Games From Folktales

A free podcast for the Ars Magica roleplaying game

July - September 2021

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The theme music for the podcast comes from Free Music Archive's public domain collection.
It is "The Fall of the Village of the Infinitesimal Forest at the Hands of the Royal Aggressor :
An Epic in Seven Parts" by Room 34.

Librivox is an online community group that records books published before 1925 into the
public domain. Thanks to the readers, producers and editors.

The Pentamerone 9

This ends the main run of The Pentamerone. I won't be recording "The Three Citrons", the final story, because it's a parallel to the deeply racist frame story. Following this, I'm going to upload the three Librivox stories I couldn't find a use for as a bonus episode, and then I'm going to summarize the twelve stories which were bowdlerized out of the English children's edition.

XXIX: SUN, MOON, AND TALIA

It is a well-known fact that the cruel man is generally his own hangman; and he who throws stones at Heaven frequently comes off with a broken head. But the reverse of the medal shows us that innocence is a shield of fig-tree wood, upon which the sword of malice is broken, or blunts its point; so that, when a poor man fancies himself already dead and buried, he revives again in bone and flesh, as you shall hear in the story which I am going to draw from the cask of memory with the tap of my tongue.

There was once a great Lord, who, having a daughter born to him named Talia, commanded the seers and wise men of his kingdom to come and tell him her fortune; and after various counsellings they came to the conclusion, that a great peril awaited her from a piece of stalk in some flax. Thereupon he issued a command, prohibiting any flax or hemp, or such-like thing, to be brought into his house, hoping thus to avoid the danger.

When Talia was grown up, and was standing one day at the window, she saw an old woman pass by who was spinning. She had never seen a distaff or a spindle, and being vastly pleased with the twisting and twirling of the thread, her curiosity was so great that she made the old woman come upstairs. Then, taking the distaff in her hand, Talia began to draw out the thread, when, by mischance, a piece of stalk in the flax getting under her finger-nail, she fell dead upon the ground; at which sight the old woman hobbled downstairs as quickly as she could.

When the unhappy father heard of the disaster that had befallen Talia, after weeping bitterly, he placed her in that palace in the country, upon a velvet seat under a canopy of brocade; and fastening the doors, he quitted for ever the place which had been the cause of such misfortune to him, in order to drive all remembrance of it from his mind.

Now, a certain King happened to go one day to the chase, and a falcon escaping from him flew in at the window of that palace. When the King found that the bird did not return at his call, he ordered his attendants to knock at the door, thinking that the palace was inhabited; and after knocking for some time, the King ordered them to fetch a vine-dresser's ladder, wishing himself to scale the house and see what was inside. Then he mounted the ladder, and going through the whole palace, he stood aghast at not finding there any living person. At last he came to the room where Talia was lying, as if enchanted; and when the King saw her, he called to her, thinking that she was asleep, but in vain, for she still slept on, however loud he called. So, after admiring her beauty awhile, the King returned home to his kingdom, where for a long time he forgot all that had happened.

So, in the original, he carries her to a bed and "picks the fruits of love", then leaves her there and forgets about her for a long time. Apparently he's the hero. Let's see the Victorian author try and tidy this up.

Meanwhile, two little twins, one a boy and the other a girl, who looked like two little jewels, wandered, from I know not where, into the palace and found Talia in a trance. At first they were afraid because they tried in vain to awaken her; but, becoming bolder, the girl gently took Talia's finger into her mouth, to bite it and wake her up by this means; and so it happened that the splinter of flax came out.

In *the original, she gives birth to twins after nine months, and two faeries appear to nurse them and put them to their mother's breasts. The girl detaches and, when trying to reattach, sucks her mother's finger, drawing out the piece of linen.*

Thereupon she seemed to awake as from a deep sleep; and when she saw those little jewels at her side, she took them to her heart, and loved them more than her life; but she wondered greatly at seeing herself quite alone in the palace with two children, and food and refreshment brought her by unseen hands.

She takes them to her breast in the Italian – she knows she's their mother because her milk has come down. She is still amazed by the whole business, though.

After a time the King, calling Talia to mind, took occasion one day when he went to the chase to go and see her; and when he found her awakened, and with two beautiful little creatures by her side, he was struck dumb with rapture. Then the King told Talia who he was, and they formed a great league and friendship, and he remained there for several days, promising, as he took leave, to return and fetch her.

When the King went back to his own kingdom he was for ever repeating the names of Talia and the little ones, insomuch that, when he was eating he had Talia in his mouth, and Sun and Moon (for so he named the children); nay, even when he went to rest he did not leave off calling on them, first one and then the other.

Now the King's stepmother

It's the king's wife, obviously, in the original.

had grown suspicious at his long absence at the chase, and when she heard him calling thus on Talia, Sun, and Moon, she waxed wroth, and said to the King's secretary, "Hark ye, friend, you stand in great danger, between the axe and the block; tell me who it is that my stepson is enamoured of, and I will make you rich; but if you conceal the truth from me, I'll make you rue it."

She's a bit more classically educated in the Italian: the boy is between Scylla and Charybdis. Her threat is "I'll make sure you're found neither dead nor alive" which is terrifying in an area which has the archnecromantrix's tribe in it.

The man, moved on the one side by fear, and on the other pricked by interest, which is a bandage to the eyes of honour, the blind of justice, and an old horse-shoe to trip up good faith, told the Queen the whole truth. Whereupon she sent the secretary in the King's name to Talia, saying that he wished to see the children. Then Talia sent them with great joy, but the Queen commanded the cook to kill them, and serve them up in various ways for her wretched stepson to eat.

The Penguin version calls the Queen a "heart of Medea", which is a reference to Medea murdering her children so that Jason cannot take them away. I admit to not knowing that tale very well – I've only seen it presented once and they were trying very hard to convince me that Medea was the heroine and murdering her children in a custody dispute was a protofeminist act. I don't think I'm sold on the idea. Making them into something to eat parallels a story in the Gesta Romanorum, which Shakespeare probably used as a source for a similar thing in Titus Androjnicus.

Now the cook, who had a tender heart, seeing the two pretty little golden pippins,

A pippin is an apple.

took compassion on them, and gave them to his wife, bidding her keep them concealed; then he killed and dressed two little kids in a hundred different ways.

Specifically kid goats in the Penguin edition. "Kid" to refer to human children first occurs in English in the 1590s.

When the King came, the Queen quickly ordered the dishes served up; and the King fell to eating with great delight, exclaiming, "How good this is! Oh, how excellent, by the soul of my grandfather!" And the old Queen all the while kept saying, "Eat away, for you know what you eat." At first the King paid no attention to what she said; but at last, hearing the music continue, he replied, "Ay, I know well enough what I eat, for YOU brought nothing to the house." And at last, getting up in a rage, he went off to a villa at a little distance to cool his anger.

The Penguin edition makes this argument clearer: "Eat up, for you are eating what is yours!" "I know, it is mine, because you di not bring a thing with you to this house."

Meanwhile the Queen, not satisfied with what she had done, called the secretary again, and sent him to fetch Talia, pretending that the King wished to see her. At this summons Talia went that very instant, longing to see the light of her eyes, and not knowing that only the smoke awaited her.

"Wishing to see her light when only fire awaited her." seems to have been translated weirdly here.

But when she came before the Queen, the latter said to her, with the face of a Nero, and full of poison as a viper, "Welcome, Madam Sly-cheat!

That's a Victorian way to avoid saying a rather more direct insult, by adding a syllable.

Are you indeed the pretty mischief-maker? Are you the weed that has caught my son's eye and given me all this trouble."

The swear words are rather more direct, because Italian nobles liked swearing, and Italian children didn't think some of our modern swears were all that bad.

When Talia heard this she began to excuse herself;

In the Penguin Edition she says her "territory was taken possession of while under a sleeping spell." Here, a better story would have the Queen and Talia team up to torture the king, who clearly deserves it, but sadly, that's not the story we have, it is merely the one I want.

but the Queen would not listen to a word; and having a large fire lighted in the courtyard, she commanded that Talia should be thrown into the flames. Poor Talia, seeing matters come to a bad pass, fell on her knees before the Queen, and besought her at least to grant her time to take the clothes from off her back. Whereupon the Queen, not so much out of pity for the unhappy girl, as to get possession of her dress, which was embroidered all over with gold and pearls, said to her, "Undress yourself —I allow you." Then Talia began to undress, and as she

took off each garment she uttered an exclamation of grief; and when she had stripped off her cloak, her gown, and her jacket, and was proceeding to take off her petticoat, they seized her and were dragging her away.

She gives a last shriek for they are about to supply "the ashes for the laundry tub in which Charon washes his britches". I've always though of Charon as more of a robe man, myself. He's the ferryman of the dead. Breeches stop just below the knee, so, that's a look for a skeletal chap. Then again, the skeletal thing is a newer convention so far as I can tell; in the ancient authors he's a greasy, beardy fellow who doesn't really seem to do laundry.

At that moment the King came up, and seeing the spectacle he demanded to know the whole truth; and when he asked also for the children, and heard that his stepmother had ordered them to be killed, the unhappy King gave himself up to despair.

He calls himself a werewolf to his children, who are lambs, in the penguin edition. He also damns himself as compost for broccoli, which I think is funny.

He then ordered her to be thrown into the same fire which had been lighted for Talia, and the secretary with her, who was the handle of this cruel game and the weaver of this wicked web. Then he was going to do the same with the cook, thinking that he had killed the children; but the cook threw himself at the King's feet and said, "Truly, sir King, I would desire no other sinecure in return for the service I have done you than to be thrown into a furnace full of live coals; I would ask no other gratuity than the thrust of a spike;

The spike is in a particular part of his anatomy in the Penguin. The tone of sarcastic acceptance is absent.

I would wish for no other amusement than to be roasted in the fire; I would desire no other privilege than to have the ashes of the cook mingled with those of a Queen. But I look for no such great reward for having saved the children, and brought them back to you in spite of that wicked creature who wished to kill them."

When the King heard these words he was quite beside himself; he appeared to dream, and could not believe what his ears had heard. Then he said to the cook, "If it is true that you have saved the children, be assured I will take you from turning the spit, and reward you so that you shall call yourself the happiest man in the world."

As the King was speaking these words, the wife of the cook, seeing the dilemma her husband was in, brought Sun and Moon before the King, who, playing at the game of three with Talia and the other children, went round and round kissing first one and then another. Then giving the cook a large reward, he made him his chamberlain; and he took Talia to wife, who enjoyed a long life with her husband and the children, acknowledging that—

"He who has luck may go to bed,
And bliss will rain upon his head."

"For those who are lucky, good rains down even when they are sleeping" in the Penguin.

XXX: NENNILLO AND NENNELLA

Woe to him who thinks to find a governess for his children by giving them a stepmother! He only brings into his house the cause of their ruin. There never yet was a stepmother who looked kindly on the children of another; or if by chance such a one were ever found, she would be regarded as a miracle, and be called a white crow. But beside all those of whom you may have heard, I will now tell you of another, to be added to the list of heartless stepmothers, whom you will consider well deserving the punishment she purchased for herself with ready money.

There was once a good man named Jannuccio, who had two children, Nennillo and Nennella, whom he loved as much as his own life. But Death having, with the smooth file of Time, severed the prison-bars of his wife's soul, he took to himself a cruel woman, who had no sooner set foot in his house than she began to ride the high horse, saying, "Am I come here indeed to look after other folk's children? A pretty job I have undertaken, to have all this trouble and be for ever teased by a couple of squalling brats! Would that I had broken my neck ere I ever came to this place, to have bad food, worse drink, and get no sleep at night! Here's a life to lead! Forsooth I came as a wife, and not as a servant; but I must find some means of getting rid of these creatures, or it will cost me my life: better to blush once than to grow pale a hundred times; so I've done with them, for I am resolved to send them away, or to leave the house myself for ever."

The poor husband, who had some affection for this woman, said to her, "Softly, wife! Don't be angry, for sugar is dear; and to-morrow morning, before the cock crows, I will remove this annoyance in order to please you." So the next morning, ere the Dawn had hung out the red counterpane at the window of the East to air it, Jannuccio took the children, one by each hand, and with a good basketful of things to eat upon his arm, he led them to a wood, where an army of poplars and beech-trees were holding the shades besieged. Then Jannuccio said, "My little children, stay here in this wood, and eat and drink merrily; but if you want anything, follow this line of ashes which I have been strewing as we came along; this will be a clue to lead you out of the labyrinth and

bring you straight home." Then giving them both a kiss, he returned weeping to his house.

But at the hour when all creatures, summoned by the constables of Night, pay to Nature the tax of needful repose, the two children began to feel afraid at remaining in that lonesome place, where the waters of a river, which was thrashing the impertinent stones for obstructing its course, would have frightened even a hero. So they went slowly along the path of ashes, and it was already midnight ere they reached their home. When Pascozza, their stepmother, saw the children, she acted not like a woman, but a perfect fury; crying aloud, wringing her hands, stamping with her feet, snorting like a frightened horse, and exclaiming, "What fine piece of work is this? Is there no way of ridding the house of these creatures? Is it possible, husband, that you are determined to keep them here to plague my very life out? Go, take them out of my sight! I'll not wait for the crowing of cocks and the cackling of hens; or else be assured that to-morrow morning I'll go off to my parents' house, for you do not deserve me. I have not brought you so many fine things, only to be made the slave of children who are not my own."

Poor Jannuccio, who saw that matters were growing rather too warm, immediately took the little ones and returned to the wood; where giving the children another basketful of food, he said to them, "You see, my dears, how this wife of mine—who is come to my house to be your ruin and a nail in my heart—hates you; therefore remain in this wood, where the trees, more compassionate, will give you shelter from the sun; where the river, more charitable, will give you drink without poison; and the earth, more kind, will give you a pillow of grass without danger. And when you want food, follow this little path of bran which I have made for you in a straight line, and you can come and seek what you require." So saying, he turned away his face, not to let himself be seen to weep and dishearten the poor little creatures.

When Nennillo and Nennella had eaten all that was in the basket, they wanted to return home; but alas! a jackass—the son of ill-luck—had eaten up all the bran that was strewn upon the ground; so they lost their way, and wandered about forlorn in the wood for several days, feeding on acorns and chestnuts which they found fallen on the ground. But as Heaven always extends its arm over the innocent, there came by chance a Prince to hunt in that wood. Then Nennillo, hearing the baying of the hounds, was so frightened that he crept into a hollow tree; and Nennella set off running at full speed, and ran until she came out of the wood, and found herself on the seashore. Now it happened that some pirates, who had landed there to get fuel, saw Nennella and carried her off; and their captain took her home with him where he and his wife, having just lost a little girl, took her as their daughter.

Meantime Nennillo, who had hidden himself in the tree, was surrounded by the dogs, which made such a furious barking that the Prince sent to find out the cause; and when he discovered the pretty little boy, who was so young that he could not tell who were his father and mother, he ordered one of the huntsmen to set him upon his saddle and take him to the royal palace. Then he had him brought up with great care, and instructed in various arts, and among others, he had him taught that of a carver; so that, before three or four years had passed, Nennillo became so expert in his art that he could carve a joint to a hair.

A carver in this case is a meat carver, not a wood carver. In the Tudor period meat carving becomes important, because the importation and use of sugar makes teeth so bad in the upper classes that its fashionable at times to paint them black, in honour of the Queen.

Now about this time it was discovered that the captain of the ship who had taken Nennella to his house was a sea-robber, and the people wished to take him prisoner; but getting timely notice from the clerks in the law-courts, who were his friends, and whom he kept in his pay, he fled with all his family. It was decreed, however, perhaps by the judgment of Heaven, that he who had committed his crimes upon the sea, upon the sea should suffer the punishment of them; for having embarked in a small boat, no sooner was he upon the open sea than there came such a storm of wind and tumult of the waves, that the boat was upset and all were drowned—all except Nennella, who having had no share in the corsair's robberies, like his wife and children, escaped the danger; for just then a large enchanted fish, which was swimming about the boat, opened its huge throat and swallowed her down.

The little girl now thought to herself that her days were surely at an end, when suddenly she found a thing to amaze her inside the fish,—beautiful fields and fine gardens, and a splendid mansion, with all that heart could desire, in which she lived like a Princess. Then she was carried quickly by the fish to a rock, where it chanced that the Prince had come to escape the burning heat of a summer, and to enjoy the cool sea-breezes. And whilst a great banquet was preparing, Nennillo had stepped out upon a balcony of the palace on the rock to sharpen some knives, priding himself greatly on acquiring honour from his office. When Nennella saw him through the fish's throat, she cried aloud,

"Brother, brother, your task is done,
The tables are laid out every one;
But here in the fish I must sit and sigh,
O brother, without you I soon shall die."

Nennillo at first paid no attention to the voice, but the Prince, who was standing on another balcony and had

also heard it, turned in the direction whence the sound came, and saw the fish. And when he again heard the same words, he was beside himself with amazement, and ordered a number of servants to try whether by any means they could ensnare the fish and draw it to land. At last, hearing the words “Brother, brother!” continually repeated, he asked all his servants, one by one, whether any of them had lost a sister. And Nennillo replied, that he recollected, as a dream, having had a sister when the Prince found him in the wood, but that he had never since heard any tidings of her. Then the Prince told him to go nearer to the fish, and see what was the matter, for perhaps this adventure might concern him. As soon as Nennillo approached the fish, it raised up its head upon the rock, and opening its throat six palms wide, Nennella stepped out, so beautiful that she looked just like a nymph in some interlude, come forth from that animal at the incantation of a magician. And when the Prince asked her how it had all happened, she told him a part of her sad story, and the hatred of their stepmother; but not being able to recollect the name of their father nor of their home, the Prince caused a proclamation to be issued, commanding that whoever had lost two children, named Nennillo and Nennella, in a wood, should come to the royal palace, and he would there receive joyful news of them.

