ISAAC ASIMOV'S

Magical Worlds of Fantasy

FAERIES

This edition published by

Barnes & Noble, Inc., by arrangement with Tekno-Books.

2000 Barnes & Noble Books

ISBN 0-7607-2369-9*paperback*

Printed and bound in theUnited States of America

00 01 02 03 MP 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

BVG

CONTENTS

FAIRYLAND

Isaac Asimov

Fantasies or folk tales thought to be suitable for childrenare often called "fairy tales," partly because the mostfamous of these stories involve entities of more-than-human powers, called fairies.

The most famous of all, for instance, is the "fairy god-mother" who conies to the rescue of poor, persecuted Cinderella. This is a story that has filled countless chil-dren with the vague desire and the perceived need for afairy godmother of their own. There are also evil fairies,such as the spiteful one who wasn't invited (through amere oversight) to a princess's christening and who placed her under a curse that led her to becoming theSleeping Beauty.

The result is that we have many pictures of fairies,some of them drawn from Disney cartoons. The good fairies look like kindly and rather bumbling housewives; the bad fairies like ugly crones, indistinguishable fromwitches. We have the Blue Fairy in*Pinocchio* and Titaniain*A Midsummer Night's Dream* who look like beautifulactresses, as well as Titania's husband Oberon, who is apowerful (but fundamentally good-hearted) monarch.Most of all, we have a modern conception of fairies astiny creatures, no bigger than a thumb, with gauzy littlebutterfly-wings, like Tinkerbell in*Peter Pan*. So strongis this particular version that earlier in this century somemischievous girls made paper representations of suchdiminutive fairies, took photographs of them, and fooled Arthur Conan Doyle into believing them to be authentic. (Conan Doyle wrote the Sherlock Holmes stories, but

his hold on reality, at least in later life, was not verystrong.)

But what*are* fairies? How did they get started?

To begin with, the original word had a form that wasclosest to our modern "fay." This word, fay, derives fromLatin words meaning "faith" or "fate," so it bears astrong mystical connotation. We still say that someone is"fey" when they seem to have sense perceptions beyondthe ordinary.

The land of the fays, the region in which they live, is "faerie," the "-rie" suffix being an archaic way of saying"land of." Because "faerie" has dropped out of con-sciousness these days, it has become "fairy." Neverthe-less, this collection of stories is called*Faeries* becausemany of them are deliberately written in archaic fashion,and because "fairy" has gained a slang meaning thesedays that is far removed from what *we* are talking about.

Of course, "fairy" does not have any form that indi-cates it is referring to the place in which fays live; there-fore it has become synonymous with fay, and the region in which fays, or fairies, live is now called "fairyland."This gives us two suffixes meaning the same thing, butwe're stuck with that.

And what gave us the idea that fairies exist? The least dramatic explanation (and, therefore, the one most likely to be true) is that they are a holdover from the old naturespirits that filled the woods and fields—the nymphs andsatyrs who represented the procreative powers of nature.In their place, we now have fairies, elves, brownies,trolls, kobolds, gnomes and other spirits that appear invarious cultures and with powers and characteristics thatvary from storyteller to storyteller.

Are there more dramatic explanations? Of course.

By and large, these spirits, whatever they are called, and we might as well lump them all together as fairies,are viewed as smaller than ordinary human beings, ashidden and elusive, as generally malignant, and fre-quently, as having longings to be human.

History is full of cases in which conquering invaders attack the natives of a region (sometimes of smaller size than the newcomers) and force them back into mountainfastnesses or hidden regions. In this way, the Celts beat

back the Picts in Scotland, the Saxons beat back theWelsh, the Indo-Europeans beat back the Basques ofSpain, and so on. There would be a dim memory of thetime when the defeated people were not yet completelyeradicated; when they engaged in guerrilla activity, andraided isolated outposts of the conquerors. The storiesof the "little people" arose and, of course, were fanta-sized out of all recognition as time went on. Undoubt- edly, Americans of European descent would have hadsimilar stories to tell about Native Americans, if the per-secution and eradication of the latter had not happenedso recently, and, so to speak, in the full glare of writtenhistory.

Perhaps the most dramatic version of this theory (and,therefore, the least likely to be true) is that the talesof fairies hark all the way back to the elimination ofNeanderthal man by "modern man," some thirty to fiftythousand years ago. Neanderthals were smaller than our-selves in height but stronger in musculature, and perhapsthat is the source of the "little people" with their fright-ening power.

In any case, it is important to remember that the best-known fairies of modern times are sanitized ones pre-pared for our children. Unlike these kindly fairy god-mothers and flitting little Tinkerbells, fairies, in theiroriginal conception, were dangerous and frightening enti-ties, and faerie, or fairyland, was a place that mingledwonder, awe, and terror in equal quantities.

Some of the stories in this collection are humorous;notably the two by Kavanaugh and the one by Philip K.Dick. Others are sentimental. Most, however, are grimlypowerful in their portrayal of different and fundamen-tally hostile cultures. I call your attention particularly toSwann's "The Manor of Roses," which is the longeststory in the book and, in my opinion, the most riveting.It is a medieval tale of authentic atmosphere, and itsdescription of the "mandrakes" is almost science fictionalin its intensity. Though I enjoyed that story the most, Ican say that each story offers to the reader rewards ofits own.

HOW THE FAIRIES CAMETO IRELAND

Herminie Templeton

The most lonesome bridle-path in all Ireland leads fromTom Healy's cottage down the sides of the hills, alongthe edge of the valley, till it raiches the highroad thatskirts the great mountain, Sleive-na-mon.

One blusthering, unaisy night, Father Cassidy, on his way home from a sick call, rode over that same path. Itwasn't strange that the priest, as his horse ambled along, should be thinking of that other night in Darby O'Gill'skitchen—the night when he met with the Good People; for there, off to the left, towered and threatened Sleive-na-mon, the home of the fairies.

The dismal ould mountain glowered toward his River-ence, its dark look saying, plain as spoken words:

"How dare ye come here; how dare ye?"

"I wondher," says Father Cassidy to himself, lookingup at the black hill, "if the Good People are fallen angels, as some do be saying.

"Why were they banished from heaven? It must havebeen a great sin entirely they committed, at any rate, forat the same time they were banished the power to makea prayer was taken from them. That's why to say a piousword to a fairy is like trowing scalding wather on him. 'Tis a hard pinnance that's put on the poor crachures. Iwisht I knew what 'twas for," he says.

He was goin' on pondherin' in that way, while Terrorwas picking his steps, narvous, among the stones of theroad, whin suddenly a frowning, ugly rock seemed tojump up and stand ferninst them at a turn of the path.

Terror shied at it, stumbled wild, and thin the most

aggrewating of all bothersome things happened—thehorse cast a shoe and wint stone lame.

In a second the priest had leaped to the ground andpicked up the horseshoe.

"Wirra! Wirra!" says he, lifting the lame foot, "whydid you do it, allannah? 'Tis five miles to a smith an' seven miles to your own warm stable."

The horse, for answer, raiched down an' touched with his soft nose the priest's cheek; but the good man looked rayproachful into the big brown eyes that turned sorrow-ful to his own.

With the shoe in his hand the priest was standin' fret-ting and helpless on the lonesome hillside, wondheringwhat he'd do at all at all, whin a sudden voice spoke upfrom somewhere near Terror's knees.

"The top of the avinin' to your Riverence," it said;"I'm sorry for your bad luck," says the voice.

Looking down, Father Cassidy saw a little cloaked fig-ure, and caught the glint of a goold crown. 'Twas BrianConnors, the king of the fairies, himself, that was in it.

His words had so friendly a ring in them that the clar-gyman smiled in answering, "Why, thin, good fortune toyou, King Brian Connors," says the good man, "an' saveyou kindly. What wind brought you here?" he says.

The king spoke back free an' pleasant. "The boys touldme you were comin' down the mountainy way, and Icame up just in time to see your misfortune. I've sentfor Shaun Rhue, our own farrier—there's no betther inIreland; he'll be here in a minute, so don't worry," says the king.

The priest came so near saying "God bless ye," thatthe king's hair riz on his head. But Father Cassidy stopped in the nick of time, changed his coorse, an'steered as near a blessing as he could without hurting theMaster of the Good People.

"Well, may you never hear of trouble," he says, "tillyou're wanted to its wake," says he.

"There's no trouble to-night at any rate," says theking, "for while Shaun is fixing the baste we'll sit in the shelter of that rock yonder; there we'll light our pipesand divart our minds with pleasant discoorsin' and wiseconvarsaytion."

While the king spoke, two green-cloaked little menwere making a fire for the smith out of twigs. So quickdid they work, that by the time the priest and the fairyman could walk over to the stone and sit

themselves inthe shelther, a thousand goold sparks were dancin' in thewind, and the glimmer of a foine blaze fought with thedarkness.

Almost as soon, clear and purty, rang the cheerfulsound of an anvil, and through the swaying shadows a dozen busy little figures were working about the horse.Some wore leather aprons and hilt up the horse's hoofwhilst Shaun fitted the red hot shoe; others blew thebellows or piled fresh sticks on the fire; all joking, laugh-ing, singing, or thrickin'; one couldn't tell whether 'twasplaying or workin' they were.

Afther lighting their pipes and paying aich other anarmful of complayments, the Master of Sleive-na-mon and the clargyman began a sayrious discoorse about thedeloights of fox hunting, which led to the considerationof the wondherful wisdom of racing horses and the dis-graceful day-ter-ray-roar-ation of the Skibberbeg hounds.

Father Cassidy related how whin Ned Blaze's stee-plechasin' horse had been entered for the Connemarra Cup, an' found out at the last minute that Ned feared tolay a bet on him, the horse felt himself so stabbed to theheart with shame by his master's disthrust, that he trewhis jockey, jumped the wall, an', head in the air, gallopedhome.

The king then tould how at a great hunting meet, whinthree magistrates an' two head excises officers were inthe chase, that thief of the worruld, Let-Erin-Ray-mimber, the chief hound of the Skibberbeg pack, insteadof follying the fox, led the whole hunt up over the moun-tain to Patrick McCaffrey's private still. The entirecounthryside were dhry for a fornit afther.

Their talk in that way dhrifted from one pleasant sub-ject to another, till Father Cassidy, the sly man, says aisyan' careless, "I've been tould," says he, "that before theGood People were banished from heaven yez were allangels," he says.

The king blew a long thin cloud from be wixt his lips,felt his whuskers thoughtful for a minute, and said:

"No," he says, "we were not exactly what you mightcall angels. A rale angel is taller nor your chapel."

"Will you tell me what they're like?" axed Father Cas-sidy, very curious.

"I'll give you an idee be comparison what they're like," the king says. "They're not like a chapel, and they're not like a three, an' they're not like the ocean,"says he. "They're different from a goint—a great daledifferent—and they're dissembler to an aygle; in factyou'd not mistake one of them for anything you'd everseen before in your whole life. Now you have a purtygood ideeah what they're like," says he.

"While I think of it," says the fairy man, a vexed frownwrinkling over his forehead, "there's three young bache-lors in your own parish that have a foolish habit of callin'their colleens angels whin they's not the laste likeness—not the laste. If I were you, I'd preach ag'in it," says he.

"Oh, I dunno about that!" says Father Cassidy, fitting a live coal on his pipe. "The crachures*must* say thimthings. If a young bachelor only talks sensible to a sensi-ble colleen he has a good chanst to stay a bachelor. An thin ag'in, a gossoon who'll talk to his sweetheart aboutthe size of the petatie crop'll maybe bate her whin they'reboth married. But this has nothing to do with your histor-ical obserwaytions. Go on, King," he says.

"Well, I hate foolishness, wherever it is," says thefairy. "Howsumever, as I was saying, up there in

heaven they called us the Little People," he says; "millions ofus flocked together, and I was the king of them all. Wewere happy with one another as birds of the same nest,till the ruction came on betwixt the black and the white

"How it all started I never rightly knew, nor wouldn't ask for fear of getting implicayted. I bade all the LittlePeople keep to themselves thin, because we had plentyof friends in both parties, and wanted throuble withnayther of them.

"I knew ould Nick well; a civiler, pleasanter spokensowl you couldn't wish to meet—a little too sweet in his ways, maybe. He gave a thousand favors and civilities tomy subjects, and now that he's down, the devil a word I'llsay ag'in him."

"I'm ag'in him," says Father Cassidy, looking very stern; "I'm ag'in him an' all his pumps an' worruks. I'll go bail that in the ind he hurt yez more than he helpedyez."

"Only one thing I blame him for," says the king; "he sajooced from the Little People my comrade and bestfriend, one Thaddeus Flynn be name. And the way thatit was, was this. Thaddeus was a warm-hearted littleman, but monsthrous high-spirited as well as quick-tem-pered. I can shut me eyes now, and in me mind see himthripping along, his head bent, his pipe in his mouth, hishands behind his back. He never wore a waistcoat, butkept always his green body-coat buttoned. A tall caubeenwas set on the back of his head, with a sprig of greenshamrock in the band. There was a thin rim of black whiskers undher his chin."

Father Cassidy, liftin' both hands in wondher, said: "If I hadn't baptized him, and buried his good father beforehim, I'd swear 'twas Michael Pether McGilligan of thisparish you were dayscribin'," says he.

"The McGilligans ain't dacint enough, nor rayfinedenough, nor proud enough to be fairies," says the king, wavin' his pipe scornful. "But to raysume and to con-tinue," he says.

"Thaddeus and I used to frayquint a place they calledthe battlements or parypets—which was a great gooldwall about the edge of heaven, and which had wide stepsdown on the outside face, where one could sit, pleasant avenings, and hang his feet over, or where one'd standbefore going to take a fly in the fresh air for himself.

"Well, agra, the night before the great battle, Thadyand I were sitting on the lowest step, looking down intoleague upon league of nothing, and talking about theworld, which was suxty thousand miles below, and hell,which was tunty thousand miles below that ag'in, when who should come blusthering over us, his black wingshiding the sky, and a long streak of lightning for a spear inhis fist, but Ould Nick.

" 'Brian Connors, how long are you going to bedownthrodden and thrajooced and looked down upon—you and your subjects?' says he.

" 'Faix, thin, who's doing that to us?' asks Thady,standing up and growing excited.

" 'Why,' says Ould Nick, 'were you made little pigmiesto be the laugh and the scorn and the mock of the whole world?' he says, very mad; 'why weren't you made intoangels, like the rest of us?' he says.

" 'Musha,' cries Thady, 'I never thought of that.'

" 'Are you a man or a mouse; will you fight for yourrights?' says Sattin. 'If so, come with me and be one of us. For we'll bate them black and blue to-morrow,' hesays. Thady needed no second axing.

" 'I'll go with ye, Sattin, me dacent man,' cried he.'Wirra! Wirra! To think of how downthrodden we are!'And with one spring Thady was on Ould Nick's chowld-ers, and the two flew away like a humming-bird ridingon the back of an aygle.

" 'Take care of yerself, Brian,' says Thady, 'and comeover to see the fight; I'm to be in it, and I extind youthe inwitation,' he says.

"In the morning the battle opened; one line of blackangels stretched clear across heaven, and faced anotherline of white angels, with a walley between.

"Every one had a spaking trumpet in his hand, likeyou see in the pictures, and they called aich other hard names across the walley. As the white angels couldn'tswear or use bad langwidge, Ould Nick's army had atfirst in that way a great advantage. But when it came tohurling hills and shying tunderbolts at aich other, theblack angels were bate from the first.

"Poor little Thaddeus Flynn stood amongst his own, inthe dust and the crash and the roar, brave as a lion. Hecouldn't hurl mountains, nor was he much at flinginglightning bolts, but at calling hard names he was ayquilto the best.

"I saw him take off his coat, trow it on the ground, and shake his pipe at a thraymendous angel. 'You owdaciousvillain,' he cried. 'I dare you to come half way over,' he says."

"My, oh my, whin the armies met together in the ralehandy grips, it must have been an illigent sight," says Father Cassidy. " 'Tis a wondher you kep' out of it,"says he.

"I always belayved," says the king, "that if he can helpit, no one should fight whin he's sure to get hurted, onless it's his juty to fight. To fight for the mere sportof it, when a throuncin' is sartin, is wasting your time and hurtin' your repitation. I know there's plenty thinksdifferent," he says, p'inting his pipe. "I may be wrong,an' I won't argyfy the matther. 'Twould have been bet-ther for myself that day if I had acted on the otherprinciple.

"Howsumever, be the time that everybody was side-stepping mountains and dodging tunderbolts, I says tomyself, says I, 'This is no place fer you or the likes ofyou.' So I took all me own people out to the battlementsand hid them out of the way on the lower steps. We'dno sooner got placed whin—whish! a black angel shotthrough the air over our heads, and began falling down,down, and down, till he was out of sight. Then a score of his friends came tumbling over the battlements; imagetlyhundreds of others came whirling, and purty soon it wasraining black wings down into the gulf.

"In the midst of the turmile, who should come jumpingdown to me, all out of breath, but Thady.

" 'It's all over, Brian; we're bate scandalous,' he says,swinging his arms for a spring and balancing himself upand down on the edge of the steps. 'Maybe you wouldn'tthink it of me, Brian Connors; but I'm a fallen angel,'says he.

" 'Wait a bit, Thaddeus Flynn!' says I. 'Don't jump,'I says.

" 'I must jump,' he says, 'or I'll be trun,' says he.

"The next thing I knew he was swirling and dartingand shooting a mile below me.

"And I know," says the king, wiping his eyes with hiscloak, "that when the Day of Judgment comes I'll haveat laste one friend waiting for me below to show me thecoolest spots and the pleasant places.

"The next minute up came the white army with pres-ners—angels, black and white, who had taken no side inthe battle, but had stood apart like ourselves.

" 'A man,' says the Angel Gabriel, 'who, for fear ofhis skin, won't stand for the right when the right is in danger, may not desarve hell, but he's not fit for heaven.

Fill up the stars with these cowards and throw the lavin'sinto the say,' he ordhered.

"With that he swung a lad in the air, and gave him afling that sent him ten miles out intil the sky. Every othergood angel follyed shuit, and I watched thousands go,till they faded like a stretch of black smoke a hundredmiles below.

"The Angel Gabriel turned and saw me, and I mustconfess I shivered.

" 'Well, King Brian Connors,' says he, 'I hope you seethat there's such a thing as being too wise and too cuteand too ticklish of yourself. I can't send you to the stars,bekase they're full, and I won't send you to the bottom-less pit so long as I can help it. I'll send yez all down tothe world. We're going to put human beans on it purty soon, though they're going to turn out to be blaggards,and at last we'll have to burn the place up. Afther that, if you're still there, you and yours must go to purdition,for it's the only place left for you.

" 'You're too hard on the little man,' says the AngelMichael, coming up—St. Michael was ever the outspo-ken, friendly person—'sure what harm, or what hurt, or what good could he have done us? And can you blamethe poor little crachures for not interfering?'

" 'Maybe I was too harsh,' says the Angel Gabriel,'but being saints, when we say a thing we must stick toit. Howsumever, I'll let him settle in any part of the world he likes, and I'll send there the kind of human beans he'd wish most for. Now, give your ordher,' hesays to me, taking out his book and pencil, 'and I'll makefor you the kind of people you'd like to live among.'

" 'Well,' says I, 'I'd like the men honest and brave,and the women good.'

" 'Very well,' he says, writing it down; 'I've got that—go on.'

" 'And I'd like them full of jollity and sport, fond ofracing and singing and hunting and fighting, and all suchinnocent divarsions.'

'You'll have no complaint about that,' says he.

" 'And,' says I, 'I'd like them poor and parsecuted,bekase when a man gets rich, there's no more fun in

him.'

" 'Yes, I'll fix that. Thrue for you,' says the AngelGabriel, writing.

" 'And I don't want them to be Christians,' says I;'make them Haythens or Pagans, for Christians are too much worried about the Day of Judgment.'

" 'Stop there! Say no more! If I make as fine a raceof people as that I won't send them to hell to plaze you, Brian Connors,' says the saint, shutting up the book, 'goyour ways; you have enough.'

"I clapped me hands, and all the Little People stoodup and bent over the edge, their fingers pointed like swimmers going to dive. 'One, two, three,' I shouted; and with that we took the leap.

"We were two years and tunty-six days falling beforewe raiched the world. On the morning of the next daywe began our sarch for a place to live. We thraveledfrom north to south and from ayst to west. Some grewtired and dhropped off in Spain, some in France, and others ag'in in different parts of the world. But the mostof us thraveled ever and ever till we came to a lovelyisland that glimmered and laughed and sparkled in themiddle of the say.

" 'We'll stop here,' I says; 'we needn't sarch farther,and we needn't go back to Italy or Swizzerland, for ofall places on the earth, this island is the nearest likeheaven; and in it the County Clare and the County Tip-perary are the purtiest spots of all.' So we hollowed outthe great mountain Sleive-na-mon for our home, andthere we are till this day."

The king stopped a while, and sat houldin' his chin in his hands. "That's the thrue story," he says, sighing piti-ful. "We took sides with nobody, we minded our ownbusiness, and we got trun out for it," says he.

So intherested was Father Cassidy in the talk of theking that the singing and hammering had died out with-out his knowing, and he hadn't noticed at all how thedarkness had thickened in the valley and how the stillness had spread over the hillside. But now, whin the chief of the fairies stopped, the good man, half frightened at thesilence, jumped to his feet and turned to look for hishorse.

Beyond the dull glow of the dying fire a crowd of Little

People stood waiting, patient and quiet, houlding Terror,who champed restless at his bit, and bate impatient withhis hoof on the hard ground.

As the priest looked toward them, two of the littlemen wearing leather aprons moved out from the others,leading the baste slow and careful over to where the goodman stood beside the rock.

"You've done me a favyer this night," says the clargy-man, gripping with his bridle hand the horse's mane, "an'all I have to pay it back with'd only harry you, an' makeyou oncomfortable, so I'll not say the words," he says.

"No favyer at all," says the king, "but before an hourthere'll be lyin' on your own threshold a favyer in the shape of a bit of as fine bacon as ever laughed happy inthe middle of biling turnips. We borryed it last nightfrom a magisthrate named Blake, who lives up in the County Wexford," he says.

The clargyman had swung himself into the saddle.

"I'd be loath to say anything disrayspectful," he saysquick, "or to hurt sensitive feelings, but on account of my soul's sake I couldn't ate anything that was come bydishonest," he says.

"Bother and botheration, look at that now!" says theking. "Every thrade has its drawbacks, but I never raya-lized before the hardship of being a parish priest. Can'twe manage it some way. Couldn't I put it some placewhere you might find it, or give it to a friend who'd sendit to you?"

"Stop a minute," says Father Cassidy. "Up at Tim
Healy's I think there's more hunger than sickness, more
nade for petaties than for physic. Now, if you sent that
same bit of bacon-----"

"Oh, ho!" says the king, with a dhry cough, "the Hea-ly's have no sowls to save, the same as parish priests have."

"I'm a poor, wake, miserable sinner," says the priest,hanging his head; "I fall at the first temptation. Don't send it," says he.

"Since you forbid me, I'll send it," says the king,chucklin'. "I'll not be ruled by you. To-morrow the Hea-ly's'll have five tinder-hearted heads of cabbage, makin'love in a pot to the finest bit of bacon in Tipperary—

that is, unless you do your juty an' ride back to warnthem. Raymember their poor sowls," says he, "an' don'tforget your own," he says.

Thepriest sat unaisy in the saddle. "I'll put all theraysponsibility on Terror," he says. "The baste has no sowl to lose. I'll just drop the reins on his neck; if he turns and goes back to Healy's I'll warn them; if he goeshome let it be on his own conscience."

He dhropped the reins, and the dishonest baste started for home imagetly.

But afther a few steps Father Cassidy dhrew up an'turned in the saddle. Not a sowl was in sight; there wasonly the lonely road and the lonesome hillside; the lastglimmer of the fairy fire was gone, and a curtain of soft blackness had fallen betwixt him an' where the blaze had been.

"I bid you good night, Brian Connors," the priestcried. From somewhere out of the darkness a woice called back to him, "Good night, your Riverence."

THE MANOR OF ROSES

Thomas Burnett Swann

I am thirty-five, a woman of middle years, and yet inthis time of pox and plague, of early death and the dyingof beauty before the body dies, it is said that I am stillas beautiful as a Byzantine Madonna, poised in theheaven of a gold mosaic and wearing sorrow like a robeof white petals. But sorrow is not a gown. It is a naked-ness to the searching eye of the curious, to the magpie -tongued who love to pry out grief:

She grieves too long. . . The Manor demands an heir . . . Who will defendus from the encroaching forest, the thieves and the Man-drake People?

It was eleven years ago, in the year 1202 of Our Lord, that my husband's comrade-in-arms, Edmund-the-Wolf,rode to me with the news of my husband's death and, asif for compensation, the riches captured before he had died in battle. Captured? Pillaged, I should say, in thesack of Constantinople. You see, it is a time when menare boys, rapacious and cruel, as ready to kill a Jew, aHungarian, a Greek as an Infidel; happy so long as theywield a sword and claim to serve God. A time when boys who have not yet grown to their fathers' pride-Crusading, it is called—are the only true men.

And yet I loved my husband, a red-haired Norman,gay as the men of the South, and not like most of our stern northern people. I loved him for his gaiety, his hairthe color of Roman bricks, and because he left me a son.

But the Crusader's code, like an evil demon of pox,also possesses children. Only last year in France and Ger-

many, Stephen proclaimed his message from Christ, Nicholas piped his irresistible flute, and the children yearned to them as tides to the moon and flowed in asea of white immaculate robes toward the shores of thatgreater sea, the Mediterranean.

Little of the madness crossed to England. Perhaps ourchildren are not inclined to visions, perhaps they preferthe hunt to the drafty halls of a church and talks withGod. But the madness, missing the thousands, somehowtouched my son. He rode to London, astride his roanpalfrey and dressed in a jerkin of sheepskin dyed to the yellow of gorse, with a leather belt at his waist and a fawn-colored pouch a-jingle with new-minted pennies.Ready to board a ship for Marseilles and join Stephen.But Stephen and most of his army were sold as slaves tothe Infidel; Nicholas died of the plague before he reached the sea; and my son of fifteen summers, reaching Lon-don, stood on the banks of the Thames to choose whattwin-castled ship would bear him across the channel, andfell to the blade of a common cut-purse. The Devil, Ithink, possessed the children, a jest to fling like a gaunt-let in the teeth of God.

God is not blind, however. In less than a year, He sent me those other children, struck with the same madness:John, a dark-haired Norman; Stephen, a Saxon butnamed like the boy of France; and Ruth, whom theycalled their guardian angel (but no one knew if she camefrom Heaven or Hell.) God, I felt, had made me Hisinstrument to preserve them from my own son's ruin.Was He wrong to trust me with so precious and difficulta task? I tried, Mother of God I tried! I sheltered themfrom the Mandrakes of the forest. Loved them, hurtthem, and then at the last—

But you shall judge me...

He ran blinded by tears across the heath, startlingbirds into flight, pheasants and grouse enough to feast a king. Conies peered from their nests and submerged likefrogs in a pond with a dull, simultaneous plop. Didn't they know that he, timorous John, who had lost his bow in the woods and scattered the arrows out of his quiver,was not a creature to fear? He had come from the hunt with his father, lord of Goshawk Castle, and the knights

Robert, Arthur, Edgar and the rest. The names of theknights were different, their features almost identical.Rough hands, calloused from wielding swords against theInfidel—and their fellow Englishmen. Cheeks ruddy withmead and not with the English climate. Odorous bodiesenveloped by fur lined surcoats which they pridefully wore even in the flush of summer, instead of imitatingthe villeins with their simple breech-clouts or their trou-sers without tunics. Lank, sweat-dampened hair, long inthe back and cut in a fringe across their- foreheads.

John, the Baron's son, had been allowed the first shot at a stag beleaguered by hounds. He was not a goodbowman, but the stag had been much too close to missexcept by design. Once, gathering chestnuts with hisfriend Stephen, the shepherd, he had seen the same ani-mal, a splendid beast with horns like wind-beaten treesalong the North Sea.

"He isn't afraid of us," Stephen had whispered.

"Nor has he reason to be," said John. "We wouldnever harm him. He's much too beautiful."

Now, the animal had turned and looked at him withrecognition, it seemed, and resignation; harried by hounds, bemused in a clump of bracken. John had firedhis arrow above the antlers. The stag had escaped, burst-ing out of the bracken as if the coarse ferns were blades of grass and leveling three dogs with his adamantinehooves.

"Girl!" his father had shouted, hoarse with rage atlosing a feast and a pair of antlers to grace his barren hall. "I should get you a distaff instead of a bow!"

For punishment John was bladed. After the knightshad downed a smaller animal, a young doe, they had stretched him across the warm, bloody carcass and eachman had struck him with the flat of his sword. Most of the knights had softened their blows. After all, he wastheir liege-lord's son. But his father's blow had left himbleeding and biting his tongue to hold back shamefultears.

Then they had left him.

"Go to the kennels and get your friend Stephen todry your tears," his father had sneered. A coarse guffawgreeted the taunt. Stephen was said to have lain with

every villein's daughter between twelve and twenty, andmen without daughters liked to jest: "Girls weep till Ste-phen dries their tears."

Alone in the woods, John forgot his shame; he wastop frightened. Just turned twelve, he knew of desperatethieves, sentenced to die by the rope, who had takenrefuge among the sycamores which remembered theRomans, and the oaks which had drunk the blood ofDruid sacrifices. As for animals, there were wolves andbears and long-tusked boars, and amphisbaenas too, thetwin-headed serpents, and griffins with scaly wings.Worst of all, there were the Mandrake People who,grown like roots, clambered out of the ground to jointheir kin in acts of cannibalism.

Where could he go? Not to the castle, certainly, wherethe hunters had doubtless climbed in a broad woodentub to scrape the grime of weeks from each other's backs,while kitchen wenches doused them with buckets ofsteaming water and ogled their naked brawn. Once, thecastle had held his mother. Its darkness had shone withthe whiteness of her samite; its odors were masked with the cloves and the

cinnamon, the mace and the musk ofher kitchen; its bailey had bloomed with a damson tree whose seeds had come from the Holy Land, and delicateshallots, the "Onions of Ascalon," had reared theirtender shoots around the tree, like little guardiangnomes.

"If there must be fruits of war," she had said, "wemust see that they are living things, not dead; sweet things, not bitter; soft things, not hard. The verdure ofearth and not the gold from dead men's coffers."

Six years ago she had died of the pox. Now, when heknelt on the stone floor of the chapel, he prayed to Father, Son, and Mary, but Mary was Mother.

No, he could not go to the castle. He could but he didnot wish to visit the Abbot's cottage and face anotherlesson in logic and astrology, Lucan and Aristotle. Hewas a willing, indeed a brilliant scholar. But there were times to study and times to look for Stephen. In spite ofhis father's taunt, it was time to look for Stephen. It wasnot that his friend was soft or womanish like a sister. Hewas, in fact, as rough-swearing, ready-to-fight a boy as

ever tumbled a girl in the hay. But he curbed hisroughness with John, respected his learning, and ignored his weaknesses.

Stephen was a Saxon villein three years older thanJohn. His forebears, he rightly claimed, had once been powerful earls. But the conquering Normans had reducedthem to the status of serfs and attached them to theirown former lands, which had once held a wooden hall surrounded by a palisade, but now a castle built by John'sgrandfather, a square stone keep encircled by curtainwalls whose gatehouse was toothed with a rusty portcullis and guarded by archers in hidden embrasures. Stephen'sparents were dead, killed by the Mandrake People in one of their swift forays out of the forest to steal sheep and hogs. It was on that very day, two years ago, that he andStephen had become inseparable friends. John had foundhim crouching above his mother's body. John, who didnot even know his name, had laid a tentative arm aroundhis shoulders—an act of extraordinary boldness for oneso shy—and half expected a snarled rebuff or even ablow. But Stephen had buried his head in the arms ofhis master's son and sobbed convulsively without tears.It was not long before they agreed to adopt each otheras brothers and, cutting their forearms with a huntingknife, mingled their blood to cement the bond.

From that time till now, Stephen had lived in a loft above the kennels, dog-boy, shepherd, farmer, fighter with fists and cudgel second to none. He could not readEnglish, much less French and Latin, but the wolvesfeared his cudgel and grown men his fists. How couldyou best describe him? Angry, sometimes, but angry*for*things and not against them. For the serfs and the squalorin which they lived; the dogs which were run too hard inthe hunt and gored by wild boars; the animals killed forsport and not for food. Sometimes, too, he was glad:loudly, radiantly, exuberantly keen on things; drawing a bow, feeding his dogs, swinging a scythe.

At other times he was neither angry nor glad, butbeyond anger and gladness; enraptured by dreams: of meeting an angel or finding Excalibur or, best of all,buying his freedom and becoming a Knight Hospitaler tosuccor pilgrims and slaughter Infidels ("But you would

have to take an oath of chastity," John reminded him."I'll think about that when the time comes," said Ste-phen). Furthermore, he was one of those rarest of rarit-ies, a dreamer who acts on his dreams, and lately he hadtalked about the ill-fated Children's Crusade, and how itwas time for other Stephens, other

Nicholases, to followthe first children and, armed with swords instead ofcrosses, succeed where they had failed.

It was John's unspeakable fear that Stephen wouldleave for Jerusalem without him, and yet he did not knowif he had the courage for such a journey, through thedark Weald to London and then by ship to Marseillesand the ports of Outre-Mer, the Outer Land, the SaracenLand. Now, he quickened his pace and thought of argu-ments with which to dissuade his friend. He met oldEdward scything in the Common Meadow; a tattered breechclout around his loins, his face and shoulders as coarse and brown as a saddle ridden from London toEdinburgh. Edward did not look up from his task, normiss a stroke of the scythe. "Why look at the sky?" heliked to mutter. "It belongs to angels, not to serfs."

"Have you seen Stephen?" John asked.

Swish, swish, swish went the scythe, and the weedscollapsed as if they had caught the plague.

"Have you seen Stephen?"

"I'm not deaf," the old man growled. "Your father'staken my youth, my pigs, and my corn, but not my ears.Not yet, anyway. Your friend'll be losing his, though,'less he does his work. He oughta be here in the Meadowright now."

"But where is he?" cried John in desperation.

"Making for the Roman Place with that look in his eyes. That's where he hides, you know. Daydreams. Didn't even speak to me."

The Roman Place. The ruin where the Romans hadworshipped their sun-god, Mithras, in an undergroundvault. Later, by way of apology to the Christian God,the Saxons had built a timber church to conceal the spotand turned the vault into a crypt for their dead. Duringthe Norman Conquest, women and children had hiddenin the church, and the Normans had set a torch to the roof and burned the building with all of its occupants.

The charred and mis-shapen remnants were almost con-cealed—healed, as it were—by flowering gorse, and afew blackened timbers, which thrust like seeking handsfrom the yellow flowers, summoned no worshippers to the buried gods.

A stranger would not suspect a vault beneath thegorse, but John parted the spiny branches and climbed through a narrow hole to a flight of stairs. A sacrednessclung to the place, a sense of time, like that of a Druidstone which lichen had aged to a muted, mottled orange and which thrust at the stars as if to commune with themin cosmic loneliness. Here, the worshippers of Mithrashad bathed themselves in the blood of the sacrificial bulland climbed through the seven stages of initiation tocommune with the sun instead of the stars. A nasty pagan rite, said the Abbot, and John had asked him why Jeho-vah had ordered Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. "It was onlya test," snapped the Abbot.

"But what about Jephthah's daughter?*She* wasn't atest." The Abbot had changed the subject.

Already, at twelve, John had begun to ask questionsabout the Bible, God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost. To Stephen, religion was feeling and not thought. God wasa patriarch with a flowing beard, and angels were almostas real as the dogs in his kennel. With John it was differ-ent. Only the Virgin Mary was not a

subject for doubts,arguments, but a beautiful, ageless woman robed insamite, dwelling in the high places of the air or almostat hand, outshining the sun and yet as simple as bread, grass, birds, and Stephen's love; invisible but never unreachable.

At the foot of the stairs he faced a long, narrow cavewith earthen walls which contained the loculi of Chris-tians buried in their cerements and which converged tothe semi-circle of an apse. Now, the apse was empty ofMithras slaying the sacred bull and Mary holding theinfant Christ. Stephen knelt in their place. He held a waxen candle which lit the frescoed roof: Jesus walking on water; multiplying loaves and fish; bidding the blindto see and the lame to walk.

"John," he gasped, "I have found—"

"A Madonna!"

She lay in a nest of bindweed shaped to a simple pallet.Her face was an ivory mask in the light of the candle. Acarved Madonna, thought John, from the transept of aFrench cathedral, but flushed with the unmistakableardors of life. No, he saw with a disappointment whichapproached dismay, she was much too young for the Vir-gin; a mere girl.

"An angel," said Stephen.

"An angel," sighed John, resenting her youthfulness.What did he need with a second angel, a girl at that? God (or the Virgin Mary) had sent him Stephen, angelicbut not female and certainly not effeminate, his hair ariot instead of an aureole, his face more ruddy than pink:a Michael or Gabriel fit for sounding a trumpet insteadof strumming a lyre.

The angel stirred and opened her eyes with a prettyfluttering; not with surprise or fright, but almost, thoughtJohn, with artful calculation, like some of the rustic lasseswho flocked to Stephen's loft. Her teeth were as whiteas her linen robe, which was bound at the waist by a cordof cerulean silk. Her pointed slippers, unicorn leathertrimmed with blue velvet, were such as might be wornin the soft pastures of heaven. She lacked only wings. Orhad she concealed them under her robe? John wastempted to ask.

Stephen forestalled him. "Greet her," he whispered."Welcome her!"

"In what language?" asked John sensibly. "I don'tknow the tongues of angels."

"Latin, I should think. She must know that, with allthe priests muttering their Benedicites."

Stephen had a point. Rude English was out of thequestion, and also the French of the Normans, who, afterall, had descended from barbarous Vikings.

"Quo Vadis?" asked John none too politely.

Her smile, though delectable, no doubt, to Stephen,did not answer the question.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated in NormanFrench.

Stephen, who understood some French, franticallynudged him. "You shouldn't question an angel. Welcomeher! Worship her! Quote her a psalm or a proverb."

"We aren't sure she's an angel. She hasn't told us, hasshe?"

At last she spoke. "I do not know how I came here,"she said in flawless Latin and, seeing the blankness onStephen's face, repeated the words in English, but witha grave dignity which softened the rough tongue. At the same time, John noticed the crucifix which she held orrather clutched in her hands: a small Greek cross witharms of equal length, wrought of gold and encrusted withstones which he knew from his studies, though not fromhis father's castle, were the fabulous pearls of the East."I remember only a darkness, and a falling, and a great forest. I wandered until I found the passage to this cave,and took shelter against the night. I must have been very tired. I feel as if I have slept for a long time." She liftedthe cross and then, as if its weight had exhausted herslender hands, allowed it to sink becomingly against her breast.

"I suppose," said John with annoyance, "you'rehungry."

Stephen sprang to his feet. "But angels don't eat!Can't you see, John? God has sent her to us as a sign! To lead us to the Holy Land! Stephen of France had hismessage from Christ. We have our angel."

"But look what happened to Stephen of France. Soldas a slave or drowned in the sea. Only the sharks knowwhich."

"I don't think he's dead. And if he is, then he listenedto the Devil's voice and not to God's. But we can *see*our angel."

"Indeed, you can see me," she said, "and you oughtto see that I am famished. Angels do eat, I assure you—at least when they travel—and something more substan-tial than nectar and dew. Have you venison perhaps?Mead?"

"You must take her to the castle," said Stephen,clearly reluctant to part with his new-found angel. "I've nothing so fine in the kennels."

"No," said John. "I'm not taking anyone to the castle.I've decided to stay with you in the kennels."

"Because of your father?"

"Yes. He bladed me before all of his men, and then

he called me a-----" He could not bring himself to

repeat the taunt, especially to Stephen. "He called me a churl. Because I missed a stag.*Our* stag. The one wepromised never to harm."

Stephen nodded with understanding. "I'm glad youmissed him. They say he's the oldest stag in the forest. They say"—and here he lowered his voice—"that he isn'ta stag at all, but Merlin turned to a beast by Vivian. ButJohn, how can you live with me in the kennels? It wouldwound your father's pride. A baron's son sharing a loftwith a dog-boy! He'd give you more than a blading, and as for me! You mayn't remember he cut off my father'sears because he broke a scythe. And now with an angelon our hands, the

only thing to do is—"

"Get the angel off our hands?"

"Leave at once for the Holy Land. I have a little foodin the kennels, a change of wear. You needn't go backto the castle at all. We've only to follow the RomanRoad through the Weald to London, and take ship toMarseilles, and from thence proceed to Outre-Mer."

"But Marseilles was where the French Stephen fell inthe hands of slavers."

"But we have a guide!"

"If she isn't really an angel—"

"At least we'll have made our escape from the castle."

"You mean we should leave the castle*forever* ?"The prospect of leaving his father exhilarated him; he wouldfeel like a falcon with its hood removed. But the castleheld all of his possessions, his codex,*The Kings of Brit*-ain,written on the finest vellum and bound betweenivory covers; and the parchment containing his favoritepoem, "The Owl and the Nightingale," copied labori-ously by his own precise hand. Much more important, itheld his mother's ghost, his sum of remembering: stairsshe had climbed, tapestries woven, garments mended; his mother living in song what she could not live in life andsinging of noble warriors and deathless loves:

See, he who carved this wood commands me to ask You to remember, oh treasure-adorned one,The pledge of old . . .

"Leave my father's castle," he repeated, "and notcome back? Ever?"

Stephen's face turned as red as the Oriflamme, thefiery banner of the French kings.*"Your father's castle?*This land belonged to my ancestors when yours were scurvy Vikings! You think I'll stay here forever as dog-boy and shepherd? Serving a man who blades his ownson? Giving him what I grow and what I hunt, and askinghis leave to take a wife? John, John, there's nothing foreither of us here. Ahead of us lies Jerusalem!"

To Stephen, the name was a trumpet blast; to John, a death knell. "But a forest stands in the way, and then a channel, and a rough sea swarming with Infidels. They have ships too, you know, swifter than ours and armedwith Greek Fire."

But Stephen had gripped his shoulders and fixed nunwith his blue, relentless gaze. "You know I can't leaveyou."

"You know you won't have to," sighed John.

The angel interrupted them, looking a little peevedthat in their exchange of pleas and protestations, of male endearments, they were neglecting their quest and theirinspiration. "As for leading you to the Holy Land, Idon't even know this forest through which you say youmust pass. But here in the ground it is damp, and beforeI came here, I did not like the look of the castle. Itseemed to me dark and fierce, with a dry ditch and agloomy keep, and narrow windows without a pane ofglass. A fortress and not a home. If

indeed I am anangel, I hope to find dwellings more pleasant here on earth. Or else I shall quickly return to the sky. In themeantime, let us set off for London, and you shall leadmeuntil I begin to remember."

The angel between them, they climbed the stairs to thesun and, skirting old Edward, who was still busily scyth- ing in the Common Meadow, came at last to the kennels.It was mid-day. The Baron and his knights had remainedin the castle since the hunt. His villeins, trudging out of the fields, had gathered in the shade of the watermill toenjoy their gruel and bread. Had anyone noticed thequick, furtive passage of the would-be Crusaders, he would have thought them engaged in childish sports, or

supposed that Stephen had found a young wench to sharewith his master's son and probably muttered, "It's hightime."

While Stephen's greyhounds lapped at their heels, theyclimbed to his loft above the kennels to get his fewbelongings: two clover-green tunics with hoods for wintry days; wooden clogs and a pair of blue stockings whichreached to the calf of the leg; a leather pouch bulgingwith wheaten bread and rounds of cheese; a flask of beer;and a knotted shepherd's crook.

"For wolves," said Stephen, pointing to the crook."I've used it often."

"And Mandrakes," asked John wickedly, hoping tofrighten the angel.

"But we have no change of clothes for a girl," saidStephen.

"Never mind," she smiled, guzzling Stephen's beer andmunching his bread till she threatened to exhaust thesupply before they began their journey. "When my robe grows soiled, I shall wash it in a stream and," she addedarchly, "the two of you may see if I am truly an angel."

The remark struck John as unangelic if not indelicate.As if they would spy on her while she bathed!

But Stephen reassured her. "We never doubted youwere. And now—" A catch entered his voice. Quicklyhe turned his head and seemed to be setting the loft in order.

"We must leave him alone with his hounds," whis-pered John to the angel, leading her down the ladder.

A silent Stephen rejoined them in the Heath. His tunicwas damp from friendly tongues and his face was wet,but whether from tongues or tears, it was hard to say.

"You don't suppose," he said, "we could take one ortwo of them with us? The little greyhound without anytail?"

"No," said John. "My father will stomp and shoutwhen he finds us gone, but then he'll shrug: 'Worthless boys, both of them, and no loss to the castle.' But stealone of his hounds, and he'll have his knights on our trail."

"But our angel has no name," cried Stephen suddenlyand angrily, as if to say: "As long as she's come to take

me from my hounds, she might at least have brought aname."

"I*had* a name, I'm sure. It seems to have slipped mymind. What would you like to call me?"

"Why not Ruth?" said Stephen. "She was always going on journeys in the Bible, leading cousins and such, wasn'tshe?"

"A mother-in-law," corrected John, who felt that,what with a Crusade ahead of them, Stephen should know the Scriptures.

"Leading and*being* led," observed the angel, whose memory, it seemed, had begun to return. "By two strap-ping husbands. Though," she hurried to explain, "not atthe same time. Yes, I think you should call me Ruth."

She is much too young for Ruth, thought John, whoguessed her to be about fifteen (though of course as anangel she might be fifteen thousand). The same age asStephen, whose thoughts were attuned to angelic visionsbut whose bodily urges were not in the least celestial.Unlike a Knight Templar, he had made no vow of chas-tity. The situation was not propitious for a crusade in thename of God.

But once they had entered the Weald, the largest for-est in southern England, he thought of Mandrakes andgriffins instead of Ruth. It was true that the Stane, anold Roman highway, crossed the Weald to join Londonand Chichester—they would meet it within the hour—but even the Stane was not immune to the forest.

At Ruth's suggestion, they carefully skirted the groundsof a neighboring castle, the Boar's Lair.

"Someone might recognize John," she said. "Send word to his father."

"Yes," John agreed, staring at the Norman tower, oneof the black wooden keeps built by William the Con-queror to enforce his conquest. "My father and Philipthe Boar were once friends. Philip used to dine with uson Michaelmas and other feast days, and I played thekettledrums for him. Since then, he and my father havefallen out about their boundaries. They both claim a cer-

tain grove of beechnut trees—pannage for their swine. Philip wouldn't be hospitable, I'm sure."

Deviously, circuitously, by way of a placid stream andan old water wheel whose power no longer turned mill-stones and ground wheat into flour, they reached theRoman Stane. Once a proud thoroughfare for uncon-querable legions, it had since resounded to Saxon, Vik-ing, and Norman, who had used it for commerce and war but, unlike the conscientious Romans, never repaired theravages of wheels and weather. Now, it had shrunk in places to the width of a peasant's cart, but the smoothRoman blocks, set in concrete, still provided a path forriders and walkers and great ladies in litters between twohorses.

"I feel like the Stane," sighed Ruth, "much-troddenand a trifle weedy." She had torn the edge of her robe on prickly sedges and muddied the white linen. She hadlost the circlet which haloed her head, and her silkentresses, gold as the throats of convolvulus flowers, hadspilled like their trailing leafage over her shoulders. As for John, he was hot, breathless, and moist with sweat,and wishing that like a serf he dared to remove his long-sleeved tunic and revel in his breechclout.

"Stephen," Ruth sighed, "now that we've found theroad, can't we rest a little?" Her speech, though still

melodious, had relaxed into easy, informal English.

"We've just begun!" he laughed. "London lies daysaway. We want to be leagues down the road before night."

"But it's already mid-afternoon. Why not rest till itgets a little cooler?"

"Very well," he smiled, reaching out to touch her ingood-humored acquiescence. Stephen, who found diffi-culty with words, spoke with his hands, which were neststo warm a bird, balms to heal a dog, bows to extract themusic from swinging a scythe, wielding an ax, gatheringbranches to build a fire. He could gesture or point ortouch with the exquisite eloquence of a man who wasdeaf, dumb, and blind. When you said good morning to him, he clapped you on the shoulder. When you walkedwith him, he brushed against you or caught you by thearm. He liked to climb trees for the rough feel of the

bark or swim in a winter stream and slap the icy currentsuntil he warmed his body. But he saved his touch forthings or the people he loved. Neither ugly things nor unkind people.

"We'll rest as long as you like," he said.

Ruth smiled. "I think I should borrow one of yourtunics. You see how my robe keeps dragging the ground."

With a flutter of modesty she withdrew to a clump ofbracken and changed to a tunic.

"Watch out for basilisks," John called after her."Their bite is fatal, you know." He muttered under his breath to Stephen: "First she ate your food, and now shewears your clothes."

"Ourfood and clothes," reproved Stephen. "Remem-ber, we're Crusaders together."

John was shamed into silence. He had to listen to Ruthas she bent branches, snapped twigs, and rustled cloth,almost as if she wished to advertise the various stages ofher change. He thought of the wenches—ten? twenty?—who had disrobed for Stephen. The subject*love* confusedhim. The Aristotelian processes of his brain refused tosift, clarify, and evaluate the problem; in fact, they crum- pled like windmills caught in a forest fire. He had lovedhis mother—what was the word?—filially; Stephen he loved fraternally. But as for the other thing, well, he hadnot been able to reconcile the courtly code as sung by thetroubadours—roses and guerdons and troths of deathless fidelity—and the sight of Stephen, surprised last year inhis loft with a naked wench and not in the least embar- rassed. Stephen had grinned and said: "In a year or so, John, we can wench together!" The girl, snickering andmaking no effort to hide her nakedness, had seemed tohim one of those Biblical harlots who ought to be shorn,or stoned. Who could blame poor Stephen for yieldingto such allurements! As for himself, however, he hadsworn the chivalric oath to practice poverty, chastity, andobedience to God. He had thought of a monastery but rather than part with Stephen, who was not in the leastmonastic, he was willing to try a life of action.

"Has a crow got your tongue?" smiled Stephen. "I

didn't mean to scold." He encircled John's shoulder withhis arm. "You smell like cloves."

John stiffened, not at the touch but at what appearedto be an insinuation. He had not forgotten his father'staunt: "Girl!" According to custom, it was girls andwomen who packed their gowns in clove-scented chests,while the men of a castle hung their robes in the roomcalled the*garderobe,* another name for the lavatory cut in the wall beside the stairs, with a round shaft droppingto the moat. The stench of the shaft protected the room—and the robes—from moths.

"They belonged to my mother," he stammered. "Thecloves, I mean. I still use her chest."

"My mother put flowering mint with her clothes," saidStephen. "AH two gowns! I like the cloves better, though. Maybe the scent will rub off on me. I haven'tbathed for a week." He gave John's shoulder a squeeze, and John knew that his manhood had not been belittled.But then, Stephen had never belittled him, had he?Teased him, yes; hurt him in play; once knocked him down for stepping on the tail of a dog; but never madelight of his manliness.

"It's not a dangerous road," Stephen continued, talk-ative for once, perhaps because John was silent. "Theabbots of Chichester patrol it for brigands. They don'tcarry swords, but Gabriel help the thief who falls afoulof their staves!"

"But the forest," John said. "It's all around us like apride of griffins. With green, scaly wings. They look asif they're going to eat up the road. They've already nib-bled away the edges, and"—he lowered his voice—"shecame out of the forest, didn't she?"

Stephen laughed. "She came out of the sky, simpleton!Didn't you hear her say she don't know nothing aboutthe forest?"

Before John could lecture Stephen on his lapse in grammar, Ruth exploded between them, as green as a down in the tenderness of spring. She blazed in Stephen'stunic, its hood drawn over her head. She had bound herwaist with the gold sash from her robe and, discardingher velvet slippers, donned his wooden clogs, whose veryugliness emphasized the delicacy of her bare feet. She

had bundled her linen robe around her slippers andcrucifix.

"No one would ever guess that I'm an angel," she smiled. "Or even a girl."

"Not an angel," said Stephen appreciatively. "But agirl, yes. You'd have to roughen your hands and hide your curls to pass for a boy."

She made a pretence of hiding her hair, but furtively shook additional curls from her hood the moment they resumed their journey, and began to sing a familiar songof the day:

In a valley of this restless mind,

I sought in mountain and in mead .. .

Though she sang about a man searching for Christ, the words rippled from her tongue as merrily as if she weresinging a carol. John wished for his kettledrums and Ste-phen began to whistle. Thus, they forgot the desolationof the road, largely untraveled at such an hour and look-ing as if the griffin-scaly forest would soon complete itsmeal.

Then, swinging around a bend and almost trampling them, cantered a knight with a red cross painted on hisshield—a Knight Templar, it seemed—and after him, ona large piebald palfrey, a lady riding pillion behind aservant who never raised his eyes from the road. Theknight frowned at them; in spite of the vows demandedof his order, he looked more dedicated to war than to God. But the lady smiled and asked their destination.

"I live in a castle up the road," said John quickly inNorman French. Unlike his friends, he was dressed in the mode of a young gentleman, with a tunic of plum-colored linen instead of cheap muslin, and a samite belt brocaded with silver threads. Thus, he must be their spokesman. "I have come with my friends to search forchestnuts in the woods, and now we are going home."

The knight darkened his frown to a baleful glare andreined his steed, as if he suspected John of stealing a finetunic to masquerade as the son of a gentleman. Boys ofnoble birth, even of twelve, did not as a rule go nutting with villeins whom they called their friends, and not atsuch an hour.

"We have passed no castle for many miles," hegrowled, laying a thick-veined hand on the hilt of his sword.

"My father's is well off the road, and the keep is low,"answered John without hesitation. "In fact, it is calledthe Tortoise, and it is*very* hard to break, like a tortoiseshell. Many a baron has tried!"

"Mind you get back to the Tortoise before dark," thelady admonished. "You haven't a shell yourself, and theStane is dangerous after nightfall. My protector and I arebound for the castle of our friend, Philip the Boar. Is itfar, do you know?"

"About two leagues," said John, and he gave herexplicit directions in French so assured and polished thatno one, not even the glowering knight, could doubt his Norman blood and his noble birth. It was always true ofhim that he was only frightened in anticipation. Now,with a wave and a courtly bow, he bade them God-speed to the castle of the Boar, received a smile from the lady,and led his friends toward the mythical Tortoise.

"Such a handsome lad," he heard the lady exclaim,"and manly as well."

"If I hadn't been so scared," said Stephen, once acomfortable distance separated them from the knight, hislady, and the unresponsive servant, "I'd have split mytunic when you said your castle was named the Tortoise.There isn't a castle for the next ten miles! It's the first fib I ever heard you tell."

"You were scared too?" asked John, surprised at suchan admission.

"You can bet your belt I was! They were lovers, youknow. Bound for a tryst at the castle of the Boar. Hewinks at such things, I hear. Runs a regular brothel forthe gentry, including himself. That lady has a husband somewhere, and the Knight Templar might just have runus through to keep us from carrying tales."

With the fall of darkness, they selected a broad and voluminous oak tree, rather like a thicket set on the mastof a ship, and between them the boys helped Ruth toclimb the trunk. With nimble hands, she prepared a nestof leaves and moss in the crook of the tree and, having removed her clogs and hidden them, along with her cru-

cifix, settled herself with the comfort of perfect familiar-ity. She seemed to have a talent for nests, above or belowthe ground.

After she had eaten some bread and cheese and drunk beer, she returned to the ground, stubbornly refusingassistance from either boy, and showed herself a more than adept climber.

"Is she angry with us?" asked John.

"She drank all that beer," explained Stephen, "andwhile she's gone—"

They scrambled to the edge of the nest and, bracing themselves against a limb, aimed at the next oak. Glee-fully, John pretended that Ruth was crouching under thebranches.

He was sorry to see her emerge from an elm insteadof the inundated oak and rejoin them in the nest.

"I was looking for rushes to keep us warm," she said. "But I didn't find a single one. We'll have to lie closetogether." She chose the middle of the nest, anticipating,no doubt, a boy to warm her on either side, and Stephenobligingly stretched on her left.

With the speed and deftness of Lucifer disguised as aserpent, John wriggled between them, forcing Ruth tothe far side of the nest. Much to his disappointment,she accepted the arrangement without protest and leanedagainst him with a fragrance of galangal, the aromaticplant imported from Outre-Mer and used as a base forperfume by the ladies of England.

"The stars are bright tonight," she said. "See, John, there's Arcturus peeping through the leaves, and there'sSinus, the North Star. The Vikings called it the Lamp ofthe Wanderer."

Stephen nudged him as if to say: "You see! Only an angel knows such things."

"Stephen," he whispered.

"Yes?"

"I'm not afraid anymore. Of leaving the castle. Not even of the forest!"

"Aren't you, John?"

"Because I'm not alone."I told you we were safe with our angel."

"I don't mean the angel." He made a pillow of Ste-

phen's shoulder, and the scent of dogs and haylofts,effaced Ruth's galangal.

"Go to sleep, little brother. Dream about London—and the Holy Land."

But fear returned to John before he could dream. Atan hour with the feel of midnight, chill and misty and hushed of owls, he was roused by the blast of a horn anda simultaneous shriek like that of a hundred

otters caughtin a millwheel. The sounds seemed to come from a dis- tance and yet were harsh enough to make him throw uphis hands to his ears.

"Hunters have found a Mandrake!" cried Stephen, sit-ting up in the nest. "It's a moonless night, and it mustbe just after twelve. That's when they hunt, you know.They blow on a horn to muffle the shriek. Let's see whatthey've caught."

But John was not eager to leave the tree. "If they'vekilled a Mandrake, they won't want to share it. Besides,they might be brigands."

Ruth had also been roused by the shriek. "John isright," she said. "You shouldn't want to see such a horri-ble sight. A baby torn from the earth!"

"I'll stay and keep Ruth company," said John, butStephen hauled him out of the nest and sent him slippingand scraping down the trunk.

"But we can't leave Ruth alone!" he groaned, pickinghimself up from a bed of acorns.

"Angels don't need protection. Hurry now, or we'llmiss the hunters."

They found the Mandrake hunters across the road anddeep among the trees, a pair of rough woodsmen, fatherand son to judge from their height, build, and flaxenhair, though the elder was as bent and brown as a much-used sickle, and his son wore a patch over one of hiseyes. The woodsmen were contemplating a dead Man-drake the size and shape of a new-born baby, except for the dirt-trailing tendrils, the outsized genitals, and the greenish tangle of hair which had grown above groundwith purple, bell-shaped flowers. The pathetic body twitched like a hatcheted chicken. Dead at its side andbound to it by a rope lay a dog with bloody ears.

Though the night was moonless and the great stars,

Arcturus and Sirius, were veiled by the mist of the forest,one of the hunters carried a lantern, and John saw theMandrake, the dog, the blood in an eerie, flickering lightwhich made him remember Lucifer's fall to Hell andwonder if he and Stephen had fallen after him.

One of the woodsmen saw them. "Might have gottenyourselves killed, both of you," he scolded, digging bees-wax out of his ears with his little finger. "Laid out likethat old hound with busted eardrums." He removed along-bladed knife from his tunic and under his father'sdirection—"no, no, clean and quick... cut it, don'tbruise it"—sliced the Mandrake into little rootlike por-tions, resinous rather than bloody, which he wrapped instrips of muslin and placed carefully in a sharkskinpouch.

"One less of the devils," muttered the father, unbend-ing himself to a rake instead of a sickle. "Another weekand it'd have climbed right out of the ground. Joined itsfolk in the warrens."

"A Richard's ransom in aphroaphro*disiacs*!" stuttered the son, completing the word with a flourish of triumph.The market for Mandrake roots was lucrative and inex-haustible: aging barons deserted by sexual powers; loverswhose love was unrequited. From Biblical times, thetimes of Jacob and Leah, the root had been recognizedas the one infallible aphrodisiac. Yes, a Richard's ransomwas hardly an overstatement. A man would pay gold andsilver, land and livestock, to win his love or resurrect hislust.

When the woodsmen had finished their grisly disec-tion, the son smiled at the boys and offered them a frag-ment the size of a small pea. "You fellows put this in agirl's gruel, and she'll climb all over you."

"He doesn't need it," said John, intercepting the gift. "Girls climb over him as it is. Like ants on a crock of sugar!"

"But you need it, eh?" laughed the son, winking hissingle eye at John. One-eyed serfs were common in France and England, and most of them had lost their eyes to angry masters and not in fights. Perhaps the young woodsman had not been prompt to deliver fire-

wood for the hearth in a great hall. "Now you'll be thecrock. But where's the sugar?"

"He'll have it," said Stephen, noticing John's embar-rassment. "Sugar enough for a nest! Give him a year ortwo. He's only twelve." Then he pointed to the carcassof the dog. "Did you have to use a greyhound? Couldn't you have done it yourselves? After all, you had the waxin your ears."

"Everyone knows a dog gives a sharper jerk. Gets thewhole Mandrake at once. Lake pulling a tooth, root andall. Besides, he was an old dog. Not many more years inhis bones. We can buy a whole kennel with what wemake from the root."

When the men had departed, talking volubly about the sale of their treasure at the next fair, and how they would spend their money in secret and keep their lord from hiscustomary third, the boys buried the dog.

"I wish they had put beeswax in his ears too," saidStephen bitterly. "And see where they whipped him to make him jump!"

"Beeswax doesn't help a dog," said John. "At least Iread that in a bestiary. His ears are so keen that the shriek penetrates the wax and kills him anyway."

"It's no wonder the Mandrakes eat us. The way wedrag their babies from the ground and cut them up! If itweren't for my parents, I could pity the poor little brutes.Now, a lot of dirty old men will strut like coxcombs andchase after kitchen wenches."

"I suppose," said John, who had furtively buried thefragment of Mandrake with the dog, "the question is, who started eating whom first." Then he clutched Ste-phen's hand and said: "I think I'm going to be sick."

"No, you're not," said Stephen, steadying John with his arm, "We're going back to the tree and get some sleep."

But Stephen was trembling too; John could feel thetremors in his arm. He's sad for the dog, he thought. I won'tbe sick. It would only make him sadder.

Ruth was waiting for them with a look which they could not read in the misted light of the stars.

"We're sorry we left you so long," said Stephen, "butthe hunters had just killed a Mandrake, and . . ."

"I don't want to hear about it."

"Mandrakes can't climb trees, can they?" asked John."The parents might be about, you know."

"Of course they can climb trees," said Stephen, whowas very knowledgeable about the woods and improvisedwhat he did not know. "They*are* trees, in a way. Rootsat least."

"Do you think they suspect we're up here? They can'tsee us, but can they sniff us out?"

"I wish you two would stop talking about Mandrakes,"snapped Ruth. "You would think they surrounded us, when everyone knows the poor creatures are almostextinct."

"Stephen's parents were killed by Mandrakes," saidJohn sharply. He would have liked to slap the girl. Shehad a genius for interruptions or improprieties. It was proper and generous for Stephen to express compassion for a Mandrake baby, but unforgivable for this ignorant girl to sympathize with the whole murderous race. Herethereal origins now seemed about as likely to him as anangel dancing on the head of a pin, a possibility which,to John's secret amusement, his Abbot had often debated with utmost seriousness.

Ruth gave a cry. "I didn't know."

"How could you?" said Stephen. "At least the oneswho killed my parents fought like men. They didn't sneakup in the dark. They stormed out of the forest beforedusk, waving their filthy arms and swinging clubs. Wehad a chance against them—except my mother, who wasbringing us beer in the fields. We were haying at thetime and we had our scythes for weapons. They only gotone of us besides my parents, and we got four of them.It's the females who're really dangerous—the young ones who pass for human and come to live in the towns. Themales can't do it; they're much too hairy right from thestart, and—well, *you* know. Too well endowed. But thelittle girls look human, at least on the outside. Inside, it's a different matter—resin instead of blood; brownskeletons which're—what would you call them, John?"

"Fibrous."

Ruth listened in silence and shrank herself into a littleball. Like a diadem spider, thought John, with brilliant

gold patterns. Drawing in her legs and looking half hersize.

"Tell her about them, John," said Stephen, who wasgetting breathless from such a long speech. "You know the whole story." And then to Ruth: "He knows every-thing. French, English, Latin. All our kings and queensfrom Arthur down to bad old King John. Even thosenaughty pagan goddesses who went about naked andmarried their brothers."

John was delighted to continue the history. He likedto deliver lectures, but nobody except Stephen ever lis-tened to him.

"In the old days, before the Crusades," said John, whowarmed to his tale like a traveling story teller, "in theold days the Mandrakes lived in the forest, and they wereso dirty and hairy that you could never mistake them forhuman. They weren't particular about their diet. Theyliked any meat—animal or human—and they trappedhunters in nets and roasted them over hot coals and then strewed their bones

on the ground as we do with drum-sticks at Michaelmas." Here, like a skilled jongleur, hepaused and looked at Ruth to gauge the effect of histale. The sight of her reassured him. If she pressed any harder against the edge of the nest, she would roll fromthe tree. "But one day a little Mandrake girl wanderedout of the forest, and a simple blacksmith took her fora lost human child, naked and dirty from the woods, and took her into his family. The child grew plump andbeautiful, the man and his wife grew peaked, and every-one said how generous it was for a poor blacksmith togive his choicest food—and there wasn't much food thatwinter for anyone—to a foundling. But in the summerthe girl was run down and killed by a wagon loaded withhay. The townspeople were all ready to garrot thedriver—until they noticed that the girl's blood was a mix-ture of normal red fluid and thick, viscous resin."

"What does 'viscous' mean?" interrupted Stephen.

"Gluey. Like that stuff that comes out of a spider whenshe's spinning her web. Thus, it was learned that Man-drakes are vampires as well as cannibals, and that themore they feed on humans, the less resinous their bloodbecomes, until the resin is almost replaced, though their

bones never do turn white. But they have to keep on feeding or else their blood will revert.

"Well, the Mandrakes heard about the girl—from arunaway thief, no doubt, before they ate him—and howshe had 'passed' until the accident. They decided to sendsome more of their girls into the villages, where life waseasier than in the forest. Some of the Mandrakes slippedinto houses at night and left their babies, well-scrubbedof course, in exchange for humans, which they carried off into the woods for you can imagine what foul pur-poses. The next morning the family would think that thefairies had brought them a changeling, and everyoneknows that if you disown a fairy's child, you'll have badluck for the rest of your life. It was a long time before the plan of the Mandrakes became generally knownaround the forest. Now, whenever a mother finds astrange baby in her crib, or a new child wanders intotown, it's usually stuck with a knife. If resin flows out,the child is suffocated and burned. Still, an occasional Mandrake does manage to pass.

"You see, they aren't at all like the Crusaders in thelast century who became vampires when they marchedthrough Hungary—the Hungarian campfollowers,remember, gave them the sickness, and then the Crusad-ers brought it back to England. They had to break theskin to get at your blood, and they had a cadaverouslook about them before they fed, and then they grewpink and bloated. It was no problem to recognize and

burn them. But the Mandrake girls, by pressing their lipsagainst your skin, can draw blood right through thepores, and the horrible thing is that they don't look likevampires and sometimes they don't even know what theyare or how they were born from a seed in the ground. They feed in a kind of dream and forget everything thenext morning."

"I think it's monstrous," said Ruth.

"They are, aren't they?" agreed John happily, satisfiedthat his story had been a success.

"Not*them*. Imean sticking babies with knives."

"But how else can you tell them from roots? It'sbecause a few people are sentimental like you that Man-drakes still manage to pass."

"Frankly," said Ruth, "I don't think Mandrakes passat all. I think they keep to themselves in the forest andeat venison and berries and*not* hunters. Now go to sleep.From what you've told me, it's a long way to London.We all need some rest."

"Good night," said Stephen.

"Sweet dreams," said Ruth

The next morning, the sun was a Saracen shield in thesky—Saladin's Shield, a Crusader would have said—andthe forest twinkled with paths of sunlight and small whitebirds which spun in the air or perched on limbs and con-stantly flickered their tails. Ruth and Stephen stood in the crook of the tree and smiled down at John as heopened his eyes.

"We decided to let you sleep," said Stephen. "You grunted like a boar when I first shook you. So we fol-lowed a wagtail to find some breakfast."

"And found you some wild strawberries," said Ruth,her lips becomingly red from the fruit. She gave him adeep, brimming bowl. "I wove it from sedges." For one who professed an ignorance of the forest, she possessed some remarkable skills.

Once on the ground, they finished their breakfast with three-cornered, burry beechnuts, which required some skillful pounding and deft fingers to extract the kernels; and Ruth, appropriating Stephen's beer, took such a gen-erous swallow that she drained the flask.

"To wash down the beechnuts," she explained.

"I don't know why the pigs like them so much," saidStephen. "They're not worth the trouble of shelling."

"The pigs don't shell them," reminded the practicalJohn.

"Anyway," continued Stephen, "we hadn't muchchoice in this part of the forest. We found a stream though." Hoisting the pouch which held their remnantsof food and their few extra garments, he said: "Ruth,get your bundle and let's take a swim."

"I hid it," she reminded him, almost snappishly."There may be thieves about. I'll get it after we swim."

All that mystery about a crucifix, thought John. As ifshe suspected Stephen and me of being brigands. Andafter she drank our beer!

The stream idled instead of gushed, and pepperwort,shaped like four-leafed clovers, grew in the quiet watersalong the banks. Stephen, who took a monthly bath in a tub with the stable hands while the daughters of villeinsdoused him with water, hurried to pull his tunic over hishead. He was justly proud of his body and had onceremarked to John, "The less I wear, the better I look.In a gentleman's clothes like yours, I'd still be a yokel. But naked—! Even gentlewomen seem to stare."

But John was quick to restore the proprieties. In thepresence of Ruth, he had no intention of showing his thin, white body, or allowing Stephen to show his radiant nakedness.

"You can swim first," he said to her. "Stephen and I will wait in the woods."

"No," she laughed. "You go first. Stephen is already down to his breechclout, and*that* is about to fall. But Iwon't be far away."

"You won't peep, will you?" John called after her, butRuth, striding into the forest as if she had a destination,did not answer him.

The stream was chilly in spite of the Saracen sun. Johnhuddled among the pepperwort, the water as high as hisknees, till Stephen drenched him with a monumentalsplash, and then they frolicked among the plants andinto the current and scraped each other's backs with sandscooped from the bottom and, as far as John was con-cerned, Ruth and the road to London could wait till theSecond Coming!

When they climbed at last on the bank, they rolled inthe grass to dry their bodies. Stephen, an expert wrestler,surprised John with what he called his amphisbaena grip;his arms snaked around John's body like the ends of thetwo-headed serpent and flattened him on the ground.

"I'm holding you for ransom," he cried, perched onJohn's chest like the seasprite Dylan astride a dolphin. "Six flagons of beer with roasted malt!"

"I promise—" John began, and freed himself with sucha burst of strength that Stephen sprawled in the grass

beneath the lesser but hardly less insistent weight ofJohn. "I promise you sixteen ticks with an abbot's rod!"

Stephen was not disgruntled. "By Robin's bow," hecried, "you've learned all my tricks!"

"I guess we had better dress," said John, releasing hisfriend to avoid another reversal. "Ruth will want to swimtoo. I hope she didn't peep," he added, looking askanceat some furiously agitated ferns beyond the grassy bank.To his great relief, they disgorged a white wagtail and not a girl. Still, something had frightened the bird.

"What do you think she would see?" laughed Stephen.

"You," said John, eyeing his friend with an admirationwhich was more wistful than envious. Stephen was a boywith a man's body, "roseate-brown from toe to crown,"to quote a popular song, and comely enough to temptan angel. When he shook his wet hair, a great armful ofdaffodils seemed to bestrew his head. A marriage of beauty and strength, thought John. For the hundredthtime he marveled that such a boy could have chosen himfor a brother; actually chosen, when they had no bondof blood, nor even of race. He peered down at himselfand wished for his clothes. At the castle he never bathedin the tub with his father's friends: only with Stephen,sometimes, in the stream of the old millwheel, or alonein the heath from his own little bucket (even in the castle,he had no private room, but slept with the rancid sonsof his father's knights).

But Stephen said: "You know, John, you're not so skinny now. You've started to fill out. The bones are there. The strength too, as you just proved. All you needis a little more meat. You'll be a man before you knowit."

"Next year?" asked John, though such a prospectseemed as far from his grasp as a fiery-plummaged phoe-nix. "You were a man at thirteen."

"Eleven. But I'm different. I'm a villein. We grow fast. With you, I'd say two or possibly three more years. Thenwe can wench together for sure."

"Who would want me when she could have you?"

Stephen led him to the bank of the stream. "Look,"he said, and pointed to their reflections in a space of clear water between the pepperworts: the bright and the

dark, side by side; the two faces of the moon. "I havemuscles, yes. But you have brains. They show in yourface."

"I don't like my face. I won't even look in those glassmirrors they bring back from the Holy Land. I alwayslook startled."

"Not as much as you did. Why, just since we left thecastle, I've seen a change. Yesterday, when you faceddown the Knight Templar, I was ready to wet mybreechclout! But you never batted an eye. And youlooked so wise. One day you'll have my muscles, but youcan bet a brace of pheasants I'll never have your brains.Come on now, let's give Ruth a chance."

At Stephen's insistence—and he had to insist vigor-ously—they bundled their tunics and wore only their breechclouts, the shapeless strips of cloth which everyman, whether priest, baron, or peasant, twisted aroundhis loins. Now they would look like field hands strippedfor a hot day's work, and John's fine tunic would notarouse suspicion or tempt thieves.

"But my shoulders," John began, "they're so white."

"They'll brown in the sun on the way to London," hesaid, and then:*"Ruth,* you can take your swim!"

He had to repeat her name before she answered in athin, distant voice: "Yes, Stephen?"

"You can swim now. You'll have the stream to your-self." To John he smiled, "She took you seriously aboutnot peeping. But you know, John,*we* didn't promise."

"You'd spy on an angel?"

Stephen slapped his back. "Now who's calling her anangel. No, I wouldn't spy. I'd just*think* about it. I'vealways wondered if angels are built like girls. Let's do a bit of exploring while she bathes. I could eat anotherbreakfast after that swim. But we mustn't stray too farfrom the stream."

Beyond a coppice of young beeches, Stephen discov-ered a cluster of slender stalks with fragrant, wispyleaves. "Fennels. Good for the fever you catch in Lon-don. We might pick a few, roots and all."

But John, thinking of Mandrakes, had no use for rootsand followed his nose to a bed of mint. "This is what your mother used to sweeten her gowns, isn't it?"

"Yes, and it's also good to eat." They knelt in themoist soil to pluck and chew the leaves, whose sweetly burning juices left them hoarse and breathless, as if theyhad gulped a heady muscatel.

But where was the stream, the road, the oak in whichthey had slept?

"The trees all look the same," said Stephen, "butthere, that old beech. Haven't we seen it before? And there, the torn ground—"

They had wandered, it seemed, to the place of theMandrake hunt. The hole remained in the earth, disturbingly human-shaped, with branching clefts fromwhich the limbs had been wrenched by the hapless dog.

"Let's get away from here," said John, as nauseaslapped him like the foul air of a*garderobe.*

"Wait," said Stephen. "There's a second hole. It's—it's where we buried the dog.*God's bowels!"* It was his crudest oath. "The dirty Infidels have dug him upand—"

Around the hole they saw a Utter of bones . . . skull. . . femur . . . pelvis...stripped of their meat and scattered carelessly through the grass.

"Stephen," said John, seizing his friend's hand. "Iknow how you feel. It was cruel of them to eat the dog. But we've got to get away from here. They'll take us forthe hunter!"

Something had waited for them.

At first it looked like a tree. No, a corpse exhumedfrom a grave with roots entwining its limbs. It wheezed;lurched; moved, swaying, toward them. It was bleached to the color of a beechnut trunk—at least, those parts ofthe skin (or was it bark?) which showed through thegreenish forest of hair (or rootlets?). Red eyes burnedin black hollows (tiny fire-dragons peering from caves,thought John). The mouth seemed a single hairlip untilit split into a grin which revealed triangular teeth likethose of a shark: to crush, tear, shred.

"Run!" screamed John, tugging at his friend, butproud Stephen had chosen to fight.

"Dog-eater!" He charged the Mandrake and used hishead for a ram.

The creature buckled like a rotten door but flung out

its limbs and enveloped Stephen into its fall; fallen, itseemed a vegetable octopus, lashing viny tentacles around its prey.

Unlike Stephen, John grew cold with anger instead ofhot; blue instead of flushed; as if he had plunged in a river through broken ice. First he was stunned. Then thefrost-caves of his brain functioned with crystalline clarity.He knew that he was young and relatively weak; againstthat bark-tough skin, his naked fists would beat in vain. A blind, weaponless charge would not avail his friend.He fell to his knees and mole-like clawed the ground. Pebbles. Pine cones. Beechnuts. Pretty, petty, useless.Then, a stone, large and jagged. With raw, bleeding hands, he wrestled the earth for his desperately neededweapon and,

without regaining his feet, lunged at thefallen Mandrake. The fibrous skull cracked and splin-tered sickeningly beneath the stone and spewed him with resin and green vegetable matter like a cabbage crushed by a millstone.

"Stephen!" he cried, but the answer hissed above him, shrill with loathing:

"Human!"

Multitudinous fingers caught and bound him with coilsof wild grapevine and dragged him, together with Ste-phen, over the bruising earth.

The Mandrake warrens were not so much habitationsas lightless catacombs for avoiding men and animals. Noone knew if the creatures had built them or found,enlarged, and connected natural caves and covered thefloors with straw. John was painfully conscious as his thinbody, little protected by the shreds of his breechclout,lurched and scraped down a tortuous passage like the throat of a dragon. His captors, he guessed, could see inthe dark, but only the scraping of Stephen's body toldhim that he had not been separated from his friend.

"Mother of God," he breathed, "let him stayunconscious!"

For a long time he had to judge their passage fromroom to room by the sudden absence of straw which marked a doorway. Finally, a dim, capricious light an-nounced their approach to a fire; a council chamber per-haps; the end of the brutal journey.

