

# HEIR APPARENT

by

Robert Bloch

Truth is a weapon which cuts both ways, and its blade is often bent in the telling.

Let not my words mislead you, for I am neither a swordsman nor any other kind of man. My name is Maug, and my station is that of first chamberwoman to the Lady Tephana.

It is for her that I must tell the truth, lest others twist the tale.

Hear me now, for this was the way of it . . .

It is whispered that we of the North have long had dealings with powers of the Dark and that we bear the taint of their blood. This I shall not deny. To live in a land where once demons held domain is difficult at best, for their power is still strong and we have learned their ways in order to survive. We who wish to dwell in peace under their sufferance must bargain for it. And if, at times, that bargain entails the mingling of bloodlines, so be it.

That my own mother entered into such an alliance has been hinted, but of this I cannot surely say, since she died at my birthing, without revealing my father's name. I was taken into the House of Paltendale as an orphan babe and in its service I grew to womanhood, learning the arts of chamberwoman to earn my keep.

I know also—and freely admit—that from childhood on I possessed certain powers greater than those of ordinary folk around me, and came easily to the study of spells and the distillation of potions employing the lore of the Dark. While other maidens of my years yearned for love, my interest lay only in learning, and I knew naught of womanly wiles and ways. And when at last love came into my life it was not the love of maid for man but the maternal affection of a mother for her child.

The child was she who became Lady Tephana, and I was not her true mother. She, like myself, was born into the House of Paltendale without living parents, both her noble sire and lady mother perishing of a plague which swept the land shortly after her birth. Some called it a curse brought down upon them for trafficking with dwellers from the Dark. Again I know nothing of this save rumor. And all I knew at the time was that a tiny infant lay helpless and unprotected, mewling for a mother's milk and starved for the succor of a tender touch and caring caresses.

Milk was secured through the services of a wet nurse, but it was I, assigned to duties in the nursery, who gave her loving care. And as the years went by it was I who became not only nurse but teacher, I who protected her with charms to ward off harm, I who was privileged to be her preceptress and guide her emergence into womanhood.

And woman she became—small in stature but well endowed with beauty of face and form. Her hair was lustrous black, her eyes deep gray, her gestures graceful, her voice a caress.

Small wonder then that she was sought as a bride by her cousin, the young heir to the House of Fortal. And when she wed she chose me to serve as her first chamberwoman.

Those were joyous times, and in memory I still hear the echo of her laughter. When the union was blessed with a son, Hylmer, it seemed her happiness was complete. But happiness is hard to come by and harder to hold; it slipped from her grasp all too swiftly with the sudden death of her

lord in a hunting accident.

Her grief was great, and I grieved for her. Lady Tephana's beauty was shrouded in the grey garb of widowhood and her position as Mistress of Fortal imperiled by her dead lord's brothers who sought to take power.

It was then that I came to her one dark and dreary day, in the tower chambers which had long since ceased to be warmed by sunlight or her smile.

"Be of good cheer, my lady," I said. "For I bring glad tidings."

"Indeed?" Gray eyes met mine with no luster in their glance. "What might those tidings be that they hold reason to dispel my sorrow?"

"Your time of mourning is over, and your widowhood as well. For even as I speak, a suitor is on his way."

The gray eyes widened. "A suitor? But I do not wish to marry again."

"It is not a question of wish," I said, "but rather one of need. Others plot your downfall here, for you have un-friends within this Keep."

"It is of no great consequence, now that my lord is gone. Whatever comes, the future holds no fears for me."

I shook my head. "And Hylmer, your son—does his welfare mean nothing to you as well? Those who scheme to bring you down will also place his life in peril, for only then can they take power."

Lady Tephana nodded quickly. "You are right, of course. It is Hylmer's safety I must consider. And if I marry again he will be under the protection of my new spouse." She rose and faced me, her eyes at last alert. "But tell me—who is it that would seek my hand in marriage?"

"Ulric, Lord of Ulm." As I spoke I glanced out of the tower window, peering down at a band of horsemen moving toward the castle on the road below, their banners bright against the sun. "And if I mistake not, he comes to claim you even now."

I was not mistaken; it was indeed Ulric who approached the Keep. Nor had I misread his purpose, for it was I, with the aid of certain spells which need not be described, who stirred his thoughts to summon him. Bluntly put, I had ensorceled Lord Ulric with a vision of Lady Tephana and her beauty, hoping to induce his coming.

