

**From the Worlds of Andre Norton**

# **The Telling of Tales**

**By Andre Norton**

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*The Telling of Tales*  
By Andre Norton

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## *The Hobyahs*

(1940s)

(Five To Nine Years)

Once upon a time at the edge of a deep, dark wood there stood a small cottage in which lived a man, his wife, their little girl and Little Dog Toby. Now within the wood itself was the house of the Hobyahs.

And the Hobyahs were horrid creatures, all leggy and hairy and black as night. And they were as wicked as they were leggy, hairy and black.

One moonless night they came dancing out of the wood waving their hairy, hairy front legs and singing in their harsh, hoarse voices:

“Hobyah, Hobyah!  
Tear down the cottage,  
Eat up the man and woman,  
And carry the little girl away--  
IN A BIG BROWN BAG!”

But Little Dog Toby heard them and he barked and barked. And the Hobyahs were frightened and ran back into the wood.

The next morning the man said to his wife: "Little Dog Toby barked last night and kept me awake. I shall teach him a lesson!" And he tied Little Dog Toby to a tree.

That very night out of the wood came the Hobyahs, waving their hairy, hairy front legs and singing in their harsh hoarse voices:

“Hobyah, Hobyah!

Tear down the cottage,  
Eat up the man and woman,  
And carry the little girl away--  
IN A BIG BROWN BAG!"

But Little Fog Toby ran around and around the tree barking as loud as he could so that the Hobyahs ran away as fast as they could scuttle.

The next morning the man said again to his wife: "Little Dog Toby barked last night and kept me awake. I shall teach him a lesson!" And he locked Little Dog Toby in the shed which stood behind the cottage.

That night the Hobyahs came again out of the wood, waving their hairy, hairy front legs and singing in their harsh hoarse voices:

"Hobyah, Hobyah!  
Tear down the cottage,  
Eat up the man and woman,  
And carry the little girl away--  
IN A BIG BROWN BAG!"

But Little Dog Toby jumped out of the shed window and ran barking to meet them. So back into the wood went the Hobyahs helter-skelter and squeak!

When the morning came the man said to his wife: "Little Dog Toby barked last night and kept me awake. I shall get rid of Little Dog Toby," he put a cord about Little Dog Toby's neck and led him to the market place where he sold him to a hunter.

That night was cloudy and there was not even the smallest sliver of moon showing. Out of the deep dark wood came the Hobyahs, waving their hairy, hairy front legs and singing in their harsh hoarse voices:

“Hobyah, Hobyah!  
Tear down the cottage,  
Eat up the man and woman,  
And carry the little girl away--  
IN A BIG BROWN BAG!”

And this time, because there was no Little Dog Toby to bark and frighten them away, that is just what the Hobyahs did! They tore down the Cottage, they ate up the man and woman, and they put the little girl in a big brown bag and carried her off to their house in the middle of the deep, dark wood.

When they got there they hung the bag on a nail in the wall and stood about talking of how they should cook the little girl for their supper. One wanted her boiled with onions, but the second wanted her baked with apples, and nothing would do for the third but to have her fried with bacon. Then the fourth pointed out that there was not enough wood in the house to do any sort of cooking--they must go out and gather fire wood for the stove before they made up their minds about supper.

Now while the Hobyahs had gone to hunt fire wood, the hunter who had bought Little Dog Toby came along. And Little Dog Toby broke free from his new master and ran barking to paw at the door of the Hobyahs' house. So the hunter peered through a window and saw the brown hag turning and twisting against the wall as the little girl tried to get out.

He hurried inside and took down the bag to free the little girl all safe and sound. Then he popped Little Dog Toby into the bag and hung it back on the nail, leaving it there while he took the little girl home with him.

After a time the Hobyahs came hurrying back with large armfuls of wood, and when they came inside one of them

hurried up to pinch the bag and see if the little girl was truly plump enough to eat for supper. But the Hobyah was clumsy and knocked the bag off the nail to the floor.

Out jumped Little Dog Toby. And SNAP! SNAP! SNAP! SNAP! He went around the circle of the Hobyahs, gobbling them all up. And that is why there are no Hobyahs in the world today -- or so I have been told.





## ***The Fat Troll***

---

(1940s)

(Six to Nine Years)

In the days before my grandmother's grandmother was born there lived at the bottom of a river a green troll. Now this troll was always hungry, and because he was always hungry he never stopped eating. Naturally he was a very fat troll indeed. But that did not bother him at all.

First he ate all the fish who swam up and down in the river, ate them all to the very last scale and fin. Then he ate the frogs that croaked along the river banks, and the turtles that slept on stones there -- even their shells -- and the dragon flies that flew above the stream. And still he was hungry.

But one day there were no more fish, frogs, turtles and dragon flies left to eat. So the troll had to chew on the grass and willow trees which grew along the river. And at last there was nothing left but bare ground.

Now on one side of the river was a fine meadow in which a farmer kept his five horses when they were not busy at hauling or plowing. And since it was now mid-summer and the plowing was done they were there all the day long.

The hungry troll, finding nothing left to eat in the river or along its banks, pulled himself out of the water and squatted in the mud looking this way and that. And so he saw the horses in the field and decided to learn if they were good to eat. Stretching out a warty green arm he seized the nearest and gobbled him up in a single bite.

"Aha," said the troll to himself, "this is indeed a delicious morsel. Why have I not fed as well before?" And he ate all of the horses as fast as he could snap them up.

An hour or so later the farmer sent his serving man down to the field to drive the horses back to the barn so that they might be taken to the blacksmith for shoeing. And the serving man was very surprised to find no horses in the field, only a fat troll squatting there stroking his round stomach.

He said to the troll, "Please, sir, have you seen five horses in this field?"

The troll looked at the serving man and rumbled:

"I've eaten all the fish, frogs, and turtles that lived in the river, all the dragon flies that flew above it, all the grass and willows that grew along its banks, and the five horses that grazed in this field. And I am still hungry. So I think that I shall eat you." And he did.

Although the troll sat in the field and waited a long time no one else came to see about horses or serving man and he became hungrier and hungrier. So at last he got to his big flat feet and clumped up the lane.

Halfway up the lane he met the farmer.

"Excuse me," said the farmer, "have you seen a serving man and five horses in this lane?"

The troll opened his big mouth wide, showing all his sharp white teeth.

"I've eaten all the fish, frogs, and turtles that lived in the river, all the dragon flies that flew above it, all the grass and willows which grew along its banks, five horses in a field and the serving man sent to fetch them. I am still hungry--so I shall eat you." And that is just what he did.

But no one else came along the lane and the troll was still hungry. So he thump-thumped up to the farmyard gate.

The dog ran out to bark at him. And the troll, blinking his round yellow eyes, said:

"I've eaten all the fish, frogs, and turtles that lived in the river, all the dragon flies that flew above it, all the grass and willows which grew along its banks, five horses in a field, the serving man sent to fetch them, and the farmer in the lane. Still I am hungry. So now I eat you." And he did.

Inside the farmyard there were a great many chickens and geese and ducks and turkeys. And when the troll clumped in among them they set up a great out-cry, fluttering around clucking, quaking, hissing, and honking as loudly as they could. The troll stood and watched them for a moment or two and then he said:

"I've eaten all the fish, frogs, and turtles that lived in the river, all the dragon flies that flew above it, all the grass and willows which grew along its banks, five horses in a field, the serving man sent to fetch them, the farmer in the lane, and the dog at the gate. I am still hungry so now I shall eat all of you." And that is just what he did.

Within the farmhouse the farmer's wife said to her maid servant:

"Run and see what is the matter in the farmyard. The chickens and geese, ducks and turkeys are raising such an out-cry that some evil must be upon us!"

So the maid servant opened the door and stepped out into the farmyard just in time to see the troll stuff the very last goose into his mouth.

"What are you doing, you robber?" she cried.

The troll caught her with one hand as he answered:

"I've eaten all the fish, frogs, and turtles that lived in the river, all the dragon flies that flew above it, all the grass and willows which grew along its banks, five horses in a field, the serving man sent to fetch them, the farmer in the

lane, the dog at the gate, all the chickens, geese, ducks and turkeys in this farmyard. But still am I hungry. So now I eat you." and he did.

When the maid did not return the farmer's wife came out on the stoop to see what was the matter. And there she saw the troll squatting as easy as you please, as if he owned the farm his own self.

"What are you doing here, you nasty thing?" cried the farmer's wife. "Be off with you before I set the dog at your heels!"

But the troll caught the farmer's wife by her apron and held her fast as he said:

"I've eaten all the fish, frogs, and turtles that lived in the river, all the dragon flies that flew above it, all the grass and willows which grew on its banks, five horses in a field, the serving man sent to fetch them, the farmer in the lane, the dog at the gate, all the chickens, geese, ducks and turkeys in the farmyard, and your maid servant. I am still hungry-- I think I shall eat you." And eat her he did.

But by now the troll had eaten so much that he could not move from the stoop and when the cat came out of the barn, her tail held high and her green eyes open wide, he could only blink and wait until she would come into snatching distance.

"Hello," said the cat politely. "You are the troll from the river, are you not? And what have you been doing today?"

"I've eaten all the fish, frogs, and turtles that lived in the river, all the dragon flies that flew above it, all the grass and willows which grew along its banks, five horses in a field, the serving man sent to fetch them, the farmer in the land, the dog at the gate, all the chickens, geese, ducks and turkeys in the farmyard, the maid servant and the farmer's wife. And if you will come a little closer I shall eat you too, for I am still hungry--"

“Very well, I shall!” And saying that the cat sprang at the fat troll with all her sharp claws out as far as possible.

And those claws cut through the green troll’s soft hide so that there tumbled out helter-skelter into the farmyard fish, turtles, frogs, horses, dog, chickens, geese, turkeys, ducks, serving man and maid, farmer and his wife and all the other things the troll had gobbled.

As for the troll, nothing remained of him but a puddle of green water which ran back down the hill into the river. And he was never heard of in that land again. Or so it has been said.



## *The Cat Who Used His Wits*

(1940s)

(Six to Ten Years)

Once upon a time, more years ago than I can rightly remember, a cat lived with a hunter in a cabin in the woods. He was very comfortable for there was always a warm fire on the hearth and plenty to eat if he had not had any luck that day in his own hunting.

But one day he returned to the cabin to discover the door locked and the hunter gone to city. Although the cat was able to crawl through a broken window he did not want to stay in the lonely cabin where there was now no fire or anything good left to eat in his dish. So he decided to find a home for himself in the woods.

While he was searching for one he met a fox with whom he had shared hunting trips. And the fox asked him:

“Why do you look so sad, my dear friend?”

“Because,” replied the cat, “I have lost my good home. The hunter has gone away and the cabin is cold and dark.”

“Ah, then come and live with me,” said the fox. “I know a fine dry cave near the top of the mountain and we can lie there as snug as a rug.”

The cat went with him and, sure enough, near the top of the mountain was a fine, dry cave just large enough for the two of them with a little to spare. But once inside the fox turned to the cat, who was making himself a bed of fallen leaves and said in a low voice;

“My friend, I have not been honest with you. Not far from here there lives a panther. and each morning when he goes



down to the river to drink he sniffs at this door and mutters how good fox would taste for breakfast --"

"So!" The cat sat down and folded his tail over his front paws. "This is a matter we must think about."

"If you wish to move--" began the fox.

But the cat shook his head. "No. I shall use my wits and see if we cannot find an answer to the sniffing of this hungry panther."

For a full hour and fifteen minutes he sat thinking. Then he said to his cave-mate:

"Friend, with you to help me, I think that I can outwit this panther. First we must return to the hunter's cabin and fetch something he stored there in his cupboard."

"What?" asked the fox.

"Come with me and see," returned the cat as he set off down the mountain.

Together they crawled through the broken window in the cabin and dragged out the skin of a panther which the hunter had shot several seasons before.

"This is our weapon," said the cat. "Now help me take it back to our cave."

"Tomorrow," the cat continued when they were home again, "you must do just as I tell you----"

The next morning, when the animals heard the sounds of the panther's claws on the rocky hillside path, the fox hurried to the mouth of the cave and bravely walked out dragging the panther skin behind him. While the cat, who was hiding far back in the shadows, said in his deepest and most growly voice:

"So that panther skin will not do, my friend? Very well, if you are so hard to please in your bedding, wait until the

morrow and I shall have ten fresh ones for you to choose from!”

Now the panther heard very well all that the cat said and he was much alarmed. For, as he thought to himself, it must be a monster who would be able to get ten fresh panther skins in one day. And since he did not wish his skin to be one of that ten, he hurried home and packed all his belongings and moved to the far side of the woods to live.

The cat and the fox lived very happily together in the cave until the coming of winter. Then the cat missed even more the hearth fire and his warm bed before it. But the hunter had never returned to the cabin. So the cat decided to go to the sheep who lived on the other side of the mountain and beg for some of their wool with which to make a winter bed.

However the sheep were not quick to give him what he wished. For the ram who ruled the flock asked what he had to offer in return. And the cat replied that he did not know, but whatever they wished he would try to get for them.

“Bah! Bah!” laughed the ram. “That you cannot do, little cat. For what we wish is safety from a wicked wolf who lives down the road. Each night as he passes our field he runs his tongue across his cruel teeth and tells us that when the winter snows are deep he will hunt us down to eat. And you, small as you are, cannot stop him!”

“I shall use my wits and see if there is not a way to do so,” replied the cat. And he curled his tail over his fore paws and considered the problem thoughtfully.

Soon he nodded twice, but said nothing more to the ram. Instead he crossed the mountain and returned to the hunter's cabin where he filled a bag with certain things he took from a cupboard. And this lumpy bag he carried back

with him to the sheep pasture where he laid it before the ram.

“When next the wolf passes this way,” the cat began, “shake this bag so that what it contains will fly out on the field. And when the wolf asks you where you got bag and contents, tell him that it is the remains of the Sunday dinner of the monster who now lives in a cave near the top of the mountain. If my plan works, you will see no more of the wolf after that.”

“And if we see no more of the wolf,” returned the ram, “you shall have a winter bed of the finest wool we have to offer.”

He kept close guard on the bag which the cat had given him and that night as he saw the wolf coming he gave it a hard shake just as the cat had ordered. Shining bones flew across the field in all directions.

When the wolf came to see what the ram had thrown about he discovered the polished bones of several wolves lay there -- wolves which had been killed by the hunter. He demanded that the ram tell him where these bones had come from, and the ram answered just as the cat had told him to.

The wolf became uneasy, for he thought that the monster might come after him for his next Sunday's dinner. And he hurried home to pack all he owned and move to the other side of the woods.

However, on the other side of the woods he met the panther and they talked about their fright. When they discovered that they both had been driven from their homes by the same monster the panther growled angrily:

“We are both great hunters. And if we go together against this monster surely he will not be able to fight both of us at once. Then we shall be able to kill or drive him away and move back to those pleasant homes we once had.”

Now an old crow heard all that passed between these two and later that same day when he was resting upon a sun warmed bough the cat sprang and caught him. But the crow instead of struggling vainly to free himself cawed:

“Cat, I know of something which will be the saving of your life--”

“So?” The cat kept one paw on the crow's tail but he listened.

“On the far side of the woods the wolf and the panther said this--”

And the crow told the cat all he had overheard.

“One favor earns another,” answered the cat when he was done and allowed the crow to go free. Then he went to call the fox and the ram to a council of war.

“We must try to get rid of these wicked animals,” he said, “for our lives will not be safe if they live on this side of the woods again. Since we cannot fight them equally, fang to fang, and claw to claw, we must use our wits.”

The cat and the fox climbed upon the broad bank of the ram and over them they pulled the skin of the panther which the cat had brought from the cabin, and, when the wolf and the panther came close to the cave, the ram rushed forth in this disguise while the cat squalled his loudest and the fox barked until he thought he would split his throat.

And the panther and the wolf, seeing this strange and fearful monster charging down upon them turned and fled, and for all that I know they may still be running over the rim of the world.

But the cat and the fox have lived happily in their cave from that day to this.



## *Ully, the Piper*

(1940s)

*This short story is the precursor to the story "Ully the Piper" published in 1970 within the anthology "High Sorcery" ~ where it underwent a major expansion.*

There was, once a village named Coomb Bracket, set so snug in a valley between two mountains that very few of the villagers ever wished to climb either to see what might lay in the great world beyond. Coomb Bracket had rich fields, a shallow sleepy river winding in and out through them, orchards of good fruit trees, and a small woodland in which were to be found nuts at the proper season. Fat sheep fed placidly in her meadows, and cows ambled to the river to drink, then back again to graze. As the villagers often said to one another, "who, prey tell, could want for any more?"

But there was one who did. Ully Dood was not the smallest, nor the youngest within Coomb Bracket, but he was the only one who was different, the only one left out of the merry making on May Day and Harvest Home, and Yule. And sometimes the longing to be one with all the others filled him with such a pain as he could hardly endure.

He sat on his small cart and watched the other lads and lasses of his age run and jump, while a great lump choked his throat. For Ully had fallen from a tree when he was so young he could not remember how life had been before that black day. And since then -- ah, he knew well what life was for one hunched of back arm useless of leg, able to get from place to place only by squatting on a cart and pushing against the ground with two sticks.

Unable to use his legs, Ully had learned to be clever with his hands. He was mender-in-chief for all the village, and aught that was broken or torn was brought to him. His widowed mother sorted it out, and Ully worked patiently hour in, and hour out to make all whole again. But he longed for someone to mend him and never so much as in mid-summer when on that eve the young people of Coomb Bracket went out to the fields to light the Beltane Fire and dance away the few hours of the year's shortest night.

He listened now to their singing as they ran along the lane:

“High Dilly, High Dally,  
Cone Lilly, come Lally!  
Dance for the ribbons--  
Dance for the shoes!”

And who would dance so gracefully and long this night that he would return in the morning wearing the pair of silver buckled shoes, and she the snood of bright ribbons to fasten her hair? Not Stephen of the Mill. He was as heavy footed in such frolicking as if he still bore one of his big grain sacks on his shoulders as he pranced here and there. Not Gretty of the Inn who tried with all her heart to be graceful. Ully had seen her practice unhappily in secret, and wished her well but who often stumbled or took a wrong step. No, this year as always, it would be Matt of High Acres Farm and the Smith's daughter, Morgana. Thinking so, Ully scowled at the lane hedge.

Morgana he knew little of, save that she saw only what she wished to see, and did only what it pleased her to do. But Matt he disliked very much. For Matt was rough of hand and tongue, caring little what he broke or tore, whether it was something which could be mended, or the feelings of others which could not. Ully had dealt with some of Matt's

breakings, but he has seen and heard others which no one could thereafter put right.

“High Dilly, High Dally--” Still they sang in the lane.

Ully bit his lip. He might be small and crooked of body, but still he was a man, or near to a man. And a man did not cry as a child over his hurts. Yet, he tried to raise his head higher above his hunched shoulders, it was so fine a night he could not bring himself to creep back into the house where his mother waited silently to pity him.

There was the scent of flowers and growing things strong in the long twilight. At last Ully reaches within his shirt and drew out one of his greatest triumphs of mending. He pulled it back and forth between clever fingers and then raised it to his lips.

The winter before one of the rare strangers who took the road over-mountain had stopped at the Inn. People had gathered to hear his news of far places -- without the least longing to see such for themselves. And later the stranger had pulled out this pipe of polished wood and had blown sweet notes from it. Then he had put it aside on the table, for Morgrana had sat beside him, her eyes shining as she asked for more tales. And Matt, seeing her interest in the outland man, has slammed down his tankard of ale with force enough to jar the pipe to the floor and break it.

There had been hot words to follow and Matt had sullenly given a silver piece to pay for the breakage. But Gretty had gathered up the pieces to bring to Ully, saying wistfully, that the music the stranger had made on it was so sweet she wished she could hear its like again. And Ully had worked very patiently indeed to piece it together. When it was complete, he had taken to blowing an odd note or two. And then he tried even more, imitating the song of a bird, the sleepy murmur of the river.



Now he played a song which he had put together so, note by note, from all the sweet sounds of the valley.

Hesitatingly he began, and then he grew more confident and louder in his piping. Tired, he took it at last from his lips, and was startled by a clapping of hands. Gretty stood by the hedge.

“Ah, Ully, play, play! A body could dance as light as a fey to such playing!”

She gathered up her full skirts, pointed her toes in a step or two, but they went awkwardly. And Ully saw her smile fade. He guessed that she shared some of his sorrow, that a clumsy body would not obey the lightness in her mind. But in a moment she was smiling again and ran to him, holding out her hand.

“Such a piper we have never had, Ully. Come along with us!”

At first he shook his head, but Gretty continued to coax, then, hearing voices in the lane, she called:

“Stephen, Will! Come, help me with Ully -- he can pipe sweeter than any bird in the bush. Let him play for our dancing this night and we shall be as well served as the Queen of the Faye!”

So Ully found himself persuaded, and Stephen pushed his cart up the steep slope to the high meadow where, on a center hill, flamed the Beltane fire. And there he set the pipe to his lips and played his song while the young people danced, laughed and sang.

But there were those not as well pleased with Ully's company. For Morgana, halting in the dance looked into the half light where Ully set on his cart and cried out, so that Matt, with whom she had been dancing, started forward his hands clenched into fists.

“Ah, it is only Ully,” she said. “I thought it was some monster out of the woods.”

"Ully?" Matt laughed. "Why does Ully come, without feet to dance upon? To stare at his betters!" He came closer. "Where did you get that pipe, little man?" He snatched at the pipe in Ully's hands. "It looks to me like the one I had to pay a good round piece for when it was broken. Give it here now. For if it is that one, then it surely belongs to me!"

Ully tried to hold on to the pipe, but Matt's strength was by far the greater, and he took it away. The dance had led to the other side of the Beltane mound now and there were none to see what happened in the half shadows. Matt held up the pipe in triumph.

"As good as new, and worth a silver piece. Samkin, the peddler, will give me that and I shall not be out of pocket anymore."

"My pipe!" cried Ully and tried to reach it. But Matt held it away.

"My pipe, crooked man! I paid for it, didn't I? Mine to do with as I will."

Helpless anger swelled in Ully and he tried to lift himself higher on his cart. But his struggles set the wheels to moving and he began to roll down the slope of the meadow backwards. Morgana cried out and moved as if to try to stop him. But Matt laughed and caught her back.

"Oh, let him go, he will come to no harm. And he had no place here now, has he my dear? Did not the very sight of him give you a fright?"

He thrust the pipe in his pocket and threw his arm about her waist, pulling her back to the singing ring of dancers now weaving their way back.

"Where is Ully?" called Gretty.