Jannuccio, who had all this time passed a sad and disconsolate life, believing that his children had been devoured by wolves, now hastened with the greatest joy to seek the Prince, and told him that he had lost the children. And when he had related the story, how he had been compelled to take them to the wood, the Prince gave him a good scolding, calling him a blockhead for allowing a woman to put her heel upon his neck till he was brought to send away two such jewels as his children. But after he had broken Jannuccio’s head with these words, he applied to it the plaster of consolation, showing him the children, whom the father embraced and kissed for half an hour without being satisfied. Then the Prince made him pull off his jacket, and had him dressed like a lord; and sending for Jannuccio’s wife, he showed her those two golden pippins, asked her what that person would deserve who should do them any harm, and even endanger their lives. And she replied, “For my part, I would put her into a closed cask, and send her rolling down a mountain.”

“So it shall be done!” said the Prince. “The goat has butted at herself. Quick now! you have passed the sentence, and you must suffer it, for having borne these beautiful stepchildren such malice.” So he gave orders that the sentence should be instantly executed. Then choosing a very rich lord among his vassals, he gave him Nennella to wife, and the daughter of another great lord to Nennillo; allowing them enough to live upon, with their father, so that they wanted for nothing in the world. But the stepmother, shut into the cask and shut out from life, kept on crying through the bunghole as long as she had breath—

“To him who mischief seeks, shall mischief fall;
There comes an hour that recompenses all.”

Pentamerone - Flayed Old Lady

We've completed the Pentamerone stories which were published for children in the Victorian period. Seventeen of the stories, however, were taken out as unsuitable. I won't be recording them, but I'll be using the Burton translation to summarize their plots and the hooks we can hang on them.

Burton's summary for the what's now called "The Flayed Old Lady", which he called "The Old Woman Discovered", is this: "The King of Roccaforte is enamoured by the voice of an old woman ; is deceived by a finger, and goeth to bed with her ; but discovering the deceit, commandeth his servants to throw her out of window, and in falling she remaineth hanging on a tree. Seven fairies sighting her they give her a charm, and she becometh a beautiful girl, and the king taketh her to wife ; the other sister being envious of her good fortune, and wishing to be made handsome also, desireth to be flayed alive, and in so doing dies." His tendency to use faux Jaocbean English is another reason not to record it in full.

In essence, there's a king who lives in a tower, and a couple of old women who are outside sitting under a tree. They can hear everything he does, and when he farts, they make jokes about how the dust is choking them, or how a flower landed on them and gave them a headache. Back in his day, kings thought that having delicate sensibilities were a sign of beauty and nobility. That's where the whole pea under a mattress thing comes from. He therefore assumes they are gorgeous, falls in love with them in the abstract, and decides to seek them out.

They know they are ugly and assume that the king will do something violent if he meets them and is embarrassed by how foolish he is being. Let's drop into the text for a second: ""Where, where art thou hidden, thou most precious jewel? Come forth, 0 thou, the most beauteous in the world! Arise, thou sun! Come forth, thou gem worthy an emperor! Make manifest thy graces, let me behold the beaming lights which kindle fire in love's domain! Chase from thee, 0 thou accursed bench, this flower of beauty : be not so ware of thy excellencies : open the gate to a poor falcon, and cage me if thou wilt! Let me behold the mouth from whose lips these sounds come forth : let me behold the bell whose sound I hear : let me behold this bird whose sweet song I listen to ; do not leave me as a sheep from Ponto to be fed with cresses, do not deny me the joy to behold and contemplate thy beauteous form.' These and other words did the king say, but he could ring Gloria, the old women's ears were deaf to his prayers, and it was like adding fuel to the fire.""

This goes on for weeks, and one day, the ladies agree to let the king see one finger, from one hand, of one lady, provided he comes back in eight days. The king agrees, seeing this as a new crack in their defences, and progress in the siege. The ladies spend the next week giving themselves intense manicures, and one, who has the finest finger, pokes it through a keyhole for him to fall in love with. Her finger is like a dart of cupid to his heart, apparently. Or more like a mace that hit him in the head and left him dazed. Or perhaps like a lighted match. Find your own violent metaphor. So he kisses it and carries on some more. Basically he demands she come forth.

Actually, it's so extreme, let's have it for the humor:

"0 sweet bow of love, 0 receptacle of all joys, 0 register of all love's privileges, for which I have become a warehouse of sorrow, and a magazine of anguish, and a custom-house of torments : is it possible, that thou wilt remain so hardened, and cruel, and feel no compassion of my complaints? 0 my sweetheart, if thou hast shown me the tail by the key-hole, put there thy lips, and we will have a jelly of happiness ; if thou hast shown part of thy sweetmeats, 0 thou river of beauty, let me behold all thy body, let me behold those eyes of hawk peregrine, and let them wither and scorch mine heart with their Ieven glances. Who holdeth prisoner the treasure of thy beauteous face ; who keepeth this beauteous ship in quarantine ; by whose power is held prisoner this charming and graceful gazelle in a pig-stye? Come out of that pit ; issue forth from those stables, come out of that hole ; leap, sweet May, and give thine hand to Cola, and pay me what I am worth ; thou knowest that I am the king, I am not a cucumber, I can bid and forbid : but that false and blind son of the lame Vulcan and the strumpet Venus, who hath full authority over all sceptres, hath made me thy subject, so that I beg of thee that of which I could command the gift; and I do as the old saw saith, for "with caresses and not with talk is Venus won."'

The woman is in trouble now. She knows the king can kill her with a whim, so she carries on for many, many phrases about how he's important and she's not, but if he wants her, he should grant her a boon, and let her come to him in complete darkness, because she can't bear to be seen naked. He agrees joyfully, so she comes to him that night in a veil.

"The king, who had waited like match near a powdercask, when he heard them coming, and heard her get into bed, perfuming his person with sweet scented musk and civet, and anointing his beard with perfumed ointment, jumped into bed. And it was well for the old woman that he was thus anointed and perfumed, so that he could not smell

the stink of her mouth, and the vinegar of her arm-pits, and the mustiness of that ugly thing. But as soon as he felt her limbs, he perceived the deception…"

The king has his servants throw her out the window. Her hair tangles about a fig tree so she does not hit the ground. Some faeries find her the next morning and they find her humiliation hilarious. To repay her for the entertainment each gives her a charm: youth, beauty, wealth, nobility, virtue, the love of others, and all good fortune. They also seat her on a velvet chair under a canopy of gold, and give her clothes with gold and gems worked through them. She is also perfumed and gifted with pages, servants and handmaidens – but if these are faeries or human is not explained.

The king looks out the window, hoping to see the body of the old woman crushed upon the ground. He instead sees the woman and has another shot with his fulsome speech. Let's have a quote:

"Throwing himself at her feet, said to her, '0 dovefaced mine, 0 thou graceful doll, 0 thou pigeon from Venus' car, triumph of love, thou hast put this heart in soak in the river Sarno. If thine eyes are not blinded by the cane-seed, and thine ears deafened by the excrement of Rennena, thou wilt hear and perceive the love-longing and pain, the anguish and sore distress that I endure for thy beauty's sake; an if thou dost not believe, at the yellowing of my face, the heat which boileth in this breast ; if thou believest not the flames of sighs, and the scorching fire which burneth in my veins ; thou who art of good understanding, and judgment, thou canst comprehend how thy golden hair bindeth me like a chain, from thy dark eyes what coal burneth me, and from thy red lips like Cupid's bow, what darts strike me : therefore shut not the gate of pity, and draw not up the bridge of mercy, and dry not up the rill of compassion : and if thou do not belie,ve me worthy to possess thy beauteous form, at least give me a safeguard of good words, a guide in a promise, and a .deed of expecting hope, an if thou dost not, I will die and thou wilt lose the form.' These and other words did the king utter from the depth of his heart, which touched the made-young old woman, and at last she accepted him for her husband.

The lady and the king are wed, and she invites her sister to the celebration. The sister keeps pestering her about how she was transformed during the feast, so eventually, in a fit of pique, the lady says "I made them flay me, o sister!" The sister goes to a barber and says "Here's fifty ducats to flay me from head to foot." The barber replies that she is mad and refuses, so she offers him even more when he is successful. As he's doing it, she is in tremendous pain, and there are buckets of blood, but she says "Who beauteous wisheth to be, with anguish and pain must troubled be!" bidding him continue until she expires. He reaches her navel, and she expires, with a "strong fart" as sign of departure.

The odd thing is that, in Ars Magica, the flaying might actually work – it sounds like a mystery cult ordeal.

As a plot hook, your character could have the Dark Secret Flaw, as a murderer. The twist is that, yes, you killed the king's sister-in-law, but she did beg and pay you to do it. After a time, a magus seeks you out as he thinks you might have the handle on an Ordeal for a Mystery which prevents cosmetic aging. There are several magical traditions which let you keep using the Aging rules to determine death, but ignore their effects on your character until death occurs – This might well be one. I've sometimes suggested the Diedne fled to South America and caused a variant of the Aztec Empire, is the flaying a faerie memory of a Diedne ritual which might later turn up in the priesthood of Xipetotec?

Pentamerone - The Young Slave

Let's return to the Burton version of the Pentamerone. His summary of "The Young Slave" is "Lisa is born from a rose-leaf, and dieth through a fairy's curse; her mother layeth her in a chamber and biddeth her brother not to open the door. But his wife being very jealous, wishing to see what is shut therein, openeth the door, and findeth Lisa well and alive, and attiring her in slave raiments, treateth her with cruelty. Lisa being at last recognised by her uncle, he sendeth his wife home to her relations, and giveth his niece in marriage. " Remember, Burton loves this faux-Jacobean style of writing.

The Baron has a sister called Cilla, and she's playing in the garden with her ladies. They have a wager about who can jump over a rosebush with a single beautiful flower upon it. Cilla wins by cheating – she knocks a leaf (or perhaps a petal) loose, and so she eats it before the other girls see. Three days later, she's pregnant. A sign saying "Don't eat this Creo vis or use it in longevity potions." would save a lot of trouble. She goes to the faeries for help, and in my personal canon, they were responsible for this. They tell her that she's pregnant by the leaf, and she gives birth secretly. She names the baby Lisa and gives it to the faeries to raise.

The faeries probably give each other high fives. Each also gives the child a magical blessing, except the last. It was running so fast to see the child it stood on a thorn and so cursed the child instead. That faeries do this sort of thing is precisely the reason people should not give babies to them to raise. The curse is that Lisa will die when she is seven, when her mother would accidentally stick a comb into her head while doing the child's hair. The queen, who apparently does not know what short hair is, or what brushes are, actually does this, and there are many tears. The queen puts the child within seven crystal chests, and locks her in a distant part of the palace. Oddly, putting corpses in crystal coffins to keep them fresh turns up in Herodotus, and is a mystery initiation of one path of House Criamon.

Cilla's health fails, so she calls her brother and basically says "I am giving you all my stuff, on one condition. Never open the final chamber in the palace which is unlocked by this particular key, and which you must keep in your desk." So, the brother agrees, and a year passes, and the he marries.

He is going off for a hunting party with the lads, and he leaves his wife in charge of the castle. This being one of the earliest collections of faerie stories, him saying "Hey, please don't open the most distant chamber using the key in my desk, OK? Love you, bye!" is not yet a trope.

His wife opens the door and sees the beautiful child inside. The story notes the child has grown as if still alive, and that the crystal coffins had lengthened to suit her. That being said, she sounds a lot older than eight in the rest of the story.

There may be a metaphor here I'm not seeing, but the wife says that this is a "Mohammed" her husband was worshipping. There is an odd tradition of Christian folklore about Muslims with weird effigies they worship (like the Templars) but it might be that the girl is more of a metaphorical idol. Either way the woman opens the coffins and tries to pull the girl's hair out, which dislodges the comb.

Lisa awakes and cries out for her mother, but the other woman cuts off her hair and gives her a beating. Then she beats her daily and scratches her face until she has black eyes (swollen like eggplants in the Penguin edition) and her mouth bleeds as if she has eaten raw pigeons. The lord comes back from whatever the Venetian equivalent is to a trip to Vegas is and asks her why she's doing this, but she answers that Lisa is a recalcitrant slave girl sent by her aunt, and that sort of explanation is perfectly normal in Venice in period.

Later, the lord is going to the market, and because he's got some noblesse oblige, but not a lot, he gets caught out by a magic effect that phases him far less than it should. He asks everyone in his household, including the cats, what they would like from the market. Despite his wife's protestations he even asks the slave girl. She asks for a doll, a knife and a pumice stone, and curses him so that if he forgets, he won't be able to cross rivers until he goes back for her swag. He forgets, and the river floods, throws up boulder and trees, and generally terrifies him until he makes good his mistake. . In some versions of the story it does it three times, once for each gift, but not in the version we are working with.

Lisa goes ot the kitchen and cries out her life story to the doll. When the doll doesn't answer, she picks up the knife, sharpens it on the pumice stone, and tells the doll that unless it answers, she's going to stab herself. The doll tells her it is not deaf, presumably because the faeries freak out when their toy is about to opt out of the game permanently. She does this for several days until the baron overhears her, realises hat's gone on, and sends her to the house of a relative to recuperate. After a few months, she becomes "as beautiful as a goddess" and her uncle throws her a banquet. During this, he asks her to recite her troubled history. The guests all weep and the baron tells his wife to go home to her family. He then gives her a good husband. and, since he doesn't have any kids and has sent his wife away, we must assume the right to inherit his estate.

Pentamerone - Penta of the Severed Hands

This is one of my favourite stories in this collection, because it's obvious a magus with a Hermetic twist is loose in the background, mucking people about. let's hear Burton's take on the plot, in his weird mock-Jacobean English:

Penta scorneth to wed her brother, and cutting off her hands, sendeth them to him as a present. He commandeth that she should be put within a chest and thrown into the sea. The tide casteth her upon a seashore. A sailor findeth her, and leadeth her to his home, but his wife thrusts her again into the same chest and into the sea. She is found by a king, and he taketh her to wife ; but by the wickedness of the same woman, Penta is expelled from that kingdom. After sore troubles and travail she is recovered by her husband and her brother.

The storyteller at the beginning of this one says that "Virtue is tried in the crucible of troubles" and I'd suggest that's because Penta has the Flaw where beauty calls trouble.

The King of Pretasecca is a widower, and he begins to have the evil thought that he should marry his sister. His reasons are, for the period, kind of sound, and could explain why the Hapsburgs all married cousins an developed a family chin. Penta, though points out that incest is a sin, and will have none of it. She says that just because he's lost his wits doesn't mean she's lost her sense of shame. She tells him that if this was a joke he's an ass, and if he was serious she thinks its a pity he has a tongue at all. Penta then leaves, locks herself in a her bedroom, and bars the door. He mopes about for a month, so she gets sick of him carrying on at her door and confronts him.

"Look," she says "I've checked my face out in the mirror pretty thoroughly and I can't see why you don't just go after someone else." He answers "You're beautiful from head to foot, but frankly it's your hands that that "make me faint with excessive desire". He then carries on about her hand for a page with various metaphors, about how its the fork on which she holds his spirit, and the spoon that holds his life's sweetness, and much more besides. Penta is, you will be unsuprised to hear, entirely unmoved by this sort of carry on, and eventually interrupts him mid-flow by dismissing him and going to her chamber.

There she pays a witless slave to chop off her hands, telling him she has secret arts to make them more beautiful and white. He complies. Penta puts her hands in a fancy basin (made in the great ceramic manufactories of Faneza) covers them with a silk napkin, and sends them to her brother with a note that says "Enjoy these. Have good health and twins."

The king throws a tantrum. He orders her cast into the sea, locked in a tarred chest. She drifts until some shore fishermen capture her box, and open it. She's even more beautiful, "like the Lenten moon over Taranto." The chief of the fishermen takes her home, but his wife, Nuccia, feels jealous. She waits for him to leave the house, then loads Penta in the chest again and throws her back in the sea.

Eventually the chest bumps into the boats of the king of Terra Verde. Is this the actual Green Land? Probably not, but I want vikings in this story, so…now it is. Deal with it, now, long dead author. The King opens the chest, claims that what comes in chests is treasure, and weeps that the "casket of so many gems has no handles".

Then he takes her home and gives her as a maid of honour to his wife, the Queen. Penta does all the services of a maid with her feet, like sewing, combing the queen's hair, and laundry. The Queen begins to think of her a daughter, and a month later, when she's dying, she makes a dying wish that her husband marry Penta as soon as her eyes close in death. He agrees, and his wife obliges the story by passing away in the next sentence. They marry immediately, and Penta becomes pregnant on their first night, but the king is required to sail to Anto-scuoglio, and so Penta gives birth before he returns.

The counsellors send a felucca to tell him he has a beautiful son, which wrecks my Greenland theory, because that's a Mediterranean type of ship. The ship has a stormy passage, and stops, by chance, at the same point where Penta washed ashore. Again, by chance, the captains find refuge with the woman who put Penta back in her box. The lady gets him drunk, takes the letter he has from Penta to the king, and swaps it with another. The new letter claims it is from the royal counsellors, says the queen has given birth to a dog, and asks for instructions. The captain is illiterate, and so does not notice the substitution.