The room of the fire was a round, spacious chamberwhere Mandrake females were silently engaged in pilingchunks of peat on a bed of coals. Neither roots norbranches were used as fuel, John saw, since that whichbegan as a root did not use wood for any purpose. Wryly he wondered how the Mandrakes would feel if they knewthat the fuel they burned had once been vegetation.

Their captors dumped them as men might deposit logsbeside a hearth, and joined the women in feeding thefire. John was tightly trussed, his feet crossed, his handsbehind his back, but he rolled his body to lie on hisside and look at Stephen's face. His friend's cheeks werescratched; his forehead was blue with a large bruise; andthe daffodils of his hair were wilted with blood andcobwebs.

"Stephen, Stephen, what have they done to you?" he whispered, biting his lip to stifle the threat of tears. Hishero, fallen, moved him to tenderness transcending wor-ship. For once he had to be strong for Stephen. He had to think of escape.

He examined the room. There were neither beds nor pallets. Apparently the Mandrakes slept in the smallerrooms and used their council chamber as a baron used his hall. It was here that they met to talk and feast. Theearthen walls were blackened from many fires. Boneslittered the straw, together with teeth, fur, and hair;inedible items. The stench of the refuse was overpower-ing and, coupled with that of excrement and urine,almost turned John's stomach. He fought nausea by won-dering how his fastidious Abbot would have faced the situation: identified himself, no doubt, with Hercules inthe Aegean stables or Christ amid the corruptions of theTemple.

Then, across the room, he saw the crucifix. Yes, it wasunmistakable, a huge stone cross. Latin, with arms ofunequal length, and set in an alcove shaped like an apse. Turtle-backed stones served as seats. Between the seatsthe ground had been packed and brushed by the kneesof suppliants. The place was

clearly a chapel, and Johnremembered the tale—a myth, he had always supposed—that after the Christians had come to England withAugustine, a priest had visited the Mandrakes in their

warrens. Once they had eaten him, they had reconsid-ered his words and adopted Christianity.

"Bantling-killer!"

A Mandrake slouched above him, exuding a smell oftarns stagnant with scum. His voice was gutteral and atfirst unintelligible. Bantling-killer. Of course.*Baby*-killer. The creature was speaking an early form ofEnglish. He went on to curse all athelings in their byr-nies—knights in their mail—and to wish that the whale-road would swallow that last of them as they sailed totheir wars in ring-prowed ships of wood. Then, havingblasted John's people, he became specific and accusedJohn and Stephen of having killed the bantling with theirdog.*His* bantling, he growled, grown from his own seed. Though the Mandrakes copulated like men and animals,John gathered that their females gave birth to objectsresembling acorns which they planted in the ground and nurtured into roots. If allowed by hunters to reach matu-rity, the roots burst from the ground like a turtle out ofan egg, and their mothers bundled them into the warrensto join the tribe—hence, the word "bantling" from "ban-tie" or "bundle."

"No," John shook his head. "No. We did not kill yourbaby. Your bantling. It was hunters who killed him!"

The creature grinned. A grin, it seemed, was a Man-drake's one expression; anger or pleasure provoked thesame bared teeth. Otherwise, he looked as vacant as acabbage.

"Hunters," he said. "You."

The crowded room had grown as hot as the kitchenbefore a feast in a castle, but the figures tending the fire,hunched as if with the weight of dirt, toil, and time,seemed impervious to the heat. They had obviously builtthe fire to cook their dinner, and now they began tosharpen stakes on weathered stones. Even the stakeswere tin instead of wood.

The whir of the flames must have alerted the youngMandrakes in the adjacent chambers. They trooped intothe room and gathered, gesticulating, around the twocaptives. They had not yet lapsed into the tired shuffleof their elders; they looked both energetic and intelli- gent. Life in the forest, it seemed, slowly stultified quick

minds and supple bodies. It was not surprising that theweary elders, however they hated men, should try to passtheir daughters into the villages.

The girls John saw, except for one, appeared to beadolescents, but hair had already forested their arms andthickened their lips. The one exception, a child of per-haps four, twinkled a wistful prettiness through hergrime. Her eyes had not yet reddened and sunken intotheir sockets; her mouth was the color of wild raspber-ries. She could still have passed.

The children seemed to have come from the midst ofa game. Dice, it appeared, from the small white objects they rattled, a little like the whale-bone cubes whichdelighted the knights in John's castle. But the dice of the Mandrake children were not so much cubes as irregular, bony lumps scratched with figures.

The Greeks, John recalled from the Abbot's lectures, had used the knuckle-bones of sheep and other animals in place of cubes.

But the Mandrake children had found a livelier game.They stripped John and Stephen of their breechcloutsand began to prod their flesh with ringers like sharp car-rots and taunt them for the inadequacy of human loins.The Mandrake boys, naked like their parents, possessedenormous genitals; hence, the potency of the murdered,fragmented roots as aphrodisiacs. Stephen stirred fitfullybut to John's relief did not awake to find himself theobject of ridicule. With excellent reason, he had alwaystaken pride in the badge of his manhood, and to findhimself surpassed and taunted by boys of eight and ninewould have hurt him more than blows. Only the girl of four, staring reproachfully at her friends, took no part in the game.

A church bell chimed, eerily, impossibly it seemed toJohn in such a place, and a hush enthralled the room.An aged Mandrake, rather like a tree smothered bymoss, hobbled among the silenced children and paused between John and Stephen. Examining. Deliberating.Choosing. He chose Stephen. When he tried to stoop,however, his back creaked like a rusty drawbridge. Hewill break, thought John. He will never reach the ground.But he reached the ground and gathered Stephen in hismossy arms.

"Bloody Saracen!" shouted John. "Take your handsoff my friend!" Stretching prodigiously, he managed to burst the bonds which held his ankles and drive his knee into the Mandrake's groin. The creature gave such a yelpthat red-hot pokers seemed to have gouged John's ears.He writhed on the ground and raised his hands to shutout the shriek and pain. Shadows cobwebbed his brain.When he struggled back to clarity, Stephen lay in thechapel before the crucifix. Looming above him, the agedMandrake stood like Abraham above Isaac. The otheradults, perhaps twenty of them, sat on the turtle-shaped stones, while the children sat near the fire to watch theproceedings from which their elders had barred them.The impression John caught of their faces—brief, fleet-ing, hazy with smoke and the dim light of the room—was not one of malice or even curiosity, but respect and fear, and the pretty child had turned her back and buriedher face in the arms of an older girl.

The officiating Mandrake intoned what seemed to bea prayer and a dedication. John caught words resembling"Father" and "Son" and realized with horror if not sur-prise that just as the Christian humans burned a Yulelog and decked their castles with hawthorn, holly, and mistletoe in honor of Christ, so the Christian Mandrakes were dedicating Stephen to a different conception of the same Christ. First, the offering, then the feast. The samevictim would serve both purposes.

He had already burst the grapevines which held hisankles. In spite of his bound hands, he struggled to his feet and reeled toward the chapel. Once, he had killed a Mandrake with cold implacability. Now he had turnedto fire: the Greek fire of the East, hurled at ships and flung from walls; asphalt and crude petroleum, sulphurand lime, leaping and licking to the incandescence ofHell. He felt as if stones and Mandrakes must yieldbefore his advance; as if Mary, the Mother of Christ,must descend from the castles of heaven or climb fromthe sanctuary of his heart and help him deliver his friend.

But the Mandrakes rose in a solid palisade; and,shrunk to a boy of twelve, he hammered his impotent fists against their wood.

"No," he sobbed, falling to his knees. "Me. NotStephen."

"John."

His name tolled through the room like the clash of amace against an iron helmet. "John, he will be all right."Her flaxen hair, coarsened with dirt and leaves, riotedover her shoulders like tarnished gold coins. She woreher linen robe, but the white cloth had lost its purity to stains and tears. She might have been a fallen angel, andher eyes seemed to smoulder with memories of heaven or visions of Hell.

She had entered the room accompanied, not com-pelled. She was not their captive. She has gained their favor, he thought, by yielding to their lust. But God will forgive her if she saves my friend, and I, John, will serveher until I die. If she saves my friend—

He saw that she held her crucifix; gripped it as if you would have to sever the hand before you could pry herfingers from its gold arms.

One of her companions called to the priest, who stoodimpassively between his cross of stone and his congrega-tion, and above Stephen. He neither spoke nor gestured,but disapproval boomed in his silence.

Ruth advanced to the fire and held her crucifix in theglow of the flames, which ignited the golden arms to asun-washed sea, milkily glinting with pearls like Saracenships, and the Mandrakes gazed on such a rarity as they had never seen with their poor sunken eyes or fancied intheir dim vegetable brains. In some pathetic, childlikeway, they must have resembled the men of the First Cru-sade who took Jerusalem from the Seljuk Turks andgazed, for the time, at the Holy Sepulchre; whateverignoble motives had led them to Outre-Mer, they were purged for that one transcendent moment of pride andavarice and poised between reverence and exaltation. Itwas the same with the Mandrakes.

The priest nodded in grudging acquiescence. Ruthapproached him through the ranks of the Mandrakes, which parted murmurously like rushes before the advanc-ing slippers of the wind, and placed the crucifix in his hands. His fingers stroked the gold with slow, lovingcaresses and paused delicately on the little mounds of the

pearls. She did not wait to receive his dismissal. Withouthesitation and without visible fear, she walked to John and unbound his hands.

"Help me with Stephen," she said. "I have traded thecross for your lives."

Once they had stooped from the shadows of the lastcave and risen to face the late morning sun, the Man-drake left them without a look or a gesture, avid, itseemed, to return to the council chamber and the bar-tered crucifix. In the dark corridors, Stephen hadregained consciousness but leaned on Ruth and John andallowed them to guide his steps, their own steps guidedby the slow, creaking shuffle of the Mandrake.

"Stephen, are you all right?" John asked.

"Tired," he gasped, stretching his battered limbs in the grass and closing his eyes.

"And you, Ruth?" John looked at her with awe andwonderment and not a little fear. He had witnessed a miracle.

She did not look miraculous as she lay beside Stephen.Once she had seemed to shrink into a spider;

now shereminded him of a wet linen tunic, flung to the ground,torn, trampled, forsaken.

"What happened, Ruth?"

"They found me by the bank after my swim. I reachedfor a stocking and looked up to see—them."

"And—?"

"They laid hands on me. Dragged me toward theirwarrens. I fought them, but the one who held me was very strong."

"And you thought of the crucifix? How they wereChristians and might value it?"

"Yes. You remember, I had hidden it in our tree. Itried to make them understand that I would give them atreasure if they let me go. You know how they talk. Like little children just learning to speak. Words and phrasesall run together. But strange, old-fashioned words. I keptshouting, 'Treasure, treasure!' But they didn't under-stand. Finally, I remembered an old word used by ourancestors. 'Folk-hoarding,' I cried, and 'Crucifix!' andthey understood. They're very devout in their way. Theygrinned, argued, waved their snaky arms. Then they let

me go. I led them to the tree. We passed the place whereyou and Stephen had fought. I saw bits of your breechclouts and knew their friends had captured you. I stopped in my tracks and said I wanted your freedom aswell as mine. Otherwise, no exchange. One of them said,'If crucifix ring-bright. If time—'

"They climbed right after me up the trunk of the tree.The sight of the crucifix as I unwrapped it made them hold their breath. I held it out to them, but they shook their heads. No, they wouldn't touch it. It was for their priest. They seemed to feel their own filth and uglinessmight tarnish the gold or lessen the magic. They didn'tgrin or look vacant anymore. They looked as if theywanted to cry. They turned their backs and let me dress in the robe—and brought me here." "And they kept their promise." "Of course. They're Christians, aren't they?" Her story troubled him. He had heard of many Chris-tians who failed to keep promises; Crusaders, for exam-ple, with Greeks or Saracens. "But why—" he began, meaning to ask why the Mandrakes would feel bound bya promise to a hated human girl.

"We can't sit here all day," she interrupted. "Theymight change their minds, Christian or not. Where is the road?"

Shakily they climbed to their feet, Stephen withouthelp at his own request ("I must get my balance back."),and saw the trees which encircled and encaged them,great sycamores and greater oaks, looking as if they weresentient old kings in an old country, Celt, Roman, andSaxon, watchfully standing guard until the usurping Nor-mans had felt the slow fingers of the land shape them tothe lineaments of Britannia, Britain, England, as thepaws and tongue of a bear sculpture her cub into herown small likeness.

"I think," said Stephen, "that the road lies*that* way."But Stephen was still befuddled by the blows to his head. They walked for a long time and did not come tothe road . . but came to the Manor of Roses.

IV

I watched them as they struggled out of the forest, the stalwart boy supported by his friends, the slighter, dark-haired boy and the girl with angel hair. On a sunny morn-ing, you see, I leave the Manor with the first twitteringof sparrows and gather the white roses from the hedgewhich surrounds my estate, or visit the windmill, thefirst, I believe, in southern England, and watch the mill-stones, powered no longer by water, grinding grain forthe bread of my kitchen. Now, it was afternoon. I had lunched in the shade of a mulberry tree (apricots, bread,and mead), returned to the hedge of roses, and seen the children. I must have gasped at the sight. They stopped and stared at me over the hedge. The girl stiffened and whispered to the boys. It was not a time when children called at strange manor houses. Startled sparrows, they seemed. Not in littleness of frailty, you understand. The girl and the older boy were more than children. It wasrather their vulnerability. Something had almost brokenthem, and they did not know if I were hunter or friend.I had to prove my friendliness as if I were coaxing spar-rows to eat from my hand.

"Follow the hedge to the right," I smiled. "You will see the gate. If you've come from the forest, you must be tired and hungry. I can give you food and a place tosleep." I had made a basket of roses out of my arms. Ihad no fear of thorns, with my gloves of antelope leather;my long, tight sleeves buttoned at the wrist; my wimple and cap; and my blue, ankle-length skirt, brocaded withstar-colored fleurs-de-lis and hanging in folds from my low-belted waist. I watched the boys, clad in breechclouts clumsily fashioned from leaves, and envied them a man'sfreedom to dress and ride where he will (unless hedresses in armor and rides to war).

The youngest, the dark-haired boy, still supporting hisfriend, addressed me with the courteous French of agentleman:

"We are not attired for the company of a lady. Yousee, we have come from the forest." His face confirmedthe impression of his speech. It is said that Saladin,England's noblest enemy, had such a face as a boy:

ascetic, scholar, poet. But first and last, I saw his needand that of his friend, the Saxon lad with the build of wandering Aengus, the Great Youth, whose kisses werecalled his birds. Even the breechclout seemed an affrontto his body. Still, he needed me. His mouth, thoughforced to a smile, was tight with fatigue and hunger, and a wound had raked his forehead. Both were spider-webbed with scratches.

The girl, though her white gown was stained and torn,resembled an angel sculptured from ivory and set in the tympanum of a London cathedral: beautiful, aloof,expressionless. She is tired, I thought. Weariness hasdrained her face. Later I will read her heart.

I met them at the wicket in the hedge, a gate so smalland low that my son had jumped it in a single boundwhen he rode for the Stane and London.

I held out my arms to greet them; my armful of roses.

They kept their ground, the dark boy straining towardme, the Saxon drawn between them.

"I can offer you more than flowers," I said, spillingthe roses.

The Norman said, "My Lady, whom have we thehonor of addressing?"

"I am called the Lady Mary. You have come to theManor of Roses."

"I thought," he said, "you might be another Mary.Will you help my friend? He has suffered a blow to his head." But it was the Norman and not his friend Ihelped. He swayed on his feet, leaned to my strength, and caught my out-stretched hand.

"I will soil your gown."

"With the good brown earth? It is the purest of allsubstances. The mother of roses."

"But you scattered your flowers on the ground."

"I have others." Supporting him with my arm and fol-lowed by his friends, I drew him toward the house.

Once, a moat had surrounded the Manor, but after myhusband's death I had filled the water with earth andplanted mulberry trees, aflutter now with linnets and sil-very filamented with the webs of silkworms; the treesformed a smaller ring within the ring of the rose hedgeto island but not to isolate my house, which was built of

bricks instead of the cold grey stones preferred by theneighboring barons. My husband had offered to build mea manor for my wedding gift.

"Build it of bricks," I had said. "The color of yourhair."

"And stoutly," he said. But the high curtain wall withits oaken door, its rows of weathered bricks from a ruined Roman villa, and its narrow embrasures for bow-men to fire their arrows, had somehow a look of havinglost its threat, like armor hung on the wall. Gabrielknows, I could not stand a siege with my poor, bedrag-gled retainers: gardeners, gatemen, cooks, seneschal, sta-ble-boy—thirty in all, without a knight among them. Thewasting fever had not been kind to the Manor of Roses.

The gatekeeper moved to help me with the boy. "Hewill tire you, my Lady."

I shook my head. No burden can equal the ache ofemptiness.

Once we had entered the bailey, Sarah the cook, whohad slipped out of the kitchen and thrown back her hoodto catch some sun, tossed up her ponderous hands—Isuspect it required some effort—and squealed, "MyLady, what have you found?"

"Children, what else? Sarah, hurry to the kitchen andprepare a meal such as young boys—young men—like.Pheasant and—"

"I know, I know," she said. "You forget I've sons ofmy own, who serve you every night!" Sarah, her threesons and her two daughters, were new to the Manor, butshe acted as if she had been my nurse since childhood. "I know what young boys like. The beast of the chaseand the fowl of the warren. All that flies and all thatgoes on hooves, and two of everything unless it's as big as a boar!" She waddled ahead of us up the stairs to thedoor and, laboriously genuflecting, vanished under thelintel with its wooden Madonna cradling the Holy Infant.

"It's a lovely house," said the Saxon boy in English."It looks like an abbot's grange."

"A very rich abbot," explained the Norman, fearfulno doubt that I had misunderstood his friend's compli-

ment, since poor abbots lived in squalid cottages.

"I meant," stammered the Saxon, "it looks so bright

and peaceful, with its Mother and Child, and its—" Hewaited for his friend to complete his sentence.

"Its two pointed roofs instead of battlements, and realwindows instead of slits for archers, with*glass* in thewindows! And Stephen, see the herb garden. Parsley,thyme, bay leaf, marjoram, mace, tarragon—"

"You know a lot about herbs," I said.

"I've read an herbal."

Once in the Manor, I took them to the bath. In all theWeald, I think, in all of England, no other house canclaim a fountain for bathing enclosed under the roof. The mouth of a dolphin, hammered from bronze by the arti-sans of Constantinople, spewed a vigorous streamlet intoa basin where Tritons gamboled on vari-colored tiles. Forbaths in the cold of winter, I stuffed the dolphin's mouthand filled the basin with kettles hot from the kitchen.

"Your friend shall bathe first," I said to the boys. Allof us now were speaking English. And to her: "Your name is—?"

When the girl was slow to answer, the Saxon said:"Ruth. She is our guardian angel. She rescued us."

"From wild beasts?"

"From Mandrakes."

I shuddered. "They are much in the woods, poor mis-shapen brutes. They have never harmed me, though.You must tell me later about your escape. Now then,Ruth. You shall have the bath to yourself. After youhave bathed, I shall send you clothes, and a perfumemade from musk, and. . ."

She looked at me with cool, veiled eyes. "You arevery kind." I wanted to say to her: I am more than twice your age, and far less beautiful. Trust me, my dear. Trustme!

I turned to the boys. The Norman, I learned, wasJohn; the Saxon, Stephen. "When Ruth has finished, it will be your turn."

"Thank you, my lady," said John. "We would like tobathe with a dolphin. But—"

"You would rather eat! What about bread and cheese and pennyroyal tea to hold you till time for supper? Or,"I added quickly, "beer instead of tea." Pennyroyal! I hadbeen too much with women.

"Beer," they said in one breath. "But," said John,"my brother has a wound."

"Brother?" I asked, surprised. A Norman gentlemanand a Saxon peasant!

"We adopted each other. Have you something for hishead?"

"For my stomach," grinned Stephen. "That's where Ihurt the most."

"For both," I said.

The hall of my manor house is hot and damp in thesummer, and cold in the winter even with pine logs, as big around as a keg of beer, crackling on the hearth. Ithas always been a room for men: shouting, roistering,warming themselves with mead. For myself, I prefer thesolar, the room of many purposes in which I sleep and dine and weave, and entertain the friends who comeinfrequently now to visit me. I left the boys in the solarwith three loaves of bread, two enormous cheeses, and a flagon of beer, and told them to eat and afterwards tobathe themselves with cloths dipped in camphor andwrap fresh linen around their waists.

"Call me after you've finished."

I had scarcely had time to find a gown for Ruth whenI heard John's voice: "Lady Mary, we've finished."

I found them so fragrant with camphor that I over-looked the patches of dirt they had left on their knees and elbows. The bread, cheese, and beer had vanishedas if there had been a raid by kitchen elves, denied theirnightly tribute of crumbs. I tended the boys' wounds with a paste of fennel and dittany and they yielded themselvesto my fingers without embarrassment, sons to a mother,and made me feel as if my hands had rediscovered theirpurpose.

"It doesn't burn at all," said Stephen. "My father useda poultice of adder's flesh pounded with wood-lice andspiders. But it burned like the devil, and stank."

"Lady Mary's hands are like silk," said John. "That'swhy it doesn't bum."

The boys began to dress in tunics which had belongedto my son: John in green, with a fawn-colored capedrawn through a ring-brooch and knotted at his shoulder,and*chausses* or stockings to match the cape, and black

leather shoes with straps; Stephen in blue, with a palerose cape and silver*chausses,* but looking with each addi-tional garment as if another chain had shackled him tothe wall.

"I wouldn't show myself in the forest like this," hemuttered. "I'd be taken for a pheasant and shot on sight."

"It's only for tonight," I said. "Don't you want to lookthe gallant for Ruth?"

"She's used to me naked. She'll take me for a jester."

"My lady."

Ruth had entered the room. She was dressed in a crim-son gown or*cotte,* caught at the waist by a belt of gildeddoeskin but falling around her feet in billows throughwhich the toes of her slippers peeped like small greenlizards. She had bound her hair in a moss-green net, and her yellow tresses twinkled like caged fireflies. (Strange,I always thought of her in terms of forest creatures: wild,unknowable,

untamable.)

"My lady, the boys may have their bath. I thank you for sending me so lovely a gown."

"We've had our bath," said Stephen with indignation."Can't you see we're dressed as gallants?"

"Lady Mary put fennel and dittany on our wounds,"said John, "and now they don't hurt any more."

"And we're going to eat," said Stephen.

"Again," said John.

Ruth examined the solar and almost relaxed from herself-containment. "Why, it's lovely," she said, extendingher arm to include the whole of the room. "It's all made of sunlight."

"Not entirely," I smiled, pointing to the high, rafteredceiling with its tie-beam and king-post. "Cobwebs collectunless I keep after Sarah's sons. They have to bring a ladder, you see, and they don't like dusting among thedark crevices. They're afraid of elves."

"But the rest," Ruth said. "There's no darknessanywhere."

The room was kindled with afternoon light from the windows: the fireplace, heaped with logs; a tall-backedchair with square sides and embroidered cushions orbankers; a huge recessed window shaped like an arch

and filled with roseate panes of glass from Constantino-ple; and, hiding the wooden timbers of the floor, a Sara-cen carpet of polygons, red, yellow, and white, with aborder of stylized Persian letters. My wainscotted walls,however, were purely English, their oaken panels painted the green of leaves and bordered with roses tomatch the carpet.

Ruth explored the room with the air of a girl familiarwith beauty, its shapes and its colors, but not without wonder. She touched my loom with loving recognition and paused at my canopied bed to exclaim: "It's like asilken tent!

"But the linnets," she said, pointing to the wicker cagewhich hung beside the bed. "Don't they miss the forest?"

"They are quite content. I feed them sunflower seedsand protect them from stoats and weasels. In return, theysing for me."

"Is it true that a caged linnet changes his song?"

"Yes. His voice softens."

"That's what I mean. The wildness goes."

"Shouldn't it, my dear?"

"I don't know, Lady Mary."

We sat on benches drawn to a wooden table with tres-tles, John and I across from Ruth and Stephen. My hus-band and I had been served in the great hall by nimble, soft-toed squires who received the dishes from kitchen menials. After his death, however, I began to dine in thesolar instead of the hall. For the last year I had beenserved by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the three illegitimate sons of my cook, Sarah. As a rule, I liked todine without ceremony, chatting with the sons—identicaltriplets with fiery red hair on their heads and arms, and thus their name: they seemed to have stepped out of afurnace. But tonight, for the sake of my guests, I hadordered Sarah and her two illegitimate daughters, Rahaband Magdalena, to prepare, and her sons to serve, a banquet instead of a supper. The daughters had laid the table with a rich brocade of Saracen knights astride theirswift little ponies, and they had placed among theknights, as if it were under seige, a molded castle ofsugar, rice-flour, and almond-paste.

After I had said the grace, the sons appeared with

lavers, ewers, and napkins and passed them among myguests. Stephen lifted a laver to his mouth and started todrink, but John whispered frantically:

"It isn't soup, it's to wash your hands."

"There'll be other things to drink," I promised.

"I haven't felt this clean since I was baptized!" Ste-phen laughed, splattering the table with water from his laver.

Both Ruth and John, though neither had eaten fromdishes of beaten silver, were fully at ease with knives andspoons; they cut the pheasant and duck before they usedtheir fingers and scooped the fish-and-crab-apple pie withthe spoons. But Stephen watched his friends with wryperplexity.

"I never used a knife except to hunt or fish," hesighed. "I'll probably cut off a finger. Then you can seeif I'm a Mandrake!"

"We'd know that already," said John. "You'd looklike a hedgehog and somebody would have chopped youup a long time ago for aphrodisiacs. You'd have broughta fortune." His gruesome remarks, I gathered, weremeant to divert me from the fact that he had furtivelydropped his knife, seized a pheasant, and wrestled off a wing. His motive was as obvious as it was generous. He did not wish to shame his friend by his own polishedmanners.

I laughed heartily for the first time since the death ofmy son. "Knives were always a nuisance. Spoons too.What are fingers for if not to eat with? So long as you don't bite yourself!" I wrenched a drumstick and thigh from the parent bird and felt the grease, warm andmouthwatering, ooze between my fingers. "Here," I said to Stephen. "Take hold of the thigh and we'll divide the piece." The bone parted, the meat split into decidedlyunequal portions. Half of my drumstick accompanied John's thigh.

"It means you're destined for love," I said.

"He's already had it," said John. "Hay-lofts full of it."

"She doesn't mean that kind," said Stephen, suddenlyserious. "She means caring—taking care of—don't you, Lady Mary? I've had that too, of course." He looked atJohn.

"Then it means you'll always have it."

"I know," he said.

John smiled at Stephen and then at me, happy becausethe three of us were friends, but silent Ruth continuedto cut her meat into snail-sized portions and lift them to her mouth with the fastidiousness of a nun (her fingers,however, made frequent trips).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego scurried betweenthe solar and the kitchen, removing and replenishing, butit looked as if John and Stephen would never satisfy theirhunger. With discreet if considerable assistance fromRuth, they downed three pheasants, two ducks, two fish-and-crab-apple pies, and four tumblers of mead.

"Leave some for us," hissed Shadrach in Stephen'sear. "This is the*last* bird." Stephen looked surprised, then penitent, and announced himself as full as a tick onthe ear of a hound. Shadrach hurried the last bird back to the kitchen.

After the feast the boys told me about their adven-tures, encouraging rather than interrupting each other with such comments as, "You tell her about the streamwith the pepperwort, John," or "Stephen you're better about the fighting." John talked more because he was more at ease with words; Stephen gestured as much ashe talked and sometimes asked John to finish a sentence for him; and Ruth said nothing until the end of the story, when she recounted, quietly, without once meeting mygaze, the episode of her capture and bargain with theMandrakes. I studied her while she spoke. Shy? Aloof,I would say. Mistrustful. Of me, at least. Simple jealousywas not the explanation. I was hardly a rival for the kindof love she seemed to want from Stephen. No, it was notmy beauty which troubled her, but the wisdom whichyouth supposes to come with age; in a word, my matureperceptions. There was something about her which shedid not wish perceived.

"And now for the gifts," I said.

"Gifts?" cried John.

"Yes. The dessert of a feast is the gifts and not thepies."

"But we have nothing to give you."

"You have told me a wondrous and frightening story.

No jongleur could have kept me more enthralled. Andfor you, I have—" I clapped my hands and Shadrach,Meshach, and Abednego appeared with my gifts, somemusical instruments which had once belonged to my son.For Ruth, a rebec, a pear-shaped instrument from theEast, three-stringed and played with a bow; for the boys, twin nakers or kettledrums which Stephen strapped to hisback and John began to pound with soft-headed woodendrumsticks.

Ruth hesitated with her rebec till Stephen turned andsaid, "Play for us, Ruth! What are you waiting for, a harp?"

Then Ruth joined them, the boys marching round and round the solar, Stephen first, John behind him poundingon the drums and thumping the carpet with his feet, andfinally Ruth, playing with evident skill and forgetting to look remote and enigmatic. Shadrach, Meshach, andAbednego had lingered in the doorway, and behind them Sarah appeared with her plump, swarthy daughters. I wasnot surprised when they started to sing; I was only sur-prised to find myself joining them in the latest popularsong:

Summer is a-comin' in, Loud sing cuckoo.Groweth seed and bloweth mead,And springs the wood anew. Sing, cuckoo!

In an hour the three musicians, their audiencedeparted to the kitchen, had exhausted the energieswhich the meal had revived. Ruth sank in the chairbeside the hearth. The boys, thanking me profusely fortheir gifts, climbed into the window seats. Stephenyawned and began to nod his head. John, in the opposite seat, gave him a warning kick,

"Come," I said to them, "there's a tittle room overthe kitchen which used to belong to my son. The hall was too big, the solar too warm, he felt. I'll show you his room while Ruth prepares for bed. Ruth, we'll fixyou a place in the window. You see how the boys aresitting opposite each other. I've only to join the seats

with a wooden stool and add a few cushions to make a couch. Or"—and I made the offer, I fear, with visiblereluctance—"you may share my own bed under thecanopy."

"The window seats will be fine."

I pointed to the Aumbry, a wooden cupboard aswirl with wrought-iron scroll work, almost like the illumi-nated page of a psalter. "There's no lock. Open thedoors and find yourself a night-dress while I show theboys their room."

My son's room was as small as a chapel in a keep, withone little square of a window, but the bed was wide aswell as canopied, and irresistible to the tired boys.

"It's just like yours!" John cried.

"Smaller. But just as soft."

"At home I slept on a bench against the wall, in aroom with eight other boys—sons of my father's knights.I got the wall bench because my father owned thecastle."

"I slept on straw," said Stephen, touching the mat-tress, sitting, stretching himself at length, and uttering a huge, grateful sigh. "It's like a nest of puppies. Whatmakes it so soft?"

"Goose-feathers."

"The geese we ate tonight—*their*feathers will stuff amattress, won't they?"

"Two, I suspect." I fetched them a silk-covered bear-skin from a small, crooked cupboard which my son hadbuilt at the age of thirteen. "And now I must see to Ruth."

I am not a reticent person, but the sight of the boys— Stephen in bed and sleepily smiling goodnight, Johnrespectfully standing but sneaking an envious glance athis less respectful friend—wrenched me almost to tears.I did not trust myself to say that I was very glad to offerthem my son's bed for as long as they chose to stay inthe Manor of Roses.

I could only say: "Sleep as late as you like. Sarah canfix you breakfast at any hour."

"You're very kind," said Stephen. "But tomorrow, Ithink, we must get an early start for London."

"London!" I cried. "But your wounds haven't healed!"

"They were just scratches really, and now you've cured them with your medicine. If we stayed, we might *never*want to go."

"I might never want you to go."

"But don't you see, Lady Mary, we have to fight forJerusalem."

"You expect to succeed where kings have failed? Fred-erick Barbarossa? Richard-the-Lion-Hearted? Two littleboys without a weapon between them!"

"We're not little boys," he protested. "I'm a youngswain—*fifteen winters old*—and John here is a—striplingwho will grow like a bindweed. Aren't you, John?"

"Grow, anyway," said John without enthusiasm. "ButI don't see why we have to leave in the morning."

"Because of Ruth."

"And Ruth is your guardian angel?" I asked with anirony lost on the boy.

"Yes. Already she's saved our lives."

"Has she, Stephen? Has she? Sleep now. We'll talktomorrow. I want to tell you about my own son."

I returned to the solar heavy of foot. It was well forRuth that she had changed to a nightdress, joined the window seats with the necessary stool, and retired to bedin a tumble of cushions. Now she was feigning sleep butforgetting to mimic the slow, deep breams of the truesleeper. Well, I could question her tomorrow. One thingI knew. She would lead my boys on no unholy Crusade.

A chill in the air awakened me. It was not unusual fora hot summer day to grow wintry at night. I rose, lit acandle, and found additional coverlets for myself andRuth. Her face seemed afloat in her golden hair; decapi-tated, somehow; or drowned.

I thought of the boys, shivering in the draft of theirglassless window. I had not remembered to draw the can-opy of their bed. In my linen nightdress and my pointedsatin slippers which, like all the footwear expected ofEnglish ladies, cruelly pinched my toes, I passed throughthe hall and then the kitchen, tiptoed among the palletsof Sarah and her children stretched near the oven, and climbed a staircase whose steepness resembled a ladder.

Lifting aside a coarse leather curtain, I stood in thedoorway of my son's room and looked at the boys. They

had fallen asleep without extinguishing the pewter lamp which hung from a rod beside their bed. The bearskin covered their chins, and their bodies had met for warmth in the middle of the bed. I leaned above them and startedto spread my coverlet. John, who was closer to me,opened his eyes and smiled.

"Mother," he said.

"Mary," I said, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"That's what I meant."

"I'm sorry I woke you."

"I'm glad. You came to bring us a coverlet, didn'tyou?"

"Yes. Won't we wake your brother?"

His smile broadened; he liked my acceptance of Ste-phen as his brother and equal. "Not our voices. Only ifI got out of bed. Then he would feel me gone. But oncehe's asleep, he never hears anything, unless it's one ofhis hounds."

"You're really going tomorrow?"

"I don't want to go. I don't think Stephen does either.It's Ruth's idea. She whispered to him in the solar, whenyou and I were talking. But I heard her just the same.She said they must get to London. She said it was why she had come, and why she had saved us from the Mandrakes."

"Why won't she trust me, John?"

"I think she's afraid of you. Of what you might guess."

"What is there to guess?"

There was fear in his eyes. He looked at Stephen,asleep, and then at me. "I think that Ruth is a Man-drake. One who has passed."

I flinched. I had thought: thief, adventuress, harlot,carrier of the plague, but nothing so terrible as Man-drake. Though fear was a brand in my chest, I spokequietly. I did not want to judge her until he had madehis case. He might be a too imaginative child, frightenedby the forest and now bewildered with sleep. He wasonly twelve. And yet, from what I had seen, I hadthought him singularly rational for his years. Stephen,one might have said, would wake in the night and babbleof Mandrake girls. Never John. Not without reason, atleast.

"Why do you think that, John?"

His words cascaded like farthings from a purse cut bya pickpocket: swift, confused at times, and yet a threadof logic which made me share his suspicions. Ruth's mys-terious arrival in the Mithraeum. Her vague answers andher claim to forgetfulness. Her lore of the forest. Hershock and disgust when he and Stephen had told herabout the Mandrake hunters. Her strangely successfulbargain with the crucifix.

"And they kept their word," he said. "Even when theythought Stephen and I had killed one of their babies. Itwas as if they let us go so that she could*use* us."

"It's true they're Christians," I said. "I've found theirstone crosses in the woods around my Manor. They might have felt bound by their word. An oath to a sav-age, especially a Christian savage, can be a sacred thing.Far more sacred than to some of our own Crusaders,who have sacked the towns of their sworn friends. Ruthmay have told you the truth about the crucifix."

"I know," he said. "I know. It's wicked of me to sus-pect her. She's always been kind to me. She brought mestrawberries in the forest once! And Stephen worshipsher. But I had to tell you, didn't I? She might havepassed when she was a small child. Grown up in a village.But someone became suspicious. She fled to the forest.Took shelter in the Mithraeum where Stephen and I found her. You see, if I'm right—"

"We're all in danger. You and Stephen most of all.You have been exposed to her visitations. We shall haveto learn the truth before you leave this house."

"You mean we must wound her? But if she passed along time ago, we would have to cut to the bone."

"We wouldn't so much as scratch her. We would sim-ply confront her with an accusation. Suppose she is aMandrake. Either she knew already when she first metyou or else her people told her in the forest. Told herwith pride: 'See, we have let you grow soft and beautifulin the town.' Tomorrow we shall demand proof of herinnocence. Innocent, she will offer herself to the knife. The offer alone will suffice. But a true Mandrake willsurely refuse such a test, and then we will know her guilt."

"It's rather like trial by combat, isn't it?" he said atlast. "God condemns the guilty. Pricks him with con-science until he loses the fight. But this way, there won't be a combat, just a trial. God will make Ruth reveal herguilt or innocence."

"And you and I will be His instruments. Nothingmore."

"And if she's guilty?"

"We'll send her into the forest and let her rejoin herpeople."

"It will break Stephen's heart."

"It will save his life. Save him from Ruth—and fromgoing to London. Without his angel, do you think he'll still persist in his foolish crusade? He will stay here with you and me. The Manor of Roses has need of two fineyouths."

"You won't make him a servant because he's a villein?His ancestors were Saxon earls when mine were pirates."

"Mine were pirates too. Blood-thirsty ones, at that.No, you and Stephen shall both be my sons. You adoptedhim. Why shouldn't I?"

"You know," he said, "when you first spoke to us atthe hedge—after we had come from the forest—you saidwe'd come to the Manor of Roses. At first I thought youmeant the*manner* of roses. Without the capitals."

"Did you, John?"

"Yes. And it's quite true. Of the house, I mean, andyou. The manner of roses."

"But I have thorns to protect the ones I love. Ruthwill feel them tomorrow." I knelt beside him and touchedmy lips to his cheek. It was not as if I were kissing him for the first time, but had kissed him every night for—how many years?—the years of my son when he rode toLondon.

"You're crying," he said.

"It's the smoke from the lamp. It has stung my eyes."

He clung to my neck, no longer a boy; a small child Icould almost feed at my breast.

"I like your hair when it's loose," he said. "It's like ahalo that comes all the way to your shoulders."

He fell asleep in my arms.

Thomas Burnett Swann

I woke to the strident twittering of sparrows. Their little shapes flickered against the window panes, and for onceI regretted the glass. I would have liked them to flood the room with their unmelodious chirpings and share inmy four-walled, raftered safety. Minikin beings, they rev-eled in the sun, noisily, valiantly, yet prey to eagle andhawk from the wilderness of sky, and the more theypiped defiance, the more they invited death.

But other sparrows were not beyond my help.

I rose and dressed without assistance. I did not callSarah's daughters to comb my hair and exclaim, "But it'slike black samite!" and fasten the sleeves above mywrists and burden my fingers with jade and tourmaline.I did not wish to awaken Ruth. I dreaded theconfrontation.

Encased from the tip of my toes to the crest of myhair, amber and green in wimple, robe, gloves, stockings,and slippers, I walked into the courtyard and sat on abench among my herbs, lulled by the soft scent of laven-der, but not from my hesitations; piqued by the sharppungency of tarragon, but not to pride in what I mustask of Ruth.

The sun was as high as a bell-tower before the soundsfrom the solar told me that the children had waked andmet. Ruth and Stephen were belaboring John when Ientered the room. Stephen looked liberated in hisbreechclout, and Ruth disported herself in his blue tunic,the one he had worn reluctantly to my feast, but without the*chausses* or the cape. They were telling John that heought to follow their example and dress for the woods.

"You're white as a sheep this morning," chided Ste-phen. "Your shoulders need the sun."

John, engulfed by his cape and tunic, might have beenten instead of twelve. I pitied the child. He would haveto side with me against his friends. He returned my smilewith a slight nod of his head, as if to say, "It must be now."

Stephen's voice was husky with gratitude: "Lady Mary, we must leave you and make our way to London. You'vefed us and given us a roof, and we won't forget you. In

a dark forest, you have been our candle. Your gifts—thedrums and rebec—will help us to earn our passage to theHoly Land."

"Knights and abbots will throw you pennies," I said. "Robbers will steal them. It will take you a long time toearn your passage."

"But that's why we have to go! To start earning. Andwhen we come back this way, we'll bring you a Saracenshield to hang above your hearth." He kissed my handwith a rough, impulsive tenderness. An aura of camphor wreathed him from yesterday's bath. He had combed hishair in a fringe across his forehead, like jonquils abovehis bluer-than-larkspur eyes. I thought how the work of thecomb would soon be spoiled; the petals wilted by thegreat forest, tangled with cobwebs, matted perhaps withblood.

"I think you should know the nature of yourcompany."

His eyes widened into a question. The innocence of them almost shook my resolve. "John? But he's my friend! If you mean he's very young, you ought to haveseen him fight the Mandrakes."

"Ruth."

"Ruth is an angel." He made the statement as onemight say, "I believe in God."

"You want her to be an angel. But is she, Stephen?Ask her."

He turned to Ruth for confirmation. "You said youcame from the sky, didn't you?"

"I said I didn't remember." She stared at the Persiancarpet and seemed to be counting the polygons or read-ing the cryptic letters woven into the border.

"But you said you remembered falling a greatdistance."

"There are other places to fall than out of the sky."

John spoke at last. "But you remembered things." Hisvoice seemed disembodied. It might have come from thevault of a deep Mithraeum. "About the forest. Where tofind wild strawberries. How to weave a cup out of rushes.How to escape from the Mandrakes."

"Ruth," I said. "Tell them who you are. Tell me. Wewant to know."

She began to tremble. "I don't know. I don't know."I was ready to pity her when she told the truth.

I walked to the Aumbry with slow, deliberate steps.In spite of my silken slippers, I placed each foot as if Iwere crushing a mite which threatened my roses. Iopened the doors, knelt, and reached to the lowest shelffor a Saracen poniard, its ivory hilt emblazoned with sap-phires in the shape of a running gazelle. The damasceneblade was very sharp: steel inlaid with threads of silver.

There was steel in my voice as I said, "You are not toleave my house till I know who you are. I accepted youas a guest and friend. Now I have reason to believe thatyou are dangerous. To the boys, if not to me."

"You would harm me, Lady Mary?" She shrank from the light of the window and joined the shadows near thehearth. I half expected her to dwindle into a spider andscuttle to safety among the dark rafters.

"I would ask you to undergo a test."

She said: "You think I am a Mandrake."

"I think you must show us that you are not a Man-drake." I walked toward her with the poniard. "My hus-band killed the Saracen who owned this blade. Wrestledhim for it. Drove it into his heart. You see, the point isfamiliar with blood. It will know what to do."

"Lady Mary!" It was Stephen who stepped betweenus; charged, I should say, like an angry stag, and almost took the blade in his chest. "What are you saying, LadyMary?"

"Ask her," I cried. "Ask her! Why does she fear theknife? Because it will prove her guilt!"

He struck my hand and the poniard fell to the floor.He gripped my shoulders.

"Witch! You have blasphemed an angel!"

Anger had drained me; indignation; doubts. I dropped inhis punishing hands. I wanted to sleep.

John awoke from his torpor and beat on his friendwith desperate fists. "It's true, it's true! You must let hergo!"

Stephen unleashed a kick like a javelin hurled from anarblast. I forgot the poniard; forgot to watch the girl. AllI could see was John as he struck the doors of theAumbry and sank, winded and groaning to the floor.

Twisting from Stephen's fingers, I knelt to the woundedboy and took him in my arms.

"I'm not hurt," he gasped. "But Ruth...theponiard..."

I saw the flash of light on the blade in Ruth's hand.Stephen swayed on his feet, a stag no longer: a bear chained in a pit, baited by some, fed by others—how canhe tell his tormentors from his friends? Wildly he staredfrom the boy he had hurt to the girl he had championed. Ruth walked toward me with soundless feet and eyes ascold as hornstones under a stream. She might have beendead.

The poniard flashed between us. I threw up my handsfor defense: of myself and John. She brought the

bladedown sharply against her own hand, the mount of thepalm below her thumb. I heard—I actually heard—thesplitting of flesh, the rasp of metal on bone. The blade must have cut through half of her hand before it lodgedin the bone, and then she withdrew it without a cry, witha sharp, quick jerk, like a fisherman removing a hook,and stretched her fingers to display her wound. The fleshparted to reveal white bone, and crimson blood, not inthe least resinous, swelled to fill the part. She smiled at me with triumph but without malice, a young girl whohad vindicated herself before an accuser more than twiceher years.

"Did you think I mean to hurt you?" she said almost playfully and then, seeing her blood as it reddened thecarpet, winced and dropped the poniard.

Stephen steadied her into the chair by the hearth andpressed her palm to staunch the flow.

"You are an evil woman," he glared at me. "Yourbeauty is a lie. It hides an old heart."

"Both of your friends are in pain," I said. "It isn't atime for curses."

He looked at John in my arms and stiffened as if hewould drop Ruth's hand and come to his friend.

"No. Stay with Ruth." I helped John across the roomto a seat in the window; the tinted panes ruddied his palecheeks. "He will be all right. Ruth is in greater need. Let me tend her, Stephen."

"You shan't touch her."

Ruth spoke for herself. "The pain is very sharp. Canyou ease it, Lady Mary?"

I treated the wound with a tincture of opium and pow-dered rose petals and swaddled her hand with linen. John rose from the window and stood behind me, in silentattendance on Ruth—and in atonement. Stephen, anactive boy denied a chance to act, stammered to hisfriends:

"Forgive me, both of you. It was my Crusade, wasn'tit? I brought you to this."

Ruth's face was as white as chalk-rubbed parchmentawaiting the quill of a monk. Her smile was illumination."But you see, Stephen, Lady Mary was right to a point.I am no more an angel than you are. Less, in fact. You'rea dreamer. I'm a liar. I've lied to you from the start, asLady Mary guessed. That's why I couldn't trust her— because I saw that she couldn't trust me. My name isn'tRuth, it's Madeleine. I didn't come from heaven but theCastle of the Boar, three miles from your own kennels.My father was noble of birth, brother to the Boar. Buthe hated the life of a knight—the hunts, the feasts, the joustings—and most of all, the Crusades without God'sblessing. He left his brother's castle to live as a scholarin Chichester, above a butcher's shop. He earned hisbread by copying manuscripts or reading the stars. It washe who taught me my languages—English and NormanFrench and Latin—and just as if I were a boy, the loreof the stars, the sea, and the forest. He also taught me to play the rebec and curtsey and use a spoon at thetable. 'Someday,' he said, 'you will marry a knight, agentle one, I hope, if such still exist, and you have to beable to talk to him about a man's interests, and alsodelight him with the ways of woman. Then he won't ride off to fight in a foolish Crusade, as most men do becauseof ignorant wives.' He taught me well and grew as pooras a Welshman. When he died of the plague last year,he left me pennies instead of pounds, and no relativesexcept my uncle, the Boar, who despised my father and took me into his castle only because I was brought tohim by an abbot from Chichester.

"But the Boar was recently widowed, and he had ataste for women. Soon I began to please him. I think I

must have grown—how shall I say it?—riper, more wom-anly. He took me hawking and praised my lore of theforest. I sat beside him at banquets, drank his beer,laughed at his bawdy tales, and almost forgot my Latin.But after a feast one night he followed me to the chapeland said unspeakable things. My own uncle! I hit him with a crucifix from the altar. No one stopped me whenI left the castle. No one knew the master was not at hisprayers! But where could I go? Where but Chichester.Perhaps the Abbot would give me shelter.

"But John, as I passed near your father's castle I hearda rider behind me. I ducked in a thicket of gorse and tumbled down some stairs into a dark vault. You see, Idid have a kind of fall, though not from heaven. I wasstiff and tired and scared, and I fell asleep and woke upto hear Stephen proclaiming me an angel and talkingabout London and tile Holy Land. London! Wasn't thatbetter than Chichester? Further away from my uncle? Stephen, I let you think me an angel because I was tired of men and their lust. I had heard stories about you evenat the castle—your way with a wench. After I knew you,though, I*wanted* your way. You weren't at all the boyin the stories, but kind and trusting. But I couldn't admitmy lie and lose your respect.

"As for the crucifix you found in my hands, I hadstolen it from my uncle. He owed me*something,* Ifelt.I had heard him say it was worth a knight's ransom. Ihoped to sell it and buy a seamstress' shop and many a fine gentleman who brought me stockings to mend.When I traded it to the Mandrakes, it was just as I said.They kept their promise for the sake of their faith. You see, they were much more honest than I have been."

Stephen was very quiet. I had seen him pressed forwords but never for gestures, the outstretched hand, the nod, the smile. I wanted to ease the silence with reassur-ances and apologies. But Ruth was looking to Stephen; it was he who must speak.

"Now I'm just another wench to you," she said withinfinite wistfulness. "I should have told you the truth. Let you have your way. This way, I've nothing at all."

He thought for a long time before he spoke, and thewords he found were not an accusation. "I think a part

of me never really took you for an angel. At least, notafter the first. I'm not good enough to deserve a guardian from heaven. Besides, you stirred me like a girl of flesh and blood. But I wanted a reason for running away. Anexcuse and a hope. I lacked courage, you see. It's a fear-ful thing for a villein to leave his master. John's fathercould have me killed, or cut off my hands and feet. SoI lied to myself: An angel had come to guide me! Wewere both dishonest, Ruth—Madeleine."

"Ruth. That's the name you gave me."

"Ruth, we can still go to London. Without any lies between us." Gestures returned to him; he clasped her shoulders with the deference of a brother (and looked toJohn: "My arms are not yet filled"). "But Lady Mary,it was cruel of you to find the truth in such a way."

"She never meant to touch Ruth," said John. "Onlyto test her. It was things I told Lady Mary that made hersuspicious."

"John, John," said Ruth, walking to him and placingher swaddled hand on his arm. "I know you've never liked me. You saw through my tale from the first. You thought I wanted your friend. You were right, of course.I wouldn't trade him for Robin Hood, if Robin were young again and Lord of the forest! But I never wished you ill. You were his chosen brother. How could I lovehim without loving you? I wanted to say: 'Don't be afraidof losing Stephen to me. It was you he loved first. If Itake a part of his heart, it won't be a part that belongsto you. Can't you see, John, that the heart is like thecatacombs of the old Christians? You can open a secondchamber without closing the first. Trust your friend tohave chambers for both of us.' But I said nothing. Itwould have shown me to be a girl instead of an angel."

"You're coming with us, John?" asked Stephen doubt-fully. "I didn't mean to hurt you. It was like the timeyou stepped on my dog. But you forgave me then."

"There's no reason for us to stay."

"You'll go on a Crusade without a guardian angel?"

"We'll walk to London and then—who knows? Ven-ice, Baghdad. Cathay! Maybe it was just to run away Iwanted, and not to save Jerusalem." He pressed John

between his big hands. "You*are* coming, aren't you,brother?"

"No," said John. "No, Stephen. Lady Mary needsme."

"So does Stephen," said Ruth.

"Stephen is strong. I was never any use to him. Justthe one he protected."

"Someday," said Ruth, "you'll realize that needing aperson is the greatest gift you can give him."

"I need all of you," I said. "Stay here. Help me. Letme help you. London killed my son. It's a city forsakenby God."

Stephen shook his head. "We have to go, Ruth and I.The Boar might follow her here. She hurt his pride aswell as his skill and stole his crucifix."

John said: "I'm going to stay."

I packed them provisions of bread, beer, and saltedbacon; gave them the Saracen poniard to use against thieves or sell in London; and strapped the rebec andkettledrums on their backs.

"You must have a livelihood in London," I said, whenStephen wanted to leave the instruments with John.

I walked with Stephen and Ruth to the wicket andgave them directions for finding the road: Walk a mile to the east . . . look for the chestnut tree with a holelike a door in the trunk.

But Stephen was looking over his shoulder for John.

"He stayed in the solar," I said. "He loves you toomuch to say good-bye."

"Or too little. Why else is he staying with you?"

"The world is a harsh place, Stephen. Harsher thanthe forest, and without any islands like the Manor of Roses." How could I make him understand that God hadgiven me John in return for the son I had lost to thedevil?

"I would be his island," said Stephen, his big frame shaken with sobs.

"Never mind," said Ruth. "Never mind. We'll comeback for him, Stephen." And then to me: "My lady, wethank you for your hospitality." She curtsied and kissed my hand with surprising warmth.

I said: "May an angel truly watch over you."

They marched toward the forest as proud and straightas Vikings, in spite of their wounds and their burdens.No more tears for Stephen. Not a backward look. Lon-don. Baghdad. Cathay!

It was then that I saw the face in the dense foliage, ableached moon in a dusk of tangled ivy.

"Ruth, Stephen," I started to call. "You are beingwatched!"

But she had no eye for the children. She was watchingme. I had seen her several times in the forest. Somethingof curiosity—no, of awe—distinguished her from thegray, anonymous tribe. Perhaps it was she who had leftthe crosses around my estate, like charms to affright the devil. She had never threatened me. Once I had run fromher. Like a wraith of mist before the onslaught of sun-light, she had wasted into the trees. I had paused andwatched her with shame and pity.

Now, I walked toward her, compelled by a need whichsurpassed my fear. "I won't hurt you," I said. I wasdeathly afraid. Her friends could ooze from the trees andenvelop me before I could cry for help. "I won't hurtyou," I repeated. "I only want to talk."

The rank vegetable scent of her clogged my nostrils. Ihad always felt that the rose and the Mandrake repre-sented the antitheses of the forest: grace and crook-edness. Strange, though, now that I looked at her closelyfor the first time, she was like a crooked tree mistreatedby many weathers; a natural object unanswerable tohuman concepts of beauty and ugliness.

Dredging archaic words from memories of old books, I spoke with soft emphasis. "Tell me," I said. "Why doyou watch my house—my mead-hall? Is it treasure-richto you? Broad-gabled?"

She caught my meaning at once. "Not mead-hall."

"What then? The roses perhaps? You may pick someif you like."

"Bantling,"

"Bantling?*In my house?"*

She knelt and seized my hand and pressed her hairylips against my knuckles.

"Here," she said.

I flung my hands to my ears as if I had heard a Man-

drake shriek in the night. It was I who had shrieked. I fled...I fled...

His eyes were closed, he rested against a cushionembroidered with children playing Hoodman Blind.He rose from his seat when he heard me enter theroom.

"They're gone?"

"What? What did you say, John?"

"Stephen and Ruth are gone?"

"Yes."

He came toward me. "You're pale, Lady Mary. Don'tbe sad for me. I wanted to stay."

I said quietly: "I think you should go with your friends.They asked me to send you after them."

He blinked his eyes. The lids looked heavy and gray. "But I am staying to protect you. To be your son. Yousaid—"

"It was really Stephen I wanted. You're only a little boy. Stephen is a young man. I would have taught himto be a gentleman and a knight. But now that he's gone,what do I need with a skinny child of twelve?"

"But I don't ask to be loved like Stephen!"

I caught him between my hands, and his lean, hard-muscled shoulders, the manhood stirring within him, belied my taunts.

"Go to him," I cried. "Now, John. You'll lose him ifyou wait!"

Pallor drained from his face, like pain routed byopium, "Lady Mary," he whispered. "I think I understand. You*do* love me, don't you? Enough to let me go.So much—"

I dropped my hands from his shoulders. I must not touchhim. I must not kiss him. "So much. So much . . ."

Beyond the hedge, he turned and waved to me, laugh-ing, and ran to catch his friends. Before he could reachthe woods, Stephen blazed from the trees.

"I waited," he cried. "I knew you would come!"

The boys embraced in such a swirl of color, of whirlingbodies and clattering kettle drums, that the fair mighthave come to London Town! Then, arm in arm with Ruth, they entered the woods:

Summer is a-comin' in,Loud sing cuckoo . . .

1,also, entered the woods. For a long time I kneltbefore one of the stone crosses left by the Mandrakes—set like a bulwark between enormous oaks to thwartwhatever of evil, griffins, wolves, men, might threatenmy house. My knees sank through the moss to acheagainst stone; my lips were dry of prayer. I knelt,waiting.

I did not turn when the vegetable scent of her was apalpable touch. I said: "Would you like to live with me in the mead-hall?"

Her cry was human; anguish born of ecstasy. I mighthave said: "Would you like to see the Holy Grail?"

"Serve you?"

"Help me. You and your friends. Share with me."

I leaned to the shy, tentative fingers which loosened my hair and spread my tresses, as one spreads a finebrocade to admire its weave and the delicacy of itsfigures.

"Bantling," she said. "Madonna-beautiful." What hadJohn said? "I love your hair when it's loose. It's like ahalo..."Roses and I have this in common: we havebeen judged too kindly by the softness of our petals.

"I must go now. Those in the mead-hall would not welcome you. I shall have to send them away. For yoursake—and theirs. Tomorrow I will meet you here andtake you back with me."

Earth, the mother of roses, has many children.

THE FAIRY PRINCE

By H. C. Bailey

The town was a mess of crowded houses and huts, with-out form, like a heap of stones. It had been that, indeed, only a little while before. There were many Welshmenwho boasted and prayed that it should be so again. Butalready there lay about it a low girdle of white, and thedin and dust of King Edward's Flemish masons arose from sundown to sunset every day. Carnarvon would have its walls before winter drove the English soldiers back across the marches, before the hundred ships thatfurrowed the straits and lay, a dark forest, in the silverriver mouth, fled from the equinox.

It was six hundred years ago, but if you know whereto look you may still find the fairy ring on the side of Cefn-du, and the cave from which the little man came. His body was covered with a grey wolf's skin that leftarms and legs bare. His head was all black beard and hair. On his left arm he wore a bracelet of wolf's teethand yellow stones. Beside and behind him stood awoman, who wore a sheepskin dyed with madder. Theywere both very small and frail, but with the quick life ofa wild animal in eye and poise. He spoke to her in aguttural droning language, and turned and went downthe mountain side light and very swift of foot. They wereof the race who held Wales before the Welshmen came; who wrought their axes and arrow-heads of stone; whowere so strange of life that the Welsh accounted them not human nor mortal. They were of the little peoplewhom we call fairies.

It was an evening in early spring, and after a day ofshowers the sky spread all lucid in pale blue and violet

and lavender grey, and the vast jagged mountain peaks seemed close upon the green and silver of the sea. Someway down the slope the little man checked and stood atgaze. He looked across stony, barren land to the rich,dark vale of the Seiont. In among its blue-green tilthwere patches of black desolation. He croned some melan-choly song, and went on more slowly, swaying as hewent. The little people loathed war and its havoc asthings unclean.

The hand of the English conqueror lay heavy uponWales. Llewelyn, her last prince, had been slain, and allhis fastnesses were fallen, and the English king held hiscourt in Carnarvon. Still the stubborn mountaineers ofGwynedd would not own him master. The English sol- diery might march up and down their valleys and burnevery homestead that offered defiance, but till the moun-tains were laid low there was refuge for every man whodared starvation, and, if they were but a remnant, the rest could go sullenly about their business, yielding nomore than they must, and making the English infinitetoil and hardship, and promising themselves rebellion at the first chance. Wales was conquered, but no man sup-posed that it was won, and, least of all men, the king in Carnarvon.

The little man, whom his wife called Corb, went downthe valley white twilight fell, and slowly and more slowly,for he would not come near the houses of men who usediron and ate baked bread till nightfall. The stars stood ina dark sky before he came to the gate of Geulan for the"good piece," the sodden goat's meat and the bowl ofmilk which the womenfolk of David, the maer of thecymwd, ever put outside for the fairies. But on this night "good piece" there was none, and lights were burning in the house, and a roaring din came from it. Corb shrankaway, vanishing like a shadow behind the byres. He smelt the loathsome breath of war, and trembled like a wildanimal aware of peril.

The house was built of stakes and wattle, roofed with branches and a thatch of furze. Within, two tree trunks,stripped of their bark and polished, supported the centreof the roof. Between them it was open to the sky, andsmoke and sparks of a blazing fire shot upwards. The

house was round and its earthen floor strewn with rushes.A table stood at one side laden with steaming dishes andhorns of mead. At the head of it a rawboned, black-browed fellow lolled in the only chair. He wore a longsurcoat, much stained and faded, but gaudy still with ahundred embroideries. By the benches on either handwere a dozen fellows like him, but something less richlyput on. They ate ravenously, and shouted at each otherover their meat, and loudly and violently when they turned to ask more.

Two women waited on them and a lad, with hate andfear in their eyes. An old man crouched over the fire hugging to his bosom a thing like a rude violin, andcrooning to himself. The elder woman whispered some-thing to the younger, a slight, pretty thing, all grace inher close white tunic, and she fled out into the night.The man at the head of the table turned with an oath:

"How now, you witch?" He caught the woman's wrist."Bring your poppet back. I want her for my sport."

The woman answered nothing, but her eyes told thatshe understood and defied him. He haled her close

andtore off the white veil that she wore folded over her grey hair, and was saying something foul when the lad sprangin and tore her away. The soldier heaved himself up witha laugh: "Here's a snarling puppy!" quoth he, and struckthe lad down into the fire. Then he stood holding hissides and chuckling while the woman dragged the sense-less body from the flames. "What, you would deny theKing's men would you, you Welsh vermin?" he said."Out into the night with you and cool your blood. Markyou, bring me that girl back, or when we ride in themorning I will leave your homestead ashes." He reachedfor the old man and dragged him up. "Tell her that inher own whining tongue, you croaking minstrel," heroared, and shook him and hurled him upon the womanwho was still kneeling by her son. Then he fell uponthem and flung them out, and kicked the stunned boyafter them. The others cheered him with laughing oaths,but as he came grinning back with an "I would teachEdward Longshanks a way to ha' done with these Welsh pardi!"there was one who twisted a lip and said, "He,too, hath a fancy for teaching at whiles."

They drank up all the mead in the house, and thenthis captain of theirs, who was called Eustace o' Dover,rolled to the door and howled for the Welsh women. Butthey were fled away up the valley, and out of the dark-ness he heard no answer save a strange moaning songthat rose and fell like a stormy wind, inhuman. Corb was singing a charm against him and all horsemen, after themanner of the little people when they were troubled byill passion and violence. Eustace o' Dover fell silent andlistened, and felt a chilled sobriety and fear steal overhim, and cried a querulous question. But only the moan-ing of the song answered him, and he barred the door in a hurry and went back to the fire. Certainly the moun-tains were full of devils.

But in the morning, when sunlight flooded the valleyand there was no sound but bird song and the music ofthe river, he was mighty bold again, and swore the Welshgirl should not escape nun. Then said one who hadmarked his fears, Grey Roger: "Ay, and you swore weshould burn the house. But a man grows wise o' nights."

"I'll leave the nest to lure the birds back," quoth Eus-tace. "By sundown we will have them again." So theyrode away.

On that morning the King rode out from Carnarvon with his wolfhounds and his foresters. You see a tower of a man on the great black charger, lean, but huge ofbone. His green surcoat is weatherbeaten and worn. Thehat slung behind him leaves his close dark curls bare tothe wind. It is a square-wrought head borne boldly, andnever still, as his eyes look all ways. For all the dark curls, beard and moustache are red gold.

They were to rouse a wolf in the glens beneath Tryfan,but the din of war had driven the beasts from their haunts, and vainly the hounds ranged round Tryfan andacross the valley to the glens beneath Moel Eilio. Therethey found, and to wild music thundered on up and downthe glens towards Cefn-du.

So the little people saw them from their cave, andCorb stole out to join the sport. Never a fairy but counted it good work done to spoil a hunt that came nighhis dwelling, and these huntsmen were of the hated folk who had brought war to the mountains. So Corb laughed

as he flitted on. Over the brow of a hill he caught thewolf's foam flecks from the furze and laid them on another line, and broke puff balls, and flung himselfdown in a tarn. Off on the false scent the hounds sped, and from above, from a cave, another of the little peopleechoed a wolf's yelp, and the hounds answered madly.But when the King crested the hill he marked the quarryagainst the skyline beyond the glen and

checked amoment, and shouted to his foresters to whip the hounds back from the false scent, and dashed right on. The for-esters rode off with blowing of horn and hallooing, butthe din of wolves from the caves had made the hounds mad, and they would not be turned. So the forestersthundered after them, falling further and still further behind, while the King rode alone after his quarry.

Once and again he saw the wolf, and then in thecombes to northward lost him altogether, and drew rein swearing, and turned to search for the hounds; but theywere far away on the slopes above Llyn Padarn. Heheard a shout, and rode to it. But that shout came fromCorb, who lurked on the hillside above a bog. Againcame the shout, and the King put spurs to his wearyhorse. The next moment green sward yielded beneaththem with a hollow sucking sound, and the horse neighedin wild terror and plunged, and Mack slime rose likespray. The King hurled himself from the saddle, and, wriggling on the mire that sucked at him, reached a tus-sock of rushes, and another and another, and haled him-self panting on to solid earth.

He had his reins still, and braced himself and flungback his shoulders and hauled at them, shouting jollily. Madly the horse struggled, ruthlessly the King hauled at the reins, and as though he were swimming in mud thehorse plunged on, slowly, slowly, till his hoofs foundsomething firm beneath the mire, and, with an ugly gulpof the sucking bog, he came out and stood streamingslime and shivering. And the King, who had no breathleft to speak, whose sides were heaving as his, caressedhim and leaned upon his neck.

Slowly down the hillside came Corb, sobbing fear.Behold, he had dared a mad deed. He had mocked at amagician. Never since the world began had man or beast

fallen into that bog and come out again alive. But thisgiant had saved his horse and himself. Plainly a giant endued with the mastery of the elements, lord of earthand water and air and fire, a magician to be worshippedlike the storm-cloud. Fearing doom for himself and allthe little people, came Corb.

And behold the giant began to laugh! Corb was soquaint a thing, like a goblin from some minister's carv-ing, so little and hairy, and bowed and quaking with fear.Corb bowed himself to the very ground, and put dirtupon his head. The giant laughed louder. Corb quakedthe more. Such awful mirth must be omen of a grimdoom. "Who art thou, o' God's Name?" the Kingroared. "Nay, nay, if thou art man do not play the worm." For Corb had gone down grovelling. The King heaved him up by his wolfskin, and "Welsh art thou,little man?" he cried. And seeing that Corb understoodnothing, he stumbled the question out in Welsh words.

Corb shook his head vehemently. "Of the mountain men," he said, calling his race by the name themselvesused. "Of the little people"—that was the Welsh name for them.

"A hobgoblin,*pardi!* "the King cried. "A fairy man!" and laughed again. "Well, Sieur Fairy, hast a house for me or so much as a stable? Our stomachs cry manger."He made some more broken Welsh and signs, and Corbunderstood him, and, turning, beckoned him on. If thisdread magician wanted no more than a meal he could betaken to the homestead of David the maer and left there,while Corb fled away to his cave.

The day was waning now, and the shadows of themountains lay black across the glens. Before they cameto the homestead—the King's horse was lame—the sun was gone, and light and shadow mingled in a cool greymist.

Eustace and his men had been before them. All dayEustace lurked in a combe above the steading, and whenhe saw the Welsh women creep back through the shad-ows of sundown, he broke in for his prey.

The boy tried to bar the door against him, and was dashed aside. Eus-tace snatched the girl with a loud laugh, and crushed herto his breast. She made no sound, only she fought him

with every muscle of body and limb, fierce, indomitable.Her mother stood aloof, giving no cry nor aiding her,but staring at the Englishman hate and a cruel defiance.The rest of the soldiery began to jeer and laugh. For all his bulk and strength, Eustace could not master his lithequarry. He cursed her, and put a hand to his dagger.Then Grey Roger waddled up and gripped his wrist, and chuckled: "Nay, nay, my master. Naked hand to nakedhand is vantage enough for any man. And I'll lay a nobleon the lass."

The others laughed, but Eustace buffeted him off withan oath. "Out on you, knave. Who leads this troop, thouor I?"

"The lass is the better man," Roger chuckled; and,indeed, the girl tore herself free and darted away and crouched behind her mother, clinging to her. The troopbroke out in a great roar of laughter. Eustace strodeupon her again cursing, but now Roger stood in his way."No, by my faith! The lass hath won the bout, and BullyEustace pays forfeit by all the laws of arms. How sayyou, lads?"

"Forfeit, forfeit!" they chuckled.

"I will ha' forfeit o' thy bones, Bully Roger," Eustace

roared. "Stand off, I say. And you-------" he grasped at

the girl.

He was suddenly aware of silence. The room was still as death. He turned and looked into the eyes of the Kingand let the girl go, and shrank back and made a saluteand shrank back again.

"Say your say," growled the King.

Eustace looked at him a moment and down again atthe ground. "I ha' nought to say," he muttered.

"Till I came you had enough to say, methinks," quoththe King. He looked round the house, at its dishevelledugliness, the scattered refuse of food, the coweringwoman, the mass of ashes on the hearth where the oldminstrel crouched and fumbled, seeking among them theseed of fire. For if once the fire was out the life of the house was gone.

"Come hither, woman," he said in his stumblingWelsh. "Fear nothing. I am the King."

"There is no King in Wales," she said fiercely. "OurKing Llewelyn is dead and hath left no seed."

He looked down at her haughtily, and for a momentthere was silence. On a sudden Grey Roger darted tothe door and peered out and thrust it to and barred it,and turning with his back against it hissed out, "Sir, thereare Welsh spearmen all about us."

The King sat himself down on a bench. "Who is cap-tain here?" he said, placidly.

Eustace saluted again.

"Methinks you have work to do," the King smiledgrim.

"We will bear you safe through them, sir," Eustacemuttered.

"They should have our horses by now," said the King.

Roger turned from the lattice window. "The horses aretaken," said he. "I reckon the Welshmen a hundred and

more."

"A hundred and more," said the King, quietly. "Well,sir, I reckon you no paladin to fight a host. What broughtthem down on you?"

"It must be the imp of a boy," Eustace muttered; andthen the woman laughed loud.

The King turned to her: "What had he done to your boy?"

"What have you done to all Wales?" she cried,fiercely.

The King glanced at her daughter. "What hath he doneby you, mistress?"

"Nothing, nothing! I am not hurt"; and she laughed.

The woman came a step nearer, and her eyes flamedat him: "Fool, fool!" she cried. "I made her the bait totempt your wild beasts to their death, and now you, too,are caught."

With grave eyes the King considered her and turnedaway. "It seems that you are a very skillful captain, Mas-ter Eustace," said he. "Go to, order your battle."

"We can hold the house," said Eustace, sullenly.

"And if they fire it?" quoth Roger.

"They'll not fire it while the women are in."

"I do not like your battle," said the King. "The womenshall go out to their kinsfolk, and with them, Master

Eustace, go you and I, for I think it is I and you whomthese Welshmen would choose."

Eustace started back. "Not you, my lord!" he cried."I will go. Yes,*pardi,* I will go yield myself, and the others may hold the house with the women and hold yousafe till help comes from Carnarvon. I will go."

There was a scream from the old minstrel: "The seedof fire! The seed lives!" He had found a living ember and blown it red, and was feeding it with dried furze andthe flames leapt up. "The soul of the house is not dead!"and he began a wild, hoarse song.

The King stood up and laid his hand on Eustace'sshoulder. "We go together," he said. "For the rest—stand to your arms, hold out to the end." He strode tothe door and drew the bar and beckoned the women.Slowly, amazed they came, and close behind them Eus-tace and he marched out on the Welsh spears.

In the misty twilight they saw saffron cloaks clusteringand the spearheads glitter. The girl's mother cried out:"Iestyn! Iestyn! we have trapped their King. See, he fol-lows after me to render himself." There was a rustle,like the sound of bees in a grove of limes on a summer's day, and the Welshmen were all round them—a mob ofsturdy, small men, for the most part with no armourabove their tunics and saffron cloaks, for the most partbare-legged and bare-foot; but some few with little coatsof mail and battle-axe, and sword in place of spear. Theyall chattered together. One who seemed the leader, not much more than a lad, and beardless, thrust through themidst and laid his hand on the King's arm, crying, "Yieldthee to me, Iestyn, son of David, son of Owen."

The King laughed, and put on his hand a hand thatswallowed it up. "I am your King," he said.

"He is taken. He shall pay the blood debt for Davidthy father, for Llewelyn our prince," the woman cried,and there were shouts.

"I am your King," he said again. "I come not to yieldmyself, but to do you justice."

But it was plain that they made nothing of his brokenWelsh. They were muttering and pressing closer whenthe girl cried out: "He is our King. He comes not toyield himself, bat to do us justice."

Then the crowd surged one way and another with a roar of talk, and Iestyn, the leader, turned upon his sister as her mother clutched her: "Nest! What sayest thou? They have wronged thee even as----"

"I am not wronged. I am my own," she cried.

Her mother screamed out: "The Englishman there, helaid hands upon her. He beat down Idwal into the fire."

"I am the King," the deep voice thundered. He smiledat the girl. "Speak my words in thy tongue, wench."

So clear tones ringing phrase for phrase with the deep,it came in Welsh and English. "He says: 'I am the King.I come to assure you justice on this man who hathwronged the homestead here, and justice on any manwhosoever that wrongs man or maid of you. For I will show favour to none that plunders or does violence, andof me the humblest serf in Wales shall have his equalright. I am your King.'

Then there was silence awhile and looks of wonderand questioning, and then a wave of chatter, and the woman cried out: "An English king is no king of ours.We will have a Welshman to our prince."

But as she spoke the blast of a horn broke throughher words, and they were all hushed and straining to listen. The boom and clang of men-at-arms came near,and a man thrust breathless through the throng, crying:"The English knights!"

Iestyn, the leader, gripped the King's arm harder, and his mother cried out: "The blood debt! The blood debt!Strike while you may!"

But the girl screamed: "They came out to us withnaked hands, Iestyn!" And Iestyn wavered, and his spearmen swayed and surged, and some gatheredtogether and ran upon the King. Eustace hurled himself in the way, and their points clashed upon his coat of mailand slipped aside, but he was borne down. Falling, hesnatched at Nest and dragged her with him, and shouted:"The girl dies if you strike the King!"

With an oath the King tore her away from him; butshe, laughing wildly, cried out: "Let be, let it be so, my lord," and struggled, and falling again into Eustace's arms, shrieked, "I die if you strike the King."

On the tumult the English horsemen broke, and the

Welsh scattered before them. But the King shouted:"Halt! Halt! We be all friends here. Who strikes, strikesthe King."

Then their captain rode up and saluted. "Orders, sir?"he asked, gruffly.

"Have this fellow in guard, Bertram," quoth the King,thrusting at Eustace with his foot. He hauled the girl up again, and "Speak for me, mistress," he said. "I chargeyou all come to me in Carnarvon on St. Mark's Day.Then shall you see this knave who hath wronged youjudged before a Welsh prince. For I will give you a princethat was born in Wales, and can speak no word ofEnglish, and he shall rule you according to the ancientlaws of Wales."

Then the woman muttered: "A fairy prince!" And the King laughed. "Come and see."The dawn of St. Mark's Day broke grey and goldenover the mountains, and a haze of misty nun fled up thestraits before the rising wind. In the huddled streets ofCarnarvon garlands and chains of branches tossed and rustled and gleamed. Soon the town was teeming withpeople, the streets all eddying, crowded life. There were men-at-arms with coifs of mail and steel caps glitteringabove their blazoned surcoats, and the craftsmen and traders had on their gayest jerkins of russet and sarcitisand even marble cloth, each with a sprig of sweet herbsstuck in his cap. The girls had bound their hair withflowers or fillets of white, and their mothers' gorgetswere never so gay, and never had the Welsh town seen such a show of scarlet and purple tyretaine. Among all these you might see the white head cloths, folded likecrowns, of Welsh women and Welsh saffron and maddergowns, and Welshmen holding together in little compa-nies, muttering together, and looking askance at theEnglishry, bare-legged and bare-footed, unarmed or hid-ing their arms beneath cloak and tunic. Beyond the half-built walls, where no guards were set, all along the greenvalleys beyond eyeshot, there were splashes of colour,white and crimson and gold, where from each homesteadand hamlet Welsh folk were hurrying to the town.

Close above the quay, where the old tower stood greenand yellow with lichen, where the first courses of the

walls already marked the plan of the new castle, the yeo-men of the King's household kept clear a great space.There flaunted banners, the three lions of England, goldupon red; the red cross of St. George, the three crownsof St. Edmund, gold upon blue; the cross and martletsof St. Edward the Confessor, in blue and gold. In a littlewhile, when the crowd was already a score ranks deep beyond the barriers and the halberds, English nobles andknights came in state to the open space in the midst."There had they many

rich ornaments, broidered on cen-dals and samites; many a fair pennon fixed on a lance,many a banner displayed," so that the gay spring air wasalive with lions and leopards and stags and boars andtrees and cinquefoil and roses and stars in all the coloursof heraldry.

There was a dais covered in crimson with gilt chairsupon it, and above a canopy all white and gold. Two hours before noon, marshalled by heralds in their tabardsand led by the Justiciar of Wales, came a company of the Uchelwyr, the men of note among the Welsh. Theywere unarmed like the English knights, and their womenwalked with them; but against the English they were ofa strange simplicity: no long trains nor mantles of velveton the women, no broidery of gold to their gorgets andwimples; and the men, neither clean-shaven nor beardedlike the English, but all with moustaches. The men hadonly cloaks and tunics that left knee and leg bare to theirwadded boots, and there were but the three colours,white and saffron and madder, among them all.

When they were drawn up in ranks before the daïs, the trumpets sounded, and out from the tower came KingEdward and his Queen. A gold diadem glittered on his close dark curls; her black hair flowed upon her shoul-ders from a band of gold. He wore a gown of red andgold, and her mantle was gold and white. Behind themwalked the pageant of their lords and ladies. To the daïs they came and saluted the people and sat them down,and Robert Burnell, the Chancellor, a heavy man ofheavy head, took stand beside the King; and beside theQueen came the women with the baby son that had beenborn to her in Carnarvon a little while before. Then the King stood up, a giant of a man, and he smiled down at

the Queen, who sat very still and pale, her hands nervouson the white silk of her mantle. The Chancellor turnedand made a sign to a black-gowned monk, and he cameforward, and as the King spoke, spoke sentence for sen-tence in Welsh.

"My good folk of Wales," the King cried, "to haveyour goodwill as I have your obedience I have bidden you here to-day. Ye have told me that ye will be contentto take for your Prince any man so he be a Welshman. Say ye so still?"

