



Includes Both Parts of Book One...

1. *JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS* and 2. *LOVE AWAKENING*

When Gaelayniel is called to a new world to fulfill its ancient prophecies, He has no idea of the many adventures that will soon test his Faythe and Courage to their extreme limits!

Leaving his beloved fiancée Al-Loreya on the post-technological planet Eyrth, he arrives in the peaceful kingdom of Phylantagia. There he is called before King Ardureus and his Council, where an ancient rhyme convinces all that he is the one chosen to escort the beautiful Princess Aureaelle to her Sorrow on Moonstone, on the dark and evil Island of Malavalea.

In "Love Awakening" (Part 2 of the book) he learns of the secret plot to bring evil into the innocent realms of the kingdom, and fights various battles for its deliverance, winning the admiration of all, and receiving the rewards of his Faythe.

Genre: Christian, High, Epic/Quest, Romantic, Literary Fantasy

"The story is anything but boring. The writing is simply poetic, in the best sense. The imagery is vivid..." "Really excellent!"

*Book One of Three Books, and
Parts 1 and 2 of Seven Parts, of the
Canticles of Au-Royaliala Trilogy*



JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS



STANLEY K. BRUBAKER

Book ONE of the TRILOGY: *The Canticles of Au-Royaliala*

Table of Contents

Part One – Journey Into Darkness

†	Book One Prologue	7
Chapter 1	ilven-roD's Chase	11
Chapter 2	Earlier Mornings	15
Chapter 3	Al-Lloreya	21
Chapter 4	Djélôn's Choice	31
Chapter 5	The Council	37
Chapter 6	The Princess Aureaelle	49
Chapter 7	Au-Royalía	63
Chapter 8	The Prophecy Song	79
Chapter 9	Journey into Darkness	81
Chapter 10	Siren Songs of Sereneya	99
Chapter 11	The Golden Locket	109
Chapter 12	The Interpreter's Cave	115
Chapter 13	Storm Clouds Raging	141
Chapter 14	The Constellation Encryphia	153
Chapter 15	Prophecy Fulfilled	157
Chapter 16	Impending Sorrow	167
Chapter 17	Innocence Invaded	175
Chapter 18	The Sacrifice	187
Chapter 19	Inconsolation	193
Chapter 20	Awakening Love	205

Part Two – Love Awakening

Chapter 21	Love Awakening	215
Chapter 22	Return to Au-Royalía	219
Chapter 23	Seven Ships to Malavalea	243
Chapter 24	The Three Battles	257
Chapter 25	Between Two Worlds	281
Chapter 26	Joy in the Morning	297
Chapter 27	Trumpets of Triumph	315
†	Book One Epilogue	339

To the real author of all truth, my Lord Jesus the Christ, my friend, the messiah of jew and gentile, the still most misunderstood IAMmortal of the ages, the purest heart of every Gaelayniel and every Al-Lloreya, my long-awaited bridegroom warrior who will return for me at the appointed hour – my eternal thankfulness, my praise, allegiance, and adoration.

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✦ Prologue ✦

This is the story of Gaelayniel... a man of two worlds.

On the planet Eyrth the year is 2217 A.D. —about 200 years after the nuclear holocaust that left much of his planet uninhabitable, and about 170 years after Eyrth's mad technologies were finally destroyed, and the last evidences of them buried.

On the other planet—where most of our story takes place—the fair kingdom of Phylantagia is rapidly approaching its 4900th year and the hour of its Seventh Seventh Sorrow, where mysterious prophecies and dark destinies are strangely intersecting.

From the planet Eyrth our hero Gaelayniel, a brave peace-loving captain of the WAHRoR, is suddenly called away to an incredible journey of courage, loyalty, and love—to escort the beautiful Princess Aureaelle across the dark Island Malavalea to her terrible Sorrow on the cold altar Moonstone.

This is the story of Gaelayniel, and of the Eyrth-woman and the Phylantagean Princess he loves.

This is a story you will never forget.

A Note about the NAMES of our Hero

You might want to know, even before you begin reading, that our main character has two names and a nickname.

On the planet Eyrth, where our story begins, he often goes by his civilian name Gaelayniel, and that's the name you'll usually see being used by his fiancée Al-Lloreya, and by other family and friends.

But when he's off on secret military operations, they use his military name Gaelynt Glenn, or the shortened nickname Gleynn [pronounced 'glayne'].

In the new world, Phylantagia, where most of the story takes place, either name is used – by the Princess, the King, or other friends or warriors – depending on the setting and situation at hand.

Since he tells us the story in first person, you won't actually see any of his names until you get into Chapters 3 and 4.

For a complete GLOSSARY INDEX of all the more important Characters, Places, Creatures, the location where they are first mentioned, and how to pronounce any unusual names, just go to the end of the book. It's on pages 342-343.

Journey into Darkness

Part One

ilven-roD's Chase

*Where silver sings, and courage rings
across the frosty air,
ere all the blight of narrow night
beshades her dark despair
and slips in ignomy away
to flee the rightness of the day,
awake, my heart, to hope again,
abandon fear, and enter in.*

“It’s your choice, of course...” the whispery rasp of the darK master sounds almost human... “it’s either *your* worthless little world, or minE. and of course *yours* won’t survive the week... and could advantage no one if it did.

“But... do you dare think you would even be here to notice?”

Again I try desperately to suck in oxygen, to break the death-grip tension in my chest.

My heart cannot possibly beat again, or will fracture in the effort. Yet as I lock eyes onto the third-size being

[a map of Phylantagia may go here]

before me, I feel the ludicrous irony of it all, as if I am a frozen spectator observing from some great distance the impossible death-dual of our words.

On a rock no larger than my head hE sits, leaning back as if totally relaxed, his puny white rubbery limbs crossed over hiS childish chest.

hE can't weigh more than forty pounds, if hE weighs anything at all. Only the moon-colored dimples of skin mark where the eyes would appear on hiS perfectly round face, but I know hE is seeing my every thought in the coalescing, and effortlessly sizing up my moral courage as if from an open book.

Why attempt an answer? Why try to communicate, reason, stall, or counter offer with this supreme incarnation of evil?

Even Djélôn, my youngest comrade, knows that if hE merely points his little finger at me I will disintegrate... if he wiggles it, I will incinerate... or if hE should casually spit at me the weakest word of hiS dark magic, I would liquefy into a spiraling mass of worms – the possibilities are endless.

I suspect hE could have dispatched me already with a mere thought... perhaps he is saving the delicacy for a later date, biding richer inspirations.

hE awaits my answer, savoring the wrestlings of my impossibilities. hE knows I am barely breathing, muscles rigid, skin sweating, every hair erect.

ilven-roD's Chase

Snake watching bird, hE softly exhales again, waiting... waiting... waiting. Will I yield finally to hiS diabolical masterY, and accept hiS well-spun offer?

† † † †

Barely I feel it. A pinprick of light through the dark curtain of my agony, that old stirring of courage slowly welling within me. From no volition of my own, against all impulse of these hellish circumstances, I feel growing in the lower reaches of my spirit, where perhaps even the cold masterR himself cannot accurately plumb, the supremacy of my awakening choice.

But before I can phrase my refusal, as the early glories of hope begin trembling across my awakening face, I see the limber limbs of my enemY stiffen and jerk violently, as he sits up straight.

The eyepatches of skin below his hardening brow glow red again, then darker still, and I feel the arousing fury of the eyes beneath them boring their enmity deeply into my heart.

† † † †

DO I? For only a second, as if miles or ages away... do I hear the silver trumpet of Djélôn?

Tremendous burstings of light. Burning smoke of stinging, singeing, searing torment. Torrents of deafening clappings of thunder... and a sudden thrust into the darkest of nothingness.

Somewhere, in whatever world, I land on the sands of a rocky beach. In absolute darkness I tremble and breathe and breathe again.

Somehow, I know not how, I suddenly sense that I am completely and gloriously alone.

Chapter Two

Earlier Mornings

*The deeper searchings of the sea
arise to surge my soul,
and ev'ry swell saluting me
bespeaks the lower whole;
her singing gems aquamarine,
her liquid sunshine golden-green,
her joy in ev'ry subtle scene
and all her prophecies between
the long-ago and yet-to-come
will cheer my wonder voyage home.*

Was it only two days ago, when, with Djélôn shading the torch beside me, we forced the bars and crept cautiously through the copper stair-gate of the sleeping castle?

Rubbing my sore limbs, I sit up, and breathe deeply the sweet air of awakening morning. Wide-winged sea birds soar and dip above the liquid glory, rising, calling, dancing in the tumbling currents of air while the strengthening light baptizes with splendor every drop of diamondry falling from flashing feathers.

How good life is, and how fortunate to be alive. With my recent terrors close to heart, I recline against the surf-smoothed boulder, reflective... sober – sifting through too-

wispy threads of experience for gleanings of orientation and direction.

But... *Djélôn*. Time and again my thoughts return to rest on my newest friend, our youngest warrior. The various events of our first days together muscle their ways through my mind. Our nightly reconnoiterings, our daily reminiscings; the reconstructions and strategeries that fast-forged our souls into oneness. But *how*, in the scant two weeks I have known him, has he so *thoroughly* won my highest respect and my deepest allegiance?

On the word of my paternal grandfather, I descend from a long line of strong men and beautiful women—men famous for courage and loyalty, women beautiful in those rugged feminine graces that make faith and family fruitful.

Only three or four when he first spoke of it—and still terrified of the dark—I was doubtful about the *courage* part, but eagerly soaked up his patient voice and the well-strung stories he hung upon me as he helped school me for the larger lessons of life.

Oh, to have him beside me now, as I remember his calmness, in the loom of these eerie events that draw me daily toward the crucible that every man must face.

Djélôn again. I remember hearing nothing about his family. Was he poured into a similar mold? Come to think of it, have I ever heard him volunteer his past—he's always so... so focused on the challenge at hand. I chuckle as I think of his reaction two mornings ago, when we were

Earlier Mornings

warming around the campfire and, checking his eye, I suddenly chucked a thirty-pound rock over the blazing circle at his very feet.

We discuss now and then whether these 'alertness tests' are worthy of the risk, but always land on the same conclusion: we would hazard our lives much more—the way they've been running lately—if we would abandon them.

But before the rock shook the boulder he was sitting on, *Djélôn* not only lifted his feet from the crusher that would have crunched them, his whole frame was in the air, and, as I gingerly picked myself up and brushed the rocks off my clothes a few seconds later, I realized I was picturing a matador under a crushing bull. Why, I had hardly extended my arms before he flattened me in the dust! But the best part was that spontaneous grin that so frequently flashes across his face, as he congratulated me on such an accurate shot.

For the twentieth time I wonder: that silvery blast I heard before landing here—*was* it from the little trumpet I told *Djélôn* to always keep at hand? I suspect it was, but the spell hit so quickly I can hardly be sure.

Hmm-mm! I wonder... When Grandfather, as a special personal gift, gave me that second smaller trumpet at my *Initiation into Manhood*, with all our Leaders and the men of my family looking respectfully on, he impressed into my memory that it had been in our lineage for hundreds of years, and just *might*—he leaned into my eyes as he said it—have supernatural blessings conferred upon it.

Is it possible, that when the silver trumpet of Djélôn sounded its fiery blast, it came at the split instant the dark masteR was destroying me with hiS most damnable curses, and somehow undid or redirected hiS dark magic to send me not into the worst place of torment hE could devise, but into this place of peacefulness instead?

My!— I still haven't mentioned my first important impressions of this new world I find myself in! You probably ascribe to it the ordinary sands and surfs and boulders and birds of the Eyrth-beaches we're both familiar with, but that is utterly inaccurate—I assure you.

Since I first awakened, I have been breathing in a *wholeness* and a *restfulness* and a 'secureness' unlike anything I have ever remotely considered, and which I am afraid I will be unable to satisfactorily describe.

Even my thoughts of the contest with ilven-roD (if that is indeed who hE was) are within a context of the calm assurance that hE, nor any other evil, can ever approach me here.

I suspect that even my longings to be again with the WAHRoR and Djélôn... my sadness when I think of my grandfather... my memories of the skirmishes just two evenings ago on the stairways in the fortress—will all wear away before a hundred hours—for I feel them diminishing as I speak!

As soon as I can, I hope to chronicle for you an accurate description of the spiritual atmosphere of this fascinating world—but it must await a more favorable time,

Earlier Mornings

for during these past several minutes, rising slowly out of the distant mists where sky kisses sea... growing steadily larger under the rosy sun... some sort of sailing vessel, I suppose, advances nearer and nearer, apparently toward this very beach. And I wonder what awaits me.

† † † †

I am on my feet now, eyes straining to shrink the distance across the sea. Ordinarily I would be well-concealed long before this, observing warily from some hidden spot the arrival and conduct of my unknown visitors. But in the hearty, strangely-cheering atmosphere of this world where fears are foreign and unfathomable, I stand in open view on the sloping beach, curious and contemplative about the vessel and its crew, calculating just how soon they may arrive. Five minutes? Ten?

Unawares, as by frequent habit, my fingers reach through the loosened collar of my tunic top to touch the beautiful carven locket which, from its well-wrought titanium chain, hangs always against my heart .

Blood pulsing, sweet-lonely thoughts pensive, I open the cover of the golden case to swing out the pale-green oval within, and focus the eyes of my heart on this image-emblem of its richest desire.

From the depths of the shining crystal appears the form of (I tell myself for the thousandth time) the most glorious feminine face in all creation. The etching in the heart of the crystal delineates lightly the eyes, the smile, the hair, the very spirit-essence of the one who occu-

pies so often my waking thoughts and who so easily keeps in sweet captivity the passions of my heart!

“Ah, my dearest! My dear, dear Al-Lloreya!” my heart whispers reverently. “Too many months have passed... too many dangers fought... too many unknowns crossed upon us... *and our worlds are no longer one!* What must we face before we meet again?”

As thumb touches crystal, to hinge it reluctantly into its golden casket, I hesitate, staring as one transfixed at the gem within. Never before have I beheld what I am seeing now – or is *it* seeing *me*?

As if the jewel suddenly cradles within its heart a drop of living sunlight, it briefly glows ever brighter into a deeper richness of emerald, flashes softly once only, and slowly fades to its usual glory.

I cannot tell you how strangely this affects me. Only the surreal serenity of this place keeps me from sharply crying out. Has something happened to my Heart’s Love? Is a dark omen portending an ill fate soon to happen? *Al-Lloreya! Al-Lloreya!* Dare I hope a cheerier meaning?

These old-habit fears will soon fade to oblivion in this strange air – *including* my concerns about their fading.

But all shifts to present reality. I return the locket to my heart, and fumble my cloak button again – for the sails have grown rapidly larger. The ship has anchored; a smaller one slips from her side, is rowed toward the shore, and I go to catch the rope.

Al-Lloreya

*Oh where is your heart, fair daughter of men,
Lost in the meadow, or hiking the glen?
Climbing the mountainside, crossing the sea?
Hunting the roebuck that roams o’er the lea?
Where is your heart, I ask you again—
Where is your heart, fairest daughter of men?*

*Where two legs are trav’ling through meadow or wood,
Where two hands are helping the pure and the good,
Where two arms are blessing the needy, the true,
Where one mouth is singing the busy day through,
Madly he calls me— I gladly pursue!
For ever, wherever, my heart in his pocket,
My life in his mind, and my face in his locket,
I always am with him, through forest or fen—
But crave his returning, the fairest of men.*

At the base of a trickling waterfall, where it splashed its glories into the pool below, on a moss-carpeted log centered in low sprinklings of fern, not far from where the wood thrush was busily trilling on its love-flute, she sat.

Here was her favorite early-morning spot, where many quiet songs she had sung, many oracles read, many life-mysteries pondered, many purposings penned, many lovely thoughts embraced, and so many silences savored.

The joys of being in love! Again today, during the dawning hour of its new glories, she smiled, wept, and prayed in turn for her dear so-dearly-Beloved.

Turning slowly to every direction of her sheltering sanctuary, she swept with merry emerald eyes the seclusion enveloping her. *No one must see!*

Thrusting her trembling hand quickly into her bosom, she withdrew a shining little locket – the loveliest she had ever seen. How she treasured it!

How pleased she had been when he so humbly and sweetly, toward the end of a shining summer evening, had kissed first one, then her other eyelid shut, placed it in her hand, and closed her fingers around it.

“Open your hand, my Love!” he had whispered softly into her ear. *“It’s my heart, in yours.”*

How her heart had sung as she twined and released the delicate golden chain through and around her fingers once, twice, three times, embracing the beauty of the pendant from various angles.

“Open it, my Love! Here, let me show you how.”

Slowly unwrapping the chain from her fingers, he then held the locket before her face, chain dangling.

“Hold it like this, and squeeze the edges twice, quickly, while pressing the top and bottom edges together with your other hand. Try it!”

Al-Loreya

“I didn’t know it opens,” she had whispered. *“I noticed no line where it could. It is so beautiful, with my name engraved on the front and... what do the symbols on the back side mean?”*

“Open it, my Love! I have waited too long already.” he had implored her, boyishly. *“Question me later.”*

Quickly and carefully she had complied, and the two shining halves of the locket had clamshelled on their fine, well-wrought hinge to open position.

She remembered as if only yesterday how her hand had flown to her throat to stifle her gasp from within.

The exquisite cameo inside was a glistening white sculpture carved above a soft emerald green, portraying both a cunningly-wrought work of art, and a perfect likeness of the face now but a few inches from her own!

“How altogether lovely!” she had whispered, so softly that he had leaned even closer. *“But, who... where...”* she had stammered, *“Who could make anything so stunningly glorious?”*

“Only... someone... who is... fevered in heart, I’m afraid...” he had ventured hesitatingly, as if slowly feeling around with his tongue for safe steppingstones on which to place his words.

“You’re teasing me! You don’t expect me to believe that you have crafted this!”

“No, no, it was Grenlynt, the kindly old goldsmythe— remember him?— who gets the greater share of the credit. Through many weeks, and by many lengthy lessons, he so very patiently taught me while I practiced on a smaller one for little sister Taeanne. It was nothing like *this* one, of course... and remember, the old craftsman had a determined and avid apprentice, for I have been envisioning this locket since the day we met, and have impatiently awaited this moment.”

† † † †

But as she sat before the waterfall now in sweet recollections, she began to count that seven moons had waxed and waned since she had last seen the living original of the cameo in her hand.

“*Where is he now? Is he safe? Does his heart ache so often for mine, as mine does for his?*” These questions and longings, and so many more, surged through her beautiful heart as she held the cameo closely, admiring it once again, reluctant to snap it quietly shut and hide within it the manly profile with the open smile and the honest, speaking eyes...

What was this? To her astonishment, as if receiving from somewhere a life of its own, the emerald-colored crystal began brightening around and through the carved alabaster figure— glowing, pulsing once, brighter, and richer— into a deep emerald green.

With a soft cry of confusion, she fell to her knees on the familiar rain-washed stone, seeking guidance and com-

Al-Loreya

fort. After interceding through many minutes for the one she so truly loved, she arose with a plan.

† † † †

Hanging from a wrought bracket of weathered copper, the simple signboard above the cobblestones would hardly have caught your eye even if you were walking directly beneath it, except that the board still shone so brightly from its gilding of purest gold, and that the bright letters painting the two words *Grenlynt, Goldsmythe* upon it were of such a rich emerald green.

Inside the shop, seated comfortably on a leather-topped stool, smooth black apron covering both lap and worktable, the goldsmythe sat.

When the three golden bells hanging on the inside of his shop door rang out the greeting, he folded the apron onto the table where he was working, rose stiffly to his feet, and greeted the young lady before him.

“*Come in, fair friend of Gaelayniel— thrice welcome! I had hoped to see you today. What can I do for you?*”

Hanging her shawl on an oaken peg, he escorted her to a place apart, where they could see the shop while speaking in relative privacy and comfort.

“You spoke of my Love,” she replied, with unusual gravity. “You helped him to craft for me a gift of great value and beauty, did you not? And, I assume, you have probably seen it?”

“Yes, I introduced him to my tools, and trained him in some tricks of my trade. But I never saw his workmanship after he had completed it, for he wanted only your eyes upon it, and in that I have honored him. I strongly suspect, however, that it was as perfectly designed and executed as anything that ever passed through my doorway – not including, of course, yourself.”

“Thank you...” she hesitated. “In that case, I will not show it to you as I had planned, but I want to describe to you something strange which happened with it only yesterday morn.”

After Al-Lloreya had painted to him the picture of her cameo’s mystifying behavior, Grenlynt sat staring in utter silence for a full minute. Sighing pensively, he leaned forward to speak, his wise and kindly heart looking out through honest auburn eyes into the depths of her own.

“How I would love to be able to answer you to our satisfaction! Instead, you have just added one more piece of puzzlement to my own muddle about it all. When I told you you were thrice welcome, I meant first, of course, because of who you are – for I greatly respected your father, and have followed with delight the doings of his children.

“I welcomed you secondly because your life is so large in the heart of Gaelayniel – how often he spoke of you! and with what enjoyment and praise! And *his* father also I knew, and loved dearly. Many conversations serious and long we enjoyed together, sometimes

Al-Lloreya

till the moon had visited half the sky. Once again, the old goldsmythe, in distant scene, sat silent.

“But my third welcoming, I confess,” he continued, taking up the thread again, “was somewhat selfish, for I was keenly hoping you could provide me some clues for the unravelling of a strange dream I had last night.

“Before I show it, please allow me to assure you that I do not consider myself superstitious, and have intercourse with neither seer nor soothsayer. Nor waste I daytime thoughts on nighttime dreams.

“But a fortnight ago I dreamed I saw the two of you – lovers together – heads bending intently over your locket as if pondering its future... just as I suppose you actually did some months ago. Of course, I thought nothing of it – why should I *not* dream about the young man who spent so many hours singing in this very studio, and of the Heart’s-love he extolled so honorably, and whose picture he left always above his workbench?

“But last night’s dream was so different. I awoke from this second dream with heart racing wildly... breathing as if I myself had just run a race... my nightshirt soaked from some great strugglings.

“The dream’s every scene was burnt into my eyes, and I see it still, this morning... as real... as real as your own fair face before me.

“As this second dream opened, I saw once again, and *exactly as in the earlier dream*, the two of you together,

Al-Lloreya

repeated detail for detail. But soon the familiar passed away. A sudden storm swept down from the north, from the icy sea, cold and dark and gusting. I saw him drop the locket into his bosom, and beheld you racing hand-in-hand toward some shelter. Then suddenly... *but must I tell you all?*"

"Please share every detail with me, as clearly as you saw it, *please...!*" she entreated, leaning forward with hands clasped on her gown, trembling. *"I must see it too."*

"As I said," Grenlynt continued, "the darkening storm sent you flying for cover. But suddenly I sensed that Gaelayniel was gone. Not that he had stumbled and rolled from the path, nor that he had out-raced you (as if one like him *could* leave you behind!)... but that he simply was... was no more where you were.

"As I said, I take little stock in dreams, but from this one I awoke with such a stifling heaviness about my heart that I cried aloud in alarm – for myself, for him, for you, for all who are true and good and worthy, for it seemed, if I can say it adequately, that something of... of *cosmic consequence was upon us!*

"Now, though I was still fully awake, *the dream resumed*, exactly as when I was asleep, but with a great change come over me.

"Still he was gone. Still you called, you searched, you ran, you prayed – no answer came. You were frantic now – running, weeping, wet hair streaming wildly, heedless of rain or storm, crying for your Beloved!

"At last I began to realize, strangely, and with a new kind of shock, that my heart was now perfectly calm. My breathing was easy. I could be ashamed now in the telling, of how peaceful and joyous I felt, as if all the deeper soothing of the ages were cradling me to rest. My worries had fled. My thoughts were rest and comfort. I remember wishing you could have the same peace, when suddenly the glowering blackness of the storm lightened. The atmosphere turned grayer, then golden – like sunrise erasing night; it then grew strangely toward tints of green, like a grand Aurora Borealis. Deepening rapidly into ever richer and brighter colors of emerald green, it glowed for a moment, burst brighter yet into pulsing sunrays – and I knew the dream was satisfied."

He sat quietly, searching his mind for any detail missed, Al-Lloreya growing calmer before him.

"What can it possibly mean?" she mused aloud. "Have you any insight or advice at all?"

He shook his head. "It has filled my mind from the moment I awoke until my three golden bells rang you into my presence. The best I can suggest right now is that we continue with open hearts, trusting for the best. If I learn anything worth sharing I will send for you – please do the same for me.

"Before you depart," he hesitated, seeing she had arisen, "...may I pray with you?"

With still-wet eyes she nodded her relief, and, putting his aged hand lightly upon her youthful head, he humbly

conferred, as one long practiced, the blessings of the peace of his dream's conclusion onto her hungering heart. Shaking hands reverently, for they both revered all that is pure and good, without a word they parted.

† † † †

What can it all mean? Were it only the curious doings of the living Light within her locket, she could almost doubt her own seeings, attributing it perhaps to her overwrought emotions. But, *the dreams...* and in such a perfect consonance of timing and confirmation. Oh, for an interpreter!

One thing sure. Her plan to see the goldsmythe, while not giving her the answers she was seeking, had certainly intensified her desire to search them out!

Perhaps, she thought, she could try to make contact with her Love; but she knew from long habit that such a course was likely impossible. She would just need to wait. Before ever he had asked her her heart's trothing, he had insisted she take ample time to consider the cost to herself of committing herself to one whose perilous missions could last long months at a time, in locations that dare not be disclosed.

She would just need to do what wise old Grenlynt had suggested — submit her heart to faith and fate... bide her time... and keep on singing.

Djélôn's Choice

*The Battle rages round the sphere.
Day is dying. Night is near.
Evil plunders. Sore-oppressed,
see the bravest and the best
fight the fight with might and main,
strategy, or long campaign.*

*See! the Battle rages yet,
Will we, do we dare forget?
See the hero, Gaelynt Glenn,
with his valiant fighting men,
See his hale and hearty one,
freedom's good and glorious son,
fearless, fell and fair Djélôn!*

*Do you fear the roiling fog,
Dark delusion's evil smog,
pressing, falling eyrthward? On!
Will we die, all promise gone?
Forward!— till the day is won,
wear your courage, brave Djélôn!*

The air was bracing and clear, and the jets exhaled from their horses' nostrils soon tipped the hair of their muzzles with frost. But as Djélôn and the more-seasoned comrades of the WAHRoR, on their weary mounts,

climbed the cold, rocky crags, Djélôn felt the blood of his pounding heart growing hotter and hotter. *Three things he knew, and they concerned him greatly.*

The first, they had at most but an hour remaining before darkness would claim these desert foothills, and their search would become almost impossible.

The second, they were *all*—all six of these rugged men—utterly beyond exhaustion. Certainly he himself, though reveling that he was even alive after the intensity of the skirmishes on the castle stairway just last evening, was far from rested, and his wounds still awaiting proper treatment.

The third, *something was desperately wrong!* Not knowing just how he knew it, he knew it, was totally convinced of it! Perhaps that was the reason why these weary men, and even the sometimes obstinate Raul-yôhn and the persuasive Braunelus, had yielded to his pleadings to join him in the search for their able captain.

Yes, these three things he knew, but what really bothered him was what he *did not know*—these questions still pounding recklessly and relentlessly through his heart.

Why had Captain Gaelynt Glenn, or *Gleyynn* as they sometimes abbreviated it, *still* not returned from his dangerous mission?

And why, really, Djélôn wondered, *did Gleyynn choose to ride off alone,* instead of taking me with him—especially after the way I acquitted myself with him last evening?

Djélons Choice

And *why* does my *heart* insist on laboring under this wilding, whelming fear, while all my experience and my cooler mind keep reminding me of how strong and sagacious, how courageous and capable our captain is?

He remembered so clearly the look in the Captain's eye just before he rode away. "My heart could easily fear where I am going, friend Djélôn," Gaelynt had told him in lowered voice, "and could especially fear the one with whom I am called for conference. As I have discussed with you in our recent conversations, his evil powers are tremendous—cunning, vile, and violent.

"Somehow my heart senses a spirit of great evil, and the converging of strong forces of darkness against us, while our foolish world, distracted by cheap pleasures, chooses to keep on sleeping! But the fight is for the brave, and for those men who are aware of the even higher costs of the battles never ventured.

"I go. I *must* go... and I *may* return. If not, give this sealed packet, privately, to noble Caderyn, who has fought beside me for so many years. In a word, it is my authorization to leave *you* in charge of this unit of the WAHRoR, for my heart tells me it should be so.

"No, Djélôn... do not protest against it because of your youthfulness, for the heart of a warrior is his hardest weapon, and yours is steady as steel. Keep an eye, though, on Braunelus, who occasionally leaves me uneasy.

"I must go! keep faith and courage beating strong in your heart, and *never* offend innocence. Guard the lives

of those innocent ones who are not directly caught up in our battles, whether man or woman, but especially protect the women and children, as you would the lives of your own mother or daughter.

“May all that is good and pure be with you; may the blessings of the brave be upon you, till we meet again.

“Courage!... be strong!”

† † † †

Throwing a quick glance over his shoulder, Djélôn saw Raul-yôhn and Caderyn still just behind him, the others and Braunelus lagging in the distance.

As his heavily-breathing mount breasted the summit, Djélôn saw, near the limits of his vision in the quickly-gathering gloam, what appeared to be Gaelynt’s horse, eyrth-tied at the bottom of a rocky slope, but Captain Gleynn himself he could nowhere see.

Shouting back to the others, he spurred again, and was soon dismounted beside Gaelynt’s horse. Racing afoot up the rocky slope just beyond the horses, Djélôn paused near the top to catch his breath, and peered cautiously through the boulders at the knoll’s rocky crown.

Before him was a rough downward slope, and at a distance of perhaps half a mile, he saw, in a low, rock-rimmed shelter, a circle where sat Captain Gaelynt, a few other assorted characters, and a little figure sitting directly across the circle from Djélôn...

Djelons Choice

From this distance he could not tell exactly what it was, but even as he squinted to resolve it into better focus, he began to feel in his heart a chill of growing terror, and assumed this was the enemy that even one like Captain Gaelynt so wisely respected. Did it see him now?

Suddenly the chill seemed to paralyze him, threatening to stop even the beatings of his very heart. The sun had dropped out of sight, darkness was gathering, some sort of awful magic was in the air... and all his courage was melting like butter on a hot skillet.

Without pausing for thought he drew – while still he could, and as swiftly as a sword – the small silver trumpet from his belt, put it to mouth, and with all remaining strength blew a single short blast of ancient triumph, and collapsed into rest.

† † † †

Weeks passed, turning into a month, and still their Captain was missing. When Caderyn and Raul-yôhn had come to the place of the trumpet blast, they had seen first Djélôn lying as dead, then, in the last clarity of twilight, a circle of men and the small figure among them. Both warriors attested that Captain Gleynn absolutely had not been among the circle, even though they had reached the summit but twenty seconds after the call of Djélôn’s trumpet.

After several long discussions, and sensing that lack of clear leadership would soon present danger and confusion, Djélôn reluctantly gave the sealed packet to Caderyn, and was accepted and duly installed as Cap-

tain until Gaelynt's return, though with some obvious hesitation on the part of Braunelus.

Loyal old Caderyn, upon recognizing the handwriting and signature as Gleyenn's, had heartily appreciated his foresight and accepted his judgment, and Raul-yôhn and their other two warriors, Keythe and Nuallan, also pledged their full support.

† † † †

But still Djélôn was troubled, not just with the mysterious absence and probable death of his closest and most venerated friend, but with the sense of a growing duty pressing itself upon him.

Through the open windows of his mind how clearly he could see, though many miles away, the trusting merry-eyed girl who held Gaelynt's heart in sweet devotion. How Gaelynt's face had glowed with delight when, with lowered voice, he had described to Djélôn his pride in her every gift and glory, and their tremendous love!

Because of the strong mutual respect he and Gaelynt had enjoyed in those two weeks of fierce fightings and forays together, he knew it would be his captain's wish that he himself should go, softly, to break the news.

He appointed good Caderyn to lead the while, traveled many days, met sweet Al-Llorey, extended every sympathy and hope—as there were no evidences of Gaelayniel's death—and bid her a brave farewell, understanding more fully her hold on Gleyenn's heart.

The Council

*The prophets, buried long in yesteryear,
our days foretold
and boldly spoke the truth the wise would hear,
our myst'ries to unfold,
interpreting to longing eye and ear
these veiled and varied visions we behold.*

*As eagle-eyed, twice seeing, fire-lippt,
while kingdoms slept
they spoke the scenes they saw to Sacred Script,
ah! treasures guarded, studied well, and kept
in royal Au-Royal's bright Crypt!*

*Still hallowed are the ancient runes and rhymes
of yesteryore,
The prophet-breathings of the ancient tymes,
deep-spoke before!
The golden keys we seek, to break the door,
lie hidden, in antiquity's dark store.*

The boat I am plying abeach glistens a pale, translucent silver, as if molded of the same pearl which lines the shells here at water's edge. The hull of the craft is emblazoned just below the rail with two lines of stunning golden glyphs, but I know not whether they are a repetition of words, or mere elements of design.

After the laying down of their twelve crimson oars the

twelve tall sun-bronzed men step off onto the sand one by one, preceded by one taller still, to greet me.

Dressed in golden mail so fine I cannot be sure it is really metal, each has a crimson half helmet on his head matching the crimson sash belt that holds the short silver dagger on his right side and the carved crimson horn at his left.

I cannot conceive why daggers are carried in this peaceful country, for we all seem as relaxed as old friends.

I bow low before them, and each bends deeply in return. With steady gaze, with measured grace and courtesy, I draw my dagger, exactly as my father once taught me.

Holding it by its razor tip, I extend it hilt-first to the tall man, obviously their leader. As if perfectly rehearsed, in liquid motion he and each of the twelve does likewise, and we solemnly return our daggers to our belts.

In my native language I try to welcome them. I attempt again with a second tongue, then find success in a third – the oldest language my grandmother had so patiently taught me.

Soon I am seated comfortably aboard the pearlescent craft aside their chief, whose name I have learned is Thauntaylius. He shares with me a drink of sweet, fresh water from some curious vessel, and, oars flashing in fluid unison, we rapidly draw nearer what appears to be a royal ship of towering masts, silver sails, and streaming banners.

The Council

I am told I will be the subject of a special Council an hour after we board, but may rest and refresh myself alone in the comfort of a private cabin until requested to appear before them.

† † † †

Are not friendship, and the trust which makes friendship possible, among the very greatest of the golden graces given unto men? Although I am yet to see anyone here more than smile, I sense among these men the same pleasant camaraderie that I fervently hope to enjoy again some blessed day with Djélón.

As they escort me respectfully along the plush crimson carpet of the lengthy deck to my private cabin, my heart already is treasuring everything it beholds.

Not only are every design and detail of this royal vessel more magnificent than anything I had yet imagined in my own world, but the dress and demeanor of every attendant seem a wondrous fusion of authority, beauty, comfort and delight. Discord, disloyalty, or the base and senseless bickerings of the unenlightened ones of my old world, seem impossible here.

The bright eye, the joyful face, the springly step, the quiet concord – all testify to a unity of spirit I have seldom seen, and perhaps *never* outside the Elders of my family or my compatriots in the WAHRoR. I find my heart joyously hoping to discover many happy hours of exploring the hearts and ways of these people, to learn some of the secrets of their joyous inner beauty.



I have rested well, spending my hour in curious meditation and more than a few remembrances of my sweet Al-Lloreya, when the quiet knocking on my cabin door summons me to the Council.

As I follow my princely escort toward the rear of the ship, I feel I am observing all the lively delights of a scaled-down and floating royal palace.

I see porters carrying bright baskets of fruit from the ice-cooled storerooms buried somewhere in the hold to the brightly-furnished tables in the foreship, for this day is sunny, the breeze is calm, and it looks to be a glorious noon for a sunside repast.

Two boys running our way stop hastily when they see me—the parrot of the one alighting upon his shoulder. As we pass I hear him whisper the name of the other boy, Andreas, who is respectfully trying to keep his pet monkey from leaping from off his head onto my own.

Into what looks like a large and stately ballroom, where our Council will confer, I am ushered, as if I were some important ambassador, to a seat of dignity and comfort in the converging focal point of a semi-circular table, behind which nine men are seated so that all may see me, and I them, at once. It looks as if I am to sit where a king, or some person of highest honor usually sits.

As my usher retires from the room, a sturdy man of

The Council

quiet authority, wearing garments that appear at same sight both luxuriously comfortable and quite practical, rises from a second chair near my own, shakes my hand cordially, and we remain standing.

“Welcome, our good friend,” he says in well-metered words, “to this fair land of Phylantagia, and aboard this royal ship sailing to Au-Royal, the ruling city of our kingdom. Our good friend Thautaylius, whom you met, tells us you are Captain Gaelynt Glenn, here recently from the world Eyrth, and that you are a warrior leading a band of men seeking to deliver your people from evil oppressions.

“Allow me to introduce each of us to you. On your left, at the end of the arc, sits our much-honored ruler, King Ardureus. It is his chair, of course, he has desired to seat you in, so we may all observe closely your answers to our urgent questions.

“Next to him sits Caedmon, both keeper of our Royal Crypt and Guardian of our sacred *Three Scrypts*.”

He continues with the introductions, each man bowing his head, rising, and waiting until all are named and standing.

I thank him, stride gently the few steps to King Ardureus, bow low before him and receive the hand he offers me across the narrow, horn-covered, curving table.

I step back to my chair, bow to the rest of them, look squarely into each friendly, sober face, and seat myself for further developments.

“I forgot to mention,” the man continues, smiling, “that my own name is Haeryck, and that I am to begin the questioning.

“Let me say first, that the reason we have not extended to you our usual courtesies, proffering you pleasant days of resting and acquainting yourself with our people, but, contrarily, have hastened you here so we may press our grave questions upon you, is that the times in which you have landed here are highly unusual – urgent ones, and, by all indication, unusually perilous.

“Old writings – prophecies ancient and sacred to us – seem to be aligning their words of wisdom, and are warning us to prepare for some unusual force against our kingdom, but exactly what, we cannot yet tell!

“Were that not enough, we are entering a *Hundredth Year*, always a time of sorrow and concern for our royal family and our citizens who so deeply love them. Moreover, this will be a *Seventh Hundred*, to which special events even more troubling are always ordained, and even a *Seventh Seventh*, if we read the ancient runes aright.

“The rich joys of every heart in Au-Royalialia, and, indeed, in all of Phylantagia, flow from three crystal fountains – our sacred writings, which we call the *Three Scripts*. Our Book Past, which we call *Hystories*, the Book Present, named *Heartwatch*, and the Book Future, referred to simply as *Revealings*, all seem, to our sages who search them daily, to be speaking to us with clamant clarity.

“And here’s where *you* may have part in this matter.

The Council

Of course we are not yet sure, but, for several reasons, and particularly because of the dream that sent us sailing to bring you hither, we must learn as much as we can immediately.

“First, we desire to question you about things spiritual, which are of first importance to each of us here, for what is a man, if not eternal, and why should he live, if not for the truth? Do you consider yourself, friend Gaelynt, a lover of Truth? For example, in the locked room centered in our Royal Crypt we possess an ancient writing from many centuries ago that mentions a holy book given for Eyrth-dwellers to live by, and tells us of some of its themes. Do you know of and follow such a book?”

My first thought is a wry *Now this will be a hard one!*, and it seems I am meditating for a full minute before I finally answer; but I remember so clearly, when only a lad, being told by my father to *never fear* to speak the truth, and to speak it fully!

“I wish to confess to each of you,” I begin hesitatingly, slowly searching each honest face before me, “that I hardly know how to answer that, even to my own satisfaction. My father, the man I have always revered the most, was not, to some people’s satisfaction, a religious man. He was the most *good*, and *upright*, and *blameless* man I have ever known, and honoring him as I do, I have striven always to uphold his honor in my own soul. If I could die as did he, how happy I would be!

“The only holy book he knew, to my knowledge, was one called *The Book*, devoted partly, I believe, to the sect

of the Jews, and all of it to the so-called Christ-followers. But I heard him comment on more than one occasion that the carelessness and lack of love for their fellow man that he saw in the lives of those few he personally knew gave him scant desire to explore their teachings further.

“But please don’t gain the impression that my father was easily put off by other people’s faults. In his last days he seemed to take more interest in eternal things and all things of the soul, so much so that I have wondered to what extent he may have pursued it, had he longer lived.

“I would also tell you,” I continue, “that my father descends from a long line of similar men, and by much father-to-son teaching and many disciplines there has hardly been a lower man among us. I say that not to boast, just to suggest that perhaps my father may have never felt the need of, for example, the Christ-follower’s ‘savior’ because of it.

“But, as I said, he was ever the picture to me of all that is holy and true and right, caring for the weak, protecting the innocent, selfless in every way. And, like him, I would always be open to instruction from any good-hearted man.

“Please allow me to speak also to you of the one closest to my heart, my dear Al-Lloreya, plighted to me too many months ago, for marriage. How I wish she stood here before you now! How many questions such an appearance would answer!

“Pure-hearted, loving every living thing with a single

The Council

heart and eye, and devoted to me more than any man deserves — she is as innocent as a child, and wise beyond any woman I have ever seen, for she also comes of a goodly family, from a wise father who, incidentally, spent many hours studying the holy book and praying to his god.

“And what a lover of Truth she is! You should hear my Al-Lloreya’s sweet prayers — as if she were a goddess talking to her god.

“In fact, the *only* shadow that has come between us during the many joyous hours of our courtings, has been that her heart is still longing that I may come to share the faith so real in her heart. I love her for it, of course — she knows I do — and I learn more of her faith each time we are together. How firmly she believes we will someday be perfectly one in faith.

“But I will not hasten to accept something of such consequence merely because of my love for her, for I sense that my own foundational beliefs must be forged in the fires of the foundry of my own heart’s faith.”

For several moments the nine men and good Haeryck beside me sit in silence, weighing their thought, until King Ardureus introduces to us a new subject.

“Caedmon, read to him the ancient prophecy — the one with the riddle. *I desire to see his response to it.*”

Caedmon pulls from some parchments on the table before him the one requested, holds it closer to his eyes, adjusts the gold-framed eye-crystals balanced on the end

of his nose, leans back in his chair, and pronounces with emphasis and distinction each word of the prophecy, in richly sonorous voice:

*Oh, reade the rune, to understande,
when Sevven Sevvenths touch the lande,
a riddle, whose prophetic rhyme
may teache you for the awful tyme,
or evil, longing to prevale,
your trusted men and kyngdoms fale.*

*Dare seek within, ye sorrow-full
the deeper searchings of your soule,
for Kyng and all the kyngly grieve
the fairest daughter borne of Eve;
the fairest of her shelter'd race
will Sorrow in her father's place.*

*But cheer, if one wud walk her through,
e'er cleare, or pure, or tryed, or trew
as to their destiny god-hurld
to joyne her from another wurld;*

*When golded jewell would alight
be brave to reade the riddle right—
the daye is near to seek the Night.*

“Please read it again!...” I cry, trembling, “...all the lines, from the very beginning.” But before he finishes the first, I am aware that every eye is upon me, and am sure I must appear pale and shaken to every one of those serious scrutinies.

Before he quite finishes it the second time, I am trembling greatly, and the King is on his feet, leaning over the table, searching my face with haunting eyes.

The Council

“What does it mean, friend Gaelynt, and why do you tremble so? Please tell us, if you can help us at all!”

“May I entreat you first,” I plead, “to explain to me more about your *Hundreth Year*, and your *Seventh Hundred*? What are they? What does it mean?”

Feeling for words, Caedman finally replies. “In our world, which we have reason to suspect may have been fashioned later than your own, we have an overarching Law, referred to in each of our *Three Scrypts*. In the words of one of our common children’s rhymes it goes like this... and perhaps you have something similar in your holy books on Eyrth:

*‘That man must first a servant be,
or ne’er attain to royalty.’*

“Well, the architect of the natural and spiritual laws of this fair world we inhabit apparently decreed that the blessedness that you see on this ship, and shining so brightly from every heart among us, can only be maintained if every member of our royalty is willing to suffer himself daily, as a common servant, for the benefit of all.

“We are happy with this arrangement, as I believe your father would be were he here, for so you have described him.

“But, to keep the members of our royal family as they should be, it is also decreed that, at the beginning of every new century, some member of the ruling royal family must suffer in some most excruciating manner, not for

his own sins, or as deed meritorious for others, as did your Eyrth's christ, if we understand Him aright, but merely to keep our royal leaders ruling ever in unselfish devotion to the good of all, as a common servant would do.

"Every one hundred years it must happen again, in always a new and unexpected manner, and never to anyone who can be by any manner predicted. We know only that it *will happen*, and that it will happen within a moon of the ushering in of the new century, and that it happens always upon a man — never a woman — except every Seventh hundred of the years.

"But now, why do you wish to know... and why so pale when the rune was finished?"

I can stall no longer. *Forgive me, dearest Al-Lloreyya, I whisper, I must show them.*

I stand up to walk, shakily, as in a dream, to the King. Kneeling on the floor before him, I reach into my outshirt, slip the titanium chain over my head, and lay the golden locket before the King, on the horn-shelled table.

Picking it up again, reluctantly, I snap open the case of the carved golden casket so similar to the one I had made earlier for my Love, but so much more rugged, and with a rune of my own written upon its back.

I hinge it open, swing the jewel to the King, and tell him briefly of my experience earlier this morning, when, watching their royal ship draw near, the "golded jewell would alight."

The Princess Aureaelle

*Deep calls to deep, Heart flows to heart,
sweet Passion to its mirror draws
the lowly, homey, humble soul,
to Life, self-giving Life, sweet Life!*

*A songbird settles on her nest,
a flashing trickle of a stream
descends from off the melting crest,
the gentle flow'ring of the bud
her bosom blossoms to the sun,
far hidden from the path of man
with glory in her seeding breast.*

*The wond'ring child, the childlike one,
who listens for his heart again
will find, when Death is found in ruin,
Life gives Itself the seeking one.*

Long ere that first Council had ended, I learned about many of the various Sorrows in the times of the *Hundreth Years*, and the good effects that redeemed them in the lives of the Royalty. But I still have many questions about some of the obscurer lines of the ancient rune.

Before walking fore-ward with the ten men to partake of that beautiful feast near the bow of the royal ship, a second Council was called for the early morrow, for good

King Ardureus quite reasonably assumed it must be his own dear daughter who shall need to suffer, for the rune said clearly the King would grieve, nor could he think of any other possibly fairer than his own daughter, and he had many serious questions to ask me about it all. Was ever a King so anxious to do his duty, while the very thought of it cut so painfully into his heart?

At that second Council he desires only three persons to be present: himself, the Keeper of the Royal Crypt (that is, the honorable Caedmon), and myself – with the possibility of his daughter, the Princess Aureaelle being called in later, if expedient.

Early on this following day, therefore, our Second Council convenes, the King Ardureus sitting in the royal chair, and Caedmon and myself seated together near the center of the curving table.

This time the good King questions me at great length about my childhood and upbringing, eliciting detailed responses about my father, my mother, my sisters, and all our familial relationships.

He then concerns himself for another hour or more with my tellings of my military experiences with the WAHRoR, asking about its founding, my father's role in it, and is especially interested in our deeper motives and methods in it all.

"To sum it all up in a few words, friend Gaelynt," he asks, "what do you really hope to accomplish? In our favored land of Phylantagia, we can hardly comprehend

The Princess Aureaelle

the need of warfare, and the continual clashing of good and evil spirits and all the selfish factions at variance with one another, as you have referred to now in your fightings.

"You are of course still on our royal ship, where perhaps a fifth of the passengers are members of the royal family, and you understand by now, I believe, that our royalty seeks to bear all the burdens of society.

"But surely you have noticed how totally joyous and sorrow-free the rest of our passengers are, for I will be greatly surprised if you tell me you have observed so much as a single quarrel among any of the common countrymen of our company aboard, leave alone an act of overt selfishness or knavery. *But have you?*"

"No, good King," I assure him. "When I landed just two days ago on the shore of your world, I sensed at once I was in a favored land, and under a favoring heaven. The very air and spirit of your kingdom breathed out refreshment!