The king sends back a letter saying that the counsellors should work hard to keep Penta in good spirits. Bad things happen due to ill stars or Heaven's commands, and men should make the best of them. On the way home the ship stops at the same place, and Nuccia swaps out the letter for one saying they should be put to death. The counsellors open the letter, have a bit of a chat with each other and conclude that the king's either going mad or under a spell, because murdering a woman

and baby is so far beyond what they are willing to do that they are amazed he'd even ask. They give her some money and send her from the city, so no news of her can reach the king.

Penta cries it out. In her reasoning we see something odd from medieval Venice "The unhappy Penta, perceiving that they had expelled her, although she was not a dishonest woman, nor related to bandits, nor a fastidious student, taking the child in arms, whom she watered with her tears, and fed with her milk, departed, and fared toward Lago-truvolo where dwelt a magician, and he beholding this beautiful maimed damsel who moved the hearts to compassion, this beauty who made more war with her maimed arms than Briareus with his hundred hands, asked her to relate to him the whole history of her misadventures." The magician, because he's awesome, tells her not worry, that she's found in him a mother and a father. Penta recovers from her depression, and the magician's servants treat her as if she was his daughter. The magician decides its time to take some names and kick some arse.

The magician hires a crier to go about telling people that whoever came to his court and told him the greatest tale of misfortune would be given a sceptre and crown, both of gold. People "more than broccoli" turn up from all over Europe, generally with stories about how noblemen have done them wrong, but also with tales of ill-luck, or dedicated work not rewarded. Frankly, there's a coven full of folk here. You've got scribes, courtiers, merchant adventurers, and military veterans just in the few examples given.

The King of Terra-Verde returns home to find he's in a fine sirup, which is a turn of phrase I like. He rages and tries to blame his counsellors, who show him the letter. The king calls the captain who bore the message, works out what when on, then sails to the hamlet where Nuccia lives. After charming her into a confession, the king coats her with tallow and burns her alive. Staying only to make sure there's a body, because he's aware of the narrative convention, he then sails hoe. On the sea, he meets the vessel of Penta's brother, and they carry on with the ceremonies of kings meeting.

After making friends the King of Pretasecca tells the King of Terra Verde that he's going to Lagotruvolo, where the king has offered a treasure to the most sorrow-stricken person in the world. The King of Terra Verde says he'll come along too, because that's him. He soliloquizes on his pain for some time, in metaphor. The King of Pretasecca doesn't agree, but they are such good friends by now they agree to travel together and split the prize. I then start singing the "Agony / Misery" duet of the princes from "Into the Woods", and the woman at the desk next to me starts playing Yaketty-Sax on her phone. Why? Who knows. It's a fool who questions the ill-omened stars, apparently.

They arrive, and send to the king's palace. The magician is all, "King? Rightio." and greets them from a throne on a dais which we have not heard about previously. He knows who they are, because they have made very sure to tell people they are kings. Time to twist the knife a bit.

Penta's brother begins first and he tells of the wrong he has done, and how wonderful his sister was, and how he murdered her by throwing her into the sea. This has made him very sad, for several pages, so clearly he should win the prize. Her husband says "Your troubles are but lumps of sugar compared to mine, because I was married to your sister, and due to a complicated plot I've lost both her and our son. Although I did incinerate a woman, so, that was a high point.", but again he takes several pages.

The magician says to a page boy "Go kiss that guy's feet." and he does. He's such a cool kid they say to the magician "Is this your son?" and he says "No."

"Who's son is he?"

"Ask his mother!"

"Where's his mother?"

Penta comes out from behind an arras, where she has been listening as is required by genre convention. There are tears and forgiveness. She seems to have forgiven her brother. The magician gives Penta and her husband his kingdom.

The magician restores Penta's hands. She just puts the stumps under her apron and pulls them out, even more beautiful than before. This can't be done with Hermetic magic – I presume her hands are more beautiful as an effect of the wizard's sigil. He may have regrown them with ritual magic while she slept, then hid them with illusions until the unveiling.

Penta's brother takes a note to the brother of the the king of Terra Verde, telling him he's now ruler, as his sibling has decided to stay with these cool people in Italy. The moral that's given is that you can't taste the sweet without having first tasted the bitter, but that seems like the sort of thing you say to Italian nobles who wouldn't know the bitter if it had a herald.

Pentamerone - Crab louse, Mouse, and Cricket

The Burton version of this story is, in his own words, summarized as “Nardiello is sent three times by his father to buy some wares with an hundred ducats each time. The first time he buyeth a mouse, the next a large crab-louse, and then a cricket, and being expelled by his father for this, he reacheth a city where by means of his purchases he cureth the king’s daughter, and after various adventures becometh her husband. “

There’s a farmer called Miccone, with a son called Nardiello, and the son is a spendthrift and and foolish. When Nardiello goes to the tavern he picks the worst people to quarrel with. When he hires sex workers, he picks the worst and pays for the best. When he gambles he’s plucked by professionals, and this is wasting all of the father’s money. How can he set him straight, he wonders? Hard work, he decides. He says to his son “Take this sack of cash to Salerno and buy us some calves. In a few years when they are oxen, we’ll sow a wheat field and become corn merchants.”

“Leave it to me” says the son, and walks off with the sack of gold. On the way to town he sees a fairy on an ancient flat, rock by the river. The faerie is playing with a giant crab louse, which is changed to “cockroach” in many editions, because public lice are hilarious only in particular cultural contexts. The crab louse is playing a tiny guitar in the Spanish manner. I presume this is really a different instrument, because guitars are from the 15th century. Let’s say it’s a citole? Nardiello asks how much for the clever beast, and the fairy says “A hundred ducats would be just the thing”. The man replies “Ah, this is perfect, I have exactly that much money in this bag.” and hands it over. The fairy puts the louse in little box, and Nardiello runs home, certain his father will be thrilled with his purchase.

His father is not thrilled. Nardiello lays the box on the table and so praises its contents that his father expects it to have a rough diamond inside. When it’s a public louse, his father is so angry he won’t let him speak any further. He demands Nardiello gets the money back, and gives him a hundred more ducats to buy three calves. On a side note, calves are really expensive in this story, at thirty-three gold ducats a head.

Naridello heads for Sarno, and on the way meets the same faerie at the same rock. She is watching a mouse that is dancing. He watches the turns and jumps and twist, mouth agape, for a long while and then offers the faerie a hundred ducats for the mouse. The faerie gives him a free box for the mouse, and sends him home. Miccione is not impressed, but can’t do much because there’s a guest at table who will gossip if he loses his temper. He gives Nardiello another hundred ducats and says “Any more of your games and I’ll slap you so hard your mother will feel it.”

On the third journey, the faerie is listening to a cricket, which sings like in nightingale. Nardiello buys it, and takes it home in a cage made of a vegetable marrow and some twigs. His father picks up a stump of wood and whacks Nardiello about the shoulder like, according to Burton, a Rodomonte. This is a character from the Orlando cycle: he’s the Saracen king who besieges Paris. He’s a villain, but mostly for racist reasons. Nardiello grabs his three animals and books it to Lombardy.

In Lombardy is a lord, Cenzone, with a single daughter, Milia. She suffered a childhood sickness, and as a lasting effect, has not smiled for seven years. So, she’s neurodiverse, and we can’t be having that in fairy stories, time to hand her off as a prize to some worthless nearby guy who has luck on his side. Anyone who can make her laugh gets her as wife, says her dad, in what is an odd choice given that the whole Pentamerone uses the same frame narrative. Why no-one stops the storyteller at this point and says “The prince -right here- poured oil in the street to make a woman laugh.” I don’t know. Cezone oddly ups the stakes, he says that if Nardiello tries and fails “the mould of his hood shall pay for it”. I’m not sure what that means, but it’s clearly a threat. Do you want her to smile or not, Cezone? Get your motivation together.

The lad pulls out his boxes of animals, and the princess laughs heartily at them. Her father, who seems determined to be displeased by life, goes from being sad because she’s sad to being sad because he now needs to marry her off to the dregs of humanity because of the ban which, the narrator does not mention again, he himself wrote. You could have made it a cash prize, Cezone. To up the stakes he says “OK, so, you can marry my daughter, if you agree that, should you not consummate the marriage within three days, I can feed you to lions.” At this point Nardiello says he’s not afraid and agrees. He does not ask the many pertinent questions this bring up, like “How do you have lions in Lombardy?” “Why do you have lions in Lombardy?” and “Does your daughter know you are feeding the men who want to marry her to lions in Lombardy?” He does literally say “..for in that time I am man enough to consummate the marriage of thy daughter and of all thine house ” which is an incest joke about having sex with the guy he’s talking to. Hilarious in medieval Italy? You decide.

There is a marriage feast, and the king gives Nardiello opium, so that when the bridal pair retire, he just falls straight asleep. The king manages this for two further

nights, because in addition to lions, he has poppies for days. “Let’s throw him to the lions”, says the king, in what is clearly still murder. Nardiello has his pets with him, and so he opens the boxes saying “I’m about to die and I have nothing to leave you, so you should go free, my beautiful animals.” The animals, in the best Broadway tradition, solve their problems by putting on a show. The lions decide this is the oddest way to avoid being eaten they’ve ever seen, that there’s no way the king is going to let them starve, and that its lionesses that hunt anyway, and so they settle in to watch. Then the mouse speaks.

It speaks in a flowery, indirect way, given that it’s meant to be doing ballet so fascinating that it saves a man from hungry lions. The gist is that the animals are magical, and will save Nardiello, because it’s clear he loves them. They then talk about submitting joyfully to slavery, because Italian nobles liked that sort of thing. The mouse then bores a tunnel upward in the wall, the size of a man, so Nardiello can walk out of the den. It even cuts stairs in the tunnel, because if its worth doing, you might as well go creative mode Minecraft.

The tunnel comes out in a hayloft, and the animals ask him what he wants. He says that what he wants, more than anything in the world, is that if the king gives Milia a new husband, he won’t be able to consummate the marriage. Thus the abused becomes an abuser, but at the start of the story you were warned he’s a lucky idiot, not a hero. The animals say that’s easy, and they’ll do it, asking Nardiello to stay in the hayloft while his cunning plan comes to fruition.

At court, the king has married his daughter to a visiting English lord. That’s two husbands in a week. No wonder Milia never smiles – it makes her Dad murder people. The new pair go to bed, but the man has overindulged at the feast and falls asleep. There’s no actual mention of opium. The crab louse, hearing his snores, sneaks into the bed and opens the man’s anus, so that he has a watery discharge of dysentery into the bed and onto his bride.

The English lord is near ready to die of shame. He gets up, washes himself, and sends for a cluster of doctors. The doctors agrees that his symptoms are a result of overindulgence at the feast. The next night, the crab louse tries the same trick but is stymied. The lord has cunningly, on the advice of many valets, equipped himself “repairs of bindings, a bank of ribbons, and a trench of rags.”

He crab louse goes back to his fellows and says he can’t break into the man’s body, so the mouse says “We need to see if a good sapper can overcome these fortifications” and goes to gnaw the cloths. Given that it has just constructed a tunnel with its teeth, the cloths provide little resistance. The crab louse then gives the man some sort of laxative enema, and he stinks up the palace. The princess, sensibly, leaves for one of her maid’s tooms. In the verbose repetition so normal in these stories we learn the sheets were white and from Holland, but come to look like a Venetian tabby.

The man, in what strikes me as a sign of great maudlin wit for someone who is blamelessly being raped by animals, says that the greatness of his his house is being undone by the looseness of his foundation. His valets say to blame the food poisoning that caused the problem the previous night, because that’s his host’s fault, but to not let it happen again, as that would make it seem as if he’s constitutionally incontinent, and would embarrass him. THey then scheme on his behalf and come up with a cunning plan.

The lord changes room, and changes bed, and “not all the poppies in the world will cause him to sleep”. He’s too nerved up, and he doesn’t want the relaxation of sleep to get to him. It’s not absolutely clear if he’s taken the “Hump or Death” bet (Thanks Mel Brooks!}. One of his valets is a maker of bombards, and so he convinces the man to let him make a wooden stopper, like those used for mortars, and the man puts it in place. Then he really can’t sleep, because it’s uncomfortable, he doesn’t want to dislodge it, and there’s the chance he’ll be eaten by lions.

The crablouse speechifies a lengthy version of “Alas comrades, as he won’t sleep I have no time for my work. We are undone.” The cricket then steps up and says “Leave this to me.” and sings a sweet lullaby, so that the man nods off. The crab louse begins its duties as a syringe, but finds the way barred. The mouse heads to the pantry, anoints the tip of its tail in mustard, and then wipes it on the upper lip of the Englishman. He sneezes so strongly that the stopped comes flying out with great force.

As he is one of those chaps who sleeps on his side with his back facing his wife, she is struck in the solar plexus with such force it almost kills her. She screams. The king comes in and asks what’s going on, and she says she’s been shot with a petard. A petard is a small bomb. It’s a box filled with powder used in breaching doors, or a firework of much the same design. The king says that’s impossible, so she pulls down the sheets and shows him the wooden implement, her injury and the…ahem…powder which propelled it. The king is disgusted and throws the Englishman out. I’m not sure exactly what he’s done wrong in this scenario or why an English lord has been specifically chosen as the butt of the joke.

He then started beating his breast and repenting killing Nardiello, as clearly he has been cursed for his cruelty. In what, to him, must have seemed an unlikely turn of events, a gigantic, speaking, public louse then tells him that Nardiello is still alive and worthy to be his son in law. The king says that this beautiful naimal has saved him from a sea of trouble and a pricking in his heart, and so the cricket goes to find his master and return him to court. The naimals then give Naridello a spell to make him a handsome youth, and the pair marry. Happily ever after. The moral is “More happens in an hour than a hundred years”

I promise you stats, remind you these were stories for children, and say that my saga, would vary.

The Vampire of Croglin Grange

The story which follows seems folkloric, but the MonsterTalk podcast has done some digging and found the places mentioned don't seem to accord with real geography. The original writer was a bit of a raconteur, known for great dinner stories, so this may have been his own work. For example the reaction of the young lady attacked by the vampire seems implausible.

I first read this story when I was about 12 in "50 Great Horror Stories". I want to dig that out now and see what other monsters I can steal from it.

It's clearly a revener, in Ars Magica terms. Statistics eventually.

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Captain Fisher also told us this really extraordinary story connected with his own family
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Fisher may sound a very plebeian name, but this family is of very ancient lineage, and for many hundreds of years they have possessed a very curious old place in Cumberland, which bears the weird name of Croglin Grange. The great characteristic of the house is that never at any period of its very long existence has it been more than one story high, but it has a terrace from which large grounds sweep away towards the church in the hollow, and a fine distant view.

When, in lapse of years, the Fishers outgrew Croglin Grange in family and fortune, they were wise enough not to destroy the long-standing characteristic of the place by adding another story to the house, but they went away to the south, to reside at Thorncombe near Guildford, and they let Croglin Grange.

They were extremely fortunate in their tenants, two brothers and a sister. They heard their praises from all quarters. To their poorer neighbours they were all that is most kind and beneficent, and their neighbours of a higher class spoke of them as a most welcome addition to the little society of the neighbourhood. On their part the tenants were greatly delighted with their new residence. The arrangement of the house, which would have been a trial to many, was not so to them. In every respect Croglin Grange was exactly suited to them.

The winter was spent most happily by the new inmates of Croglin Grange, who shared in all the little social pleasures of the district, and made themselves very popular. In the following summer, there was one day which was dreadfully, annihilatingly hot. The brothers lay under the trees with their books, for it was too hot for any active occupation. The sister sat in the verandah and worked, or tried to work, for, in the intense sultriness of that summer day, work was next to impossible. They dined early, and after dinner they still sat out in the verandah, enjoying the cool air which came with evening, and they watched the sun set, and the moon rise over the belt of trees which separated the grounds from the churchyard, seeing it mount the heavens till the whole lawn was bathed in silver light, across which the long shadows from the shrubbery fell as if embossed, so vivid and distinct were they.

"When they separated for the night, all retiring to their rooms on the ground-floor (for, as I said, there was no upstairs in that house), the sister felt that the heat was still so great that she could not sleep, and having fastened her window, she did not close the shutters in that very quiet place it was not necessary and, propped against the pillows, she still watched the wonderful, the marvellous beauty of that summer night. Gradually she became aware of two lights,
two lights which flickered in and out in the belt of trees which separated the lawn from the churchyard, and as her gaze became fixed upon them, she saw them emerge, fixed in a dark substance, a definite ghastly something which seemed every moment to become nearer, increasing in size and substance as it approached. Every now and then it was lost for a moment in the long shadows which stretched across the lawn from the trees, and then it emerged larger than ever, and still coming on on. As she watched it, the most uncontrollable horror seized her. She longed to get away, but the door was close to the window and the door was locked on the inside, and while she was unlocking it, she must be for an instant nearer to it. She longed to scream, but her voice seemed paralysed, her tongue glued to the roof of her mouth.
"

Suddenly, she never could explain why afterwards, the terrible object seemed to turn to one side, seemed to be going round the house, not to be coming to her at all, and immediately she jumped out of bed and rushed to the door, but as she was unlocking it, she heard scratch, scratch, scratch upon the window, and saw a hideous brown face with flaming eyes glaring
in at her. She rushed back to the bed, but the creature continued to scratch, scratch, scratch upon the window. She felt a sort of mental comfort in the knowledge that the window was securely fastened on the inside. Suddenly the scratching sound ceased, and a kind of pecking sound took its place. Then, in her agony, she became aware that the creature was unpicking the lead ! The noise continued, and a diamond pane of glass fell into the room.

Then a long bony finger of the creature came in and turned the handle of the window, and the window opened, and the creature came in ; and it came across the room, and her terror was so great that she could not scream, and it came up to the bed, and it twisted its long, bony fingers into her hair, and it dragged her head over the side of the bed, and it bit her violently in the throat.