Then there came from the Welsh folk before him mut-terings and cries and shouts, and the monk turned to theKing: "They say they will welcome any Prince to Walesthat is Welshman born. But none other."

The King laughed. "I will name you a Prince," hecried, "if you will follow and obey him whom I name."

And again there was muttering and shouting, and the monk turned and said: "So they swear to do if the Kingshall appoint one of their nation."

The King strode forward: "I will name you one thatwas born in Wales and can speak never a word of English. In whose life and conversation you shall findnought of Englishry."

Whereat the Welsh shouted loud and long, and the monk said: "For such an one they swear to give their lives."

Then the King took from the captain of his yeomen,Sir Bertram Daylesford, his shield, and on it put his babyson that lay there murmuring softly, and he held the shield with its burden aloft and cried: "Behold yourPrince! Here in Carnarvon was he born, and of Englandhe knows nought. I give you mine own son to guard you.Hold him dear and cherish him, Prince of Wales."

For a moment there was silence. Then the air was rentwith shouts and laughter. After a while, from the

midstof the Welsh folk, came out an old man and said: "Himwe will hold dear and cherish, and for him we will giveour lives," and again the shouts rose loud.

The King called out for silence: "Look you, the firstthing that your Prince shall do shall be justice. Stand forth you, Iestyn, and your mother and your sister. Bringme that knave Eustace." Iestyn came from the crowd,

flushed and uneasy, leading his mother Etthil, and thegirl Nest clung to her. Two yeomen marched Eustace up.Then the King lowered the shield. "Here is one that hath wronged a Welsh homestead," he cried. "Look, child!"and he made the baby look at Eustace, who was indeedno pretty sight, so that the baby cried bitterly. "Thydoom is said," quoth the King, grimly. "Take him awayand let nun hang," and Eustace bowed his head.

Then the girl Nest cried out: "My lord, my lord!" and flung wide her arms.

And her mother said quickly: "No, no! the babe mustnot send him to death."

And Iestyn drew himself up: "My lord, let the first thing we have of our Prince be mercy."

The King put the child aside and said: "Hearken,Welsh folk! here be some of you that ask mercy on an Englishman that hath wronged a Welsh home. How sayyou?"

Loudly, they shouted "Mercy! Mercy!"

"So be it," quoth the King. "Let him go!" and theyeomen left their hold of Eustace, and he slunk away, and the eyes of the girl Nest followed him. "But hereaf-ter, if any man whosoever doth wrong to Welsh folk theirPrince will hold him to stern account."

Again the shouts rose wildly, and in eager ranks theWelsh came up to look upon their Prince as he lay in hismother's arms.

That night in the caves of the little people it was toldthat peace had come again to Wales, and Corb and all the little people knew that it was their work.

THE UGLY UNICORN

Jessica Amanda Salmonson

In a garden in China five hundred years ago, there wasa maiden whose eyes were so pretty, it was difficult tobelieve she was blind.

The blind girl's name was Kwa Wei. She was be-friended by the Liu-mu, a homely silver-haired creaturelike a one-horned jackass. As Kwa Wei was blind, shehad no idea the Liu-mu was ugly.

It came the first time in spring. Kwa Wei had beensmelling orange blossoms and plums. On hearing the beast's hoofs upon the lawn, she thought it was a ponybroken loose from Uncle Lu Wei's stables.

It was friendly, so she petted its head, and felt the single horn, blunt at the end.

At once she thought it had to be a young Poh, thestrongest and most beautiful unicorn of the many kinds that live in China. She clapped her hands and giggled. "It's a Poh! Have you come to visit me in my darkness?I'm glad!"

The Liu-mu was too embarrassed and ashamed to say,"I am not the strong, good-looking Poh, but only an unfortunate Liu-mu." He had never been mistaken foranything beautiful until now. So all he said was, "Yes, Ihave come to visit you."

"Oh! How I wish I could see you with these uselesseyes!" said Kwa Wei, and giggled anew.

The Liu-mu lowered his broad head until the blunthorn touched the ground. His eyes were as sad as a deer's.

"Would you like a ride through the garden?" askedthe Liu-mu. Kwa Wei clapped her hands delightedly and

climbed upon the ugly unicorn. "Hold on to my mane,"he said, then trotted off through a maze of hedges.

Such creatures as the Liu-mu are able to run throughmore than one world. Kwa Wei knew at once that thegarden had changed. The air was thicker with perfume. Grander flowers pressed around her as she rode aroundand about Fairyland.

"Wheee!" exclaimed Kwa Wei, feeling the gentle windin her hair. "Faster!" she said, laughing. "Faster!"

"Not too fast," said the Liu-mu. "I'll get worn out."

Such was the first meeting of Kwa Wei and the ugly unicorn.

The girl's uncle was a famous general under the ruleof Duke Ling. Such important families live sad and vio-lent lives.

On the day of Kwa Wei's birth, it had been arrangedthat she would marry Hah Ling Me, Duke Ling's grand-son. When the girl was two years old, she became ill andlost her sight. She hardly remembered what it was liketo see.

It was difficult to dissolve a marriage agreementbetween important families. Year after year, Duke Ling wished that Kwa Wei would die, so that his favoritegrandson needn't be burdened with a blind wife. If themarriage agreement were cancelled, there might be warbetween Duke Ling and his own general.

As for Uncle Lu Wei, he knew it was a painful situa-tion. Over the years he had sought the aid of famousphysicians from all over China.

"Her eyes are so beautiful," he said. "Why can't youmake them work?"

The physicians could do nothing.

When his niece approached the year of marriage,Uncle Lu sent in desperation for the wizard-woman of

Mount Tzu.

The wizard-woman was thin and tiny and wrinkled.She looked like an old fairy, that's how small she was.She had no teeth and her nose was so small you couldhardly see it. She looked into Kwa Wei's face and in hereyes and finally said, "She can be cured."

Lu Wei was delighted. "How can she be cured?" heasked.

"It requires only the rind of an orange and the pit ofa plum, ground together with the horn of a Liu-mu."

Uncle Lu's spirits fell. "I have oranges and plums inmy garden. They will bear fruit soon. But as to the hornof the Liu-mu, who has ever seen one?"

To Kwa Wei the little old wizard-woman said, "Prettygirl, would you like to be able to see through those eyes?"

"I cannot remember what it was like to see," she said."The world is very nice even so." Then wistfully sheadded, "But I would like to see my friend the Poh, themost beautiful unicorn in China."

"Have you the Poh as your friend?"

"Yes I do."

"Well, you may go now. I must speak to your unclein private."

When the blind girl left the hall, the wizard-woman said to Lu Wei: "There were silver hairs on her dress. They are the hairs of the Liu-mu. It may have repre-sented itself as a glorious Poh, being ashamed of its ugliness."

From her bag of medicine, the wizard-woman retrievedtwo cubes of sugar. She said, "This is Liu-mu poison.The Liu-mu is intelligent and will not eat from the handof anyone it doesn't know. Kwa Wei herself must feedthe Liu-mu the poison. Then you can tear out the hornfrom its brow and grind it with the orange peel and plumpit. When Kwa Wei eats biscuits made of this mixture,her eyes will be cured."

When the wizard-woman returned to her mountainretreat, Uncle Lu sat in his high-backed wooden chair and sighed. He said to himself, "I must let Kwa Weibelieve the Liu-mu is a Poh. I must trick her into be-lieving these poisonous cubes are sugar for her pet Poh.When the Liu-mu is dead, I will take its horn to makethe curative biscuits. But Kwa Wei must never know howit happened, or she will be unhappy. It is a sad thing,but if I do not do it, there will be war with Duke Ling."

Uncle Lu was not a bad man. Nevertheless, he plannedto do this bad thing. Kwa Wei would have her sight; she

would be able to marry her betrothed; no one would beoffended, so there would be no war. What was the lifeof the Liu-mu, which after all was ugly, compared to allthese good outcomes? Even so, Uncle Lu felt terrible.

The following afternoon, Kwa Wei once more rode theLiu-mu in and out of Fairyland. "I smell a flower unlikeanything in my uncle's garden!" she said excitedly."What does it look like, oh most beautiful and strongPoh?"

"It looks like a persimmon tree, but its flowers arelacy hollow balls that glow in the middle."

"Oh! And I smell something like a tulip tree, but it'sdifferent!"

"Its leaves are purple and red, but its flowers areemerald green."

"Is it true?" Kwa Wei asked. "Fairyland is a beautifulplace for a unicorn as beautiful as you."

The Liu-mu felt guilty not to admit it was not a Poh-unicorn. To make amends for his lie, he said to the rideron his back: "I would like to take you to visit the Vale of the Unicorns."

"Is there such a Vale?" asked Kwa Wei enthu-siastically.

"The Vale of the Unicorns is terrifyingly beautiful,so much so that mortals go blind if they see it. As you are already blind, it will be perfectly safe. Even with-out your sight, you will feel the beauty, and smell the beauty, and hear the beauty of the Vale of theUnicorns."

Therefore the Liu-mu took his rider toward twostone lanterns. The lanterns began to grow until theywere as large as temples. Then Kwa Wei and the uglyunicorn were in the Vale of the Unicorns. The first unicornthey met was the fierce Hiai-chi. It was humming to itself a primitive chant in a deep voice. If birds were as big asdragons, they might sound like the humming Hiai-chi.

"What is making such a deep song?" asked Kwa Wei,clinging tightly to the Liu-mu's curly mane.

"It is my friend the Hiai-chi. You can say hello to it."

"Hello, Hiai-chi. I have come to the Vale of the Uni-corns riding the beautiful, strong Poh."

The Hiai-chi was a unicorn twice the size of an ele-phant. Its horn sprouted between the eyes of its dragonhead. It had a tail like a hundred brooms and a manelike a lion. When this wonderful animal heard Kwa Weisay she was riding on a Poh, the Hiai-chi began to laughin its bass voice. It said, "Are you riding on a Poh? Haha ha! You're a funny maiden!"

"Yes, I am the Poh-unicorn," said the Liu-mu sternly,and the Hiai-chi stopped laughing.

"You have a marvelous voice to chant with," said KwaWei. "Will you chant sutras for my Uncle Lu, who hasbeen unhappy for several days?"

"I will chant sutras for your uncle," said the Hiai-chi. Then Kwa Wei and the ugly unicorn went elsewhere in the Vale. The next beast they encountered was the Kio-toan tiger-unicorn. It had striped fur and three pairs oflegs. Its horn was like a licorice-and-orange candy stick.It was purring like a big kitten.

"What a pleasant sound," said Kwa Wei. "What sortof unicorn is it?"

"The tiger-unicorn, Kio-toan," said the Liu-mu. "Ifyou reach over to one side, you can scratch behind

one of its ears."

Kwa Wei scratched behind the Kio-toan's ear. Thebeast purred louder. "Such gentle hands!" said the Kio-toan. "Scratch a little to the left."

"I'm glad to meet you," said Kwa Wei as she contin-ued to scratch behind the ear. "As I am blind, the beautyof the Vale cannot hurt me. Even without sight, I cantell that it is a splendid place. And the tiger-unicorn isalmost as lovely as the Poh that I am riding."

The Kio-toan laughed. "So that is a Poh you areriding? Well, thank you for the nice rub behind my ear."

The next unicorn they met was the Pih Sie, a littlegoat-unicorn with long white fur, golden eyes, and sweetpink lips. It made a sound like a gentle lamb and KwaWei guessed at once, "It's the Pih Sie! Oh, sweet littlegoat-unicorn, am I glad to meet you, riding as I am onChina's most beautiful unicorn, the Poh!"

"That is very funny," said the Pih Sie in a musicalvoice. "That is funny indeed. This is the most beautiful Poh, is it?"

"Yes I am," said the Liu-mu. "Don't pretend youdon't know me."

"I know you very well, Master Poh, O Most BeautifulAmong Us. But that ugly fellow over there among thepeony flowers knows you better."

Among the peony flowers stood the actual Poh, agraceful horned horse with strength to devour lions. Sud-denly the Liu-mu began to tremble.

"What's wrong?" asked Kwa Wei, feeling her friendshake.

The Poh spoke with the voice of an angelic being."The Poh that you are riding is afraid because I am the vicious Kutiao, the leopard-unicorn. I am usually danger-ous. But here in the Vale of the Unicorns, I am harmless. Don't worry about me, strong and beautiful Poh-unicorn,Ruler of the Vale of Unicorns. But as you leave, take care not to run into the ugly face of the Liu-mu, or yourfriend might not think the Vale is excellent after all."

Then the Poh, pretending to be a leopard-unicorn,leapt across the hedge of peonies and was gone.

The Liu-mu, ashamed of itself, took Kwa Wei back toward the temple-sized lanterns. The two stone lanternsbegan to shrink until they were ordinary garden decora-tions. Then Kwa Wei recognized the sounds and smellsof her uncle's garden.

"I am glad you took me to that place," said Kwa Weias she climbed down from the back of the ugly unicorn."The biggest surprise was the Kutiao. I never would haveguessed a leopard-unicorn would sound like an angelinstead of a grouchy old leopard."

"Kwa Wei," said the Liu-mu, "What if I weren't themost beautiful unicorn in China, but only an unfortunateLiu-mu that looks like a silly old donkey."

"Ha ha!" laughed Kwa Wei. "It could never be true,so why think about it? You are gentle and the best friendanyone could have. What could you be but the strongand gorgeous Poh? Anyway, you are the

most beautifulto me."

Then remembering something, Kwa Wei opened thepouch dangling from her belt, and removed two sugarcubes. She said, "Uncle Lu gave me these candies andsaid they would be a nice treat for my friend the Poh.

Here, this one's your reward for taking me through theVale of the Unicorns."

"Thank you, I accept," said the Liu-mu as it ate thesugar.

Kwa Wei laughed musically and said, "I'm a selfishgirl, so I'll eat the other one myself." She put it right in her mouth. It was tasty but it made her head swim. Shesaid goodbye to the ugly unicorn and started awaythrough the familiar garden.

When it was time for the day's last meal, Kwa Wei didnot show up at the table. Servants went to find out whatshe was doing. They found her on the ground outsidethe mansion, unable to get up. She was carried to bed and the local physician was sent for. Uncle Lu Weiarrived to see what was wrong. Kwa Wei said, "Oh,Uncle, I don't feel very well. Do I have to eat mydinner?"

"Not if you don't want to," said Uncle Lu.

The doctor said, "It is something in her stomach. Whatdid you eat today, young mistress Kwa Wei?"

The girl replied, "Nothing since lunch, except a piece

Lu Wei became pale when he heard this. He backedout of the room, stumbling. When the doctor came put,Kwa Wei's uncle said, "She has eaten Liu-mu poisonprepared by the wizard-woman of Mount Tzu. What canwe do?"

"She must have the antidote in two or three hours orshe will die," said the doctor.

Soldiers employed by Uncle Lu Wei, along with every-one else available in and around his mansion, were sentimmediately to Mount Tzu to search for the wizard-woman. Lu Wei himself went, it was so important.

Every afternoon, Duke Ling's favorite grandson,young master Hah Ling Me, visited the old ruler for a game of checkers. But today, the old man's favoritegrandson hadn't come. When a servant went to checkon Hah Ling Me and find out why he was tardy, theydiscovered, stretched out on the floor in the young man'shouse, an ugly unicorn too sick to stand up.

Soldiers came and surrounded the sick animal and pointed spears at him. "What have you done with HahLing Me!" demanded one of the soldiers.

The sick unicorn said, "I am none other than Hah LingMe, too sick to return to my human shape."

The soldiers weren't sure they believed it, but took thesick Liu-mu to the palace on the back of a cart. DukeLing came out into the yard to talk to the Liu-mu. Herecognized Hah Ling Me's sorrowful eyes and

gentlevoice. "Grandfather," said the ugly unicorn, "as I wasnever allowed to see my betrothed, General Lu Wei's niece, I took this other form to see her in her uncle'sgarden. Now I am sick and cannot change back."

Duke Ling looked around at the members of his house-hold, who were gathered in the yard to see the ugly uni-corn. Then the duke announced the long hidden secret:

"My son Prince Ling, who died in brave battle tenyears ago, had three wives. His favorite was Princess Chu, who vanished after the death of my son. It wasoften rumored that the beautiful woman was a fairy prin-cess, and that she returned to Fairyland after the deathof her husband. She left behind their only child, youngmaster Hah Ling Me, a homely boy, but so gentle andkind that everyone loved nun. As you can see, he is a fairy-boy after all, and has fallen ill in his other shape asa Liu-mu. There is only one person with the skill to nurse a Liu-mu: the wizard-woman of Mount Tzu. All my sol-diers and even the scullery maids and servants must goat once to Mount Tzu to find the wizard-woman in orderto save my fairy grandson."

Everyone from Lu Wei's mansion had already rushedinto the mountains to seek the wizard-woman. The exception was one nurse who remained at pitiful KwaWei's side, mopping her brow with a silk rag. The girl moaned. Suddenly there was a commotion against the outside wall of the bedroom, as though something weretrying to knock the mansion over.

The nurse hurried to a place beside the door to thehallway and grabbed a long wooden pole. She stood ready to fight. But when the wall crumbled, the nursesaw a big animal, China's most beautiful unicorn, its one

horn as long as a spear, its nostrils flaring, its four hooveslike big hammers pounding the floor of the bedroom.

The nurse dropped her fighting-stick and fell down ina swoon.

Kwa Wei sat up slowly and asked, "Is it an earth-quake? Why has the wall fallen in?"

Then Kwa Wei heard the huge footsteps and asked,"Who is it?"

"You have met me once before," said the Poh, andKwa Wei recognized the angelic voice.

"You are the leopard-unicorn! You said you were dan-gerous outside the Vale of the Unicorns. Will you eatme?"

"I am not the leopard-unicorn, but the ruler of uni-corns, the Poh that all call beautiful. I said I was the Kutiao because your friend the Liu-mu pretended to beme."

"My dear friend is not the Poh but the Liu-mu?"

"Now you know the truth. He is the ugliest of uni-corns. He is also sick, just like you, because you both ate poison. Come quickly! Ride upon my shoulders! Iwill take you to the only one that can save your life!"

Kwa Wei struggled from beneath the covers and wentto the Poh's side wearing her silk nightgown. The

Poh-unicorn knelt so that Kwa Wei could climb wearily ontothe strong white shoulders. Then the Poh leapt throughthe hole in the wall and ran across the tops of trees.

Duke Ling's soldiers and servants and Duke Ling him-self were all in the mountains looking for the wizard-woman, leaving behind one elderly gardener to standover the sick Liu-mu. When the gardener saw the fiercelybeautiful Poh running toward the castle, right across the tops of trees, what could the old man do but hide in thebushes?

The Poh and its rider, Lu Wei's blind niece, landedgracefully in the yard. The elderly gardener trembled ashe saw the Poh snatch up the Liu-mu in its mouth as a mother cat snatches up a kitten. Then the Poh ran off inthe direction of a small stone garden ornament, wherethe Poh, the Liu-mu, and General Lu Wei's blind niece, disappeared.

Just like Kwa Wei's nurse, Duke Ling's gardenerfainted.

Goodness! What a strange story! Does anyone knowwhat is likely to happen next? The most beautiful unicornin China, with the most ugly unicorn held by the scruff,and the beautiful blind maiden riding on its back, hurriedinto Fairyland where the Poh deposited its cargo beforethe throne of the Fairy Queen.

The queen lived in a crystal palace. She was morebeautiful than mortal eyes can tell. She kept at the side of her throne a small bag that looked exactly like thebag owned by the wrinkled old wizard-woman of MountTzu. Was it possible that the withered up mountain hag and this beautiful queen were the same woman? Whoknows! In any case, the Fairy Queen was instantly ableto cure Kwa Wei and the Liu-mu of the poison.

When the Liu-mu opened its eyes, it turned into thehomely but sweet young master Hah Ling Me, Duke Ling's grandson. He looked up at the Queen of Fairylandand exclaimed, "Mother! I haven't seen you in so long!I thought you must have died. I was sad!"

"You were meant for the mortal world, Hah Ling Me, and you were meant for this mortal girl. But your grand-father Duke Ling didn't want you to marry her becauseshe is blind. Due to my tricks, I have gotten youtogether. Now you will be married in Fairyland whereno one can stop you. You will be sent home with manywedding presents to start your own house and be inde-pendent of the families Ling and Wei. You can do whatyou please from now on."

"And will you cure my bride of blindness?" asked HahLing Me.

"Fairies cannot undo what Gods require. The onlycure for her blindness involves your death, Hah Ling Me."

I will gladly die for Kwa Wei!" said Hah Ling Me.

"Wait a minute," said Kwa Wei. "Have I complainedbecause I'm blind? If I had my vision, you could neveragain take me to the Vale of the Unicorns, because inthe first place you'd be dead, and second of all, if I sawthe Vale with my eyes, it would blind me! I want to

marry you, Hah Ling Me, oh most beautiful boy inChina!"

"I am not beautiful, Kwa Wei, but you are very beauti-ful. Can you really marry such an ugly fellow?"

Kwa Wei laughed as though it were a joke. "Anyway,"she said, "let's get married right now."

Up on the side of Mount Tzu, the soldiers and house-hold members of Duke Ling's palace had come to blows with the soldiers and household of Lu Wei's mansion.Scullery maids and stable workers and soldiers used their kung-fu to give each other black eyes and bloody noses.After a while, they were all worn out. Their bones were sore. The fighters were scattered on the ground, sweating and puffing and unable to move. Duke Ling and GeneralLu Wei shouted for both sides to get up and fight somemore. They finally did get up, but not to fight. Instead,a wonderful thing began to happen, and everyone stoodto see it.

Coming down from the highest part of the mountainwas a wedding-parade of a startling kind. Riding on theback of the Poh were a groom and a bride. Hah LingMe and Kwa Wei were both dressed in fabulous costumesand wore bright opera paint on their faces. Behind themcame a whole train of animals with carts full of useful and valuable objects.

The Pih Sie or goat-unicorn pulled a cart laden withgold coins.

The purring Kio-toan or tiger-unicorn's cart was full offine lacquered furniture, bolts of cloth that shimmered like precious stones and metals, and swords encrustedwith gems.

The Hiai-chi or dragon-unicorn was humming the wed-ding song. It pulled a gigantic cart on which sat a bighouse with prettily carved doors and windows and roofs.

Walking alongside this procession was the old wizard-woman of the mountain. She had married them herself.When the procession stopped, the wizard-woman said,"Hah Ling Me and Kwa Wei have been married in Fairy-land. These gifts will set them up in their own house. Itis for Duke Ling and Lu Wei to decide where the newly-weds' house will be."

"I will give my north acres, closest to Duke Ling'spalace," said Uncle Lu Wei happily.

"I will give my south acres, closest to Lu Wei's man-sion," said Duke Ling, equally glad.

Then the beat-up and bruised members of the twohouseholds began to dance and sing together. They fol-lowed the wedding procession down from the mountain.

For five hundred years this story has waited to be told.Now it has been.

THE BROWNIE OF THEBLACK HAGGS

by James Hogg

When the Sprots were Lairds of Wheelhope, which isnow a long time ago, there was one of the ladies whowas very badly spoken of in the country. People did not just openly assert that Lady Wheelhope (for every land-ward laird's wife was then styled Lady) was a witch, butevery one had an aversion even at hearing her named;and when by chance she happened to be mentioned, oldmen would shake their heads and say, "Ah! let us alaneo' her! The less ye meddle wi' her the better." Old wives would give over

spinning, and, as a pretence for hearingwhat might be said about her, poke in the fire with thetongs, cocking up their ears all the while; and then, aftersome meaning coughs, hems, and haws, would haply say,"Hech-wow, sirs! An a' be true that's said!" or something equally wise and decisive.

In short, Lady Wheelhope was accounted a very badwoman. She was an inexorable tyrant in her family, quar-relled with her servants, often cursing them, strikingthem, and turning them away; especially if they were religious, for she could not endure people of that charac-ter, but charged them with every thing bad. Whenevershe found out that any of the servant men of the Laird'sestablishment were religious, she gave them up to the military, and got them shot; and several girls that wereregular in their devotions, she was supposed to have gotrid of by poison. She was certainly a wicked woman, elsemany good people were mistaken in her character; andthe poor persecuted Covenanters were obliged to unitehi their prayers against her.

As for the Laird, he was a big, dun-faced, pluffy body,

that cared neither for good nor evil, and did not wellknow the one from the other. He laughed at his lady's tantrums and barley-hoods; and the greater the rage thatshe got into, the Laird thought it the better sport. Oneday, when two maid-servants came running to him, ingreat agitation, and told him that his lady had felled oneof their companions, the Laird laughed heartily, and saidhe did not doubt it.

"Why, sir, how can you laugh?" said they. "The poorgirl is killed."

"Very likely, very likely," said the Laird. "Well, it willteach her to take care who she angers again."

"And, sir, your lady will be hanged."

"Very likely; well, it will teach her not to strike sorashly again—Ha, ha, ha! Will it not, Jessy?"

But when this same Jessy died suddenly one morning, the Laird was greatly confounded, and seemed dimly to comprehend that there had been unfair play going. Therewas little doubt that she was taken off by poison; butwhether the Lady did it through jealousy or not, wasnever divulged; but it greatly bamboozled and astonished the poor Laird, for his nerves failed him, and his wholeframe became paralytic. He seems to have been exactly in the same state of mind with a colley that I once had.He was extremely fond of the gun as long as I did notkill anything with it (there being no game laws in Ettrick Forest in those days), he got a grand chase after thehares when I missed them. But there was one day that Ichanced for a marvel to shoot one dead, a few paces before his nose. I'll never forget the astonishment that the poor beast manifested. He stared one while at thegun, and another while at the dead hare, and seemed tobe drawing the conclusion, that if the case stood thus, there was no creature sure of its life. Finally, he took histail between his legs and ran away home, and neverwould face a gun all his life again.

So was it precisely with Laird Sprot of Wheelhope. Aslong as his Lady's wrath produced only noise and uproaramong the servants, he thought it fine sport; but whenhe saw what he believed the dreadful effects of it, he became like a barrel organ out of tune, and could onlydiscourse one note, which he did to every one he met.

"I wish she mayna hae gotten something she had beenthe waur of." This note he repeated early and late, nightand day, sleeping and waking, alone and in company,from the moment that Jessy died till she was buried; and on going to the churchyard as chief mourner, he whis-pered it to her relatives by the way. When they came tothe grave, he took his stand at the head, nor would hegive place to the girl's father; but there he stood, like ahuge post, as though he neither saw nor heard; and whenhe had lowered her head into the grave and dropped thecord, he slowly lifted his hat with one hand, wiped hisdim eyes with the back of the other, and said, in a deep tremulous tone, "Poor lassie! I wish she didna get some-thing she had been the waur of."

This death made a great noise among the common peo-ple; but there was little protection for the life of thesubject in those days; and provided a man or womanwas a real Anti-Covenanter, they might kill a good manywithout being quarrelled for it. So there was no one totake cognizance of the circumstances relating to the deathof poor Jessy.

After this the Lady walked softly for the space of twoor three years. She saw that she had rendered herself odious, and had entirely lost her husband's countenance,which she liked worst of all. But the evil propensity couldnot be overcome; and a poor boy, whom the Laird outof sheer compassion had taken into his service, being found dead one morning, the country people could nolonger be restrained; so they went in a body to the Sher-iff, and insisted on an investigation. It was proved that she detested the boy, had often threatened him, and hadgiven him brose and butter the afternoon before he died;but notwithstanding of all this, the cause was ultimatelydismissed, and the pursuers fined.

No one can tell to what height of wickedness she mightnow have proceeded, had not a check of a very singularkind been laid upon her. Among the servants that camehome at the next term, was one who called himself Mero-dach; and a strange person he was. He had the form of a boy, but the features of one a hundred years old, savethat his eyes had a brilliancy and restlessness, which werevery extraordinary, bearing a strong resemblance to the

eyes of a well-known species of monkey. He was forwardand perverse, and disregarded the pleasure or displeasure of any person; but he performed his work well and withapparent ease. From the moment he entered the house,the Lady conceived a mortal antipathy against him, andbesought the Laird to turn him away. But the Lairdwould not consent; he never turned away any servant,and moreover he had hired this fellow for a trivial wage,and he neither wanted activity nor perseverance. Thenatural consequence of this refusal was, that the Ladyinstantly set herself to embitter Merodach's life as muchas possible, in order to get early quit of a domestic every way so disagreeable. Her hatred of him was not like acommon antipathy entertained by one human beingagainst another—she hated him as one might hate a toador an adder; and his occupation of jotteryman (as theLaird termed his servant of all work) keeping him always about her hand, it must have proved highly annoying.

She scolded him, she raged at him; but he only mockedher wrath, and giggled and laughed at her, with the mostprovoking derision. She tried to fell him again and again,but never, with all her address, could she hit him; andnever did she make a blow at him, that she did not repent it. She was heavy and unwieldy, and he as quick in hismotions as a monkey; besides, he generally contrived that she should be in such an ungovernable rage, thatwhen she flew at him, she hardly knew what she wasdoing. At one time she guided her blow towards him,and he at the same instant avoided it with such dexteritythat she knocked down the chief hind, or foresman; andthen Merodach giggled so heartily, that, lifting the kitchen poker, she threw it at him with a full design ofknocking out his brains; but the missile only broke every article of crockery on the kitchen dresser.

She then hasted to the Laird, crying bitterly, and tell-ing him she would not suffer that wretch Merodach, asshe called him, to stay another night in the family.

"Why, then, put him away, and trouble me no moreabout him," said the Laird.

"Put him away!" exclaimed she; "I have alreadyordered him away a hundred times, and charged him never to let me see his horrible face again; but he only

grins, and answers with some intolerable piece of impertinence."

The pertinacity of the fellow amused the Laird; his dimeyes turned upwards into his head with delight; he thenlooked two ways at once, turned round his back, andlaughed till the tears ran down his dun cheeks; but hecould only articulate, "You're fitted now."

The Lady's agony of rage still increasing from this deri-sion, she upbraided the Laird bitterly, and said he wasnot worthy the name of man, if he did not turn awaythat pestilence, after the way he had abused her.

"Why, Shusy, my dear, what has he done to you?"

"What done to me! has he not caused me to knockdown John Thomson? and I do not know if ever he willcome to life again!"

"Have you felled your favourite John Thomson?" saidthe Laird, laughing more heartily than before; "you might have done a worse deed than that."

"And has he not broke every plate and dish on thewhole dresser?" continued the Lady; "and for all this devastation, he only mocks at my displeasure—absolutelymocks me—and if you do not have him turned away, and hanged or shot for his deeds, you are not worthy thename of man."

"O alack! What a devastation among the cheenametal!" said the Laird; and calling on Merodach, he said,"Tell me, thou evil Merodach of Babylon, how thoudaredst knock down thy Lady's favourite servant, John Thomson?"

"Not I, your honour. It was my Lady herself, who gotinto such a furious rage at me, that she mistook her man,and felled Mr. Thomson; and the good man's skull isfractured."

"That was very odd," said the Laird, chuckling; "I donot comprehend it. But then, what set you on smashingall my Lady's delft and cheena ware?—That was a mostinfamous and provoking action."

"It was she herself, your honour. Sorry would I be tobreak one dish belonging to the house. I take all the house servants to witness, that my Lady smashed all thedishes with a poker; and now lays the blame on me!"

The Laird turned his dim eyes on his Lady, who was

crying with vexation and rage, and seemed meditatinganother personal attack on the culprit, which he did

not at all appear to shun, but rather to court. She, however,vented her wrath in threatenings of the most deep anddesperate revenge, the creature all the while assuring herthat she would be foiled, and that in all her encountersand contests with him, she would uniformly come to theworst; he was resolved to do his duty, and there beforehis master he defied her.

The Laird thought more than he considered it prudentto reveal; he had little doubt that his wife would findsome means of wreaking her vengeance on the object ofher displeasure; and he shuddered when he recollectedon who had taken "something that she had been thewaur of."

In a word, the Lady of Wheelhope's inveterate malig-nity against this one object, was like the rod of Moses,that swallowed up the rest of the serpents. All her wickedand evil propensities seemed to be superseded if notutterly absorbed by it. The rest of the family now livedin comparative peace and quietness; for early and lateher malevolence was venting itself against the jottery-man, and against him alone. It was a delirium of hatredand vengeance, on which the whole bent and bias of her inclination was set. She could not stay from the creature'spresence, or, in the intervals when absent from him, she spent her breath in curses and execrations; and then, notable to rest, she ran again to seek him, her eyes gleamingwith the anticipated delights of vengeance, while, ever and anon, all the ridicule and the harm rebounded onherself.

Was it not strange that she could not get quit of thissole annoyance of her life? One would have thought she easily might. But by this time there was nothing fartherfrom her wishes; she wanted vengeance, full, adequate,and delicious vengeance, on her audacious opponent. But he was a strange and terrible creature, and the means ofretaliation constantly came, as it were, to his hand.

Bread and sweet milk was the only fare that Merodachcared for, and having bargained for that, he would notwant it, though he often got it with a curse and with illwill. The Lady having, upon one occasion, intentionally

kept back his wonted allowance for some days, on theSabbath morning following, she set him down a bowl of rich sweet milk, well drugged with a deadly poison; andthen she lingered in a little ante-room to watch the suc-cess of her grand plot, and prevent any other creaturefrom tasting of the potion. Merodach came in, and thehousemaid said to him, "There is your breakfast,creature."

"Oho! my Lady has been liberal this morning," saidhe; "but I am beforehand with her. Here, little Missie, you seem very hungry today—take you my breakfast."And with that he set the beverage down to the Lady's little favourite spaniel. It so happened that the Lady's only son came at that instant into the ante-room seeking her, and teasing his mamma about something, whichwithdrew her attention from the hall-table for a space.When she looked again, and saw Missie lapping up the sweet milk, she burst from her hiding-place like a fury, screaming as if her head had been on fire, kicked theremainder of its contents against the wall, and lifting Mis-sie in her bosom, retreated hastily, crying all the way.

"Ha, ha, ha—I have you now!" cried Merodach, asshe vanished from the hall.

Poor Missie died immediately, and very privately;indeed, she would have died and been buried, and never one have seen her, save her mistress, had not Merodach,by a luck that never failed him, looked over the wall ofthe flower garden, just as his lady was laying her favour-ite in a grave of her own digging-She, not perceivingher tormentor, plied on at her task, apostrophising the insensate little carcass—"Ah! poor dear little creature,thou hast had a hard fortune, and hast drank of the bitterpotion that was not intended for thee; but he shall drinkit three times double for thy sake!"

"Is that little Missie?" said the eldrich voice of thejotteryman, close at the Lady's ear. She uttered a loud scream, and sank down on the bank. "Alack for poorMissie!" continued the creature in a tone of mockery,"my heart is sorry for Missie. What has befallen her—whose breakfast cup did she drink?"

"Hence with thee, fiend!" cried the Lady; "what righthast thou to intrude on thy mistress's privacy? Thy turn

is coming yet; or may the nature of woman change withinme!"

"It is changed already," said the creature, grinningwith delight; "I have thee now, I have thee now! And were it not to show my superiority over thee, which I doevery hour, I should soon see thee strapped like a mad cat, or a worrying bratch. What wilt thou try next?"

"I will cut thy throat, and if I die for it, will rejoice in the deed; a deed of charity to all that dwell on the face of the earth."

"I have warned thee before, dame, and I now warn thee again, that all thy mischief meditated against me will fall double on thine own head."

"I want none of your warning, fiendish cur. Hencewith your elvish face, and take care of yourself."

It would be too disgusting and horrible to relate orread all the incidents that fell out between this unaccountable couple. Their enmity against each other hadno end, and no mitigation; and scarcely a single day passed over on which the Lady's acts of malevolent inge-nuity did not terminate fatally for some favourite thingof her own. Scarcely was there a thing, animate or inani-mate, on which she set a value, left to her, that was notdestroyed; and yet scarcely one hour or minute could sheremain absent from her tormentor, and all the while, itseems, solely for the purpose of tormenting him. Whileall the rest of the establishment enjoyed peace and quiet-ness from the fury of their termagant dame, matters stillgrew worse and worse between the fascinated pair. The Lady haunted the menial, in the same manner as theraven haunts the eagle, for a perpetual quarrel, thoughthe former knows that in every encounter she is to comeoff the loser. Noises were heard on the stairs by night,and it was whispered among the servants, that the Lady had been seeking Merodach's chamber, on some horribleintent. Several of them would have sworn that they hadseen her passing and repassing on the stair after mid-night, when all was quiet; but then it was likewise well known that Merodach slept with well-fastened doors, anda companion in another bed in the same room, whosebed, too, was nearest the door. Nobody cared much what became of the jotteryman, for he was an unsocial and

disagreeable person; but someone told him what theyhad seen, and hinted a suspicion of the Lady's intent.But the creature only bit his upper lip, winked with hiseyes, and said, "She had better let that alone; she willbe the first to rue that."

Not long after this, to the horror of the family andthe whole countryside, the Laird's only son was found murdered in his bed one morning, under circumstances that manifested the most fiendish cruelty and inveteracyon the part of his destroyer. As soon as the atrocious actwas divulged, the Lady fell into convulsions, and lost herreason; and happy had it been for her had she neverrecovered the use of it, for there was blood upon her hand, which she took no care to conceal, and there waslittle doubt that it was

the blood of her own innocentand beloved boy, the sole heir and hope of the family.

This blow deprived the Laird of all power of action;but the Lady had a brother, a man of the law, who cameand instantly proceeded to an investigation of this unac-countable murder. Before the Sheriff arrived, the house-keeper took the Lady's brother aside, and told him hehad better not go on with the scrutiny, for she was sure the crime would be brought home to her unfortunatemistress; and after examining into several corroborativecircumstances, and viewing the state of the ravingmaniac, with the blood on her hand and arm, he made the investigation a very short one, declaring the domes-tics all exculpated.

The Laird attended his boy's funeral, and laid his head inthe grave, but appeared exactly like a man walking ina trance, an automaton, without feelings or sensations,oftentimes gazing at the funeral procession, as on some- thing he could not comprehend. And when the deathbellof the parish church fell a-tolling, as the corpse ap-proached the kirk-stile, he cast a dun eye up towards thebelfry, and said hastily, "What, what's that? Och ay, we're just in time, just in time." And often was he ham-mering over the name of "Evil Merodach, King of Baby-lon," to himself. He seemed to have some farfetched conception that his unaccountable jotteryman was insome way connected with the death of his only son, and

other lesser calamities, although the evidence in favour of Merodach's innocence was as usual quite decisive.

This grievous mistake of Lady Wheelhope can only beaccounted for, by supposing her in a state of derange-ment, or rather under some evil influence, over whichshe had no control; and to a person in such a state, themistake was not so very unnatural. The mansion-houseof Wheelhope was old and irregular. The stair had four acute turns, and four landing-places, all the same. In theuppermost chamber slept the two domestics—Merodach in the bed farthest in, and in the chamber immediatelybelow that, which was exactly similar, slept the YoungLaird and his tutor, the former in the bed farthest in; and thus, in the turmoil of her wild and raging passions,her own hand made herself childless.

Merodach was expelled by the family forthwith, butrefused to accept his wages, which the man of law pressed upon him, for fear of further mischief; but hewent away in apparent sullenness and discontent, no oneknowing whither.

When his dismissal was announced to the Lady, whowas watched day and night in her chamber, the news had such an effect on her, that her whole frame seemedelectrified: the horrors of remorse vanished, and anotherpassion, which I neither can comprehend nor define,took the sole possession of her distempered spirit. "Hemustnot go!—He*shall* not go!" she exclaimed. "No, no, no—he shall not—he shall not—he shall not!" and thenshe instantly set herself about making ready to followhim, uttering all the while the most diabolical expres- sions, indicative of anticipated vengeance. "Oh, could Ibut snap his nerves one by one, and birl among his vitals! Could I but slice his heart off piecemeal in small messes,and see his blood lopper, and bubble, and spin away inpurple slays: and then to see him grin, and grin, and grin, and grin! Oh—oh—oh—How beautiful and grand asight it would be to see him grin, and grin, and grin!" And in such a style would she run on for hours together.

She thought of nothing, she spake of nothing, but the discarded jotteryman, whom most people now began to regard as a creature that was "not canny." They had seenhim eat and drink, and work, like other people; still he

had that about him that was not like other men. Hewas a boy in form, and an antediluvian in feature. Somethought he was a mongrel, between a man and an ape,some a wizard, some a kelpie, or a fairy, but most of all,that he was really and truly a Brownie. What he was Ido not know, and therefore will not pretend to say; butbe that as it may, in spite of locks and keys, watching and waking, the Lady of Wheelhope soon made herescape, and eloped after him. The attendants, indeed,would have made oath that she was carried away by someinvisible hand, for it was impossible, they said, that shecould have escaped on foot like other people; and thisedition of the story took in the country; but sensible peo-ple viewed the matter in another light.

As for instance, when Wattie Blythe, the Laird's oldshepherd, came in from the hill one morning, his wife Bessie thus accosted him. "His presence be about us, Wattie Blythe! Have ye heard what has happened at the ha'? Things are aye turning waur and waur there, and itlooks like as if Providence had gi'en up our Laird's house to destruction. This grand estate maun now gang frae theSprots; for it has finished them."

"Na, na, Bessie, it isna the estate that has finished theSprots, but the Sprots that hae finished the estate, andthemsells into the boot. They hae been a wicked anddegenerate race, and aye the langer the waur, till they hae reached the utmost bounds o' earthly wickedness; and it's time the deil were looking after his ain."

"Ah, Wattie Blythe, ye never said a truer say. Andthat's just the very point where your story ends, and mine begins; for hasna the deil, or the fairies, or the brownies, ta'en away our Leddy bodily! And the hail country is running and riding in search o' her; and thereis twenty hunder merks offered to the first that can findher, and bring her safe back. They hae ta'en her away,skin and bane, body and soul, and a', Wattie!"

"Hech-wow! but that is awesome! And where is itthought they have ta'en her to, Bessie?"

"O, they hae some guess at that frae her ain hintsafore. It is thought they hae carried her after that satanof a creature, wha wrought sae muckle wae about thehouse. It is for him they are a' looking, for they ken

weel, that where they get the tane they will get thetither."

"Whew! is that the gate o't, Bessie? Why, then, theawfu' story is nouther mair nor less than this, that the Leddy has made a 'lopement, as they ca't, and run awayafter a blackguard jotteryman. Heck-wow! wae's me forhuman frailty! But that's just the gate! When aince the deil gets in the point o' his finger, he will soon have in his haill hand. Ay, he wants but a hair to make a tetherof, ony day! I hae seen her a braw sonsy lass; but eventhen I feared she was devoted to destruction, for she ayemockit at religion, Bessie, and that's no a good mark ofa young body. And she made a' its servants her enemies; and think you these good men's prayers were a' to blawaway i' the wind, and be nae mair regarded? Na, na, Bessie, my woman, take ye this mark baith o' our bairns and other folk's—If ever ye see a young body that disre-gards the Sabbath, and makes a mock at the ordinanceso' religion, ye will never see that body come to muckle good. A braw hand our Leddy has made o' her gibes andjeers at religion, and her mockeries o' the poor perse-cuted hill-folk!—sunk down by degrees into the very dregs o' sin and misery! Run away after a scullion!"

"Fy, fy, Wattie, how can ye say sae? It was weelkenn'd that she hatit him wi' a perfect and mortal hatred,and tried to make away wi' him mae ways nor ane."

"Aha, Bessie; but nipping and scarting is Scots folk's wooing; and though it is but right that we suspend ourjudgments, there will naebody persuade me if she befound alang wi' the creature, but that she has run awayafter him in the natural way, on her twa shanks, withouthelp either frae fairy or brownie."

"I'll never believe sic a thing of ony woman born, letbe a leddy weel up in years."

"Od help ye, Bessie! Ye dinna ken the stretch o' cor-rupt nature. The best o' us, when left to oursells, arenae better than strayed sheep, that will never find theway back to their ain pastures; and of a' things made o'mortal flesh, a wicked woman is the warst."

"Alack-a-day! we got the blame o' muckle that we lit-tle deserve. But, Wattie, keep ye a geyan sharp lookoutabout the cleuchs and the caves o' our hope; for the

Leddy kens them a' geyan weel; and gin the twentyhunder merks wad come our way, it might gang a waurgate. It wad tocher a' our bonny lasses."

"Ay, weel I wat, Bessie, that's nae lee. And now,when ye bring me amind o't, I'm sair mista'en if I didna hear a creature up in the Brockholes this morning, skirl-ing as if something were cutting its throat. It gars a' thehairs stand on my head when I think it may hae beenour Leddy, and the droich of a creature murdering her.I took it for a battle of wulcats, and wished they might pu' out ane anither's thrapples; but when I think on itagain, they war unco like some o' our Leddy's unearthly

screams."

"His presence be about us, Wattie! Haste ye—pit onyour bonnet—tak' your staff in your hand, and gang andsee what it is."

"Shame fa' me, if I daur gang, Bessie."

"Hout, Wattie, trust in the Lord."

"Aweel, sae I do. But ane's no to throw himsell owera linn, and trust that the Lord will kep him in a blanket.And it's nae muckle safer for an auld stiff man like meto gang away out to a wild remote place, where there is ae body murdering another. What is that I hear, Bessie?Haud the lang tongue o' you, and rin to the door, andsee what noise that is."

Bessie ran to the door, but soon returned, with hermouth wide open, and her eyes set in her head.

"It is them, Wattie! it is them! His presence be about us! What will we do?"

"Them? whaten them?"

"Why, that blackguard creature, coming here, leadingour Leddy by the hair o' the head, and yerking her wi'a stick. I am terrified out o' my wits. What will we do?"

"We'll*see* what they*say"* said Wattie, manifestly inas great terror as his wife; and by a natural impulse, or as a last resource, he opened the Bible, not knowingwhat he did, then hurried on his spectacles; but beforehe got two leaves turned over, the two entered, a fright-ful-looking couple indeed. Merodach, with his old with-ered face, and ferret eyes, leading the Lady ofWheelhope by the long hair, which was mixed

with grey,

and whose face was all bloated with wounds and bruises,and having stripes of blood on her garments.

"How's this!—How's this, sirs?" said Wattie Blythe.

"Close that book, and I will tell you, goodman," saidMerodach.

"I can hear what you hae to say wi' the beuk open,sir," said Wattie, turning over the leaves, pretending tolook for some particular passage, but apparently not knowing what he was doing. "It is a shamefu' businessthis; but some will hae to answer for't. My Leddy, I amunco grieved to see you in sic a plight. Ye hae surely been dooms sair left to yoursell."

The Lady shook her head, uttered a feeble hollowlaugh, and fixed her eyes on Merodach. But such a look! It almost frightened the simple aged couple out of theirsenses. It was not a look of love nor of hatred exclu-sively; neither was it of desire or disgust, but it was a combination of them all. It was such a look as one fiendwould cast on another, in whose everlasting destructionhe rejoiced. Wattie was glad to take his eyes from such countenances, and look into the Bible, that firm founda-tion of all his hopes and all his joy.

"I request that you will shut that book, sir," said the horrible creature; "or if you do not, I will shut it for youwith a vengeance"; and with that he seized it, and flungit against the wall. Bessie uttered a scream, and Wattiewas quite paralysed; and although he seemed disposed to run after his best friend, as he called it, the hellishlooks of the Brownie interposed, and glued him to hisseat.

"Hear what I have to say first," said the creature, "andthen pore your fill on that precious book of yours. One concern at a time is enough. I came to do you a service.Here, take this cursed, wretched woman, whom you styleyour Lady, and deliver her up to the lawful authorities, to be restored to her husband and her place in society.She has followed one that hates her, and never said one kind word to her in his life; and though I have beat herlike a dog, still she clings to me, and will not depart, so enchanted is she with the laudable purpose of cutting mythroat. Tell your master and her brother, that I am not to be burdened with their maniac. I have scourged—I

have spurned and kicked her, afflicting her night andday, and yet from my side she will not depart. Take her.Claim the reward in full, and your fortune is made; andso farewell!"

The creature went away, and the moment his back was turned, the Lady fell a-screaming and struggling, like onein an agony, and, in spite of all the couple's exertions,she forced herself out of their hands, and ran after the retreating Merodach. When he saw better would not be,he turned upon her, and, by one blow with his stick, struck her down; and, not content with that, continuedto maltreat her in such a manner, as to all appearancewould have killed twenty ordinary persons. The poordevoted dame could do nothing, but now and then utter a squeak like a half-worried cat, and writhe and grovelon the sward, till Wattie and his wife came up, and with-held her tormentor from further violence. He then bound her hands behind her back with a strong cord, and deliv-ered her once more to the charge of the old couple, whocontrived to hold her by that means, and take her home.

Wattie was ashamed to take her into the hall, but led her into one of the out-houses, whither he brought

herbrother to receive her. The man of the law was mani-festly vexed at her reappearance, and scrupled not totestify his dissatisfaction; for when Wattie told him howthe wretch had abused his sister, and that, had it notbeen for Bessie's interference and his own, the Ladywould have been killed outright, he said, "Why, Walter,it is a great pity that he did*not* kill her outright. Whatgood can her life now do to her, or of what value is herfife to any creature living? After one has lived to disgraceall connected with them, the sooner they are taken offthe better."

The man, however, paid old Walter down his twothousand merks, a great fortune for one like him in thosedays; and not to dwell longer on this unnatural story, Ishall only add, very shortly, that the Lady of Wheelhopesoon made her escape once more, and flew, as if drawnby an irresistible charm, to her tormentor. Her friendslooked no more after her; and the last time she was seen alive, it was following the uncouth creature up the waterof Daur, weary, wounded, and lame, while he was all

the way beating her, as a piece of excellent amusement. A few days after that, her body was found among somewild haggs, in a place called Crook-burn, by a party of the persecuted Covenanters that were in hiding there,some of the very men whom she had exerted herself todestroy, and who had been driven, like David of old, topray for a curse and earthly punishment upon her. They buried her like a dog at the Yetts of Keppel, and rolledthree huge stones upon her grave, which are lying thereto this day. When they found her corpse, it was mangled and wounded in a most shocking manner, the fiendish creature having manifestly tormented her to death. Hewas never more seen or heard of in this kingdom, thoughall that countryside was kept in terror of him for manyyears afterwards; and to this day, they will tell you ofThe Brownie of the Black Haggs,which title he seems tohave acquired after his disappearance.

THE DREAM OFAKINOSUKÉ

Lafcadio Hearn

In the district called Toïchi of Yamato province, thereused to live a goshi named Miyata Akinosuké. . . . [HereI must tell you that in Japanese feudal times there wasa privileged class of soldier-farmers,—free-holders,—cor-responding to the class of yeomen in England; and these were called goshi.]

In Akinosuké's garden there was a great and ancientcedar-tree, under which he was wont to rest on sultrydays. One very warm afternoon he was sitting under this tree with two of his friends, fellow-goshi, chatting anddrinking wine, when he felt all of a sudden verydrowsy,—so drowsy that he begged his friends to excusehim for taking a nap in their presence. Then he lay downat the foot of the tree, and dreamed this dream:—

He thought that as he was lying there in his garden,he saw a procession, like the train of some great daimyo,descending a hill near by, and that he got up to look atit. A very grand procession it proved to be,—moreimposing than anything of the kind which he had everseen before; and it was advancing toward his dwelling.He observed in the van of it a number of young menrichly appareled, who were drawing a great lacqueredpalace-carriage, or*gosho-guruma,* hung with bright bluesilk. When the procession arrived within a short distanceof the house it halted; and a richly dressed man—evidently a person of rank—advanced from it,approached Akinosuké, bowed to him profoundly, andthen said:—

"Honored Sir, you see before you a*kérai* [vassal] ofthe Kokuo of Tokoyo.* My master, the King, commands me to greet you in his august name, and to place myself wholly at your disposal. He also bids me inform you that he augustly desires your presence at the palace. Be there-fore pleased immediately to enter this honorable car-riage, which he has sent for your conveyance."

Upon hearing these words Akinosukéwanted to makesome fitting reply; but he was too much astonished andembarrassed for speech;—and in the same moment hiswill seemed to melt away from him, so that he could onlydo as the*kérai* bade him. He entered the carriage; thekéraitook a place beside him, and made a signal; thedrawers, seizing the silken ropes, turned the great vehiclesouthward;—and the journey began.

In a very short time, to Akinosuké's amazement, thecarriage stopped in front of a huge two-storied gateway(romon),of Chinese style, which he had never beforeseen. Here the*kérai* dismounted, saying, "I go toannounce the honorable arrival,"—and he disappeared.After some little waiting, Akinosukésaw two noble-look-ing men, wearing robes of purple silk and high caps of the form indicating lofty rank, come from the gateway.These, after having respectfully saluted him, helped himto descend from the carriage, and led him through thegreat gate and across a vast garden, to the entrance ofa palace whose front appeared to extend, west andeast, to a distance of miles. Akinosukéwas then showninto a reception-room of wonderful size and splendor. His guides conducted him to the place of honor, and respectfully seated themselves apart; while serving-maids, in costume of ceremony, brought refreshments. When Akinosukéhad partaken of the refreshments,the two purple-robed attendants bowed low before

"This name "Tokoyo" is indefinite. According to circumstances itmay signify any unknown country,—or that undiscovered countryfrom whose bourn no traveler returns,—or that Fairyland of far-eastern fable, the Realm of Horai. The term "Kokuo" means theruler of a country,—therefore a king. The original phrase,*Tokoyo*no Kokuo,might be rendered here as "the Ruler of Horai," or"the King of Fairyland."

him, and addressed him in the following words,—eachspeaking alternately, according to the etiquette of courts:—

"It is now our honorable duty to inform you... as tothe reason of your having been summoned hither. . . . Our master, the King, augustly desires that you become his son-in-law; . . . and it is his wish and command thatyou shall wed this very day...the August Princess, his maiden-daughter. . . . We shall soon conduct you to thepresence-chamber . . . where His Augustness even nowis waiting to receive you. . . . But it will be necessary that we first invest you . . . with the appropriate gar- ments of ceremony."*

Having thus spoken, the attendants rose together, andproceeded to an alcove containing a great chest of goldlacquer. They opened the chest, and took from it various robes and girdles of rich material, and a *kamuri.* or regal headdress. With these they attired Akinosukéas befitteda princely bridegroom; and he was then conducted to thepresence-room, where he saw the Kokuo of Tokoyoseated upon the*daiza,*† wearing the high black cap ofstate, and robed in robes of yellow silk. Before the*daiza,*to left and right, a multitude of dignitaries sat in rank, motionless and splendid as images in a temple; and Aki-nosuké, advancing into their midst, saluted the king with the triple prostration of usage. The king greeted him with gracious words, and then said:—

"You have already been informed as to the reason ofyour having been summoned to Our presence. We havedecided that you shall become the adopted husband of Our only daughter;—and the wedding ceremony shallnow be performed."

As the king finished speaking, a sound of joyful musicwas heard; and a long train of beautiful court ladies

*The last phrase, according to old custom, had to be uttered by

both attendants at the same time. All these ceremonial observances

can still be studied on the Japanese stage.

†This was the name given to the estrade, or dais, upon which a

feudal prince or ruler sat in state. The term literally signifies "great

seat."

advanced from behind a curtain, to conduct Akinosukéto the room in which his bride awaited him.

The room was immense; but it could scarcely containthe multitude of guests assembled to witness the weddingceremony. All bowed down before Akinosukéas he tookhis place, facing the King's daughter, on the kneeling-cushion prepared for him. As a maiden of heaven the bride appeared to be; and her robes were beautiful as asummer sky. And the marriage was performed amidgreat rejoicing.

Afterwards the pair were conducted to a suite of apartments that had been prepared for them in another portion of the palace; and there they received the con-gratulations of many noble persons, and wedding gifts beyond counting.

Some days- later Akinosukéwas again summoned tothe throne-room. On this occasion he was received even more graciously than before; and the King said to him:—

"In the southwestern part of Our dominion there isan island called Raishu. We have now appointed you Governor of that island. You will find the people loyaland docile; but their laws have not yet been brought intoproper accord with the laws of Tokoyo; and their customshave not been properly regulated. We entrust you withthe duty of improving their social condition as far as maybe possible; and We desire that you shall rule them withkindness and wisdom. All preparations necessary for your journey to Raishu have already been made."

So Akinosukéand his bride departed from the palaceof Tokoyo, accompanied to the shore by a great escortof nobles and officials; and they embarked upon a ship ofstate provided by the king. And with favoring winds theysafely sailed to Raishu, and found the good people ofthat island assembled upon the beach to welcome them.

Akinosukéentered at once upon his new duties; andthey did not prove to be hard. During the first three years of his governorship he was occupied chiefly withthe framing and the enactment of laws; but he had wisecounselors to help him, and he never found the work

unpleasant. When it was all finished, he had no activeduties to perform, beyond attending the rites and cere-monies ordained by ancient custom. The country was sohealthy and so fertile that sickness and want wereunknown; and the people were so good that no laws wereever broken. And Akinosukédwelt and

ruled in Raishufor twenty years more,—making in all twenty-three yearsof sojourn, during which no shadow of sorrow traversedhis life.

But in the twenty-fourth year of his governorship, agreat misfortune came upon him; for his wife, who hadborne him seven children,—five boys and two girls,—fellsick and died. She was buried, with high pomp, on thesummit of a beautiful hill in the district of Hanryoko;and a monument, exceedingly splendid, was placed aboveher grave. But Akinosuké felt such grief at her deaththat he no longer cared to live.

Now when the legal period of mourning was over,there came to Raishu, from the Tokoyo palace, a *shisha,*or royal messenger. The*shisha* delivered to Akinosukéa message of condolence, and then said to him:—

"These are the words which our august master, theKing of Tokoyo, commands that I repeat to you: 'We will now send you back to your own people and country. As for the seven children, they are the grandsons andthe granddaughters of the King, and shall be fitly caredfor. Do not, therefore, allow your mind to be troubledconcerning them."

On receiving this mandate, Akinosuké submissivelyprepared for his departure. When all his affairs had beensettled, and the ceremony of bidding farewell to his coun-selors and trusted officials had been concluded, he wasescorted with much honor to the port. There heembarked upon the ship sent for him; and the ship sailedout into the blue sea, under the blue sky; and the shapeof the island of Raishu itself turned blue, and then turnedgray, and then vanished forever. . . . And Akinosukésuddenly awoke—under the cedar-tree in his owngarden! . . .

For the moment he was stupefied and dazed. But heperceived his two friends still seated near him,—drinking

and chatting merrily. He stared at them in a bewilderedway, and cried aloud,—

"How strange!"

"Akinosukémust have been dreaming," one of themexclaimed, with a laugh. "What did you see, Akinosuké,that was strange?"

Then Akinosuké told his dream,—that dream of three-and-twenty years' sojourn in the realm of Tokoyo, in theisland of Raishu;—and they were astonished, because hehad really slept for no more than a few minutes.

One goshi said:—

"Indeed, you saw strange things. We also saw some-thing strange while you were napping. A little yellowbutterfly was fluttering over your face for a moment or two; and we watched it. Then it alighted on the ground beside you, close to the tree; and almost as soon as italighted there, a big, big ant came out of a hole, andseized it and pulled it down into the hole. Just beforeyou woke Up, we saw that very butterfly come out of thehole again, and flutter over your face as before. And then it suddenly disappeared: we do not know where itwent."

"Perhaps it was Akinosuké's soul," the other goshi said;—"certainly I thought I saw it fly into his mouth. . . . But,even if that butterfly*was* Akinosuké's soul, the factwould not explain his dream."

"The ants might explain it," returned the first speaker."Ants are queer beings—possibly goblins. . . . Anyhow,there is a big ant's nest under that cedar-tree." . . .

"Let us look!" cried Akinosuké, greatly moved by thissuggestion. And he went for a spade.

The ground about and beneath the cedar-tree provedto have been excavated, in a most surprising way, by aprodigious colony of ants. The ants had furthermore builtinside their excavations; and their tiny constructions ofstraw, clay, and stems bore an odd resemblance to minia-ture towns. In the middle of a structure considerablylarger than the rest there was a marvelous swarming ofsmall ants around the body of one very big ant, whichhad yellowish wings and a long black head.

"Why, there is the King of my dream!" cried Akino-

suké; "and there is the palace of Tokoyo! . . . Howextraordinary! . . . Raishu ought to lie somewhere south-west of it—to the left of that big root. . . . Yes!—here it is!...How very strange! Now I am sure that I canfind the mountain of Hanryoko, and the grave of theprincess."...

In the wreck of the nest he searched and searched,and at last discovered a tiny mound, on the top of whichwas fixed a water-worn pebble, in shape resembling aBuddhist monument. Underneath it he found—embed-ded in clay—the dead body of a female ant.

ELFINLAND

Johann Ludwig Tieck

(TRANSLATED BY THOMAS CARLYLE)

"Where is our little Mary?" said the father.

"She is playing out upon the green there with ourneighbour's boy," replied the mother.

"I wish they may not run away and lose themselves,"said he; "they are so thoughtless."

The mother looked for the little ones, and broughtthem their evening luncheon. "It is warm," said the boy; "and Mary had a longing for the red cherries."

"Have a care, children," said the mother, "and do notrun too far from home, and not into the wood; Father and I are going to the fields."

Little Andres answered: "Never fear, the wood fright-ens us; we shall sit here by the house, where there arepeople near us."

The mother went in, and soon came out again withher husband. They locked the door, and turned towards the fields to look after their labourers, and see their hayharvest in the meadow. Their house lay upon a littlegreen height, encircled by a pretty ring of paling, which likewise enclosed their fruit and flower garden. The ham-let stretched somewhat deeper down, and on the other side lay the castle of the Count. Martin rented the largefarm from this nobleman; and was living in contentmentwith his wife and only child; for he yearly saved some money, and had the prospect of becoming a man of sub-stance by his industry,

for the ground was productive, and the Count not illiberal.

As he walked with his wife to the fields, he gazed cheerfully round and said: "What a different look this quarter has, Brigitta, from the place we lived in formerly!

Here it is all so green; the whole village is bedecked with thick-spreading fruit-trees; the ground is full of beautifulherbs and flowers; all the houses are cheerful andcleanly, the inhabitants are at their ease: nay, I couldalmost fancy that the woods are greener here than else-where, and the sky bluer; and, so far as the eye canreach, you have pleasure and delight in beholding thebountiful Earth."

"And whenever you cross the stream," said Brigitta,"you are, as it were, in another world, all is so dreary and withered; but every traveller declares that our villageis the fairest in the country far and near."

"All but that fir-ground," said her husband; "do butlook back to it, how dark and dismal that solitary spot is lying in the gay scene: the dingy fir-trees with thesmoky huts behind them, the ruined stalls, the brook flowing past with a sluggish melancholy."

"It is true," replied Brigitta; "if you but approach thatspot, you grow disconsolate and sad, you know not why.What sort of people can they be that live there, and keep themselves so separate from the rest of us, as if they had an evil conscience?"

"A miserable crew," replied the young Farmer: "gip-sies, seemingly, that steal and cheat in other quarters, and have their hoard and hiding place here. I wonderonly that his Lordship suffers them."

"Who knows," said the wife, with an accent of pity,"but perhaps they may be poor people, wishing, out ofshame, to conceal their poverty; for, after all, no onecan say aught ill of them; the only thing is, that they donot go to church, and none knows how they live; for the little garden, which indeed seems altogether waste, can-not possibly support them; and fields they have none."

"God knows," said Martin, as they went along, "what trade they follow; no mortal comes to them; for the placethey live in is as if bewitched and excommunicated, sothat even our wildest fellows will not venture into it."

Such conversation they pursued, while walking to thefields. That gloomy spot they spoke of lay aside from thehamlet. In a dell, begirt with firs, you might behold ahut, and various ruined office-houses; rarely was smokeseen to mount from it, still more rarely did men appear

there; though at times curious people, venturing some-what nearer, had perceived upon the bench before thehut, some hideous women, in ragged clothes, dandling in their arms some children equally dirty and ill-favoured;black dogs were running up and down upon the bound-ary; and, of an evening, a man of monstrous size wasseen to cross the footbridge of the brook, and disappearin the hut; and, in the darkness, various shapes were observed, moving like shadows round a fire in the open air. This piece of ground, the firs and the ruined huts,formed in truth a strange contrast with the bright greenlandscape, the white houses of the hamlet, and the stately new-built castle.

The two little ones had now eaten their fruit; it cameinto their heads to run races; and the little nimble Mary always got the start of the less active Andres. "It is notfair," cried Andres at last: "let us try it for some length,then we shall see who wins."

"As thou wilt," said Mary; "only to the brook we mustnot run."

"No," said Andres; "but there, on the hill, stands thelarge pear-tree, a quarter of a mile from this. I shall runby the left, round past the fir-ground; thou canst try it by the right over the fields; so we do not meet till weget up, and then we shall see which of us is swifter."

"Done," cried Mary, and began to run: "for we shallnot mar one another by the way, and my father says itis as far to the hill by that side of the Gipsies' house asby this."

Andres had already started, and Mary, turning to theright, could no longer see him. "It is very silly," said sheto herself: "I have only to take heart, and run along the bridge, past the hut, and through the yard, and I shallcertainly be first." She was already standing by the brookand the clump of firs. "Shall I? No; it is too frightful," said she. A little white dog was standing on the fartherside, and barking with might and main. In her terror, Mary thought the dog some monster, and sprang back."Fy! Fy!" said she: "the dolt is gone half way by thistime, while I stand here considering." The little dog keptbarking, and, as she looked at it more narrowly, itseemed no longer frightful, but, on the contrary, quite

pretty; it had a red collar round its neck, with a glittering bell; and as it raised its head, and shook itself in barking,the little bell sounded with the finest tinkle. "Well, Imust risk it!" cried she, "I will ran for life; quick, quick,I am through; certainly to Heaven, they cannot eat meup alive in half a minute!" And with this, the gay, coura-geous little Mary sprang along the footbridge; passed the dog, which ceased its barking and began to fawn on her;and in a moment she was standing on the other bank,and the black firs all round concealed from view herfather's house, and the rest of the landscape.

But what was her astonishment when here! The loveli-est, most variegated flower-garden, lay round her; tulips, roses, and lilies were glittering in the fairest colours; blue and gold-red butterflies were wavering in the blossoms;cages of shining wire were hung on the espaliers, withmany-coloured birds in them, singing beautiful songs;and children, in short white frocks with flowing yellowhair and brilliant eyes, were frolicking about; some play-ing with lambkins, some feeding the birds, or gatheringflowers, and giving them to one another; some, again,were eating cherries, grapes, and ruddy apricots. No hutwas to be seen; but instead of it, a large fair house, with a brazen door and lofty statues, stood glancing in themiddle of the space. Mary was confounded with surprise,and knew not what to think; but, not being bashful, she went right up to the first of the children, held out herhand, and wished the little creature good-even.

"Art thou come to visit us, then?" said the glitteringchild; "I saw thee running, playing on the other side, butthou wert frightened at our little dog."

"So you are not gipsies and rogues," said Mary, "asAndres always told me? He is a stupid thing, and talksof much he does not understand."

"Stay with us," said the strange little girl; "thou wilt like it well."

"But we are running a race."

"Thou wilt find thy comrade soon enough. There, takeand eat."

Mary ate, and found the fruit more sweet than any shehad ever tasted in her life before; and Andres, and the

race, and the prohibition of her parents, were entirely forgotten.

A stately woman, in a shining robe, came towardsthem, and asked about the stranger child. "Fairest lady,"said Mary, "I came running hither by chance, and nowthey wish to keep me."

"Thou art aware, Zerina," said the lady, "that she canbe here but for a little while; besides, thou shouldst haveasked my leave."

"I thought," said Zerina, "when I saw her admittedacross the bridge, that I might do it; we have often seenher running in the fields, and thou thyself hast taken pleasure in her lively temper. She will have to leave ussoon enough."

"No, I will stay here," said the little stranger; "forhere it is so beautiful, and here I shall find the prettiest playthings, and store of berries and cherries to boot. Onthe other side it is not half so grand."

The gold-robed lady went away with a smile; and manyof the children now came bounding round the happyMary in their mirth, and twitched her, and incited her to dance; others brought her lambs, or curious playthings;others made music on instruments, and sang to it.

She kept, however, by the playmate who had first met her; for Zerina was the kindest and loveliest of them all.Little Mary cried and cried again: "I will stay with you forever; I will stay with you, and you shall be my sisters";at which the children all laughed, and embraced her."Now we shall have a royal sport," said Zerina. She ran into the palace, and returned with a little golden box, inwhich lay a quantity of seeds, like glittering dust. Shelifted of it with her little hand, and scattered some grainson the green earth. Instantly the grass began to move,as in waves; and, after a few moments, bright rosebushesstarted from the ground, shot rapidly up, and budded allat once, while the sweetest perfume filled the place. Mary also took a little of the dust, and, having scatteredit, she saw white lilies, and the most variegated pinks, pushing up. At a signal from Zerina, the flowers disap- peared, and others rose in their room. "Now," said Zer-ina, "look for something greater." She laid two pineseeds in the ground, and stamped them in sharply with

her foot. Two green bushes stood before them. "Graspme fast," said she; and Mary threw her arms about theslender form. She felt herself borne upwards; for thetrees were springing under them with the greatest speed;the tall pines waved to and fro, and the two children heldeach other fast embraced, swinging this way and that in the red clouds of the twilight, and kissed each other;while the rest were climbing up and down the trunks withquick dexterity, pushing and teasing one another withloud laughter when they met; if any one fell down in the press, it flew through the air, and sank slowly and surelyto the ground. At length Mary was beginning to be fright-ened; and the other little child sang a few loud tones, and the trees again sank down and set them on the ground asgradually as they had lifted them before to the clouds.

They next went through the brazen door of the palace.Here many fair women, elderly and young, were sittingin the round hall, partaking of the fairest fruits, and lis-tening to glorious invisible music. In the

vaulting of theceiling, palms, flowers, and groves stood painted, amongwhich little figures of children were sporting and windingin every graceful posture; and with the tones of themusic, the images altered and glowed with the most burn-ing colours; now the blue and green were sparkling likeradiant light, now these tints faded back in paleness, thepurple flamed up, and the gold took fire; and then thenaked children seemed to be alive among the flower-garlands and to draw breath, and emit it through their ruby-coloured lips; so that by fits you could see theglance of their little white teeth, and the lighting up of their azure eyes.

From the hall, a stair of brass led down to a subterra-nean chamber. Here lay much gold and silver, and pre-cious stones of every hue shone out between them.Strange vessels stood along the walls, and all seemedfilled with costly things. The gold was worked into manyforms, and glittered with the friendliest red. Many littledwarfs were busied sorting the pieces from the heap, andputting them in the vessels; others, hunch-backed andbandy-legged, with long red noses, were tottering slowlyalong, half-bent to the ground, under full sacks, whichthey bore as millers do their grain; and, with much pant-

ing, shaking out the gold-dust on the ground. Then they darted awkwardly to the right and left, and caught therolling balls that were like to run away; and it happened now and then that one in his eagerness overset the other,so that both fell heavily and clumsily to the ground. They made angry faces, and looked askance, as Mary laughedat their gestures and their ugliness. Behind them sat anold crumpled little man, whom Zerina reverentlygreeted; he thanked her with a grave inclination of his head. He held a sceptre in his hand, and wore a crownupon his brow, and all the other dwarfs appeared toregard him as their master, and obey his nod.

"What more wanted?" asked he, with a surly voice, asthe children came a little nearer. Mary was afraid, anddid not speak; but her companion answered, they wereonly come to look about them in the chambers. "Stillyour old child's tricks!" replied the dwarf: "Will there never be an end to idleness?" With this, he turned againto his employment, kept his people weighing and sorting the ingots; some he sent away on errands, some he chid with angry tones.

"Who is the gentleman?" said Mary.

"Our Metal-Prince," replied Zerina, as they walkedalong.

They seemed once more to reach the open air, for theywere standing by a lake, yet no sun appeared, and theysaw no sky above their heads. A little boat receivedthem, and Zerina steered it diligently forwards. It shotrapidly along. On gaining the middle of the lake, thestranger saw that multitudes of pipes, channels, andbrooks, were spreading from the little sea in every direc-tion. "These waters to the right," said Zerina, "flowbeneath your garden, and this is why it blooms so freshly;by the other side we get down into the great stream."On a sudden, out of all the channels, and from everyquarter of the lake, came a crowd of little children swim-ming up; some wore garlands of sedge and water-lily; some had red stems of coral, others were blowing oncrooked shells; a tumultuous noise echoed merrily fromthe dark shores; among the children might be seen thefairest women sporting in the waters, and often several of the children sprang about some one of them, and with

kisses hung upon her neck and shoulders. All saluted thestrangers; and these steered onwards through the revelryout of the lake, into a little river, which grew narrowerand narrower. At last the boat came aground. Thestrangers took their leave, and Zerina knocked againstthe cuff. This opened like a door, and

a female form, all red, assisted them to mount. "Are you all brisk here?"inquired Zerina. "They are just at work," replied the other, "and happy as they could wish; indeed, the heatis very pleasant.

They went up a winding stair, and on a sudden Mary found herself in a most resplendent hall, so that as sheentered, her eyes were dazzled by the radiance. Flame-coloured tapestry covered the walls with a purple glow;and when her eve had grown a little used to it, thestranger saw, to her astonishment, that, in the tapestry,there were figures moving up and down in dancing joy-fulness; in form so beautiful, and of so fair proportions,that nothing could be seen more graceful; their bodieswere as of red crystal, so that it appeared as if the bloodwere visible within them, flowing and playing in its courses. They smiled on the stranger, and saluted herwith various bows; but as Mary was about approachingnearer them, Zerina plucked her sharply back, crying: "Thou wilt burn thyself, my little Mary, for the whole ofit is fire."

Mary felt the heat. "Why do the pretty creatures notcome out," said she, "and play with us?"

"As thou livest in the Air," replied the other, "so arethey obliged to stay continually in Fire, and would faintand languish if they left it. Look now, how glad they are,how they laugh and shout; those down below spread outthe fire-floods everywhere beneath the earth, andthereby the flowers, and fruits, and wine, are made toflourish; these red streams again, are to run beside thebrooks of water; and thus the fiery creatures are keptever busy and glad. But for thee it is too hot here; let us return to the garden."

In the garden, the scene had changed since they leftit. The moonshine was lying on every flower; the birdswere silent, and the children were asleep in complicatedgroups, among the green groves. Mary and her friend,

however, did not feel fatigue, but walked about in thewarm summer night, in abundant talk, till morning.

When the day dawned, they refreshed themselves onfruit and milk, and Mary said: "Suppose we go, by wayof change, to the firs, and see how things look there?"

"With all my heart," replied Zerina; "thou wilt seeour watchmen too, and they will surely please thee; they are standing up among the trees on the mound." Thetwo proceeded through the flower-garden by pleasant groves, full of nightingales; then they ascended a vine-hill; and at last, after long following the windings of a clear brook, arrived at the firs, and the height which bounded the domain. "How does it come," said Mary,"that we have to walk so far here, when without, thecircuit is so narrow?"

"I know not," said her friend; "but so it is."

They mounted to the dark firs, and a chill wind blewfrom without in their faces; a haze seemed lying far and wide over the landscape. On the top were many strangeforms standing: with mealy, dusty faces; their misshapenheads not unlike those of white owls; they were clad infolded cloaks of shaggy wool; they held umbrellas of curi-ous skins stretched out above them; and they waved andfanned themselves incessantly with large bat's wings,which flared out curiously beside the woollen roque-laures. "I could laugh, yet I am frightened," cried Mary.

"These are our good trusty watchmen," said her play-mate; "they stand here and wave their fans, that coldanxiety and inexplicable fear may fall on every one thatattempts to approach us. They are covered so, becausewithout it is now cold and rainy, which they cannot bear.But snow, or wind, or cold air, never reaches down tous; here is an everlasting spring and summer: yet if these poor people on the top were not frequently relieved, theywould certainly perish."

"But who are you, then?" said Mary, while againdescending to the flowery fragrance; "or have you no name at all?"

"We are called the Elves," replied the friendly child;"people talk about us in the Earth, as I have heard."

They now perceived a mighty bustle on the green."The fair Bird is come!" cried the children to them: all

hastened to the hall. Here, as they approached, youngand old were crowding over the threshold, all shoutingfor joy; and from within resounded a triumphant peal ofmusic. Having entered, they perceived the vast circuitfilled with the most varied forms, and all were lookingupwards to a large Bird with glancing plumage, that wassweeping slowly round in the dome, and in its statelyflight describing many a circle. The music sounded moregaily than before; the colours and lights alternated morerapidly. At last the music ceased; and the Bird, with arustling noise, floated down upon a glittering crown thathung hovering in air under the high window, by whichthe hall was lighted from above. His plumage was purpleand green, and shining golden streaks played through it;on his head there waved a diadem of feathers, so resplen- dent that they glanced like jewels. His bill was red, andhis legs of a glancing blue. As he moved, the tints gleamed through each other, and the eye was charmed with their radiance. His size was as that of an eagle. Butnow he opened his glittering beak; and sweetest melodiescame pouring from his moved breast, in finer tones thanthe lovesick nightingale gives forth; still stronger rose the song, and streamed like floods of Light, so that all, thevery children themselves, were moved by it to tears of joy and rapture. When he ceased, all bowed before him;he again flew round the dome in circles, then dartedthrough the door, and soared into the light heaven,where he shone far up like a red point, and then soon vanished from their eyes.

"Why are ye all so glad?" inquired Mary, bending toher fair playmate, who seemed smaller than yesterday.

"The King is coming!" said the little one; "many of ushave never seen him, and whithersoever he turns his face, there is happiness and mirth; we have long lookedfor him, more anxiously than you look for spring whenwinter lingers with you; and now he has announced, byhis fair herald, that he is at hand. This wise and gloriousBird, that has been sent to us by the King, is calledPhoenix; he dwells far off in Arabia, on a tree, whichthere is no other that resembles it on Earth, as in like manner there is no second Phoenix. When he feels him-self grown old, he builds a pile of balm and incense,

kindles it, and dies singing; and then from the fragrantashes, soars up the renewed Phoenix with unlessenedbeauty. It is seldom he so wings his course that menbehold him; and when once in centuries this does occur,they note it in their annals, and expect remarkableevents. But now, my friend, thou and I must part; forthe sight of the King is not permitted thee."