Matt shrugged. "He is gone."

“Gone? But it is a long way back and he --” She began to run down the hill lane calling, “Ully! Ully!”

However Ully's runaway cart had not taken him to the lane, but in another direction altogether, bumping and bouncing down the slope of the meadow and into the wood. He crouched in the middle of that small, unsteady platform, unable to move, afraid to try and catch at any of the shrubs or low hanging branches he passed; for fear that he might be pulled off, to lie helpless on the ground.

In and out among the trees spun the cart and Ully began to wonder why it had not upset, or run against one of the big trunks, or caught in a bush. It was almost as if someone were guiding it along. Although when he tried to turn his head and look, he saw nothing but dark trees and bushes.

Then, with a last rush, the cart was through the edge of the wood and out in the open again. There was no fire blazing here, but the moon was so bright that it made Ully blink. He dared to reach out now and catch at this tuft of grass, that runner of vine to pull the cart about that he no longer faced the woods through which he had come, but an open glade where the grass grew short and thick as if it were mown and tended to be a garden instead of wild growth. Around the circle of turf grew flowers and graceful bushes. While sailing through the air were huge moths.

Ully's heart did not pound quite so fast as he stared at all the beauty about him. His fingers, resting on his poor shrunken knees, twitched. He so wanted his pipe--

But he had no pipe now. Softly Ully began to hum the same lilting tune which had so pleased Gretty, the notes he has spun out of bird song and water ripple. Then his hum became a whistle, low but clear. The moths gathered as if they danced a measure in answer. How he wished he had his pipe! Ully has never been in such a place before and it seemed to him that all the small beauties he has ever seen

were here made into one, just as he might fit the bits of a broken bowl into a complete thing again.

One of the moths fluttered closed and, hesitatingly, Ully held out his hand. It lit fearlessly on his forefinger, its wide wings, seemingly tipped with star dust, for there were tiny points of glitter on them, fanned lazily several times before it took to the air again.

Ully wipes that hand across his forehead, sweeping back a loose lock of his thick hair. And straightway -- he gasped.

Where moths had flown, he now saw tiny winged people. They came to earth and grew, became small youths and maidens. And they smiled at Ully. Though none of them spoke aloud, he knew what they wanted of him.

"Sing, Ully, whistle, Ully! Make music for our dancing. We have no piper, you have no pipe, but there is your song and it is one to set free all feet!"

So Ully sang, and he whistled, and he hummed. He must be asleep and dreaming, or else he had indeed fallen on that wild race downhill and hit his head, so that this was born of that hurt. But let it continue as long as it could, for this was happiness.

But at last that whirling dance stilled. He blinked. Moths again lit on the ground, fanning their wings, or hung from bushes. All save one. For still facing Ully stood a small man. He tugged smooth his jacket, hooked his fingers in his belt and spoke:

"Our thanks to you, Ully. Never have we been so well served by any musician. But more than just thanks do we give you."

He raised his arms and was a moth, which flew straight into Ully's face. Flinching, Ully rolled over, off his cart, and his head rapped against a tree root, dazing him.

He did not know how long it was before he tried to move, raise his hand to his aching head. But struggle up he did. Struggle up -- indeed! Ully who could not move his shriveled, useless legs, nor straighten his crooked back -- why -- why, he was straight! Straight as Stephen, as Matt. If this was more of the dream he never wished to wake again! He pulled himself up farther and farther, until he stood on his two feet, leaning against a tree, his clothes ripping away from this big new body. Then he took a step or two away from the support of the trunk and found that his feet did move and he was walking. Throwing back his head, Ully laughed, and cried aloud his joy as the morning sun warmed his body. But the sun glinted on something else, too, and Ully leaned forward to see. Lying on the green turf was a pipe -- and such a pipe! He has thought that the one he has mended was fine, but this was such as a king's piper might play.

Slowly Ully picked it up, half fearing that it might disappear. Then he put it to his lips and began to play. His own small song, by this pipe it sounded more beautiful than his dreams. Piping softly, walking with care, because walking was so new to him, Ully went back to the village. He went by back ways and kept out of sight until he came to his mother's cottage.

She, poor woman, was weeping. For when he had not returned from the meadow, she feared him hurt or lost. And some of the villagers were gathering now to hunt for him. But when she looked upon Ully standing in the doorway, her tears were forgot, smiles such as she had not known for years came to her lips, and the sad load on her heart vanished forever.

All the village marveled at Ully's story. Some of the oldest gaffers and granddames shook their heads knowingly; spoke of fays and how it was known those had their chosen places to dance in. And that if one won their favor marvelous things came of it. Those strange people had

treasures, too, and Ully's pipe must have come from such a hoard.

But Ully declared that what made it s. treasure was not its gold mounting but the sounds which came from it.

It would seem that beside a straight back and legs and the pipe, Ully has also brought luck back with him that mid-summer morning. For his hands, always so clever at mending, were now twice as much in demand. And, since he could now travel, he was summoned hither and thither up and down the whole valley, to deal with things which would not go right. Thus he prospered and in the evenings he would bring out his pipe and the young people and children of the village would dance.

Matt watched the dancing and his anger grew. For it was known now how he had treated Ully, and the young people turned from him. But he would not admit his fault, saying instead that Ully worked enchantment. And he spoke against Ully and his pipe, hinting that oftentimes fairy gifts brought misfortune in their wake. Some of the villagers listened to him, for there are always those who do not like to see others prosper. Among them was Morgana, for when she tried to dance to Ullly's piping in the evening her steps were never quite right, and now she was shunned as a partner, even Gretty, who was nowadays much less awkward, being chosen before her. One day she said to Matt:

“Four times a year they say the fays do come, and soon it will be Lemmas Eve. Take your pipe then and pipe for them. Surely you can charm them even more than Ully did, and your reward will then be the greater.”

For it was true that Matt had been practicing on the pipe he had taken from Ully. And he did play well the rounds and lays the villagers had once danced to, before Ully brought the fairy pipe.

The more Matt considered Morgana's suggestion, the better he thought it. Let him find the fairy people and play and they would make him payment, even as they had Ully. But not a pipe – no -- he would ask for gold and with such would buy wide fields so he could be a great man in Coomb Bracket.

So at sundown on Lammas Eve he went to the wood. But, though he pushed and pulled, thorn bushes catching; and tearing his clothing and his skin, he was a long time reaching the glade.

There was the green turf just as Ully had described it, and Matt settled down, pipe in hand, while the night grew darker and he heard noises in the wood which sent a shiver or two up his back. But he stayed stubbornly where he was, watching for the dancing moths until his eyes ached. At last there were some shadowy flutterings in the air, though they were hard to see. And Matt, deciding that Ully had been adding to the truth with his description of glittering moths, put his pipe to his lips and began to play.

It was a song which he knew and fancied he played very well indeed. But the notes coming now were woeful, when they were not shrill squeaks. Then he was frightened and tried to take the pipe from his lips. Only to discover that this he could not do, some force was making him play on and on, while horrible noises filled the air, to hurt his ears and make his head ache.

The shadows swirled and dipped, flapped about, sometimes very close to his face. And all the time he had to play those shrill, sour notes. While his body ached, his mouth grew dry, and his fear became greater and greater.

For how many hours his torment continued, Matt did not know. But at last his leaden arms fell to his sides, the pipe spun away to the ground, and he saw the sun was rising. The fluttering things which had moved to his piping looked unpleasantly like great bloated flies and wasps.

One of them, buzzing loudly, flew straight at Matt and stung him severely on his upper lip.

With a cry he tried to get to his feet, but he was so stiff from sitting so long, that he fell to his knees, and so broke his pipe under one. Unable to walk he crawled, while the stinging winged thing buzzed threateningly over his head. Finally, painfully, he reached the village. But his stiffness of limb was long in wearing off, so that he could not dance, nor even walk upright again, for many a day. While the sting on his lip made his face so swollen he hated to show it abroad. Nor did he ever tell anyone what had happened in the woods on Lemmas Eve.

But Ully's piping led the village to the Beltane Fire the next year, and for many a year thereafter.





## *Ring of Stone*

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(1940s)

Hans has worked faithfully and long for Master Simon. And Master Simon was not an easy man to serve for he knew the value of a gold piece, aye, and of a silver piece, and even of a small copper bit. And few of them ever found their way out of his fat fingers, I can tell you that.

Those of his household had watered soup and black bread to eat, with nary a bite of cheese or meat, save on a feast day, and then it was never enough to take more than a mouthful for a man. And the quilts on the beds were thin even in winter -- while as for coals for the fires -- those were counted out one by one with Master Simon doing the counting, too.

So at the end of his three years of service young Hans asked for his wages, saying he was minded to try his fortune elsewhere. Which made Master Simon angry, for Hans was a good worker. When he found he could not persuade the boy to stay, he flung two small silver pieces at him, and bade him be off then at once.

Hans knew that he should have been paid more than two pieces of silver for the years behind his. But he also knew better than to try to pry any more money out of Master Simon's tightly latched purse. So he went off, determined to be wiser in the future when he picked a master.

Now before he has gone more than half a mile down the King's Highway he was overtaken by the forester who worked for Master Simon. And the forester dragged along by a rope leash an old hound.

"Where are you taking Bruno?" Hans asked.

"I have orders to take him to the village and sell him for what his hide will bring. Master Simon believes him too old to hunt and will not feed an idle dog."

Hans was angry for he knew that Bruno had been a greet hunter and it was not the hound's fault that he could no longer run so swiftly or nose out game as well as he had in the past. To sell a faithful servant for what his skin was worth seemed to the boy a monstrous deed. And he brought from his pocket one of the silver pieces.

"Will you take this for Bruno?"

"Gladly," returned the forester. "That is more than he is worth, and it will save me a long hot walk to the village."

So the forester turned back and Hans threw off the rope, patting Bruno and making much of him. When he started on, the hound followed closely at his heels.

But they had hardly gone another hundred yards before one of the maid servants caught up with them. In her arms she held a bag which twisted and turned as if it held something living.

"Where are you going, Marta? And what have you in that bag?" asked Hans.

The maid servant was glad to stop and rest as she answered.

"Ah, 'tis you, Hans. Why, I am going to the village. As for what is in this bag of mine -- it is Fritzie, our kitchen cat. Master Simon says that she had not earned her keep this past year -- Poor Fritzie, she has cleaned away the mice so there are no more of them. Now I am to sell her to the fur dealer for her pelt."

"Now that is an evil thing," returned Hans. "For there is no better mouser in the whole wide world than Fritzie, and she is a gentle, loving beast into the bargain." Straightway he brought out his second silver piece.

“Will you take this, Marta, and leave Fritzie with me?”

“Most willingly, Hans. It will save me a long walk and you are welcome to her.”

And the maid ran back along the road. Hans emptied the cat out of the bag and petted her until Fritzie purred and licked his hand with her rough tongue. Then he buttoned her into the front of his jacket and went on.

“Ha, Bruno and Fritzie,” he said, “the sun is high over us and I have not even a copper bit in my pocket now to buy food. I fear we shall go fasting until I find a new master.”

But Bruno, to Hans's great surprise opened his mouth and, instead of barking, said:

“Leave the matter of food to me, master.”

He turned aside into the bushes and minutes later he returned with a fine fat rabbit. So they dined well. And that evening Fritzie fished by the river, using her forepaw so neatly and cleverly, that she flipped out several trout. The three of them slept together in a hay stack and Hans was more content than he had been for a long time.

In the morning they went on down the highway. But before the sun was quite overhead they came to a crossroads. And there, under the sign post, were some boys throwing rocks at a snake. It was already pinned fast by one stone and it seemed close to death.

Hans drove off the boys and picked up the stone which imprisoned the snake's tail. But it was too spent to escape. So, though his flesh shrank from the touch of its scales, Hans carried the creature into a neighboring field and laid it down on a bank of moss. As he was turning away another snake glided to the side of the injured one. And to Hans's astonishment it spoke to him.

“Man creature, you have saved my son this day. And do not think that the snake people have no gratitude. Raise

that round stone yonder and take what you find under it. It will bring you good fortune."

Hans picked up the round rock. And pressed into the moist earth under it was a ring of polished green stone. He tried it on and it fit his middle finger perfectly. But when he turned to thank the snake, both reptiles were gone.

He did not see how the ring would make his fortune, but it was a handsome thing and perhaps he could sell it in the next town for enough to buy food and lodging.

But the next town proved to be very far away and when night began to fall the three travelers were in the midst of a desolate waste with no food or lodging to be found. Tired and footsore Hans sat down on a large rock to rest, turning the ring about on his finger, while Bruno and Fritzie crowded close to him as if they, too, feared the coming night.

"Now if there was but an inn across the road and I had a pocketful of gold to spend in it --" began Hans.

And no sooner were the words out of his mouth than there appeared an inn across the road, its gate hospitably open to the night, rich smells of cooking food drifting from its doors and windows, and a bustle of servants coming and going about their business.

Hans gaped open mouthed. Then he put his hand cautiously into his pocket. And, sure enough, there were a number of gold pieces there.

But he did not move to enter the inn. Instead he began to think quite seriously, and Hans was no lackwit. He had wished for an inn and gold and straightway they were his. But, if he could have whatever he wished for now -- why not ask for something more permanent than gold which is easily spent, and inn shelter for a single night. Keeping his eyes upon the inn he considered all sides of the matter.

He had been a good servant and knew how to manage a stable and buy and sell wisely for a household -- though Master Simon had been so cheeseparing a master as was hard to serve under. Now here ran the King's Highway on which all who went to the city must travel, and good inns along it were very few. A man who kept such an inn, even if it had come to him by the way of magic, might well make his fortune.

And even as Hans was thinking this a party of wool merchants came along with a train of pack animals. Their surprise at finding the inn was plain, but they turned their train into the courtyard with exclamations of pleasure and prepared to spend the night.

Hans nodded and then he touched the ring and said:

"It seems to me that I would have an excellent future as landlord of that inn. If it is in your powers, snake's gift, let that be my fortune."

Calling to Bruno and Fritzie to follow, he crossed the road and entered the inn yard where the grooms saluted him as master and a maid in the doorway curtsied.

So did Hans come to keep the inn, and keep it very well he did, so that without any more magic aid the venture prospered and Hans no longer had an empty purse or a shabby coat on his back. In the yard Bruno had a house of his own where he could be snug and warm and yet give warning of all comers. While Fritzie ruled in the kitchen and no mouse nor rat ever dared show whisker or tail there.

Now, perhaps half a year after, Master Simon had reason to go to the city, and he decided to spend one night on the way in the new inn he had heard such tales of. But to his great amazement he discovered Hans was the master there. Then more than anything did he wish to know how his servant had come to such a fine fortune. And he asked

many questions, but Hans, on the pretext of seeing to the comfort of travelers, would spare no time to answer them.

At last Master Simon could stand it no longer, but swore that he would learn how Hans had done so well. So, instead of going on to the city the next morning, he returned to his home and called to him the maid Marta. On the table before her he put five pieces of gold--more than she has ever seen before in her whole life.

"I have heard, my dear Marta," Master Simon told her, "that you wish to marry Will the Miller, but that you have no dowry."

Tears came into Marta's eyes as she nodded.

"These gold pieces shall be yours for a dowry, my girl, if you will do something for me."

Marta's eyes became as round as the gold pieces.

"What is it you wish, Master?"

"Go to the new inn which lies two leagues from here on the King's Highway. The landlord of that inn is the same stupid Hans who used to work here. Find out what stroke of fortune served him so well. That is all I want to know. Tell me that and the gold is freely yours."

Now Marta could see no harm in this, and she knew that with a dowry of five gold pieces she could be wed that very month. So she went off to the inn. But as she came into its yard she remembered that Hans had not left Master Simon with kind feelings between them and she thought it better not to tell the truth about her mission.

Instead she went to the kitchen door and asked for work as a maid servant.

It happened that Hans was talking to the cook when Marta came in and he knew her at once. When he asked her what she did, she replied she had lost her place with Master Simon and was walking the highway seeking work.

Hans told her to sit down on the settle by the fire and ordered the cook to give her food and drink. Marta looked about her wonderingly and said with a Sigh:

“Fortune has indeed favored you, Hans. But how did you gain such luck?”

Hans stood the green ring; around on his finger and did not answer. Marta watched him a long moment and then summoned tears to her eyes and cried, bewailing her own hard fate and luckless fortune.

Then at last Hans took pity on her, and, trying to prove that good fortune comes when one least expects it, told her the story of his ring. At the tale's end she regarded him with awe and astonishment.

“But if this ring gives you whatever you wish for, dear Hans, why are you not a king with a castle to live in and a princess for your wife?”

Hans laughed. “Nay, Marta, I am most content with this inn. It may have come to me by the way of magic, but by work I am making it my own. I have no longing for a crown on my head -- they are over-heavy and tiresome wearing by all reports -- and I want none of the sorrows and worries of a kingdom to rule. Nor would I sit easy with a princess-wife facing me across the board each morning, noon, and night, for I am a simple man, with more liking for well cooked bacon and beans on my plate, than the dainty dishes to suit royal tasting, and I fear such a wife would find me both dull and wanting in fine manners and let me know it, too!”

Then one of the servants called him away and Marta slipped out of the kitchen and started back to Master Simon's. Only now she was scheming as to how she might make a better bargain for her knowledge.

So when she again stood before Master Simon she said boldly “I have learned what you wish to know, Master.



But this is a much greater matter than you have dressed. And not one word shall cross my lips until you put down another five pieces of gold.”

Master Simon grumbled and threatened. But she stood firm and he could get nothing out of her until he laid down the additional money. Then she told his the story of the stone ring.

“So,” Master Simon plucked at his thick underlip when she had done “Well, take your gold, girl, and be off. I have much to think about.”

As soon as Marta had left the room he went to a cupboard and brought out a threadbare black jacket and a battered pack such as a poor peddler might carry.

“So Master Hans does not wish to be a king? Well, others may be more enterprising,” said Master Simon to himself as he put on the jacket and stowed some small wares away in his pack. He then darkened his face with the juice of nut hulls and pulled his hair raggedly over his eyes under a broken rimmed hat. Then he set off down the road once more.

Reaching the inn he opened up his pack in the hall and sat by it, waiting for buyers. Now among the odds and ends he had was a fine hunting knife, very like to one he knew Hans had often looked upon wistfully when he was still a servant of Master Simon's. And as Hans crossed the hall now he saw that and picked it up. But the hilt has been well greased by Master Simon so it slipped in Hans' hold and cut his flesh. The disguised peddler set up a cry of dismay and caught Hans's hand as if to staunch the bleeding wound. But so was he able to slip the ring off Hans's finger and pop it into his mouth before Hans guessed what was happening.

An instant later the inn, the peddler, and all, vanishes and Hans stood in an empty wasteland with only Bruno and

Fritzie for company. He nursed his bare and bleeding hand and knew that with the loss of the ring his good fortune had fled.

But there was no use in bewailing his own folly and he started walking along the Highway, within a league he came to a river and on its far bank was a tall castle he was sure had not been there before.

“That must be the new home of the peddler who stole my ring,” he said.

Bruno looked at the castle, and then he growled:

“Dear master, your luck may have gone, but you saved, our lives. Now let us see if we cannot repay you. If the peddler is in yonder castle, perhaps we can deal with him - - we he would not suspect, you he would be on guard against.”

Hans watched as the two animals went down to the water's edge where Fritzie climbed upon the dog's back and the old hound waded out into the floor and began to swim. Across the river the animals made their way up through the bushes to the postern gate.

And when the shadows of night hung; heavy the cat crept on noiseless feet into the castle, Slipping through the halls until she came to a treasure room where Master Simon sat turning the ring; around and around on his finger and wishing for coffers of gold and jewels. When he at last tired of this sport, he put the ring under his tongue and went to bed. But Fritzie waited and in due time a mouse came by. The cat sprang and made it captive.

“Little one,” she hissed, holding her prey fast with both front paws, “listen well, and you shall go free. In yonder room sleeps a man. Do you creep upon his bed and tickle his nose with your tail so that he coughs or sneezes. If you do this business right you will naught to fear from me. But

beware. I shall crouch at the foot of the bed and if you do not obey me that shall be the end of you."

The mouse, shivering fear, agreed and scampered into Master Simon's room where it climbed upon the bed. There it drew its tail back and forth across the tip of Master Simon's nose. And he started up among his pillows with a mighty sneeze. Out flew the ring, away over the foot of the bed where Fritzie seized it and was out of the door in an instant.

She sped down the halls and through the castle gate into the bushes where Bruno waited. But Bruno now insisted that she should give the ring to him to carry since his mouth was so much the larger. Although she protested, Fritzie was forced to agree before the hound would enter the river.

They were no more than in the middle of the stream when Master Simon came running along the bank. By the bright moonlight he saw the swimming dog with the cat on his back and he shouted:

"Ho, Bruno!"

Bruno, hearing the voice of his old master and forgetting the ring, barked. Out fell the ring and down it went into the water where a fish snapped it up.

"Stupid!" snarled Fritzie. "Now we must go to work gain."

She made Bruno swim to the far shore and there seat himself on the cold wet stones where he could hold the tip of his tail in the water, moving it slowly back and forth while Fritzie watched with sharp eyes.

In time the fish arose to snap at the tail tip, and one, two, Fritzie scooped it out and had it open to pluck out the ring. This they carried to Hans in triumph. Once more he put it on his finger and his first wish removed Master Simon across seven seas and over seven mountains from whence that thief never returned. As for Hans's second wish --

surely you need not ask about that! But there stands again  
a very good inn on the King's Highway.



## *The Knights of the Fish*

(1940s)

Many, many years ago there lived a knight who had long served his king faithfully and well. But at length the king died and so did the knight, his lady, his war horse and his hunting hound, leave the court and return to his old home in a distant part of the kingdom. It was an ancient manor house set high upon the cliffs above the North Sea.

Now the knight has little gold in his purse to show for all his years at court, and he was sad, for the manor house was nigh a ruin. There were holes in the outer walls through which the sea wind whistled, bringing in mist to cloud the very cups and plates from which they drank and ate. And rain sometimes dripped dismally in the halls from the broken roof, to run in trickling streams across the floor.

Every day the knight climbed down the rocks to the village below, and there he worked with the fishermen, hauling, on the heavy nets, taking his part of the day's catch back to the manor where it sometimes was all his household has to eat.

One night there came a great storm which drove the sea waves high against the cliffs until the whole manor trembled and the knight and his lady feared that its walls would fall to crush them. When, at last, morning came the Knight thought he saw a large shoal of big fish close to shore, and he hurried down to profit from such good fortune.