"The waves and winds around me seemed to be conferring musical blessings upon me, as intimately as if the shores were alive with smiling minstrels and glad bands of marching bards – all playing the songs they know I love the best.

"The sands beneath my feet, the boulders near the spot where Thautaylius and the Twelve landed – all seemed as if they were living things, devoting themselves, by their strength and beauty, to my delight.

“And especially to one like myself, who has necessarily spent so many hours facing death and danger, it has been as uplifting to me as it has been unusual. *Of course* I am eager to acquaint myself with many of your common countrymen, and am curious to explore your culture which seems so excellent and enticing, so superb in every way, fair and phenomenal.

“And, were I not so seemingly bound up in this prophetic knot which we are trying to unravel, I would think myself to have landed in some sort of dream-world where I would live forever, providing I could be joined here by my dear Al-Lloreya and some others dear to heart.

“But back to your question. You were asking, good King Ardureus, what we hope to accomplish in our warrings. The WAHRoR, as I believe you have heard, stands for Warriors Advancing Humanity’s Recovery of Reason. Our Warriors seek, both by our writings and our battles against evil, to influence Humanity to live only for the good and pleasure of their fellows, and the ‘Recovery of Reason’ speaks to the hope that all good men will someday rise above the many evils, rebellions, deaths, diseases, and discords of our present experience, until all are abolished.

“Is it possible? Perhaps not, but to us it still seems right that man would be able to give the trial of mutual goodness, and peaceableness, and racial and international harmony at least the opportunity for experiment, and, experimenting sufficiently under wise and exemplary leadership, should be able to choose the higher and truly civilized life that your people are enjoying here.

The Princess Aureaelle

“Although the total membership of our WAHRoR numbers only in the few hundreds—hardly measuring up to the appearance of a recognizable military factor, we hold faith that, since we are fighting for the truth and the right, there may be invisible powers fighting with us, and that, though we battle against seemingly insurmountable odds, we may yet accomplish something in the end.

“To us it does not seem reasonable to assume that evil and ignorance and darkness shall always have the greater strength, and that they shall, in the last days, with some diabolical upper hand, destroy us all.

“We have pledged ourselves, to the man, to be and to do all we possibly can to advance the vision of our elders, earnestly believing we shall prevail at last. If not, we at least will have maintained our own honor and example, and can but perish bravely in the effort.”

As I conclude unto him my answer, King Ardureus sits sorting it through in noble thought, the light of his humble piety shining through his careworn face, the very picture of finest nobility.

“I admire, good friend Gaelynt,” he affirms at last, “both the ideals you cherish, and the zeal with which you pursue them. And with all my heart I wish you full success in attaining them.

“As you have surely surmised, our Council of Nine and I are quite concerned, if some person—in the words of the rune—should be ‘from another world’ ‘god-hurled’

into our own to help us through this time of doubled destiny, that he will be not only a safe guide for my daughter, who is surely the one being called by the rune to ‘sorrow in her father’s place,’ but also that he will respect our fair kingdom, its laws, its ways and countrymen. As the ruling family, ours is the awe-ful responsibility of ensuring that no evil from another world should land upon the shores of our own, and infect our race.

“The answers from your heart have fully satisfied me, Captain Gaelynt, and, therefore I, the highest standing ruler of the fair kingdom of Phylantagia, King Ardureus the Third, must now request you, since all signs seem to converge upon you, if you will give me plight and promise to do your manly best to escort my daughter, the Princess Aureaelle to her dark destiny, and, if the divine powers shall allow it, to bring her safely to us again.

“If you agree to the endeavor, I will allow her to meet with us and ask any questions she may desire. She is in a room nearby, quietly waiting. I will go to her first, speaking with her for some minutes to fully satisfy her of my own impressions, and then leave the choice to her own mind, for hers is the fate and the privilege. What say you?”

Alas, it lands upon me at the last... and my heart sinks toward death. If I acquiesce, as surely I must, not for me are the cheerful music, the baskets of fruit, the joyful sun, the shining singing sands, the happy people, the lads and maidens, the parrots and monkeys and the endless songs – not for me.

Not for me are the pleasant musings under the smiling heavens, or, if I can even remember her long enough in this air of

The Princess Aureaelle

fading worries, to search for any possible way to return to my world and its own princess, my Al-Lloreya – not, alas! for me.

Suddenly my musings are interrupted by our good friend Caedmon. All through our discourse at this Second Council, he has been silent, speaking not one syllable, but observing closely every question and answer, scribbling notes swiftly into a bound sheave of parchments before him on the old horn-covered table. At this juncture of the meeting he speaks: “Did you not intend, good King Ardureus, to say somewhat about where he might be going?”

“Thank you, thank you... yes, yes... I certainly did.” the King replies, nodding.

“Good Gaelynt,” the King continues, turning to me again, “You may be still unaware that this delightful atmosphere you speak so fondly of does not extend, properly, over the entirety of my domain.

“There is, nearly two moons north and east of here, a darkening sea, and beyond it, an island of several weeks’ journey across, where forces of evil have maintained something of a foothold through these several millennia past. They seem to adhere to firm boundaries, never venturing far from off that large island, and to have contented themselves with tormenting the unfortunate dwellers there, so that, in many ways, those sad people’s lives are like those of the Eyrth dwellers you have described. In some ways, perhaps, they may be worse, for there seem to be in some of the higher and remoter regions of that island several dark forests and dark waters, where dark doers practice their dark doings—

sorcerers of olde and evil magic, from ages long-past— invisible to eye, but sometimes terrible in influence.

“On many occasions through the recent centuries, brave men from our royal family have volunteered to move into that country, to transplant some of the love and goodness of our people into those dark regions, hoping to reform some of the inhabitants, or at least encourage those who still love the light. Hopefully some of them live there still.

“We tell you this because *it is to that dark island, called Malavalea, that a member of our royal family must sail every Hundredth Year*” to meet the afflicting Death or Sorrow that helps to sanctify the hearts of our Royalty.

“Please forgive me for neglecting to mention it; I can hardly bear the thought of my own dear daughter, the Princess Aureaelle, touching that foul island— and I certainly meant to apprise you of it before asking you to share in the risks and honors of her Sorrow.”

“Think nothing of it, my good King,” I assure him, “I am able to carry in my heart but a small part of the deep grievings you bear in your own, and I trust you fully. You are a man like was my own father— I can pay you no higher reverence than that!

“Under your proffered blessing, and in the name of all that is True and Honorable and Pure and Good, I will, while still my eye sees, my heart beats, and my strength remains, guide and guard your noble daughter, loving her as I would my own sister, Truth helping me, as surely

The Princess Aureaelle

as I know *you* would protect her, were it allowed you to go with her.”

As I plight myself to King Ardureus, some living, lingering pulsation of Hope, rooted far below in the deepest caverns of my heart, like the flame from the wetted wick of a wax taper, seems to slowly and finally extinguish, while, even in its extinguishment, the peace of duty embraced kindly settles over me.

† † † †

After what seemed an hour, but was perhaps only thirty minutes or so, the door opens, and in steps the Princess Aureaelle, slowly but not faltering, followed by her sorrowing father. Face veiled, dressed in simple but queenly attire, she seems the very picture of brave and sorrowful grace as she softly walks the carpeted room to sit in the chair by her father’s, her hand in his hand.

These first seconds of acquaintanceship strongly suggest to me that she is a daughter worthy of her father. She seems the very sister of purity and grace, her every step and movement both modest and free from pretense. Her next action confirms it.

Seeing the earnestness of my eyes searching her heart, she rises, even before her father begins to introduce us, walks to the table and stretches her hand to mine, as I rise and bow deeply before her.

“Greetings, friend and Captain Gaelynt, and... brave welcome to Phylantagia. Though we have not met, my

father has encouraged my heart so much this past day, and especially this past half hour, with his earnest recountings of who you were on Eyrth, and of your journeying here. Thauntaylius also, and his Twelve, I have dialogued with, and several men of the Council of Nine.

“They have all spoken so well of you, and have shared with me already so many stories of your brave exploits, and of your holy love to the beautiful Al-Lloreya – how my heart longs already to meet her!

“Please be at ease, for I would also ask you some questions from my heart, in the presence of these two honorable men – for you know the terrible fates that seem to be thrusting us together, and my womanly heart must be at rest if we are indeed called to be off soon together to meet them.”

At ease? How can I possibly be at ease, for a horrible thing has happened, and I struggle to maintain even the outer semblance of composure.

For, as she beseeched herself again, putting once more her hand into the hand of the King, she distractedly removed from her face her almost-transparent Veil of Sorrow – which I had heard she is wearing in her few public appearances... I suppose so she can better read my expressions when I begin answering her questions.

But even as her hand drapes her veil across the knees of her gown, my heart plunges into icy cold, then fiery hot, now burning, now racing thought – desperate for answers to the questions raging within me!

The Princess Aureaelle

From *where* are these strange entangling fingers of fate that touch all these happenstances? For, as I see clearly, for the first time, the face of the Princess Aureaelle, I sit as one who has been suddenly stunned! utterly aghast! entranced! – for two obvious facts sit on her face before me.

The first? even as sun surpasses moon in brilliance, so the indescribable splendor of Princess Aureaelle’s beauty seems infinitely more regal, more childlike and ladylike, ethereal and lovely than any holy thing I have ever beheld – *including* my own beloved Al-Lloreya.

The second? still more devastating to any shreds of equilibrium remaining within me, she looks as alike as any mother could to her daughter, nay, almost as an older sister to the younger (but how then her twin?)... looks exactly like, I say, but a little older than, that same sweet person of my heart – my Al-Lloreya! *Oh, my Al-Lloreya!*

Before I can turn my head to look at Caedmon, in an attempt to hide my shock, I notice the eyes of the king growing puzzled as he watches me trying in vain to undo the hard heart-pulsings of the questions racing through my mind:

How can a daughter of this new world look so much like the one I love best, left behind in the other?

How can the beauty of anyone so surpass the beauty of one whose beauty is already the sum of perfection?

Did the King not notice – when I opened my locket to tell him the story of the glowing crystal – the face within it so perfectly reflecting his own Aureaelle’s?

By long experience, my old warrior instincts try to calm my heart for the battle ahead. The King, I assume, decides to question me later, and the Princess...

I wonder, does she think me a madman already? Unable to hold back a smile at the absurdity of my first impression to her unveiled eyes, I am surely crowning the effect with my smile!

But as I turn bravely toward the lovely emerald eyes, I see they are modestly lowered behind the twin valances of long lashes, perhaps from observing my startlement.

All this mental whirlwind has occurred within but a few seconds, and I force my mind back to her comments.

"I thank you, Princess Aureaelle, for your generous compliments, and for your love already to the jewel of my heart, my Al-Lloreya. I'm sure she would love to meet you, too, for I sense already no little similarity between the two of you... (*true words, but seeming weak, and almost false.*)

"Perhaps my previous exploits have been exaggerated to you – I assure you that my heart is far from perfect, in courage or any other virtue. But my desire, as I'm sure is yours, is to be all that I can be in Truth, in Love, and in the Purity that keeps Courage courageous.

"I pray you also, to please be at ease to ask me anything – *anything* – your heart would be comforted in knowing, here in the presence of your father and the good Caedmon."

From this poor beginning there proceeds an hour of

The Princess Aureaelle

questions, conversations, and even a few humorous reminiscings about some of my special times with my little sisters and brother. My heart is warming already in the growing sensation of that same camaraderie that has always thrilled me with my dear Al-Lloreya, and my compatriot Djélôn.

"I'm sure they have already told you," the Princess quietly remarks, after the spacings between our questions have begun lengthening into longer and longer musings, "why we will need to leave within the week..."

My startled eyes betray me again, and she flushes, looking up to her father.

"Oh, oh," the King stammers, "I'm sorry, my dear... that is the *second* extremely important item to totally escape me, and in the space of but three hours! Where *is* my mind?"

"I know where it is, dear Father." she very quietly replies, squeezing the hand she still tenderly holds, "and you know how much I love you for it. Sir Caedmon, can you please explain to Captain Gaelynt our urgency?"

Good Caedmon lifts his quill from the parchment, re-arranges his thoughts, and proceeds.

"You remember, Captain, that this Suffering we are called upon to endure must begin within a moon of the threshold of this new Seventh Seventh century. We dare not arouse the fiery ire of Justice by letting carelessness or cowardice tarry us a day beyond that limit.

“Exactly three moons from tomorrow, the new century will be ushered in amid the splendors of Au-Royalialia, not with fireworks and fanfare, as are most New Years, but with flags lowered, trumpets muted, and the sad strings singing their dolorous heart-pulling tunes.

“Instead of rich feasts lasting three full weeks, to the accompaniment of music and dancing, minstrels and merriment, there will be in our royal city many public fastings, frequently-scheduled prayers day and night, many sad ballads of the previous Sorrows read and wept over by our young men and maidens, and by our old men, royal ladies, and little children.

“Because of the distance to the Isle Malavalea,” here Caedmon winces and looks at the Princess as if wishing he could recall the dark word, or had chosen another, “and because of all the unhappy events that may surprise you along the way, you must be in the first ship of your journey, with everything we can supply you, ready to depart, in less than a week.”

A few more thoughts of conversation ensue, Caedmon’s quill gliding across the parchment to detail the minutes meticulously. He pauses, removes quickly from their perch on his nose the gold-rimmed eye-crystals, blots the tears from his eyes, wipes his nose with a silver-gray cloth, and repairs to his writing.

How greatly do these people love their King and his family, my heart cries out, and indeed they should! What privilege is mine to know, to befriend and defend such noble spirits – even should I die in the endeavorings!

Au-Royalialia

*Ah, see the banners wave their bright regalia,
And hear the trumpets call, our fears displacing;
How brave the Royal City, Au-Royalialia,
Her sad and holy Sorrow now embracing.*

*[Tears flowing, Trumpets blowing...
Hearts brighten, Sorrows lighten...]*

*Exalt her proud and ancient, honored, history,
All ye who know and, knowing, love high duty;
Come share her griefs and, grieving, boast her victory,
And in her victory behold her beauty.*

*[Prayers waving, Honor saving...
Banners flowing, Trumpets blowing...]*

The royal ship has docked, and, for the first time, I walk through the huge carved gates of gold, into Au-Royalialia – the Golden City of Splendor.

How shall I describe it? When man is able to collect in a replica held in his hand, and reflect fully and accurately from within it the many-miles-wide panoramas of the multi-splendored sunrise, and fully bring forth all the glories of the vastness of her expanses above, her breezes upon the face, the sweet plashings of her waves,

the callings and soarings and sailings of her seabirds, and the salt smell above her breakers, all within the motionous harmony of the whole, then – perhaps, but I think not – I may be able to describe to you with mere words the heart swellings that are mine as I enter the Royal City.

How brave thy land, Phylantagia, and how bright thy city, Au-Royalialia!

It was desired by the King, ere we left the Council, that the Princess and I should be immediately together, the better to be known and loved and prayed-for together by the people, and the readier to prepare for our journey.

It was also decided, by the Princess and myself, to spend three swift days in acquainting me with the land and peoples and ways of her kingdom, while bidding her favorite friends and places farewell, then the last three days in packing our preparations for a rapid departing.

Having given a complete list to the royal overseers, much like I have done so many other times before my expeditions with the WAHRoR, I confess now a strange and heightened excitement as to what unknown garments and weapons and victual-stores I will find when we return to Au-Royalialia three days hence.

The fame of the ancient skills of the royal smythes and garmynt weavers has already slipped into my ears more than once, and I will not be surprised to find weather-proof capes and overshirts that will, even under bright moonlight, keep us invisible except to each other, won-

Au-Royalialia

drous garments that can be soaked through and instantly dry again, and trusted weapons and charms of various sorts that will accomplish, in fell straits, strange feats.

But today, Day Six before departure, we are off to the marketplaces just inside the east gate of the city, then away to spend two days and a night in the home of Princess Aureaelle's dearest friend, one Aravelle.

As I walk beside the Princess, I am overwhelmed at the multiplying myriads of courtesies and thoughtful-nesses, wise and real amid the practical blessings wished upon us from every heart.

The news seems to have spread swiftly that the Council of Nine has officially decided that their dear Princess Aureaelle is the only one who can receive the divine decrees, that she will be escorted by a brave warrior who by strange divine intervention has just landed here from another world, and that they will depart but six days hence.

As we walk the busy street, people gladly make way for us or crowd eagerly around us, call blessings upon us, and make frequently a friendly gesture to us, about which I question the Princess.

"We call them *prayer waves*," she explains. "See that young maiden there, the one in the bright blue robe, how the forefingers of her right hand start at the center of her heart, quickly loop vertically up before her face, then toward it and back down, just brushing her lips for a kiss before rushing out before her to arms' length, where she throws it to us from opening hand.

Au-Royal

"I'm not sure why we call them *prayer waves*, for I think *blessing waves* or *prayer kisses* would be just as accurate. But it's the way we have expressed, for at least a thousand years, and all at once, a prayer from the heart, a kiss from the mouth, and a blessing from the hand in one swift motion visible at great distance. And it's perfectly acceptable to repeat it several times, especially on occasions like this, as she is doing."

I find myself intrigued by the contrasting emotions of the populace. Frequently we encounter the unashamed tears or open weepings of Aureaelle's royal relations—and she seems to have many—followed by words of well-wishing and strong hugs to the Princess or hearty half-hugs and handshakes to myself. But all the while, the merry commoners—I dislike the word, but don't know how to efficiently avoid it—are sometimes singing, dancing, joking, laughing, or piping merrily just a few paces away. This bothers me, and I question the Princess.

"Oh, no!" she assures me, "It is not in the least bit disrespectful! They know that every member of Royalty wishes it to be exactly so, and that we find much of our daily joy in leaving them free of the sorrows we are privileged to bear for them. If they would drop their merriment and trade it down for sobriety, only *then* would they dishonor us. Even as we bear sorrow, sometimes, for them, so do they wear their glad celebrations of joy for us."

A merry group of children, thoroughly lost in the joys of being alive, chase each other in warping circles of Tag, yet being as careful as if they were many years older, not to interfere with the people or merchandise about them.

"*Andreas!*" I call, seeing in the group the shoulders of a boy with a monkey clinging to both of his ears, "*is that you?*" He turns, and his wide eyes change into a wider grin. He gives me a single, hasty, perfectly-executed prayer wave, and spins away to his merry group.

I notice also small circles of people, here under a tree, there in a shady corner, and just beyond us in an open space of the marketplace, kneeling or standing quietly in a circle of held hands with their open eyes to the heaven, while one or all seem to be softly speaking or singing.

"Those are a few of our prayer rings," Aureaelle, for so she has entreated me to address her, instructs, "and there will be thousands of them in the months we are away, both scheduled or spontaneous, and it is because of them I hope to be able to continue our journey until my Sorrow is accomplished. When you return, especially if I am not with you, be sure to thank them for me from the heart.

"Should I tell you, friend Gaelynt," she hesitates, "that my body seems to be weakening? My spirit is not discouraged, not much, but since I first looked my Sorrow fully in the face, I have begun to feel a weight in my every muscle. Please, if I am not being presumptuous, will you pray for me?"

Is it my hesitation, or does she remember something the King shared with her? Brightly she continues "I'm sorry... I forgot you are just learning our customs; would you mind if I join that circle of maidens there? And of course they will welcome you, too, if you desire, but no one will think the less of you if you await me here."

“I will gladly join you, but perhaps silently,” I assure her, and in a minute we slip into the circle, and I find myself holding the Princess’s hand in my left, that of a sweet-faced market girl in my right, and wishing I had a third hand for the tears that soon well up, as if to hallow the simple spontaneity of their mutual devotion.

I find myself treasuring every cadence of their musings or music in this soul-moving experience, but find still my mind wandering, wondering: In this land, *is every girl a princess?*

When our market basket is in danger of spilling over – for Aureaelle delights to buy especially from the few people whose names she does not yet know – we wend our way from the city, toward the quieter hills of the quilted countryside, where small vineyards, pastures, and gardens spread their glories beneath the sun. The music and happy conversation of the city fade behind us.

“*You will just love my friend Aravelle,*” the Princess confides. “And I want you to tell me if she is not at least a little like your dear Al-Lloreya. She is a girl whose family is far from wealthy, but even poverty is not discredited here, if it be honest because of so much time being spent in doing good deeds to others, which is her case exactly.

“But of course there has been no *deep poverty* here in Phylantagia – like that which you described to my father – for thousands of years. For how could poverty possibly exist where people share so freely their time and goods... and point by loving example and humble exhortations toward every valuable virtue?”

Au-Royalia

Now, perhaps I should explain to you that I am not in the least offended by what Aureaelle has just said to me, nor by how she has said it.

In comparing her fair world to my own native, traving old Eyrth, I detected not a hint of anything false in what she was saying, nor a single breath of that self-righteous, so-called, ‘piety’ that turns many honest seekers of truth back to the shadows. She was simply stating to me the obvious – and with the innocent love of a little child. But my musings upon her statements are suddenly interrupted, for she is turning from the pathway and pointing with great excitement to some bright patches of flowers just ten or fifteen paces away.

“*Look,*” she cries out to me, with smiles of delight. “*The regalia are blooming – and they’re almost ready to go!*”

“I follow her through the grasses to a sunlit clearing where dozens of clumps of bright floral blooms are slowly waving on delicate stems at least two feet – and some nearly three feet – high.

The tall shiny stems of subdued, almost frosty, sage contrast nicely to the rich colors of the blooms. For not only are the blooms larger than the largest of tulips – with which many of us are familiar – but their four huge glossy petals blaze either in flaming crimson reds feathered with fiery stripes of yellow and gold – like the one she is now leading me to – or, as in some of the other patches around us, sunny yellows as gay as daffodils, or brilliant, purple-fringed blues.

“Look at that one!” cries Aureaelle again, as she grasps my arm to lead me toward her trophy, “It’s leaving! Oh, how I love to watch them!”

As we bend down and I study more closely the bloom that so excites Aureaelle, I see the four huge petals rotate away from their cup shape, to form a new symmetry, even as the cup’s narrow base slowly folds into two halves.

The wide, pale-pink, softly-textured style and stigma in the center of the flower now recline so quickly to a more horizontal position that I begin to suspect this *regalius* is as much fauna as flora. Suddenly its four petals begin flapping, and I realize it looks almost exactly like a large butterfly, but still attached to the pale green stem.

“Do you have these on Eyrth?” she asks me. “We have many species of flyowers in Phylantagia, but the *regalius* is my favorite, and especially the *regalius royalius*. I hope you won’t think me conceited when it shows you why.”

Before I can answer, the flame-winged flyower breaks loose from its beautiful stem and, with two crimson anthers slowly waving like large antennae, soars gracefully higher into wide circles of new freedom – but soon flutters ever lower, to alight on Aureaelle’s golden hair.

“It is the *regalia royalia*, like this one, that alight *only* on the royalty. My father once told me he thinks it may be for encouraging us against our occasional sorrows. Do you think me conceited for enjoying its attention?”

“Of course not,” I reply. “It wasn’t *your* design, and

Au-Royalia

you need to just bask in its blessing. But, although I haven’t met your friend Aravelle yet, I declare that *you* remind me more every moment of my Al-Lloreya – for she would just adore these flyowers... *exactly* as do you.”

Perhaps forty minutes later Aureaelle points to a neat but humble cottage tucked between gardens and barn, and begins telling me more about Aravelle. But, by this time, the Princess is admitting some weariness, and as the road rises a hundred feet before reaching Aravelle’s gate, she is leaning on my arm, and we are walking slowly when we reach the door.

“Aureaelle!” The door is flung wide, and the arms of a young lady flung wider. Probably in her early twenties, Aravelle cannot honestly be declared beautiful, but I soon see her striking inward beauty, rich and rare, shining out through her every expression of eyes, mouth, or touch.

After introducing me to Aravelle by name only – “I’ll tell you more about him after we catch up,” Aureaelle promises – they converse for several minutes. Again I am struck by the total lack of artificiality between a Princess and her *subject*, which word I use, of course, only to show that Aureaelle seldom needs it at all.

“I have some news I need to break to you, dear Aravelle,” the Princess begins, but may I first refresh myself in your room for a time?”

“Of course!” comes the ready reply, “You know you are always welcome. And if your friend Gaelynt would rest, there is a bench in the shade of the garden, just be-

hind the cottage. Here," turning to me, "I will show you where it is. Please feel free to make yourself as comfortable as you can until we awaken you."

As I stretch out on the stone bench all the Councils, questions, burdens, and journey preparations of these past two days fade into a blurring swirl of tearful and laughing market-goers and compassionate prayer-maidens, and I am soon far away, in a deep, satisfying sleep.

I awaken to the sound of suppressed merriment – well, the proper ancient term for it, really, is *giggles*. Both the Princess and Aravelle are reaching their hands to me, as if overanxious for me to sit up, or inferring that I am unable to do it by myself.

"We were just wondering... should we go ahead and eat without you, our brave, long-sleeping warrior?" the Princess asks, almost coyly.

"WELL!" I hammer back, in my very gruffest voice, the one I have hardly ever outside of battle used except when playing with my little sisters. "*And – why – NOT!?*"

Not really annoyed by their behavior, but deciding I may as well join in and see if I can fool them, and for how long, I continue my cold and haughty stare until I see first Aravelle, and then the Princess waver, close to tears.

Suddenly, with a mighty roar, the face of a man utterly mad, and my arms flailing wildly – but soon wearing a broad and boyish smile – I rise from the bench, and chase them noisily to the table.

Au-Royalia

"You had me really worried," the still-pale Aureaelle confesses, hand over her heart. "Thank you for not being... really... like *that*."

† † † †

The day is nearly over, and a kettle of soup bubbles above the fire. Aravelle's mother has returned from the market, her father is in from the orchard, and we are enjoying our fireside conversation.

First Aravelle, and now her parents have learned of Princess Aureaelle's brave mission, and have chosen, as they are free to do, to weep, as if they are of the royal blood, instead of enjoying the freedom of their common birthright to merriment.

Soon both parents are abed, and Aureaelle draws me quietly aside.

"Could I speak to you privately about something, out-of-doors?" she asks.

Speaking quickly, a few steps beyond the front doorstep, for the breeze is cooling, she continues. "I am just beginning to know you, and know next to nothing about the customs of your Eyrth world. But I have a perplexity I must share with you. If I speak from my heart, will you please hear me out, and try to trust my motive?"

I assure her, and she resumes. "For some reason, I would feel more secure, if you would sleep in the same room as I, this first night we are together, for we have

only a few more days until we must leave, and you know that the divine decree does not allow a third person to our journey. Of course I am in no danger in this household, and I do not need your protection; and please do not think that I feel the need to prove your trustworthiness. *I want to* trust you, and I *do* trust you, as I would my own brother, had I one still living. But still the desire remains, and I think it warranted.

“Ordinarily, in Phylantagia, no woman unmarried would ever consider such a thing—it is utterly unheard of, and I find myself hoping it is so in your world too. Do you understand what I am asking?”

Hardly trusting myself to answer her even under this weak starlight, I hear at last my husky reply, for I consider my heart, as I told Djélôn, my hardest weapon, and the trust I seek always to earn from others the most valuable adornment to my sacred honor.

“Yes, I understand perfectly, Princess Aureaelle, and I respect you and honor you for the asking. I had actually considered also that such a proving might be wise sometime before our departure, although my thoughts had roamed only so far as the sanctity of your father’s home. But this is, in one sense, the first night of our journey together, and I am open to reconsidering it here, amid the hearts of such good people, instead of... who knows where, even though our custom among my family is exactly as yours.”

In silent appreciation, Aureaelle’s hand finds and squeezes my own, and, as quickly, releases it.

Au-Royal

“Consider also this next problem,” she continues. “I broached the possibility to Aravelle’s father, and, after hesitating but a moment, he, trusting and understanding my heart request, put his hand on my head and offered such a sweet and precious blessing. But I have not mentioned his approval of the idea to Aravelle, and she is almost adamant that it should not be so, although she realizes we have many moons of journey alone before us. Have you any wisdom to offer her?”

“I am a trained warrior, and—after my final experience in my own world—consider myself fortunate to be alive. Almost all of my thought, since I relinquished myself to the dangers and hardships of a desperate journey with you into the darkest regions of an unknown world, have been toward safely and successfully getting you there—wherever we are going—and back again to your father’s house, if it is at all possible.

“But, yes, I have given it some thought, and I may have a word that will seem wise to good Aravelle. If not, would you agree that this initial proving of our honor may await, perhaps just as well, another opportunity?”

Agreeing, she precedes me again into the cottage, where Aravelle uneasily awaits us.

Drawing stools and chair as close together as possible, both so we can speak softly, so as not to awaken her parents, and to better read each others’ hearts in larger script, I begin by addressing Aravelle.

“Our Princess, dear Aravelle, whose character we both

Au-Royal

know is blameless, has shared with me both her request, and your honest reluctance to it. Please receive my heart, that I tell you the truth when I say that I understand perfectly the scruples of your reservation. But I believe I see also another angle you may wish to consider. May I take a few moments to share with you one of the sweetest stories any world, I suspect, has ever received?"

With her nod of consent, I feel my way slowly ahead. "The young lady who is of all ladies most beautiful to me – and I say that here in the presence of the Princess Aureaelle who is in some ways more beautiful still – once told me this tale. It is from the holy book of the world Eyrth, and my dear Al-Lloreya believes that the story I am going to tell you is part of the one story central to all our world's struggles and our deliverance from them.

"Before I tell the story, I wish to confess to the two of you that my proud warrior heart has sometimes hesitated to fully believe it. But, seeing the lives of your love-loving citizens in prayer circles and marketplace, and upon observing your good King and the men with whom he surrounds himself, I find my heart daily opening, as if to accept it, more and more.

"My Al-Lloreya first told me the tale in brief and touching words, and I have read it for myself one time since. Regardless of how you choose to receive the story, it may contain something fit to touch our situation here this night. But first, dear Aravelle, be at ease – for both the good Princess and I have fully determined to choose no plan in your presence that would trouble your conscience in the least.

"In my world, which has almost always been, and is now, a wretched one with long histories of warfare, and few of peace, there was once promised, from the time of man's first needing him, a deliverer.

"In that world too there have been wise prophets, through whom Al-Lloreya believes her god and his angels have spoken, to turn men to the good, but *hear this*.

"Hundreds of years before he actually arrived, this sinless, and now somewhat famous, redeemer was promised by many sages and prophets to enter our world to give his life as an eternal blood sacrifice for his people. Of interest to the three of us here, he would also be called a man of Sorrows.

"In some ways – but merely outward, I suppose – we might say that Aureaelle's Sorrow may have some similarity to his, but only superficially as far as its method and purpose. But the point to which I am pressing is this, that this one man – who of all men was declared by those who knew him best to be fearless and faultless – came to his eyrthly birth amid horrible scandal.

"Many years before his birth, it was prophesied that a virgin would conceive (which is of course by the design of things impossible) and that the child would be called holy unto his divine father. An angel was sent to a virgin, announcing she should become the mother of that promised savior, though still unmarried.

"Like Aureaelle, and myself, the virgin and her espoused Lover had to decide whether to follow the voice

of truth in their hearts and surrender to the divine messenger — at the probable loss of both reputation and their sacred public honor — or to remain safely within the bounds of the wise conventions of propriety and prevent the fulfillment of the prophecies, or at least send them to another virgin for their fulfilling.

“Dear Aravelle, I shudder to think what manner of sufferings I may be forced to witness in the heart of our Princess under these coming moons. But I suspect that her death to reputation may be the first part — possibly even a large part — of the sorrowings she will need to face in this Sorrow of your Seventh Seventh century.”

We sit now, in the near darkness, Aravelle, and then Aureaelle, with her arms around her, and then myself, with a hand of silent blessing on each fair head, all quietly weeping — they, for the Sorrow before her, and I, for that, and for this tendering Love — before the fading fire of the humble cottage.

Moments later, Aravelle is in her bed, still softly sobbing. I hear Aureaelle, soon to slide in beside her, dressing for bed behind me, and, as I lie comfortably on a stack of coverlets on the floor by the slightly-cracked door, I see just one bright star through the window beyond.

Soon we will all slip into slumber, and I find myself briefly wondering just what their thoughts are; but I am soon busy sorting through my own, these odd thrustings of circumstance... these strange meldings of my heart... and my dear Al-Lloreya.

The Prophecy Song

Song of Sevens

*Seven seas, and seven sorrows,
Seven men on misty morrows,
Seven horrors evil-fated,
Seven honors long awaited,
Seven woes, with One o’ertowering
Seven gifts of Grace empowering;
Hasten, heroes, to the chrysm
of your sorrowful baptysm—
Seven woes till wrong is mended
and the five of seven ended.*

“I know I’m the King’s daughter — the royal Princess — and have been told I am fair to look upon... but my musical voice, you will soon see, is quite ordinary. “

With these words, a stronger Princess, walking briskly but pensively beside me back toward the City, continues telling me the few known facts about the history of the “Song of Sevens,” given to the royalty of Phylantagia five thousand years earlier and supposed now by Caedmon to have been composed for our coming Sorrow.

“Now, this poem I am going to sing to you must *always*, here in Phylantagia, be *sung* — never, under

penalty of death!, merely read or quoted aloud—and sung only by members of the royal family.

But—because your life is now so entwined within the lives of my family, my own life and our sorrows—Caedmon and my father have assured me that you also may sing it, and we wish you to do so, learning it well and wearing it as a guiding scroll of wisdom in your very heart, as soon as I show you the tune.”

With this introduction, the beautiful Princess Aureaelle opens my heart to the words that will be our constant accompaniment through the trials we are soon to meet, set to voices of music I could never have imagined possible in any possible world.

The words, although perhaps potent in potentials of imagery, are but simple. But it is the *tune*—with its cadent meldings of minor and major, now sweet and strengthening, while, at the same time, eerily holy and haunting—that sends swordpoints of feeling and thought sweeping deeply through my heart.

I find myself struggling as never in battle or Council to contain within the boundaries of one man’s emotions both these soaring heights of ecstasy simultaneous with the deepest pits of sorrowing despair, as if I feel already the scenes sung so soon to come upon me.

When the tune ends, I am lying facedown by the pathway, words and music burned forever into my being—weeping like a little child. Kneeling beside me, hand on my back, above my heart, Aureaelle weeps with me.

Journey into Darkness

*What are the stirrings deep within
these Passions of my passion,
these Longings for one earlier Day
before the darkness fell, and
dark’ning night and waning Light
and wanton, dark transgressions
their deep unholy gloom and waste
upon the man-world left,
or numb, unknowing Grief, bereft,
her glory shorn, bewailed
she knew not what?*

*Whence come these courtesies of Grace
that sanctify the darker place,
turn unto Heav’n our blackest hell,
their higher Innocence impel,
and whisper, through the dark’ning storm,
thorn-pricking harm, or wild alarm,
“... all, all is well!”?*

Twice-clad with royalty, my right arm shows not just the most noble and serviceable garments Au-Royalialia could prepare and bestow upon it for our journey, but also the beautiful and weary Princess Aureaelle leaning heavily upon it in holy grace.

With her father smiling bravely upon us, trust, courage and dignity on his rugged, aging, still-shining face;

with Thauntaylius and The Twelve gravely saluting, their daggers pointing to the heavens; with trumpets blaring and the strange strings singing their brave and haunting melancholia; amid flowers dropping from the lads waving from the turrets; amid the sacred kisses and prayer-waves from the merry little girls and all my newfound friends on every side; amidst the quaverings and inner pleadings for bravery from deep within my own trembling breast, wondering if I will ever see this sacred company again, we depart.

† † † †

For two weeks now we have sailed steadily toward the northeast, the ship's bowsprit pointing ever to the pleasant port of Benevincea which is still another week away. Our worthy old vessel carries in its shadowy and smelly lower regions about two hundred sheep, sometimes noisy, and a dozen tall stacks of tanned hides. On its more pleasant upper deck we move about between scores of huge sturdy baskets of sunny fruit from the orchard lands west of Au-Royalialia.

We soon learned that the three young families making up the remainder of our passengers on board are all related to each other, and are as merry as songbirds as they converse with childlike excitement about moving onto the small plots of land they have purchased, where they plan to build little cots near the old farm of their favorite uncle. Their little children are all joyful and well-behaved, like all the other children I have observed in this pleasant land, and are a delightful distraction to the princess and myself.

Journey into Darkness

Aureaelle, wearing a common mourning veil and the everyday clothes of a simple country maiden, goes still unrecognized. I can tell it is acutely unpleasant for her to maintain this pretense of morose melancholy to evade the friendly women's questions, but we think it best that our true identities should now be hidden; eventually the other passengers leave us to our reclusiveness.

Day after day we walk the railings for a while, then look for a place to sit where we can converse without interruption, and I find myself treasuring every moment of these instructive times together.

In the hurry of that last busy week in the Royal City, it seemed that the Councils and our preparations for departure swallowed up the bulk of our time and nearly all of our energy. Today, though, we are again seated comfortably between the weathered railing and the square baskets of fruit, in a place approachable only from the direction in which I am facing. Our heads are close, so we may talk quietly, and again I treasure this time when I can unload from my heart some of the questions I am still longing to toss to the princess.

"Aryell," for so we have disguised her name for these more public parts of our journey, yet not so much that an accidental slip of her real name would be so obvious, "I have so many questions to ask you about this pleasant atmosphere of your kingdom.

"When I first landed in Phylantagia, I noticed at once the wholeness and peacefulness of my spirit. So strange was this spirit of friendly benevolence, or simple, health-

ful *goodness* that I felt not only in everything around me but in my own being an *immense and immediate contrast* to my usual feelings.

“During the first days I was quite concerned that any memories from my old world would soon be lost forever – for I could feel them fading quickly. I was especially alarmed that I might lose all recollection of my friends at home, my fellow-warriors like Djélôn, and especially my dear Al-Lloreya.

“But I soon discovered, even during my week living in your Royal City, that these old memories are as keen as ever. What caused that initial feeling, and can you explain to me why it has changed?”

For a moment the Princess sits in silence. Her veil has been removed, and she sits here where no one can observe her face, those beautiful green eyes seeming to reflect the emerald waters of her distant gaze.

“I’m not sure I can totally satisfy you,” she responds, simply, “but two thoughts come to mind. Surely it is obvious that, for our citizens who are not of the royal family, the pleasantness you spoke of is their lifelong heritage. For some reason they seem to have not within them that nature that produces in your old world all the unhappy battles between hearts and nations, and, with our royalty protecting them, theirs is a rich, lifelong heritage of flourishing festivity.

“When you first landed here, you had not yet forged your commitment to royalty, and were still breathing the

Journey into Darkness

free air of the common people. But now that you have chosen this dangerous journey, you may well expect to have all the cares of our royalty, perhaps even as our King himself.”

As I sit in quiet reflection, she continues. “My other musing concerns myself. Perhaps you will find it strange when I say that my father could tell you how I also have experienced, somewhat, that same curious change you speak of, from sunny gaiety to disquieting concern.

“I doubt I ever encountered it to the same degree that you have, but, because I possessed such a very sensitive nature, he chose to shelter me as much as possible from even the noble cares of the royalty where he thought they might dampen my merriment or weigh down too early the pressing cares of my Princesshood that would soon enough come upon me. How I love him for it! and how glad I often am for such a wise father, who protected by so many means my inward and outward innocence, even while cultivating in every way possible the noble virtues and selfless character he treasures so much.

“Gaelynt, if you ever see any goodness in me, please remember to credit my dear father. See how I love to honor him! Sometimes I pause to reflect that if, instead of being the famous King of all this land, he were only some poor unknown peasant in the remotest corner of the kingdom, he would still be the kingliest person here – so dear is his loving heart.

“But you were asking about the fading away of all unpleasant memories... should I tell you, dear Gaelynt, that

I am afraid mine may be returning and increasing? In my private thoughts, it seems that even the sunshine of this pleasant sea can distract me but little. And as we find ourselves each sunrise a day closer to my unknown Sorrow, sometimes it seems that all things repugnant or fearful that I have ever fought are gathering around my heart to disquiet me.

“But I fear I am being thoughtless and selfish to even tell you this! Please believe me, that I share it only so you can help steady me for our journey, and make your own cares easier!”

“Trouble yourself no longer,” I reply, shaking my head teasingly, but with a sad smile behind the words. “You know how much I already love both you and your father, and I am ready to help conduct not just your outward person, but your inward also, as honorably as I can to wherever our fates decree.

“But sometimes I fear that I also, like your father, in my desires to shelter you as much and as long as I can, may be doing so even beyond wisdom – for there is something I keep putting off day after day so you can enjoy as long as possible this relaxing in the sunshine.”

Her questioning expression prompts me to continue. “Have you remembered that we still haven’t gone through all the parcels and chests of our stores and gifts from Au-Royalia? I assume there will be weapons and charms and instructions that could turn your heart more than necessary toward the darkness and sorrows awaiting us. But this morning I was thinking, may we not also find pre-

Journey into Darkness

cious gifts and letters of encouragement from our many friends there? Shall we begin opening them, to see?”

“Let’s!” she replies instantly, with a cheerful sunrise dawning on her face. “Can we go and start unwrapping them this instant?”

Soon we are in our cabin, with its heavy door locked, and are opening some of the smaller and lighter packages, some received just minutes before sailing.

“Oh!” squeals the Princess with delight, from her place on her knees on the floor beside me, “it’s from Aravelle! How very lovely!” She holds unrolled before me a colorful, hand-scripted parchment, with decorative lettering writ in scrolling calligraphs of richest complementing colors. “What lovely sentiments – Aravelle has always been able to express her lovely heart so easily to me. How I shall treasure this!... and it’s just small enough that I can keep it with my personal things. But it’s your turn now...”

Picking up a small, beautifully-finished box which will just fit into my hand, I admire its corners intricately dovetailed together, and turn it over several times, weighing its heft and balance, while trying to guess the contents. On the center of its lid I study the inscription which contains two simple words with the image of a sword between:

Thayne  *Gleynn*

“Who is *Thayne*?” I ask Aureaelle... “Should I know?”

She looks surprised for a moment. “You remember Thauntaylius, I’m sure—have you not heard he is sometimes called Thayne, by his very closest friends?”

“I have not,” I reply, still admiring the perfect balancings of joinery and design wrought in this object in my hands. “I wonder where he acquired such a lovely case. It certainly makes me anxious to see what’s inside.”

“I forget how short and harried were your hours in Au-Royal,” the Princess replies. “Perhaps you think Thauntaylius dresses always in uniform, as when he and his Twelve first brought you to us, or when we sailed hence. But those are the rare exception! Nine times of ten I have seen him in his orderly workshop, beard and arms covered with wood dust, inspecting something he or one of his workmen has been contriving, holding it to the light shining through one of his large windows. I can almost smell the fragrant wood pieces as I speak!

“I love to go there, Gaelynt, for he is a true artist, and declares his heart in all his works. But do open it, for it tells already how much he admires you.”

“Perhaps he shows also his love for his royal Princess,” I return with a broad smile... which soon fades as I find myself wondering how he or any other artist would sorrow to think of her visiting his shop no more... “But let’s see what it holds.”

Releasing the latch, I fold back the lid and see that its interior is covered with a thick cushioning of scarlet velvet. Inside I see only a single parchment, folded, with

Journey into Darkness

two columns of words printed neatly in ink of darkest blue. But two things about it puzzle me: first, the box is empty, except for the paper which covers most of its floor (but why, then, such a heavy box?) and second, the parchment seems pressed into a planar concave, exactly as if by some heavy cylinder weighing it down.

I turn it over—the easiest way to get the paper out, since its edges almost touch the sides of the box— and feel the wooden casket suddenly become much lighter as some object hits my hand and bounces to the floor.

My thoughts burn with curiosity, and my fingers soon stumble across a solid, sturdily-constructed *something* with a shape reminding me of a flute, but compacted to a fourth its length. Whatever it is, I marvel first that it can be so totally invisible: I see no surface reflections, as from glass or jewel, and remember that I could read even through its heavy center the fine print of the paper as clearly as if nothing were covering it.

As I explore its balance and shape, I feel several holes, like those of a flute. My fingers see also, attached to it near one end, the strong, supple loop of an equally-invisible lanyard. I stretch the loop to its length, and decide it is just right for hanging *the object* from my neck.

I rise, walk to the porthole in the outer wall of our cabin, and observe, just as I suspected, that the object casts not the least fragment of a shadow—even with full sunlight streaming through it.

“Please enlighten me, Aureaelle. A skilled craftsman

Thauntaylius may be, but this is not wood — I never conceived such a material as this possible! ...and I still have not the slightest idea what its use may be, although the paper will surely instruct us about that.”

“Ah,” she sighs, “there is still so much I long to show you!”

“In the underground caverns of our sacred Royal Crypt, just across the main hallway from the centering room where our *Three Scrypts* and other lesser holy books, ancient writings, runes, riddles, and commentaries upon them are kept, and almost across from the apartment where the honorable Sir Caedmon and his guards sleep, there is an underground workroom — much larger than this small ship — lit brightly day and night, we know not how.

“In the various corners and cells of that great room, studying often by night, and working occasionally by day, are a number of honored ‘wyrkmyn’ — so they are still called — keeping carefully alive, and perhaps even occasionally improving upon it, our ancient heritage of skilled weaponry and holy majic.

“It was to the worktable beside one of their fuming forges I walked one day, with Thauntaylius, to pick up the silver daggers he and his men had ordered. Sir Caedmon was with us too, for he is still responsible in leading the wyrkmyn in their noonday minutes of prayer and praise, and he assured me, as we carefully examined each dagger, that — although each had been cast originally of ordinary silver — after the master wyrkmyn had finished

Journey into Darkness

with them, they were both unbreakable and unbendable, would keep their edge ever razor-sharp though used in a thousand desperate battles, and could never be defeated in any way, or even lost, so long as the heart of its wielder yields true.”

“To me, dear Gleyenn, it is hardly a surprise, therefore, that when Thayne had finished crafting for you this perfect... whatever it is... of irynwood, or whatever he used, it went then through many subsequent processes — like as a potter fires his work in a kiln, or as a piece of common metal is plated, but this from within — and ended up so much improved from its lower beginnings.

“But let’s read the parchment — I cannot imagine what it is that he has given you!”

Feeling like a young lad who has just stepped, for the first time, into the swelling organ music and stained-glass glories of some vast cathedral, I unfold the paper. Seeing a verse on the reverse side, I decide to read aloud to the Princess what he has written to me:

*Thru the strugglings of thy heart,
stronger courage to impel,
ever, while we are apart,
guard the gift— oh! wear it well!*

*Safely, to the full finesse,
practice wisely night or day,
sleeping, waking, quick to bless
when your will it must obey.*

After reading the curious thoughts twice aloud, I turn the paper over and read to myself the fine print describ-

ing the object and its use. Apparently it is indeed a sort of flute, one with two main uses, and designed to be played in several various ways.

Its second use (I find myself telling Aureaelle about this one first) is one for which I will need no practice except that of a listening ear and an honest, obedient heart. It promises that on a few rare occasions of extreme confusion, if the flute suggests itself to my mind and I play it with sweet and trusting faythe, it will play such a tune, audible only in my innermost heart, as to cut through all doubt and confusion and give me clear and immediate direction.

“Imagine, dear Gleynn,” cries Aureaelle, “how good Caedmon and his wyrkmyn are, to spend so many hours in prayer and divine craftsmanship to help us already in preparing for sorrows still unknown! But, what is the flute’s other use?”

“That one is equally strange, and I am pondering just exactly how it will help us. He encourages me, first of all, that no matter how I play it the flute cannot bring harm to myself.

“He then continues with detailed explanations as to how to blow it so that it can put either friend or enemy – or a large crowd of them – either gradually or immediately to sleep; or, if blown in another manner, can immediately or gradually awaken them!”

After discussing several possible ways how this silent and invisible flute may be of use to us in dangerous situ-

Journey into Darkness

ations, we again read Thayne’s two verses about it, and the Princess strongly encourages me to begin practicing with it at once. As she reads the directions aloud carefully, I begin learning the finger positions on the three holes, and the varied means of playing it. I find it of interest that the one “tune” most likely needed in a most desperate dilemma requires no fingering at all – but instead requires a quick staccato of wynd-working.