Then the lady with the golden robe came through thethrong, and beckoning Mary to her, led her into a sequestered walk. "Thou must leave us, my dear child," said she; "the King is to hold his court here for twentyyears, perhaps longer; and fruitfulness and blessings willspread far over the land, but chiefly here beside us; all the brooks and rivulets will become more bountiful, allthe fields and gardens richer, the wine more generous,the meadows more fertile, and the woods more fresh andgreen; a milder air will blow, no hail shall hurt, no flood shall threaten. Take this ring, and think of us: but bewareof telling anyone of our existence; or we must fly thisland, and thou and all around will lose the happinessand blessing of our

neighbourhood. Once more, kiss thyplaymate, and farewell." They issued from the walk; Zerina wept, Mary stooped to embrace her, and theyparted. Already she was on the narrow bridge; the coldair was blowing on her back from the firs; the little dogbarked with all its might, and rang its little bell: shelooked around, then hastened over, for the darkness ofthe firs, the bleakness of the ruined huts, the shadows of the twilight, were filling her with terror.

"What a night my parents must have had on myaccount!" said she within herself, as she stept on the green; "and I dare not tell them where I have been, orwhat wonders I have witnessed, nor indeed would theybelieve me." Two men passing by saluted her; and asthey went along, she heard them say: "What a prettygirl! Where can she come from?" With quickened stepsshe approached the house: but the trees which werehanging last night loaded with fruit were now standingdry and leafless; the house was differently painted, and a new barn had been built beside it. Mary was amazed,and thought she must be dreaming. In this perplexity sheopened the door; and behind the table sat her father,

between an unknown woman and a stranger youth."Good God! Father," cried she, "where is my mother?"

"Thy mother!" said the woman, with a forecastingtone, and sprang towards her: "Ha, thou surely canst not—Yes, indeed, indeed thou art my lost, long-lostdear, only Mary!" She had recognised her by a little brown mole beneath the chin, as well as by her eyes andshape. All embraced her, all were moved with joy, andthe parents wept. Mary was astonished that she almostreached to her father's stature; and she could not under-stand how her mother had become so changed and faded;she asked the name of the stranger youth. "It is ourneighbour's Andres," said Martin. "How comest thou tous again, so unexpectedly, after seven long years? Wherehast thou been? Why didst thou never send us tidings of thee?"

"Seven years!" said Mary, and could not order herideas and recollections. "Seven whole years?"

"Yes, yes," said Andres, laughing, and shaking hertrustfully by the hand; "I have won the race, good Mary;I was at the pear-tree and back again seven years ago,and thou, sluggish creature, art but just returned!"

They again asked, they pressed her; but remembering her instruction, she could answer nothing. It was theythemselves chiefly that, by degrees, shaped a story forher: How, having lost her way, she had been taken upby a coach, and carried to a strange remote part, whereshe could not give the people any notion of her parents'residence; how she was conducted to a distant town,where certain worthy persons brought her up and loved her; how they had lately died, and at length she hadrecollected her birthplace, and so returned. "No matterhow it is!" exclaimed her mother; "enough, that we havethee again, my little daughter, my own, my all!"

Andres waited supper, and Mary could not be at home in anything she saw. The house seemed small and dark;she felt astonished at her dress, which was clean andsimple, but appeared quite foreign; she looked at thering on her finger, and the gold of it glittered strangely,enclosing a stone of burning red. To her father's ques-tion, she replied that the ring also was a present fromher benefactors.

She was glad when the hour of sleep arrived, and she hastened to her bed. Next morning she felt much morecollected; she had now arranged her thoughts a little,and could belter stand the questions of the

people in thevillage, all of whom came in to bid her welcome. Andreswas there too with the earliest, active, glad, and service- able beyond all others. The blooming maiden of fifteen had made a deep impression on him; he had passed asleepless night. The people of the castle likewise sent for Mary, and she had once more to tell her story to them,which was now grown quite familiar to her. The oldCount and his Lady were surprised at her good-breeding;she was modest, but not embarrassed; she made answercourteously in good phrases to all their questions; all fearof noble persons and their equipage had passed awayfrom her; for when she measured these halls and formsby the wonders and the high beauty she had seen with the Elves in their hidden abode, this earthly splendourseemed but dim to her, the presence of men was almostmean. The young lords were charmed with her beauty.

It was now February. The trees were budding earlierthan usual; the nightingale had never come so soon; the spring rose fairer in the land than the oldest men couldrecollect it. In every quarter, little brooks gushed outto irrigate the pastures and meadows; the hills seemed heaving, the vines rose higher and higher, the fruit-trees blossomed as they had never done; and a swelling fra-grant blessedness hung suspended heavily in rosy cloudsover the scene. All prospered beyond expectation; norude day, no tempest injured the fruits, the wine flowedblushing in immense grapes; and the inhabitants of theplace felt astonished, and were captivated as in a sweetdream. The next year was like its forerunner; but menhad now become accustomed to the marvellous. Inautumn Mary yielded to the pressing entreaties ofAndres and her parents; she was betrothed to him, andin winter they were married.

She often thought with inward longing of her residencebehind the fir-trees; she continued serious and still. Beautiful as all that lay around her was, she knew ofsomething yet more beautiful; and from the remem- brance of this, a faint regret attuned her nature to soft

melancholy. It smote her painfully when her father andmother talked about the gipsies and vagabonds, thatdwelt in the dark spot of ground. Often she was on thepoint of speaking out in defence of those good beings, whom she knew to be the benefactors of the land; espe- cially to Andres, who appeared to take delight in zeal-ously abusing them. Yet still she repressed the word thatwas struggling to escape her bosom. So passed this year;in the next, she was solaced by a little daughter, whomshe named Elfrida, thinking of the designation of herfriendly Elves.

The young people lived with Martin and Brigitta, thehouse being large enough for all; and helped their par-ents in conducting their now extended husbandry. Thelittle Elfrida soon displayed peculiar faculties and gifts;for she could walk at a very early age, and could speakperfectly before she was a twelvemonth old; and aftersome few years, she had become so wise and clever, andof such wondrous beauty, that all people regarded herwith astonishment; and her mother could not keep awaythe thought that her child resembled one of those shining little ones in the space behind the Firs. Elfrida cared notto be with other children; but seemed to avoid, with asort of horror, their tumultuous amusements; and likedbest to be alone. She would then retire into a corner ofthe garden, and read, or work diligently with her needle;often also you might see her sitting, as if deep sunk in thought; or violently walking up and down the alleys, speaking to herself. Her parents readily allowed her to have her will in these things, for she was healthy, andwaxed apace; only her strange sagacious answers and observations often made them anxious. "Such wise chil-dren do not grow to age," her grandmother, Brigitta,many times observed; "they are too good for this world; the child, besides, is beautiful beyond nature, and willnever find its proper place on Earth."

The little girl had this peculiarity, that she was veryloath to let herself be served by any one, but endeav-oured to do everything herself. She was almost the earli-est riser in the house; she washed herself carefully, anddressed without assistance: at night she was equally care-ful; she took special heed to pack up her clothes and

washed them with her own hands, allowing no one, not even her mother, to meddle with her articles. The mother humoured her in this caprice, not thinking it of any con-sequence. But what was her astonishment, when, hap-pening one holiday to insist, regardless of Elfrida's tears and screams, on dressing her out for a visit to the castle, she found upon her breast, suspended by a string, a pieceof gold of a strange form, which she directly recognisedas one of that sort she had seen in such abundance inthe subterranean vault! The little thing was greatly fright- ened; and at last confessed that she had found it in thegarden, and as she liked it much, had kept it carefully:she at the same time prayed so earnestly and pressingly to have it back, that Mary fastened it again on its former place, and, full of thoughts, went out with her in silenceto the castle.

Sidewards from the farmhouse lay some offices for thestoring of produce and implements; and behind thesethere was a little green, with an old grove, now visitedby no one as, from the new arrangement of the buildings,it lay too far from the garden. In this solitude Elfridadelighted most; and it occurred to nobody to interrupt her here, so that frequently her parents did not see herfor half a day. One afternoon her mother chanced to be in these buildings, seeking for some lost article among the lumber; and she noticed that a beam of light wascoming in, through a chink in the wall. She took athought of looking through this aperture, and seeing what her child was busied with; and it happened that astone was lying loose, and could be pushed aside, so thatshe obtained a view right into the grove. Elfrida was sitting there on a little bench, and beside her the well-known Zerina; and the children were playing, and amus-ing one another, in the kindliest unity. The Elf embracedher beautiful companion, and said mournfully: "AW dear little creature, as I sport with thee, so have I sportedwith thy mother, when she was a child; but you mortalsso soon grow tall and thoughtful! It is very hard: wertthou but to be a child as long as I!"

"Willingly would I do it," said Elfrida; "but they allsay, I shall come to sense, and give over playing alto-gether; for I have great gifts, as they think, for growing

wise. Ah! and then I shall see thee no more, thou dearZerina! Yet it is with us as with the fruit-tree flowers: how glorious the blossoming apple-tree, with its redbursting buds! It looks so stately and broad; and every one, that passes under it, thinks surely something greatwill come of it; then the sun grows hot, and the buds come joyfully forth; but the wicked kernel is alreadythere, which pushes off and casts away the fair flower'sdress; and now, in pain and waxing, it can do nothingmore, but must grow to fruit in harvest. An apple, to be sure, is pretty and refreshing; yet nothing to the blossomof spring. So it is also with us mortals: I am not glad inthe least at growing to be a tall girl. Ah! Could I but once visit you!"

"Since the King is with us," said Zerina, "it is quiteimpossible; but I will come to thee, my darling, often, often; and none shall see me either here or there. I willpass invisible through the air, or fly over to thee like abird. O! we will be much, much together, while thou artstill little. What can I do to please thee?"

"Thou must like me very dearly," said Elfrida, "as Ilike thee in my heart. But come, let us make another rose."

Zerinatook the well-known box from her bosom,threw two grains from it on the ground; and instantly a green bush stood before them, with two deep-red roses,bending their heads, as if to kiss each other. The children plucked them smiling, and the bush disappeared. "O thatit would not die so soon!" said Elfrida; "this red child,this wonder of the Earth!"

"Give it me here," said the little Elf; then breathedthrice upon the budding rose, and kissed it thrice. "Now," said she, giving back the rose, "it will continuefresh and blooming till winter."

"I will keep it," said Elfrida, "as an image of thee; Iwill guard it in my little room, and kiss it night and morn-ing, as if it were thyself."

"The sun is setting," said the other; "I must go home."They embraced again, and Zerina vanished.

In the evening, Mary clasped her child to her breast,with a feeling of alarm and veneration. She henceforthallowed the good little girl more liberty than formerly;

and often calmed her husband when he came to searchfor the child; which for some time he was wont to do,as her retiredness did not please him; and he feared that, in the end, it might make her silly, or even pervert herunderstanding. The mother often glided to the chink; andalmost always found the bright Elf beside her child,employed in sport, or in earnest conversation.

"Wouldst thou like to fly?" inquired Zerina once.

"O well! How well!" replied Elfrida; and the fairyclasped her mortal playmate in her arms, and mounted with her from the ground, till they hovered above thegrove. The mother, in alarm, forgot herself, and pushedout her head in terror to look after them; when Zerina,from the air, held up her finger, and threatened yetsmiled; then descended with the child, embraced her, and disappeared. After this, it happened more than oncethat Mary was observed by her; and every time, the shin-ing little creature shook her head, or threatened, yet with friendly looks.

Often, in disputing with her husband, Mary had saidin her zeal: "Thou dost injustice to the poor people in the hut!" But when Andres pressed her to explain whyshe differed in opinion from the whole village, nay, fromhis Lordship himself; and how she could understand it better than the whole of them, she still broke off embar-rassed, and became silent. One day, after dinner, Andresgrew more violent than ever; and maintained that, byone means or another, the crew must be packed away, as a nuisance to the country; when his wife, in anger,said to him: "Hush! for they are benefactors to thee andto every one of us."

"Benefactors!" cried the other, in astonishment:"These rogues and vagabonds?"

In her indignation, she was now at last tempted torelate to him, under promise of the strictest secrecy, thehistory of her youth: and as Andres at every word grewmore incredulous, and shook his head in mockery, shetook him by the hand, and led him to the chink; where,to his amazement, he beheld the glittering Elf sporting with his child, and caressing her in the grove. He knewnot what to say; an exclamation of astonishment escaped him, and Zerina raised her eyes. On the instant she grew

pale, and trembled violently; not with friendly, but withindignant looks, she made the sign of threatening, andthen said to Elfrida: "Thou canst not help it, dearestheart; but they will never learn sense, wise as they believe themselves." She embraced the little one withstormy haste; and then, in the shape of a raven, flew with hoarse cries over the garden, toward the Firs.

In the evening, the little one was very still; she kissed her rose with tears; Mary felt depressed and frightened,Andres scarcely spoke. It grew dark. Suddenly therewent a rustling through the trees; birds

flew to and frowith wild screaming, thunder was heard to roll, the Earthshook, and tones of lamentation moaned in the air.Andres and his wife had not courage to rise; theyshrouded themselves within the curtains, and with fearand trembling awaited the day. Towards morning, it grew calmer; and all was silent when the Sun, with his cheerfullight, rose over the wood.

Andres dressed himself; and Mary now observed thatthe stone of the ring upon her finger had become quite pale. On opening the door, the sun shone clear on theirfaces, but the scene around them they could scarcely rec-ognise. The freshness of the wood was gone; the hillswere shrunk, the brooks were flowing languidly withscanty streams, the sky seemed grey; and when youturned to the Firs, they were standing there no darkeror more dreary than the other trees. The huts behindthem were no longer frightful; and several inhabitants ofthe village came and told about the fearful night, andhow they had been across the spot where the gipsies had lived; how these people must have left the place at last, for their huts were standing empty, and within had quitea common look, just like the dwellings of other poorpeople: some of their household gear was left behind.

Elfrida in secret said to her mother: "I could not sleeplast night; and in my fright at the noise, I was prayingfrom the bottom of my heart, when the door suddenlyopened, and my playmate entered to take leave of me.She had a travelling pouch slung round her, a hat on herhead, and a large staff in her hand. She was very angryat thee; since on thy account she had now to suffer theseverest and most painful punishments, as she had always

been so fond of thee; for all of them, she said, were veryloath to leave this quarter."

Mary forbade her to speak of this; and now the fer-ryman came across the river, and told them new won-ders. As it was growing dark, a stranger man of largesize had come to him, and hired his boat till sunrise; and with this condition, that the boatman should remain quietin his house, at least should not cross the threshold ofhis door. "I was frightened," continued the old man,"and the strange bargain would not let me sleep. Islipped softly to the window, and looked towards the river. Great clouds were driving restlessly through thesky, and the distant woods were rustling fearfully; it wasas if my cottage shook, and moans and lamentationsglided round it. On a sudden, I perceived a white stream-ing light, that grew broader and broader, like many thou-sands of falling stars; sparkling and waving, it proceededforward from the dark Fir-ground, moved over the fields,and spread itself along towards the river. Then I hearda trampling, a jingling, a bustling, and rushing, nearerand nearer; it went forwards to my boat, and all stept into it, men and women, as it seemed, and children; andthe tall stranger ferried them over. In the river were by the boat swimming many thousands of glittering forms;in the air white clouds and lights were wavering; and all lamented and bewailed that they must travel forth so far,far away, and leave their beloved dwelling. The noise of the rudder and the water creaked and gurgled between-whiles, and then suddenly there would be silence. Many a time the boat landed, and went back, and was againladen; many heavy casks, too, they took along with them,which multitudes of horrid-looking little fellows carried , and rolled; whether they were devils or goblins, Heavenonly knows. Then came, in waving brightness, a statelyfreight; it seemed an old man, mounted on a small whitehorse, and all were crowding round him. I saw nothing of the horse but its head; for the rest of it was coveredwith costly glittering cloths and trappings: on his browthe old man had a crown, so bright that, as he cameacross, I thought the sun was rising there, and the red-ness of the dawn glimmering in my eyes. Thus it wenton all night; I at last fell asleep in the tumult, half in

joy, half in terror. In the morning all was still; but theriver is, as it were, run off, and I know not how I am

tosteer my boat in it now."

The same year there came a blight; the woods diedaway, the springs ran dry; and the scene, which had oncebeen the joy of every traveller, was in autumn standingwaste, naked and bald; scarcely showing here and there,in the sea of sand, a spot or two where grass, with a dingygreenness, still grew up. The fruit-trees all withered, the vines faded away, and the aspect of the place became somelancholy, that the Count, with his people, next year left the castle, which in time decayed and fell to ruins.

Elfrida gazed on her rose day and night with deep longing, and thought of her kind playmate; and as it drooped and withered, so did she also hang her head;and before the spring the little maiden had herself fadedaway. Mary often stood upon the spot before the hut,and wept for the happiness that had departed. Shewasted herself away like her child, and in a few years she too was gone. Old Martin, with his son-in-law,returned to the quarter where he had lived before.

DARBY O'GILL AND THEGOOD PEOPLE

Herminie Templeton

On the road between Kilcuny and Balinderg, Jerry Mur-taugh, the car-driver, told me his story:

Although only one living man of his own free will everwent among them there, still, any well-learned person inIreland can tell you that the abode of the Good Peopleis in the hollow heart of the great mountain Sleive-na-mon. That same one man was Darby O'Gill, a cousin ofmy own mother.

One night the Good People took the eldest of Darby'sthree fine pigs. The next week a second pig went thesame way. The third week not a tiling had Darby left forthe Balinrobe fair. You may aisily think how sore andsorry the poor man was, an' how Bridget his wife an' thechildher carried on. The rent was due, and all left was to sell his cow Rosie to pay it. Rosie was the apple ofhis eye; he admired and rayspected the pigs, but he lovedRosie.

Worst luck of all was yet to come. On the morningwhen Darby went for the cow to bring her into market,bad scrans to the hoof was there; but in her place onlya wisp of dirty straw to mock him. Millia murther! Whata howlin' and screechin' and cursin' did Darby bring backto the house!

Now Darby was a bould man, and a desperate man inhis anger, as you soon will see. He shoved his feet into a pair of brogues, clapped his hat on his head, grippedhis stick in his hand.

"Fairy or no fairy, ghost or goblin, livin' or dead, whotook Rosie'll rue this day," he says.

With those wild words he bolted in the direction ofSleive-na-mon.

All day long he climbed like an ant over the hill, look-ing for a hole or cave through which he could get at theprison of Rosie. At times he struck the rocks with hisblack-thorn, cryin' out challenge.

"Come out, you that took her," he called. "If ye havethe courage of a mouse, ye murtherin' thieves, come out!"

No one made answer—at laste, not just then. But atnight, as he turned, hungry and footsore, toward home,who should he meet up with on the crossroads but the ould fairy doctor, Sheela Maguire. Well known she wasas a spy for the Good People. She spoke up:

"Oh, then, you're the foolish, blundherin'-headed manto be saying what you've said, and doing what you'vedone this day, Darby O'Gill," says she.

"What do I care!" says he fiercely. "I'd fight the divilto-night for my beautiful cow."

"Then go into Mrs. Hagan's meadow beyant," saysSheela, "and wait till the moon is up. By-an'-by ye'll seea herd of cows come down from the mountain, and yerown'll be among them."

"What'll I do then?" asked Darby, his voice threm-bling with excitement.

"Sorra a hair I care what ye do! But there'll be lads there, and hundreds you won't see, that'll stand no ill words, Darby O'Gill."

"I thank you kindly," says Darby, "and I bid yougood-evening, ma'am." He turned away, leaving her standing there alone, looking after him; but he was surehe heard voices talkin' to her, and laughin' and tittherin' behind him.

It was dark night when Darby stretched himself on the ground in Hagan's meadow; the yellow rim of the moonjust tipped the edge of the hills. The time passed mortalslow; and it was an hour later when a hundred slow shad-ows, stirring up the mists, crept from the mountain waytoward him. First he must find was Rosie among theherd. To creep quiet as a cat through the hedge andreach the first cow was only a minute's work. Then hisplan—to wait till cock-crow—with all other sober, sensi-

ble thoughts, went clean out of the lad's head before hisrage; for, cropping eagerly the long sweet grass, the firstbaste he met was Rosie.

With a leap Darby was behind her, his stick fallingsharply on her flanks. The ingratitude of that cow almostbroke Darby's heart. Rosie turned fiercely on him, witha vicious lunge, her two horns aimed at his breast. Therewas no suppler boy in the parish than Darby, and wellfor him it was so, for the mad rush the cow gave wouldhave caught any man the laste thrifte heavy on his legs,and ended his days right there.

As it was, our hayro sprang to one side. As Rosiepassed, his left hand gripped her tail. When one of the O'Gills takes hould of a thing, he hangs on like a bullterrier. Away he went, rushing with her.

Now began a race the like of which was never heardof before or since. Ten jumps to the second, and a hun-dred feet to the jump. Rosie's tail standing straight upin the air, firm as an iron bar, and Darby floating straight out behind; a thousand furious fairies flying a short dis-tance after, filling the air with wild commands andthreatenings.

Suddenly the sky opened for a crash of lightning thatshivered the hills, and a roar of thunder that turned outof their beds every man, woman, and child in four count-ies. Flash after flash came the lightning, hitting on everyside of Darby. If it wasn't for fear of hurting Rosie, thefairies would sartenly have killed Darby. As it was, hewas stiff with fear, afraid to hould on and afraid to lavego, but flew, waving in the air at Rosie's tail like a flag.

As the cow turned into the long, narrow valley whichcuts into the east side of the mountain, the Good Peoplecaught up with the pair, and what they didn't do toDarby, in the line of sticking pins, pulling whiskers, andpinching wouldn't take long to tell. In troth, he was just about to let go his hould, and take the chances of a fall,when the hillside opened and—whisk! the cow turned into the mountain. Darby found himself flying down awide, high passage which grew lighter as he went along.He heard the opening behind shut like a trap, and hisheart almost stopped beating, for this was the fairies'

home in the heart of Sleive-na-mon. He was captured bythem!

When Rosie stopped, so stiff were all Darby's joints,that he had great trouble loosening himself to come down. He landed among a lot of angry-faced little peo-ple, each no higher than your hand, every one wearinga green velvet cloak and a red cap.

"We'll take him to the king," says a red-whiskeredwee chap. "What he'll do to the murtherin' spalpeen 'll be good and plenty!"

With that they marched our bould Darby, a prisoner, down the long passage, which every second grew widerand lighter, and fuller of little people.

Sometimes, though, he met with human beings likehimself, only the Mack charm was on them, they havingbeen stolen at some time by the Good People. He sawLost People there from every parish in Ireland, bothcommoners and gentry. Each was laughing, talking, anddivarting himself with another. Off to the sides he couldsee small cobblers making brogues, tinkers mendingpans, tailors sewing cloth, smiths hammering horseshoes,every one merrily to his trade, making a divarsion out ofwork.

Down near the center of the mountain was a roomtwenty times higher and broader than the biggest churchin the world. As they drew near this room, there arosethe sound of a reel played on bagpipes. The music wasso bewitching that Darby, who was the gracefullest reeldancer in all Ireland, could hardly make his feet behave.

At the room's edge Darby stopped short and caughthis breath, the sight was so entrancing. Set over the broad floor were thousands and thousands of the GoodPeople, facing this way and that, and dancing to a reel;while on a throne in the middle of the room sat ouldBrian Conners, King of the Fairies, blowing on the bag-pipes. The little king, with a goold crown on his head,wearing a beautiful green velvet coat and red kneebreeches, sat with his legs crossed, beating time with hisfoot to the music.

There were many from Darby's own parish; and whatwas his surprise to see there Maureen McGibney, his

own wife's sister, whom he had supposed resting dacintlyin her grave in holy ground these three years.

There she was, gliding back and forth, ferninst a littlegray-whiskered, round-stomached fairy man, as thoughthere was never a care nor a sorrow in the world.

As I told you before, I tell you again, Darby was thefinest reel dancer in all Ireland; and he came from a family of dancers, though I say it who shouldn't, as hewas my mother's own cousin. Three things in the worldbanish sorrow—love and whisky and music. So, when thesurprise of it all melted a little, Darby's

feet led him in to the thick of the throng, right under the throne of theking, where he flung care to the winds, and put his heart and mind into his two nimble feet. Darby's dancing wassuch that purty soon those around stood still to admire.

Backward and forward, sidestep and turn; cross over,then forward; a hand on his hip and his stick twirlingfree; sidestep and forward; cross over again; bow to hispartner, and hammer the floor.

It wasn't long till half the dancers crowded aroundadmiring, clapping their hands, and shouting encourage-ment. The ould king grew so excited that he laid downthe pipes, took up his fiddle, came down from thethrone, and standing ferninst Darby began a finer tunethan the first.

The dancing lasted a whole hour, no one speaking aword except to cry out, "Foot it, ye divil!" "Aisy now,he's threading on flowers!" "More power to you!" "Playfaster, king!" "Hooroo! hooroo! hooray!"

Then the king stopped and said:

"Well, that bates Banagher, and Banagher bates theworld! Who are you, and how came you here?"

Then Darby up and tould the whole story.

When he had finished, the king looked sayrious. "I'm glad you came, an' I'm sorry you came," he says. "If wehad put our charm on you outside to bring you in, you'dnever die till the end of the world, when we here must all go to hell. But," he added quickly, "there's no use in worrying about that now. That's nayther here nor there!Those willing to come with us can't come at all, at all;and here you are of your own free act and will. Howsom-ever, you're here, and we daren't let you go outside to

tell others of what you have seen, and so give us a badname about—about taking things, you know. We'll make you as comfortable as we can; and so you won't worry about Bridget and the childher, I'll have a goold sover-eign left with them every day of their lives. But I wishwe had the comeither on you," he says, with a sigh, "forit's aisy to see you're great company. Now come up tomy place an' have a noggin of punch for friendship's sake," says he.

That's how Darby O'Gill began his six months' stay with the Good People. Not a thing was left undone tomake Darby contented and happy. A civiler people thanthe Good People he never met. At first he couldn't get over saying, "God keep all here," and "God save youkindly," and things like that, which was like burningthem with a hot iron.

If it weren't for Maureen McGibney, Darby would bein Sleive-na-mon at this hour. Sure she was always thewise girl, ready with her crafty plans and warnings. Ona day when they two were sitting alone together, she saysto him:

"Darby, dear," says she, "it isn't right for a dacintman of family to be spending his days cavortin', and idlin', and fillin' the hours with sport and nonsense. Wemust get you out of here; for what is a sovereign a dayto compare with the care and protection of a father?"she says.

"Thrue for ye!" moaned Darby, "and my heart is justsplittin' for a sight of Bridget an' the childher. Bad luck to the day I set so much store on a dirty, ongrateful, threacherous cow!"

"I know well how you feel," says Maureen, "for I'dgive the whole world to say three words to Bob

Broder-ick, that ye tell me that out of grief for me has neverkept company with any other girl till this day. But that'llnever be," she says, "because I must stop here till the

Day of Judgment, and then I must go to------" says she,

beginning to cry, "but if you get out, you'll bear a mes-sage to Bob for me, maybe?" she says.

"It's aisy to talk about going out, but how can it bedone?" asked Darby.

"There's a way," says Maureen, wiping her big gray

eyes, "but it may take years. First, you must know thatthe Good People can never put their charm on any onewho is willing to come with them. That's why you camesafe. Then, again, they can't work harm in the daylight,and after cockcrow any mortal eye can see them plain;nor can they harm any one who has a sprig of holly, norpass over a leaf or twig of holly, because that's Christmasbloom. Well, there's a certain evil word for a charm thatopens the side of the mountain, and I will try to find itout for you. Without that word all the armies of the world couldn't get out or in. But you must be patientand wise, and wait."

"I will so, with the help of God," says Darby.

At these words, Maureen gave a terrible screech.

"Cruel man!" she cried, "don't you know that to saypious words to one of the Good People, or to one undertheir black charm, is like cutting him with a knife?"

The next night she came to Darby again.

"Watch yerself now," she says, "for to-night they'regoin' to lave the door of the mountain open, to thry you; and if you stir two steps outside they'll put the comeitheron you," she says.

Sure enough, when Darby took his walk down the pas-sage, after supper, as he did every night, there the sideof the mountain lay wide open and no one in sight. Thetemptation to make one rush was great; but he onlylooked out a minute, and went whistling back down thepassage, knowing well that a hundred hidden eyes were on nun the while. For a dozen nights after it was thesame.

At another time Maureen said:

"The king himself is going to thry you hard the day,so beware!" She had no sooner said the words than Darby was called for, and went up to the king.

"Darby, my sowl," says the king, in a sootherin' way,"have this noggin of punch. A betther never was brewed;it's the last we'll have for many a day. I'm going to setyou free, Darby O'Gill, that's what I am."

"Why, king," says Darby, putting on a mournful face,"how have I offended ye?"

"No offense at all," says the king, "only we're depriv-ing you."

"No depravity in life!" says Darby. "I have lashinsand lavings to ate and to drink, and nothing but fun an' divarsion all day long. Out in the world it was nothingbut work and throuble and sickness, disappointment andcare."

"But Bridget and the childher?" says the king, givinghim a sharp look out of half-shut eyes.

"Oh, as for that, king," says Darby, "it's aisier for awidow to get a husband, or for orphans to find a father,than it is for them to pick up a sovereign a day."

The king looked mighty satisfied and smoked for awhile without a word.

"Would you mind going out an evenin' now and then,helpin' the boys to mind the cows?" he asked at last.

Darby feared to thrust himself outside in theircompany.

"Well, I'll tell ye how it is," replied my brave Darby."Some of the neighbors might see me, and spread the report on me that I'm with the fairies, and that'd disgraceBridget and the childher," he says.

The king knocked the ashes from his pipe. "You're awise man besides being the hoight of good company,"says he, "and it's sorry I am you didn't take me at myword; for then we would have you always, at laste tillthe Day of Judgment, when—but that's nayther here nor there! Howsomever, we'll bother you about it no more."

From that day they thrated him as one of their own.

It was one day five months after that Maureen pluckedDarby by the coat and led him off to a lonely spot.

"I've got the word," she says.

"Have you, faith! What is it?" says Darby, all of athremble.

Then she whispered a word so blasphemous, so irreli-gious, that Darby blessed himself. When Maureen sawhim making the sign, she fell down in a fit, the holyemblem hurt her so, poor child.

Three hours after this me bould Darby was sitting athis own fireside talking to Bridget and the childher. The neighbors were hurrying to him, down every road and through every field, carrying armfuls of holly bushes, ashe had sent word for them to do. He knew well he'dhave fierce and savage visitors before morning.

After they had come with the holly, he had them make a circle of it so thick around the house that a fly couldn't walk through without touching a twig or a leaf. But thatwas not all.

You'll know what a wise girl and what a crafty girlthat Maureen was when you hear what the neighbors didnext. They made a second ring of holly outside the first,so that the house sat in two great wreaths, one wreatharound the other. The outside ring was much the bigger, and left a good space between it and the first, with roomfor ever so many people to stand there. It was like theinner ring, except for a little gate, left open as thoughby accident, where the fairies could walk in.

But it wasn't an accident at all, only the wise plan ofMaureen's; for nearby this little gap, in the outside wreath, lay a sprig of holly with a bit of twine tied to it.Then the twine ran along up to Darby's house, and inthrough the window, where its end lay convaynient to hishand. A little pull on the twine would drag the straypiece of holly into the gap, and close tight the outsidering.

It was a trap, you see. When the fairies walked inthrough the gap, the twine was to be pulled, and so theywere to be made prisoners between the two rings of holly. They couldn't get into Darby's house, because thecircle of holly nearest the house was so tight that a fly couldn't get through without touching the blessed tree orits wood. Likewise, when the gap in the outer wreath was closed, they couldn't get out again. Well, anyway,these things were hardly finished and fixed, when thedusky brown of the hills warned the neighbors of twilight,and they scurried like frightened rabbits to their homes.

Only one amongst them all had courage to sit insideDarby's house waiting the dreadful visitors, and that onewas Bob Broderick. What vengeance was in storecouldn't be guessed at all, at all, only it was sure that it was to be more terrible than any yet wreaked on mortalman.

Not in Darby's house alone was the terror, for in theiranger the Good People might lay waste the whole parish.The roads and fields were empty and silent in the dark-ness. Not a window glimmered with light for miles

around. Many a blaggard who hadn't said a prayer foryears was now down on his marrow bones among thedacint members of his family, thumping his craw, androaring his Pather and Aves.

In Darby's quiet house, against which the cunning, thepower, and the fury of the Good People would firstbreak, you can't think of half the suffering of Bridgetand the childher, as they lay huddled together on thesettle bed; nor of the sthrain on Bob and Darby, whosat smoking their dudeens and whispering anxiouslytogether.

For some rayson or other the Good People were longin coming. Ten o'clock struck, then eleven, afther thattwelve, and not a sound from the outside. The silenceand the no sign of any kind had them all just about crazy,when suddenly there fell a sharp rap on the door.

"Millia murther," whispered Darby, "we're in for it.They've crossed the two rings of holly, and are at the door itself."

The childher begun to cry and Bridget said her prayersout loud; but no one answered the knock.

"Rap, rap, rap," on the door, then a pause.

"God save all here!" cried a queer voice from theoutside.

Now no fairy would say, "God save all here," soDarby took heart and opened the door. Who should be standing there but Sheelah Maguire, a spy for the GoodPeople. So angry were Darby and Bob that they snatchedher within the threshold, and before she knew it theyhad her tied hand and foot, wound a cloth around her mouth, and rouled her under the bed. Within the minutea thousand rustling voices sprung from outside. Through the window, in the clear moonlight, Darby marked weedsand grass being trampled by invisible feet, beyond thefarthest ring of holly.

Suddenly broke a great cry. The gap in the first ringwas found. Signs were plainly seen of uncountable feetrushing through, and spreading about the nearer wreath.Afther that a howl of madness from the little men andwomen. Darby had pulled his twine and the trap wasclosed, with five thousand of the Good People entirely at his mercy.

Princes, princesses, dukes, dukesses, earls, earlesses,and all the quality of Sleive-na-mon were prisoners. Notmore than a dozen of the last to come escaped, and theyflew back to tell the king.

For an hour they raged. All the bad names ever called to mortal man were given free, but Darby said never aword. "Pick-pocket," "sheep stayler," "murtherin' thafeof a blaggard," were the softest words trun at him.

By an' by, howsomever, as it begun to grow near tocock-crow, their talk grew a great dale civiler. Then camebeggin,' pladin', promisin', and enthratin', but the doorsof the house still stayed shut an' its windows down.

Purty soon Darby's old rooster, Terry, came down from his perch, yawned, an' flapped his wings a few times. At that the terror and the screechin' of the GoodPeople would have melted the heart of a stone.

All of a sudden a fine, clear voice rose from beyantthe crowd. The king had come. The other fairies grewstill, listening.

"Ye murtherin' thafe of the world," says the kinggrandly, "what are ye doin' wid my people?"

"Keep a civil tongue in yer head, Brian Connor," saysDarby, sticking his head out the window, "for I'm asgood a man as you, any day," says Darby.

At that minute Terry, the cock, flapped his wings andcrowed. In a flash there sprang into full view the crowdof Good People—dukes, earls, princes, quality, and com-moners, with their ladies, jammed thick together aboutthe house; every one of them with his head thrown backbawling and crying, and tears as big as pigeons' eggsrouling down his cheeks.

A few feet away, on a straw pile in the barnyard, stoodthe king, his goold crown tilted on the side of his head,his long green cloak about him, and his rod in his hand,but thremblin' all over.

In the middle of the crowd, but towering high abovethem all, stood Maureen McGibney in her cloak of green an' goold, her purty brown hair fallin' down on her shoul-ders, an' she—the crafty villain—cryin' an' bawlin', an'abusin' Darby, with the best of them.

"What'll you have an' let them go?" says the king.

"First an' foremost," says Darby, "take yer spell*off*that slip of a girl there, an' send her into the house."

In a second Maureen was standing inside the door,her both arms about Bob's neck, and her head on his collarbone.

What they said to aich other, and what they done inthe way of embracin' an' kissin' an' cryin' I won't

taketime in telling you.

"Next," says Darby, "send back Rosie and the pigs."

"I expected that," says the king. And at those wordsthey saw a black bunch coming through the air; in a fewseconds Rosie and the three pigs walked into the stable.

"Now," says Darby, "promise in the name of OuldNick" ('tis by him the Good People swear) "never to moil nor meddle again with any one or anything fromthis parish."

The king was fair put out by this. Howsomever, hesaid at last, "You ongrateful scoundhrel, in the name ofOuld Nick, I promise."

"So far, so good," says Darby; "but the worst is yetto come. Now you must ralayse from your spell everysoul you've stole from this parish; and besides, you mustsend me ten thousand pounds in goold."

Well, the king gave a roar of anger that was heard inthe next barony.

"Ye high-handed, hard-hearted robber," he says, "I'llnever consent!" he says.

"Plase yerself," says Darby. "I see Father Cassidycomin' down the hedge," he says, "an' he has a prayer for ye all in his book that'll burn ye up like wisps ofsthraw ef he ever catches ye here," says Darby.

With that the roaring and bawling was pitiful to hear, and in a few minutes a bag with ten thousand goold sov-ereigns in it was trun at Darby's threshold; and fifty peo-ple, young an' some of them ould, flew over an' stoodbeside the king. Some of them had spent years with thefairies. Their relatives thought them dead an' buried. They were the Lost Ones from that parish.

With that Darby pulled the bit of twine again, openingthe trap, and it wasn't long until every fairy was gone.

The green coat of the last one was hardly out of sightwhen, sure enough, who should come up but Father Cas-

sidy, his book in his hand. He looked at the fifty people who had been with the fairies standin' there—the poorcrathures—thremblin' an' wondherin', an' afeared to go to their homes.

Darby tould him what had happened.

"Ye foolish man," says the priest, "you could have gotout every poor prisoner that's locked in Sleive-na-mon,let alone those from this parish."

"Would yer Reverence have me let out the Corko-niens, the Connaught men, and the Fardowns, I ask ye?"he says hotly. "When Mrs. Malowney there goes home and finds that Tim has married the Widow Hogan, ye'llsay I let out too many, even of this parish, I'm thinkin'."

"But," says the priest, "ye might have got ten thou-sand pounds for aich of us."

"If aich had ten thousand pounds, what comfort wouldI have in being rich?" asked Darby again. "To

enjoy wellbeing rich, there should be plenty of poor," says Darby.

"God forgive ye, ye selfish man!" says Father Cassidy.

"There's another rayson besides," says Darby. "Inever got betther nor friendlier thratement than I had from the Good People. An' the divil a hair of their headsI'd hurt more than need be," he says.

Some way or other the king heard of this saying, an'was so mightily pleased that next night a jug of the finestpoteen was left at Darby's door.

After that, indade, many's the winter night, when thesnow lay so heavy that no neighbor was stirrin', and whenBridget and the childher were in bed, Darby sat by thefire, a noggin of hot punch in his hand, argying an' get-ting news of the whole world. A little man, with a gooldcrown on his head, a green cloak on his back, and onefoot thrown over the other, sat ferninst him by thehearth.

NO MAN'S LAND

John Buchan

CHAPTER I. THE SHIELING OF FARAWA

It was with a light heart and a pleasing consciousness ofholiday that I set out from the inn at Allermuir to trampmy fifteen miles into the unknown. I walked slowly, for I carried my equipment on my back—my basket, fly-books and rods, my plaid of Grant tartan (for I boastmyself a distant kinsman of that house), and my greatstaff, which had tried ere then the front of the steeper Alps. A small valise with books and some changes of linen clothing had been sent on ahead in the shepherd'sown hands. It was yet early April, and before me lay fourweeks of freedom—twenty-eight blessed days in which to take fish and smoke the pipe of idleness. The Lent termhad pulled me down, a week of modest enjoyment there after in town had finished the work; and I drank in thesharp moorish air like a thirsty man who has been for-wandered among deserts.

I am a man of varied tastes and a score of interests.As an undergraduate I had been filled with the old maniafor the complete life. I distinguished myself in theSchools, rowed in my college eight, and reached the dis-tinction of practising for three weeks in the Trials. I haddabbled in a score of learned activities, and when thetime came that I won the inevitable St Chad's fellowshipon my chaotic acquirements, and I found myself com-pelled to select if I would pursue a scholar's life, I hadsome toil in finding my vocation. In the end I resolved that the ancient life of the North, of the Celts and theNorthmen and the unknown Pictish tribes, held for me

the chief fascination. I had acquired a smattering ofGaelic, having been brought up as a boy in Lochaber, and now I set myself to increase my store of languages.I mastered Erse and Icelandic, and my first book—a monograph on the probable Celtic elements in the Eddiesongs—brought me the praise of scholars and the deputy-professor's chair of Northern Antiquities. So much forOxford. My vacations had been spent mainly in theNorth—in Ireland, Scotland, and the Isles, in Scandina-via and Iceland, once even in the far limits of Finland. Iwas a keen sportsman of a sort, an old-experiencedfisher, a fair shot with gun and rifle, and in my hillcraftI might well stand comparison with most men. April hasever seemed to me the finest season of the year even inour cold northern altitudes, and the memory of manybright

Aprils had brought me up from the South on thenight before to Allerfoot, whence a dogcart had takenme up Glen Aller to the inn at Allermuir; and now thesame desire had set me on the heather with my face to the cold brown hills.

You are to picture a sort of plateau, benty and rock-strewn, running ridge-wise above a chain of little peatylochs and a vast tract of inexorable bog. In a mile theridge ceased in a shoulder of hill, and over this lay thehead of another glen, with the same doleful accompani-ment of sunless lochs, mosses, and a shining and resolutewater. East and west and north, in every direction save the south, rose walls of gashed and serrated hills. It wasa grey day with blinks of sun, and when a ray chancedto fall on one of the great dark faces, lines of light andcolour sprang into being which told of mica and granite. I was in high spirits, as on the eve of holiday; I hadbreakfasted excellently on eggs and salmon-steaks; I hadno cares to speak of, and my prospects were not uninvit-ing. But in spite of myself the landscape began to take me in thrall and crush me. The silent vanished peoples of the hills seemed to be stirring; dark primeval facesseemed to stare at me from behind boulders and jags of rock. The place was so still, so free from the cheerfulclamour of nesting birds, that it seemed a*temenos* sacred to some old-world god. At my feet the lochs lappedceaselessly; but the waters were so dark that one could

not see bottom a foot from the edge. On my right thelinks of green told of snake-like mires waiting to crushthe unwary wanderer. It seemed to me for the momenta land of death, where the tongues of the dead criedaloud for recognition.

My whole morning's walk was full of such fancies. I lita pipe to cheer me, but the things would not be got ridof. I thought of the Gaels who had held those fastnesses;I thought of the Britons before them, who yielded to their- advent. They were all strong peoples in their day,and now they had gone the way of the earth. They hadleft their mark on the levels of the glens and on the more habitable uplands, both in names and in actual forts, and graves where men might still dig curios. But the hills—that black stony amphitheatre before me—it seemed strange that the hills bore no traces of them. And thenwith some uneasiness I reflected on that older andstranger race who were said to have held the hill-tops.The Picts, the Picti—what in the name of goodness werethey? They had troubled me in all my studies, a sort of blank wall to put an end to speculation. We knew noth-ing of them save certain strange names which men calledPictish, the names of those hills in front of me—the Mun-eraw, the Yirnie, the Calmarton. They were the*corpus*vilefor learned experiment; but Heaven alone knew what dark abyss of savagery once yawned in the midst of thedesert.

And then I remembered the crazy theories of a pupilof mine at St Chad's, the son of a small landowner onthe Aller, a young gentleman who had spent his sub-stance too freely at Oxford, and was now dreeing hisweird in the Backwoods. He had been no scholar; but acertain imagination marked all his doings, and of a Sun-day night he would come and talk to me of the North. The Picts were his special subject, and his ideas were mad. "Listen to me," he would say, when I had mixedhim toddy and given him one of my cigars; "I believethere are traces—ay, and more than traces—of an oldculture lurking in those hills and waiting to be discov- ered. We never hear of the Picts being driven from thehills. The Britons drove them from the lowlands, theGaels from Ireland did the same for the Britons; but the

hills were left unmolested. We hear of no one going nearthem except outlaws and tinklers. And in that very placeyou have the strangest mythology. Take the story of the Brownie. What is that but the story of a little swart manof uncommon strength and cleverness, who does good and ill indiscriminately, and then disappears. There aremany scholars, as you yourself confess, who think thatthe origin of the Brownie

was in some mad belief in the old race of the Picts, which still survived somewhere inthe hills. And do we not hear of the Brownie in authentic records right down to the year 1756? After that, whenpeople grew more incredulous, it is natural that the belief should have begun to die out; but I do not see why stray traces should not have survived till late."

"Do you not see what that means?" I had said in mockgravity. "Those same hills are, if anything, less knownnow than they were a hundred years ago. Why shouldnot your Picts or Brownies be living to this day?"

"Why not, indeed?" he had rejoined, in all ser-iousness.

I laughed, and he went to his rooms and returned witha large leather-bound book. It was lettered, in the rococostyle of a young man's taste, "Glimpses of the Unknown," and some of the said glimpses he proceededto impart to me. It was not pleasant reading; indeed, I had rarely heard anything so well fitted to shatter sensi-tive nerves. The early part consisted of folk-tales andfolk-sayings, some of them wholly obscure, some of themwith a glint of meaning, but all of them with some hintof a mystery in the hills. I heard the Brownie story incountless versions. Now the thing was a friendly littleman, who wore grey breeches and lived on brose; nowhe was a twisted being, the sight of which made the ewesmiscarry in the lambing-time. But the second part wasthe stranger, for it was made up of actual tales, most of them with date and place appended. It was a most Bed-lamite catalogue of horrors, which, if true, made the wholesome moors a place instinct with tragedy. Sometold of children carried away from villages, even from towns, on the verge of the uplands. In almost every casethey were girls, and the strange fact was their utter disap-pearance. Two little girls would be coming home from

school, would be seen last by a neighbour just where theroad crossed a patch of heath or entered a wood, andthen—no human eye ever saw them again. Children'scries had startled outlying shepherds in the night, andwhen they had rushed to the door they could hear noth-ing but the night wind. The instances of such disappear-ances were not very common—perhaps once in twenty years—but they were confined to this one tract of coun-try, and came in a sort of fixed progression from themiddle of last century, when the record began. But thiswas only one side of the history. The latter part was alldevoted to a chronicle of crimes which had gone unpun-ished, seeing that no hand had ever been traced. The list was fuller in last century; in the earlier years of the pres-ent it had dwindled; then came a revival about the 'fif- ties; and now again in our own time it had sunk low. Atthe little cottage of Auchterbrean, on the roadside in Glen Aller, a labourer's wife had been found pierced tothe heart. It was thought to be a case of a woman'sjealousy, and her neighbour was accused, convicted, and hanged. The woman, to be sure, denied the charge withher last breath; but circumstantial evidence seemed suffi-ciently strong against her. Yet some people in the glen believed her guiltless. In particular, the carrier who hadfound the dead woman declared that the way in which her neighbour received the news was a sufficient proofof innocence; and the doctor who was first summoned professed himself unable to tell with what instrument the wound had been given. But this was all before the days ofexpert evidence, so the woman had been hanged without scruple. Then there had been another story of peculiar horror, telling of the death of an old man at some littlelonely shieling called Carrickfey. But at this point I had risen in protest, and made to drive the young idiot frommy room.

"It was my grandfather who collected most of them,"he said. "He had theories,* but people called him mad,

*In the light of subsequent events I have jotted down the materialsto which I refer. The last authentic record of the Brownie is in thenarrative of the shepherd of Clachlands, taken down towards theclose of

last century by the Reverend Mr. Gillespie, minister ofAllerkirk, and included by him in his "Songs and Legends of GlenAller." The authorities on the strange carrying-away of children are

so he was wise enough to hold his tongue. My father declares the whole thing mania; but I rescued the book, had it bound, and added to the collection. It is a queer hobby; but, as I say, I have theories, and there are more things in heaven and earth-----"

But at this he heard a friend's voice in the Quad., anddived out, leaving the*banal* quotation unfinished.

Strange though it may seem, this madness kept comingback to me as I crossed the last few miles of moor. I wasnow on a rough tableland, the watershed between twolochs, and beyond and above me rose the stony backs ofthe hills. The burns fell down in a chaos of granite boul-ders, and huge slabs of grey stone lay flat and tumbledin the heather. The full waters looked prosperously formy fishing, and I began to forget all fancies in anticipa-tion of sport.

Then suddenly in a hollow of land I came on a ruinedcottage. It had been a very small place, but the wallswere still half-erect, and the little moorland garden wasoutlined on the turf. A lonely apple-tree, twisted andgnarled with winds, stood in the midst.

From higher up on the hill I heard a loud roar, and Iknew my excellent friend the shepherd of Farawa, whohad come thus far to meet me. He greeted me with theboisterous embarrassment which was his way of prefacinghospitality. A grave reserved man at other times, on suchoccasions he thought it proper to relapse into hilarity. I fell into step with him, and we set off for his dwelling.But first I had the curiosity to look back to the tumble-down cottage and ask him its name.

A queer look came into his eyes. "They ca' the place

to be found in a series of articles in a local paper, the "Allerfoot Advertiser," September and October 1878, and a curious book pub-lished anonymously at Edinburgh in 1848, entitled "The Weath-ergaw." The records of the unexplained murders in the sameneighbourhood are all contained in Mr. Fordoun's "Theory ofExpert Evidence," and an attack on the book in the "Law Review"for June 1881. The Carrickfey case has a pamphlet to itself—now extremely rare—a copy of which was recently obtained in a book-seller's shop in Dumfries by a well-known antiquary, and presentedto the library of the Supreme Court in Edinburgh.

Carrickfey," he said. "Naebody has daured to bide therethis twenty year sin'—but I see ye ken the story." And, as if glad to leave the subject, he hastened to discourseon fishing.

CHAPTER II. TELLS OF AN EVENING'S TALK.

The shepherd was a masterful man; tall, save for thestoop which belongs to all moorland folk, and active asa wild goat. He was not a new importation, nor did hebelong to the place; for his people had lived in theremote Borders, and he had come as a boy to this shiel-ing of Farawa. He was unmarried, but an elderly sisterlived with him and cooked his meals. He was reputed tobe extraordinarily skilful in his trade; I know for a factthat he was in his way a keen sportsman; and his fewneighbours gave him credit for a

sincere piety. Doubtlessthis last report was due in part to his silence, for after his first greeting he was wont to relapse into a singulartaciturnity. As we strode across the heather he gave mea short outline of his year's lambing. "Five pair o' twinsyestreen, twae this morn; that makes thirty-five yowes that hae lambed since the Sabbath, I'll dae weel if God's willin'." Then, as I looked towards the hill-tops whencethe thin mist of morn was trailing, he followed my gaze."See," he said with uplifted crook—"see that sicht. Isthat no what is written of in the Bible when it says, 'The mountains do smoke.' " And with this piece of apologet-ics he finished his talk, and in a little we were at thecottage.

It was a small enough dwelling in truth, and yet largefor a moorland house, for it had a garret below the thatch, which was given up to my sole enjoyment. Belowwas the wide kitchen with box-beds, and next to it theinevitable second room, also with its cupboard sleeping-places. The interior was very clean, and yet I rememberto have been struck with the faint musty smell which isinseparable from moorland dwellings. The kitchenpleased me best, for there the great rafters were blackwith peat-reek, and the uncovered stone floor, on whichthe fire gleamed dully, gave an air of primeval simplicity.But the walls spoiled all, for tawdry things of to-day had

penetrated even there. Some grocers' almanacs—yearsold—hung in places of honour, and an extraordinarylithograph of the Royal Family in its youth. And this,mind you, between crooks and fishing-rods and old guns,and horns of sheep and deer.

The life for the first day or two was regular and placid.I was up early, breakfasted on porridge (a dish which Idetest), and then off to the lochs and streams. At firstmy sport prospered mightily. With a drake-wing I killeda salmon of seventeen pounds, and the next day had afine basket of trout from a hill-burn. Then for no earthlyreason the weather changed. A bitter wind came out ofthe north-east, bringing showers of snow and stinginghail, and lashing the waters into storm. It was now fare- well to fly-fishing. For a day or two I tried trolling withthe minnow on the lochs, but it was poor sport, for I had no boat, and the edges were soft and mossy. Then indisgust I gave up the attempt, went back to the cottage,lit my biggest pipe, and sat down with a book to awaitthe turn of the weather.

The shepherd was out from morning till night at his work, and when he came in at last, dog-tired, his face would be set and hard, and his eyes heavy with sleep.The strangeness of the man grew upon me. He had a shrewd brain beneath his thatch of hair, for I had triedhim once or twice, and found him abundantly intelligent. He had some smattering of an education, like all Scottishpeasants, and, as I have said, he was deeply religious. Iset him down as a fine type of his class, sober, serious,keenly critical, free from the bondage of superstition.But I rarely saw him, and our talk was chiefly in mono-syllables—short interjected accounts of the number oflambs dead or alive on the hill. Then he would producea pencil and notebook, and be immersed in some calcula-tion; and finally he would be revealed sleeping heavilyin his chair, till his sister wakened him, and he stumbledoff to bed.

So much for the ordinary course of life; but one day— the second I think of the bad weather—the extraordinaryhappened. The storm had passed in the afternoon into aresolute and blinding snow, and the shepherd, finding ithopeless on the hill, came home about three o'clock. I

could make out from his way of entering that he was ina great temper. He kicked his feet savagely against the door-post. Then he swore at his dogs, a thing I had neverheard him do before. "Hell!" he cried, "can ye no keepout o' my road, ye britts?" Then he came sullenly intothe kitchen, thawed his numbed hands at the fire, andsat down to his meal.

I made some aimless remark about the weather.

"Death to man and beast," he grunted. "I hae got the sheep doun frae the hill, but the lambs will never tholethis. We maun pray that it will no last."

His sister came in with some dish. "Margit," he cried,"three lambs away this morning, and three deid wi' thehole in the throat."

The woman's face visibly paled. "Guid help us, Adam;that hasna happened this three year."

"It has happened noo," he said, surlily. "But, by God!if it happens again I'll gang mysel' to the Scarts o' theMuneraw."

"O Adam!" the woman cried shrilly, "baud yourtongue. Ye kenna wha hears ye." And with a frightened glance at me she left the room.

I asked no questions, but waited till the shepherd'sanger should cool. But the cloud did not pass so lightly.When he had finished his dinner he pulled his chair tothe fire and sat staring moodily. He made some sort ofapology to me for his conduct. "I'm sore troubled sir; but I'm vexed ye should see me like this. Maybe thingswill be better the mom." And then, lighting his shortblack pipe, he resigned himself to his meditations.

But he could not keep quiet. Some nervous unrestseemed to have possessed the man. He got up with a start and went to the window, where the snow was drift-ing unsteadily past. As he stared out into the storm Iheard him mutter to himself, "Three away, God helpme, and three wi' the hole in the throat."

Then he turned round to me abruptly. I was jottingdown notes for an article I contemplated in the "RevueCeltique," so my thoughts were far away from the pres-ent. The man recalled me by demanding fiercely, "Doye believe in God?"

I gave him some sort of answer in the affirmative.

"Then do ye believe in the Devil?" he asked.

The reply must have been less satisfactory, for he came forward and flung himself violently into the chair beforeme.

"What do ye ken about it?" he cried. "You that bidesin a southern toun, what can ye ken o' the God that works in thae hills and the Devil—ay, the manifold dev-ils—that He suffers to bide here? I tell ye, man, that if ye had seen what I have seen ye wad be on your kneesat this moment praying to God to pardon your unbelief. There are devils at the back o' every stane and hidin' inevery cleuch, and it's by the grace o' God alone that a man is alive upon the earth." His voice had risen highand shrill, and then suddenly he cast a frightened glancetowards the window and was silent.

I began to think that the man's wits were unhinged,and the thought did not give me satisfaction. I had no relish for the prospect of being left alone in this moorland dwelling with the cheerful company of a maniac. But his next movements reassured me. He was clearly only dead-tired, for he fell sound asleep in his chair, and by thetime his sister brought tea and wakened him, he seemedto have got the better of his

excitement.

When the window was shuttered and the lamp lit, I setmyself again to the completion of my notes. The shep-herd had got out his Bible, and was solemnly readingwith one great finger travelling down the lines. He wassmoking, and whenever some text came home to himwith power he would make pretence to underline it withthe end of the stem. Soon I had finished the work Idesired, and, my mind being full of my pet hobby, I fell into an inquisitive frame of mind, and began to questionthe solemn man opposite on the antiquities of the place.

He stared stupidly at me when I asked him concerningmonuments or ancient weapons.

"I kenna," said he. "There's a heap o' queer things inthe hills."

"This place should be a centre for such relics. You know that the name of the hill behind the house, as far as I can make it out, means the 'Place of the Little Men.'It is a good Gaelic word, though there is some doubtabout its exact interpretation. But clearly the Gaelic peo-

ples did not speak of themselves when they gave thename; they must have referred to some older and stranger population,"

The shepherd looked at me dully, as not under-standing.

"It is partly this fact—besides the fishing, of course—which interests me in this countryside," said I, gaily.

Again he cast the same queer frightened glancetowards the window. "If ye'll tak the advice of an aulder man," he said, slowly, "ye'll let well alane and no meddlewi' uncanny things."

I laughed pleasantly, for at last I had found out myhardheaded host in a piece of childishness. "Why, I thought that you of all men would be free fromsuperstition."

"What do ye call supersteetion?" he asked.

"A belief in old wives' tales," said I, "a trust in thecrude supernatural and the patently impossible."

He looked at me beneath his shaggy brows. "How doye ken what is impossible? Mind ye, sir, ye're no in thetoun just now, but in the thick of the wild hills."

"But, hang it all, man," I cried, "you don't mean tosay that you believe in that sort of thing? I am prepared for many things up here, but not for the Brownie,—though, to be sure, if one could meet him in the flesh,it would be rather pleasant than otherwise, for he was acompanionable sort of fellow."

"When a thing pits the fear o' death on a man he ayespeaks well of it."

It was true—the Eumenides and the Good Folk over again; and I awoke with interest to the fact that the con-versation was getting into strange channels.

The shepherd moved uneasily in his chair. "I am a man that fears God, and has nae time for daft stories; but I havena traivelled the hills for twenty years wi' my een shut. If I say that I could tell ye stories o' faces seenin the mist, and queer things that have knocked against me in the snaw, wad ye believe me? I wager

ye wadna.Ye wad say I had been drunk, and yet I am a God-fearing temperate man."

He rose and went to a cupboard, unlocked it, andbrought out something in his hand, which he held out to

me. I took it with some curiosity, and found that it wasa flint arrow-head.

Clearly a flint arrow-head, and yet like none that I hadever seen in any collection. For one thing it was larger,and the barb less clumsily thick. More, the chipping wasnew, or comparatively so; this thing had not stood thewear of fifteen hundred years among the stones of thehillside. Now there are, I regret to say, institutions which manufacture primitive relics; but it is not hard for a prac-tised eye to see the difference. The chipping has eithera regularity and a balance which is unknown in the realthing, or the rudeness has been overdone, and the resultis an implement incapable of harming a mortal creature. But this was the real thing if it ever existed; and yet—Iwas prepared to swear on my reputation that it was not half a century old.

"Where did you get this?" I asked with somenervousness.

"I hae a story about that," said the shepherd. "Outside the door there ye can see a muckle flat stane aside thebuchts. One simmer nicht I was sitting there smoking tillthe dark, and I wager there was naething on the stanethen. But that same nicht I awoke wi' a queer thocht, as if there were folk moving around the hoose—folk thatdidna mak' muckle noise. I mind o' lookin' out o' the windy, and I could hae sworn I saw something blackmovin' amang the heather and intil the buchts. Now I had maybe threescore o' lambs there that nicht, for I hadto tak' them many miles off in the early morning. Weel,when I gets up about four o'clock and gangs out, as Iam passing the muckle stane I finds this bit errow. 'That'scome here in the nicht,' says I, and I wunnered a weeand put it in my pouch. But when I came to my faulds what did I see? Five o' my best hoggs were away, andthree mair were lying deid wi' a hole in their throat."

"Who in the world-----?" I began.

"Dinna ask," said he. "If I ainee sterted to speir aboutthae maitters, I wadna keep my reason."

"Then that was what happened on the hill thismorning?"

"Even sae, and it has happened mair than ainee sin'that time. It's the most uncanny slaughter, for sheep-

stealing I can understand, but no this pricking o' the puirbeasts' wizands. I kenna how they dae't either, for it's no wi' a knife or ony common tool."

"Have you never tried to follow the thieves?"

"Have I no?" he asked, grimly. "If it had been com-mon sheep-stealers I wad hae had them by the heels, though I had followed them a hundred miles. But this isno common. I've tracked them, and it's ill they are to track; but I never got beyond ae place, and that was theScarts o' the Muneraw that ye've heard me speak o'."

"But who in Heaven's name are the people? Tinklersor poachers or what?"

"Ay," said he, drily. "Even so. Tinklers and poacherswhae wark wi' stane errows and kill sheep by a hole intheir throat. Lord, I kenna what they are, unless theMuckle Deil himsel'."

The conversation had passed beyond my comprehen-sion. In this prosaic hard-headed man I had come on thedead-rock of superstition and blind fear.

"That is only the story of the Brownie over again, andhe is an exploded myth," I said, laughing.

"Are ye the man that exploded it?" said the shepherd,rudely. "I trow no, neither you nor ony ither. My bonny man, if ye lived a twalmonth in thae hills, ye wad singsafter about exploded myths, as ye call them."

"I tell you what I would do," said I. "If I lost sheepas you lose them, I would go up the Scarts of the Mun-eraw and never rest till I had settled the question onceand for all." I spoke hotly, for I was vexed by the man'schildish fear.

"I daresay ye wad," he said, slowly. "But then I amno you, and maybe I ken mair o' what is in the Scarts p' the Muneraw. Maybe I ken that whilk, if ye kennedit, wad send ye back to the South Country wi' your hertin your mouth. But, as I say, I am no sae brave as you,for I saw something in the first year o' my herding herewhich put the terror o' God on me, and makes me a fearfu' man to this day. Ye ken the story o' the gudemano' Carrickfey?"

I nodded.

"Weel, I was the man that fand him. I had seen thedeid afore and I've seen them since. But never have I

seen aucht like the look in that man's een. What he sawat his death I may see the morn, so I walk before the Lord in fear."

Then he rose and stretched himself. "It's bedding-time, for I maun be up at three," and with a short good night he left the room.

CHAPTER III. THE SCARTS OF THE MUNERAW

The next morning was fine, for the snow had been inter-mittent, and had soon melted except in the high conies.True, it was deceptive weather, for the wind had goneto the rainy south-west, and the masses of cloud on thathorizon boded ill for the afternoon. But some days' inac-tion had made me keen for a chance of sport, so I rosewith the shepherd and set out for the day.

He asked me where I proposed to begin.

I told him the tarn called the Loch o' the Threshes,which lies over the back of the Muneraw on another watershed. It is on the ground of the Rhynns Forest, andI had fished it of old from the Forest House. I knew themerits of the trout, and I knew its virtues in a south-westwind, so I had resolved to go thus far afield.

The shepherd heard the name in silence. "Your bestroad will be ower that rig, and syne on to the water o'Caulds. Keep abune the moss till ye come to the placethey ca' the Nick o' the Threshes. That will take ye to the very lochside, but it's a lang road and a sair."

The morning was breaking over the bleak hills. Little clouds drifted athwart the corries, and wisps of haze flut-tered from the peaks. A great rosy flush lay over oneside of the glen, which caught the edge of the sluggishbog-pools and turned them to fire. Never before had Iseen the mountain-land so clear, for far back into theeast and west I saw mountain-tops set as close as flowersin a border, black crags seamed with silver lines which Iknew for mighty waterfalls, and below at my feet thelower slopes fresh with the dewy green of spring. A namestuck in my memory from the last night's talk.

"Where are the Scarts of the Muneraw?" I asked.

The shepherd pointed to the great hill which bears the name, and which lies, a huge mass, above the watershed.

"D'ye see yon corrie at the east that runs straucht upthe side? It looks a bit scan, but it's sae deep that it's aye derk at the bottom o't. Weel, at the tap o' the rig itmeets anither corrie that runs doun the ither side, andthat one they ca' the Scarts. There is a sort o' burn in itthat flows intil the Dule and sae intil the Aller, and,indeed, if ye were gaun there it wad be from Aller Glenthat your best road wad lie. But it's an ill bit, and ye'llbe sair guidit if ye try't."

There he left me and went across the glen, while Istruck upwards over the ridge. At the top I halted and looked down on the wide glen of the Caulds, which there is little better than a bog, but lower down grows into agreen pastoral valley. The great Muneraw still dominatedthe landscape, and the black scaur on its side seemedblacker than before. The place fascinated me, for in thatfresh morning air the shepherd's fears seemed mon-strous. "Some day," said I to myself, "I will go andexplore the whole of that mighty hill." Then I descendedand struggled over the moss, found the Nick, and in twohours' time was on the loch's edge.

I have little in the way of good to report of the fishing.For perhaps one hour the trout took well; after that theysulked steadily for the day. The promise, too, of fineweather had been deceptive. By midday the rain wasfalling in that soft soaking fashion which gives no hopeof clearing. The mist was down to the edge of the water,and I cast my flies into a blind sea of white. It was hope- less work, and yet from a sort of ill-temper I stuck to itlong after my better judgment had warned me of its folly. At last, about three in the afternoon, I struck my camp,and prepared myself for a long and toilsome retreat.

And long and toilsome it was beyond anything I had ever encountered. Had I had a vestige of sense I wouldhave followed the burn from the loch down to the ForestHouse. The place was shut up, but the keeper would gladly have given me shelter for the night. But foolishpride was too strong in me. I had found my road in mistbefore, and could do it again.

Before I got to the top of the hill I had repented mydecision; when I got there I repented it more. For belowme was a dizzy chaos of grey; there was no landmark

visible; and before me I knew was the bog through whichthe Caulds Water twined. Ihad crossed it with sometrouble in the morning, but then I had light to pick mysteps. Now I could only stumble on, and in five minutesI might be in a bog-hole, and in five more in a betterworld.

But there was no help to be got from hesitation, sowith a rueful courage I set off. The place was if

possibleworse than I had feared. Wading up to the knees withnothing before you but a blank wall of mist and thecheerful consciousness that your next step may be yourlast—such was my state for one weary mile. The streamitself was high, and rose to my armpits, and once and again I only saved myself by a violent leap backwardsfrom a pitiless green slough. But at last it was past, and I was once more on the solid ground of the hillside;

Now, in the thick weather I had crossed the glen muchlower down than in the morning, and the result was thatthe hill on which I stood was one of the giants which, with the Muneraw for centre, guard the watershed. HadI taken the proper way, the Nick o' the Threshes wouldhave led me to the Caulds, and then once over the boga little ridge was all that stood between me and the glenof Farawa. But instead I had come a wild cross-countryroad, and was now, though I did not know it, nearly asfar from my destination as at the start.

Well for me that I did not know, for I was wet anddispirited, and had I not fancied myself all but home, I should scarcely have had the energy to make this lastascent. But soon I found it was not the little ridge I hadexpected. I looked at my watch and saw that it was fiveo'clock. When, after the weariest climb, I lay on a pieceof level ground which seemed the top, I was not surprisedto find that it was now seven. The darkening must be at hand, and sure enough the mist seemed to be deepeninginto a greyish black. I began to grow desperate. Herewas I on the summit of some infernal mountain, withoutany certainty where my road lay. I was lost with a ven-geance, and at the thought I began to be acutely afraid.

I took what seemed to me the way I had come, andbegan to descend steeply. Then something made me halt,and the next instant I was lying on my face trying pain-

fully to retrace my steps. For I had found myself slipping,and before I could stop, my feet were dangling over aprecipice with Heaven alone knows how many yards ofsheer mist between me and the bottom. Then I triedkeeping the ridge, and took that to the right, which Ithought would bring me nearer home. It was no goodtrying to think out a direction, for in the fog my brainwas running round, and I seemed to stand on a pin-pointof space where the laws of the compass had ceased tohold.

It was the roughest sort of walking, now steppingwarily over acres of loose stones, now crawling down theface of some battered rock, and now wading in the longdripping heather. The soft rain had begun to fall again,which completed my discomfort. I was now seriously tired, and, like all men who in their day have bent toomuch over books, I began to feel it in my back. My spineached, and my breath came in short broken pants. It wasa pitiable state of affairs for an honest man who hadnever encountered much grave discomfort. To easemyself I was compelled to leave my basket behind me,trusting to return and find it, if I should ever reach safetyand discover on what pathless hill I had been strayed.My rod I used as a staff, but it was of little use, for myfingers were getting too numb to hold it.

Suddenly from the blankness I heard a sound as ofhuman speech. At first I thought it mere craziness—the cry of a weasel or a hill-bird distorted by my ears. But again it came, thick and faint, as through acres of mist,and yet clearly the sound of "articulate-speaking men." In a moment I lost my despair and cried out in answer.This was some forwandered traveller like myself, and between us we could surely find some road to safety. SoI yelled back at the pitch of my voice and waited intently.

But the sound ceased, and there was utter silenceagain. Still I waited, and then from some place much nearer came the same soft mumbling speech. I couldmake nothing of it. Heard in that drear place it made the nerves tense and the heart timorous. It was the strangestjumble of vowels and consonants I had ever met.

A dozen solutions flashed through my brain. It wassome maniac talking Jabberwock to himself. It was some

belated traveller whose wits had given out in fear. Per-haps it was only some shepherd who was amusing himselfthus, and whiling the way with nonsense. Once again Icried out and waited.

Then suddenly in the hollow trough of mist before me,where things could still be half discerned, there appeareda figure. It was little and squat and dark; naked, appar-ently, but so rough with hair that it wore the appearanceof a skin-covered being. It crossed my line of vision, notstaying for a moment, but in its face and eyes thereseemed to lurk an elder world of mystery and barbarism,a troll-like life which was too horrible for words.

The shepherd's fear came back on me like a thunder-clap. For one awful instant my legs failed me, and I hadalmost fallen. The next I had turned and ran shriekingup the hill.

If he who may read this narrative has never felt theforce of an overmastering terror, then let him thank his Maker and pray that he never may. I am no weak child,but a strong grown man, accredited in general with sound sense and little suspected of hysterics. And yet I went upthat brae-face with my heart fluttering like a bird andmy throat aching with fear. I screamed in short dry gasps;involuntarily, for my mind was beyond any purpose. I felt that beast-like clutch at my throat; those red eyes seemed to be staring at me from the mist; I heard ever behind and before and on all sides the patter of those inhuman feet.

Before I knew I was down, slipping over a rock andfalling some dozen feet into a soft marshy hollow. I wasconscious of lying still for a second and whimpering likea child. But as I lay there I awoke to the silence of the place. There was no sound of pursuit; perhaps they hadlost my track and given up. My courage began to return,and from this it was an easy step to hope. Perhaps afterall it had been merely an illusion, for folk do not seeclearly in the mist, and I was already done withweariness.

But even as I lay in the green moss and began to hope,the faces of my pursuers grew up through the mist. Istumbled madly to my feet; but I was hemmed in, the rock behind and my enemies before. With a cry I rushed

forward, and struck wildly with my rod at the first darkbody. It was as if I had struck an animal, and the nextsecond the thing was wrenched from my grasp. But still they came no nearer. I stood trembling there in the cen-tre of those malignant devils, my brain a mere weather-cock, and my heart crushed shapeless with horror. Atlast the end came, for with the vigour of madness I flungmyself on the nearest, and we rolled on the ground. Thenthe monstrous things seemed to close over me, and witha choking cry I passed into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IV. THE DARKNESS THAT IS UNDER THE EARTH

There is an unconsciousness that is not wholly dead,where a man feels numbly and the body lives without thebrain. I was beyond speech or thought, and yet I felt theupward or downward motion as the way lay in hill orglen, and I most assuredly knew when the open air waschanged for the close underground. I could feel dimlythat lights were flared in my face, and that I was laid in some bed on the

earth. Then with the stopping of move-ment the real sleep of weakness seized me, and for longI knew nothing of this mad world.

Morning came over the moors with bird-song and theglory of fine weather. The streams were still rolling inspate, but the hill-pastures were alight with dawn, and the little seams of snow glistened like white fire. A rayfrom the sunrise cleft its path somehow into the abyss,and danced on the wall above my couch. It caught my eye as I wakened, and for long I lay crazily wonderingwhat it meant. My head was splitting with pain, and inmy heart was the same fluttering nameless fear. I did notwake to full consciousness; not till the twinkle of sunfrom the clean bright out-of-doors caught my senses didI realise that I lay in a great dark place with a glow ofdull firelight in the middle.

In time things rose and moved around me, a few rag-ged shapes of men, without clothing, shambling withtheir huge feet and looking towards me with curvedbeast-like glances. I tried to marshal my thoughts, andslowly, bit by bit, I built up the present. There was no

question to my mind of dreaming; the past hours hadscored reality upon my brain. Yet I cannot say that fearwas my chief feeling. The first crazy terror had subsided,and now I felt mainly a sickened disgust with just a tingeof curiosity. I found that my knife, watch, flask, and money had gone, but they had left me a map of thecountryside. It seemed strange to look at the calico, with the name of a London printer stamped on the back, andlines of railway and highroad running through everyshire. Decent and comfortable civilisation! And here wasI a prisoner in this den of nameless folk, and in the midstof a life which history knew not.

Courage is a virtue which grows with reflection andthe absence of the immediate peril. I thought myself intosome sort of resolution, and lo! when the Folkapproached me and bound my feet I was back at once in the most miserable terror. They tied me all but myhands with some strong cord, and carried me to the cen-tre, where the fire was glowing. Their soft touch was theacutest torture to my nerves, but I stifled my cries lestsome one should lay his hand on my mouth. Had that happened, I am convinced my reason would have failedme.

So there I lay in the shine of the fire, with the circleof unknown things around me. There seemed but threeor four, but I took no note of number. They talked husk-ily among themselves in a tongue which sounded all gut-turals. Slowly my fear became less an emotion than ahabit, and I had room for the smallest shade of curiosity.I strained my ear to catch a word, but it was a merechaos of sound. The thing ran and thundered in my brainas I stared dumbly into the vacant air. Then I thoughtthat unless I spoke I should certainly go crazy, for my head was beginning to swim at the strange cooing noise.

I spoke a word or two in my best Gaelic, and theyclosed round me inquiringly. Then I was sorry I had spo-ken, for my words had brought them nearer, and Ishrank at the thought. But as the faint echoes of myspeech hummed in the rock-chamber, I was struck by acurious kinship of sound. Mine was sharper, more dis-tinct, and staccato; theirs was blurred, formless, but stillwith a certain root-resemblance.

Then from the back there came an older being, whoseemed to have heard my words. He was like some foulgrey badger, his red eyes sightless, and his hands trembling on a stump of bog-oak. The others made wayfor him with such deference as they were capable of, andthe thing squatted down by me and spoke.

To my amazement his words were familiar. It wassome manner of speech akin to the Gaelic, but broad-

ened, lengthened, coarsened. I remembered an old book-tongue, commonly supposed to be an impure dialect once used in Brittany, which I had met in the course of myresearches. The words recalled it, and as far as I couldremember the thing, I asked him who he was and wherethe place might be.

He answered me in the same speech—still more broad-ened, lengthened, coarsened. I lay back with sheeramazement. I had found the key to this unearthly life.

For a little an insatiable curiosity, the ardour of the scholar, prevailed. I forgot the horror of the place, andthought only of the fact that here before me was the greatest find that scholarship had ever made. I was pre-cipitated into the heart of the past. Here must be thefountainhead of all legends, the chrysalis of all beliefs. Iactually grew light-hearted. This strange folk around me were now no more shapeless things of terror, but objects of research and experiment. I almost came to think them not unfriendly.

For an hour I enjoyed the highest of earthly pleasures. In that strange conversation I heard—in fragments andsuggestions—the history of the craziest survival the worldhas ever seen. I heard of the struggles with invaders,preserved as it were in a sort of shapeless poetry. There were bitter words against the Gaelic oppressor, bittererwords against the Saxon stranger, and for a moment ancient hatreds flared into life. Then there came the taleof the hill-refuge, the morbid hideous existence pre-served for centuries amid a changing world. I heard frag-ments of old religions, primeval names of god and goddess, half-understood by the Folk, but to me the keyto a hundred puzzles. Tales which survive to us in brokendisjointed riddles were intact here in living form. I layon my elbow and questioned feverishly. At any moment

they might become morose and refuse to speak. Clearlyit was my duty to make the most of a brief good fortune.

And then the tale they told me grew more hideous. Iheard of the circumstances of the life itself and their dailyshifts for existence. It was a murderous chronicle—a his-tory of lust and rapine and unmentionable deeds in thedarkness. One thing they had early recognised—that therace could not be maintained within itself; so that ghoul-ish carrying away of little girls from the lowlands began,which I had heard of but never credited. Shut up in thosedismal holes, the girls soon died, and when the new race had grown up the plunder had been repeated. Then there were bestial murders in lonely cottages, done for Godknows what purpose. Sometimes the occupant had seenmore than was safe, sometimes the deed was the mere exuberance of a lust of slaying. As they gabbled theirtales my heart's blood froze, and I lay back in the agoniesof fear. If they had used the others thus, what way ofescape was open for myself? I had been brought to this place, and not murdered on the spot. Clearly there wastorture before death in store for me, and I confess Iquailed at the thought.

But none molested me. The elders continued to jabberout their stories, while I lay tense and deaf. Then to myamazement food was brought and placed beside me— almost with respect. Clearly my murder was not a thingof the immediate future. The meal was some form of mutton—perhaps the shepherd's lost ewes—and a littlesmoking was all the cooking it had got. I strove to eat,but the tasteless morsels choked me. Then they set drinkbefore me in a curious cup, which I seized on eagerly,for my mouth was dry with thirst. The vessel was of gold,rudely formed, but of the pure metal, and a coarse designin circles ran round the middle. This surprised meenough, but a greater wonder awaited me. The liquorwas not water, as I had guessed, but a sort of sweet ale,a miracle of flavour. The taste was curious, but somehow familiar; it was like no wine I had ever drunk, and yet Ihad known that flavour all my life. I sniffed at the brim,and there rose a faint fragrance of thyme and heatherhoney and the sweet things of the moorland. I almostdropped the thing in my surprise; for here in this rude

place I had stumbled upon that lost delicacy of the North,the heather ale.