But when he hauled in his net after the first anxious cast he found but one fish caught within the cordage. And this was such a fish as he had never seen before. For its scaled flanks were as bright as thrice burnished silver, and its fins

and tail inky black. It was so wonderous a sight that he could not slay it, but cast it free once more into the waves. And, although he fished all the rest of that day, and left the sandy show only at sunset, he caught nothing else. So that night those in the manor went hungry to their beds.

The next morning, shortly after dawn, the knight returned to his labor. On his first cast he again brought in the fish of sable and silver, or, if not that very one, another as like as one pea in a pod is to its fellow. And, although hunger bit sharply within him, again he could not slay so wonderous and beautiful a thing, but turned it living back to the sea.

But for the rest of the day his luck was no better than it had been the day before, and again he returned empty -- handed to his home. So that night his lady wept with hunger as they went fasting to bed. Then the knight vowed that whatever he caught upon the morrow he would have into the cooking pot without delay.

So, even before the cold dawn, he felt his way down the cliff side and made ready his net with trembling hands, casting it out into the sea as the first reel spear of the sun split the east. And he drew it back again with a single fish fighting in its folds -- the black and silver fish he had brought in twice before. Again when he looked upon its silver beauty he could not bear to put an end to such a rare work of God.

But, as he strove to free it from the net, the fish spoke to him, using the tongue of Christian man and saying:

“Good fisherman, three times has it been in your heart to set me free. But it is clearly the will of Our Lord that I should be your captive. Take me and cook me, and then carve me well into eight equal parts. Of these let your lady wife eat two, give two unto your war horse, and two unto the hound in your courtyard. The two which are left you must plant one on either side of your great gate.”

And the knight did as the fish had bade him. When it was cooked he did not partake of a single flake of its body, but divided it so that his lady, his horse, and his hound each feasted upon two portions. While the remaining two he planted deep in the earth at the main gate of the manor courtyard.

Now from that day forward the luck of the knight changed. First he received a sum of gold which had long been owed him by a distant kinsman and with this he repaired the manor so it no longer stood open to wind and rain. And fish swam in plenty to his net so that hunger was no longer his portion.

In the fullness of time his lady wife bore him twin children, children whose fair skin had the whiteness of pure silver and whose hair was as dark as the night sky. And the boy they named "Sable", his sister "Silver." So alike were they in face and form that when dressed in the rough fisher clothes they wore each day one could not be told from the other.

On the same day that Sable and Silver were born, in the stable the war horse stood watching over twin colts, white of hide but raven of mane and tail, while the hound nuzzled two puppies, silvery white spotted with black. And beside the gate two silver birch saplings pushes above the soil.

Sable and Silver grew strong and tall, and Silver was nowise content to stay with her lady mother in the manor, following only the ways of a housewife. But she learned sword play beside her brother and rode on her colt to follow the falcon in hunting. Thus passed some years of time.

Until there came the day when the knight thought it best to send Sable to court, that he might learn the ways of the world and mayhap rise to honor in the king's service. So, he brought out half of his remaining gold and with it



bought a mail shirt of black and silver and a helmet bearing the crest of a strange and wonderful fish. These he gave his son with his blessing.

But Silver wept within her chamber because this venture could not be hers also. Until, before he left, her brother called her apart and said:

“While I am away from you, dear sister, look each morning upon this birch which stands to the left of our gate. If it flourishes you will know that all is well with me. But if it begins to droop and fade, then you shall know that some ill has befallen and I have come into great danger.”

Silver promised that this she would faithfully do. And she watched her brother ride away on the road which led to the King's own city.

At court Sable chanced to win the favor of the Earl Marshal and was taken into that company of knights who followed him to war. In the course of time he won the heart of the Earl's daughter and took her to wife.

Some weeks after their marriage Sable and his lady traveled to the Marches where Sable was sent by his overlord as Warden to hold the frontiers of the country for the King's peace. And there they lived in a tall tower where the daughter of the Earl had herself been born.

She had a bower high in the tower which overlooked the mountains of the east. But the windows of this room had been filled in with stone and sealed, with heavy tapestries hung before them. When Sable asked why this had been done none in the castle could give him any reason. And when he begged the answer from his lady she turned aside her head as one who is fearful and prayed him not to press her upon the matter.

But as the days passed Sable longed for light and air within the bower and finally, while his lady was gone on a pilgrimage to a shrine, he brought in workmen from the

city below and had the stones pried out of the windows so that the winds were free to blow and the sunlight once more fell across the floor of the chamber.

That night at moonrise Sable stood by one of the newly opened casements and looked out upon those mountains which made a black wall across the less dark sky. And so he chanced to see, on the crown of the highest of the peaks, a pale and waging gleam, as if some signal fire blazed there. He summoned his squire and demanded to know why a fire should burn in such a desolate spot.

But the squire seemed sore afraid at the sight and said that in his memory it had not done so. Only from the olden days there were ill tales of such a fire and what had happened to those who went to learn its cause. He begged Sable to close again the windows and put from his mind all longing to know the reason for the signal.

Sable was not so easily persuaded and his desire to know the secret of the fire grew and grew within him until it was a consuming passion. At last he could withstand it no longer. Mounting his horse and calling his hound he rode off along the mountain road.

From sunrise to moonrise his path led upward. The road faded into a faint track much scored by the storms of many years, but it was still plain enough to follow. And just as the palid moonlight struck full upon the mountain peak he came out upon a level plain of rock. There, pale and ghostly as the grey moon overhead, blazed the fire, the flames coiling into the air like giant evil serpents, giving forth no honest heat, nor smoke.

But, as the moonlight holds strange beauty, so did the fire enchant the beholder. And Sable drew nigh to it, sunk in its witchery. When he came so close he saw that someone tended it, throwing into the devouring flames black and crooked branches. The fire tender turned as Sable approached her and she looked straight into his eyes.

For it was a woman who stood there, a woman all grey-white as the flames she fed -- save that a curtain of hair cloaked her from head to ankle -- hair which was a living flame as the fire she fed was not.

She smiled, a slow, full smile, and her voice was as the chiming of crystal bells as she said:

“Welcome, sir knight. Glad as I to have company in the silences of this forgotten waste.”

Sable, half dreaming, bemused by the twisting of the flames and the exceeding beauty of her voice, dismounted and went forward on foot.

The woman of the fire continued to smile and now through her hands she drew the glistening strands of her hair, which curled and rippled in company with the flames as if it had a life of its own. But now at Sable's feet his hound crouched and growled, baring teeth menacingly at the flame tender. Her smile faded and she said to Sable:

“If you would come to the fire, send back your hound, the beast likes me not.”

But when Sable ordered the hound back it would not obey. Instead it snarled and seized upon his surcoat with its teeth, striving to keep him from the fire. Then Sable dealt it an uffet, sending it from him whimpering, as he did so his horse reared high and screamed aloud into the night.

Then the woman pulled from her head three hairs, and these she cast as a fisherman casts his line. One fell upon the horse and straightway it became quiet. The second fell upon the hound, and no longer did it whisper or growl. But the third wrapped around Sable above his heart.

The touch of it was like a finger of ice laid upon the door of his heart. And he found he could not move, but must stand listening to the chimes of cruel, cold bells which was the laughter of the woman of the fire as he became a pillar of stone because of her witchery.

Now at the manor beside the sea Silver went to look upon the birch trees in the dawn. Hers stood tall and green and flung its rustling breaches high and joyfully in the wind. But the one which was Sable's was touched with sere yellow and dragged limply to the ground. And in this manner she knew evil had come to her brother.

Straightway she went to her father and said that she must go into the world and see what danger had come to him who shared her spirit. And her father, grown old and tired, allowed her to have her say.

So she took that part of the gold which was her dowry and had fashioned a coat o mail and a helmet which was as like Sable's as one fish scale is like another. Then, mounting her horse and calling her hound she rode into the world.

In due time she came to that tower on the Marches where her brother had been sent to rule as Warden. And there his lady sighting her did first deem Silver to be her lord come again because of their great likeness. With joyful cries she ran to this knight bearing the fish crest and embraced him.

But when Silver made plain who she was, her brother's wife fell into wild weeping and wailing for the loss of her lord and would not be comforted. And from her brother's squire Silver learned of the mountain fire and of how Sable had gone to discover its secret.

Then she, too, took the mountain road. But when she reached the lip of the rocky plain where burned the fire, she drew her sword and approached the flames on cautious feet, naked steel in hand, wending her way among many tall stones which stood thereabouts.

And the witch of the flames stood straightly by her fire, watching Silver's coming through narrowed eyes. For by her magic she sensed that this knight was not as the others she had so easily laid her bonds upon.

But she asked in her sweet voice: "What seek you here, fair knight?"

And Silver made stern answer. "I seek my brother who came this same way afore time and has not since been seen in the ways of men."

The woman of the flame ran her fingers through the curtain of her hair, plucking out three long strands. The first she flung, at Silver's 'horse and it went through the air with the swiftness of a truly aimed arrow.

But Silver's sword flashes also and out through that wicked bond so it fell to earth in two parts.

The women of the fire snarled in rage and flung her second hair. But that, too, did Silver cut, and the third also. Then the witch women crouched and spun around on her heels so that her hair made a wild cloud about her as she chanted spells and mouthed curses.

Silver leaped forward and drew her shearing sword blade through the floating hair. And the severed strands flew into the hungry fire where they flashed into bright scarlet flame.

But where the witch of the fire had stood a handful of grey dust puffed up, to be carried away by the rising wind. The fire died and was gone, and at its falling into ash the stones about the rocky plain stirred, stretched, and became living men and animals once again.

So did Silver free her brother and bring him down once again to rule the Marches. But as for her, she married a king's son and in time became a queen of great wisdom and strength whose name is yet alive in the songs of men of the North Country.

## The Telling of Tales

## *The Legend of the Fairy Stone*

(1940s)

The-old king gave Farree a long measuring look. Come a little closer, my eyes are failing me and I want to see the markings on the tips of your wings. Farree leaned forward and felt shaky fingers touch his wings. Thank you Farree, and please forgive me for doubting you. The story I am about to tell you has been kept a secret for fear of further exploitation of what is left of our race. My only daughter is kept hostage on our planet and her life is in danger if this secret is revealed to our enemies.

This is the season of the quarter moon, and it was at a time like this when life on our planet began. It is said that our beginning goes back to the creation of the universe. Our small planet was formed of crystal located in a direct line of the light source.

All colours, shades and hues imaginable were reflected and burned permanently into its core. It was known as the Planet of Everlasting Beauty. Colours also have healing properties and with their constant movement across the surface of the planet they created energy fields. It was within these areas that life started. The dominant colour determined the race of our people. You, for instance, belong to the green ones. Green builds bodies and prevents their decay. Your colour helped build the bodies of all the different races. Your sound equivalent is the basic sound of our music. You can understand that your ancestors were considered our life-givers.

It was the green ones who could feel, read and interpret the emanations of the core. So we learned our mission. We were chosen to carry beauty in all its many aspects to all corners of the universe. You will find essence of the Core

on every planet in the universe. It is present in every form of life, be it man, beast or plant. That is why our races are so varied. You must be familiar with the flower fairies, mountain fairies, even tooth-fairies, to name a few. In our library you can read the many accomplishments of our people, though some of them have turned into "fairy-tales" by disbelievers.

The King paused and as his hands passed over his wings, his eyes filled with tears. Ah, the wings, he said, that is another story. With the vast distance to cover as the universe expanded and the light dimming in some places, we had to find a different way to travel. The Green-Ones consulted the Core. Our ancestors were told to prepare for what we call the long sleep. We now know that it was the time of no-moon, which is the period following the lesser quarter moon. We went to the Hall of the Core and all races took their place in that part of the hall which reflected their respective colours. No-one knows for sure what happened then. When they awoke there was a hump like growth between our shoulders. Similar to the one you have carried around for so long. The hall of the Core was filled with beautiful music - the healing sound of all colours combined. When we again reached the time of the quarter moon the shoulder growth had broken open and the first winged race appeared. The basic wing colour matched the body colour, however, exposed to clear light, the wings reflected all colour. The Green-Ones wings had a sign of the core on the tips of their wings. That is what I was looking for when I asked you to show me your wings.

The changes of our moon phases resemble the time of a year on earth. We were told that during the period of no-moon, winter on planet Earth we were to return to the Hall of the Core for rejuvenation and instructions for the Old Ones as well as the young. Our life-span is four hundred earth years which gives us enough time to colonize planets permanently provided the light source is strong enough.



Not every planet has a moon, consequently we cannot live there. We need the gentle light. Also, it makes man more receptive to our song. Man quiets down their day time activities and turns his attention to the more subtler or creative aspects of life. I am sure, you have observed this yourself.

For many of our moon phases we worked, fulfilling our mission. As we reached the farther areas of the universe the light was dimming and that was about the time we began hearing stories of doubt about our existence. The stories increased at our no-moon gatherings and it was believed that it was caused by changes in man's attitudes and lifestyles. There was less and less time for quiet, reflective moments. In order to prove our existence men began to kidnap us occasionally until, today, it has turned out to be a great hunt all over the universe for fairies. It was also discovered that were not only hunted to prove our existence but also our wings. Man believes our wings to be magic. There were tales of fairy god-mothers who granted wishes -- and men have so many wishes.

Instead of turning to the reflection of the Core within, they believe that catching a fairy brings them luck. This belief has spread over most of the universe, which brings us to our dilemma of today.

We do not dare to gather for our meetings at the Core, for fear of drawing attention to it. It is our life giver. Many of our race have given up their lives in an attempt to hide our origin. A few careless ones have shown the way to a hand full of men who are now visiting our planet at intervals. The Green-Ones are almost extinct because they were called upon for help. The ones who left this planet never returned. I am too old and weak to make the journey to the Core end my daughter is too young and not schooled enough interpret the Cores meaning.

You are not familiar with our ways. Yet you are our only hope. Maybe if you can free my daughter....

Farree started humming -- it was the basic sound. The sound filled the king's chamber and the old king fell into a deep sleep.



## *Yankee Camels*

(1940s)

Renny Peyton spit out grit from between his teeth. When Texas produced dust, it was sure man-sized. And the summer winds of 1862 were whipping out a prize lot of it. He made the futile gesture of trying to brush it off his short cavalry jacket. If he'd had all the sense he'd been born with, he'd be back east right now, helping General Lee chase the Yanks home to their burrows. Instead he was detailed on a very different duty. He glanced at the paper between his grimy fingers, fortified himself with an inspection of those sergeant's stripes which did after all now bar his sleeve, and advanced close enough to his chosen victims to hear their present conversation.

"Mangy lookin' critters, ain't they? Got tempers worsen mules, too. Fact is self-respectin' mules won't come within a mile o' 'em. Jeff Davis sends us 'way out here to git him a Yankee fort an' wota we got? A bunch o' stinkin' camels!"

The speaker aimed a stream of tobacco juice at a passing lizard and hitched up his sagging Confederate gray trousers.

"Now, Jas, yuh shouldn't talk that way," chided a tall, rawboned young man who rested his shoulders against the pole wall of the corral. "It was ol' Jeff hisself brought these here camels to America. He was fixin' to use 'em for a Camel Corps to scout with in the desert —"

"Camel Corps!" exploded Jas Wilkins. "Soljers ride them things? Jeff Davis ain't crazy~or is he?"

"Hardly," Renny cut in. "Those camels can carry six hundred pounds and go seventy miles in twelve hours. And they find grazing where horses and mules would

starve. Beale took them clear to California and had an excellent trip –“

Jas snorted. “Beale is a Yankee, ain’t he? Takes a Yankee to order ‘em around. We ain’t gonna –“

“Oh, but we are.”

“Wot?” Both Jas and his young companion rounded upon Renny. He waved the folded paper under Jas’s hooked promontory of a nose.

“Colonel’s orders. We’re to march three camels to Fort Bowie. Guess they want to see us earn our rations the hard way –“

“An! jes’ who’s we?” demanded Jas with justified suspicion.

“You, and me, and Buck, here. The Colonel said that three of us could manage.”

“I ain’t ridin’ no danged camel –“ Jas’ ragged mustache bristled up on his short lip like the whiskers of an angry cat.

“Thar was Injun sign no’th o’ here yesterday.” Buck flicked the red dust from the toe of his boot with the braided lash of a quirt. “Th’ Colonel reckon that we’re jes’ gain’ t’ be invisible when we ride outa th’ fort?”

Renny’s chin set aggressively. The sergeant’s stripes were only a month old, but they were his. “We have our orders. Besides that sign wasn’t too fresh. Probably the war party that left it is miles away now. We’re pulling out at six.”

Since Jas Wilkins flatly refused to trust his middle-aged bones to the dubious safety of a camel saddle and neither Buck Gamblin, the scout, nor Renny secretly felt any more confident, they rode out of the gate of Fort Houston early the next morning on the backs of the three plunging, snorting horses that had objected the least to escorting the snarling, evil-smelling ships of the desert. Camels and

horses, camels and mules, as Jas had observed, simply didn't mix. Jas's comments upon the subject were especially pointed when his own mount deposited him in the roadway, having been urged to near one of the snake-necked beasts.

The camels were certainly not the most pleasant traveling companions. They gurgled and groaned, and were apt to snap a piece out of man or beast who came within reach of their crooked yellow teeth. Since they smelt like nothing on earth, but something which should have been under it long ago as Buck declared loudly and a little too often – riding to the windward of them was added punishment. And the horses continued to fight bitterly against any close contact.

When to the stubborn antics of the animals you added the ever present dust which clogged nostrils and throat and sifted down between clothing and skin, and a blazing sun, you had all the ingredients for a splendid trip thought Renny as he drew rein to mop his flushed face, with the result that he streaked his dust mask until he looked like a warrior in full paint. Buck scouted ahead while Jas plodded unhappily along, it being his turn to have the camel lead looped on his saddle horn.

Renny put his hand on his canteen and then took it away again. If it was full of Virginia spring water now, cool and tasty, but the musty stuff sloshing in it wasn't worth mouthing.

After all, this trip couldn't last forever. He straightened in his saddle and, whistling "Dixie", cantered up to join Jas in his martyrdom.

They camped that night on the crumbling bank of a dry river bed. Buck rode in just as Renny knelt to light the camp fire. With a vigorous kick the scout sent the fuel, painfully grubbed from the stunted grease and cottonwood, flying. Renny got stiffly to his feet, tight mouthed.

“What’s the idea?”

“Want to lose yer hair?” Buck returned. “We’re in Injun country an’ thar’s plenty sign. We ain’t in no way fitted to fight off half th’ Comanche Nation. We eat cold ‘til we git t’ Bowie an’ hope that we don’t meet up with no young bucks wot want to count some coups.”

Hardtack and dried meet were poor fare at the best, but the way they stuck in a dust salted throat added to the disgruntlement of the eaters. Jas abandoned his cud of tobacco, swearing that it made him twice as thirsty to chew. But that did not hinder him any from listing in a monotonous voice all the items he was going to eat and drink once the adobe walls of Bowie closed about them.

They kept guard watch by watch. And Renny wondered, as he crouched carbine in hand, whether he could see Indians if they crept up the sanded bottom of the river bed. He had hated the barrenness of the Texas frontier when first he had come to ride its plains. But something about the country seemed to get right under a man’s skin –

The rumbling protest of one of the hobbled camels brought him out of musing. Two days more and they should be safe in Bowie. He stretched to move cramped legs. And just one more hour and it would be dawn for sure.

One of the blanketed sleepers beyond stirred, coughed, and wriggled out of his coverings.

“How goes it?” Buck was pulling on his boots.

“Haven’t seen a thing –”

“Jes’ th’ same, we’d better hit trail –”

“This early?”

“Unhuh.”

The camels complained, puffed out foul breath, and gurgled with promising menace as they were urged to

their feet. But Jas out-grumbled them victoriously as he and Renny made fast their loads.

They headed on, following the two deep ruts across the plain which marked the road of the supply wagons. It was still crisply cool and as yet the dust wasn't rising.

"we'll make th' Needles by noon sure," prophesied Buck. "I'll be reel glad to see that thar bunch o' rocks. Means thar's only thurty miles more t' Bowie."

But they had not yet sighted that strange cluster of tall pointed rocks when they ran heed first into trouble, Buck who was leading, breasted a small ridge, gave a single wild glance to what lay beyond, and came pounding back, his quirt stinging air and horsehide.

"Injuns!"

"Back—"

"Can't!" Buck jerked a warning thumb. Against the sky behind them a black thread of smoke arose. "Signals. we're cotched right!"

"We can ride west," Jas pointed with his chin.

"Not with them camels, we can't. They're too slow in th' move!"

Jas's answer was to throw the lead line away. "Let 'em stay here then—"

But when the three spurred their mounts into a run, the camels quickened their rocking pace to a sort of ungainly trot and kept up. There was a wild shout behind, they had been sighted.

They might be able to reach the scant shelter promised by the Needles, which were not more than a mile or two away. But they had no hope of getting to Bowie. Their horses were not blessed with either the speed or the staying power possessed by the wiry Indian ponies.



“Ahhhhh!”

The cry snapped Renny’s head around. Jas’ scrawny gray was down, kicking wildly as it lay, its rider rolling to get out of the range of the flying hooves. With all his strength the sergeant dragged on his reins, bringing his frantic horse to a trot and then turned back to the crawling man.

But there was another aiming for him too, a warrior on a black and white pony, thundering down, lance ready to spit Jas between his bony shoulders.

Renny’s roan was within inches of Jas when its rider brought it to a stop and leaned down to grab at the trooper’s shirt collar. The cloth tore, but Jas caught at the stirrup and pulled himself up, scrambling up behind Renny. The lance tip swished through the air a fraction away from the sergeant’s chin. Then, as the loud crack of a carbine tore the air, the lance wavered and was gone as its wielder slid limply down into the drifts of dry grass.

They rode double back to where Buck had pulled up, his carbine still smoking. Beyond the scout were three brown dots fast vanishing into the distance, the camels were still westward bound.

The disaster which had dismounted Jas had shortened their chances, thought Renny bitterly, to the vanishing point. They might reach the doubtful protection offered by the Needles. But to try to fight it out on the open prairie was certain death.

“North!” shouted Buck.

Obediently Renny headed his floundering horse in the new direction. Buck covered him, shooting from the saddle a second time. And the snap of the carbine was answered by a wavering scream.

“Th’ Needles!” Shrieked Jas in his ear. Yes, that was the gray of the freak rock formation outlined blockily against the brown of the plain.

Then the roan stumbled. By main force of will and hand Renny brought its head up, the pounding of unshod hooves heavy in his ears. Add he flinched as the animal under him screamed. A bloody nick had been chopped in its right ear.