For safety’s sake, Aureaelle is lying on her side on the small bed of the somewhat crowded cabin, her head on a simple cushion, while I sit on the chair nearby. When I blow the first tentative note, one for besleepment, I see her hand suddenly relax, the paper fall from it, and in five seconds she is sleeping as sweetly as a baby.

I read again the instructions for awakening a single friend. I blow the flute lightly, and she opens her eyes, picks up the parchment, and continues reading where she has just left off. Suspecting she may be totally unaware of what has just happened, I experiment with her, blowing with more intensity, then less; with more “attack,” then less; at greater, then lesser, duration.

After she has thus slept and awakened eight or ten times, I detail to her what I have done, and in great amazement she confirms what I am suspecting – that she has no recollection whatsoever of anything interrupting in any way her reading of the codes on the parchment.

And how she laughs when I narrate to her the humorous incident which occurred while she was in her fourth sleep! For there she was, slumbering comfortably on her

back, with a colorful hand-woven coverlet spread over her, while I was studiously pondering the instructions for more details – when I had a sudden impulse to peer out the cabin door. I unlocked it... swung it open... stepped outside... and nearly tripped over the body of the ship’s captain – a worthy man named Frederic – who was peacefully slumbering and snoring loudly, at my very feet!

Stepping hastily back into the cabin, I shut the door, grabbed the parchment, and played the short phrase for awakening a single person. Hardly had Aureaelle begun reading again when there sounded a loud knocking, and struggling to keep my face sober, I stepped through the door.

“Good day, my friend,” he said as I stepped out and closed the cabin door behind me. “Can you come with me quickly? Something strange is happening!”

Leading me rapidly to an open space near the center of the deck, I saw the entire band of our merry passengers – men, women, and children, seated comfortably on a circle of chairs, crates and benches – all sleeping soundly.

Near the center of the circle a golden-haired lad was lying on his side, his arm thrown over a half-grown puppy, with his sister, cuddling her doll, beside him. Both children were soundly asleep.

“I’ve tried every way possible to awaken them, short of soaking them with sea-water,” Captain Frederic told me, more loudly than necessary, “but they’ve been sleeping this way for at least fifteen minutes. I’ve never seen

Journey into Darkness

anything like it – do you have any good suggestions?”

“Let me go back to my cabin and ask Aryell,” I proposed – after shaking the oldest sleeper a few seconds and then laying him on his side on the deck, to which he seemed in danger of falling from the crate where he was still balanced. “Perhaps she may have an idea.”

In the cabin again, I quickly played the silent strain for awakening a group of friends, and returned to Captain Frederic. “Maybe we should just give them a few more minutes...” I called to him. But as I got closer I noticed he was bending over the little boy and lifting him to his feet. Yes, the whole circle was awake, and fully unaware of their puzzling sleep, to the captain’s greater perplexity.

“Perhaps I have been piping a little too hard,” I tell Aureaelle, “but it’s so much more difficult to learn when I can hear nothing at all... and how will I ever master it, unless, like Thayne instructed me, I practice it faithfully?”

The Princess and I are still laughing about this in quiet amusement, thankful that no one was hurt, when again I hear the same urgent pounding on our door. I step out... and Captain Frederic grabs me by the arm. “Can you come below with me, quickly? It’s the sheep!”

† † † †

On this glorious, sunny day our ship has slipped at last into these beautiful blue waters of the famous bay of Benevincea. The other passengers have disembarked, and the last sheep are noisily leaving the boat, but the

Princess and I are sitting in our cabin with the good captain Frederic who has requested our audience.

In our three weeks on his vessel, he has never beheld Aureaelle's unveiled face, nor questioned us about our apparent sorrow, or even our ultimate destination. A man of humble courtesy, he has assumed we are common people, probably mourning for a few weeks the loss of some loved one, and has respected our desire for privacy. But today he needs to talk.

"We have had a favored voyage, my friends, and I've been so delighted to have you aboard. I have sailed this ship for nearly two-score years, enjoying every minute of it in high delight—for I am never so happy as when on the sea.

"This voyage also has been exceeding pleasant. But last night I dreamt a strange dream—and am sore troubled by it. May I share it with you?"

With our assent, he commences. "You know that I have received no news from Au-Royalialia these past three weeks upon the water, and that the Moon of our Royal Sorrow will soon be upon us. I have been increasingly concerned about which of our dear members of Royalty will soon need to suffer. I had planned to ask ashore before launching, whether the Council had perchance announced the person chosen for the Journey-to-Sorrow, but had a strange impulse in my heart to keep all my thoughts on the matter silent, abiding my time.

"But last night I had just fallen asleep when I awoke

Journey into Darkness

from the most vivid and stirring dream of my lifetime. *I dreamed that our good Princess Aureaelle—whom I was privileged to briefly behold several years ago during the New Year Pageant—was the very one chosen to suffer.* How shocked I was, even though I knew that this is a Seventh Century, when of course our men are never called.

"I cannot tell you how much this troubled me—almost as if she were my own daughter, and I cried aloud in my dream—I remember my exact words—*'But what can an old skipper do? Alas, I see no way to help her!'*

"By as clear a voice as ever I have heard, my question was instantly answered. 'Sell your ship,' it commanded me, 'or leave it in harbor until you see the Princess again—or until four more moons have passed.'

"The voice in my dream went on," good Frederic continues, "giving me detailed instructions. I am to gather several of my acquaintances together—those I respect the most—and we are to lay aside our merriment and give ourselves to prayer night and day during these four moons, gathering to us as many as we can of the local populace who will help us freely and wholeheartedly.

"Was that not an unusual dream... and such a strange request? Even today it makes me tremble—to fear that our Princess is really the one, and that she may need to suffer so!

"But I testify to you that I have fully decided to obey the dream, and that's why I am telling it you. I can't recall if you live here at Benevincea, or were planning to journey further. But if you stay... *will you consider band-*

ing together with me in these four moons of entreaty?"

Neither he nor I could have expected the answer he suddenly receives from us. The Princess – sweet-hearted as always – rises from her chair, walks over to where the Captain – in his agitation – has arisen and is standing. Removing her veil, she throws her arms around him, hugs him gently, stands on tiptoe to plant a short kiss on his stubbled cheek, and pushes him away to arms' length, with her hands still on his shoulders.

"I am the Princess Aureaelle," she says softly, on the verge of weeping, "and it is men like yourself who give me the courage to go on. Please receive from the depths of my sorrowing heart my deepest, fullest appreciation."

After we have broken to him some of the history of our coming together, and after Aureaelle has quoted for him the ancient rune that Caedmon read at our first Council, we tell him about the jewel that glowed strangely with other-worldly light, to confirm us to this journey.

I write down and commit to memory the directions to Captain Frederic's home, which happens to be just a few miles from where our ship is rocking so gently in these waters of Benevincea. As I do so, I find myself hoping with all my being that we – both the Princess and myself – may live to return and visit this worthy man here in his home ere the four moons are concluded.

Siren Songs of Sereneya

*See the evil host assembling,
feel the evil powers near,
laughing, if they see you trembling,
mocking if you yield to fear.*

*See the madness of their passion,
all your powers to control,
their obsession for possession
as they serenade your soul.*

*Will you tremble, but receive them,
as the music draws you near?
You shall wisely disbelieve them
when they slyly reappear.*

*When the tempters are before you,
in the whisp'rings of the wraith,
Do not yield—they will abhor you
as they flee before your faythe!*

"Just *when...*" I hear the Princess calling to me, as we struggle upward through the glooming gloam, "...will fair Innocence be as prized and precious in these darker outlyings as she is on the mainlands of our fair Phylantagia?"

How utterly *different* have these past ten days been

from our three previous weeks with Captain Frederic!

After traveling in a rough cart for two days through the rugged hills north of Benevincea, we then crossed the isthmus east of it to arrive in good health and decent spirits on the eastern shores of Phylantagia, where we first beheld the darker waters of the gloomy Malferean Sea.

Our desires here were simple... we thought. We would merely board or book another ship, or a smaller boat, if necessary – and slip across the Malferean Sea, through the Straits of Sereneya, and to the dark island of Malavalea, where we would finally begin several weeks of working our way on foot across that treacherous island to our ultimate destination of Sorrow.

But I paid out three full days trying to find *any* able sea captain – however brave his reputation – who would even *consider* sailing us across those waters, through that strait, or to that island!

Gold I offered them in plenty. I appealed to their courage, then to their reputation. But neither treasure nor entreaty seemed to tempt in the least these rugged men whose hearts seemed full of strong excuses and, I fervently hoped, exaggerations of their wild superstitions and fears.

“What good is gold, if I don’t come back alive to enjoy it?” one of them asked, prudently enough, or, “Have you ever *been there yourself?*” asked another. “Why any fool should desire to sail ten leagues in *that* direction is outside of my compass!” muttered a third, shaking his head in angry disbelief.

Siren Songs of Sereneya

But on the third day we came at last across a young captain who had already been offered a tremendous payment by two families hoping to carry into Malavalea’s darkness some of the spiritual sunshine of noble Au-Royaliala, and all was loaded to launch early the next morn.

As bravely as possible, therefore, we stepped off of that land still connecting us to the Royal City, and set sail for the Straits of Sereneya. But before two hours had passed, the skies suddenly darkened and a fierce storm came shrieking down upon us, and lasted for six appalling days.

All through the weary hours of that long, dark, and dangerous week we grew more and more disheartened as the ship’s crew and the two good families wearied us with a seemingly endless reservoir of fearful tales and evil rumors about both the small isle of Sereneya and the larger Isle Malavalea beyond. As much as possible I sheltered the Princess from anyone’s company but my own.

For six days of terror we battled the elements, and when our wet and listing vessel finally limped safely between the rocky promontories just west of Sereneya we fervently hoped the storm would abate. Instead, with a last unleashing of its demonic fury, the storm lashed us in redoubled intensity, again and again, until finally, with our mast broken and our main sails shredded or gone, we washed into a sheltering bay of Sereneya. And there is where our real troubles began.

Fearful of spending the night on the ship, utterly exhausted in body and much worn down in spirit by those

sevenscore hours of acute anxiety, we stumbled with weary relief into the first hostel we could find. In a tiny room adjacent to, and also opening into, the slightly drier one of Aureaelle, I had just slipped into a tossing sleep when a scream from the Princess sent me running to her bedside.

With just enough moonlight coming through the little storm-lashed pane to see, I fumbled to light the candle while her moanings and weeping stretched even further my drum-tight nerves.

Sitting straight up in her bed, her long hair flowing down over her and onto the coverlet around her, I saw her shoulders trembling, and she seemed still afraid to open her eyes.

Standing beside her, I drew her sideways against me, her shoulder against my stomach and her head against my chest. For just a moment it seemed she was beginning to calm, the sobs quieting. I put my right hand upon the crown of her head, and was just beginning to quietly pray some of those beautiful and now commonplace phrases which I had learned from the sweet prayer maidens of Au-Royal, when suddenly she screamed again, jerked violently away from me, covered her face with both hands, and sobbed out her heart, trembling like a devastated child.

“What is it, dear one?” I asked, for I was so worn down that I felt I could easily weep myself, in utter confusion and helplessness. “Can’t you tell me?” Her racking, shaking sobs were my only answer.

Siren Songs of Sereneya

“Isn’t there *anything* I can do to help you? Can’t you open your eyes, and tell me about it?” Again, her only reply was the sobbing out of the remainder of her strength, against me.

As you remember, I was at this stage of my life, spiritually, still but an infant, and knew next to nothing about any methods of protecting us from the spirits of evil that seemed to possess this dark island of Sereneya and to saturate this little room with their stifling onslaughts of oppression.

Again I walked to Aureaelle, to take her hand up into both of mine. Again I entreated her – weeping now myself – to please allow me to try to help her. Suddenly, for only a few seconds, I saw her eyes open at last, but was greatly dismayed by their wild, glazed hopelessness and the total bewilderment that had transformed their usual emerald placidity into these wildly churning seas.

Falling on my knees in extreme weariness, I buried my head against the side of her bed, praying to one I was only beginning to believe in, crying out in exhausted brokenness for *anything* that would give us peace. Suddenly, a thought came to mind, and I put Thayne’s flute, which has hung day and night around my neck since first I began learning to play it, into my mouth. Playing sweetly, and with as much “faythe” as I had (seemingly none whatsoever) I suddenly received in my innermost being a first clear thought of instruction: to use the invisible flute to give the Princess some vital rest.

Regretfully, my own wisdom desired me to first tell

her about it, and for the third time I approached her.

“Aureaelle,” I began softly... for her sobbing was a little quieter now, “I am going to put you to sleep for a little while, so you can get some valuable rest. I assure you that all will be well when you awaken, when the sun is shining on us again.”

For the second time her startled eyes opened upon me, and she screamed again, longer this time, then broke out once more into violent sobbings – and in acute pain cried out, as from a shattered heart, “*But... that’s... what you... you... were doing... in my... dream...!*”

In utter numbness of weariness, I gently put her to sleep, and, wishing with all my heart I could do the same to myself, walked instead into the other room. Gathering up all my coverlets, I brought them back to the floor beside Aureaelle’s bed, made my roll there, checked to ascertain that both outer doors were securely bolted, took one lingering look at the drying tears on the face of the princess – which seemed to be finally relaxing a little – and stretched myself out for some hours of sleep.

† † † †

“Does the lady fare better today,” the captain asked me the following morn, searching my eyes as we broke our fast with his crew. “It sounded to us like you were torturing her. Had we heard a single rough word from you, we had immediately battered down your door.”

“She’s still sleeping, and I pray she’ll be better when

Siren Songs of Sereneya

she awakes. She had a most horrible dream – so serious she couldn’t even speak of it. If you are a praying man, I request that you would help me entreat for her. Captain, do *you* sense a *heaviness of spirit* in this awful place?”

“Heavy enough, that if I ever get back home you’ll *never* get me to sail here again...” he replied, “...*for any amount of gold*. I just hope we can find a mast and some muslin, and move on to Malavalea, and get me back before another storm like that hits me. If an evil mind was not behind *that* storm, I... I don’t know a barnacle from a broomstick.”

Through most of that day, while the captain enquired the shores for a mast, I allowed the Princess to sleep. After first checking on her, I lightly sponged her face with warm water. Then, laying my hands on her crown and forehead, I couldn’t resist praying for her, silently for a few minutes, then audibly, using all the prayers I could remember from the prayer rings of Au-Royalialia. How far away they now seemed, though just a month hence! Stepping a pace from her, I practiced several prayer-waves from my heart and lips to her lidded eyes, and found myself again on the verge of weeping.

My hours of sleep, and my hearty breakfast with the captain and his crew had revitalized me greatly. How good it was to be off the thrashing ship, and able to rub out the threat of drowning from my list of concerns. But as I journeyed through our five days on Sereneya, I felt always the presence of those dark forces of evil. Always nagging me, occasionally attacking, they were entrenched, inciting and darkly intelligent.

Late afternoon, with some pieces of bread and a bowl of warm broth in hand, I returned to awaken the princess. With a prayer for fortitude and direction, I awoke her, as gently as I could. At first, she seemed totally at peace, even giving me a weak smile as she received the broth and bread.

Wondering if she had totally forgotten her nightmare, and afraid to mention anything that might return her to it, I tried to be as pleasant and nonchalant as possible. Once only I saw her start to tremble, saw her look deeply into my eyes, as if searching my heart, exhale a trembling breath, and relax again, eating more easily.

“Come and hold me,” she whispered at last, shyly, and as trustingly as a little child, while she was handing back to me her empty plate and saucer. “As if I am one of your little sisters, hold me tightly — like you tried to last night. I’m awfully, *awfully*, *dreadfully* sorry, and I entreat your forgiveness. Maybe I can tell you something about it tomorrow.”

“There is nothing to forgive, little one,” I assured her, holding her with her side against me, for perhaps a full minute. “Your struggles are mine, and we will just rejoice every time we have overcome one, and we will just keep on trusting that all will come out right in the end. And remember always that your father, and Aravelle, and a multitude of your dear friends and countrymen are praying for you, so keep resting and trusting — be strong.”

† † † †

Siren Songs of Sereneya

However, although that was the Princess’s most difficult struggle at Sereneya, it was not the end of it for me. It seemed that that first experience there with Aureaelle was just the opening sortie of a desperate attempt from intelligent and allied spirits of evil to first undermine any foundations of Faythe that I had ever received, and then, by subsequent variations of strategy to further destroy and obliterate them.

Several times I faced the bold and brazen music as if a whole battalion of trumpets were calling against me, in open attacks of desperate mockings, railings, and ridiculing effronteries, calling me by name, and accusing me of the most imbecilic naivete for even considering that I could overcome their evil forces, which I could so clearly feel fighting against me.

More often it was the dervish slow and steady music of imperceptible doubtings and ‘small’ delusions, rising so craftily in their subtleties so as to be entirely unobserved until I found myself wrestling, as with spiritual sweat and blood, through deep deadlocks of struggle just to believe that such an invisible and spiritual, *benevolent and personally caring* Intelligence could even exist.

On two occasions they came with siren songs of base sensuality. The first time, after I had been worn down by long fatigue, they tried to plant within me the sugared seeds of self-justifying lust. Several days later, when I was perhaps overconfident because I had just wrestled against an especially destructive and damnable doubting and had trusted through to a place of glad victory, they tried to sweetly serenade me with their soft and

seducing strains that, had I yielded to them, would have completely compromised my very honor as the Princess's protector.

Thankfully, when Sereneya's sick symphony had played out all of the sweet or sordid selections in her old repertoire of deluded songs – and after the evil spirits of Sereneya had aimed against the courage of my heart one final, lingering canon of despair – I believe it was the very *contrast* of their music to the deeply satisfying and heart-stirring canticles of Au-Royalialia that proved their ineffectiveness and undoing. For, surely, that man who has been satiated and satisfied with the choicest of meat and bread and cheese and wine is the one hardest to draw away unto the counterfeit crumbs of the competing delicacies of lies.

On the morning of our sixth day at Sereneya, our sturdy ship – fitted anew with a tall spruce mast rigged out with shining sails of muslin – slowly eases out of the harbor of Sereneya.

With veiled face, the Princess stands beside me, while the gentle breezes begin to slide us faster and farther into the darkening waters.

With veiled heart, I stand at the rail beside her, having not the slightest idea what adventures yet await us, but glad to be leaving Sereneya. If we could but sail to the west, and south, instead of again toward the clouds that seem to always hide the morning sun, how happy we would be!

The Golden Locket

*Let curses fall on him who harms
this locket, or its maiden's charms,
or sword of agony descend
on mocking heart, or foulest fiend
without permission peering in,*

*But great reward that person earns
the locket to its lord returns.*

— engraven on the back of my golden locket

Hardly have we reached open waters, until we lock again the door of our now-even-smaller cabin to return to our gifts from Au-Royalialia. The Princess, whose lovely scroll from Aravelle lies now always rolled up beside her bed, unwraps many more personal gifts, each one seeming to represent uncounted precious hours of prayerful love and remembrance.

She has been given also some garments which from a pace or two away look to be those of a common peasant woman – perhaps rugged enough for any terrain and weather – but upon closest examination are seen to be intricately embroidered in delicate thread of the same size and color spelling out hundreds of verses from the *Three Scrypts*, along with suitable poems, proverbs, prayers, and personal well-wishings from several score of her friends and royal relations.

Together we unwrap several parcels of weatherproof and wyrkmyn-forged garments even more wonderful than anything I had imagined and even better designed to get us safely to the fulfilling of our Sorrow. She lifts also, from its sturdy packing, a small ivory horn with the single word *Oyntmynt* carved into it.

It hangs from a short leather strap attached to a heavy brazen clasp, and the note from the elder wyrkman says it is to be guarded carefully, for *“a syngle drop may have wonderful effect against poyzen or syckness and may heal withyn a few hours the most serious wounds, or restore life and energy to any honest-hearted person, although workyng just the opposyte effects upon any evil foe or treacherous heart.”*

How strange it is, I ponder, that our dark enemy must choose between trying to either delude us or destroy us along the way to prevent us from fulfilling the Sorrow which would sanctify the royal family and the citizens of Phylantagia for another hundred years, or – on the other hand – allow us to journey through to the Sorrow decreed, for the pleasure of tormenting or slaying the favorite lady of all that Kingdom in the tortures of her Sorrow.

Among my own parcels I discover a silver Phylantagean dagger with seven jewels inlaid in its amethystine handle, along with several charms and weapons never comprehended by me, which I begin immediately studying and wearing beneath my outcloak, and we journey on without event, until the afternoon of the third day.

On this third afternoon we see that the skies are grow-

The Golden Locket

ing ever darker, until we can scarcely see the waters directly beneath us. Suddenly I hear a loud cry of alarm from the young captain. “Pirates on starboard! Women locked up – every man armed and on deck.”

Commanding the Princess Aureaelle to bolt the cabin door securely from the inside, and to stay on her knees in prayer, I rush to the rails where nearly a score of desperate, dark-faced men are fighting furiously – weapons thrusting and parrying – to board and possess our ship.

Engaging a man who has just jumped to the deck beside me, I am soon trying to fend off, also, a second man on my other side, and receive a nasty slash under my right arm as they and a third man slowly work me sternward, farther and farther from our crew.

With a sudden feint and thrust I had learned fifteen years earlier from one of my uncles, and have used in several battles in my old wyrd, I soon drop the second man into the sea and dodge behind a deck post just in time to prevent the sword of the third rogue from lifting my head.

Before he can reach me, I suddenly recall what I have vowed many times recently to remember at the first sign of conflict. I turn away from him to somewhat hide my next action – and blow the three firm blasts on Thayne’s flute that will instantly drop every stranger into a sleep from which they will not, in a setting like this one, awaken.

While our wondering crew – for I think we may have lost but one man, and I see only our young captain and one deck hand with superficial wounds – are clearing the

deck and boarding the pirates' vessel for inspection, I hold my left hand to my wound and stride to my cabin, where I throw an old mat from the floor onto the bed, and lie down on my back with my bleeding side above it.

Aureaelle, with face calm and pale, helps remove my invisible flute and my slashed and bloody cloak, and as I continue applying pressure to the wound with my left hand, she opens her ivory horn to apply a single drop of her 'oyntment' to my wound.

The droplet seems to flow at once—as in a thin film, almost but a reflection—over the entire area of the wound. But the healing itself seems to occur more slowly than we would have suspected. My breathing soon returns to normal. She gives me some water, and a little food, and, as I rest on my back, I suddenly open my eyes and see her gazing curiously at the golden locket resting above my heart on its heavy chain.

"That must be the one you showed my father," she says quietly, her face still pale and concerned. Troubled a little by her unavoidable discovery of it, and by the curious look in her eyes, I think of my dear Al-Lloreya, so many weeks, and miles, and a world away.

"Would you like to see it?" I ask, still feeling exhausted from the battle and my loss of blood. "You may."

I raise my head so she can slip the chain over it, and she holds the heavy carven locket a foot from my eyes as she examines it seriously. "What are the strange symbols on its back?" she enquires. "Are they words?"

The Golden Locket

As I examine it so I can read and explain to her its warning message, I startle to see a strange change upon it. Whereas I had originally engraved the verse in our common Eyrth language, I see it is now changed to the strange larger symbols of Phylantagia's oldest runes, and with the vowels missing to conserve space, as in the one Sir Caedmon showed me on my last day in the Royal City. Had I not written the original verse myself, I doubt I could have given to her the sense of all the lines.

I tell her, briefly, the history of my making it, after the smaller one I made for my Love, but sense she is probably wishing—but would never ask me—to see the jewel inside that her father has surely mentioned to her.

With inward but hidden reluctance, I show her how to squeeze the top and bottom together, while I squeeze twice with my left hand the edges, and open the cover.

I swing the jewel out from its case so she can better observe in this dim light of our cabin the lovely inner etchings of the radiant face of my Love. I see the startlement in Aureaelle's emerald eyes as she gasps and flies her hand to her throat, even as she pushes the locket a few inches farther from her eyes... almost as if there were something in it that she fears.

"It's... she's... so beautiful," she murmurs, searching for words. "and how I *do* wish she were here, and that she could be ministering to you and see the wounds you have earned so bravely. How truly lovely she is... and I wonder not that your heart goes always to her." She smiles down upon me with a strange (and trembling?) love.

Is she startled because of Al-Lloreya's likeness to her own face? Or is the locket so different from what she had imagined from the King's description to her? I am getting really drowsy (is her cordial making me even sleepier?)... and she notices.

"How thoughtless and selfish of me! You need to be sleeping soundly. Let me slip this back over your neck, and I'll cover you up so you can rest. The wound has finally stopped bleeding, so we..."

A firm knocking on our door interrupts her. I stow the locket under my mat, and she opens the door.

There stands our captain, his right arm in a crude sling hanging from the shoulder. "Oh... am I glad to see you alive!" he cries. "My men told me it looked like you didn't have a chance when those three savages went after you with such devilish cursings and hackings. Will you recover?"

"A couple of days, and I hope to help you at the wheel," I smile to him. "But how are the others?"

"All are accounted for, but we have lost a young crewman, sadly enough—that boy on his first voyage. All the rest of us look to heal.

"And we have an extra man on board. I want you to meet him as soon as you're able—except for some reason we can't seem to awaken him. He looks like a decent enough fellow, but we found him all tied up in at least a dozen sturdy ropes—and chained like an animal to a heavy post just outside the cabin on the pirates' ship."

The Interpreter's Cave

*Dreamings and prophecies, riddles, and runes,
songs from the ages with long-mold'ring tunes,
codes from the lodes of the deep mines of lore
from the still-singing waves of the Spirit's high shore,
parables penned or applied to the light,
gems from the darkness revealed to our sight—
each, in its time, to the heart that is true
will arise—when the moment is ripened—anew.*

*Blest! is the seeker—the sinner or sage,
young man, or child, or feeble with age—
the wondering one who will earnestly seek,
with a faythe that is bright and a wonderment meek,
to freely receive what the holy one bares...
to love all the truth the Interpreter shares.*

Before the day's end, I am able to walk with the captain to see our new "prisoner," who has of course been awakened, with no one's suspecting it, by Thayne's gift.

The very picture of relieved gratefulness, the handsome young man, named Cephrun, turns out to be the grandson of a distant cousin of Aureaelle's father, one who had moved to Malavalea some thirty years earlier.

Betrayed into an ambush and captured by some of the

very men he had been endeavoring to help, our young friend, when we intercepted him, had been en route to Sereneya, where—he had overheard—he was to be secreted to a den north of the fort until either a worthy ransom, or two, should be paid—upon which he would perhaps be released to his redeemers—or sold into slavery, or slain and thrown into the sea.

Aureaelle and I, after three more days of sailing upon the still-darkening waters, finally prepare to disembark onto this rugged beach of a western bay of Malavalea, where her shining rock cliffs as black as obsidian and as jagged as the sharp teeth of some grinning monster reach out to welcome us—first under a drenching storm of shuddering gusts and shrieking gales of tempest, followed by shrill flares of flashing green lighting with scores of simultaneous bolts dropping all around us for nearly an hour, succeeded by hailstones as large as my thumb pelt-ing the deck and thoroughly shredding our new sails.

Suddenly it all clears up, *in less than a minute*—and drops to a total silence—I suppose so we can more fully appreciate what follows: the loud, lingering laughter of demonic cursings—in a few of them Aureaelle and I can actually distinguish our names—accompanied by some deeply booming war-drums from the black clouds high in the dusky heavens, BOOM-Boom-booming into a final, long-echoing, maniacal invitation of welcome.

Trying not to show the dismay which is already determining to hook its nails beneath my skin, I look first at Aureaelle, then at the captain, shaking my head. “Are you sure you don’t want to stay here with us,” I ask him,

The Interpreters Cave

eyes twinkling, “so we can enjoy picnics on the beach, and have many pleasant excursions together?”

“I don’t think I would jest about it, were I you... although I don’t doubt your motive in it,” he replies, shaking his head morosely. “If I didn’t have that extra supply of muslin stowed in the rear cabin, I confess I would feel like throwing myself into the sea, rather than sleep and journey across this hellish island.

“You are *sure* you are called to be here, I suppose...”

† † † †

During our last two days on the ship, the Princess and I were busy rearranging our dwindling stores of food, our clothing, our lightweight new garments and small gifts, and all the various items we will need to carry in our backpacks and shoulder bags while we hike the rocky terrains into the heart of Malavalea.

And now, the hour has come. Our six weeks at sea are over, and our goodbyes must be said. To the friendly faces on the stern of the diminishing ship, we send a hundred devoted and deliberate prayer-waves—for the new sails have barely a breeze for billowing—and receive so many more in return, for after that last battle in our struggles together, we finally decided to reveal to them who the Princess and I really are, and why we are come.

From our new captive-friend, Cephrun, I received during those three days much valuable information about this evil island, its ridges, and rivers, and roads, and the

locations of its three crude bridges. And from him, fortunately, I have also learned about some especially dangerous areas of concentrated evil—for he was born and has grown to manhood on Malavalea.

He explained to me that the huge island is shaped roughly like an ancient dragon, with long neck outstretched toward its head—which is completely opposite us across the long island, for we have landed near the end of its tail—and that it has one wing raised above it, to the north west, and a thin clawlike peninsula ahead and off to our right, still out of sight, as if it were a claw reaching out to snatch foolish voyagers from the sea.

Since so many of the Century-Sorrowers of Au-Royalialia never return to the Royal City, and since the ways of Suffering among those who *do return* are so varied, and since the ones who are allowed to return seem always hesitant to discuss their sufferings, or to share any details except those that will clearly be a blessing to their citizens, even the good Sir Caedmon could give me but little instruction as to just where we should go, and what we should actually do if we reach the island. “You will just need to follow as clearly as you can,” he said, “wherever Duty seems daily to direct you.”

After all those hours of conversing with Cephrun on the ship late into the night, and after asking even more questions again this morning—before he eagerly took a trail toward home, which was almost in the opposite direction from the one we will be taking—I am finally at the place where I have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the bowels and banes of Malavalea’s geography, and I

The Interpreters Cave

believe I might be able to find my way to some of our rare outposts of love where the shining Light from the Royal City seeks still to penetrate the committed demonic gloom terrorizing her bewoed inhabitants.

Princess Aureaelle and I stand where the beach narrows into our first trail, the one that should take us to the Cave of the Interpreter.

“I have seen him on only two occasions,” Cephrun had told me, “and I don’t know of anyone who has ever been inside his dwelling, for it is considered a sacred place. But I can easily tell you how to get there, I mean, if you *can* manage to get there... you know what I mean...” for he had already chronicled to me so many battles, dark encounters, desperate struggles, and sad losses—with few encouragements sprinkled among them.

† † † †

Through the early hours of this first morning here on Malavalea, where that greenish-gray sunlight ahead of us and to our right (we *think* that’s where it is) is trying in vain to pierce the gloomy layers of cloudbank, we hike on the slippery black shards beneath our feet up a trail leading between the obsidian cliffs and vaguely toward the Interpreter’s Cave, which is still a brisk eight-hour hike away, according to Cephrun, but which I figure will take us at least a day, perhaps nearly two.

Yes, I just used the word *hiking*, but you are probably wondering, and with great reason, how our good Princess can even *walk*, after her horrible dream during our

first night on Sereneya (of which, by the way, she has still told me but the sketchiest of details)... followed less than a week later by the pirates' attempts to slay us all at sea... and *that* followed, soon after, by the eerie 'welcome' thrown into our faces upon our arriving here... and then by the breaking of our last ties to any friends or familiar faces whatsoever.

In truth, Aureaelle just barely made it to the crest of the first hill—less than an hour after we began—and progressed that far only by stopping twice to rest.

Even now, where we walk slowly on a smoother and easier passage—one dropping easily and gradually lower as it calls us seemingly to a burned-out looking expanse of black barrenness further down-slope—I find myself walking the trail rather slowly, with her pack strung over my right shoulder, my left arm around her, and my hand under her arm to better support her as she leans heavily upon me, her right hand tightly clasping my sturdy leather waist belt for support.

"I am so sorry..." she tells me, looking up through not-very-merry emerald eyes that appear as if the smallest complaint from me would turn them into fast-flowing salt-pools instead, "I just wish I wasn't always so exhausted. Is it just *worrying*—my lack of *Faythe*? We are only starting, and I feel I cannot take another step!"

"You mention the very word I have been thinking on," I reply, "and I'm ready for a rest, too. Let's go sit on that smooth boulder—at least we won't need to look for shade—and enjoy a short meal, and some rest.

The Interpreters Cave

Maybe we can discuss that 'faythe' to which you refer."

I drop our packs to the ground against the front of the large flat stone, which is about as long as a table, and the height of a rough bench, and she sits on it for a moment. While I am getting some nuts and dried fruits from her pack, she slips down to the ground, so she can lean with her side against the boulder and her back against my larger pack. Soon her head is leaning back upon it, and she is sleeping soundly, without, I realize too late, having eaten a single bite of strengthening food.

I really am not complaining, or at least I don't think I am, even in my inner heart. Of course I have anticipated this very situation—since the day we visited her friend Aravelle, and the sweet Aureaelle humbly told me of her weakening condition.

But I find myself wondering again—marveling, actually—that even a small number of good people can *voluntarily* come to this dark isle, and live on it for years at a time. Speaking of 'Faythe'—do I have *any of it* at all? *Just what is Faythe? How does it work?*

Suddenly I remember the last gift I opened from Au-Royalia—just three days ago—and the one with which I have been longing to acquaint myself.

It seems that Sir Caedmon, that good guardian of the Royal City's underground Royal Crypt and the one man living who thought he knew, or was at least partially acquainted with, every volume in their sacred library, had found, just two evenings before our departure, a

small book that had fallen down behind some larger volumes and had lain there for at least dozens of years. Only because he had removed three large volumes at once had he seen in the shadows behind them, lying down, the small sacred volume, and he was totally at a loss in coming up with any way it could have journeyed from Eyrth to Phylantagia.

How excited he was, he told me in the note accompanying it, when he discovered it to be the Holy Book of Eyrth—or part of it, at least. For many hours, far beyond his usual hour of retiring, he eagerly read through it... thumbing through it here, reading whole sections there, trying to make by sheer magnitude of effort a mental compendium of that book written by such a conglomeration of authors covering such a variety of subjects in such a myriad of ways.

Early the next morning, said his note to me, his eyes were red and burning, and he sat wearily for a moment on the edge of his bed, until, remembering the volume, he leaped away, leaving the bed unmade, and into his clothes. But as he was washing and preparing himself for the day, a horrible thought came to him. Three times he fought it away, and three times it eventually, *quietly and tenaciously*, he wrote, returned.

Finally good Caedmon submitted, and, after perusing it during every spare minute of that busy day, he wrapped the book that evening for my voyage instead.

But, as I sit here now on the stone above the sleeping Princess, I recall that, with the challenges of these last two

The Interpreters Cave

busy days upon us, I have read only a page of that revered volume of Truth, and that somewhere on that page I saw written a verse of wisdom seeming to teach clearly that *a good man shall find Life by his faythe*.

Seeing that I cannot fetch the book to me without disturbing the sleeping Aureaelle, I lie flat on my back on the huge stone, my mind sweeping the dark sky and wondering about the great issues that stretch my heart toward the invisible realms that seem so infinitely above and beyond it, and am soon with the Princess—asleep.

I awaken to the pattering, then pelting, of cold rain, and to the discovery that Aureaelle has been long awake, has eaten, and is awaiting me.

Refreshed by it all, she helps me find our wyrkmyn-crafted garments—which we have both been longing, like little children with a new toy—to try out. So lightweight are they, and so comfortable, it is hard to imagine they will be of much use in cold or rainy weather, but we soon discover how high the wisdom which descends down into the wyrkmyn's deep underground smyth-shop really is.

With our cloaks and hoods firmly secured, and with our packs made of a similar but heavier material, we feel no need to envy the oil-feathered waterfowl, as the rain now comes down in great oblique and slashing sheets upon us. Fortunately, the trail here is high, and is gravelly enough that it gets neither muddy nor soft, and we find ourselves making much better time than we had thought possible.

As night begins to settle around us, we find a sheltering nook, almost a den, under a rock projecting out so far that the ground here is dry. We make narrow but surprisingly comfortable beds from the rolls that have hung compacted all day beneath our packs, and sleep like babies in their comfort and warmth.

After a quick breakfast, for I figure we only have two or three hours to the sage's cave, we set out again. Long before noon we are walking slowly up the trail to the hidden doorway in the side of the rocky knob, and located for me so well by good Cephrun.

We step upward into the winding corridor behind the thick hedge of junipers which hide his cave from all but the most instructed eyes. Rather loudly I call into the echoing cavern, "Is anyone here? Friends from the Royal City are come."

I hear an immediate and heartwarming reply. "If from the Royal City, come in quickly, and art welcome. But just *whom*," as he comes around a stony turn of the passageway with hand stretched out already to welcome us, "have I the honor of greeting?"

"Ahhh, just as I suspected. Our dear Princess Aureaelle." He gives her a bow, and, as we have just removed our dripping raincloaks, follows it with a quick fatherly embrace, and steps back with her right hand still clasped warmly within both of his own larger ones, while searching her eyes for a full tender minute.

"It has been five years since I have seen you, my dear

The Interpreters Cave

daughter, but your heart shines out still as if from your father's clear sparkling eyes. May you keep them *always* as clear as they are today!

"And good Gaelayniel—the Eyrth-man! Welcome, welcome, thrice welcome," he cries, as he gives to me the same loving embrace, and the same searching of my eyes, fully as warmly. "I like what I see—in both of you.

"Just let me awaken the fire a bit and set on some water for tea," he says, rearranging the dozing logs, shaking them into a blaze, and adding three more even as he speaks, "...and we'll soon be old acquaintances. I was hoping to see you last evening, and then I got such a burden to pray for you during the middle of the day. Did things go better after that?"

"You see, if I've learned anything in my two hundred years living here in the bowels of Malavalea, it's this: the next day, or the next hour, or even the next minute, will likely be a total surprise from what you are naturally expecting.

"Yes, it sometimes seems that this evil isle is swarming with unhappy devils that cannot abide either themselves or each other, and that they operate contrary to any known laws of sanity or reason. Once in awhile, though—whether by accident or deliberate cooperation I've never fully made up my mind—they seem actually to help each other, and then... *look sharp!*

"I beg your pardon, good Princess," he interrupts himself, "I see I am troubling you already with my blunt

blunderings about the invisibles. Help me make this tea, dear heart, and I'll try to save the war zone somewhat for the warrior," he concludes, giving me a merry wink from a shining blue eye.

Soon we are seated in odd-looking chairs of wood and leather, which I suspect he has himself made. I am amazed at how perfectly comfortable they are, as if designed by the same one who invented spines, arms, and leg bones.

"As I was saying," he resumes, stirring a huge lump of golden sugar into his tea, "I felt to pray for you, and I'm sure it made a big difference. But that doesn't mean I get much credit for it, or need any at all.

"You see, I absolutely cannot even think to pray for someone, but what 'my' thought has existed already in a *far more* caring and aware and alert intelligence than I will ever be – that is, in the one I cheerfully call *father*.

"To that pure *first thought* I merely attach, if I choose, my own. By itself, my prayer would perhaps mean nothing, but, attached to *his*, it can mean everything!

"It can rally together with dozens or thousands of others on the same subject, helping them to flow together – like the tiny streamlets high up in the melting peaks which so *gently* begin their tricklings, but end up days later rushing wildly within some wide-surg-ing torrent to press into the mighty ocean itself.

"But perhaps I am going too fast – Gaelayniel, how long have you been a lover of Truth?

The Interpreters Cave

"Not long enough," I return, "Please continue."

"Ah, friend Gaelayniel... attitude is everything. Like I was saying, your little prayer, the one you hardly think worth breathing, may yet be the first prayer addressing some desperate need, to which thousands of others of the same purpose attach themselves – like pigeons, after being separated by a turbulent storm, reforming into their flock to fly in force together.

"Actually, I sometimes think that even one of my very smallest prayers, if an honest outflow from a pure motive – though it may be so *small*, is still as useful as a little hook – and one upon which soon many life-transforming thoughts, and purposings, and daring deeds, and intercessory miracles may hang and work together, to help revolutionize history and bring many sons to glory!

"But of course there is also that bold, adventurous prayer that may sally forth alone – like some brave warrior – to claim some throne, or empty one, or do a thousand other necessary deeds."

Now... all this flow of conversation to me is quite enough, I'm sure, to give you a description of the good heart of the Interpreter. I wonder if he is somewhat lonely, because, although we talk all through the day and deeply into the night, and long after the Princess has gone to her bed in a cozy off-room, he is still speaking freely and fluently, like a flowing fountain – as if he simply *longs* to pour out so generously, to anyone who loves them, those saving truths which he values so highly, and has labored so long to learn.

How cheerily and clearly this man with the simple, trusting heart of a little child answers my every question and encourages my founding Faythe.

Before I finally fall asleep on the floor near the Princess, where he has arranged my cot, we have discussed, or at least touched on, dozens of the most heart-stirring and eternal matters.

He has begun to illuminate my heart with much new understanding about things relating to *time* – past, present and future – and of *eternity*. He has opened up new truths about my spirit, body, and soul. He has warned me about things dear, not dear enough, or too dear, to men – and showed me the value of things dear to his ‘father,’ as he refers to him so often.

To some depth (for me, but probably never wading beyond the shallows, to him) he has begun to teach me about those things which seem to be at the very heart of divinity, humanity, personality, masculinity, and femininity, all of which he holds in highest regard.

How little – I soon realize – I really know about spiritual birth, and growth, and nurturing – and especially as to how they all relate to our maturing into the perfection of the personhood of the father.

The next morning, rested by our sleep and refreshed by a hearty breakfast, the three of us walk outside for an hour, for this day is warmer and less gloomy than any day yet on this evil island. It actually seems more like day than night.

The Interpreters Cave

Returning to the cave, the Interpreter leads us through the little off room, where the Princess and I had slept, into a corridor beyond. Rounding a bend in the tunnel, which was just higher than our heads, we walk suddenly into a room which appears to be perhaps fifty paces in depth, and which widens as it deepens, to perhaps seventy paces wide at its far, rough-shapen wall. Except at its entrance where we stand, the room is almost dark as night.

Immediately inside the cavern are two narrow corridors, one to our left, and one on our right, leading we know not where.

“These three rooms,” the Interpreter says, “are rooms in which no one but myself has ever before entered. When I first came to this island I found them here – in the very bowels of dark Malavalea – where they were built many ages ago for our instruction.

“The room we are standing in will teach us about things present. The corridor at left leads to the cavern which speaks of mysteries past, and the one on our right, to mysteries future. Both of those, of course, must be entered from the present, where we now stand.

“Now, a few days ago, I was on my knees in the room on the right, worshipping, when I received knowledge that you would soon visit me, and that I am to host you for three days, to teach you, to encourage you, and to interpret for you things profitable for your journeys into the Sorrow awaiting you.

“Gaelayniel, I’m wondering: has the Princess

Aureaelle yet sung for you our sacred *'Song of Sevens'*?

Upon receiving my affirmation, he continues. "We will sing it one time through—and then I will begin to open for you a few of its meanings."

Together, with the rich voice of the Interpreter leading us, we sing reverently about the mysterious *'sevens'* into which our fates are weaving our lives.

*Seven seas, and seven sorrows,
Seven men on misty morrows,
Seven horrors evil-fated,
Seven honors long awaited,
Seven woes, with One o'ertowering
Seven gifts of Grace empowering;
Hasten, heroes, to the chrysm
of your sorrowful baptyism
Seven woes till wrong is mended
and the five of seven ended.*

"Your first *'sea'*, Gaelayniel, was a figurative one, and it is now past, but let us walk into the room at our left, to see it revealed to us.

As we walk into the second room I see it is a little larger, but with darker walls, and a somewhat lower ceiling.

"As I was saying," the Interpreter continues, your first *'sea'* is a spiritual one, and is that invisible ocean which lies as a great gulf between our two worlds. See it now before you—and, with it, your first *'sorrow'* and the first *'man'*, your first *'horror'*, your first *'woe'*, and your first *'honor'*. For you were known—and the song was written—thousands of years before you were born."

The Interpreters Cave

Even before he finishes the words, I see, sitting about four paces ahead of me on a little rock, the evil enmity of *ilven-roD*. And, exactly as happened some weeks ago, my body is stiff with terror. I can hardly breathe, but the scene is soon gone, and the last deafening clappings of thunder have reverberated from our cavern. The smell of searing smoke still lingers for several moments in our nostrils, even after the scene has disappeared.

"Your second *'sea'* was the Mara Phylantagea, the sea on which Thautaylius and his Twelve appeared to take you to the royal ship." Again, before his words are completed, the entire cavern instantly illuminates with the radiant beauty of the seashore. I can smell the salt air, hear the calling of the gulls, and see them sailing to and fro seemingly much higher and farther away than this cavern could contain, and realize I can tell no difference at all from the experience I had when I was awaiting Thayne's pearlescent craft and its impressive crew.

I step back quickly as a wave laps against my sandal, but am too late, and my foot is soaked. As I reach for the uncoiling rope thrown from Thayne's hand, the scene fades, and—except for my wet sandal and pulsing heart—is gone.

I turn to look at the Princess, and see glowing upon her face the holy light of childlike wonderment and worship. I assume mine shows the same, but the Interpreter continues.

"Your third sea, brave Gleyynn, is the Malferean Sea near Sereneya. See, and behold it before you." Suddenly,

in the darkest foggy gloom, I am standing on the deck of our ship; I see another ship against her, and hear the captain's loud cry, '*Pirates on starboard...*'

I turn to run to the cabin, to lock Aureaelle safely inside, but see only the winding corridor of our cavern... the one leading to the off room where Aureaelle slept. Heart pounding, hand still on dagger, I turn again, and, so real is the scene before me that I must join the battle once more. With the wild and profane curses echoing into the black sky of our sacred cavern, I fight exactly as before. In a minute, the first man lies on the deck, the second soon drops into the sea; the third man swings his sword at my neck, and... the scene begins to fade.

Breathing heavily, I return to the closer reality, where Princess Aureaelle, — her face white, and her hand on her breast — trembles, and seems ready to faint, but the Interpreter steadies her, and speaks again.

"Your second woe, Gaelayniel, is tied in with your second '*honor*' and is also past... see it before you." Before his words end I see myself sitting aboard the royal ship, in the ballroom of the First Council. The ancient rune has just been read for the second time, and the King is standing on his feet searching my face with his haunting eyes.

"This second woe, Gaelayniel, but confirms the first — that you have indeed been called to our world to risk yourself against a challenge of our ages. For the Princess Aureaelle... for her father, and her kingdom — and for all that can be right in our noble domain, it is your *special honor* to be called, and chosen, and faithful — indeed, that

The Interpreters Cave

is why you are here and I am showing you these things today."

Now, I observe that in this vision, contrary to the previous one, the King and his Council-men are unaware of the Interpreter or our conversation, as the Interpreter continues.

"Here you see yourself in the presence of the King, greatly alarmed that some great fate has fallen upon you, and wondering if you are worthy, and able to master it." The scene fades.

"Your third woe, Gaelayniel, is also past, but I must declare it to you privately. Aureaelle, would you retire to your bedroom for a moment? We will soon call you."

As soon as she has left, a fifth scene appears. Again I am in the ballroom, and in the Second Council. The Princess Aureaelle has just unveiled her face, and a most confusing, twofold woe is mine when I behold her resemblance to my Love, and see the obvious superiority of her beauty, as compared with that of my Al-Lloreyra.

"Gaelayniel, let me show you something, about *beauty*." Instantly the ballroom fades, to be replaced, out of a great darkness, by a glorious brightening sunrise lighting up the expanse of some great ocean, as beautiful as I have ever seen.

For only a few seconds it brightens, then fades, to be replaced — in slow succession — by several warming, then fading scenes of beauty: a lovely mountain meadow,

where several magnificent elk are grazing... a coral reef, with a myriad of colorful fishes swimming through... two little children, a boy and a girl, playing happily together beside a murmuring stream... the noble face of King Ardureus... the face of my dearest Al-Lloreya... and the face again of Aureaelle – but much more beautiful than I have ever yet seen it – yea, more beautiful than I could even imagine anything ever to be, or have been – even though she is, as before, seated by her father in the council room before me.

