and the occasional old man looked as he walked by. He imagined that he looked a bit

all agree, but when one says something you have to listen or else."

"Or else what?"

The group of men grew annoyed now. A boy that was among the half dozen of them decided to run away.

"You want trouble? What are you, an idiot? We don't have a choice. Nobody has survived here."

Robyn knew now that he was trapped. Two of the men were pointing their bows at him.

The boy had apparently gone to get reinforcements. A few more had arrived. Some on horseback and others in thick armor. He would soon be surrounded.

"Tell me what this is about?"

"Why, Parod is annoyed with somebody about something. You will find out when the boat lands."

"Happy you are here to joins us. With a fine steed as well. Why, you are welcome bring the horse with you if you like."

Robyn was surprised by the change in tone. They were acting like he came willingly. In a way he had. He realized that he would need to put up a fight to get out of this, a fight where he would be dishonored and likely killed. They obviously were able to do this to many others. This was the war he had "volunteered" for?

“Why, we will escort you down to the boat. There is one leaving this afternoon. Why, we will feed you first and send you on your merry way. Purple outfit. Nice. You may be remembered. You may become a hero.”

On they went now. Though the mood was courteous, Robyn realized that he was caught. Glory might be his. Surprisingly his body was used to using the weapons he had, and he had gotten used to riding the horse.

After a meal of mutton and chops and ale, he and a few dozen others went on the boat to take them over the water.

Most on the boat gave him strange looks, but he was better armed than most. Maybe he could do the right thing where they were going now? Why was he dressed in purple? He did not really know, but astrologers and New Age people liked that color. It could be a color for a peaceful people, maybe for the magical, but things were not likely to be under his control. Was this Medieval time really better? He would have to wait to find out, and it might not be better for him. He now remembered the old expression, be careful what you wish for.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The Mythic Circle is a small annual literary magazine published by *The Mythopoeic Society*, which celebrates the work of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and other writers in the mythic tradition. (For more information about the Mythopoeic Society, contact Edith L. Crowe, Corresponding Secretary, The Mythopoeic Society, PO Box 6707, Altadena, CA 91003. E-mail: correspondence@mythsoc.org)

Copies of the next issue, *Mythic Circle*, #34, scheduled to appear in the summer of 2012, can be pre-ordered for \$8.00 through the Mythopoeic Society's website, <<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythic-circle/preorder/>>. Back issues are available at <<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythic-circle/history/>>.

Submissions and letters of comment should be sent to: Gwenth Hood, English Department, Marshall University, Huntington WV 25701, or e-mailed to <mythiccircle@mythsoc.org>. Paper submissions should be double-spaced and should include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The Mythic Circle exists primarily for the benefit of writers trying to develop their craft in the Mythopoeic tradition and publishes short fiction, poetry, and artwork (mostly illustrations of stories and poems.) By editorial policy we favor our subscribers. As a small literary magazine, we can only reward our authors with one complimentary copy of the issue in which the accepted

work appears. We do not pay any money. We have, as yet, no hard and fast length limits, but we as a small publication, we must think very well of a story more than 5000 words long to publish it. Shorter works have a better chance.

Editorial and Commentary

In this issue, we welcome back some previous authors, namely Dag Rossman, with a continuation on the adventures of Faragrim the Draug, and Ryder Miller, with his modern warrior-errant. October Williams and David Sparenberg also return with more variations on their poetic themes. Again, Tim and Bonnie Callahan offer their superb talents for the cover and illustrations, adding texture and imaginative depth to the issue.

With us for the first time are storytellers Eric Kregel, Erin Avery, Fred Hilary, and Joe Krauss, as well as poets Joshua Drake, Roger Echo-Hawk, and D. S. Martin. Their themes range through time and space, in contemporary and jurisdictions, and in the links between them. (What are dreams and visions for?)

And because your editor believes that debate and discussion can take place in fiction and poetry as easily as in essay form, I present, with Ryder Miller's kind permission, an exploratory sequel to his story, "The Purple Crusade," with its questions about the nature of honor in modern as opposed to medieval warfare. Perhaps we will have more commentary on such issues, or more stories on these themes.

Robyn's Further Adventures

or

The Red, the Purple and the Green

Robyn opened his eyes and found a man sitting beside his bed. The hospital bed. He wondered a moment what had happened to his horse and his ship, reality asserted itself all too soon. His restored left arm, phantom of a fleeting dream, was gone again. How long had he slept?

"Did I miss the movie? *The Purple Crusade*?" he asked.

"I doubt it," said his visitor, dark eyes gleaming. The frames of his eyeglasses, almost translucent, cast a purple glow on his white coat. "I came to tell you that the tests came out fine. We can start the fitting

tomorrow—unless you back out."

"Back out? Why would I?"

"Why indeed? You're a good candidate, and you've given your informed consent. Unless you withdraw it."

He remembered the videos they'd made him watch, the forms he had signed. "It won't make things the way they were before," he said.

"No, never. But that doesn't mean things won't be good. In their way. You'll have sensation of a kind—but not your old sensations. Digits of a kind, but not like your old fingers. You won't be able to do

everything you did before. But some things you'll do fine. And you'll learn to do things you couldn't do before, things that others can't. It will be an adventure."

"You'll be famous, Dr. Old, if this works out," said Robyn. "What about me? Will I win honor?"

"Why not? What sort of honor do you want, Robyn?"

##

Robyn rode his mare down the gangway onto the broad beach. He was glad the former dream had returned, since he enjoyed it. However, he sensed that his equipment was different. And suddenly he saw, bearing down on him, a tall man dressed from head to foot in bright red armor. The horse, a third again as large as Robyn's, came to a halt twenty paces away, and pawed the ground, snorting.

"So!" exclaimed the Red Knight. "King Parod sends a purple champion this time! And what sorcerous weapon is that in your left hand? Not very knightly?"

Until that moment, Robyn had not thought about his left arm, but now he realized that it was multi-jointed thing, perhaps resembling a tenacle from a distance, and it culminated in a hand of changeable size, now swollen to three times its natural size and still swelling. *Dr. Old's prosthetic*, he thought. *I wonder how it works?* "Just how knightly is this quarrel?" he demanded, to gain time. Suddenly he knew that he could control the size of the hand, and made it double once again.

The Red Knight looked frightened, rather silly of him, Robyn thought, since he was the one with the sword and lance. But his voice was definitely quavering as he warned, "Your king will win no glory if your victory comes by unchivalrous means!"

"So what will your king do with his honor if you win? What will mine do, if I

win?" Robyn asked.

"Of course, you arrogant fool, the winner will expect everyone to listen when he talks and do exactly what he says. And rather than expose Parod's entire kingdom to peril, the two of them agreed to settle the question through single combat. Ours."

"Single combat might not be a bad idea," Robyn said. "I can't say I think much of the rest of it, though. People should have the right to mind their own business and do whatever is best for them, except when there's real trouble. That's how it is in my country, or it should be.

"But if your king really is such a swaggering ass that he wants everyone to flatter him whether they need to or not, at least it's halfway decent of him to arrange a combat between people who want to fight, instead of just riding out and mowing down everyone in sight. That is what the evil ones did it in my world. They killed thousands of people who never did anything to them, just to prove how angry they were and how no one else mattered. That's why I went to war and lost my natural arm, and why I have this sorcerous thing instead."

The Red Knight looked unimpressed. "That's not much to be proud of."

"And what are *you* so proud of?" Robyn suddenly realized that his prosthetic arm could be a missile-throwing weapon. In his mind's eye, he saw a store-room of shootable things: arrows, axes, laser beams, ball bearings, soccer balls, footballs, beach balls.

"For what you've said, a pie in the face is about right," he told the Red Knight. And then in his mind's eye, he saw a row of luscious pies. Apple pie, cream pie, blueberry pie, peach pie. But cherry pie, surely, fit the Red Knight best. Whoosh! The missile thrower sucked in the pie and out it flew. As his challenger swung his lance, the pie struck his face with a satisfying *thwack*. The Red Knight lost his

balance, and, following his lance's momentum, fell over his horse's shoulder and hit the ground with a clatter and an undignified screech.

Robyn shrank his limb-weapon to normal size and signaled his mare to ride on. *I suppose he'll gather reinforcements and pursue,* he thought. *That could be exciting.*

##

But no one followed as he explored the new land. Sand gave way to lush meadow, and he let the mare graze as she pleased. Presently, however, he saw a delegation of pedestrians advancing. They did not seem hostile, so he waited for them.

"Hail, Sir Robyn," said their leader, when they had come to within ten paces. "Please dismount and accept a change of clothes." They laid a parcel of green garments before him.

"Thanks for the offer," said Robyn, "but why would I change my clothes?"

"Why do you wear purple? It is the color of princely arrogance. Green is the color of nature, of honest men, the true color of honor. Get off your mare, let her graze as she pleases. Here no one tries to be greater than anyone else. We eat what the land produces, and when we must, after the manner of a legendary Robyn for whom you must be named, we take from those who

have too much and give it to those who have too little."

Robyn considered. "That sounds fine, but someone took me from my world and put me in this purple outfit. I won't give it up until I find out who and why. It's my quest."

The men in green stood shoulder to shoulder, scowling. "Do you know that wearing purple, you're claiming to be a king or prince? That you're making yourself the enemy of honest men, and of nature?"

"No, I don't know that," said Robyn. "No one told me so. Maybe I'm wearing purple because I've earned a purple heart. Or maybe it's because in my country, we all vote to choose the president, who has powers like a king, so in a way, we are all princes, although we all give up our power to the one we all have chosen. As for you, if you try to change what people wear against their will, and if you take things from people and give them to others because you want to, you have the arrogance of princes, even though you wear green."

Robyn had had enough of this conversation, and he signaled his mare, who sprang into a gallop. Soon they left green delegation staring and grumbling.

What new sights awaited Robyn in this strange land? Honor, he decided, is what you make of it, and he would take adventures as they came.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Erin Avery earned his B.A. in History, Philosophy and English from Indiana Wesleyan University in 1986, where he taught Greek to remedial students for four semesters. He currently teaches English, History, Philosophy, Computers and Keyboarding at National College in Richmond Kentucky. Erin is working on his graduate degree in English at Eastern Kentucky University. His special areas of emphasis are: medieval romance, fairy tale, fantasy and science-fiction literature, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis studies.

Bonnie Callahan has contributed art to Mythopoeic publications for over 3 decades. She was in on the premieres of *Mythlore*, *Mythprint*, *Mythril*, and *Parma Eldalamberon*. Bonnie has worked as a background stylist in the animation industry for over 20 years, and also designs logos, posters, and cards, as well as painting art on rocks. Her illustrations have often appeared in *The Mythic Circle*.

Tim Callahan graduated from the Chouinard Art School with a degree in illustration. He has worked in the animation industry as a background designer and layout artist for over 20 years and has regularly contributed art for *The Mythic Circle*. He and Bonnie met while working on the infamous Bakshi production of Lord of the Rings.

Joshua Drake is Assistant Professor of Music and Humanities at Grove City College. He was born just north of Nashville and was raised on a Union land grant belonging to his family for generations. He received his M.Mus. and Ph.D. in musicology from the University of Glasgow. His publications include articles on topics from Renaissance Italy, though his interest in alliterative meter comes from a lifetime of reading medieval English poetry.

Roger Echo-Hawk is a writer, artist, and historian who lives in Colorado, where he is a member of the Grey Havens Tolkien discussion society. His most recent book is *The Magic Children: Racial Identity at the End of the Age of Race*.

Frederick Hilary was introduced to the delights of the fantasy story by Enid Blyton's *Book of Brownies*, and to the pleasures of reading by Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. He studied medieval literature at Saint David's College, Lampeter, under Alcuin Blamires, the son of C.S. Lewis' pupil and friend Harry Blamires. He currently lives in Greece, where he is working on a novel-length retelling of the Hercules myths, among other works. While he has published short stories in online magazines, the present story is his debut in print.

Eric Kregel graduated with a BA in English Writing and attended the MLA Writer's Workshop in Iowa. He has published some journalism in the *South Peace News* and has earned an award at <www.writerstoolbox.com> for my inspirational fiction "Decrease." He has Science Fiction/Horror stories published in various webzines.

Joseph Krauss teaches American Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Scranton where he also directs the honors program. He has published short stories in, among other places, *Moment*, *Oleander Review*, *Literary Chaos*, and *Sinister Tales*. He doesn't especially like bad guys, but his grandfather was a semi-notorious gangster in Prohibition Chicago, so maybe that explains it.

D.S. Martin's poetry collection *Poiema* (Wipf & Stock) was a 2009 prize winner at The Word Guild's Awards. His books are available at: <www.dsmartin.ca>.

Ryder Miller Ryder W. Miller is an environmental reporter, critic, writer, poet, and independent scholar, who does not live very far from Berkeley, California. He is the editor of *From Narnia to a Space Odyssey* and co-writer of *San Francisco: A Natural History*. He has published stories in *Mythic Circle* and on *The Lost Souls* website.

Douglas "Dag" Rossman has been retelling and, more recently, expanding upon the Norse myths and legends for the past thirty years before live audiences across the Midwest. He has two published collections of original short stories (many of which first appeared in *The Mythic Circle*) set in the Nine Worlds of Norse mythology. The most recent one, *The Dragonseeker Saga* (Skandisk, Bloomington, MN, 2009), has also been characterized as a young adult fantasy novel. The story in this current issue of *Mythic Circle* is a direct sequel to certain of the events taking place in that book.

David Sparenberg is an eco-poet-playwright, Shakespearean actor, stage director, storyteller and workshop facilitator. His literary work has appeared in over 120 periodicals, journals and anthologies in 13 countries and is the author of six books, including *THE WAY OF THE GREEN TROUBADOUR* and *THE GREEN TROUBADOUR SOURCE BOOK*. David lives in Seattle, WA and is part time faculty at Seattle Central Community College.

October Williams is a Midwestern homemaker -- and has enjoyed some extended stretches of time in Latin America.

POETRY IS

by
David Sparenberg

Poetry? Poetry is, ah... Poetry seeks, ah... Yes.

Poetry seeks—recurrence. That is its form, a form constructed for re-entrance. Its desire is to preserve a symbolum of memory. By containing in words, in heated words—and in the silent, breathing spaces between words—the pathos and passion, the mystery and the penetrating force of experience. Experience made memorable as a presence of power: disciplined, aesthetic, seductive, vulnerable. Composed in one manner or another to draw the emotional philosophy of life into its recurrence; a point of reference. A signpost on the path of pilgrimage, with fortunetelling fingerprints—yes.

Poetry offers reference backward to the initial, wild intensity of experience; a hindsight that is longing to be lived again in an alterity of future reception. A micro-renaissance: born once more into being present with feeling; if not within the presence of feeling. That is alive!

Poetry? Poetry is-sa... It is: voice rhythms, felt sounds, word pictures. An ancient, ageless, renewing virginity sprung from the original seed of time. Poetry is one of creation's grand amphitheaters of love for life, a theater of blood and dreams, of broken bread and spilled wine, of circus absurdities. Where each of the players is positioned, symbolically. For viewing: horizontally, vertically, inside-out, outside-in, all around. Where the costumes, designed with roots and tendrils as well as wings, are the energies of articulation, arranged to explore the contours of nudity.

Poetry is that human act of beauty, lusting to be recognized, witnessing to belonging, bursting like a seedpod full of song, wending like a river imbibing light that enters this edgy, listening world with so little material substance. Yet poetry comes here among us, footing to be taken home, taken to heart, held in embrace, especially, most especially, loved tenderly in the still of night. That is love!

Poetry is—love's first and recurring naivety.