Buck had already reached the foot of the towering rocks and now he was firing with deliberate skill, making each shot count, as he covered the desperate flight of the other two. Renny caught a glimpse of a brown arm almost at his shoulder. He felt Jas swing away. Then that arm was gone. Stone walls loomed up before them and he threw himself from the saddle, carbine in hand, to join Buck.

Jes limped into the shelter of the nearest rock, still carrying the clubbed six-shooter he had used to dispose of their last reckless attacker.

Slowly the three white men retreated into a narrow cleft between two groups of the rocks. Jas grimaced when he glanced around their pocket of safety.

“Well, seein’ as how we ain’t got no water ner extra shells, this is a right smart hole to git cotched in. All them red devils has got t’ do is sit an’ weit ‘til we come trottin’ out —”

“Wonder if these can be climbed?” Renny patted the pillar of rock beside him. “No harm in trying it.”

Before either of his companions could stop him he had pulled himself up on a rough projection and was feeling overhead for another hold.

“Come down, yuh fool!” hissed the scout. “They’ll pick yuh off, sure as shootin’!”

“They can’t see me, rock between us,” Renny called down as he found his hold and went up. Inch by inch he made it, breaking nails and scraping flesh raw, but at last he came out upon the slightly rounded summit of the rock. Rising

to his knees he pulled out of their case his most prized possession, a pair of military glasses.

Slowly he swept the horizon. The Indians, now sullenly retreating out of the range of Buck's accurate fire, were the only moving things to be seen until — the glasses stopped and focused upon a patch of light brown, half in the shelter of the dry river bed.

The patch broke into separate shapes and Renny found himself counting the camels. Their panic stricken flight had brought them into a pocket between two high banks. And there they were plainly content to stay, feeding quietly on some stunted bushes which cloaked the banks of the vanished river.

Save for the camels and the patrolling Indians the prairie was empty. Renny returned the glasses to their case. How long would it be before their non-arrival at Bowie would be known. Maybe a week, maybe more. And no one could last more than a day or so here without water. Right now the stone under his hands was almost burning hot! One of those distant camels still carried their supplies and spare ammunition.

"If only the camels had come here!" he muttered before he turned to descend again, sliding the last few feet to land on some particularly sharp rocks.

"How does it look?" inquired Jas.

"Nothing but the Indians in sight. The camels have gone to ground in that river bed to the southwest. Wish they'd had sense enough to follow us —"

"Them camels has got more sense than yuh give 'em credit fer," commented Jas grimly. "They didn't follow us — that's right sensible."

"We could do with the supplies —"

“We could do wi’ a lotta things we ain’t gonna see agin. Water an’ such. Better spare th’ gab, talkin’ makes a man thirsty!” Buck squinted along the barrel of his carbine tugging open the collar of his sweat soaked shirt with one hand.

The day dragged on, hour by baking hour. Now and then a young warrior would ride along just out of range, chanting his war song and taunting the prisoners in the circle of the rocks. There was a chance that at nightfall they might slip away, but the marksmanship of one brave spoiled that in the late afternoon when Buck’s horse went down, an arrow in throat. Renny’s mount had never recovered from its dash under a double burden and now stood, with dull eyes and drooping head, alone.

“‘Spite all I said ‘bout them ornery camels,” croaked Jes, “I’d be plumb glad to see ‘em now, ‘specially since they say a man kin ride th’ critters.”

A man can ride — ! Renny sat up suddenly. What if they could in some way reach the camels. Horses just naturally hated the brutes — look at the trouble they had had back at camp trying to find some that wouldn’t go hog-wild when they had to march with the beasts. And certainly the Indian ponies were not broken to the sight and smell of them. Men on camel back might have a better chance than men on horses.

“Buck,” he turned eagerly to the scout, “What chance would we have of making that piece of river bed where the camels are?”

The Scout’s grin was dry and tight-lipped. “None. These here Injuns are jes’ waitin’ fer us to try somethin’ like that.”

“Could one of us get through if the other two kept the Indians’ attention?” persisted Renny.

“Buck might,” cut in Jas. “Buck knows Injuns an’ he knows th’ country like he knows his hand —”

“Then listen —” quickly Renny outlined the plan which had come to him. The others made protests and then suggestions and in the end Buck nodded.

“It might work at that. Leastwise it’s better’n sittin’ here cookin t’ death. We’ll wait ‘til dark en’ try it.”

By Jas’s nickel-cased watch it was close to ten o’clock when the first act began. Buck stripped down to improvised breech-clothe and moccasins and rubbed his white skin dark with rock dust. He crept to the far edge of the Needles and crouched there, waiting.

Renny’s horse stood wearily while its master and Jas provided it with a rider. Almost their entire combined wardrobe had gone into the fashioning of the unwieldy figure they now lashed into the saddle. When the last knot was tied, Renny led the apathetic roan ‘round to-face the point they had marked as the center of the Indian line, and brought his quirt down in a stinging blow across its haunches. He flinched as he felt the leather crack on hide, but this was their only chance now.

With a pitiful neigh the horse bounded forward, its rider reeling realistically. They might have been watching a man wounded and suffering, clinging to his saddle by force of will and endurance. And, by some miracle, the roan did not keep to the course set, but turned, running parallel to the Indian line, at last disappearing over the ridge. It was a very lifelike representation of a man making a frenzied attempt to ride for his life.

A shout and then another told the listeners that the roan was being sighted and pursued. Renny glanced behind him. The shadow which had been Buck was gone — out into the night. If only the Indians had been drawn off long enough to let him through!

“Watch out, son,” Jas’ bony fingers bit into the boy’s arm as a second burst of angry shouting came down the slope. “Them red devils has discovered th’ joker. Now they’ve got thar dander up an’ might come peltin’ right fer us. We’ve got t’ make it hot fer ‘em if they go!”

“But it’s too dark now to see what we’re shooting at –”

Jas groaned and said patiently. “Look – over thar. See that open patch, they’ve got t’ cross that t’ git at us, ain’t they? An’ yuh kin see ‘em good’n plain when they tries it. ”

Almost before the last words were out of his mouth he fired. A dark figure on the very edge of the patch he had pointed to twisted convulsively and then was still. Jas gave the hoarse bark which served him for laughter.

“That did fer one. ‘N Injuns don’t take kindly t’ night fightin’. They may pull back now an’ wait t’ rush us at dawn – that’s their trick.”

Renny stared feverishly into the dark. He thought that he could feel those dark eyes spying from the ridge, see the shadows wriggling through the dust toward the Needles. He licked dry lips with a tongue almost as dry.

“D’you – d’you suppose Buck got through?”

“If a man could, he did. That thar boy was born in a wagon an’ raised with a rifle in his fist. Bin a scout since he was able t’ fork a saddle. If we see them camels agin, ‘twill be with Buck bringin\* ‘em in, But he can’t be too quick ‘bout it fer me. I ain’t longin’ fer any uppity Injun t’ go weerin’ my hair at his belt – wot thar be left o’ it!”

The night wore on. Twice the besieged fired at suspicious shadows – without effect. At least, decided Renny wearily, the Indians would certainly believe now that their attempt for escape had failed and should not be able to guess that only two instead of three faced them. The night wind was chill against their half-naked bodies and the gritty rock and sand rasped their unprotected skin. What if Buck had

not won through? What if he had been unable to find the camels? What if —? Jas nudged him.

“Gonna work ‘round t’ th’ back. Buck should he comin’ in that way —”

The whisper trailed off as the trooper crept away.

After what seemed hours he spoke again, “Hi — Sarg —?”

Renny edged around a boulder.

“Jes’ saw somethin’ comin’ cross thar —”

“Buck?”

“Might be. Leastways we kin git ourselves ready —”

Out of the darkness came a nasty bubbling sound, answered by the scream of a startled and protesting horse.

“Buck!” called Renny.

“Comin’,” he was answered. “Git ready t’ ride!”

Three strange shapes trotted purposefully toward the Needles, their bubbling complaint loud and clear, to be heard even above the clamor mounting behind them. Renny darted out and gripped the nose rope of the nearest. At his command it knelt and he half threw, half pulled Jas onto the high backed saddle. Then he left the older man to his own devices as he scrambled aboard the third camel.

Jas swore as his animal got to its feet by a series of jerks.

“How d’ yuh drive these here things?” he demanded.

“Aim ‘em that way,” ordered Buck, “an’ give ‘em thar heads —”

But they weren’t to escape so easily. Already arrows were rattling against the rocks behind them. And the war cries of the horsemen hovering on the ridge were loud and menacing.

“Git!” Buck swung his quirt against dusty brown hide, with a last burble of protest his camel “got”. And behind it pounded the other two.

Renny clutched wildly at any part of the saddle which swung within his reach. There seemed to be no way of settling oneself to fit that lurching gait.

It was like riding a pitching mule, only worse. He glanced back. The Indians weren’t drawing in too quickly, and some of them seemed to be having trouble with their horses.

Then, as if out of the ground itself, four horsemen appeared directly before the racing camels. Buck’s mount, the tallest and heaviest, and most evil tempered of the trio, struck down, its yellow teeth tearing flesh. The horses went stark raving mad and broke, two of them spilling their riders almost under the camels’ feet. But the camels kept calmly on.

After awhile Buck allowed them to modify their trot to their usual plodding shuffle. The east was ribboned by the first red rays of the dawn. Renny glanced dizzily down at the stable ground which now seemed entirely too far away.

But the scout was grinning at his partners in misfortune. “Thar’s Bowie!” He pointed ahead to where a walled box arose abruptly from the plain.

“These here camels are faster’n horses —”

“‘Bout time we saw that.” Jas grunted. Beneath its brown weathering his battered face wore a greenish tinge.

“You hurt?” asked Renny.

Jes groaned hollowly. “Hurt! I’ve lost th’ company o’ my stomach. These danged camels weren’t never meant fer riding!”

“They saved us from the Indians —”



Jas grimaced sourly. "Son, in th' last half hour, I've come t' know that thar's some things a heap worse'n Injuns." Suddenly he leaned over and was very busy. "Yankee Camels," came his weak whisper as they struck into the ruts of the fort road. "Jes' plain ornery Yankee camels!"

## The Telling of Tales

## ***Strong Medicine***

*The date for this story is unknown ~ the original manuscript is typed on the onion-paper that went out of style in 1970s.*

Beat now the story drum and let all harken to a Great-Grandfather tale of what happened in the days when the Thunder Bird counted the “whens” of his children and not the “nows.”

There was a young warrior, Black Gull, of the Sea Coast People – they who go forth upon the Bitter Water to take the seal and whale, who dance the Dance of the Sea Otter and the Storm Birds. He was a hunter whose lodge never looked for food or fur, but he was a hasty youth and one who thought after he acted.

One morning he went to the shores edge heedlessly, not watching where he placed his feet. Thus he trod upon a basket of clams new gathered, and tripped, to fall upon his fish spear so that the shaft broke. He was angered, not at his own clumsiness, but at the basket. So he drew back his foot and gave it a great kick.

The clams shot out, most to be lost in the sand. And the basket itself, though very cunningly woven, was broken. For this Black Gull was to be sorry, as shall be told.

For that basket had been shaped by the hand of Bitter Aspen, and she was one who had medicine powers. Moreover she had little liking, even before that day, for Black Gull, since he had twice beaten her grandson at wrestling.

Thus having seen from a distance, the despoiling of her basket and the loss of the food she had gathered so patiently. Bitter Aspen returned to her lodge and took up her medicine things. Wrapping about her, her heaviest robe, she went up to the rocks of the sea cliffs and there

she purified herself with sweet smoke, and she spun the prayer sticks, and she made strong medicine. Thereafter she sat and watched the sea for space, until there was a rippling of waves and she knew her magic had been successful.

One of the shore fishers reported that a strange seal had been sighted, and that it possessed a blue coat, not a common pelt. Knowing that this must be a medicine animal, the tribe came down to the shore to watch it swim lazily back and forth, for it seemed to be without fear of hunters, but watched the men and women on the sands even as they watched it.

Then the hunters brought their harpoons, for each wanted to take such an animal that its power might in turn be his. But as each threw at what seemed to be a very easy target, he failed. Until they said one to another that there was no taking of this seal. But Black Gull did not agree and he got into a canoe and made to follow the seal, though wise men on shore spoke against such folly.

The seal showed no fear, swimming just a little beyond the canoe, always leading Black Gull further out. But, as they came so into the middle of the bay, Black Gull thought he saw a chance for a proper throw. And he hurled his harpoon, giving a shout of triumph as he saw it went home in the seal's body. However the animal gave a great leap forward and the force of the jerk on the harpoon line brought Black Gull with it, out of the overturned canoe, dragging through the waves. Now he discovered he could not let go of the line, but that he was as fast as if the harpoon was in his body. While the seal, swimming as strongly as if it bore no wound at all, headed out for the open sea.

It continued to swim on and on towing Black Gull away from land, so that those on shore lost all sight of him, and said, one to another, that he was indeed gone and that

none of them might expect to see him again. Day spread and twilight came, and still the seal swam on untiringly. But when darkness covered the ocean, that force of pull suddenly slackened and Black Gull found himself alone.

He kept afloat, and now and then swam. But, not knowing in which direction land lay, he thought that death was close. So at last he began to sign, weakly, his death chant. The grey of dawn was then upon him. But as the wave bore him on, still struggling to keep his head above water, he saw a darker shadow. And, with the last of his strength, he pulled to it, to find an overturned canoe floating sluggishly.

This was no small fisherman's canoe, but a mighty one which might be a Chieftain's war vessel. And Black Gull was able to draw himself up a little on it. Though his plight was little better than it had been. The sun was bright and hot and it made him see queer things, such as monsters rising out of the deep, ready to swallow him.

Then a black gull, his own medicine and totem, lit on the edge of the canoe and walked along it towards him. The gull spoke to him in his own tongue, saying to hold on and there would be a better end to this than he now thought. So he held as best as he could.

Maybe he slept then. But at last a sharp cry made him raise his head slowly. And a fierce pain in his outstretched hand brought him even farther awake. He looked into the bright eyes of the gull, and the bird pecked at him once again. Beyond the bird he saw the rise of land against the water. Screaming, the gull took off towards the land. And feebly Black Gull followed his totem bird, using his last strength to reach a beach and drag himself out on the sand, without power to crawl farther.

There he was found by those who had their lodges on the island. And they treated him as an enemy, tying his hand and foot with thongs of hide, bringing him into their

village as a prisoner. There they held council within Black Gulls hearing and decided at last to offer him to the sea god.

Then Black Gull spoke in as large a voice as he could summon: "Do not give me to the sea. Can you not see, you stupid ones, that the sea has already spat me back upon the land and does not want me?"

The Chief of the island people came to look down at Black Gull, who glared back as fiercely as he could.

"Who are you who dares to speak so?"

"I am Black Gull -" returned that warrior proudly.

"And who - or what is Black Gull?"

"The mightiest of all warriors."

"Which is a great boast from a man who lies with our thongs cutting his flesh to make him our prisoner," returned the Chief coldly.

"But for a man who can prove what he said, it is no boast but the truth," answered Black Gull as stoutly.

Now the rest of the island warriors had crowded in to hear, and they began to demand that he indeed prove that he spoke the truth. Black Gull looked about, meeting the eyes of one then another, and always with such defiance and pride as to impress them that was no common man.

"Put against me the greatest of your warriors, and I shall prove that I am the better."

"This man must have strong medicine," the Shaman came forth, swinging his demon rattle, puffing towards Black Gull the sacred smoke from his pipe, thus warding off what dangers the stranger might bring among them. "Let his show us how strong."

Slowly the Chief nodded. One of the warriors cut Black Gull's bonds. Then they brought him into the Chief's lodge

and put about his shoulders a robe of soft seals fur, setting before him a pot of stew still steaming from the fire. He filled his empty stomach eagerly, wondering the while what proof they would now demand of him.

As the elders, the Chief, and the Shaman waited for him to finish eating, they puffed on a pipe they passed from hand to hand, all the time watching him without seeming to stare openly. Black Gull knew that whatever trials now lay before him would be such testing as he had not faced before, so not only his body but his wits must serve him.

When he was done, the Chief spoke: "Sleep now. Let it not be said that the People of the Otter did not act fairly in all ways."

Leaving him in the lodge they went away. Black Gull, rolled in his new robe, closed his eyes.

"Gull," he called in thought to his totem, "Be with me now, even as you were upon the sea." And he put his hand on the medicine bag which hung at his throat, in which was the wing pinion of a sea gull. So did he fall asleep.

The next morning the Chief led the way inland to the center of the island where was a lake, deep and very blue. He pointed to it and said:

"So deep is this lake that no man has ever touched the bottom of it. But our young men know it well and move in it as easily as if they wore the fur of the sea otter on their bodies. Let this stranger prove that he dive into its depths and stay below its surface longer than Aksanti, and we shall believe that he speaks a part of the truth."

There stood forth from among the warriors a young man with the deep chest of one who could put much air in his lungs. Black Gull looked to him and then to the blue water. Something fluttered on the surface and he saw there a drift of weeds, caught in it a feather. And he said within his heart:

“Thanks to you, oh, my totem, for showing me in this way how to win.”

The young warrior dove cleanly from the rocks into the lake and the Shaman counted aloud, moving one stone from a pile at his right hand to a place by his left. He counted ten, and then another four, before the diver arose to the surface and made his way back to the shore.

Black Gull threw aside his belt and loin cloth, stepping out of his moccasins and dove in turn. Under water he swam to the drifting tangle of weeds and took his place beneath it, rising under it every five counts to gulp in air. And so it was, the Shaman made a count for him of ten and ten, and another ten for good measure. Until at last Black Gull swam to shore. Those waiting him there held their hands before their mouths in astonishment that any man could stay so long under water.

The Shaman swung his rattle fiercely as Black Gull climbed to take up his moccasins and belt.

“If you are a seal spirit,” the old man cried, “then go back into the sea from which you came!”

Black Gull laughed. “I am no seal spirit, but a man. All of my clan can as well or better.”

That night they feasted. The young men danced and the old told tales of great deeds done when the world was younger and the Thunder Bird still visited men. But when Black Gull went to sleep in the lodge, once more he held to his medicine bag and thought of the Gull who was his totem and protector.

And he dreamed a great power dream, wherein he wandered through a valley such as he had heard tales of from roving hunters, where the earth gave forth steam and heat to burn a man. It seemed that he would die unless he found a way out. So he searched, with less and less hope. Then he saw a bird flying low through the smoke and



steam, and he stumbled after, to come to a narrow crevice between two rocks. Though that seemed too narrow for him to win though, yet such a struggle he did. But in the midst of struggling he awoke to find it dawn and the Shaman and the Chief with him.

They brought him to a place by the shore where had been set up two sweat lodges. Again a warrior came forward and took his place by the entrance of one. While the Chief led Black Gull to the other.

“It shall be seen if you are one who can master water in another way,” said the Chief. “For to him that stays the longest in the heat of these lodges shall go the coup.”

To Black Gull in a little while it was his dream of the night come true, for the heat of the steam was great. Yet he must stay within it as ever and again the door was loosed and another pail full of water dashed upon the heated rocks. He began to grow weak and fearful that was indeed one test which he could not win.

Then he remembered his dream, and thought it had been sent to him with a purpose. So he examined the floor of the lodge which was of earth. It was difficult to see well through the steam and vapour, so he felt about him with his hands. And found against the back wall was a rock embedded in the ground. With a sharp pointed stone he dug and at last moved it a little, finally raising part of it so he could claw at the looser soil under it.

He worked carefully but with haste. And shortly he had a space into which he might crawl, and an opening beyond through which he could breathe the fresh air and feel cooler.

Thus he would go there for a time when he could no longer endure the heat and steam, and then wriggle out when heard those who brought fresh hot stones and water to the lodge. At length, when there seemed there would

never be an end, he heard the sound of the Shaman's rattle. So he shoved the rock back into its hole, packing back the earth about it. He had hardly finished before the lodge curtain was pulled aside and the Chief and the Shaman beckoned him forth.

"Seal person you say you are not, but are you lizard?" the Chief greeted him as he crawled into the open. Above the sun was well toward the west, and Black Gull knew that he had won the second of the tests.

Once more they feasted most of the night away. But Black Gull noticed that while the old men spoke to him with courtesy, the young ones gave him black looks. And he thought that, even if he won the third test they set for him, yet he might lose if they had their way. So he asked a question now and then of those about him, such questions as he thought would those that any man might ask. And thus he learned that this island must lie to the south and west of his own shore country, and there was no way back unless he could take one of their canoes and dare the sea.

But the warriors were ever about and he could not reach the canoes. Nor could he think of any plan which might be successful.

With the morning the Chief and the Shaman came again to Black Gull. They sat awhile, smoking their sweetly scented willow bark, not speaking while Black Gull wondered more and more what new trial they had devised. At last the Chief said:

"You are indeed a man of great and strong medicine, stranger from out of the sea. But will your medicine work for more than one sun, one night -- without ceasing?"

"What mean you?" asked Black Gull.

"Can you go without sleep for a night, a day, another night, and yet more? Our warriors are strong. They have

taken the war trail over the bitter water and they have kept awake so. Is this also true of you?"

"Try me," replied Black Gull. Though now he could see no way out for him.

"So be it," agreed the Chief. "This night shall you begin, and matched with you our strongest warrior."

Black gull needed time to think, so now he said: "Each man has his own medicine. Therefore I must go apart to consult my totem."

The Shaman nodded. "This is a proper thing."

Black Gull walked away from the village, but not toward the shore nor the beached canoes. For he knew that eyes watched him. And, though none would follow on his heels, yet all he did would be seen.

He came to a wooded place and laid himself down beside a fallen tree well eaten with rot, his hand laying on his medicine bag while he thought:

"Gull, show me how I may come out of this."

Perhaps he would dream again. But, though he closed his eyes, yet he remained awake. Then he opened them to look about him. It chanced that, lying as he did he first saw the soft wood of the log. An ant ran busily along it, and in the here - there travels of that he could read no message. But the wood itself - ah - the wood!

Black Gull put out his hand as if he would draw himself up, and between fingers he pinched off a goodly portion of the spongy stuff. Hoping no one saw, he hid what he had taken between his belt and his body. Then he went on, to the rocks beside the lake where he had won the dive. There he sat for a space, staring down into the water, but thinking very fast and clearly. So desperate was his plan, but it was one, he was sure, his medicine had meant him to try.

At last he went back to the village. And at sunset the Shaman and the Chief brought him to a small lodge set apart from the others. Beside it was another before which stood a young warrior. At a nod of the Chief's he entered the lodge, and the Shaman spoke to Black Gull:

"The both of you shall stay in these lodges, and each measure of time one shall look in upon you. He first sleeps shall be the loser."