Of this I spoke not, thinking it wiser that my Lady believe his presence here was prompted only by his own desire. And it pleased me greatly that their meeting bore fruit; he appeared much taken with her charms and lost no time in urging his suit. As for Lady Tephana, she seemed not unmindful of his brave appearance and ardent entreaty. Knowing the safety of her son was at stake, she dispensed with the coquetry of courtship and readily consented to become Ulric's bride.

The ceremony was celebrated quietly, amidst general rejoicing, and sooner than I'd dared believe possible my lady journeyed south to her new lord's land. Hylmer was left behind for a time in the care of trusted chamberwomen, until she felt assured of the stability of her new estate as Lord Ulric's wife.

But I rode with her, and it was I who stayed at her side after our arrival at Ulm. And it was I who soon sensed the coming of a cloud which cast its shadow over the marriage. For while Ulric looked upon her lovingly in the presence of others, I noted that in their private moments his smiles gave way to frowns.

This troubled me, and at last I could keep silent no longer. Seeking out Lady Tephana in her chambers I made bold to question her.

"Forgive my forwardness," I said. "But I speak only out of devotion to your well-being. What is it between you and Lord Ulric which mars this marriage?"

Lady Tephana shrugged. "There is nothing between us." She smiled thinly. "Perhaps it is that which disturbs him."

I stared at her, realizing the full import of her words.

"Do you mean that after a month of wedlock there has been no consummation of the union?"

She nodded quickly and would have turned away, but I deterred her. "How can that be?" I said. "Lord Ulric is indeed somewhat older and less handsome than your late husband, but still he is of noble birth and a fine figure of a man. Is there some secret deformity in his person, some hidden flaw which inspires your repugnance? Surely it is not his indifference that prompts your rejection; even I, who know little of the ways of love, can see how greatly he yearns to follow wedding with bedding."

"Truly said." Lady Tephana faced me now, and I read anger in her eyes. "Ulric does indeed burn with desire to possess me, but his longing has little to do with love, or even lust. To him I am not a person but merely a receptacle to be filled with seed. He does not truly look upon me as wife or woman; he married only to beget an heir."

I nodded. "But this is natural. All men wish for offspring, and a lord needs sons to carry on the line."

"It is more than need which impels him," Lady Tephana said. "Since coming here I have learned much. Soon after Ulric's birth his father's doings brought down a curse upon the House of Ulm, and no further children were born alive thereafter. Mindful of this, Ulric himself married when quite young, hoping to rid the curse and secure an heir. His wife was sickly, but he had little concern for her. He promptly got her with child and when the poor lady died in the birthing he mourned not at this; it was only the loss of the infant which sorrowed him.

"His second wife, the Lady Elva, was wedded in unseemly haste thereafter. It is said she captivated him with the beauty of her fair hair, the slim perfection of her body with its exquisite, pear-shaped breasts. It is also said that he felt true affection for her, but this did not deter him from his purpose. He took her roughly and repeatedly until she too conceived, not once but several times, and always the

offspring came before their time so that none survived. Perhaps he loved her truly, but this did not prevent him from dismissing her. He craved a child, and that is why he came to wed me—only because he must father an heir for Ulmsdale.

“As he thinks of naught but his own position, so must I think of mine. And this I swear—I shall not become an instrument of his arrogance, a brood-mare to serve his purpose. Proud he may be, but so am I. Mine is the pride of womanhood, and he shall not humble it.”

“Even at the cost of your son’s life?” I said softly.

“I will protect Hylmer,” she declared.

“With what—a woman’s wiles?” I frowned. “How long do you think you can fend Ulric off with talk of headaches or being in your monthly courses? Sooner or later he will insist upon claiming his rights to your person, and if you resist he will surely banish you. Then Hylmer, like yourself, forfeits all protection. You two will wander the Waste to your deaths.”

Lady Tephana, she who walked high in her grace, now stood with sagging shoulders, and the white purity of her complexion grayed to ashen pallor.

“But what am I to do?” she cried.

“The answer is simple,” I said. “You must conceive.”

“Never!” A spark of anger flared from the ashes, reddening her cheeks and flaming from her eyes. “Come what may, Ulric shall not use me thus.”

“Consider his position,” I counseled. “Ulric acts not out of malice but only to protect Ulm.”

“His motives do not matter,” Lady Tephana declared. “If I give him a son, the boy becomes his rightful heir, and Hylmer would still have no assurance of safety in the future.” Her eyes flashed fire. “I tell you I will not bear Ulric’s child.”

“I speak only of conception,” I murmured. “But the child need not be Ulric’s.”