Turning to me, and looking deeply into my eyes, the Interpreter asks me, “Of all that you see in the Princess Aureaelle, what, to you, is the most beautiful?” I know he is so clearly reading the answers on my heart, and I obediently answer him, slowly finding the words.

“When I first saw her, with her face veiled, it was her outward art of gracefulness. After that, for a time, it was the holy beauty of her face and form. Soon it was her unassuming oneness with her people and Aravelle. Always it has been her trusting purity with myself. Lately it has been more and more the serenity of her surrender to her Sorrow... *how can I know what yet will be*, and if one should stand out above the rest?”

“You have answered well,” he replies, “but I need to warn you of one thing. Through my father’s eyes, there are thousands of worthy virgins and persons in our worlds who do *not* have – in their first life here – that outward grace, or face, or form that so impresses you. But, like good Aravelle, whom you referred to, they have, or are learning to have, those other good things

The Interpreters Cave

you mentioned. And the radiant beauty of the inward heart – the *unassuming oneness with others*, the *trusting purity*, and the *surrender to difficult situations*, which you mentioned, have taken even my father much longer to fashion, are much rarer, and are of much higher value than the outward forms of beauty, which may be things of a single day.

“I say this not to scold you, for I see that you have done well with both of your princesses, in both of your worlds. I merely caution you... for even when beauty is treasured in purity, you may value it too highly, which could shipwreck your Faythe when you see that purity despised by others, or that outward beauty perishing.

“I will say no more about that, for now – you may summon the Princess to us again.”

“Before I call her,” I ask him, hesitating, “I am wondering if I dare ask you about something that has greatly troubled me these many weeks.”

“Ask away,” he replies me, “I will help you if I may.”

“Well, really, I have *two* questions,” I begin, “but they may be related. The first, as you are already aware, is that I am greatly troubled that the Princess Aureaelle so perfectly resembles my own ‘princess,’ as you called her, back in my own world. To me this seems uncanny – or worse – and I can think of no solution to it worth keeping. But am I too bold in asking you about it? The other part of it, of course, is my wondering if I will be able to return to my dear Al-Lloreya?”

The Interpreter, looking on me with a kindly, fatherly expression, sighs deeply. "I would love to help you with those questions, which are both worthy ones, and I respect you for asking them. The one I do not yet know the answer to, and even if we would enter the third cavern to look into the future I would not receive its answer, for it is part of your story that must await its time.

"The other question I *do* know the answer to, but am not yet allowed to share it, for it also must await its day. But please be encouraged in this: my father, who loves you perfectly, can make no mistakes in these matters, and you may exercise your Faythe fully to the furthest extent, knowing that he is true and will work out all to the very best for you in the end."

I go to Aureaelle, and return with her to the central chamber, where the Interpreter tarries for us.

"I would now, my young friends, shine some greater illumination upon our present realities. Hold your hearts in check, and do not fear—for I will make visible to you some of the darkness of Malavalea."

Before his last words are finished, the great room is in utter blackness of darkness, so dark I cannot see my companions, or my hand before my face.

But here... and there... around, above, and before us I see appearing—first one, then another, in dark shadowy colors of red, or deep midnight blue, or palest cadaverous green, or fluctuating grays—the apparitions of everything you would never want to see.

The Interpreters Cave

Leering, lusting, angry, murderous, profane and defiling creatures of every sort that men or devils have ever imagined are circling above us, dropping toward us, or boldly charging us, but are apparently held back by some wall of mercy. One creature especially, a small pyramidal creature with small face and a tiny triangular mouth, seems curiously dark to me, and portending.

The black walls and unseen ceiling of our cavern echo loudly as a huge multitude of them crowd together, while throwing into our hearts the foulest, vilest curses and damnings human ears have ever heard. I can hardly believe that the Interpreter is allowing the Princess to hear it, and indeed she stumbles against me in the darkness, and I feel her cringing and shrinking from it, as if stabbed to her heart, with each new blow. Is he, perhaps, steeling her for what is to come?

The noise of the angry mass of apparitions slowly quiets, allowing me to notice something even worse. Cool and ghoulish spirits of deadly apathy, like chilling bodies of dreadful fog, are drifting silently everywhere—across, and below, and even through, the other demon bodies. Their utter dullness and heedlessness and inactivity of thought or desire, either for us or against us—their total indifference to us in their tepid state of utter soullessness—seems more horrible to me than anything I can imagine.

But soon I see every apparition beginning to startle and shrink, as if trying to remove itself from some dawning Presence. Even the apparitions of apathy seem almost to stir themselves to horror, as if realizing too late that something which may awaken them is approaching.

Faintly, as from beyond the silent darkness, I thrill to a barely discernible sound. Swelling slowly louder, I recognize it finally as sweet and triumphant music – the singing and praise from a thousand prayer-rings of Au-Royalialia and the songs of Faythe from ten-thousand hearts across fair Phylantagia!

Closer and louder the chorus swells! From ten thousand canticles, I hear the one resounding song of Faythe ringing out louder and louder in perfect harmony. And I hear now, joining with it, the rich voice of the Interpreter, the sweet and steady voice of Aureaelle, and my own heart's joy mingling with them in the words of this swelling pageant of praise.

Into the velvety darkness – for the last lurid demon is fled – I see now, like a vast sprinkling of diamond dust – a great cascading of stars, piercing at every point the darkness. Successively, one after another rushes toward us in an enlarging circle of light, showing suddenly to us the clear faces of its prayer ring, or the face of some Faythe-filled person. In rapid succession – in perhaps eight or ten locations around the cavern – like the pulsing of fireworks, the myriad faces and circles appear and fade, their song or prayer growing louder as they enlarge to larger-than-life size, and fade away, to be replaced by the next.

“One more thing,” the Interpreter remarks, as the room returns to its former quietness, “in the Chamber of the Future, I will show you. I then wish to bestow upon you your first Gift of Grace.”

Stepping into the adjacent room, we see it is in shape

The Interpreters Cave

almost a mirror of the one opposite, where things past are declared – but many time larger, with a ceiling that seems higher than the large hill outside containing this cave.

“This stepping into your future will not be pleasant. But I have been told to show it to you here, so that its first appearance to you will be with the accompaniment of Faythe.” Quickly the room chills, and a pale-green moon shines down from where the ceiling of our room had been.

Barely able to penetrate the gloomy fogs before us, it shines onto the open clearing – flat and bare – of a cold and gloomy forest, and upon a large flat stone the size of a long, rough-surfaced bed.

“*See, and behold... here is Moonstone* – where the great and long-prophesied Sorrow of Princess Aureaelle, with the accompanying sorrow of Gaelayniel must be accomplished. Look well upon it – for it is to this that all of the fateful events of your lives have been pressing, are pressing, and will press.

“Here you will be faytheful, will find honor, and all will be well – or here you will fail... and all will be lost.”

I see the Princess's eyes pool with tears, as she looks at the cold pale-green slab before us... the very antithesis of her own fair person. Bravely she turns to the Interpreter, with a trembling smile and a slight nod of her head.

“I will now give to you, Gaelayniel, your first great Gift of Grace. But, perhaps I should qualify that, for someday you will clearly see that every thing that you have

ever received has been a work of great grace. But I am commanded to give to you, here, one which only the faytheful may receive, and to you it will be given in abundance—even to the point of being sometimes visible before you, during your struggles with Malavalea.

He asks me to kneel before him, here at the entrance of the Cavern of the Future, which I gladly do. He anoints my head with oil, then places both of his hands upon it, while Aureaelle—kneeling not far from me—silently joins him in his prayers for me. With thanksgiving he cries, as he bids me open my eyes, “Behold, the Golden Mirror!”

Before me, hovering vertically perhaps two feet above the ground, as if hanging on a wall, is a picture frame, carven of purest gold. Perhaps twenty by thirty-three inches, it will neither completely possess me, nor I it. But on urgent occasions, he tells me, it may decide to either reflect into my face or throw into my heart from within itself, some vital understanding for a trial at hand.

Whenever I see it appearing or going before me, I am to honor it with highest reverence, obeying its teachings immediately and implicitly. And even when I do *not* see it, he tells me, I am to remember and *believe* that the Golden Mirror is yet with me and will teach me, as if the Interpreter himself were present, the things of truth when they should best be shared.

Storm Clouds Raging

*Sweeping, sweeping, slowly sweeping
through the lurid moonlit glow,
see the garish, ghoulis glimmers
of the phantoms here below,
and the cold and bloodless specters
in their driftings to and fro.*

*Haunting, in their forms and moanings—
do you start, when they appear,
do you hear them, do you fear them,
when you feel their coldness near?
Hold the Truth, and keep it shining,
from the royal Golden Mirror.*

*Evil spirits hold no terror
even in the darkest night,
if the heart will wear its Courage
and the Faythe is shining bright;
let the monster moan its mis’ry,
if we’re walking in the Light.*

Oblivious to the cold and rainy weather again upon us, we leave the Interpreter’s cave behind us, to journey ever northward and westward toward the dragonlike head at the far end of this serpent-shaped Malavalea.

Of course we do not plan to go that far. Our ultimate

destination is that cold and gloomy clearing where *Moonstone* lies waiting for us, in the very heart of the dragon.

Aureaelle's pack is again well-stocked, with choice foods from the Interpreter's stores, and our hearts are well-warmed by the many blessings received from his heart and hands.

Our destination is another cave, one which is hopefully just three or four days away, a much smaller and ordinary cave where lives the good lady Livana.

After traveling through most of the hours of the day in the rain, the weather turns less nasty, and an hour before darkness falls the rain stops. Because of the chilly air, we continue wearing our raincloaks, but are able to eat a light meal in comfort. We decide to travel another hour or so, while light remains, for we are desirous to meet Livana, and enjoy a time with her as soon as possible.

As the Princess and I journey nearer, and into a gloomy, darkening vale just ahead of us, she requests and eventually draws from me some tales of my adventures with Djélôn and some even earlier battles while I was serving with the WAHRoR.

After painting for her several memorable scenes – but of course leaving out the abhorrent details – I sense that these true accounts are not leaving her fearful, but seem to be building up her Faythe, instead.

I begin to launch into a fourth saga about a fierce battle

Storm Clouds Raging

when my father was still with us, on the edge of a cliff high above a turbulent sea. I pause for a moment, thinking how very different were those battles with men, in a world of men, compared to some of these strange, more recent, experiences in dark Malavalea.

As if to confirm the thought, the Princess and I suddenly hear a tremendous beastly roar, perhaps twenty paces ahead of us and to our right. We soon see standing there, as if evolving out of the black shadows themselves, a huge bear with glistening fur black as night, and with murderous hatred gleaming at us from two hot eyes that glow like coals of red fire.

Even as I drop my pack to the trail beside me, and start backing the Princess and myself a few steps to a place where the trail is level and better lit, the creature roars a loud challenge of terror at us again, and drops down onto all four legs. But as our astonished eyes fix upon it, a strange and greater terror occurs.

The shape of the demonic creature is slowly transforming. We see its body, its legs, its head, and then its face changing, and in less than a minute it has become a perfectly-shaped lion – but glistening as black as midnight – standing high on a boulder ahead of us and higher than our heads, glaring and roaring directly into our hearts its evil challenge.

Its glowing red eyes shift briefly to look at its twitching tail, and we see, to our increasing horror, that the tail is thickening... is changing to a glowing golden color, but with angling bands of darker red winding around its now-

smooth, scaly body, which culminates in the swollen head of a poisonous serpent. While the 'tail' is twitching, coiling, and lunging toward us, the glistening black fangs spread themselves wide, and evil malice shines brightly from diamond-shaped eyes of icy blue.

Suddenly the lion turns to us again, and, with a mighty roar, crouches low to spring upon us. Even as my hand grasps the handle of my dagger, Aureaelle all but thrusts the invisible flute into my mouth. With less than a second to spare, I blow the special code, even while I push the Princess to the ground, and dive across her.

As I scramble to my feet again, we hear the demonic beast thud upon the trail just beyond where we had been standing. It rolls clumsily several times, and stops against a tree in the deep shadows just beyond the trail, with its legs dangling beside it, sleeping peacefully.

Leaving the Princess on the trail, I thrust my dagger deeply into the lion's heart... with results so vulgar I wonder if I should describe them to you.

As if the creature contains some great pressure, like that of a bloating corpse, the piercing of my dagger suddenly releases a smell foul beyond description... one which would easily contort your face and empty your stomach three hundred paces away.

Even worse, more than a few drops of the putrid spray that burst forth are upon me – mostly upon my garments, but much of it on my hand, some on my arms, even some droplets on my face.

Storm Clouds Raging

Remembering the little stream we crossed but a few minutes back the trail, I run for it at nearly top speed, the Princess only too glad to run with me from the horrible scene. Emptying my weapons and the valuables from my belt and pockets, I plunge into the cold stream, lie down, and scrub myself and my garments as well as I can, until I hope that my skin, my garments, and the flute are clean.

Soon we are back to the scene, to pick up my pack and travel on, where I notice that the end of the lion's tail – the serpent's head – which apparently had been under the lion when it stopped rolling, has now somehow extricated itself from the reeking carcass.

From behind the dead body of the lion, it still thrashes and hisses at us with fangs wide, its diamond eyes glittering in the darkness. I find a sturdy dead branch, about as long as my height, and begin clubbing the dancing head, time and again, until finally the lights go out, the mouth hangs nearly shut, and it dangles from the dead beast that bore it.

With shaken, but humbled and thankful hearts, we resume our trek, the tales of my old Eyrth-battles well forgotten.

"It is to *you*, dear Princess, that we obviously owe our lives. My dagger may have fared ill against a devil like that one... and I thank you for your clear thinking and quick courage.

"Thank you, Captain Gaelynt," she replies softly, and so princess-like in her warmth and modesty. "But do you

suppose I had had that courage, were you not sharing with me your own exploits? And of course we must *always* remember that the flaming arrows of love from the songs and prayer-circles of Au-Royalia, and from all the good hearts of her realm, must fall where they will. Who can say what a myriad of shining hosts may be traveling with us!"

I find her hand in the darkness, and give it a tender squeeze of gratitude and love. How self-forgetting... how *precious* she is! Again, I find tears starting to well in my eyes, and pause to wonder again at these strange meldings of my heart. I certainly remember no such tender gratitudes after my battles on Eyrth.

We journey on, long enough to get higher, and away from the putrid smells and vile memories of that dark glen, and decide to make camp for the night. But, after that harrowing experience—and unable to find a place as protected as I would like—we settle for the most suitable spot we can find, for it is quite dark now, and bed finally at the bottom of a sheltering bluff, next to a large fallen log, where the Princess sleeps well enough, but I fitfully—wondering if we should stay awake by turns, and wishing I could stay awake all night, to guard her, in such a place as this.

A few days later, after no unusual setbacks, we reach the cave of the good lady Livana in the late afternoon of the fourth day. The Princess has again been weakening, and for these past two days has been walking slowly, leaning heavily on me for support. On the morning of the third day, when I carried her across a waist-deep and boiling ford, it seemed that she was getting alarmingly lighter,

Storm Clouds Raging

although she insisted she was eating enough, and was trying not to worry. You can imagine, then, how good it feels to us, after knocking on the sturdy oaken door of Livana's cave, to be welcomed inside.

Her home is a single room, with a kitchen and pantry near the door, beds for herself and for guests behind wooden screens in a back corner, and a large sitting and living area under the high dome between. In the very center of the room, a stone oven and fireplace has been laid up, with a chimney up nearly to the high ceiling, where the smoke disappears into the various cracks above.

As we sup and visit around the fire, good Livana answers wisely our questions about the regions between here and dark *Moonstone*, showing great interest in the highlights and shadows of our journey, and of our stay at the Interpreter's cave.

"Did he tell you about the *daemuks*?" she asks, after we have just described for her the vision in the central cavern where he opened to us the dark creatures of Malavalea. "They've been seen several times lately, just north of here." Seeing our doubtful glances at each other, she continues. "Daemuks are one of the most feared creatures of this island... and for several good reasons. They are so small and so strangely-built that at first glance you would probably think them harmless, and that you could easily run away from them.

"A daemuk is small, no more than ten inches tall, and has a pear-shaped—almost pyramidal—body, with legs so short as to greatly deceive you about their speed. Their

tiny arms, too, are very short and childlike in appearance, and their tiny hands are similar to our own, but have only two fingers and a thumb, with clawlike nails.

“I think I may have seen one,” I interject, “in the evil vision. Are their heads small, and pyramidal, like their bodies – with beady black eyes close together near the center of the face, and a small, triangular mouth beneath?”

“You have described it perfectly,” Livana responds. “But what else stood out about it?”

“My main impression was an ominous feeling, almost of fear, as if the sight of the creature was an evil omen. Are they especially vicious, or malicious?”

“Very much so,” Livana replies, “and like a school of piranhas, or a column of army ants, they almost always travel in large companies. If you see one, there will probably be with it at least a hundred, and if you are fighting them, or trying to escape, they may have already – quickly and unseen – surrounded you to swarm upon you.

“But along with their surprising speed, it is their venomous *bite* which makes them so feared. Each bite leaves a small triangle of marks upon you, no bigger than the tip of your little finger. It is easily distinguished by the two tiny dots of blood from their two lower fangs, and the slightly larger spot of blood centered above it, from their wider upper tooth. The three dots of blood are barely visible, but each bite becomes a welt red with angry poison, and if a victim receives more than a few of them he almost always dies... usually before the next morning.

Storm Clouds Raging

“Legend has it that one reason the daemuks are so angry and fight so fiercely, is that each is possessed by a devil of insatiable lust. Apparently, according to those who have captured and observed them, they are, from the looks of their bodies unable to reproduce themselves, and we suspect that the demons inhabiting them are burning with jealousy against all creatures that can.

“About the only encouraging thing to say about them, is that they despise the light of daytime, so I advise you to travel as far by day as you can, and camp, if you are able, on the high and open, moonlit places.”

After another day and night spent with Livana, our hearts and spirits are again greatly refreshed, for she is – like the other good souls brave enough to live on the island – wise in the ways of truth, and radiating in a hundred ways the love of the father.

Early in the third morning, for Aureaelle is refreshed, and the sky seems unusually clear, we depart at first light, to travel as far as possible through the regions indwelt by the evil daemuks – desiring to reach a high, if exposed, plateau where few trees are found.

But we have traveled less than an hour, when, as the Interpreter had warned us, things have so *quickly* changed. The clear sky is ominously swept away by dark clouds dropping down to heavy formations just above us, and howling winds similar to those that first welcomed us to Malavalea begin dropping trees across the pathway before us, then behind us, and soon all around us. I see signs of approaching terror in Aureaelle’s eyes –

does she see it in mine? – and sense the rapidly-growing fatigue upon her.

“I’m afraid your flute will do no good against *this*,” she murmurs, “but we have still many people praying for us, like the bright visions showed.

“But perhaps the flute *may help us yet*,” she adds, gladly contradicting herself, “Is it by chance inviting you to play upon it?”

“I have sensed nothing,” I reply, “and hesitate to use it before it does. Perhaps we are to just exercise the Faythe we already have, and stand still with trusting hearts.”

Even as I finish saying it, a huge tree crashes down just a few feet behind us. Ours eyes – each seeing faythe in the other’s – confirm it, and we kneel on the trail together. Another tree crashes down immediately in front of us, then another, and three more beside us, until we smile at each other to realize that we are within a loose fortress of stacked trees, and there are none near enough and large enough to move it. The clouds go scudding away, and only a stiff gale blows through the open sky.

“The prayer-arrows are aimed straight and sure, and the demons of destruction must wait for another opportunity,” Aureaelle whispers, as we clamber through the wall of fallen trees before us. “*Thank you, Father.*”

† † † †

That night, we camped on the high plateau we had

Storm Clouds Raging

hoped to reach, for Aureaelle’s strength returned with the victory of our Faythe. And all through today we have made good progress, and would have made camp by mid-afternoon, had a favorable site presented itself.

But darkness is now falling, and we have found no prospects at all suitable, where we would wish to spend the night near the evil daemuks.

“If I thought you could endure it, Aureaelle, I would suggest we just keep traveling slowly, for I fear to sleep in this place. If we keep slowly moving, with eyes and ears open, and with my flute in my mouth, perhaps we can avoid them, and arrive at a place safer for slumber.”

“I’m willing to try,” she replies gamely. “I think I may be able travel, slowly... and I fear it would be even more difficult for me to stay awake half the night sharing the watchings with you. Besides, I hardly trust myself as a watchman, and fear harm would come upon us.”

Several hours later we are still traveling, Aureaelle almost dragging her feet in weariness, and I with the flute still in mouth, when we drop into a low area where the very air seems drugged for drowsiness.

“I see not how I can stay awake another minute,” she protests feebly. “Can you stay awake while I nap, even for just a few minutes?”

Soon, in the best place we can find, she is sitting on the very edge of the trail, with her back against a boulder, and sleeping soundly. I try my hardest to stay awake, for

the dark shadows of the thickets of brush are only a few paces from us, in any direction.

I am awakened by a piercing scream from the Princess, and a second later feel on my legs and arm the agonizing bites of the climbing, clawing daemuks.

Even as the evil rodents are clawing their way up my body, I shove the flute in my mouth and blow it forcefully. How agonizing are the sharp pains in my legs from the piercings of their claws and fangs!

Now that they are sleeping, we slowly and painfully remove the ones that are still hanging on us by their claws, and carefully pry open the mouths of the ones with fangs in our flesh.

As soon as Aureaelle is freed from them, she begins applying a tiny droplet of oyntmynt to each poisonous bite, as do I a few moments later. But even with our remedy applied so soon, it is nearly an hour before we have recovered enough strength to journey on.

Wide awake still from our close brush with death, we step into our packs, and shoulder our bags, to leave the slumbering bodies with their angry demons behind us. As we step through them, they seem to number at least several score. Including the ones unseen in the dark shadows, there are surely at least a hundred or two.

I wonder how long the flute will leave them sleeping.

Chapter Fourteen

The Constellation Encryphia

*Twelve small stars, their message bearing,
twelve white jewels, wisdom sharing,
See Encryphia through the ages
puzzling all the learned sages.
Shepherd lads, their sheep well keeping,
study, till their thoughts are sleeping,
twelve bright stars one heart displaying,
twelve bright stars the mind portraying
of their wise and ancient Planner,
belted through with milky banner:
in the heavens, brightly thrilling,
thirty-three small stars o'erspilling.*

The angry welts on our arms and legs still ache and burn, and we know not how to mollify them. Hiking again, we are on our way to what may be our last friendly outpost, a remote cabin where, hopefully, an elderly couple from the Royal City still lives. Perhaps we can find there some effective emollient used by the local inhabitants.

As the sun sets on our tenth day on the island, we see an amazing sight — *stars shining!* In all our days here, we have enjoyed only one or two days clear enough to notice any measurable warmth from the sun, but never yet has a *night* been clear enough to see a single shining

star. As we walk along on a high upper trail, the breeze is brisk and chilling, but our hearts are strangely cheered by this sight which is so very rare on Malavalea.

I find myself again trying to acquaint myself with these new stars and galaxies and nebulae – for not one of those I saw during my first weeks in Phylantagia coincided with the ones visible from Eyrth, which I know well.

Just beginning to appear – where the North Star appears from the northern portions of the Eyrth – is the one constellation that fascinates me most... appropriately named, Aureaelle informs me, Encryphia.



This mysterious constellation pictures almost perfectly, as shown in my sketch above, an inverted heart – made of twelve equally-pale reddish stars, but with a hazy band running through it which reminds me of Orion’s belt – made of thirty-three smaller, and also perfectly-spaced, stars of a pale light blue.

The curious symmetry and order of the heart, with the nearly perfect spacing of the ribbon stars, and the uniformity of color in each grouping are so obviously de-

The Constellation Encryphia

signed to convey a message to our meditations that it is no wonder to me that people through the millennia have searched the Phylantagean heavens for adjacent patterns of stars or constellations to connect somehow with the mysterious Encryphia.

I have no way of knowing now, of course, but will learn later, that at this very moment when the Princess and I are admiring Encryphia, many of our friends, on a high hill west of the Royal City, are also observing it.

Aureaelle’s father, the King, with Sir Caedmon and most of the Council of Nine, and Thauntaylius and many of his Twelve are all together, where they have traveled a few miles to join a large prayer-ring. But the prayers have ended, the heavens are beautiful, and the faytheful worshippers stand gazing into the beckoning heavens.

Six or seven miles east of them, standing at the side of the road in front of their cottage, are Aravelle and her father and mother – also entranced with the unusual closeness and clarity of the heavens that seem to be drawing people all across the realm to study her closely.

On the crown of the hill above his cave, the Interpreter stands also, gazing in childlike worship at this display of divine authority from millennia past.

At once, to the bewildering wonderment of nearly all of us, the twelve stars of the heart darken from their pale pink of the ages into a deep, blood-red crimson, and less than a minute later the ribbon stars lose their pale blue, and shine whiter than sparkling diamonds. Of all

the entranced observers, only the Interpreter seems untroubled. He hurries down the hill, into his cave, through the off room, and into the left-hand, then the center, and then the right-hand cavern, where he sees, as if glowing in the high heavens, the riddle's end.

In the Cavern of the Past, he sees Encryphia as she has been through the ages. In the central room, he sees her in her new beauty – crimson-gloried with diamond band. In the third, he sees what the rest of us will not see until the Sorrow is accomplished – an eternal Encryphia with heart stars of richest crimson, banded through with a banner of flashing, ever-pulsing diamonds. But the big difference, in the vision of the third room, I have not yet mentioned. For as the Interpreter stares with enraptured eyes he sees that the constellation has flipped at last, and the heart will be right-side-up, forever.

But Caedmon, when that future vision is fulfilled, will understand the answer as quickly as will the Interpreter, for already he is rushing back to the city, to lay hands on an old canticle recently rediscovered and impressed upon him. Almost certain that there is a connection between the old writing and the stellar event that is setting Phylantagia a-talking, he finds it at last, wondering. The first verse on the old sheepskin parchment reads like this:

*When bright Encryphia is changed,
and all her glory rearranged,
Behold her righted, Sorrow past,
to tell the message true, at last.*

For the second verse, you must – as did I – wait a little longer, until the time for the verse is ripe.

Prophecy Fulfilled

*Oh, reade the rune, to understande,
when Sevven Sevvenths touch the lande,
a riddle, whose prophetic rhyme
may teache you for the awful tyme,
or evil, longing to prevale,
your trusted men and kyngdoms fale.*

*Dare seek within, ye sorrow-full
the deeper searchings of your soule,
for Kyng and all the kyngly grieve
the fairest daughter borne of Eve;
the fairest of her shelter'd race
will Sorrow in her father's place...*

*...When golded jewell would alight
be brave to reade the riddle right—
the daye is near to seek the Night.*

—excerpts from Sir Caedmon' ancient rune
concerning the Forty-Ninth Century's Sorrow;
see page forty-four for the entire canticle

As the good King Ardureus awoke early the next morning, his heart, which had for many weeks been so heavy, was now growing heavier still.

His first thought was of that scene from the evening before, where, as he stood with his friends on the western

hilltop, the ancient constellation had before their wondering eyes changed into new celestial dress.

The beautiful Encryphia had long been one of his favorites – how could she *not* be, with her singular picture of symmetry that made her the first constellation learned by every child of Phylantagia! And how much *more beautiful* had she appeared after her heart stars and band stars had arrayed themselves in such a new richness of color!

However... forty five stars in the heavens – no matter how orderly – after five thousand years of burning do not just change their colors all in the same instance without some stellar reason. Every day, his daughter's journey toward Sorrow pressed him, absorbed him, sometimes seemed to crush him... and he found himself suspecting now that either her Sorrow was at this moment being accomplished, or was rapidly approaching.

"Perhaps I should go visit Caedmon," he mused aloud. *"He bid me adieu last night as if he could hardly hasten quickly enough to reach the Royal Crypt and search through our old canticles."*

Twenty minutes later he was in the central room of the underground Crypt, and the aged heads of both King and Crypt-keeper were bent over the old sheepskin, and pondering the poetic lines:

*When bright Encryphia is changed,
and all her glory rearranged,
Behold her righted, Sorrow past,
to tell the message true, at last.*

Prophecy Fulfilled

"The first line is surely at least partially fulfilled – for we witnessed great changes in her," Caedmon declared. "But has *all her glory been rearranged*, and has she been '*righted*' – what does *that* mean? If so, then the Princess's Sorrow is surely consummated. But I suspect we have seen only the first part of the prophecy's fulfillment, and that the Sorrow is very soon upon us."

Glancing up at just that moment, Sir Caedmon was shocked to read on the good King's face such a heavy burden of grief. How much older he looked – as if he had aged in just these past several weeks many years!

Tears filled his eyes, both for the Princess – whom he loved as dearly as if she were his own daughter, and whose time was surely soon upon her – and for this noble man revered by him of all men the most.

"Surely..." thought he, *"the 'Kyng' is grieving 'the fairest daughter born of Eve' exactly as the old rune predicted so many millennia ago. But surely this fulfillment – the response of the hearts of kingly men to the prophetic utterances – is of so much more value than are the mere outward mechanical fulfillments by physical objects, such as stars and jewels and temporary and material things.*

Just moments later, had you peered around the corner and into the most sacred precincts of the Royal Crypt, you would have seen on his knees on the floor that noble monarch who rules over all of fair Phylantagia.

Arms upstretched... his crown on the floor beside him... tears streaming from his eyes – for nearly an hour

he prayed to the one who had helped him through so many trials past—while his broken cries rang out for ‘mercy upon our dearest Aureaelle’ and for ‘courage for our brave friend Gaelayniel’ and ‘for grace to know how to pray, and how to wait, and how to receive’—on some rapidly approaching day—‘the news of our Sorrow.’

Beside him, of course, in similar inward and outward posture, his good friend Caedmon bore witness, and interwove from time to time the corresponding cries of his own agonizing soul with those of the King, their royal entreaties winging their way heavenward as one.

Unknown to them was the fact that there were many other persons at that very same moment, who—having seen Encryphia’s cryptic behavior—were also upon their knees or in other postures of praise and petition.

On the fragrant sawdust beneath the northernmost window of the west wall of his workshop, Thautaylius and three of his workmen had long abandoned their craftsmanship to plead for grace and courage for the beautiful Aureaelle who had so often brought sunshine, even on the cloudiest days, into their presence.

Not many miles from them, in the little garden behind their humble country cottage, Aravelle—with her parents beside her and her head lying on her arms on a stone bench—cried out, in reverent fear and royal Faythe for her friend Aureaelle and her brave guide Gaelayniel.

In a corner of his bedroom on the outskirts of the Royal City—upon the floor by his bed where his brave new toy

Prophecy Fulfilled

broom-horse was lying mournfully abandoned—a small boy was crying, for little Andreas was learning to pray, and was framing from within a princely heart his first worthy prayers for ‘that brave man from the other wyrl’d’ who had called his name to smile at him so long ago.

And somewhere—many leagues to the north, beside the beauteous Bay of Benevincea—there were upon their knees a whole band of men, with nearly a dozen women sprinkled in also, all trying to sob *quietly* so they could better hear the humble, eloquent and unpretentious prayers of their countryman, the honorable old skipper called Frederic.

All these, and so many more across the fair reaches of Phylantagia, ascended up to the father, just as they do from our own world, and from wherever the hearts of the *made* are in joyous vital connection to that of the *maker*.

Indeed, it could not be otherwise, for no fruit is so fruitful as is *Love*, and no fruit so faithfully remembered as that true heart royalty which the lowest person may learn to practice well, and which Aureaelle had practiced for so long.

† † † †

On the dark island of Malavalea, the Princess and I are hiking slowly onward—sometimes upward, sometimes downward, but always forward—toward the evil heart of the dragon.

In a way similar to what happens every day here, the

obvious gloom around us and the unknown gloom before us are threatening to find their way inside, for they seek always some new entrance for coiling up within and around our hearts, to completely demoralize them.

I find myself wishing again that I could see *something*, or say *something* to cheer up the Princess—for her steps are beginning once more to lag.

Suddenly I stop, and point off to our right, and Aureaelle nearly stumbles into me—probably expecting some new spiritual or physical beast coming to slay us.

“Do you see it?” I ask her, and seeing that she is still searching for it, I add, “Just to the right of that big dark boulder—isn’t that a *regalius* flyower?”

“Oh, I see it!” she exclaims, “but it is so pale. I’ve never seen one like it. Do you think it would be safe for us to go look at it?”

I hold her arm as we slowly pick our way, for the round pebbles of the rough slope beneath our feet are slippery.

“It looks almost identical to the *regalia royalia* we saw east of the City,” she exclaims, “and it looks like it will launch within a few moments—may we stay for it? But what a strange color it is. The stem is the same... perhaps a bit lighter—but look at the pale petals, which are just the color of the moon here when we can barely see it through the evil, absorbing clouds.

“I think I remember, now...” she continues, “my fa-

Prophecy Fulfilled

ther telling me several years ago that there was one like this...—what was its name...? I think he called it *regalius lunarius*, and its color does remind me of the moon moth—although dreadfully faded, to such a ghastly, almost cadaverous, paleness. But look, *see it changing!*”

In less than five minutes, the beautiful butterflyower is a-wing, and circling above us, but with less energy than the one we saw when we were journeying to Aravelle’s cottage. Now it begins dropping lower, in shrinking circles of fluttering delicateness. And, like the much-brighter flame-winged flyower we had seen earlier, it settles ever-so-gently onto Aureaelle’s hair, while she exclaims softly, almost as if surprised, “*Oh-h—am I really a princess here, even in Malavalea?*”

But suddenly she bursts into tears—for soon the pale lunar-colored flyower launched from the dear Princess’s living crown, to hover fluttering before her face—and landed on her gown just above her heart, where it fluttered its wings wildly in a few seconds of trembling, placidly folded them together, and *died*, still clinging to her gown.

“*Why did it do that?*” sobs Aureaelle, “*It was so beautiful!... and they usually live for at least a year after they fly.*”

We return to the trail, and walk in silence, puzzling at the excitement, then the death, of a *regalius* on Malavalea.

“Perhaps it was just a way of showing you its devotion, or of encouraging you,” I suggest. “Or possibly we are unwise,” I add with a weak smile, “to believe that we

must attach to absolutely *everything* that happens to us here some deep meaning needing to be soon unravelled. At any rate, do you remember *The Commandment of Good Hope*, which the Interpreter taught us?"

"I believe I have recalled it a hundred times already," she confesses, "for it seems so *perfectly* fitted for my heart."



May I share with you just one more strange occurrence of this forlorn and funereal day?

Late in the afternoon we are wearily walking, just as the darker glooms of evening are descending apace upon us, and we are again in a *place most unsuitable* for spending the night. Again we are trying not to think about the venomous daemuks, even while we know we *must* be constantly on guard for any noise that could help us prepare for them—when suddenly there appears in the center of the narrow pathway before us the shining Golden Mirror of the Interpreter.

Hovering above the trail—with its top frame just higher than my eyes—it immediately throws our two weary faces into our hearts... for this time the Princess also sees it.

How very ashamed we both are. For the reflection shows our heads hanging even lower in this new distress—and indeed, our faces appear to us to be as *faytheless* and *frightened* and *downheartened* as if we have never received either a prayer, a prophecy, or a promise.

Prophecy Fulfilled

But see now our shame washing away!—for quickly our faces begin brightening into sunny and joyful countenance, until they remind me of a glorious sunrise I saw over the Bay of Benevincea.

Most decidedly *not* because of some new courage in our hearts... and *not* because we have repented of our unbelief or resolved greater courage... indeed, *not by any good thing from within us—but of some grace of its own volition, as from within the Mirror itself*—the picture has brightened, and our two faces, which can but reflect the weariness or cheeriness of our hearts, have followed!

But behold!—even as we see in the Mirror our faces beaming out this new and shining confidence, with our heads again held high—the scene suddenly shifts, and a picture I hope never to forget burns itself into the deep eyes of our souls, while our outward eyes begin to blur with tears of joy.

Have you ever stood... quietly, alone, and at peace with yourself... beholding something so beautiful that it moved you to tears simply by its beauty? That is a small picture of what is happening within us now, only this time I sense it is happening through many deep layers of our innermost souls.

Any image of the Princess or myself has now fled from the glorious Golden Mirror. Only blackness remains. But gradually, so very slowly now, we see its darkness being replaced before our very eyes by the dawning of brilliant, blazing, burning, glowing, golden light—as if the shining sun itself is striving vainly to contain itself

within this Golden Mirror, but must overflow instead upon the two of us who are standing here with gladdening hearts on this dismal little trail running into the heart of evil Malavalea.

But see now the vision! The golden light is coalescing into the form of a Face—divine, humanlike, a Face such as I could not fully paint for you—even were I given permission, and would never *dare* to describe to you—even if I were able.

This much I will say. The beauty of that Face commands a love more immense than all the infinite dimensions of our universe, and shines upon us in such copious generosity that the Princess and I are both weeping as if our hearts are totally broken, which indeed they are, by the joy and forgiveness, and welcomeness, and blessingness, that overflow them from that holy gaze. How these intoxicating realities of our newly-washed hearts thrill and terrify and encourage us!

But it is the *Eyes*—with their purity and clarity and wisdom and patience and sweetness and overwhelming understanding and *measureless love*—that move us so greatly—they, and the fact that these lovely eternal eyes are *weeping* in divine sorrow. Yes, they are weeping out the tears—salty and wet and genuine—of their empathetic sufferings with the Sorrow of Aureaelle. We see the tears dropping—almost flowing—from the golden frame onto the Malavalean trail, even while newer ones are streaming still from those sorrowing Eyes... and running in little rivulets of divine sympathy down the Mirror's crystal surface.

Impending Sorrow

*In the smelting furnace, hotter, hotter,
there my hand will lift you—higher, higher;
Come, my suff'ring son, with Sorrow's daughter
yielding here to mine your each desire,
From your lower depths, to Love's refining,
hotter, higher, hotter, till the lining
of the mirror, clear, reflects the shining
of the father's Face, his true designing.*

A bewildering throbbing of deep, despairing grogginess has been heavy upon me all through the dark hours of the morning, and I am now too troubled in spirit to rest, and wishing only to die, as I can see no reason to hope, and no cause to search for a promise.

But in the last minutes before daylight, the heavy clouds which have been surging through the darkness of my mind are finally split open by the optimistic oratorio of a soulful songbird—rare on this dark island—and I suddenly see clearly what has been happening: I have *again* allowed some spirit of Malavalea, like a skilled pianist, to play in my mind too long, with evil fingers.

The Princess is also now awake. She gives me a cheery morning blessing, and after we have made our meal and

arranged our packs we are on our way again. Soon we are warily observing again, from the long, long trail, the varying scenes of Malavalea.

Behind us—I see the shadowy thickets and narrow ledges enveloping yesterday’s winding trail. I can still barely discern, I believe, the spot where the glorious Golden Mirror graciously appeared, to teach us, and to relieve us from our glowering spiritual gloom.

Around us—where they are keeping ever in those heavy shadows, are the silent trees, as mute as if they were forever bewitched from playing any music of joy through their drooping branches.

Miles ahead of us, for the country there opens up a little—far beyond the bleak, rugged underbrush, beside a knife-edged rim of black basalt, I see the little ribbon of this old trail snaking always lower. At that limit of my vision, I suspect our pathway will lie less than a league from the pale cool *Moonstone*.

Moonstone. How often, since first I heard of it from noble Caedmon—and especially after we saw it in the Interpreter’s cave, in the Chamber of the Future—have I thought, or tried not to think, upon it.

And when I examine how my own heart shrinks from it, I wonder at how much more the Princess’s beautiful heart must surely start and recoil from any picturings of it—even as it did in the Cavern of the Future, before she bravely nodded to her Interpreter that trembling smile of supreme Faythe.

Impending Sorrow

But again today, every step we take along this twisting trail brings us closer to dark *Moonstone*, and she feels we should hesitate no longer to speak about it.

“Gaelayniel, may I open to you some of my questions about *Moonstone*?”

“Of course, dear heart, speak on...”

“The gist of my concern is this. How shall a person prepare herself, or *shall I even try to prepare myself*, for such a suffering as seems prophetically destined to come upon me? Again and again I find myself wondering about it. I don’t think it’s just faytheless worrying—I feel that I *need to know* if there is more I should be *doing* to prepare myself—or am I just to *trust*, with a simple Faythe, and assume that all will be given to me as I need it?”

Sighing inwardly, I realize that I feel so totally unqualified to answer for the Princess such a vital question—for it is the very one with which *I also* have been *grappling* along so many miles of the trail. But, just as I feel I *must* say something... I remember the Book.

Is it possible, that I *still* have not spent even *an hour* reading in that book which good Caedmon—because of his own interest in it—was so loathe to loan me for our journey? How has the time slipped away?

Opening my backpack I take, from the weatherproof wrapping around it, the little Book which has traveled—like myself, in some unknown way—from the old Eyrth of my past, to fair Phylantagia.

“Perhaps we may find the answer in here, dear Aureaelle,” I quietly assure her, wondering just why my own heart is warming, even as I say them, to the words.

“For many days I have desired to search through this volume for some of the treasures that good Sir Caedmon assures me are within it, but have been distracted in a hundred ways from doing so. If it holds any salient teachings, or heart comfortings for us – as I suspect it does – may I ask your forgiveness in advance for the injury my negligence has caused us?”

“Of course, Gaelayniel. I think I also was aware of the book... but we are not *usually* so forgetful. Do you suppose the dark spirits of Malavalea have been clouding our memories to prevent our acquainting ourselves with it?”

“That smells *exactly* like their kind of work,” I answer, “but let me find the two passages in here that Caedmon insisted I read, about the sufferings of the Eyrth’s Christ. He told me where they are found, and I memorized the locations.

For a minute I thumb through the volume, trying to find the passages, but am so unacquainted with the book that I soon give up and go to the contents page to begin finding the references Caedmon gave me. He said the first passage refers to Jesus’ prayers for *himself*, and the second refers to his concerns about *his friends*.

“According to Caedmon, this *Jesus* was prophesied hundreds of years before his birth to be the one *messiah*, or *deliverer*, by which all men on the planet Eyrth could

Impending Sorrow

find forgiveness of their sins, and receive the nature of their divine creator – so they could be restored to their original high position of fellowship with him.

As I told you and Aravelle, the Christ was conceived by a young Jewish virgin, was born into shame and poverty, and lived a short life – about thirty-some years, Caedmon said – before he was violently murdered through political intrigue by the very persons he had come to save. But Caedmon said that that murder was necessary – for it had been prophesied, and was fulfilled down to dozens of the minutest details, for he died hanging on a tree – *crucified* was the word they used for it – exactly as the prophets had forespoken.

“According to Caedmon it was necessary, in the divine scheme of things, that there be a *blood sacrifice* – and from a sinless being – to atone for the sins of men, and it became necessary that the creator himself – the so-called ‘word’ who had spoken Eyrth men into existence, do the atoning – for he was the only one who was absolutely pure and able, therefore, to constitute an acceptable sacrifice.

“Ah, here it is... I think this is what Caedmon urged me to read, for it speaks of how he prepared himself for his betrayal and death. I’ll read it slowly, and we can discuss it as we please.

“‘And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John’ – Caedmon said those were his three

closest followers — ‘and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; and saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death; tarry ye here, and watch.’”

“We can certainly identify with some of *that*,” Aureaelle mused, “but what happens next?”

“And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.’

“Apparently, even though his agonizing death was prophesied, and he had been born to fulfill all those prophecies, he thought it permissible to pray to his father that if there could be *any other way possible* for Eyrth men to be redeemed, he would be excused from having all the suffering, and shame, and sorrow of their sinful deeds visited upon him. Aureaelle, do you think we should consider doing the same?”

“I see no danger in it,” Aureaelle replies, thoughtfully, “as long as we know we are totally yielded — as he was — to the father’s will in the matter. But what does the other passage say, where he prays about his friends?”

“It’s in a different section, by a different writer, the one, according to Caedmon, whom Jesus loved the most. Here it is. ‘I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep

Impending Sorrow

them from the evil.’ But it goes on. ‘They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.’”

“That, too,” the Princess interjects, “we can identify with — although in a different way, as you told Aravelle and me. Are we not now here in Malavalea, just days perhaps from some horrible suffering or death, because we have been consecrating ourselves to this most unusual Sorrow — the only one like it in forty-nine centuries of Phylantagean history? But do read on, for I find it very encouraging — for our Sorrow, like his, is to turn hearts from selfishness to nobility.”

I continue reading to Aureaelle, slowly, and with feeling, for I understand how it is so encouraging to her — in the deep loneliness of her Sorrow — to be able to hear the chronicle of one who has suffered, in like manner, a similar but even much greater Sorrow.

“Listen to this part of his prayer, Aureaelle,” I say to her, after reading several sentences more, ‘O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.’

“To me it appears that his first great motive in giving himself to his Sorrow is that all who hear of it would

learn about his father's great love for him! Is that not strange, that his father would send him, or allow him to go, to such a Sorrow as was his, and the son is so concerned that the very Sorrow will help the lost people to see the perfect love between the father and son!"

"But is it not even so with us?" the Princess asks. "You know how I love my father, the King, and have asked you to credit him for any good thing you see in me. Indeed, I do not see how I could possibly go through with this, did I not love him so, and know that he feels my Sorrow fully as much as do I!"



For hours now we have been treading the trail, and I have read to the Princess dozens of pages from Caedmon's book. We have read about the Christ's birth—including the portion of the story I gave to Aravelle—his childhood, his call to minister to even his ungrateful friends and relatives, a sermon he gave on a mountainside, and many of his miracles, for he attested to his divinity by doing many miraculous works, especially to those who held Faythe in him. When our trail turns to a steep and rough descent, and reading becomes too difficult, I put the book back in my pack, but I can tell that Aureaelle is more encouraged than she has been for many days.

As we journey on, we further encourage each other with the bright promises, worthy parables, and good commandments that the Interpreter and his Golden Mirror have been so kindly teaching us, and we resolve to be faytheful when our Sorrow comes upon us.

Innocence Invaded

The Mockeries of Malavalea

*How salient is Gaelynt— Oh! is he wise!—
Gallant and valiant, but cruelly dies!*

*See what he brings for us, gen'rous and good,
Love's lasting loyalties, drained with his blood.*

*A fool now he came, a fool now he dies;
Bring him to shame— see, where he lies,*

*Meat for our children, bones for our bread,
Tales for our merry ones after he's dead.*

*A fool now he dies, a fool, as he came;
Rise, Malavalea— stamp out his name.*

—from Malathakeus, captain of the daemuks

As far as I can see, in every direction around me, as my eyes strain against the gloom of this foul, foul night—for the moon is just arising—I sense the dark presence of the wicked daemuks. Perhaps this is their night, and they are even now gathering en masse, as if for a great feast or a time of wicked celebration. Somehow, both the Princess and I suspect that the time of our Sorrow is almost at hand.

Torn between the many conflicting desires converging within me, I can only determine to be – to the best of my knowledge and ability – faytheful.

I am plighted to the King to protect and guide his daughter, but to what final end I still cannot know. To my abandonment of her to suffering? to death?

Aureaelle herself has reminded me that I must protect her only to the point of the father's will, for somehow her Sorrow must be accomplished, and this is still the great question with which I am often wrestling.

On the one hand, my entire life, even my entire lineage for at least the two hundred years past, has been a receiving of the grand purposes of my grandsires – and I have been bred and trained, even generations before I was born, to be a wise, brave-hearted warrior.

On the other, I am now giving myself more and more to the invisible elements of truth, and seeking with all my heart to be under the authority of that primary Authority – the founder and finisher of truth. I seek daily, therefore, to be always ready for instant battle, unless I am told clearly to relinquish the Princess to her suffering. But I am also learning to mistrust my native heart, and to live more and more by the invisible *Faythe* which so often precludes the carrying out of my own will.

I am discussing these very things with Aureaelle, as we journey ever closer to the cold vale of *Moonstone*. Today was a cloudy one, and we began the day hoping to reach a high clearing described to us by Livana.