As it bit her, her voice was released, and she screamed with all her might and main. Her brothers rushed out of their rooms, but the door was locked on the inside. A moment was lost while they got a poker and broke it open. Then the creature had already escaped through the window, and the sister, bleeding violently from a wound in the throat, was lying unconscious over the side of the bed. One brother pursued the creature, which fled before him through the moonlight with gigantic strides, and eventually seemed to disappear over the wall into the churchyard. Then he rejoined his brother by the sister's bedside.

She was dreadfully hurt and her wound was a very definite one, but she was of strong disposition, not given either to romance or superstition, and when she came to herself she said, "What has happened is most extraordinary and I am very much hurt. It seems inexplicable, but of course there is an explanation, and we must wait for it. It will turn out that a lunatic has escaped from some asylum and found his way here.'

The wound healed and she appeared to get well, but the doctor who was sent for to her would not believe that she could bear so terrible a shock so easily, and insisted that she must have change, mental and physical ; so her brothers took her to Switzerland.

Being a sensible girl, when she went abroad, she threw herself at once into the interests of the country she was in. She dried plants, she made sketches, she went up mountains, and, as autumn came on, she was the person who urged that they should return to Croglin Grange.

' We have taken it she said, 'for seven years, and we have only been there one ; and we shall always find it difficult to let a house which is only one story high, so we had better return there ; lunatics do not escape every day.' As she urged it, her brothers wished nothing better, and the family returned to Cumberland.

From there being no upstairs in the house, it was impossible to make any great change in their arrangements. The sister occupied the same room, but it is unnecessary to say she always closed her shutters, which, however, as in many old houses, always left one top pane of the window uncovered. The brothers moved, and occupied a room together exactly opposite that of their sister, and they always kept loaded pistols in their room.

"The winter passed most peacefully and happily. In the following March the sister was suddenly awakened by a sound she remembered only too well scratch, scratch, scratch upon the window, and looking up, she saw, climbed up to the topmost pane of the window, the same hideous brown shrivelled face, with glaring eyes, looking in at her. This time she screamed as loud as she could. Her brothers rushed out of their room with pistols, and out of the front door. The creature was already scudding away across the lawn. One of the brothers fired and hit it in the leg, but still with the other leg it continued to make way, scrambled over the wall into the churchyard, and seemed to disappear into a vault which belonged to a family long extinct.

The next day the brothers summoned all the tenants of Croglin Grange, and in their presence the vault was opened. A horrible scene revealed itself. The vault was full of coffins ; they had been broken open, and their contents, horribly mangled and distorted, were scattered over the floor. One coffin alone remained intact. Of that the lid had been lifted, but still lay loose upon the coffin. They raised it, and there, brown, withered, shrivelled, mummified, but quite entire, was the same hideous figure which had looked in at the windows of Croglin Grange, with the marks of a recent pistol-shot in the leg ; and they did the only thing that can lay a vampire: they burnt it.

Cordiphagii

This week, two poems linked by the theme of hearts eaten away. I was going to save this for Halloween, but I'm sure something else will appear. The first was recorded for Librivox by Devorah Allen, and could be reskinned from the Miser's Pot in Realms of Power: Infernal. Stats eventually.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" by George MacDonald

The miser lay on his lonely bed;
Life's candle was burning dim.
His heart in an iron chest was hid
Under heaps of gold and an iron lid;
And whether it were alive or dead
It never troubled him.

Slowly out of his body he crept.
He said, "I am just the same!
Only I want my heart in my breast;
I will go and fetch it out of my chest!"
Through the dark a darker shadow he leapt,
Saying "Hell is a fabled flame!"

He opened the lid. Oh, Hell's own night!
His ghost-eyes saw no gold!—
Empty and swept! Not a gleam was there!
In goes his hand, but the chest is bare!
Ghost-fingers, aha! have only might
To close, not to clasp and hold!

But his heart he saw, and he made a clutch
At the fungous puff-ball of sin:
Eaten with moths, and fretted with rust,
He grasped a handful of rotten dust,
And shrieked, as ghosts may, at the crumbling touch,
But hid it his breast within.

And some there are who see him sit
Under the church, apart,
Counting out coins and coins of gold
Heap by heap on the dank death-mould:
Alas poor ghost and his sore lack of wit—
They breed in the dust of his heart!

Another miser has now his chest,
And it hoards wealth more and more;
Like ferrets his hands go in and out,
Burrowing, tossing the gold about—
Nor heed the heart that, gone from his breast,
Is the cold heap's bloodless core.

Now wherein differ old ghosts that sit
Counting ghost-coins all day
From the man who clings with spirit prone
To whatever can never be his own?
Who will leave the world with not one whit
But a heart all eaten away?

The second poem contains a ghoul variant, so its core stats are in Realms of Power: Faerie.

It is read by Allan Davis Drake. He was a fantastic reader, and one of the early Voxers. His contributor note says he passed away eleven years ago, so he and I didn't overlap by much. I have not followed his material, but he has 655 sections in the database, so I'll be looking through them for other pieces that are a little spooky.

In the Desert by Stephen Crane

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.
I said, "Is it good, friend?"
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;

"But I like it
"Because it is bitter,
"And because it is my heart."

Black Spirits and White – Count Albert

This is your monster of the month, a little early because the Venice episode did not come together. Way back in Episode 184 (Major Weir) we discussed a Scottish regio where there were dancing skeletons. They make a return here under the control of the ghost of a suicided German count. I've trimmed down the story so it's just the bit which works for us: basically a pair of atheists spend a night in a haunted castle to debunk it, and trouble ensues.

Thanks to the Librivox team! Statistics eventually.

In Kropfsberg Keep

Finally they decided that there was no use in sitting up and boring themselves any longer, they had much better rest; so Otto threw himself down on the mattress, falling almost immediately asleep. Rupert sat a little longer, smoking, and watching the stars creep along behind the shattered glass and the bent leads of the lofty windows; watching the fire fall together, and the strange shadows move mysteriously on the mouldering walls.

The iron hook in the oak beam, that crossed the ceiling midway, fascinated him, not with fear, but morbidly. So, it was from that hook that for twelve years, twelve long years of changing summer and winter, the body of Count Albert, murderer and suicide, hung in its strange casing of mediæval steel; moving a little at first, and turning gently while the fire died out on the hearth, while the ruins of the castle grew cold, and horrified peasants sought for the bodies of the score of gay, reckless, wicked guests whom Count Albert had gathered in Kropfsberg for a last debauch, gathered to their terrible and untimely death.

What a strange and fiendish idea it was, the young, handsome noble who had ruined himself and his family in the society of the splendid debauchees, gathering them all together, men and women who had known only love and pleasure, for a glorious and awful riot of luxury, and then, when they were all dancing in the great ballroom, locking the doors and burning the whole castle about them, the while he sat in the great keep listening to their screams of agonized fear, watching the fire sweep from wing to wing until the whole mighty mass was one enormous and awful pyre, and then, clothing himself in his great-great-grandfather's armor, hanging himself in the midst of the ruins of what had been a proud and noble castle. So ended a great family, a great house.

But that was forty years ago.

He was growing drowsy; the light flickered and flared in the fireplace; one by one the candles went out; the shadows grew thick in the room. Why did that great iron hook stand out so plainly? why did that dark shadow dance and quiver so mockingly behind it?—why— But he ceased to wonder at anything. He was asleep.

It seemed to him that he woke almost immediately; the fire still burned, though low and fitfully on the hearth. Otto was sleeping, breathing quietly and regularly; the shadows had gathered close around him, thick and murky; with every passing moment the light died in the fireplace; he felt stiff with cold. In the utter silence he heard the clock in the village strike two. He shivered with a sudden and irresistible feeling of fear, and abruptly turned and looked towards the hook in the ceiling.

Yes, It was there. He knew that It would be. It seemed quite natural, he would have been disappointed had he seen nothing; but now he knew that the story was true, knew that he was wrong, and that the dead do sometimes return to earth, for there, in the fast-deepening shadow, hung the black mass of wrought steel, turning a little now and then, with the light flickering on the tarnished and rusty metal. He watched it quietly; he hardly felt afraid; it was rather a sentiment of sadness and fatality that filled him, of gloomy forebodings of something unknown, unimaginable. He sat and watched the thing disappear in the gathering dark, his hand on his pistol as it lay by him on the great chest. There was no sound but the regular breathing of the sleeping boy on the mattress.

It had grown absolutely dark; a bat fluttered against the broken glass of the window. He wondered if he was growing mad, for—he hesitated to acknowledge it to himself—he heard music; far, curious music, a strange and luxurious dance, very faint, very vague, but unmistakable.

Like a flash of lightning came a jagged line of fire down the blank wall opposite him, a line that remained, that grew wider, that let a pale cold light into the room, showing him now all its details,—the empty fireplace, where a thin smoke rose in a spiral from a bit of charred wood, the mass of the great bed, and, in the very middle, black against the curious brightness, the armored man, or ghost, or devil, standing, not suspended, beneath the rusty hook. And with the rending of the wall the music grew more distinct, though sounding still very, very far away.

Count Albert raised his mailed hand and beckoned to him; then turned, and stood in the riven wall.

Without a word, Rupert rose and followed him, his pistol in hand. Count Albert passed through the mighty wall and disappeared in the unearthly light. Rupert followed mechanically. He felt the crushing of the mortar beneath his feet, the roughness of the jagged wall where he rested his hand to steady himself.

The keep rose absolutely isolated among the ruins, yet on passing through the wall Rupert found himself in a long, uneven corridor, the floor of which was warped and sagging, while the walls were covered on one side with big faded portraits of an inferior quality, like those in the corridor that connects the Pitti and Uffizzi in Florence. Before him moved the figure of Count Albert,—a black silhouette in the ever-increasing light. And always the music grew stronger and stranger, a mad, evil, seductive dance that bewitched even while it disgusted.

In a final blaze of vivid, intolerable light, in a burst of hellish music that might have come from Bedlam, Rupert stepped from the corridor into a vast and curious room where at first he saw nothing, distinguished nothing but a mad, seething whirl of sweeping figures, white, in a white room, under white light, Count Albert standing before him, the only dark object to be seen. As his eyes grew accustomed to the fearful brightness, he knew that he was looking on a dance such as the damned might see in hell, but such as no living man had ever seen before.

Around the long, narrow hall, under the fearful light that came from nowhere, but was omnipresent, swept a rushing stream of unspeakable horrors, dancing insanely, laughing, gibbering hideously; the dead of forty years. White, polished skeletons, bare of flesh and vesture, skeletons clothed in the dreadful rags of dried and rattling sinews, the tags of tattering grave-clothes flaunting behind them. These were the dead of many years ago. Then the dead of more recent times, with yellow bones showing only here and there, the long and insecure hair of their hideous heads writhing in the beating air. Then green and gray horrors, bloated and shapeless, stained with earth or dripping with spattering water; and here and there white, beautiful things, like chiselled ivory, the dead of yesterday, locked it may be, in the mummy arms of rattling skeletons.

Round and round the cursed room, a swaying, swirling maelstrom of death, while the air grew thick with miasma, the floor foul with shreds of shrouds, and yellow parchment, clattering bones, and wisps of tangled hair.

And in the very midst of this ring of death, a sight not for words nor for thought, a sight to blast forever the mind of the man who looked upon it: a leaping, writhing dance of Count Albert's victims, the score of beautiful women and reckless men who danced to their awful death while the castle burned around them, charred and shapeless now, a living charnel-house of nameless horror.

Count Albert, who had stood silent and gloomy, watching the dance of the damned, turned to Rupert, and for the first time spoke.

"We are ready for you now; dance!"

A prancing horror, dead some dozen years, perhaps, flaunted from the rushing river of the dead, and leered at Rupert with eyeless skull.

"Dance!"

Rupert stood frozen, motionless.

"Dance!"

His hard lips moved. "Not if the devil came from hell to make me."

Count Albert swept his vast two-handed sword into the fœtid air while the tide of corruption paused in its swirling, and swept down on Rupert with gibbering grins.

The room, and the howling dead, and the black portent before him circled dizzily around, as with a last effort of departing consciousness[51] he drew his pistol and fired full in the face of Count Albert.

Perfect silence, perfect darkness; not a breath, not a sound: the dead stillness of a long-sealed tomb. Rupert lay on his back, stunned, helpless, his pistol clenched in his frozen hand, a smell of powder in the black air. Where was he? Dead? In hell? He reached his hand out cautiously; it fell on dusty boards. Outside, far away, a clock struck three. Had he dreamed? Of course; but how ghastly a dream! With chattering teeth he called softly,—

"Otto!"

There was no reply, and none when he called again and again. He staggered weakly to his feet, groping for matches and candles. A panic of abject terror came on him; the matches were gone! He turned towards the fireplace: a single coal glowed in the white ashes. He swept a mass of papers and dusty books from the table, and with trembling hands cowered over the embers, until he succeeded in lighting the dry tinder. Then he piled the old books on the blaze, and looked fearfully around.

No: It was gone,—thank God for that; the hook was empty.

But why did Otto sleep so soundly; why did he not awake?

He stepped unsteadily across the room in the flaring light of the burning books, and knelt by the mattress.

So they found him in the morning, when no one came to the inn from Kropfsberg Keep, and the quaking Peter Rosskopf arranged a relief party;—found him kneeling beside the mattress where Otto lay, shot in the throat and quite dead.

Lamia by John Keats

Time for the longest poem in GFF history. This creature has turned up at least twice in Ars Magica. In the first version of The Mysteries we are told about Apollonius. In Realms of Power: Faerie, I give this story as an example of a ghula that is not from (modern) Arabic countries. Keats, though, has a new angle: his Lamia is sincere. Thanks to Bruce Kachuck, and all of Librivox, for the recording.

Upon a time, before the faery broods
Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,
Before King Oberon's bright diadem,
Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,
Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns
From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd lawns,
The ever-smitten Hermes empty left
His golden throne, bent warm on amorous theft:
From high Olympus had he stolen light,
On this side of Jove's clouds, to escape the sight
Of his great summoner, and made retreat
Into a forest on the shores of Crete.
For somewhere in that sacred island dwelt
A nymph, to whom all hoofed Satyrs knelt;
At whose white feet the languid Tritons poured
Pearls, while on land they wither'd and adored.
Fast by the springs where she to bathe was wont,
And in those meads where sometime she might haunt,
Were strewn rich gifts, unknown to any Muse,
Though Fancy's casket were unlock'd to choose.
Ah, what a world of love was at her feet!
So Hermes thought, and a celestial heat
Burnt from his winged heels to either ear,
That from a whiteness, as the lily clear,
Blush'd into roses 'mid his golden hair,
Fallen in jealous curls about his shoulders bare.
From vale to vale, from wood to wood, he flew,
Breathing upon the flowers his passion new,
And wound with many a river to its head,
To find where this sweet nymph prepar'd her secret bed:
In vain; the sweet nymph might nowhere be found,
And so he rested, on the lonely ground,
Pensive, and full of painful jealousies
Of the Wood-Gods, and even the very trees.
There as he stood, he heard a mournful voice,
Such as once heard, in gentle heart, destroys
All pain but pity: thus the lone voice spake:
"When from this wreathed tomb shall I awake!
When move in a sweet body fit for life,
And love, and pleasure, and the ruddy strife
Of hearts and lips! Ah, miserable me!"
The God, dove-footed, glided silently
Round bush and tree, soft-brushing, in his speed,
The taller grasses and full-flowering weed,
Until he found a palpitating snake,
Bright, and cirque-couchant in a dusky brake.
She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—
So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.
Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:
Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:
And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there
But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?
As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air.
Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake
Came, as through bubbling honey, for Love's sake,
And thus; while Hermes on his pinions lay,
Like a stoop'd falcon ere he takes his prey.

"Fair Hermes, crown'd with feathers, fluttering light,
I had a splendid dream of thee last night:
I saw thee sitting, on a throne of gold,
Among the Gods, upon Olympus old,
The only sad one; for thou didst not hear
The soft, lute-finger'd Muses chaunting clear,
Nor even Apollo when he sang alone,
Deaf to his throbbing throat's long, long melodious moan.
I dreamt I saw thee, robed in purple flakes,
Break amorous through the clouds, as morning breaks,
And, swiftly as a bright Phoebean dart,
Strike for the Cretan isle; and here thou art!
Too gentle Hermes, hast thou found the maid?"
Whereat the star of Lethe not delay'd
His rosy eloquence, and thus inquired:
"Thou smooth-lipp'd serpent, surely high inspired!
Thou beauteous wreath, with melancholy eyes,
Possess whatever bliss thou canst devise,
Telling me only where my nymph is fled,—
Where she doth breathe!" "Bright planet, thou hast said,"
Return'd the snake, "but seal with oaths, fair God!"
"I swear," said Hermes, "by my serpent rod,
And by thine eyes, and by thy starry crown!"
Light flew his earnest words, among the blossoms blown.
Then thus again the brilliance feminine:
"Too frail of heart! for this lost nymph of thine,
Free as the air, invisibly, she strays
About these thornless wilds; her pleasant days
She tastes unseen; unseen her nimble feet
Leave traces in the grass and flowers sweet;
From weary tendrils, and bow'd branches green,
She plucks the fruit unseen, she bathes unseen:

And by my power is her beauty veil'd
To keep it unaffronted, unassail'd
By the love-glances of unlovely eyes,
Of Satyrs, Fauns, and blear'd Silenus' sighs.
Pale grew her immortality, for woe
Of all these lovers, and she grieved so
I took compassion on her, bade her steep
Her hair in weird syrops, that would keep
Her loveliness invisible, yet free
To wander as she loves, in liberty.
Thou shalt behold her, Hermes, thou alone,
If thou wilt, as thou swearest, grant my boon!"
Then, once again, the charmed God began
An oath, and through the serpent's ears it ran
Warm, tremulous, devout, psalterian.
Ravish'd, she lifted her Circean head,
Blush'd a live damask, and swift-lisping said,
"I was a woman, let me have once more
A woman's shape, and charming as before.
I love a youth of Corinth—O the bliss!
Give me my woman's form, and place me where he is.
Stoop, Hermes, let me breathe upon thy brow,
And thou shalt see thy sweet nymph even now."
The God on half-shut feathers sank serene,
She breath'd upon his eyes, and swift was seen
Of both the guarded nymph near-smiling on the green.
It was no dream; or say a dream it was,
Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass
Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.
One warm, flush'd moment, hovering, it might seem
Dash'd by the wood-nymph's beauty, so he burn'd;
Then, lighting on the printless verdure, turn'd
To the swoon'd serpent, and with languid arm,
Delicate, put to proof the lythe Caducean charm.
So done, upon the nymph his eyes he bent,
Full of adoring tears and blandishment,
And towards her stept: she, like a moon in wane,
Faded before him, cower'd, nor could restrain
Her fearful sobs, self-folding like a flower
That faints into itself at evening hour:
But the God fostering her chilled hand,
She felt the warmth, her eyelids open'd bland,
And, like new flowers at morning song of bees,
Bloom'd, and gave up her honey to the lees.
Into the green-recessed woods they flew;
Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do.