Tree in a September Storm,

Carretera Picacho Ajusco (Mexico)

by
October Williams

The sky's a Chinese pattern through the leaves --
The grey embossed in gold, above the blue
Woven against the green; and she who weaves
Is dark and drooping, gracefully askew –

Her head hung over, tracing the last light
While it lingers:
The aureate borders of her art her arms bedight,
Delineate on her fingers.

Till an obsidian cloud obscures the embers,
And, rising on a rising wind, her tapestry askance
Slips unremembered from her fingers that exquisitely unbend
To catch the first few drops — while she remembers.

She turns her head and waits, brushing her glance
Over the wind veiled grasses that attend
Her; at her feet the rain, a glass of splintered silver,
Catches her stance:
Her slender umber, and her falling train,
The angle of her elegance
Before the Storm of passionate surrenders —

Bowing before the Dance.

She Shall Live On

by

Eric J. Kregel

The fuzzy, faded video image of Mari St. John looked deeply into the camera. The pale, balding woman grasped her bed sheets tightly. Closing her eyes, she swallowed a few times. She shook off the tears.

“Thandie, my love. I want to be with you always. I want to be there when you marry. I want to be there when you have your first birth. I want to be there when you grow old. Thandie, I can’t be. I just can’t. So the next best thing is that you will have this as a way for me to live on...”

A new voice spoke. It was a deep, television voice droning over the image. “This is a mother’s legacy. A mother, who did not let even cancer stop her love for her daughter.”

Mari’s image changed. She wore a pink shirt, had most of her hair, and was now sitting in her kitchen, staring at the video camera. “I plan to have a library of video messages. You shall watch a video messages of me throughout your life. That way, I can always be there with you. Some messages will be general. Some will be specific. They are here for you, so that your mother, I, will always be with you.”

The image of her seemed stronger, earlier in her stages of cancer. She still had her hair, the glow of her skin, and the energy

to deliver her distinct, St. John spunk that landed her the TV anchor job for City News based out of Calgary.

A polite, male voice continued his narration, “Since Mari St. John was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she videotaped herself for the sake of her 6 year old daughter, Thandie.”

Another image; this time Mari was outside in the snow. She looked over the snow blanketing their backyard. Mounds tackled the swing set and slide. She wore a wool cap, black jacket, and rubber boots. Face flushed from the cold, she looked deep into the camera, stating on cue, “Thandie, I shall live on.”

The newsman providing the narration now appeared, wandering through the streets of downtown Calgary. He looked into the camera, slowly striding towards the lens with confidence and sobriety. “As it was announced a week ago, Mari St. John passed away. She will be missed, here at City News. We will not forget her, keeping her legacy with us. Her daughter, as well, will never forget her and has a concrete connection to her mother’s legacy. Her daughter, Thandie, has now a videotaped memorial of her mother.”

The scene cut to a small, young girl.

Her face red with crying, the camera took up most of her face. "I will watch the tapes a lot because I miss my mother. It's like she's here with me."

The newsman returned, still facing the camera on the streets of Calgary. "A legacy given by a mother whose love would not end. Even in death. For Thandie, her mother lives on. Gerry Theroux, City News Calgary."

The image popped out of existence replaced by the harsh scream of static. The television muted. The remote control signaled the VCR to rewind the tape.

Randall climbed out of his worn, brown leather chair and lurched to a stand. He reached over to the lamp, turning it on. His living room filled with light, alerting him to the figure of a woman standing in the kitchen. He put on his glasses to find out who was there. Upon seeing the girl, he explained, "I was just--"

"Watching the old news broadcast about mom?" Thandie asked.

"Well, I wanted to see what was on the tape." Randall looked away from his daughter. "I didn't want to tape over anything...important." He laughed quietly to himself.

"Dad," Thandie said. "If it's a videotape in our house, it's probably one of mom."

"Probably. I guess I don't want to record something on an important tape." He drew his robe, tying it up. "When did you get home?"

"Not long." She walked to the other brown chair in the living room, pointing at the television that centered the room. "Breton walked me to the door and saw me in about five minutes ago."

Randall scratched the half circle of thinning hair connecting his ears together on top of his head. "Oh, did you have fun?" The click of the VCR sounded, signaling the end of the rewind cycle.

"Yes. We saw that new Space movie."

"Oh, I'm jealous. I used to be really into Sci-Fi."

"I know, you used to write it." His teenage daughter leaned close toward him, said, "I could see it again! We could watch it tomorrow, after you watch your church programs."

"Oh." He slunk away, moving his head away first and then his whole body. "Oh no. No. I hear its going to be below 0 tomorrow. Shouldn't go outside. Might get cold and that wouldn't be healthy."

"Of course it will be below 0 tomorrow. It's Alberta! Have you ever known Alberta to be warm?"

Randall allowed a bit of noise to come from his laugh. He pointed at his daughter. "That's good. That's something your mother, Mari, would say."

Upon hearing her dead mother's name, she rolled her eyes quickly to herself, as to not be caught by her father. "Dad, I..."

Randall reached for another tape and replaced it with the video in the player. He pressed play. Almost to his daughter, he said, "Let's watch another message from your mother."

Thandie shrugged and let the message begin.

Breton met his father at church, where he worked. His father wore his collar and suit, just returning from a funeral. Breton sat in his office, going through some of his books.

While he waited for his father, he scanned through the maps of the Holy Lands. Breton loved maps and dictionaries and any sort of reference books. He struggled in school to read actual stories or poems, but loved to research them. This is why he got high marks in school, especially in his English classes: he hated stories, but loved researching them. This love of research came out every time he was in his father's office, going through all of the Bible helps. He was asked by his teachers why he loved

non-fiction so much, to which he replied, "It feeds the fiction inside of my head." The teacher, nor the class, understood this statement and put it with all of the rest of Breton's cryptic comments in class.

His father, Kendrid, enjoyed watching his son tear through his books. He would joke, "It makes it look as if I actually research my homilies. He clears off all of my dust." When he entered his office, he found his son in a deep trance over a page concerning ancient Babylon.

"Son!" No response. Breton just stared. "Breton!"

Breton looked up with a sleepy look he wore through most of his adolescence. He mumbled, "Hey dad."

"So, to what do I owe this pleasure?"

"I was nearby. Thought I'd stop by."

"We live 15 kilometers away and it's snowing. And you don't drive, so you would have had to ride your bike. I don't think you were in the neighborhood. Something's on your mind." Breton gazed at his father with the same vigor the outside of a house stares at the neighborhood. He stared at his father until the silence could no longer be endured.

"So, how's that girl you've been seeing. Thandie?"

"Oh yeah. I've been meaning to ask you something about her."

Kendrid sat on the edge of his desk, relaxing. "Oh yes. What about?"

"Can you have dinner with her family tonight? I want to figure out something about her."

"What needs to be figured out? And why do you need me to be there while you figure it out?"

"I just do. I can't explain it. And I thought, well, maybe you could pick up what I'm seeing."

"Which is?"

"I don't know yet." He looked away from his father, staring at a globe in the corner of his father's room. "I like this girl.

I want to figure out something. Plus, we don't have any plans tonight."

Kendrid shrugged and nodded. For the rest of the late afternoon, Breton did his homework while his dad worked on the office. About 5:30, they drove over to Thandie's house for supper.

They found the St. John's home at the end of a cul de sac of one of Calgary's more wealthy neighborhoods, McKenzie Towne. Kendrid, the moment he saw the neighborhood and remembered the last name, yawned an exclamation of recognition, "Oh! Thandie's mom is Mari, the newscaster!"

Before they got any closer, Breton mumbled out of the corner of his mouth, "Was, dad. Was her mother. She died about 7 years ago."

"Yes, I remember now." Kendrid said, to no one in particular, "Another widowed husband, eh? We make great meals and lousy after-dinner chats. This should be, well, familiar."

They knocked at the door, waiting until the door swung open. Thandie greeted them. She giggled and bounced, full of raw, 17 year old energy. Her laughter infectious, Kendrid couldn't help smiling back at the girl.

"Well, hello! Welcome to our home," she said.

Breton mumbled, while looking away from everyone, "This is my dad."

"Hello, Breton's father!" She tried sounding official.

"Please, I'm just Kendrid."

"Not Father Kendrid or Pastor Kendrid?"

Kendrid chuckled, unsure why. "No. No one calls me those titles. I'm simply Kendrid. Even Breton calls me Kendrid. I'm allergic to titles."

She motioned for them to enter. They took off their shoes, coats, and hats, entering into the warmth of the home. Entering the

large home with high vaulted ceiling and a mammoth great room, Randall waddled out of the kitchen to greet them. A small man, constantly hunched to the right, he trumpeted a greeting from his small voice, "Well, hello there. I see they've arrived." He shook both of their hands. "Dinner is almost ready. Before we begin, we need to watch a video tape."

Randall led them to the living room, sitting them down in each a chair. The St. John's television was mounted on a wall full of cabinets. Randall opened the far right cabinet, revealing hundreds of private videotapes, all with the white stickers and words written by a dark pen. He found one and pulled it out delicately.

Kendrid joked, "So, I see you've got a lot of tapes. Is that for hockey or football?"

Randall tenderly put the video in the player and answered, "Oh no. I prefer not to watch sports. Mari doesn't like me to watch sports." He turned on the TV and VCR.

The image blipped to life. Mari St. John sat in a large, white swing chair, overlooking at beautiful spring day. Somehow, background music gently played giving an air of warmth and sincerity. Mari, in clothes she wore while giving a newscast, bounced, "Well, hello there! It is so good to meet you! I am Mari St. John, Thandie's mother. I understand that you are considering taking out my daughter. If this is true, than you are watching the right video section." The video faded into an image of her standing her garage.

"Here in our garage is our '96 Porsche. We purchased it when I won an award for excellence in journalism." She walked by a beautiful, cherry red Porsche. "This car is worth more than the last three of our previous cars combined. It took me a long time to save and plan for this purchase."

The camera cut in close to her face. "You would love to drive this car, wouldn't you? Most young people would. Say I,

without much thought, throw you the keys, without ever knowing you or learning to trust you? Foolish? Unwise? Of course. But how much more valuable is my daughter to me than just a sports car that's cool today and junk tomorrow."

The scene changed. Mari walked along a hillside, overlooking Olympic Park. "Thandie is very precious to me. I am her mother and a mother's love is a deep, mystical bond. I'm not there to approve or disapprove of you seeing my daughter, but I am here now, telling you that she must be cherished, honored, and protected. You must be a gentleman, whoever you are. Now I have left a questionnaire for you to fill out, which Randall will score. He's been coached as to what I look for. Please take this form home and return it the next time you see Thandie. I wish her luck on her new adventure with you." The tape ended.

Kendrid looked at his son, hoping to read any expression on his son's face. The boy sat, staring blankly at the screen.

"Dinner is ready," Randall said

Randall, after spending most of the meal hunched over his plate, asked Kendrid, "So, you live alone? I mean, you're not married?"

"Widowed. My wife, Breton's mother, died during childbirth." Kendrid was still working on his potatoes. His steak finished and carrots sucked up, his meal was now the starches. "Breton was her only child."

"Oh. I'm sorry to hear that," Randall said. "It must have been hard for you to raise your son alone."

Kendrid swallowed his potato, wiped his mouth with a cloth napkin, and smiled at his son. "Immensely. I mean, Breton was an easy baby, luckily. He even changed his own diapers." He looked around and discovered no one laughed at his attempted joke.

"Seriously, it was difficult. But we human beings are adaptive, learning how to survive

without certain things. We move on, we live on when people leave us. I miss my wife, Jane, but I wouldn't trade losing her for the world. It made me a lot more aware of Breton, a lot more aware of people in general. I use the illustration about someone who loses their eyesight and their sense of hearing is heightened. Losing my wife, my High School sweetheart, was-

"Mari died when Thandie was seven." Randall chirped this, cutting off Kendrid's musing. His tone was oddly inappropriate, curt in how matter-of-fact about his devastating loss. "Yes, she died of cancer. It was very difficult losing her. She did everything. I don't think I ever changed Thandie once. She brought Thandie everywhere, on all of her news stories. She read to Thandie and she did her news show. I cooked and cleaned, but only set to her instructions. She was very particular."

"It sounds like it was a hard transition."

"She made it easy. She videotaped herself for Thandie. If she hadn't, we would have lost her completely." Kendrid tried to make sense of that last statement: we would have lost her completely. How?, he wondered. She's dead, isn't that "completely"? How do you cut a percentage of life from death?

Kendrid shook this kind of thinking from his mind. He rose, striking the table of dishes.

"We saw one of those before dinner."

Clumsily, he pointed to his son.

"Remember?" Breton didn't move, staring at Thandie. "How many messages did she leave?"

"Oh, the catalog registers about 452 6 hour tapes and over 18,000 messages. Some are much longer than the one you got. Around the end, most of the messages are just her talking to the camera from the hospital bed. The one you saw was during the first couple months of her filming. She loved being in front of the camera and this

was her way of leaving something behind for Thandie.

"During her 11 month fight with cancer, she spent a lot of time on her messages. She would labor over these messages, often times skipping sleep or eating. She really took it up as a labor of love. For Thandie."

"And have you watched many of them?"

"We watch her messages every day. With her face shining through the screen, she never has left us."

"Interesting." Kendrid remarked this mostly to himself.

In the car ride back to their home, Breton broke the silence by mumbling, "I don't know how to ask this, so I may ask this wrong."

"Ask and be wrong, son"

"Is Thandie weird?"

Is Thandie weird?, Kendrid thought to himself. I can see why my son would be attracted to her. Pretty, blond little girl. She got her looks from her mom, a television person. Television people, who are scarce in Alberta, are such strange people. They remind me of unicorns, gently prancing through someone's garden. They look like they don't belong in places like the suburbs or in grocery stores. But you see these television people, these magnificently beautiful people, and there they are. Thandie's mom was a television person. And Thandie, for all purposes, looks just like one too.

Is Thandie weird? How can I explain to my son that grief does different things to different people? It's weird to have grief, on any level, so those who have it are weird. And our grief came out entirely different than Randall's grief. How can I explain this to a kid who's, well, fallen in love with a unicorn?

"Define weird, Breton."

The boy squirmed, already having a difficult time taking. "Well, she's forced to

watch a bunch of videotapes of her dead mother. That's weird, right?"

"It's weird to lose a mom. It shouldn't happen. So, yeah, she's weird."

"But she watches videos every night. She's done this for 10 years. That's weird."

My son isn't as dumb as he looks.

"Who turns on the tape? Is it her or her father?"

"I dunno. But she watches them. I like her but I'm worried. You know, all of that psychological stuff."

"I see. Well, what are you most comfortable with? Do you like her?"

"Yeah."

"Do you like spending time with her?"

"Yeah."

"Then spend time with her. Don't be like our Old Man and over-think this one."

"It's just weird."

"Yeah, it is. Just weird."

Mari looked into the camera, wondering if it was on. She nodded and began, "I have five rules concerning finding a spouse. These rules should be followed after High School. During the next eleven years, just date to have fun. Don't get a boyfriend. Only date someone you intend to marry and since you can't marry in High School, don't even bother. Just have fun with friends. As you have heard from my other recorded messages, I don't believe that girls should be exclusive to one man unless they intend to marry them. Courtship, my dear. Dating is dead, but courtship is a way where your father and I can be involved with your marital decisions."

Mari sat in her hospital bed, with most of her hair lost. She wore a pale blue paper gown, exposing her pale skin. Her eyes were crimson, with a faint hint of her once green eyes. She lost considerable weight, resembling a skeleton hanging in a science classroom.

"But if you find someone you want to commit your life to, make certain of 5 things.