For a second I was entranced with my discovery, andthen the wonder of the cup claimed my attention. Wasit a mere relic of pillage, or had this folk some hidden mine of the precious metal? Gold had once been com-mon in these hills. There were the traces of mines on Cairnsmore; shepherds had found it in the gravel of theGled Water; and the name of a house at the head of theClachlands meant the "Home of Gold."

Once more I began my questions, and they answeredthem willingly. There and then I heard that secret forwhich many had died in old time, the secret of theheather ate. They told of the gold in the hills, of corrieswhere the sand gleamed and abysses where the rockswere veined. All this they told me, freely, without a scru-ple. And then, tike a clap, came the awful thought thatthis, too, spelled death. These were secrets which this race aforetime had guarded with their lives; they told them generously to me because there was no fear ofbetrayal. I should go no more out from this place.

The thought put me into a new sweat of terror—not at death, mind you, but at the unknown horrors which might precede the final suffering. I lay silent, and after binding my hands they began to leave me and go off to other parts of the cave. I dozed in the horrible half-swoon of fear, conscious only of my shaking limbs, and the great dull glow of the fire in the centre. Then I became calmer. After all, they had treated me with toler-able kindness: I had spoken their language, which few of their victims could have done for many a century; it might be that I had found favour in their eyes. For a little I comforted myself with this delusion, till I caught sight of a wooden box in a corner. It was of modern make, one such as grocers use to pack provisions in. It had some address nailed on it, and an aimless curiosity compelled me to creep thither and read it. A torn and weather-stained scrap of paper, with the nails at the cor-ner rusty with age; but something of the address might still be made out. Amid the stains my feverish eyes read, "To Mr M------, Carrickfey, by Allerfoot Station."

The ruined cottage in the hollow of the waste with the

single gnarled apple-tree was before me in a twinkling. Iremembered the shepherd's shrinking from the place andthe name, and his wild eyes when he told me of the thingthat had happened there. I seemed to see the old manin his moorland cottage, thinking no evil; the suddenentry of the nameless things; and then the eyes glazed in unspeakable terror. I felt my lips dry and burning. Aboveme was the vault of rock; in the distance I saw the fire-glow and the shadows of shapes moving around it. Myfright was too great for inaction, so I crept from thecouch, and silently, stealthily, with tottering steps andbursting heart, I began to reconnoitre.

But I was still bound, my arms tightly, my legs moreloosely, but yet firm enough to hinder flight. I could

not get my hands at my leg-straps, still less could I undo the manacles. I rolled on the floor, seeking some sharp edgeof rock, but all had been worn smooth by the use ofcenturies. Then suddenly an idea came upon me like aninspiration. The sounds from the fire seemed to haveceased, and I could hear them repeated from anotherand more distant part of the cave. The Folk had left theirorgy round the blaze, and at the end of the long tunnelI saw its glow fall unimpeded upon the floor. Once there,I might burn off my fetters and be free to turn mythoughts to escape.

I crawled a little way with much labour. Then suddenlyI came abreast an opening in the wall, through which apath went. It was a long straight rock-cutting, and at the end I saw a gleam of pale light. It must be the open air;the way of escape was prepared for me; and with a prayerI made what speed I could towards the fire.

I rolled on the verge, but the fuel was peat, and thewarm ashes would not burn the cords. In desperation Iwent farther, and my clothes began to singe, while myface ached beyond endurance. But yet I got no nearermy object. The strips of hide warped and cracked, butdid not burn. Then in a last effort I thrust my wrists bodily into the glow and held them there. In an instantI drew them out with a groan of pain, scarred and sore,but to my joy with the band snapped in one place. Weak as I was, it was now easy to free myself, and then camethe untying of my legs. My hands trembled, my eyes

were dazed with hurry, and I was longer over the job than need have been. But at length I had loosed mycramped knees and stood on my feet, a free man oncemore.

I kicked off my boots, and fled noiselessly down thepassage to the tunnel mouth. Apparently it was close on evening, for the white light had faded to a pale yellow.But it was daylight, and that was all I sought, and I ran for it as eagerly as ever runner ran to a goal. I came outon a rock-shelf, beneath which a moraine of boulders fellaway in a chasm to a dark loch. It was all but night, but I could see the gnarled and fortressed rocks rise in ram-parts above, and below the unknown screes and cliffswhich make the side of the Muneraw a place only for foxes and the fowls of the air.

The first taste of liberty is an intoxication, andassuredly I was mad when I leaped down among the boulders. Happily at the top of the gully the stones were large and stable, else the noise would certainly have dis-covered me. Down I went, slipping, praying, my charred wrists aching, and my stockinged feet wet with blood.Soon I was in the jaws of the cleft, and a pale star rose before me. I have always been timid in the face of greatrocks, and now, had not an awful terror been dogging my footsteps, no power on earth could have driven meto that descent. Soon I left the boulders behind, andcame to long spouts of little stones, which moved withme till the hillside seemed sinking under my feet. Some-times I was face downwards, once and again I must havefallen for yards. Had there been a cliff at the foot, Ishould have gone over it without resistance; but by the providence of God the spout ended in a long curve intothe heather of the bog.

When I found my feet once more on soft boggy earth,my strength was renewed within me. A great hope ofescape sprang up in my heart. For a second I lookedback. There was a great line of shingle with the cliffsbeyond, and above all the unknown blackness of thecleft. There lay my terror, and I set off running acrossthe bog for dear life. My mind was clear enough to knowmy road. If I held round the loch in front I should come to a burn which fed the Farawa stream, on whose banks

stood the shepherd's cottage. The loch could not be far;once at the Farawa I would have the light of the

shielingclear before me.

Suddenly I heard behind me, as if coming from thehillside, the patter of feet. It was the sound which whitehares make in the winter-time on a noiseless frosty day as they patter over the snow. I have heard the same softnoise from a herd of deer when they changed their pas-tures. Strange that so kindly a sound should put the veryfear of death in my heart. I ran madly, blindly, yet think-ing shrewdly. The loch was before me. Somewhere I hadread or heard, I do not know where, that the brutish aboriginal races of the North could not swim. I myselfswam powerfully; could I but cross the loch I should savetwo miles of a desperate country.

There was no time to lose, for the patter was comingnearer, and I was almost at the loch's edge. I tore offmy coat and rushed in. The bottom was mossy, and I had to struggle far before I found any depth. Something plashed in the water before me, and then something elsea little behind. The thought that I was a mark forunknown missiles made me crazy with fright, and I struckfiercely out for the other shore. A gleam of moonlightwas on the water at the burn's exit, and thither I guidedmyself. I found the thing difficult enough in itself, for my hands ached, and I was numb with my bonds. Butmy fancy raised a thousand phantoms to vex me. Swim-ming in that black bog water, pursued by those namelessthings, I seemed to be in a world of horror far removedfrom the kindly world of men. My strength seemed inex-haustible from my terror. Monsters at the bottom of thewater seemed to bite at my feet, and the pain of mywrists made me believe that the loch was boiling hot, and that I was in some hellish place of torment.

I came out on a spit of gravel above the burn mouth,and set off down the ravine of the burn. It was a straitplace, strewn with rocks; but now and then the hill turf came in stretches, and eased my wounded feet. Soon thefall became more abrupt, and I was slipping down a hill-side, with the water on my left making great cascades inthe granite. And then I was out in the wider vale where the Farawa water flowed among links of moss.

Far in front, a speck in the blue darkness, shone thelight of the cottage. I panted forward, my breath comingin gasps and my back shot with fiery pains. Happily the land was easier for the feet as long as I kept on the skirtsof the bog. My ears were sharp as a wild beast's withfear, as I listened for the noise of pursuit. Nothing came but the rustle of the gentlest hill-wind and the chatter of the falling streams.

Then suddenly the light began to waver and move athwart the window. I knew what it meant. In a minuteor two the household at the cottage would retire to rest,and the lamp would be put out. True, I might find theplace in the dark, for there was a moon of sorts and theroad was not desperate. But somehow in that hour thelamplight gave a promise of safety which I clung todespairingly.

And then the last straw was added to my misery. Behind me came the pad of feet, the pat-patter, soft, eerie, incredibly swift. I choked with fear, and flungmyself forward in a last effort. I give my word it was sheer mechanical shrinking that drove me on. God knowsI would have lain down to die in the heather, had thethings behind me been a common terror of life.

I ran as man never ran before, leaping hags, scram-bling through green well-heads, straining towards the fast-dying light. A quarter of a mile and the pattersounded nearer. Soon I was not two hundred yards off, and the noise seemed almost at my elbow. The light wentout, and the black mass of the cottage loomed in thedark.

Then, before I knew, I was at the door, battering itwearily and yelling for help. I heard steps within and a hand on the bolt. Then something shot past me withlightning force and buried itself in the wood. The

dread- ful hands were almost at my throat, when the door wasopened and I stumbled in, hearing with a gulp of joy thekey turn and the bar fall behind me.

CHAPTER V. THE TROUBLES OF A CONSCIENCE

My body and senses slept, for I was utterly tired, but my brain all the night was on fire with horrid fancies. Again

I was in that accursed cave; I was torturing my hands in the fire; I was slipping barefoot among jagged boulders;and then with bursting heart I was toiling the last milewith the cottage light—now grown to a great fire in theheavens—blazing before me.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, and I thankedGod for the comfortable rays of the sun. I had been laid in a box-bed off the inner room, and my first sight wasthe shepherd sitting with folded arms in a chair regardingme solemnly. I rose and began to dress, feeling my legsand arms still tremble with weariness. The shepherd'ssister bound up my scarred wrists and put an ointmenton my burns; and, limping like an old man, I went into the kitchen.

I could eat little breakfast, for my throat seemed dryand narrow; but they gave me some brandy-and-milk,which put strength into my body. All the time the brotherand sister sat in silence, regarding me with covertglances.

"Ye have been delivered from the jaws o' the Pit," said the man at length. "See that," and he held out to me a thin shaft of flint. "I fand that in the door thismorning."

I took it, let it drop, and stared vacantly at the win-dow. My nerves had been too much tried to be rousedby any new terror. Out of doors it was fair weather,flying gleams of April sunlight and the soft colours ofspring. I felt dazed, isolated, cut off from my easy pastand pleasing future, a companion of horrors and the sport of nameless things. Then suddenly my eye fell onmy books heaped on a table, and the old distant civilisa-tion seemed for the moment inexpressibly dear.

"I must go—at once. And you must come too. You cannot stay here. I tell you it is death. If you knew what I know you would be crying out with fear. How far is itto Allermuir? Eight, fifteen miles; and then ten downGlen Aller to Allerfoot, and then the railway. We mustgo together while it is daylight, and perhaps we may beuntouched. But quick, there is not a moment to lose."And I was on my shaky feet, and bustling among mypossessions.

"I'll gang wi' ye to the station," said the shepherd,

"for ye're clearly no fit to look after yourself. My sisterwill bide and keep the house. If naething has touched usthis ten year, naething will touch us the day."

"But you cannot stay. You are mad," I began; but hecut me short with the words, "I trust in God."

"In any case let your sister come with us. I dare notthink of a woman alone in this place."

"I'll bide," said she. "I'm no feared as lang as I'mindoors and there's steeks on the windies."

So I packed my few belongings as best I could, tum-bled my books into a haversack, and, gripping the shep-herd's arm nervously, crossed the threshold. The glenwas full of sunlight. There lay the long shining links ofthe Farawa burn, the rough hills tumbled beyond, andfar over all the scarred and distant forehead of the Mun-eraw. I had always looked on moorland country as thefreshest on earth—clean, wholesome, and homely. Butnow the fresh uplands seemed like a horrible pit. WhenI looked to the hills my breath choked in my throat,and the feel of soft heather below my feet set my hearttrembling.

It was a slow journey to the inn at Allermuir. For onething, no power on earth would draw me within sight of the shieling of Carrickfey, so we had to cross a shoulderof hill and make our way down a difficult glen, and then over a treacherous moss. The lochs were now gleaminglike fretted silver; but to me, in my dreadful knowledge,they seemed more eerie than on that grey day when I came. At last my eyes were cheered by the sight of ameadow and a fence; then we were on a little byroad;and soon the fir-woods and corn-lands of Allercleuch were plain before us.

The shepherd came no farther, but with brief good-bye turned his solemn face hillwards. I hired a trap anda man to drive, and down the ten miles of Glen Aller Istruggled to keep my thoughts from the past. I thoughtof the kindly South Country, of Oxford, of anything com-fortable and civilised. My driver pointed out the objectsof interest as in duty bound, but his words fell on unheeding ears. At last he said something which rousedme indeed to interest—the interest of the man who hearsthe word he fears most in the world. On the left side of

the river there suddenly sprang into view a long gloomy cleft in the hills, with a vista of dark mountains behind,down which a stream of considerable size poured itswaters.

"That is the Water o' Dule," said the man in a rever-ent voice. "A graund water to fish, but dangerous to life,for it's a' linns. Awa' at the heid they say there's a terri-ble wild place called the Scarts o' Muneraw,—that's ashouther o' the muckle hill itsel' that ye see,—but I'venever been there, and I never kent ony man that hadeither."

At the station, which is a mile from the village of All-erfoot, I found I had some hours to wait on my train forthe south. I dared not trust myself for one moment alone,so I hung about the goods-shed, talked vacantly to theporters, and when one went to the village for tea Iaccompanied him, and to his wonder entertained him at the inn. When I returned I found on the platform a stray bagman who was that evening going to London. If thereis one class of men in the world which I heartily detest it is this; but such was my state that I hailed him as abrother, and besought his company. I paid the differencefor a first-class fare, and had him in the carriage withme. He must have thought me an amiable maniac, for I talked in fits and starts, and when he fell asleep I would wake him up and beseech him to speak to me. At way-side stations I would pull down the blinds in case of rec-ognition, for to my unquiet mind the world seemed full of spies sent by that terrible Folk of the Hills. When thetrain crossed a stretch of moor I would lie down on theseat in case of shafts fired from the heather. And then at last with utter weariness I fell asleep, and wokescreaming about midnight to find myself well down inthe cheerful English midlands, and red blast-furnaces blinking by the railway-side.

In the morning I breakfasted in my rooms at St Chad's with a dawning sense of safety. I was in a different and calmer world. The lawn-like quadrangles, the great trees,the cawing of rooks, and the homely twitter of spar-rows—all seemed decent and settled and pleasing.Indoors the oak-panelled walls, the shelves of books, thepictures, the faint fragrance of tobacco, were very differ-

ent from the grimcrack adornments and the accursedsmell of peat and heather in that deplorable cottage. Itwas still vacation-time, so most of my friends were down;but I spent the day hunting out the few cheerful pedantsto whom term and vacation were the same. It delightedme to hear again their precise talk, to hear them makea boast of their work, and narrate the childish little acci-dents of their life. I yearned for the childish once more;I craved for women's drawing-rooms, and women's chat-ter, and everything which makes life an elegant game. God knows I had had enough of the other thing for a lifetime!

That night I shut myself in my rooms, barred my win-dows, drew my curtains, and made a great destruction.All books or pictures which recalled to me the moorlands were ruthlessly doomed. Novels, poems, treatises I flunginto an old box, for sale to the second-hand bookseller.Some prints and water-colour sketches I tore to pieceswith my own hands. I ransacked my fishing-book, andcondemned all tackle for moorland waters to the flames.I wrote a letter to my solicitors, bidding them go no further in the purchase of a place in Lome I had longbeen thinking of. Then, and not till then, did I feel the bondage of the past a little loosed from my shoulders. Imade myself a night-cap of rum-punch instead of myusual whisky-toddy, that all associations with that dismalland might be forgotten, and to complete the renuncia-tion I returned to cigars and flung my pipe into a drawer.

But when I woke in the morning I found that it ishard to get rid of memories. My feet were still sore and wounded, and when I felt my arms cramped and reflectedon the causes, there was that black memory always nearto vex me.

In a little term began, and my duties—as deputy-pro-fessor of Northern Antiquities—were once more clamor-ous. I can well believe that my hearers found my lectures strange, for instead of dealing with my favourite subjects and matters, which I might modestly say I had made myown, I confined myself to recondite and distant themes,treating even these cursorily and dully. For the truth is,my heart was no more in my subject. I hated—or Ithought that I hated—all things Northern with the viru-

lence of utter fear. My reading was confined to scienceof the most recent kind, to abstruse philosophy, and toforeign classics. Anything which savoured of romance ormystery was abhorrent; I pined for sharp outlines andthe tangibility of a high civilisation.

All the term I threw myself into the most frivolous lifeof the place. My Harrow school-days seemed to havecome back to me. I had once been a fair cricketer, so Iplayed again for my college, and made decent scores. Icoached an indifferent crew on the river. I fell into theslang of the place, which I had hitherto detested. Myformer friends looked on me askance, as if some freakish changeling had possessed me. Formerly I had been ready for pedantic discussion, I had been absorbed in my work,men had spoken of me as a rising scholar. Now I fledthe very mention of things I had once delighted in. The Professor of Northern Antiquities, a scholar of Europeanreputation, meeting me once in the parks, embarked onan account of certain novel rings recently found in Scot-land, and to his horror found that, when he had gotwell under weigh, I had slipped off unnoticed. I heardafterwards that the good old man was found by a friendwalking disconsolately with bowed head in the middle of the High Street. Being rescued from among the horses'feet, he could only murmur, "I am thinking of Graves,poor man! And a year ago he was as sane as I am!"

But a man may not long deceive himself. I kept up the illusion valiantly for the term; but I felt instinctively thatthe fresh schoolboy life, which seemed to me the extremeopposite to the ghoulish North, and as such

the mostdesirable of things, was eternally cut off from me. Nocunning affectation could ever dispel my real nature orefface the memory of a week. I realised miserably thatsooner or later I must fight it out with my conscience. Ibegan to call myself a coward. The chief thoughts of my mind began to centre themselves more and more roundthat unknown life waiting to be explored among the unfathomable wilds.

One day I met a friend—an official in the BritishMuseum—who was full of some new theory about primi-tive habitations. To me it seemed inconceivably absurd;

but he was strong in his confidence, and without flaw inhis evidence. The man irritated me, and I burned toprove him wrong, but I could think of no argument whichwas final against his. Then it flashed upon me that myown experience held the disproof; and without morewords I left him, hot, angry with myself, and tantalisedby the unattainable.

I might relate my*bona-fide* experience, but would menbelieve me? I must bring proofs, I must complete myresearches, so as to make them incapable of disbelief.And there in those deserts was waiting the key. Therelay the greatest discovery of the century—nay, of themillennium. There, too, lay the road to wealth such as Ihad never dreamed of. Could I succeed, I should befamous for ever. I would revolutionise history andanthropology; I would systematise folk-lore; I wouldshow the world of men the pit whence they were diggedand the rock whence they were hewn.

And then began a game of battledore between myself and my conscience.

"You are a coward," said my conscience.

"I am sufficiently brave," I would answer. "I haveseen things and yet lived. The terror is more than mortal,and I cannot face it."

"You are a coward," said my conscience.

"I am not bound to go there again. It would be purely for my own aggrandisement if I went, and not for anymatter of duty."

"Nevertheless you are a coward," said my conscience.

"In any case the matter can wait."

"You are a coward."

Then came one awful midsummer night, when I laysleepless and fought the thing out with myself. I knew that the strife was hopeless, that I should have no peacein this world again unless I made the attempt. The dawnwas breaking when I came to the final resolution; andwhen I rose and looked at my face in a mirror, lo! it waswhite and lined and drawn like a man of sixty.

CHAPTER VI.**SUMMER ON THE MOORS**

The next morning I packed a bag with some changes ofclothing and a collection of notebooks, and went up totown. The first thing I did was to pay a visit to my solici-tors. "I am about to travel," said I, "and I

wish to haveall things settled in case any accident should happen tome." So I arranged for the disposal of my property incase of death, and added a codicil which puzzled thelawyers. If I did not return within six months, communi-cations were to be entered into with the shepherd at theshieling of Farawa—post-town Allerfoot. If he could pro- duce any papers, they were to be put into the hands of certain friends, published, and the cost charged to myestate. From my solicitors I went to a gun-maker's in Regent Street and bought an ordinary six-chamberedrevolver, feeling much as a man must feel who proposedto cross the Atlantic in a skiff and purchased a small life-belt as a precaution.

I took the night express to the North, and, for a mar-vel, I slept. When I woke about four we were on theverge of Westmoreland, and stony hills blocked the hori-zon. At first I hailed the mountain-land gladly; sleep for the moment had caused forgetfulness of my terrors. Butsoon a turn of the line brought me in full view of a heathery moor, running far to a confusion of distant peaks. I remembered my mission and my fate, and ifever condemned criminal felt a more bitter regret I pityhis case. Why should I alone among the millions of thishappy isle be singled out as the repository of a ghastlysecret, and be cursed by a conscience which would notlet it rest?

I came to Allerfoot early in the forenoon, and got a trap to drive me up the valley. It was a lowering grey day, hot and yet sunless. A sort of heat-haze cloaked thehills, and every now and then a smurr of rain would meetus on the road, and in a minute be over. I felt wretchedly dispirited; and when at last the white-washed kirk of Allermuir came into sight and the broken-backed bridge of Aller, man's eyes seemed to have looked on no drear-ier scene since time began.

I ate what meal I could get, for, fears or no, I was

voraciously hungry. Then I asked the landlord to find me some man who would show me the road to Farawa. Idemanded company, not for protection—for what could two men do against such brutish strength?—but to keepmy mind from its own thoughts.

The man looked at me anxiously.

"Are ye acquaint wi' the folks, then?" he asked.

I said I was, that I had often stayed in the cottage.

"Ye ken that they've a name for being queer. The mannever comes here forbye once or twice a-year, and hehas few dealings wi' other herds. He's got an ill name,too, for losing sheep. I dinna like the country ava. Upby yon Muneraw—no that I've ever been there, but I'veseen it afar off—is enough to put a man daft for the resto' his days. What's taking ye thereaways? It's no the timefor the fishing?"

I told him that I was a botanist going to explore certainhill-crevices for rare ferns. He shook his head, and thenafter some delay found me an ostler who would accom-pany me to the cottage.

The man was a shock-headed, long-limbed fellow, withfierce red hair and a humorous eye. He talked sociablyabout his life, answered my hasty questions with deft-ness, and beguiled me for the moment out of myself. Ipassed the melancholy lochs, and came in sight of thegreat stony hills without the trepidation I had expected.Here at my side was one who found some humour even in those uplands. But one thing I noted which broughtback the old uneasiness. He took the road which led usfarthest from Carrickfey, and when to try him I proposedthe other, he vetoed it with emphasis.

After this his good spirits departed, and he grewdistrustful.

"What mak's ye a freend o' the herd at Farawa?" he demanded a dozen times.

Finally, I asked him if he knew the man, and had seenhim lately.

"I dinna ken him, and I hadna seen him for years till a fortnicht syne, when a' Allermuir saw him. He cam doun one afternoon to the public-hoose, and begood todrink. He had aye been kenned for a terrible godly kindo' a man, so ye may believe folk wondered at this. But

when he had stuck to the drink for twae days, and filledhimsel' blind-fou half-a-dozen o' times, he took a fit o'repentance, and raved and blethered about siccan a lifeas he led in the muirs. There was some said he wasspeakin' serious, but maist thocht it was juist daftness."

"And what did he speak about?" I asked sharply.

"I canna verra weel tell ye. It was about some kind o'bogle that lived in the Muneraw—that's the shouthers o'tye see yonder—and it seems that the bogle killed his sheep and frichted himsel'. He was aye bletherin', too,about something or somebody ca'd Grave; but oh! theman wasna wise." And my companion shook a contemp-tuous head.

And then below us in the valley we saw the shieling,with a thin shaft of smoke rising into the rainy grey weather. The man left me, sturdily refusing any fee. "Iwantit my legs stretched as weel as you. A walk in the hills is neither here nor there to a stoot man. When willye be back, sir?"

The question was well-timed. "To-morrow fortnight,"I said, "and I want somebody from Allermuir to comeout here in the morning and carry some baggage. Willyou see to that?"

He said "Ay," and went off, while I scrambled downthe hill to the cottage. Nervousness possessed me, andthough it was broad daylight and the whole place layplain before me, I ran pell-mell, and did not stop till Ireached the door.

The place was utterly empty. Unmade beds, unwasheddishes, a hearth strewn with the ashes of peat, and dustthick on everything, proclaimed the absence of inmates. I began to be horribly frightened. Had the shepherd andhis sister, also, disappeared? Was I left alone in the bleak place, with a dozen lonely miles between me and human dwellings? I could not return alone; better this horribleplace than the unknown perils of the out-of-doors. Hast-ily I barricaded the door, and to the best of my power shuttered the windows; and then with dreary forebodingsI sat down to wait on fortune.

In a little I heard a long swinging step outside and the sound of dogs. Joyfully I opened the latch, and there was

the shepherd's grim face waiting stolidly on what mightappear.

At the sight of me he stepped back. "What in theLord's name are ye daein' here?" he asked. "Didna ye get enough afore?"

"Come in," I said, sharply. "I want to talk."

In he came with those blessed dogs,—what a comfortit was to look on their great honest faces! He sat downon the untidy bed and waited.

"I came because I could not stay away. I saw too muchto give me any peace elsewhere. I must go back, eventhough I risk my life for it. The cause of scholarshipdemands it as well as the cause of humanity."

"Is that a' the news ye hae?" he said. "Weel, I've mair to tell ye. Three weeks syne my sister Margit was lost,and I've never seen her mair."

My jaw fell, and I could only stare at him.

"I cam hame from the hill at nightfa' and she was gone. I lookit for her up hill and doun, but I couldnafind her. Syne I think I went daft. I went to the Scarts and huntit them up and doun, but no sign could I see. The folk can bide quiet enough when they want. Syne I went to Allermuir and drank mysel' blind,—me, that's aGod-fearing man and a saved soul; but the Lord helpme, I didna ken what I was at. That's my news, and dayand nicht I wander thae hills, seekin' for what I canna find."

"But, man, are you mad?" I cried. "Surely there areneighbours to help you. There is a law in the land, andyou had only to find the nearest police-office and compelthem to assist you."

"What guid can man dae?" he asked. "An army o'sodgers couldna find that hidy-hole. Forby, when I wentinto Allermuir wi' my story the folk thocht me daft. Itwas that set me drinking, for—the Lord forgive me!—I wasna my ain maister. I threepit till I was hairse, but thebodies just lauch'd." And he lay back on the bed like a man mortally tired.

Grim though the tidings were, I can only say that mychief feeling was of comfort. Pity for the new tragedyhad swallowed up my fear. I had now a purpose, and apurpose, too, not of curiosity but of mercy.

"I go to-morrow morning to the Muneraw. But first Iwant to give you something to do." And I drew roughly a chart of the place on the back of a letter. "Go intoAllermuir to-morrow, and give this paper to the landlordat the inn. The letter will tell him what to do. He is toraise at once all the men he can get, and come to theplace on the chart marked with a cross. Tell him lifedepends on his hurry."

The shepherd nodded. "D'ye ken the Folk are watch-ing for you? They let me pass without trouble, for they'venae use for me, but I see fine they're seeking you. Ye'llno gang half a mile the morn afore they grip ye."

"So much the better," I said. "That will take mequicker to the place I want to be at."

"And I'm to gang to Allermuir the morn," herepeated, with the air of a child conning a lesson. "Butwhat if they'll no believe me?"

"They'll believe the letter."

"Maybe," he said, and relapsed into a doze.

I set myself to put that house in order, to rouse thefire, and prepare some food. It was dismal work; and meantime outside the night darkened, and a great windrose, which howled round the walls and lashed the rainon the windows.

CHAPTER VII. IN*TUAS MANUS, DOMINE!*

Ihad not gone twenty yards from the cottage door ere I knew I was watched. I had left the shepherd still dozing,in the half-conscious state of a dazed and broken man.All night the wind had wakened me at intervals, and nowin the half-light of morn the weather seemed morevicious than ever. The wind cut my ears, the whole firma-ment was full of the rendings and thunders of the storm.Rain fell in blinding sheets, the heath was a marsh, andit was the most I could do to struggle against the hurri-cane which stopped my breath. And all the while I knewI was not alone in the desert.

All men know—in imagination or in experience—thesensation of being spied on. The nerves tingle, the skingrows hot and prickly, and there is a queer sinking ofthe heart. Intensify this common feeling a hundredfold,

and you get a tenth part of what I suffered. I am tellinga plain tale, and record bare physical facts. My lips stoodout from my teeth as I heard, or felt, a rustle in theheather, a scraping among stones. Some subtle magneticlink seemed established between my body and the myste-rious world around. I became sick—acutely sick—with the ceaseless apprehension.

My fright became so complete that when I turned a corner of rock, or stepped in deep heather, I seemed tofeel a body rub against me. This continued all the wayup the Farawa water, and then up its feeder to the littlelonely loch. It kept me from looking forward; but it like-wise kept me in such a sweat of fright that I was readyto faint. Then the notion came upon me to test this fancyof mine. If I was tracked thus closely, clearly the trackers would bar my way if I turned back. So I wheeled roundand walked a dozen paces down the glen.

Nothing stopped me. I was about to turn again, whensomething made me take six more paces. At the fourthsomething rustled in the heather, and my neck wasgripped as in a vice. I had already made up my mind onwhat I would do. I would be perfectly still, I would con-quer my fear, and let them do as they pleased with meso long as they took me to their dwelling. But at thetouch of the hands my resolutions fled. I struggled and screamed. Then something was clapped on my mouth, speech and strength went from me, and once more I wasback in the maudlin childhood of terror.

In the cave it was always a dusky twilight. I seemedto be lying in the same place, with the same dull glare of firelight far off, and the same close stupefying smell.One of the creatures was standing silently at my side,and I asked him some trivial question. He turned andshambled down the passage, leaving me alone.

Then he returned with another, and they talked their guttural talk to me. I scarcely listened till I remembered that in a sense I was here of my own accord, and on adefinite mission. The purport of their speech seemed to be that, now I had returned, I must beware of a secondflight. Once I had been spared; a second time I shouldbe killed without mercy.

I assented gladly. The Folk, then, had some use for me. I felt my errand prospering.

Then the old creature which I had seen before creptout of some corner and squatted beside me. He put aclaw on my shoulder, a horrible, corrugated, skeleton thing, hairy to the finger-tips and nailless. He grinned,too, with toothless gums, and his hideous old voice waslike a file on sandstone.

I asked questions, but he would only grin and jabber,looking now and then furtively over his shoulder towardsthe fire.

I coaxed and humoured him, till he launched into anarrative of which 1 could make nothing. It seemed a mere string of names, with certain words repeated atfixed intervals. Then it flashed on me that this might be a religious incantation. I had discovered remnants of aritual and a mythology among them. It was possible thatthese were sacred days, and that I had stumbled uponsome rude celebration.

I caught a word or two and repeated them. He looked at me curiously. Then I asked him some leading ques-tion, and he replied with clearness. My guess was right. The midsummer week was the holy season of the year,when sacrifices were offered to the gods.

The notion of sacrifices disquieted me, and I wouldfain have asked further. But the creature would speak no more. He hobbled off, and left me alone in the rock-chamber to listen to a strange sound which hung cease-lessly about me. It must be the storm without, like apack of artillery rattling among the crags. A storm ofstorms surely, for the place echoed and hummed, and to my unquiet eye the very rock of the roof seemed to, shake!

Apparently my existence was forgotten, for I lay longbefore any one returned. Then it was merely one whobrought food, the same strange meal as before, and lefthastily. When I had eaten I rose and stretched myself.My hands and knees still quivered nervously; but I wasstrong and perfectly well in body. The empty, desolate,tomb-like place was eerie enough to scare any one; butits emptiness was comfort when I thought of its inmates.Then I wandered down the passage towards the fire

which was burning in loneliness. Where had the Folk gone? I puzzled over their disappearance.

Suddenly sounds began to break on my ear, comingfrom some inner chamber at the end of that in which thefire burned. I could scarcely see for the smoke; but Ibegan to make my way towards the noise, feeling alongthe sides of rock. Then a second gleam of light seemed to rise before me, and I came to an aperture in the wallwhich gave entrance to another room.

This in turn was full of smoke and glow—a murkyorange glow, as if from some strange flame of roots. There were the squat moving figures, running in wildantics round the fire. I crouched in the entrance, terrifiedand yet curious, till I saw something beyond the blaze which held me dumb. Apart from the others and tied tosome stake in the wall was a woman's figure, and theface was the face of the shepherd's sister.

My first impulse was flight. I must get away andthink,—plan, achieve some desperate way of escape. I sped back to the silent chamber as if the gang were atmy heels. It was still empty, and I stood helplessly in the centre, looking at the impassable walls of rock as a wea-ried beast may look at the walls of its cage. I bethought me of the way I had escaped before and rushed thither,only to find it blocked by a huge contrivance of stone.Yards and yards of solid rock were between me and the upper air, and yet through it all came the crash and whis-tle of the storm. If I were at my wits' end in this innerdarkness, there was also high commotion among thepowers of the air in that upper world.

As I stood I heard the soft steps of my tormentors.They seemed to think I was meditating escape, for

theyflung themselves on me and bore me to the ground. Idid not struggle, and when they saw me quiet, they squat-ted round and began to speak. They told me of the holyseason and its sacrifices. At first I could not follow them;then when I caught familiar words I found some clue,and they became intelligible. They spoke of a woman,and I asked, "What woman?" With all frankness theytold me of the custom which prevailed—how every twen-tieth summer a woman was sacrificed to some devilishgod, and by the hand of one of the stranger race. I said

nothing, but my whitening face must have told them atale, though I strove hard to keep my composure. I askedif they had found the victims. "She is in this place," theysaid; "and as for the man, thou art he." And with thisthey left me.

I had still some hours; so much I gathered from theirtalk, for the sacrifice was at sunset. Escape was cut off for ever. I have always been something of a fatalist, andat the prospect of the irrevocable end my cheerfulnessreturned. I had my pistol, for they had taken nothingfrom me. I took out the little weapon and fingered itlovingly. Hope of the lost, refuge of the vanquished, easeto the coward,—blessed be he who first conceived it!

The time dragged on, the minutes grew to hours, andstill I was left solitary. Only the mad violence of the storm broke the quiet. It had increased in violence, for the stones at the mouth of the exit by which I had for-merly escaped seemed to rock with some external pres-sure, and cutting shafts of wind slipped past and cleft the heat of the passage. What a sight the ravine outside mustbe, I thought, set in the forehead of a great hill, andswept clean by every breeze! Then came a crashing, andthe long hollow echo of a fall. The rocks are splitting,said I; the road down the corrie will be impassable nowand for evermore.

I began to grow weak with the nervousness of the wait-ing, and by-and-by I lay down and fell into a sort of doze.When I next knew consciousness I was being roused by two of the Folk, and bidden get ready. I stumbled to myfeet, felt for the pistol in the hollow of my sleeve, andprepared to follow.

When we came out into the wider chamber the noiseof the storm was deafening. The roof rang like a shieldwhich has been struck. I noticed, perturbed as I was,that my guards cast anxious eyes around them, alarmed,like myself, at the murderous din. Nor was the worldquieter when we entered the last chamber, where the fireburned and the remnant of the Folk waited. Wind hadfound an entrance from somewhere or other, and theflames blew here and there, and the smoke gyrated in odd circles. At the back, and apart from the rest, I saw

the dazed eyes and the white old drawn face of thewoman.

They led me up beside her to a place where there wasa rude flat stone, hollowed in the centre, and on it arusty iron knife, which seemed once to have formed partof a scythe-blade. Then I saw the ceremonial which wasmarked out for me. It was the very rite which I haddimly figured as current among a rude people, and evenin that moment I had something of the scholar'ssatisfaction.

The oldest of the Folk, who seemed to be a sort ofpriest, came to my side and mumbled a form of words.His fetid breath sickened me; his dull eyes, glassy like a brute's with age, brought my knees together. He put theknife in my hands, dragged the terror-stricken womanforward to the altar, and bade me begin.

I began by sawing her bonds through. When she feltherself free she would have fled back, but stopped whenI bade her. At that moment there came a noise of rend-ing and crashing as if the hills were falling, and for onesecond the eyes of the Folk were averted from the frus-trated sacrifice.

Only for a moment. The next they saw what I haddone, and with one impulse rushed towards me. Then began the last scene in the play. I sent a bullet throughthe right eye of the first thing that came on. The secondshot went wide; but the third shattered the hand of anelderly ruffian with a cruel club. Never for an instant didthey stop, and now they were clutching at me. I pushed the woman behind, and fired three rapid shots in blindpanic, and then, clutching the scythe, I struck right andleft like a madman.

Suddenly I saw the foreground sink before my eyes.The roof sloped down, and with a sickening hiss a moun-tain of rock and earth seemed to precipitate itself on myassailants. One, nipped in the middle by a rock, caughtmy eye by his hideous writhings. Two only remained in what was now a little suffocating chamber, with embersfrom the fire still smoking on the floor.

The woman caught me by the hand and drew me withher, while the two seemed mute with fear. "There's a

road at the back," she screamed. "I ken it. I fand itout." And she pulled me up a narrow hole in the rock.

How long we climbed I do not know. We were bothfighting for air, with the tightness of throat and chest,and the craziness of limb which mean suffocation. I can-not tell when we first came to the surface, but I remem-ber the woman, who seemed to have the strength ofextreme terror, pulling me from the edge of a crevasseand laying me on a flat rock. It seemed to be the depthof winter, with sheer-falling rain and a wind that shookthe hills.

Then I was once more myself and could look aboutme. From my feet yawned a sheer abyss, where once hadbeen a hill-shoulder. Some great mass of rock on thebrow of the mountain had been loosened by the storm,and in its fall had caught the lips of the ravine and sweptthe nest of dwellings into a yawning pit. Beneath a moun-tain of rubble lay buried that life on which I had thoughtto build my fame.

My feeling—Heaven help me!—was not thankfulnessfor God's mercy and my escape, but a bitter mad regret.I rushed frantically to the edge, and when I saw only theblackness of darkness I wept weak tears. All the timethe storm was tearing at my body, and I had to grip hardby hand and foot to keep my place.

Suddenly on the brink of the ravine I saw a third fig-ure. We two were not the only fugitives. One of the Folkhad escaped.

The thought put new life into me, for I had lost thefirst fresh consciousness of terror. There still remained a relic of the vanished life. Could I but make the thing myprisoner, there would be proof in my hands to overcomea sceptical world.

I ran to it, and to my surprise the thing as soon as itsaw me rushed to meet me. At first I thought it was with some instinct of self-preservation, but when I saw its eyesI knew the purpose of fight. Clearly one or other shouldgo no more from the place.

We were some ten yards from the brink when I grap-pled with it. Dimly I heard the woman scream with fright, and saw her scramble across the hillside. Then we

were tugging in a death-throe, the hideous smell of the thing in my face, its red eyes burning into mine, and itshoarse voice muttering. Its strength seemed incredible;but I, too, am no weakling. We tugged and strained,its nails biting into my flesh, while I choked its throatunsparingly. Every second I dreaded lest we should plunge together over the ledge, for it was thither myadversary tried to draw me. I caught my heel in a nickof rock, and pulled madly against it.

And then, while I was beginning to glory with the prideof conquest, my hope was dashed in pieces. The thingseemed to break from my arms, and, as if in despair,cast itself headlong into the impenetrable darkness. Istumbled blindly after it, saved myself on the brink, andfell back, sick and ill, into a merciful swoon.

CHAPTER VIII. NOTE IN CONCLUSION BY THE EDITOR

At this point the narrative of my unfortunate friend, Mr.Graves of St Chad's, breaks off abruptly. He wrote it shortly before his death, and was prevented from com-pleting it by the shock of apoplexy which carried him off.In accordance with the instructions in his will, I haveprepared it for publication, and now in much fear andhesitation give it to the world. First, however, I mustsupplement it by such facts as fall within my knowledge. The shepherd seems to have gone to Allermuir and bythe help of the letter convinced the inhabitants. A body of men was collected under the landlord, and during theafternoon set out for the hills. But unfortunately thegreat midsummer storm—the most terrible of recent cli- matic disturbances—had filled the mosses and streams,and they found themselves unable to proceed by any direct road. Ultimately late in the evening they arrived at the cottage of Farawa, only to find there a raving woman, the shepherd's sister, who seemed crazy withbrain-fever. She told some rambling story about herescape, but her narrative said nothing of Mr. Graves.So they treated her with what skill they possessed, and sheltered for the night in and around the cottage. Nextmorning the storm had abated a little, and the womanhad recovered something of her wits. From her they

learned that Mr. Graves was lying in a ravine on the sideof the Muneraw in imminent danger of his life. A bodyset out to find him; but so immense was the landslip,and so dangerous the whole mountain, that it was nearlyevening when they recovered him from the ledge of rock. He was alive, but unconscious, and on bringing him backto the cottage it was clear that he was, indeed, very ill. There he lay for three months, while the best skill thatcould be got was procured for him. By dint of an uncom-mon toughness of constitution he survived; but it was anold and feeble man who returned to Oxford in the earlywinter.

The shepherd and his sister immediately left the coun-tryside, and were never more heard of, unless they arethe pair of unfortunates who are at present in a Scottishpauper asylum, incapable of remembering even their names. The people who last spoke with them declaredthat their minds seemed weakened by a great shock, and that it was hopeless to try to get any connected or ratio-nal statement.

The career of my poor friend from that hour was little short of a tragedy. He awoke from his illness to find theworld incredulous; even the country-folk of Allermuir setdown the story to the shepherd's craziness and myfriend's credulity. In Oxford his argument was receivedwith polite scorn. An account of his experiences whichhe drew up for the "Times" was refused by the editor; and an article on "Primitive Peoples of the North,"embodying what he believed to be the result of his dis-coveries, was unanimously rejected by every responsiblejournal in Europe. Whether he was soured by such treat-ment, or whether his brain had already been weakened,he became a morose silent man, and for the two yearsbefore his death had few friends and no society. From the obituary notice in the "Times" I take the following

paragraph, which shows in what light the world had cometo look upon him:—

"At the outset of his career he was regarded as a risingscholar in one department of archaeology, and his Taffertlectures were a real contribution to an obscure subject.But in after-life he was led into fantastic speculations;and when he found himself unable to convince his col-

leagues, he gradually retired into himself, and lived prac-tically a hermit's life till his death. His career, thusbroken short, is a sad instance of the fascination whichthe recondite and the quack can exercise even on menof approved ability."

And now his own narrative is published, and the worldcan judge as it pleases about the amazing romance. Theview which will doubtless find general acceptance is that the whole is a figment of the brain, begotten of someharmless moorland adventure and the company of suchreligious maniacs as the shepherd and his sister. Butsome who knew the former sobriety and calmness of myfriend's mind may be disposed timorously and with deep hesitation to another verdict. They may accept the narra- tive, and believe that somewhere in those moorlands hemet with a horrible primitive survival, passed through the strangest adventure, and had his finger on an epoch-making discovery. In this case they will be inclined to sympathise with the loneliness and misunderstanding ofhis latter days. It is not for me to decide the question.That which alone could bring proof is buried beneatha thousand tons of rock in the midst of an untroddendesert.

john buchan.

THE PRISM

By Mary E. Wilkins

There had been much rain that season, and the vegeta-tion was almost tropical. The wayside growths were jun-gles to birds and insects, and very near them to humans. All through the long afternoon of the hot August day,Diantha Fielding lay flat on her back under the lee ofthe stone wall which bordered her stepfather's, ZenasMay's, south mowing-lot. It was pretty warm there,although she lay in a little strip of shade of the tangle ofblackberry-vines, poison-ivy, and the gray pile of stones; but the girl loved the heat. She experienced the gentlelanguor which is its best effect, instead of the fierceunrest and irritation which is its worst. She left that to rattlesnakes and nervous women. As for her, in times of extreme heat, she hung over life with tremulous flutters,like a butterfly over a rose, moving only enough to pre-serve her poise in the scheme of things, and realizing tothe full the sweetness of all about her.

She heard, as she lay there, the voice of a pine-treenot far away—a solitary pine which was full of gusty sweetness; she smelled the wild grapes, which were reluc-tantly ripening across the field over the wall that edgedthe lane; she smelled the blackberry-vines; she looked with indolent fascination at the virile sprays of poison-ivy. It was like innocence surveying sin, and wonderingwhat it was like. Once her stepmother, Mrs. Zenas May,had been poisoned with ivy, and both eyes had beenclosed thereby. Diantha did not believe that the ivywould so serve her. She dared herself to touch it, then she looked away again.

She heard a far-carrying voice from the farm-house at

the left calling her name. "Diantha! Diantha!" She layso still that she scarcely breathed. The voice came again.She smiled triumphantly. She knew perfectly well whatwas wanted: that she should assist in preparing supper.Her stepmother's married daughter and her two childrenwere visiting at the house. She preferred remainingwhere she was. Her sole fear of disturbance was from the children. They were like little ferrets. Diantha didnot like them. She did not like children very well underany circumstances. To her they seemed always out oftune; the jar of heredity was in them, and she felt it,although she did not know enough to realize what shefelt. She was only twelve years old, a child still, thoughtall for her age.

The voice came again. Diantha shifted her position alittle; she stretched her slender length luxuriously; she felt for something which hung suspended around herneck under her gingham waist, but she did not then remove it. "Diantha! Diantha!" came the insistent voice.

Diantha lay as irresponsive as the blackberry-vinewhich trailed beside her like a snake. Then she heard thehouse door close with a bang; her ears were acute. Shefelt again of that which was suspended from her neck. Acurious expression of daring, of exultation, of fear, wasin her face. Presently she heard the shrill voices of chil-dren; then she lay so still that she seemed fairly to oblit-erate herself by silence and motionlessness.

Two little girls in pink frocks came racing past; theirflying heels almost touched her, but they never saw her.

When they were well past, she drew a cautious breath,and felt again of the treasure around her neck.

After a while she heard the soft padding of many hoofsin the heavy dust of the road, a dog's shrill bark, thetinkle of a bell, the absent-minded shout of a weary man. The hired man was driving the cows home. The fragranceof milk-dripping udders, of breaths sweetened with clo-ver and meadow-grass, came to her. Suddenly a coldnose rubbed against her face; the dog had found her out.But she was a friend of his. She patted him, then pushed him away gently, and he understood that she wished toremain concealed. He went barking back to the man.The cows broke into a clumsy gallop; the man shouted.

Diantha smelled the dust of the road which flew over thefield like smoke. She heard the children returning downthe road behind the cows. When the cows galloped, they screamed with half-fearful delight. Then it all passed by,and she heard the loud clang of a bell from the farm-house.

Then Diantha pulled out the treasure which was sus-pended from her neck by an old blue ribbon, and sheheld it up to the low western sun, and wonderful lightsof red and blue and violet and green and orange danced over the shaven stubble of the field before her delightedeyes. It was a prism which she had stolen from the best-parlor lamp—from the lamp which had been her own mother's, bought by her with her school-teaching moneybefore her marriage, and brought by her to grace hernew home.

Diantha Fielding, as far as relatives went, was in acurious position. First her mother died when she was very young, only a few months old; then her father hadmarried again, giving her a stepmother; then her fatherhad died two years later, and her stepmother had married again, giving her a stepfather. Since then the stepmotherhad died, and the stepfather had married a widow witha married daughter, whose two children had raced downthe road behind the cows. Diantha often felt in a sorebewilderment of relationships. She had not even a cousinof her own; the dearest relative she had was the daughter of a widow whom a cousin of her mother's had marriedfor a second wife. The cousin was long since dead.

Thewife was living, and Diantha's little step second cousin,as she reckoned it, lived in the old homestead which had belonged to Diantha's grandfather, across the way fromthe May farm-house. It was a, gambrel-roof, half-ruinous structure, well banked in front with a monstrous growthof lilacs, and overhung by a great butternut-tree.

Diantha knew well that she was heaping up vials ofcold wrath upon her head by not obeying the supper-bell, but she lay still. Then Libby came—Libby, the littlecousin, stepping very cautiously and daintily; for shewore slippers of her mother's, which hung from her smallheels, and she had lost them twice already.

She stopped before Diantha. Her slender arms, termi-

nating in hands too large for them, hung straight at hersides in the folds of her faded blue-flowered muslin. Herpretty little heat-flushed face had in it no more specula-tion than a flower, and no more changing. She was likea flower, which would blossom the same next year, and the next year after that, and the same until it died. There was no speculation in her face as she looked at Dianthadangling the prism in the sunlight, merely unimaginativewonder and admiration.

"It's a drop off your best-parlor lamp," said she, inher thin, sweet voice.

"Look over the field, Libby!" cried Diantha, excitedly.

Libby looked.

"Tell me what you see, quick!"

"What I see? Why, grass and things."

"No, I don't mean them; what you see from this."

Diantha shook the prism violently.

"I see a lot of different colors dancing," replied Libby,"same as you always see. Addie Green had an ear-dropthat was broken off their best-parlor lamp. Her mothergave it to her."

"Don't you see anything but different lights?"

"Of course I don't. That's all there is to see."

Diantha sighed.

"That drop ain't broken," said the other little girl."How did she happen to let you have it?" By "she"Libby meant Diantha's stepmother.

"I took it," replied Diantha. She was fastening theprism around her neck again.

Libby gasped and stared at her. "Didn't you ask her?"

"If I'd asked her, she'd said no, and it was my ownmother's lamp. I had a right to it."

"What'll she do to you?"

"I don't know, if she finds out. I sha'n't tell her, if Ican help it without lying."

Diantha fastened her gingham frock securely over theprism. Then she rose, and the two little girls went homeacross the dry stubble of the field.

"I didn't go when she called me, and I didn't go whenthe supper-bell rang," said Diantha.

Libby stared at her wonderingly. She had never felt animpulse to disobedience in her life; she could not under-

stand this other child, who was a law unto herself. Shewalked very carefully in her large slippers.

"What'll she do to you?" she inquired.

Diantha tossed her head like a colt.

"She won't do anything, I guess, except make me gowithout my supper. If she does, I ain't afraid; but I guessshe won't, and I'd a heap rather go without my supperthan go to it when I don't want to."

Libby looked at her with admiring wonder. Dianthawas neatly and rigorously, rather than tastefully, dressed.Her dark blue-and-white gingham frock was starchedstiffly; it hung exactly at the proper height from her slen-der ankles; she wore a clean white collar; and her yellowhair was braided very tightly and smoothly, and tied witha punctilious blue bow. In strange contrast with thealmost martial preciseness of her attire was the expres-sion of her little face, flushed, eager to enthusiasm,almost wild, with a light in her blue eyes which did not belong there, according to the traditions concerning littleNew England maidens, with a feverish rose on hercheeks, which should have been cool and pale. However,that had all come since she had dangled the prism in therays of the setting sun.

"What did you think you saw when you shook thatear-drop off the lamp?" asked Libby; but she asked with- out much curiosity.

"Red and green and yellow colors, of course," repliedDiantha, shortly.

When they reached Diantha's door, Libby bade hergood night, and sped across the road to her own house.She stood a little in fear of Diantha's stepmother, ifDiantha did not. She knew just the sort of look whichwould be directed toward the other little girl, and sheknew from experience that it might include her. Fromher Puritan ancestry she had a certain stubbornness when brought to bay, but no courage of aggression; so she ran.

Diantha marched in. She was utterly devoid of fear.

Her stepmother, Mrs. Zenas May, was washing thesupper dishes at the kitchen sink. All through the housesounded a high sweet voice which was constantly off thekey, singing a lullaby to the two little girls, who had to

go to bed directly after they had finished their eveningmeal.

Mrs. Zenas May turned around and surveyed Diantha as she entered. There was nothing in the least unkind inher look; it was simply the gaze of one on a firm stand-point of existence upon another swaying on a precarious balance—the sort of look a woman seated in a car givesto one standing. It was irresponsible, while cognizant ofthe discomfort of the other person.

"Where were you when the supper-bell rang?" askedMrs. Zenas May. She was rather a pretty woman, withan exquisitely cut profile. Her voice was very even,almost as devoid of inflections as a deaf-and-dumb per-son's. Her gingham gown was also rigorously starched.Her fair hair showed high lights of gloss from carefulbrushing; it was strained back from her blue-veinedtemples.

"Out in the field," replied Diantha.

"Then you heard it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"The supper-table is cleared away," said Mrs. May. That was all she said. She went on polishing the tum-blers, which she was rinsing in ammonia water.

Diantha glanced through the open door and saw thedining-room table with its chenille after-supper cloth on.She made no reply, but went up-stairs to her own cham-ber. That was very comfortable—the large south one back of her step-parents'. Not a speck of dust was to be seen in it; the feather-bed was an even mound of snow. Diantha sat down by the window, and gazed out at thedeepening dusk. She felt at the prism around her neck,but she did not draw it out, for it was of no use in thatlow light. She could not invoke the colors which it held.Her chamber door was open. Presently she heard the best-parlor door open, and heard quite distinctly herstepmother's voice. She was speaking to her stepfather.

"There's a drop broken off the parlor lamp," said she.

There was an unintelligible masculine grunt ofresponse.

"I wish you'd look while I hold the lamp, and see ifyou can find it on the floor anywhere," said her step-mother. Her voice was still even. The loss of a prism

from the best-parlor lamp was not enough to ruffle heroutward composure.

"Don't you see it?" she asked, after a little.

Again came the unintelligible masculine grunt.

"It is very strange," said Mrs. May. "Don't look any

more."

She never inquired of Diantha concerning the prism. In truth, she believed one of her grandchildren, whomshe adored, to be responsible for the loss of the glitteringornament, and was mindful of the fact that Diantha'smother had originally owned that lamp. So she said noth-ing, but as soon as might be purchased

another, and Diantha kept her treasure quite unsuspected.

She did not, however, tremble in the least while thesearch was going on down-stairs. She had her defense quite ready. To her sense of justice it was unquestion-able. She would simply say that the lamp had belonged to her own mother, consequently to her; that she had aright to do as she chose with it. She had not the slightest fear of any reproaches which Mrs. May would bring tobear upon her. She knew she would not use bodily pun-ishment, as she never had; but she would have stood inno fear of that.

Diantha did not go to bed for a long time. There wasa full moon, and she sat by the window, leaning her twoelbows on the sill, making a cup of her hands, in whichshe rested her peaked chin, and peered out.

It was nearly nine o'clock when some one entered theroom with heavy, soft movements, like a great tame dog.It was her stepfather, and he had in his hand a large wedge of apple-pie.

"Diantha," he said, in a loud whisper, "you gone tobed?"

"No, sir," replied Diantha. She liked her stepfather.She was always aware of a clumsy, covert partizanship from him.

"Well," said he, "here's a piece of pie. You hadn'tought to go to bed without any supper. You'd ought to come in when the bell rings another time, Diantha."

"Thank you, father," said Diantha, reaching out herhand for the pie.

Zenas May, who was large and shaggily blond, with a

face like a great blank of good nature, placed a heavyhand on her little, tightly braided head, and patted it.

"Better eat your pie and go to bed," he said. Then heshambled down-stairs very softly, lest his wife hear him.

Diantha ate her pie obediently, and went to bed, and with the first morning sunlight she removed her prismfrom her neck, and flashed it across the room, and sawwhat she saw, or what she thought she saw.

Diantha kept the prism, and nobody except Libbyknew it, and she was quite safe with a secret. While shedid not in the least comprehend, she was stanch. Evenwhen she grew older and had a lover, she did not tell him; she did not even tell him when she was married tohim that Diantha Fielding always carried a drop off thebest-parlor lamp, which belonged to her own mother,and when she flashed it in the sunlight she thought shesaw things. She kept it all to herself. Libby married before Diantha, before Diantha had a lover even. Youngmen, for some reason, were rather shy of Diantha,although she had a little property in her own right, inher-ited from her own father and mother, and was, more-over, extremely pretty. However, her prettiness was notof a type to attract the village men as quickly as Libby's more material charms. Diantha was very thin and small, and her color was as clear as porcelain, and she gave acurious impression of mystery, although there was appar-ently nothing whatever mysterious about her.

But her turn came. A graduate of a country college, a farmer's son, who had worked his own way through col-lege, had now obtained the high school. He saw Diantha,and fell in love with her, although he struggled against it. He said to himself that she was too delicate, that hewas a poor man, that he ought to

have a more robustwife, who would stand a better chance of dischargingher domestic and maternal duties without a breakdown.Reason and judgment were strongly developed in him.His passion for Diantha was entirely opposed to both,but it got the better of him. One afternoon in Augustwhen Diantha was almost twenty, he, passing by herhouse, saw her sitting on her front doorstep, stopped,and proposed a little stroll in the woods, and asked her to marry him.

"I never thought much about getting married," saidDiantha. Then she leaned toward him as if impelled by some newly developed instinct. She spoke so low that hecould not hear her, and he asked her over.

"I never thought much about getting married,"repeated Diantha, and she leaned nearer him.

He laughed a great triumphant laugh, and caught herin his arms.

"Then it is high time you did, you darling," he said.

Diantha was very happy. *

They lingered in the woods a long time, and when theywent home, the young man, whose name was Robert Black, went in with her, and told her stepmother whathad happened.

"I have asked your daughter to marry me, Mrs. May,"he said, "and she has consented, and I hope you arewilling."

Mrs. May replied that she had no objections, stiffly,without a smile. She never smiled. Instead of smiling, she always looked questioningly even at her beloved grandchildren. They had lived with her since their moth-er's death, two pretty, boisterous girls, pupils of RobertBlack, who had had their own inevitable little dreamsregarding him, as they had had regarding every man whocame in their way.

When their grandmother told them that Diantha wasto marry the hero who had dwelt in their own innocentlybold air-castles of girlish dreams, they started at first as from a shock of falling imaginations; then they began tothink of their attire as bridesmaids.

Mrs. Zenas May was firmly resolved that Dianthashould have as grand a wedding as if she had been her own daughter.

"Folks sha'n't say that she didn't have as good an outfitand wedding as if her own mother had been alive to seeto it," she said.

As for Diantha, she thought very little about her outfitor the wedding, but about Robert. All at once she waspossessed by a strong angel of primal conditions of whoseexistence she had never dreamed. She poured out hervery soul; she made revelations of the inmost innocencesof her nature to this ambitious, faithful, unimaginative

young man. She had been some two weeks betrothed,and they were walking together one afternoon, when sheshowed him her prism.

She no longer wore it about her neck as formerly. Adawning unbelief in it had seized her, and yet there

weretunes when to doubt seemed to doubt the evidence ofher own senses.

That afternoon, as they were walking together in thelonely country road, she stopped him in a sunny interval between the bordering woods, where the road stretchedfor some distance between fields foaming with wild carrotand mustard, and swarmed over with butterflies, and she took her prism out of her pocket and flashed it full beforeher wondering lover's eyes.

He looked astonished, even annoyed; then he laughedaloud with a sort of tender scorn.

"What a child you are, dear!" he said. "What are youdoing with that thing?"

"What do you see, Robert?" the girl cried eagerly,and there was in her eyes a light not of her day and generation, maybe inherited from some far-off Celticancestor—a strain of imagination which had survived theglaring light of latter days of commonness.

He eyed her with amazement; then he looked at thegorgeous blots and banners of color over the fields.

"See? Why, I see the prismatic colors, of course. Whatelse should I see?" he asked.

"Nothing else?"

"No. Why, what else should I see? I see the prismaticcolors from the refraction of the sunlight."

Diantha looked at the dancing tints, then at her lover,and spoke with a solemn candor, as if she were making confession of an alien faith. "Ever since I was a child, Ihave seen, or thought so—" she began.

"What, for heaven's sake?" he cried impatiently.

"You have read about—fairies and—such things?"

"Of course. What do you mean, Diantha?"

"I have seen, or thought so, beautiful little peoplemoving and dancing in the broken lights across the fields."

"For heaven's sake, put up that thing, and don't talk

such nonsense, Diantha!" cried Robert, almost brutally.He had paled a little.

"I have, Robert."

"Don't talk such nonsense. I thought you were a sensi-ble girl," said the young man.

Diantha put the prism back in her pocket.

All the rest of the way Robert was silent and gloomy.His old doubts had revived. His judgment for the timebeing got the upper hand of his passion. He began towonder if he ought to marry a girl with such preposterousfancies as those. He began to wonder if she were justright in her mind.

He parted from her coolly, and came the next evening,but remained only a short time. Then he stayed away several days. He called on Sunday, then did not comeagain for four days. On Friday Diantha grew desperate.She went by herself out in the sunny field, walking ankle-deep in flowers and weeds, until she reached the marginof a little pond on which the children skated in winter.Then she took her prism from her pocket and flashed itin the sunlight, and for the first time she failed to seewhat she had either seen, or imagined, for so many years.

She saw only the beautiful prismatic colors flashingacross the field in bars and blots and streamers of roseand violet, of orange and green. That was all. Shestooped, and dug in the oozy soil beside the pond withher bare white hands, and made, as it were, a little grave,and buried the prism out of sight. Then she washed her hands in the pond, and waved them about until they weredry. Afterward she went swiftly across the field to theroad which her lover must pass on his way from school, and, when she saw him coming, met him, blushing andtrembling.

"I have put it away, Robert," she said. "I saw nothing;it was only my imagination."

It was a lonely road. He looked at her doubtfully, thenhe laughed, and put an arm around her.

"It's all right, little girl," he replied; "but don't letsuch fancies dwell in your brain. This is a plain, common world, and it won't do."

"I saw nothing; it must have been my imagination," she repeated. Then she leaned her head against her lov-

er's shoulder. Whether or not she had sold her birthright,she had got her full measure of the pottage of love whichfilled to an ecstasy of satisfaction her woman's heart.

She and Robert were married, and lived in a prettynew house, from the western windows of which she couldsee the pond on whose borders she had buried the prism. She was very happy. For the time being, at least, all themysticism in her race had given place to an utter revela-tion of earthly bliss. People said how much Diantha hadimproved since her marriage, what a fine housekeepershe was, how much common sense she had, how she wassuch a fitting mate for her husband, whom she adored.

Sometimes Diantha, looking from a western window,used to see the pond across the field, reflecting the lightof the setting sun, and looking like an eye of revelation of the earth; and she would remember that key of a lostradiance and a lost belief of her own life, which was buried beside it. Then she would go happily and prepareher husband's supper.

THE KITH OF THEELF-FOLK

Lord Dunsany

The north wind was blowing, and red and golden the lastdays of Autumn were streaming hence. Solemn and coldover the marshes arose the evening.

It became very still.

Then the last pigeon went home to the trees on thedry land in the distance, whose shapes already had takenupon themselves a mystery in the haze.

Then all was still again.

As the light faded and the haze deepened, mysterycrept nearer from every side.

Then the green plover came in crying, and all alighted.

And again it became still, save when one of the ploverarose and flew a little way uttering the cry of the waste.And hushed and silent became the earth, expecting thefirst star. Then the duck came in, and the widgeon, com-pany by company: and all the light of day faded out ofthe sky saving one red band of light. Across the lightappeared, black and huge, the wings of a flock of geese beating up wind to the marshes. These too went downamong the rushes.

Then the stars appeared and shone in the stillness, andthere was silence in the great spaces of the night.

Suddenly the bells of the cathedral in the marshesbroke out, calling to evensong.

Eight centuries ago on the edge of the marsh men had built the huge cathedral, or it may have been seven cen-turies ago, or perhaps nine; it was all one to the WildThings.

So evensong was held, and candles lighted, and thelights through the windows shone red and green in the

water, and the sound of the organ went roaring over the marshes. But from the deep and perilous places, edgedwith bright mosses, the Wild Things came leaping up todance on the reflection of the stars, and over their headsas they danced the marsh-lights rose and fell.

The Wild Things are somewhat human in appearance,only all brown of skin and barely two feet high. Their ears are pointed like the squirrel's, only far larger, andthey leap to prodigious heights. They live all day underdeep pools in the loneliest marshes, but at night theycome up and dance. Each Wild Thing has over its heada marsh-light, which moves as the Wild Thing moves;they have no souls, and cannot die, and are of the kithof the Elf-folk.

All night they dance over the marshes, treading uponthe reflection of the stars (for the bare surface of the water will not hold them by itself); but when the stars begin to pale, they sink down one by one into the poolsof their home. Or if they tarry longer, sitting upon therushes, their bodies fade from view as the marsh-firespale in the light, and by daylight none may see the WildThings of the kith of the Elf-folk. Neither may any seethem even at night unless they were born, as I was, inthe hour of dusk, just at the moment when the first starappears.

Now, on the night that I tell of, a little Wild Thinghad gone drifting over the waste, till it came right up to the walls of the cathedral and danced upon the imagesof the coloured saints as they lay in the water among thereflection of the stars. And as it leaped in its fantasticdance, it saw through the painted windows to where thepeople prayed, and heard the organ roaring over themarshes. The sound of the organ roared over themarshes, but the song and prayers of the people streamedup from the cathedral's highest tower like thin goldchains, and reached to Paradise, and up and down themwent the angels from Paradise to the people, and fromthe people to Paradise again.

Then something akin to discontent troubled the Wild Thing for the first time since the making of the marshes;and the soft grey ooze and the chill of the deep waterseemed to be not enough, nor the first arrival from north-

wards of the tumultuous geese, nor the wild rejoicing of the wings of the wildfowl when every feather sings, northe wonder of the calm ice that comes when the snipe depart and beards the rushes with frost and clothes thehushed waste with a mysterious haze where the sun goesred and low, nor even the dance of the Wild Things inthe marvellous night; and the little Wild Thing longed tohave a soul, and to go and worship God.

And when evensong was over and the lights were out,it went back crying to its kith.

But on the next night, as soon as the images of thestars appeared in the water, it went leaping away from star to star to the farthest edge of the marshlands, wherea great wood grew where dwelt the Oldest of WildThings.

And it found the Oldest of Wild Things sitting undera tree, sheltering itself from the moon.

And the little Wild Thing said: "I want to have a soulto worship God, and to know the meaning of music, and to see the inner beauty of the marshlands and to imagineParadise."

And the Oldest of the Wild Things said to it: "Whathave we to do with God? We are only Wild Things, andof the Kith of the Elf-folk."

But it only answered, "I want to have a soul."

Then the Oldest of the Wild Things said: "I have nosoul to give you; but if you got a soul, one day you would have to die, and if you knew the meaning of music youwould learn the meaning of sorrow, and it is better to be a Wild Thing and not to die."

So it went weeping away.

But they that were kin to the Elf-folk were sorry forthe little Wild Thing; and though the Wild Things cannotsorrow long, having no souls to sorrow with, yet they feltfor awhile a soreness where their souls should be, whenthey saw the grief of their comrade.

So the kith of the Elf-folk went abroad by night tomake a soul for the little Wild Thing. And they went over the marshes till they came to the high fields among the flowers and grasses. And there they gathered a largepiece of gossamer that the spider had laid by twilight;and the dew was on it.

Into this dew had shone all the lights of the long banksof the ribbed sky, as all the colours changed in the restful spaces of evening. And over it the marvellous night hadgleamed with all its stars.

Then the Wild Things went with their dew-bespangledgossamer down to the edge of their home. And therethey gathered a piece of the grey mist that lies by night over the marshlands. And into it they put the melody of the waste that is borne up and down the marshes in theevening on the wings of the golden

plover. And they putinto it too the mournful song that the reeds are com- pelled to sing before the presence of the arrogant NorthWind. Then each of the Wild Things gave some treasuredmemory of the old marshes, "For we can spare it," they said. And to all this they added a few images of the starsthat they gathered out of the water. Still the soul thatthe kith of the Elf-folk were making had no life.

Then they put into it the low voices of two lovers thatwent walking in the night, wandering late alone. Andafter that they waited for the dawn. And the queenlydawn appeared, and the marsh-lights of the Wild Thingspaled in the glare, and their bodies faded from view; andstill they waited by the marsh's edge. And to them wait-ing came over field and marsh, from the ground and outof the sky, the myriad song of the birds.

This too the Wild Things put into the piece of haze that they had gathered in the marshlands, and wrappedit all up in their dew-bespangled gossamer. Then the soullived.

And there it lay in the hands of the Wild Things nolarger than a hedgehog; and wonderful lights were in it, green and blue; and they changed ceaselessly, goinground and round, and in the grey midst of it was a purpleflare.

And the next night they came to the little Wild Thing and showed her the gleaming soul. And they said to her: "If you must have a soul and go and worship God, and become a mortal and die, place this to your left breast alittle above the heart, and it will enter and you willbecome a human. But if you take it you can never berid of it to become immortal again unless you pluck itout and give it to another; and*we* will not take it, and

most of the humans have a soul already. And if youcannot find a human without a soul you will one day die, and your soul cannot go to Paradise, because it was onlymade in the marshes."

Far away the little Wild Thing saw the cathedral win-dows alight for evensong, and the song of the peoplemounting up to Paradise, and all the angels going up anddown. So it bid farewell with tears and thanks to theWild Things of the kith of Elf-folk, and went leapingaway towards the green dry land, holding the soul in itshands.

And the Wild Things were sorry that it had gone, butcould not be sorry long, because they had no souls.

At the marsh's edge the little Wild Thing gazed forsome moments over the water to where the marsh-fireswere leaping up and down, and then pressed the soulagainst its left breast a little above the heart.

Instantly it became a young and beautiful woman, who was cold and frightened. She clad herself somehow withbundles of reeds, and went towards the lights of a housethat stood close by. And she pushed open the door andentered, and found a farmer and a farmer's wife sitting over their supper.

And the farmer's wife took the little Wild Thing with the soul of the marshes up to her room, and clothed herand braided her hair, and brought her down again, and gave her the first food that she had ever eaten. Then thefarmer's wife asked many questions.

"Where have you come from?" she said.

"Over the marshes."

"From what direction?" said the farmer's wife.

"South," said the little Wild Thing with the new soul.

"But none can come over the marshes from thesouth," said the farmer's wife.

"No, they can't do that," said the farmer.

"I lived in the marshes."

"Who are you?" asked the farmer's wife.

"I am a Wild Thing, and have found a soul in themarshes, and we are kin to the Elf-folk."

Talking it over afterwards, the farmer and his wifeagreed that she must be a gipsy who had been lost, andthat she was queer with hunger and exposure.

So that night the little Wild Thing slept in the fanner'shouse, but her new soul stayed awake the whole night long dreaming of the beauty of the marshes.

As soon as dawn came over the waste and shone onthe farmer's house, she looked from the window towardsthe glittering waters, and saw the inner beauty of themarsh. For the Wild Things only love the marsh and know its haunts, but now she perceived the mystery ofits distances and the glamour of its perilous pools, with their fair and deadly mosses, and felt the marvel of theNorth Wind who comes dominant out of unknown icy lands, and the wonder of that ebb and flow of life whenthe wildfowl whirl in at evening to the marshlands andat dawn pass out to sea. And she knew that over her head above the farmer's house stretched wide Paradise,where perhaps God was now imagining a sunrise whileangels played low on lutes, and the sun came rising up on the world below to gladden fields and marsh.

And all that heaven thought, the marsh thought too;for the blue of the marsh was as the blue of heaven, andthe great cloud shapes in heaven became the shapes inthe marsh, and through each ran momentary rivers ofpurple, errant between banks of gold. And the stalwartarmy of reeds appeared out of the gloom with all theirpennons waving as far as the eye could see. And from another window she saw the vast cathedral gathering itsponderous strength together, and lifting it up in towersout of the marshlands.

She said, "I will never, never leave the marsh."

An hour later she dressed with great difficulty andwent down to eat the second meal of her life. The farmerand his wife were kindly folk, and taught her how to eat.

"I suppose the gipsies don't have knives and forks,"one said to the other afterwards.

After breakfast the farmer went and saw the Dean,who lived near his cathedral, and presently returned andbrought back to the Dean's house the little Wild Thing with the new soul.

"This is the lady," said the farmer. "This is Dean Mur-nith." Then he went away.

"Ah," said the Dean, "I understand you were lost the

other night in the marshes. It was a terrible night to belost in the marshes."

"I love the marshes," said the little Wild Thing withthe new soul.

"Indeed! How old are you?" said the Dean.

"I don't know," she answered.

"You must know about how old you are," he said.

"Oh, about ninety," she said, "or more."

"Ninety years!" exclaimed the Dean.

"No, ninety centuries," she said; "I am as old as themarshes."

Then she told her story—how she had longed to be ahuman and go and worship God, and have a soul andsee the beauty of the world, and how all the Wild Thingshad made her a soul of gossamer and mist and music andstrange memories.

"But if this is true," said Dean Murnith, "this is verywrong. God cannot have intended you to have a soul.

"What is your name?"

"I have no name," she answered.

"We must find a Christian name and a surname for you. What would you like to be called?"

"Song of the Rushes," she said.

"That won't do at all," said the Dean.

"Then I would like to be called Terrible North Wind,or Star in the Waters," she said.

"No, no, no," said Dean Murnith; "that is quiteimpossible. We could call you Miss Rush if you like.How would Mary Rush do? Perhaps you had better haveanother name—say Mary Jane Rush."

So the little Wild Thing with the soul of the marshes took the names that were offered her, and became MaryJane Rush.

"And we must find something for you to do," saidDean Murnith. "Meanwhile we can give you a room here."

"I don't want to do anything," replied Mary Jane; "Iwant to worship God in the cathedral and live beside themarshes."

Then Mrs. Murnith came in, and for the rest of thatday Mary Jane stayed at the house of the Dean.

And there with her new soul she perceived the beauty

of the world; for it came grey and level out of mistydistances, and widened into grassy fields and ploughlandsright up to the edge of an old gabled town; and solitaryin the fields far off an ancient windmill stood, and hishonest handmade sails went round and round in the free East Anglian winds. Close by, the gabled houses leaned out over the streets, planted fair upon sturdy timbers that grew in the olden time, all glorying among themselvesupon their beauty. And out of them, buttress by buttress,growing and going upwards, aspiring tower by tower, rose the cathedral.

And she saw the people moving in the streets all lei-surely and slow, and unseen among them, whispering toeach other, unheard by living men and concerned onlywith bygone things, drifted the ghosts of very long ago.And wherever the streets ran eastwards, wherever weregaps in the houses, always there broke into view the sightof the great marshes, like to some bar of music weirdand strange that haunts a melody, arising again andagain, played on the violin by one musician only, whoplays no other bar, and he is swart and lank about thehair and bearded about the lips, and his moustache droops long and low, and no one knows the land fromwhich he comes.. All these were good things for a new soul to see.

Then the sun set over green fields and ploughland, and the night came up. One by one the merry lights of cheerylamp-lit windows took their stations in the solemn night.

Then the bells rang, far up in a cathedral tower, andtheir melody fell on the roofs of the old houses and poured over their eaves until the streets were full, andthen flooded away over green fields and plough, till itcame to the sturdy mill and brought the miller trudgingto evensong, and far away eastwards and seawards thesound rang out over the remoter marshes. And it was allas yesterday to the old ghosts in the streets.

Then the Dean's wife took Mary Jane to evening ser-vice, and she saw three hundred candles filling all theaisle with light. But sturdy pillars stood there in unlit vastnesses; great colonnades going away into the gloom,where evening and morning, year in year out, they didtheir work in the dark, holding the cathedral roof aloft.

And it was stiller than the marshes are still when the icehas come and the wind that brought it has fallen.

Suddenly into this stillness rushed the sound of theorgan, roaring, and presently the people prayed and sang.

No longer could Mary Jane see their prayers ascendinglike thin gold chains, for that was but an elfin fancy, butshe imagined clear in her new soul the seraphs passing in the ways of Paradise, and the angels changing guard to watch the World by night.

When the Dean had finished service, a young curate,Mr. Millings, went up into the pulpit.

He spoke of Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus:and Mary Jane was glad that there were rivers havingsuch names, and heard with wonder of Nineveh, thatgreat city, and many things strange and new.

And the light of the candles shone on the curate's fairhair, and his voice went ringing down the aisle, and MaryJane rejoiced that he was there.

But when his voice stopped she felt a sudden loneli-ness, such as she had not felt since the making of the marshes; for the Wild Things never are lonely and neverunhappy, but dance all night on the reflection of thestars, and, having no souls, desire nothing more.

After the collection was made, before any one movedto go, Mary Jane walked up the aisle to Mr. Millings.

"I love you," she said.

Nobody sympathised with Mary Jane.

"So unfortunate for Mr. Millings," everyone said;"such a promising young man."

Mary Jane was sent away to a great manufacturing cityof the Midlands, where work had been found for her ina cloth factory. And there was nothing in that town thatwas good for a soul to see. For it did not know thatbeauty was to be desired; so it made many things bymachinery, and became hurried in all its ways, andboasted its superiority over other cities and becamericher and richer, and there was none to pity it.

In this city Mary Jane had had lodgings found for hernear the factory.

At six o'clock on those November mornings, about the

time that, far away from the city, the wildfowl rose upout of the calm marshes and passed to the troubled spaces of the sea, at six o'clock the factory uttered aprolonged howl and gathered the workers together, and there they worked, saving two hours for food, the wholeof the daylit hours and into the dark till the bells tolledsix again.

There Mary Jane worked with other girls in a longdreary room, where giants sat pounding wool into a longthread-like strip with iron, rasping hands. And all day long they roared as they sat at their soulless work. Butthe work of Mary Jane was not with these, only theirroar was ever in her ears as their clattering iron limbswent to and fro.

Her work was to tend a creature smaller, but infinitely more cunning.

It took the strip of wool that the giants had threshed,and whirled it round and round until it had twisted it into hard thin thread. Then it would make a clutch withfingers of steel at the thread that it had gathered, andwaddle away about five yards and come back with more.

It had mastered all the subtlety of skilled workers, and had gradually displaced them; one thing only it could notdo, it was unable to pick up the ends if a piece of thethread broke, in order to tie them together again. Forthis a human soul was required, and it was Mary Jane'sbusiness to pick up broken ends; and the moment sheplaced them together the busy soulless creature tied them for itself.

All here was ugly; even the green wool as it whirledround and round was neither the green of the grass noryet the green of the rushes, but a sorry muddy green thatbefitted a sullen city under a murky sky.

When she looked out over the roofs of the town, theretoo was ugliness; and well the houses knew it, for

withhideous stucco they aped in grotesque mimicry the pillarsand temples of old Greece, pretending to one another tobe that which they were not. And emerging from thesehouses and going in, and seeing the pretence of paintand stucco year after year until it all peeled away, the souls of the poor owners of those houses sought to be other souls until they grew weary of it.