Lady Tephana stared at me in puzzlement. "You would have me cuckold him with another man?"

I smiled. "Suppose it was not a man?"

My lady stared, taking my meaning. Then, "You would have me consort with evil?" she whispered.

I shook my head. "Evil is an empty word. The cosmos itself exists only as the interplay of Light and Darkness, which are neither good nor evil—merely opposite aspects of the same power. Power which men seek to control by means we call magic."

"You have knowledge of such magic, then?" Lady Tephana said.

"I do. And I would employ it so that you bear a babe which is not truly of Ulric's blood."

"But what purpose would that serve?"

"Yours," I told her. "If the offspring is not Ulric's it will become your ally, not his. Thus it will grow to protect you and your child. Is that not what you desire?"

Lady Tephana nodded. "More than life itself." She hesitated, grey eyes intent on mine. "But are you certain you can do this?"

"Trust me," I said.

And she did.

So it was that she went to Lord Ulric and cozened him, saying that she would no longer withhold her favors, for now her true desire was as his—to give him a manchild. But when he sought to take her she implored that he wait only a few days longer. First she must make pilgrimage to the shrine of Gunnora, Our Lady of Fruitfulness, and pray to her for the life and good health of Ulric's issue.

Convinced and content, he agreed to her going, wishing her well on the mission.

Before departure I took other steps to guard our safety. When Ulric's former wife, Lady Elva, took refuge in Nordsdale Abbey she left behind her own first chamberwoman. This was one Ylas, an ill-favored creature with a

harelip, who was skilled in needlework. I was disturbed by her continued presence here and wondered if she had been instructed to stay and spy upon Lady Tephana and her doings. To distract her from such purpose I now sought her out with a smiling face and asked her to weave a scarf for my lady, using fine fabric which I gave her together with drawings of a pattern for her needle to follow. Thus employed I felt she would be unmindful of our own comings and goings.

And so we did next day, accompanied by two guards, though it was not Gunnora's shrine we sought. The guards knew naught of this, for in their provisions was an ample supply of drink containing a potion I concocted to insure sound sleep and direct their dreams. To them those dreams would seem reality, so that next morning upon awakening they would swear they had spent the night in sentry outside the portals of Gunnora's shrine.

But once their slumber was assured, Lady Tephana and I made our way farther into the bleak and barren land where stood another edifice, erected by darker powers for a darker purpose.

It was there, in the crumbling ruins of what had not been raised by human hands, that we came under the cloak of night. And it was there, in a chamber steeped with shadows, that Lady Tephana removed her cloak at my instruction and laid herself upon a slab of stone, baring her body to reveal the richness of its charms.

The slab was cold and the night chill, but it was with fear of the strange shadows that she shuddered and shivered until my words calmed her into repose. Eyes closed, she slumbered, unaware of what transpired in the midnight hours.

As she lay in loveliness I drew forth a short wand fashioned from the spine of an unborn infant and bathed in its blood to confer the power of charmed command.

Power too took added strength from the sound of the



words I muttered in a tongue forgotten by men but well remembered by those who dwell in the Darkness.

The force surged forth to stir the shadows, imbuing them with a life of their own. Swirling into shifting shapes, the shadows took fearsome form as they drew closer to the slab, gathering to gaze on the bared body of my lady. Hands that were more like claws or talons swooped forth, seeking to touch, to grasp, to possess. But with wand and words I kept them back whilst I sought the semblance of one summoned by name—the Darklord Galkur.

And as my lady slept he came, emerging from the striving shapes to tower over the slab with more than a shadow's substance. There was such hunger in his glowing gaze; such emanations of dark desire as to set me atremble so that the wand almost slipped from between my fingers. Hastily I tightened my grip, chanting aloud the ancient ritual which alone could hold the adept's powers of Darklord Galkur in thrall.

Even so, he crept closer to my sleeping lady, closer than any of his shadowy company, tensing above her body as though to hurl himself upon it.

"You want her?" I whispered. "Then listen. Listen, Lord Galkur, and heed me well."

Now, murmuring in the midnight, I proposed my pact—my lady's flesh in return for Galkur's favor. And when I at last concluded, the huge head nodded in eager assent.

"Then it is agreed," I said. The shape made as if to advance upon its prey but with my wand I waved it back. "Leave us now so that I can prepare the way. She shall be yours at moontide of tomorrow's eve."