"So be it," agreed Black Gull.

Once within the dark of the lodge he brought forth that which he had scraped from the rotted tree, and found, to the leaping of his heart that he had chosen rightly. For in the gloom it glowed a little. Then he set himself with patience to wait.

At intervals the flap of the lodge was raised and one looked in upon him. So it went for the first night, and the following day, and into the second night. Still black gull waited in patience. He sat with his back against the lodge wall, away from the door, and did not change his position, save that with the coming of the second night he drew his robe about him to cover his head and shoulders.

It was near the second dawn that he judged he must go. For those who had been on watch during the night must then tire. And he had been working steadily to loosen the back of the lodge.

Swiftly, after an inspection, he slipped out of the robe, fastening it to the lodge wall, rolling inside it one of the sleeping mats which had been left so enticingly near. At the top of the mat he set two pieces of the glowing wood from the tree, that they might seem as eyes when the torch was flashed in the door and the guard looked within.

Eel-like Black Gull wriggled through his hole and lay tight pressed against the earth, waiting for any alarm from the

guard. When that did not come, he dared to crawl into the bushes, and so reached the shore and the canoes.

The large ones were beyond his strength to launch. So he must choose a small one, never meant to go far off-shore. This he pushed into the water, fearing any moment to hear the camp aroused behind him. But it slid into the water and he swam beside it, so any watching might think it had drifted free of itself.

Out it went, until at last he was able to board it and take up a paddle. But how dared a man venture so upon the sea? For, save for the island, there was no land to be seen. Only he had heard that a current ran past the island which would take him north and east, and so perhaps again near his own shore. When he felt the pull of that upon the canoe, he ceased paddling and sat with his right hand against his medicine bag, listening for any alarm from the island.

When the dawn broke the island was far behind. But in the canoe he had no food, no water. There was nothing, save a harpoon and its line coiled about it. Black Gull pushed at that.

“Small use!” He was tempted to hurl it overboard, remembering how his harpoon brought him into trouble. But so much had he now learned – that it is better to think before acting. And a harpoon was not only a hunting tool, but a weapon.

“I am Black Gull,” he chanted, “I have won free from the island, and from the sea! I am a hunter and a warrior, and I am not yet a dead man! Hear me, bitter water, empty sky, Father Sun – I am not yet a dead man! There is strength in my arm – my body –”

He held high the harpoon so that the sun shone bright upon it.

“I make medicine,” he continued. “For as the gull fly over the sea, so shall this canoe take me also. Gull, I am your clan, your brother -”

There was a beating of wings, and indeed gulls dropped from the sky to wheel over the water ahead. Something wallowed there, beat the waves with feeble splashing. Black Gull took up the paddle and sent the canoe towards that. To see that a small whale, and one already half dead, struggled there, foam washing readily from its side wherein was planted a harpoon.

Above the gulls screamed and Black Gull, hardly knowing why, cast his own harpoon at the creature. The weapon went home cleanly and the whale gave a great lurch forward, towing behind it the canoe and Black Gull. As it had been with the blue seal, so was it now with the whale and he was borne on and on.

But more and more blood colored the waves and the great beast was tiring. Still it swam, always north and east, pulling the canoe as if that had no weight at all.

All though the day so it went, and always the cloud of gulls screamed overhead. Though the whale paused now and then, yet always would it once more start on again. At sunset its pauses grew longer, it moved more feebly, but still Black Gull did not throw off the line. For the gulls were still above, and two or three lit on the edge of the canoe, paying him no attention, but watching the dying whale.

Twice in the night did that journey end and begin again. When the sun arose the line of the harpoon was no longer taught and Black Gull, weary from lack of sleep, saw that the body of the whale rolled in the shallow waters of a small bay. And this bay, its rocky walls, were known to him!

He heard shouting on shore and saw canoes pushing out, the men in them eager to get such a feast of fine, rich meat. Then did Black Gull wave his paddle aloft. And he croaked, for his mouth and throat were very dry, the hunting song. For his was the harpoon in the kill, his the first meat honor. And so as they came near the men in the canoes fell silent, for to them it was if the dead had returned.

But Black Gull greeted them all by name and they took heart and paddled forward to cast lines on the whale and bring in it for dulling up. While all the village came to share such bounty.

Only in the upper rocks Bitter Aspen cast dust upon her head and broke her prayer sticks, tore asunder her medicine bag. For who can bewitch a man whom the Thunder Bird and the sun so favors? Who has such strong medicine? And she wailed upon the wind until a gull cried in answer.

## The Telling of Tales



## *Place by the Window*

*The date for this story is unknown ~ the original is in Andre's hand and very hard to read, every attempt to type exactly what was on the page has been made.*

It was such a nice day. The sun was bright but there was just a touch of chill so one could wear the mink. She raised her hand to caress the sleekness of the fur. Drawn up like this it did not show any of the patchy places.

She made a small face - hardly aware of the deepening of wrinkles she had been so careful not to see for years that they indeed did not exist for her. Holding the memory of one's mirrored image at forty into the sixties had been her own defense against the years which spun by so swiftly now.

It was not her face she looked at now but her tinted hair, her suit, the luxury of the mink. Lydia was always so perfectly turned out. She shook her head in that shadow of despair. After all these years of wistful trying she could never equal Lydia's perfection. Yet she always hoped!

So nice a day. She would walk. After all Damins was only three blocks away. She picked up the needle worked bag - pleased with its coloring. All her own work. Now her nod was one of satisfaction. Lydia had its twin, of course, but both were of her making.

Outside the door of the lobby she shivered and pulled the mink tighter about her throat. The bright sun was deceiving. She had felt so chilly all morning. Maybe she was taking cold. But if she was she was determined Lydia would not know. Lydia detests colds, in fact all ailments, with the same no nonsense that made her so secure in the world. She smiled a little trying to picture Lydia prey to a sniffing, cough ridden cold. Lydia simply was never sick.

But still it was chilly today. And she had better not walk too fast. The queer stray pain – No, she would be like Lydia and just tell herself there was no pain.

Odd – there was a hazy look to things today. Maybe she needed her glasses changed. Remember to ask for an appointment with Dr. Haynes. Maybe she would call this afternoon.

No, Lydia would have something to do. She hurried a little faster. Lydia always had something planned. That was what made Thursdays so special. Lunch with Lydia and then ...

Her hand went to her breast. That pain – no – there was no pain. She was right here now. Even if Lydia had not come yet Miss Dorothy would see she got the right table – the one by the window. Why, they had had that same table for – for how long?

She frowned, unable to really remember. Not that that was important. What was, was that the table was theirs on Thursdays – always.

The warm air of the restaurant felt good – but she did not loosen the mink stole. Where was Miss Dorothy? There was a man standing in her place. A young man who looked important, cross. He stared at her – no smile, no pleasant greeting. He looked – she halted for a moment in her advance across the red carpet – he looked as if she had no business being here.

But this was Thursday – it was, was it not? For a moment she felt a small stir of fear. She had not forgotten the day, she could not! Lydia would be vexed – No – it must be Thursday.

The young man had moved, said something she could not quite hear. He did not speak up distinctly like Miss Dorothy – Never mind she knew just where to sit anyway.

Once inside the dining room her confidence returned. Maybe this was the day Lydia would come early.

But he was standing in the way! She spoke firmly – hoping she summoned some of Lydia’s emphatic tone.

“We always have the place by the window.”

Only – there were others there! At their Thursday table! How could they? Miss Dorothy, where was Miss Dorothy? She knew!

A man – a young man with that longish hair which made one look so unkempt – Lydia could be most outspoken about hair like that. And the girls with him – with that odd make up which made her eyes look so queer.

They should move. Only - she knew she did not have Lydia’s strength of character. She could not make a scene, protest. Only it was not right – Lydia would be very cross with her, tell her again she had absolutely no will of her own. Maybe it was true. But she had always hated being conspicuous in any way.

Weakly she took the seat the man pulled out for her. It was dark here and she knew she could not see the menu properly. That was one reason why she was always glad they had the place by the window.

Maybe – Grace was their waitress. She took an interest. Such a nice, pleasant girl! Maybe Grace could fix it before Lydia came. Then Lydia would never know.

She looked at her watch. They always ate early, to give themselves a long afternoon. But – it could not be nearly one! She was confused. The clock in her room, had she checked her watch by that? She could not remember now.

Teresa always set the room clock for her so she could be sure of the time. It got away from her some days now. No, she could not remember checking this morning.

But even if she had been late Lydia would have waited. Where was Lydia? Maybe she had left a message. Maybe she was ill –

Lydia was never ill, never! There was that time – just a little while ago – she tried to remember when. Lydia had just been tired. They had taken the taxi back to the Shelton and let her off there. She had not seemed so much herself. But everyone did get tired.

It would have been perfect if Lydia had moved to the Arms. But she always said it was better that they did not – as she expressed it “live in each others’ pockets” so they always meet here.

If she could only see Miss Dorothy – or Grace! They might know.

Only Grace did not come either. It was another man, a stranger. He had no business taking Grace’s place. She told him she was waiting for a friend. He had an impatient look, too.

She felt queer, as if she were in the wrong place at the wrong time. But this was Damins, and it was Thursday. It was chilly in here. Maybe she should not have sipped that ice water. A cup of tea – Grace knew just how she liked it. Only Grace was not here.

That couple by the window. As soon as they left she would move over. She tried to see what they were eating. If it were dessert – Oh, let them eat and go before Lydia came!

She did not know what she would have done all these years since she retired if it had not been for Lydia. Odd, now she could hardly remember a time when Lydia had not taken a firm charge of her. Not bossy really, but Lydia did seem so capable and when her own thinking as Lydia pointed out was muzzy now and then Lydia was always there.

There had been some gossips at the Hotel. She sniffed recalling just what she had said that time to Mr. Rosen when he had said Lydia was running her and he did not know Lydia at all, of course. She had never come to the Arms. He never spoke up like that again, mind you. She had been pleased in a mild way when he had left though – every time she had seen him she had been reminded of what he had said, even though he had been so wrong.

Of course she had helped Lydia out once or twice when there were those big bills. Goodness, what were friends for? She had certainly never begrudged any of it – not even when she had sold her bonds. Lydia would have done the same for her.

Where was Lydia?

That young couple – they had only coffee cups in front of them now. Surely they were nearly ready to leave. She had better hold her purse, be ready to move so Lydia would find her just where she ought to be – at the place by the window on Thursday.

She was proud of her plan. There they were getting up. Now –

And there was Lydia marching right past the man who had so oddly taken Miss Dorothy's place. She had better wave so Lydia could see her. Yes – everything, nearly everything was alright. She – that pain again, but it did not matter. The place by the window, reach it and Lydia –

“Who is she?”

“Never saw her before! For Christ's sake get her out! Call an ambulance. She's probably from the hotel down the street. They ought to know better than to let those so-called guests of theirs get out and wander around like this.”

“Wait a minute; I think I've seen her before. When Arrington's were running this place last year she used to

come in – a regular she was. Always had that table over there. They used to humor her – she always said she was waiting for a friend.”

“Well, we’re not Arrington’s. And we’re not running a home away from home for senior citizens.”

“She won’t be coming again – ”

“You said it!”

“She won’t be going anywhere again – ”

“Christ! That’s all we need – a heart attack or something right in the dining room! Where’s that damned ambulance?”

“Lydia! We got the place by the window.”

“Of course, it’s Thursday, isn’t it? Don’t be silly Marjory.”

“Marjory. You’re the only one to call me that now – ”

“It’s your name isn’t it? Buck up – I’ll tell you what we are going to do this afternoon. Just listen – ”



## *Water Wizard*

*This is a very rough draft of "Frog Magic" published in 1997 within the DAW anthology "Wizard Fantastic" the original is in Andre's hand and very hard to read, every attempt to type exactly what was on the page has been made. --- ? \_\_\_? Denotes a word that was not decipherable.*

The puff of green skin on the river washed stone opened his big eyes. To have one's life so quickly change could not help but disorientate one for at least a short space of time. The trick was always to remember just WHO he was. A fly buzzed overhead and his mouth snapped open, a loop of sticky tongue caught the lush fly and the large frog shivered. There in, was an alien body could resist to its nature, which act conscious orders, until the alien was in total charge. He must be on guard.

"How did you do that?" The sharp croaks were hardly more than adolescent peeping. He stared down at the questioner. Undoubtedly one of his own species.

"As you do also." He croaked and forgot his resolution of moments earlier to gather in a larger prey - a dragonfly.

"No - I mean how did you get there?" the small frog boosted himself up on a lower river greened stone and raised a fore foot to point. "You just appeared out of the air!"

The frog sensed more curiosity than awe of any kind as he questioned. Another bright youngster who had more curiosity than his own good. Anyway there was no reason to waste time with this insignificant junior but it seemed that the youngster was neither awed by the size of the larger elder, nor stricken abashed by his offending silence but he was continuing.



“How do you do it – puff right out of the air like that – one moment nothing – then you.”

“It’s a long tale and a difficult one to explain” the big frog was badgered into replying with a turtle’s snappishness. “It does not matter how I got here – the point is” he was thinking aloud now – “Just how am I going to get back.”

Get back – how long would it take the present frog personality to absorb Hymaron, Wizard Second Class, who had certainly taken several wrong steps today. Wizards removed lesser enemies in this fashion, they did not fall prey themselves to such juvenile tricks. In spite of attempt at control he caught another fly. Yes the body would certainly absorb the persona of the man unless he moved swiftly.

“Get back where?” the younger frog persisted.

Such a change included time, place, and victim, but the key was always returning – he need only find the lock in which to insert it. Surrounded once more by familiar walls he thought – he hoped he could successfully deal with the probable – and later, and more lingering with Witchita who was responsible for his present plight. His pop eyes focused with some force on the small frog.

“You know the river, youngling?” he demanded.

“Sure. I have gone far down as the null,” the creature was plainly boasting, “and as far up as the falls-”

“Falls!” Hymaron caught at that. It was the check point he believed then fortune favored him now.

“A long way indeed,” he tried to tailor his croaking into a faint mistaken of pleasantry.

“Dangerous, too!” boasted the small frog. “There’s that place where the hole is. Get in there and it’s good bye.”

But firmly holding the frog part under stiff control Hymaron readied his body for a leap into the water. Only

those four slender legs refused to obey the order of the body's owner.

Of course, how could he have felt it would be that easy? It required some contortion to be able to inspect the rock on which he had come into being. Frog sight obstructed those lines but not enough that Hymaron did not understand what those water carvings represented. He hunched around to make sure he was completely surrounded.

The arcs of Arbus. Hmmm. Well he might have known she would not settle for such a childish revenge as transformation alone. Back again in his first position he glanced down to discover that his audience of one had expanded and was continuing to expand as other frogs swam effortlessly to join his interrogator. The last comer was as large if not larger than he was himself -- and the crowd parted respectfully to let this one through -- popeyes looked into popeyes. The new comer gave a croak as loud as a shout and his companion was instantly silent.

Hymaron dared a probe. He encountered nothing but frog thoughts until he slid past the future into memory. No, this was not to be hailed as command in ?\_\_\_? and spells but - his thought pounced and held up that scoop of memory.

The large frog half turned as if to take himself as far as possible from the site. But Hymaron's powers had nearly always been thought born and he held. The object of his intense stare submerged but Hymaron knew he was still there.

Holding on to his large catch with determination, he dared now to turn part of his attention to the youngster who had first discovered him. The frog jerked - its fore leg twitching. Then it sprang for the same rock which had mad Hymaron captured. The wet green brown body landed with a plop on the horn of one of the arcs. So! It

could be done – now was the time to call upon his prisoner.

Sullenly and manifestly fighting against the power which was drawing it the large frog came back into sight. For a long moment that silent battle of wills continued and the big frog climbed up, his body now stretched beside its younger companion.

Hymaron eyed the result carefully. His hind limb slipped. He leaped – landed for a moment only as those green backs before the water enfolded him.

Upstream that youngling had said, so up stream it would be paying no attention to the green skinned company Hymaron tested a new advance and then relaxed. Yes, he could depend upon the natural instincts and rhythms of this body to carry him along. But kept a wary eye on the nearest bank. Witchita had set one trap. He could well believe it was not the only one. She actually would not want to face time again.

The whole of which he had been told did exist. He was not sure how keen frog sense of smell could be but several unpleasant odors told him this was his doorway, filthy as it might become.

Hymaron fought his way through water that was soupy with refuse. The drain slanted upward but with great determination he could find holds for the toes of his four feet. What he feared most did not happen until he was well up the shoot – a cascade of dirty water suddenly showered and battered him but he held with mass determination.

Though he certainly had never explored this particular wing in the walls of the tower Hymaron was sure he was drawing near to his goal. Magic has its own particular scent and that was growing stronger. This dim light beat in to the darkness ahead and he renewed his efforts to the

strongest perch. Fortune favored him in that the scullery maid was not at work at the sink into which he crawled. He lay exhausted and panting in the hard slate of the tub unaware of the voices he could hear until a name and some words made sense.

“Didn’t never ride out to the gate, I tells you. Young Master Bean set the lock his own self. Certain the Noble Lord could banish that but we all know what sounds when a spell explodes – louder than any drum!”

“Well, he ain’t here and that one queens it in the great hall as if she sits in the High Seat by rights – givin orders right and left this morning. I seed what she put in the drink cup of Master Bean and the sergeant of the guard. Now they both trails behind her like they was puppies and she was their dame. I tell you that this here is no place to be with that fine Madam ruling it.”

The voices were fading as the speakers moved further away. But Hymaron had heard enough. So she was playing with potions again – his determination to deal with Witchita knew the strength of anger. Those potions could be deadly if used too often or in too great quantities.

It took him several desperate leaps to clear the high wall of the sink. Then he could hear movement and talking in the kitchen beyond the scullery. So he kept to the shadows his sleek body gathering a fur of lint and dust.

Hymaron was near winded when he won to the top of the stairs and saw the great hall with the gleam of witch light making a slow and ?\_\_\_? marking it was night. He made a rapid mental calculation though he did not know if his persona had lingered in him, but after Witchita had tricked he did not think that his journey between great hall and river stone had been too protruded.

The hall was oddly silent for this hour. No coming and going of confused serving goblins busy at the dias table. In

fact that was even not set up. But the High Seat stood there and towards that he hopped laboriously.

There was no use in heading for his laboratory. The very devices he had set up for security would betray him now that he wore this guise. But determination won over fatigue and he made it not only to the dias but in one last leap to which he fed almost all his remaining strength he at last won the High Seat and squatted there puffing.

Witchita might have removed his proper body but once her unexpected numbing potion wore off his mind remained fiercely alert. Wizards had their tools, yes. But behind those was a mind which controlled such and that for Hymaron was not locked.

He had been forced duly from a short rest, which his mind worked furiously, he began using first one back foot and then the other alternate by scrapping from his moist skin of all the debris he had gathered during his travels and splatting it up to the surface of one of the dias. When he had a pile of mingled dust and lent, savory material...

Hymaron stretched his head back as far as it could go and two of the light balls answered his call, dropping out of the flitting game they and the fellow ?\_\_\_? ?\_\_\_? to hover over that pile - shedding a suddenly brighter glow upon it.

Now!

Hymaron could not make the proper passes effectively while in this body but he could visualize and that is what he needed now. The mound arose sluggishly, thinning into a dark mist. Two more of the energy gasses swooped nearer, while the rest forced out as if driven by some force of the light.

It settled and swirled around Hymaron. He could feel no change in his body - no - this was only a summoning of an envelope.

A man sat in the High Chair – once well known to him as a dream visitor for Witchita? \_\_\_? body all she considered to be worthy of her adoration. And it solidified into seeming complete life as Hymaron sent one of the globes to summon. He must concentrate on holding this shadow self together long enough to achieve his plan. If Witchita were alert she would already sense the presence of a spell in formation. She had triumphed before on her own – perhaps she was first vain enough to believe she was now immune to another magic.

The globe suddenly formed two rings – one by the hall door, the other about the High Seat. There was the sound of a protesting hinge and the door opened. She was there right enough and he had by chance chosen his time slightly for her lithesome body was more revealed than concealed by a spider silk night rail, though she had bundled as shawl? \_\_\_? about her shoulders.

Hymaron might have smacked his lips at the capture of a very large and succulent fly. Dream caught she was! She had ensnared herself and needed only a touch from him to seek out the source of her hope for pleasure.

The young man pale of countenance but handsome of feature did not rise from the High Seat but held forth both hands in welcome, his eyes alive with dangerous promise. And she came unflatteringly to him.

“Cevin”, she breathed and his own arms came expanded but welcomed the offered embrace. Hymaron posed beneath the shadow he had summoned. She was bent forward, apparently not finding it strange her imaged lover did not rise to hold her.

Still bemused as one caught in the web of sleep she leaned forward and her lips slightly parted to urge his kiss. Lips indeed met lips but not as Witchita had expected. Her eyes widened and she looked in terrified horror at what she had so spontaneously kissed. But even as her dream was

swept away so did he she had come to meet was changing again. The frog vanished as quickly as the man and Hymaron sat firmly in the martyr's place in the hall.

"You --" she cowered as well she might. Not only cowered but her body was wavery and as the silken shift and shawl puddled on the floor a frog stared up at Hymaron with bitter and frightened eyes.

He surveyed her deictically. Then, to make sure the transformation was complete, he made a quick pounce and lifted the frog to the level of his own eyes.

"You undoubtedly make a beautiful frog, Witchita" he observed. "But I fear you shall never know the freedom of the river in which to plan a revenge.

He snapped his fingers and out of the air appeared his wand. Apparently she had not seen fit to break that. Still holding the now squirming and kicking frog in one hand, with the other hand Hymaron marked out an oblong space on the floor. Three more waves and he firmly repeated words, and he had at his feet a proper crystal aquarium. Into this he dropped the frog which was ?\_\_\_? trying to bite him with toothless jaw.

"Water-" another pass of the wand produced that. "A rock for a High Seat", he continued "And of course dear Witchita I shall see that each day you will have a feast of the best flies."

The frog had climbed up on the summoned rock and was making futile attempts to leap out but there seemed to have also come into existence an invisible lid to her prison which she could not pass.

Hymaron chuckled. "Remember your history my dear. There was a princess who kissed a frog and gained her heart's desire. You met lip to lip with your love but the ending differed. I am afraid sometimes legends are not true."

He clapped his hands and a goblin flanked into being.