At evening Mary Jane went back to her lodgings. Onlythen, after the dark had fallen, could the soul of Mary Jane perceive any beauty in that city, when the lampswere lit and here and there a star shone through the smoke. Then she would have gone abroad and beheldthe night, but this the old woman to whom she was con-fided would not let her do. And the days multipliedthemselves by seven and became weeks, and the weekspassed by, and all days were the same. And all the whilethe soul of Mary Jane was crying for beautiful things, and found not one, saving on Sundays, when she wentto church, and left it to find the city greyer than before.

One day she decided that it was better to be a wildthing in the lovely marshes, than to have a soul that criedfor beautiful things and found not one. From that dayshe determined to be rid of her soul, so she told herstory to one of the factory girls, and said to her:

"The other girls are poorly clad and they do soullesswork; surely some of them have no souls and would takemine."

But the factory girl said to her: "All the poor havesouls. It is all they have."

Then Mary Jane watched the rich whenever she sawthem, and vainly sought for some one without a soul.

One day at the hour when the machines rested and thehuman beings that tended them rested too, the windbeing at that time from the direction of the marshlands,the soul of Mary Jane lamented bitterly. Then, as shestood outside the factory gates, the soul irresistibly com-pelled her to sing, and a wild song came from her lips,hymning the marshlands. And into her song came crying her yearning for home and for the sound of the shout ofthe North Wind, masterful and proud, with his lovelylady the Snow; and she sang of tales that the rushes mur-mured to one another, tales that the teal knew and theWatchful heron. And over the crowded streets her song went crying away, the song of waste places and of wild free lands, full of wonder and magic, for she had in herelf-made soul the song of the birds and the roar of theorgan in the marshes.

At this moment Signor Thompsoni, the well-known

English tenor, happened to go by with a friend. Theystopped and listened; every one stopped and listened.

"There has been nothing like this in Europe in mytime," said Signor Thompsoni.

So a change came into the life of Mary Jane.

People were written to, and finally it was arranged thatshe should take a leading part in the Covent GardenOpera in a few weeks.

So she went to London to learn.

London and singing lessons were better than the Cityof the Midlands and those terrible machines. Yet stillMary Jane was not free to go and live as she liked bythe edge of the marshlands, and she was still determinedto be rid of her soul, but could find no one that had nota soul of their own.

One day she was told that the English people wouldnot listen to her as Miss Rush, and was asked what moresuitable name she would like to be called by.

"I would like to be called Terrible North Wind," saidMary Jane, "or Song of the Rushes."

When she was told that this was impossible and Signo-rina Maria Russiano was suggested, she acquiesced atonce, as she had acquiesced when they took her awayfrom her curate; she knew nothing of the ways ofhumans.

At last the day of the Opera came round, and it wasa cold day of the winter.

And Signorina Russiano appeared on the stage before a crowded house.

And Signorina Russiano sang.

And into the song went all the longing of her soul, thesoul that could not go to Paradise, but could only worship God and know the meaning of music, and the longingpervaded that Italian song as the infinite mystery of thehills is borne along the sound of distant sheep-bells. Thenin the souls that were in that crowded house arose littlememories of a great while since that were quite quitedead, and lived awhile again during that marvellous song.

And a strange chill went into the blood of all thatlistened, as though they stood on the border of bleak marshes and the North Wind blew.

And some it moved to sorrow and some to regret, and

some to an unearthly joy. Then suddenly the song went wailing away, like the winds of the winter from themarshlands when Spring appears from the South.

So it ended. And a great silence fell foglike over allthat house, breaking in upon the end of a chatty conver-sation that a lady was enjoying with a friend.

In the dead hush Signorina Russiano rushed from thestage; she appeared again running among the audience,and dashed up to the lady.

"Take my soul," she said; "it is a beautiful soul. It canworship God, and knows the meaning of music and canimagine Paradise. And if you go to the marshlands withit you will see beautiful things; there is an old town therebuilt of lovely timbers, with ghosts in its streets."

The lady stared. Every one was standing up. "See,"said Signorina Russiano, "it is a beautiful soul."

And she clutched at her left breast a little above theheart, and there was the soul shining in her hand, with the green and blue lights going round and round and thepurple flare in the midst.

"Take it," she said, "and you will love all that is beau-tiful, and know the four winds, each one by his name,and the songs of the birds at dawn. I do not want it,because I am not free. Put it to your left breast a littleabove the heart."

Still everybody was standing up, and the lady feltuncomfortable.

"Please offer it to some one else," she said.

"But they all have souls already," said SignorinaRussiano.

And everybody went on standing up. And the lady took the soul in her hand.

"Perhaps it is lucky," she said.

She felt that she wanted to pray.

She half-closed her eyes, and said, "Unberufen." Thenshe put the soul to her left breast a little above the heart,and hoped that the people would sit down and the singergo away.

Instantly a heap of clothes collapsed before her. For a moment, in the shadow among the seats, those who wereborn in the dusk hour might have seen a little brown thing leaping free from the clothes; then it sprang into

the bright light of the hall, and became invisible to anyhuman eye.

It dashed about for a little, then found the door, andpresently was in the lamplit streets.

To those that were born in the dusk hour it mighthave been seen leaping rapidly wherever the streets ran northwards and eastwards, disappearing from humansight as it passed under the lamps, and appearing againbeyond them with a marsh-light over its head.

Once a dog perceived it and gave chase, and was left far behind.

The cats of London, who are all born in the dusk hour,howled fearfully as it went by.

Presently it came to the meaner streets, where thehouses are smaller. Then it went due northeastwards, leaping from roof to roof. And so in a few minutes itcame to more open spaces, and then to the desolate lands, where market gardens grow, which are neithertown nor country. Till at last the good black trees cameinto view, with their demoniac shapes in the night, andthe grass was cold and wet, and the night-mist floated over it. And a great white owl came by, going up anddown in the dark. And at all these things the little WildThing rejoiced elvishly.

And it left London far behind it, reddening the sky,and could distinguish no longer its unlovely roar, but heard again the noises of the night.

And now it would come through a hamlet glowing andcomfortable in the night; and now to the dark, wet, openfields again; and many an owl it overtook as they driftedthrough the night, a people friendly to the Elf-folk. Sometimes it crossed wide rivers, leaping from star tostar; and, choosing its way as it went,

to avoid the hardrough roads, came before midnight to the East Anglianlands.

And it heard there the shout of the North Wind, whowas dominant and angry, as he drove southwards his adventurous geese; while the rushes bent before himchaunting plaintively and low, like enslaved rowers ofsome fabulous trireme, bending and swinging under blows of the lash, and singing all the while a dolefulsong.

And it felt the good dank air that clothes by night the broad East Anglian lands, and came again to some oldperilous pool where the soft green mosses grew, andthere plunged downward and downward into the neardark water, till it felt the homely ooze once more comingup between its toes. Thence, out of the lovely chill thatis in the heart of the ooze, it arose renewed and rejoicingto dance upon the image of the stars.

I chanced to stand that night by the marsh's edge, for-getting in my mind the affairs of men; and I saw the marsh-fires come leaping up from all the perilous places.And they came up by flocks the whole night long to the number of a great multitude, and danced away togetherover the marshes.

And I believe that there was a great rejoicing all thatnight among the kith of the Elf-folk.

THE SECRET PLACE

Richard McKenna

This morning my son asked me what I did in the war.He's fifteen and I don't know why he never asked mebefore. I don't know why I never anticipated thequestion.

He was just leaving for camp, and I was able to puthim off by saying I did government work. He'll be twoweeks at camp. As long as the counselors keep pressureon him, he'll do well enough at group activities. The moment they relax it, he'll be off studying an ant colonyor reading one of his books. He's on astronomy now. The moment he comes home, he'll ask me again just what I did in the war, and I'll have to tell him.

But I don't understand just what I did in the war.Sometimes I think my group fought a death fight with a local myth and only Colonel Lewis realized it. I don'tknow who won. All I know is that war demands of somemen risks more obscure and ignoble than death in battle.I know it did of me.

It began in 1931, when a local boy was found dead inthe desert near Barker, Oregon. He had with him a sackof gold ore and one thumb-sized crystal of uraniumoxide. The crystal ended as a curiosity in a Salt Lake City assay office until, in 1942, it became of strangelygreat importance. Army agents traced its probable originto a hundred-square-mile area near Barker. Dr. Lewis was called to duty as a reserve colonel and ordered tofind the vein. But the whole area was overlain by thou-sands of feet of Miocene lava flows and of course it wasgeological insanity to look there for a pegmatite vein.The area had no drainage pattern and had never been

glaciated. Dr. Lewis protested that the crystal could havegotten there only by prior human agency.

It did him no good. He was told his was not to reasonwhy. People very high up would not be placated untilmuch money and scientific effort had been spent in asearch. The army sent him young geology graduates,including me, and demanded progress reports. For thesake of morale, in a land of frustrated desperation, Dr.Lewis decided to make the project a model textbookexercise in mapping the number and thickness of thebasalt beds over the search area all the way down to the prevolcanic Miocene surface. That would at least be auseful addition to Columbia Plateau lithology. It wouldalso be proof positive that no uranium ore existed there,so it was not really cheating.

That Oregon countryside was a dreary place. Thesearch area was flat, featureless country with black lavaoutcropping everywhere through scanty gray soil in whichsagebrush grew hardly knee high. It was hot and dry insummer and dismal with thin snow in whiter. Windshowled across it at all seasons. Barker was about a hun-dred wooden houses on dusty streets, and some hayfarms along a canal. All the young people were away atwar or war jobs, and the old people seemed to resentus. There were twenty of us, apart from the contract drillcrews who lived in their own trailer camps, and we weregown against town, in a way. We slept and ate at Col-thorpe House, a block down the street from our head-quarters. We had our own "gown" table there, and wemight as well have been men from Mars.

I enjoyed it, just the same. Dr. Lewis treated us like students, with lectures and quizzes and assigned reading.. He was a fine teacher and a brilliant scientist, and weloved him. He gave us all a turn at each phase of thework. I started on surface mapping and then worked withthe drill crews, who were taking cores through the basaltand into the granite thousands of feet beneath. Then Iworked on taking gravimetric and seismic readings. Wehad fine team spirit and we all knew we were gettingpriceless training in field geophysics. I decided privatelythat after the war I would take my doctorate in geophys-ics. Under Dr. Lewis, of course.

In early summer of 1944 the field phase ended. Thecontract drillers left. We packed tons of well logs andmany boxes of gravimetric data sheets and seismic tapesfor a move to Dr. Lewis's Midwestern university. Therewe would get more months of valuable training while weworked our data into a set of structure contour maps.We were all excited and talked a lot about being withgirls again and going to parties. Then the army said partof the staff had to continue the field search. For technicalcompliance, Dr. Lewis decided to leave one man, and he chose me.

It hit me hard. It was like being flunked out unfairly. I thought he was heartlessly brusque about it.

"Take a jeep run through the area with a Geiger oncea day," he said. "Then sit in the office and answer thephone."

"What if the army calls when I'm away?" I askedsullenly.

"Hire a secretary," he said. "You've an allowance forthat."

So off they went and left me, with the title of fieldchief and only myself to boss. I felt betrayed to the hos-tile town. I decided I hated Colonel Lewis and wished Icould get revenge. A few days later old Dave Gentrytold me how.

He was a lean, leathery old man with a white mustacheand I sat next to him in my new place at the "town"table. Those were grim meals. I heard remarks abouthealthy young men skulking out of uniform and wastingtax money. One night I slammed my fork into my half-emptied plate and stood up.

"The army sent me here and the army keeps me here,"I told the dozen old men and women at the table. "I'dlike to go overseas and cut Japanese throats for you kind hearts and gentle people, I really would! Why don't you all write your Congressman?"

I stamped outside and stood at one end of the veranda,boiling. Old Dave followed me out.

"Hold your horses, son," he said. "They hate the gov-ernment, not you. But government's like the weather,and you're a man they can get aholt of."

"With their teeth," I said bitterly.

"They got reasons," Dave said. "Lost mines ain't sup-posed to be found the way you people are going at it.Besides that, the Crazy Kid mine belongs to us here inBarker."

He was past seventy and he looked after horses in the local feedyard. He wore a shabby, open vest over fadedsuspenders and gray flannel shirts and nobody wouldever have looked for wisdom in that old man. But it wasthere.

"This is big, new, lonesome country and it's hard onpeople," he said. "Every town's got a story about a lostmine or a lost gold cache. Only kids go looking for it.It's enough for most folks just to know it's there. It helps'em to stand the country."

"I see," I said. Something stirred in the back of mymind.

"Barker never got its lost mine until thirteen yearsago," Dave said. "Folks just naturally can't stand to see you people find it this way, by main force and so soonafter."

"We know there isn't any mine," I said. "We're justproving it isn't there."

"If you could prove that, it'd be worse yet," he said."Only you can't. We all saw and handled that ore. It wasquartz, just rotten with gold in wires and flakes. The boywent on foot from his house to get it. The lode's got tobe right close by out there."

He waved toward our search area. The air above itwas luminous with twilight and I felt a curious surge of interest. Colonel Lewis had always discouraged us fromspeculating on that story. If one of us brought it up, Iwas usually the one who led the hooting and we all sug-gested he go over the search area with a dowsing rod. Itwas an article of faith with us that the vein did not exist.But now I was all alone and my own field boss.

We each put up one foot on the veranda rail arid restedour arms on our knees. Dave bit off a chew of tobaccoand told me about Owen Price.

"He was always a crazy kid and I guess he read everybook in town," Dave said. "He had a curious heart, thatboy."

I'm no folklorist, but even I could see how myth ele-

ments were already creeping into the story. For onething, Dave insisted the boy's shirt was torn off and hehad lacerations on his back.

"Like a cougar clawed him," Dave said. "Only theyain't never been cougars in that desert. We backtrackedthat boy till his trail crossed itself so many times it wasno use, but we never found one cougar track."

I could discount that stuff, of course, but still the storygripped me. Maybe it was Dave's slow, sure voice; per-haps the queer twilight; possibly my own wounded pride.I thought of how great lava upwellings sometimes tearloose and carry along huge masses of the country rock.Maybe such an erratic mass lay out there, perhaps onlya few hundred feet across and so missed by our drillcores, but rotten with uranium. If I could find it, I wouldmake a fool of Colonel Lewis. I would discredit thewhole science of geology. I, Duard Campbell, thedespised and rejected one, could do that. The front ofmy mind shouted that it was nonsense, but something farback in my mind began composing a devastating letterto Colonel Lewis and comfort flowed into me.

"There's some say the boy's youngest sister could tellwhere he found it, if she wanted," Dave said. "She usedto go into that desert with him a lot. She took on prettywild when it happened and then was struck dumb, but Ihear she talks again now." He shook his head. "Poor little Helen. She promised to be a pretty girl."

"Where does she live?" I asked.

"With her mother in Salem," Dave said. "She went to business school and I hear she works for a lawyer there."

Mrs. Price was a flinty old woman who seemed to con-trol her daughter absolutely. She agreed Helen would bemy secretary as soon as I told her the salary. I got Hel-en's security clearance with one phone call; she hadalready been investigated as part of tracing that uranium crystal. Mrs. Price arranged for Helen to stay with a fam-ily she knew in Barker, to protect her reputation. It wasin no danger. I meant to make love to her, if I had to,to charm her out of her secret, if she had one, but I would not harm her. I knew perfectly well that I was

only playing a game called "The Revenge of DuardCampbell." I knew I would not find any uranium.

Helen was a plain little girl and she was made of fright-ened ice. She wore low-heeled shoes and cotton stockingsand plain dresses with white cuffs and collars. Her onegood feature was her flawless fair skin against which herpeaked, black Welsh eyebrows and smoky blue eyes gave her an elfin look at times. She liked to sit neatly tuckedinto herself, feet together, elbows in, eyes cast down,voice hardly audible, as smoothly self-contained as anegg. The desk I gave her faced mine and she sat like thatacross from me and did the busy work I gave her, and Icould not get through to her at all.

I tried joking and I tried polite little gifts and atten-tions, and I tried being sad and needing sympathy. She listened and worked and stayed as far away as the moon. It was only after two weeks and by pure accident that Ifound the key to her.

I was trying the sympathy gambit. I said it was not sobad, being exiled from friends and family, but what Icould not stand was the dreary sameness of that searcharea. Every spot was like every other spot and

there was no single, recognizable*place* in the whole expanse. Itsparked something in her and she roused up at me.

"It's full of just wonderful places," she said.

"Come out with me in the jeep and show me one," Ichallenged.

She was reluctant, but I hustled her along regardless.I guided the jeep between outcrops, jouncing and lurch-ing. I had our map photographed on my mind and Iknew where we were every minute, but only by mapcoordinates. The desert had our marks on it: well sites,seismic blast holes, wooden stakes, cans, bottles andpapers blowing in that everlasting wind, and it was alldismally the same anyway.

"Tell me when we pass a 'place' and I'll stop," I said.

"It's all places," she said. "Right here's a place."

I stopped the jeep and looked at her in surprise. Hervoice was strong and throaty. She opened her eyes wideand smiled; I had never seen her look like that.

"What's special, that makes it a place?" I asked.

She did not answer. She got out and walked a few

steps. Her whole posture was changed. She almostdanced along. I followed and touched her shoulder.

"Tell me what's special," I said.

She faced around and stared right past me. She had anew grace and vitality and she was a very pretty girl.

"It's where all the dogs are," she said.

"Dogs?"

I looked around at the scrubby sagebrush and thin soiland ugly black rock and back at Helen. Something waswrong.

"Big, stupid dogs that go in herds and eat grass," shesaid. She kept turning and gazing. "Big cats chase thedogs and eat them. The dogs scream and scream. Can'tyou hear them?"

"That's crazy!" I said. "What's the matter with you?"

I might as well have slugged her. She crumpled instantlyback into herself and I could hardly hear her answer.

"I'm sorry. My brother and I used to play out fairytales here. All this was a kind of fairyland to us." Tears formed in her eyes. "I haven't been here since...Iforgot myself. I'm sorry."

I had to swear I needed to dictate "field notes" toforce Helen into that desert again. She sat stiffly with

pad and pencil in the jeep while I put on my act withthe Geiger and rattled off jargon. Her lips were pale andcompressed and I could see her fighting against the spellthe desert had for her, and I could see her slowly losing.

She finally broke down into that strange mood and Itook good care not to break it. It was weird but wonder-ful, and I got a lot of data. I made her go out for "fieldnotes" every morning and each tune it was easier tobreak her down. Back in the office she always froze againand I marveled at how two such different persons could inhabit the same body. I called her two phases "OfficeHelen" and "Desert Helen."

I often talked with old Dave on the veranda after din-ner. One night he cautioned me.

"Folks here think Helen ain't been right in the headsince her brother died," he said. "They're worrying about you and her."

"I feel like a big brother to her," I said. "I'd never

hurt her, Dave. If we find the lode, I'll stake the bestclaim for her."

He shook his head. I wished I could explain to himhow it was only a harmless game I was playing and noone would ever find gold out there. Yet, as a game, itfascinated me.

Desert Helen charmed me when, helplessly, she hadto uncover her secret life. She was a little girl in a wom-an's body. Her voice became strong and breathless withexcitement and she touched me with the same wonderthat turned her own face vivid and elfin. She ran laughingthrough the black rocks and scrubby sagebrush andmomentarily she made them beautiful. She would pullme along by the hand and sometimes we ran as much asa mile away from the jeep. She treated me as if I werea Wind or foolish child.

"No, no, Duard, that's a cliff!" she would say, pulling me back.

She would go first, so I could find the stepping stones across streams. I played up. She pointed out woods andstreams and cliffs and castles. There were shaggy horses with claws, golden birds, camels, witches, elephants andmany other creatures. I pretended to see them all, andit made her trust me. She talked and acted out the fairytales she had once played with Owen. Sometimes he wasenchanted and sometimes she, and the one had to darethe evil magic of a witch or giant to rescue the other. Sometimes I was Duard and other times I almost thoughtI was Owen.

Helen and I crept into sleeping castles, and we hidwith pounding hearts while the giant grumbled in search of us and we fled, hand in hand, before his wrath.

Well, I had her now. I played Helen's game, but Inever lost sight of my own. Every night I sketched inon my map whatever I had learned that day of thefairyland topography. Its geomorphology was remark-ably consistent.

When we played, I often hinted about the giant's trea-sure. Helen never denied it existed, but she seemed trou-bled and evasive about it. She would put her finger to her lips and look at me with solemn, round eyes.

"You only take the things nobody cares about," she

would say. "If you take the gold or jewels, it brings youterrible bad luck."

"I got a charm against bad luck and I'll let you haveit too," I said once. "It's the biggest, strongest charm inthe whole world."

"No. It all turns into trash. It turns into goat beansand dead snakes and things," she said crossly. "Owen told me. It's a rule, in fairyland."

Another tune we talked about it as we sat in a gloomyravine near a waterfall. We had to keep our voices lowor we would wake up the giant. The waterfall was reallythe giant snoring and it was also the wind that blew for-ever across that desert.

"Doesn't Owen ever take anything?" I asked.

I had learned by then that I must always speak ofOwen in the present tense.

"Sometimes he has to," she said. "Once right here the witch had me enchanted into an ugly toad. Owen put aflower on my head and that made me be Helen again."

"A really truly flower? That you could take home withyou?"

"A red-and-yellow flower bigger than my two hands,"she said. "I tried to take it home, but all the petals cameoff."

"Does Owen ever take anything home?"

"Rocks, sometimes," she said. "We keep them in asecret nest in the shed. We think they might be magic eggs."

I stood up. "Come and show me."

She shook her head vigorously and drew back. "I don'twant to go home," she said. "Not ever."

She squirmed and pouted, but I pulled her to her feet.

"Please, Helen, for me," I said. "Just for one littleminute."

I pulled her back to the jeep and we drove to the oldPrice place. I had never seen her look at it when wepassed it and she did not look now. She was freezing fast back into Office Helen. But she led me around the sag-ging old house with its broken windows and into a tum-ble-down shed. She scratched away some straw in onecorner, and there were the rocks. I did not realize how

excited I was until disappointment hit me like a blow in the stomach.

They were worthless waterworn pebbles of quartz androsy granite. The only thing special about them was thatthey could never have originated on that basalt desert.

After a few weeks we dropped the pretense of fieldnotes and simply went into the desert to play. I had Hel-en's fairyland almost completely mapped. It seemed tobe a recent fault block mountain with a river parallel toits base and a gently sloping plain across the river. Thescarp face was wooded and cut by deep ravines and ithad castles perched on its truncated spurs. I kept check-ing Helen on it and never found her inconsistent. Severaltimes when she was in doubt I was able to tell her where she was, and that let me even more deeply into her secretlife. One morning I discovered just how deeply.

She was sitting on a log in the forest and plaiting alittle basket out of fern fronds. I stood beside her. She looked up at me and smiled.

"What shall we play today, Owen?" she asked.

I had not expected that, and I was proud of howquickly I rose to it. I capered and bounded away and then back to her and crouched at her feet.

"Little sister, little sister, I'm enchanted," I said."Only you in all the world can uncharm me."

"I'll uncharm you," she said, in that little girl voice."What are you, brother?"

"A big, black dog," I said. "A wicked giant namedLewis Rawbones keeps me chained up behind his castlewhile he takes all the other dogs out hunting."

She smoothed her gray skirt over her knees. Hermouth drooped.

"You're lonesome and you howl all day and you howlall night," she said. "Poor doggie."

I threw back my head and howled.

"He's a terrible, wicked giant and he's got all kinds of terrible magic," I said. "You mustn't be afraid, little sis-ter. As soon as you uncharm me I'll be a handsomeprince and I'll cut off his head."

"I'm not afraid." Her eyes sparkled. "I'm not afraidof fire or snakes or pins or needles or anything."

"I'll take you away to my kingdom and we'll live hap-pily ever afterward. You'll be the most beautiful queen in the world and everybody will love you."

I wagged my tail and laid my head on her knees. Shestroked my silky head and pulled my long black ears.

"Everybody will love me." She was very serious now."Will magic water uncharm you, poor old doggie?"

"You have to touch my forehead with a piece of thegiant's treasure," I said. "That's the only onliest way touncharm me."

I felt her shrink away from me. She stood up, her facesuddenly crumpled with grief and anger.

"You're not Owen, you're just a man! Owen'senchanted and I'm enchanted too and nobody will ever uncharm us!"

She ran away from me and she was already OfficeHelen by the tune she reached the jeep.

After that day she refused flatly to go into the desertwith me. It looked as if my game was played out. But Igambled that Desert Helen could still hear me, under-neath somewhere, and I tried a new strategy. The office was an upstairs room over the old dance hall and, I sup-pose, in frontier days skirmishing had gone on therebetween men and women. I doubt anything went on asstrange as my new game with Helen.

I always had paced and talked while Helen worked.Now I began mixing common-sense talk with fairylandtalk and I kept coming back to the wicked giant, LewisRawbones. Office Helen tried not to pay attention, butnow and then I caught Desert Helen peeping at me outof her eyes. I spoke of my blighted career as a geologistand how it would be restored to me if I found the lode.I mused on how I would live and work in exotic places and how I would need a wife to keep house for me andhelp with my paper work. It disturbed Office Helen. Shemade typing mistakes and dropped things. I kept it upfor days, trying for just the right mixture of fact andfantasy, and it was hard on Office Helen.

One night old Dave warned me again.

"Helen's looking peaked, and there's talk around. MizFowler says Helen don't sleep and she cries at night and

she won't tell Miz Fowler what's wrong. You don't hap-pen to know what's bothering her, do you?"

"I only talk business stuff to her," I said. "Maybe she'shomesick. I'll ask her if she wants a vacation." I did notlike the way Dave looked at me. "I haven't hurt her. Idon't mean her any harm, Dave," I said.

"People get killed for what they do, not for what theymean," he said. "Son, there's men in this here town would kill you quick as a coyote, if you hurt HelenPrice."

I worked on Helen all the next day and in the after-noon I hit just the right note and I broke her defenses.I was not prepared for the way it worked out. I had justsaid, "All life is a kind of playing. If you think about itright, everything we do is a game." She poised her pencil and looked straight at me, as she had never done in thatoffice, and I felt my heart speed up.

"You taught me how to play, Helen. I was so seriousthat I didn't know how to play."

"Owen taught me to play. He bad magic. My sisterscouldn't play anything but dolls and rich husbands and Ihated them."

Her eyes opened wide and her lips trembled and shewas almost Desert Helen right there in the office.

"There's magic and enchantment in regular life, if youlook at it right," I said. "Don't you think so, Helen?"

"I know it!" she said. She turned pale and droppedher pencil. "Owen was enchanted into having a wife andthree daughters and he was just a boy. But he was theonly man we had and all of them but me hated himbecause we were so poor." She began to tremble andher voice went flat. "He couldn't stand it. He took thetreasure and it killed him." Tears ran down her cheeks. "I tried to think he was only enchanted into play-deadand if I didn't speak or laugh for seven years, I'duncharm him."

She dropped her head on her hands. I was alarmed. Icame over and put my hand on her shoulder.

"I did speak." Her shoulders heaved with sobs. "Theymade me speak, and now Owen won't ever come back."

I bent and put my arm across her shoulders.

"Don't cry, Helen. He'll come back," I said. "Thereare other magics to bring him back."

I hardly knew what I was saying. I was afraid of whatI had done, and I wanted to comfort her. She jumpedup and threw off my arm.

"I can't stand it! I'm going home!"

She ran out into the hall and down the stairs and fromthe window I saw her run down the street, still crying.All of a sudden my game seemed cruel and stupid to me and right that moment I stopped it. I tore up my map offairyland and my letters to Colonel Lewis and I wonderedhow in the world I could ever have done all that.

After dinner that night old Dave motioned me out to one end of the veranda. His face looked carved out ofwood.

"I don't know what happened in your office today,and for your sake I better not find out. But you send Helen back to her mother on the morning stage, youhear me?"

"All right, if she wants to go," I said. "I can't just fireher."

"I'm speaking for the boys. You better put her on thatmorning stage, or we'll be around to talk to you."

"All right, I will, Dave."

I wanted to tell him how the game was stopped nowand how I wanted a chance to make things up with Helen, but I thought I had better not. Dave's voice wasflat and savage with contempt and, old as he was, hefrightened me.

Helen did not come to work in the morning. At nineo'clock I went out myself for the mail. I brought a largemailing tube and some letters back to the office. Thefirst letter I opened was from Dr. Lewis, and almost like magic it solved all my problems.

On the basis of his preliminary structure contour mapsDr. Lewis had gotten permission to close out the field phase. Copies of the maps were in the mailing tube, formy information. I was to hold an inventory and be ready to turn everything over to an army quartermaster teamcoming in a few days. There was still a great mass ofdata to be worked up in refining the maps. I was to join

the group again and I would have a chance at the labwork after all.

I felt pretty good. I paced and whistled and snappedmy fingers. I wished Helen would come, to help on

theinventory. Then I opened the tube and looked idly at themaps. There were a lot of them, featureless bed afterbed of basalt, like layers of a cake ten miles across. Butwhen I came to the bottom map, of the prevolcanic Mio-cene landscape, the hair on my neck stood up.

/*had made that map myself. It was Helen's fairyland.*The topography was point by point the same.

I clenched my fists and stopped breathing. Then it hitme a second time, and the skin crawled up my back.

The game was real. I couldn't end it. All the time thegame had been playing me. It was still playing me.

I ran out and down the street and overtook old Davehurrying toward the feedyard. He had a bolstered gunon each hip.

"Dave, I've got to find Helen," I said.

"Somebody seen her hiking into the desert just at day-light," he said. "I'm on my way for a horse." He did not slow his stride. "You better get out there in your stink-wagon. If you don't find her before we do, you better just keep on going, son."

I ran back and got the jeep and roared it out across the scrubby sagebrush. I hit rocks and I do not knowwhy I did not break something. I knew where to go andfeared what I would find there. I knew I loved HelenPrice more than my own life and I knew I had drivenher to her death.

I saw her far off, running and dodging. I headed the jeep to intercept her and I shouted, but she neither sawme nor heard me. I stopped and jumped out and ranafter her and the world darkened. Helen was all I couldsee, and I could not catch up with her.

"Wait for me, little sister!" I screamed after her. "Ilove you, Helen! Wait for me!"

She stopped and crouched and I almost ran over her. I knelt and put my arms around her and then it was onus.

They say in an earthquake, when the direction of upand down tilts and wobbles, people feel a fear that drivesthem mad if they can not forget it afterward, This wasworse. Up and down and here and there and now andthen all rushed together. The wind roared through the rock beneath us and the air thickened crushingly aboveour heads. I know we clung to each other, and we werethere for each other while nothing else was and that is all I know, until we were in the jeep and I was guiding it back toward town as headlong as I had come.

Then the world had shape again under a bright sun. Isaw a knot of horsemen on the horizon. They were head-ing for where Owen had been found. That boy had run a long way, alone and hurt and burdened.

I got Helen up to the office. She sat at her desk withher head down on her hands and she quivered violently.I kept my arm around her.

"It was only a storm inside our two heads, Helen," Isaid, over and over. "Something black blew away out ofus. The game is finished and we're free and I love you."

Over and over I said that, for my sake as well as hers.I meant and believed it. I said she was my wife and wewould marry and go a thousand miles away from thatdesert to raise our children. She quieted to a trembling,but she would not speak. Then I heard hoofbeats andthe creak of leather in the street below and then I heardslow footsteps on the stairs.

Old Dave stood in the doorway. His two guns lookedas natural on him as hands and feet. He looked at Helen,bowed over the desk, and then at me, standing besideher.

"Come on down, son. The boys want to talk to you,"he said.

I followed him into the hall and stopped.

"She isn't hurt," I said. "The lode is really out there,Dave, but nobody is ever going to find it."

"Tell that to the boys."

"We're closing out the project in a few more days," I

said. "I'm going to marry Helen and take her away withme."

"Come down or we'll drag you down!" he said harshly."We'll send Helen back to her mother."

I was afraid. I did not know what to do.

"No, you won't send me back to my mother!"

It was Helen beside me in the hall, She was DesertHelen, but grown up and wonderful. She was pale, pretty, aware and sure of herself.

"I'm going with Duard," she said. "Nobody in theworld is ever going to send me around like a package again."

Dave rubbed his jaw and squinted his eyes at her.

"I love her, Dave," I said. "I'll take care of her allmy life."

I put my left arm around her and she nestled against me. The tautness went out of old Dave and he smiled.He kept his eyes on Helen.

"Little Helen Price," he said, wonderingly. "Who everwould've thought it?" He reached out and shook us both gently. "Bless you youngsters," he said, and blinked hiseyes. "I'll tell the boys it's all right."

He turned and went slowly down the stairs. Helen andI looked at each other, and I think she saw a new facetoo.

That was sixteen years ago. I am a professor myselfnow, graying a bit at the temples. I am as positivistic ascientist as you will find anywhere in the Mississippidrainage basin. When I tell a seminar student "That assertion is operationally meaningless," I can make itsound downright obscene. The students blush and hateme, but it is for their own good. Science is the only safegame, and it's safe only if it is kept pure. I

work hardat that, I have yet to meet the student I cannot handle.

My son is another matter. We named him OwenLewis, and he has Helen's eyes and hair and complexion.He learned to read on the modern sane and sterile chil-dren's books. We haven't a fairy tale in the house—butI have a science library. And Owen makes fairy tales outof science. He is taking the measure of space and timenow, with Jeans and Eddington. He cannot possiblyunderstand a tenth of what he reads, in the way I under-

stand it. But he understands all of it in some other wayprivately his own.

Not long ago he said to me, "You know, Dad, it isn'tonly space that's expanding. Time's expanding too, andthat's what makes us keep getting farther away from when we used to be."

And I have to tell him just what I did in the war. Iknow I found manhood and a wife. The how and why ofit I think and hope I am incapable of fully understanding.But Owen has, through Helen, that strangely curious heart. I'm afraid. I'm afraid he will understand.

THE KING OF THE ELVES

Philip K. Dick

It was raining and getting dark. Sheets of water blewalong the row of pump at the edge of the filling station;the trees across the highway bent against the wind.

Shadrach Jones stood just inside the doorway of thelittle building, leaning against an oil drum. The door wasopen and gusts of rain blew in onto the wood floor. Itwas late; the sun had set, and the air was turning cold.Shadrach reached into his coat and brought out a cigar.He bit the end off it and lit it carefully, turning away from the door. In the gloom, the cigar burst into life,warm and glowing. Shadrach took a deep draw. He but-toned his coat around him and stepped out onto thepavement.

"Darn," he said. "What a night!" Rain buffeted him,wind blew at him. He looked up and down the highway,squinting. There were no cars in sight. He shook hishead, locked up the gasoline pumps.

He went back into the building and pulled the doorshut behind him. He opened the cash register and counted the money he'd taken in during the day. It wasnot much.

Not much, but enough for one old man. Enough tobuy him tobacco and firewood and magazines, so that he could be comfortable as he waited for the occasional cars to come by. Not very many cars came along the highwayany more. The highway had begun to fall into disrepair;there were many cracks in its dry, rough surface, andmost cars preferred to take the big state highway thatran beyond the hills. There was nothing in Derryville toattract them, to make them turn toward it. Derryville

was a small town, too small to bring in any of the major industries, too small to be very important to anyone.Sometimes hours went by without—

Shadrach tensed. His fingers closed over the money.From outside came a sound, the melodic ring of the sig-nal wire stretched along the pavement.Dinggg!

Shadrach dropped the money into the till and pushedthe drawer closed. He stood up slowly and walked toward the door, listening. At the door, he snapped offthe light and waited in the darkness, staring out.

He could see no car there. The rain was pouring down,swirling with the wind; clouds of mist moved along theroad. And something was standing beside the pumps.

He opened the door and stepped out. At first, his eyescould make nothing out. Then the old man swalloweduneasily.

Two tiny figures stood in the rain, holding a kind ofplatform between. them. Once, they might have been gaily dressed in bright garments, but now their clotheshung limp and sodden, dripping in the rain. They glancedhalfheartedly at Shadrach. Water streaked their tinyfaces, great drops of water. Their robes blew about them with the wind, lashing and swirling.

On the platform, something stirred. A small headturned wearily, peering at Shadrach. In the dim light, a rain-streaked helmet glinted dully.

"Who are you?" Shadrach said.

The figure on the platform raised itself up. "I'm theKing of the Elves and I'm wet."

Shadrach stared in astonishment.

"That's right," one of the bearers said. "We're allwet."

A small group of elves came straggling up, gatheringaround their king. They huddled together forlornly, silently.

"The King of the Elves," Shadrach repeated. "Well,I'll be darned."

Could it be true? They were very small, all right, andtheir dripping clothes were strange and oddly colored.

But*Elves?*

"I'll be darned. Well, whatever you are, you shouldn'tbe out on a night like this."

"Of course not," the king murmured. "No fault of our own. No fault . . ." His voice trailed off into a choking cough. The Elf soldiers peered anxiously at the platform.

"Maybe you better bring him inside," Shadrach said."My place is up the road. He shouldn't be out in the rain."

"Do you think we like being out on a night like this?"one of the bearers muttered. "Which way is it? Direct us."

Shadrach pointed up the road. "Over there. Just fol-low me. I'll get a fire going."

He went down the road, feeling his way onto the first of the flat stone steps that he and Phineas Judd had laidduring the summer. At the top of the steps, he lookedback. The platform was coming slowly along, swaying alittle from side to side. Behind it, the Elf soldiers picked their way, a tiny column of silent dripping creatures,unhappy and cold.

"I'll get the fire started," Shadrach said. He hurriedthem into the house.

Wearily, the Elf King lay back against the pillow.After sipping hot chocolate, he had relaxed and his heavybreathing sounded suspiciously like a snore.

Shadrach shifted in discomfort.

"I'm sorry," the Elf King said suddenly, opening hiseyes. He rubbed his forehead. "I must have drifted off.Where was I?"

"You should retire, Your Majesty," one of the soldierssaid sleepily. "It is late and these are hard times.". "True," the Elf King said, nodding. "Very true." Helooked up at the towering figure of Shadrach, standing before the fireplace, a glass of beer in his hand. "Mortal,we thank you for your hospitality. Normally, we do notimpose on human beings."

"It's those Trolls," another of the soldiers said, curledup on a cushion of the couch.

"Right," another soldier agreed. He sat up, gropingfor his sword. "Those reeking Trolls, digging and croaking—"

"You see," the Elf King went on, "as our partywas crossing from the Great Low Steps toward the Castle, where it lies in the hollow of the ToweringMountains—"

"You mean Sugar Ridge," Shadrach supplied help-fully.

"The Towering Mountains. Slowly we made our way.A rain storm came up. We became confused. All at once a group of Trolls appeared, crashing through the under-brush. We left the woods and sought safety on the End-less Path—"

"The highway. Route Twenty."

"So that is why we're here." The Elf King paused amoment. "Harder and harder it rained. The wind blew around us, cold and bitter. For an endless time we toiledalong. We had no idea where we were going or what would become of us."

The Elf King looked up at Shadrach. "We knew onlythis: Behind us, the Trolls were coming, creeping through the woods, marching through the rain, crushingeverything before them."

He put his hand to his mouth and coughed, bendingforward. All the Elves waited anxiously until he was done. He straightened up.

"It was kind of you to allow us to come inside. Wewill not trouble you for long. It is not the custom of

theElves—"

Again he coughed, covering his face with his hand.The Elves drew toward him apprehensively. At last theking stirred. He sighed.

"What's the matter?" Shadrach asked. He went overand took the cup of chocolate from the fragile hand. TheElf King lay back, his eyes shut.

"He has to rest," one of the soldiers said. "Where'syour room? The sleeping room."

"Upstairs," Shadrach said. "I'll show you where."

Late that night, Shadrach sat by himself in the dark,deserted living room, deep in meditation. The Elves were asleep above him, upstairs in the bedroom, the Elf King in the bed, the others curled up together on the rug.

The house was silent. Outside, the rain poured downendlessly, blowing against the house. Shadrach couldhear the tree branches slapping in the wind. He claspedand unclasped his hands. What a strange business itwas—all these Elves, with their old, sick king, their pip-ing voices. How anxious and peevish they were!

But pathetic, too; so small and wet, with water drip-ping down from them, and all their gay robes limp andsoggy.

The Trolls—what were they like? Unpleasant and notvery clean. Something about digging, breaking and push-ing through the woods . . .

Suddenly, Shadrach laughed in embarrassment. Whatwas the matter with him, believing all this? He put hiscigar out angrily, his ears red. What was going on? Whatkind of joke was this?

Elves? Shadrach grunted in indignation. Elves in Der-ryville? In the middle of Colorado? Maybe there wereElves in Europe. Maybe in Ireland. He had heard ofthat. But here? Upstairs in his own house, sleeping inhis own bed?

"I've heard just about enough of this," he said. "I'mnot an idiot, you know."

He turned toward the stairs, feeling for the banister inthe gloom. He began to climb.

Above him, a light went on abruptly. A door opened.

Two Elves came slowly out onto the landing. Theylooked down at him. Shadrach halted halfway up the stairs. Something on their faces made him stop.

"What's the matter?" he asked hesitantly.

They did not answer. The house was turning cold, coldand dark, with the chill of the rain outside and the chill of the unknown inside.

"What is it?" he said again. "What's the matter?"

"The king is dead," one of the Elves said. "He dieda few moments ago."

Shadrach stared up, wide-eyed. "He did? But—"

"He was very old and very tired." The Elves turnedaway, going back into the room, slowly and quietly shut-ting the door.

Shadrach stood, his fingers on the banister, hard, leanfingers, strong and thin.

He nodded his head blankly.

"I see," he said to the closed door. "He's dead."

The Elf soldiers stood around him in a solemn circle.The living room was bright with sunlight, the cold whiteglare of early morning.

"But wait," Shadrach said. He plucked at his necktie. "I have to get to the filling station. Can't you talk to mewhen I come home?"

The faces of the Elf soldiers were serious andconcerned.

"Listen," one of them said. "Please hear us out. It isvery important to us."

Shadrach looked past them. Through the window hesaw the highway, steaming in the heat of day, and downa little way was the gas station, glittering brightly. Andeven as he watched, a car came up to it and honkedthinly, impatiently. When nobody came out of the sta-tion, the car drove off again down the road.

"We beg you," a soldier said.

Shadrach looked down at the ring around him, theanxious faces, scored with concern and trouble. Strangely, he had always thought of Elves as carefree beings, flitting without worry or sense—

"Go ahead," he said. "I'm listening." He went overto the big chair and sat down. The Elves came up aroundhim. They conversed among themselves for a moment,whispering, murmuring distantly. Then they turnedtoward Shadrach.

The old man waited, his arms folded.

"We cannot be without a king," one of the soldiers said. "We could not survive. Not these days."

"The Trolls," another added. "They multiply very fast.They are terrible beasts. They're heavy and ponderous,crude, bad-smelling—"

"The odor of them is awful. They come up from thedark wet places, under the earth, where the blind, grop-ing plants feed in silence, far below the surface, far fromthe sun."

"Well, you ought to elect a king, then," Shadrach sug-gested. "I don't see any problem there."

"We do not elect the King of the Elves," a soldiersaid. "The old king must name his successor."

"Oh," Shadrach replied. "Well, there's nothing wrongwith that method."

"As our old king lay dying, a few distant words cameforth from his lips," a soldier said. "We bent closer, frightened and unhappy, listening."

"Important, all right," agreed Shadrach. "Not some-thing you'd want to miss."

"He spoke the name of him who will lead us."

"Good. You caught it, then. Well, where's thedifficulty?"

"The name he spoke was—was your name."

Shadrach stared. *"Mine?"*

"The dying king said: 'Make him, the towering mortal,your king. Many things will come if he leads the Elvesinto battle against the Trolls. I see the rising once againof the Elf Empire, as it was in the old days, as it wasbefore—"

"Me!" Shadrach leaped up. "Me? King of the Elves?"

Shadrach walked about the room, his hands in hispockets. "Me, Shadrach Jones, King of the Elves." He grinned a little. "I sure never thought of it before."

He went to the mirror over the fireplace and studiedhimself. He saw his thin, graying hair, his bright eyes, dark skin, his big Adam's apple.

"King of the Elves," he said. "King of the Elves. Waittill Phineas Judd hears about this. Wait till I tell him!"

Phineas Judd would certainly be surprised!

Above the filling station, the sun shown, high in theclear blue sky.

Phineas Judd sat playing with the accelerator of his oldFord truck. The motor raced and slowed. Phineasreached over and turned the ignition key off, then rolledthe window all the way down.

"What did you say?" he asked. He took off his glassesand began to polish them, steel rims between slender,deft fingers that were patient from years of practice. Herestored his glasses to his nose and smoothed whatremained of his hair into place.

"What was it, Shadrach?" he said. "Let's hear thatagain."

"I'm King of the Elves," Shadrach repeated. Hechanged position, bringing his other foot up on the run-ningboard. "Who would have thought it? Me, ShadrachJones, King of the Elves."

Phineas gazed at him. "How long have you been—King of the Elves, Shadrach?"

"Since the night before last."

"I see. The night before last." Phineas nodded. "I see.And what, may I ask, occurred the night before last?"

"The Elves came to my house. When the old Elf kingdied, he told them that—"

A truck came rumbling up and the driver leaped out."Water!" he said. "Where the hell is the hose?"

Shadrach turned reluctantly. "I'll get it." He turnedback to Phineas. "Maybe I can talk to you tonight whenyou come back from town. I want to tell you the rest.It's very interesting."

"Sure," Phineas said, starting up his little truck. "Sure,Shadrach. I'm very interested to hear."

He drove off down the road.

Later in the day, Dan Green ran his flivver up to thefilling station.

"Hey, Shadrach," he called. "Come over here! I wantto ask you something."

Shadrach came out of the little house, holding a waste-rag in his hand.

"What is it?"

"Come here." Dan leaned out the window, a wide grinon his face, splitting his face from ear to ear. "Let meask you something, will you?"

"Sure."

"Is it true? Are you really the King of the Elves?"

Shadrach flushed a little. "I guess I am," he admitted,looking away. "That's what I am, all right."

Dan's grin faded. "Hey, you trying to kid me? What'sthe gag?"

Shadrach became angry. "What do you mean? Sure, I'm the King of the Elves. And anyone who says I'mnot—"

"All right, Shadrach," Dan said, starting up the flivverquickly. "Don't get mad. I was just wondering."

Shadrach looked very strange.

"All right," Dan said. "You don't hear me arguing,do you?"

By the end of the day, everyone around knew aboutShadrach and how he had suddenly become King of theElves. Pop Richey, who ran the Lucky Store in Derry-ville, claimed Shadrach was doing it to drum

up tradefor the filling station.

"He's a smart old fellow," Pop said. "Not very manycars go along there any more. He knows what he's doing."

"I don't know," Dan Green disagreed. "You shouldhear him. I think he really believes it."

"King of the Elves?" They all began to laugh. "Won-der what he'll say next."

Phineas Judd pondered. "I've known Shadrach foryears. I can't figure it out." He frowned, his face wrin-kled and disapproving. "I don't like it."

Dan looked at him. "Then you think he believes it?"

"Sure," Phineas said. "Maybe I'm wrong, but I reallythink he does."

"But how could he believe it?" Pop asked. "Shadrachis no fool. He's been in business for a long time. He must be getting something out of it, the way I see it. Butwhat, if it isn't to build up the filling station?"

"Why, don't you know what he's getting?" Dan said,grinning. His gold tooth shone.

"What?" Pop demanded.

"He's got a whole kingdom to himself, that's what—to do with like he wants. How would you like that, Pop?Wouldn't you like to be King of the Elves and not haveto run this old store any more?"

"There isn't anything wrong with my store," Pop said."I ain't ashamed to run it. Better than being a clothingsalesman."

Dan flushed. "Nothing wrong with that, either." Helooked at Phineas. "Isn't that right? Nothing wrong withselling clothes, is there, Phineas?"

Phineas was staring down at the floor. He glanced up."What? What was that?"

"What you thinking about?" Pop wanted to know."You look worried."

"I'm worried about Shadrach," Phineas said. "He's getting old. Sitting out there by himself all the time, in the cold weather, with the rain water running over thefloor—it blows something awful in the winter, along thehighway—"

"Then you*do* think he believes it?" Dan persisted."You*don't* think he's getting something put of it?"

Phineas shook his head absently and did not answer.

The laughter died down. They all looked at oneanother.

That night, as Shadrach was locking up the filling sta-tion, a small figure came toward him from the darkness.

"Hey!" Shadrach called out. "Who are you?"

An Elf soldier came into the light, blinking. He was dressed in a little gray robe, buckled at the waist with aband of silver. On his feet were little leather boots. Hecarried a short sword at his side.

"I have a serious message for you," the Elf said."Now, where did I put it?"

He searched his robe while Shadrach waited. The Elf brought out a tiny scroll and unfastened it, breaking thewax expertly. He handed it to Shadrach.

"What's it say?" Shadrach asked. He bent over, hiseyes close to the vellum. "I don't have my glasses withme. Can't quite make out these little letters."

"The Trolls are moving. They've heard that the oldking is dead, and they're rising, in all the hills and valleysaround. They will try to break the Elf Kingdom intofragments, scatter the Elves—"

"I see," Shadrach said. "Before your new king can really get started."

"That's right." The Elf soldier nodded. "This is a cru-cial moment for the Elves. For centuries, our existencehas been precarious. There are so many Trolls, and Elvesare very frail and often take sick—"

"Well, what should I do? Are there any suggestions?"

"You're supposed to meet with us under the Great

Oak tonight. We'll take you into the Elf Kingdom, andyou and your staff will plan and map the defense of the Kingdom."

"What?" Shadrach looked uncomfortable. "But Ihaven't eaten dinner. And my gas station—tomorrow is Saturday, and a lot of cars—"

"But you are King of the Elves," the soldier said.

Shadrach put his hand to his chin and rubbed itslowly.

"That's right," he replied. "I am, ain't I?"

The Elf soldier bowed.

"I wish I'd known this sort of thing was going to hap-pen," Shadrach said. "I didn't suppose being King of theElves—"

He broke off, hoping for an interruption. The Elf sol-dier watched him calmly, without expression.

"Maybe you ought to have someone else as yourking," Shadrach decided. "I don't know very much aboutwar and things like that, fighting and all that sort ofbusiness." He paused, shrugged his shoulders. "It's noth- ing I've ever mixed in. They don't have wars here in Colorado. I mean they don't have wars between human beings."

Still the Elf soldier remained silent.

"Why was I picked?" Shadrach went on helplessly, twisting his hands. "I don't know anything about it. Whatmade him go and pick me? Why didn't he pick somebodyelse?"

"He trusted you," the Elf said. "You brought himinside your house, out of the rain. He knew that you expected nothing for it, that there was nothing youwanted. He had known few who gave and asked nothingback."

"Oh." Shadrach thought it over. At last he looked up. "But what about my gas station? And my house? Andwhat will they say, Dan Green and Pop down at thestore—"

The Elf soldier moved away, out of the light. "I haveto go. It's getting late, and at night the Trolls come out.I don't want to be too far away from the others."

"Sure," Shadrach said.

"The Trolls are afraid of nothing, now that the oldking is dead. They forage everywhere. No one is safe."

"Where did you say the meeting is to be? And what time?"

"At the Great Oak. When the moon sets tonight, justas it leaves the sky."

"I'll be there, I guess," Shadrach said. "I supposeyou're right. The King of the Elves can't afford to let his kingdom down when it needs him most."

He looked around, but the Elf soldier was alreadygone.

Shadrach walked up the highway, his mind full ofdoubts and wonderings. When he came to the first of theflat stone steps, he stopped.

"And the old oak tree is on Phineas's farm! What'llPhineas say?"

But he was the Elf King and the Trolls were movingin the hills. Shadrach stood listening to the rustle of thewind as it moved through the trees beyond the highway,and along the far slopes and hills.

Trolls? Were there really Trolls there, rising up, boldand confident in the darkness of the night, afraid of noth-ing, afraid of no one?

And this business of being Elf King . . .

Shadrach went on up the steps, his lips pressed tight.When he reached the top of the stone steps, the last raysof sunlight had already faded. It was night.

Phineas Judd stared out the window. He swore andshook his head. Then he went quickly to the door andran out onto the porch. In the cold moonlight a dimfigure was walking slowly across the lower field, comingtoward the house along the cow trail.

"Shadrach!" Phineas cried. "What's wrong? What areyou doing out this time of night?"

Shadrach stopped and put his fists stubbornly on hisships.

"You go back home," Phineas said. "What's got into you?"

"I'm sorry, Phineas," Shadrach answered. "I'm sorryI have to go over your land. But I have to meet some-body at the old oak tree."

"At this time of night?"

Shadrach bowed his head.

"What's the matter with you, Shadrach? Who in theworld you going to meet in the middle of the night on my farm?"

"I have to meet with the Elves. We're going to planout the war with the Trolls."

"Well, I'll be damned," Phineas Judd said. He wentback inside the house and slammed the door. For a longtime he stood thinking. Then he went back out on the porch again. "What did you say you were doing? Youdon't have to tell me, of course, but I just—"

"I have to meet the Elves at the old oak tree. Wemust have a general council of war against the Trolls."

"Yes, indeed. The Trolls. Have to watch for the Trollsall the time."

"Trolls are everywhere," Shadrach stated, nodding hishead. "I never realized it before. You can't forget themor ignore them. They never forget you. They're always planning, watching you—"

Phineas gaped at him, speechless.

"Oh, by the way," Shadrach said. "I may be gone forsome time. It depends on how long this business is going to take. I haven't had much experience in fighting Trolls, so I'm not sure. But I wonder if you'd mind looking afterthe gas station for me, about twice a day, maybe oncein the morning and once at night, to make sure no one'sbroken in or anything like that."

"You're going away?" Phineas came quickly down thestairs. "What's all this about Trolls? Why are you going?"

Shadrach patiently repeated what he had said.

"But what for?"

"Because I'm the Elf King. I have to lead them."

There was silence. "I see," Phineas said, at last."That's right, you*did* mention it before, didn't you? But, Shadrach, why don't you come inside for a while andyou can tell me about the Trolls and drink some coffeeand—"

"Coffee?" Shadrach looked up at the pale moon abovehim, the moon and the bleak sky. The world was

still

and dead and the night was very cold and the moonwould not be setting for some time.

Shadrach shivered.

"It's a cold night," Phineas urged. "Too cold to beout. Come on in—"

"I guess I have a little time," Shadrach admitted. "Acup of coffee wouldn't do any harm. But I can't stay verylong..."

Shadrach stretched his legs out and sighed. "This cof-fee sure tastes good, Phineas."

Phineas sipped a little and put his cup down. The living room was quiet and warm. It was a very neat little living room with solemn pictures on the walls, gray uninterest-ing pictures that minded their own business. In the cornerwas a small reed organ with sheet music carefullyarranged on top of it.

Shadrach noticed the organ and smiled. "You stillplay, Phineas?"

"Not much any more. The bellows don't work right.One of them won't come back up."

"I suppose I could fix it sometime. If I'm around, I mean."

"That would be fine," Phineas said. "I was thinkingof asking you."

"Remember how you used to play 'Vilia' and DanGreen came up with that lady who worked for Pop dur-ing the summer? The one who wanted to open a pottery shop?"

"I sure do," Phineas said.

Presently, Shadrach set down his coffee cup andshifted in his chair.

"You want more coffee?" Phineas asked quickly. Hestood up. "A little more?"

"Maybe a little. But I have to be going pretty soon."

"It's a bad night to be outside."

Shadrach looked through the window. It was darker;the moon had almost gone down. The fields were stark.Shadrach shivered. "I wouldn't disagree with you," hesaid.

Phineas turned eagerly. "Look, Shadrach. You go onhome where it's warm. You can come out and fight Trolls

some other night. There'll always be Trolls. You said soyourself. Plenty of time to do that later, when the weath-er's better. When it's not so cold."

Shadrach rubbed his forehead wearily. "You know, itall seems like some sort of a crazy dream. When did I start talking about Elves and Trolls? When did it all begin?" His voice trailed off. "Thank you for the cof- fee." He got slowly to his feet. "It warmed me up a lot. And I appreciated the talk. Like old times, you and mesitting here the way we used to."

"Are you going?" Phineas hesitated.*"Home?"*

"I think I better. It's late."

Phineas got quickly to his feet. He led Shadrach to thedoor, one arm around his shoulder.

"All right, Shadrach, you go on home. Take a goodhot bath before you go to bed. It'll fix you up. And maybe just a little snort of brandy to warm the blood."

Phineas opened the front door and they went slowlydown the porch steps, onto the cold, dark ground.

"Yes, I guess I'll be going," Shadrach said. "Goodnight—"

"You go on home." Phineas patted him on the arm."You run along home and take a good hot bath. And then go straight to bed."

"That's a good idea. Thank you, Phineas. I appreciateyour kindness." Shadrach looked down at Phineas's handon his arm. He had not been that close to Phineas foryears.

Shadrach contemplated the hand. He wrinkled hisbrow, puzzled.

Phineas's hand was huge and rough and his arms wereshort. His fingers were blunt, his nails broken and cracked. Almost black, or so it seemed in the moonlight.

Shadrach looked up at Phineas. "Strange," hemurmured.

"What's strange, Shadrach?"

In the moonlight, Phineas's face seemed oddly heavyand brutal. Shadrach had never noticed before how thejaw bulged, what a great protruding jaw it was. The skinwas yellow and coarse, like parchment. Behind the

glasses, the eyes were like two stones, cold and lifeless.The ears were immense, the hair stringy and matted.

Odd that he had never noticed before. But he hadnever seen Phineas in the moonlight.

Shadrach stepped away, studying his old friend. Froma few feet off, Phineas Judd seemed unusually short andsquat. His legs were slightly bowed. His feet were enor-mous. And there was something else—

"What is it?" Phineas demanded, beginning to growsuspicious. "Is there something wrong?"

Something was completely wrong. And he had nevernoticed it, not in all the years they had been friends. Allaround Phineas Judd was an odor, a faint, pungentstench of rot, of decaying flesh, damp and moldy.

Shadrach glanced slowly about him. "Somethingwrong?" he echoed. "No, I wouldn't say that."

By the side of the house was an old rain barrel, halffallen apart. Shadrach walked over to it.

"No, Phineas. I wouldn't exactly say there's something wrong."

"What are you doing?"

"Me?" Shadrach took hold of one of the barrel stavesand pulled it loose. He walked back to Phineas, carryingthe barrel stave carefully. "I'm King of the Elves. Who—or what—are you?"

Phineas roared and attacked with his great murderous shovel hands.

Shadrach smashed him over the head with the barrelstave. Phineas bellowed with rage and pain.

At the shattering sound, there was a clatter and fromunderneath the house came a furious horde of bounding,leaping creatures, dark bent-over things, their bodiesheavy and squat, their feet and heads immense. Shadrach took one look at the flood of dark creatures pouring outfrom Phineas's basement. He knew what they were.

"Help!" Shadrach shouted. "Trolls! Help!"

The Trolls were all around him, grabbing hold of him,tugging at him, climbing up him, pummeling his face andbody.

Shadrach fell to with the barrel stave, swung again andagain, kicking Trolls with his feet, whacking them withthe barrel stave. There seemed to be hundreds of them.

More and more poured out from under Phineas's house,a surging black tide of pot-shaped creatures, their greateyes and teeth gleaming in the moonlight.

"Help!" Shadrach cried again, more feebly now. Hewas getting winded. His heart labored painfully. A Trollbit his wrist, clinging to his arm. Shadrach flung it away,pulling loose from the horde clutching his trouser legs,the barrel stave rising and falling.

One of the Trolls caught hold of the stave. A wholegroup of them helped, wrenching furiously, trying to pullit away. Shadrach hung on desperately. Trolls were allover him, on his shoulders, clinging to his coat, ridinghis arms, his legs, pulling his hair—

He heard a high-pitched clarion call from a long wayoff, the sound of some distant golden trumpet, echoingin the hills.

The Trolls suddenly stopped attacking. One of them dropped off Shadrach's neck. Another let go of his arm.

The call came again, this time more loudly.

"Elves!" a Troll rasped. He turned and moved towardthe sound, grinding his teeth and spitting with fury.

"Elves!"

The Trolls swarmed forward, a growing wave of gnash-ing teeth and nails, pushing furiously toward the Elf col-umns. The Elves broke formation and joined battle,shouting with wild joy in their shrill, piping voices. Thetide of Trolls rushed against them, Troll against Elf,shovel nails against golden sword, biting jaw againstdagger.

"Kill the Elves!"

"Death to the Trolls!"

"Onward!"

"Forward!"

Shadrach fought desperately with the Trolls that werestill clinging to him. He was exhausted, panting and gasp-ing for breath. Blindly, he whacked on and on, kickingand jumping, throwing Trolls away from him, throughthe air and across the ground.

How long the battle raged, Shadrach never knew. Hewas lost in a sea of dark bodies, round and evil-smelling,

clinging to him, tearing, biting, fastened to his nose andhair and fingers. He fought silently, grimly.

All around him, the Elf legions clashed with the Trollhorde, little groups of struggling warriors on all sides.

Suddenly Shadrach stopped fighting. He raised hishead, looking uncertainly around him. Nothing moved. Everything was silent. The fighting had ceased.

A few Trolls still clung to his arms and legs. Shadrachwhacked one with the barrel stave. It howled and dropped to the ground. He staggered back, strugglingwith the last troll, who hung tenaciously to his arm.

"Now you!" Shadrach gasped. He pried the Troll looseand flung it into the air. The Troll fell to the ground andscuttled off into the night.

There was nothing more. No Troll moved anywhere. All was silent across the bleak moon-swept fields.

Shadrach sank down on a stone. His chest rose andfell painfully. Red specks swam before his eyes. Weakly,he got out his pocket handkerchief and wiped his neckand face. He closed his eyes, shaking his head from sideto side.

When he opened his eyes again, the Elves were comingtoward him, gathering their legion together again. TheElves were disheveled and bruised. Their golden armorwas gashed and torn. Their helmets were bent or missing.Most of their scarlet plumes were gone. Those that stillremained were drooping and broken.

But the battle was over. The war was won. The Trollhordes had been put to flight.

Shadrach got slowly to his feet. The Elf warriors stoodaround him in a circle, gazing up at him with silent

respect. One of them helped steady him as he put hishandkerchief away in his pocket.

"Thank you," Shadrach murmured. "Thank you very much."

"The Trolls have been defeated," an Elf stated, still awed by what had happened.

Shadrach gazed around at the Elves. There were manyof them, more than he had ever seen before. All theElves had turned out for the battle. They were grim-

faced, stern with the seriousness of the moment, wearyfrom the terrible struggle.

"Yes, they're gone, all right," Shadrach said. He wasbeginning to get his breath. "That was a close call. I'mglad you fellows came when you did. I was just aboutfinished, fighting them all by myself."

"All alone, the King of the Elves held off the entire Troll army," an Elf announced shrilly.

"Eh?" Shadrach said, taken aback. Then he smiled."That's true, I*did* fight them alone for a while. I*did* hold off the Trolls all by myself. The whole darn Troll

army."

"There is more," an Elf said.

Shadrach blinked. "More?"

"Look over here, O King, mightiest of all the Elves.This way. To the right."

The Elves led Shadrach over.

"What is it?" Shadrach murmured, seeing nothing atfirst. He gazed down, trying to pierce the darkness. "Could we have a torch over here?"

Some Elves brought little pine torches.

There, on the frozen ground, lay Phineas Judd, on hisback. His eyes were blank and staring, his mouth halfopen. He did not move. His body was cold and stiff.

"He is dead," an Elf said solemnly.

Shadrach gulped in sudden alarm. Cold sweat stoodout abruptly on his forehead. "My gosh! My old friend!What have I done?"

"You have slain the Great Troll."

Shadrach paused.

"I*what?"*

"You have slain the Great Troll, leader of all theTrolls."

"This has never happened before," another Elfexclaimed excitedly. "The Great Troll has lived for cen-turies. Nobody imagined he could die. This is our mosthistoric moment."

All the Elves gazed down at the silent form with awe,awe mixed with more than a little fear.

"Oh, go on!" Shadrach said. "That's just PhineasJudd."

But as he spoke, a chill moved up his spine. He

remembered what he had seen a little while before, ashe stood close by Phineas, as the dying moonlight crossedhis old friend's face.

"Look." One of the Elves bent over and unfastenedPhineas's blue-serge vest. He pushed the coat and vestaside. "See?"

Shadrach bent down to look.

He gasped.

Underneath Phineas Judd's blue-serge vest was a suitof mail, an encrusted mesh of ancient, rusting iron, fas-tened tightly around the squat body. On the mail stoodan engraved insignia, dark and time-worn, embeddedwith dirt and rust. A moldering half-obliterated emblem.The emblem of a crossed owl leg and toadstool.

The emblem of the Great Troll.

"Golly," Shadrach said. "And*I* killed him."

For a long time he gazed silently down. Then, slowly,realization began to grow in him. He straightened up, a smile forming on his face.

"What is it, O King?" an Elf piped.

"I just thought of something," Shadrach said. "I justrealized that—that since the Great Troll is dead and theTroll army has been put to flight—"

He broke off. All the Elves were waiting.

"I thought maybe I—that is, maybe if you don't need me any more—"

The Elves listened respectfully. "What is it, MightyKing? Go on."

"I thought maybe now I could go back to the fillingstation and not be king any more." Shadrach glanced hopefully around at them. "Do you think so? With thewar over and all. With him dead. What do you say?"

For a time, the Elves were silent. They gazed unhap-pily down at the ground. None of them said anything.At last they began moving away, collecting their bannersand pennants.

"Yes, you may go back," an Elf said quietly. "Thewar is over. The Trolls have been defeated. You may return to your filling station, if that is what you want."

A flood of relief swept over Shadrach. He straightenedup, grinning from ear to ear. "Thanks! That's fine. That'sreally fine. That's the best news I've heard in my life."

He moved away from the Elves, rubbing his handstogether and blowing on them.

"Thanks an awful lot." He grinned around at the silent Elves. "Well, I guess I'll be running along, then. It's late.Late and cold. It's been a hard night. I'll—I'll see youaround."

The Elves nodded silently.

"Fine. Well, good night." Shadrach turned and startedalong the path. He stopped for a moment, waving backat the Elves. "It was quite a battle, wasn't it? We really licked them." He hurried on along the path. Once againhe stopped, looking back and waving. "Sure glad I couldhelp out. Well, good night!"

One or two of the Elves waved, but none of them saidanything.

Shadrach Jones walked slowly toward his place. Hecould see it from the rise, the highway that few cars traveled, the filling station falling to ruin, the house thatmight not last as long as himself, and not enough moneycoming in to repair them or buy a better location.

He turned around and went back.

The Elves were still gathered there in the silence ofthe night. They had not moved away.

"I was hoping you hadn't gone," Shadrach said,relieved.

"And we were hoping you would not leave," said asoldier.

Shadrach kicked a stone. It bounced through the tight silence and stopped. The Elves were still watching him.

"Leave?" Shadrach asked. "And me King of theElves?"

"Then you will remain our king?" an Elf cried.

"It's a hard thing for a man of my age to change. To stop selling gasoline and suddenly be a king. It scaredme for a while. But it doesn't any more."

"You will? You*will?"*

"Sure," said Shadrach Jones.

The little circle of Elf torches closed in joyously. Intheir light, he saw a platform like the one that had carried the old King of the Elves. But this one was much

larger, big enough to hold a man, and dozens of the

soldiers waited with proud shoulders under the shafts.A soldier gave him a happy bow. "For you, Sire." Shadrach climbed aboard. It was less comfortable than

walking, but he knew this was how they wanted to take

him to the Kingdom of the Elves.

FLYING PAN

Robert F. Young

Marianne Summers worked in a frying-pan factory. Foreight hours every day and for five days every week shestood by a production-line conveyor and every time afrying pan went by she put a handle on it. And all thewhile she stood by one conveyor she rode along onanother—a big conveyor with days and nights over it instead of fluorescent tubes, and months standing along it instead of people. And every time she passed a monthit added something to her or took something away, andas time went by she became increasingly aware of theultimate month—the one standing far down the line,waiting to put a handle on her soul.

Sometimes Marianne sat down and wondered how shecould possibly have gotten into such a rut, but all thewhile she wondered she knew that she was only kiddingherself, that she knew perfectly well why. Ruts weremade for untalented people, and if you were untalentedyou ended up in one; moreover if you were untalentedand were too stubborn to go home and admit you wereuntalented, you stayed in one.

There was a great deal of difference between dancingon TV and putting handles on frying pans: the differencebetween being graceful and gawky, lucky and unlucky,or—to get right back to the basic truth again—the differ-ence between being talented and untalented. No matterhow hard you practiced or how hard you tried, if your legs were too fat, no one wanted you and you ended upin a rut or in a frying-pan factory, which was the samething, and you went to work every morning and per-formed the same tasks and you came home every night

and thought the same thoughts, and all the while yourode down the big conveyor between the merciless months and came closer and closer to the ultimate monththat would put the final touches on you and make you just like everybody else. . . .

Mornings were getting up and cooking breakfasts inher small apartment and taking the bus to work. Eve-nings were going home and cooking lonely suppers andafterward TV. Weekends were writing letters and walk-ing in the park. Nothing ever changed and Marianne hadbegun to think that nothing ever would. . . .

And then one night when she came home, she founda flying frying pan on her window ledge.

It had been a day like all days, replete with fryingpans, superintendents, boredom and tired feet. Around

ten o'clock the maintenance man stopped by and askedher to go to the Halloween Dance with him. The Hallow-een Dance was a yearly event sponsored by the companyand was scheduled for that night. So far, Marianne hadturned down fifteen would-be escorts.

A frying pan went by and she put a handle on it. "No,I don't think so," she said.

"Why?" the maintenance man asked bluntly.

It was a good question, one that Marianne couldn'tanswer honestly because she wasn't being honest withherself. So she told the same little white lie she had toldall the others: "I—I don't like dances."

"Oh." The maintenance man gave her the same lookhis fifteen predecessors had given her, and moved on.Marianne shrugged her shoulders. I don't care*what* theythink, she told herself. Another frying pan went by, andanother and another.

After a while, noon came, and Marianne and all theother employees ate frankfurters and sauerkraut in the company cafeteria. The parade of frying pans recom-menced promptly at 12:30.

During the afternoon she was approached twice moreby would-be escorts. You'd have thought she was theonly girl in the factory. Sometimes she hated her blueeyes and round pink face, and sometimes she even hated her bright yellow hair, which had some of the properties

of a magnet. But hating the way she looked didn't solveher problems—it only aggravated them—and by the time4:30 came she had a headache and she heartily despised the whole world.

Diminutive trick-or-treaters were already making the rounds when she got off the bus at the corner. Witcheswalked and goblins leered, and pumpkin candles sput-tered in the dusk. But Marianne hardly noticed.

Halloween was for children, not for an embittered oldwoman of twenty-two who worked in a frying-pan factory.

She walked down the street to the apartment buildingand picked up her mail at the desk. There were two letters, one from her mother, one from—

Marianne's heart pounded all the way up in the eleva-tor and all the way down the sixth-floor corridor to herapartment. But she forced herself to open her mother'sletter first. It was a typical letter, not essentially differentfrom the last one. The grape crop had been good, butwhat with the trimming and the tying and the diskingand the horse-hoeing, and paying off the pickers, therewasn't going to be much left of the check—if and whenit came; the hens were laying better, but then they always did whenever egg prices dropped; Ed Olmstead was put-ting a new addition on his general store (it was hightime!); Doris Hickett had just given birth to a 7 Ib. babyboy; Pa sent his love, and please forget your foolish pride and come home. P.S.—Marianne should see the wonder-ful remodeling job Howard King was doing on his house. It was going to be a regular palace when he got done.

Marianne swallowed the lump in her throat. Sheopened the other letter with trembling fingers:

dear marianne,

I said I wasn't going to write you any more, that I'dalready written you too many times asking you to come home and marry me and you never gave me ananswer one way or the other. But sometimes a fellow's pride don't amount to much.

I guess you know I'm remodeling the house and Iguess you know the reason why. In case you don'tit's the same reason I bought the house in the first

place, because of you. I only got one picture window and I don't know whether I should put it in the parloror in the kitchen. The kitchen would be fine, but allyou can see from there is the barn and you knowhow the barn looks, but if I put it in the parlor thenorthwest wind would be sure to crack it the first winter though you'd get a good view of the road and the willows along the creek. I don't know what to do.The hills behind the south meadow are all red andgold the way you used to like them. The willows looklike they're on fire. Nights I sit on the steps and pic-ture you coming walking down the road and stopping by the gate and then I get up and walk down the pathand I say, "I'm glad you've come back, Marianne. I guess you know I still love you." I guess if anybody ever heard me they'd think I was crazy because theroad is always empty when I get there, and there's no one ever standing by the gate.

howard

There had been that crisp December night with the soundof song and laughter intermingling with the crackling ofthe ice beneath the runners and the chug-chugging of thetractor as it pulled the hay-filled sleigh, and the stars sobright and close they touched the topmost branches ofthe silhouetted trees, and the snow, pale and clean in the starlight, stretching away over the hills, up and up, intothe first dark fringe of the forest; and herself, sitting onthe tractor with Howard instead of in the hay with therest of the party, and the tractor lurching and bumping,its headbeams lighting the way over the rutted countryroad—

Howard's arm was around her and their frosty breaths blended as they kissed. "I love you, Marianne," Howard said, and she could see the words issuing from his lips inlittle silvery puffs and drifting away into the darkness,and suddenly she saw her own words, silver too, hoveringtenuously in the air before her, and presently she heardthem in wondrous astonishment: "I love you, too,Howie. I love you, too. . . ."

* * *

She didn't know how long she'd been sitting there cry-ing before she first became aware of the ticking sound.A long time, she guessed, judging by the stiffness of herlimbs. The sound was coming from her bedroom windowand what it made her think of most was the commonpins she and the other kids used to tie on strings and rigup so they'd keep swinging against the windowpanes oflonely old people sitting alone on Halloween.

She had lit the table lamp when she came in, and itsbeams splashed reassuringly on the living-room rug. But beyond the aura of the light, shadows lay along the walls,coalesced in the bedroom doorway. Marianne stood up,concentrating on the sound. The more she listened themore she doubted that she was being victimized by theneighborhood small fry: the ticks came too regularly tobe ascribed to a pin dangling at the end of a string. Firstthere would be a staccato series of them, then silence, thenanother series. Moreover, her bedroom window was sixstories above the street and nowhere near a fire escape.

But if the small fry weren't responsible for the sound,who was? There was an excellent way to find out.

Mari-anne forced her legs into motion, walked slowly to thebedroom doorway, switched on the ceiling light andentered the room. A few short steps brought her to the window by her bed.

She peered through the glass. Something gleamed onthe window ledge but she couldn't make out what it was.The ticking noise had ceased and traffic sounds driftedup from below. Across tile way, the warm rectangles ofwindows made precise patterns in the darkness, anddown the street a huge sign said in big blue letters:spruck's corn pads are the best.

Some of Marianne's confidence returned. She releasedthe catch and slowly raised the window. At first shedidn't recognize the gleaming object as a flying saucer;she took it for an upside-down frying pan without a han-dle. And so ingrained was the habit by now that shereached for it instinctively, with the unconscious inten- tion of putting a handle on it.

"Don't touch my ship!"

That was when Marianne saw the spaceman. He wasstanding off to one side, his diminutive helmet glimmer-

ing in the radiance ofspruck's corn pads. He wore agray, form-fitting space suit replete with ray guns, shoul-der tanks, and boots with turned-up toes, and he wasevery bit of five niches tall. He had drawn one of theray guns. (Marianne didn't know for sure they were ray guns, but judging from the rest of his paraphernalia,what else could they be?) and was holding it by the bar- rel. It was clear to Marianne that he had been tappingon the window with it.

It was also clear to Marianne that she was going, orhad gone, out of her mind. She started to close the window—

"Stop, or I'll burn you!"

Her hands fell away from the sash. The voice hadseemed real enough, a little on the thin side, perhaps, but certainly audible enough. Was it possible? Could thistiny creature be something more than a figment?

He had changed his gun to his other hand, she noticed, and its minute muzzle pointed directly at her forehead. When she made no further move, he permitted the barrelto drop slightly and said, "That's better. Now if you'll behave yourself and do as I say, maybe I can spare yourlife."

"Who are you?" Marianne asked.

It was as though he had been awaiting the question.He stepped dramatically into the full radiance of the light streaming through the window and sheathed his gun. Hebowed almost imperceptibly, and his helmet flashed likethe tinsel on a gum wrapper. "Prince Moy Trehano," hesaid majestically, though the majesty was marred by the thinness of his voice, "Emperor of 10,000 suns, Com-mander of the vast space fleet which is at this very momentin orbit around this insignificant planet you call 'Earth'!"

"Wh—why?"

"Because we're going to bomb you, that's why!"

"But why do you want to bomb us?"

"Because you're a menace to galactic civilization! Whyelse?"

"Oh," Marianne said.

"We're going to blow your cities to smithereens. There'll be so much death and destruction in our wake

that you'll never recover from it....Do you have anybatteries?"

For a moment Marianne thought she had misunder-stood. "Batteries?"

"Flashlight batteries will do." Prince Moy Trehanoseemed embarrassed, though it was impossible to tell forsure because his helmet completely hid his face. Therewas a small horizontal slit where, presumably, his eyes were, but that was the only opening. "My atomic drive'sbeen acting up," he went on. "In fact, this was a forcedlanding. Fortunately, however, I know a secret formulawhereby I can convert the energy in a dry-cell batteryinto a controlled chain reaction. Do you have any?"

"I'll see," Marianne said.

"Remember now, no tricks. I'll burn you right throughthe walls with my atomic ray gun if you try to call anyone!"

"I—I think there's a flashlight in my bed-tabledrawer."

There was. She unscrewed the base, shook out thebatteries and set them on the window sill. Prince MoyTrehano went into action. He opened a little door on theside of his ship and rolled the batteries through. Thenhe turned to Marianne. "Don't you move an inch from where you are!" he said. "I'll be watching you through the viewports." He stepped inside and closed the door.