1) **Marry those of your faith.** You have been raised as an Evangelical, Protestant Christian. If you want more information on your faith, consult tapes 111-151. I've seen too many relationships tear people when individuals try to marry outside of their tribe.

2) **Make sure he comes from a household with both parents.** A boy raised by divorced parents will only divorce you...more than likely. 3) **Does he have a purpose for his life?** What is he on Earth for? A man without a purpose should not be considered as a spouse. A man needs to know where he's and then who he's taking with him, not the other way around. 4) **Does he fit into your purpose?** In order to create your own life's purpose, see message 234 on tape 59. Finally, 5) **What does his father look like?** Not just how the father behaves, but what he actually looks like. Is he overweight? Is he bald? How does he dress? Look to the father to foresee what kind of man you shall marry."

She smiled. The message ended

Thandie wrapped her scarf around her face, tucking it into her wool cap. She zipped up her jacket and left for the cold, outside world of Canada. For the first few moments, the warmth of her house lingered around her, only to be replaced by the stinging, sharp cold air.

She left the walkway that wrapped around the side of the house, leading to the sidewalk. As she reached the sidewalk, she heard her name called out.

She turned around. A woman popped out of a white van. She wore a very nice jacket, full of fur and leather. She wore an awful lot of make-up, tipping Thandie off that she was involved, somehow, with Mari's media world.

"Excuse me, Thandie? Thandie St. John?"

Through the fabric of her scarf, she

responded, "Yes?"

The blond woman shivered. "I knew your mother, Mari. She was an inspiration to me. When I started at City News was when she was anchoring the news. She was a very dear person to me. We were thinking, back at the station, of doing a follow up story on her life."

"Uh-huh."

"Would it be possible if we could interview you? We want follow up on her plan, when she made all of the video messages for you. You know, see how they've helped you and raised you. Would it be possible if my camera man can take some shots with you and then we could do a--"

"I'm busy right now. I'm going to see a friend of mine. I don't have time right now."

"It will only take a few moments--"

"No, I don't think so. Not now." She took three steps backwards, away from the van.

"Then when? Could we come by tomorrow?"

"No. Busy then. Can't."

"When? You name the time. We'll work around your schedule, I more than understand. A seventeen year old girl can be really busy."

"I don't do interviews." She backed up two more steps. "I don't like cameras. I can't. I won't. Sorry."

The blond woman bit her lower lip. Her voice raised a bit. "Your mother inspired millions of women, not just in Canada but throughout the States. She taught many women how to be better mothers, take charge of their homes and lives. I think it would be unfair to these women not to show how her hard work has paid off."

"I'm sorry, but I don't want to talk about my mum."

"But you have an obligation to women throughout the continent to tell her story."

"Her story has already been told, plenty of times. I'm sorry, but I don't..."

"Listen, quit thinking of yourself. Your mother's story must live on..."

Thandie closed her eyes, turned, and ran away from the white van. The blond woman ran three steps after her and called her name out. Thandie paid no attention, running to Breton's house. When she left the cul de sac, she stopped running.

Her head sunk down to her knees. She covered her face. In her private world, she cried.

Breton figured Thandie was tired that day. She spoke and was her usual, warm self. But something was different. He couldn't put his finger on it, other than it was an off day. They spent the day reading old children's books to each other. She giggled, he laughed. Something, somehow, was funny.

Everyone should be allowed to have an off day, he told himself, reminding himself more of his dad than anything else.

She ate dinner over at his house. Kendrid served cheese potatoes, some fish he caught near Vernon in BC, and some squash. During the meal, Kendrid made the kids laugh by mispronouncing one of their favorite bands. The laughter seemed to unleash a flood of laughs from Thandie, since she couldn't stop. She turned red, hiding her face. The little girl, thin as a rail, looked as though she would be knocked over by the force of air from her laughs. But she didn't. Instead, her heaves and snorts encouraged the two males to continue in their laughter.

When things settled, Kendrid wiped a tear from his eye and mentioned, "You're quite good at laughing."

"How so?" she inquired.

"It's infectious. You find something funny, laugh, and the whole room wants to join you. It's like some psychic power or

something.”

“Laughter?”

Kendrid burst a smile and admitted, “I know it sounds silly, but it’s a nice treat to hear some laugh with such skill. You’re, in the full sense of the word, a joy.”

Thandie crinkled her nose, trying to receive his compliment. Not sure what it meant or how to take it, she simply thanked him and continued in her meal.

After dinner, the kids went into what Kendrid called the front room. The front room’s main feature was the front door and, along with the front door, it was never really used. Beautiful furniture, nice pictures, and a collection of empty space and sound. Hanging over their antique couch, rested a painting of Breton’s mother.

Thandie discovered it, stepping back as if to take it in and treating it as if it hung in a museum. She whispered, “Is that her? Your mother?”

“Yeah, that was her.”

Thandie’s eyes drank in the picture of Breton’s mother, scanning side to side of the frame to capture every color and image. The painting was of her sitting in a chair, in front of a lush red curtain. She did not smile, but wore a stern expression. Not of anger, but more of strength and determination. She wore a jewel green dress, her hair tied tightly in a bun. She radiated Breton’s blue, almost white, eyes. Her hands were fists, readied on her lap.

“She was beautiful.”

Considering her comment, “Yeah, she was. She was twenty six when she had this painting done of her. It was a first year anniversary gift.”

“Ever miss her?”

Breton thought about that question, wearing a lost expression while thinking. Finally, he admitted, “I never knew her. She’s more of a story than a person. Dad will tell stories about her, but she’s kind of

like a character in those tales. You know, it’s like knowing Zorro or Superman: you know them, but you wouldn’t count them as family.”

“Was it tough for your father to lose her?”

“He says so. That’s some of his stories about her. You know, ‘like the one about losing my wife’. I know he loved her deeply, otherwise he wouldn’t tell stories about her. I guess that’s how my dad likes people: he tells stories about them.”

“Do you think he’ll ever tell a story about me?”

“Oh you? You laughing at the table is sure to be a story. Yeah, the more you’ll spend time with him, the more stories he’ll collect about you. My dad’s a real story teller.”

“My dad used to be a storyteller. Actually, he’s a published author. That was a while ago, before my mum died.”

“What happened to his stories?”

“If he needs to say something, he doesn’t tell a story anymore. Instead, we just watch a video of mum. She’s become his storytelling.”

“Videos, eh?” He said nothing, keeping in his thoughts. He changed his tone to lively one. “I sometimes have dreams about my mom. She’ll come out in my dreams, every once and a while.”

“How so?”

“She’ll show up when I have a dream about giving a speech or when I’m visiting the dentist or playing sports or when I’m doing some sort of adventure. Like one time I was on a boat, fighting against that mythological creature Kraken. Yeah, I was telling all of my crew members to sail closer to the monster. I held a spear.” He demonstrated his spear stance to her. “I was ready to hurl the thing, killing the monster and freeing the village of its control. I pulled back my spear. Aimed.” He cleared his throat and then relaxed his stance. “And my

dead mother comes aboard the ship at that moment.”

“What does she do?”

“She doesn’t do anything. She talks and tells me to do things.”

“Like what?”

“That I have to take the trash out or that the sidewalk needs salt because there’s new snow. She starts going through a whole list of things I have to do. And I want to tell her, ‘Mum, I’m killing mythological monsters, here. Plus, you’re dead.’”

They both laughed.

Thandie, in the midst of her laughter, squeaked, “I have dreams of my mother too.”

“Really?”

“I wake up in the middle of the night and I’m in my bed. I wander out of my bed, into the living room. She’s there. She looks scared, like something is going to kill all of us. She doesn’t hug me, we don’t talk, and she seems preoccupied. She takes me by the hand and leads me out. We go to the town’s indoor pool. She has the key, for some reason. She pushes me into the water. I don’t know why. She puts her powerful hands on my head, holding me under. And she tries to drown me.”

“Does she?”

“No. I wake up from the dream before she does. I have to wake up in order to get out of this dream.”

“So you’ve had this dream before, eh?”

She nodded. Silence followed. Great, she thought. I’ve now made him think I’m weird. She tried to salvage the evening. “It’s probably not the same as killing Krakens.”

Breton mumbled with a smile, “We all have our Krakens

Thank you, Breton. Thanks for saying that.

Thandie returned home later than she ought to. She slipped into the dark house,

hoping to make her way to her room undetected. She walked past the living room, into the hallway, and passed the bathroom...

Randall flipped on the bedroom light, banishing the darkness. Thandie felt like she was caught in a spot light, the world circling around her. Randall droned, “Thandie?”

Thandie jumped. Her father walked slowly to her, every step becoming more and more surrounded by the light. “Thandie, it’s later than 9 pm. We have rules. Rules your mother gave us.”

“I know father. I lost track of time and...”

“Your mother and I said 9 pm. 9 pm. You’re forty-five minutes late. Why?”

“I was out with Breton and we lost track of time. I’m sorry, truly I am. I’m willing to take whatever consequence you decide, father. It was wrong of me to be out late and it was inconsiderate.”

If I beat him to the punch, maybe he might just punish me and be done with it, Thandie reasoned. It was wrong of me being out so late. I’m willing to admit it and change. If he can just see that, then maybe that will be it.

“I appreciate your spirit, Thandie. That is making this a lot easier.”

“I ask for your forgiveness, father. I am sorry for being out late.” Please, let that be all of it. Ground me. Forbid me to see Breton for a couple of weeks. Take away the television. Don’t bring mom into this.

“However, I don’t think you see the bigger picture,” Randall began. “There’s a big concept that is being overlooked.”

“You’re probably right. I just saw myself being late and forgetting the time. If there is something worse that I did, please let me know.” That didn’t sound sarcastic, did it? I’ve got to sound sincere. Be sincere. That’s the only way I can get through this.

“The big picture can’t be explained by me, but by your mother.” Oh dear God, no.

Don't pull out the tape. "Your mother understood that these kinds of things would happen. Luckily, she's recorded some messages for you. Now, I don't want to show this tape to you because she gets cross. But I think it's important."

"Father, I think it would be best if I just was punished like a normal kid and..." Thandie, what did you say? Don't go there. Now we'll be up all night. Shouldn't have said it. You were scared, angry. Certainly. But don't ever compare yourself with 'normal' families.

Randall's eyes widened, stretching the skin of his face past its elasticity. His mouth gaped open. In a voice pregnant with drama, he moaned, "We are not normal. We will never be normal again. We have lost our mother, my wife. We will never be usual, normal again." He pointed at this daughter. "I think you need to see a couple of videos tonight."

Thandie heard herself before she felt herself scream at her father. She didn't even feel herself getting mad, but some switch was thrown. She yelled, "No more videos! No more recorded messages! I can't take it anymore!"

Randall stepped away for a second. He closed his eyes, moving his face away from his daughter. He collected himself. In a warm, reasonable voice, he related, "I know it's late and you're tired. I know you don't mean that. I know you love your mother and you regret saying those things."

I'm crying. Who is this girl doing all of the speaking for me? I yelled at my father, I'm in tears, and now I'm telling him what I think of those stupid videos of mum. What is going on with me? Who's running the controls?

Thandie mumbled, while looking away from Randall, "Maybe."

Randall moved closer to her daughter. His face without emotion, with the exception of his brows slightly raised. Speaking

through a small slit in between his teeth, he growled, "You love your mother, right?"

Don't say anything else, Thandie. Nothing else. Turn around and go to bed. Turn around. Stop what you're doing.

She met her father with the same poker face, eyes deep into his. "Maybe I don't want to see another video."

She turned around and entered her bedroom, closing the door on her father.

Randall didn't sleep that night. He wanted to go into Thandie's room, yell at her, scream, and force her to sleep outside. The moment the idea of forcing her to sleep outside in the Canadian snow crossed his mind, he knew that he wasn't thinking straight.

Never discipline Thandie when you're angry, Randall remembered Mari telling him. He knew that if he tried to talk to her anymore tonight, he would say things that he would regret. Better sleep on it, calm down, and deal with her in the morning. Don't try to solve anything when you're this mad.

Never discipline a child when you're angry. When do you discipline a child, Randall mused. When you're happy? When you've awoken from a nap, you hear the birds chirp, and you're feeling at peace with your world?

Randall shook off this line of thought. He knew he was too angry to try to be the reasonable one in the relationship. Thandie, in his mind, had disrespected him and his late wife, that was all there was to it. She would have to be punished, he reasoned. And someone in the house had to be the one making sense, so it might as well be the parent. I shall be nice to her tomorrow and then bring up what she did when she's calm, reasonable.

Randall sat in his bed in the darkness of his room. He still slept in a Queen sized mattress, fearing the smallness of other practically sized beds. It was the bed he had

been given as a wedding gift by Mari's sister. This bed would remain, along with the memory of Mari.

A memory flashed in his mind. He sat in a hospital room, watching Mari sleep. She had lost most of her hair. They had finished the last round of Chemotherapy and she had gotten really sick. They decided to keep an eye on her while her body struggle with the last dosage of radiation. He remembered that was the last round of radiation, before the doctors decided that the cancer would not go away and would slowly gain control of Mari.

He slept that night in the bed with her. When they were awake, they planned their next vacation. Still hopeful at that point.

Mari woke up quickly, rising quickly out of her bed. Randall cautioned her not to move to quickly since she was connected to a bunch of monitors and an IV.

Mari smiled at his fuss. She leaned back in her bed and moaned, "I think I need to make some more videos for Thandie."

"I thought we decided we weren't going to do that," he said. "Your therapist suggested that was hurting your focus on the present. Remember, he said that if spent all of this time getting ready for your death and you end up surviving-"

"I had a dream. I'm not going to survive." She said this plainly.

Randall wanted a bit more. He leaned toward her, asking, "How do you know? From a dream?"

"I just do. And my videos are more important now than they've ever been. I must document everything so that our daughter can get through this time of grief with minimal damage." She spoke faster. "These things can destroy children, Ran. They can totally wipe them out. This cancer, this thing killing me, is my issue, not hers. She shouldn't have to suffer because of my sickness. And she won't. She will still be raised by her mother; she will still be a

healthy, normal girl. I will be with her in her life. I will live on." She shook when she spoke. Her eyes narrowed. "We will beat this. Death will not ruin my daughter. We will still be a healthy family, despite my death." Randall reached out, to place his hand on his wife. "She will have a video for everything. She will not be alone for anything. We will work around the clock, for her to have everything she can have." Randall pressed down on her shoulder as she tried to rise, becoming more and more excited. "This is for her. My love for my daughter won't be defeated by cancer." Her eyes fixed past her husband, she continued to speak in a quick, desperate voice. "Damn it, this cancer won't take away our relationship! It can't! I love her, Randall! I will be her mother! She won't be alone! Damn it, she won't be alone!"

Mari started to shake, tears growing and rolling out of her eyes. As she cried, she coughed and gargled. Randall rubbed his wife's shoulder. Randall used most of his strength to swallow. His hand reaching, he froze in a lurch extending to his wife. Mari covered her face as it winced and tightened.

She sobbed for minutes.

As the cries settled, she asked Randall in a small, broken voice, "I'm not being selfish, am I? This isn't weird. I want to help Thandie, not ruin things for her. I'm not being weird and selfish?"

Randall whispered, "You are someone who has never had a selfish thought her life. Everything you have ever done has been for Thandie. This is no exception."

"But it's weird, isn't it? Having a bunch of videos of your dead mother."

"Cancer is weird. Cancer is something that shouldn't happen, but does. If anything, us being here instead of our home in Calgary is weird."

"Promise me one thing: promise me that she will watch the videos. I've lived most of my life in front of the camera. Having a

camera pointed at me is part of my setting, part of who am. But I allow myself to be taped because I have always believed someone will be watching on the other end. Make sure that happens. Make sure Thandie will see her mother. I can't have peace unless I know that I won't only be recorded, but watched. Make sure she sees me, Randall."