“Smirch,” Hymaron bade him, “take this aquarium to the tower of the Lady Witchita. See there is light and of course plenty of flies for her delectation. I trust you will in time, my dear, come to find that you have won a certain form of safety and be content.”

If a frog could glare the captive achieved that now. Hymaron laughed and waved the goblin on to his duty. Now, he arose from the High Seat and stretched luxuriously, up to the laboratory to see what mischief Witchita has been engaged in during his involuntary absence.





## *Explorer IV*

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*The date for this story is unknown ~ the original is in Andre's hand and very hard to read, every attempt to type exactly what was on the page has been made. --- ?\_\_\_? Denotes a word that was not decipherable.*

Unfortunately for Explorer IV of the Tricurion Empire on its galaxy rim run space was not a vacuum. The other and more deadly drifters moved in erratic patterning. A huge mass of what might either have been the debris of another explorer or an asteroid of limited size met the Explorer IV head on with not enough warning because of an undetected computer error.

The result for the Explorer IV was complete disaster, one which gave even the well trained space crew no chance. Death came instantly to those who were lucky - lingering for some to whom only moments were centuries of torment. Walls bulged - trapping and crushing cabin occupants.

The hissing of exploding circuitry lasted hardly longer than the lives who had once depended upon their power. Screams were swallowed; defending explosions began to die away. There was left only desolation, crushed machinery and disruption of all life.

Inside walls of the ship grew a thick coat of white frost under the ?\_\_\_? of ?\_\_\_? space as the inert mass now crushed heavily against that which had destroyed it subsided into the frost.

Only - in the protected corner of one of the once numerous cargo bays, something stirred with a life rooted purpose.

His tall frame casting a long shadow before him in the dusk, Eric Lain landed a well aimed kick to clear the path of rotten log.

“Why me, why is it always ‘Eric, get some wood and get the lead out of your boots while you do. You’ve been here at camp long enough to know to do that work’” he grumbled.

Then, looking down he startled even himself by a strong shout.

“Ahag!”

Up his left leg crawled squirming white grubs. Frantically he beat them off, having to use his bare hands, which was disgusting. By the time he was through his checkered flannel shirt was half out, the front of his jeans skewed around to the side, he had one Nike partially off when he tried to shake off the crawlers.

Now he only hoped none of those back at camp, especially Steph, had heard the strayed screech.

Though, his frustration after circling the ground camp site twice and seeing nothing on the ground worth harvesting grew the hotter and this time not against himself.

The dusk was getting thicker when he finally spotted through a small hole what seemed a pile of split and broken wood down by the lake shore. However as he headed quickly in that direction he suddenly shivered for no real reason. He tried a rather strained laugh as he said “Just like one of Mom’s premonitions.”

A harsh snap brought him to a standstill, to glance swiftly from side to side. Surely that had been a real noise but there was nothing moving he could spot.

“Just the wind,” he croaked. Still he shivered again.

It seemed awfully quiet around here just now. He could even pick up the sound of the distant voices of his family setting up camp. They had had to take just what the rangers directed. Seemed that even this eastern part of Montana must be full of nature seekers over a weekend

and the Lains were certainly not pleased. Now he picked up the tail end of some sharp comments as he moved on toward that promising shadow pile among the trees.

It was rather crowded this year – that camp. Dad and Mom, Eric’s sister Erica with her pompous listen-to-me now husband, Dwayne. He himself had only agreed to all this togetherness because he had been allowed to bring Stephanie along on this early March outing in 2000. Supposed to be some sort of a date to remember he thought.

The growing dusk thickened and he tried to watch his footing over the rough ground. That strange and silly idea he was being somehow invisibly escorted continued to hold. Perhaps it was just as well, Steph had not wanted to come along. She had been so emphatic he had even forgotten his flash light, an omission he was beginning more and more to regret. But he did manage to spot a small tree which had apparently been struck by lightning not too far away. It looked, as he peered through what was left of the fast fading light as if it were already broken into usable pieces as it hit the ground.

As he readied himself to start for the nearest - a beam of eye blinding light caught him dead center. He was frozen, as bedazzled as a deer in headlights of a speeding car.

“Hay,” his voice wavered a bit as he tried to make it reach the camp, “look - I”

Shielding his eyes he squinted between his fingers upward at what must be the source of that brilliant burst. It was moving - a dark shape - certainly nothing he had ever heard of - no plane would come so low and hover like that.

“What is -” Eric never finished that question as he was brutally slammed down to his knees, gasping for the very

air that was being sucked from his lungs. Now he was being lifted into the air.

Trying as hard as he could to gather a voice again he screamed but not for long.

At the camp they had finished the task of settling in and for the first time Eric's continued absence was noted first by Dwayne with a voiced sneer over how long did it take to pick up a couple of sticks anyway. The older members began to call - to no purpose. And finally they used a distress signal to summon a ranger.

Suddenly it seemed to all of them that the dark this night was different - that it might hold the unexplainable. There was a search however well planned according to all regulations. Even with the coming of day it continued.

They found tracks, yes, but those ended abruptly at the lightning shattered trees. Dogs were brought in only to sniff and smell although plainly unable to pick up any further scent.

It all became one of those mysteries one read about in tabloids and finally started something of a legend. Eric remained an unsolvable mystery except that he remained a sad one to those who had so blithely gone carrying. It was noted there after that, that section of this park had few visitors for the remainder of the season.

The Telling of Tales

## *Who Dreams of Dragons?*

For Anne McCaffrey

*(As far as we know this was the last story Andre ever wrote.)*

"This is a new one Aunt Kat. Where did you get it?"

Ashley surveyed the white dragon, just the right size to fit comfortably into one's hand. The carefully carved scales had a semblance of flitting rainbows though she had not moved it. Katlin Rosswell, mistress of dragon lore, leaned forward.

"You've gone right to the heart of the matter, Ashley. We didn't get it – it was just here yesterday morning. No one had entered in the gift book, nor will anyone admit being responsible for its appearance. It's made of mother-of-pearl and it certainly is a work of art. Robbi and I went through the trash barrel, down to the bottom. There was no box, nor wrappings, to explain it."

She moved on to her desk where a collection of papers was piled untidily, picking up one sheet after another, glancing at each before she discarded it. Suddenly, holding the last she had taken up, Katlin Rosswell moved closer to the desk lamp which she switched on.

"No!" Her denial was sharp and sudden.

"What's the matter?" Ashley joined her to look down at the sheet of paper. Though she was seeing it upside down it was plain that the lines of printing there were not ordered as they should be. There were gaps here and there as if words had been erased and in those gaps were

touches of brilliant red, green, blue and yellow such as crayons might have left.

The older woman stroked the page to flatten it more.

“King Fristan” she was reading aloud, “reached for the serpent – Serpent?” With the tip of her finger she pointed down a couple of lines. Now she indicated a purple slash: “Six or Eight make sure it’s straight.”

Having read, she looked up at Ashley sternly. “Who was here this morning?”

“She said her name was Winifred Monck,” Ashley answered readily. “There,” she pointed to a yellow slip protruding from a pocket of the desk pad. “Said she wanted to leave a note. But I was here with her all the time and all she did was write that.”

Aunt Kat had the note out and unfolded. She frowned as she read aloud.

“M. W. Monck – 6 Limington Court. Hmm – Limington Court.” Once more she rounded on Ashley, “What did she look like?”

“She was kind of old – well, her hair was white – what you could see of it. She had a knitted cap pulled down over it as if this was winter. Her face – her face was just plain ordinary. She had a big old cape, not a coat which came clear down to the floor. Still – she wasn’t any bag woman – I had a queer feeling somehow that she was someone important.”

Aunt Kat had sat down behind the desk. She brought out a large MS envelope from the lower drawer and slipped the page into it only to find more colored markings on the next one below. In the end she uncovered five such and they were stored carefully away in the envelope along with the yellow message slip.



"I understand you are going over to the Hobby exhibit with Sue Rogers".

Ashley nodded. "Her mother entered a quilt her great-grandmother Swift had made - clear back around the time of the Civil War."

Aunt Kat smiled. "That has visited about every exhibit in this part of the country for the last ten years." She commented. "It is a family -"

She had only gotten so far when Ashley interrupted. "The dragon - the pearl dragon!"

Where there had rested, only moments earlier, in a shaft of sunlight, there was nothing now but the well polished surface of the table. Katlin was on her feet staring at the empty space.

"But you did not take it!" Her voice had risen a little.

"No!" Ashley replied quickly. "I never touched it at all."

Her Aunt came from behind the desk, moved to the table. For some reason she was pointing at all which rested there now repeating names for each. "Chinese Fighting fish of Cinnabar - Willard's birthday present this year. Carved ivory needle case from Looie, she found that in London. Mud figure of Chinese poet getting drunk - Spanish comb set in brilliants -"

Silent now, she stood just looking down at small treasures. Ashley stooped, and was searching the floor, though she could not imagine what had knocked the figure from the table. It should show up well against the rich dark colors of the Persian rug. There was nothing there.

Katlin had gone to her knees and was peering around the feet of the nearest chair which were carved in the form of great claws clasping balls. Even running fingers between the claws of the nearest foot. Ashley straightened up. There was no white dragon there, she was sure of it.

As her line of sight again flicked at the table top she stiffened.

“It can’t be!”

On the very spot of gleaming mahogany where it had been before stood the mother-of-pearl scaled dragon.

Staring at the dragon, then at Ashley, and back again at the figure, Katlin pulled herself to her feet and sat down in the very chair she had been examining. Ashley had retreated a little from the table burdened by curios.

“It was gone!”

Aunt Kat’s voice was harsh as she answered, after a pause which went on too long. “Yes” – just one word, no attempt at any explanation. Then she added, after another long moment of silence: “We can bear witness for each other. However I can do without such a trick again.”

She arose and went to the table. For a moment she hesitated before she gathered up her long white skirt and with that wrapped it well around the figure she picked it up. Ashley drew close, obeying Katlin’s gesture. The dragon was laid full length on the desk top to rest on a sheet of unmarked paper. Deftly Katlin swathed the paper about the fantastic creature and proceeded to use sealing tape backward and forward until she had a package the shape of its contents thoroughly hidden from sight.

“Make note of this, if you will, Ashley –” that was the voice she used when commenting on some important point of research. “Top drawer – left side.” She jerked the indicated drawer open roughly and brought it entirely out, to be lifted to the desk top. Into the space from which it had come she pushed her hand well in.

Ashley noted now her aunt’s heavy breathing. Then she heard the click and Katlin withdrew her hand, caught up the packet and put it into the drawer space. There came

another lick. Katlin's hand was out. With both of them, she reinserted the drawer and pushed it carefully closed, level with desk front.

"So -" Now her attention switched to Ashley. "You know my work." A statement not a question. She pushed back her chair, turned it on its rollers a fraction so she was now facing the wall behind her, covered with shelves packed with books in bright colored jackets. "Thirty-five years of it. Two Hugos, a Nebula, - First Fantasy Award - all of it. I've dealt with fantasy, talked about, lectured, had two seasons of a TV series which they are talking about reviving. If I had been alone and had repeated to someone what just happened, as well I might, what could have been the result? The old lady - t'is a pity she has - as the saying use to be - gone around the bend. She's taken to believe what she writes about is real."

"I do not know what is real," she moved, drawing herself straight up in her chair. "But I shall make every effort to find out -"

Ashley near jumped as the phone nearer to her than to Katlin rang. Her aunt signaled for her to take it.

"Yes, Yes - Sue. I don't know -" To leave Aunt Kat here alone she should not do that. However her aunt was nodding vigorously shaping words Ashley was not able to translate. "In twenty minutes?"

Katlin continued to nod. "All right, I'll be ready."

Before Ashley could utter any protest, Katlin spoke. "There is something you can do -" she said quickly. "They are an estate sale in connection with the show. I had intended to attend but now there are other things to be done. "I've heard that they some very old books that belonged to the great-grandmother Edgehill. Look them over. I want very much to have any which deal with local history, have heard that she had some unusual ones. I will

call Hannah Berryman – she is in charge of that sale and is always ready to help me with references. I'll tell her that you are acting for me. Will you do this, Ashley?"

It was the sort of request she could always expect from her Aunt. To hear her make it was reassuring, making one believe that what had happened here was only a trick. One which Aunt Kat would speedily solve, Ashley almost had a feeling of relief.

"Of course," she agreed. Catching sight of the outer world through the window behind her hostess she added, "If the weather lets us –"

Katlin laughed sounding just as she always did. "Don't worry about that. They are using the old Acker barn to exhibit most things this year." She was looking down at the surface of the desk before her and paused, then she spoke again rather swiftly as if she were afraid she would forget something of importance. "Ashley – no – I don't think I need to say this to you. Our adventure is off the record as the reporters say –"

"Yes." Ashley agreed. But it hurt a little – did Aunt Katlin think she would tell such a story?

She was still unhappy over that when Sue arrived in the red pickup the Rogers' clan used. Apparently Sue was looking forward to some luck in buying for the shop at her mother's Bed and Breakfast. She also was flushed with irritation and was only too quick to spill out the source of that.

"I tell you an old biddy like that shouldn't be allowed behind the wheel of a car – car, it was more a pile of junk! If she has any insurance on it I'm the next home-coming queen! It was just plain weird – like it was out of Buffy – you know the Vampire killer."

Her eyes were on the road before her with care however Sue was intent on what she had seen.

“That old wreck swerved around the corner. One of the back doors came open as if it had never really been shut and out fell this basket, to hit a hedge bush – she was that close to the edge. It opened, too, and out came this white thing. I swear to you Ashley it was a lizard of some kind. The old hag didn’t try to stop the car, she didn’t even have her hands on the wheel – was just waving them around in the air. Good thing she wasn’t going fast when the car hit against a fence post and stopped. Come on another foot or so more and we’d have met head on. I was trying to get out of her way.”

Sue pointed with her chin, still holding her tight grip on the car wheel. “I don’t think the fender was scrapped. I got right out and went to see – thought maybe she needed help she was acting so queer. And where did I land? Right smack down on my behind, she shoved me out of the way as she got out, paid me no attention but ran back to that basket – went hunting on the ground around it, and the caught up the white thing – never did see it clearly – I got there, asked if I could help. She never even looked at me while she rolled whatever it was up in a ball and pressed it tight against her.”

“I went closer, I really thought she might be hysterical or something. Some people get queer over pets – My cousin Ida kept a black rooster in the house – said they talked together –” Sue shook her head and took a deep breath. “Well, she looked up at me, had a cap pulled tight down on her head so you could see only her face. She was real old and she made a sort of face at me. Then she brushed right by me without saying anything. Slammed me out of her way – and did she jest me away! Look!”

Sue had glanced down at her right hand she loosed her grip and held it away from the wheel, flexing the fingers. A little above the wrist there showed a dark smear and the beginning of a bruise.

Crows – Ravens – what have you. Did they not appear as suggestions of evil in fantasy? Ashley had typed notes for Aunt Kat a good number of summers now. Surely she could remember – crows, ravens of evil – dragons to eat damsels – she knew well what appeared being normal in fantasy. Dragons –!

She was scowling. “You can see ahead a’ fairly good distance here,” she pointed out. “But my old woman and her rambling wreck had just disappeared.” She paused, when Ashley did not speak she added: “All right, just tell me I dreamed it all – if it that can be done while driving.”

Ashley thought of a disappearing dragon and shook her head. However she could not Answer Sue with her own strange see-not see adventure.

“Is there any turn off along here?”

“Just the one we’re going to pass shortly. It’s been closed off months now – otherwise we’d have a straight go to the barn. We have to circle around by the river now.”

It was a very few moments later that she did point out a light spot in the brush wall which she said was the closed turn off.

Sue said nothing more as she aimed the car down the road and hoped they did not have much farther to go. Ashley glanced once at her watch – fifteen to one – the cold lunch offered by the committee must be near over, the exhibit would be open at one.

“Eleanor Chesley was making her chicken salad,” Sue said suddenly. “She never will give anyone the secret of her dressing.”

Chicken salad – dressing – Ashley swallowed again and tried to quickly remember some feature of the North River Presbyterian Ladies’ specialties. Chocolate – those cookies

filled with chocolate – Higgins – Rice –no, Pebbles. “I hope there are some of Mrs. Pebbles cookies left.”

The trees no longer fenced them in. They had passed what looked to be a log cabin fallen into rotting, displaced logs. From that the scene changed abruptly to a house some distance back from the road. Its walls were so tightly covered with a vine whose green leaves had a blackish gleam. Clearly nothing had been done to clear the vegetation and a large tree lay on the ground to bar the way to the door.

A structure on the other side of the road showed only a suggestion that it might once have been a house. What could be seen was blackened and charred by fire.

Ashley shivered. This was the third summer she had spent with Aunt Kat. She had never seen the dead town before nor even heard it spoken of. “Is it all like this – deserted and broken up?” she asked.

“I dunno. We go through here to reach Avery but we’ve never stopped. Not a place one wants to go poking through I would say. It is still marked on the old road map Mick has up on his wall; Limington Court is what it’s named there. Let’s get out of here!”

For some reason Ashley found herself staring as intently ahead as if she were the driver. Sue finally slowed for a corner and they headed north, another turn brought them on one of the state roads, across that into a lane. Ahead they could see cars parked, two long picnic tables still burdened, and perfectly ordinary people preparing to enter the huge red barn.

Ashley found herself trying to get the rest of a sandwich eaten one bite at a time while also attempting to return greetings in a fairly acceptable manner. Mostly people wanted to know where Aunt Kat was and she could only offer the weak excuse of busy and that her Aunt planned

to be there later. Sue had been claimed to help transport some large boxes into the barn and they had had no time to discuss the mystery on the road.

Having finished the sandwich, and accepted a napkin laden with a trio of cookies, Ashley stood off a little to view the decorations forming a mural of sorts on the barn wall. The portrait of an intricate quilt she recognized. The model for that had been three times winner at quilt shows last year. Next to it was a column of HEX signs – She swallowed the last of the cookies and wiped her hands on the napkin. Nice to have a drink – but she couldn't go in drinking. She turned aside to drop the napkin in one of the trash bins.

“----- took them out.”

Ashley made a little face. She knew that speaker – only too well. Bertha Ray was on the School Board, also the Library Board, and the President of the Ladies' Aid Committee at the Church. She also was the personification of Queen Victoria and was seldom amused by anything.

“What did Vernon say?” asked her tall, thin companion of the moment, a stranger to Ashley.

“Some stupid thing about how popular the book was and that it had won prizes. It doesn't matter if it has won the Noble Award. It is certainly not the sort of thing we want on the library shelves – witches – dragons – Black magic. NO! Then Miss Withers talks about good writing and the like. And I just cry evil was evil no matter how you dressed it up. The best thing that could happen to Summerset would be to have that woman move out of here. Oh – I'll have to be on the run. You know that chest of books they found in the Edgehill attic – well, Marvin, he went and told Mrs. Berryman to sell them. They should have just dumped them in a good fire. And I am going to



see that that's where they go - but I'm to judge the Junior Quilters first."

Best go and see Mrs. Berryman herself. Ashley entered the barn door stopping only to pay her dollar entrance money. She was sure that Miss Ray had been talking about one of Aunt Kats books. Maybe Drake and Dragon that was the latest. If so - time then for another letter from Bridget Boyd. Ashley grinned. Bridget was her own creation. Though she had never said so she was sure Aunt Kat knew who that fervent supporter was. She might have her Aunt's gift for fiction but her defense and explanation of Halloween customs had been very carefully researched.

She did not allow a halt near the quilt display though that was one of her favorite places, nor a side visit to Leslie Morgan's jewelry display. The open spaces were becoming crowded but she saw now the sign announcing the estate sale and was able to locate a table, much carven as to legs, on which was piled what could only be books with dull scuffed covers.

Ashley sniffed. There was a queer smell around the untidy piles of books. One or two had no backs left - were just dirty and raw looking. She knew that this was treasure hunting in a way but she had never been sent to do it all by herself before, just stood by and carried the choices Aunt Kat made.

"Winfred Garland's Girlhood - " she read the title of the top volume on the pile nearest her though it was so dim it was hard to make out the old fancy letters. As she picked it up the loose cover flipped open.

"To our dear Mattie for her fifteenth birthday, the Twenty-fourth of June, 1872"

Ashley smoothed the cover back into place and reached for the next volume. In the end she had six books, one very much worth the worse for wear, which she thought Aunt

Kat might want. There was a very old note book with an inscription that it had belonged to Howard Write, a school teacher. But the one which hardly hung together seemed to be a scrapbook in which there were cards and letters, as well as faded pictures. One of the others was what Aunt Kat had spoken of a local history of the town – the date was 1900 on the title page.

“Finding what you want, Ashley?” Mrs. Berryman came by her on her way to the register.

“I think my Aunt could use these –” she indicated those she had piled by themselves on a nearby piecrust table.

Mrs. Berryman looked over her selections. “I’d agree with that. Suppose we just them over here in this cupboard her to see if she does get a chance to come in later.”

Ashley saw them into the cupboard and then she dared ask a question: “What made Miss Ray sat these should be burnt?”

“She said that, did she?” Mrs. Berryman shook her head. “Well I did see her with her nose in one last Tuesday when Vernon brought the box into the church. This one I think.” She took up a book with a thick black cover from the table.

“But that’s just a cookbook!” protested Ashley.

“It’s a little more. Two people used it at different times. See – There’s a page of recipes, yes – but over here is something else in a different handwriting altogether.”

The handwriting she indicated was very dim. Ashley took the book closer to one of the lamps set alight to show off a Tiffany shade.

“Do not call upon that in the north wood for what dwelt there has no kindness for any Edgehill. Be certain that the proper call be used.” She looked up at Mrs. Berryman confused. “That sounds as if it were copied out of the Lovecraft Tales, a ghost story or horror one.”

“I would say perhaps someone was trying to write such in the old days and just set down bits.”

“But –” she looked to Mrs. Berryman. “I didn’t see this before. Just the recopies – things such as sweet potato pie and mint tea–”

“The recopies are mainly at the beginning. And a lot of the other material is very dim. Do you want this one for your Aunt also?”

Ashley nodded. “Indeed I do.”

She felt uneasy as she saw Mrs. Berryman put it with the others. How could she have made such a mistake? She was sure that she had examined the book more carefully than that. Uneasily she glanced down at her watch – nearly three – She did want to see the quilts and maybe the Winston dollhouses, and she had heard that Clara Dodds had added some stuffed animals to the doll display.

However she was uneasy enough to once again check everything left on the book table – most that was left were old school books and fiction – and none of them, though she shuffled pages from one cover to another, had anything written in.