Left to herself, the serpent now began
To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,
Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,
Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;
Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear,
Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,
Flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear.
The colours all inflam'd throughout her train,
She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain:
A deep volcanian yellow took the place
Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;
And, as the lava ravishes the mead,
Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede;
Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,
Eclips'd her crescents, and lick'd up her stars:
So that, in moments few, she was undrest
Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,
And rubious-argent: of all these bereft,
Nothing but pain and ugliness were left.
Still shone her crown; that vanish'd, also she
Melted and disappear'd as suddenly;
And in the air, her new voice luting soft,
Cried, "Lycius! gentle Lycius!"—Borne aloft
With the bright mists about the mountains hoar
These words dissolv'd: Crete's forests heard no more.

Whither fled Lamia, now a lady bright,
A full-born beauty new and exquisite?
She fled into that valley they pass o'er
Who go to Corinth from Cenchreas' shore;
And rested at the foot of those wild hills,
The rugged founts of the Peraean rills,
And of that other ridge whose barren back
Stretches, with all its mist and cloudy rack,
South-westward to Cleone. There she stood
About a young bird's flutter from a wood,
Fair, on a sloping green of mossy tread,
By a clear pool, wherein she passioned
To see herself escap'd from so sore ills,
While her robes flaunted with the daffodils.

Ah, happy Lycius!—for she was a maid
More beautiful than ever twisted braid,
Or sigh'd, or blush'd, or on spring-flowered lea
Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy:
A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore
Of love deep learned to the red heart's core:
Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain
To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain;
Define their pettish limits, and estrange
Their points of contact, and swift counterchange;
Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart
Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art;
As though in Cupid's college she had spent
Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent,
And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment.

Why this fair creature chose so fairily
By the wayside to linger, we shall see;
But first 'tis fit to tell how she could muse
And dream, when in the serpent prison-house,
Of all she list, strange or magnificent:
How, ever, where she will'd, her spirit went;
Whether to faint Elysium, or where
Down through tress-lifting waves the Nereids fair
Wind into Thetis' bower by many a pearly stair;
Or where God Bacchus drains his cups divine,
Stretch'd out, at ease, beneath a glutinous pine;

Or where in Pluto's gardens palatine
Mulciber's columns gleam in far piazzian line.
And sometimes into cities she would send
Her dream, with feast and rioting to blend;
And once, while among mortals dreaming thus,
She saw the young Corinthian Lycius
Charioting foremost in the envious race,
Like a young Jove with calm uneager face,
And fell into a swooning love of him.
Now on the moth-time of that evening dim
He would return that way, as well she knew,
To Corinth from the shore; for freshly blew
The eastern soft wind, and his galley now
Grated the quaystones with her brazen prow
In port Cenchreas, from Egina isle
Fresh anchor'd; whither he had been awhile
To sacrifice to Jove, whose temple there
Waits with high marble doors for blood and incense rare.
Jove heard his vows, and better'd his desire;
For by some freakful chance he made retire
From his companions, and set forth to walk,
Perhaps grown wearied of their Corinth talk:
Over the solitary hills he fared,
Thoughtless at first, but ere eve's star appeared
His phantasy was lost, where reason fades,
In the calm'd twilight of Platonic shades.
Lamia beheld him coming, near, more near—
Close to her passing, in indifference drear,
His silent sandals swept the mossy green;
So neighbour'd to him, and yet so unseen
She stood: he pass'd, shut up in mysteries,
His mind wrapp'd like his mantle, while her eyes
Follow'd his steps, and her neck regal white
Turn'd—syllabling thus, "Ah, Lycius bright,
And will you leave me on the hills alone?
Lycius, look back! and be some pity shown."
He did; not with cold wonder fearingly,
But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice;
For so delicious were the words she sung,
It seem'd he had lov'd them a whole summer long:
And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,
Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,
And still the cup was full,—while he afraid
Lest she should vanish ere his lip had paid
Due adoration, thus began to adore;
Her soft look growing coy, she saw his chain so sure:
"Leave thee alone! Look back! Ah, Goddess, see
Whether my eyes can ever turn from thee!
For pity do not this sad heart belie—
Even as thou vanishest so I shall die.
Stay! though a Naiad of the rivers, stay!
To thy far wishes will thy streams obey:
Stay! though the greenest woods be thy domain,
Alone they can drink up the morning rain:
Though a descended Pleiad, will not one
Of thine harmonious sisters keep in tune
Thy spheres, and as thy silver proxy shine?
So sweetly to these ravish'd ears of mine
Came thy sweet greeting, that if thou shouldst fade
Thy memory will waste me to a shade—
For pity do not melt!"—"If I should stay,"
Said Lamia, "here, upon this floor of clay,
And pain my steps upon these flowers too rough,
What canst thou say or do of charm enough
To dull the nice remembrance of my home?
Thou canst not ask me with thee here to roam
Over these hills and vales, where no joy is,—
Empty of immortality and bliss!
Thou art a scholar, Lycius, and must know
That finer spirits cannot breathe below
In human climes, and live: Alas! poor youth,
What taste of purer air hast thou to soothe
My essence? What serener palaces,
Where I may all my many senses please,
And by mysterious sleights a hundred thirsts appease?
It cannot be—Adieu!" So said, she rose
Tiptoe with white arms spread. He, sick to lose
The amorous promise of her lone complain,
Swoon'd, murmuring of love, and pale with pain.
The cruel lady, without any show
Of sorrow for her tender favourite's woe,
But rather, if her eyes could brighter be,
With brighter eyes and slow amenity,
Put her new lips to his, and gave afresh
The life she had so tangled in her mesh:
And as he from one trance was wakening
Into another, she began to sing,
Happy in beauty, life, and love, and every thing,
A song of love, too sweet for earthly lyres,
While, like held breath, the stars drew in their panting fires
And then she whisper'd in such trembling tone,
As those who, safe together met alone
For the first time through many anguish'd days,
Use other speech than looks; bidding him raise
His drooping head, and clear his soul of doubt,
For that she was a woman, and without
Any more subtle fluid in her veins
Than throbbing blood, and that the self-same pains
Inhabited her frail-strung heart as his.
And next she wonder'd how his eyes could miss
Her face so long in Corinth, where, she said,
She dwelt but half retir'd, and there had led
Days happy as the gold coin could invent
Without the aid of love; yet in content
Till she saw him, as once she pass'd him by,
Where 'gainst a column he leant thoughtfully
At Venus' temple porch, 'mid baskets heap'd
Of amorous herbs and flowers, newly reap'd
Late on that eve, as 'twas the night before
The Adonian feast; whereof she saw no more,
But wept alone those days, for why should she adore?
Lycius from death awoke into amaze,
To see her still, and singing so sweet lays;
Then from amaze into delight he fell
To hear her whisper woman's lore so well;

And every word she spake entic'd him on
To unperplex'd delight and pleasure known.
Let the mad poets say whate'er they please
Of the sweets of Fairies, Peris, Goddesses,
There is not such a treat among them all,
Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,
As a real woman, lineal indeed
From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.
Thus gentle Lamia judg'd, and judg'd aright,
That Lycius could not love in half a fright,
So threw the goddess off, and won his heart
More pleasantly by playing woman's part,
With no more awe than what her beauty gave,
That, while it smote, still guaranteed to save.
Lycius to all made eloquent reply,
Marrying to every word a twinborn sigh;
And last, pointing to Corinth, ask'd her sweet,
If 'twas too far that night for her soft feet.
The way was short, for Lamia's eagerness
Made, by a spell, the triple league decrease
To a few paces; not at all surmised
By blinded Lycius, so in her comprized.
They pass'd the city gates, he knew not how
So noiseless, and he never thought to know.

As men talk in a dream, so Corinth all,
Throughout her palaces imperial,
And all her populous streets and temples lewd,
Mutter'd, like tempest in the distance brew'd,
To the wide-spreaded night above her towers.
Men, women, rich and poor, in the cool hours,
Shuffled their sandals o'er the pavement white,
Companion'd or alone; while many a light
Flared, here and there, from wealthy festivals,
And threw their moving shadows on the walls,
Or found them cluster'd in the corniced shade
Of some arch'd temple door, or dusky colonnade.

Muffling his face, of greeting friends in fear,
Her fingers he press'd hard, as one came near
With curl'd gray beard, sharp eyes, and smooth bald crown,
Slow-stepp'd, and robed in philosophic gown:
Lycius shrank closer, as they met and past,
Into his mantle, adding wings to haste,
While hurried Lamia trembled: "Ah," said he,
"Why do you shudder, love, so ruefully?
Why does your tender palm dissolve in dew?"—
"I'm wearied," said fair Lamia: "tell me who
Is that old man? I cannot bring to mind
His features—Lycius! wherefore did you blind
Yourself from his quick eyes?" Lycius replied,
'Tis Apollonius sage, my trusty guide
And good instructor; but to-night he seems
The ghost of folly haunting my sweet dreams.

While yet he spake they had arrived before
A pillar'd porch, with lofty portal door,
Where hung a silver lamp, whose phosphor glow
Reflected in the slabbed steps below,
Mild as a star in water; for so new,
And so unsullied was the marble hue,
So through the crystal polish, liquid fine,
Ran the dark veins, that none but feet divine
Could e'er have touch'd there. Sounds Aeolian
Breath'd from the hinges, as the ample span
Of the wide doors disclos'd a place unknown
Some time to any, but those two alone,
And a few Persian mutes, who that same year
Were seen about the markets: none knew where
They could inhabit; the most curious
Were foil'd, who watch'd to trace them to their house:
And but the flitter-winged verse must tell,
For truth's sake, what woe afterwards befel,
'Twould humour many a heart to leave them thus,
Shut from the busy world of more incredulous.

Love in a hut, with water and a crust,
Is—Love, forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust;
Love in a palace is perhaps at last
More grievous torment than a hermit's fast—
That is a doubtful tale from faery land,
Hard for the non-elect to understand.
Had Lycius liv'd to hand his story down,
He might have given the moral a fresh frown,
Or clench'd it quite: but too short was their bliss
To breed distrust and hate, that make the soft voice hiss.
Besides, there, nightly, with terrific glare,
Love, jealous grown of so complete a pair,
Hover'd and buzz'd his wings, with fearful roar,
Above the lintel of their chamber door,
And down the passage cast a glow upon the floor.

For all this came a ruin: side by side
They were enthroned, in the even tide,
Upon a couch, near to a curtaining
Whose airy texture, from a golden string,
Floated into the room, and let appear
Unveil'd the summer heaven, blue and clear,
Betwixt two marble shafts:—there they reposed,
Where use had made it sweet, with eyelids closed,
Saving a tythe which love still open kept,
That they might see each other while they almost slept;
When from the slope side of a suburb hill,
Deafening the swallow's twitter, came a thrill
Of trumpets—Lycius started—the sounds fled,
But left a thought, a buzzing in his head.
For the first time, since first he harbour'd in
That purple-lined palace of sweet sin,
His spirit pass'd beyond its golden bourn
Into the noisy world almost forsworn.
The lady, ever watchful, penetrant,
Saw this with pain, so arguing a want
Of something more, more than her empery
Of joys; and she began to moan and sigh
Because he mused beyond her, knowing well

That but a moment's thought is passion's passing bell.
"Why do you sigh, fair creature?" whisper'd he:
"Why do you think?" return'd she tenderly:
"You have deserted me—where am I now?
Not in your heart while care weighs on your brow:
No, no, you have dismiss'd me; and I go
From your breast houseless: ay, it must be so."
He answer'd, bending to her open eyes,
Where he was mirror'd small in paradise,
My silver planet, both of eve and morn!
Why will you plead yourself so sad forlorn,
While I am striving how to fill my heart
With deeper crimson, and a double smart?
How to entangle, trammel up and snare
Your soul in mine, and labyrinth you there
Like the hid scent in an unbudded rose?
Ay, a sweet kiss—you see your mighty woes.
My thoughts! shall I unveil them? Listen then!
What mortal hath a prize, that other men
May be confounded and abash'd withal,
But lets it sometimes pace abroad majestical,
And triumph, as in thee I should rejoice
Amid the hoarse alarm of Corinth's voice.
"Let my foes choke, and my friends shout afar,
While through the thronged streets your bridal car
Wheels round its dazzling spokes." The lady's cheek
Trembled; she nothing said, but, pale and meek,
Arose and knelt before him, wept a rain
Of sorrows at his words; at last with pain
Beseeching him, the while his hand she wrung,
To change his purpose. He thereat was stung,
Perverse, with stronger fancy to reclaim
Her wild and timid nature to his aim:
Besides, for all his love, in self despite,
Against his better self, he took delight
Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new.
His passion, cruel grown, took on a hue
Fierce and sanguineous as 'twas possible
In one whose brow had no dark veins to swell.
Fine was the mitigated fury, like
Apollo's presence when in act to strike
The serpent—Ha, the serpent! certes, she
Was none. She burnt, she lov'd the tyranny,
And, all subdued, consented to the hour
When to the bridal he should lead his paramour.
Whispering in midnight silence, said the youth,
"Sure some sweet name thou hast, though, by my truth,
I have not ask'd it, ever thinking thee
Not mortal, but of heavenly progeny,
As still I do. Hast any mortal name,
Fit appellation for this dazzling frame?
Or friends or kinsfolk on the citied earth,
To share our marriage feast and nuptial mirth?"
"I have no friends," said Lamia," no, not one;
My presence in wide Corinth hardly known:
My parents' bones are in their dusty urns
Sepulchred, where no kindled incense burns,
Seeing all their luckless race are dead, save me,
And I neglect the holy rite for thee.
Even as you list invite your many guests;
But if, as now it seems, your vision rests
With any pleasure on me, do not bid
Old Apollonius—from him keep me hid."
Lycius, perplex'd at words so blind and blank,
Made close inquiry; from whose touch she shrank,
Feigning a sleep; and he to the dull shade
Of deep sleep in a moment was betray'd

It was the custom then to bring away
The bride from home at blushing shut of day,
Veil'd, in a chariot, heralded along
By strewn flowers, torches, and a marriage song,
With other pageants: but this fair unknown
Had not a friend. So being left alone,
(Lycius was gone to summon all his kin)
And knowing surely she could never win
His foolish heart from its mad pompousness,
She set herself, high-thoughted, how to dress
The misery in fit magnificence.
She did so, but 'tis doubtful how and whence
Came, and who were her subtle servitors.
About the halls, and to and from the doors,
There was a noise of wings, till in short space
The glowing banquet-room shone with wide-arched grace.
A haunting music, sole perhaps and lone
Supportress of the faery-roof, made moan
Throughout, as fearful the whole charm might fade.
Fresh carved cedar, mimicking a glade
Of palm and plantain, met from either side,
High in the midst, in honour of the bride:
Two palms and then two plantains, and so on,
From either side their stems branch'd one to one
All down the aisled place; and beneath all
There ran a stream of lamps straight on from wall to wall.
So canopied, lay an untasted feast
Teeming with odours. Lamia, regal drest,
Silently paced about, and as she went,
In pale contented sort of discontent,
Mission'd her viewless servants to enrich
The fretted splendour of each nook and niche.
Between the tree-stems, marbled plain at first,
Came jasper pannels; then, anon, there burst
Forth creeping imagery of slighter trees,
And with the larger wove in small intricacies.
Approving all, she faded at self-will,
And shut the chamber up, close, hush'd and still,
Complete and ready for the revels rude,
When dreadful guests would come to spoil her solitude.

The day appear'd, and all the gossip rout.
O senseless Lycius! Madman! wherefore flout
The silent-blessing fate, warm cloister'd hours,
And show to common eyes these secret bowers?
The herd approach'd; each guest, with busy brain,
Arriving at the portal, gaz'd amain,

And enter'd marveling: for they knew the street,
Remember'd it from childhood all complete
Without a gap, yet ne'er before had seen
That royal porch, that high-built fair demesne;
So in they hurried all, maz'd, curious and keen:
Save one, who look'd thereon with eye severe,
And with calm-planted steps walk'd in austere;
'Twas Apollonius: something too he laugh'd,
As though some knotty problem, that had daft
His patient thought, had now begun to thaw,
And solve and melt—'twas just as he foresaw.