That's Mari, he thought. That's the woman I've always known. That's the woman I married. The journalist, the television personality. She couldn't stand not being recorded.

Randall swallowed again. It went down harder this time.

"I promise. I promise that there won't be a day that goes by in which Thandie won't be spoken to by her mother."

Randall remembered his wife in the bed, nodding to him. He still had the image of her face while he sat on the bed.

In the darkness of his lone bedroom, he wept next to Mari's picture over the bed. Breton walked Thandie home, after school. He knew she was bothered, simply because she didn't talk about it nor about anything else.

When he got to her doorstep, he shrugged and exhaled, "I'll see you later. Okay?"

"Okay." She turned and left to go inside.

When she got inside, she found her father cleaning the book case of her mother's videos. She sat down in the living room, without making a sound, watching him. Her arms crossed, she waited for her father to turn around and notice her.

It took a while. Randall was in a deep focus, wiping clean any dust particles that collected on the videos. His brow furled, his attention steady. He looked as if he was operating rather than cleaning.

Thandie shut her eyes tightly upon seeing her father. She shook her head to

herself, opened them, and cleared her throat.

"Oh! Thandie! Welcome home!" Randall said. He looked so happy. Such a plastic happiness, Thandie thought.

Thandie didn't respond. Instead, she sat and stared at him.

Randall looked slowly to the left, as if to catch something or someone Thandie was staring at sourly other than him. After a spell, he asked, "Yes?"

"I want you to play one of mom's tapes."

Randall shot her a bright smile, turning in an almost a dance. "Yes, my dear. Which is it?"

"Play the one where she explains who I should go to when her library doesn't have a response for any of our issues."

He turned to see his little girl. "Excuse me?"

"In the event that I have a question to which she hasn't answered, whom do I go to for answers? Where can I go when her library of answers can't give me the advice I need?"

Randall put his fingers near his chin. He froze in thought a few moments, until he fingered the air suggesting he had an idea. He grabbed the master video list, recording all of the entries she had made for Thandie. After searching through the list two times, he looked up and admitted, "She doesn't have a entry answering that question."

Without emotion, Thandie said, "Good. If mom's video library is silent on this issue, I want to ask you, dad: who do I go to when mom's library isn't enough?"

A quick flash of terror lighted Randall's face. He quickly hid it, replacing his expression with confidence. "I'm sure there's a tape or message that Mari had recorded about this. Maybe if I look...I'm sure...Absolutely sure..."

"There isn't, dad. She has made no entries about. She has made entries about cooking, cleaning, dating boys, how to dress,

where to go to church, and how to balance a checkbook. But there's nothing on using other people to get advice. So now I will ask you, dad, where do I go when mom's library isn't enough?"

"I can't answer this question...maybe it's part of the entry about church...yes, she would say something about that..."

"She doesn't. It's missing from her entries. So, I turn to you: who do I go to when her library isn't enough?"

Randall's confidence dissolved. He searched the notepad frantically. His mouth moved rapidly, sounding out words and phrases that meant nothing. His right hand shook.

"I'm s-sure there's something here. She wouldn't have left a hole. It's too big. The library is too big for an omission. It must be here." He fumbled through the pages.

"She did not leave any message. So now I ask you, dad."

"Of course she won't cover everything, but this, you would think, should be here."

"It isn't. Not her fault. I'm not mad her. But I ask you: let me know, on this important question, what you think? Give me a piece of advice that has not been recorded by mum."

He threw down the list. "I can't! I can't do this without your mother!" Randall turned crimson, shaking.

She rose, meeting his anger with an equal level of anger. "You have been for seven years! You have raised me, parented me, and supported me for seven years without her! She has been dead for seven years! You have been the one that has been here without her!"

"That's not true! The tapes! The tapes have her, telling us what to do!"

"They don't work! You do! She is not my parent! She's just a recording!"

"That's your mother! Don't you dare..."

"My mother is gone! She is dead!"

Thandie was shaking, wanted to hit someone or something. Her stomach shook. Her fingertips tingled. She couldn't stop herself from yelling. "I wish mother had the good sense to die like everyone else instead of doing what she did! I wish she left us alone!"

Randall made a fist and recoiled back. His eyes on fire, he stared down at his daughter. Before he could follow through on his strike, he screamed, "Get the Hell in your room!" His fist made a point, commanding her to leave.

Thandie left her father. She did not leave her room for the rest of the day and night.

A dark, almost blue light glowed in Thandie's room when she woke up. Her eyes opened slowly, drinking in the squares and hues of her room. She lifted her head, feeling a sharp, shooting pain in the right side of her neck. She clutched her neck, rubbing it to work out the pain.

I fell asleep, she told herself. Fallen asleep sitting cross-legged, I must have been twisted like this for hours. She straightened her back. No, just my neck is in pain.

She looked to her clock radio. 2:32 am. Was I asleep that long? I guess so.

Thandie left her father, did her homework, ate some fruit she had in her room, and started writing in her journal. When the sun set she fell asleep. During that time, she heard no noise from outside her door.

At first, I didn't want to see my father. But now, since it's been 11 hours since our fight, I wonder if he's all right. Probably asleep. Still, I just want to check up on him.

She rose to her feet. Still in her clothes from school, with the exception of her boots, she slowly walked to her door. Creeping under her door shone a light. However, it

was not the light that normally came from the kitchen or even the television set. Dark blue, yet brighter than anything coming from under her doorway.

She opened the door slowly, waiting for it to be completely open soundlessly before she stepped through. She took a careful step onto the hall runner that stretched across the hallway. Carefully, she put her weight on her foot in order to make no creak or bend. Placing her other foot on the runner, she shuffled into a silent pace down to the living room.

The strange light came from her living room. Rather than going to her father's room to see if he was asleep, she decided to first investigate the living room. As she walked closer and closer to the living room, the dark-blue light became more alien than she had originally suspected.

She came into the kitchen with the first glance of the living room. Standing on every chair, every surface, and every bookcase rested television and DVD/VCR sets. All flashing, blinking, and glowing with different programs. None of these televisions belonged to them. All from different periods of times and styles. All faced different directions, aimlessly broadcasting around the room to no one in particular.

And standing in the center of the room was Mari St. John, looking as healthy as her first broadcast to her daughter.

Mari spotted Thandie. Before the emotion flooded from Thandie is seeing her dead mother alive, Mari said, "Your father is the only one asleep, dreaming. You are very much awake and I am here in every sense of reality. I've been sent here on a mission."

Thandie stared at her dead mother, full of life and breadth and standing in her living room.

My mother is alive, she thought. Talking to me. Telling me it's not a dream. And any moment, I'm going to freak out.

"Go on." Thandie said as calmly as she could deliver.

"Thandie, do you believe in the after-life?" Mari asked.

"Only at church." Don't freak out, don't freak out....

"Well this isn't church and I am here. But only for a short time. I'm on a mission."

"What is your mission?" It feels real and not a dream. But some dreams feel real. What's going on? Why can't this be a dream where weird things happen and I just accept it? I'm full of fear and common sense: two horrible things in a dream.

"I've been given a chance to do one visit and do one thing while I'm here on Earth. I chose to come back home and erase all of my videos. My request was granted, so I'm here now to take care of all of these videos."

"And what about dad?" Not only is she making sense, her visit makes sense. How can this be? How can I have a reasonable conversation with my dead mother?

"He won't be awake for any of this. He'll be asleep while we erase these tapes, during which he'll have a dream explaining what is going on. Next morning, he will be rested and at peace with these tapes being gone."

"And me? Why do I get to see you do all of this?"

"I need your help. And it was decided that you should be a part of the process."

"And why are we erasing all of the tapes you, at one time, thought was so important?"

Mari walked out of the living room and into the kitchen. "When I made those tapes, I was afraid to die. That Randall's wife would die. That my parenting would die." She opened the refrigerator, pulling out a cold can of pop. She popped open the can. "And through the last seven years, I've seen what those tapes have done. They've turned me into a ghost, haunting everything in this house. I don't believe in ghosts, Thandie. Even now that I'm dead, I don't believe in

ghosts.” She took a sip and quickly winced. “Oh, that’s horrible! Why did I ever think I’d like the taste of pop again?”

“So, you’re not a ghost?” She walked over to her dead mother. “What are you?” She touched her mother, feeling the fabric of her pink shirt. It felt real.

“I’m on loan. There’s a difference.” She took another sip, just to see if she was right the first time. She winced in displeasure. “Maybe there isn’t, I just don’t like the term ‘ghost’. I mean, they haunt and terrorize. I’m here to liberate.” She walked back to the television sets in the living room. She pressed a record button on one of the television sets. “Now, we have a job to do and erase my image.”

“And erase our memories of you?”

Mari only laughed. She faced her daughter, smiling.

I had forgotten that smile. My mom’s smile! That’s right, before cancer and her death and everything, she used to smile at me. Half smile, half smirk. And ended her smiles with her wrinkling her nose, making the smile more of an event than an expression. Why hadn’t she recorded that on the videos? She never smiled, laughed, or chuckled on her videos.

“Oh, keep your memories. Let’s just erase the tapes.” She playfully messed up her daughter’s hair.

“And so you propose to erase all of these videos?”

“I think you need that opportunity to go on a date without playing a video of me before and after your date.”

“So, you want to take away the experience of having all of my dates meet my dead mother?” Her tone serious, she stood with her hands on her hips. Mari stared back at her daughter. Mari, equally adamant, wore a stern, motherly expression. And laughed, ending with a nose crinkle. Thandie’s stance broke, erupting in laughter. “I hated that. I hated showing videos of

you...”

“They weren’t me! It was a ghost of me. I’m me. This is me. The real me.”

“But you’re dead,” Thandie said with a smile. “How can you be dead and here?”

“I’m on loan.”

“You said that already. How can you be on loan? From whom?”

“Come, help me erase these tapes.”

Randall turned over to his left side, awakened from his sleep by the unexplained notion that he was not alone in his dark bedroom.

He heard Mari’s voice call out from the far corner of their bedroom. “You’re now sleeping in the center of the bed. That’s good,” she said.

Randall woke up slowly, feeling okay about the idea of his wife’s ghost talking to him in the middle of the night. Just as he couldn’t explain why he woke up with the sensation of no longer being alone, he felt that it was right, at that particular moment, for Mari to be there.

“It took a couple of years and a really bad cold to get me in the center,” Randall said in a croak. “I’m sorry. I should roll back to my side of the bed.”

“Please, stay there,” she said as she sat at the end of the bed. “It makes me happy to see you where you are.” He lifted his head up and saw her familiar shadow. “I came here on a mission. While we’re talking, I’m also with our daughter Thandie as part of this mission.”

“How can you be here and also with Thandie at the same time?” He now was sitting completely up, his eyes able to focus on Mari with enough clarity to see her smiling at him.

“Randall, you’re talking to me, Mari. Mari, who died and shouldn’t be here. You believe that this isn’t a dream or some kind of hallucination, don’t you?” He nodded slowly. “So why quibble how I can be in

two places at once?" She laughed, gently shaking the whole bed. "Randall, I'm on a mission. I've been sent to erase all those video tapes in your 'Mari Library'."

"No," Randall said in a small, mousy voice. "Thandie needs those. She can't forget what you look like or your words. We've got to leave those, keep those for her. She really needs them."

"Randall," Mari said in a near, playful coo. "Is Thandie the one who really needs them? Is she really the one who can't let go?"

"Okay." His voice was quiet as he shrugged. A devouring emptiness started to grow in his stomach as he said the next set of words. "I need them. Mari, I'm scared. I can't raise her without you."

"You already have been raising her without me, Randall," the ghost said to her husband who was sitting in the center of the bed.

"I'm scared, Mari."

"I want you to think about what you've just said and what's exactly happening tonight: you're telling the ghost of your departed wife you're scared. Doesn't that strike you as a little odd?"

"But it's the truth. I'm scared that you'll stop being a part of our lives."

"So you saw me when I lied on my spelling test?" Thandie asked.

"I not only saw you make a forgery of your father's handwriting in crayon, but I could read your mind. And I knew his. Randall pretended to be furious, but he still keeps the F- test with his fake signature on it."

Thandie gobbled up more cold cereal. Thandie leaned against some pillows, forming a small nest on the floor. Mari had made a similar nest next to a tall wall of television sets. Both girls on the floor, both laughing, both erasing tapes.

"Where I'm living now," Mari stated. "We can see what people think, feel, and want. It's funny that all of the things people try to keep secret here or even lie about are common knowledge where I live."

"Which is?"

"Sorry, can't tell you. Don't you have the law of the prophets and the miracles of former ages?"

"Excuse me?" Thandie barked.

"Can't help you. Everything about where I live now has been revealed here on Earth: it's community access."

Thandie, changing the subject without permission and abruptly, said, "I love sitting on the floor. Dad never lets me sit on the floor. He told me that you were against it."

"Liar! He always got mad at me for sitting on the floor. He loved his furniture and felt it 'undignified' to sit on the floor. He's so British!"

"Dad's British?"

"Oh, we're not French. His folks came here from England. He never told you about that?"

"Never. He doesn't talk much about himself."

"He doesn't talk much. That used to not be the case." Mari reached, out of habit, for some nuts in a bowl nearby. She stopped herself, remembering what they tasted like. "I'm afraid he didn't take the loss of his wife well. At times, I used to doubt his love. Now that idea is so far from the truth. He always loved me and still does." She looked at the remaining tapes needing to be erased. "I wish love was enough to make someone happy."

"She's turning out to be an amazing young woman," Mari said to her husband who had stopped crying in the darkness of his bed.

Randall cleared his throat and regained the strength to his voice. "I miss talking to

you, Mari. I wish you didn't have to go."

"I'm already gone, Randall. What you're experiencing now is the last echo of a voice long since ceased." A pause followed and she broke it by laughing. "You really don't know what I've just said, do you?"

"How much longer do we have before you go again?"

"Minutes. Seconds possibly. Not long." She reached out and grabbed his ankle through the bed sheets and blanket. "I want to give you a last word."

"True to yourself, even as a ghost: you've got to leave the last word."

She was quiet as if she was mustering strength for the word. "Enough," she said.

"Enough? Okay, you've made your point. I won't show any more videos or be weird or--"

"That's not what I mean. You are enough. You have to be enough, for Thandie. Dying taught me that no love is bigger than when one person says to another, 'Enough'."

"Enough?" Randall said, trying on the word for size. "Enough."

"Enough," was the last word said by Mari to Randall.

The sun peaked over the tops of the house next door, spilling over the southern skyline. The last tape recording a morning news show over Mari's last message.

"This is the last tape. I'm here on contract. As soon as it's finished erasing and re-recording, I'm done here on Earth. I go back."

"To where?"

Mari laughed. "Somewhere that's given me a fresh perspective on things. A place that's full of what's important and doesn't waste time in what's not. You'll like it, Thandie. I really believe you'll fit in well. Already, you act in a lot of ways like someone who lives where I live." She

leaned in, speaking through her teeth.

"That's a compliment."

Thandie's red eyes burned. She looked through only slits, as her eyes' sleep circles compounded. She asked in a moan, "So, any parting words?"

"You mean like my last video message? I'm through, Thandie. It was a good thing gone wrong and I..."

"No video message. Just something for me to remember you by."

She reached out to her daughter's hands. She grabbed them tightly. It had been years since Thandie's hands were held by her mother. It reminded her of the days she'd go shopping and her mother didn't want her to get lost. Whispering, she commanded, "Be Thandie. Simply put, be Thandie St. John. Don't be anymore than Thandie nor any less. You are quickly becoming less of my child and more of your own: journey to that end. I've seen the end result, Thandie, and I know it's something to look forward to. Be Thandie."