Innocence Invaded

But how weak was Aureaelle! Although she seemed cheerful and courageous in spirit, her energy was again rapidly failing her, and long before evening fell upon us, she was leaning heavily upon me, and forcing herself by strength of will along the trail.

As darkness falls, therefore, we are again in a place decidedly unsuitable for spending the night – and I greatly fear another ambush by the daemuks. As I see how closely and thickly the brush draws around us, to the very edge of the trail – and how low and dark is the vale where we must camp, and how very heavy are the clouds, so that the moon seems not to rise – I become so distressed that I silently cry out for direction and for more *Faythe* – not knowing yet that *Faythe* is something we may *always, and at any time, choose to exercise*, by just deciding to believe in the goodness of the divine Father, and the trustworthiness of his motives and promises.

Suddenly, as if hanging from the air only a few feet in front of my eyes, the Golden Mirror appears. Its heavy frame glows from within – especially so in this gloomy darkness – and its shining crystal throws back to me a fearful face such as no worthy warrior should wear. As I continue to gaze, shifting scenes appear across its crystal surface, like the scenes in the Interpreter's caverns.

As I study the moving display, I realize that Aureaelle, though she is right beside me, does not see the mirror.

Four graphic scenes I now see – so painful that I suppose I shall never be able to forget them. The first one is of a host of the little rodent-spirited daemuks running

toward me. They follow a slightly larger leader, who seems even more malicious than the rest.

The second is of the Princess, attacked by and partially covered by the lustful little daemuks. In the third scene I see myself – my back against a tree – encircled by many strange ropes, and utterly helpless.

In the fourth picture, I see a group of men standing, faces skyward, in a great prayer-circle. Directly opposite me, his face so large and clear as if he were only a few feet in front of me, is the sorrowing face of the King, but with a sweet sense of submission hallowing his pain.

Beside him, on his left, is good Caedmon – on his right is the Interpreter. Behind him, like the farther side of an outer prayer-circle, I see Thauntaylius, Captain Frederic, and several others who have joined us in our sorrow. But the thing that impresses me most – upon every face – is the sad serenity of submission to a higher will. Perhaps someone who does not know them as well as do I might think them *too passive*, but I know how mighty and manly and courageous is that self-mastery which makes their surrender possible.

Alas, the hour is come, and my assignment is now clear. That final scene which was upon it, and then the Golden Mirror itself, fade away. I wonder just how much I should tell now, to the Princess.

I apprise her that the Golden Mirror has appeared to me, and that I have a clear sensing that our sorrow is upon us. I describe to her the faces I have just now seen in the

Innocence Invaded

prayer-circle, and I feel a mighty aching in my breast that I must strengthen her immediately for what is to come.

Laying both of my hands upon the crown of her head, I pray for her fervently, asking for divine help that we may both remain strong and faithful to whatever end is decreed. I pray for grace for myself, that I may somehow restrain myself from fighting against any detail of what the Sorrow of the Seventh Seventh Century must include.

As I finish the prayer, I see again in my mind that noble, suffering face of King Ardureus. I draw the Princess to me for a firm and brotherly hug, kiss her lightly on her forehead, tell her to be strong... and the foul and poisonous daemuks are immediately upon us.

After the first few cries of pain, the Princess Aureaelle bears her suffering with amazing fortitude, and I hear only her occasional moanings, muffled acknowledgments of great suffering, and pure and passionate prayers for grace to forgive, to endure, to suffer nobly to whatever end must come.

Finally the greenish moonlight breaks through the clouds, and I see pictures identical with the scenes of the Golden Mirror. The daemuks' leader, whose name is Malathakeus, is shouting out orders, like the little demented tyrant that he is, even as he curses furiously the Princess, myself, and all of his fellow daemuks.

To help them capture and bind us, the daemuks have brought with them three evil creatures about four feet in

height. Each looks somewhat like a pig—if you can picture one walking on its hind legs—but with humanlike hands and the face and beard of a huge and filthy goat. For want of a better name, I'll simply call them pyggeruts.

Since the Golden Mirror has shown me that I am to resist these evil forces no longer—so the Sorrow may be finished—I submit to the clamor of the daemuks and the rough handling of the two largest pyggeruts, who now shove me up against an irynwood tree and bind me to it by many heavy strands of a strange glowing rope. I observe the third pyggerut—ten paces away—binding Aureaelle tightly to another tree in similar fashion, but with ordinary rope.

Because of the Mirror's command, and because I do not want them to discover my invisible flute, I do not resist them at all—except that I try to maintain a little slack between myself and the tree, but find it nearly impossible.

After we are bound to their satisfaction, and the knots have been thoroughly inspected, Malathakeus and the three pyggeruts step in front of me. They laugh maliciously, mutter some dark and odiferous spell, and the outer surfaces of my ropes begin sizzling with blue electric fire. I immediately stop straining against them, for the least force causes the fire of the ropes to flame up hotter—searing my flesh and causing my garments to smoulder.

They now make a circle around me. The three pyggeruts squat lower, so they can hold the hands of

Innocence Invaded

Malathakeus and a dozen other daemuks who are eagerly mixing in among them—and the circle begins to move. They slowly circle around me, dancing merrily, shrieking, singing loudly their evil discordant songs, and praising their higher demons.

For perhaps five minutes this evil dance around me continues, then they break up the circle, to repeat it around poor Aureaelle, who—as I can just distinguish in this murky moonlight—is sorrowfully watching.

Upon her also they place the darkest curses of their songs and incantations, while the great crowd of lust-filled daemuks—which has been held back from the Princess only by the cursings and loud threats of the third pyggerut—surges and quarrels around them, scarcely restrained.

Finally, the demon circle opens, and the vile, long-awaited orgy begins.

With each daemuk of the multitude, even those farthest back in the dark shadows, seeking to claw his way to the front of the crowd—as if he can wait no longer to attack the Princess—I see and hear much confusion among them. Like perverted rodents, the ones closest to Aureaelle keep attempting to climb her robe or legs, aided by their filthy little claws, but hardly any make it above her knees before they are cursed, bitten, and clawed back down to the ground by the sheer weight of the ones below them.

Smelling smoke from my cloak, I back against the tree,

away from the sizzling ropes, for I have been straining unknowingly against them, in spite of the searing pain.

During all of these proceedings, every one of my warrior instincts – which I have been cultivating for so many years – is screaming at me to break loose from these ropes, to swing my dagger through the venomous beasts until as many as possible are destroyed. But, with tremendous conflict and effort, I force myself to remember what the King, the Council, the Interpreter, and the Golden Mirror have commanded me.

I soon discover another twist in the dark magic upon my ropes. Any straining against them not only causes their blue fire to flame up hotter, but seems also to immediately begin sapping away my energy... and I suspect that if I pressed hard against them, I would fall asleep, or pass out.

Now, I have not yet mentioned to you that when I first surrendered to this hoard of devilish creatures, my flute was still in my mouth – although I knew I would be sorely tempted to unwisely use it. But soon after the last ropes were wound around me, when I first felt the strong electric shock of the blue fire, I dropped it, and it is hanging now above my heart.

Over and over – again and again and again – I try to flip it into my mouth, while – every ten minutes or so, for the moon still battles the clouds – I see the malicious daemuks swarming the princess. The lower portion of her gown is now in shreds, ripped by the fangs and claws of the climbing daemuks, and her undershyrt, which still

Innocence Invaded

covers her knees, is also beginning to shred. Still the low multitude surrounds her, filling her ears with the cursings and pantings and lewd and vilifying remarks of their evil desires, while the smell of their filthy pyramidal bodies and the continual new pangs of the climbing claws and piercing venomous fangs attack her body and spirit.

In dark agony I find myself wondering again: just *how* could her *sensitive feminine spirit* – a delicate harp so finely tuned to the very essence of purity and love – *possibly* survive this rabid abyss of spiritual defilement?

Occasionally, the clouds thin, and I see upon her face the marks of her horror. Her eyes have been long shut, and – did I not hear from her the occasional subdued cry or muffled moaning of some fresh new torment – I would assume she has already passed out, for the ropes binding her to the tree are tight enough to hold her upright, and I see not how she can bear such physical and emotional pain, even if in a state of deep shock, for so long.

After nearly an hour of effort, each one leaving my neck burned a little more, I finally catch the lanyard of my flute in my teeth and begin working it higher. By slowly using my lips, teeth, and tongue, with some careful jerkings of my head, the flute is finally in my mouth.

But just as I inhale a deep breath, to blast the evil daemuks into slumber, I feel a strong caution in my heart to *beware*, lest I thwart the fulfilling of the Sorrow. Instead, sensing the sweet invitation of the flute, I blow as sweetly and faithfully as I can the tune that will bring clarity of direction.

Suddenly I realize that the pyggeruts have apparently gone – which doesn't surprise me, for they seemed to take little personal interest in the Princess or myself, and acted almost as if they feared me, even after I was securely bound. And now that I think about it, they seemed to relate to the daemuks with ill-covered contempt, and I suspect they cooperated with them but grudgingly.

The flute's mind-clearing holy magic now speaks to me a second thought – one I could have thought of hours earlier. In the pocket where I have carried them for many days – practically touching now my bound hand – rest the three small charms from the forges of the holy wyrkmyn of Au-Royalialia. I have used none of them, but remember that one was designed for just such a situation as this, and after a little reflection I remember the prayer of Faythe given to accompany it. I repeat it to myself a few times, wondering just how soon the sweet Princess's Sorrow will be fully accomplished, and just how I will know.

A few minutes later, the clouds thin again, and I see that the daemuks also have wandered away into the darkness. I suspect that – between their incessant fightings and quarrelings, and the frustrating hours of needing to leave their insatiable lusts unsatisfied – they have finally worn themselves out, and are planning to sneak back tomorrow night to resume their activity.

I assume also, as I remember the malice burning in the glaring eyes of Malathakeus, that they would be happy to leave me bound here for many days – unless some wild animal mercifully intervenes – so I can longer feel

Innocence Invaded

the agony of watching them abuse the Princess, until – her noble heart dead to their terrors – her decomposing corpse will finally draw them no more.

Sliding my hand at last into my pocket, I distinguish by shape the correct charm, and whisper its rhyme:

*Placing by Faythe ev'ry evil behind me,
Gladly I trust you to quickly unbind me.*

Suddenly I hear, and feel, and see the blue fire on my ropes flaring up brightly. It snaps loudly, just once, and immediately dies away. The ropes, as I begin to flex my stiffened muscles against them – for I assume I have been bound here now for at least six hours – stretch like clay, and fall at my feet.

With shaky legs, and with trembling heart, I walk under the moonlight to the silent Princess, who has for perhaps an hour or so uttered no discernible moanings, nor shown any signs of life.

Softly I call her name, telling her we are finally alone, but receive no response. As I raise her hanging head, to lift her face into the light, I am relieved to see not even a single fang-marked welt on her face or arms or neck, for the low creatures were unable to climb so high.

How deeply is my heart grieved, and my wounded spirit crushed, as I behold the dear Princess Aureaelle thus – cruelly bound to an irynwood tree in the heart of Malavalea, so that the demented, demon-possessed daemuks could so savagely abuse her.

I— who from bloody scenes of battle have carried and buried more than one beloved comrade— marvel at how much more deeply I am torn and angered by this senseless night of debauchery.

How— just how— can such a queenly lady, a woman of such sterling grace and lovely, unselfish character, be, by any breathing intelligence under the heavens, so desperately despised, and so totally trashed!

After cutting Princess Aureaelle loose from the tree, I place a new outskyrft from her pack around her, and carry her for perhaps an hour, to the dark vale of *Moonstone*, to which we have so long been laboring, until I am too exhausted to continue.

On a dark mossy bed of Malavalea, not far from the trail, I place her, and, lying beside her for the first time, throw a vainly-protecting arm around her. Weeping out the last dregs of my sorrow-slain heart, I fall at last into a troubled sleep.

† † † †

I awaken at last, perhaps an hour before sunrise. The evil gray-green moon has set, and I startle as I realize all that is now come upon me.

Forcing myself to eat some nourishing food from her pack, for I have no appetite whatsoever, I finally feel able to face what I simply could not face immediately after that horrible scene. I feel her wrist, then her throat, to see if I can find any semblance of a pulse.

The Sacrifice

*come claim, O Death, come claim your own,
for man cannot your finger stay;
from gutter or from lofty throne
you bear us one by one away—
but know not, now, how long the chill
of temporary dark decree
will give permission to your will
to work your vengeful revelry,
so boast not loudly of your pow'r!
the final record will confide—
writ in your blood— your final hour,
declare at last that Death has died.*

Alas...! the dark ending of Death, to which we have travailed and traveled so long, is upon us. What a sad trek it has been, as our hearts have journeyed through dyings, unto dyings, and through deaths, unto deaths.

The devilish deeds of the dark daemuks have reduced the most noble creature of this fair world's creation to the most pitiable picture my mind can conceive— a woman of glorious inward and outward splendor *despised, shredded, and poisoned unto the edge of death.*

Alive, her body hot with a raging fever, but long

unconscious and, mercifully, no longer aware of the cruel debaucheries against her, the Princess Aureaelle lies in my arms, on the very threshold of the door of death.

As I carry her to the pale green *Moonstone*, numbly obedient to the will that seems to point only downward, and deposit her body on its cold and hard and unforgiving surface, I fear I am crossing over the borders of insanity, and wondering, if I do, will I ever return.

How galling are the memories of that raging helplessness when I was bound – the horrible experience of being forced to endure the moonlit sounds and lurid scenes of her Sorrow. My emotional reserves are fully spent, and I long only to help the Princess a little longer, obeying the charges still upon me from the good King and Caedmon, and the prayers for courage from the Royal City, and my own commitments to honor, and any small remnants of loyalty still lingering in my heart.

When all has been accomplished, I can imagine – as I think still upon her suffering, her shame, and her Sorrow – no higher desire than to find some honorable way to just lie down in death, to rest beside her.

What is this life? What is this madness of the endless selectings of only inferior choices – while the ones we crave the most so temptingly dangle just above, but so hopelessly beyond, our reach? Why, being creatures of time, long we still to overcome death – as if our hearts insist upon our being beings of eternity, and stubbornly refuse to submit to these visible realities? And just who – really – is the fool: the cynical soul, aged too quickly into his hardening unbelief, or the one clinging to

The Sacrifice

his childhood and its birthright of freedom to believe what the undefiled heart longs to know true?

Like a cooling cloud drifting slowly beneath the sun on a day of sweltering heat, a picture of the aged Interpreter, so joyful in his cave of truth, slides like some brightening shadow slowly across my fevered mind, easing me for a moment from my agonizing sorrow.

But the picture passes. The burning pain and the feverish questions return. I forget the bright eyes, the noble prayers, the kingly hearts, the brave men and the maidens and the prayer rings and the prophecies and the heart-stirring canticles of the Royal City. Only this wild despair and death and devastation lie ahead of me, and on the barely-breathing person before me.

How beautiful she was!

How can I possibly accept this? and how can I go on? Can a man – simply because he has long ago determined that he should, or must, or will – somehow forge his way forward in the doing of the impossible?

How alive she was! how free! how pure she was – how good... but reduced in the end... – to this?

Forgetting all except these thoughts that keep me shackled to my various lovings of the Princess Aureaelle – although they are all, of course, daughters of the one ever overwhelming Love – I never once pause to remember that perhaps I should coax from the invisible flute, by sweet and trusting Faythe, the music that could help

me see with clarity the bigger picture, and help me to lay the fair Princess down into her even-greater and future glories. Neither... not once... do I remember the shining Golden Mirror, nor the truths which it had – or so I once thought – so permanently baptyzed upon my heart.

I *do* remember the oyntment. Is it possible that it may heal her from even *this*?

Somehow, even after the madness of all that moonlit misery, I see the little horn still hanging from her wyrkmyn-fashioned sash, by mere shreds of leather.

The word *Oyntmynt* is still carved upon it, and seems to mock me – that this man-made object should continue unchanged, while that person of so much greater value, who wore it so faithfully on her garmynts lies, in wreck and ruin, and will soon be no more.

Twisting the stopper from the horn, I pour seven precious droplets onto my open palm, and apply them to the unconscious head and face: to the crown of her head... to her forehead... to each eyelid... to each cheek... to her lips.

After a few minutes, the Princess groans, so quietly that – though all around us is as still as Death – I can just faintly hear her. She groans again, slightly louder, and her eyelids flutter as if to open. A third time she moans in misery, as if being called anew to the sufferings of life, and I accuse myself with guilt and shameful horror that I should even desire to recall her to myself.

But her eyelids open, her head turns slightly toward

The Sacrifice

me, and her last, precious words – tripping softly and slowly, as if from the very arms of the specter of death – come forth to my hungry heart.

“Thank you... dear... Gaelayniel...” it takes her a full quarter-minute to release just these few words to me...

“You have... not failed... me... for the... prophecy... will stand, and the Sorrow... must come.

“Please... hold me...” she continues, with perhaps increasing energy, *“for I feel so... terribly... (she shudders)... defiled... almost wicked... and... in this... I must die.”*

Of course I cannot describe to you how devastated and utterly helpless these words leave me, even while I find myself desperately clinging to the hope that she may recover. Madly, a thought even flashes across my heart that I may dump the entire little horn of oyntmynt upon her, but reason restrains. But now her final words, in a last failing of strength, fall upon me.

“Please know... dear Gaelayniel... that through the long night... I thought often upon you... and your pure love helped me... to keep Faythe... and to... keep love alive in my heart... as it is now.”

How I want to cry out to her... to encourage her... to entreat her to stay, but something I cannot name restrains me, and I fear to break the silence, lest another word should come... but her words to me are finally ended.

My tears are now flowing from my eyes as freely

as if I were a little child – and, for several lingering minutes, I strain to listen. My ear is now upon her heart, from whence I hear the faint rhythm from the drum of her life pulsing to its end... and all... all... is silence.

Suddenly I start violently, for a horrible shriek of demonic delight – mocking, menacing, vile and violent, and seeming to be but a few feet above my head – cries out in evil triumph. It reverberates around *Moonstone*, thunders through my brain, rolls into the dark forest around me, and echoes across the clearing again and again.

Staggering backward from the very intensity of it, I trip over a thick root in the darkness, and sprawl onto the ground. As I pick myself up, I see under the dull greenish glare of the open-faced moon the Princess Aureaelle lying on her back in the cooling embrace of death on the cold stone bed called *Moonstone*.

But as I start to walk closer – for the demoniacal shriekings now sound farther away – a glowing fence of blue electric fire begins dancing on *Moonstone's* perimeter. Like horizontal dartings of barbed lightning, the blue fire is pulsing in evil electric frenzy, higher, now lower, occasionally drawing closer, but never quite touching, the cold stone slab, or the corpse of the Princess.

For perhaps an hour the crackling of the blue electric fire continues, accompanied by the occasional cacklings of demonic laughter from the darknesses around me.

These outward manifestations of evil fade away, as the waxing sungloom attempts to overcome the moon.

Inconsolation

*Fair is the dove, or the white-winged gull
sailing in splendor above the sea,
Fair is the silvery moonbeam full
washing the foam on the breaker free,
But fairer by far was thy noble soul,
leaving me empty and sorrowful
reaching for love so ethereal
for thy spirit is lost from me,
thy spirit is lost from me.*

*Fair was the star in the velvet night
Twinkling and shimmering radiantly,
Softly we sang to the mysty light,
strolling together the quiet lea,
But fairer by far was thy shining love
than silver or velvet or starshine or dove!
O the beauty is thine I am weeping of,
for thy spirit is lost from me,
thy spirit is lost from me.*

Where two hearts are pursuing together the highest and purest lessons of Truth, it is *there* that the joys of oneness are the sweetest of all – and *there* that the pains of parting are so very severe.

As I awaken to this sad morning, all the throes of our parting and the dull sorrows of my continually-aching heart press heavily upon me.

The dark layers of clouds above me seem heavier even than usual, which, on Malavalea, is saying a lot—portending that the day will likely be so gloomy as to seem but a less-unpleasant interval between two even-gloomier nights. Again this morning my heart flies to my dear Al-Lloreya, as it has done so frequently during these recent trials. How I desire—with all my heart—a good long walk and a lingering talk with my dearest. How glad I would be to see her—though I realize how selfish its sounds to say it here on Malavalea—walking to me out of these perpetual glooms, and into my arms.

Assuming she is still alive—but in that world I know not how to get to—and taking for granted that I am always upon *her* heart even as *she* has been continually upon mine, I cannot help but think of her who is always so full of merry, radiant life, and especially as I turn my mind toward the silent, cooling Princess Aureaelle, and my duties toward her during these final few days.

In the lower corner of my heavy pack, wrapped carefully by the royal ladies of Au-Royalía, is a sacred bundle of special cloths surrounding jewelled bottles of priceless oils and spices—carried here against this very situation. How many times, I wonder, have I prayed they would not be needed?

Many hours did I spend rehearsing with the good King Ardureus, Sir Caedmon, and the two elderly ladies of the royal family *exactly* what they required me to do, upon the event of the Princess's death, for it is no trivial thing how the dead are to be handled throughout the kingdom of Phylantagia. On two separate occasions with

Inconsolation

them I was given careful and meticulous instructions.

“Especially with the royalty, Captain Gaelynt,” I remember the aged Caedmon saying to me, as we reviewed it again before our departure, “the preparations of the dead, whether for burial or cremation, are exacting, and *must* be followed to the letter.”

As on Eyrth, the methods they presented to me were simple and practical, and why I have shrunk from the idea so much I cannot tell, for I have been afraid of neither blood, or wounds, or death itself, and I know that our undertakers in both worlds face these unpleasanties daily.

First, of course, are the cleansings, for which Phylantagean laws decree for the royalty a second and a third, the washing of the hair, then the anointing of the corpse with the special blend of fragrant oils, which I have carried these many weeks.

Following that, some special spices are mixed with pure water, in which the two lightweight winding-cloths are soaked and immediately wound around the body, according to their custom.

If possible, this must all be done within the first several hours—especially in the cold mornings of Malavalea, and the body is to be arranged to its proper position, before it begins to stiffen.

The Princess Aureaelle will, of course, be arrayed, as is usual, upon her back, but not in a beautiful golden coffin where she will lie in state for the long lines of

mourning Au-Royal. No, she will rest instead on the center of cold *Moonstone*, where only I and perhaps a few other persons will even see her after her passing.

After all else has been accomplished, I am to drape the *moonveil*—a gossamer silken sheet of shining white—smoothly over all but her head, hands, and feet, and then finish by arranging her long golden hair in cascades around her face and down over the moonveil to her waist.

In this position, she must lie guarded under my careful Watch while two moons shine down upon her. On the third day, following equally distinct procedures, I will bury her.

All of this procedure, I was told—being part of the Century Sorrow—is my own responsibility, unless sickness, death, or disability renders it impossible. The only exception is that I shall request some noble person to join me during the long hours of the sunWatches and moonWatches, for loving eyes must be always upon her, and I am to pray that I may find at least three goodly persons to attest to her death, and witness her burial.

Because they have instructed me so well, I believe I can—during these next few hours—fully prepare her for *Moonstone* without problem—even in the numbness of my present, dull state. But it is the emotional and the spiritual aspects of it, I think, that I could so easily dread.

The body of the Princess is lying on the edge of *Moonstone*, the only table here in this wilderness suitable and clean. With a fire burning nearby, and pure water from

Inconsolation

the spring, it is time to begin, for she has already been dead for three hours.

But as I begin preparing her for the washings, I see that my first battle will be one of my spirit, for as I raise her robe I see on her legs the swollen rash of the poisonous red fang-welts, and discover that on her lower legs most of her skin has been shredded to strips or removed by the claws of demented daemuks.

Instantly, the horrors of that moonlit orgy reappear. I can almost feel the fire-ropes around me, and the frustrations of anger begin to violently rise up within me. As I angrily jerk the gown back down over her knees, to help compose myself, I find myself asking again that old, old question. *How can any god—and especially one like the good Interpreter's 'father'—if he really is all-loving and all-powerful, as his followers claim, allow such evil beasts as these damnable daemuks to live? What final purpose could possibly justify such a choice?*

I decide to argue it out later, and turn again to my duty. As I remove the once-beautiful gown, to drape it over the edge of *Moonstone* beside me, I notice its hundreds of delicately-wrought proverbs and verses from the *Three Scripts*. The irony of those myriads of exhortations to love and good works, stained lightly all through by the little triangles of the dots of blood from the piercings of the daemuks, again distracts my mind to begin questioning the *father*.

But more struggle is to come. For, as I am lifting her shoulders and passive head to pull her gown over them, I

notice a finely-wrought golden chain hanging around her neck. Gently tugging the delicate chain, I pull from beneath her undershyrt a small and carefully-crafted golden locket, which looks for all the wyrlld like the one I gave less than a year ago to the darling of my heart.

I cry out in dismay, for though it seems absolutely impossible, it simply *must* be the one. Did I not spend two months peering at it closely as I fashioned it there in old Grenlynt's workshop... and is not her name upon it?

Again, I look up to the heavens and cry out for grace. Hoping against hope that this is but a second-world duplicate – even as the lifeless, still-beautiful, face beneath me so perfectly reflects my old-wyrlld Love – I work – with hands trembling so violently that I can barely manage it, to squeeze the vertical and horizontal axes of the locket simultaneously, to open the case.

Aghast, but hardly surprised, I see the beautiful cameo of my portrait swing forth, as if to allow its two carven eyes to look wonderingly into my own startled ones... while a tiny piece of folded parchment drifts down onto Aureaelle's hair.

For several minutes I stand in shock, holding the locket. I sit on *Moonstone's* edge, staring at the locket. I open it, shut it, examining it again and again and again – clasping, unclasping – hinging the cameo out, and in again.

As if my heart simply *must* understand what it cannot understand, and simply *will not believe* what it must believe... I wrestle, and wonder, and wrestle again.

Inconsolation

Weary with the exhaustion from my night of Sorrow still hanging upon me, and with this new fearfulness of our fates found in my finding of Al-Lloreya's locket multiplying its burden, I finally fall to my knees. Laying my head on my arms on the cold, hard edge of this stony and unforgiving altar, I weep, and wrestle, and pray, until a truce of peace has been – at least temporarily – offered and received.

Rising again, her locket still clasped in my hand, I look again at Aureaelle's beautiful, now cool, face – framed by the golden hair which flows in waves of glory toward the wound-welted and shredded legs and feet.

Suddenly I actually *notice* the folded scrap of parchment that fell, moments ago, from the opening locket and onto her hair.

I can hardly pick it up – so violent now are all my tremblings – but I capture it at last, drop it as I seek to unfold it, apprehend it again, and finally open it – to read the thirty simple words daintily printed thereupon.

*Be brave – my Dearest – as I have been brave,
and as I have been true, be true. Keep me ever
in your heart, as I, your Al-Lloreya, have kept you.*

† † † †

Only three hours have now passed since my sorrow-slain heart was slain afresh by the simple message from the tiny scrap of parchment. The abhorrible corpse of my lovely princesses has been washed three times,

anointed with the precious spiced oils of the Royal City, wrapped twice in the fragrant winding sheets, and arranged into its final position – the one she will wear when placed in Malavalea’s dark grave only two days hence.

The gossamer *moonveil* is draped smoothly over her form, covering all except her bloodless face and her lower arms and hands. Draped over that draping, and flowing, as decreed, around the pale marble face and nearly to her waist, are her long and lush golden tresses.

On her breast the fingers of her left hand are curled – and none too soon – around three stalks of regalia found near the spring where I fetcht my water – their blooming heads of pale, luna-moth green pluckt a day too early for the flyowers to ever open wide and fly away.

At the end of her right arm, which lies at her side, her right hand is turned palm up – with her fingers open and outstretched as if to symbolize that she has given away at last all she could possibly give, or is ready to receive any last gifts of mercy from heaven... if any mercies therein are still found.

Around her lovely neck lies the chain of the golden locket, dimly reflecting its golden glories from where it rests above her heart on the glimmering *moonveil*. Two days are still mine for determining whether I will bury it with her.

† † † †

Inconsolation

The darkness of the first moon is now upon me. It shines a special luster upon the eerie altar called *Moonstone*, upon the *moonveil* from Au-Royalialia, and upon the lovely Princess Aurealle who was the Crown of delight of that Royal City and its Kingdom.

If all the Century Sorrows through the millennia have wrung the hearts of Phylantagia – and if every Seventh Century, with its feminine Sorrow, even more so – who can fathom what copious measures of grief will attend this Seventh Seventh?

As I enter this first moonWatch, I use the little energy I still possess to fight sleep and in praying that “some noble person” will soon “join me during the long hours of the sunWatches and moonWatches, for loving eyes must be always upon her.”

When the moon is at its zenith, I hear the soft and sorrowful tune of a plaintive minor growing ever closer, and the Interpreter walks into shadowy view.

Saying not a word, tears streaming from his hallowed face, he hugs me to his strong heart again and again, turns to weep afresh over the cold *Moonstone*, kisses each cold cheek, kneels on the stones nearby, and cries out in silent entreaties while the evil-hued shadowy clouds veil the moon again. Soon, remembering my utter exhaustion, he rises to keep moonWatch, and I am immediately asleeping.

When I finally awaken, just before sunrise, I converse with the Interpreter, between long pauses of serious reflection, until he has learned the horrible details of the

Princess's death, and I have discovered that he knows, basically, no more than do I about the present and the future that are hanging upon us in such final solemnity, for "except for a picture showing to me the Princess lying upon cold Moonstone, and a voice pressing me to hasten thereunto, my caverns are all as silent and dark as a tomb."

Through the long minutes of the day Watch our eyes are always above *Moonstone*, as we guard with loving eyes and ponder with numb hearts the still beautiful – but O so changed – Princess Aureaelle, and wade woodenly through our precious memories of her loving life.

Soon after the sun finds its zenith above the clouds, the good Interpreter leaves, for he wants to visit Livana, to see if she and one of her noble friends can return with him to *Moonstone*, "hopefully well before midnight."

As darkness deepens, I find myself again facing the dark Malavalean demons of Doubt, but in battles marked by intensities far greater than any I have yet fought, even on the island of Sereneya.

Again and again I fight manfully, trying to remember all the truths and spiritual promises which I have from so many good instructors received so well. But as the battles continue, hour after hour, after hour after hour, I know I am wearing down.

On more than one occasion I have been well warned about the danger of relying upon my own wisdom, or upon my own strength – and know I have made some progress in learning to just *rest* and even *rejoice quietly* in

Inconsolation

the divine sufficiency, for I am learning that this is the secret to the life of Faythe. But this relentless hounding by all these evil Malavalean spirits is wearing me down.

Perhaps the single most difficult thing for me – even more difficult than having so many large questions of my life left hanging with no immediate answers, and even more difficult than this rending loss of all I have ever held precious – is that which lies at the very heart and bottom of what Faythe really is.

Am I willing – *really willing*, when the refining fires have burnt themselves out in the bottom of my being – to still commit myself to *trusting* that *every motive* of the invisible Being who fashioned me, and who so obviously still maintains his right to put boundaries around me, *is pure*? Am I willing to trust him, even in all this... that he is tempering every evil stroke against me *for my own ultimate good*, and to trust him still to the very end?

I sense my entire eternal future is hanging on the answer to that simple question. I sense also, that I *want* to believe, and I *want* to obey, for there is the rub. I sense also, that if I ever give in to one of these deluding voices that are incessantly whispering in my ears, I shall, to the delight of Malavalea, go utterly mad.

Suddenly I find myself battling again my *anger* at the evil daemuks. For I have just pictured in my mind how the evil hoard of daemuks must have felt, when they returned next night to find the irynwood trees empty, and the ropes lying on the ground. Is there any chance at all, that they *still* have not finished their evilry?

How could I possibly stand it, if the dark mass of creatures would suddenly come panting out of these dark shadows around me, and climb even up onto *Moonstone*? Could I possibly bear it?

In struggling with my heart, I realize that I am also now battling some dark thoughts about the Interpreter. At first, it is only because he tarries, and tarries, and my eyes are so heavy toward the sleep they so desperately need.

But I soon discover that I am also somewhat *envious* of the unperturbed serenity of his spiritual maturity, and his seeming immunity from such sufferings as are now my own. I am even beginning to doubt his motives in 'helping' me, and I hear voices whispering about his 'weakness' — for he seems to know as little as do I about this darkness we are in.

Realizing, with a start, the extreme folly of hearing and harboring such dangerous thoughts, I repent again — to turn back for the thousandth time to the quiet place of obedience.

Again I take myself in hand, and speak sharply to myself: 'Gaelayniel, you *must* simply *abide* in the provision of the father — as you have discussed so many times with the beautiful Aureaelle.

'If you don't, you will completely fail your mission, and will find yourself in the end to be an utter fool... and one *utterly mad*.'

Awakening Love

*Cold the terror, dark the error,
Long the struggles of the soul,
Ever sweeping from our keeping,
Drawing, fuller, to the Full,
Each desire to the higher,
All the better to the best,
To the younger, growing hunger,
To the older, rest.*

*To the portal hasten, mortal,
To your higher dying, thrust,
In the loving Will all-yielden,
In the daily waiting, trust:
Vulnerable love-embracings
Grace anew the childlike heart,
Tears' and trials' sweet retracings
Purity impart.*

In the tightening grip of this crucible to which my own longings and choices have hastened me, I sense I must yet *struggle through*, by one means or another, to some single satisfying and right conclusion at the very end, *but I see not how!*

On the one hand I face, struggling for mastery within me, my long lineage of righteous warring men, tremen-

dous courage, chivalrous manhood in all the heightened splendors made possible by so many generations of focused, disciplined masculinity. What tremendous privilege has been mine, born into a home where unstained character and noble outworkings of service to others were portrayed with crystal-consistent clarity throughout my formative youthful years.

On the other, there now strive within me these newer longings for true immortality – something so much more satisfying than having my name in some future generation’s moldering history books to be dutifully memorized by its dull and weary children. And I have had also my two royal evangelles, Al-Lloreyya, and the Princess Aureaelle.

But as we have journeyed on, I confess that my manly courage which seemed so shining and invincible amid the outblasting blessings of the trumpets of Au-Royaliala, has feared and faltered; that I have striven in vain for the beautiful and eternal *spirit of serenity*, like Princess Aureaelle’s, which I fain had thought to purchase for my own soul’s possession. Serenity?

I remember also my many transgressings against the Commandment of Good Hope taught to us in the Cave of the Interpreter. I have wrestled these questions through, alpha to omega, again and again.

Through seas of sorrow, through dreams and interpretations, visions and vexations, parables, prophecies, perils and promises we have journeyed. But, like a dull nagging ache beneath it all, I have sensed that,

Awakening Love

whether our daily trail was descending lower, or climbing toward some temporary height – our overall direction was downward, toward these terrible endings.

Not only was our journey into darkness, and into weakness, where I was shorn of all native strength... not only were we driven to the very edges of endurance... not only have I failed – notwithstanding the determinedness of my daily disciplines, to attain the outward serenity of my companion – I have also – *alas!*, failed so many times, and in so many situations, to maintain the scarlet Fayette I have received.

Within and without, I have failed. “*I have failed!*” – I tell you, “*I have failed utterly.*” The Golden Mirror is silent for so long – *have I offended It?* – and I see *only* the abiding dullness of darkness and vexation.

Were it only *my own* sufferings – perhaps, but I know not how – I could bear it. But the Princess is dead, and her supremely beautiful heart has been stilled forever! *Stilled!* and I, alas... alas! – I see no way forward... no way possible to endure it.

† † † †

“I will bear it no longer! These heart battles *must* come to an end! I will lie down beside her, and die with her!”

Melding action to word, I rise from the stony pavement where I had laen prostrated through many

wrestlings. But as I approach *Moonstone*, the Golden Mirror suddenly blocks my way, throwing my face back into my heart.

For just a moment, relief begins calming my sagging body and morale; then dark Malavalean thoughts again thrust themselves in full force upon me.

“Out of my way, vile mirror— you drive me to madness! I can fight no longer! Do not tempt me!”

For only a second, wide eyes wild, I stare at the mirror *still* hindering my choices. I plunge my dagger through its very center, shattering it forever, shards of the heaven-wrought crystal falling to the moonlit stones, while the golden frame silently disappears from before me.

Panting wildly, I clamber onto the stone slab where the beautiful Princess Aureaelle, under her glistening moonveil, all unmindful of my violent self-battles, sleeps in tranquility of death.

On cold *Moonstone*, lying on my back beside her, I raise my dagger before the moon, to plunge it deeply into my heart.

Reason... passion... peace... try vainly and again to slip into my fevered brain or my trembling heart; my right arm convulses into knottings of agonies... but finally I prevail against myself.

In dark and damnable Unbelief, in utter Rebellion against Faythe and the supreme goodness and wisdom

Awakening Love

of higher Justice, I raise the dagger once more, plunging it deeply into my throbbing heart, to find peace at last... *and awoken from my dream.*

In cold sweat, not moving a muscle, I slowly thaw from the events lived out so vividly. The moon still shines down from the chilly heavens, and I realize with horror that I am indeed lying on the cold moonlit Table. Hastily I slip over the edge and onto my knees, my eyes just high enough to notice that the nearest edge of Aureaelle's *moonveil* is still smooth on the stone, exactly as it had been. I weep aloud, struggling to regain equilibrium from the horrors of my nightmare, crying out for peace, and wisdom, and for the deep heart-sanity I have been longing for through these progressively more difficult searchings.

But here I hesitate... must I really be *thankful*— even after all of this? Must I really... be *thankful*?

As if a Judgment falls instantly upon me for my even tarrying with the question, I suddenly sense a dark blackness climbing over me, clutching for my heart. I open my eyes, and see an ominous cloud of deepest midnight blue stealthily sweeping the moon. As utter darkness descends, a deepening chill begins to freeze against my very spirit. Numbness and the Fear-with-many-faces mock me, laugh at me, and shriek their profanest curses against me, reveling in the permission they finally have to do with me what they will.

With wildly-swirling horror, I realize I am spiraling into the same hellish whirlpool again, except that this

one is *not* just some nightmare from which I may after a time awaken.

Once again the darkness, this time thick and glowering—*a darkness that can be felt*, something stronger and more vile than anything my dagger has ever cut through.

Once again, the doubts; the struggles; the horrible battles of self against Self.

Once again, dagger in hand, I jump up and rush in desperate lust for control, to death beside the Princess.

Once again the Golden Mirror appears before me — I plunge my dagger with demon force into its center, but nothing shatters. It fades from view — slowly... slowly... maddeningly slowly... swinging to my left like a door on a hinge as if to infer *I have many instructions of wisdom for you, but will not force them against your will. As I created you, I leave you — free to your own overarching desire.*

Leaping up to *Moonstone*, I keenly feel how greatly increased are *these* terrors and agonies and struggles compared to those which the horrid nightmare had held. Once more I lie down beside her.

Again I stretch the dagger higher toward the now-blackened moon, to strengthen its final death-plunge into my being. My mind has calculated its decision, and my impassioned heart must obey.

As the mighty muscles of my strong right arm — this

Awakening Love

warrior's arm that has slain so many evil men in so many terrible battles — clench for the thrust, I feel a strong hand upon my forehead... another on my shoulder... and see a brightening Light flowing around and upon me.

"Who are you?" I ask, in commingling relief and anger. *"And why are you come? Leave me alone!..."* (then, seeing Princess Aureaelle's white-marble face in the strange softness of this new flowing light) *"No, don't! — please stay!"*

"I am Antaylius," his voice answers me, speaking slowly with a dignity of authority that makes me tremble, *"an archangel sent from the higher regions to bring you Mercy-above-Justice. You are greatly beloved, and it is my master's wish that you turn now from your madness, and be soothed and restored to sweet besettlement."*

From the horn hanging on the golden sash girding his glistening tunic, he pours forth into his open palm some fragrant soothing oil, and applies it to my forehead, from whence it flows over my weeping face, and into my beard.

"Rise forth in peace, my son. But remember... you were never required to be strong or pure or brave from any independent virtue of your own.

"Return to your higher confidences in the father, thinking ever upon him. Forgive yourself fully, even as you have now been fully forgiven, and for your own sake, and for the sake of our beautiful Aureaelle..."

His voice trails off as he glances reverently upon the

cold, again-moonlit sculptural form, and whispers softly
“may her memorials be forever alive in our hearts...”

Then, almost as an afterthought, he lifts his horn above her silent, moonlit, death-frozen face, and empties its chrysm upon her forehead, her hair, and her moon-pale cheeks. Dipping his right forefinger into the thicker oil-pool on her forehead, he now touches gently each sealed eyelid, passes the tip of his finger gently across her lips, wipes his hands thoroughly upon his white garment (which receives it, and is as clean as before), kisses reverently each of her faded cheeks, and, turning to me once again, continues to me his fatherly entreatings.

“My son, *never* weary in waiting – it is your sure deliverance. *Wait* for the Golden Mirror; *trust* in the Faythe given you from above, and *hope* – though hope lies dead in ashes before your weary feet – to the very end.

“Blessings from on high be upon you, friend Gaelayniel, for so they are commanded and will not be rescinded. Look joyfully, through the gifts of each new day, to the signature of the good and pure and eternal in the lowest flower you tread, and in the dimmest light from distant shining star.

“Peace be upon you, Gaelayniel! Sleep now, for I will moonWatch the Princess. And when you awaken, go in the strength of new humility, and in the heart’s-ease of simple abiding... and may joy be yours, in the new-born morning.

† — The End of Part One

Love Awakening



Part Two

Love Awakening

*But where is the tune of the ancient rune,
The prophecy long forbidden,
And where is the moon of the lost-long tune,
That shone on the music hidden,
And when will the tune of the long-waned moon
By the moonbeams raised and ridden,
Revealing its art to th'immaculate heart,
Come forth by the Truth, fair-bidden?*

It is a sunrise like none I have ever seen! Long fingers of rose, orange, and crimson spread their glories above the still-shadowing strata of amethyst and sienna below – streaming higher, higher into the flaming yellows and golds above, stretching from the wasteland of Farenthille on my left, to the Eudeyrean foothills on my right.

Free again! *Forgiven* in heart and mind and spirit, refreshed in body by my perfect rest where I slept as easily as a babe in my now-sweet-and-humble boldness – and for the third time beside the Princess on the cold *Moonstone* which felt to me as soft and warm as a new feather bed... with peace reigning anew in my heart, and with the blessings and anointing of Antaylius still thrilling my new-made being, I kneel, and praise, arise, and run leaping like little Andreas, or his monkey, to

the stream, where I bathe in the splashing waters and, still enraptured, return in the ecstasies of this newly-wrought calm to the Table. I have never felt, in either world, as I feel just now!

While the moon, already a distancing memory, silently drops from view behind me, the glowing torch of the sun, like a strong man rejoicing in the running of a race, burns its way brighter through the curtained pastels on either side to break through the ribbons for its crowning above.

Opening the supple leather bag left me by Antaylius, I find cheeses, strange irregular rounds of bread, delicious strips of dried meats, fruits, and all I could desire for my now-ravenous appetite.

As I sit quietly, eating with reverent thankfulness because of all these new blessings upon me, I muse again on the old prophecy. Again I gaze at the Princess, where the sun of the second day shows in sharp relief the bloodless face, and the moonveil hiding in sorrowful stillness the feminine form so recently radiant and alive. But, what is this sudden impulse, moving upon me as never before?

Like the faint stirring of echoes from the song of a long-forgotten dream, the sad words of the prophecy flow line by line through my heart.

Again the rising impulse in my now love-trembling heart raises me to my feet; I feel strangely empowered, as by a new baptism of love which is *compelling* me to sing.

Striding quickly, I hasten—not knowing it is for the

Love Awakening

last time now—to *Moonstone's* roughened edge. Reaching over as far as I can, I obey these warm inner compellings by grasping the cold stiff fingers of each of the virgin's hands in the pulsing warmth of my own. Standing thus for a moment beside her, I somehow sense I will never see her again in this sad, undone state of passing, while, strangely enough, some rising joy within me utterly precludes my weeping or even sorrowing!

For a full and sacred minute I pause in this strange position, living touching the dead, until I can stay silent no longer. Clothed in my trembling voice, a sweet and haunting melody I have never learned sounds forth, the words completing the old prophecy accompanying it:

*And here is the tune of the ancient rune,
The prophecy long forbidden,
And after the moon of the lost-long tune,
I am singing the music hidden;
Now will the tune of the waning moon,
By its death-beams raised and ridden,
Revealing its art from my new-humbled heart,
Come forth to its end, fair-bidden!*

As the last words of the joyful, yet melancholic, tune fade from my lips and memory, I feel soft warming tinges of bittersweet pain in the tips of my fingers. Staring briefly at them in a numbness of wondering, I notice next the pale cheeks warming in tinges of softest rose.

Rigid, entranced, my eyes fixated upon her, I see the new colorings of her cheeks spread concentrically to her cheekbones, her chin, her forehead, and finally to her lips. The perfectly-formed lips redden to their former glory,

part sweetly, and sing perfectly, in the most ethereal and thrushlike timbre I have ever heard, the last line of the song I have just taught her.

Suddenly her eyelids—marble lustre lost—flutter, open wide... and I see for a moment the vanishing bedazedment of her eyes, then their rapid return to the bright emerald glories of wondering merriment.

Pulling my hands, she sits up, casting aside the lunar bouquet and, as a useless thing, her moonveil. I see she is fully dressed, exactly as when she died precisely twenty-seven hours ago, and lay on *Moonstone* amid the crackling encirclings of blue electric fire—but now with face and hands and feet and garments as fresh and new as Life can make them.

Obedying the impulses of this revelation fully to the end, I slide my arms beneath her, and—looking joyfully up to the heavens—lift her up and away from the cold, cruel *Moonstone* of her Sorrow-full baptyism.

Rejoicing in the realization that she is heavier now than when I carried her across the first roiling ford, I step away from the cold stone slab. In tender and brotherly affection, I hug her firmly to my heart, both of us weeping our joy-tears softly. And for the first time in this strange new world—thinking how joyfully her father will soon be doing the same—I tenderly kiss one warming cheek, then the other, in sacred celebration of our mercies received. Steadying her on her feet, we turn our backs to *Moonstone*, and walk hand-in-hand away from the darknesses of its horrible curses forever.

Return to Au-Royalialia

*Somewhere, good people, singing, love-laden,
wait for glad tidings, young man and maiden;
Somewhere a father, hopeful and brave,
watches the waters, gladsome and grave.*

*See the skilled craftsman, hand to the helve,
rugged Thauntaylius there with the Twelve,
Aravelle, Andreas, all are awaiting
sails in the sunrise, tidings elating.*

*Somewhere, in sunlight, bright waves a-splashing,
bright ships a-sailing, brave men a-dashing,
Bright Au-Royalialia, decked in her glory,
waits for the sweet and the heart-warming story!*

Hearts singing, hand-in-hand, we climb aboard the first sailing vessel that sees our signal. It is a bright and spritely ship, somewhat lightly-laden, carrying mostly bales of wool, but mixed with some better ballastings of spices and oaken caskets of wine encrowding the hold.

Wind in our faces, song in our hearts, the beautiful Aureaelle looks fully again the Princess that she is, and I—with many conflicting thoughts of Au-Royalialia and the still-painful thoughts of my dearest Al-Lloreyia crowd-

ing after—squint across the cerulean waters toward the flying flags of Au-Royalía—many hundreds of miles away! How I long—and dread—to see her father.

How can I confess to such a noble King that I did my best to leave the daughter he had so carefully and trustingly placed under my charge, to lie cold and unattended and *dead* on *Moonstone*—or (would she even have arisen without my obedient touch?) to a rising from her Sorrow only to discover me self-slain beside her on that cold grave slab, leaving her alone and unprotected for the perilous journey home!

All through these past several weeks, we have, for the most part, retraced the trails and repeated our stops at those various places of blessing and provision, but with what a difference upon us!

Instead of weariness, self-dyings, onslaughts of delusion badgering us by day and by night, journeying ever into the darkness of heavier hearts and deeper sorrows, we have walked instead, even through these devilish glooms of Malavalea, toward the beautiful warming Light.