He met within the murmurous vestibule
His young disciple. "'Tis no common rule,
Lycius," said he, "for uninvited guest
To force himself upon you, and infest
With an unbidden presence the bright throng
Of younger friends; yet must I do this wrong,
And you forgive me." Lycius blush'd, and led
The old man through the inner doors broad-spread;
With reconciling words and courteous mien
Turning into sweet milk the sophist's spleen.

Of wealthy lustre was the banquet-room,
Fill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume:
Before each lucid pannel fuming stood
A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,
Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,
Whose slender feet wide-swerv'd upon the soft
Wool-woofed carpets: fifty wreaths of smoke
From fifty censers their light voyage took
To the high roof, still mimick'd as they rose
Along the mirror'd walls by twin-clouds odorous.
Twelve sphered tables, by silk seats insphered,
High as the level of a man's breast rear'd
On libbard's paws, upheld the heavy gold
Of cups and goblets, and the store thrice told
Of Ceres' horn, and, in huge vessels, wine
Come from the gloomy tun with merry shine.
Thus loaded with a feast the tables stood,
Each shrining in the midst the image of a God.

When in an antichamber every guest
Had felt the cold full sponge to pleasure press'd,
By minist'ring slaves, upon his hands and feet,
And fragrant oils with ceremony meet
Pour'd on his hair, they all mov'd to the feast
In white robes, and themselves in order placed
Around the silken couches, wondering
Whence all this mighty cost and blaze of wealth could
spring.

Soft went the music the soft air along,
While fluent Greek a vowel'd undersong
Kept up among the guests discoursing low
At first, for scarcely was the wine at flow;
But when the happy vintage touch'd their brains,
Louder they talk, and louder come the strains
Of powerful instruments—the gorgeous dyes,
The space, the splendour of the draperies,
The roof of awful richness, nectarous cheer,
Beautiful slaves, and Lamia's self, appear,
Now, when the wine has done its rosy deed,
And every soul from human trammels freed,
No more so strange; for merry wine, sweet wine,
Will make Elysian shades not too fair, too divine.
Soon was God Bacchus at meridian height;
Flush'd were their cheeks, and bright eyes double bright:
Garlands of every green, and every scent
From vales deflower'd, or forest-trees branch rent,
In baskets of bright osier'd gold were brought
High as the handles heap'd, to suit the thought
Of every guest; that each, as he did please,
Might fancy-fit his brows, silk-pillow'd at his ease.

What wreath for Lamia? What for Lycius?
What for the sage, old Apollonius?
Upon her aching forehead be there hung
The leaves of willow and of adder's tongue;
And for the youth, quick, let us strip for him
The thyrsus, that his watching eyes may swim
Into forgetfulness; and, for the sage,
Let spear-grass and the spiteful thistle wage
War on his temples. Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.

By her glad Lycius sitting, in chief place,
Scarce saw in all the room another face,
Till, checking his love trance, a cup he took
Full brimm'd, and opposite sent forth a look
'Cross the broad table, to beseech a glance
From his old teacher's wrinkled countenance,
And pledge him. The bald-head philosopher
Had fix'd his eye, without a twinkle or stir
Full on the alarmed beauty of the bride,
Brow-beating her fair form, and troubling her sweet pride.
Lycius then press'd her hand, with devout touch,
As pale it lay upon the rosy couch:
'Twas icy, and the cold ran through his veins;
Then sudden it grew hot, and all the pains
Of an unnatural heat shot to his heart.
"Lamia, what means this? Wherefore dost thou start?
Know'st thou that man?" Poor Lamia answer'd not.
He gaz'd into her eyes, and not a jot
Own'd they the lovelorn piteous appeal:
More, more he gaz'd: his human senses reel:
Some hungry spell that loveliness absorbs;
There was no recognition in those orbs.

“Lamia!” he cried—and no soft-toned reply.
The many heard, and the loud revelry
Grew hush; the stately music no more breathes;
The myrtle sicken’d in a thousand wreaths.
By faint degrees, voice, lute, and pleasure ceased;
A deadly silence step by step increased,
Until it seem’d a horrid presence there,
And not a man but felt the terror in his hair.
“Lamia!” he shriek’d; and nothing but the shriek
With its sad echo did the silence break.
“Begone, foul dream!” he cried, gazing again
In the bride’s face, where now no azure vein
Wander’d on fair-spaced temples; no soft bloom
Misted the cheek; no passion to illume
The deep-recessed vision—all was blight;
Lamia, no longer fair, there sat a deadly white.
“Shut, shut those juggling eyes, thou ruthless man!
Turn them aside, wretch! or the righteous ban
Of all the Gods, whose dreadful images
Here represent their shadowy presences,
May pierce them on the sudden with the thorn
Of painful blindness; leaving thee forlorn,
In trembling dotage to the feeblest fright
Of conscience, for their long offended might,
For all thine impious proud-heart sophistries,
Unlawful magic, and enticing lies.
Corinthians! look upon that gray-beard wretch!
Mark how, possess’d, his lashless eyelids stretch
Around his demon eyes! Corinthians, see!
My sweet bride withers at their potency.”
“Fool!” said the sophist, in an under-tone
Gruff with contempt; which a death-nighing moan
From Lycius answer’d, as heart-struck and lost,
He sank supine beside the aching ghost.
“Fool! Fool!” repeated he, while his eyes still
Relented not, nor mov’d; “from every ill
Of life have I preserv’d thee to this day,
And shall I see thee made a serpent’s prey?”
Then Lamia breath’d death breath; the sophist’s eye,
Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,
Keen, cruel, perceant, stinging: she, as well
As her weak hand could any meaning tell,
Motion’d him to be silent; vainly so,
He look’d and look’d again a level—No!
“A Serpent!” echoed he; no sooner said,
Than with a frightful scream she vanished:
And Lycius’ arms were empty of delight,
As were his limbs of life, from that same night.
On the high couch he lay!—his friends came round
Supported him—no pulse, or breath they found,
And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound.

The King of Elfland's Daughter: Conclusion

This section is where Dunsany starts paying off his earlier bits of folklore, so there's not much new to discuss, but I do want to flag that Zironderel has the same attitude to magic that House Jerbiton does. Magic causes beauty, even natural beauty.

Thanks again to Librivox and Michele Fry for the recording.

CHAPTER XXX: The Coming of Too Much Magic

In Erl that had sighed for magic there was indeed magic now. The pigeon-loft and old lumber-lofts over stables were all full of trolls, the ways were full of their antics, and lights bobbed up and down the street at night long after traffic was home. For the will-o'-the-wisps would go dancing along the gutters, and had made their homes round the soft edges of duck-ponds and in green-black patches of moss that grew upon oldest thatch. And nothing seemed the same in the old village.

And amongst all these magical folk the magical half of Orion's blood, that had slept while he went amongst earthly men, hearing mundane talk each day, stirred out of its sleep and awakened long-sleeping thoughts in his brain. And the elfin horns that he often heard blowing at evening blew with a meaning now, and blew stronger as though they were nearer.

The folk of the village watching their lord by day saw his eyes turned away towards Elfland, saw him neglecting the wholesome earthly cares, and at night there came the queer lights and the gibbering of the trolls. A fear settled on Erl.

At this time the parliament took counsel again, twelve grey-beard quaking men that had come to the house of Narl when their work was ended at evening; and all the evening was weird with the new magic of Elfland. Every man of them as he ran from his own warm house on his way to the forge of Narl had seen lights leaping, or heard voices gibbering, which were of no Christom land. And some had seen shapes prowling which were of no earthly growing, and they feared that all manner of things had slipped through the border of Elfland to come and visit the trolls.

They spoke low in their parliament: all told the same tale, a tale of children terrified, a tale of women demanding the old ways again; and as they spoke they eyed window and crevice, none knowing what might come.

And Oth said: "Let us folk go to the Lord Orion as we went to his grandfather in his long red room. Let us say how we sought for magic, and lo we have magic enough; and let him follow no more after witchery nor the things that are hidden from man."

He listened acutely, standing there amongst his hushed comrade neighbours. Was it goblin voices that mocked him, or was it only echo? Who could say? And almost at once the night all round was hushed again.

And Threl said: "Nay. It is too late for that." Threl had seen their lord one evening standing alone on the downs, all motionless and listening to something sounding from Elfland, with his eyes to the East as he listened: and nothing was sounding, not a noise was astir; yet Orion stood there called by things beyond mortal hearing. "It is too late now," said Threl.

And that was the fear of all.

Then Guhic rose slowly up and stood by that table. And trolls were gibbering like bats away in their loft, and the pale marsh-lights were flickering, and shapes prowled in the dark: the pit-pat of their feet came now and then to the ears of the twelve that were there in that inner room. And Guhic said: "We wished for a little magic." And a gust of gibbering came clear from the trolls. And then they disputed awhile as to how much magic they had wished in the olden time, when the grandfather of Orion was lord in Erl. But when they came to a plan this was the plan of Guhic.

"If we may not turn our lord Orion," he said, "and his eyes be turned to Elfland, let all our parliament go up the hill to the witch Ziroonderel, and put our case to her, and ask for a spell which shall be put against too much magic."

And at the name of Ziroonderel the twelve took heart again; for they knew that her magic was greater than the magic of flickering lights, and knew there was not a troll or thing of the night but went in fear of her broom. They took heart again and quaffed Narl's heavy mead, and re-filled their mugs and praised Guhic.

And late in the night they all rose up together to go back to their homes, and all kept close together as they went, and sang grave old songs to affright the things that they feared; though little the light trolls care, or the will-o'-the-wisps, for the things that are grave to man. And when only one was left he ran to his house, and the will-o'-the-wisps chased him.

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When the next day came they ended their work early, for the parliament of Erl cared not to be left on the witch's hill when night came, or even the gloaming. They met outside Narl's forge in the early afternoon, eleven of the parliament, and they called out Narl. And all were wearing the clothes they were wont to wear when they went with the rest to the holy place of the Freer, though there was scarcely a soul he had ever cursed that was not blessed by her. And away they went with their old stout staves up the hill.

And as soon as they could they came to the witch's house. And there they found her sitting outside her door gazing over the valley away, and looking neither older nor younger, nor concerned one way or the other with the coming and going of years.

"We be the parliament of Erl," they said, standing before her all in their graver clothes.

"Aye," she said. "You desired magic. Has it come to you yet?"

"Truly," they said, "and to spare."

"There is more to come," she said.

"Mother Witch," said Narl, "we are met here to pray you that you will give us a goodly spell which shall be a charm against magic, so that there be no more of it in the valley, for overmuch has come."

"Overmuch?" she said. "Overmuch magic! As though magic were not the spice and essence of life, its ornament and its splendour. By my broom," said she, "I give you no spell against magic."

And they thought of the wandering lights and the scarce-seen gibbering things, and all the strangeness and evil that was come to their valley of Erl, and they besought her again, speaking suavely to her.

"Oh, Mother Witch," said Guhic, "there is overmuch magic indeed, and the folk that should tarry in Elfland are all over the border."

"It is even so," said Narl. "The border is broken and there will be no end to it. Will-o'-the-wisps should stay in the marshes, and trolls and goblins in Elfland, and we folk should keep to our own folk. This is the thought of us all. For magic, if we desired it somewhat, years ago when we were young, pertains to matters that are not for man."

She eyed him silently with a cat-like glow increasing in her eyes. And when she neither spoke nor moved, Narl besought her again.

"O Mother Witch," he said, "will you give us no spell to guard our homes against magic?"

"No spell indeed!" she hissed. "No spell indeed! By broom and stars and night-riding! Would you rob Earth of her heirloom that has come from the olden time? Would you take her treasure and leave her bare to the scorn of her comrade planets? Poor indeed were we without magic, whereof we are well stored to the envy of darkness and Space." She leaned forward from where she sat and stamped her stick, looking up in Narl's face with her fierce unwavering eyes. "I would sooner," she said, "give you a spell against water, that all the world should thirst, than give you a spell against the song of streams that evening hears faintly over the ridge of a hill, too dim for wakeful ears, a song threading through dreams, whereby we learn of old wars and lost loves of the Spirits of rivers. I would sooner give you a spell against bread, that all the world should starve, than give you a spell against the magic of wheat that haunts the golden hollows in moonlight in July, through which in the warm short nights wander how many of whom man knows nothing. I would make you spells against comfort and clothing, food, shelter and warmth, aye and will do it, sooner than tear from these poor fields of Earth that magic that is to them an ample cloak against the chill of Space, and a gay raiment against the sneers of nothingness.

"Go hence. To your village go. And you that sought for magic in your youth but desire it not in your age, know that there is a blindness of spirit which comes from age, more black than the blindness of eye, making a darkness about you across which nothing may be seen, or felt, or known, or in any way apprehended. And no voice out of that darkness shall conjure me to grant a spell against magic. Hence!"

And as she said "Hence" she put her weight on her stick and was evidently preparing to rise from her seat. And at this great terror came upon all the parliament. And they noticed at the same moment that evening was drawing in and all the valley darkening. On this high field where the witch's cabbages grew some light yet lingered, and listening to her fierce words they had not thought of the hour. But now it was manifestly growing late, and a wind roamed past them that seemed to come over the ridges a little way off, from night; and chilled them as it passed; and all the air seemed given over to that very thing against which they sought for a spell.

And here they were at this hour with the witch before them, and she was evidently about to rise. Her eyes were fixed on them. Already she was partly up from her chair. There could be no doubt that before three moments were passed she would be hobbling amongst them with her glittering eyes peering in each one's face. They turned and ran down the hill.

CHAPTER XXXI: The Cursing of Elfin Things

As the parliament of Erl ran down the hill they ran into the dusk of evening. Greyly it lay in the valley above the mist from the stream. But with more than the mystery of dusk the air was heavy. Lights blinking early from houses showed that all the folk were home, and the street was deserted by everything that was human; save when with hushed air and almost furtive step they saw their lord Orion like a tall shadow go by, with will-o'-the-wisps behind him, towards the house of the trolls, thinking no earthly thoughts. And the strangeness that had been growing day by day made all the village eerie. So that with short and troubled breath the twelve old men hurried on.

And so they came to the holy place of the Freer, which lay on the side of the village that was towards the witch's hill. And it was the hour at which he was wont to celebrate after-bird-song, as they named the singing that they sang in the holy place when all the birds were home. But the Freer was not within his holy place; he stood in the cold night air on the upper step without it, his face turned towards Elfland. He had on his sacred robe with its border of purple, and the emblem of gold round his neck; but the door of his holy place was shut and his back was towards it. They wondered to see him stand thus.

And as they wondered the Freer began to intone, clear in the evening with his eyes away to the East, where already a few of the earliest stars were showing. With his head held high he spoke as though his voice might pass over the frontier of twilight and be heard by the people of Elfland.

"Curst be all wandering things," he said, "whose place is not upon Earth. Curst be all lights that dwell in fens and in marish places. Their homes are in deeps of the marshes. Let them by no means stir from there until the Last Day. Let them abide in their place and there await damnation.

"Cursed be gnomes, trolls, elves and goblins on land, and all sprites of the water. And fauns be accursed and such as follow Pan. And all that dwell on the heath, being other than beasts or men. Cursed be fairies and all tales told of them, and whatever enchants the meadows before the sun is up, and all fables of doubtful authority, and the legends that men hand down from unhallowed times.

"Cursed be brooms that leave their place by the hearth. Cursed be witches and all manner of witcheries.

"Cursed be toadstool rings and whatever dances within them. And all strange lights, strange songs, strange shadows, or rumours that hint of them, and all doubtful things of the dusk, and the things that ill-instructed children fear, and old wives' tales and things done o' midsummer nights; all these be accursed with all that leaneth toward Elfland and all that cometh thence."

Never a lane of that village, never a barn, but a will-o'-the-wisp was dancing nimbly above it; the night was gilded with them. But as the good Freer spoke they backed away from his curses, floating further off as though a light wind blew them, and danced again after drifting a little way. This they did both before and behind him and upon either hand, as he stood there upon the steps of his holy place. So that there was a circle of darkness all round him, and beyond that circle shone the lights of the marshes and Elfland.

And within the dark circle in which the Freer stood making his curses were no unhallowed things, nor were there strangenesses such as come of night, nor whispers from unknown voices, nor sounds of any music blowing here from no haunts of men; but all was orderly and seemly there and no mysteries troubled the quiet except such as have been justly allowed to man.

And beyond that circle whence so much was beaten back by the bright vehemence of the good man's curses, the will-o'-the-wisps rioted, and many a strangeness that poured in that night from Elfland, and goblins held high holiday. For word was gone forth in Elfland that pleasant folk had now their dwelling in Erl; and many a thing of fable, many a monster of myth, had crept through that border of twilight and had come into Erl to see. And the light and false but friendly will-o'-the-wisps danced in the haunted air and made them welcome.

And not only the trolls and the will-o'-the-wisps had lured these folk from their fabled land through the seldom-traversed border, but the longings and thoughts of Orion, which by half his lineage were akin to the things of myth and of one race with the monsters of Elfland, were calling to them now. Ever since that day by the frontier when he had hovered between Earth and Elfland he had yearned more and more for his mother; and now, whether he willed it or no, his elfin thoughts were calling their kin that dwelt in the elvish fells; and at that hour when the sound of the horns blew through the frontier of twilight they had come tumbling after it. For elfin thoughts are as much akin to the creatures that dwell in Elfland as goblins are to trolls.