That musty-dusty order which hung about the book display seemed to be growing stronger – then Ashley felt a push which sent her against the edge of the table and she half turned indignantly. The pusher was already on her way to Mrs. Berryman and all one could see was a knitted cap pulled down as it might be if the wearer were in the midst of a winter storm, and a body so muffled in a cape it might belong to anyone or anything.

This, the girl was sure, was the Monck woman who had wanted to Aunt Kat – and – and – maybe Sue’s wacky driver who knew how to disappear on a open lane. She was not sure why but she headed after her.

There was certainly no mistaking that cracked voice which possessed an almost crow-like stridency.

“----Corrie’s books, that’s what I’m talking about! And I don’t mean those nabby-dabby things you’ve got on that there table neither. She promised them to me – Now that lubloy of a lawyer says Corrie didn’t leave no will and, less she did, promises she made don’t mean nothing. That were never no Corrie’s ways of doing things. You people sell her books to someone else and it’s just stealin’ ain’t never done anybody any good.”

“Mr. Hatyers is in charge of the estate legally. He himself turned then in to be sold –”

“Which by the looks of things you have gone and did. Who got them? I got a right to say I’ll pay what they paid and take them back.”

“I’m very sorry – Miss – Mrs –”

Ashley had come up right behind the queer old woman and Mrs. Berryman had seen her but she gave no sign she had. Which was fair – after all Ashley had selected what Aunt Kat wanted before this Miss Monck or whoever she was showed up.

“Sorry is, and sorry was, and sure sorry will be!” Proclaimed the would be customer. “Better you do some good thinking on that, woman. There’s them one does never want to get wrong-sided with.” With a jerk of her cloak she was off, apparently not sighting Ashley at all.

“Who is she?” Ashley asked. “Is her name Monck?” Quickly she explained the puzzling visit to Aunt Kat.

“She’s one of the local mysteries,” returned Mrs. Berryman. “Mostly they call her trash-bag Granny. She lives down on Limington Court – or had a house there before the big storm two years ago when lightning struck it. I’ve heard that she sort of camps out now in the Shelly

place. That's owned by some out-of-towner who never visits here. There was once a Monck family down there right enough – provided a lot of scary stories for the youngsters – the later ones the woman were supposed to be witches. They died close together of the flue back in the 40s. Oh, Monica, she looked past Ashley to hail a lady who was inspecting some figurines on the shelves of a small display case, “It didn't turn up-”

She was halfway across the space between them now to deliver what was apparently a disappointing message. Ashley left also, but not before she had passed the cupboard where the books had been placed and made sure that it was securely closed.

Aunt Kat might even get a new idea for a book from all this she thought as she started on towards the quilt display. She had done a book – A Shadow Dark As Night – a couple years ago about a vampire who was a witch and had a whole town scared.

Ashley hoped to run into Sue but had no sight of her. Somehow the quilt show did not appear as bright and interesting as they usually did and Ashley did not push on to where the various other pieces of needle work were carefully displayed. Instead of old book odor the scent of candles became stronger now and she suddenly stopped, caught by a half glance at the rows of such set out to entice. Those lilies – she had to admit they were perfect. One could well believe that they were indeed living flowers at the height of their glory. But what Ashley had noticed was not a flower!

Not again! No – a candle – a gleaming dragon of wax with a pearl like surface. Aunt Kat must see that.

“Hi Ashley! Back for the summer?” The boy wearing the T-shirt which proclaimed the freedom of a small drove of horses rose up behind the candle display.

“Rufus – your Mom put you in charge this time?”

He shrugged. “She’s got us organized this year – regular hours on and off. But we’re doing okay. Like the lilies?”

“They’re grand –” Ashley ran a forefinger along just below the tiger lily candle. “But I’m really interested in this.” Her finger stopped below the dragon. “I want it for my Aunt –”

Rufus nodded. “Yeah? She got another Weredragon book coming out? She sure can write to give a guy the shivers. This is a try out for Mom – there’s just the one. She sure hunted to get what she thought was the right color. It’s marked fifteen dollars–”

Ashley was already delving into her belt purse. “Can you wrap it up well? Sometimes wax breaks easily.”

She wanted to ask if Mrs. Burns had copied the dragon from one she had seen but that was kind of a pushy question. Better let sleeping dragon lie. Oddly now she suddenly felt impatient, that she wanted to get away. Every new tissue wrapping Rufus put around the purchase added to her discomfort. Luckily the lilies suddenly drew attention and she just had time to pay for the candle and pack it away in her purse before one of the newcomers started asking questions concerning the flowers. With a wave to Rufus she left.

There came a sudden blast from the loud speaker at the judging stand and people turned that way.

Miss Ray was jerking the speaker down closer to her mouth: Has anyone seen a small black kitten without a tail? One is missing from the Harmon Pet Center. If seen or found please return to Dale Harmon at once.” Now she spoke even louder with a pause between each word as if to underline it: Small Manx kitten – black, no tail, return to or report to the Harmon Pet center.”

Tough, Ashley thought. With this crowd the poor little thing is probably scared to death. Wonder if Aunt Kat has come yet. She made a quick trip down the length of the barn, ending again at the book stall and there indeed she found her aunt standing with one hand on a pile of books – the books she herself had selected – as if claiming them against all comers. She did not know why exactly but at the moment Ashley shot a quick glance around half expecting to see also the woman from the dead street. But trash-bag Granny was not in evidence. Aunt Kat looked up, saw her and beckoned.

“Excellent – sheer luck.” Aunt Kat had produced two large canvas tote bags and was slipping the books into them, making equal loads to the best of her ability.

Ashley had turned her head – had she or had she not seen something like a black shadow – or the edge of a long cape – in the now crowded center of the barn?

“You expect Sue? Planning to stay for the square dance?”

If the trash-bag Granny, or who ever she was caught sight of Aunt Kat’s tote bags and their contents – and with Mrs. Ray hanging around – the might indeed be trouble.

The girl hooked the handles of the nearest bag over her arm and was reaching for the other. “No – Listen, I think we’d better get out of here – I’ll tell you why later.”

Aunt Kat did not yield the second tote to her, “The car’s parked down by the fence. I promised to see the new flower candles Myra Burns has this year. No, I’ll keep this.” She drew back at Ashley’s second try to reach the tote, instead set it on her own arm. “Be with you soon.”

She was away again to speak to Mrs. Berryman. At least, thought Ashley with a small feeling of relief, she hasn’t asked questions. But that was always Kat’s way – she listened and she understood no matter who was talking. Within minutes – and some not to gentle pushing – the girl

was outside the barn. For just a moment she stood gazing at the tent on her right from which now and then sounded a bark.

Dale Harmon always hoped to find some who were willing to adopt her orphans at these country things – though he was very particular about anyone who appeared interested. She hoped he would get the black kitten back.

She moved from the lane leading up to the barn, a narrow way which was crowded now, and struck out over the weed thick verge. The field set aside for parking was about filled and there were a number of cars along the fence. There was Aunt Kat's familiar jeep which was kept for country driving and next to it – how could a car which looked so battered still be driven? The one which had aroused Sue's sharp feeling – it might just be. But to have it beside Aunt Kat's could well mean the same sort of unpleasant meeting she was trying to avoid.

Her approach was slowed. Should she go back towards the barn and hope to meet Aunt Kat or stay where she was? Mrs. Berryman had certainly not told the stranger who had the books and so trash-bag Granny might not learn that until they were safely gone.

The sun was very hot – better move over there and just sit down. The grass had been beaten flat and the shadow of the battered car reached across the gap between it and the jeep. Ashley settled the tote to lean against one of the latter's wheels and was about to drop down beside it when her head went back and she gasped. She heard – or was it she felt? But it had reached her, such a wave of fear as set her trembling so that she had to catch at the fender of the jeep and hold on while the world jolted around her.

She stared at the old wreck of a car. Crouching down she tried to see under it. And she was still crouched so when



Aunt Kat came around the back of the wreck to confront her.

“What in the world –”

Ashley glance in her direction but made no verbal answer, swinging up her right hand to point at the ancient vehicle. However at the same time – It wasn’t anything to be felt this time – she was certain she heard a thin cry of fear and she was at the side door of the car her hand on the handle in quick answer. A moment later Katlin was beside her.

The window was cracked as well as smeared. Ashley near flattened her nose against the murky pane trying to see more clearly. Resting on the back seat, the covering of which was slit in a number of places, was a box – or rather a small cage. The front was a cover of wire netting and, even as Ashley centered on it, the cage seemed to quiver and once more came that cry.

Ashley twisted and jerked at the door handle. Once more the cage moved a fraction closer to the edge. Something within hit the restraint of the netting and caught there. The cage moved a little more under the tugging. And Ashley pounded on the door latch with her fist.

Kat’s hand settled over hers. “Ashley, what is it?”

“I don’t know – but it’s in that cage and it’s frightened – terribly frightened!”

At last the handle began to turn – at least it wasn’t locked. The relief from that discovery seemed to give her an extra strength of pull and the girl got the door open. A strange, unpleasant odor puffed out and a small cry of sheer terror reached their ears.

Ashley stumbled forward and gasped as she scraped her shin.

She landed with her face not far from the side of the cage. At the same time the paw caught there twisted loose, and

she was looking straight into the terror filled eyes of a black kitten. One of the perky ears was dribbling blood from a deep slit.

There was swift movement from the other end of the cage. The kitten squeaked, shrinking back against the box wall. However the predator 's pounce was stopped almost before it had begun. Without thinking it through Ashley slapped the end of the prison farthest from the cowering kitten. Heavily toothed jaws open to snap in her direction and the scaled body tried to leap, only to be jerked back.

Ashley caught at the cage and edged back. Somehow she managed to be free of the car into full daylight. When there was room Aunt Kat helped and they set the netted box on the ground. Ashley looked up at her companion.

“Do you see it?” she demanded.

Aunt Kat looked at her blankly. She might have been confronted by something she could not honestly believe existed.

“Dragon -”

“White one,” Ashley persisted, “Mother-of-pearl one - alive -”

The kitten cried pitifully again.

“Got to get that out -” She ran hands around the upper edge of the cage seeking some exit.

“Yes.” Aunt Kat pushed close to her, dragging her belt purse to the fore and shaking out of that a small shower of card case, change purse, several crumpled Kleenex, eyewear and, finally, one of her prized possessions - a well endowed Swiss Army Knife. A moment or two to chose from its bewildering array of encased tools and she was busy prying at the juncture of netting and wood just above where the kitten had taken refuge.

Then – only a short period of quick prying and pulling and the girl was holding the kitten who at first fought for freedom, subsiding at last into her hold, exhausted. The blood from the torn ear had marked Ashley’s T-shirt and she knew she must find help for the small animal as soon as possible.

However now, as she cuddled and gently restrained the kitten, her attention was mainly on the remaining occupant of the cage.

Aunt Kat pushed down the netting she has loosened. It was unbroken. There was a flash of white as the other captive jumped. The woman jerked back hand just in time.

“Can it get out?” Ashley wanted to know.

“Might – might not –”

The girl settled the kitten inside the T-shirt she pulled loose at the waist. Once more the handful of fur fought, needle tips of tiny claws showing through the material. With one hand cupped around the hidden prisoner, Ashley jerked the door of the car open to its widest extent.

She was ready to help as Katlin lifted the cage gingerly and somehow worked it back on the tattered seat. Then her aunt stood for a moment staring at it, for, once her controlling hold was gone, it began to shake again. Luckily she had started to turn when a gnarled length of wood, aimed at perhaps her head, swept on and Ashley was slammed back against the car, a long raking scratch opening down her arm.

The musty odor puffed out of the cape as the strange woman who appeared to haunt this day stumbled half into the back seat. Aunt Kat grabbed at her niece continuing to open space between the weird stranger and them both. She gave Ashley a vigorous push toward the jeep.

“In!”

Trying to keep one hand protectively over the still faintly struggling bulge at her middle Ashley obeyed. She was gasping when she partly fell in the seat. Back at the other car the door was still open, half in, half out the black bundle of the cap was stilled. It's wearer making no effort to rise. Aunt Kat took a couple of small steps in that direction, she might be going to offer help.

However she stopped, as, from the direction of the crumpled woman, came a spatter of what be words – though to Ashley those had no more meaning than cries of the crows. Aunt Kat was on the move again, covering the distance around the front of the jeep, the ground on the other side of the car. She scrambled into the driver's seat by the girl.

"Seatbelt!" That was both a warning and an order.

Ashley dared to use both hands to draw that about her. With her sitting down she was sure the kitten could not crawl out.

The jeep snorted after its particular fashion and they were backing away from the fence. As they passed the other car Ashley was sure that the stranger had not moved.

Something did. A blot of white, on the other's knitted cap, struggling to detach one long clawed foot from the loop of the wool. Then they were by. Luckily there had been a change in the number of visitors and Aunt Kat was able to pull out of the special parking area and bring them back to that road which was a collection of potholes in less time.

"Mr. Havens – the kitten –"

"No time for that now. You can call him when we get home." Katlin hesitated a moment as they hit something of a bump in the road. When she spoke again her voice sounded hard and cold, "I don't know just what is going on, however I am sure it is no good – maybe for all of us."

“What – what’s it all about?” Ashley gave a start as a crow voice sounded out of the brush wall of the neglected road. “That woman, she wanted the books you took. But how did she know you had them – or was it that she knew we freed the kitten – –?”

She pulled up the T-shirt and brought the kitten out of hiding, It no longer fought but lay limp in her hand. “It’s –” Ashley burst out.

Aunt Kat aimed the jeep a little up the verge – she pulled the girls hand closer and leaned over it.

“No – not dead.” Was her answer. “But hold it out in the air. There’s a horse trough not far ahead and water.”

They were on their way again. Ashley nursing the fur scrap against her. Twice they had to reduce speed in order to scrape along the verge and let cars going the other way pass them. But at last they reached the way of ruined and deserted houses and Aunt Kat brought them into a wider space before a house which seemed intact, it lacked even the overgrown bushes and the brick supported vines to be seen elsewhere. And there was a double stretch of concrete which might once have suggested an ornamental stream. Water fed into one end halfway up the side, to disappear through a similar exit at the other end.

It was very quiet – all the confusing sounds of the hobby show were long gone. Even breezes avoided this place.

Ashley became aware of the silence as Aunt Kat, using the med-kit which was always a part of the jeep, washed the torn ear and cleaned the fur clumped with clots of blood. The kitten had its golden eyes wide open, fixed for the most part on Aunt Kat. But it remained limp, showing no fear of what was being done.

“That’s all we can do now,” Katlin observed. “We’ll take you to Bob Wells as soon as we can.” Out of her large bag came a folded bandana wrapped package from which she

freed the square of material as soon as possible. Shaking it she drew it around the kitten and Ashley was certain she heard a scrap of a purr much muted.

Her Aunt showed no sign of swift return to the jeep. Out of her treasure bag she drew a folded cup, giving it a shake to open. She dipped it into the trough water then, after sloshing it around she poured that out, only to dip again. Holding the cup to Ashley:

“Drink up.” Only that, no explanation.

The girl obeyed. The water was quite cool. She had not realized that she was really thirsty until she gulped two mouthfuls. Then Aunt Kat took it from her and, having looked intently into the cup for a moment she also drank. Ashley as not only thirsty for water – she wanted to know what was happening, for she was very certain that something of importance was in progress. However before she could ask Aunt Kay spoke.

“The roots of fantasy are old, old beliefs. We who hunt through legends and folklore, even tales of those small communities of the more immediate past which are or have been less aware of the changes in daily life, must handle reports carefully. In fantasy the major point of action is the endless struggle between good and evil.”

“We explore in odd places but we do not accept shadow as truth. Yes, there are things of this world, finds which cannot be explained using the measure we accept –”

“Such as speculative archaeology –” Ashley broke in.

“Just so. Unfortunately when we show interest in such subjects we are, by many of our kind, supposed to be believers. From believers we are promoted to practitioners – dabblers in evil – in the eyes of others.”

Again she paused. Now she had picked up the package which had been wrapped in the bandana and was turning it around. The kitten had gone to sleep in Ashley's lap.

"There are book burnings, accusations - Sometimes positions lost - black listings - before time there were actual deaths - horrors which are only used human against human."

"I cannot claim that I have been set up as a martyr ready for the stake. But for the past two months, ever since I lectured at Bresley on the place of witchcraft four hundred years ago, I have been very aware that there is an interest, I can do without, being taken in my affairs."

She had freed from its wrappings what she had taken from the bandana. They were both looking down at the figure of the white dragon.

"The problem now is that there are two forces against me. Those who would burn books - Such as I have faced before. Then - now - there is this." She held up her hand and the dragon seemed to glow as if indeed, according to legend, was filled with a blazing fire.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhh -"

The kitten came to frantic life, Ashley barely had time to catch it as its struggling within the muffling bandana set it close to skidding off her knees.

Once again the throat piercing cry sounded. They had not heard any opening or closing of the house door. At the foot of the three steps leading up to the swaybacked porch where that door was to be seen, she stood.

Why had she thought the stranger to be small - or old, wondered the girl for a moment. She stood very straight, her left hand sliding from her shoulder to her breast, smoothing the white thing clinging to the folds of that bundle some cape. The tight knitted cap had shifted

somewhat releasing straying flocks of dull grey hair, allowing a chance to see her face fully.

The skin, deep creased by the wrinkles which framed the eyes and bracketed what appeared to be a lipless mouth, open to display a straggle of teeth, was also grey or grimed. While the eyes sunken back into skull hollows were – red! Red as if sparks were set there.

Ashley and Aunt Kat were both on their feet facing what had hailed them moments later with that screech.

Aunt Kat took another step forward. When she spoke her voice held a forceful note Ashley had never heard before.

“What would you do?” Even those words, though she could indeed understand them, sounded almost as if they came from some other language. This was an Aunt Kat she did not know.

The tread-like lips smacked together and then parted. Upswept the woman’s left arm, down that support flashed the white creature. Very alike to the figure Aunt Kat had, it was – a white dragon – smoke curls rising from its snout.

“What is ours.” The woman replied. “What was given by promise but never received...” The Dragon raised its head a fraction and spat – Flame? That sprat could not be anything but flame.

Aunt Kat did not answer at once. Again those lips wrinkled.

“As so above.” The other moved her right arm as if she were fighting stiffness. Now she held not only the dragon steady in their sight but also a staff, the gnarled sides of which carried patterns of lines. Ashley looked away quickly – lines which ran and looped –

“Martine Mantha Monck”



The three portions of that name seemed to echo back through the air above them.

“You name me rightly. You play with words, use snips and shreds –”

“As above – so below –” Aunt Kat interrupted.

Perhaps it was meant for laughter that sound. The woman’s shoulders shook a little. On her left hand the dragon looped a foreleg about her fingers as its footing swayed. In her right fist the staff bowed.

“So be it!” that had the authority of an oath. “If you dare – only you have not the heart for true power, scribbler! You write of it as one dabbling toes in a flood, but going no further.”

She backed away a little. Aunt Kat looked to Ashley, “This must be done. But none of it yours. Stay –”

She still held the pearl shell dragon in the other hand she had her key chain – Keys – and , Ashley remembered, that odd stone brought back from Ireland – green marble fashioned into a cross inset with silver lines, mainly circles – ancient Celtic, Aunt Kat had explained.

Aunt Kat surely must have help in whatever she planned to do but the girl did not what that was to be. The kitten had leaned down and was sniffing at her belt bag sticking out in a bulky fashion. On sudden impulse Ashley loosed the catch and brought out the well wrapped candle. A black paw darted and the tissue tore, again and more ragged strips fell. A quick upward glance let Ashley know that they were both watching her. The paw seemed almost to be flashing like small lightning tearing away the remnants of the wrapping.

Pinched between forefinger and thumb Ashley held the candle in full sight. She had been right – it was a copy of the figure Aunt Kat held – also of the restless beast on the

woman's hand and wrist. Candles should be lighted – Her Aunt suddenly twisted the keys and ring and from somewhere a stronger beam of sun was triggered to strike upon the wick. At the same time first, loose fire blistered across Ashley's hand. She cried out and tried to open her hand, drop the candle, but for the second time a flame licked. The candle was indeed swept away but it did not fall to the ground.

Instead it blazed into a wild lump of flame clinging to the staff the woman had aimed at her. Ashley threw herself back, landing with a jarring bump on the ground. The flames caught at the folds of the cape, climbed, ate as if the thick cloth had been soaked in oil. So bright were they that she closed smarting eyes.

As if closing off sight was an encouragement to hearing, swinging words which had no meaning for her grew louder, deadening any other sound. She felt now as if she were the shuddering center of a heaving mass from which there could be no escape. Time no longer had any meaning, her body moved back and forth in time with the sound.

Ashley became aware that a support behind her stopped that swing of body and she opened her eyes. Some distance away was upraised a black pillar wreathed around by ash-grey smoke. Part of a charred rod lay on the ground before it. Aunt Kat knelt there singing still but her voice was strained. She trilled a last word, hummed a last note and got to her feet.

“To your own place go,”

The pillar was gone with blink of an eye. The charred staff with it. Aunt Kat turned to the stone water trough. On its edge she carefully placed the pearl dragon. As she stood watching there was movement in the tangle of grass where the pillar had been, an upheaval of charred earth. Flight

through the air – the coming of another fist sized dragon to perch next to the white one. This was black, the glossy black of Hematite. Into the position as its fellow the black one stiffened.

Ashley had staggered closer. “What – what happened?” she demanded not waiting for an answer, her heart still pounding.

“There is much in the world we cannot understand. We cannot even explain.”

“Speculative – all speculative?” Ashley made a question of that.

Aunt Kay nodded. She put her hand together as if she had something balanced within the cup they formed. “I have this scrap and that, but always have I worked with care. Never have I ever used in any. I have read strange accounts and closed all but the outer mind to them, writing the true description of ritual. Nor shall I –, one may carry keys and never use them. One must be above temptation,”

She suddenly took up the white dragon and holding it by its base, smashed it down upon the stone side of the trough. The black dragon followed and she thrust her hand into the water, hunting out all chips of both figures. A visit to the jeep provided her with a scarf – one of the beauties from Paris. She rolled and tied, and with a tire lever dug a hole to bury all and tamped flat the filled in earth.

Now she stood before Ashley. But before she could speak the girl shifted the once more sleeping kitten to its other side and was hugging her aunt.

“Everyone has dreams, dear Kat. One does not have to share them, Dragon dreams least of all. This is – was – a dream.”

Her aunt gave her a searching look and then slowly nodded.

“Yes – if you will have it so – a dream.” She said slowly.  
“One from which we have awakened in good time – you and I.”