Except for the crossing of a few of the deeper fords, not once have I needed to carry the Princess. Eyes bright, smile quick, perfect in vigor and grace, she walked lightly beside me, or even sprinted like a beautiful roe merrily up some new slope, awaiting me there to catch up to her.

How anxious the Princess and I are to return to Au-Royalía!—but I force myself to remember that you may

Return to Au-Royalía

wish to relive with us some of those first wonderful hours and days we shared together, after those amazing *Moonstone* mercies had so beautifully reestablished us in an abounding Faythe. So please allow me to return to those first days after the Princess's rebirth... to chronicle a few of our experiences along the there-to-here.

† † † †

I have already tried to describe my ecstasy in being forgiven and set right by the father—by his sanctifying chrysm and encouraging words through the archangel Antaylius. And how very glad I am to have the good King's—and all Phylantagia's—beautiful Princess Aureaelle alive and *equally enthralled* beside me!

But ecstasy, and enthrallment—even in Phylantagia, and even in the strong constitutions of persons like the Princess and myself—must soon give way to the practical outwalking of daily duty. Our *ecstacies* spring out of our *joys of Life*, and our *renewed relationships* with each other, with our father, and with all Phylantagia. But even these sublime rejoicings are tempered by several facts.

We are still on Malavalea. We have no reason to suppose or even hope that the evil forces of Malavalea have surrendered, or that our battles are over. We still have many miles and at least a few weeks between *Moonstone*, which is just behind us, and the obsidian beach where we hope to somehow find passage.

Now, during this first twenty-four hours of our *aliveness* together again, we discover two beautiful things.

The first occurs just after dark in our first evening away from *Moonstone*. We have been traveling with renewed strength and lively conversation, and are nearing the high open spaces where we wish to spend the night.

For the past twenty or thirty minutes the clouds above us have been thinning, and for the second time on Malavalea we see the rarity of glorious starshine. But, lo! As we cast our hearts heavenward to enjoy it, the book of the sky opens ever further—and farther to northward—until we read for the second time here the beautiful constellation Encryphia.

“Look!” cries the Princess. *“Look at her heart, turned right-side-up! What can it mean?”*

Too moved for words, we unshoulder our packs, set them on the trail, and sit side by side upon them—I with my arm around her—pondering the mysteries of this strange rearranging of Encryphia’s glories... until the clouds soon hide them again.

Soon the trail begins ascending to the high open flatland. Feeling comparatively safe here, we are soon snug and warm in our bedrolls, one sleeping while the other watches, until the welcome dawnlight invites us to enlarge the fire and enjoy a hearty meal.

And it is here, on this first new morning, that I learn yet again how little I really know about Malavalea, or Phylantagia, or... perhaps any other world.

We are sitting on rocks around the fire, finishing our

Return to Au-Royalie

breakfast, when I see a huge eagle land on a limb high above us, in an old dark stub perhaps a hundred feet east of our campfire—at the very edge of our clearing. I say ‘huge’ because the royal creature looks to be at least three times as large as any I have ever seen, and is as golden as if molten from the sun itself.

Suddenly, like a bolt from the morning mists, he drops from his perch, swoops into a smooth spiraling circle, glides entirely around our clearing, and, with the last thrust of his descent, sails to a stump not ten feet beyond the Princess, drops his talons, and balances upon it.

From long habit, the Princess and I both freeze. He is obviously fully aware of us, for he looks me directly in the eye, with an intelligence that cannot be denied. For a full minute he perches like some glorious statue, each feather as if of glowing gold, still unblinking. His head and the band on the tips of his tail feathers are a blazing brilliant white.

“Greetings, good Gaelayniel!” he says to me, finally, *“Greetings from above these gloomy Malavalean clouds.”* He shakes his beak at me slowly, from side to side, and continues, in a low, almost human, if slightly-reedy, voice, *“Are you so surprised to see an old eagyl speaking so to you?”*

“No, you have not yet conversed with us,” he continues—and I am sure I see a twinkle in his engaging tiger-ringed eye... *“But your father—and ours—has told us we may more fully awaken again, for the time is nearing—and behold! will soon be—when this dark night called Malavalea*

will be battling us to its death, against the brightening Day!

“But allow me to introduce myself! The name our father gave me is Skyfeathyr, and I am the arch-eagyl of all the talking eagyls. All of Phylantagia we once inhabited – during her first centuries – but through the centuries since have lived only here in Malavalea and with ordinary eagyl voices since her Great Rebellion several millennia ago. It is only now – since your Sorrow has been accomplished – that our father has commanded our voices to us again.

“But if you are curious, you can learn more of us whenever you wish, from either Caedmon – for he has read of us from time to time – or from the Interpreter. Both will warrant for us. And it is the Interpreter who sends me to you now, carrying two messages.

“First, he requests you to come to him at the earliest possible hour – for he has some things to show you.

“He urges you also to give me a swift message for your father, Princess Aureaelle (here he courteously bows his head to her, and immediately rights it again) – so I may wing to the sorrowing King the sure mercies of the father. What would you have me say?”

At this unexpected request I see the dear Princess struggling mightily for composure – so overjoyed is she at the thought of her beloved father receiving so soon the encouraging news of her Living still.

After requesting a few of my own thoughts too, she gives to the stunning creature a summary sentence rich

Return to Au-Royalia

with love and blessings, and the noble Skyfeathyr – who is yet to blink an eye – bows his shining golden head to us just once, launches from his perch, soars into widening and ascending circles higher and higher above the snags, until he is just visible – where we see him speeding like an arrow of sunshine toward the Golden City.

“How very, very *good* our father is!” Aureaelle cries, turning to me with swimming eyes, “and how *ashamed* I am of my fearings and doubtings.”

† † † †

As we walk the winding stony hallway of his cave, to the warm heart of the Interpreter, I realize my own heart is pulsing strangely: how I do *long* to see again this good man.

“Welcome!” he cries, giving the Princess a long fatherly hug, tears of joy streaming down his kindly face. “I saw just enough to give me *hope* that you were coming.”

“And welcome again, *good* Gaelayniel!” he cries, and continues as if clearly reading the shrinkings of my heart, “No... *do not look back to your failures, my son, for you have repented already, and once is enough. And what you have confessed already to the father you need not mention to me.* I can assure you it is *not* the will of the father that you keep looking back at your times of faythelessness – for he loves to give you a clean start for the asking, and you will discover that the challenges of each new day cannot be better met than by mighty rejoicings in him.”

How delightful are these moments with the Interpreter! After a delicious meal, hot and strengthening, he lifts a crudely-fashioned harp from a shadowy nook. The instrument itself impresses me in neither design nor beauty. But the spirit of hopeful mystery soon descends upon it, and as I begin to sing along with Aureaelle and the Interpreter, sweet rivers of joy flow through my heart, even as my heart flows with the music into those liquid seas of love of which we are singing!

“But, come!” he invites us, rising abruptly to his feet, after perhaps an hour of this childlike worshipping of the father, “I want to show to you a beautiful picture before we retire for the night.”

With long strides he leads us from our place by the fire, through the off-room where we will sleep, and into the Cavern of the Present. The room darkens, and we see for the second time – shining from seemingly millions of miles away, but as large and bright as if she were just before us – the beautiful Encryphia. Her twelve crimson stars shine her glowing heart warmly into our own, and the piercing radiance of the thirty-three pulsing diamonds of her glowing banner flash against the walls of the cavern.

Encryphia fades now to her normal size, as if returning to greater distance – and her pulsing banner appears to us just as if we were standing outside this cave under a starry night – when we notice what first appears to be a small glowing cloud, or perhaps a comet of shining stars, appearing in the distant corner of the Cavern’s great night sky.

Return to Au-Royalie

Rapidly growing larger as it approaches us, we see it defining now into what appear to be individual white stars. But no, for we hear soft music, like gentle birdsong, and see it is a flock of beautiful doves – each one glowing as white as Encryphia’s diamonds.

Perhaps twenty or so in number, the joyful birds circle above us, cooing excitedly. As many as can land on the shoulders and head and outstretched arms of the Interpreter, and several of the others upon the Princess and myself.

“Welcome, my friends,” the Interpreter greets them. “But, where are you going? Can you show us?”

“*To the City!... to the City!...*” they cry out, in soft voices of excitement. With a fluttering of their illuminous white wings fanning us – and almost blinding us, for the doves seem to grow even brighter as by some holy excitement – they rise above us, circle once, and shoot like a flock of glowing arrows through the corridorway at our right, and into the Cavern of the Future.

The Princess and I follow the Interpreter as he runs to tell them goodbye. For, as we step into the room, we see the royal doves already far away, like a comet of glory streaming toward Au-Royalie. We watch them till they are only a faint glow on the distant horizon.

But see now what we behold before us, in this Cavern of the Future!

Almost the entirety of the Kingdom of Phylantagia

appears as a living map spread out before us! As if we are high amid the peaks of an imposing mountain, far across the ocean east of the Royal City, we see to our left – on the southwestern shore of the Mara Phylantagea – the gleaming beach where I first landed in this fair world.

Far in the distance ahead of us, like a shining jewel, appears royal Au-Royalia herself, but at such distance that we can just recognize her gleaming walls and turrets, and, like the slenderest thread of a ribbon, the road that leads from her eastern gate toward Aravelle’s cottage and beyond.

In the distance ahead of us, and to the right (that is, in the northwest) we see in aquamarine splendor the Bay of Benevincea. To our right, very near to us, we see the dark island Sereneya, and at below right we see – and can just barely feel the presence of – the black island of Malavalea.

On the waters between the two dark islands we see, like tiny insects, a fleet of ships sailing in formation from Sereneya to Malavalea. But it is here, on the larger and darker island, that our attention is fully arrested.

“Please allow me to declare to you something of what you have been seeing,” the good Interpreter requests of us quietly.

“The doves you saw, like Skyfeathyr the eagyl, whom you have already met, have been given their voices again, and are just one more proof to us that Malavalea is awakening, and will soon be desperately waging her warfare

Return to Au-Royalia

against the shining swords of Justice. Mighty battles are drawing near, and the doves will be valuable message-bearers between the Royal City and the brave men on our fleet of ships.

“I assume you noticed how the doves were glowing, as with inner light? How faithfully they reflect whatever is in the hearts of those who behold them! When they fly in Malavalea they will be invisible to the blinded hearts there, but to the faithful hearts scattered there – Livana, Cephrun, and the rest – they will be birds shining white in daylight or darkness. Like arrows they will speed to the good hearts that need them, so please remember to call them whenever they can help you, and trust them always.

“Even as we speak, they are speeding my messages to the Royal City, to King Ardureus and the Council of Nine.

“If the King and his Council concur with Sir Caedmon – as I am confident they will – they will immediately begin taking up strategies for war against Malavalea. How clearly it is impressed upon my heart that the time for Battle is almost here, and I am greatly surprised if Sir Caedmon has not been already discovering old writings, and is not daily hearing of new dreams confirming it.

“The ships you see between the dark islands are those of our own fleet, but I cannot yet tell you how soon we will be able to fully fit them and man them for the struggle. I assume we are looking at least several months into the future.

“Neither can I tell, Captain Gaelynt, just what your part in the Battles will be, but I encourage you to return to the Royal City with reasonable haste.

“But look now, on Malavalea. What do you see, and can you declare to me anything that appears to you unusual?”

We gaze down upon the island, as if we are just above it, and see it growing rapidly larger, as if drawing nearer to us, until the perimeter of the foul land spreads all around us.

From the black obsidian beach of the dragon’s tail, at our left, to its hideous head, the island stretches its menacing malice in such close detail that we can actually see here and there some of the trails and fords of our journey.

Just below us we see the ominous clearing of *Moonstone*, and I think I can make out the stony knob that conceals the Interpreter’s cave, in which, of course, we are.

But, although the entire picture appears to be physically shaped and colored exactly as it would appear were we soaring above it on the back of Skyfeathyr, there seems to be a layer of spiritual vision added to, or perhaps subtracted from, the scene.

At various spots over the island: from the end of the trail leading to Cephrun’s house; from some location near the good lady Livana’s cave; from places here and there even near *Moonstone’s* clearing; and from even around the northeast areas of the dragon’s head... we see shin-

Return to Au-Royalia

ing columns of light like great blazing beacons beginning in bright points of glory down on Malavalea’s surface, and shining their narrow columns of splendor like glowing torches of light high, high up through the darkness around them, and into the infinite heavens.

“You are beholding Malavalea, as it appears in the ‘*Record of the Righteous*’,” the Interpreter declares, “with the good lives of the faythful shining there like the stars of the firmament forever!

“But behold Malavalea also, as in it appears in the ‘*Witness of the Wicked*’.”

Immediately the dozens of glowing torches appear to have dimmed to half their glory – for they are marbled through with the swirling roiling smogs of dense spiritual darkness.

As if staggering from a blow, the Princess and I both fall a step or two backward, holding our noses and closing our eyes from the horrible stench and the spirits of perversion assaulting our senses.

From the wildness beyond *Moonstone*, and nearly all the way to the island’s dragonish head, in all those dark, dark regions to which the Princess and I never attained, we see what appears to be a black Whirlpool of Death.

Rotating so slowly as to be almost imperceptibly turning, it seems to be ever draining down from the inhabitants of Malavalea all joy and life and goodness and virtue and beauty... ever, ever downward, into a noxious black

sinking cesspool of swirling wretchedness and ruin.

In the atmosphere just above that damnable vacuum of dark nothingness, we see the gnarrish shapes of the evil Malavalean devils, appearing nearly the same as in the vision shown to us here in the Interpreter's cave, before the Princess's great Sorrow. Again we see those profane personifications of depravity and delusion, and the malicious imps of every evil.

Like dark phantoms of fog, they are skulking through murky Malavalea, or floating above her, as if trying to convince themselves they will be able to avoid the dark swirl-pit beneath them, even while knowing they must inevitably succumb.

We see also those ghoulish apparitions of deadly apathy, misting in dull clouds of brown, or gray, or the ghastly pale greens of death, floating above *Moonstone*, and all over the area around the dragonhead end of the island.

But see the vital difference. Even as we watch, we see the stirrings of awareness upon these dark specters. As if the smouldering coals of long-past personhood within their shriveled hearts are kindling with prescient premonition—almost as if they can smell our fleet of ships nearing Sereneya, or hear the battle trumpet soon to come—we see the shapes of even the most apathetic ghouls beginning to define, with actual details appearing upon them. Dimensions... edges... faces... colors... all slowly delineate, then disappear—advancing, retreating, as if being slowly woven to and fro by some unheard music into a slow stream of consciousness.

Return to Au-Royalia

Not just in these darker northeastern regions, but even in the parcels of wilderness nearer the obsidian beach and along the snaking trails to *Moonstone*, we see other similar dark whirlpools, of muddy grayish brown, grayish blue, or darkest green... slowly, slowly swirling as if to sap away the life from every already-dying malevolent or maleficent malcontent still breathing on the island.

But all who are living above these whirlpits—the demon spirits and the creatures they are wearing—seem to be also defining into clearer focus, as if preparing themselves for the horrible choices of cooperating with each other for a time, or perishing in the refusal.

I glance at the Princess, to see how she is standing up to all this, and see in the lurid light reflecting onto her face from the dark island that she appears pale, almost greenish-hued, as if sick to her stomach. I squeeze her hand firmly, and put an arm around her... feeling that if she would retch from these horrible odors, I would surely do likewise. How utterly reprehensible is this foul scene before us!

Suddenly the scene shifts—as if days have passed—and we see our fleet of ships sailing past the island, southward of the beach of the black obsidian cliffs.

It shifts again—perhaps a few months have passed—and we see, for just a few splendid seconds, the last shreds of darkness and demonry evaporating from the island, even as the beacon columns of glorious light begin flaming brighter, while the dark fogs roll away.

"Hasten the Day, dear father... Hasten the Day!" the Interpreter cries, startling us with a mighty shout. The loud cry of his heart echoes far, fades into the dark distances before us, strangely returns to us, and begins reverberating louder and louder through the cavern, *"Hasten the glorious Day!"*

† † † †

The angry waves of Malavalea and the sullen seas of Sereneya are behind us, replaced by these inviting, dancing, sunhearted, aquamarine waves in the Bay of Benevincea. How *beautiful*, to our hungry hearts, does every sparkling reflection of the sunny scene appear.

The evil voices have long faded from our ears. We hear now instead the cheery words of the brave captain who has brought us here, who anchored near the obsidian beach that first morning after the Princess and I arrived there from our weeks of hiking – and who took us aboard with such delight, after unloading there some brave and faithful souls from Au-Royal.

We shake his hand warmly, express our much appreciation, and, an hour after disembarking, the Princess and I are sitting on a sturdy wagon pulled by two horses. Our packs are leaning against the sideboards, and as we recline on our backs under this glorious Phylantagean sunshine, we could almost fall asleep, so good is the road, and so soft the cushion of hay beneath us. What joyful anticipations are ours!

"Here's the place," cries the friendly farm lad, who is

Return to Au-Royal

delivering us to our destination, *"and I think I see the good Captain Frederic himself, stepping out to see who we are."*

After we have thanked the young man profusely – for he will take no payment for delivering us to Frederic's gate – we walk into the arms of the dear old skipper, who weeps unashamedly for very joy, so grateful is he to see us still alive, with our Sorrow accomplished.

Clasping the Princess's fair hand warmly between his two huge, work-weathered paws, he thanks us again and again for stopping in to see him, even as we remind him just as sincerely of the great debt that is ours for his earnest months of prayer.

"You cannot possibly know," the Princess tells him, her shining emerald eyes looking deeply into his own, *"how very encouraged we were when we saw in the Interpreter's Cave – but that is another story – your face and your prayer ring appearing before our very eyes, and saw so many of your friends on their knees with you – hands held, crying out for us in our Sorrow. The picture lasted for only a second, but I will treasure it always."*

Late into the night, long after our evening feast is finished, we sit visiting with the old skipper, answering his earnest questions, while one friend, then another, then a few more, slip quietly into his home, until every lamplit corner is full.

How eagerly he offers to sail us to the Royal City – and how eagerly we accept the gift! And it soon appears that nearly every man, woman, and child here in his

spacious rooms will join us, for he invites them all, and nearly everyone commits himself to the adventure.

For although Frederic himself is the only one who has previously met us, the hearts of these Love-Warriors have been long forged into oneness with each other *and with us* by their many weeks of praying, fasting, and singing on our behalf.

Three short days later, the good Captain Frederic is finally a skipper again. With his crew recalled... his ship readied and stocked... our friends on board with us... the sea and sky begging us to sail – we are *off at last*, to brave Au-Royalia!

Only one point of uneasiness is mine. A certain person has joined us – the last man to board – who goes by the name of Drelleus. Dark, reclusive, almost furtive... he first appeared to us as a fellow passenger sailing with us here from Malavalea.

Then he was alone, but is now joined by two equally curious men using the names Tallis and Tark, and the three of them appear to have only a feigned interest in all the hearty hopes and noble delights that bind the rest of our hearts together. To me it seems more than coincidental that he disappeared immediately upon our arrival at Benevincea, but is now sailing with us again.

Sitting as close to us as they can, but in the shadows, they appear only casually interested in, or even bored by, our conversations – to which they seldom contribute more than an occasional question – while, if my own

Return to Au-Royalia

suspicions are valid, they are soaking up every word.

Captain Frederic, the Princess, and several others agree we should keep our guard up against these three characters, and shelter our communications from them. So far I have told no one except the Captain that war is likely being planned against Malavalea, and we are determined to keep it close among us.

For the first eleven days, all goes well. Hour after hour, our ship pleasantly parts the great waves, while they catch upon their shining surfaces the myriad diamond sun-sparkles of the day, and the reflections of Encryphia and a hundred other smiling constellations gleaming upon them by night.

And it is on just such a night as this – with the warm starlight reflections beckoning us from every horizon – that the Princess and I desire to step out beneath the stars. Putting on our light outshirts, for the deck will soon cool, we are just ready to step from our cabin, when I feel a confusion of premonition. So pleasant have these last several days been that I could so easily shrug it aside; but I hesitate, call the Princess back, and bar the door.

“What is it?” she asks, seeing my face. I motion her to the floor beside me, and we kneel on the rough deck of the cabin. Just as I am ready to ask the father for instructions, we both startle to see, a few feet in front of us, the glorious Golden Mirror. The image we see in its colored crystal seems simple enough: it pictures to our eyes exactly what we would expect to find if we would now step out through our cabin door as we had planned.

On our right, a wall of wooden barrels, stacked twice my height and securely lashed together. On our left, the starboard wall of the captain's cabin, with more crates of merchandise stacked high beyond. The ship's deck, with the yellow light from our cabin lamp shining upon its nearer walkway – but turning soon into a dark starlit passageway with only the dim shadows beyond.

As far as we can discern, all seems well, and the starry night awaits us, beckoning us out to where we may walk along the railing and worship the father, from whose loving heart a tiny portion will shine down to us through the heart of Encryphia... for all seems calm.

Suddenly a simple sketching – like a pale green painting – is superimposed over the tranquil scene in the Mirror... and our hearts nearly stop. Three dark figures are revealed. The two on our right, apparently just beyond the barrels, are crouching down as if ready to spring out against us. The one grasps a long dagger, and the other holds something, perhaps an axe, above his head. On our left, just beyond the captain's cabin, or perhaps among the stacks of crates beyond it, crouches the third man, a dagger in his hand, with coils of rope piled near his feet.

Because our thoughts only a moment before had been so relaxed, so secure, so romantic in the magic of this balmy evening, the shock of this sudden discovery slaps like a mighty icy breaker against our warm hearts. Are we not on the *Mara Phylantagea* – where all is secure – less than a fortnight from the *Royal City*, where pirates have never been, and where crime is unknown?

Return to Au-Royalia

The scene fades to black, the Golden Mirror follows. We continue to kneel – so very, very thankful, praising the father and asking quick guidance, for I feel we should somehow face the situation immediately.

Leaving Aureaelle in the cabin, I step out the door and knock on the door of the captain's cabin, calling back to Aureaelle that I'll see if Frederic may have a chair or two, or at least a cushion or two for us to borrow. As soon as she hears his door opening, she quietly bars our own.

I partially close Frederic's door, softly, so as to make it sound to the men in hiding as if I have not even shut it. I chat with Captain Frederic about chairs and pillows, then motion him to silence, whisper to him to follow me with a lamp... and I blow on Thayne's flute, firmly, the special code. I see Frederic's eyes startle at my strange motions, then look at me doubtfully. But within ten minutes we have secured all three of the sleeping men. Their wrists are lashed tightly together behind their backs; their ankles are cinched, and several ropes around their necks and legs will keep them in fetal position if they awaken.

We are not quite ready to yield to our first impulse – which is to toss the three murderers into the sea – but decide to leave them sleeping as long as they will, both for our temporary convenience, and because I am curious how long they may remain asleeping.

The captain and I decide, even though we now trust everyone on the ship, to leave the cause of their sleep unexplained, entreating our friends to allow us the secret against future dangers.

When morning comes, the entire company is quite astonished, for no one aboard the ship can comprehend that such a thing has actually happened—or ever *could* happen—in fair Phylantagia.

“Are the boundaries around Malavalea now broken?” they ask us, in great dismay and concern. “Is it possible that there are *more* people like this, sneaking in to betray the populace, or overthrow the King?”

We discuss these things for many hours, and ponder what we should do with the men when they awaken. We eat our noon meal, and I see our friends are *still* trying to comprehend these new possibilities in a kingdom that has not, for at least thousands of years, ever experienced such an act of wicked and dishonorable treachery, or anything beginning to approach it.

But suddenly a mighty shout sounds at the bow, and swells into a loud chorus of calls engulfing the entire deck, for a ship has been sighted, nearly directly ahead of us, and is bearing down upon us.

With its masts towering in the early afternoon sunshine, silver sails gleaming, banners flowing gaily, the Royal Ship draws nearer, and we can soon see the sailors and lads waving joyously from the rigging, and some fireworks shooting up, up, up, and out over the sea.

I run to our cabin, for Princess Aureaelle has just lain down to a nap—so much has the terrible act plotted last evening against us weighed her down in sorrowful musings.

Return to Au-Royalie

But how gladly she awakens to the news, and soon she is holding onto my arm to steady herself—for she is just awakening—even as she propels me faster toward the bow of our ship.

“Do you suppose my father is aboard?” she asks me, sounding just as would an excited little child, or my dear Al-Llorea. “Oh, I will be s-o-o glad to see him, if only he is!”

“I’ll be surprised if he isn’t,” I smile back to her, as our eyes search the decks of the nearing vessel. “But maybe I shouldn’t be saying that, since your hopes are sky-high already.”

“Oh-h-h!” she squeals with delight, just a minute or two later, “I think I see him, right up by the bowsprit! But who is that beside him? He has his arm around some lady... oh-h-h! it’s Aravelle, and see how she’s waving to us!”

Soon hundreds, if not thousands, of prayer waves are flying from ship to ship, and from heart to heart, as I feel the dear Princess Aureaelle literally trembling on my arm. “I was so afraid I would *never* see them here again... and they’re actually here. Dear father, forgive me of my lack of faythe—but, no, *surely* you understand! Oh, I’m so glad, glad, glad!”

How Aureaelle is waving!—as am I—and how gladly do Aravelle, the good King Ardureus, Thauntaylius and all of his Twelve—trumpets playing skyward, Caedmon, and so many more rejoice even after this Sorrow of the Seventh Seventh... for the good Princess Aureaelle is alive from the dead, and all seems well in Phylantagia.

Before many more minutes have passed, the two skilled skippers have anchored their ships only twenty steps or so apart, for the waves are calm. A light rope is thrown from the Royal Ship down and across to our deck, for the deck of the Royal Ship is much higher than our own. Captain Frederic attaches a sturdier rope to it, which is pulled back up to the deck of the larger ship. The end of a light rope bridge is secured to it, and we pull it back to ours. Both ends of the rope bridge are secured, and the Princess and I are invited to be the first to cross over.

I'm a little surprised at the courage of the Princess, as I lift her over our ship's railing and onto the rather-widely-spaced floor rungs of the shaky rope bridge. As I follow her across it, I have to scramble to keep up with her, so quickly is she climbing across.

She is so anxious to be with her loved ones that she seems not to even notice the lightness of our rope 'railings'—no thicker than her finger—or how thin and far apart are the teak flooring slats of our bouncing, swaying bridge, nor the surface of the waves far below her.

Soon our good friend Thayne is lifting her over the rail, and she is immediately in her father's holy embrace—her arms around his neck... then in Aravelle's... then in her fathers's again... then in Thayne's—then turning to a hundred others. I follow her from heart to heart until my arms are aching and my cheeks are well-washed by these flowing tears of love. How glad we are to be mingling again... at last... with these dear, dear friends who are such lovers of the true.

Seven Ships to Malavalea

*When men of peace their comforts leave,
to fight against the foe,
Their gardens and their vineyards grieve
to see the laborers go;
Their children, gathered around their knees,
their wives, to fears resigned,
Would call them to the life of ease,
but needs be left behind,
but needs be left behind.*

*When men of honor sail away
to danger or to death,
Weep for the innocent who stay,
by bravery bereft;
See pray'rs ascending for sweet reprieve,
and grace on all below,
When men of peace their comforts leave
to fight against the foe,
to fight against the foe.*

All along the waterfront where our Royal Ship is now being moored to the wharf, wherever there is room for even a single person to stand we see the glad citizens of Phylantagia joyfully awaiting us.

And as far as my eyes can see, the crowd swells,

like a mighty wave of people—weeping, singing, waving, celebrating—all packed together as if for a grand parade, along both sides of this glorious boulevard that flows up and across the bridge over the sparkling stream Merrystone, and upslope another half mile to the shining City.

Even there I can just see a colorful crowd of celebrants blanketing the common areas, and the rest of the Royal Park, pressing right up to the great Golden Doors.

On the street, the lawns, the statues, the lampposts and bannerpoles, and watching eagerly from every window, balcony, and turret, the glad hearts of Au-Royalialia and her countrylands far beyond are flowing together, as if a multitude of prayer-rings have melted together into a swelling paean of praise.

For nearly a week the glad merriment of feasts and fireworks and minstrels and praise continues. From ten thousands of hearts the glad gaiety overflows. Every day is market day, and there is no one alive who can remember seeing the City so crowded, in such holy joviality and jubilation. Nor do more than a few of the many souls among them know of any reason why the celebrations should not continue for many weeks.

Unknown to the multitude, though—a hot fire is burning within the heart of good King Ardureus, for the Seventh Seventh Century has brought these dire challenges to their kingdom, and the weight of awesome responsibility in this crucial time is plowing continually the furrows of his mind.

Seven Ships to Malavalea

Unknown to the merry crowds, there are within the hold of Frederic's ship—which followed the Royal Ship here to glad Au-Royalialia, and is now gently rocking on the waters just east of the City—three treacherous hearts tightly bound, securely imprisoned, and guarded well. A single small boat communicates with it daily.

Unknown to the merry celebrants of Au-Royalialia—the good King and his Council of Nine have been convening early every morning... Caedmon is earnestly searching the ancient texts of the Royal Crypt at every opportunity... and the fiery underground forges of their skilled *wyrkmyn* are flaming by day and by night, with their showers of sparks flying out from the new challenges of armor and weaponry daily produced therein.

Unknown to the feasting, singing multitude—Captain Frederic's crew and passengers, who are all pledged to strict silence about the three prisoners, are spending all their daylight hours within an underground sanctuary room of the Royal Crypt, where they continue their prayer rings almost as if the Sorrow of the Princess has not been concluded. Only at night, and under most careful guard, are they allowed outside, where they can walk in small groups under the stars of good Phylantagia.

Unknown to the good revelers—Captain Frederic and I are discussing ways to convert his vessel and those of several of his fellow skippers into warships for our coming contest against those dark northeastern regions of Phylantagia.

Unknown to the merry maidens—except Aravelle her-

self, who is with the Princess always—and unknown to Andreas and the lads he plays with every day, their hero warrior from Eyrth—for so they daily sing of me—is continually burdened with a hundred pressing decisions. For when the unthinkable has happened, the unimaginable must be planned for, and I have been seeking to remember from every military experience I ever had in that other, more evil, world the wisdom I now need for focusing against these strange new battles soon at hand.

Just *how* shall I help teach the cunning ways of warfare to a kingdom that has experienced only the blessings of peace for thousands of years? And how can one effectively prepare even well-trained forces for the invisible powers of evil entrenched in Sereneya and Malavalea?

How I wish Djélôn were here, that we could confer together! What would I not give, to see him, and loyal Caderyn, and Raul-yôhn, and Keythe running up to greet me; for they could be of inestimable value in my daily training sessions with Thauntaylius and his Twelve.

Are you wondering why we are being so secretive about our three prisoners? Of course we are loath to break the news, when everyone is in the midst of such glad celebrations, by shocking the populace with the news that their good and safe Phylantagia is no longer as good and safe as they believe.

The other reason is this: when Captain Frederic and I first saw the Royal Ship bearing down upon us, I suggested that the entire Kingdom should be kept in innocence of the matter—unless the King decided otherwise—

Seven Ships to Malavalea

to give us the advantage of surprise in our strategies against Malavalea.

Therefore, before the Princess and I crossed the rope ladder to board the Royal Ship, Frederic solemnly received from every person aboard his vessel a Pledge of Silence about the matter, and we didn't even tell the King and his Council members for several more hours—not until the Royal Ship was sailing briskly back toward Au-Royal, with her people on board as happy as a free people can be.

† † † †

We have been back here at the City of Gold less than a week, when I see Captain Frederic stalking toward me looking like the very picture of angry exasperation.

As the low angles of early-morning sunlight paint sharp shadows on the wind-flushed ruggedness of his face, I see mingled there burning flashes of shame... sorrow... frustration... and a violent volcano of anger, which I soon see is directed primarily at himself.

"They're escaped!" After turning to be sure no one else is within earshot, he spits the words out angrily. "Gone! All three of them! Not a rat left on the ship!"

As I begin to grasp the horrible import of the dismaying news, he throws me the details. Apparently a small boat attached itself to his ship last night, soon after darkness, and, as if they knew exactly where the three captives were cabined, some skilled men patiently and qui-

etly sawed through their outer cabin wall a few feet above the waterline, loosened Drelleus, Tallis, and Tark, and spirited them away across the dark waters. Surely it would have taken at least an hour to saw a large enough hole so quietly, but the four guards, who were wide awake just outside the locked door of the cabin, heard not a thing.

As if the escape of these murderous men—free now near the Golden City—is not dismaying enough, we have also to fear that they may have been guided by some treacherous intelligence on ship or shore.

Upon receiving these dark tidings, the good King immediately convenes a Council—with myself, his Nine counsellors, Captain Frederic, and the eight guards who were aboard the vessel during the escape all in sober attendance.

After getting accurate descriptions of the three Malavaleans, and discussing the situation thoroughly, we unanimously decide that the time has come when the good citizens of Phylantagia must be fully apprised of the attempted assassinations of the Princess and myself, and must have these new dangers to the Kingdom fully explained to them. War must be declared against those cancerous northeastern islands, Sereneya and Malavalea, and enough courageous volunteers trained for conflict.

A public convocation is immediately announced for all the citizens of the Royal City and her nearby countrylands, to be held later this very morning, just inside the Golden Gates.

In the meantime, couriers are sped forth, to instruct

Seven Ships to Malavalea

the populace in every corner of the Kingdom about these horrible new assaults against the innocence of the Kingdom, and to describe the three Malavalean assassins, warning the citizenry against them, and imploring their aid in finding and capturing them.

My mere words, of course, can only begin to convey the initial confusion and the increasing consternation of these people as they try to absorb these mind-crashing new developments. Had we announced that the Kingdom will completely run out of water and air in just sixty days, I cannot imagine it would affect them more.

Everywhere, people are standing in twos, in threes, in small groups, and large ones—trying to comprehend how their lives may soon be changing.

Everywhere, prayer-rings are spontaneously forming. Vendors and customers alike have practically abandoned the market stalls. The money boxes full of gold and silver coin sit open and unattended—no one in sight—on the sturdy truss-tables, surrounded by colorful fruits and vegetables, rich aromatic herbs, brightly-dyed skeins of wool, colorful bolts of woven cloth, or trays of salted fish—all seemingly of no interest whatsoever to the newly-burdened citizenry.

I find myself watching a lone merchant, a man tall and pleasant looking, as he drains a sturdy Self-Serve moneybasket full of gold coins into a heavy leather bag. He sets it on the table by the traffic aisle, and starts to walk away. Suddenly he startles. He turns around and stares with narrow eyes at his money sack... as if he

has never seen one before. I try to imagine what horrible thoughts he must – for the first time in his life – be thinking, for great is the heavy-footed anguish walking back and forth across his honest face.

He goes slowly back to his stall... starts to hide the bag out of sight behind some produce... hesitates... looks around at the people in a nearby prayer-ring... shakes his head as if in great agony or conviction of personal guilt – and falls finally, sobbing, to his knees. Laying his arms on a box of vegetables, he buries his face upon them, and weeps as violently as if he has just learned of a death in his family.

For many long minutes he prays, great shoulders trembling and shaking, while I – an Eyrthling still trying to comprehend Phylantagean innocence – wonder how a Phylantagean can possibly imagine the crime, the distrust, the danger, the horrible economic waste, and the violence to all social relationships that this deadly new epidemic from Malavalea is seeking to spawn.

Is it the sunshaft of light on the basket of large white eggs just above his head...? Somehow I suddenly remember those beautiful glowing arrows speeding from the Interpreter's Cave to this Golden City. The Doves! *Why* have I not thought of them before?

Leaving the weeping entrepreneur to figure out how to best protect his bag of coins and his conscience and his relationship of trust with his fellow citizens, and his doubts about the future, and his whole concept of security, and his innocent faythe in the father, I quietly sprint

Seven Ships to Malavalea

my way between the sober conversations and the growing prayer-rings until I reach the now-triply-guarded Golden Doorway above the marble steps leading down to the Royal Crypt. I give Thayne a crisp salute, but only a quick word of greeting.

As soon as I find Sir Caedmon – who is examining a prototype of armor for one of the ships – I lay my urgent question upon him. “Just *how*,” I entreat him, “does one call to himself the sacred Doves?”

He answers me not a word. He stands and stretches himself to full height, facing directly east but looking nearly straight up... spreads his hands wide, and says – almost whispers, actually, in words so soft I can barely hear them, although I am close beside him – a simple humble request:

“Good Doves of the father... come now to Caedmon. The good Gaelayniel... I mean Captain Gaelynt Gleyynn... needs you to come.”

Surely no more than three minutes have passed, when we hear the flutter of eager wings, and the cooing of the beautiful Doves – their blazing whiteness glowing even brighter in this underground hallway – and the lovely birds are now perching upon us and all around us.

“We’re here... we’re here... What can we do-o-o for you-o-o-o? Tell us... tell us... and send us quickly away-y-y..”

For a few moments we describe to them perfectly the exact appearances of the evil Drelleus and Tallis and Tark,

along with details about when and where they had been when they escaped. "Look carefully," I plead with them, and bring us word at once if the father discovers them to you."

"We wil-l-l-l... he wil-l-l-l... we wil-l-l-l..." the Doves reply, in a flurry of soft, excited voices, *"and we're off and away-y-y-y, while the sun travels high-h-h-h..."*

Five seconds later the hallway is quiet. The honorable Sir Caedmon and I kneel on the tile floor for a few minutes thanking the father and asking his guidance on the Doves. We then rise, to discuss the outfitting of our ships, of which we now have seven committed.

First—in the center of our fleet—will be the huge Royal Ship itself, with a carefully selected crew of strange and various 'warriors.' Like most of the other ships, it will be stocked with food, armor, and provisions of all kinds. But this ship will have half of her second deck equipt as a hospital and recuperary, where medicinal herbs, and prayers, and sacred anointings will be in attendance, and where, if necessary, surgeries may be performed.

The small, silvery pearlescent boat of Thauntaylius, with twenty-three like it, will also be aboard the Royal Ship, to serve us whenever needed.

We plan to man our fleet of seven ships with various kinds of troops, but our most valuable 'warriors' will remain, strangely enough, usually out of sight in the lower decks of the ships. For not just the King, but Sir

Seven Ships to Malavalea

Caedmon, every man of the Council of Nine, along with Thayne and his Twelve—their silver daggers and all my military classes notwithstanding—are all in definite and vehement agreement that when the day is finally won and Malavalea is forever free—it will be primarily the invisible feats of faythe wrought by these hidden 'warriors' that shall claim the highest honor.

† † † †

Two moons have now passed, since the escape of the three evil infiltrators. During those busy weeks our other six ships too have been fitted, stocked, and manned for battle. They consist of some of the very largest and sturdiest trading vessels we can find—for in all of Phylantagean history there has been no record of warships ever being built or seen. One of the six—Captain Frederic's—is now leading our formation, and the other five are owned by skippers he has known through the years.

Flanking Captain Frederic's ship on these gradually-darkening waters is one similar to his, which was remodeled and christened *The Albatross*. While moored near the Royal City, it received by day and by night a steady traffic of skilled shipwrights and dozens of busy wyrkmyn from the Royal Crypt—by which it was modified, strengthened, and outfitted with some curious inventions of holy maJic.

Just behind the two lead ships, the Royal Ship sails proudly, her great bow splitting the waves, silver sails whipping in the stiffening breeze. Finally I am with the

Princess again in a rare hour together, and am realizing just how seldom I have been seeing her – and how much missing her – during these many weeks of preparation.

As I see the flashings of her quick smile and bright emerald eyes again, I find my heart loving her even more. I still find it hard to believe that we allowed her to come, but we would have had a difficult time changing her mind.

“Of course I can stay below with the prayer-warriors,” she insisted, “and the Royal Ship has plenty of secure cabins down there if the battle goes hard. And Aravelle will be with me, and is full of common sense, even if you think I am *not*,” she added mischievously.

As we catch up on recent developments, I suddenly see shadows on her face and hear the fluttering wings and cooing voices of the beautiful Doves – even as they begin landing upon us. For these past many weeks some of them have been arriving at the Royal City, and now on the Royal Ship, every few days or whenever they have new intelligence to deliver to us.

Less than twenty-four hours after we first sent them to search for Drelleus and his henchmen, a few of the doves returned – for they had flown swiftly. With many flutterings of excitement they told us they had found the three men boarding a ship departing for Sereneya. Traveling with them was a company of about forty men in all, frequently huddling together in stealthy communications.

The holy Doves were invisible to the scowling Captain Wyrmlode and to Drelleus and his men, and they

Seven Ships to Malavalea

chose from that first day to remain on various places of the ship to pick up any information they could glean. Soon they had learned much of the treacherous story.

It seems that this Drelleus, a wicked fishermyn of northeast Malavalea, heard that the Princess Aureaelle had been brought to Life again after the final accomplishment of her Sorrow. Hearing that the Princess and I were forsaking the island for the Royal City, he immediately gathered into angry conference some worthless and wicked vermin living near the Bay of Dragonhead, and in their presence vowed a great curse on King Ardureus, the entire Royal Family, and all of Phylantagia.

Sensing the spiritual awakenings around him on the dark island, and seeing the anger of the daemuks, the pyggeruts, and the other awakening demon-creatures, he decided that if ever Malavalea were to spread her dark ways to the bright lands beyond, the time for her invasion must be soon.

To that purpose, he sailed with us to Sereneya – where he found Tallis and Tark, and beguiled them to join him – and sailed with us again toward the Royal City. In the ambition of his twisted depravity, he was fervently hoping for an opportunity to assassinate the Princess Aureaelle and myself, and if at all possible to take command of the ship, and murder or hold for ransom Captain Frederic and some of the crew.

They would then dock the ship in some remote region, and stealthily work their way on foot toward the City of Gold, where they assumed they could find many

more miscreants like themselves, either in prison, or holding grudges against the King, or hopelessly in debt to their taxes – all which situations, of course, the glad hearts of the sunny land have never experienced.

The bad news for Phylantagia is that the infiltrators were apparently able to take advantage of the childlike guilelessness of some of the citizenry – turning curiosity first to growing interest and then to deluded animosity... and it seems that their cunning questions and skillful slanderings turned dozens of innocent hearts toward their abominable cause.

The better news is that, so far as we can discern, they have taken every convert with them back to Malavalea – so hopefully there are none of their henchmen near the Royal City, or influencing people there.

Instead, or so say the Doves, they are readying their boats, and endeavoring to rally the entire island for a stealth attack against *'those bunches of stupid sheep,'* as they call the strong-hearted people of our kingdom.

As far as the good Doves can tell, no one on Malavalea is aware that our fleet is only ten or twelve days from Sereneya... winds and the good will of the father permitting.

The Three Battles

*And how shall men who love the sun
or scenes of amity below,
where harmony and sweet concord,
from lowly soil, in blessings flow—
oh, how shall these be called away,
to risk their lives for many a day?*

*And how shall these who love their home,
their wives, their children 'round their feet,
be called to lands afar, to roam
where Death and danger they will meet—
and why shall these who treasure Peace,
go risk their own, for its increase?*

Captain Frederic tells us we are now less than a day's journey from the evil little island of Sereneya, where the Princess and I were so sorely beset. The day is calm, and for the past two hours the sun has been slowly dropping from its apex toward the western sea behind us.

The darkening waves of this Malferean Sea are calm, and our seven ships are sailing as slowly as possible, for we will wait for total darkness to fall, before we slip through the Straits of Sereneya. Hopefully the moon will give us enough light to safely navigate the Strait, so we

can reach Malavalea with no one to warn the army of Drelleus of our approaching. We have just finished the day's Fourth Drill, by which each man of our hundreds of warriors on the seven ships has been perfecting his skills with either sword or bow—for each man commenced his training immediately upon volunteering for our voyage and being accepted for combat.

I have just returned with Thayne from some of our smaller ships, where we were intensifying the sword drill, to this Royal Ship. All of our archers have been here on the larger ship since sunup, for today was a perfect chance for them to practice at greater range on its lengthier deck.

The archers are just beginning to slide down the ropes and hanging rope ladders into the pearlescent transport boats for shuttling back to their base ships. Some of their instructors will join them, for we have been occasionally overlapping some of our seven instructors of swordplay and seven of archery between the various groups—over all of which I have been diligently in charge.

Soon enough we hope to engage those evil forces of Malavalea, which I have learned so well to respect. But just now we have perhaps half an hour to rest, and I am reminding myself I should appreciate these last hours of calm. And what more enjoyable way could I be resting than just as I am? Walking slowly near the railing just ahead of me is the beautiful Princess Aureaelle—flanked by two of my favorite Phylantagean men.

Her right arm clings to Thayne's, just above his el-

The Three Battles

bow, and on the other side of her is our good King Ardureus. Beside me walks the sweet country maiden, Aravelle, who for so many good reasons holds the Princess's heart near her own. Several of Thayne's men are with us.

I am glancing casually across the waves toward Frederic's vessel, when my body tenses at the sight that no sailor, except the youngest and most foolish, really wishes to see. For I am looking at the huge scaly humps of what must be a gigantic sea serpent rising and falling between our ships. Even as I shout and reach for my trumpet, I hear a dozen other calls from the lookouts on our other ships.

Before our horrified eyes, the great stupidly-grinning head of the colossal beast begins rising out of the sea, no more than sixty feet from our railing. The bright sunlight shows every detail of its dripping head as it keeps rising, rising, rising... higher—and, to our amazement—still higher, nearly to the top of our mast—even as the many sinuous loops of its undulating body stretch toward our leading ships in the sea beyond. Surely the monster must be at least two hundred feet long.

We order the Princess and Aravelle below, with one of Thayne's men accompanying them, even as the rest of us draw our weapons. Archers fit arrow to string, awaiting my command. The mighty serpent's evil head, as if observing our movements on the deck, lowers until it is just level with us, and only thirty feet from our railing.

Suddenly, after the roar of a fiery breath flames to-

ward us — it must have been at least fifteen feet long, and we recoil from its heat — the gigantic sea-dragon snaps its huge mouth shut and drops its head, for its near-sighted eyes have now discovered one of our transport boats on the waters below our railing, where six or seven of our brave archers were just settling themselves into it. The great reptilian head of the beast slips under the boat, and jerks up swiftly, raising the lightweight pearlescent craft at least thirty feet into the air, before it slips off the snout and falls, nearly upside down, upon the water.

I see four of the archers soon surfacing and swimming for the rope ladders. The fifth and sixth men never have a chance. With two quick movements, and two great gulps they disappear from before our horrified eyes — drunken up and swallowed whole by the mouth of the enormous sea serpent. A tumultuous shout goes up from all the watchers — but what can we do? So substantial are its scales, that our arrows would only enrage it even more.

How earnestly I am now crying out to my father for wisdom — for although I had heard when the Princess and I first sailed to Malavalea that such creatures were still believed to exist, I totally rejected the possibility as mere local superstition. But I see the creature now raising its evil head again, to perhaps twenty feet above our railing, as if it is trying to see just what kind of prey has been making these little noises and movements upon the open deck of our ship.

I am just ready to command that we all send arrows

The Three Battles

flying into its great red eyes, when a golden thunderbolt falls from the heavens upon the back of the monster's head. By the time we can comprehend what has happened, the great arch-eagyl Skyfeathyr has landed lightly on the dragon's head, has thrust his huge hooked beak into the creature's flashing red eye nearest us, then into the other one, and has tumbled off the huge serpent's head backwards, and down nearly to the surface of the water, from where he caught himself in a mighty glide and was out of reach before the flames from the turning head could singe his feathyr.

Higher he climbs, and lands on the top of our central mast... just as I see a second sea serpent gliding between two of our ships toward its mate that is now thrashing blindly and with horrible violence in every direction, threatening to capsize or destroy our smaller ships.

Upon my command to shoot, at least a hundred of our metal-tipped arrows fly against the first serpent. Sixty or seventy arrows remain in its eyes, nostrils, and mouth — the rest break or bounce off its scales as if we had shot them against a wall of stone.

While the immense sea monster's mate is gliding up beside it, somehow realizing the injury to the first one, and rising up in rage to avenge it, the hand of Thautaylius thrusts the invisible flute into my mouth and entreats me to blow it.