Within the calm and the dark of the good man's curses the twelve old men stood silent listening to every word. And the words seemed good to them and soothing and right, for they were over-weary of magic.

But beyond the circle of darkness, amidst the glare of the will-o'-the-wisps with which all the night flickered, amidst

goblin laughter and the unbridled mirth of the trolls, where old legends seemed alive and the fearfullest fables true; amongst all manner of mysteries, queer sounds, queer shapes, and queer shadows; Orion passed with his hounds, eastwards towards Elfland.

CHAPTER XXXII: Lirazel Yearns for Earth

In the hall that was built of moonlight, dreams, music and mirage Lirazel knelt on the sparkling floor before her father's throne. And the light of the magical throne shone blue in her eyes, and her eyes flashed back a light that deepened its magic. And kneeling there she besought a rune of her father.

Old days would not let her be, sweet memories thronged about her: the lawns of Elfland had her love, lawns upon which she had played by the old miraculous flowers before any histories were written here; she loved the sweet soft creatures of myth that moved like magical shadows out of the guardian wood and over enchanted grasses; she loved every fable and song and spell that had made her elfin home; and yet the bells of Earth, that could not pass the frontier of silence and twilight, beat note by note in her brain, and her heart felt the growth of the little earthly flowers as they bloomed or faded or slept in seasons that came not to Elfland. And in those seasons, wasting away as every one went by, she knew that Alveric wandered, knew that Orion lived and grew and changed, and that both, if Earth's legend were true, would soon be lost to her forever and ever, when the gates of Heaven would shut on both with a golden thud. For between Elfland and Heaven is no path, no flight, no way; and neither sends ambassador to the other. She yearned to the bells of Earth and the English cowslips, but would not forsake again her mighty father nor the world that his mind had made. And Alveric came not, nor her boy Orion; only the sound of Alveric's horn came once, and often strange longings seemed to float in air, beating vainly back and forth between Orion and her. And the gleaming pillars that held the dome of the roof, or above which it floated, quivered a little with her grief; and shadows of her sorrow flickered and faded in the crystal deep of the walls, for a moment dimming many a colour that is unknown in our fields, but making them no less lovely. What could she do who would not cast away magic and leave the home that an ageless day had endeared to her while centuries were withering like leaves upon earthly shores, whose heart was yet held by those little tendrils of Earth, which are strong enough, strong enough?

And some, translating her bitter need into pitiless earthly words, may say that she wished to be in two places at once. And that was true, and the impossible wish lies on the verge of laughter, and for her was only and wholly a matter for tears. Impossible? Was it impossible? We have to do with magic.

She besought a rune of her father, kneeling upon the magic floor in the midmost centre of Elfland; and around her arose the pillars, of which only song may say, whose misty bulk was disturbed and troubled by Lirazel's sorrow. She besought a rune that, wherever they roamed through whatever fields of Earth, should restore to her Alveric and Orion, bringing them over the border and into the elfin lands to live in that timeless age that is one long day in Elfland. And with them she prayed might come, (for the mighty runes of her father had such power even as this) some garden of Earth, or bank where violets lay, or hollow where cowslips waved, to shine in Elfland for ever.

Like no music heard in any cities of men or dreamed upon earthly hills, with his elfin voice her father answered her. And the ringing words were such as had power to change the shape of the hills of dreams, or to enchant new flowers to blow in fields of faery. "I have no rune," he said, "that has power to pass the frontier, or to lure anything from the mundane fields, be it violets, cowslips or men, to come through our bulwark of twilight that I have set to guard us against material things. No rune but one, and that the last of the potencies of our realm."

And kneeling yet upon the glittering floor, of whose profound translucence song alone shall speak, she prayed him for that one rune, last potency though it be of the awful wonders of Elfland.

And he would not squander that rune that lay locked in his treasury, most magical of his powers and last of the three, but held it against the peril of a distant and unknown day, whose light shone just beyond a curve of the ages, too far for the eerie vision even of his foreknowledge.

She knew that he had moved Elfland far afield and swung it back as tides are swung by the moon, till it lapped at the very edge of the fields of men once more, with its glimmering border touching the tips of the earthly hedges. And she knew that no more than the moon had he used a rare wonder, merely wafting his regions away by a magical gesture. Might he not, she thought, bring Elfland and Earth yet nearer, using no rarer magic than is used by the moon at the neap? And so she supplicated him once again, recalling wonders to him that he had wrought and yet used no rarer spell than a certain wave of his arm. She spoke of the magical orchids that came down once over cliffs like a sudden roseate foam breaking over the Elfin Mountains. She spoke of the downy clusters of queer mauve flowers which bloomed in the grass of the dells, and of that glory of blossom that forever guarded the lawns. For all these wonders were his: bird-song and

blooming of flower alike were his inspirations. If such wonders as song and bloom were wrought by a wave of his hand, surely he might by beckoning bring but a short way from Earth some few fields that lay so near to the earthly border. Or surely he might move Elfland a little earthward again, who had lately moved it as far as the turn in the path of the comet, and had brought it again to the edge of the fields of men.

“Never,” he said, “can any rune but one, or spell or wonder or any magical thing, move our realm one wing’s width over the earthly border or bring anything thence here. And little they know in those fields that even one rune can do it.”

And still she would scarce believe that those accustomed powers of her wizard sire could not easily bring the things of Earth and the wonders of Elfland together.

“From those fields,” he said, “my spells are all beaten back, my incantations are mute, and my right arm powerless.”

And when he spoke thus to her of that dread right arm, at last perforce she believed him. And she prayed him again for that ultimate rune, that long-hoarded treasure of Elfland, that potency that had strength to work against the harsh weight of Earth.

And his thoughts went into the future all alone, peering far down the years. More gladly had a traveller at night in lonely ways given up his lantern than had this elvish king now used his last great spell, and so cast it away, and gone without it into those dubious years; whose dim forms he saw and many of their events, but not to the end. Easily had she asked for that dread spell, which should appease the only need she had, easily might he have granted it were he but human; but his vast wisdom saw so much of the years to be that he feared to face them without this last great potency.

“Beyond our border,” he said, “material things stand fierce and strong and many, and have the power to darken and to increase, for they have wonders too. And when this last potency be used and gone there remains in all our realm no rune that they dread; and material things will multiply and put the powers in bondage, and we without any rune of which they go in awe shall become no more than a fable. We must yet store this rune.”

Thus he reasoned with her rather than commanded, though he was the founder and King of all those lands, and all that wandered in them and of the light in which they shone. And reason in Elfland was no daily thing, but an exotic wonder. With this he sought to soothe her earthward fancies.

And Lirazel made no answer but only wept, weeping tears of enchanted dew. And all the line of the Elfin Mountains quivered, as wandering winds will tremble to notes of a violin that have strayed beyond hearing down the ways of the air; and all the creatures of fable that dwelt in the realm of Elfland felt something strange in their hearts like the dying away of a song.

“Is it not best for Elfland that I do this?” said the King.

And still she only wept.

And then he sighed and considered the welfare of Elfland again. For Elfland drew its happiness from the calm of that palace, which was its centre, and of which only song may tell; and now its spires were troubled and the light of its walls was dim, and a sorrow was floating from its vaulted doorway all over the fields of faery and over the dells of dream. If she were happy Elfland might bask again in that untroubled light and eternal calm whose radiance blesses all but material things; and though his treasury were open and empty yet what more were needed then?

So he commanded, and a coffer was brought before him by elfin things, and the knight of his guard who had watched over it forever came marching behind them.

He opened the coffer with a spell, for it opened to no key, and taking from it an ancient parchment scroll he rose and read from it while his daughter wept. And the words of the rune as he read were like the notes of a band of violins, all played by masters chosen from many ages, hidden on midsummer’s midnight in a wood, with a strange moon shining, the air all full of madness and mystery; and, lurking close but invisible, things beyond the wisdom of man.

Thus he read that rune, and powers heard and obeyed it, not alone in Elfland but over the border of Earth.

CHAPTER XXXIII: The Shining Line

Alveric wandered on, alone of that small company of three without a hope to guide him. For Niv and Zend, who were lately led by the hope of their fantastic quest, no longer yearned for Elfland but were guided now by their plan to hold Alveric back from it. They vacillated more slowly than sane folk, but clung with far more than sane fervour to each vacillation. And Zend that had wandered through so many years with the hope of Elfland before him looked on it, now that he had seen its frontier, as one of the rivals of the moon. Niv who had endured as much for Alveric’s quest saw in that magical land something

more fabulous than was in all his dreams. And now when Alveric attempted lame cajoleries with those swift and ferocious minds he received no more answers from Zend than the curt statement “It is not the will of the moon”: while Niv would only reiterate “Have I not dreams enough?”

They were wandering back again past farms that had known them years before. With their old grey tent more tattered they appeared in the twilight, adding a shade to the evening, in fields wherein they and their tent had become a legend. And never was Alveric unwatched by some mad eye, lest he should slip from the camp and come to Elfland and be where dreams were stranger than Niv’s and under a power more magical than the moon.

Often he tried, creeping silently from his place in the dead of night. One moonlight night he tried first, waiting awake till all the world seemed sleeping. He knew that the frontier was not far away as he crept from the tent into the brightness and black shadows and passed Niv sleeping heavily. A little way he went, and there was Zend sitting still on a rock, gazing into the face of the moon. Round came Zend’s face and, newly inspired by the moon, he shouted and leapt at Alveric. They had taken away his sword. And Niv woke and came towards them with immense fury, united to Zend by one jealousy; for each of them knew well that the wonders of Elfland were greater than any fancy that their minds would ever know.

And again he tried, on a night when no moon shone. But on that night Niv was sitting outside the camp, relishing in a strange and joyless way a certain comradeship that there was between his ravings and the interstellar darkness. And there in the night he saw Alveric slipping away towards the land whose wonders far transcended all Niv’s poor dreams; and all the fury the lesser can feel for the greater awoke at once in his mind; and, creeping up behind him, without any help from Zend he smote Alveric insensible to the ground.

And never did Alveric plan any escape after that but that the busy thoughts of madness anticipated it.

And so they came, watchers and watched, over the fields of men. And Alveric sought help of the folk of the farms; but the cunning of Niv knew too well the tricks of sanity. So that when the folk came running over their fields to that queer grey tent from which they heard Alveric’s cries, they found Niv and Zend posed in a calm that they had much practised, while Alveric told of his thwarted quest of Elfland. Now by many men all quests are considered mad, as the cunning of Niv knew. Alveric found no help here.

As they went back by the way by which they had marched for years Niv led that band of three, stepping ahead of Alveric and Zend with his lean face held high, made all the leaner by the long thin points to which he had trained his beard and his moustaches, and wearing Alveric’s sword that stuck out long behind him and its hilt high in front. And he stepped and perked his head with a certain air that revealed to the rare travellers who saw him that this sparse and ragged figure esteemed itself the leader of a greater band than were visible. Indeed if one had just seen him at the end of the evening with the dusk and the mist of the fenlands close behind him he might have believed that in the dusk and the mist was an army that followed this gay worn confident man. Had the army been there Niv was sane. Had the world accepted that an army was there, even though only Alveric and Zend followed his curious steps, still he was sane. But the lonely fancy that had not fact to feed on, nor the fancy of any other for fellowship, was for its loneliness mad.

Zend watched Alveric all the while, as they marched behind Niv; for their mutual jealousy of the wonders of Elfland bound Niv and Zend together to work as with one wild whim.

And now one morning Niv stretched himself up to the fullest possible height of his lean inches and extended his right arm high and addressed his army, “We are come near again to Erl,” he said. “And we shall bring new fancies in place of outworn things and things that are stale; and its customs shall be henceforth the way of the moon.”

Now Niv cared nothing for the moon, but he had great cunning, and he knew that Zend would aid his new plan against Erl if only for the sake of the moon. And Zend cheered till the echoes came back from a lonely hill, and Niv smiled to them like a leader confident of his hosts. And Alveric rose against them then, and struggled with Niv and Zend for the last time, and learned that age or wandering or loss of hope had left him unable to strive against the maniacal strength of these two. And after that he went with them more meekly, with resignation, caring no longer what befell him, living only in memory and only for days that had been; and in November evenings in this dim camp in the chill he saw, looking only backwards through the years, Spring mornings shine again on the towers of Erl. In the light of these mornings he saw Orion again, playing again with old toys that the witch had made with a spell; he saw Lirazel move once more through the gracious gardens. Yet no light that memory is able to kindle was strong enough to illumine much that camp in those sombre evenings, when the damp rose up from the ground and the chill swooped out of the air, and Niv and Zend as darkness came stealing nearer began to chatter in low eager voices schemes inspired by such whims as throve at dusk in the waste. Only when the sad day drifted wholly thence and Alveric slept by flapping tatters that streamed from the tent in the night, then only was memory, unhindered by the busy changes of day,

able to bring back Erl to him, bright, happy and vernal; so that while his body lay still, in far fields, in the dark and the Winter, all that was most active and live in him was back over the wolds in Erl, back over the years in Spring with Lirazel and Orion.

How far he was bodily, in sheer miles from his home, for which his happy thoughts each night forsook his weary frame, Alveric knew not. It was many years since their tent had stood one evening a grey shape in that landscape in which it now waved its tatters. But Niv knew that of late they had come nearer to Erl, for his dreams of it came to him now soon after he fell asleep, and they used to come to him further on in the night, on the other side of midnight and even towards morning: and from this he argued that they used to have further to come, and were now but a little way off. When he told this secretly one evening to Zend, Zend listened gravely but gave no opinion, merely saying “The moon knows.” Nevertheless he followed Niv, who led this curious caravan always in that direction from which his dreams of the valley of Erl came soonest. And this queer leadership brought them nearer to Erl, as often happens where men follow leaders that are crazy or blind or deceived; they reach some port or other though they stray down the years with little foresight enough: were it otherwise what would become of us?

And one day the upper parts of the towers of Erl looked at them out of blue distance, shining in early sunlight above a curve of the downs. And towards them Niv turned at once and led directly, for the line of their wandering march had not pointed straight to Erl, and marched on as a conqueror that sees some new city’s gates. What his plans were Alveric did not know, but kept to his apathy; and Zend did not know, for Niv had merely said that his plans must be secret; nor did Niv know, for his fancies poured through his brain and rushed away; what fancies made what plans in a mood that was yesterday’s how could he tell to-day?

Then as they went they soon came to a shepherd, standing amongst his grazing sheep and leaning upon his crook, who watched and seemed to have no other care but only to watch all things going by, or, when nothing passed, to gaze and gaze at the downs till all his memories were fashioned out of their huge grass curves. He stood, a bearded man, and watched them with never a word as they passed. And one of Niv’s mad memories suddenly knew him, and Niv hailed him by his name and the shepherd answered. And who should he be but Vand!

Then they fell talking; and Niv spoke suavely, as he always did with sane folk, aping with clever mimicry the ways and the tricks of sanity, lest Alveric should ask for help against him. But Alveric sought no help. Silent he stood and heard the others talking, but his thoughts were far in the past and their voices were only sounds to him.

And Vand enquired of them if they had found Elfland. But he spoke as one asks of children if their toy boat has been to the Happy Isles. He had had for many years to do with sheep, and had come to know their needs and their price, and the need men have of them; and these things had risen imperceptibly up all round his imagination, and were at last a wall over which he saw no further. When he was young, yes once, he had sought for Elfland; but now, why now he was older; such things were for the young.

“But we saw its border,” said Zend, “the border of twilight.”

“A mist,” said Vand, “of the evening.”

“I have stood,” said Zend, “upon the edge of Elfland.”

But Vand smiled and shook his bearded head as he leaned on his long crook, and every wave of his beard as he shook it slowly denied Zend’s tales of that border, and his lips smiled it away, and his tolerant eyes were grave with the lore of the fields we know.

“No, not Elfland,” he said.

And Niv agreed with Vand, for he watched his mood, studying the ways of sanity. And they spoke of Elfland lightly, as one tells of some dream that came at dawn and went away before waking. And Alveric heard with despair, for Lirazel dwelt not only over the border but even, as he saw now, beyond human belief; so that all at once she seemed remoter than ever, and he still lonelier.

“I sought for it once,” said Vand, “but no, there’s no Elfland.”

“No,” said Niv, and only Zend wondered.

“No,” replied Vand and shook his head and lifted his eyes to his sheep.

And just beyond his sheep and coming towards them he saw a shining line. So long his eyes stayed fixed on that shining line coming over the downs from the eastward that the others turned and looked.

They saw it too, a shimmering line of silver, or a little blue like steel, flickering and changing with the reflection of strange passing colours. And before it, very faint like threatening breezes breathing before a storm, came the soft sound of very old songs. It caught, as they all stood gazing, one of Vand’s furthest sheep; and instantly its fleece was that pure gold that is told of in old romance; and the shining line came on and the sheep disappeared altogether. They saw now that it was about the height of the mist from a small stream; and still Vand stood gazing at it, neither moving nor thinking. But Niv turned very

soon and beckoned curtly to Zend and seized Alveric by the arm and hastened away towards Erl. The gleaming line, that seemed to bump and stumble over every unevenness of the rough fields, came not so fast as they hastened; yet it never stopped when they rested, never wearied when they were tired, but came on over all the hills and hedges of Earth; nor did sunset change its appearance or check its pace.