Marianne held her terror at bay and peered at thespaceship more closely. They aren't really flying *saucers* at all, she thought; they're just like frying pans . . . flyingfrying pans. It even had a little bracket that could havebeen the place where the handle was supposed to go.Not only that, its ventral regions strongly suggested afrying-pan cover.

She shook her head, trying to dear it. First thing youknew, everything she saw would look like a frying pan.She remembered the viewports Prince Moy Trehano hadmentioned, and presently she made them out—a seriesof tiny crinkly windows encircling the upper part of thesaucer. She leaned closer, trying to see into the interior.

"Stand back!"

Marianne straightened up abruptly, so abruptly thatshe nearly lost her kneeling position before the window

and toppled back into the room. Prince Moy Trehanohad reemerged from his vessel and was standing imperi-ously in the combined radiance of the bedroom light andspruck's corn pads.

"The technical secrets of my stellar empire are not forthe likes of you," he said. "But as a recompense for your assistance in the repairing of my atomic drive I am goingto divulge my space fleet's target areas.

"We do not contemplate the complete destruction ofhumanity. We wish merely to destroy the present civiliza-tion, and to accomplish this it is our intention to wipeout every city on Earth. Villages will be exempt, as willsmall towns with populations of less than 20,000 humans.The bombings will begin as soon as I get back to myfleet—a matter of four or five hours—and if I do not return, they will begin in four or five hours anyway. So if you value your life, go ho—I mean, leave the city atonce. I, Prince Moy Trehano, have spoken!"

Once again the bow, and the iridescing of the tinsellyhelmet, and then Prince Moy Trehano stepped into thespaceship and slammed the door. A whirring soundensued, and the vessel began to shake. Colored lights went on in the viewports—a red one here, a blue onethere, then a green one—creating a Christmas-tree effect.

Marianne watched, entranced. Suddenly the door flewopen and Prince Moy Trehano's head popped out. "Getback!" he shouted. "Get back! You don't want to get burned by the jets, do you?" His head disappeared andthe door slammed again.

Jets? Were flying saucers jet-propelled? Even as she instinctively shrank back into her bedroom, Mariannepondered the question. Then, as the saucer rose fromthe window ledge and into the night, she saw the littlestreams of fire issuing from its base. They were far moresuggestive of sparks from a Zippo lighter than they wereof jets, but if Prince Moy Trehano had said they werejets, then jets they were. Marianne was not inclined toargue the point.

When she thought about the incident afterward sheremembered a lot of points that she could have argued— if she'd wanted to. Prince Moy Trehano's knowledge of the English language, for one, and his slip of the tongue

when he started to tell her to go home, for another. Andthen there was the matter of his atomic drive. Certainly, Marianne reflected later, if the bombs his fleet was sup- posed to have carried were as technically naive as hisatomic drive, the world had never had much to worry about.

But at the moment she didn't feel like arguing anypoints. Anyway, she was too busy to argue. Busy pack-ing. Under ordinary circumstances Prince Moy Trehano'sthreatened destruction of the cities of Earth would neverhave been reason enough to send her scurrying to thesticks. But Lord, when you were so sick of the pinchedlittle channels of blue that city dwellers called a sky, ofthe disciplined little plots of grass that took the place of fields, of bored agents who sneered at you just becauseyou had fat legs; when, deep in your heart, you wantedan excuse to go home—then it was reason enough.

More than enough.

At the terminal she paused long enough to send atelegram:

dear howie: put the picture window in thekitchen, i don't mind the barn. will be home onthe first train.

marianne

When the lights of the city faded into the dark line ofthe horizon, Prince Moy Trehano relaxed at the

controls. His mission, he reflected, had come off reasonably well.

Of course there had been the inevitable unforeseencomplication. But he couldn't blame anyone for it besides himself. He should have checked the flashlight batteriesbefore he swiped them. He knew well enough that halfthe stock in Olmstead's general store had been gathering dust for years, that Ed Olmstead would rather die thanthrow away anything that some unwary customer mightbuy. But he'd been so busy rigging up his ship that hejust hadn't thought.

In a way, though, his having to ask Marianne's help inthe repairing of his improvised motor had lent his storya conviction it might otherwise have lacked. If he'd saidright out of a clear blue sky that his "fleet" was going

to bomb the cities and spare the villages, it wouldn't havesounded right. Her giving him the batteries had suppliedhim with a motivation. And his impromptu explanationabout converting their energy into a controlled chainreaction had been a perfect cover-up. Marianne, he wassure, didn't know any more about atomic drives than hedid.

Prince Moy Trehano shifted to a more comfortableposition on his matchbox pilot's seat. He took off his tinfoil helmet and let his beard fall free. He switchedoff the Christmas-tree lights beneath the Saran Wrap viewports and looked out at the village-bejeweledcountryside.

By morning he'd be home, snug and secure in his min-iature mansion in the willows. First, though, he'd hidethe frying pan in the same rabbit hole where he'd hiddenthe handle, so no one would ever find it. Then he couldsit back and take it easy, comforted by the knowledge ofa good deed well done—and by the happy prospect ofhis household chores being cut in half.

A witch went by on a broom. Prince Moy Trehanoshook his head in disgust. Such an outmoded means oflocomotion! It was no wonder humans didn't believe inwitches any more. You had to keep up with the times ifyou expected to stay in the race. Why, if he were as old-fashioned and as antiquated as his contemporaries he might have been stuck with a bachelor for the rest of hislife, and a shiftless bachelor—when it came to house- work, anyway—at that. Not that Howard King wasn't a fine human being; he was as fine as they came. But younever got your dusting and your sweeping done mooningon the front steps like a sick calf, talking to yourself andwaiting for your girl to come home from the city.

When you came right down to it, you*had* to be mod-ern. Why, Marianne wouldn't even have*seen* him, to saynothing of hearing what he'd had to say, if he'd worn histraditional clothing, used his own name and employed hisnormal means of locomotion. Twentieth-century humanswere just as imaginative as eighteenth-century and nine-teenth-century humans: they believed in creatures fromblack lagoons and monsters from 20,000 fathoms and fly-ing saucers and beings from outer space—

But they didn't believe in brownies. . . .

MY FATHER, THE CAT

Henry Slesar

My mother was a lovely, delicate woman from the coastof Brittany, who was miserable sleeping on less than three mattresses, and who, it is said, was once injuredby a falling leaf in her garden. My grandfather, a descen-dant of the French nobility whose family had ridden thetumbrils of the Revolution, tended her

fragile body and spirit with the same loving care given rare, brief-bloom-ing flowers. You may imagine from this his attitude con-cerning marriage. He lived in terror of the vulgar, heavy-handed man who would one day win my mother's heart, and at last, this persistent dread killed him. His concernwas unnecessary, however, for my mother chose a suitor who was as free of mundane brutality as a husband couldbe. Her choice was Dauphin, a remarkable white catwhich strayed onto the estate shortly after his death.

Dauphin was an unusually large Angora, and his abil-ity to speak in cultured French, English, and Italian wassufficient to cause my mother to adopt him as a house-hold pet. It did not take long for her to realize thatDauphin deserved a higher status, and he became herfriend, protector, and confidante. He never spoke of hisorigin, nor where he had acquired the classical educationwhich made him such an entertaining companion. Aftertwo years, it was easy for my mother, an unworldlywoman at best, to forget the dissimilarity in their species.In fact, she was convinced that Dauphin was anenchanted prince, and Dauphin, in consideration of herillusions, never dissuaded her. At last, they were marriedby an understanding clergyman of the locale, who sol-

emnly filled in the marriage application with the name of M. Edwarde Dauphin.

I, Etienne Dauphin, am their son.

To be candid, I am a handsome youth, not unlike my mother in the delicacy of my features. My father's heri-tage is evident in my large, feline eyes, and in my slightbody and quick movements. My mother's death, when Iwas four, left me in the charge of my father and hiscoterie of loyal servants, and I could not have wished fora finer upbringing. It is to my father's patient tutoringthat I owe whatever graces I now possess. It was myfather, the cat, whose gentle paws guided me to the trea-sure houses of literature, art, and music, whose whiskers bristled with pleasure at a goose well cooked, at a mealwell served, at a wine well chosen. How many happyhours we shared! He knew more of life and the humanit-ies, my father, the cat, than any human I have met inall my twenty-three years.

Until the age of eighteen, my education was his per-sonal challenge. Then, it was his desire to send me intothe world outside the gates. He chose for me a universityin America, for he was deeply fond of what he called"that great raw country," where he believed my felinequalities might be tempered by the aggressiveness of therough-coated barking dogs I would be sure to meet.

I must confess to a certain amount of unhappiness inmy early American years, torn as I was from the comfortsof the estate and the wisdom of my father, the cat. ButI became adapted, and even upon my graduation fromthe university, sought and held employment in a metro-politan art museum. It was there I met Joanna, the youngwoman I intended to make my bride.

Joanna was a product of the great American south-west, the daughter of a cattle-raiser. There was a bloom-ing vitality in her face and her body, a lustiness born of open skies and desert. Her hair was not the gold of antiq-uity; it was new gold, freshly mined from the black rock.Her eyes were not like old-world diamonds; their sparkle was that of sunlight on a cascading river. Her figure wasbold, an open declaration of her sex.

She was, perhaps, an unusual choice for the son of afairy-like mother and an Angora cat. But from the first

meeting of our eyes, I knew that I would someday bringJoanna to my father's estate to present her as my fiancee.

I approached that occasion with understandable trepi-dation. My father had been explicit in his advice beforeI departed for America, but on no point had he beenmore emphatic than secrecy concerning himself. Heassured me that revelation of my paternity would bringridicule and unhappiness upon me. The advice wassound, of course, and not even Joanna knew that our journey's end would bring us to the estate of a large,cultured, and conversing cat. I had deliberately fostered the impression that I was orphaned, believing that theproper place for revealing the truth was the atmosphereof my father's home in France. I was certain that Joannawould accept her father-in-law without distress. Indeed,hadn't nearly a score of human servants remaineddevoted to their feline master for almost a generation?

We had agreed to be wed on the first of June, and onMay the fourth, emplaned in New York for Paris. Wewere met at Orly Field by Francois, my father's solemnmanservant, who had been delegated not so much as escort as he was chaperone, my father having retainedmuch of the old world proprieties. It was a long trip byautomobile to our estate in Brittany, and I must admitto a brooding silence throughout the drive which frankly puzzled Joanna.

However, when the great stone fortress that was ourhome came within view, my fears and doubts were quickly dispelled. Joanna, like so many Americans, wasthrilled at the aura of venerability and royal custom sur-rounding the estate. Francois placed her in charge ofMadame Jolinet, who clapped her plump old hands with delight at the sight of her fresh blonde beauty, and chat-tered and clucked like a mother hen as she led Joanna to her room on the second floor. As for myself, I hadone immediate wish: to see my father, the cat.

He greeted me in the library, where he had been anx-iously awaiting our arrival, curled up in his favorite chair by the fireside, a wide-mouthed goblet of cognac by hisside. As I entered the room, he lifted a paw formally,but then his reserve was dissolved by the emotion of ourreunion, and he licked my face in unashamed joy.

Francois refreshed his glass, and poured another for me, and we toasted each other's well-being.

"To you,*mon purr"* I said, using the affectionatename of my childhood memory.

"To Joanna," my father said. He smacked his lips over the cognac, and wiped his whiskers gravely. "And whereis this paragon?"

"With Madame Jolinet. She will be down shortly."

"And you have told her everything?"

I blushed. "No,*mon purr,* Ihave not. I thought it bestto wait until we were home. She is a wonderful woman,"I added impulsively. "She will not be—"

"Horrified?" my father said. "What makes you so cer-tain, my son?"

"Because she is a woman of great heart," I saidstoutly. "She was educated at a fine college for womenin Eastern America. Her ancestors were rugged people,given to legend and folklore. She is a warm, human per-son—"

"Human," my father sighed, and his tail swished."You are expecting too much of your beloved, Etienne. Even a woman of the finest character may be dismayedin this situation."

"But my mother—"

"Your mother was an exception, a changeling of theFairies. You must not look for your mother's soul in Joanna's eyes." He jumped from his chair, and cametowards me, resting his paw upon my knee. "I am gladyou have not spoken of me, Etienne. Now you must keepyour silence forever."

I was shocked. I reached down and touched myfather's silky fur, saddened by the look of his age in his gray, gold-flecked eyes, and by the tinge of yellow in hiswhite coat.

"No,*mon purr,"* I said. "Joanna must know the truth.Joanna must know how proud I am to be the son of Edwarde Dauphin."

"Then you will lose her."

"Never! That cannot happen!"

My father walked stiffly to the fireplace, staring intothe gray ashes. "Ring for Francois," he said. "Let him build the fire. I am cold, Etienne."

I walked to the cord and pulled it. My father turnedto me and said: "You must wait, my son. At dinner thisevening, perhaps. Do not speak of me until then."

"Very well, father."

When I left the library, I encountered Joanna at the head of the stairway, and she spoke to me excitedly.

"Oh, Etienne! What a*beautiful* old house. I know Iwill love it! May we see the rest?"

"Of course," I said.

"You look troubled. Is something wrong?"

"No, no. I was thinking how lovely you are."

We embraced, and her warm full body against mineconfirmed my conviction that we should never be parted.She put her arm in mine, and we strolled through thegreat rooms of the house. She was ecstatic at their sizeand elegance, exclaiming over the carpeting, the gnarledfurniture, the ancient silver and pewter, the gallery offamily paintings. When she came upon an early portraitof my mother, her eyes misted.

"She was lovely," Joanna said. "Like a princess! Andwhat of your father? Is there no portrait of him?"

"No," I said hurriedly. "No portrait." I had spokenmy first lie to Joanna, for there was a painting, half-

completed, which my mother had begun in the last yearof her life. It was a whispering little watercolor, and Joanna discovered it to my consternation.

"What a magnificent cat!" she said. "Was it a pet?"

"It is Dauphin," I said nervously.

She laughed. "He has your eyes, Etienne."

"Joanna, I must tell you something—"

"And this ferocious gentleman with the moustaches?Who is he?"

"My grandfather. Joanna, you must listen—"

Francois, who had been following our inspection tourat shadow's-length, interrupted. I suspected that his tim- ing was no mere coincidence.

"We will be serving dinner at seven-thirty," he said."If the lady would care to dress—"

"Of course," Joanna said. "Will you excuse me,Etienne?"

I bowed to her, and she was gone.

At fifteen minutes to the appointed dining time, I was

ready, and hastened below to talk once more with myfather. He was in the dining room, instructing the ser-vants as to the placement of the silver and accessories.My father was proud of the excellence of his table, and took all his meals in the splendid manner. His apprecia-tion of food and wine was unsurpassed in my experience,and it had always been the greatest of pleasures for me to watch him at table, stalking across the damask anddipping delicately into the silver dishes prepared for him.He pretended to be too busy with his dinner preparationsto engage me in conversation, but I insisted.

"I must talk to you," I said. "We must decide togetherhow to do this."

"It will not be easy," he answered with a twinkle."Consider Joanna's view. A cat as large and as old as myself is cause enough for comment. A cat that speaksis alarming. A cat that dines at table with the householdis shocking. And a cat whom you must introduce asyour—"

"Stop it!" I cried. "Joanna must know the truth. Youmust help me reveal it to her."

"Then you will not heed my advice?"

"In all things but this. Our marriage can never behappy unless she accepts you for what you are."

"And if there is no marriage?"

I would not admit to this possibility. Joanna was mine;nothing could alter that. The look of pain and bewilder-ment in my eyes must have been evident to my father, for he touched my arm gently with his

paw and said:

"I will help you, Etienne. You must give me yourtrust."

"Always!"

"Then come to dinner with Joanna and explain noth-ing. Wait for me to appear."

I grasped his paw and raised it to my lips. "Thank you,father!"

He turned to Francois, and snapped: "You have my instructions?"

"Yes, sir," the servant replied.

"Then all is ready. I shall return to my room now,Etienne. You may bring your fiancee to dine."

I hastened up the stairway, and found Joanna ready,

strikingly beautiful in shimmering white satin. Together, we descended the grand staircase and entered the room.

Her eyes shone at the magnificence of the service set upon the table, at the soldiery array of fine wines, someof them already poured into their proper glasses for myfather's enjoyment:*Haut Medoc,* from*St. Estephe,* authentic*Chablis, Epernay Champagne,* and an Ameri-can import from the Napa Valley of which he was fond.I waited expectantly for his appearance as we sipped ouraperitif, while Joanna chatted about innocuous matters, with no idea of the tormented state I was in.

At eight o'clock, my father had not yet made hisappearance, and I grew ever more distraught as Francoissignalled for the serving of the*bouillon au madere.* Hadhe changed his mind? Would I be left to explain mystatus without his help? I hadn't realized until thismoment how difficult a task I had allotted for myself,and the fear of losing Joanna was terrible within me. Thesoup was flat and tasteless on my tongue, and the miseryin my manner was too apparent for Joanna to miss.

"What is it, Etienne?" she said. "You've been somorose all day. Can't you tell me what's wrong?"

"No, it's nothing. It's just—" I let the impulse takepossession of my speech. "Joanna, there's something I should tell you. About my mother, and my father—"

"Ahem," Francois said.

He turned to the doorway, and our glances followedhis.

"Oh, Etienne!" Joanna cried, in a voice ringing withdelight.

It was my father, the cat, watching us with his gray,gold-flecked eyes. He approached the dining table, regarding Joanna with timidity and caution.

"It's the cat in the painting!" Joanna said. "You didn'ttell me he was here, Etienne. He's beautiful!"

"Joanna, this is—"

"Dauphin! I would have known him anywhere. Here,Dauphin! Here, kitty, kitty, kitty!"

Slowly, my father approached her outstretched hand,and allowed her to scratch the thick fur on the back ofhis neck.

"Aren't you the pretty little pussy! Aren't you thesweetest little thing!"

"Joanna!"

She lifted my father by the haunches, and held him inher lap, stroking his fur and cooing the silly little wordsthat women address to their pets. The sight pained andconfused me, and I sought to find an opening word thatwould allow me to explain, yet hoping all the time that my father would himself provide the answer.

Then my father spoke.

"Meow," he said.

"Are you hungry?" Joanna asked solicitously. "Is the little pussy hungry?"

"Meow," my father said, and I believed my heartbroke then and there. He leaped from her lap and padded across the room. I watched him through blurred eyesas he followed Francois to the corner, where the servanthad placed a shallow bowl of milk. He lapped at iteagerly, until the last white drop was gone. Then heyawned and stretched, and trotted back to the doorway,with one fleeting glance in my direction that spoke articu-lately of what I must do next.

"What a wonderful animal," Joanna said.

"Yes," I answered. "He was my mother's favorite."

KID STUFF

Isaac Asimov

The first pang of nausea had passed and Jan Prentisssaid, "Damn it, you're an insect."

It was a statement of fact, not an insult, and the thingthat sat on Prentiss' desk said, "Of course."

It was about a foot long, very thin, and in shape afarfetched and miniature caricature of a human being. Itsstalky arms and legs originated in pairs from the upperportion of its body. The legs were longer and thickerthan the arms. They extended the length of the body,then bent forward at the knee.

The creature sat upon those knees and, when it didso, the stub of its fuzzy abdomen just cleared Prentiss'desk.

There was plenty of time for Prentiss to absorb thesedetails. The object had no objection to being stared at.It seemed to welcome it, in fact, as though it were usedto exciting admiration.

"What are you?" Prentiss did not feel completelyrational. Five minutes ago, he had been seated at his typewriter, working leisurely on the story he had prom-ised Horace W. Browne for last month's issue of *Far*-fetched Fantasy Fiction.He had been in a perfectly usualframe of mind. He had felt quite fine; quite sane.

And then a block of air immediately to the right ofthe typewriter had shimmered, clouded over and con-densed into the little horror that dangled its black andshiny feet over the edge of the desk.

Prentiss wondered in a detached sort of way that hebothered talking to it. This was the first time his profes-

sion had so crudely affected his dreams. It*must* be adream, he told himself.

"I'm an Avalonian," said the being. "I'm from Ava-lon, in other words." Its tiny face ended in a mandibularmouth. Two swaying three-inch antennae rose from aspot above either eye, while the eyes themselves gleamedrichly in their many-faceted fashion. There was no signof nostrils.

Naturally not, thought Prentiss wildly. It has tobreathe through vents in its abdomen. It must be talking with its abdomen then. Or using telepathy.

"Avalon?" he said stupidly. He thought: Avalon? Theland of the fay in King Arthur's time?

"Certainly," said the creature, answering the thoughtsmoothly. "I'm an elf."

"Oh, no!" Prentiss put his hands to his face, took themaway and found the elf still there, its feet thumping against the top drawer. Prentiss was not a drinking man,or a nervous one. In fact, he was considered a very pro-saic sort of person by his neighbors. He had a comfort-able paunch, a reasonable but not excessive amount ofhair on his head, an amiable wife and an active ten-year-old son. His neighbors were, of course, kept ignorant of the fact that he paid off the mortgage on his house bywriting fantasies of one sort or another.

Till now, however, this secret vice had never affectedhis psyche. To be sure, his wife had shaken her headover his addiction many times. It was her standard opin-ion that he was wasting, even perverting, his talents.

"Who on Earth reads these things?" she would say."All that stuff about demons and gnomes and wishing rings and elves. All that*kid* stuff, if you want my frankopinion."

"You're quite wrong," Prentiss would reply stiffly. "Modern fantasies are very sophisticated and mature treatments of folk motifs. Behind the façade of glib unre-ality there frequently lie trenchant comments on theworld of today. Fantasy in modern style is, above all,adult fare."

Blanche shrugged. She had heard him speak at conven-tions so these comments weren't new to her.

"Besides," he would add, "fantasies pay the mortgage,don't they?"

"Maybe so," she would reply, "but it would be nice ifyou'd switch to mysteries. At least you'd get quarter-reprint sales out of those and we could even tell theneighbors what you do for a living."

Prentiss groaned in spirit. Blanche could come in nowat any time and find him talking to himself (it was tooreal for a dream; it might be a hallucination). After thathe*would* have to write mysteries for a living—or take towork.

"You're quite wrong," said the elf. "This is neither adream nor a hallucination."

"Then why don't you go away?" asked Prentiss.

"I intend to. This is scarcely my idea of a place to live.And you're coming with me."

"I am*not*. What the hell do you think you are, tellingme what I'm going to do?"

"If you think that's a respectful way to speak to arepresentative of an older culture, I can't say much for your upbringing."

"You're not an older culture------" He wanted to add:

You're just a figment of my imagination; but he had beena writer too long to be able to bring himself to committhe cliché.

"We insects," said the elf freezingly, "existed half abillion years before the first mammal was invented. We watched the dinosaurs come in and we watched them go out. As for you man-things—strictly newcomers."

For the first time, Prentiss noted that, from the spoton the elf's body where its limbs sprouted, a third vesti-gial pair existed as well. It increased the insecticity of theobject and Prentiss' sense of indignation grew.

He said, "You needn't waste your company on socialinferiors."

"I wouldn't," said the elf, "believe me. But necessitydrives, you know. It's a rather complicated story but when you hear it, you'll*want* to help."

Prentiss said uneasily, "Look, I don't have much time.Blanche—my wife will be in here any time. She'll beupset."

"She won't be here," said the elf. "I've set up a blockin her mind."

"What!"

"Quite harmless, I assure you. But, after all, we can'tafford to be disturbed, can we?"

Prentiss sat back in his chair, dazed and unhappy.

The elf said, "We elves began our association with youman-things immediately after the last ice age began. Ithad been a miserable time for us, as you can imagine. We couldn't wear animal carcasses or live in holes asyour uncouth ancestors did. It took incredible stores ofpsychic energy to keep warm."

"Incredible stores of what?"

"Psychic energy. You know nothing at all about it.Your mind is too coarse to grasp the concept. Please don't interrupt."

The elf continued, "Necessity drove us to experimentwith your people's brains. They were crude, but large. The cells were inefficient, almost worthless, but there were a vast number of them. We could use those brainsas a concentrating device, a type of psychic lens, andincrease the available energy which our own minds couldtap. We survived the ice age handily and without havingto retreat to the tropics as in previous such eras.

"Of course, we were spoiled. When warmth returned,we didn't abandon the man-things. We used them toincrease our standard of living generally. We could travelfaster, eat better, do more, and we lost our old, simple,virtuous way of life forever. Then, too, there was milk."

"Milk?" said Prentiss. "I don't see the connection."

"A divine liquid. I only tasted it once in my life. Butelfin classic poetry speaks of it in superlatives. In the old days, men always supplied us plentifully. Why mammalsof all things should be blessed with it and insects not isa complete mystery. . . . How unfortunate it is that themen-things got out of hand."

"They did?"

"Two hundred years ago."

"Good for us."

"Don't be narrow-minded," said the elf stiffly. "It wasa useful association for all parties until you man-things

learned to handle physical energies in quantity. It wasjust the sort of gross thing your minds are capable of."

"What was wrong with it?"

"It's hard to explain. It was all very well for us to lightup our nightly revels with fireflies brightened by use oftwo manpower of psychic energy. But then you men- creatures installed electric lights. Our antennal receptionis good for miles, but then you invented telegraphs, tele-phones and radios. Our kobolds mined ore with muchgreater efficiency than man-things do, until man-thingsinvented dynamite. Do you see?"

"No."

"Surely you don't expect sensitive and superior crea-tures such as the elves to watch a group of hairy mam-mals outdo them. It wouldn't be so bad if we couldimitate the electronic development ourselves, but ourpsychic energies were insufficient for the purpose. Well,we retreated from reality. We sulked, pined

and drooped. Call it an inferiority complex, if you will, butfrom two centuries ago onward, we slowly abandonedmankind and retreated to such centers as Avalon."

Prentiss thought furiously. "Let's get this straight. Youcan handle minds?"

"Certainly."

"You can make me think you're invisible? Hypnoti-cally, I mean?"

"A crude term, but yes."

"And when you appeared just now, you did it by liftinga kind of mental block. Is that it?"

"To answer your thoughts, rather than your words:You are not sleeping; you are not mad; and I am not supernatural."

"I was just making sure. I take it, then, you can read my mind."

"Of course. It is a rather dirty and unrewarding sort of labor, but I can do it when I must. Your name is Prentiss and you write imaginative fiction. You have one larva who is at a place of instruction. I know a great dealabout you."

Prentiss winced. "And just where is Avalon?"

"You won't find it." The elf clacked his mandibles together two or three times. "Don't speculate on the pos-

sibility of warning the authorities. You'll find yourself ina madhouse. Avalon, in case you think the knowledgewill help you, is in the middle of the Atlantic and quiteinvisible, you know. After the steamboat was invented,you man-things got to moving about so unreasonably thatwe had to cloak the whole island with a psychic shield.

"Of course, incidents*will* take place. Once a huge,barbaric vessel hit us dead center and it took all the psychic energy of the entire population to give the island the appearance of an iceberg. The*Titanic,* I believe, wasthe name printed on the vessel. And nowadays there are planes flying overhead all the time and sometimes thereare crashes. We picked up cases of canned milk once.That's when I tasted it."

Prentiss said, "Well, then, damn it, why aren't you stillon Avalon? Why did you leave?"

"I was ordered to leave," said the elf angrily. "Thefools."

"Oh?"

"You know how it is when you're a little different. I'mnot like the rest of them and the poor tradition-riddenfools resented it. They were jealous. That's the best explanation. Jealous!"

"How are you different?"

"Hand me that light bulb," said the elf. "Oh, just un-screw it. You don't need a reading lamp in the

daytime."

With a quiver of repulsion, Prentiss did as he was toldand passed the object into the little hands of the elf.Carefully, the elf, with fingers so thin and wiry that theylooked like tendrils, touched the bottom and side of thebrass base.

Feebly, the filament in the bulb reddened.

"Good God," said Prentiss.

"That," said the elf proudly, "is my great talent. Itold you that we elves couldn't adapt psychic energy to electronics. Well, I can! I'm not just an ordinary elf. I'ma mutant! A super-elf! I'm the next stage in elfin evolu-tion. This light is due just to the activity of my own mind,you know. Now watch when I use yours as a focus."

As he said that, the bulb's filament grew white hot andpainful to look at, while a vague and not unpleasant tick-ling sensation entered Prentiss' skull.

The lamp went out and the elf put the bulb on thedesk behind the typewriter.

"I haven't tried," said the elf proudly, "but I suspectI can fission uranium too."

"But look here, lighting a bulb takes energy. You can't
just hold it-----"

"I've*told* you about psychic energy. Great Oberon,man-thing, try to understand."

Prentiss felt increasingly uneasy; he said cautiously,"What do you intend doing with this gift of yours?"

"Go back to Avalon, of course. I*should* let those foolsgo to their doom, but an elf does have a certain patrio-tism, even if he is a coleopteron."

"A what?"

"We elves are not all of a species, you know. I'm ofbeetle descent. See?"

He rose to his feet and, standing on the desk, turnedhis back to Prentiss. What had seemed merely a shiningblack cuticle suddenly split and lifted. From underneath,two filmy, veined wings fluttered out.

"Oh, you can fly," said Prentiss.

"You're very foolish," said the elf contemptuously,"not to realize I'm too large for flight. But they*are* attractive, aren't they? How do you like the iridescence? The lepidoptera have disgusting wings in comparison.They're gaudy and indelicate. What's more they'realways sticking out."

"The lepidoptera?" Prentiss felt hopelessly confused.

"The butterfly clans. They're the proud ones. Theywere always letting humans see them so they could be admired. Very petty minds in a way. And that's whyyour legends always give fairies butterfly wings

insteadof beetle wings which are*much* more diaphanously beau-tiful. We'll give the lepidoptera what for when we getback, you and I."

"Now hold on-----"

"Just think," said the elf, swaying back and forth inwhat looked like elfin ecstasy, "our nightly revels on the fairy green will be a blaze of sparkling light from curli-cues of neon tubing. We can cut loose the swarms ofwasps we've got hitched to our flying wagons and installinternal-combustion motors instead. We can stop this

business of curling up on leaves when it's time to sleepand build factories to manufacture decent mattresses. Itell you, we'll*live*. . . . And the rest of them will eat dirtfor having ordered me out."

"But I can't go with you," bleated Prentiss. "I haveresponsibilities. I have a wife and kid. You wouldn't takea man away from his—his larva, would you?"

"I'm not cruel," said the elf. He turned his eyes fullon Prentiss. "I have an elfin soul. Still, what choice haveI? I must have a man-brain for focusing purposes or I willaccomplish nothing; and not all man-brains are suitable."

"Why not?"

"Great Oberon, creature. A man-brain isn't a passivething of wood and stone. It must co-operate in order tobe useful. And it can only co-operate by being fullyaware of our own elfin ability to manipulate it. I can useyour brain, for instance, but your wife's would be uselessto me. It would take her years to understand who andwhat I am."

Prentiss said, "This is a damned insult. Are you tellingme I believe in fairies? I'll have you know I'm a completerationalist."

"Are you? When I first revealed myself to you, youhad a few feeble thoughts about dreams and hallucina-tions but you talked to me, you accepted me. Your wifewould have screamed and gone into hysterics."

Prentiss was silent. He could think of no answer.

"That's the trouble," said the elf despondently. "Prac-tically all you humans have forgotten about us since weleft you. Your minds have closed; grown useless. To besure, your larvae believe in your legends about the 'littlefolk,' but their brains are undeveloped and useful onlyfor simple processes. When they mature, they lose belief.Frankly, I don't know what I would do if it weren't foryou fantasy writers."

"What do you mean, we fantasy writers?"

"You are the few remaining adults who believe in theinsect folk. You, Prentiss, most of all. You've been afantasy writer for twenty years."

"You're mad. I don't believe the things I write."

"You have to. You can't help it. I mean, while you'reactually writing, you take the subject matter

seriously.

After a while your mind is just naturally cultivated intousefulness. . . . But why argue? I*have* used you. Yousaw the light bulb brighten. So you see you must comewith me."

"But I won't." Prentiss set his limbs stubbornly. "Canyou make me against my will?"

"I could, but I might damage you, and I wouldn't wantthat. Suppose we say this. If you don't agree to come, Icould focus a current of high-voltage electricity throughyour wife. It would be a revolting thing to have to do, but I understand your own people execute enemies ofthe state in that fashion, so that you would probably findthe punishment less horrible than I do. I wouldn't wantto seem brutal even to a man-thing."

Prentiss grew conscious of the perspiration matting theshort hairs on his temple.

"Wait," he said, "don't do anything like that. Let'stalk it over."

The elf shot out his filmy wings, fluttered them andreturned them to their case. "Talk, talk, talk. It's tiring. Surely you have milk in the house. You're not a verythoughtful host or you would have offered me refresh-ment before this."

Prentiss tried to bury the thought that came to him, topush it as far below the outer skin of his mind as he could. He said casually, "I have something better thanmilk. Here, I'll get it for you."

"Stay where you are. Call to your wife. She'll bringit."

"But I don't want her to see you. It would frightenher."

The elf said, "You need feel no concern. I'll handleher so that she won't be the least disturbed."

Prentiss lifted an arm.

The elf said, "Any attack you make on me will be farslower than the bolt of electricity that will strike yourwife."

Prentiss' arm dropped. He stepped to the door of hisstudy.

"Blanche!" he called down the stairs.

Blanche was just visible in the living room, sitting

woodenly in the armchair near the bookcase. She seemedto be asleep, open-eyed.

Prentiss turned to the elf. "Something's wrong withher."

"She's just in a state of sedation. She'll hear you. Tellher what to do."

"Blanche!" he called again. "Bring the container of eggnog and a small glass, will you?"

With no sign of animation other than that of baremovement, Blanche rose and disappeared from view.

"What is eggnog?" asked the elf.

Prentiss attempted enthusiasm. "It is a compound ofmilk, sugar and eggs beaten to a delightful consistency.Milk alone is poor stuff compared to it."

Blanche entered with the eggnog. Her pretty face wasexpressionless. Her eyes turned toward the elf but light-ened with no realization of the significance of the sight.

"Here, Jan," she said, and sat down in the old, leath-er-covered chair by the window, hands falling loosely toher lap.

Prentiss watched her uneasily for a moment. "Are yougoing to keep her here?"

"She'll be easier to control. . . . Well, aren't you goingto offer me the eggnog?"

"Oh, sure. Here!"

He poured the thick white liquid into the cocktailglass. He had prepared five milk bottles of it two nights before for the boys of the New York Fantasy Association and it had been mixed with a lavish hand, since fantasywriters notoriously like it so.

The elf's antennae trembled violently.

"A heavenly aroma," he muttered.

He wrapped the ends of his thin arms about the stemof the small glass and lifted it to his mouth. The liquid'slevel sank. When half was gone, he put it down and sighed, "Oh, the loss to my people. What a creation!What a thing to exist! Our histories tell us that in ancientdays an occasional lucky sprite managed to take the placeof a man-larva at birth so that he might draw off theliquid fresh-made. I wonder if even those ever experi-enced anything like this."

Prentiss said with a touch of professional interest,

"That's the idea behind this business of changelings, isit?"

"Of course. The female man-creature has a great gift.Why not take advantage of it?" The elf turned his eyesupon the rise and fall of Blanche's bosom and sighedagain.

Prentiss said (not too eager, now; don't give it away),"Go ahead. Drink all you want."

He, too, watched Blanche, waiting for signs of restor-ing animation, waiting for the beginnings of breakdownin the elf's control.

The elf said, "When is your larva returning from itsplace of instruction? I need him."

"Soon, soon," said Prentiss nervously. He looked athis wristwatch. Actually, Jan, Junior, would be back, yelling for a slab of cake and milk, in something likefifteen minutes.

"Fill 'er up," he said urgently. "Fill 'er up."

The elf sipped gaily. He said, "Once the larva arrives,you can go."

"Go?"

"Only to the library. You'll have to get volumes on electronics. I'll need the details on how to build televi-sion, telephones, all that. I'll need to have rules on wir-ing, instructions for constructing vacuum tubes. Details, Prentiss, details! We have tremendous tasks ahead of us.Oil drilling, gasoline refining, motors, scientific agricul-ture. We'll build a new Avalon, you and I. A technicalone. A scientific fairyland. We will create a new world."

"Great!" said Prentiss. "Here, don't neglect yourdrink."

"You see. You are catching fire with the idea," saidthe elf. "And you will be rewarded. You will have a dozen female man-things to yourself."

Prentiss looked at Blanche automatically. No signs ofhearing, but who could tell? He said, "I'd have no usefor female man-th—for women, I mean."

"Come now," said the elf censoriously, "be truthful.You men-things are well known to our folk as lecherous,bestial creatures. Mothers frightened their young forgenerations by threatening them with men-things. . . .

Young, ah!" He lifted the glass of eggnog in the air andsaid, "To my own young," and drained it.

"Fill 'er up," said Prentiss at once. "Fill 'er up."

The elf did so. He said, "I'll have lots of children. I'llpick out the best of the coleoptresses and breed my line.I'll continue the mutation. Right now I'm the only one,but when we have a dozen or fifty, I'll interbreed themand develop the race of the super-elf. A race of electro—ulp—electronic marvels and infinite future....If I couldonly drink more. Nectar! The original nectar!"

There was the sudden noise of a door being flung openand a young voice calling, "Mom! Hey, Mom!"

The elf, his glossy eyes a little dimmed, said, "Thenwe'll begin to take over the men-things. A few believe already; the rest we will—urp—teach. It will be the olddays, but better; a more efficient elf-hood, a tighterunion."

Jan, Junior's, voice was closer and tinged with impa-tience. "Hey, Mom! Ain't you home?"

Prentiss felt his eyes popping with tension. Blanche satrigid. The elf's speech was slightly thick, his balance alittle unsteady. If Prentiss were going to risk it, now, nowwas the time.

"Sit back," said the elf peremptorily. "You're beingfoolish. I knew there was alcohol in the eggnog from the moment you thought your ridiculous scheme. You men-things are very shifty. We elves have many

proverbsabout you. Fortunately, alcohol has little effect upon us.Now if you had tried catnip with just a touch of honeyin it...Ah, here is the larva. How are you, little man- thing?"

The elf sat there, the goblet of eggnog halfway to hismandibles, while Jan, Junior, stood in the doorway. Jan, Junior's, ten-year-old face was moderately smeared withdirt, his hair was immoderately matted and there was alook of the utmost surprise in his gray eyes. His battered schoolbooks swayed from the end of the strap he held in his hand.

He said, "Pop! What's the matter with Mom? And—and what's that?"

The elf said to Prentiss, "Hurry to the library. No timemust be lost. You know the books I need." All trace of

incipient drunkenness had left the creature and Prentiss'morale broke. The creature had been playing with him.

Prentiss got up to go.

The elf said, "And nothing human; nothing sneaky; notricks. Your wife is still a hostage. I can use the larva'smind to kill her; it's good enough for that. I wouldn't want to do it. I'm a member of the Elfitarian EthicalSociety and we advocate considerate treatment of mam-mals so you may rely on my noble principles*if* you doas I say."

Prentiss felt a strong compulsion to leave flooding him.He stumbled toward the door.

Jan, Junior, cried, "Pop, it can talk! He says he'll killMom! Hey, don't go away!"

Prentiss was already out of the room, when he heardthe elf say, "Don't stare at me, larva. I will not harm your mother if you do exactly as I say. I am an elf, afairy. You know what a fairy is, of course."

And Prentiss was at the front door when he heardJan, Junior's, treble raised in wild shouting, followed byscream after scream in Blanche's shuddering soprano.

The strong, though invisible, elastic that was drawing Prentiss out the house snapped and vanished. He fellbackward, righted himself and darted back up the stairs.

Blanche, fairly saturated with quivering life, wasbacked into a corner, her arms about a weeping Jan, Junior.

On the desk was a collapsed black carapace, coveringa nasty smear of pulpiness from which colorless liquiddripped.

Jan, Junior, was sobbing hysterically, "I hit it. I hit itwith my schoolbooks. It was hurting Mom."

An hour passed and Prentiss felt the world of normal-ity pouring back into the interstices left behind by thecreature from Avalon. The elf itself was already ash inthe incinerator behind the house and the only remnantof its existence was the damp stain at the foot of hisdesk.

Blanche was still sickly pale. They talked in whispers.

Prentiss said, "How's Jan, Junior?"

"He's watching television."

"Is he all right?"

"Oh,*he's* all right, but*I'll* be having nightmares for weeks."

"I know. So will I unless we can get it out of ourminds. I don't think there'll ever be another of those—things here."

Blanche said, "I can't explain how awful it was. I kepthearing every word he said, even when I was down inthe living room."

"It was telepathy, you see."

"I just couldn't move. Then, after you left, I couldbegin to stir a bit. I tried to scream but all I could do was moan and whimper. Then Jan, Junior, smashed himand all at once I was free. I don't understand how ithappened."

Prentiss felt a certain gloomy satisfaction. "I think Iknow. I was under his control because I accepted the truth of his existence. He held you in check through me. When I left the room, increasing distance made it harderto use my mind as a psychic lens and you could beginmoving. By the time I reached the front door, the elfthought it was time to switch from my mind to Jan, Junior's. That was his mistake."

"In what way?" asked Blanche.

"He assumed that all children believe in fairies, but he was wrong. Here in America today children*don't* believe in fairies. They never hear of them. They believe in Tom Corbett, in Hopalong Cassidy, in Dick Tracy, in HowdyDoody, in Superman and a dozen other things, but notin fairies.

"The elf just never realized the sudden culturalchanges brought about by comic books and television,and when he tried to grab Jan, Junior's, mind, hecouldn't. Before he could recover his psychic balance,Jan, Junior, was on top of him in a swinging panicbecause he thought you were being hurt and it was allover.

"It's like I've always said, Blanche. The ancient folkmotifs of legend survive only in the modern fantasy mag- azine, and modern fantasy is purely adult fare. Do you finally see my point?"

Blanche said humbly, "Yes, dear."

Prentiss put his hands in his pockets and grinnedslowly. "You know, Blanche, next time I see Walt Rae,I think I'll just drop a hint that I write the stuff. Timethe neighbors knew, I think."

Jan, Junior, holding an enormous slice of butteredbread, wandered into his father's study in search of the dimming memory. Pop kept slapping him on the backand Mom kept putting bread and cake in his hands andhe was forgetting why. There had been this big old thingon the desk that could talk . . .

It had all happened so quickly that it got mixed up inhis mind.

He shrugged his shoulders and, in the late afternoonsunlight, looked at the partly typewritten sheet in his father's typewriter, then at the small pile of paper restingon the desk.

He read a while, curled his lip and muttered, "Geewhiz. Fairies again. Always kid stuff!" and wandered off.

THE LONG NIGHTOF WAITING

Andre Norton

"What—what are we going to do?" Lesley squeezed her hands so tightly together they hurt. She really wanted torun, as far and as fast as she could.

Rick was not running. He stood there, still holding toAlex's belt, just as he had grabbed his brother to keephim from following Matt. Following him where?

"We won't do anything," Rick answered slowly. "But people'll ask—all kinds of questions. You onlyhave to look at that—" Lesley pointed with her chin towhat was now before them.

Alex still struggled for freedom. "Want Matt!" heyelled at the top of his voice. He wriggled around to beatat Rick with his fists.

"Let me go! Let me go—with Matt!"

Rick shook him. "Now listen here, shrimp. Matt'sgone. You can't get to him now. Use some sense—lookthere. Do you see Matt? Well, do you?"

Lesley wondered how Rick could be so calm—accepting all of this just as if it happened every day—like going to school, or watching a tel-cast, or the regu-lar, safe things. How could he just stand there and talkto Alex as if he were grown up and Alex was just being pesty as he was sometimes? She watched Rick wonder-ingly, and tried not to think of what had just happened.

"Matt?" Alex had stopped fighting. His voice sounded as if he were going to start bawling in a minute or two.And when Alex cried—! He would keep on and on, andthey would have questions to answer. If they told thereal truth—Lesley drew a deep breath and shivered.

No one, no one in the whole world would ever believe

them! Not even if they saw what was right out here inthis field now. No one would believe—they would saythat she, Lesley, and Rick, and Alex were all mixed upin their minds. And they might even be sent away to ahospital or something! No, they could never tell thetruth! But Alex, he would blurt out the whole thing ifanyone asked a question about Matt. What could theydo about Alex?

Her eyes questioned Rick over Alex's head. He was still holding their young brother, but Alex had

turned,was gripping Rick's waist, looking up at him de-mandingly, waiting, Lesley knew, for Rick to explain ashe had successfully most times in Alex's life. And if Rickcouldn't explain this time?

Rick hunkered down on the ground, his hands now onAlex's shoulders.

"Listen, shrimp, Mart's gone. Lesley goes, I go, toschool—"

Alex sniffed. "But the bus comes then, and you geton while I watch—then you come home again—" His small face cleared. "Then Matt—he'll come back? He'sgone to school? But this is Saturday! You an' Lesleydon't go on Saturday. How come Matt does? An' where'sthe bus? There's nothin' but that mean old dozer that'schewin' up things. An' now all these vines and stuff—andthe dozer tipped right over an'—" He screwed around alittle in Rick's grip to stare over his brother's hunchedshoulder at the disaster area beyond.

"No," Rick was firm. "Matt's not gone to school. He's gone home—to his own place. You remember back atChristmas time, Alex, when Peter came with Aunt Fran and Uncle Porter? He came for a visit. Matt came withLizzy for a visit—how he's gone back home—just likePeter did."

"But Matt said—he said*this* was his home!" counteredAlex. "He didn't live in Cleveland like Peter."

"It was his home once," Rick continued still in thatgrown-up way. "Just like Jimmy Rice used to live downthe street in the red house. When Jimmy's Dad gotmoved by his company, Jimmy went dear out to St.Louis to live."

"But Matt was sure! He said*Ms* was his home!" Alex

frowned. "He said it over and over, that he had comehome again."

"At first he did," Rick agreed. "But later, you knowthat Matt was not so sure, was he now? You think aboutthat, shrimp."

Alex was still frowning. At least he was not screamingas Lesley feared he would be. Rick, she was suddenlyvery proud and a little in awe of Rick. How had heknown how to keep Alex from going into one of histantrums?

"Matt—he did say funny things. An' he was afraid ofcars. Why was he afraid of cars, Rick?"

"Because where he lives they don't have cars."

Alex's surprise was open. "Then how do they go tothe store? An' to Sunday School, an' school, an' everyplace?"

"They have other ways, Alex. Yes, Matt was afraid ofa lot of things, he knew that this was not his home, thathe had to go back."

"But—I want him—he—" Alex began to cry, not with the loud screaming Lesley had feared, but in a way nowwhich made her hurt a little inside as she watched himbutt his head against Rick's shoulder, making no effortto smear away the tears as they wet his dirty cheeks.

"Sure you want him," Rick answered. "But Matt—he was afraid, he was not very happy here, now was he, shrimp?"

"With me, he was. We had a lot of fun, we did!"

"But Matt wouldn't go in the house, remember? Remember what happened when the lights went on?"

"Matt ran an' hid. An' Lizzy, she kept telling him an'telling him they had to go back. Maybe if Lizzy hadn't all the time told him that—"

Lesley thought about Lizzy. Matt was little—he wasnot more than Alex's age—not really, in spite of whatthe stone said. But Lizzy had been older and quicker tounderstand. It had been Lizzy who had asked most ofthe questions and then been sick (truly sick to her stom-ach) when Lesley and Rick answered them. Lizzy hadbeen sure of what had happened then—just like she wassure about the other—that the stone must never be

moved, nor that place covered over to trap anybody else.So that nobody would fall through—

Fall through into what? Lesley tried to remember allthe bits and pieces Lizzy and Matt had told about wherethey had been for a hundred and ten years—a*hundred*and*ten* just like the stone said.

She and Rick had found the stone when Alex had runaway. They had often had to hunt Alex like that. Eversince he learned to open the Safe-tee gate he would go off about once a week or so. It was about two monthsafter they moved here, before all the new houses hadbeen built and the big apartments at the end of the street.This was all more like real country then. Now it wasdifferent, spoiled—just this one open place left and that(unless Lizzy was right in thinking she'd stopped it all) would not be open long. The men had started to clear itoff with the bulldozer the day before yesterday. All theground on that side was raw and cut up, the trees andbushes had been smashed and dug out.

There had been part of an old orchard there, and abig old lilac bush. Last spring it had been so pretty. Ofcourse, the apples were all little and hard, and hadworms in them. But it had been pretty and a swell placeto play. Rick and Jim Bowers had a house up in thebiggest tree. Their sign said "No girls allowed," but Les-ley had sneaked up once when they were playing LittleLeague ball and had seen it all.

Then there was the stone. That was kind of scarey.Yet they had kept going to look at it every once in a while, just to wonder.

Alex had found it first that day he ran away. Therewere a lot of bushes hiding it and tall grass. Lesley felt her eyes drawn in that direction now. It*was* still there.Though you have to mostly guess about that, only oneteeny bit of it showed through all those leaves and things.

And when they had found Alex he had been workingwith a piece of stick, scratching at the words carved therewhich were all filled up with moss and dirt. He had beenso busy and excited he had not tried to dodge them ashe usually did, instead he wanted to know if those werereal words, and then demanded that Rick read them tohim.

Now Lesley's lips silently shaped what was carved there.

A long night of waiting.

To the Memory of our dear children,

Lizzy and Matthew Mendal,

Who disappeared on this spot

June 23, 1861.

May the Good Lord return them

to their loving parents and this

world in His Own reckoned time.

Erected to mark our years of watching,

June 23, 1900.

It had sounded so queer. At first Lesley had thought itwas a grave and had been a little frightened. But Rickhad pointed out that the words did not read like thoseon the stones in the cemetery where they went on Memo-rial Day with flowers for Grandma and Grandpa Targ. It was different because it never said "dead" but"disappeared."

Rick had been excited, said it sounded like a mystery.He had begun to ask around, but none of the neighborsknew anything—except this had all once been a farm.Almost all the houses on the street were built on thatland. They had the oldest house of all. Dad said it hadonce been the farm house, only people had changed it and added parts like bathrooms.

Lizzy and Matt—

Rick had gone to the library and asked questions, too.Miss Adams, she got interested when Rick kept on want-ing to know what this was like a hundred years ago(though of course he did not mention the stone, that was their own secret, somehow from the first they knew theymust keep quiet about that). Miss Adams had shownRick how they kept the old newspapers on film tapes.And when he did his big project for social studies, he had chosen the farm's history, which gave him a goodchance to use those films to look things up.

That was how he learned all there was to know aboutLizzy and Matt. There had been a lot in the old paperabout them. Lizzy Mendal, Matthew Mendal, aged

eleven and five—Lesley could almost repeat it word forword she had read Rick's copied notes so often. Theyhad been walking across this field, carrying lunch to theirfather who was ploughing. He had been standing by afence talking to Doctor Levi Morris who was driving by. They had both looked up to see Lizzy and Matthew com-ing and had waved to them. Lizzy waved back and then—she and Matthew—they were just gone! Right out of themiddle of an open field they were gone!

Mr. Mendal and the Doctor, they had been so sur-prised they couldn't believe their eyes, but they had

hunted and hunted. And the men from other farms hadcome to hunt too. But no one ever saw the childrenagain.

Only about a year later, Mrs. Mendal (she had keptcoming to stand here in the field, always hoping, Lesleyguessed, they might come back as they had gone) camerunning home all excited to say she heard Matt's voice,and he had been calling "Ma! Ma!"

She got Mr. Mendal to go back with her. And he heardit, too, when he listened, but it was very faint. Just likesomeone a long way off calling "Ma!" Then it was goneand they never heard it again.

It was all in the papers Rick found, the story of howthey hunted for the children and later on about Mrs. Mendal hearing Man. But nobody ever was able toexplain what had happened.

So all that was left was the stone and a big mystery.Rick started hunting around in the library, even after he finished his report, and found a book with other storiesabout people who disappeared. It was written by a mannamed Charles Fort. Some of it had been hard reading,but Rick and Lesley had both found the parts which werelike what happened to Lizzy and Matt. And in all those other disappearances there had been no answers to whathad happened, and nobody came back.

Until Lizzy and Matt. But suppose she and Rick andAlex told people now, would any believe them? Andwhat good would it do, anyway? Unless Lizzy was right and people should know so they would not be caught.Suppose someone built a house right over where thestone stood, and suppose some day a little boy like Alex,

or a girl like Lesley, or even a mom or dad, disappeared?She and Rick, maybe they ought to talk and keep ontalking until someone believed them, believed them enough to make sure such a house was never going tobe built, and this place was made safe.

"Matt—he kept sayin' he wanted his mom," Alex'svoice cut through her thoughts. "Rick, where was his mom that she lost him that way?"

Rick, for the first tune, looked helpless. How couldyou make Alex understand?

Lesley stood up. She still felt quite shaky and a little sick from the left-over part of her fright. But the worstwas past now, she had to be as tough as Rick or he'dsay that was just like a girl.

"Alex," she was able to say that quite naturally, and her voice did not sound too queer, "Matt, maybe he'llfind his mom now, he was just looking in the wrongplace. She's not here any more. You remember lastChristmas when you went with Mom to see Santy Clausat the store and you got lost? You were hunting momand she was hunting you, and at first you were lookingin the wrong places. But you did find each other. Well,Matt's mom will find him all right."

She thought that Alex wanted to believe her. He hadnot pushed away from Rick entirely, but he looked as ifhe were listening carefully to every word she said.

"You're sure?" he asked doubtfully. "Matt—he was scared he'd never find his mom. He said he kept callingan' calling an' she never came."

"She'll come, moms always do." Lesley tried to makethat sound true. "And Lizzy will help. Lizzy," Lesley hesitated, trying to choose the right words, "Lizzy's verygood at getting things done."

She looked beyond to the evidence of Lizzy's gettingthings done and her wonder grew. At first, just after ithad happened, she had been so shocked and afraid, shehad not really understood what Lizzy had done beforeshe and Matt had gone again. What—what*had* Lizzy learned during that tune when she had been in the otherplace? And how had she learned it? She had neveranswered all their questions as if she was not able to tell

them what lay on the other side of that door, or whateverit was which was between*here* and*there*.

Lizzy's work was hard to believe, even when you sawit right before your eyes.

The bulldozer and the other machines which had beenparked there to begin work again Monday morning-Well, the bulldozer was lying over on its side, just as ifit were a toy Alex had picked up and thrown as he didsometimes when he got over-tired and cross. And theother machines—they were all pushed over, some even broken! Then there were the growing things. Lizzy hadrammed her hands into the pockets of her dress-likeapron and brought them out with seeds trickling betweenher fingers. And she had just thrown those seeds here and there, all over the place.

It took a long time for plants to grow—weeks—Lesley knew. But look—these were growing right while you watched. They had already made a thick mat over everypiece of the machinery they had reached, like they hadto cover it from sight quickly. And there were flowersopening—and butterflies—Lesley had never seen somany butterflies as were gathering about those flowers,arriving right out of nowhere.

"Rick—how—?" She could not put her wonder into afull question, she could only gesture toward what washappening there.

Her brother shrugged. It was as if he did not want tolook at what was happening. Instead he spoke to bothof them sharply.

"Listen, shrimp, Les, it's getting late. Mom and Dadwill be home soon. We'd better get there before they do.Remember, we left all the things Matt and Lizzy used out in the summer house. Dad's going to work on thelawn this afternoon. He'll want to get the mower out ofthere. If he sees what we left there he'll ask questionsfor sure and we might have to talk. Not that it would doany good."

Rick was right. Lesley looked around her regretfullynow. She was not frightened any more—she, well, shewould like to just stay awhile and watch. But she reachedfor Alex's sticky hand. To her surprise he did not objector jerk away, he was still hiccuping a little as he did after

he cried. She was thankful Rick had been able to managehim so well.

They scraped through their own private hole in thefence into the backyard, heading to the summer house which Rick and Dad had fixed up into a rainy day place to play and a storage for the outside tools. The campingbags were there, even the plates and cups. Those werestill smeared with jelly and peanut butter. Just think,Matt had never tasted jelly and peanut butter before, hesaid. But he had liked it a lot. Lesley

had better sneakthose in and give them a good washing. And the milk—Lizzy could not understand how you got milk from abottle a man brought to your house and not straight from a cow. She seemed almost afraid to drink it. And shehad not liked Coke at all—said it tasted funny.

"I wish Matt was here." Alex stood looking down atthe sleeping bag, his face clouding up again. "Matt wasfun—"

"Sure he was. Here, shrimp, you catch ahold of thatand help me carry this back. We've got to get it into thecamper before Dad comes."

"Why?"

Oh, dear, was Alex going to have one of his stubbornquestion-everything times? Lesley had put the plates and cups back into the big paper bag in which she had smug-gled the food from the kitchen this morning, and wasfolding up the extra cover from Matt's bed.

"You just come along and I'll tell you, shrimp." Sheheard Rick say. Rick was just*wonderful* today. ThoughMom always said that Rick could manage Alex betterthan anyone else in the whole family when he wanted tomake the effort.

There, she gave a searching look around as the boysleft (one of the bags between them) this was cleared.They would take the other bag, and she would do thedishes. Then Dad could walk right in and never knowthat Lizzy and Matt had been here for two nights and aday.

Two nights and a day—Lizzy had kept herself and Mattout of sight yesterday when Lesley and Rick had been atschool. She would not go near the house, nor let Mattlater when Alex wanted him to go and see the train Dad

and Rick had set up in the family room. All she hadwanted were newspapers. Lesley had taken those to herand some of the magazines Mom had collected for theSalvation Army. She must have read a lot, because when they met her after school, she had a million questions toask.

It was then that she said she and Matt had to go away,back to where they had come from, that they could not stay in this mixed up horrible world which was not theright one at all! Rick told her about the words on thestones and how long it had been. First she called him aliar and said that was not true. So after dark he hadtaken a flashlight and went back to show her the stone and the words.

She had been the one to cry then. But she did not forlong. She got to asking what was going to happen in thefield, looking at the machines. When Rick told her, Lizzyhad said quick and hot, no, they mustn't do that, it wasdangerous—a lot of others might go through. And*they,* those in the other world, didn't want people who did bad things to spoil everything.

When Rick brought her back she was mad, not at him,but at everything else. She made him walk her down tothe place from which you could see the inter-city thru-way, with all the cars going whizz. Rick said he was sureshe was scared. She was shaking, and she held onto his hand so hard it hurt. But she made herself watch. Then,when they came back, she said Matt and she—they hadto go. And she offered to take Alex, Lesley, and Rickwith them. She said they couldn't want to go on livinghere.

That was the only time she talked much of what it waslike*there.* Birds and flowers, no noise or cars

rushing about, nor bulldozers tearing the ground up, everythingpretty. It was Lesley who had asked then:

"If it was all that wonderful, why did you want tocome back?"

Then she was sorry she had asked because Lizzy's facelooked like she was hurting inside when she answered:

"There was Ma and Pa. Matt, he's little, he misses Mabad at times. Those*others,* they got their own way of life, and it ain't much like ours. So, we've kept a-tryin'

to get back. I brought somethin'—just for Ma." She showed them two bags of big silvery leaves pinned together with long thorns. Inside each were seeds, allmixed up big and little together.

"Things grow*there"* she nodded toward the field,"they grow strange-like. Faster than seeds hereabouts. You put one of these," she ran her finger tip in amongthe seeds, shifting them back and forth, "in the ground,and you can*see* it grow. Honest-Injun-cross-my-heart-an'-hope-to-die if that ain't so. Ma, she hankers for flow-ers, loves 'em truly. So I brought her some. Only, Ma,she ain't here. Funny thing—*those*over*there,* they havea feelin' about these here flowers and plants.*They* tellyou right out that as long as*they have* these growin' 'round*they* 're,safe."

"Safe from what?" Rick wanted to know.

"I dunno—safe from somethin' as*they* think maychange 'em. See, we ain't the onlyest ones gittin' through to*there.* There's others, we've met a couple. Susan—she's older 'n me and she dresses funny, like one of thereal old time ladies in a book picture. And there's Jim—he spends most of his time off in the woods, don't seehim much. Susan's real nice. She took us to stay withher when we got*there.* But she's married to one of*them,* so we didn't feel comfortable most of the time. Anyway*they* had some rules—they asked us right away did wehave anything made of iron. Iron is bad for*them they*can't hold it, it burns*them* bad. And*they* told us rightout that if we stayed long we'd change. We ate*their* foodand drank*their* drink stuff—that's like cider and it tastes good. That changes people from here. So after awhileanyone who comes through is like*them.* Susan mostly isby now, I guess. When you're changed you don't wantto come back."

"But you didn't change," Lesley pointed out. "You came back."

"And how come you didn't change?" Rick wanted toknow. "You were there long enough—a hundred and tenyears!"

"But," Lizzy had beat with her fists on the floor ofthe summer house then as if she were pounding a drum. "It weren't that long, it couldn't be! Me, I counted every

day! It's only been ten of 'em, with us hunting the placeto come through on every one of 'em, calling for Ma andPa to come and get us. It weren't no hundred and tenyears—"

And she had cried again in such a way as to makeLesley's throat ache. A moment later she had been bawl-ing right along with Lizzy. For once Rick did not lookat her as if he were disgusted, but instead as if he weresorry, for Lizzy, not Lesley, of course.

"It's got to be that time's different in that place," hesaid thoughtfully. "A lot different. But, Lizzy, it's true, you know—this is 1971, not 1861. We can prove it."

Lizzy wiped her eyes on the hem of her long apron."Yes, I got to believe. 'Cause what you showed me ain'tmy world at all. All those cars shootin' along so fast,lights what go on and off when you press a button onthe wall—all these houses built over Pa's good farmin' land—what I read today. Yes, I gotta believe it—but it'shard to do that, right hard!

"And Matt 'n' me, we don't belong here no more, notwith all this clatter an' noise an' nasty smelling air likewe sniffed down there by that big road. I guess we gottago back*there.* Leastwise, we know what's there now."

"How can you get back?" Rick wanted to know.

For the first time Lizzy showed a watery smile. "I ain'tno dunce, Rick.*They* got rules, like I said. You carrysomething outta that place and hold on to it, an' it pullsyou back, lets you in again. I brought them there seedsfor Ma. But I thought maybe Matt an' me—we might want to go visitin'*there.* Susan's been powerful good tous. Well, anyway, I got these too."

She had burrowed deeper in her pocket, under thepackets of seeds and brought out two chains of woven grass, tightly braided. Fastened to each was a smallarrowhead, a very tiny one, no bigger than Lesley's littlefingernail.

Rick held out his hand. "Let's see."

But Lizzy kept them out of his reach.

"Them's no Injun arrowheads, Rick. Them's what*they*use for*their* own doin's. Susan, she calls them 'elf-shots.'Anyway, these here can take us back if we wear 'em. And we will tomorrow, that's when we'll go."

They had tried to find out more about*there,* but Lizzywould not answer most of their questions. Lesley thoughtshe could not for some reason. But she remained firm inher decision that she and Matt would be better off*there*than*here.* Then she had seemed sorry for Lesley andRick and Alex that they had to stay in such a world, and made the suggestion that they link hands and go through together.

Rick shook his head. "Sorry—no. Mom and Dad—well, we belong here."

Lizzy nodded. "Thought you would say that. But—it'sso ugly now, I can't see as how you want to." She cuppedthe tiny arrowheads in her hand, held them close. "Overthereit's so pretty. What are you goin' to do here whenall the ground is covered up with houses and the air'sfull of bad smells, an' those cars go rush-rush all day andnight too? Looky here—" She reached for one of themagazines. "I'm the best reader in the school house. Miss Jane, she has me up to read out loud when theschool board comes visitin'." She did not say that boast-fully, but as if it were a truth everyone would know. "An' I've been readin' pieces in here. They've said a lotabout how bad things are gittin' for you all—bad air, badwater—too many people—everything like that. Seemslike there's no end but bad here. Ain't that so now?"

"We've been studying about it in school," Lesleyagreed, "Rick and me, we're on the pick-up can drive

next week. Sure we know."

"Well, this ain't happening over*there,* you can betyou!*They* won't let it."

"How do they stop it?" Rick wanted to know.

But once more Lizzy did not answer. She just shookher head and said*they* had their ways. And then she hadgone on:

"Me an' Matt, we have to go back. We don't belonghere now, and back*there* we do, sorta. At least it's morelike what we're used to. We have to go at the same hour as before—noon time—"

"How do you know?" Rick asked.

"There's rules. We were caught at noon then, we go at noon now. Sure you don't want to come with us?"

"Only as far as the field," Rick had answered for

them. "It's Saturday, we can work it easy. Mom has ahair appointment in the morning, Dad is going to drive her 'cause he's seeing Mr. Chambers, and they'll do theshopping before they come home. We're supposed tohave a picnic in the field, like we always do. Being Satur-day the men won't be working there either."

"If you have to go back at noon," Lesley was tryingto work something out, "how come you didn't get hereat noon? It must have been close to five when we sawyou. The school bus had let us off at the corner and Alexhad come to meet us—then we saw you—"

"We hid out," Lizzy had said then. "Took a chanceon you 'cause you were like us—"

Lesley thought she would never forget that first meet-ing, seeing the fair haired girl a little taller than she, herhair in two long braids, but such a queer dress on—likea "granny" one, yet different, and over it a big coarse-looking checked apron. Beside her Matt, in a check shirtand funny looking pants, both of them barefooted. They had looked so unhappy and lost. Alex had broken away from Lesley and Rick and had run right over to them tosay "Hi" in the friendly way he always did.

Lizzy had been turning her head from side to side asif hunting for something which should be right there before her. And when they had come up she had spokenalmost as if she were angry (but Lesley guessed she wasreally frightened) asking them where the Mendal housewas.

If it had not been for the stone and Rick doing all thathunting down of the story behind it, they would not have known what she meant. But Rick had caught on quickly. He had said that they lived in the old Mendal house now,and they had brought Lizzy and Man along with them.But before they got there they had guessed who Lizzy and Matt were, impossible as it seemed.

Now they were gone again. But Lizzy, what had shedone just after she had looped those grass strings around her neck and Matt's and taken his hand? First she had thrown out all those seeds on the ground. And then she had pointed her finger at the bulldozer, and the othermachines which were tearing up the rest of the farm she had known.

Lesley, remembering, blinked and shivered. She had expected Lizzy and Matt to disappear, somehow she had never doubted that they would. But she had not foreseenthat the bulldozer would flop over at Lizzy's pointing,the other things fly around as if they were being thrown,some of them breaking apart. Then the seeds sprouting,vines and grass, and flowers, and small trees shootingup—just like the time on TV when they speeded up thecamera somehow so you actually saw a flower openingup. What had Lizzy learned*there* that she was able todo all that?

Still trying to remember it all, Lesley wiped the dishes.Rick and Alex came in.

"Everything's put away," Rick reported. "And Alex,he understands about not talking about Matt."

"I sure hope so, Rick. But—how did Lizzy do that— make the machines move by just pointing at them? Andhow can plants grow so quickly?"

"How do I know?" he demanded impatiently. "I didn'tsee any more than you did. We've only one thing toremember, we keep our mouths shut tight. And we'vegot to be just as surprised as anyone else when somebodysees what happened there—"

"Maybe they won't see it—maybe not until the mencome on Monday," she said hopefully. Monday was aschool day, and the bus would take them early. Then she remembered.

"Rick, Alex won't be going to school with us. He'll behere with Mom. What if somebody says something andhe talks?"

Rick was frowning. "Yeah, I see what you mean. So—we'll have to discover it ourselves—tomorrow morning.If we're here when people get all excited we can keepAlex quiet. One of us will have to stay with him all thetime."

But in the end Alex made his own plans. The light wasonly grey in Lesley's window when she awoke to findRick shaking her shoulder.

"What—what's the matter?"

"Keep it low!" He ordered almost fiercely. "Listen,Alex's gone—"

"Gone where?"

"Where do you think? Get some clothes on and comeon!"

Gone to*there* ?Lesley was cold with fear as she pulledon jeans and a sweat shirt, thrust her feet into shoes.But how could Alex—? Just as Matt and Lizzy had gonethe first time. They should not have been afraid of beingdisbelieved, they should have told Dad and Mom allabout it. Now maybe Alex would be gone for a hundredyears. No—not Alex!

She scrambled down stairs. Rick stood at the backdoor waving her on. Together they raced across the back-yard, struggled through the fence gap and—

The raw scars left by the bulldozer were gone. Richfoliage rustled in the early morning breeze. And the birds—! Lesley had never seen so many different kindsof birds in her whole life. They seemed so tame, too,swinging on branches, hopping along the ground, pecking a fruit. Not the sour old apples but golden fruit. It hungfrom bushes, squashed on the ground from its ownripeness.

And there were flowers—and—

"Alex!" Rick almost shouted.

There he was. Not gone, sucked into*there* where theycould never find him again. No he was sitting under abush where white flowers bloomed. His face was smearedwith juice as he ate one of the fruit. And he was pattinga bunny! A real live bunny was in his lap. Now and thenhe held the fruit for the bunny to take a bite too. Hisface, under the smear of juice, was one big smile. Alex'shappy face which he had not worn since Matt left.

"It's real good," he told them.

Scrambling to his feet he would have made for thefruit bush but Lesley swooped to catch him in a big hug.

"You're safe, Alex!"

"Silly!" He squirmed in her hold. "Silly Les. This is agood place now. See, the bunny came 'cause he knowsthat. An' all the birds. This is a*good* place. Here—" hestruggled out of her arms, went to the bush and pulledoff two of the fruit. "You eat—you'll like them."

"He shouldn't be eating those. How do we know it'sgood for him?" Rick pushed by to take the fruit from his brother.

Alex readily gave him one, thrust the other at Lesley.

"Eat it! It's better'n anything!"

As if she had to obey him, Lesley raised the smoothyellow fruit to her mouth. It smelled—it smelled good—like everything she liked. She bit into it.

And tine taste—it did not have the sweetness of an orange, nor was it like an apple or a plum. It wasn't likeanything she had eaten before. But Alex was right, itwas good. And she saw that Rick was eating, too.

When he had finished her elder brother turned to thebush and picked one, two, three, four—

"You*are* hungry," Lesley commented. She herself hadtaken a second. She broke it in two, dropped half to theground for two birds. Their being there, right by herfeet, did not seem in the least strange. Of course oneshared. It did not matter if life wore feathers, fur, orplain skin, one shared.

"For Mom and Dad," Rick said. Then he lookedaround.

They could not see the whole of the field, the growthwas too thick. And it was reaching out to the boundaries.Even as Lesley looked up a vine fell like a hand on theirown fence, caught fast, and she was sure that was onlythe beginning.

"I was thinking Les," Rick said slowly. "Do youremember what Lizzy said about the fruit from*there* changing people. Do you feel any different?"

"Why no." She held out her finger. A bird flutteredup to perch there, watching her with shining beads of eyes. She laughed. "No, I don't feel any different."

Rick looked puzzled. "I never saw a bird that tamebefore. Well, I wonder—Come on, let's take these to Mom and Dad."

They started for the fence where two green runnersnow clung. Lesley looked at the house, down the streetto where the apartment made a monstrous outline againstthe morning sky.

"Rick, why do people want to live in such ugly places.And it smells bad—"

He nodded. "But all that's going to change. You knowit, don't you?"

She gave a sigh of relief. Of course she knew it. The

change was beginning and it would go on and on untilherewas like*there* and the rule of iron was broken forall time.

The rule of iron? Lesley shook her head as if to shakeaway a puzzling thought. But, of course, she must have always known this. Why did she have one small memorythat this was strange? The rule of iron was gone, the longnight of waiting over now.

THE QUEEN OF AIR ANDDARKNESS

Poul Anderson

The last glow of the last sunset would linger almost untilmidwinter. But there would be no more day, and the northlands rejoiced. Blossoms opened, flamboyance onfirethorn trees, steelflowers rising blue from the brok andrainplant that cloaked all hills, shy whiteness of kiss-me-never down in the dales. Flitteries darted among themon iridescent wings; a crownbuck shook his horns and bugled through warmth and flower odors. Between hori-zons the sky deepened from purple to sable. Both moons were aloft, nearly full, shining frosty on leaves and mol-ten on waters. The shadows they made were blurred byan aurora, a great blowing curtain of light across halfheaven. Behind it the earliest stars had come out.

A boy and a girl sat on Wolund's Barrow just underthe dolmen it upbore. Their hair, which streamed half-way down their backs, showed startlingly forth, bleachedas it was by summer. Their bodies, still dark from thatseason, merged with earth and bush and rock; for theywore only garlands. He played on a bone flute and shesang. They had lately become lovers. Their age wasabout sixteen, but they did not know this, consideringthemselves Outlings and thus indifferent to time, remem-bering little or nothing of how they had once dwelt inthe lands of men.

His notes piped cold around her voice:

"Cast a spell,weave it wellof dust and dewand night and you."

A brook by the grave mound, carrying moonlight down to a hill-hidden river, answered with its rapids. A flockof hellbats passed black beneath the aurora.

A shape came bounding over Cloudmoor. It had twoarms and two legs, but the legs were long and claw-footed and feathers covered it to the end of a tail andbroad wings. The face was half-human, dominated by itseyes. Had Ayoch been able to stand wholly erect, hewould have reached to the boy's shoulder.

The girl rose. "He carries a burden," she said. Hervision was not meant for twilight like that of a northlandcreature born, but she had learned how to use every signher senses gave her. Besides the fact that ordinarily a pook would fly, there was a heaviness to his haste.

"And he comes from the south." Excitement jumpedin the boy, sudden as a green flame that went across the constellation Lyrth. He sped down the mound. "Ohoi,Ayoch!" he called. "Me here, Mistherd!"

"And Shadow-of-a-Dream," the girl laughed,following.

The pook halted. He breathed louder than the sough-ing in the growth around him. A smell of bruised yerbalifted where he stood.

"Well met in winterbirth," he whistled. "You can helpme bring this to Carheddin."

He held out what he bore. His eyes were yellow lan-terns above. It moved and whimpered.

"Why, a child," Mistherd said.

"Even as you were, my son, even as you were. Ho,ho, what a snatch!" Ayoch boasted. "They were a scorein yon camp by Fallowwood, armed, and besides watcherengines they had big ugly dogs aprowl while they slept.I came from above, however, having spied on them till I knew that a handful of dazedust—"

"The poor thing." Shadow-of-a-Dream took the boyand held him to her small breasts. "So full of sleep yet, aren't you, littleboo?" Blindly, he sought a nipple. Shesmiled through the veil of her hair. "No, I am still tooyoung, and you already too old. But come, when youwake in Carheddin under the mountain you shall feast."

"Yo-ah," said Ayoch very softly. "She is abroad andhas heard and seen. She comes." He crouched down,

wings folded. After a moment Mistherd knelt, and then Shadow-of-a-Dream, though she did not let go the child.

The Queen's tall form blocked off the moons. For a while she regarded the three and their booty. Hill andmoor sounds withdrew from their awareness until itseemed they could hear the northlights hiss.

At last Ayoch whispered, "Have I done well,Starmother?"

"If you stole a babe from a camp full of engines," saidthe beautiful voice, "then they were folk out of the farsouth who may not endure it as meekly as yeomen."

"But what can they do, Snowmaker?" the pook asked."How can they track us?"

Mistherd lifted his head and spoke in pride. "Also, now they too have felt the awe of us."

"And he is a cuddly dear," Shadow-of-a-Dream said."And we need more like him, do we not, Lady Sky?"

"It had to happen in some twilight," agreed she whostood above. "Take him onward and care for him. By this sign," which she made, "is he claimed for the Dwellers."

Their joy was freed. Ayoch cartwheeled over theground till he reached a shiverleaf. There he swarmed up the trunk and out on a limb, perched half hidden byunrestful pale foliage, and crowed. Boy and girl bore thechild toward Carheddin at an easy distance-devouring lope which let him pipe and her sing:

"Wahaii, wahaii!

Wayala, laii!

Wing on the Wind

high over heaven,

shrilly shrieking,

rush with the rainspears,

tumble through tumult,

drift to the moonhoar trees and the dream-heavy

shadows beneath them,and rock in, be one with the clinking wavelets of

lakes where the starbeams drown."

As she entered, Barbro Cullen felt, through all griefand fury, stabbed by dismay. The room was unkempt.

Journals, tapes, reels, codices, file boxes, bescribbledpapers were piled on every table. Dust filmed mostshelves and corners. Against one wall stood a laboratory setup, microscope and analytical equipment. She recog-nized it as compact and efficient, but it was not what youwould expect in an office, and it gave the air a faintchemical reek. The rug was threadbare, the furnitureshabby.

This was her final chance?

Then Eric Sherrinford approached. "Good day, Mrs.Cullen." he said. His tone was crisp, his handclasp firm.His faded gripsuit didn't bother her. She wasn't inclinedto fuss about her own appearance except on special occa-sions. (And would she ever again have one, unless shegot back Jimmy?) What she observed was a cat's personalneatness.

A smile radiated in crow's feet from his eyes. "Forgivemy bachelor housekeeping. On Beowulf we have—we had, at any rate—machines for that, so I never acquiredthe habit myself, and I don't want a hireling disarrangingmy tools. More convenient to work out of my apartmentthan keep a separate office. Won't you be seated?"

"No, thanks. I couldn't," she mumbled.

"I understand. But if you'll excuse me, I function bestin a relaxed position."

He jackknifed into a lounger. One long shank crossedthe other knee. He drew forth a pipe and stuffed it from a pouch. Barbro wondered why he took tobacco in soancient a way. Wasn't Beowulf supposed to have the up- to-date equipment that they still couldn't afford to buildon Roland? Well, of course old customs might surviveanyhow. They generally did in colonies, she rememberedreading. People had moved starward in the hope of pre-serving such outmoded things as their mother tongues or constitutional government or rational-technological civilization. . . .

Sherrinford pulled her up from the confusion of her weariness: "You must give me the details of your case,Mrs. Cullen. You've simply told me that your son was kidnapped and your local constabulary did nothing. Oth-erwise I know just a few obvious facts, such as your beingwidowed rather than divorced; and you're the daughter

of outwayers in Olga Ivanoff Land who, nevertheless,kept in close telecommunication with Christmas Landing;and you're trained in one of the biological professions;and you had several years' hiatus in field work until recently you started again."

She gaped at the high-cheeked, beak-nosed, black-haired and gray-eyed countenance. His lighter made ascritand a flare which seemed to fill the room. Quietness dwelt on this height above the city, and winter dusk wasseeping in through the windows. "How in cosmos do youknow that?" she heard herself exclaim.