"Is that it?"

"That's quite a lot! And it's enough for me to say. The rest is up to you." Mari looked at her daughter, who had the appearance of running a marathon. She belted an exhale and then giggled. "It's been years since I've seen exhaustion."

"Well, you're seeing it right now."

Mari announced to Thandie while she yawned, "I hate to remind you, but as soon as this is done I'm gone. Everything will be restored to normal except the library."

"Will I see you again?"

"Like this? No. But you will see me again."

Thandie looked away, her eyes starting to shine from tears.

Mari slightly smiled. "That's the first time you cried over my death. Do you realize that? You never grieved, never..."

"I was told you never left. That we have you in our video library. That you live on."

“Lies. Lies told out of love and fear.” Mari shook. Her eyes glistened along with her daughter. “It’s been such a long time since I’ve cried. There are no tears where I live.” She looked up, away from her daughter. “I wanted to guard your memory of me, so I videotaped myself. By losing that testament of myself, I ended up...”
“Giving me a better memory of...”
The tape stopped. And she was gone.

Two weeks later, Thandie and Randall were sitting in the somewhat warm, Calgary sun while Breton put four hearty steaks on the BBQ. They shifted on the cold wood of the backyard’s picnic table and bench. Kendrid sat in a small fold-up chair just hovering above the ground, drinking his pop.

Kendrid chirped, “I’ve been offered a chance to stay at a friend’s cabin up north, around Jasper. It would be for a weekend. I haven’t used much of my vacation time, so I’m free to go whenever. I was wondering, would you two like to come? There are plenty of rooms in the cabin and we can keep the kids separated.”

Randall looked up, scratching his head. “I’d really like to go...I think it would be fun...I’m getting busy again with writing...I think so. Sure. Give me a date and I’ll work around it.” He added, “I’ve never seen

Jasper.”

“Never seen Jasper! It’s an amazing place. Kind of makes you proud it’s in your province.”

Thandie got up and walked over to Breton hovering over the BBQ. The sun shone in Spring as they watched the days get longer, the air get warmer. Breton wore his staple facial expression: mouth open, eyes wide enough just to see through, and his head bobbing from thought to thought. Thandie asked, “How’s it going?”

“I’ve burned everything. I’m flipping over some on their raw sides, but I’ve ruined our dinner.” He snorted. “You’re going to have to put up with a meal that sucks. Sorry.”

“I think we can do that.”

Breton remarked, “Your dad’s like a new person. He’s funny, relaxed, and carries on conversations. What happened?”

“I don’t know. I know certain things happened, but I don’t know the whole story.” She left it at that, allowing the silence to explain what she couldn’t.

“Good things?”

“Wonderful things.” She put her arm around him.

Breton shrugged. He mumbled, “It’s good. All of it’s good. I guess it’s what we do to live on. Move on. Live on. You know, grow up and stuff.” Thandie nodded.

The End

The Fairy Wife

by

Fred Hilary

When his beloved wife died, Malkus III, regent of the last mortal realm before the lands of Faerie, ordered that not only his court, but also the kingdom, from highest noble to lowliest peasant, enter a period of mourning lasting exactly three years and thirty one days. The number was no accident, for it was chosen to correspond to the length of courtship he had enjoyed with his irreplaceable Julia. These mourning days did not last long, however; in fact they came to an end after a little less than three months, when the Queen herself, or else her ghost, was glimpsed riding a white horse in the shadowy marches on the edge of the kingdom.

At first it was taken as an omen, and Malkus summoned interpreters of dreams and visions; after a second sighting the favourite saying was that she had indeed become a wandering spirit, but Malkus was at a loss to root out some discontent she had felt whilst living. The third time she was seen, however, settled it, for that time she was not seen riding alone, as at the first, her long raven hair weaving spells in the moonlight, her shimmering white horse almost a match for her much missed and mournful beauty. She was with another: not a human but a Fairy, a noble or king, dressed in dark velvet with a crown of onyx jewels upon his head; he and Julia were weaving dances around each other as they drove their horses in a wild gallop.

“What did you say?” Malkus said to the peasant witness of this third moonlight reverie, as the poor fellow cowered at the foot of the dais. “She was laughing?”

“Aye,” squirmed the thin, nervous-looking fellow. “But it was night, and you know what the moon can do. It’s what I thought I saw.”

“You were exact in the details. Laughing like a little village girl, you said. Or like the Queen of May.”

“I should not have presumed...”

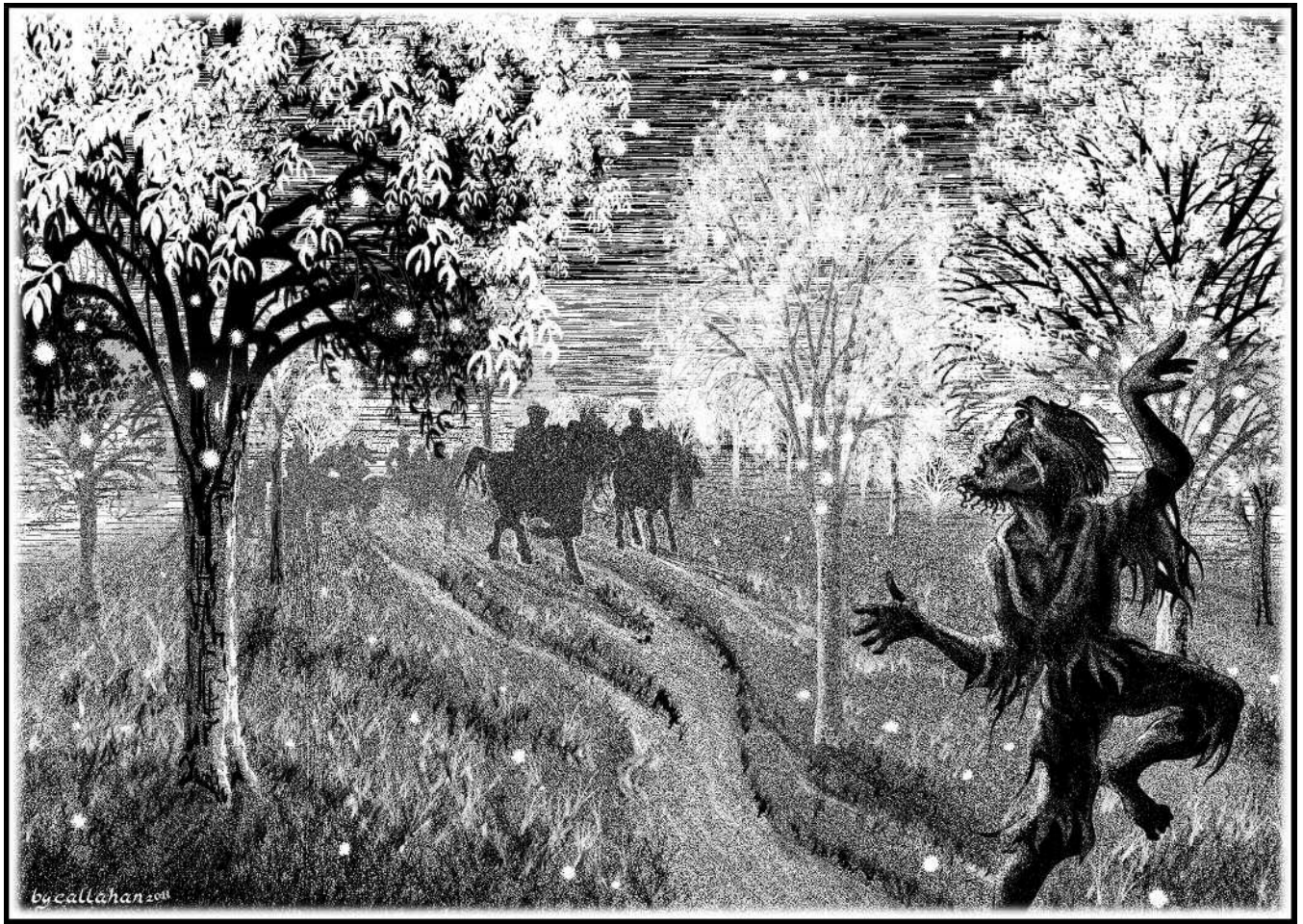
Malkus grunted. “Where did they ride off to?”

“Into the forest. Beyond the marches -”

Malkus’s advisers exchanged worried glances. There was the same muttering breath. “Faerie,” they all whispered at once, though they quickly sealed their lips and hung their heads.

“Go unlock the crypt, then,” the king said wearily stepping down from his throne. He moved his flabby weight down from the dais and across the marble floor. “Open the casket. Bring baskets of rose petals. Let me look upon her once more. But hear this, if I find that these sightings have been lies, then the witnesses will be hanged in the morning. Hanged? Too slight a punishment to measure against my grief. Boiled alive. Drawn and quartered.”

In less than half an hour the truth was determined: the casket was empty, and the king emerged from the crypt bewildered and angry. On the day of her death, when she had supposedly succumbed while sleeping to some unknown ailment, he had seen her face and touched her skin. She had been cold, the light in her eyes gone. It had all been an enchantment, a trick: what other explanation could there be?



“Very well, then, I will ride into Faerie myself, with a small band of soldiers,” he declared, snapping out of his sullen mood. “I’ll need a guide. Is there no one who has been there?”

They fetched him Moon-eye Tom, taken by most to be a fool of the local village, but held by others to have been blessed by a visit to Faerie, these last claiming that all longed for the place but feared to cross its borders. Tom had been left such that he could not settle back into mortal life. He was noted to spend most of his time weeping over the

beauties he had left behind; when asked why he did not return, he would not answer in clear words, only: “When ye desire to catch between your fingers the west wind, when ye would drink the silver moonlight, it is all mocking, in the end, because no matter how long you stand on the high downs with an open fist as the wind blows against you, no matter how much you try to cup the moonlight in your hands, it’s as nothing. So I put myself away from where all those yearning thoughts come from.”

When the king's advisers told him that he must be their guide, he at first tried to escape the clutches of the soldiers, but then when they threatened him with death he relented.

And so the company, with the king in its midst, and the fool bounding along before it, went to the marches, and crossed into the forest, and left the mortal kingdom behind.

The king thought, at first, that they had entered a grove filled with numberless burning candles. There were innumerable tiny flames all about them, burning steadily with bright gold tongues, like the reflection of candles as it is caught in golden cups on feast days.

"They are ash trees," said Moon-eye, seeing his wonder.

Malkus looked beyond the tiny fires to the branches of the surrounding trees, and then he realized that these were not candles but the leaves themselves, burning with an unearthly flame that did not consume them. All he could say was, "they are not ash, surely, but some other kind."

"They are the ash trees of Faerie," replied Moon-eye. "They will soon be afire. For now, it is only the leaves which burn, but soon the whole tree will be lit thus."

"Is someone intent on burning the woods?"

"The woods burn themselves."

When the king gave a puzzled look, Moon-eye shuffled off and paused beside one of the tree boles.

"This is now autumn. The time when the leaves turn from gold to red, and from red to flame. And after that, after they have burned for the time that has been declared, they will turn to smoke, and the tree will catch fire, and then there will be left only ash, but ash in which the new seedlings will take root."

They left the glade of the burning leaves behind, and passed on to another glade, and

yet another, and in each there was a new wonder, each one inclined to incite madness. In one glade it was as if the stars themselves had descended to the earth, as if they had declined in deference to the king, for all around the passing troop there were bright silver orbs, glittering with many points of light, whirling around in spheres and tracing shapes familiar to the watchers of the heavens; now they took the shape of Orion, with his great sword, and soon after formed themselves into the Great Bear; and on went the dance of shapes and lights.

As they passed from one glade to the next, King Malkus felt a throb of longing and sadness. These beauties were beyond the dreams of his kingdom; they enchanted and bedazzled where his own beloved places, the places he and Julia had cultivated these past years, merely titillated. There is an excess of beauty here, he said to himself. It is right that they say mortals go mad.

But it was not all beautiful, for the path as it wound around went through darker and more sinister country, terrible and frightful in proportion to mortal places as its beauty was to mortal beauty. They rode through a sickening swamp, through a dark forest where the trees threaded their branches like spider's webs, until the road rose to a fearsome crag, and on the leveling top a high plateau suddenly stretched before them, and there stood a castle, bejeweled by the moon; and all sense of terror fled, and longing returned, in all except the king himself.

"I don't trust it," said King Malkus, as the horses began to stamp either in excitement or fear. "It is treacherous beauty."

"It may be, yes," said Moon-eye. But his words were lost on the king, for Malkus had already ridden forth to a green sward beside the open drawbridge, a place where a moonlit pool glittered.

The Fairy King – who other could be so

richly attired, with velvet black cloak and onyx crown - stood on the opposite bank of the pool as King Malkus alit from his horse, driven by spurring jealousy. The king stepped to the bank and watched his rival on the other side, scarcely ten feet away.

"I have awaited your coming," said the Fairy King, with a bow so slight it seemed like mockery. "Do not think I have foreseen it, for though there are some here who read the stars or who, as in your country, pick among the innards of birds, I am not one of them. I needed no divination; I simply knew your heart. I weighed it, and I knew it would drive you here."

"Where is Julia?" said the King, growling, with no trace of the nobility he normally displayed on public occasions.

"She is in joy. I do not mean she is happy. Not content, as she might be with pretty tinkling fountains and landscaped gardens. Delighted? Not even that, for all the love you gave her, though in truth you put her in a cage. She spends her days in willful happiness, and her wild nights riding over all the breadth of this heady moon-enchanted country, and she never tires, she never ceases in her longing for more.

"What comparable thing can you give her?" He opened his fist, and a small bird, seemingly made of china but in fact a living form, fluttered out and alit on a ledge beside the drawbridge, to sing with a haunting melody the likes of which Malkus had never heard. "Can you match her whims with every beautiful thing, can you give her songbirds when she has enough of silence? Can you cast a bathing pool at her feet?" He waved his hand and a spring of water suddenly jetted up from between the grass and rocks on the other side of the drawbridge. The water spread swiftly, more swiftly than mortal flowing, until it became a second pool that reflected the moonlight. "Do you think

she ever loved you as she loves me? I, whose love transfigures her mortal form and spirit?"

"She is my wife!"

"By the laws of your country, not mine. She was young. She knew little about the life she would settle into."

"Very well, then, it seems I must take her by force."

"You can ride an entire army in here. The forests will confound you. The swamp will take your knights. There is nothing you can threaten me with, and no flame or axe will penetrate the gates of this castle."

As if the matter were decided, there was suddenly a pall on the moon, and when it cleared there was no one standing there on the other bank, and the drawbridge had been raised, and the king was standing alone beside his horse. When he returned to his men he spoke of the Fairy King, but all of them owned to have seen nothing, as if the pall had dimmed things all the while; all except Moon-eye, who perhaps because his wanderings in Faerie had given him penetrative sight, bore witness to the exchange and the wonders that flowed from the hands of Oberon.

They camped that night beside a grove of trees on the edge of a swamp. The king did not speak for a long time, and took himself apart, and it was left to the king's chief adviser, the chamberlain, to try to speak to him.

"Do you not think it might be better to accept things as they are?" whispered his chamberlain, not knowing what else to say, for in truth even the knights were afraid and wanted to return to their own lands.

The king looked up, shocked. "I am sorry if I speak frankly," said the chamberlain. "But the woman has chosen the Fairy King. Could you love her, now, even if you got her back?"

The king hung his head. "I want to talk

to her. I want to hear her side of things, not this tyrant king's. For that is what I think he is – surely he has enchanted her. He has made her believe she loves him; it was he who talked her into the subterfuge in the first place.”