Shadows lack voices but I fancied my words echoed by Galkur's deeper tones. And then his shape slithered back to merge and mingle with the other phantasmal forms as they swirled away into the darkness, vanishing to leave me alone with Lady Tephana asleep on the stone stained by other sacrifices. Now she too would be sacrificed to seal

this pact with Darkness, but mercifully she knew not of the bargain I had struck.

As for me, I slept not, but waited the coming of dawn in silence. When Lady Tephana awoke and sought to question me I told her merely that my efforts had met with success and all would be well. Seeking the guards before the portals of Gunnora's shrine, I bid them bestir themselves. As I had foreseen they were none the wiser for our absence during the night, and now together we made our way back to the Keep.

There, as Lady Tephana rested in her tower chamber, I sped to the kitchen below, for in accordance with my plan I needs must prepare a potion. With me I brought certain herbs and simples gathered from the weed-strung Waste. And while cook and serving-maids stood apart, curious as to my intent yet afraid to question me, I filled a brew pot on the hearth and began the rituals required.

To folk who know not magic it seems strange that potency resides in the leaves and petals of common growths. The secret, of course, lies not in the plants themselves but in their proper mingling. It is much the case as with words. Used singly they lack strength. But when grouped together in certain sentences they can cajole, command, condemn, curse, inspire love or loathing, happiness or hatred. And plants possess similar powers when combined for intended usage.

To compound the efficacy of my concoction I hummed an age-old tune, for musical notes—again when properly assembled—convey a still other power of their own.

All this is the essence of magic's meaning—the informed use of the commonplace to create a linkage with Forces that surround us—and bend those Forces to our bidding.

In the midst of my task I spied the woman Ylas creeping about the kitchen and stealthily observing my every movement. From the look of her she did not relish the odors

arising from the bubbling pot before me. And there was an aura about her, as if she were not alone but accompanied by an intangible presence. An image came unbidden to me; that of an eagle-headed gryphon, which is the guardian symbol of the House of Ulm. But what this had to do with the actual and visible Ylas I could not divine; dismissing the vagrant fancy I watched the woman leave after making pretense of eating bread and cheese.

Puzzled, I sent my thoughts after her, informed with a purpose she must fulfil. My sending proved successful, for when I finished my workings and took a portion of my potion to Lady Tephana's tower, Ylas appeared bearing the scarf I had bid her weave. This she presented to the lady, who placed it about her shoulders and praised her work.

But there was about this a matter for unease. Before Ylas arrived I had poured my potion into a golden goblet, and now she recognized its scent. Peering down, she passed her fingers over the goblet's rim, then drew back quickly, and in the twilight of the tower window I saw her misshapen mouth go agape in fear as she turned to depart from the chamber.

"What possesses her?" Lady Tephana exclaimed.

"No matter," I replied. "At best she can but suspect rather than know. As for possession, that in itself is a matter we must now consider. For the night is nigh."

Then, and only then, did I inform the lady of what lay ahead and of the part she was to play in it.

Briefly put, the plan was this. With the coming of darkness Lady Tephana would seek out Lord Ulric and invite him to sup in her tower chambers. Here, with a sumptuous meal prepared, she must greet him with warm and wifely words of welcome while arrayed in a rich robe woven but thinly to cover her charms yet not conceal them. Together they would dine by the light of scented candles, the fragrance of which would mingle with the perfume my lady had applied to her person. And as they enjoyed their

repast she would employ the methods of a magic common to womankind—shy gestures, sidelong glances, stifled sighs; such sorceries as need not words to give them meaning. The wine Lord Ulric took with his meal must aid in kindling desire, but nothing could inflame his senses like my lady's unspoken promise of passion to come.

Inevitably he would seek to draw her to the bed, but before the moment of sweet surrender she must invite him to drink first from the golden goblet.

Once the potion passed his lips our aim was accomplished. For even as he drew the garment from her shapely shoulders a strange sleep would steal over him—but a sleep in which he fancied himself still awake. Thus, though he held heaven in his arms and sought the portals of paradise, he would do so only in dream.

Then, as the potion took full effect, Ulric's mortal body would be usurped by the essence of one not completely mortal, as Darklord Galkur took both his place and his pleasure.

Lady Tephana listened and her great gray eyes were haunted with misgiving. "But this is a dreadful thing we do," she whispered.

"A needful thing," I told her. "If there is issue from this union, both it and your son Hylmer will enjoy the protection of Darklord Galkur."

My lady shuddered. "It is said this Galkur is a creature neither animal nor human. How can I freely give myself to such a monster?"