He shrugged and fell into the lecturer's manner forwhich he was notorious. "My work depends on noticingdetails and fitting them together. In more than a hundredyears on Roland, the people, tending to cluster accordingto their origins and thought-habits, have developed regional accents. You have a trace of the Olgan burr,but you nasalize your vowels in the style of this area,though you live in Portolondon. That suggests steadychildhood exposure to metropolitan speech. You werepart of Matsuyama's expedition, you told me, and took your boy along. They wouldn't have allowed any ordi-nary technician to do that; hence you had to be valuable enough to get away with it. The team was conductingecological research; therefore you must be in the life sci-ences. For the same reason, you must have had previous field experience. But your skin is fair, showing none ofthe leatheriness one gets from prolonged exposure to thissun. Accordingly, you must have been mostly indoors fora good while before you went on your ill-fated trip. Asfor widowhood—you never mentioned a husband to me,but you have had a man whom you thought so highly of that you still wear both the wedding and the engagementring he gave you."

Her sight blurred and stung. The last of those wordshad brought Tim back, huge, ruddy, laughterful and gen-tle. She must turn from this other person and stare out-ward. "Yes," she achieved saying, "you're right."

The apartment occupied a hilltop above ChristmasLanding. Beneath it the city dropped away in walls, roofs, archaistic chimneys and lamplit streets, goblinlights of human-piloted vehicles, to the harbor, the sweep

of Venture Bay, ships bound to and from the Sunward Islands and remoter regions of the Boreal Ocean, whichglimmered like mercury in the afterglow of Charlemagne. Oliver was swinging rapidly higher, a mottled orange disca full degree wide; closer to the zenith which it couldnever reach, it would shine the color of ice. Alde, halfthe seeming size, was a thin slow crescent near Sirius,which she remembered was near Sol, but you couldn'tsee Sol without a telescope—

"Yes," she said around the pain in her throat, "myhusband is about four years dead. I was carrying our firstchild when he was killed by a stampeding monocerus.We'd been married three years before. Met while wewere both at the University—'casts from School Centralcan only supply a basic education, you know—we founded our own team to do ecological studies undercontract—you know, can a certain area be settled while maintaining a balance of nature, what crops will grow,what hazards, that sort of question—Well, afterward Idid lab work for a fisher co-op in Portolondon. But themonotony, the . . . shut-in-ness . . . was eating me away. Professor Matsuyama offered me a position on the teamhe was organizing to examine Commissioner HauchLand. I thought, God help me, I thought Jimmy—Timwanted him named James, once the tests showed it'd bea boy, after his own father and because of 'Timmy and Jimmy' and— Oh, I thought Jimmy could safely comealong. I couldn't bear to leave him behind for months,not at his age. We could make sure he'd never wanderout of camp. What could hurt him inside it? / had never believed those stories about the Outlings stealing human children. I supposed parents were trying to hide from themselves the fact they'd been careless, they'd let a kidget lost in the woods or attacked by a pack of satansor— Well, I learned better, Mr. Sherrinford. The guard robots were evaded and the dogs were drugged and whenI woke, Jimmy was gone."

He regarded her through the smoke from his pipe.Barbro Engdahl Cullen was a big woman of thirty or so(Rolandic years, he reminded himself, ninety-five per-cent of Terrestrial, not the same as Beowulfan years),broad-shouldered, long-legged, full-breasted, supple of

stride; her face was wide, straight nose, straightforwardhazel eyes, heavy but mobile mouth; her hair was red-dish-brown, cropped below the ears, her voice husky, hergarment a plain street robe. To still the writhing of herfingers, he asked skeptically, "Do you now believe in theOutlings?"

"No. I'm just not so sure as I was." She swung aboutwith half a glare for him. "And we have found traces."

"Bits of fossils," he nodded. "A few artifacts of a neo-lithic sort. But apparently ancient, as if the makers died ages ago. Intensive search has failed to turn up any realevidence for their survival."

"How intensive can search be, in a summer-stormy, winter-gloomy wilderness around the North Pole?" shedemanded. "When we are, how many, a million peopleon an entire planet, half of us crowded into this

onecity?"

"And the rest crowding this one habitable continent,"he pointed out.

"Arctica covers five million square kilometers," sheflung back. "The Arctic Zone proper covers a fourth of it. We haven't the industrial base to establish satellitemonitor stations, build aircraft we can trust in those parts, drive roads through the damned darklands andestablish permanent bases and get to know them andtame them. Good Christ, generations of lonely outway-men told stories about Graymantle, and the beast wasnever seen by a proper scientist till last year!"

"Still, you continue to doubt the reality of theOutlings?"

"Well, what about a secret cult among humans, bora of isolation and ignorance, lairing in the wilderness, stealing children when they can for—" She swallowed.Her head drooped. "But you're supposed to be theexpert."

"From what you told me over the visiphone, the Porto-london constabulary questions the accuracy of the report your group made, thinks the lot of you were hysterical,claims you must have omitted a due precaution and thechild toddled away and was lost beyond your finding."

His dry words pried the horror out of her. Flushing,she snapped: "Like any settler's kid? No. I didn't simply

yell. I consulted Data Retrieval. A few*too* many suchcases are recorded for accident to be a very plausible explanation. And shall we totally ignore the frightenedstories about reappearances? But when I went back tothe constabulary with my facts, they brushed me off. Isuspect that was not entirely because they're undermanned.I think they're afraid too. They're recruited from countryboys; and Portolondon lies near the edge of theunknown."

Her energy faded. "Roland hasn't got any central po-lice force," she finished drably. "You're my last hope."

The man puffed smoke into twilight, with which itblent, before he said in a kindlier voice than hitherto: "Please don't make it a high hope, Mrs. Cullen. I'm the solitary private investigator on this world, having noresources beyond myself, and a newcomer to boot."

"How long have you been here?"

"Twelve years. Barely time to get a little familiaritywith the relatively civilized coastlands. You settlers of acentury or more—what do you, even, know about Arc-tica's interior?"

Sherrinford sighed. "I'll take the case, charging nomore than I must, mainly for the sake of the experience,"he said. "But only if you'll be my guide and assistant,however painful it will be for you."

"Of course! I dreaded waiting idle. Why me, though?"

"Hiring someone else as well qualified would be pro-hibitively expensive, on a pioneer planet where everyhand has a thousand urgent tasks to do. Besides, youhave motive. And I'll need that. I, who was born onanother world altogether strange to this one, itself alto-gether strange to Mother Earth, I am too

dauntinglyaware of how handicapped we are."

Night gathered upon Christmas Landing. The airstayed mild, but glimmer-lit tendrils of fog, sneaking through the streets, had a cold look, and colder yet was the aurora where it shuddered between the moons. Thewoman drew closer to the man in this darkening room, surely not aware that she did, until he switched on a fluoropanel. The same knowledge of Roland's alonenesswas in both of them.

One light-year is not much as galactic distances go.You could walk it in about 270 million years, beginningat the middle of the Permian Era, when dinosaursbelonged to the remote future, and continuing to the present day when spaceships cross even greater reaches.

But stars in our neighborhood average some nine light-years apart; and barely one percent of them have planetswhich are man-habitable; and speeds are limited to lessthan that of radiation. Scant help is given by relativistictime contraction and suspended animation en route.These make the journeys seem short; but history mean-while does not stop at home.

Thus voyages from sun to sun will always be few. Colo-nists will be those who have extremely special reasonsfor going. They will take along germ plasm for exogeneticcultivation of domestic plants and animals—and ofhuman infants, in order that population can grow fast enough to escape death through genetic drift. After all,they cannot rely on further immigration. Two or threetimes a century, a ship may call from some other colony. (Not from Earth. Earth has long ago sunk into alien con-cerns.) Its place of origin will be an old settlement. The young ones are in no position to build and man interstel-lar vessels.

Their very survival, let alone their eventual moderniza-tion, is in doubt. The founding fathers have had to takewhat they could get, in a universe not especially designedfor man.

Consider, for example, Roland. It is among the rarehappy finds, a world where humans can live, breathe,eat the food, drink the water, walk unclad if they choose,sow their crops, pasture their beasts, dig their mines,erect their homes, raise their children and grandchildren. It is worth crossing three quarters of a light-century to preserve certain dear values and strike new roots into thesoil of Roland.

But the star Charlemagne is of type F9, forty percentbrighter than Sol, brighter still in the treacherous ultravi-olet and wilder still in the wind of charged particles that seethes from it. The planet has an eccentric orbit. In themiddle of the short but furious northern summer, whichincludes periastron, total insolation is more than double

what Earth gets; in the depth of the long northern winter,it is barely less than Terrestrial average.

Native life is abundant everywhere. But lacking elabo-rate machinery, not economically possible to constructfor more than a few specialists, man can only endure thehigh latitudes. A ten-degree axial tilt, together with theorbit, means that the northern part of the Arctican conti-nent spends half its year in unbroken sunlessness.Around the South Pole lies an empty ocean.

Other differences from Earth might superficially seemmore important. Roland has two moons, small but close,to evoke clashing tides. It rotates once in thirty-twohours, which is endlessly, subtly disturbing to organismsevolved through gigayears of a quicker rhythm. Theweather patterns are altogether unterrestrial. The globeis a mere 9500 kilometers in diameter; its surface gravityis 0.42 x 980 cm/sec2;

the sea-level air pressure is slightlyabove one Earth atmosphere. (For actually Earth is the freak, and man exists because a cosmic accident blewaway most of the gas that a body its size ought to have kept, as Venus has done.)

However,*Homo* can truly be called*sapiens* when hepractices his specialty of being unspecialized. His repeated attempts to freeze himself into an all-answeringpattern or culture or ideology, or whatever he has named it, have repeatedly brought ruin. Give him the pragmaticbusiness of making his living and he will usually do ratherwell. He adapts, within broad limits.

These limits are set by such factors as his need forsunlight and his being, necessarily and forever, a part ofthe life that surrounds him and a creature of the spiritwithin.

Portolondon thrust docks, boats, machinery, ware-houses into the Gulf of Polaris. Behind them huddled the dwellings of its 5000 permanent inhabitants: concretewalls, storm shutters, high-peaked tile roofs. The gaietyof their paint looked forlorn amidst lamps; this town laypast the Arctic Circle.

Nevertheless Sherrinford remarked, "Cheerful place,eh? The kind of thing I came to Roland looking for."

Barbro made no reply. The days in Christmas Landing,

while he made his preparations, had drained her. Gazingout the dome of the taxi that was whirring them down-town from the hydrofoil that brought them, she supposedhe meant the lushness of forest and meadows along theroad, brilliant hues and phosphorescence of flowers ingardens, clamor of wings overhead. Unlike Terrestrialflora in cold climates, Arctican vegetation spends every daylit hour in frantic growth and energy storage. Not tillsummer's fever gives place to gentle winter does it bloom and fruit; and estivating animals rise from their dens and migratory birds come home.

The view was lovely, she had to admit: beyond thetrees, a spaciousness climbing toward remote heights, sil-very-gray under a moon, an aurora, the diffuse radiancefrom a sun just below the horizon.

Beautiful as a hunting satan, she thought, and as terri-ble. That wilderness had stolen Jimmy. She wondered ifshe would at least be given to find his little bones andtake them to his father.

Abruptly she realized that she and Sherrinford were attheir hotel and that he had been speaking of the town.Since it was next in size after the capital, he must havevisited here often before. The streets were crowded andnoisy; signs flickered, music blared from shops, taverns, restaurants, sports centers, dance halls; vehicles werejammed down to molasses speed; the several-stories-high office buildings stood aglow. Portolondon linked an enor- mous hinterland to the outside world. Down the Gloria River came timber rafts, ores, harvest of farms whoseowners were slowly making Rolandic life serve them,meat and ivory and furs gathered by rangers in the moun-tains beyond Troll Scarp. In from the sea came coastwise freighters, the fishing fleet, produce of the SunwardIslands, plunder of whole continents further south wherebold men adventured. It clanged in Portolondon,laughed, blustered, swaggered, connived, robbed, preached, guzzled, swilled, toiled, dreamed, lusted, built,destroyed, died, was born, was happy, angry, sorrowful,greedy, vulgar, loving, ambitious, human. Neither thesun's blaze elsewhere nor the half year's twilight here—wholly night around midwinter—was going to stay man'shand.

Or so everybody said.

Everybody except those who had settled in the dark-lands. Barbro used to take for granted that they were evolving curious customs, legends, and superstitions,which would die when the outway had been completelymapped and controlled. Of late, she had wondered. Per-haps Sherrinford's hints, about a change in his own atti-tude brought about by his preliminary research, wereresponsible.

Or perhaps she just needed something to think aboutbesides how Jimmy, the day before he went, when sheasked him whether he wanted rye or French bread for asandwich, answered in great solemnity—he was becom-ing interested in the alphabet—"I'll have a slice of whatwe people call the F bread."

She scarcely noticed getting out of the taxi, registering,being conducted to a primitively furnished room. Butafter she unpacked she remembered Sherrinford had sug-gested a confidential conference. She went down the halland knocked on his door. Her knuckles sounded less loudthan her heart.

He opened the door, finger on lips, and gestured hertoward a corner. Her temper bristled until she saw theimage of Chief Constable Dawson in the visiphone. Sher-rinford must have chimed him up and must have a reasonto keep her out of scanner range. She found a chair andwatched, nails digging into knees.

The detective's lean length refolded itself. "Pardon theinterruption," he said. "A man mistook the number. Drunk, by the indications."

Dawson chuckled. "We get plenty of those." Barbrorecalled his fondness for gabbing. He tugged the beardwhich he affected, as if he were an outwayer instead ofa townsman. "No harm in them as a rule. They onlyhave a lot of voltage to discharge, after weeks or monthsin the backlands."

"I've gathered that that environment—foreign in a mil-lion major and minor ways to the one that created man—I've gathered that it does do odd things to the personal-ity." Sherrinford tamped his pipe. "Of course, you knowmy practice has been confined to urban and suburban areas. Isolated garths seldom need private investigators.

Now that situation appears to have changed. I called to ask you for advice."

"Glad to help," Dawson said. "I've not forgotten whatyou did for us in the de Tahoe murder case." Cautiously:"Better explain your problem first."

Sherrinford struck fire. The smoke that followed cutthrough the green odors—even here, a paved pair of kilo-meters from the nearest woods—that drifted past trafficrumble through a crepuscular window. "This is more a scientific mission than a search for an absconding debtoror an industrial spy," he drawled. "I'm looking into twopossibilities: that an organization, criminal or religious orwhatever, has long been active and steals infants; or thatthe Outlings of folklore are real."

"Huh?" On Dawson's face Barbro read as much dis-may as surprise. "You can't be serious!"

"Can't I?" Sherrinford smiled. "Several generations' worth of reports shouldn't be dismissed out of hand. Especially not when they become more frequent and con-sistent in the course of time, not less. Nor can we ignorethe documented loss of babies and small children,amounting by now to over a hundred, and never a tracefound afterward. Nor the finds which demonstrate thatan intelligent species once inhabited Arctica and may stillhaunt the interior."

Dawson leaned forward as if to climb out of the screen."Who engaged you?" he demanded. "That Cullen woman? We were sorry for her, naturally, but she wasn'tmaking sense and when she got downright abusive—"

"Didn't her companions, reputable scientists, confirmher story?"

"No story to confirm. Look, they had the place ringed with detectors and alarms, and they kept mastiffs. Stan-dard procedure in a country where a hungry sauroid orwhatever might happen by. Nothing could've entered unbeknownst."

"On the ground. How about a flyer landing in themiddle of camp?"

"A man in a copter rig would've roused everybody."

"A winged being might be quieter."

"A living flyer that could lift a three-year-old boy?Doesn't exist."

"Isn't in the scientific literature, you mean, Constable. Remember Graymantle; remember how little we knowabout Roland, a planet, an entire world. Such birds doexist on Beowulf—and on Rustum, I've read. I made acalculation from the local ratio of air density to gravityand, yes, it's marginally possible here too. The childcould have been carried off for a short distance before wing muscles were exhausted and the creature mustdescend."

Dawson snorted. "First it landed and walked into thetent where mother and boy were asleep. Then it walked away, toting him, after it couldn't fly further. Does that sound like a bird of prey? And the victim didn't cry out,the dogs didn't bark, nothing!"

"As a matter of fact," Sherrinford said, "those incon-sistencies are the most interesting and convincing featureof the whole account. You're right, it's hard to see howa human kidnapper could get in undetected, and an eagletype of creature wouldn't operate in that fashion. Butnone of this applies to a winged intelligent being. Theboy could have been drugged. Certainly the dogs showedsigns of having been."

"The dogs showed signs of having overslept. Nothinghad disturbed them. The kid wandering by wouldn't doso. We don't need to assume one damn thing except, first, that he got restless and, second, that the alarmswere a bit sloppily rigged—seeing as how no danger wasexpected from inside camp—and let him pass out. And,third, I hate to speak this way, but we must assume thepoor tyke starved or was killed."

Dawson paused before adding: "If we had more staff,we could have given the affair more time. And would have, of course. We did make an aerial sweep, whichrisked the lives of the pilots, using instruments whichwould've spotted the kid anywhere in a fifty-kilometerradius, unless he was dead. You know how sensitive ther-mal analyzers are. We drew a complete blank. We havemore important jobs than to hunt for the scattered piecesof a corpse."

He finished brusquely, "If Mrs. Cullen's hired you, myadvice is you find an excuse to quit. Better for her, too.She's got to come to terms with reality."

Barbro checked a shout by biting her tongue.

"Oh, this is merely the latest disappearance of theseries," Sherrinford said. She didn't understand how he could maintain his easy tone when Jimmy was lost."More thoroughly recorded than any before, thus more suggestive. Usually an outwayer family has given a tear-ful but undetailed account of their child who vanishedand must have been stolen by the Old Folk. Sometimes, years later, they'd tell about glimpses of what they sworemust have been the grown child, not really human anylonger, flitting past in murk or peering through a windowor working mischief upon them. As you say, neither theauthorities nor the scientists have had personnel or resources to mount a proper investigation. But as I say,the matter appears to be worth investigating. Maybe aprivate party like myself can contribute."

"Listen, most of us constables grew up in the outway.We don't just ride patrol and answer emergency calls,we go back there for holidays and reunions. If any gangof...of human sacrificers was around, we'd know."

"I realize that. I also realize that the people you camefrom have a widespread and deep-seated belief in nonhu-man beings with supernatural powers. Many actually gothrough rites and make offerings to propitiate them."

"I know what you're leading up to," Dawson fleered."I've heard it before, from a hundred sensationalists. The aborigines are the Outlings. I thought better of you. Surely you've visited a museum or three, surely you'veread literature from planets which do have natives—or damn and blast, haven't you ever applied that logic of yours?"

He wagged a finger. "Think," he said. "What have wein fact discovered? A few pieces of worked stone; a fewmegaliths that might be artificial; scratchings on rock thatseem to show plants and animals, though not the way any human culture would ever have shown them; tracesof fires and broken bones; other fragments of bone that seem as if they might've belonged to thinking creatures,as if they might've been inside fingers or around bigbrains. If so, however, the owners looked nothing likemen. Or angels, for that matter. Nothing! The most

anthropoid reconstruction I've seen shows a kind of two-legged crocagator.

"Wait, let me finish. The stories about the Outlings— oh, I've heard them too, plenty of them; I believed them when I was a kid—the stories tell how there're differentkinds, some winged, some not, some half-human, somecompletely human except maybe for being too hand- some—It's fairyland from ancient Earth all over again.Isn't it? I got interested once and dug into the HeritageLibrary microfiles, and be damned if I didn't find almost the identical yarns, told by peasants centuries beforespaceflight.

"None of it squares with the scanty relics we have, if they are relics, or with the fact that no area the size ofArctica could spawn a dozen different intelligent species,or...hellfire, man, with the way your common sense tellsyou aborigines would behave when humans arrived!"

Sherrinford nodded. "Yes, yes," he said. "I'm less sure than you that the common sense of nonhuman beings is precisely like our own. I've seen so much varia-tion within mankind. But, granted, your arguments arestrong. Roland's too few scientists have more pressingtasks than tracking down the origins of what is, as youput it, a revived medieval superstition."

He cradled his pipe bowl in both hands and peeredinto the tiny hearth of it. "Perhaps what interests me most," he said softly, "is why—across that gap of centu-ries, across a barrier of machine civilization and itsutterly antagonistic world-view—no continuity of tradi-tion whatsoever—why have hardheaded, technologicallyorganized, reasonably well-educated colonists here brought back from its grave a belief in the Old Folk?"

"I suppose eventually, if the University ever doesdevelop the psychology department they keep talking about, I suppose eventually somebody will get a thesisout of that question." Dawson spoke in a jagged voice,and he gulped when Sherrinford replied:

"I propose to begin now. In Commissioner HauchLand, since that's where the latest incident occurred. Where can I rent a vehicle?"

"Uh, might be hard to do—"

"Come, come. Tenderfoot or not, I know better. In

an economy of scarcity, few people own heavy equip-ment. But since it's needed, it can always be rented. Iwant a camper bus with a ground-effect drive suitablefor every kind of terrain. And I want certain equipment installed which I've brought along, and the top canopysection replaced by a gun turret controllable from the driver's seat. But I'll supply the weapons. Besides rifles and pistols of my own, I've arranged to borrow someartillery from Christmas Landing's police arsenal."

"Hoy? Are you genuinely intending to make ready for...a war . . . against a myth?"

"Let's say I'm taking out insurance, which isn't terriblyexpensive, against a remote possibility. Now, besides thebus, what about a light aircraft carried piggyback for use in surveys?"

"No." Dawson sounded more positive than hitherto. "That's asking for disaster. We can have you flown to abase camp in a large plane when the weather report'sexactly right. But the pilot will have to fly back at once, before the weather turns wrong again. Meteorology'sunderdeveloped on Roland, the air's especially treacher-ous this time of year, and we're not tooled up to produce aircraft that can outlive every surprise." He drew breath."Have you no idea of how fast a whirly-whirly can hit, orwhat size hailstones might strike from a clear sky, or—?Once you're there, man, you stick to the ground." He hesitated. "That's an important reason our information isso scanty about the outway and its settlers are so isolated."

Sherrinford laughed ruefully. "Well, I suppose ifdetails are what I'm after, I must creep along anyway."

"You'll waste a lot of time," Dawson said. "Not tomention your client's money. Listen, I can't forbid you to chase shadows, but—"

The discussion went on for almost an hour. When the screen finally blanked, Sherrinford rose, stretched, andwalked toward Barbro. She noticed anew his peculiar gait.He had come from a planet with a fourth again Earth'sgravitational drag, to one where weight was less than halfTerrestrial. She wondered if he had flying dreams.

"I apologize for shuffling you off like that," he said."I didn't expect to reach him at once. He was quite

truth-ful about how busy he is. But having made contact, I

didn't want to remind him overmuch of you. He candismiss my project as a futile fantasy which I'll soon giveup. But he might have frozen completely, might evenhave put up obstacles before us, if he'd realized throughyou how determined we are."

"Why should he care?" she asked in her bitterness.

"Fear of consequences, the worse because it is unad-mitted—fear of consequences, the more terrifying because they are unguessable." Sherrinford's gaze went to the screen, and thence out the window to the aurorapulsing in glacial blue and white immensely far overhead."I suppose you saw I was talking to a frightened man.Down underneath his conventionality and scoffing, hebelieves in the Outlings—oh, yes, he believes."

The feet of Mistherd flew over yerba and outpacedwindblown driftweed. Beside him, black and misshapen,hulked Nagrim the nicor, whose earthquake weight lefta swathe of crushed plants. Behind, luminous blossomsof a firethom shone through the twining, trailing outlinesof Morgarel the wraith.

Here Cloudmoor rose in a surf of hills and thickets.The air lay quiet, now and then carrying the distance-muted howl of a beast. It was darker than usual at win-terbirth, the moons being down and aurora a wan flickerabove mountains on the northern worldedge. But thismade the stars keen, and their numbers crowded heaven,and Ghost Road shone among them as if it, like theleafage beneath, were paved with dew.

"Yonder!" bawled Nagrim. All four of his armspointed. The party had topped a ridge. Far off glimmered a spark. "Hoah, hoah! 'Ull we right off stamp dem flat,or pluck dem apart slow?"

We shall do nothing of the son, bonebrain,Morgarel'sanswer slid through their heads.*Not unless they attack*us, and they will not unless we make them aware of us, and her command is that we spy out their purposes.

"Gr-r-rum-m-m.. I know deir aim. Cut down trees,stick plows in land, sow deir cursed seed in de clods and in deir shes. 'Less we drive dem into de bitterwater, andsoon, soon, dey'll wax too strong for us."

"Not too strong for the Queen!" Mistherd protested,shocked.

Yet they do have new powers, it seems,Morgarelreminded him.*Carefully must we probe them.*

"Den carefully can we step on dem?" asked Nagrim.

The question woke a grin out of Mistherd's own uneas-iness. He slapped the scaly back. "Don't talk, you," hesaid. "It hurts my ears. Nor think; that hurts your head.Come, run!"

Ease yourself,Morgarel scolded.*You have too much*life in you, human-born.

Mistherd made a face at the wraith, but obeyed to theextent of slowing down and picking his way through what cover the country afforded. For he traveled on behalf of the Fairest, to learn what had

brought a pair of mortals questing hither.

Did they seek that boy whom Ayoch stole? (He contin-ued to weep for his mother, though less and less oftenas the marvels of Carheddin entered him.) Perhaps. Abirdcraft had left them and their car at the now aban-doned campsite, from which they had followed an out-ward spiral. But when no trace of the cub had appearedinside a reasonable distance, they did not call to be flownhome. And this wasn't because weather forbade the far- speaker waves to travel, as was frequently the case. No,instead the couple set off toward the mountains ofMoonhorn. Their course would take them past a few out-lying invader steadings and on into realms untrodden bytheir race.

So this was no ordinary survey. Then what was it?

Mistherd understood now why she who reigned hadmade her adopted mortal children learn, or retain, theclumsy language of their forebears. He had hated that drill,wholly foreign to Dweller ways. Of course, you obeyedher, and in time you saw how wise she had been. . . .

Presently he left Nagrim behind a rock—the nicorwould only be useful in a fight—and crawled from bushto bush until he lay within man-lengths of the humans.A rainplant drooped over him, leaves soft on his bareskin, and clothed him in darkness. Morgarel floated tothe crown of a shiverleaf, whose unrest would better con- ceal his flimsy shape. He'd not be much help either. And

that was the most troublous, the almost appalling thinghere. Wraiths were among those who could not just senseand send thoughts, but cast illusions. Morgarel hadreported that this time his power seemed to rebound off an invisible cold wall around the car.

Otherwise the male and female had set up no guardianengines and kept no dogs. Belike they supposed nonewould be needed, since they slept in the long vehicle which bore them. But such contempt of the Queen'sstrength could not be tolerated, could it?

Metal sheened faintly by the light of their campfire. They sat on either side, wrapped in coats against a cool-ness that Mistherd, naked, found mild. The mate dranksmoke. The female stared past him into a dusk whichher flame-dazzled eyes must see as thick gloom. Thedancing glow brought her vividly forth. Yes, to judgefrom Ayoch's tale, she was the dam of the new cub.

Ayoch had wanted to come too, but the WonderfulOne forbade. Pooks couldn't hold still long enough forsuch a mission.

The man sucked on his pipe. His cheeks thus pulled into shadow while the light flickered across nose andbrow, he looked disquietingly like a shearbill about tostoop on prey.

"—No, I tell you again, Barbro, I have no theories,"he was saying. "When facts are insufficient, theorizing isridiculous at best, misleading at worst."

"Still, you must have some idea of what you're doing,"she said. It was plain that they had threshed this outoften before. No Dweller could be as persistent as heror as patient as him. "That gear you packed—that gener-ator you keep running—"

"I have a working hypothesis or two, which suggestedwhat equipment I ought to take."

"Why won't you tell me what the hypotheses are?"

"They themselves indicate that that might be inadvis-able at the present time. I'm still feeling my way into the labyrinth. And I haven't had a chance yet to hookeverything up. In fact, we're really only protected against so-called telepathic influence—"

"What?" She started. "Do you mean . . . those leg-ends about how they can read minds too—" Her words

trailed off and her gaze sought the darkness beyond hisshoulders.

He leaned forward. His tone lost its clipped rapidity,grew earnest and soft. "Barbro, you're racking yourself to pieces. Which is no help to Jimmy if he's alive, themore so when you may well be badly needed later on.We've a long trek before us, and you'd better settle intoit."

She nodded jerkily and caught her lip between herteeth for a moment before she answered, "I'm trying."

He smiled around his pipe. "I expect you'll succeed.You don't strike me as a quitter or a whiner or an enjoyer of misery."

She dropped a hand to the pistol at her belt. Her voice changed; it came out of her throat like knife from sheath."When we find them, they'll know what I am. Whathumans are."

"Put anger aside also," the man urged. "We can'tafford emotions. If the Outlings are real, as I told youI'm provisionally assuming, they're fighting for theirhomes." After a short stillness he added: "I like to thinkthat if the first explorers had found live natives, menwould not have colonized Roland. But too late now. We can't go back if we wanted to. It's a bitter-end struggle,against an enemy so crafty that he's even hidden from usthe fact that he is waging war."

"Is he? I mean, skulking, kidnapping an occasionalchild—"

"That's part of my hypothesis. I suspect those aren'tharassments, they're tactics employed in a chillingly sub-tle strategy."

The fire sputtered and sparked. The man smokedawhile, brooding, until he went on:

"I didn't want to raise your hopes or excite you undulywhile you had to wait on me, first in Christmas Landing, then in Portolondon. Afterward we were busy satisfyingourselves Jimmy had been taken further from camp than he could have wandered before collapsing. So I'm onlytelling you now how thoroughly I studied available mate-rial on the...Old Folk. Besides, at first I did it onthe principle of eliminating every imaginable possibility,however absurd. I expected no result other than final

disproof. But I went through everything, relics, analyses,histories, journalistic accounts, monographs; I talked tooutwayers who happened to be in town and to what sci-entists we have who've taken any interest in the matter. I'm a quick study. I flatter myself I became as expert asanyone—though God knows there's little to be experton. Furthermore, I, a comparative stranger, maybe looked on the problem with fresh eyes. And a patternemerged for me.

"If the aborigines became extinct, why didn't theyleave more remnants? Arctica isn't enormous; and it's fertile for Rolandic life. It ought to have supported a population whose artifacts ought to have accumulated over millennia. I've read that on Earth, literally tens ofthousands of paleolithic hand axes were found, more bychance than archaeology.

"Very well. Suppose the relics and fossils were deliber-ately removed, between the time the last survey partyleft and the first colonizing ships arrived. I did find somesupport for that idea in the diaries of the original explor-ers. They were too preoccupied with checking the habit-ability of the planet to make catalogues of primitivemonuments. However, the remarks they wrote downindicate they saw much more than later arrivals did. Sup-pose what we have found is just what the removers over-looked or didn't get around to.

"That argues a sophisticated mentality, thinking inlong-range terms, doesn't it? Which in turn argues that the Old Folk were not mere hunters or neolithicfarmers."

"But nobody ever saw buildings or machines or anysuch thing," Barbro protested.

"No. Most likely the natives didn't go through ourkind of metallurgy-industrial evolution. I can conceiveof other paths to take. Their full-fledged civilizationmight have begun, rather than ended, in biological sci-ence and technology. It might have developed potentiali-ties of the nervous system, which might be greater intheir species than in man. We have those abilities tosome degree ourselves, you realize. A dowser, forinstance, actually senses variations in the local magneticfield caused by a water table. However, in us, these tal-

ents are maddeningly rare and tricky. So we took ourbusiness elsewhere. Who needs to be a telepath, say,when he has a visiphone? The Old Folk may have seenit the other way around. The artifacts of their civilizationmay have been, may still be, unrecognizable to men."

"They could have identified themselves to the men,though," Barbro said. "Why didn't they?"

"I can imagine any number of reasons. As, they couldhave had a bad experience with interstellar visitors earlierin their history. Ours is scarcely the sole race that hasspaceships. However, I told you I don't theorize in advance of the facts. Let's say no more than that the OldFolk, if they exist, are alien to us."

"For a rigorous thinker, you're spinning a mighty thinthread."

"I've admitted this is entirely provisional." Hesquinted at her through a roil of campfire smoke. "You came to me, Barbro, insisting in the teeth of officialdomyour boy had been stolen; but your own talk about cultistkidnappers was ridiculous. Why are you reluctant toadmit the reality of nonhumans?"

"In spite of the fact that Jimmy's being alive probably. depends on it," she sighed. "I know." A shudder: "Maybe I don't dare admit it."

"I've said nothing thus far that hasn't been speculatedabout in print," he told her. "A disreputable speculation,true. In a hundred years, nobody has found valid evi-dence for the Outlings being more than a superstition.Still, a few people have declared it's at least possibleintelligent natives are at large in the wilderness."

"I know," she repeated. "I'm not sure, though, whathas made you, overnight, take those arguments seriously."

"Well, once you got me started thinking, it occurredto me that Roland's outwayers are not utterly isolatedmedieval crofters. They have books, telecommunica-tions, power tools, motor vehicles, above all they have amodern science-oriented education. Why*should* theyturn superstitious? Something must be causing it." Hestopped. "I'd better not continue. My ideas go furtherthan this; but if they're correct, it's dangerous to speakthem aloud."

Mistherd's belly muscles tensed. There was danger forfair, in that shearbill head. The Garland Bearer must be warned. For a minute he wondered about summoningNagrim to kill these two. If the nicor jumped them fast,their firearms might avail them naught. But no. Theymight have left word at home, or—He came back to his ears. The talk had changed course. Barbro was murmur-ing, "—why you stayed on Roland."

The man smiled his gaunt smile. "Well, life on Beo-wulf held no challenge for me. Heorot is—or was; thiswas decades past, remember—Heorot was densely popu-lated, smoothly organized, boringly uniform. That waspartly due to the lowland frontier, a safety valve thatbled off the dissatisfied. But I lack the carbon-dioxidetolerance necessary to live healthily down there. Anexpedition was being readied to make a swing around a number of colony worlds, especially those which didn't have the equipment to keep in laser contact. You'll recall its announced purpose, to seek out new ideas in science,arts, sociology, philosophy, whatever might prove valu- able. I'm afraid they found little on Roland relevant to Beowulf. But I, who had wangled a berth, I saw opportu-nities for myself and decided to make my home here."

"Were you a detective back there, too?"

"Yes, in the official police. We had a tradition of suchwork in our family. Some of that may have come from the Cherokee side of it, if the name means anything toyou. However, we also claimed collateral descent fromone of the first private inquiry agents on record, back onEarth before spaceflight. Regardless of how true thatmay be, I found him a useful model. You see, an arche-

type-"

The man broke off. Unease crossed his features. "Best we go to sleep," he said. "We've a long distance to coverin the morning."

She looked outward. "Here is no morning."They retired. Mistherd rose and cautiously flexed lim-berness back into his muscles. Before returning to theSister of Lyrth, he risked a glance through a pane in the car. Bunks were made up, side by side, and the humanslay in them. Yet the man had not touched her, though

hers was a bonny body, and nothing that had passedbetween them suggested he meant to do so.

Eldritch, humans. Cold and claylike. And they wouldoverrun the beautiful wild world? Mistherd spat in dis-gust. It must not happen. It would not happen. She whoreigned had vowed that.

The lands of William Irons were immense. But thiswas because a barony was required to support him,

hiskin and cattle, on native crops whose cultivation was stillpoorly understood. He raised some Terrestrial plants as well, by summerlight and in conservatories. However, these were a luxury. The true conquest of northern Arc-tica lay in yerba hay, in bathyrhiza wood, in pericoupand glycophyllon and eventually, when the market hadexpanded with population and industry, in chalcan-themum for city florists and pelts of cage-bred rover for city furriers.

That was in a tomorrow Irons did not expect he wouldlive to see. Sherrinford wondered if the man really expected anyone ever would.

The room was warm and bright. Cheerfulness crackledin the fireplace. Light from fluoropanels gleamed offhand-carven chests and chairs and tables, off colorful dra-peries and shelved dishes. The outwayer sat solid in hishighseat, stoutly clad, beard flowing down his chest. Hiswife and daughters brought coffee, whose fragrancejoined the remnant odors of a hearty supper, to him, hisguests, and his sons.

But outside, wind hooted, lightning flared, thunderbawled, rain crashed on roof and walls and roared downto swirl among the courtyard cobblestones. Sheds andbarns crouched against hugeness beyond. Trees groaned;and did a wicked undertone of laughter run beneath thelowing of a frightened cow? A burst of hailstones hit thetiles like knocking knuckles.

You could feel how distant your neighbors were, Sher-rinford thought. And nonetheless they were the peoplewhom you saw oftenest, did daily business with by visi-phpne (when a solar storm didn't make gibberish of theirvoices and chaos of their faces) or in the flesh, partiedwith, gossipped and intrigued with, intermarried with; in

the end, they were the people who would bury you. The lights and machinery of the coastal towns were mon-strously farther away.

William Irons was a strong man. Yet when now hespoke, fear was in his tone. "You'd truly go over Troll Scarp?"

"Do you mean Hanstein Palisades?" Sherrinford responded, more challenge than question.

"No outwayer calls it anything but Troll Scarp," Bar-bro said.

And how had a name like that been reborn, light-yearsand centuries from Earth's dark ages?

"Hunters, trappers, prospectors—rangers, you callthem—travel in those mountains," Sherrinford declared.

"In certain parts," Irons said. "That's allowed, by apact once made 'tween a man and the Queen after he'd done well by a jack-o'-the-hill that a satan had hurt.Wherever the plumablanca grows, men may fare, if theyleave mangoods on the altar boulders in payment forwhat they take out of the land. Elsewhere—" one fist clenched on a chair arm and went slack again—" 's notwise to go."

"It's been done, hasn't it?"

"Oh, yes. And some came back all right, or so theyclaimed, though I've heard they were never lucky after-ward. And some didn't, they vanished. And some who returned babbled of wonders and horrors, and stayedwitlings the rest of their lives. Not for a long tune hasanybody been rash enough to break the

pact andovertread the bounds." Irons looked at Barbro almostentreatingly. His woman and children stared likewise,grown still. Wind hooted beyond the walls and rattledthe storm shutters. "Don't you."

"I've reason to believe my son is there," she answered.

"Yes, yes, you've told and I'm sorry. Maybe somethingcan be done. I don't know what, but I'd be glad to, oh,lay a double offering on Unvar's Barrow this midwinter,and a prayer drawn in the turf by a flint knife. Maybethey'll return him." Irons sighed. "They've not done such a thing in man's memory, though. And he could have aworse lot. I've glimpsed them myself, speeding madcap

through twilight. They seem happier than we are. Mightbe no kindness, sending your boy home again."

"Like in the Arvid song," said his wife.

Irons nodded. "M-hm. Or others, come to think of it."

"What's this?" Sherrinford asked. More sharply thanbefore, he felt himself a stranger. He was a child of citiesand technics, above all a child of the skeptical intelli-gence. This family*believed.* It was disquieting to seemore than a touch of their acceptance in Barbro's slownod.

"We have the same ballad in Olga Ivanoff Land," shetold him, her voice less calm than the words. "It's oneof the traditional ones, nobody knows who composed them, that are sung to set the measure of a ring-dancein a meadow."

"I noticed a multilyre in your baggage, Mrs. Cullen,"said the wife of Irons. She was obviously eager to get offthe explosive topic of a venture in defiance of the Old Folk. A songfest could help. "Would you like to enter-tain us?"

Barbro shook her head, white around the nostrils. Theoldest boy said quickly, rather importantly, "Well, sure,I can, if our guests would like to hear."

"I'd enjoy that, thank you." Sherrinford leaned backin his seat and stroked his pipe. If this had not happened spontaneously, he would have guided the conversationtoward a similar outcome.

In the past he had had no incentive to study the folk-lore of the outway, and not much chance to read thescanty references on it since Barbro brought him hertrouble. Yet more and more he was becoming convincedhe must get an understanding—not an anthropologicalstudy; a feel from the inside out—of the relationshipbetween Roland's frontiersmen and those beings whichhaunted them.

A bustling followed, rearrangement, settling down tolisten, coffee cups refilled and brandy offered on the side. The boy explained, "The last line is the chorus. Everybody join in, right?" Clearly he too hoped thus tobleed off some of the tension. Catharsis through music?Sherrinford wondered, and added to himself: No;exorcism.

A girl strummed a guitar. The boy sang, to a melodywhich beat across the storm noise:

"It was the ranger Arvidrode homeward through the hillsamong the shadow shiverleafs,along the chiming

hills.The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"The night wind whispered around himwith scent of brok and rue.Both moons rose high above himand hills aflash with dew.The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"And dreaming of that womanwho waited in the sun, he stopped, amazed by starlight, and so he was undone.The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"For there beneath a barrowthat bulked athwart a moon,the Outling folk were dancing in glass and golden shoon.The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"The Outling folk were dancinglike water, wind and fireto frosty-ringing harpstrings,and never did they tire.The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"To Arvid came she striding from where she watched the dance,the Queen of Air and Darkness,with starlight in her glance.The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"With starlight, love, and terror

in her immortal eye,

the Queen of Air and Darkness—"

"No!" Barbro leaped from her chair. Her fists wereclenched and tears flogged her cheekbones. "You can't—pretend that—about the things that stole Jimmy!"

She fled from the chamber, upstairs to her guestbedroom.

But she finished the song herself. That was about sev-enty hours later, camped in the steeps where rangers dared not fare.

She and Sherrinford had not said much to the Ironsfamily after refusing repeated pleas to leave the forbid-den country alone. Nor had they exchanged manyremarks at first as they drove north. Slowly, however,he began to draw her out about her own life. After awhile she almost forgot to mourn, in her rememberingof home and old neighbors. Somehow this led to discov-eries—that he beneath his professorial manner was agourmet and a lover of opera and appreciated herfemaleness; that she could still laugh and find beauty inthe wild land around her—and she realized, half guiltily,that life held more hopes than even the recovery of the son Tim gave her.

"I've convinced myself he's alive," the detective said. He scowled. "Frankly, it makes me regret having takenyou along. I expected this would be only a fact-gatheringtrip, but it's turning out to be more. If we're dealing withreal creatures who stole him, they can do real harm. Iought to turn back to the nearest garth and call for a plane to fetch you."

"Like bottommost hell you will, mister," she said."You need somebody who knows outway conditions; andI'm a better shot than average."

"M-m-m...it would involve considerable delay too,wouldn't it? Besides the added distance, I can't put a signal through to any airport before this current burst ofsolar interference has calmed down."

Next "night" he broke out his remaining equipmentand set it up. She recognized some of it, such as the thermal detector. Other items were strange to her, cop-ied to his order from the advanced apparatus of hisbirthworld. He would tell her little about them. "I've

explained my suspicion that the ones we're after havetelepathic capabilities," he said in apology.

Her eyes widened. "You mean it could be true, theQueen and her people can read minds?"

"That's part of the dread which surrounds their legend,isn't it? Actually there's nothing spooky about the phe-nomenon. It was studied and fairly well defined centuriesago, on Earth. I daresay the facts are available in thescientific microfiles at Christmas Landing. You Roland- ers have simply had no occasion to seek them out, anymore than you've yet had occasion to look up how tobuild power beamcasters or spacecraft."

"Well, how does telepathy work, then?"

Sherrinford recognized that her query asked for com-fort as much as it did for facts, and spoke with deliberatedryness: "The organism generates extremely long-waveradiation which can, in principle, be modulated by the nervous system. In practice, the feebleness of the signalsand their low rate of information transmission makethem elusive, hard to detect and measure. Our prehumanancestors went in for more reliable senses, like visionand hearing. What telepathic transceiving we do is mar-ginal at best. But explorers have found extraterrestrialspecies that got an evolutionary advantage from devel-oping the system further, in their particular environ- ments, I imagine such species could include one whichgets comparatively little direct sunlight—in fact, appears to hide from broad day. It could even become so able inthis regard that, at short range, it can pick up man'sweak emissions and make man's primitive sensitivitiesresonate to its own strong sendings."

"That would account for a lot, wouldn't it?" Barbroasked faintly.

"I've now screened our car by a jamming field," Sher-rinford told her, "but it reaches only a few meters pastthe chassis. Beyond, a scout of theirs might get a warn-ing from your thoughts, if you knew precisely what I'mtrying to do. I have a well-trained subconscious whichsees to it that I think about this in French when I'moutside. Communication has to be structured to beintelligible, you see, and that's a different enough

structure from English. But English is the only humanlanguage on Roland, and surely the Old Folk have learned it."

She nodded. He had told her his general plan, whichwas too obvious to conceal. The problem was to makecontact with the aliens, if they existed. Hitherto they hadonly revealed themselves, at rare intervals, to one or afew backwoodsmen at a time. An ability to generate hal-lucinations would help them in that. They would stay clear of any large, perhaps unmanageable expeditionwhich might pass through their territory. But two people, braving all prohibitions, shouldn't look too formidable toapproach. And . . . this would be the first human teamwhich not only worked on the assumption that the Out-lings were real but possessed the resources of modern,off-planet police technology.

Nothing happened at that camp. Sherrinford said he hadn't expected it would. The Old Folk seemed cautious this near to any settlement. In their own lands they mustbe bolder.

And by the following "night," the vehicle had gonewell into yonder country. When Sherrinford stopped theengine in a meadow and the car settled down, silence rolled in like a wave.

They stepped out. She cooked a meal on the glowerwhile he gathered wood, that they might later cheer themselves with a campfire. Frequently he glanced at hiswrist. It bore no watch—instead, a radio-controlled dial,to tell what the instruments in the bus might register.

Who needed a watch here? Slow constellationswheeled beyond glimmering aurora. The moon Alde stood above a snowpeak, turning it argent, though thisplace lay at a goodly height. The rest of the mountainswere hidden by the forest that crowded around. Itstrees were mostly shiverleaf and feathery white plu-mablanca, ghostly amid their shadows. A few fire-thorns glowed, clustered dim lanterns, and theunderbrush was heavy and smelled sweet. You couldsee surprisingly far through the blue dusk. Somewherenearby a brook sang and a bird fluted.

"Lovely here," Sherrinford said. They had risen

from their supper and not yet sat down or kindled theirfire.

"But strange," Barbro answered as low. "I wonder ifit's really meant for us. If we can really hope to possessit."

His pipestem gestured at the stars. "Man's gone tostranger places than this."

"Has he? I...oh, I suppose it's just something leftover from my outway childhood, but do you know, whenI'm under them I can't think of the stars as balls of gas,whose energies have been measured, whose planets havebeen walked on by prosaic feet. No, they're small and cold and magical; our lives are bound to them; after wedie, they whisper to us in our graves." Barbro glanceddownward. "I realize that's nonsense."

She could see in the twilight how his face grew tight."Not at all," he said. "Emotionally, physics may be a worse nonsense. And in the end, you know, after a suffi-cient number of generations, thought follows feeling.Man is not at heart rational. He could stop believing thestories of science if those no longer felt right."

He paused. "That ballad which didn't get finished inthe house," he said, not looking at her. "Why did it affect you so?"

"I was overwrought. I couldn't stand hearing*them*.well, praised. Or that's how it seemed. My apologies forthe fuss."

"I gather the ballad is typical of a large class."

"Well, I never thought to add them up. Culturalanthropology is something we don't have time for on Roland, or more likely it hasn't occurred to us, witheverything else there is to do. But—now you mention it,yes, I'm surprised at how many songs and stories havethe Arvid motif in them."

"Could you bear to recite it for me?"

She mustered the will to laugh. "Why, I can do betterthan that if you want. Let me get my multilyre and I'llperform."

She omitted the hypnotic chorus line, though, whenthe notes rang out, except at the end. He watched her where she stood against moon and aurora.

"—the Queen of Air and Darknesscried softly under sky:

" 'Light down, you ranger Arvid, and join the Outling folk.You need no more be human,which is a heavy yoke.'

"He dared to give her answer:'I may do naught but run.A maiden waits me, dreamingin lands beneath the sun.

" 'And likewise wait me comradesAnd tasks I would not shirk,for what is Ranger Arvidif he lays down his work?

" 'So wreak your spells, you Outling,and cast your wrath on me.Though maybe you can slay me,you'll not make me unfree.'

"The Queen of Air and Darkness stood wrapped about with fearand northlight-flares and beautyhe dared not look too near.

"Until she laughed like harpsongand said to him in scorn:'I do not need a magicto make you always mourn.

" 'I send you home with nothingexcept your memory of moonlight, Outling music,night breezes, dew, and me.

" 'And that will run behind you, a shadow on the sun,and that will lie beside youwhen every day is done.

" 'In work and play and friendshipyour grief will strike you dumb for thinking what you are—and— what you might have become.

" 'Your dull and foolish womantreat kindly as you can.Go home now, Ranger Arvid,set free to be a man!'

"In flickering and laughter the Outling folk were gone. He stood alone by moonlight and wept until the dawn.The dance weaves under the firethorn."

She laid the lyre aside. A wind rustled leaves. After along quietness Sherrinford said, "And tales of this kindare part of everyone's life in the outway?"

"Well, you could put it thus," Barbro replied."Though they're not all full of supernatural doings. Someare about love or heroism. Traditional themes."

"I don't think your particular tradition has arisen ofitself." His tone was bleak. "In fact, I think many of your songs and stories were not composed by humans."

He snapped his lips shut and would say no more on the subject. They went early to bed.

Hours later, an alarm roused them.

The buzzing was soft, but it brought them instantlyalert. They slept in gripsuits, to be prepared for emergen-cies. Sky-glow lit them through the canopy. Sherrinford swung out of his bunk, slipped shoes on feet and clippedgun holster to belt. "Stay inside," he commanded.

"What's here?" Her pulse thudded.

He squinted at the dials of his instruments and checkedthem against the luminous telltale on his wrist. "Threeanimals," he counted. "Not wild ones happening by. Alarge one, homeothermic, to judge from the infrared, hold-ing still a short ways off. Another . . . hm, low tempera-ture, diffuse and unstable emission, as if it were morelike a . .a swarm of cells coordinated somehow .

pheromonally? . . . hovering, also at a distance. But thethird's practically next to us, moving around in the brush;and that pattern looks human."

She saw him quiver with eagerness, no longer seeminga professor. "I'm going to try to make a capture," hesaid. "When we have a subject for interrogation— Stand ready to let me back in again fast. But don't risk yourself,whatever happens. And keep this cocked." He handedher a loaded big-game rifle.

His tall frame poised by the door, opened it a crack.Air blew in, cool, damp, full of fragrances and murmur-ings. The moon Oliver was now also aloft, the radianceof both unreally brilliant, and the aurora seethed inwhiteness and ice-blue.

Sherrinford peered afresh at his telltale. It must indi-cate the directions of the watchers, among those dappledleaves. Abruptly he sprang put. He sprinted past theashes of the campfire and vanished under trees. Barbro's hand strained on the butt of her weapon.

Racket exploded. Two in combat burst onto themeadow. Sherrinford had clapped a grip on a smaller human figure. She could make out by streaming silverand rainbow flicker mat the other was nude, male, long-haired, lithe, and young. He fought demoniacally, seek-ing to use teeth and feet and raking nails, and meanwhilehe ululated like a satan.

The identification shot through her: A changeling, sto-len in babyhood and raised by the Old Folk. This crea-ture was what they would make Jimmy into.

"Ha!" Sherrinford forced his opponent around anddrove stiffened fingers into the solar plexus. The boy gasped and sagged. Sherrinford manhandled him towardthe car.

Out from the woods came a giant. It might itself havebeen a tree, black and rugose, bearing four great gnarlyboughs; but earth quivered and boomed beneath itslegroots, and its hoarse bellowing filled sky and skulls.

Barbro shrieked. Sherrinford whirled. He yanked outhis pistol, fired and fired, flat whipcracks through thehalflight. His free arm kept a lock on the youth. Thetroll shape lurched under those blows. It recovered and came on, more slowly, more carefully, circling around to

cut him off from the bus. He couldn't move fast enough to evade unless he released his prisoner—who was hissole possible guide to Jimmy—

Barbro leaped forth. "Don't!" Sherrinford shouted."For God's sake, stay inside!" The monster rumbled andmade snatching motions at her. She pulled trigger. Recoilslammed her in the shoulder. The colossus rocked andfell. Somehow it got its feet back and lumbered towardher. She retreated. Again she shot and again. The crea-ture snarled. Blood began to drip from it and gleam oililyamidst dewdrops. It turned and went off, breakingbranches, into the darkness that laired beneath thewoods.

"Get to shelter!" Sherrinford yelled. "You're out ofthe jammer field!"

A mistiness drifted by overhead. She barely glimpsed it before she saw the new shape at the meadow edge."Jimmy!" tore from her.

"Mother." He held out his arms. Moonlight coursed in his tears. She dropped her weapon and ran to him.

Sherrinford plunged in pursuit. Jimmy flitted away intothe brush. Barbro crashed after, through clawing twigs.Then she was seized and borne away.

Standing over his captive, Sherrinford strengthened thefluoro output until vision of the wilderness was blocked off from within the bus. The boy squirmed beneath thatcolorless glare.

"You are going to talk," the man said. Despite the haggardness in his features, he spoke quietly.

The boy glowered through tangled locks. A bruise waspurpling on his jaw. He'd almost recovered ability to flee while Sherrinford chased and lost the woman. Returning,the detective had barely caught him. Tune was lackingto be gentle, when Outling reinforcements might arriveat any moment. Sherrinford had knocked him out anddragged him inside. Now he sat lashed into a swivel seat.

He spat. "Talk to you, man-clod?" But sweat stoodon his skin and his eyes flickered unceasingly around themetal which caged him.

"Give me a name to call you by."

"And have you work a spell on me?"

"Mine's Eric. If you don't give me another choice, I'llhave to call you . . . m-m-m . . . Wuddikins,"

"What?" However eldritch, the bound one remaineda human adolescent. "Mistherd, then." The lilting accentof his English somehow emphasized its sullenness."That's not the sound, only what it means. Anyway, it'smy spoken name, naught else."

"Ah, you keep a secret name you consider to be real?"

"She does. I don't know myself what it is. She knowsthe real names of everybody."

Sherrinford raised his brows. "She?"

"Who reigns. May she forgive me, I can't make thereverent sign when my arms are tied. Some invaders callher the Queen of Air and Darkness."

"So." Sherrinford got pipe and tobacco. He let silencewax while he started the fire. At length he said:

"I'll confess the Old Folk took me by surprise. I didn'texpect so formidable a member of your gang. EverythingI could learn had seemed to show they work on myrace—and yours, lad—by stealth, trickery, and illusion."

Mistherd jerked a truculent nod. "She created the first nicors not long ago. Don't think she has naught but daz-zlements at her beck."

"I don't. However, a steel-jacketed bullet works prettywell too, doesn't it?"

Sherrinford talked on, softly, mostly to himself: "I dostill believe the, ah, nicors—all your half-humanlike breeds—are intended in the main to be seen, not used.The power of projecting mirages must surely be quitelimited in range and scope as well as in the number ofindividuals who possess it. Otherwise she wouldn't haveneeded to work as slowly and craftily as she has. Evenoutside our mind-shield, Barbro—my companion—couldhave resisted, could have remained aware that whatevershe saw was unreal...if she'd been less shaken, lessfrantic, less driven by need."

Sherrinford wreathed his head in smoke. "Never mindwhat I experienced," he said. "It couldn't have been the same as for her. I think the command was simply givenus, 'You will see what you most desire in the world,running away from you into the forest.' Of course, shedidn't travel many meters before the nicor waylaid her.

I'd no hope of trailing them; I'm no Arctican woodsman,and besides, it'd have been too easy to ambush me. Icame back to you." Grimly: "You're my link to your overlady."

"You think I'll guide you to Starhaven or Carheddin?Try making me, clod-man."

I want to bargain."

"I s'pect you intend more'n that." Mistherd's answerheld surprising shrewdness. "What'll you tell after youcome home?"

"Yes, that does pose a problem, doesn't it? BarbroCullen and I are not terrified outwayers. We're of the city. We brought recording instruments. We'd be the firstof our kind to report an encounter with the Old Folk,and that report would be detailed and plausible. It wouldproduce action."

"So you see I'm not afraid to die," Mistherd declared,though his lips trembled a bit. "If I let you come in and do your man-things to my people, I'd have naught leftworth living for."

"Have no immediate fears," Sherrinford said. "You're merely bait." He sat down and regarded the boy througha visor of calm. (Within, it wept in him:*Barbro, Barbro!)*"Consider. Your Queen can't very well let me go back, bringing my prisoner and telling about hers. She has tostop that somehow. I could try fighting my waythrough—this car is better armed than you know—butthat wouldn't free anybody. Instead, I'm staying put.New forces of hers will get here as fast as they can.I assume they won't blindly throw themselves against amachine gun, a howitzer, a fulgurator. They'll parleyfirst, whether their intentions are honest or not. Thus Imake the contact I'm after."

"What d'you plan?" The mumble held anguish.

"First, this, as a sort of invitation." Sherrinfordreached out to flick a switch. "There. I've lowered my shield against mind-reading and shape-casting. I daresay the leaders, at least, will be able to sense that it's gone.That should give them confidence."

"And next?"

"Why, next we wait. Would you like something to eator drink?"

During the time which followed, Sherrinford tried tojolly Mistherd along, find out something of his life. Whatanswers he got were curt. He dimmed the interior lightsand settled down to peer outward. That was a long fewhours.

They ended at a shout of gladness, half a sob, fromthe boy. Out of the woods came a band of the Old Folk.

Some of them stood forth more clearly than moonsand stars and northlights should have caused. He in thevan rode a white crownbuck whose horns were gar-landed. His form was manlike but unearthly beautiful,silver-blond hair falling from beneath the antlered hel-met, around the proud cold face. The cloak fluttered offhis back like living wings. His frost-colored mail rang ashe fared.

Behind him, to right and left, rode two who boreswords whereon small flames gleamed and flickered. Above, a flying flock laughed and trilled and tumbled inthe breezes. Near them drifted a half-transparent misti-ness. Those others who passed among trees after their chieftain were harder to make out. But they moved inquicksilver grace, and as it were to a sound of harps and trumpets.

"Lord Luighaid." Glory overflowed in Mistherd'stone. "Her master Knower—himself."

Sherrinford had never done a harder thing than to sitat the main control panel, finger near the button of theshield generator, and not touch it. He rolled down asection of canopy to let voices travel. A gust of windstruck him in the face, bearing odors of the roses in his mother's garden. At his back, in the main body of thevehicle, Mistherd strained against his bonds till he couldsee the incoming troop.

"Call to them," Sherrinford said. "Ask if they will talkwith me."

Unknown, flutingly sweet words flew back and forth."Yes," the boy interpreted. "He will, the Lord Luighaid.But I can tell you, you'll never be let go. Don't fightthem. Yield. Come away. You don't know what 'tis to bealive till you've dwelt in Carheddin under the mountain."

The Outlings drew nigh.

Jimmy glimmered and was gone. Barbro lay in strongarms against a broad breast, and felt the horse movebeneath her. It had to be a horse, though only a fewwere kept any longer on the steadings, and they for spe-cial uses or love. She could feel the rippling beneath its hide, hear a rush of parted leafage and the thud when a hoof struck stone; warmth and living scent welled uparound her through the darkness.

He who carried her said mildly, "Don't be afraid, dar-ling. It was a vision. But he's waiting for us and we'rebound for him."

She was aware in a vague way that she ought to feelterror or despair or something. But her memories laybehind her—she wasn't sure just how she had come tobe here—she was borne along in a knowledge of beingloved. At peace, at peace, rest in the calm expectationof joy. . . .

After a while the forest opened. They crossed a leawhere boulders stood gray-white under the moons, theirshadows shifting in the dim hues which the aurora threwacross them. Flitteries danced, tiny comets, above theflowers between. Ahead gleamed a peak whose top wascrowned in clouds.

Barbro's eyes happened to be turned forward. She sawthe horse's head and thought, with quiet surprise: Why,this is Sambo, who was mine when I was a girl. Shelooked upward at the man. He wore a black tunic and acowled cape, which made his face hard to see. She couldnot cry aloud, here. "Tim," she whispered.

"Yes, Barbro."

"I buried you—"

His smile was endlessly tender. "Did you think we'reno more than what's laid back into the ground? Poortorn sweetheart. She who's called us is the All Healer.Now rest and dream."

"Dream," she said, and for a space she struggled torouse herself. But the effort was weak. Why should shebelieve ashen tales about . . . atoms and energies, noth-ing else to fill a gape of emptiness . . . tales she couldnot bring to mind . . . when Tim and the horse her fathergave her carried her on to Jimmy? Had the other thing

not been the evil dream, and this her first drowsy awak-ening from it?

As if he heard her thoughts, he murmured, "They havea song in Outling lands. The Song of the men:

"The world sails

to an unseen wind.

Light swirls by the bows.

The wake is night.

But the Dwellers have no such sadness."

"I don't understand," she said.

He nodded. "There's much you'll have to understand,darling, and I can't see you again until you've learnedthose truths. But meanwhile you'll be with our son."

She tried to lift her head and kiss him. He held herdown. "Not yet," he said. "You've not been received among the Queen's people. I shouldn't have come foryou, except that she was too merciful to forbid. Lie back,lie back."

Time blew past. The horse galloped tireless, neverstumbling, up the mountain. Once she glimpsed a troopriding down it and thought they were bound for a lastweird battle in the west against . . . who? . . . one wholay cased in iron and sorrow— Later she would ask her-self the name of him who had brought her into the landof the Old Truth.

Finally spires lifted splendid among the stars, whichare small and magical and whose whisperings comfort usafter we are dead. They rode into a courtyard wherecandles burned unwavering, fountains splashed and birdssang. The air bore fragrance of brok and pericoup, ofrue and roses; for not everything that man brought washorrible. The Dwellers waited in beauty to welcome her.Beyond their stateliness, pooks cavorted through the gloaming; among the trees darted children; merriment caroled across music more solemn.

"We have come—" Tim's voice was suddenly, inexpli-cably a croak. Barbro was not sure how he dismounted, bearing her. She stood before him and saw him sway onhis feet.

Fear caught her. "Are you well?" She seized both his

hands. They felt cold and rough. Where had Sambogone? Her eyes searched beneath the cowl. In this brighter illumination, she ought to have seen her man'sface clearly. But it was blurred, it kept changing. "What's wrong, oh, what's happened?"

He smiled. Was that the smile she had cherished? Shecouldn't completely remember. "I, I must go," he stam-mered, so low she could scarcely hear. "Our time is notready." He drew free of her grasp and leaned on a robedform which had appeared at his side. A haziness swirledover both their heads. "Don't watch me go...backinto the earth," he pleaded. "That's death for you. Till our time returns— There, our son!"

She had to fling her gaze around. Kneeling, she spreadwide her arms. Jimmy struck her like a warm, solid can-nonball. She rumpled his hair, she kissed the hollow ofhis neck, she laughed and wept and babbled foolishness;and this was no ghost, no memory that had stolen offwhen she wasn't looking. Now and again, as she turnedher attention to yet another hurt which might have comeupon him—hunger, sickness, fear—and found none, shewould glimpse their surroundings. The gardens weregone. It didn't matter.

"I misted you so, Mother. Stay?"

"I'll take you home, dearest."

"Stay. Here's fun. I'll show. But you stay."

A sighing went through the twilight. Barbro rose.Jimmy clung to her hand. They confronted the Queen.

Very tall she was in her robes woven of northlights,and her starry crown and her garlands of kiss-me-never. Her countenance recalled Aphrodite of Milos, whose pic-ture Barbro had often seen in the realms of men, savethat the Queen's was more fair, and more majesty dwelt upon it and in the night-blue eyes. Around her the gar-dens woke to new reality, the court of the Dwellers andthe heaven-climbing spires.

"Be welcome," she spoke, her speaking a song,"forever."

Against the awe of her, Barbro said, "Moonmother, let us go home."

"That may not be."

"To our world, little and beloved," Barbro dreamed

she begged, "which we build for ourselves and cherish for our children."

"To prison days, angry nights, works that crumble inthe fingers, loves that turn to rot or stone or driftweed,loss, grief, and the only sureness that of the final nothing-ness. No. You too, Wanderfoot who is to be, will jubilate when the banners of the Outworld come flying into thelast of the cities and man is made wholly alive. Now gowith those who will teach you."

The Queen of Air and Darkness lifted an arm in sum-mons. It halted, and none came to answer.

For over the fountains and melodies lifted a gruesomegrowling. Fires leaped, thunders crashed. Her hosts scat-tered screaming before the steel thing which boomed up the mountainside. The pooks were gone in a whirl offrightened wings. The nicors flung their bodies againstthe unalive invader and were consumed, until theirMother cried to them to retreat.

Barbro cast Jimmy down and herself over him. Towerswavered and smoked away. The mountain stood bareunder icy moons, save for rocks, crags, and farther off a glacier in whose depths the auroral light pulsed blue. Acave mouth darkened a cliff. Thither folk streamed, seek-ing refuge underground. Some were human of blood,some grotesques like the pooks and nicors and wraiths;but most were lean, scaly, long-tailed, long-beaked, notremotely men or Outlings.

For an instant, even as Jimmy wailed at her breast—perhaps as much because the enchantment had beenwrecked as because he was afraid—Barbro pitied theQueen who stood alone in her nakedness. Then that onealso had fled, and Barbro's world shivered apart.

The guns fell silent, the vehicle whirred to a halt. Fromit sprang a boy who called wildly, "Shadow-of-a-Dream,where are you? It's me, Mistherd, oh, come, come!"—before he remembered that the language they had beenraised in was not man's. He shouted in that until a girl crept out of a thicket where she had hidden. They stared at each other through dust, smoke, and moonglow. Sheran to him.

A new voice barked from the car, "Barbro, hurry!"

Christmas Landing knew day: short at this time ofyear, but sunlight, blue skies, white clouds, glittering water, salt breezes in busy streets, and the sane disorder of Eric Sherrinford's living room.

He crossed and uncrossed his legs where he sat, puffedon his pipe as if to make a veil, and said, "Are youcertain you're recovered? You mustn't risk overstrain."

"I'm fine," Barbro Cullen replied, though her tonewas flat. "Still tired, yes, and showing it, no doubt. One doesn't go through such an experience and bounce backin a week. But I'm up and about. And to be frank, Imust know what's happened, what's going on, before Ican settle down to regain my full strength. Not a wordof news anywhere."

"Have you spoken to others about the matter?"

"No. I've simply told visitors I was too exhausted totalk. Not much of a lie. I assumed there's a reason for censorship."

Sherrinford looked relieved. "Good girl. It's at myurging. You can imagine the sensation when this is madepublic. The authorities agreed they need time to studythe facts, think and debate in a calm atmosphere, havea decent policy ready to offer voters who're bound tobecome rather hysterical at first." His mouth quirkedslightly upward. "Furthermore, your nerves and Jimmy'sget their chance to heal before the journalistic storm breaks over you. How is he?"

"Quite well. He continues pestering me for leave to

g

o play with his friends in the Wonderful Place. But atis age, he'll recover—he'll forget."

"He may meet them later anyhow."

"What? We didn't—" Barbro shifted in her chair."I've forgotten too. I hardly recall a thing from our last hours. Did you bring back any kidnapped humans?"

"No. The shock was savage, as was, without throwingthem straight into an...an institution. Mistherd, who'sbasically a sensible young fellow, assured me they'd getalong, at any rate as regards survival necessities, tillarrangements can be made." Sherrinford hesitated. "I'mnot sure what the arrangements will be. Nobody is, atour present stage. But obviously they include those peo-ple—or many of them, especially those who aren't full-

grown—rejoining the human race. Though they maynever feel at home in civilization. Perhaps in a way that'sbest, since we will need some kind of mutually acceptableliaison with the Dwellers."

His impersonality soothed them both. Barbro becameable to say, "Was I too big a fool? I do remember how I yowled and beat my head on the floor."

"Why, no." He considered the big woman and herpride for a few seconds before he rose, walked over andlaid a hand on her shoulder. "You'd been lured andtrapped by a skillful play on your deepest instincts, at a moment of sheer nightmare. Afterward, as that wounded monster carried you off, evidently another

type of being came along, one that could saturate you with close-range neuropsychic forces. On top of this, my arrival, the sud-den brutal abolishment of every hallucination, must havebeen shattering. No wonder if you cried out in pain.Before you did, you competently got Jimmy and yourselfinto the bus, and you never interfered with me."

"What did you do?"

"Why, I drove off as fast as possible. After severalhours, the atmospherics let up sufficiently for me to call Portolondon and insist on an emergency airlift. Not thatthat was vital. What chance had the enemy to stop us?They didn't even try. But quick transportation was cer-tainly helpful."

"I figured that's what must have gone on." Barbrocaught his glance. "No, what I meant was, how did you find us in the backlands?"

Sherrinford moved a little off from her. "My prisoner was my guide. I don't think I actually killed any of theDwellers who'd come to deal with me. I hope not. Thecar simply broke through them, after a couple of warningshots, and afterward outpaced them. Steel and fuelagainst flesh wasn't really fair. At the cave entrance, I did have to shoot down a few of those troll creatures.I'm not proud of it."

He stood silent. Presently: "But you were a captive," he said. "I couldn't be sure what they might do to you,who had first claim on me." After another pause: "Idon't look for any more violence."

"How did you make...the boy . . . cooperate?"

Sherrinford paced from her, to the window, where hestood staring out at the Boreal Ocean. "I turned off themind shield," he said. "I let their band get close, in fullsplendor of illusion. Then I turned the shield back onand we both saw them in their true shapes. As we went northward I explained to Mistherd how he and his kindhad been hoodwinked, used, made to live in a world thatwas never really there. I asked him if he wanted himselfand whoever he cared about to go on till they died asdomestic animals—yes, running in limited freedom on solid hills, but always called back to the dream-kennel."His pipe fumed furiously. "May I never see such bitter-ness again. He had been taught to believe he was free."

Quiet returned, above the hectic traffic. Charlemagnedrew nearer to setting; already the east darkened.

Finally Barbro asked, "Do you know why?"

"Why children were taken and raised like that? Partly because it was in the pattern the Dwellers were creating;partly in order to study and experiment on members ofour species—minds, that is, not bodies; partly becausehumans have special strengths which are helpful, likebeing able to endure full daylight."

"But what was the final purpose of it all?"

Sherrinford paced the floor. "Well," he said, "ofcourse the ultimate motives of the aborigines areobscure. We can't do more than guess at how they think,let alone how they feel. But our ideas do seem to fit the data.

"Why did they hide from man? I suspect they, orrather their ancestors—for they aren't glittering elves, you know; they're mortal and fallible too—I suspect the natives were only being cautious at first, more cautious than human primitives, though certain of those on Earthwere also slow to reveal themselves to

strangers. Spying,mentally eavesdropping, Roland's Dwellers must have picked up enough language to get some idea of how dif-ferent man was from them, and how powerful; and theygathered that more ships would be arriving, bringing set-tiers. It didn't occur to them that they might be concededthe right to keep their lands. Perhaps they're still morefiercely territorial than us. They determined to fight, intheir own way. I daresay, once we begin to get insight

into that mentality, our psychological science will gothrough its Copernican revolution."

Enthusiasm kindled in him. "That's not the sole thingwe'll learn, either," he went on. "They must have scienceof their own, a nonhuman science born on a planet thatisn't Earth. Because they did observe us as profoundlyas we've ever observed ourselves; they did mount a planagainst us, that would have taken another century ormore to complete. Well, what else do they know? Howdo they support their civilization without visible agricul-ture or above-ground buildings or mines or anything? How can they breed whole new intelligent species toorder? A million questions, ten million answers!"

"*Can*we learn from them?" Barbro asked softly. "Orcan we only overrun them as you say they fear?"

Sherrinford halted, leaned elbow on mantel, huggedhis pipe and replied: "I hope we'll show more charity than that to a defeated enemy. It's what they are. Theytried to conquer us, and failed, and now in a sense weare bound to conquer them, since they'll have to maketheir peace with the civilization of the machine ratherthan see it rust away as they strove for. Still, they never did us any harm as atrocious as what we've inflicted onour fellow man in the past. And, I repeat, they couldteach us marvelous things; and we could teach them, too,once they've learned to be less intolerant of a different way of life."

"I suppose we can give them a reservation," she said,and didn't know why he grimaced and answered so roughly:

"Let's leave them the honor they've earned! Theyfought to save the world they'd always known from that—" he made a chopping gesture at the city—"andjust possibly we'd be better off ourselves with less of it."

He sagged a trifle and sighed, "However, I suppose ifElfland had won, man on Roland would at last—peace-fully, even happily—have died away. We live with ourarchetypes, but can we live in them?"

Barbro shook her head. "Sorry, I don't understand."

"What?" He looked at her in a surprise that drove outmelancholy. After a laugh: "Stupid of me. I've explainedthis to so many politicians and scientists and commission-

ers and Lord knows what, these past days, I forgot I'dnever explained to you. It was a rather vague idea ofmine, most of the tune we were traveling, and I don'tlike to discuss ideas prematurely. Now that we've metthe Outlings and watched how they work, I do feel sure."

He tamped down his tobacco. "In limited measure,"he said, "I've used an archetype throughout my own working life. The rational detective. It hasn't been a con-scious pose—much—it's simply been an image which fit-ted my personality and professional style. But it draws an appropriate response from most people, whether ornot they've ever heard of the original. The phenomenon is not uncommon. We meet

persons who, in varying degrees, suggest Christ or Buddha or the Earth Motheror, say, on a less exalted plane, Hamlet or d'Artagnan.Historical, fictional, and mythical, such figures crystallizebasic aspects of the human psyche, and when we meetthem in our real experience, our reaction goes deeperthan consciousness."

He grew grave again: "Man also creates archetypesthat are not individuals. The Anima, the Shadow—and,it seems, the Outworld. The world of magic, of glam-our—which originally meant enchantment—of half-human beings, some like Ariel and some like Caliban,but each free of mortal frailties and sorrows—therefore,perhaps, a little carelessly cruel, more than a littletricksy; dwellers in dusk and moonlight, not truly godsbut obedient to rulers who are enigmatic and powerfulenough to be—Yes, our Queen of Air and Darknessknew well what sights to let lonely people see, what illu-sions to spin around them from time to time, what songsand legends to set going among them. I wonder howmuch she and her underlings gleaned from human fairytales, how much they made up themselves, and howmuch men created all over again, all unwittingly, as thesense of living on the edge of the world entered them."

Shadows stole across the room. It grew cooler and thetraffic noises dwindled. Barbro asked mutedly: "Butwhat could this do?"

"In many ways," Sherrinford answered, "the outwayerisback in the dark ages. He has few neighbors, hearsscanty news from beyond his horizon, toils to survive in

a land he only partly understands, that may any nightraise unforeseeable disasters against him and is boundedby enormous wildernesses. The machine civilizationwhich brought his ancestors here is frail at best. He couldlose it as the dark-age nations had lost Greece andRome, as the whole of Earth seems to have lost it. Lethim be worked on, long, strongly, cunningly, by thearchetypical Outworld, until he has come to believe inhis bones that the magic of the Queen of Air and Dark-ness is greater than the energy of engines: and first hisfaith, finally his deeds will follow her. Oh, it wouldn't happen fast. Ideally, it would happen too slowly to benoticed, especially by self-satisfied city people. But whenin the end a hinterland gone back to the ancient way turned from them, how could they keep alive?"

Barbro breathed, "She said to me, when their bannersflew in the last of our cities, we would rejoice."

"I think we would have, by then," Sherrinford admit-ted. "Nevertheless, I believe in choosing one's own destiny."

He shook himself, as if casting off a burden. Heknocked the dottle from his pipe and stretched, muscle by muscle. "Well," he said, "it isn't going to happen."

She looked straight at him. "Thanks to you."

A flush went up his thin cheeks. "In time, I'm sure,somebody else would have— Anyhow, what matters is what we do next, and that's too big a decision for oneindividual or one generation to make."

She rose. "Unless the decision is personal, Eric," shesuggested, feeling heat in her own face.

It was curious to see him shy. "I was hoping we mightmeet again."

"We will."

Ayoch sat on Wolund's Barrow. Aurora shuddered sobrilliant, in such vast sheafs of light, as almost to hidethe waning moons. Firethorn blooms had fallen; a fewstill glowed around the tree roots, amidst dry brok whichcrackled underfoot and smelled like woodsmoke. The airremained warm but no gleam was left on the sunsethorizon.

"Farewell, fare lucky," the pook called. Mistherd and

Shadow-of-a-Dream never looked back. It was as if theydidn't dare. They trudged on out of sight, toward thehuman camp whose lights made a harsh new star in the south.

Ayoch lingered. He felt he should also offer goodbyeto her who had lately joined him that slept in the dolmen. Likely none would meet here again for loving or magic.But he could only think of one old verse that might do.He stood and trilled:

"Out of her breasta blossom ascended.The summer burned it.The song is ended."

Then he spread his wings for the long flight away.

About the Editors

ISAAC ASIMOV has been called "one of America's treasures." Born in the Soviet Union, he was brought tothe United States at the age of three (along with hisfamily) by agents of the American government in a suc-cessful attempt to prevent him from working for thewrong side. He quickly established himself as one of thiscountry's foremost science fiction writers and writesabout everything, and although now approaching middleage, he is going stronger than ever. He long ago passed his age and weight in books, and with over 400 to his credit, threatens to close in on his I.Q. His collection ofshort stories,*Robot Visions,* was published by Roc Books in March 1991.

MARTIN H. GREENBERG has been called (in*The*Science fiction and Fantasy Book Review)"the King of the Anthologists"; to which he replied, "It's good to bethe King!" He has produced more than 200 of them,usually in collaboration with a multitude of co-conspira-tors, most frequently the three who have given youGhosts.A professor of regional analysis and political sci-ence at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, he has finally published his weight.

CHARLES G. WAUGH is a professor of psychologyand communications at the University of Maine at Augusta who is still trying to figure out how he got him-self into all this. He has also worked with many collabo-rators, since he is basically a very friendly fellow. He hasdone over 100 anthologies and single-author collections,and especially enjoys locating unjustly ignored stories.He also claims that he met his wife via computer dating—her choice was an entire fraternity or him, and she has only minor regrets.