“The king will not let you into the castle.”

Suddenly Malkus looked over at Moon-eye. “Is there a way?”

Moon-eye chuckled. “To enter the castle of King Oberon? Or match your wits with his? If there be, who would dare it? Mayhap there is someone who can help you, though.”

“Who? Speak up!”

“The Queen.”

“Julia? But that’s exactly the problem. I can’t see her.”

“Mind that Julia is the queen in your country, not in this. The Fairy King has given up his consort for your pretty wife. If you find the Fairy Queen, his Titania, you may find that she takes your side. Oh wicked Oberon, he is ever unfaithful. Makes a quarry of mortal women as well as Fair, and afterwards, flings them aside like mouldy potatoes. The Queen is angry with him.”

“Where is she?”

“In the castle, of course. All goes on under her nose. But she rides abroad, under moonlight, and there you may find her, on one of her wanderings. Ask her, my King, what can be done against Oberon. Terrible and beautiful she is, more than a match for her husband. I have seen her, down by the lake in midsummer, seeking to avenge her husband’s discrepancies with indiscretions of her own. Mayhap she will be there in autumn too.”

“Where is this lake? Lead me there.”

Moon-eye sprang to his feet, and went bounding off on a path through the swamp. “Come, then, my king, but come alone, for we cannot be bridled with men and horses.”

He saw the king’s hesitation, and the muttering of the knights and advisors, and added: “Do not doubt my service, for who else has guided you into this pathless realm? If I wanted to deceive you, I could have done so before now, and offered up all your souls to the watchers in the trees. Come, before the night is out, before Titania returns to her bower.”

The king took a deep breath and went after him. He was not used to running; his belt felt tight, and his legs staggered under the weight of his armour, but he kept Moon-eye in sight as he sprang through the high reeds and dodged among the pools of black, brackish water.

He ran until he was out of breath, and it was with great relief that he saw that Moon-eye had come to a halt some distance in front. The man turned to him, and seemed to bow before darting off to the left, in a dash that was more of a leap, and out of sight.

“He has betrayed me,” the king thought, but hardly had the idea formed when he saw, beyond where Moon-eye had fled, the gleaming waters of a lake, and on the edge of it another figure, a woman’s shape, mantled and crowned like a queen – who else but Titania, her back to him, looking out onto the shining water.

He stepped up to her with trepidation, and trembled when she turned to him, as if his very breath had alerted her, for he had made no sound.

It was as if the Queen was as terrible and beautiful as all the wonders of Faerie combined; as if, as an immortal, she stood in relation to her realm as creator to created; the shock of the beauty almost drove Malkus to his knees, and he staggered there, his mouth finding no words.

He lowered his eyes, then, remembering his cause, looked into her face and shivered. Her eyes were a mocking fire, and they

seemed to burn into his very soul. In an instant, he knew that he did not have to explain his coming; that like her husband she could tell all from a single glance.

"Come with me, on a dalliance this night," she said, clutching his hand and leading him, speechless and relenting, through the long reeds by the water's edge.

She threw back a glance as she led, saying, "Do you love this woman?"

Malkus was out of breath as he answered, but somehow he knew that to her every word was clear. "I did, yes. Before."

Titania abruptly stopped, and facing him, giggled when she saw the shadows under his eyes. "Before?"

"Well, yes, I love her still. But before this night I never saw the Queen of Faerie, and now it is as if I have entered a dream, where the shadow of longing has been replaced with a fiery dart."

"What is she, this Queen of yours? A delicate thing? A rose that folds its petals under winter rain? Perhaps a delicate, captive bird, which has never known the hawk or the sky?"

Titania threw back her robe from her shoulders, and tossed out her glorious hair, which was of russet threaded with silver. "You have never known other than her, have you, king? Not the pale virgins for your bed, when the Queen turned her face away; not the dark women of court, the sorceresses of summer isle. All are as one, all of nature, all the same."

She put her lips to his, and the last of his resistance left him. They fell into a bed of rushes, only a foot or two from the water, and with that embrace the king left all his grief and loss behind him, and waves of desire broke upon him, and they made love, and that single act blotted out all the enchantments of Faerie.

He knew, even as it took place, that he

had no command of himself, for the Queen had put him under an enchantment, and it all seemed an ecstatic spell.

It was some time before either of them spoke, for hand in hand they watched the stars above the lake, which danced to a quicker rhythm than their movement in the mortal realm. Then, the Queen turned to him and said: "What of your Julia now? You came here, wanting the keys to the castle. Do you still seek to get her back?"

The king rose and stood looking at his reflection in the lake water. "I don't know. Until this night, yes, I would have given anything. But now..."

"You have tasted something other than mortal love. Like your wife, you are enchanted, king." She smiled, then broke into laughter. "What do you wish now? Do you wish to follow me everywhere on my nighttime wanderings, to witness my reveries and be driven mad by jealous desire?"

Malkus staggered. The pain, as he heard her words, was like a dart in his chest. Was she mocking him? Parting the reeds, he went away from the lake, and the Queen followed after him.

"What if I could do this thing for you? What if I could let you into the castle? Would you then give up what you have tasted here this night? Do you think that Julia could do the same? That you would both go back to your mortal kingdom, and regain happiness?"

He kept walking, and she followed. "No," he said, at length. "No, I cannot give her up. Even for all the passion you have offered me, and which in any case cannot be mine, except for a fleeting moment. I have sat idle too long. I do not want your help in getting in to the castle. I will find my own way."

He knew, as he kept walking, not really knowing where he was going, that he could

not lose her unless she herself permitted it. But, when by what was either luck or enchantment, he caught sight of the others, she was gone, and he knew that he alone would have to find a way into the castle, and that Moon-eye's plan had failed.

He joined the others and by his command they broke camp: they would not wait until morning, but ride back to the plateau and the castle; they saw no more of the Queen that night.

Reaching the windy plateau again, they rode to the gates of the castle, and Malkus, for the first time since he was a young man, leapt down from his horse before it had properly halted, putting out his hand to halt his knights. "Ride from here once I am inside," he said. "I will win her by force of arms. There is nothing you can do to help me. Oberon will bewitch you in an instant. Since there is so little chance for armies, as he said, then we should settle it one king to another."

"Arms against an enchanter?" said the chamberlain, shaking his head.

"Indeed I will try. There are legends still told to babes and stripling boys about heroes, men who fought against enchanters, against monsters and dragons. Well, my belt feels tight, but my sword feels light. I will storm the castle quietly, and we shall see. Something the Queen said made me understand. Julia has been a caged bird. I do not think I was free of blame in this, but I will not let Oberon keep her captive, even if she herself does not recognize it as such. I will see that it is put to an end by my own hand."

But how was he going to get in? He would knock, of course. His gauntlets thudded against the iron door. There was a long pause, with his knights still watching him fearfully from the green sward, then he was inside, shouldering past the Fairy guard

at the doorway, climbing the stairs, out of breath but carried forward by sheer reckless will. At the top of the highest tower there were more guards, but these were quickly felled by his sword. He hardly stopped to catch a breath, and he gave no thought to what he was doing.

Then he stood at the entrance to the bedchamber. He broke open the door and saw the bed empty, the curtains of the casement open, and a figure standing at the window, her back turned to him, looking out at the moon. He was sure, then, though she was clothed differently, that it was Julia.

"Where is the King of Fairy?" Malkus demanded.

The voice was familiar, but faint, as though from far away. "He has gone to hunt other fledglings."

"He has abandoned you? I knew it would be so. I feared it, yet I hoped. Still, if he comes back, I will kill him if I can. I must."

"You could not kill him. None can. He is immortal."

"Then I will die by my right of arms. Come back, Julia, to my kingdom. Give up this moony enchantment. These things that can never be yours."

"Never be mine?" she said, her back still turned. "Oh, that they could be mine forever. If it is true, then I will die in pursuit of them. I will follow these enchantments all my days."

"You love the King, then? You love Oberon."

"Yes, I love him. But in his company I love the wild dances. The moonlight reveries. I love riding bareback through these magical forests. I love to walk next to the Fairy sea."

"Then you won't come back?"

"What is enchantment, Malkus?"

He didn't understand what she meant by

the question. "Spells? Illusion? The thing that Oberon has that I, being mortal, cannot."

"I will tell you what it means to me. Enchantment means spells on our senses. When we believe that the tears of the moon bejewel the grass. When we are caged but even the sky holds no bounds."

She turned then. As she did so, her shape seemed to grow, so that she was at once taller, and more imposing than Julia;

crypt, or does she indeed dally elsewhere with Oberon?"

"Don't you understand? All along I was the Fairy Queen," she said. "I was Titania. I put on a mask for you, but now I have put it off again."

He nodded, pained.

"No, you don't really grasp what I mean. I was once the Fairy Queen. I was a wanderer in moonlight forests, I was Titania in all but name. You caught me, you caged me, and loved me, and I became Julia, but you have forgotten what it is to hunt me. You have forgotten what it is to enchant. Do you not wonder why it took you so long to court me? You, a king."

"I thought you died."

"Perhaps I did. Perhaps I will, without the enchantment I was used to. That is why I brought you here. That is why I worked this beguiling magic, and used Moon-eye Tom to bring you to me, and the peasants who bore witness to my nighttime rides. Was I not your Queen of Faerie once, before our settled life took over? Have you forgotten that we were both under a spell? You were Oberon, and to win me you used every enchantment, and we feasted on beauty together.

"Look in the mirror over there. You will see not a fattened, weary king but the King of Faerie, the king that you once were.

more beautiful and more commanding. It was the Queen. Not his queen, not Julia, but the Fairy Queen.

"It's been you all along?" Malkus gasped. "Where is Julia?"

"So you have found me. You have hunted me here," said Titania, laughing.

"So you transformed yourself? I have been deceived? Does Julia still lie in the

Before the castle, when you stood beside the pool, and Oberon matched you on the opposing bank, it was your own reflection, your own former self, that told you that you could not hold me, because you could not work wonders as he could. And it is true indeed, that you have forgotten that all the time of our first love we walked in fairy woods, we made every thrush into a nightingale, we thought every trickle a fountain, we chased beauty with a desire that was never sated. I have put on this face again, for it is the face of the Queen of Fairy, as yours was once the face of Oberon himself. Look in the mirror."

He turned to the mirror and gasped. He saw not Malkus, the aging and paunched king, but Oberon, the proud and handsome, Oberon dressed in black samite, the garb of a king and warrior, a hunter. He turned back to the Queen, to Julia, to Titania, and saw she had paced once more towards the window. She cast a laughing look back, winking at him. "You broke your way into this tower. That means that you have learned again how to win. You have transformed yourself into the King of Fairy once more. Look down! It's no mere reflection now. You have become Oberon again. That means that you know how to enchant. Do you still know how to hunt?"

And with this she stepped over the threshold, and where once there was a woman, even a Queen of Fairy, there was now a tiny bird, spreading its wings into the moonlight.

The king stepped after her. There, on the edge of the casement, he cast a look down,

as if doubting, but saw that she was right, that he was indeed the lean, black-garbed king of Faerie. And no longer hesitating, he he plunged towards the moon, and became a hawk. He took to wing, and tasted the magical air, and pursued her that night and all his days.



On Caterpillars, Corneille, and Canova

by

Joshua Drake

Caterpillars climb, clinging to leaf-scrap,
tracing a trail, in a trance-like march,
seeking a high place suicidal.
They're all hell-bound. Hateful Venus
goads them higher, gonads her tool-box.
Psyche searched out (similar her fate)
Pluto's portal, punished by Venus
to reclaim beauty closed in a casket—
a boxful of beauty. From a beech tree-limb
caterpillars dive, caught in their free-fall,
saved by their spindles, sewn to the tree limb—
botched suicide. Psyche desp'rate
climbed a cliff-face. As she clings its side,
wind-blown and frightened, her frame exposed
as rags unravel, the rocks feel her,
pressed prayerfully. Presently the cliff-face,
by her touch enlivened, longs to help her.
“If it's to hell's-gate you go (hear me out dear!)
by a leap to your death-bed, don't go there that way.
I know the safe way, the secret gate
that swings both ways.” In a brown death-shroud
caterpillars sleep, encased captives.
They've opened the boxful— a bad surprise.
Sleep overtakes them. Mitosis flays.
chromosomes are sundered in a sudden ballet
in a silent darkness. Similarly Psyche
sleeps on the dirt-floor— dismal décor.
Dappling dust flecks dim her ivory.
Pale plenitude turns pied but lovely.
Gravity, greedy, with the ground conspires
to hold her body. Bound vertical,
like a stone out of place— plumb-line for the plant life—
in the dark dangling, in a dun-hued lozenge,
an explosive Fineness with a force to fissure
dilates a crease. Chrysalides break.
Faceless Fineness, fingering the corpse,

Your nail incised the soft side-wall.
No one noticed. Noble Psyche,
a soul imploded, displayed naked
as Venus's victim, (vain to defy Her!)
moribund in sleep, a mute beauty,
lazily reaches! Righteousness woke her,
winged and youthful, with a wide embrace.
He'd won her freedom— wonderful to say.
Just Jupiter judged in the court room,
heard from Venus her verity, vain.
Eros o'erruled her righteous in his case.
He flies silent. Psyche side-long,
grips him for safety grafted to his side.
Faceless Fineness, fugitive unfrightened,
You cradle Psyche when chrysalides break.

MARIPOSA

by

David Sparenberg

to be small and delicate
with beauty of a dreamlike bug
to spread one's wings in beauty
giving color to the morning
to breathe so small and tender
sighing
that only angels may
feel the brushing whisper, songlike
in the creative tempest
of cosmic wind
to be the red
poppy in the field of eros
and to blush with ecstasy
to be flight's velvet
and the crazy work
of alchemy
to go away, to come again
in micro-feathers
and poems of memory

Summer Solstice

by
Roger Echo-Hawk

Rumor awakened in their underground realm
Of a country far-off. All the sleeping animals
Howled in their sleep, rattled horns, whistled
Stirring eagerly in their slumber below the earth
They stood in their cities, the Summer King spoke
Of his distant destinations. He had journeyed far
Beyond faded tales of a forgotten whispered path
Holding odd seeds he had returned underground
Hidden warmth in his hands moved their hearts
Everyone stood, the people and the animals stood
Insensible, the animals groaned, now they'd start
To somehow find a way through troubled dreams
They'd question one murky belief after another
And abandon all to believe in the world above.



In our retellings I suppose we don't much bother
Keeping straight the bent details, crooked roads
In one tale after another, how we handed down
Sidelong versions of whatever happened next
Under ebbing oceans an ancient underground
Somewhere in the receding past they kept saying
Their slippery sense of community mattered, it
Shaped them, their history, the story they filled
Themselves with every day, waking their minds
Connecting to the history of memory as if it all
Felt real, seemed specific enough, logical enough
Those changing details that give rise to the world
In our retellings of the tale along a crooked road



Summer King, Morning Star, child of sunshine
Along his pathway stumbled enchanted animals
Flickering in & out of view, everyone followed
Peering into the nearby future, eyes closed as if
Gathered underground, seeing through shadows
Another land full of seeds with glowing hearts
Alight in his open hands, the King of Summer



To see the future one must look into the mirror
Of the past. It isn't difficult to justify the story
Of what we think we know, all of that knowing
The Summer King stands in underground cities
A sightless crowd of creatures that howl and stir
The King of Summer knows; in his hands, light



So now we will go and I know it is difficult to go
Though no one can see very far into the future
How earth in this version of the story is hollow
Where is the evidence, the advocacy we need
For reconciliation, the latitude of togetherness
Of our diurnal rhythms, our nocturnal patterns
The worldwide distribution of necessary traits
The trail of traits leading us back into ourselves
A world under the world of lumbering animals
Wandering from one enchanted land to another
All of us, our eyes closed, yes we think we know
Groping for lifetimes through scene after scene
As if rumors will tell us that now it is time to go
We hear there is a mirror at the end of the dream



He stood up in the mirror at the end of the dream
Summer King, the King of Summer Solstice stood
Among all the fabled forgotten creatures long ago
In darkened cities underground the Summer King
Spoke without speaking, a whispering light inside
His hands, lost in wonder, somewhere in the past
He stood up in the mirror at the end of the dream

The Quality of Mercy

by

Dag Rossman

Gudmund awakened from a fitful sleep to awareness that his shoulder was being gently shaken by the hand of a large hooded figure who knelt beside him. Startled and confused for a moment by his surroundings—which appeared to be a large cave—Gudmund sat bolt upright and gasped: “What? Who?”