"There is a way," I told her. "When Lord Ulric drinks from the goblet you must signify your desire to drink in turn—not from the goblet, but from his lips, while his mouth still holds the liquid of the potion. This will please him, I know, for there can be no more precious a prelude to the act of love.

"You need but take a sip of the brew to bring the blessing of sleep. Within moments your senses will slumber, though

you will appear to be awake. You shall not be aware of Galkur's coming and caresses, nor will he discern that you thus deny him your participation in his pleasuring."

Lady Tephana pondered upon my proposal for a long moment before breaking silence. "There is no other way?"

"None. This is the only course."

She sighed, then nodded. "So be it, then."

Night descended and Lord Ulric ascended to the tower. All was in readiness as arranged, and all went in accordance with my plan.

To assure myself of this I found a station in the room adjoining the bedchamber. Kneeling there in the darkness I put my eye to the keyhole of the chamber door. It was not curiosity which prompted me, but after all my calculation and worrisome workings—and above all, for the sake of my lady—I must be certain of the results obtained.

So it was that I witnessed the meeting of Lord Ulric and his bride, their meal together, her amorous enticement, and its effect upon him. I saw too his draining of the golden goblet and how Lady Tephana drank a portion drawn by a kiss with opened mouth—a kiss that ended only as the lovers sank down upon the bed together.

Together—yet not for long. As the two entwined there seemed a great stirring in the bedchamber, and the candlelight wavered, flames fluttering in a whirl of wind. Then shadows came, though I did not sense their source, filling the room with a swirl of seething sable which spiraled down upon the bed and merged into a single shape.

The shape descended upon Lord Ulric, seeming to absorb his body, so that now Lady Tephana lay beneath a shadow. This shadow was unlike any other, for it had eyes—great eyes, holding a lambent light as they feasted upon my lady's bared beauty, eyes that gloated as fingers of darkness fondled and fastened themselves upon her person. But as the black bulk descended I saw, or seemed to

see, a curious change in its contours. For a moment it melted, and in its place appeared the profiled semblance of a great beaked and horned birdlike head borne by a body with widespread wings. But it was Galkur's loins below which thrust forward, and from them darted that which had the hideous likeness of a writhing serpent. At the sight of its writhing and the realization of its intent I cried out in terror, then swooned away before the door.

How long I lay in merciful unawareness I cannot say, but when at last I roused and steeled myself to again peer through the keyhole I saw that Galkur's shadow had vanished, together with all other fearful forms. Now only Lord Ulric and Lady Tephana lay side by side in slumber, their bodies bathed in the warming glow of calm candlelight.

Of what transpired on that fateful evening I spoke not, nor did my lady venture to discuss. But it was apparent that Lord Ulric was unaware of anything amiss and now he looked fondly on his bride—the more so as he perceived the growing evidence of her condition. For it was increasingly obvious she was with child and this pleased him greatly. So fulsome was his favor that Lady Tephana made bold to bring Hylmer to the Keep. Ulric welcomed him warmly and I know he took his place with favor, though I saw him but seldom in the months to come.

As for me, I remained haunted with a vexing uncertainty as to what I had actually witnessed before my fainting spell. Each time I encountered the needlewoman Ylas I wondered if by some mischance she too had wrought a magic of her own.

It was a matter of grave concern, and when Lady Tephana entered the final weeks of her carrying I determined upon a course that would ensnare Ylas, however unwittingly, as a party to the outcome of my plans.

Providing my lady with what was needful, I enlisted her

to summon Ylas to the bedchamber where she lay awaiting the approaching hour of birthing. Here, in accordance with my instruction, she gave Ylas two bolts of cloth—one red, the other white—together with a parchment I prepared bearing a design to be woven into a birth-cloth for the newborn infant.

The design held symbols not usually employed, but I hoped Ylas would feel sufficiently flattered by being entrusted with her task and follow orders to weave the pattern as instructed.

But when I sought her out to take possession of her finished handiwork I perceived instantly that she had betrayed my wishes, for the birthing-cloth bore other symbols—the twin trceries of Gunnora's amulet of protection and the gryphon guardian of the House of Ulm.

Of my displeasure I gave no sign, merely gathering the cloth and wrapping it in the folds of another. Thus shielded, the symbols would possess no power, and Ylas's tampering was thwarted.

Still I could not be assured she might not resort to other means of interfering if left to her own devices; it might be that she was capable of weaving spells as well as cloth.