CHAPTER XXXIV: The Last Great Rune

As Alveric hastened back, led by two madmen, to those lands over which he had long ago been lord, the horns of Elfland had sounded in Erl all day. And though only Orion heard them, they no less thrilled the air, flooding it deep with their curious golden music, and filling the day with a wonder that others felt; so that many a young girl leaned from her window to see what was enchanting the morning. But as the day wore on the enchantment of the unheard music dwindled, giving place to a feeling that weighed on all minds in Erl and seemed to bode the imminence of some unknown region of wonder. All his life Orion had heard these horns blowing at evening except upon days on which he had done ill: if he heard the horns at evening he knew that it was well with him. But now they had blown in the morning, and blew all day, like a fanfare in front of a march; and Orion looked out of his window and saw nothing, and the horns rang on, proclaiming he knew not what. Far away they called his thoughts from the things of Earth that are the concern of men, far away from all that casts shadows. He spoke to no man that day, but went among his trolls and such elfin things as had followed them over the border. And all men that saw him perceived such a look in his eyes as showed his thoughts to be far in realms that they dreaded. And his thoughts were indeed far thence, once more with his mother. And hers were with him, lavishing tendernesses that the years had denied her, in their swift passage over our fields that she never had understood. And somehow he knew she was nearer.

And all that strange morning the will-o'-the-wisps were restless and the trolls leaped wildly all about their lofts, for the horns of Elfland tinged all the air with magic and excited their blood although they could not hear them. But towards evening they felt impending some great change and all grew silent and moody. And something brought to them yearnings for their far magical home, as though a breeze had blown suddenly into their faces straight off the tarns of Elfland; and they ran up and down the street looking for something magical, to ease their loneliness amongst mundane things. But found nothing resembling the spell-born lilies that grew in their glory above the elfin tarns. And the folk of the village perceived them everywhere and longed for the wholesome earthly days again that there were before the coming of magic to Erl. And some of them hurried off to the house of the Freer and took refuge with him amongst his holy things from all the unhallowed shapes that there were in their streets and all the magic that tingled and loomed in the air. And he guarded them with his curses which floated away the light and almost aimless will-o'-the-wisps, and even, at a short distance, awed the trolls, but they ran and capered only a little way off. And while the little group clustered about the Freer, seeking solace from him against whatever impended, with which the air was growing tenser and grimmer as the short day wore on, there went others to Narl and the busy elders of Erl to say "See what your plans have done. See what you have brought on the village."

And none of the elders made immediate answer, but said that they must take counsel one with another, for they trusted greatly in the words said in their parliament. And to this intent they gathered again at the forge of Narl. It was evening now, but the sun had not yet set nor Narl gone from his work, but his fire was beginning to glow with a deeper colour among the shadows that had entered his forge. And the elders came in there walking slowly with grave faces, partly because of the mystery that they needed to cover their folly from the sight of the villagers, partly because magic hung now so gross in the air that they feared the imminence of some portentous thing. They sat in their parliament in that inner room, while the sun went low and the elfin horns, had they but known it, blew clear and triumphantly. And there they sat in silence, for what could they say? They had wished for magic, and now it had come. Trolls were in all the streets, goblins had entered houses, and now the nights were mad with will-o'-the-wisps; and all the air was heavy with unknown magic. What could they say? And after a while Narl said they must make a new plan; for they had been plain bell-fearing folk, but now there were magical things all over Erl, and more came every night from Elfland to join them, and what would become of the old ways unless they made a plan?

And Narl's words emboldened them all, though they felt the ominous menace of the horns that they could not hear; but the talk of a plan emboldened them, for they deemed they could plan against magic. And one by one they rose to speak of a plan.

But at sunset the talk died down. And their dread that something impended grew now to a certain knowledge. Oth and Threl knew it first, who had lived familiar with mystery in the woods. All knew that something was coming. No one knew what. And they all sat silent wondering in the gloaming.

Lurulu saw it first. He had dreamed all day of the weed-green tarns of Elfland, and growing weary of Earth, had gone all lonely to the top of a tower that rose from the

Castle of Erl and perched himself on a battlement and gazed wistfully homewards. And looking out over the fields we know, he saw the shining line coming down on Erl. And from it he heard rise faint, as it rippled over the furrows, a murmur of many old songs; for it came with all manner of memories, old music and lost voices, sweeping back again to our old fields what time had driven from Earth. It was coming towards him bright as the Evening Star, and flashing with sudden colours, some common on Earth, and some unknown to our rainbow; so that Lurulu knew it at once for the frontier of Elfland. And all his impudence returned to him at sight of his fabulous home, and he uttered shrill gusts of laughter from his high perch, that rang over the roofs below like the chatter of building birds. And the little homesick trolls in the lofts were cheered by the sound of his merriment though they knew not from what it came. And now Orion heard the horns blowing so loud and near, and there was such triumph in their blowing, and pomp, and withal so wistful a crooning, that he knew now why they blew, knew that they proclaimed the approach of a princess of the elfin line, knew that his mother came back to him.

High on her hill Ziroonderel knew this, being forwarned by magic; and looking downward at evening she saw that star-like line of blended twilights of old lost Summer evenings sweeping over the fields towards Erl. Almost she wondered as she saw this glittering thing flowing over the earthly pastures, although her wisdom had told her that it must come. And on the one side she saw the fields we know, full of accustomed things, and on the other, looking down from her height, she saw, behind the myriad-tinted border, the deep green elfin foliage and Elfland's magical flowers, and things that delirium sees not, nor inspiration, on Earth; and the fabulous creatures of Elfland prancing forward; and, stepping across our fields and bringing Elfland with her, the twilight flowing from both her hands, which she stretched out a little from her, was her own lady the Princess Lirazel coming back to her home. And at this sight, and at all the strangeness coming across our fields, or because of old memories that came with the twilight or bygone songs that sang in it, a strange joy came shivering upon Ziroonderel, and if witches weep she wept.

And now from upper windows of the houses the folk began to see that glittering line which was no earthly twilight: they saw it flash at them with its starry gleam and then flow on towards them. Slowly it came as though it rippled with difficulty over Earth's rugged bulk, though moving lately over the rightful lands of the Elf King it had outspeeded the comet. And hardly had they wondered at its strangeness, when they found themselves amongst most familiar things, for the old memories that floated before it, as a wind before the thunder, beat in a sudden gust on their hearts and their houses, and lo! they were living once more amongst things long past and lost. And as that line of no earthly light came nearer there rustled before it a sound as of rain on leaves, old sighs, breathed over again, old lovers' whispers repeated. And there fell on these folk as they all leaned hushed from their windows a mood that looked gently, wistfully backward through time, such a mood as might lurk by huge dock-leaves in ancient gardens when everyone is gone that has tended their roses or ever loved the bowers.

Not yet had that line of starlight and bygone loves lapped at the walls of Erl or foamed on the houses, but it was so near now that already there slipped away the daily cares that held folk down to the present, and they felt the balm of past days and blessings from hands long withered. Now elders ran out to children that skipped with a rope in the street, to bring them into the houses, not telling them why, for fear of frightening their daughters. And the alarm in their mothers' faces for a moment startled the children; then some of them looked to the eastward and saw that shining line. "It is Elfland coming," they said, and went on with their skipping.

And the hounds knew, though what they knew I cannot say; but some influence reached them from Elfland such as comes from the full moon, and they bayed as they bay on clear nights when the fields are flooded with moonlight. And the dogs in the streets that always watched lest anything strange should come, knew how great a strangeness was near them now and proclaimed it to all the valley.

Already the old leather-worker in his cottage across the fields, looking out of his window to see if his well were frozen, saw a May morning of fifty years ago and his wife gathering lilac, for Elfland had beaten Time away from his garden.

And now the jackdaws had left the towers of Erl and flew away westward; and the baying of the hounds filled all the air, and the barking of lesser dogs. This suddenly ceased and a great hush fell on the village, as though snow had suddenly fallen inches deep. And through the hush came softly a strange old music; and no one spoke at all.

Then where Ziroonderel sat by her door with her chin on her hand gazing, she saw the bright line touch the houses and stop, flowing past them on either side but held by the houses, as though it had met with something too strong for its magic; but for only a moment the houses held back that wonderful tide, for it broke over them with a burst of unearthly foam, like a meteor of unknown metal burning in heaven, and passed on and the houses stood all quaint and queer and enchanted, like homes remembered out of a long-past age by the sudden waking of an inherited memory.

And then she saw the boy she had nursed step forward into the twilight, drawn by a power no less than that which was moving Elfland: she saw him and his mother meet again in all that light that was flooding the valley with splendour. And Alveric was with her, he and she together a little apart from attendant fabulous things, that escorted her all the way from the vales of the Elfin Mountains. And from Alveric had fallen away that heavy burden of years, and all the sorrow of wandering: he too was back again in the days that were, with old songs and lost voices. And Ziroonderel could not see the princess's tears when she met Orion again after all that separation of space and time, for, though they flashed like stars, she stood in the border in all that radiance of starlight that shone about her like the broad face of a planet. But though the witch saw not this there came to her old ears clearly the sounds of songs returning again to our fields out of the glens of Elfland, wherein they had lain so long, which were all the old songs lost from the nurseries of the Earth. They crooned now about the meeting of Lirazel and Orion.

And Niv and Zend had ease at last from their fierce fancies, for their wild thoughts sank to rest in the calm of Elfland and slept as hawks sleep in their trees when evening has lulled the world. Ziroonderel saw them standing together where the edge of the downs had been, a little way off from Alveric. And there was Vand amongst his golden sheep, that were munching the strange sweet juices of wonderful flowers.

With all these wonders Lirazel came for her son, and brought Elfland with her that never had moved before the width of a harebell over the earthly border. And where they met was an old garden of roses under the towers of Erl, where once she had walked, and none had cared for it since. Great weeds were now in its walks, and even they were withered with the rigour of late November: their dry stalks hissed about his feet as Orion walked through them, and they swung back brown behind him over untended paths. But before him bloomed in all their glory and beauty the great voluptuous roses gorgeous with Summer. Between November that she was driving before her and that old season of roses that she brought back to her garden Lirazel and Orion met. For a moment the withered garden lay brown behind him, then it all flashed into bloom, and the wild glad song of birds from a hundred arbours welcomed back the old roses. And Orion was back again in the beauty and brightness of days whose dim fair shades his memory cherished, such as are the chief of all the treasures of man; but the treasury in which they lie is locked, and we have not the key. Then Elfland poured over Erl.

Only the holy place of the Freer and the garden that was about it remained still of our Earth, a little island all surrounded by wonder, like a mountain peak all rocky, alone in air, when a mist wells up in the gloaming from highland valleys, and leaves only one pinnacle darkly to gaze at the stars. For the sound of his bell beat back the rune and the twilight for a little distance all round. There he lived happy, contented, not quite alone, amongst his holy things, for a few that had been cut off by that magical tide lived on the holy island and served him there. And he lived beyond the age of ordinary men, but not to the years of magic.

None ever crossed the boundary but one, the witch Ziroonderel, who from her hill that was just on the earthward border would go by broom on starry nights to see her lady again, where she dwelt unvexed by years, with Alveric and Orion. Thence she comes sometimes, high in the night on her broom, unseen by any down on the earthly fields, unless you chance to notice star after star blink out for an instant as she passes by them, and sits beside cottage doors and tells queer tales, to such as care to have news of the wonders of Elfland. May I hear her again!

And with the last of his world-disturbing runes sent forth, and his daughter happy once more, the elfin King on his tremendous throne breathed and drew in the calm in which Elfland basks; and all his realms dreamed on in that ageless repose, of which deep green pools in summer can barely guess; and Erl dreamed too with all the rest of Elfland and so passed out of all remembrance of men. For the twelve that were of the parliament of Erl looked through the window of that inner room, wherein they planned their plans by the forge of Narl, and, gazing over their familiar lands, perceived that they were no longer the fields we know.

The Troubadour by W.S. Gilbert

This week I'm taking time to get the backlog of monsters sorted. As a sort of filler, here's a poem about a troubadour trying to rescue a maid, by W.S. Gilbert, of musical hall fame.

A Troubadour he played
Without a castle wall,
Within, a hapless maid
Responded to his call.
"Oh, willow, woe is me!
Alack and well-a-day!
If I were only free
I'd hie me far away!"
Unknown her face and name,
But this he knew right well,
The maiden's wailing came
From out a dungeon cell.

A hapless woman lay
Within that prison grim—
That fact, I've heard him say,
Was quite enough for him.
"I will not sit or lie,
Or eat or drink, I vow,
Till thou art free as I,
Or I as pent as thou!"
Her tears then ceased to flow,
Her wails no longer rang,
And tuneful in her woe
The prisoned maiden sang:

"Oh, stranger, as you play
I recognise your touch;
And all that I can say,
Is thank you very much!"
He seized his clarion straight,
And blew thereat, until
A warder oped the gate,
"Oh, what might be your will?"
"I've come, sir knave, to see
The master of these halls:
A maid unwillingly
Lies prisoned in their walls."
With barely stifled sigh
That porter drooped his head,
With teardrops in his eye,
"A many, sir," he said.

He stayed to hear no more,
But pushed that porter by,
And shortly stood before
Sir Hugh de Peckham Rye.
Sir Hugh he darkly frowned,
"What would you, sir, with me?"
The troubadour he downed
Upon his bended knee.

Sir Hugh he called—and ran
The warden from the gate,
"Go, show this gentleman
The maid in forty-eight."
By many a cell they passed
And stopped at length before
A portal, bolted fast:
The man unlocked the door.

"Oh, ah!—indeed—I see,"
The troubadour exclaimed—
"If I may make so free,
How is this castle named?"
The warden's eyelids fill,
And, sighing, he replied,
"Of gloomy Pentonville
This is the Female Side!"
The minstrel did not wait
The warden stout to thank,
But recollected straight
He'd business at the Bank.

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Peckham Rye is a real place – it's a park in southern London. William Blake claimed to have visions of angels there. Pentonville is a Nineteenth Century prison, but the same plot would suit Magonomia or Ars Magica, transposed ot another site.

Venice : Basic Geography

A change of pace on the Venice material – I think that trying to draw all the folklore together, like I did with Cornwall, may be a fool's errand. I keep heading off into the weeds. My plan is to keep adding the folklore I find, but to try and give the whole thing a spine and ribs by working toward a chapter layout that I'll assemble on the blog that accompanies the podcast. I'll Frankenstein bits in, create a rough shape, and then we'll move onto proper drafting. So – time for a folklore free episode.

If you look at a map of Venice, the first thing you'll notice is that it looks like a sketch. Coastlines are smooth, or straight, and have angles. This is because the coasts are, in many cases, artificial. As we noted in an early episode, the islands of the lagoons have been extended by reclamations using wood pylons and backfill. Many of the islands you'll see on a modern map were added after the game period, and a few have been lost over time – usually low islands destroyed by flooding.

The largest island group, by area, is Venice proper. It's historically divided into six regions, called sesitieri, three each side of the Grand Canal. There is a single bridge across the Grand Canal in 1220 – a pontoon sort of affair called the Bridge of the Mint. By the Maganomia period it's been renamed the Rialto and rebuilt in stone.

The first three districts are:

Castello – the largest of the six divisions. This is where the Arsenal is, and where the Greek merchants live. The site of the Arsenal is now the Bienelle Gardens. It's the seat of the Bishopric of Olivolo, and when that is merged with the Pariarchate of Grado in the 15th century, this becomes the seat of the Patriarch of Venice.
Cannaregio – This area was where most people coming from the mainland landed in Venice. It's named after the Royal Canal. After 1516 this area contains the Jewish ghetto, but during the Ars Magica game period, Jews are in an odd legal situation where they are both not allowed in the city, and also work in the city while living in the island of Guidecca, off the south coast. The area has some palaces, along the Grand Canal, but is mostly a worker's area
San Marco – where the public square we have discussed in some depth is found. This is the social centre of Venice.

Then across the Grand Canal are

San Polo – the smallest of the six divisions, but one of the most densely inhabited. This is where the city's markets are.

Dorsoduro – This area, administratively, also includes the island of Guidecca, to the south. It's where the highest land in Venice is found.
Santa Croce – during the Ars period this seems to technically be the possession of a Hungarian nobleman, but surely that can't be right?

The Venetian Lagoon is divided from the Adriatic by two barrier islands called Lido and Pellestrina. Lido has a settlement on it called Malamocco, which is named after the Roman settlement of Metamaucum which was taken by the sea. Pellestrina's largest town is also called Pellestrina. Also worth noting is the small island of Choggia, which lies at the far south of the line created by the two barrier islands, and is a sort of customs station for ships coming into the Lagoon. In some earlier episodes we discussed Charlemange's attempted invasion. I think it got as far as Choggia and Malmacco, which is why the capital was moved further into the lagoons. The northern edge of the lagoons is guarded by a peninsula called the Litorale del Cavallino, but "litoral" there just means "coast",

The third largest "island" in the lagoons is Murano, which is actually seven islands held together with bridges. In 1291 all glassmakers in Venice are forced to relocate there, creating an odd noble class of merchants who make mirrors for a living, which we can surely use. The second largest island, Sant Erasmo, is governed from Murano, and seems to mostly be farmland.

Between Murano and Venice is a squarish island that's a cemetery in the modern day. Sadly, San Michele Cemetery dates form the 19th century. Before that, each of the courtyards around which Venetian neighbourhood are gathered was a cemetery, apparently. St Michele is created when people decide that's unsanitary, particularly on islands which occasionally flood.

As I mentioned, every so often an island goes missing. That could be a magus waiting for a storm and then casting The Shrouded Glen about the coast. The lagoon is such a busy shipping channel that people would still wander into the hidden area by an accident on a regular basis, although there are little crannies in the south of the lagoon where you'd have some privacy. The lagoon is only seventy-three feet deep at most, so if you want to make your own island using the rules in Transforming Mythic Europe, this is a great spot. You could also put a new island in the, rather less busy, northern lagoons.

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