Faragrim, the draug who had rescued him from three trolls the day before, chuckled as he stood: “I didn’t mean to frighten you, my friend, but you have slept away much of the morning . . . so you have just enough time for a bit to eat before we must be on our way if I’m to see you safely to Kverndal before the trolls emerge again from their daytime lairs. If they were to attack in larger numbers, or in a place where they could come at me from both front and back at the same time, I fear I might not be able to protect you.”

Gudmund shuddered at the thought. Kneeling by the small fire that illuminated the cave and took the edge off the chill in the air, he hastened to consume the food Faragrim had laid out for him. Although the draug no longer needed to eat, he maintained a larder of imperishable foodstuffs for the benefit of his occasional mortal visitor.

Shortly thereafter, Faragrim led Gudmund out of the cave mouth and into the maze of trails that wound among the rocky heights of the Trolls’ Teeth mountains. From time to time the companions passed by a cave opening or a deep, dark crevice in the rocks . . . and these they gave as wide a berth

as the trail permitted.

“Some are the lairs of wild animals, but others show troll sign. Either way, it’s best to take no chances,” declared Faragrim. “I’ll stay with you until we are within sight of the twin stones they call the Gate of Kverndal. You’ll be safe enough on your own from there on.”

“I can’t tell you how grateful I am for all you have done for me, Faragrim. I owe you my life! But aren’t you taking an awful risk coming so far from shelter in broad daylight?” Gudmund asked anxiously. “I’ve always heard that draugs could only go abroad at night.”

“Heh, heh, heh, heh, heh.” Faragrim’s chuckle was eerie. “Have no fear, my friend; sunlight would neither turn me to stone like a troll nor blind me as it would a dwarf. I can’t say what constraints keep other draugs in the dark but, as for me, I prefer the darkness for the same reason I wear this deep hood . . . to conceal my features from any mortal being I might chance to meet. My countenance is that of one long dead, a sight few mortals could gaze upon without fear and loathing. The lady Freyja spared me from having to enter Hel’s domain that I might protect mortals, not terrify them.”

“You needn’t hide your face from me, Faragrim. After all you have done for me, how could I possibly fear you now?”

“A generous attitude, Gudmund, and I am touched by your trust, but I think we would both be more comfortable if I remain hooded. Besides, you never know when

someone else might suddenly appear. Trust me in this, too, my friend, as you do in all else.”

They walked in silence for several minutes before Gudmund changed the subject by asking: “Tell me, if you will, the story behind that remarkable staff you used to slay the two trolls yesterday. Their leader called it a rune staff, but I didn’t see or hear you use any magic at the time.”

“And I didn’t,” declared Faragrim. “I let the trolls’ over-eagerness work to their own destruction. It is part of the art of staff-fighting to use a stronger enemy’s power against him. Thus I was able to redirect the first troll’s charge away from me and over the cliff. A few well-placed blows brought the second troll to his knees; then it became a simple matter to send him after the first one. Magic should only be used as a last resort.”

“But you could have done so, if you’d felt the need?”

“Oh, yes, Gudmund, Kraki was right when he called my staff a rune staff. I suppose I’d better tell you where it came from before you burst with curiosity.”

“Please do,” Gudmund responded eagerly.

“Well, it happened like this,” began Faragrim as he thought back over the many momentous events that had marked his existence as a draug. “Soon after my encounter with Freyja and Hel, I left my barrow mound for good because so many people lived nearby that it would have been only a matter of time before someone saw me coming or going . . . and that would have created a panic in the neighborhood. Draugs have an unfortunately well-deserved reputation for destructive behavior, and I knew that I wouldn’t be given a chance to convince my mortal neighbors that I was different from other draugs. No, sooner or later some hotheads would have decided I was simply too dangerous to be trusted, and then they would have tried to burn me up in

my mound. If it had come to that, I probably could have fought my way free and gotten away—but almost surely not without injuring some of the very people Freyja had charged me with protecting!

“So I simply stole away in the middle of the night after replacing the stones so everyone would think I was still reposing quietly within the mound. Then I set out to find a new home in a more remote area. Hence my cave in the Trolls’ Teeth mountains, which is an ideal location, for it lies right on the edge of troll country, thus making it easy for me to keep an eye on them . . . as well as for me to go down into the valleys and watch over the human farmsteads.

“From time to time as I made my rounds, I would come upon moose in the margins of the dark mountain tarns where those magnificent animals came to feed on the juicy water plants. At first they were skittish when I approached but, in time, they became used to the sight and smell of me and calmly went about their business . . . as I did mine. One large male, who apparently possessed more curiosity than his fellows, eventually went so far as to come up to the trail and greet me with a regal nod of his great head. When he did this, I paused and spoke quietly to him for a moment before going on my way. This became something of a ritual for us whenever I passed by. Having become by necessity rather a solitary creature, it eased my loneliness to be able to form a sympathetic bond with another living being. What that grand old fellow got out of it, I cannot say, but it must have brought him some degree of pleasure, too, or he wouldn’t have continued to greet me by the tarn once he had assured himself that I was no threat to him or his family.”

“How wonderful,” said Gudmund, admiringly. “I have never heard of anyone else who succeeded in befriending a ‘King of the Forest.’ Most people who aren’t hunting

moose for their meat just try to stay out of their way.”

“Which is wise of them,” responded Faragrim, “for when a moose is aroused it could easily trample a man to death. But, be that as it may, my pleasant companionship with this particular bull soon came to an abrupt and tragic end.”

“What happened?” asked Gudmund with concern.

“One morning when I approached the tarn, there were no moose to be seen. Puzzled, I drew nearer to the margin of the dark water to see if there might be some clue to their absence. Nothing was visible at first, but shortly I heard a breathy moaning sound coming from a beaten-down stand of reeds farther along the shore. Pushing my way into the reeds, I discovered the body of the old bull, broken and bleeding. He was still alive, but just barely. It was clear to me that his back had been broken and the flesh torn from one hind leg and that side of his rib cage. I was also sure that his attacker would be coming back to finish the job . . . perhaps after it let its big meal settle for awhile.”

“How horrible!” gasped Gudmund. “Who—or what—could have done such a thing?”

“Gruesome it was, for certain, but only the way of things sometimes if the killer were another animal.” Then the draug’s tone took on a hard edge. “But any human who would eat flesh from the body of his still-living prey is needlessly torturing and dishonoring the animal that is being sacrificed that he might live. Such a person hardly deserves to be called a man!”

“Ugh, I should think not! But perhaps the killer wasn’t a human. Could it have been a bear or a troll?”

“Indeed, Gudmund, that is the same conclusion I reached. No human would have had the strength to break the moose’s back, and a bear would surely have left bite marks on the neck. No, the killer must have been a

troll of some kind, perhaps a *nökken*—one of those water-dwelling trolls could easily have stalked even a wary moose without revealing itself until the moment it attacked.”

“What happened then, Faragrim? Was there anything you could do for the poor moose?”

“Not as much as I would have liked, I’m afraid. The old fellow was beyond any hope of healing, so all I could offer him was release from his pain . . . and companionship in his passing. Kneeling beside him in the reeds, I eased his noble head onto my lap and stroked his long muzzle. Then I drew my belt knife from its sheath and held it up before his eyes so he could understand what I intended to do. And I’m sure he did, for he looked me straight in the eyes and blinked his big brown eyes twice in a very deliberate manner, as if giving me permission to proceed. Placing the tip of my blade against the weakly pulsing vessel that carries blood to the brain, I thrust the knife deeply into his neck . . . then quickly drew it down in such a way as to insure that the vessel would be severed cleanly and completely, for I did not want the poor beast to suffer longer than absolutely necessary.

“The blood spurted from his neck, though not very strongly for he had already lost so much of it from his gaping wounds. As his eyes shuttered in death, I offered a prayer to Freyja: ‘Lady of Light, hear your servant Faragrim, I pray. You who love all animals, please accept the spirit of this noble warrior into your service in Folkvang. I ask it for his sake, who cannot speak for himself.’ Then I thought I saw a valkyrie ride down from the clouds and extend her spear to gently touch the moose’s body. For a moment they were surrounded by a blinding light. Then, when I looked again, there was no trace of the body or of the valkyrie . . . and I knew that my prayer had been answered.”

Gudmund, sturdy farmer though he was,

wiped away a tear from his cheek. “That’s the most touching story I’ve ever heard. It was a wonderful thing that you did, Faragrim.”

“I felt it was the least I could do to honor a friend. But that was not yet the end of the story . . .”

“There’s more? I can hardly wait to hear it,” exclaimed Gudmund.

“Several weeks went by as I continued my dusk-to-dawn patrols of the neighborhood, pausing each time I passed the tarn where the moose had been killed to reflect upon what had happened there. Then, one day, I was roused from my musings by the approach of a small cart drawn by two of the largest forest cats I had ever seen. Strange as that sight was, however, I soon had eyes only for the cart’s lovely driver . . . none other than Freyja herself.

“Dropping to one knee, I greeted her and gave her thanks for accepting the spirit of my moose friend into Folkvang. Cheerily she replied: ‘He has made himself quite at home in the shallow, birch-ringed lake that lies close to my own home . . . an ideal place for him to spend eternity. Your compassion for one who is not of your kind is a rare and fine gift, Faragrim.’ I bowed my head and remained silent, for what can one reply to such words from a goddess?

“Then Freyja went on: ‘Ordinarily the quality of mercy should be its own reward, but in this case it seemed fitting that you should also receive something more tangible. The moose wanted you to have something personal as a token of remembrance, so he offered an antler from the remains of his earthly body. I accepted—and thanked him—on your behalf but, knowing his gift might prove awkward for you to carry around with you, I took the liberty of having it changed into a more portable form. I hope you don’t mind.’ Hearing no objection from me, she continued: ‘I carried the antler to Völund, the master-smith who dwells near

Valhalla, and asked him to use his considerable skills to render the change.’”

“‘Did you say Völund, my lady?’ I gasped. ‘That was the name of my murdered father, and he was said to be a great smith, too. Could it be the same person?’”

“‘Indeed, it is’ laughed Freyja, amused by my consternation, ‘and I’m sure that was one reason he agreed so gladly to make this gift for you.’ Having said that, she reached down into her cart and drew forth the staff I am carrying even now and which you saw me use to overcome those trolls yesterday.

“‘It’s beautiful, my lady,’ I exclaimed as I examined the three-pronged antler head of the staff, ran my fingers along the smooth yew-wood shaft, and admired the polished antler butt cap.

“‘It is that,’ opined Freyja, ‘as is all of Völund’s work, but it is also more than that. Notice the protection rune engraved in the antler head? Algiz not only stands for the spreading antlers of a moose but, in this case, actually draws its power from the spiritual essence of the very moose you helped. Call upon it only at great need . . . and use it wisely.’ Acknowledging my profuse thanks, the goddess picked up the reins of her cart, purred briefly to her team of cats, and soon they all disappeared from view.

“That’s the end of the story, Gudmund, and there ahead of us lean the stones that form the Gate of Kverndal . . . and which mark the end of our journey. Here we part company, for you can go safely hence to your brother’s steading in the valley below, while I need to return to my cave.”

“Will I never see you again?” asked Gudmund anxiously.

“Oh, I will surely look in on you from time to time as I make my rounds. And, of course, you are welcome to visit me in my cave. A runic spell shields its entrance from those who wish me ill, but to you it is always open.” Faragrim paused for a moment, then reached beneath his cloak to draw out a

shining black hunting horn, which he handed to Gudmund. "Should dire need arise, blow Windfar three times, and I will come to you at once. Now fare thee well, my friend."

"And thee also, Faragrim," Gudmund exclaimed, impulsively clasping the draug's cold, clammy hand and gripping it firmly

without hesitation or the trace of a shudder.

And, in that act of unconditional acceptance, Faragrim was struck with the realization that for the first time since his death and re-animation he had found a human being who was truly his friend, in deed as well as in word.

What Lucy Saw

by
D. S. Martin

On the day after the night on which she woke
& wandered through pools of moonlight
& spoke to the trees a whispered invitation
almost an incantation to also waken
that made them rustle in the windless air
& to almost heed her
the children became lost in an unfamiliar wood

It was then she saw him between
two mountain ashes before he vanished
like some evanescent vapour
a great lion *The* great Lion
his mane outshining the sun
there then not there where he'd been
unseen by the others leaving her verity
unverifiable unbelievable
though believed by one who'd not seen
who later received his *well done*

Sarbanes at Sea

by

Joe Krauss

It cost me 5051 scudi for passage on a scow out of Kennettsmouth. Five thousand went to make the captain think the risk worthwhile and 51 to buying 17 casks of Kander mead, one for each of the blackguards charged with keeping that tub afloat. Liquor of that character was hard to come by then, but it remains the best distraction I know. I wanted no attention, as you can imagine, and when a man drinks enough that he thinks he sees two of you, you can be certain that he will remember neither.

The captain suspected what I was; I would never have trusted a dolt without wits enough for that. I chose him precisely because he seemed canny enough to take the certainty of my gold over the chance of a king's cruiser intercepting him. As for the possibility of his own betrayal, I trusted him as far as the 5000 scudi would lead. And so long as it led out of West Morinda, I was satisfied.

My purse was full enough. I'd been throughout the province for months, pandering myself to merchants and mayors and even one petty prince. Such men sought me. They wanted wizard blood, but not, as the king did, to spill in the gutters of the town square. They craved it for the veins of their unborn sons or, failing that, their

daughters' wombs.

And their pay was handsome. Certainly more so than their wives or daughters. I have stood stud for many a local potentate, my good friends, and I can tell you that there is labor in it beyond your bawdy jests. But there is a fortune in it for those of us of the blood – as well my grandfather taught me – and I have never regretted pawning my own jewels when need has pressed me.

My berth should have gone for a first mate. My good captain was a master of economy, and he released his regular lieutenant when I made him my offer. It mattered little that I knew nothing of the sea except that boats go where the winds tell them. He'd put out among the men that I was to help with the command, and that satisfied them and gave me the anonymity I sought.

I boarded three days before we could leave port and spent them holed up in that closet, walking the decks only by moonlight and then just to taste the breeze. My berth permitted me to spy upon the men who bustled about the decks, however, and I came to know the face of every one of them.

So it was I noticed that we acquired an 18th hand on the morning we put out. His hair alone told me that he was no Morindan. Unlike theirs, a curly mass of yellow, his was black and straight, much as you see my own.

He was shorter as well, but stockier. Where they mirrored the shape of the masts they served, he was squatter, more powerful. His was a body built for the land, and I could see he took to sea only out of desperation.