So three days later, as Lady Tephana's time came upon her, I bade Ylas join us on our journeying. For Lady Tephana had gone to Ulric and asked that she give birth in the shrine of Gunnora. Here, with the favor of the great patroness of womankind, she would bear him a living heir at last to break the curse which beset the House of Ulm. Despite her secret betrayal she was quite sincere in her hope to bear a living child, and felt the need of Gunnora's birth-blessing.

With Lord Ulric's consent we started forth, my lady in a horse litter led by manservants, whilst I bestrode another mare. Ylas and two castle maids followed on foot.

Sullen signs of an approaching storm suffused the sky, and when at last we came unto the hillside we made no

attempt to follow the path upward, for the climb was too steep for the horses to mount safely. We turned to go around the hill and reach the shrine from its opposite side, making our way along a road which had been laid by the Old Ones through their land.

Then the storm descended, and in its full fury we could go no farther but needs must seek shelter within the half-leveled structure which long ago the Old Ones had raised as a stopping-place. Placing Lady Tephana's litter in the inner chamber with the women, the men and steeds were left to make do in the outer one as best they could.

Now, as howling wind and hissing rain tore night to tatters, my lady trembled to find herself in this place of darkness instead of Gunnora's shrine. But there was no help for it, and as lightning flashed and thunder boomed she writhed in the pangs of birthing, babbling regret of the pact she had made with other powers. I too felt unease, but it was too late to alter what had been done, and there was naught to do but await the coming of the child.

Thunder heralded its birth, and when the maids drew forth the babe it squirmed and squealed loudly, for it was indeed alive.

As I ministered to my lady, Ylas took the infant and placed it upon the birthing-cloth. Then lightning flickered forth from cracks in the ruined walls and in its glare I turned and beheld the child. Beheld its manly human form which terminated in hooves instead of feet—beheld also the human face whenceforth peered two glowing yellow eyes.

And as I stared stricken, a sound as of the beating of great wings rose above the tumult of the storm, as did the echo of a mighty voice raised triumphant over all.

“Son sealed to me!”

The echo faded but my fright remained. For it was then I knew that we had failed. Despite Galkur's brand upon its body and despite the cry of what I sensed to be the



Gryphon Lord, this was truly Lord Ulric's son.

I moved to place the child beside Lady Tephana, but Ylas shrieked that this was a demon's get, and when my lady saw what she had birthed she screamed and averted her gaze in horror.

Nor would she ever look upon it or hold it in her arms, even when we returned to Ulmsdale and Lord Ulric accepted his heir without question or reproach. He gave the infant into the care of a trusted forester who took him to raise in a place far distant from the Keep.

And I, who had risked and sacrificed so much for my mistress to safeguard her future, found myself without favor in her eyes. Banished from her presence, I now know naught but desolation and despair.

Sometimes I ponder upon that of which I spoke—the nature of a cosmos in which good and evil are illusions, merely the interplay between Light and Darkness which we seek to control by magic so that we ourselves may gain power.

And this I ask myself: what if our power is also an illusion? What if the forces of Light and Darkness are themselves but pawns in some vaster game which we cannot ever comprehend, or hope to master?

The answer to these questions I do not know.

I know only that I am afraid . . .

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## Afterword

*I was introduced to Andre Norton and her business associate Ingrid Zierhut at a convention. The ladies then retired to their room, where Ms. Norton promptly fell asleep and Ms.*

*Zierhut read the ads in the program booklet—thus giving you some idea of the kind of impression I made on them. Still, something did result from our meeting, because when Ms. Norton awoke she announced, “I just had an idea,” and Ms. Zierhut responded, “So do I.” Whereupon both said, in unison, “Why not ask Mr. Bloch to write a story for Tales of the Witch World?”*

*It was a crazy idea, so of course I agreed. As we all know, somebody—either Shakespeare or Isaac Asimov—wrote, “There are two sides to every story,” and “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” Actually these quotations come from Diogenes Laertius and Charles Caleb Colton respectively, and both are misquotations. Laertius’ term was “question” instead of “story” and Colton didn’t qualify his wording with “form of.” Nevertheless, I was guided by the incorrect quotes—writing the other side of André Norton’s story from the opposite viewpoint of another character, but deliberately imitating the Norton style which, like the lady herself, I greatly admire. “Making a mistake is not always an error,” as somebody once said. I think it was me. Having read my story, it’s up to you to decide if what I did was right or wrong. At any rate, consider “Heir Apparent” as a tribute to the talented tale-teller who inspired it.*

—ROBERT BLOCH