Before our astonished eyes, both creatures instantly go limp, and slowly turn belly up, as if floating in death. But the pale green underbelly is not as soft as it looks, and

the arrows from the other boats simply bounce off exactly as they had before.

Finally all the archers have heard our commands to hold their arrows – reluctantly, for those on the other ships know nothing of the invisible flute, and suspect that the serpents are only feigning death.

As the huge dragon drifts within a few feet of our ship, I grab a sword from the warrior beside me, and climb down to jump upon its pale wide belly. To my surprise, the scales that appear to be so rough – for each one is larger than my hand – are so slippery with some slimey film that I would have slid off into the water, had my dagger point not gripped just enough to stop my sliding.

I finally angle my sword and force it with all my strength between two huge scales – hoping I am over its heart – but I really have no reason to think the sword is long enough to even reach it, for the great dragon must be thirty feet through, at this point. Grieving most of all that there is no way we can slit open the beast’s belly to possibly rescue the two warriors inside, I leap to the rope ladder dropped behind me, and scramble up to the deck.

We leave the two slumbering sea monsters floating southwest of the smaller dark island, hoping they will remain unobserved by the Sereneyans... or else distract them for at least a few days.

A thousand admiring warriors throw prayer-waves of respect and appreciation to the mighty Skyfeathyr

The Three Battles

as he launches from the mast and soars away in humble majesty toward the Golden City... and, finally, we are sailing again toward the evil Island of Malavalea.

† † † †

Seven days now separate us from that tragic scene where our first two warriors perished, victims of the huge Sea Serpents.

That same night, as soon as the skies grew black around us, we sailed carefully past the dark island Sereneya, where some months ago the Princess and I were so severely attacked by those raging spirits of evil, and where our ship was so severely tested by the demonic winds.

This time, though, we were permitted to skirt the island without incident, and in the seven days since have made excellent progress. I can almost feel the prayers of the dear people back in the Royal City, and across the fair sunlit lands of Phylantagia, for it seems that the waves are parting before our ships, as if to speed them along, and the steady wind brings us closer to the challenges ahead. I am still upset at myself, however, that two men perished because of my neglect to remember the Invisible Flute, and my foolish arrogance about the Sea Serpents.

Why was I so prone – so proud? – to trust in my own opinions, that I could so quickly dismiss as mere foolish superstitions the tales I had heard about those huge sea serpents?

And if I was so wrong about the Sea Serpents, then what shall I do about those other tales? What about the Sea-Maern, the sea-folk who supposedly live in the watery depths, and who are said to number at least in the many hundreds?

A strong and secretive people purportedly living in this very Malferean Sea between Sereneya and Malavalea, they are usually peaceful, and seldom seen – or so the tales were told to us – but are formidable foes when angry.

Although I so-carefully sheltered the ears of the Princess from those strange stories about the Sea-Maern, perhaps I would do well now to remember every detail I was told about those rugged men with their dark-green fish-scale skin and their streaming, sea-weedy hair, who can so swiftly ride upon their great golden sea-horses to the surface to shoot with strong arms and deadly skill the long green arrows from their shining green bows.

It seems that more than one local fisherman claims to have surprised one – when the waves and shadows were just right, and could see him shooting his arrows at the great fish with which they feed their families.

Another story goes like this. Just before midnight, upon a calm and moonlit sea – a good fisher boy had been quietly drifting along with the wind and tide, just enjoying the warm evening and the gentle, cooling breeze – for he was to be soon married, and had pleasant thoughts upon his mind – when he floated immediately above huge circles of dozens of the Sea-Maern, who appeared to be playing in contests or games.

The Three Battles

Some were riding swiftly on their golden sea stallions, shooting arrows at a target-net strung between two swift Sea-Maern riding far ahead.

Others were riding in swift circles here – or swimming without horses elsewhere – in long circular marathons, in which the swift athletes were relaying batons of shining silver to their successive riders or swimmers.

While the Sea-Maern were thus engaged, their wives – the *maerma* – swam even nearer beneath the fisher boy's boat, in interweaving circles of moonlit art, through what appeared to be some kind of a swimming 'dance' accompanied by joyful song, for their faces were full of joy, and trails of bubbles floated from every mouth to the surface, to break all around the enchanted fisher lad. How his throbbing heart was *longing* to hear the music!

And while the sea women were so beautifully making their merriment, their younger children – whom the local people who believe in them call *maerrubs*, and who were too small to be watching their fathers in their games – were slowly splashing, and playing tag, and spinning flat seashells to each other within the protection of their mothers' and some sea-maedyns' inner circles.

So entranced was the fisher boy in the romance of his observations that he never once thought of himself as being in any danger, until the beautiful face of a sea-maedyn only a few feet from his own – for she was just beneath the edge of his boat – happened to look up toward the rippling moon and saw it reflecting off the glasslike surface onto his enrapt smiling face.

The Three Battles

In about as much time as it takes me to describe it, the sea-maerma and their little maerrubs disappeared, diving into the dark depths, and a ring of the stern Sea-Maern surrounded the fisher lad's boat, treading water and aiming a dozen arrows at his heart.

Seeing he was unarmed, an older Maern dismounted from his sea stallion, climbed into the lad's boat, and sat on the seat at its other end—staring at him sternly for a full moment.

Looking back at the incident later, the fisher boy said he suspected his life was spared by possibly three things. For one, he had no weapons upon himself or with him in the boat. He was also, to his great amazement, able to understand some of the words of their low, slurring tongue, and—he especially credits his life to this one—he had resting upon his lap a crude metal harp, surprisingly similar to the ones some of the sea-maedyns had been playing.

Within a minute, all the taut bowstrings of the dripping metal bows—save one—relaxed, and some of the Sea-Maern were seen to be actually weeping. For they had requested of him a song, almost as if they doubted whether he could really play the harp, and when he began bravely singing out the ecstasies of his desire toward his betrothed Beloved, and of the drawing near of their wedding day, and of the bliss that would follow, the Maern listened earnestly, as if they really wanted to believe that something good could be in the hearts of the strange Light-world boatmen who trapped and netted and snared the fish of their own watery regions.

After the fisher had sung and harped for them a few more joyful airs, the last arrow was lowered. The Maern in the boat solemnly shook the fisher lad's hand, pointed reverently up toward the great full moon, and slipped into the water, and onto his sea stallion. The entire ring of Sea-Maern dove into their wet underworld, and the fisher boy pulled his oars earnestly toward home.

But that was then... I remind myself, trying to open my heart to believing the story, if it can indeed be true, and this is now. And are not the evil hearts of Malavalea at this very moment spreading their false ways and destructive beliefs into the trusting hearts of even good men and beasts and spirit beings? What lies have they been cunningly sowing and cultivating... and how shall we war against them?

As I think about these invisible misinformation wars... the battles before the battles... I appreciate more than ever the prayer circles of Phylantagia, and I find myself rethinking the tactics and priorities of our WAHRoR organization back on Planet Eyrth, as never before. *Does not history instruct the honest observer that the soul of any mighty kingdom first begins its descent down into decline and ruin when its citizens allow their hearts to be turned away from grateful daily prayer, and devotion to the divine?*

† † † †

We appear to be only four days away from landing on Malavalea, when we realize we have some undesired visitors. High above us, but circling gradually lower, are nearly a dozen dark *shadow vultures*, as Captain Frederic

calls them — evil, unpleasant birds similar to our common vulture, but nearly twice the size, and so nearly transparent that you can, in the daytime, see within them the disgusting things they have been eating, but in dark or gloomy times hardly see them at all.

Flying just above the range of our arrows, they circle slowly over our fleet of ships. I assume they are gleaning all the information they can as to how many of us there are, how we are armed, and where we appear to be heading, but they soon fly off toward dark Malavalea, apparently to warn Drelleus of our approach.

As soon as they leave, we alter our course, to sail around the south and to the east of the island, so we can sail into Dragonhead Bay on its northeastern end, and there begin the battle, in the very heart of their evilry — hopefully catching them unprepared.

At the first light of dawn on our third morning after seeing the shadow vultures, we suddenly startle to the strident sound of trumpets blasting from every ship! They pierce the early gloom, accompanied by cries of warning, for nearly a hundred boats of the *Mallamyn* — Drelleus' evil fishermyn — have surrounded our fleet. Already dozens of rope-hooks have been thrown up and over the railings of several of our ships — including the Royal Ship, where I am standing — and the Mallamyn are trying to scale them without being seen, while being covered by archers in their boats almost below.

Fortunately we have required at least two-thirds of our warriors to be fully ready for battle even at this early

The Three Battles

hour, and we are soon lifting the rope hooks or cutting off the tops of the ropes to drop the swarming Mallamyn back into the sea. Only a few of them even reach the railing, and are quickly defeated.

After a quarter hour of furious flying arrows, Drelleus and his evil Mallamyn archers, having lost the element of surprise, change their tactics.

Moments later, on the decks of all our ships, we are fighting myriads of small but hungry fires — for from longbow and crossbow hundreds of speeding arrows with hotly-blazing bituminous tips are flying against us. While half of our men are preventing and squelching the blazes, the Mallamyn again attempt to climb up to our decks, but are again prevented, for we have enough men on board our ships that no serious fires even take hold.

Suddenly there is a complete lull in the fighting. The Mallamyn lay down their bows, and regroup just east of our fleet, which has tightened its formation until none of their boats can be safe inside our smaller circle.

The wicked Drelleus now stands tall in their lead boat, picks up a loud horn, and bellows to us a challenge.

“Men of Au-Royalialia, and citizens of Phylantagia, hear my honorable *Invitation to Combat*... and consider it well.

“Through no fault of our own, you are invading, in many great ships, our fair island of Malavalea, which has done you no harm, as you very well know. I see not how and man who claims to love justice and honor can, with

any good conscience, even consider such an unfair and unprovoked attack on men who have long been such honest and upright citizens.”

At these words, I see Thayne and his Twelve, who happen to be still with me on the Royal Ship, look at me angrily, pointing to their bows. Perhaps they are remembering how ruthlessly Drelleus would have murdered the Princess Aureaelle and myself, on Frederic’s ship, had the Golden Mirror not prevented it.

Now, unknown to Drelleus, three of Thayne’s Twelve—men of great faythe and courage—have been gifted also with tremendous strength, and have been exercising it with these formidable wyrkmyn-forged bows for just such an hour as this.

During these past three months they have been piercing the centers of targets fifty yards farther away than is the cowardly Drelleus now, and I am certain that if I would just nod my head to Thayne, the haughty traitor Drelleus would instantly fall, three arrows in his heart.

But I raise my right hand, with fingers spread wide, put my left forefinger to my lips, and point to Drelleus, who is still ranting against us.

“If there are enough honorable men among you, men who would fight fairly, instead of shooting down from great ships onto helpless fishermyn, I have a fair proposal. Launch twenty of your smaller transport crafts, filled with your very bravest warriors—for you will need them—and let them come against an equal number of our own boats,

The Three Battles

filled man for man. For only one hour we will fight, on a more fair and even footing, and you will have no need to be forever ashamed of the cowardice such as you are now displaying.

“To the ones who best prove their mettle the rest will surrender. The loss of many lives will be prevented, peace will soon reign, and conditions for our mutual benefit will be fairly negotiated, that we may continue to live together peacefully, as we have for so many years.”

Now Thayne—who knows ‘a rat is forever a rat, and never a more despicable rat than when it looks you in the eye to declare it is something else’—is pleading still, with longing eyes, for my permission to silence the incorrigible scoundrel once for all... but I still hesitate, for I wish to not only win the war against evil Malavalea, but to win over to our righteous cause—if at all possible—any honest hearts that may still have a respect for courageous chivalry beating within them.

Quietly now, as if from almost beyond the periphery of my thought, I sense Thayne’s invisible flute drawing me to its counsel, and I bow on one knee and draw, as faythefully as I can, from its haunting silences, the clarity of direction we need.

I wince, for the answer instantly comes, and is absolutely clear. Thayne struggles even as do I—so contrary is its counsel to our common sense, to all of our training and our natural and spiritual inclinations. But, with pain on his warriors’ faces, their great bows drop, and their terrible, taut bowstrings are relaxed, one by one.

Putting my own horn to my mouth, I agree to Drelleus' evil challenge. For ten minutes we negotiate the terms, one of which I insist on emphatically: that the contest be staged within the arena of our seven encircling ships, "for you know we may be trusted, or you would never have thrown us the wager."

Twenty of our pearlescent transport craft are lowered, and into each boat a dozen of our skilled archers, daggers at their side, are soon settled. They row out into the arena, and make a long, slightly-curved front, even as Drelleus and his men match them man-for-man, in boat-for-boat, from across the arena.

In the rear of their center boat Drelleus is taking command of his Mallamyn, and from the front of our own center boat Thayne—for I could not prevent him—is directing our own brave company.

I am ashamed to realize that I have shown you so many scenes from on the decks of our ships and the surface of the Sea—but have written almost nothing about the powers below.

But please know that by early dawn, even before the first bugle blasted its warning, our Prayer-Warriors had already assembled together in the lower decks of all seven of our ships, and with courageous prayers and canticles of praise were inviting the father to glorify his high name this day. And please remember, as we return to this second battle—the Sea Battle—the vital role they are playing.

The twenty boats from each force are now fully aligned against each other, and all appear to be ready. As agreed,

The Three Battles

my bugler blows a loud, clear blast on a golden trumpet, followed by three short successive blasts at the end. Each warrior is to count to five, and the battle will begin, according to the rules we have agreed upon.

But suddenly, to the horror of every man on our seven decks, we see each of our twenty pearlescent boats instantly surrounded by eight or ten deadly warriors, for even before the final count is finished—boiling up from beneath the placid surface, as if they were deadly echoes to my trumpet—are hundreds of the stern Sea-Maern, arrows at the ready.

Each Maern, clinging with his knees to his golden sea horse, aims an arrow at our warrior nearest him, and of course cannot miss a target less than ten feet in front of him, unless he is first slain.

Even before my trumpeter answers with a new command, hundreds of our own arrows are flying down upon the Malavalean boats, for every one of us knows that the terms of the contract have been completely nullified by this blatant act of new treachery. Indeed, it was only a ruse to destroy our most skilled warriors and to test our strength, though surely with the knowledge that they would lose some of their own inferior warriors.

While men in every boat are fighting valiantly, with many falling, hardly a man on our decks notices that the other seventy boats of the Mallamyn have quietly rowed from their places between our ships to where they can be hidden from our sight beyond our vessels, which they are again seeking to scale.

On only three of our ships are they discovered—by the Doves—before any can clamber over the railings, and even the Royal Ship is compromised. Behind me, nearly twenty Mallamyn are running silently across the deck toward us, while we are busy shooting into the arena.

By the time we discover them, another ten Mallamyn, probably handpicked by Drelleus himself, have already glided quietly across our deck to descend to our lower hold, where our shocked and defenseless Prayer Warriors are crying out in fervent faytheful entreaties.

Princess Aureaelle, who was at that very moment walking over to join the great prayer-ring, would likely have been slain on the spot, had not Aravelle pushed her to the deck, and taken an arrow in her side that was meant for the falling Princess. But by Aureaelle's 'oyntmynt' Aravelle's wound is stanchd, and her life spared.

The prayers are now answered by the previous prayers of the wyrkmyn from many months ago. For at this very moment, on the upper deck, I blow with all my might Thayne's invisible Flute, and every Mallaman and Sea-Maern in the watery arena to which I was aiming the Flute, is instantly sleeping, and, as was clearly commanded to us by the father before we sailed, is soon slain.

As our warriors in the arena are slaying the Mallamyn and Sea-Maern, and some of their Golden Sea Horses, I see we have at least a few warriors alive in every boat. The battle rages around the outer ring of our fleet, until all our ships are cleared, and our arrows are sending the remaining Mallamyn in retreat toward Malavalea.

The Three Battles

One more item I will share, before we move on to the final Battle at Dragonhead. As Thayne, who is not only alive, but practically uninjured, is rowing his craft toward the Royal Ship, he sees a strange creature slowly surfacing in the water only ten feet in front of him.

He has never seen such an odd being before, but recognizes, from the tales I told him, what must be a sea-maerrub, which you will remember is a child of the Sea-Folk. Even as he is wondering whether he should slay it, the head and face slowly surfaces just beyond it, of a beautiful sea-maerma. Long hair streaming down to the waist of her emerald-green body, she speaks to Thayne, in soft, musical pleadings, asking him to spare them until she has made her defense. Her name, he learns, is Maereanne.

When Thayne learns that she has been kidnapped from another group of peace-loving and father-worshipping Sea-Maern in a far-off region of Phylantagia, and that the Maern who kidnapped her and fathered her two Maerrubs is now slain, he agrees that she shall receive safe passage, and that we will do everything in our power to return her to her Sea-Folk, wherever they are.

She then tells Thayne... to our mixed relief... that by original intent, back when all Sea-Maern were first made and were all still honorable, they were so fashioned that if a Sea-Maern dies dishonorably his maerma and unmarried maerrubs will also die, within a few minutes of his passing, no one knowing just how. Because of that natural law, she can now assure Thayne that she and her two maerrubs now swimming with her are the only Sea-Folk still alive in all this region of Phylantagia.

She carefully instructs Thayne of a certain promontory where she will await us on our return from Malavalea, for she is sure she can describe to us how to find the spot where her people live, although she would probably be unable to find it herself, since she was blindfolded and drugged when kidnapped, and is perhaps a thousand miles away from her own beloved Sea-Folk.

† † † †

As we round the island early next morn to sail into the Bay at Dragonhead, each of us is strengthening his heart for what we assume will be our greatest battle yet.

If we lost two warriors in our Battle with the Sea Serpents... and nearly a hundred more in the Sea Battle two days ago... what can we now expect in this greater conflict which we believe—according to our prophecies and old canticles received so long ago—will free Malavalea and all Phylantagia from evil, and from evil beings, if we are only able to triumph, in the end?

Both Tallis and Tark are dead, slain in the Sea Battle, but Drelleus—the coward that he is—apparently swam around one of our ships and slipped away in one of the retreating boats before anyone noticed he was missing. We assume he is even now, with the help of the nefarious Wyrmlode, building up all of his troops and their defenses, summoning all the evil spirits together, and preparing fiery strategies for Malavalea's last stand.

Soon our seven ships anchor, out from the wharfs of Dragonhead, and I am finally able to see, situated on a

The Three Battles

nicely-elevated bluff above the northern shores of Dragonhead Bay, the gleaming white castle, which I have long heard of but never seen. Built many millennia earlier, in the days when Malavalea was still called Gallavalea, it remains even today in almost perfect condition, and is by far the most beautiful sight on the evil island.

Leaving enough men to hopefully protect each of our ships, our warriors slip into the transport craft, and are soon assembling in regiments upon the shore, preparing to march against the castle. For whatever reason, our sailing, anchoring, and transporting have gone completely unchallenged.

Finally we are ready to march. Every warrior drops one knee to the sand, bowing his head as my bugler gives three fiery blasts from his golden trumpet, and I follow with a simple prayer of praise to the father. Suddenly we all stand, lift both arms to our father, and the march is on.

Before we are halfway to the castle, a fury of spiritual storm—I know not what else to call it—blows down upon us, and, although the hour is early, pitch-black darkness descends upon us all, until we cannot see the man in front of us. Horrible demonic shriekings, so loud that we must cover our ears to even *think*, besiege us, until each of our warriors feels as if he were inside a reverberating drum beating louder and louder to destroy him.

Huge streaks of blue lightning fall among us, incinerating more than a few of our men, and injuring others, who begin seeking their way, or being helped by others, back toward the infirmary of the Royal Ship—

their steps down toward the beach illuminated only by the bluish flares of further torture and death.

Giant hailstones, as large as cannon balls, begin falling among our ranks, each missile flaming with hot, sizzling fires of blazing blue.

So sudden and unexpected and overpowering is this combined onslaught against us that I—I humbly confess it—have not the slightest idea what to recommend, and doubt that anyone could comprehend a word I would shout out, if I even knew what to say.

Shall we retreat to our ships... give it all up... sail away... ? I can hardly bear the awful responsibility that is mine, combined with this consuming hopelessness I feel. A few more moments of this, and our expedition will surely prove to be all in vain.

† † † †

At this very moment, in a world far away, Djélôn and five of his compatriots in the WAHRoR are being suddenly thrust into a new type of warfare, such as they have never imagined. As if they are but one man, they see suddenly in lucid vision—almost as if I am standing in their midst—a distressed Captain Gaelynt Glenn fighting for his life among hordes of visible Mallamyn... and surrounded by both visible and invisible demonic enemies of every foul description.

All around me, above me... even through me... the creatures are floating, while cursing, kicking, damning

The Three Battles

and mocking me, spitting on me, fighting against me, and thrusting my courage through, with every vile weapon.

As if they were but one man, Djélôn and his five sprawl full length on the ground. In this strange new warrior stance of abject prostration, each man suddenly begins exercising a fiery faith he has never learned, toward a father he has never addressed... for who can resist the love of the father when he reveals himself in such a whelming descent of majesty upon him, unless the very heart is false?

For many minutes they wrestle, and weep, and battle, and cry out aloud together... and the vision passes.

† † † †

Ever so gradually, as if Eyrth warriors, and ship prayer-warriors, and Phylantagean prayer-ring warriors are weak and far away, the darkness of Malavalea thins, but it *does* begin to thin—and we can see the bottom of the white castle, with the black billowing clouds of entrenched evil shrouding its upper stories and towers.

But, behold! for every eye turns now toward the Bay, where it appears that *The Albatross*—our ship that was furnished and finished by the holy maJic of the wise wyrkmyrn of Au-Royalialia—seems to be ablaze with fire.

To our horror-struck eyes it appears that the entire ship—in which King Ardureus, Princess Aureaelle... and indeed all of the Royalty traveling with us, are sheltered—is ablaze, for great tongues and sheets of bright flamings of orange and red and golden fire so cover the hull of the

ship that nothing else can be seen, and all appears to be lost. But as this new terror grips our hearts, we behold, even in our beholding, an awesome sight, and our courage returns. The burning ship is *not* being consumed!

Instead, as if from the concentration of every faythe-filled prayer from faythe-filled hearts in every world, a fine silvery myst begins rising, like a small cloud-column from the midst of the ship.

From the center of *The Albatross*, the silvery column rises... spreads... and – high above our masts – begins billowing outward into rapidly-expanding cumulous clouds of pale-green, now golden, now fiery, blinding, golden-mysted clouds of mysterious authority. Soon the skies, and the seas, and the entire Island of Malavalea itself are enshrouded beneath the beautiful cloud.

When the first golden mysts begin drifting around the white castle, a swift conclusion comes. Every evil being within it comes storming out, as if he would fling himself into the sea to escape the mysty Presence. As they rush past us to the shore, horrible infightings begin among them, and many men and beasts alike perish – even before the sea claims the last evil creatures and Mallamyn, and the golden myst forever banishes the evil spirits to the planet prepared for their eternal sufferings.

Drelleus and Wyrmlode – before they can reach the beach – are slain by arrows from Thayne and his men, and Malavalea yields to absolute silence. But soon a new sound arises, for the silence gives place to those eternal canticles, the sweet-sounding hymns of Au-Royalialia.

Between Two Worlds

*Could I but thrust my hands into my breast
to clasp the sorrows of my breaking heart,
to grasp in firmer grip the cent'ring self,
my suff'rings and my sorrows so intense,
so dead to former joys and ruined dreams
as to be by the merest, slend'rest, threads
bound to those base realities I thought,
in earlier times, I loved,
yet, more than these, so full of throbbing Life,
still pulsing, passioned, in the wilder height
that growing Life in faythefulness reveals...
and from your own self-thrustings of the like,
your purer, nobler, wiser heart receive,
two hearts exchanged, but beating still as one,
no more mere spirit echoes flung between,
in far from satisfactory embrace,
but bearing, beating, being of the One,
our fuller knowledge, full communion sweet
would daily be complete, our loves increased.*

After Aravelle and the Princess Aureaelle have applied the precious drops of oyntmynt to our wounded warriors – although Aravelle is herself still stiff and sore and limping from her own wound from yesterday – they join Thauntaylius, his Twelve, the joyful King, and several others and myself for an exploration of the white castle. But how could our hearts prepare for what we will find?

What a full spectrum of emotions are ours, as we stroll quietly through the spacious, vaulted rooms of what was once such a magnificent edifice, but is now so dark, and dirty, and cluttered by centuries of lazy neglect.

In what appears to have been a library we discover, lying open, some old books of filthy magic. In a dirty, but large and well-designed, kitchen now full of beastly scraps we encounter great stinking piles of fish bones (from how many decades past, we wonder) surrounded by stacks of unwashed bowls and cups and tableware.

The dirty unmended garments of the fishermyn hang on pegs near the doors, above piles of long-worn-out footwear and discarded cloaks and rags of all kinds.

Everywhere we walk, the story is the same. A beautiful, circular, marble stairway, with the thick turnings of its great balustrades and its magnificent golden handrails deep in dust, beckons us up to the next floor higher.

As our group ascends the curving steps, Aureaelle and I, who have been lagging farther and farther behind, decide to explore instead a room nearby, which we have just noticed. Aravelle looks back from the other group, sees our welcoming smiles and gestures, and hurries our way to join us.

Passing through a richly-framed opening, we are soon stepping down a circular alabaster stairway, which descends us into a huge ballroom – but a murky one, for the high windows have all been covered with now thread-bare cloths which are still seeking to hinder the sunrays

Between Two Worlds

that wish to coming flooding with new joy into the room.

“Don’t you wish these walls could talk?” Aureaelle asks us. “What a fascinating history they would declare!”

“I’m not sure I really want to hear it,” Aravelle responds, shaking her head doubtfully, “if they would speak of these recent centuries. But if they could recall for us the glories of Gallavalea, when all her dwellers were good and honorable men... *how I would love to learn it!*”

We continue our conversation, share new discoveries, and wind our ways through various rooms, until we find what must have been the castle’s chapel. The windows, which begin higher than our heads and stretch up for at least twenty feet higher, are like the stained-glass arches of our own Eyrth, but appear to be of thinly-sliced, colorful and precious gemstones, instead of glass.

The frames around them, richly rolled and fluted, and cascading into perfect balancings of beauty, are of some exotic, fine-grained wood unknown to us. “When Thayne sees it,” Aureaelle muses, “Perhaps *he* will know.”

The silence and the dust of the chapel are so deep that we stand in silent wonder, musing about the strangeness of such a beautiful room buried so long in sad neglect.

As if their beautiful hearts would hallow again this neglected place of worship, Aureaelle and Aravelle kneel in front of a long pew of golden-veined white marble, its tapestry coverings long piled with dust. But as I turn too-abruptly to join them, I accidentally trip over some-

thing unseen on the dark floor, and fall against one of the heavy marble branches of a magnificent lampstand which I have been carefully examining, and, to my great dismay, send it crashing to the floor.

The noise is still echoing loudly through the large chamber, when a new sound startles the two noble ladies to their feet, and we all stand staring at one another.

Something – or someone – is still alive... and cries, as if from great distance and in great agony, from the lower bowels of this magnificent castle on Dragonhead Bay.

Guided by the repeated callings and groanings, we search doorways and stairways for perhaps ten minutes. Finally I discover a trapdoor in the floor of a room next to the chapel. The dust scrapings around the carpet covering the concealed door show clearly the sign of the carpet's frequent movements.

Now, ever since the evil spirits were banished from this island, our hearts have been witnessing to us that all is finally well on Malavalea. But I still find myself hesitating to even peer into the dark dungeon below, leave alone to actually drop down into it.

But the voice continues its pleadings. *"Help me... I beg you for mercy! Have you no heart in you at all?"*

"I'm dying... dying... why do you not feed me, or at least give me water? ...mercy! ...have mercy!"

Noticing now a ladder leaning against a wall beside

Between Two Worlds

me, I lower it into the darkness, and descend carefully into the evil smells and dark dampness of the dungeon. I still cannot see the source of the weak, entreating voice.

"Who are you?" I query, "...and why are you here?"

"I'm Brettik, of course," he replies in muffled pathos, "You should know who I am. Why have you left me to die?"

I find that Brettik is unbound, for the ceiling is so high that without the ladder it would be utterly impossible for a single man to even touch – leave alone force open – the trapdoor so high above his head.

Half-carrying the weak and haggard man, who seems to be but a youth, slowly up the ladder, I finally step out behind him, as he collapses onto the dark marble floor beside the trapdoor, in utter exhaustion.

"It is!" cries Aravelle, her hand on her heart, with her face as white as the castle itself. *"I thought that's what he told you! It's Brettik... it really is Prince Brettik."*

Bursting into tears, she kneels on the floor beside him, clasps his hand tightly between her own, and begins to thank the good father, over and over again.

But now it's the good Princess, who joins her in her weepings. *"Aravelle! are you saying this is my brother – the Prince who left my grieving father a year before I came to him? Oh! I cannot wait to show him to my dear father!"*

"Of course I'm Prince Brettik," the weak young man

replies, almost angrily, *“and I was almost the dead and mouldering Prince Brettik, thanks to Drelleus and his vile crew. But praised be our good father for sending you to me, and just in time.*

“But come,” he pleads with us, *“if you have any food or water at all, give it to me at once... for we must now search for my mother, if she also may be still alive.”*

Again Aravelle’s hand flies to her heart. *“Prince Brettik! are you saying that Queen Vadorea... after all these years... may also be still alive...?”*

“She was a few weeks ago... the last time I saw her,” he replies, angrily. *“Drelleus was threatening to put her to death on the spot, if I didn’t give him my word to help betray to him the kingdom; but I haven’t seen her since.”*

Less than fifteen minutes later, in a dungeon under another carpet-covered trapdoor only a few rooms further from the chapel, we find the noble Queen – still alive, but too weak to even speak. Apparently the conceited Drelleus felt confident that the concentrated Malavalean powers of evil could soon overcome our feeble goodness, and either thought the Queen and the Prince not worth saving, or perhaps planned to return to them, if necessary, to use them for future bargainings, or ransoms.

I will never forget the joys of the sweet scene that follows these events a few moments later. Blowing moderately at frequent intervals on the little bugle I carry, I signal Thayne’s party until we meet at last, near the main doors of the great castle. Words cannot describe

Between Two Worlds

the astonishment, the joy, the disbelief, the relief, the anger and the immense gratefulness that sweep across the heart of the noble King Ardureus, as he puts his eyes upon and his arms around these two dear ones so long missing, and so often feared to be dead.

Bit by bit, through the coming hours, I piece together the history of the increasing sorrows of good King Ardureus, which can be summarized as follows.

More than twenty years before this time, King Ardureus had married his sixth cousin, the beautiful Queen Vadorea, who gave birth a year later to a goodly son, the Prince Brettik. But for the following twelve years she was unable to bear again, until she finally bore unto him the little Princess Laticea, who died tragically only two day after birth.

Unable to cope with her grief, the sorrowing Queen decided to visit for a few weeks a dear friend on the coast north of Benevincea, hoping to find there some consolation and recovery. But only a week into her stay – while pensively walking along the seacoast alone, on a glorious sunny day – she completely disappeared.

Couriers rode the terrible news to the King, while search parties combed sea and land. After many weeks the grieving King heard that some in the Kingdom were suspecting – although such a thing had never happened in fair Phylantagia before – that she must have finally drowned her intense sorrows with herself. Unwilling to accept that idea, the good King finally had to call off the searchings, but refused to let hope die from his own heart.

But King Ardureus soon had yet another sorrow to face. The handsome Prince Brettik, now fourteen years old, was already manly – strong and headstrong, skilled with bow and sword and in all other sports, even as was his father the King.

Extremely fond of his mother, Prince Brettik was becoming gradually estranged from the King, partly because he had a hard time accepting and giving himself to the concept of suffering, servanthood Royalty – and especially at the thought of the royal ones of the fairer sex bearing the burdens of their Seventh Century Sorrows.

After some strong warnings from his father, but with the King's eventual grudging permission and his great love and parting blessings, the Prince finally sailed – perhaps to show his courage and independence – to Malavalea, where he moved in with a cousin who had been his dearest friend before joining an outpost there.

It was at this point in the sorrowing life of King Ardureus that his sister learned of a beautiful young lady in the outregions of Benevincea, orphaned and alone, of whom all spoke so highly that she was called to the palace to cheer up the grieving king. After a trial of only a few months, the King's sister and several other royal relatives entreated him to adopt the fatherless girl. He named her the Princess Aureaelle.

With Prince Brettik all seemed to go well for awhile, even on Malavalea. His cousin, only a few years older than the prince, was a strong, bright-hearted lad who owned a fishing boat on the Bay of Malavalea, and was

Between Two Worlds

a good influence on the young Prince in every way.

But only six years later, the Prince went out one day to check some lobster traps, and never returned. His cousin searched long for him, concerned that he might have been murdered by a brutish fisherman who lived nearby, one Drelleus, because of some jealousy and unreasonable quarrelings they had had about their fishing spots.

As if these six sorrows were not enough for the King, only four months after Prince Brettik's supposed death he learned that his dear adopted Princess Aureaelle was the very one decreed for the Seventh Seventh Sorrow!

And then – after all these sorrows had fallen upon him – he was told that horrible treachery and vile wickedness were invading his fair and innocent kingdom.

But today! – today, at long last – in the perfect timing of the wisdom of the father, the noble King Ardureus sits in glad celebration just inside the entrance of the white castle, weeping for joy as long lines of warriors from our seven ships come to congratulate him – some with tears, all with wonderment and worship – rank after rank.

Beside him, holding his right hand, reclines the pale but beautiful Queen Vadorea, and at his left is sitting the handsome Prince Brettik, now so much humbler and wiser. Both of the former prisoners are thin and weak – but little worse for the wear – and are warmly received and encouraged by every warrior-citizen's words.

Behind the royal couple I am sitting, occasionally

rising to give someone a hearty hug or handshake. To my right sits my beautiful Princess Aureaelle, often holding my hand. Her other hand holds the hand of Aravelle, who looks more and more, with every passing day, like the royal family she loves.

And stepping now into the white castle, just as the last warriors return to their ship, is that dear, dear man – the Interpreter! After praying through the battles, which he was watching in clear detail in his central cavern, he has rushed here to Dragonhead to celebrate with the King. He invites me to his Cave, for he has some wonderful news to share with me, and departs – an old, old man who has labored for two hundred years, and is seeing fruit at last, as he walks home into the heart of glad Gallavalea.

† † † †

Early the next morning, I row to Frederic's ship, and bid the dear skipper a hearty adieu. An hour from now he will be leaving, with a small crew and no warriors, for it is agreed that his is the ship that should pick up the sea-maerma – Maereanne, and her two lively maerrubs. Apparently these Sea-Maern can live outside of water for several hours, and he has a large water vat on his ship in which she and her maerrubs can safely ride, although he suspects they may wish to stop every day to catch some fish and refresh themselves in the open sea.

Frederic and Thayne agree that the place best fitting her description of the area from which Maereanne was kidnapped is a small island just west of the Long White Cliffs – which are themselves a few hundred miles east of

Between Two Worlds

Au-Royalialia, and are so named because the cliffs are for at least fifty miles so dense and steep that no ship can dock there.

After thanking Captain Frederic and commending him to the father's care, I bid a sorrowful farewell to Princess Aureaelle and the rest of her royal family, for the Interpreter has told me he must send me to them by a strange and different route.

I wonder about that, as I walk toward the Interpreter's Cave, and marvel also that I am here – alone, unarmed, alive, and as safe as can be, walking the old, old trail from Dragonhead to the once-fearful *Moonstone*. For the Interpreter has declared to us that the father has clearly confirmed to him that evil has now been cleansed from all Phylantagia – from land, and sea, and sky, as he will explain to me in fuller detail when I visit him.

When I reach the clearing of *Moonstone*, I pause for nearly an hour, to reflect upon the father's many, many mercies during the recent moons past. Never again will dark clouds make the light from the moon that ghastly greenish-gray – and on many a starry night a forever-righted Encryphia will smile down upon glad Gallavalea.

Malathakeus and his demented daemuks are gone. Never again will Pyggeruts – or any other demon-indwelt creatures – inhabit this island. I finally rise from my worship, and for at least ten minutes I lie on my back on *Moonstone*, just between the places where my dead princesses and my nearly-crazed self once lay, enumerating now the father's many mercies. How *graciously* he provided for

my every need, and how *fully* he forgave me after I failed him. I try to remember the unlearned words of the song that my spirit sang to the pale, resurrecting Princess – but they have escaped me, perhaps gone forever.

I reach the Interpreter's Cave, and receive a hearty welcome from the kindly Interpreter. A few minutes after I arrive, he takes me into the Cavern of the Present, and I see all Phylantagia spread out before me, then the Isle 'Malavalea' – now Gallavalea – also just below me, with a golden myst flowing over the whole. A loud voice cries out, as if from just above us, "*It is done! It is accomplished! Evil will be no more! In the glad Kingdom of the Faytheful, it is finished! ...finished! ..finished!*"

The Interpreter then tells me three heart-stirring pieces of news: First, he will send me tomorrow from this very Cave back to my own place on the Eyrth, where Al-Lloreya is still awaiting me – for in the time frame of that world, she has not yet left for Phylantagia.

Also, he will show me how to travel safely between our two worlds when truly necessary – using at times one of his three caverns, and at other times the third charm from the holy wyrkmyn – for it was he who carefully instructed them that I would soon need it.

The third piece of news also thrills me. The good King Ardureus promised him that after I have wedded my two princesses, the White Castle will be ours to dwell in, as a token of great appreciation for all I have done for him. But in addition to that magnificent building – the Interpreter tells me – we are to also receive this very Cave

Between Two Worlds

for our own use. The father will soon call him to another place, for his work on Malavalea is nearly accomplished. But mine may continue here for many years.

† † † †

*'For ever, wherever, my heart in his pocket,
My life in his mind, and my face in his locket,
I always am with him, through forest or fen—
But crave his returning, the fairest of men.'*

At the base of a trickling waterfall, where it splashes its glories into the pool below, on a moss-carpeted log centered in low sprinklings of fern, not far from where the wood thrush is busily trilling on its love-flute, my Eyrth-princess, Al-Lloreya, is sitting.

Here is her favorite early-morning spot, where many quiet songs she has sung, many oracles read, many life-mysteries pondered, many purposings penned, many lovely thoughts embraced, and so many silences savored.

The *joys* of being in love! Again today, during the dawning hour of its new glories, she smiles, weeps, and prays in turn for her dear so-dearly-Beloved.

Turning slowly to every direction of her sheltering sanctuary, she sweeps with merry emerald eyes the seclusion enveloping her. *No one must see!*

Thrusting her trembling hand quickly into her bosom, she withdraws from it a shining little locket – the loveliest she has ever seen. How she treasures it!

She snaps open the case, reverently kisses again the shining cameo, and admires once again the sturdy face with the honest eyes speaking so eloquently to her own.

But what does she hear? *Is she discovered?* Even as she snaps the case shut, she thrusts it into her bosom... for she hears the growing song of a hearty male voice, singing.

Softly, as if far away... then nearer... now clearer... ever louder, the song comes... then someone comes striding, and now *running* into her hallowed sanctuary, and she is weeping for joy in the sanctuary of my arms.

† † † †

How could we possibly be happier than we are right now? The first busy week with my Al-Lloreya is over. Already we have met with her mother, who not only blesses our desire to marry, but offers us to make it a double wedding with her own, for she apparently has met with and prayed with dear old Grenlynt the goldsmythe at least once too often! We congratulate her warmly, and tell her we would be delighted to join our wedding unto their own.

I have also met with Djélôn. For several hours, after much backslapping and a whole-hearted, manly hug, we discussed the recent events of our respective worlds. I thanked him heartily for saving my life on at least two occasions – first with the silver trumpet, which helped send me to fair Phylantagia, and again when he and his five compatriots were interceding for me ‘with more difficulty than we have ever experienced in a physical

Between Two Worlds

battle,’ as Djélôn declared when he reverently told me of the strange experience. After visiting with him a few hours, I forced myself to leave him – for I had an appointment with Al-Lloreya – but promised him we would find more hours to talk, as soon as possible.

“Of course you realize,” I said to him with a wink, as we parted, “how really fortunate you are. Not only will you be the best man at my wedding in two weeks, but you will also be... *are you ready for this, Djélôn?*... the *very first person*, and maybe the only one I will ever invite to travel with me back to Phylantagia. I know you would love it there, and... By the way, I happen to know a young lady there who is a real jewel, and would perhaps someday be willing to crown some worthy man’s life.”

These next two weeks before the wedding will be busy ones, for our lists are still growing longer.

In addition to more discussions with Djélôn, I need to spend some long hours with the Elders of the WAHRoR – for many of them are my near relatives, and a great number of them are invited to our wedding. And, not only must I account for my long absence, but I feel I must also lay some foundations for the discussions that must eventually come – hopefully with no hard feelings between us.

Already my beliefs about warfare are changing, and I am so young in my new faythe that I can hardly know what new convictions might soon stand in the way of my former allegiance to the laws of the WAHRoR. We agree on dates for two five-hour-long evening meetings, to be held in our secret, underground headquarters, but for now

I will spare you from the details of those conferences.

Our double wedding is a hallowed time of pure joy! Grenlynt and Al-Lloreya's dear mother are glowing as brightly as if they were twenty years younger, and of course our own ceremony too is a blissful hour from Paradise, and the more beautiful because we have carefully guarded our hearts and kept ourselves for it.

Soon – too, too soon – our short honeymoon is over, but I have promised her another one before I am a month older, on an island that is growing lovelier every day.

I have not told her she will be called within a few weeks to that world where I've been living... that her memories of this world will be lost... that she will be adopted there into the Royal Family... that she will live there for nearly six years before I see her there for the first time in the Council on the Royal Ship, but because of her six-year 'time shift' when she enters Phylantagia, she will have arrived there six years earlier than the time when I arrived, with no time shift... that, having lived there six years, she will be no longer eighteen, but still be twenty-four years old when I arrive there again, a few short weeks from now. For, as you know, there can be no 'age shifts' but only 'time shifts' when you enter another world, and she must age, as have I, a day at a time, in whatever world.

Nor do I tell her that when I arrive there again in a few weeks, much of Phylantagia and all of Au-Royalialia will be gathering together in the City of Gold to celebrate with us as I wed her again – my six-years-more-beautiful and just-as-precious bride – the Princess Aureaelle.

Joy in the Morning

*Between the worlds and back again,
from Joy to greater joying,
so flows the trail from end to end,
the father's hand deploying.*

*From sky to sky Djélôn and I,
the higher Journey yearning,
by Grace have slipped into the crypt
where Love is brightly burning.*

*No tempting play could thwart the way,
no fleeting gain convince us;
he presses to a brighter Day
and I toward my Princess.*

*My Al-Lloreya safely mine,
I leave bright Eyrth behind me,
with Princess Aureaelle to find
the way of Life assigned me.*

I have no idea where we have landed, for we are in total darkness, but I feel as rested as if I have been sleeping for a week. My drowsy mind is wonderfully enwrapped within a deep, deep peacefulness, and I am only slowly awakening, as if I am in no hurry... no hurry at all... no hurry at all, to even know.

Exactly where we have landed I know not... *but, it feels like Phylantagia!* Fully alive now in that glorious thought, I call Djélôn to awaken him too. I sit up slowly... stand up carefully... and we walk toward what looks like a dim strip of golden light shining as if from beneath a door.

Slowly opening it, we look out into a room which is quite a bit larger than this private prayer cell we were in – and my heart thrills at the ecstasies before our eyes.

I am indeed in Phylantagia – and I see in front of me one of the sacred prayer-rooms of the Royal Crypt. For I see through its open doorway an ancient, carven and curiously-engraven golden door across the hallway, which I recognize as the rear door of the apartment where the noble Sir Caedmon sleeps.

I see two people kneeling in front of us, facing us, but we are unobserved, for their eyes are closed. The older one is quietly praising the father, and I see on his noble face the shining tears of joy.

The young woman beside him, her arms of praise reaching high, seems to be mouthing silent words of agreement... nodding her head at times... and I observe on her salt-wet cheeks the shining of tremendous happiness.

Not wishing to disturb them, we walk quietly around them, and, leaving Djélôn just behind me, I slip down onto my knees between them. As I kneel, I briefly rest my hands upon their backs in silent blessing, which is in no way unusual here, and their prayers continue.

Joy in the Morning

For perhaps ten minutes I silently join in with their ardent heart-cries of joy, until I feel my own is ready, from very delight, to burst. A pause comes... I finally find my voice, and quietly pray aloud.

Before my first sentence of thanksgivings is finished we are all on our feet – hugging each other affectionately, and rejoicing together, for the good father has already answered some of their prayers by my safe journey to Eyrth, and my reappearing here in the City of Splendor.

I introduce Djélôn – the first stranger to ever ‘invade’ the sacred precincts of this Royal Crypt! – and he is welcomed heartily, even before I share how he has helped save my life on various occasions, in both worlds.

And King Ardureus... and my lovely Princess Aureaelle...! With what sweet humility and delight do they answer my questions now about their journeyings back from Gallavalea, while they tell us of the joy they brought to every heart along the way as they declared the Kingdom free again.

As they warmly share their joys, I see Djélôn with wide eyes trying to comprehend the marvelous details of this room we are in, the obvious supreme integrity of both King and Princess, and the tales they are telling and the amazing deeds they keep referring to.

With equal joy, I tell King Ardureus and Aureaelle of the warm welcomings I received on Eyrth, and of how blissful was my reunion with Al-Lloreya when I surprised her in her sacred sanctuary. I share also with them some

of the details of our wedding there, and our honeymoon, which, of course, Aureaelle has long ago forgotten — probably within ten days of when she first breathed the pleasant Phylantagia atmosphere, those six long years ago.

“But my obligations on Eyrth are finished, at least for awhile,” I tell my Princess, her eyes shining. “By returning there I was able to verify that you were still unmarried... and what a beautiful virgin you were — how I wish you could have seen yourself.”

At that remark, the Princess shakes her head ruefully, not because she wishes she could see her Eyrthly beauty, I assume, but because she has lost from memory the joyous details of our wedding days together.

“I also wanted to go so your mother could come to our wedding there — and of course I’ve been longing also to see Grenlynt the goldsmythe, and my comrades in the WAHRoR — especially Djélôn, here — and so many other friends and relations.

“But, rise up, my Love, my fair One, and come away! The flowers appear... the voice of the dove is heard in our land... and we are finally free to begin planning our royal wedding... for the joy of every heart of the Kingdom speaks often of it, and is longing to see the Day.”

† † † †

Already I have introduced Djélôn to the Queen Vadorea and the Prince Brettik — who are both rapidly recovering their strength and good cheer — and to Sir

Joy in the Morning

Caedmon and most of the Council of Nine, to Aravelle, whom Djélôn seems to take more than just a friendly interest in, and to an embarrassing list of others... for they all speak to him such grand things about me, of which I am completely unworthy, that I soon find myself hesitating to walk anywhere with him at all.

But today Djélôn and the Princess Aureaelle and I are stepping into the workshop of a certain Phylantagian warrior whose heart is so much like Djélôn’s own. What joy — almost painful — thrills my heart as the brave Thautaylius and his skilled warrior-craftsmen gather around us, and the Princess and I describe to them the various ways their invisible gift was used to deliver us from death, even before Thayne joined us in the Three Battles. How I thank them for their prayers and foresight.

I see that Djélôn’s heartfelt admiration — exactly as I expected — is from first acquaintance fully won by the noble heart of Thayne, and I rejoice that they will be such fast friends together. I smile to myself, as I think how richly surprised and delighted Djélôn will be when he meets the wyrkmyn at their forges in the Royal Crypt, and when he tours the Royal Palace, which we are supposed to do tomorrow.

† † † †

Can words describe the merriment that is ours as the beautiful Princess Aureaelle and I walk through the sunlit streets of the City of Gold, conversing with so many happy hearts, and thanking one person after another for their faithful prayers during our journey to the Sorrow?

How jubilant is every golden hour! Everywhere we go, we sense in our hearts anew what the good father has confirmed to us through the Interpreter – that Phylantagia is from every evil completely free! Rich are my rejoicings... but I still struggle to comprehend how really *good* is every heart in this Kingdom – *and how blessedly free is each one who humbly possesses that goodness!*

In sad sobriety, I find myself thinking upon and discussing with Aureaelle the harried, compromised lives of so many Eyrth-citizens I have known, and wishing with all my heart that each person of the myriads living there could enjoy the true faythe founded in the love of the father, to live out all the brief days of their lives in the rich treasures of a clear conscience and an eternal hope.