But it was the gauntlet he wore on one hand that told me of his blood. You speak among yourselves of my own ... disfigurement. This I know, and you needn't bother with denials or confessions. It is a mark of my line, or of so much of that line as I know. Perhaps some of my bastards have two fine hands that wouldn't betray them even to the most learned inspectors. Still, he wore the glove too well, with too much ease for mere fashion's sake. He was accustomed to hiding one of his hands, and for one such as I, he had as well declared at the top of his voice that we fled the king for the same reasons.

Had he arrived any earlier, I might have killed him at once, but I wanted no trace of murder. Nor did I compel my captain to send him in search of another berth because, were he apprehended, the king's ministers might have been more resolute in tracking others of us. Since we were departing hours after I noted him, I did nothing. My captain could sell passage to another refugee, but if he compromised my safety I'd have his liver.

And we raised sail none too soon. I had seen guardsmen throughout the three days of my captivity, but never so many as when we left port. If there were this many in Kennettsmouth, it meant some minister had reports of me in the vicinity. My notoriety was in its adolescence only, but there were men who would risk their lives to destroy me. I fear no man, but even I fear an entire kingdom on the alert.

We were at sea less than a full day – I lost track of the hours after a bout of retching – when the crow's nest spotted a distant sail. It was too far to see clearly at first, but I extracted the story from the captain soon enough. He told me it was a king's warship

charged with eliminating piracy. It was the usual practice of such a vessel, he informed me, to board ships such as ours to check for the proper tax stamps and, often, to extract additional monies from captains whose standing with the government was, as he put it, "like lice on a balding man's head. We've nowhere to hide and nowhere else to warm ourselves."

He surely guessed that the patrol might also have been looking for me – or for one like me. I cursed anew our last-minute passenger, assuming it was his trail the authorities had followed to my own refuge. It irritated me that I could be compromised by a child with little sense of his own gift, little knowledge to awaken the power in his blood.

In retrospect, I should have proposed a bribe right away. A full purse deployed correctly is as formidable as a platoon, and no corrupt collector would risk either life or command to apprehend a man that his authorities could not know was aboard a vessel he had searched. I was troubled, though, by the patrols I had seen at Kennettsmouth and by the boy, and I mistrusted myself at sea. My instincts were in as much turmoil as my stomach.

"You will outrun his majesty's ship," I instructed the captain. He had not before heard me give a full command, and it bewildered him. He stood confused for a moment, and I had to strike him across the cheek to regain the attention I demanded. "You will outstrip him, sir. If it is a fair wind that you require, I shall supply it. If you would have the sea trouble our pursuer and not yourself, describe the commotion you desire, and I shall cause it."

He stood there dumbfounded still, and I had to restrain myself from taking his life at that instant. He was, as yet, an instrument for which I had need.

I gathered the air around myself into one ball and I spoke to it. "Air, you are air no longer. I name you stone. You will forget

what you were, and know only that you are stone.” And by the power of my blood it was so. It knew its name, and it did my bidding.

My aim was off. I attribute that now to the unsteadiness of the waves and to the sunlight that the sea mirrored into lightning. Instead of striking the vessel’s mast, my missile pierced its sail. It exhaled like a man sighing, and we began to pull away.

“By the masks,” the captain declared as he recovered himself. “They’ve a crew close to a hundred men. If she nears us now that you’ve singed her, we’re food for the sharks.” I had no time for his prattle, and he lost all ear for his own words as we watched several archers appear on the deck and draw back their strings.

The failing sail had revealed the sun behind it too abruptly for me to see with the clarity I needed, and there was nothing I could do to deter the first few volleys. They were far enough way that there was little worry, but I did feel one arrow sing above my head, and several struck the sides of our vessel. I heard the scream of a mate on our ship as another struck his thigh and remained there, its feathers waving back and forth like a tippler laughing. He was a man of no consequence, though.

“Enough,” I spoke when a passing cloud restored my vision. I called on the sea and gave a portion of it a new name, saying, “Sea, I name you ice. You are this new thing, this thing I have named you.” And at that, by the power of my blood, I caused an iceberg to arise between our ships.

The captain eyed me in a way that pleased me. In the instant, he knew me for his commander. Even though we were aboard his ship, he saw my rightful place and made way. He told me that the patrol, though slowed, would persist in its chase. It had struck its mainsail, but even one as ignorant as I saw that it could persist with only its lesser sails.

“I expect you to inform me if there is

any change in our pursuer,” I commanded. “I have need of rest if I am to hold off a warship by myself.” And then, after I had turned away, I added, “Have the new crewman come to see me. I shall be in my cabin.”

The boy entered with all the proper deference. His clothes were of a fine make, too fine by the half for travel that called on him to work passage as a seaman. His adoring mother, no doubt, had outfit him for his adventures, and I could imagine her smothering him with kisses as the father or some guardian weighed in with calculations on when pursuers would arrive at the front door.

I said nothing when he walked into my cabin. I lay in my hammock, observing him as I rocked with the interminable sway of the ship. I like to measure a man’s mettle in silence. The canny and the stupid bear it well. He gave a proper bow – head, neck and shoulders – and said, “You requested me, my lord?”

When I didn’t answer, he looked directly ahead rather than at me. He’d had military training; even an irregular such as I recognized it for what it was. Five minutes I had him stand there, and five minutes he held his posture as at a review. I think perhaps he even understood the situation; he was as a private standing before a captain, and I was measuring him only to see how he might serve my designs.

“You were pursued yestermorning as you made your way to this vessel. You know that don’t you?” I spoke without preamble, yet he showed no surprise.

“I fear so, my lord,” he said. “If I have put you in peril as a consequence of my recklessness, I beg the chance to make amends.”

“What makes you think that you could make amends, child? Have you some secret that will win us this pursuit? Have you power enough to battle a warship of the very

king of West Morinda? You do know that we are hunted creatures, lad?

"We, sir?"

"I know what you are, child. Do you have any idea yourself?"

He looked me in the eye, and I saw a flash of pride. "I am, sir, as I believe are you, of the royal line of Kander. I bear the mark of that descent between the fingers of my left hand, and, I understand, I carry a power that tyrants fear."

"Royal?" I laughed. "You have that story from your grandmother, I imagine. What is she? Some great merchant's niece, a girl-child the great man set out for breeding with that earless, formless thing that survived Kander's wreck?"

He flushed but held his composure. "My grandfather was Carwen Ffarald, general of Mayst province until the barbarians sacked Kandrasit and the last prince fell. He led a remnant of our people into the Morindan plains and established a household there. How my grandmother came to know that prince of whom you speak I cannot say. We are patriots, sir, and we are pledged to see Kander restored."

"Are there others of you?"

"I have two sisters, my lord. There are..." he paused, "cousins, I understand. I have never met them, though. The time is not yet ripe for them to go abroad."

"And it is for you?"

"It is, sir. Folk of Kander are spread across the lands. Some have found wealth and influence, but most know hardship and displacement. We need a leader, sir. We need someone of the blood who can demonstrate that Kander lives, that there is hope for the restoration. We are a mighty people, betrayed only by the short-sightedness of the ministers who misled the royal powers of my grandfather's time."

I laughed, and wondered at the stories that went untold: the century of corruption that preceded that great purging, the cousins

who slew cousins, the fathers who blinded their sons that they might sustain their line without brooking a rival.

I said merely. "And you would be that leader, child? You would gather the folk and lead them back to the valleys of our making, reestablish the kingdom and sit atop its throne?"

He met my gaze. "I would serve that cause, my lord. If others of the blood will lead us, I will aid however my powers permit. You are right to laugh at a revolt with none stronger than I to lead it. I am on a quest; I seek a leader to follow."

I watched my young cousin reassume the posture of a lieutenant.

"Would you follow me?" I asked.

"To Kander, my lord. if you will you lead us there."

"Yes," I nodded to him. "Yes. We shall see." I paused to give an impression of seriousness. Can any of you imagine me coveting such a crown, desiring to sit in pomp and to hear the complaints of a wounded, whining aristocracy? No, rather the Four Knaves for me, my friends, rather our 'operations' and the likes of you for my citizenry. That boy saw in me another Sun King. He imagined me a hero in his family's noxious idea of such a creature. He dreamed me a better man than I am, so let us hoist flagons to him.

I awoke the next morning to find my stomach yet troubled. When I came aboard deck, the captain pointed wordlessly, half a mile away, to two, and perhaps a third sail. Their captains knew their maneuvers. As I had to squint into the bright light that they knew enough to use against me, I feared that they were prepared in other ways. Surely they would have bouzouki and bows.

Life at sea is monotony, my fellows. You've tried it, Kallen. You were in a Korian freighter's galley when good cousin Meynard found you, weren't you? It is a sundial frozen at noon; it is a horizon that

runs with malicious sameness in every direction.

I paced and gathered my strength, searching for distractions to keep my mind off the condition of my stomach. I consulted one of the captain's charts and found that, while it would take another week to reach Amanara, we might find harbor in Arra Cammelon. I prepared one of the lifeboats for my own, secreting my chest there and naming it a thing that none could see but myself.

And, out of curiosity, I tested the boy and found him, for the most part, wanting. He was too precise, too much wedded to the idea that what he saw was what needed to be. He had no stomach for the work, little will that he knew for his own alone. It's more than blood that goes into making a wizard, boys, more than blood. There's arrogance, too, the certainty that this world is mine for the taking and the remaking.

Still, when I spoke of his grandmother, when I made him think fleetingly of her couplings with the thing that begot his mother and his aunts, I saw a spark that I thought I might fan if only there were kindling at hand. What held him back was only – and laugh if you will, my fellows – what held him back was nothing more than love of me. The boy so clearly wanted my regard that he could not see to hate me, could not imagine that I was a father he would have to loathe in order to harness all that his blood promised. I gather he'd have had me for his own father if wishing could make it so. Laugh at a jest such as that. I was probably more father than his own hapless pater; I shared the blood with him at least.

The morning augured ill. The sky was cloudless and the sun high, and the sea flashed so bright that my eyes ached when I tried to regard the sails that stalked us. It was a morning of nature's wizardry, with the sunlight wreaking its own transformations, naming one wave a bolt of lightning and

another a furtive dolphin. Heaven is a wizard that surpasses us all, even Teeyus, and in the face of it I knew to husband my strength.

I named the occasional cloud, and I was pleased to find the boy capable of nearly that much. Such moments were respite, though, and the ship or ships that fell back while the shade held would close again when we were again naked beneath the sky. The strain of pursuit told on my concentration, and the ships dogged us for hours. I needed sleep. The boy seemed exhausted from his efforts as well, but I instructed him to make some display of wizardry to cover my absence. It was barely noon when I took to my cabin.

The captain roused me in what seemed an instant, but I learned it was already past 2 o'clock. I staggered to the deck, and found our pursuers knew their game. One ship had closed to us on the sunless side; two others had the afternoon sun behind them, and they were distorted and ghostly even though they were no more than 200 meters away. The closer of the two had a handful of archers at the prow, and one or another fired a shot to test the range.

Near them, I saw a group of performers, and I could already hear them above the waves. They were a serious sounding group, harmonizing well enough for soldiers and with instruments in tune, but they had no real grace. They gave me little worry save for one figure, the short plump one I assumed, with a tenor that sounded as if it might disrupt me.

The boy was a wreck. He held his eyes open through stubbornness, but he was staggering wildly as his fatigue danced with the rolling of the deck. "Sleep," I told him. "We will have need of you when the ship to the port side closes." He made to argue with me, and then he slumped at the base of a mast with his head lolling against his shoulder.

When I saw that the arrows would reach us soon enough, I went to the starboard side and, carrying a cone to amplify my voice, I

spoke to the mainmast of the lead pursuer. "Wood," I called, "wood, you are no longer wood. You are no longer a thing that wrestles with the sea beneath you. You are sand, sinking sand. Stand before the wind no longer but sink, find your level." And, by the power of my blood, I made it so. That great mast began to quiver and chunks of it fell in grains to the deck below.

The fool performers sang their merriless tune all the louder, and I laughed to see one of the player's hands draw back in pain as a bouzouki string snapped across it. The fiddles sawed noisily back and forth, offering a cacophony that threatened nothing but its auditors. The group was disarrayed at once, its members as badly trained as they were ungifted. As I feared, though, the tenor held. His voice was pure enough, and his song beguiling. The wood heard him, not me, and most of the mast remained whole.

His back was turned to me so that he might sing to the wood, and it was a simple matter to speak at once to one of the arrows his fellows had already put aloft. With a word, it turned in flight and found him below the shoulder blade. And this was rich: he died noisily, shrieking, his song corrupt beneath the too bright sky.

Still, the mast held. He had done that much, and I knew at that moment that I was overmatched. I had not yet dispatched a single ship, and the other two were closing. I spoke quickly to a stone I'd carried in my pocket, calling it fire, and sent it toward the mast again. There was an explosion near the crow's nest, and the top-sails came crashing down, obscuring two of the archers and knocking another off his balance.

The remaining archers fired wildly toward us, and a few arrows struck our ship as we pulled away.

I ran across the deck to confront the port side threat. Too late. It's arrows were in range, and I had to retreat again. From behind a barrel on the deck, I saw two of the

scow's sailors wave in surrender, gesturing for the Morindans to throw them ropes to make fast our ships. In disgust, I called up a wind that caught them unsuspecting and blew both overboard.

I crawled to the boy, who lay insensible. My own head ached, so I doubted he could accomplish much, but it was past time to see his blood at work.

"Boy," I called as I struck his head against the mast. "Boy, awake to the fray. For Kander, boy. Rise for Kander."

His eyes snapped open, but they were glazed.

"Call on your blood, boy," I said. "Rain fire on the foes who approach."

He staggered vaguely toward the port side, and I heard him mumbling incantations, seeking the formulae I had given him only the morning before. I heard an explosion and then shouts.

Our ship was on the brink of chaos. An arrow took our captain in the chest. He clutched it with both his hands, so startled at its sudden appearance that he seemed not to know his own pain. Other fools stripped off their shirts and waved them wildly, so anxious to surrender that they pranced about like animals.

I spoke to the ropes that secured one of the dinghies, and they unraveled, sending it to the water below to drift away. I heard the thud, thud, thud of arrows against it.

I found my way to the cargo hold and spoke to my cloak, telling it to become as a barrel. It was an old trick, one I'd perfected in the markets of my youth to protect myself when my grandfather had angered one marshal or another. Then I lost myself to sleep at once.

I awoke some hours later, confident that dark had fallen above. I crept up the stairs, amused to find that my barrel had actually been moved while I slept inside it. Imagine, the fools had had their hands upon me and, sensing my weight within, mistook me for

cargo.

There was only one warship remaining, its topsails obliterated. Our deck was quiet; the captain's body lay near the wreckage of several chests.

When I looked up, I saw the boy. They had tied him by his ankles so that his arms hung downward, and he dangled in a light breeze. His fine clothing was in strips, and I thought for a moment that they had tied a ribbon around his neck. It was, I saw soon, the work of a knife they had dragged across his throat, no doubt severing the vocal cords as they'd been trained. It goes without saying that they'd gouged out his eyes.

They'd found their wizard.

I made my way to a lifeboat and lowered myself as quietly as I could. A splash alerted one of the ship's watchmen, and I heard him sound the alarm just as I told

the air to rise up in my single sail. I spoke fire to the boards of the ship as I pulled out of range of my voice, and I knew that I would live to see the dawn.

The men of the ship busied themselves with putting out the fire, and I sped noiselessly away toward what I took to be the direction of Arra Cammelon. I turned back a final time and saw the boy illuminated by the fire, hanging as if waving a fare-thee-well.

He served me, and I thank his insulted corpse.

I made landfall several hours later. Damn the West Morindans, boys, and damn the marshals of every nation. I've had my vengeance on them, as all you know, but I never was to sea again. Laugh with me, boys, and drink. I never was to sea again.—