## Fanus

There was mist curled about the bottom of the dell where the river was broadest and most shallow--just as if the damp grayness had been poured into the hollow from some giant's bottle. Fanus squatted at the edge of the bushes trying to see through that dull cloud.

Giant bottle? There were no giants any more. He turned his shaggy head to look over one shoulder. Maybe somewhere up in the mountains there might still be giants, but the last one down here had been seen so long ago it was just a story now. Fanus shivered.

Not because he was cold, the downy hair on his body kept all but the sharpest winter winds from reaching him. And it was not winter now, around was the fresh green of early midsummer.

He was---alone. Things had been slowly slipping away. Away to where?

Once more he shivered, and pressed his hands over his pointed ears. Yesterday--last sun time--THOSE had come again, Even the dark quiet of the trees, the sharp thorns of the brambles, the roots projecting from the ground to trip a man up--none of those had been enough to keep Them away. And they had brought their sharp axes to cut and kill.

Master Oak they had brought crashing down, and Warrior Pine. They had dragged bushes from the ground, leaving them to shrivel in great horrible death piles. Then They had done the worst of all for they had summoned fire who was the great enemy of the wild. All the flames had feasted on the brush, ringing trees and eating them trunk and crown.

The deer had fled the first, for they were the swiftest, and then the rabbits and the smaller things. The fishers sprang from trees which had been their homes as long as Fanus could remember, the squirrels, brown and red together for once, their own ancient war forgot, and birds who had cried for lost nests and dead nestlings— all together they were gone.

However, even before They had come so boldly there had been warnings. The nymphs of Wayfare had vanished before last snow time, and with them the elves, and the dwarves angry and helpless, growling or crying with rage.

All gone. Fanus swallowed and stared dumbly into the whirls of the fog, He held his fingers before him so that he could count them one by one. Thumb---that was when the beech dwelling dryads had first told of these newcomers who destroyed and killed and strove to put an end to the forest. Forefinger, that was when the dwarves of the Black Hills had burrowed so far underground that no one ever saw one of their stooped and twisted bodies again. Middle finger---that was the stir of the elfish people and their flitting. Next finger-----

He stared at that one and his whole body quivered, for that marked the going of his own folk. They had laid a warning on him, but he would not listen--would not let himself listen, for was he not the guardian of Frost-Fair the most beautiful thing this or any other forest could shelter.

Now the tears gathered in his eyes and dripped into the soft down which covered his face, to wet the stiffer hair of his body pelt.

Frost – Fair!

Fanus threw himself face down on the ground and cried as he might have done as if he were only a cub – babe. Because Frost – Fair, too, had gone or was lost

between one day's morn and the moon's rise. Gone out of the safe place Fanus had guided her to while he went roving to find the most tender of the thick grass in the forest glades and the last of the wild apples for her eating . And this finger and all the others marked the many days he had hunted for her.

At first he thought she had gone roving though he had tried so hard to tell her that was dangerous. Then, for a very black time, he had believed that They had taken her as they took anything which they found which was different and beautiful.

Only her tracks which had been so plain in the forest mold had not led to the west from which the hunters and the tree killers came. He had trailed and sniffed and hunted himself, only to be baffled in the end. For it would seem that Frost-Fair might have mounted into the sky for any trace which remained behind now. Since that he had wandered here and there remembering all her favorite places and finding no trace at all.

Already They had cut and burnt through many of those. Now only the spring, which trickled down hereabout to join the river and now was hidden by the mist, was the last of their happy places.

He listened to all the forest voices about him, even the leaves rustled now, not in answer to wind but out of fear lest those would come tramping to slay and burn, and make an end to the world.

However, the leaves were full of their own fear and so was all the world about him. No one spoke of Frost – Fair. Was he the only one who remembered her now?

Slowly Fanus rose to his hands and knees and then drew himself down to the stream's edge. The thickness of the fog was like a many leafed bush to close about him. He



dabbled his hands in the chill water and then made a cup of them so he might drink.

He was very thin for he had spent little time in a harvesting of early berries or hunting for the earth hidden bulbs which were his food. And his head felt queer and dizzy when he moved too quickly.

It must have been the dullness which had crept so upon him during his search, that made him now see that wisp of white flutter and continue to look at it so long before he felt a great surge of hope and dared to believe----  
- He caught at that strand and raised it quickly to his nose. It was a tuft of white hair right enough and he sniffed the never to be forgotten scent of moonflowers. Frost-Fair!

Fanus wavered up, stamping his mud – streaked hoofs deeper in the sand of the stream bank. He wound the length of hair about his wrist, using finger tips and teeth to make it fast there.

The scent of it was fresh. Frost-Fair might have been here this very day! Where? Fanus turned slowly, his head under the weight of stubby horns high, his nose wider, to catch any scent no matter how faint.

Now he whistled---a call which he had used for so many times in the past that his lips seemed to shape it all of their selves without any willing from him.

"Cooooommmmmeeeee!" the sound might be a little shrill but that was what it meant, "Cooooommmeee tooo mmeeee!"

Only, when he listened after that call had gone out there was no answer. No quick whinny of welcome, no pounding of small hooves on the forest floor.

Yet Frost-Fair had been here and-----

Fanus' whole body jerked as he heard that other sound. It burst forth from the horn They used to summon

their hounds so there be a chase through the forest--a hunting of some frightened creature who ran through what had been its home and was now a place of despair and death.

Frost-Fair! Fanus did not know how he knew that the one which fled was his beauty, his charge, and friend. But that was so he had no doubt at all.

His stump of a tail thumped stiff and hard against his body. His chest arched as he drew in a deep breath. Yes, now he could hear the yapping of the dogs. And the chase was heading toward him! Once before he had beaten those running hunters at their own game. The effort had left him weak for two sun times after. But it had worked. Suppose now he could cut across Frost-Fair's path and get the hounds to follow him instead? It was the only thing he could think of.

He ran at his best pace, not from that horns and hounds but toward them. And all the time he sniffed the air, striving to catch the scent of the white coated beauty---

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Now! His head turned, then he was down on one knee to look upon the rotted leaves under one of the huge trees which grew at the heart of the wood. No! He had been right! Too many times he had seen those delicate prints. And the odor of moonflowers was strong and warm.

He must not call. Better that Frost-Fair went free with him behind, He thrust his hands deep into the hoof--printed mold and stirred it swiftly, setting there--in his own musky odor. For a whole dangerous moment he squatted there, trying to make sure the stronger scent of his own flesh covered that other. Then he, too, began to run, to the right--toward the wood crowned mountains just as Frost-Fair had turned left.

Twice he stopped to listen, and, at last, he caught the excited bay of what must be the lead hound---after him. They had reached the roiling of the trail and were now running feet behind Fanus.

Tricks he knew, those flashed into his head as he ran and dodged, waded through water, swung from one tree held vine to another. At first he had been leaving only a clear trail, however the farther he was hunted the more he began to conceal his passing. There was no reason to be torn by hound's teeth if they were all so teased away to follow him.

His breath came fast and there was a pain beginning beneath his ribs. Twice he stumbled and once would have rolled to the bottom of a gully if he had not caught at some ragged bushes, their thorns digging deeply into his hands and arms.

On and on! The land was rising now; those were first slopes of the mountains. He was far from those parts of the forest he knew best and he could not foresee ahead to where he might find refuge or at least have a chance of throwing the hunt off his trail.

Still surely Frost-Fair was safe for now. He must keep the hunt aware of him as long as he could.

Panting, his hands pressed to his aching side, Fanus leaned against the rough barked trunk of a massive tree. There were no longer any vines or he might have climbed, knowing that the hounds could not follow. Yet they would ring round such a refuge keeping him there until THEY came. There would be the nick of an arrow on string, then---

Fanus shook his head. Drops of sweat fell like the tears he had shed earlier. He raised his hands and, with their horny stubs of nails, scratched down the tree bark.

No, without growing wings he had no chance to escape here .

There came a flicker of light to his left. He jumped, putting the tree to his back. Facing out. Then----

NO! Had he not been panting so hard he would have cried that aloud.

Pure as moonlight among the trees she came, picking a way with her small shining hooves as if she had never heard the horn and hounds, as if this were just any day and they were meeting as they always had.

"Nooooooooo — ——" he wailed. "Ruuunnnn- — — oh, runnn- — — —"

She only bobbed her head so the golden tip of her horn caught a bit of light shifting down among tree branches, to blaze like a star in the frosty night of the cold season. She trotted on, though he waved his hands and arms trying to warn her off. Her large dark eyes were fixed on him as if there were need of a message. Then she was close enough so that horn tip touched him before the sleek white hide on her shoulder rubbed against his own dark brown hair. It was the old invitation she had always given him.

"Mount and Ride" to Fanus it was as clear as if she spoke aloud in his own tongue. "Mount and we shall run with the wind, with the water, we shall hunt----"

Hunt! A horn bellowed and the hounds yapped in answer.

Fanus struck at the arch of Frost-Fair's neck, striving to make her back away--to listen and flee. He must---his whole body shook with fear as he thought of what he must do. He must allow himself to be seen, to stumble along until the hounds dragged him down, that was the only

answer now. But this stubborn Frost-Fair might still get away!

There was a flicker of light which was not sun, but which dazzled his eyes for an instant. Frost-Fair neighed and in her deep call he read refusal, doubt, the beginning of anger.

She reached forward her head and her teeth closed on his shoulder, drawing him away from the tree, bringing him with her into the open where a fallen tree had long ago beaten an open space in the woodland.

That flicker of bedazzling light swept down towards them and seemed to hover for an instant over Frost-Fair. As if she had been called, she shook her head vigorously, after loosing her hold on Fanus. She reared on her hind legs and pawed in the direction of the brilliant patch as if she was offering to do battle with it.

The hounds! That last baying had come from very near this time. Fanus snatched for one of the branches of the fallen tree only to have it turn to rotting powder in his hold. He could find no weapon!

At last Frost—Fair was obeying him. Rearing and plunging as if she were fighting some invisible rope, she was going out of the clearing, back toward the mountain slope.

Fanus scrambled to the top of the fallen tree. He could see a hole there, perhaps he could hide--if once Frost-Fair were free. She had indeed vanished behind the standing giants though he thought he could still see a flicker of the light which had stung his eyes with its flashing.

He scrambled along the tree trunk and found the hole, not deep enough to take all of him but perhaps it would give him part shelter. He had his hands on the edge

of it when the first of the hounds burst out into the small clearing and leaped, jaws fringed with foam, for him.

Paws scabbled on the dusty bark. But it could not reach him. Only there was more and more of them. Two hands in number, they ringed him around now taking turns in leaping at him, snapping jaws only a fraction away from his sweating body.

The horn sounded and now came the first of Them. They were elf-like in appearance but much heavier and coarser of face. While their hate for the woodlands and those who dwelt there was like a dark cloak which each of them wore.

"Hallloooooo!" The first of the hunters put his rounded hand to his lips and cried out that summons. He did not have one of those weapons which could and did send a swift shaft through the air to kill. Instead he carried a short spear in one hand and he charged forward with that. Then he pulled his mount in so quickly that the horse reared, and he sat staring at Fanus as if the woods dweller were a dragon hatchling or some such fearsome thing.

"Demon!"

The 'rider shouted that strange word which Fanus did not understand, though he believed that it meant all harm to him.

There was a second rider come into the clearing--- then a third. It was he who kicked and beat the dogs away from their attack upon the fallen tree. But it was the second rider who loosed a rope from about his waist and fashioned a noose of one end of it while they spoke loudly one to the other and stared at Fanus.

Here was hate and fear such as the woodsboy had never known. THESE were truly black evil, even as the forest dwellers had guessed. They did not kill him quickly as he had thought they would do---no, it was in their

minds to take him captive and that was more of a horror than to die.

He dodged the first throw of that rope. But, because one of the hounds broke from the rest of the pack and headed in the direction Frost – Fair had gone and Fanus had watched him, hunched in upon himself, waiting for the beast to give tongue, that the second cast of the rope caught him, settling about his shoulders. The noose jerked tight with a vicious force which brought him sliding out of the poor half refuge he had taken, down towards the hounds.

The third rider went among the animals, kicking and shouting, until those withdrew into a semi – circle about the tree and it was into the opening among the very heart of his enemies that Fanus was pulled. He landed roughly on the ground, the air forced out of him. And pain of that bruising fall brought with it more fear.

They had him and he could not even be sure that Frost-Fair had escaped. A second sharp pull on the rope dragged him up to his knees, then the slack end of the rope was laid across his shoulders in a lashing blow.

So he stood at last within the circling of the hounds, the three towering horses larger by a third than Frost – Fair, and the three enemies of the woodlands. He who held the rope remounted and twisted the loose end about his saddle horn. He made a gesture with his hand and the hounds were once more on their feet to snarl and snap at the captive.

Thus stumbling and falling, to be dragged, rising again when a hound's teeth grazed his pelt, Fanus was taken. But Frost – Fair's trail had apparently not been picked up and the hunters appeared satisfied with netting only the woodsboy.

He had already been weary when he had met Frost-Fair. To that weariness was now added the burden of fear as he wavered forward with the hounds shuffling and growling around him, plainly kept from attack only by the will of the riders.

These talked loudly among themselves, continuing to look back over their shoulders as if he presented some wonder they could not understand. Though he feared, Fanus determined that these would not know it so he stamped along stiffly on his two hooves, his head as high as he could hold it. That word which had first been shouted at him-- "demon" was repeated again and again until he was sure that it was meant to name him.

He was also certain that the rider who so led him was deliberately jerking on the rope, causing him to fall and be dragged for a painful step or two before he could win to his feet again. And he wondered when this torment of a journey would be over at last.

They came out, as the evening shadows were beginning to thicken, into a large gash in the woodland where the trees had been hacked, to lie dying on the ground, and men continued to score their trunks with axes.

Shouting, those same men came to crowd about the hunting party, pointing and talking loudly as they surveyed Fanus. Then came two more of these, wearing shining metal on their bodies, who cleared a path for a third whose cloak was the brilliant scarlet of new spilled blood. He surveyed Fanus with a look of wonder which became excitement and at his orders the rope end was loosed from the saddle and thrown to one of the metal coated men. Once more Fanus was brought forward at another's bidding and far from gently.



He who wore the scarlet cloak made a quick gesture with his hands and waved the guard who drew the woodsboy forward to an abrupt stop. There came hurrying another of the forest destroyers and he was wrapped in black as dark as the shadows of a moonless night. It was he who ordered them to take another loop around the feet of Fanus and then draw him roughly along to have the ropes fastened to a stake from which he could not loosen himself. There he lay full in the light of a fire which those who would destroy all the green world fed with wood from which the sap still dripped and a thick smoke arose to join the night's shadow.

One of those who wore the metal upon his body settled down not too far away and kept his eyes upon Fanus. Whenever the woodsboy looked at him he made faces as horrible as might a troll and gestured with his sword as if he would move to cut unkempt head from befurred body.

For sometime Fanus merely lay unmoved and then he began to think beyond the fear of his capture. What they would do with him now he did not know but he was sure they meant him no good at all.

The destroyers had finished their slaying for the day and came to the fire over which they hung great pots aboil until the steam arose. Fanus was sickened by that smell for he knew that it came from the bodies of those who dwelt in the green treed forest, some with whom he might even have played and journeyed in days past.

All that he could cling to now was the knowledge that Frost-Fair was gone---along with that brilliant glimmer--and he was certain that shine in the air was no trick of these who worked here. He did not have his fingers free for the counting, but he remembered again how those of the forest had gone---the elves, the giants, the tree and earth spirits, and those of his own blood. He was

the last of his kind---just as Frost-Fair had no other kin. Because each was alone they had perhaps clung the closer to each other.

Frost-Fair---Fanus closed his eyes so that he could not see the devouring fire and those about it. Frost-Fair, surely she was safe! If the hunters had brought her down he would have seen her here --either as a prisoner like himself or limply dead. For that alone he could be thankful.

The night was dark. No moon showed, for clouds gathered thick and heavy, as if drawn by the smoke of the fire's burning. Fanus heard the distant roll of the thunder drums----perhaps giants did still stay in the mountains to sound that beat and hurl their lightning spears at all comers.

A boot caught him in the ribs and he looked up to see the man of the red cloak, and he of the black standing over him.

"Demon----" That was what they called him but the rest of what black robe said was meaningless and when Fanus said nothing in reply he of the cloak kicked him again.

Once more the black robe spoke and then turned and talked with the cloaked one who called to the man in the metal shirt. That one came, reluctantly, Fanus thought, as if, even though he was bound so, he was to be feared, to try the rope knots.

Having made sure he was tightly captive the three of them left him alone again. But he remembered well the look in the black robe's eyes. There was no hope of any goodness here. But how could one expect that from those who destroyed all they touched?

At first he thought it was a star, that point of light showed in the sky over that portion of the forest which still

stood beyond the fury of the axes. But then--it was too low and it moved!

He knew of no night hunter that would so show itself. It had the seeming of that light which had guided Frost-Fair to safety. Apparently it did not fear those gathered here, but whirled slowly in dips and glides on towards the place of cut trees and uprooted brush.

And then----Fanus's throat and mouth were dry--- he could not, dared not, scream as he wanted to. That spot of white glimmering as it followed--that must be Frost-Fair! She trotted forward as she always did in her coming to him, paying no attention to those others. Surely any moment now one of the enemy might sight her and raise a cry!

Frost-Fair, an inner portion of him shouted, Frost -- Fair get you away while still you can!

Instead she moved the closer. What Fanus feared happened. There was a cry and men about the fire sat up from where they had lain to sleep, some of them with swords and bows ready for use.

That light above her head whirled down and Frost-Fair was no longer herself, rather a glistening ball rolling in toward the fire. At the same time Fanus felt a jerk on the rope which held him prisoner. Then a huge dark shape loomed over him and he was caught up by hands--or were those paws? Straightway he touched what was surely fur and slid down the slickness of that into darkness.

How long he lay in that darkness he never could tell for it was as he had slept and never dreamed. Or, if he did, he forgot his dreams when again he lay in the light and felt the rope about him twitch this way and that.

He was looking up at a creature who loomed as tall as a tree or a giant. But this was neither, rather an animal he had never seen before. Nor had he ever heard tell of

such a one. It crouched on its hind legs, balancing with a long tail behind and its huge body was covered with purplish brown fur. Still there was a green tinge to that as if some of the color of the forest had rubbed off on it.

"Ha, mouseling---"

The creature was talking to him and he could understand!

"I am Fanus," he returned, feeling that now he was caught in a dream.

"Your people left the wood long ago. Were you lazy or thick of wit that you did not go also, mouseling?"

Fanus flushed. He did not want to talk of Frost-Fair so he asked, rubbing his arms where the rope had chafed him, "Who are you? Hound of some giant?"

"I am Ealgon----"

Fanus was very still. All the queer tales which his people had once told flooded into his mind. Ealgon, the greatest of those who fought against the destroyers---who was the savior of all which grew rooted or moving on four feet---she who kept the gates of the safe place which were not open to many others such as himself.

"Great one," he said in a small voice, "why do you trouble yourself with me?"

"Why did you trouble yourself with Frost-Fair?" came a question in reply.

"We---I----" Somehow he could not find the words he wanted to say. "Frost-Fair!" He looked around but there was no sign of that shining white coat, spiraling, gold tipped horn. "Where is she?" He dared to demand, his hand going out to clutch some of the soft fur on the great leg which partially sheltered him.

"She is in the Twilight Kingdom with Thumm who led her there. But what we shall do with you now? Of that I am not sure. Those who come to destroy will not be stopped and soon the forest will be nothing. Your people have left no trail behind them----where can you live, mouseling?"

He swallowed and then said in a voice which was hardly above a whisper and which trembled, in spite of all his efforts to keep it steady:

"With Frost—Fair----" But the words trailed away as he was sure that that could never be. Where was a home for him now?

Ealgon was watching him closely with her big eyes. Now she reacted forward once more and her paw closed about him so that again he was in darkness. Also he must have slept for he did not remember anything between his first awakening and the second.

Now Ealgon had set him on his two feet and he was looking out into the most wondrous place he had ever seen. To him the forest had been mighty and beautiful but this was not the forest--it was a far different place.

There was light, for from overhead came the shine of what seemed to be stars, much closer and brighter than any he had ever seen, to make a light close to day. Trees grew and between them were plants and vines, and a small stream gurgled to itself as it crossed the space before them.

But he had only moments to see it so, for there was a company as strange as the land itself gathering before Ealgon and Fanus.

Three were winged or seemed to find their way best through the air. One was an eagle, a king among such by his size and his proud held head. Another was a creature Fanus could not put name to, yet there was nothing

frightening about its strangeness. The third seemed to be a being of cold fire who dodged and leapt as if to remain still was more than it could endure. Last came one who stepped with the same great pride as the eagle showed. In body he was like unto Frost-Fair but instead of smooth white hide, he was covered with blue feathery growth. And all of these centered their gaze upon Fanus.

"What have you brought us this time, Ealgon?" It was the blue feathered one who spoke.

"The one whom Frost-Fair sought---he who lingered above in the old world because he would not leave her, Indigo."

"He is two legged," the blue feathered one replied. "From most two legs has come the evil which has eaten up the world."

"Let him go to his own kind!" snapped the eagle. While the strange creature lighted near Indigo to nod its head with that heavy bill bobbing up and down in quick agreement.

"His own kind are gone," said Ealgon.

"The more fool he for not going with them---" retorted the eagle.

"Not so---" For the first time Fanus heard that soft voice and knew it for Frost-Fair's. "He drew the hunt from me, let himself be taken when Thumm, came for me. Fanus is friend to all of the forest. If there is no room here for him, then I shall go with him----"

For a moment all that strange company were silent. It was Ealgon who spoke first.

"His kind are also among the hunted in that other place. We cannot send him back to that world."

Indigo pawed the earth with one brilliant blue hoof.

"Ealgon made this place and brought us to it. She carries nothing within her pouch save that which is good for us. And wherein did she carry this one? In that same pouch. Therefore there is a place here for him."

Frost-Fair came on dancing feet and nudged Fanus with her soft nose. He did not realize he was crying until he tasted his own salty tears. But, as he threw his arms around Frost-Fair's neck he knew that this was such a place as all the good driven from the other world would find safety. And to be accepted here was worth all the good things he had ever known. He smiled shyly at them all as he stood by Frost-Fair.

"I— —I am with those of a real world," he said slowly, "The Twilight Kingdom," he spoke the name softly-- "Yes, this is the best of all!"

Frost-Fair neighed and Ealgon gave a nod of her massive head. He felt far warmer than he would have under the sun of midsummer-- it was a good warmth and he had Frost-Fair safe forever now.