Love from the father, upon the cold frost of unbelief, would – like the sun’s shining ray – share ill to none, and grace to all. Yesterday’s failures, Today’s hopelessness, and all the cycling futilities of depraved delusion would fall away before a brightening Tomorrow – one worthy of man’s nobler longings.

New life would flow joyously from heart to heart, from nation to nation – and the travailing old Eyrth would again become the Paradise it was designed to be, with every citizen appropriating the rich provision offered through the royal blood of the redeemer.

† † † †

The Golden City, Au-Royalialia, is as busy as I’ve ever seen it, with carts, and vendors, and decorators, and happy

Joy in the Morning

citizens from every region of the Kingdom crowding the streets, the market places and the bazaars in happy jostling and singing.

Tonight – as soon as it’s dark enough – Djélôn and I are to join Aravelle and the Princess Aureaelle and the multitude just outside the City, to watch a huge display of the Royal Fireworks – which is only the first event planned during an entire week of extravagant celebration.

Every day there will be friendly rivalries among the different divisions of our one thousand warriors who have recently returned from the Three Battles. Thousands of citizens from all across fair Phylantagia will delight in watching their contests of endurance and skill in running, climbing, and other rugged activities, with the added excitement of archery contests, matches of knife-throwing, and competitions of sword-play every hour on the hour.

Throughout the entire week we will be feasted on fares almost beyond description, on fruits and sacred beverages, and meats grilling over hundreds of fires, and breads of all sorts from smiling red-faced mothers and maidens in every part of the bustling city.

All week long we will be cheered by hundreds of music-makers playing their instruments and singing to us the heart-stirring folk songs and rich spiritual hymns that are part of the heart-fountains that flow in fair Phylantagia. Sometimes the crowds will just drift around them, friends talking with friends... sometimes they will weep at the touching songs of the Sorrows... often they will join in and add their own voices to the

music – for every heart in this favored land has learned to make its own melody from earliest childhood.

And, of course, for the older children there will be all sorts of games, and contests for their own skills, and rides in brightly-painted donkey-carts and in carts pulled by clip-clopping ponies... and, for the smaller children, rides on the backs of great waddling ducks, and little elephant-like animals, and animals you might not believe in even if I showed you a likeness of them.

And when evening comes, after the feasts are finished, and the iced creams, and the rich candies, and the salted nuts, and the sweet fruits, – and the long serpent cookies (a new item I noticed in the windows of a bakery we just passed) – and all the exotic delicacies from afar have satisfied the tastes of every heart, the special music of the Sacred Dances will begin. For thousands of years, and up to this present hour, the father has been giving his canticles to Phylantagia, and some of the songs of the Sacred Dances are the most treasured of all.

Many of the dances will begin like a common prayer-ring of men, or maidens, or children, holding hands and slowly speeding up their circles as the music progresses. Suddenly the circles will reverse, and will often interweave with the other circles into complicated patterns of motion which are as pleasing to the eyes of the smiling observer as is the music to his heart.

There will also be complicated dances – usually by the country folk – where large groups of husbands and wives, each with his own, will perform lively and complicated

Joy in the Morning

steps while singing the music that the bards are playing, until the whole device, each couple together, is resolved into a dropping to the knees, lifting the held hands to the father in holy delight, singing a single verse all-together, and then a springing to their feet and running away to get lost amid the crowd.

And after the seven days of this first week of festivities – there is to be a Royal Awards Ceremony for the honoring of all those who fought in the Three Battles, and as a holy time of memorial to remember those who gave their lives for us all.

† † † †

And now the seventh day of the celebration is upon us. The weather has been perfect, to the relief of the thousands camping just outside the city. Since the streets are requested to be quiet well before midnight, the pilgrims begin each day rested and healthy, and in the high spirits that seem to be the birthright of every dweller here. During the whole week I have not seen a single quarrel, or heard a single harsh word, or had reason to suspect someone was struggling to keep such words contained. After seven days the children still play happily. Once I have seen Andreas and his monkey, and several times discovered I was watching instead a different monkey on a different child.

The morning of the Awards Ceremony is finally here, and I admit I have thought about it more than once with a certain level of discomfort, for I assume I will be asked to stand before them all, both to receive Honor from the

people, and to give honor to the father, who made our mission successful.

But, to my surprise, there is almost no rehearsal—and only a minimum of planning—almost as if no one is overly concerned, and I begin to realize that this freedom from nervous and self-consciousness is just one of the daily benefits that are mine when living amid such a loving and prayer-sharing people. Indeed, I must be growing in spiritual awareness, for I tell Aureaelle I think I can actually *feel it sometimes* when I am being prayed for, with which she fully agrees.

By the third hour of the day, we are gathered together in the great Park near the Golden Gates of the City. The great raised stage, large enough to hold hundreds of people, is of smooth marble, its floor perhaps six feet above the lawns that gradually rise in a bowl-shaped amphitheatre toward the city wall.

Perhaps thirty feet above us, supported by thirty huge turned columns of white marble with rich swirlings of gold, is a four-sided roof topped by ceramic tiles of emerald green. The curvings of the tapering walls and the shapings of the roof give a strong acoustical advantage to even the most ordinary voices, and perhaps twenty thousands persons of the great crowd gathered will be able to capture the words and music firsthand.

The honorable Sir Caedmon, for whom everyone has the highest respect, and the dear Interpreter, whom hardly anyone knows, are presiding over the Ceremony, and will give out the awards and honors.

Joy in the Morning

After The Interpreter is introduced to everyone, the first ones brought out to be honored are their own dear King Ardureus and Queen Vadorea—so recently reunited—and several minutes pass before the cheering crowd quiets enough to let Sir Caedmon continue.

“Your good King Ardureus protested to even appear before you all, for he feels it is *you* who should receive the honor, but I will let him thank you in person.”

How sweetly does the King welcome, and praise, and encourage his people, thanking them humbly and sincerely for their many prayers and much support through the years of his trials. Into his hands there is now presented a handsome well-wrought plaque of pure gold, and as he holds it up for all to behold I see carved upon it a verse from the Three Scrypts about the duties of royalty. “To you, King Ardureus,” Sir Caedmon cries, “on behalf of every citizen of Phylantagia, I thank you for your enduring faythe and bright fidelity.”

“And to you, dear Queen, we present a keepsake to help us always remember the father’s great goodness in bringing you all back together. But first, let Prince Brettik and the Princess Aureaelle come and stand beside you.

From her seat beside me, my beautiful bride-to-be arises, and I marvel once again at her humility and grace as she walks so sweetly up to stand beside her father, smiling, I assume, to the Queen, and to Prince Brettik beside her—for they smile back to her as she joins them.

“Good Prince Brettik, we wish to honor you also, for

giving yourself to the father even in the midst of your great personal sufferings and loss. May your courage and integrity be an example and a blessing to every citizen of Phylantagia, through many prosperous years.

“The Interpreter and I now wish to present to our beloved Royal Family, on the behalf of every grateful citizen, this special gift of love from our holy wyrkmyn.” As soon as The Interpreter has joined him, they unveil and present to them a large gold-framed picture.

As they hold it up, and slowly turn it so that every congregant can see it, I marvel, from my seat on the stage just a few paces away, at the outstanding *reality* of the likenesses. So real do the eyes in the faces of King, Queen, Prince and Princess appear, that they seem to be looking at me as clearly as is the Princess, who smiles at me joyfully from behind it.

“We now wish to honor,” the Interpreter speaks out, in a voice far too strong for a man of his age, “Captain Gaelynt Glenn, our friend that the father sent to us from the world Eyrth, and our own dear Princess Aureaelle, also from the Eyrth—for the prophecy needed to be fulfilled by a daughter of Eve. Come forth, brave Gaelayniel.”

As I walk up to stand beside my Princess, I remember the sweet, self-forgetting humility of the dear King, and remember, as he must have, that this is not really about me. As I take the Princess’s hand, we share a brief smile with each other... and the clapping and father-thanking praisings of the great crowd swell and continue for several long moments. As we gaze out to the farther

Joy in the Morning

edges and corners of the crowd, I find myself needing to guard against completely choking up, for my heart is tender, that so many lovely people—all unknown to me only a short year ago—should have so welded their love and melded their hearts to my own.

Having been apprised that they wish me to speak for at least twenty minutes or so, I first relate to them some of my early impressions of their fair kingdom, then of how unqualified I felt for the duties the father was pressing upon me. As I continue, I mention several of the struggles and dangers we faced, and some of the trials of our faythe that were so often upon us. Not glossing over my failures, I yet refrain from mentioning myself more than is really necessary. As I briefly picture to them some of the highlights and wondrous deliverances of our journey, I look frequently at the Princess, who is still holding my hand and smiling her bright encouragement from the heart-reflections in her lovely emerald eyes.

“But it is not just *our father* whom I wish to thank,” I finally conclude, “that I am alive before you this day. *Each one of you*, by your daily prayers and praises, has helped make it possible that our journey could continue, and that the Sorrow of Princess Aureaelle could be honorably accomplished.

“From the depths of my heart, and on behalf of your dear Princess beside me, we thank you for all that you have been, and all that you are, and all that you will be, in fair Phylantagia.

“May the loving hands of the father wrap around you,

blessing and shielding and prospering you and your families, until time is no longer.

“But the Princess and I also wish to give special thanks to some of the servants you see standing before you.

“To the man who is so much like my own Eyrthly father – your good King Ardureus – I pledge again my eternal allegiance, so long as we are one in the father.

“To Sir Caedmon, and the Council of Nine... to Thautaylius and his courageous Twelve... to Captain Frederic, and to all the other brave faythe-filled souls who encouraged us along the way... to The Interpreter, who so lovingly pressed us ever forward in the way of duty... to Antaylius the arch-angel sent from the father to save me from myself, to all these, and to all of you we offer ourselves as your friends and love-servants forever.”

In the great sea of faces before me, I see that many eyes are shining, handkerchiefs appearing here and there, and many of the women are weeping – for honest love begets honest appreciation wherever its holy seed is sown... and I desire to conclude as soon as I can.

“But there is one here especially whom I wish to honor and thank, the one called by the father to your Seventh Seventh Sorrow. Weak in herself, as every one of us is, but so strong in the shining courage of beautiful obedience, I thank your faytheful lady, the Princess Aureaelle, for trusting me, for loving me, for sometimes forgiving me, and for drawing from my heart all that is purest and best.

Joy in the Morning

“A few weeks ago I was privileged to join my heart with hers in marriage, at her old Eyrth home... and with your loving support I wish to wed her again as the Princess Aureaelle – a week from today – here in this same place. You are all invited, one and all... *so please come and join us in our glad celebrations.*”

A thundering roar of good cheer swells from the people, as I turn to walk with the Princess toward my chair. But the Interpreter stops me. “Not so fast, son,” he says quietly, smiling upon me... “It’s my turn now.”

Turning again to the crowd, and lifting up his voice – as had I, so that I am nearly hoarse – he stretches his right hand up toward the heavens, while laying his left hand, with a veiled gift held by his arm, on his heart.

“On behalf of every good citizen of Phylantagia, and the father to whom all praise must return, we wish to thank Captain Gleyynn – our friend Gaelayniel – for giving himself to our Sorrow, and for safely escorting our dear Princess Aureaelle to her suffering and death on *Moonstone* – and for bringing her back to us again. We wish to give him, as a token our heartfelt devotion, a special gift.

He uncovers the flat item he has been holding, and presents it to us. The Princess and I see – and I hold up for the crowd to admire – a perfect replica of the Golden Mirror, only about one-third the size of its Original.

But even as I lift it up, and slowly swing it from one edge of the craning crowd to the other, my eyes swim with tears, because I have seen upon its surface – shining

out from the rear side of the crystal where only the Princess and The Interpreter and perhaps the Royal Family can see it—the sweet and grave but smiling face of my own Eyrthly father—that grand, departed, warrior-sire who first turned me toward the loving of all that is true.

I hand the Mirror to the Princess, and Thauntaylius now stands. He tells the people that we had planned to honor at this time all the warriors who sailed with us to The Three Battles. *“But every warrior among us,”* he declares, *“feels that our battles were not so much won by ourselves, as by the unseen prayer-warriors in the lower holds of our ships, and all across our good land of Phylantagia.”*

“Knowing it is impossible to honor you all, we beg you to please allow us to show our appreciation by standing beside every true prayer-warrior in the honored place of obscurity.”

As Thayne takes his seat, and I stand again, I see some faces still puzzling at the thought. Some heads begin to nod in silent assent, when suddenly a collective gasp of astonishment comes upon thousands of faces now startled by a strange, strange sight.

For suddenly—with a rush of wind and the loud beating of pinions—a bright thunderbolt of gold plummet, brakes, glides, and lands gracefully just in front of us.

That glorious golden arch-eagyl, the noble Skyfeathyr, turns his great hooked beak toward me, and calls me to come closer, even as a young lad with gleaming eyes—my young friend Andreas—turns to slide down from the great eagyl’s shoulders, and walks steadily toward me.

Joy in the Morning

He removes from where it was hanging about his neck the soft strap of a leather pouch, and loosens the drawstring to open it. Reaching into the bag, he withdraws from within it and presents to me two lovely parchment scrolls—holding one higher, and closer to me, as if I should open it first. Andreas then returns—still neither proud nor embarrassed, for this is Phylantagia—to stand beside the magnificent sky-creature, with his arm across the great bird’s shoulder.

“Don’t just stand there... r-r-read it!” Skyfeathyr commands me, in his low voice.

Unrolling the first scroll, then rolling it again to its beginning, I realize that the precious document, which must be at least ten feet long, consists of almost nothing except signatures recently gathered from throughout the Kingdom. Thousands and thousands of names—the names of people from all over Phylantagia, and nearly all of people still unknown to me in person—are signed in small script, attesting to the statement at the top.

“On behalf of every free citizen of the Kingdom of Phylantagia, we the undersigned express our heartfelt appreciation for all you have risked, undertaken, and suffered, during your protection of our Princess in her Seventh Seventh Sorrow, and in bringing her to us again.”

“We thank the father for calling you to our aid, and pledge our love and loyalty to you forever, as we live in him. (Signed by) King Ardureus III, Queen Vadorea, Prince Brettik, Princess Aureaelle, Sir Caedmon, etc.”

Fighting again the tears melting from my heart, I give the scroll into Aureaelle's hand, and take the second one from her. I see it is much shorter, only five or six feet in length, but with rich calligraphy on all of its borders, and with verses from The Three Scrypts on both ends.

Like the first scroll, this one contains many names, written in dark red – the names of the one hundred and twenty seven warriors who perished in our Three Battles. Below each name are written some details in smaller scrypt about the man's family and area of residence, with a simple eulogy following.

Not trusting my voice to read them off, I hand the sturdy leather scroll to Thauntaylius, who lifts up his voice again. *"In memory of, and to the sacred honor of every brave and honorable warrior of Phylantagia, who for the father's glory, and by the father's perfect will, perished in the Three Battles recently fought for the restoring of Phylantagia, we record here the names of the fallen, for our eternal remembrance and gratefulness, pledging to stand beside you."*

For several minutes Thayne slowly reads the name of each fallen warrior with its brief eulogy and pertinent information. A hand is over every heart, and, except for the weeping of the beloved, all is as silent as a sepulchre.

The last sorrowful song is sung, the last trumpets blown, the last prayer of blessing said. Skyfeathyr circles up, up and away, and with hearts full, a long line of citizens comes filing past the Scroll of the Fallen, speaking quietly with those of us who were with them in the battles, and are still alive to bless their families.

Trumpets of Triumph

*Joy, joy, joy singing, more than heart can hold,
Bells, bells, bells ringing, Wedding Bells of gold,
Gleeful souls of Gallavalea, come from o'er the sea,
Friends from all of Phylantagia praising merrily,
Sunny souls, in love exulting, sing from shore to shore!
Hear the bells a-ringing, ringing— Joy forevermore.*

*See the blithesome banners waving from the towers high,
Hear the golden bells declare the Wedding hour is nigh!
Join the multitudes rejoicing in the father's care,
Merry are the people gath'ring for the feast so fair.
Shout the song of celebration, glad beneath the sun...
Sing! the heart of Aureaelle by Gaelynt has been won!*

*Hear the trumpet calls abounding from the turrets high,
Clarion notes of gold a-sounding through the smiling sky;
Bells, bells, bells ringing, echo o'er the lea!
Canticles of celebration, over land and sea.*

"...a mighty fine shot, my lad," Thauntaylius calls to the youngster whose arrow has neatly pierced the very center of a target nearly fifty paces away. *"You have a good eye... and a steady arm... Just keep up the good work!"*

With a word of courtesy and a flashing smile, the young lad thanks Thayne, but with hardly any embarrassment, even though he sees that the Princess Aure-

abelle, Aravelle, Djélôn, and myself are all looking on. As I reflect upon it, I realize that this is one of the things I treasure most here in Phylantagia – this richness of blossoming childhood free to progress so naturally from stage to innocent stage within the security of a beautiful birthright of purity and love.

From one delight to the next we continue our pleasant ramblings, for this entire week stretching up to our Royal Wedding has been designed to be one huge celebration of celebration.

As during the previous week, we see colorful crowds of merry Phylantageans everywhere. Again the very air is abreath with music, and it seems that every few minutes our ears and eyes are alluring our hearts toward some new harper, or flutist, or lads and maidens blowing on simple wind instruments, while their friends help sing the airy cheers along.

Like huge wildflowers scattered through the swelling crowds of enchanted excursionists, the colorful tops of tents and booths stretch nearly a league ahead of us in several directions, their flags and swirling pennants blowing in the gentle breeze. Bright hand-lettered signs beckon us from every side toward smorgasbords of tasty treats or full meals of the farm-wives' very best cooking.

But whereas last week's events were in more of a military vein, leading up to the Ceremony of Honor for all of our heroes who helped bring innocence back to Phylantagia – this week consists of a varied plate of events appealing more to our country people... our sea-farers...

Trumpets of Triumph

and the honest working-men who improve the open spaces of our fair countryland.

Hay-rides are everywhere. I estimate that at least three thousand of our happy citizens at this very moment are looking out over the crowds from their seats on golden bales of straw stacked on handsomely-painted farm wagons pulled by prancing horses, their merry bells ringing. Like everything else here, except for the food and crafts and items for sale, these rides cost nothing, for every person seems to be daily seeking new ways to increase the enjoyment of his fellows.

Children and youths of all ages are enjoying their own contests, but are also mingling easily with their families, and I observe everywhere the marks of genuine familial love, which is the foundation and future of every enduring society. How it thrives here in the golden kingdom!

In the rolling greens west of Au-Royal, good-natured farmers and lumberjacks are vying with each other every morning in simple sporting contests that keep everyone in high humor. New prizes are being given out hourly – for anything from the neatest, highest, fastest hay-stacking, to the best-bred and best-trained livestock. Trained horses and dogs and cats and lambs and calves – and any other creature you would see on a farm – have been groomed, and are showing their paces.

East of the city we see a huge field of long aisles and simple trestle tables where hard-working tradesmen and skilled craftsmen are displaying their services and wares, and where long-lasting friendships are being forged.

And wherever their parents are busy, their children are nearby, showing their own clever crafts, their lustrous livestock, and their fledgling businesses.

Not to be outdone, the good wives are displaying seemingly miles of tables of cookery and crafts – elegant arrangements of jams and candies and candles and preserves, and boxes of fragrant soaps, and exquisite baskets of flowers, and fruits, and dried meats – whatever the creative mind can make, and the heart admire.

They too are competing for hundreds of prizes, giving out samples of their prize-winning foods, sharing their favorite recipes, and making merry in a thousand innocent ways. The best confectionaries, the most finely-designed and sewn garments, and the most practical and innovative ideas for making sturdy houses into happy homes are everywhere abundantly evident.

† † † †

But there is one home for which our hearts are daily longing, and to which the beautiful Princess and I are always pressing.

For that reason, this second day after the Ceremony of Honor must be the last ‘free’ day for the Princess and me... for before our new home, will come our wedding... and before our wedding can happen, a myriad of details must be woven into the enduring tapestry.

We tell Djélôn and Aravelle to stroll the grounds as they wish, but for us the rest of our week will be filled

Trumpets of Triumph

with the joys of doing everything possible to make our wedding day a hallowed time of blessing. For many weeks past we have been planning it all out, so that these final days before the wedding can be as smooth as possible. But soon Djélôn and Aravelle are working alongside us, and helping us in a hundred ways.

Every evening, long before sundown, the crowds move toward the Royal City, to find places with their families in the evening activities. Their livestock have been fed and bedded down for the night, their booths and wares and crafts are all deserted, and their money boxes of gold and silver coin are left open and unguarded upon the tables again – for once again are Phylantagia and every glad heart within her free and fair.

Throughout the mighty evening aggregation, a hallowed offering of sacred song and private praises, and public prayer rings and the teaching of the Sacred Scrypts, and sacred dance and fellowship in the sure bonds of the father flow freely from heart to heart, and up to the father. For he who truly loves the high father loves everyone below him, and how *rich* is that society which is generously salted and inflamed by such vital heart communions within its populace.

† † † †

Two days before the wedding, we begin preparing the grounds around the Royal Palace, to set up the huge tents that will provide for overflow seating and feasting during our holy convocation. It is while we are standing just outside the Golden Gates – helping with the placement

of a tent in the Royal Park for the gifts we'll be receiving, and another across the boulevard for the gifts we'll be giving to each guest – that we become aware that there is no small stir down the road toward the bridge over the beautiful stream Merrystone.

First we hear children shouting, louder than usual... then we see people beginning to pack the royal road... and all are hurrying toward the bridge. Hoping all is well – for children play always beside the water – the Princess and I, with Thayne and Aravelle, hasten toward the bridge. When we are almost there, the good skipper Captain Frederic comes puffing up to meet us – with a mysterious smile on his face – a smile so huge that our anxieties fade, changing instantly to deep curiosity.

"If you are free at the moment, come along" he invites us, smiling even more, *"I have guests desiring to meet you."*

As we try to pass patiently through the crowd, he leads us not onto, but around and under the bridge... to the very edge of the swirling, splashing Merrystone.

There, before our wondering eyes, is a family of the Sea Folk! A handsome Sea-Maern, not seeing us at first, is charging across the stream on a golden sea stallion, while his lovely maerma swims, and dives, and comes to the surface singing, nearby.

Their two charming maerrubs, one several years older than the other, are as lively as dolphins. They dart, and dive, and come flying out of the river to twist and roll and land again with mighty splashes or smooth glides –

Trumpets of Triumph

to the delight of the merry children who are shouting and clapping them on.

"Please allow me to introduce to you our Princess Aureaelle, of whom I have told you much, and the good Gaelayniel who brought her back from her Sorrow," the skipper tells them, as they glide closer, to gather respectfully at Merrystone's grassy bank. *"And meet a Sea-Maern who truly loves the father,"* Captain Frederic smiles to us. *His name is Ichthus, and his new wife here is named Maereanne. Their maerrubs are Mauren and Maera.*

"When I delivered Maereanne and her maerrubs to their colony near the Long White Cliffs, she told me that she had been engaged to Ichthus, but was kidnapped just three weeks before their wedding. When I dropped them off on our way home from the Battle at Dragonhead Bay, she found that he had been waiting and praying for her through the years, and as soon as they saw their hearts were still one, they married.

Now, as my ears are learning the history of this dear family, my eyes are examining the details of their appearance – and my heart praises my good father for creating these lovely people, and for allowing me to meet them.

As I observe **Ichthus** – the maern of the family, who is sitting astride his beautiful golden sea stallion – I see that he is built quite like the ordinary men of our world, but with several distinguishing features that would instantly set him apart.

His entire body, the same size as my own, is of a dark emerald green. Fine scales like those of a fish cover his

arms and his legs. His feet are a little longer than ours, and are webbed for about half their length, as are his hands, so he can spread them into wide flippers when he is swimming.

The rest of his body, excepting his face, sports a sleek and beautiful fur similar to that worn by a harp seal, but of a very light green color.

The hair that crowns his head is thick and wavy, looking almost like dark seaweed, and tapers nearly to his shoulders. The hair of his beard is finer, and is colored a dark rusty orange.

His eyes, large and sensitive, are golden brown, and shine warmly from the pale green skin surrounding them. I suspect our light is uncomfortably bright for him, for I see him squint if he turns toward the sun.

Maereanne — the good maerma we rescued near Sereneya — looks, from her waist to her tail, much like a fish... similar to the mythological mermaids you may have seen pictures of, and with scales of a shimmering emerald green.

From her waist up, she appears similar to her husband, but is more slender, and her pale green fur is perhaps more thick and lustrous. The scales on her arms and hands are finer, but match perfectly the larger ones on her strong, horizontally-fluked tail.

Her long wavy hair, which looks like fine strands of seaweed, is much lighter than her husband's. Almost as

Trumpets of Triumph

pale as her fine light-green fur, it flows nearly to her waist.

Supple and slender, she is about half a foot longer than my Princess Aureaelle. Like her husband, she has golden-brown eyes that shine brightly as she smiles upon us.

Her two maerrubs — the eleven-year-old **Mauren** and his sister **Maera**, who is about six — are nearly copies of Ichthus and Maereanne — and their shimmering, radiant beauty makes the merry Merrystone merrier than ever.

To our delight the entire family swims fifty paces upstream, turns in the center of the river to face the crowds on the bridge, and bursts into sweet measures of song. We see the four of them quietly treading water to stay in place, as their strange voices enchant us with music seldom heard above the watery surfaces.

At first, the four of them begin to sing, in unison.

*It's under the wavelets that rush and foam,
in waters like these, that the Sea-Maern play;
deep down in the depths of our watery home,
we're off to adventures— away!*

Now **Ichthus**, the handsome Sea-Maern sings alone, his rich and throaty voice carrying easily to the gathering crowd that presses against the railings of the bridge,

*It's into the sunshine or under the waves
and over the corals the current laves,
or down to the chillier ocean caves
where fishes are huge and slow;
I'm shooting the fish, from my golden stag,
or chasing my children in games of tag
or racing beside them in 'capture the flag'
for I am a Maern— ho, ho!*

His beautiful wife **Maereanne** sings out to us now, in a voice as sweet as a dream.

*My Ichthus is kind as a sea-maern can be,
so brave and so good to my maerrubs and me;
we've a wonderful life in the beautiful sea
where Love is our capital law;
through curtains of sunlight we lower and lift,
our bubbles of music forever adrift,
and it's every new day that's a wonderful gift
for I am a maerma— hurrah!*

And now her six-year-old **Maera** raises a voice that's as clear as a bell, and every Phylantagean fortunate enough to be here at this first performance strains to hear her. How sweetly she smiles, as she sings with childish voice!

*Though I am a maerrub, and only a girl,
deep down in the waters I twirl and whirl
and pick the glad sun-flags that color and furl
or search for the pearls with glee;
In sunny green waters we surf and we sail;
though I am so small, with my powerful tail
when I'm racing with Mauren I often prevail...
for I am a sea-child— hee, hee!*

But the eleven-year-old **Mauren** now raises his voice, and sings as if he is completely at ease — while he grins at the children nearest him on the north bank of Merrystone.

*I too am a maerrub, but nearly a maern;
in sunny green currents my strong flippers churn
where life is so good, and there's so much to learn
as we worship the father with awe;
Through high, crashing breakers, I glimmer and glide,
I twist... or I turn... I slip... and I slide...
if you jump on my back I will give you a ride
for I am a sea-boy—hurrah!*

Just as he finishes his song he dives into the water,

Trumpets of Triumph

and emerges immediately against Merrystone's northern bank. A brave little golden-haired girl, perhaps six years old, is set astride his back.

Clasping Mauren's light-green hair tightly in her right hand — for her left hand still clutches a wilting bouquet of bright flowers — she rides, with her eyes wide, in ever-enlarging circles around and around on Merrystone's gently-rippling surface, until he darts to the northern bank and stops suddenly — throwing her up to be caught by her smiling father... amid much clapping and cheering.

All the while he was carrying her, the rest of Mauren's family were concluding the beautiful song, their thrilling voices streaming through the gentle breezes into smiling, worshipping hearts.

*Beneath the glad waters, in calm or storm,
beneath the mad whitecaps that toss and play,
we're safe and we're happy, and free from alarm,
and life is a blessing— hurrah!*

*We've come to the city, the Gates of Gold,
to celebrate with you the Wedding Day,
for Gaelynt and Princess are making us bold,
and here we're together— hurrah!*

*Oh, under the ripples that rush and foam,
in waters like these will the Sea-Maern play;
deep down in the depths of our watery home,
we're off to adventures— away!*

Immediately the entire family disappears below the surface — for Mauren has rejoined them — and they are gone from our sight for so long that the little golden-haired girl begins to cry.

Suspecting their direction from the bubbles they first left, I see them emerge at last, perhaps two hundred feet away, on the other side of the bridge. The crowd presses to the other rail, and they repeat their service of love again.

† † † †

Joy, joy, joy! for the beautiful Aureaelle... and the Day... and the father... and all of our joys... are mine! ...and the *golden hour* of our Golden Day is come!

Jubilance dances within my heart as I first behold my Princess Aureaelle in the simplicity of her bridal beauty – for she is wearing for the foundation of her flowing and elaborate bridal dress that second, finely-embroidered gown which she wore only twice during our sad journey to Malavalea.

Almost identical to the one shredded and bloodied by the daemuks, this one, upon close examination, shows a different collection of sacred scrypts and holy proverbs – with each word upon it embroidered by one of those loving hearts who were wondering even as they plied needle and thread if she would every return to them again.

“Never have you been more worthy of being honored as the Royal Princess of Phylantagia,” I encouraged her, when she chose the dress, *“than when you were walking those trails with me to your Sorrow. In terrible temptations and trials you proved by your noble heart the wisdom of those proverbs threaded throughout your robe. Courage... grace... faythe... patience – how sweetly you exemplified them all.”*

Trumpets of Triumph

Every heart is hushed, as we sit now in silence below the vaulted crystal ceiling that domes this great sanctuary in the center of the Royal Palace of Au-Royalia.

Suddenly the music swells again, and the eyes long turned to the back of the vast cathedral see her at last. The good Queen Vadorea, now the picture of radiant health, slowly stands, and thousands rise after her, to watch my Princess Aureaelle as she humbly and sweetly walks the carpeted aisle, throwing smiles and kisses to those who are nearer her, and prayer waves to those farther in.

As I receive her from our honorable King Ardureus, and turn to walk a few steps higher, I marvel at how truly handsome are Djélôn and Thauntaylius and the other ten men in their royal garments... and how absolutely radiant are the lovely Aravelle and the eleven maidens beside her.

The candles are lit and merged... the bright bouquets are lovingly blended... the flowing fountains of wine begin coursing together into one blending color.

Again the privilege is mine to gaze deeply into the lovely emerald eyes of my Princess, and into the shining heart beyond them. Our vows are said, the hands of the Interpreter are laid lovingly upon us as he commits us to the father, and good Sir Caedmon pronounces us man and wife.

I gently lift her veil, and, for the first time in Phylantagia our lips meet, and our love is sealed. *How strange it is, I muse, to think that only a few weeks ago, I*

kissed you for the first time on Eyrth, but that you were six years younger than you are today!

Again, the trumpets peal their triumph, the joyful strings sing as if to burst, the golden bells ring, the flutes trill, and the choir sings, as every heart rejoices together.

Amid the colorful green shrubs which somewhat screen the huge wooden wine-vat in the wings beside us, I wink at good Ichthus, where he sits astride his sea stallion, his beautiful maerma beside him on the rocks, with only the tip of her emerald tail in the water, and her maerrubs in front of them.

As the recessional begins, with the purest music that has ever swelled and echoed from the vaulted crystal above us ringing through our hearts, the Princess – my Bride at last – takes my arm. We slowly walk down the rose-petaled aisle, waving to every heart, as far as we can see.

But we have stepped forward only a few short paces when twenty glowing arrows of Love shoot toward us from beyond the great arch before us, like glowing sunbeams of radiant whiteness. Alighting on our shoulders, and hovering around us – they coo and flutter in grand excitement.

“We’re here-r-r-re... we’re here-r-r-re... we’re here-r-r-re... for how could we stay away-y-y-y...? And thousands more of us are coming... for a pass is opened, is opened-d-d-d... and the Western Divide of Phylantagia is a barrier no more-r-r-re... is no more-r-r-re...”

Trumpets of Triumph

As if to prove their words true, a veritable *cloud* of the white doves – thousands of them – stream into the great cathedral, until one is sitting on the shoulder of every guest – and on both shoulders of the bridal party and the worshipping sea-folk – and still a few hundred of them are circling, sixty feet above our heads.

As one, they suddenly burst into song... dove song... but with the sweetness and humble intelligence of the father written into every holy word. I will not even try to describe the soft beauty and power of their song to you, although I would remember it forever.

“How could our good father have possibly chosen a more loving way to confirm our marriage, and to redeem us even yet again from our failures, and from the sorrows of our Sorrow? the sweet Princess marvels with me later, as we discuss it.

For the rest of the day the feast continues, for the great platters of meats and of cheeses and of breads, and the wines and the music and the love of every heart are in one great flowing of ecstasy, but never to excess, and we know that the father is pleased with this shadow of his image in Phylantagia.

After an hour of quiet rest apart, the Princess and I walk hand-in-hand with Djélôn to the greatest extravaganza of fireworks Au-Royal has ever seen. How these people *do* love their royal family, and especially their royal Princess, though only an orphan from another world. I marvel again and again at the strange fates that have brought me here, and wonder what other strange

and heart-changing adventures may be mine in the years ahead.

At the end of this perfect day, my joyful, but wearying Princess and I walk to its perfect conclusion—the apartment of noble Sir Caedmon in the center of the Royal Crypt, which he pressed upon us with such humility of love.

Lavishly decorated under the guidance of Djélôn and Aravelle, we hardly recognize it, at first. But we can think of no place we would rather be—as the Princess and I celebrate our first night here together as man and wife—than in this underground sanctuary, so close to the room of the Three Scrypts, and the forges of the holy wyrkmyn whose prayers and wisdom helped to preserve our unworthy lives to this hour.

Three days here... and we sail for Gallavalea, to take possession of our white castle. From Djélôn's and Aravelle's remarks and teasing hints, I suspect we will find it totally made over toward its earlier majesties.

We must also visit the Interpreter during his last night in his Cave, so he can 'give us the keys,' as he said it—not literal ones, of course, for the passage into his cave was ever open even when evil was scheming to reign forever triumphant over dark Malavalea.

† † † †

Not only has the castle been emptied, and scrubbed and polished to its former stateliness, but the grounds are

Trumpets of Triumph

being transformed into its lovely gardens once more, for some old drawings were discovered in a sunlit attic above its sixth floor, and as we wend our way over the new flagstone walkways around the castle, we see on every side the thousands of gifts and hours of love that the ships have brought with their crowds of craftsmen and gardeners and vine-dressers from every corner of the kingdom.

On our third night in the castle we discover something that reminds me once again that I am still just a little boy inside—for how excited I become when I see it.

Ever since we arrived here, the Princess and I have been trying to take a quick walk through at least two new floors of the castle every day, exploring it in the company of those who have been cleaning and refurbishing it, but are awaiting our instructions for final improvements and decorating.

On this third evening, after the last overseers have joined their families in the camp down by the Bay, we decide to find our way into the attic, just to get away from all these scenes of busyness around us.

Observing in the attic a huge wall bed leaning against the northern wall of a smaller western wing, I ask Aureaelle to help me drag its massive dark-oaken frame away from the wall, for I am hoping there is a window behind it, to lighten this darker corner of the attic.

To our surprise, when we have angled the heavy frame out far enough for us to peer behind it, I see a rugged door built of vertical oaken planks, with wide

hand-wrought brackets and hinges stretching across it.

The door is locked, but a hammered ring of ancient keys dangles from an old nail on its thick oaken casing, and I try them one by one until the old lock clicks, and turns, and we swing the creaking door wide.

Exactly what I may have expected I don't remember; perhaps another wing, for there are no windows in the walls nearby, and the various roofs and rooms of the castle's multiplying heights would make outside observation almost impossible.

But what we discover beyond the oaken door is this. A circular stairway of pale stone winds its way upward within a white stone tower perhaps twenty feet in diameter, until it ends at—I think, for I can just see it in the dim light from a few small windows along the stairway—a trapdoor in a floor at least fifty feet above us.

Dropping the keys into a pocket, and taking the Princess's hand, we climb the wide easy steps, pausing to peer out each window as it comes. Again I marvel at the intelligence and apparently unlimited resources of the men who built this castle, some millennia before, with such foresight and skill.

As I gaze down at its heavy walls, and at the parapets above its ramparts, and at the heavy, perfectly-lain stone slabs of its sloping roofs, and its various corner towers and turrets and pinnacles, and its keep, and its battlements, I rejoice again that evil is now banished from this noble land forever.

Trumpets of Triumph

As the trapdoor is unlocked, opened, and closed again from above, the Princess and I look quickly around us, then into each other's startled eyes... and we silently drop to our knees together to worship the father.

Expecting to see no more than a nearly-bare stone floor—with perhaps some simple furniture here and there—I observe instead that we have stumbled into an advanced astronomical observatory. I see that Aureaelle has not the slightest idea what the large item in the center of the room is.

Its long cylinder is angled upward toward the convex crystal dome above the room, which looks to be as clear as the day it was built, and I see the transparent dome is hidden from ground view by the circular stone perimeter rising a few feet above it.

Already the sun is going down, and I can hardly wait to uncover the great instrument to see if it works. Although I have never actually seen a telescope before—it being one of the things forbidden to the post-technological Eyrth—I have looked at pictures of some in the two-centuries-old forbidden literature that was secreted by my great⁷-grandfather, and is now locked up securely in our innermost vault at the underground headquarters of the WAHRoR.

As we light several brazen lamps fastened to the massive stone walls (for we have found several urns of oil and some flint-sticks nearby) we rest on the old oaken furniture, or continue examining the walls. As I am admiring an old painting, a seascape, I touch the canvas

lightly to straighten it, and it falls from the wall – for apparently it had been hanging from only an inferior iron nail. As I catch it I see a brazen plaque that was hanging behind it, securely fastened to the stone wall. The heavy metal casting has upon it a fine script of raised letters... of the characters used in Phylantagia's oldest runes, and I can just make out the two verses.

*When bright Encryphia is changed,
and all her glory rearranged,
Behold her righted, Sorrow past,
to tell the message true, at last.*

*Come gaze at her, long ages hence,
within the father's circumstance,
And marvel now, your Sorrow o'er,
the father smiles on us once more.*

Hours later, we reverently cover again the telescope – but not before it has shone into our worshipping eyes myriads of stars around the heart stars of Encryphia. We descend through the trapdoor and lock it, to retire to our room far below.

To keep the door to the tower more easily concealed, we decide to make the room that opens into the attic a private study, where we can rest, or nap – or retreat up to the tower – with a note to leave us undisturbed hanging on the study door.

Is this selfish of us? We think not, for after we have discussed it openly, the practical Aureaelle reminds me that there may be good reason it has been hidden away for these many centuries.

Trumpets of Triumph

Perhaps we may yet need, in our future days here, to carry into the quietness of this tower some pressing cares or struggles involving this world – or another one yet unknown to us – for who but the father himself knows just where the journeys of our life-story may take us.

We may yet need to spend long hours here of undisturbed prayer, she suggests, or secret conferences with loyal commanders, or just hours of gazing in worship at the father behind the smiling Encryphia.

Wondering if Phylantagia may also be now in a post-technological era, or if the telescope was somehow brought here from Eyrth, I decide to leave the precisely-moving instrument, with its many unknown and untarnished metals gleaming upon it, hidden from public knowledge, at least for the present.

† † † †

As you see, I could keep this story flowing, like a rippling brook... for my heart is full of our many experiences amid the glories of fair Phylantagia. But the hour is late, and you have listened long.

To sum it up, we visit the old Interpreter in his Cave at the appointed time, and he opens to us the events of the Song of Sevens that have been already fulfilled. The conclusion of them, he tells us, will have to await their day, for our journey will go on and on.

He assures me also that our good father will somehow reveal them to us – at the best possible hour and

in the wisest way... and I hope to sketch it for you in some future chronicles, if the father wills it so.

The dear old Interpreter tells us the father is calling him to another world for a time, and he gives us some clear explanations as to just how we are to make use of these caverns of the Past, Present, and Future to travel — *'only when it is clearly the will of the father'* — to other worlds, or to other ages here within Phylantagia, and how we may choose to return to one of these time-caverns within our Cave, or — by carefully using the wyrkmyn-fashioned charm — to the royal crypt where the charm was forged.

He then gives to us a tearful adieu, telling us we will see him no more in fair Phylantagia, but that we *may* see him in another world — he has not yet been told.

"If nowhere else, I will certainly see you some Day in that bright world with the father, for the honest experience in multitudes of obedient hearts will ever declare it so."

And, in like manner as he finally parts from the dear Princess Aureaelle and myself — after embracing us again and again in his pure and fatherly love — so must I part from you.

Perhaps we will meet again in this world, perhaps in another. Until then, I commend you to our father's good keeping, and bid you adieu. May his grace and mercy and peace be yours, forever and aye.

† — The End of Part Two

Book One Epilogue

† Book One Epilogue †

*Her bells are rung, but still are singing.
Her songs are sung, but still are ringing,
The Sorrow they were singing of
has passed, baptyzed by holy Love,
and while the pure, the faythe-filled soul
rejoices in the Bountiful,
the trail leads on. The Kingdom fair
gives Joy to ev'ry dweller there,
while still our friend Gaelayniel
pursues with Princess Aureaelle
not crowns, or Phylantagean thrones
but higher things the father owns.
Djélôn, and Al-Lloreyá dear,
have joined our holy hero here,
the best of friends that Eyrth can give,
to Phylantagia come, to live.
From Au-Royalía, still springing,
bright Canticles of Faythe come winging,
forever in our hearts a-singing.*

*And so... we have journeyed together, through sorrows
unto the baptyism of Sorrow. But we have been baptyzed also
with Joy... and have met, on land and in sea and sky, some
characters worth remembering.*

*While our heroes' story could be here concluded, it seems
desirable to journey still further with them, for there is no truer*

way to better learn the heart of someone than by forging it into oneness with our own while we face with them the fiery new trials that challenge us to courage and felicity... while preparing us for the even greater Joys that are sure to come!

From their three Caverns of the Past, the Present, and the Future, our heroes will be visiting Eyrth – soon after its nuclear holocaust, and at other times – and will be time-traveling also to some of Phylantagia’s earlier and later eras.

If you would journey with them, you are warmly invited.

The Canticles of Au-Royalialia

— A Journey of Seven Parts —

Book 1 Journey into Darkness 27 chapters

Part One Journey into Darkness 20 chapters

Our hero Gaelayniel lands in the new world, Phylantagia, to help fulfill its prophecies—thereby losing contact with his fiancée Al-Lloreyia and his best friend, the warrior Djélôn. He meets King Ardureus, and escorts the beautiful Princess Aureaelle through many conflicts and dangers, delivering her to her prophesied Sorrow at *Moonstone*.

Part Two Love Awakening 7 chapters

Gaelayniel sees the Princess Aureaelle returned to Life, and sails with her back to the Royal City. He helps lead the battles for delivering Malavalea from its influences of evil, restoring innocence to the Kingdom of Phylantagia. From the Cavern of the Interpreter, he returns to Eyrth, to marry Al-Lloreyia. Coming back to Phylantagia, he is given the White Castle and the Interpreter’s Cave, and marries the Princess Aureaelle in a Royal Wedding in the City of Gold.

Book One Epilogue

Book 2 Encryphia Conquers All 25 chapters

Part One Till the Night Fades 9 chapters

[To be finalized...]

Part Two Illusion 8 chapters

[To be finalized...]

Part Three Encryphia Conquers All 8 chapters

[To be finalized...]

s

Book 3 Eyrth’s Jubilation 25 chapters

Part One Fight for Eyrth 13 chapters

[To be finalized...]

Part Two Eyrth’s Jubilation 12 chapters

[To be finalized...]

Final Epilogue: Eternity’s Portal

Index & Glossary of Characters, Places, and Creatures, where first mentioned

Note: the main character, telling the story in first person, has three names—his civilian name, **Gaelayniel**, and his military names—**Gaelynt Glenn** and nickname **Gleyynn**. Pronunciations are below, where first used. **Main characters’ names are in bold type.**

Part One – Journey into Darkness Page 9

ilven-roD, etc., the evil darK master	9
Djélôn [juh-LONN] of the WAHRoR	10
The WAHRoR, read either as a word [wahr-orr], or as an acronym; defined on page 50)	16
Al-Lloreya [al-loe-RAY-uh] the betrothed Eyrth-lady	18
Grenlynt [GREN-lint] the goldsmythe	22
Gaelayniel , [guh-LAY-nee-ell] our hero’s civilian name	23
Gaelynt Glenn [GAY-lent Glenn] his military name and Gleyynn [glayne] his nickname	29 30
Caderyn [KADD-runn] of the ROHRoR	31
Au-Royalialia, [AH-roy-ALE-ee-uh] the Royal City	35
Thauntaylius (or, Thayne, p. 85) and the Twelve	36
Andreas, boy on ship with monkey	38
Phylantagia [FILL-un-TAYJ-ee-uh] the royal kingdom in the new world	39 39
King Ardureus[ar-DUR-ee-us] king of Phylantagia	39
Caedmon [KADD-munn] keeper of the Royal Crypt and Guardian of the sacred <i>Three Scrypts</i>	39 39
Haeryck [HAYR-ick], moderator at the First Council	40
The “Three Scrypts” Book Past, <i>Hystories</i> , the Book Present, <i>Heartwatch</i> , & Book Future, <i>Revealings</i>	40 40
Princess Aureaelle [ahr-ee-ELL], the King’s daughter	48
Malavalea [mowl-luh-VALE-ee-uh], the dark island	54
Aravelle [AIR-uh-vell], the Princess’s best friend	63
Benevincea, a pleasant port city north of Au-Royalialia	80
Frederic, captain of our first ship toward Malavalea	92
Sereneya, the haunted island enroute to Malavalea	97
The Malferean Sea, between Sereneya and Malavalea	98

[List from Part One – continued]

The Interpreter, the good prophet on Malavalea	113
Cephrun, young man captured by pirates	113
<i>Moonstone</i> , the stone table, or altar, on Malavalea	137
The Golden Mirror, gift given by the Interpreter	138
Livana, the good prophetess on Malavalea	145
The daemuks, evil pyramidal-shaped ‘rodents’	145
The Constellation Encryphia, a heart with a banner	151
Malathakeus, captain of the evil daemuks	173
The Pyggeruts, the demonic pig-goat creatures	178
Antaylius, the archangel	209

Part Two – Love Awakening Page 213

Skyfeathyr, the great golden arch-eagyl	223
The White Doves, messengers visible to pure hearts	227
Drelleus, the evil man from Malavalea who wants to infiltrate and bring evil into all of Phylantagia	236 236
Tallis and Tark, Drelleus’ two co-conspirators	236
Merrystone, the stream below the Golden City	244
<i>The Albatross</i> , the maJic warship	253
Wyrmlode, Malavalean Captain of Drelleus’ boat	255
Bay of Dragonhead, at northwest Malavalea	255
The Sea-Serpents (or Sea-Dragons) near Sereneya	259
The Sea-Maern, Maerma, and Maerrubs	264
The Shadow Vultures	267
The Mallamyn, Drelleus’ Malavalean fishermyn	268
Maereanne, the good Sea-Maerma, and her Maerrubs	275
The White Castle, on the Bay of Dragonhead	277
Prince Brettik, the King’s lost son	285
Queen Vadorea, queen of Phylantagia	286
Laticea, infant princess who died at birth	287
The Long White Cliffs, where the good Sea-Maern live	290
Ichthus, Maereanne’s good Sea-Maern husband, and...	321
Mauren and Maera, her maerrubs	321