



Eaglethorpe Buxton and the Sorceress

Wesley Allison

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Eaglethorpe Buxton and the Sorceress

By Wesley Allison

For William Shakespeare

The greatest writer of all time

And any conspiracy theorists who think that he is not responsible for his own works should be dragged out into the street and be beaten like dogs.

Eaglethorpe Buxton and the Sorceress

(As Told by Eaglethorpe Buxton)

(And including in its entirety, *The Ideal Magic*, a play in one act by
Eaglethorpe Buxton)

By Wesley Allison

Chapter 1

Chapter One: Wherein I encounter the sorceress for the first time.

Antriador is quite a beautiful city. Sitting on the coast of South Lyrria, which is to say the southern coast of that land that used to be the Kingdom of Lyrria but is now a collection of highly competitive city-states, beside azure ocean waves, surrounded by olive trees and vineyards, it is one of the most delightful spots in the world. More important to me was its reputation as a center of the arts, for I am famed adventurer and story-teller Eaglethorpe Buxton. After having held-up all winter at an Inn in Brest, which is to say the country up north, writing a play— a most wonderful play, if I do say so myself, I had come south to Lyrria to produce it. Antriador boasts some sixty playhouses, so I was able to find one that was appropriate, which is to say tasteful enough and yet inexpensive enough for me to lease.

Opening night was wonderful. The playhouse was packed, the upper levels with nobles and wealthy merchants along with their richly dressed wives or their scantily clad mistresses, or sometimes both, and the lower house thronging with commoners who paid two pennies for standing room. My play was a success. Of course, there was never any doubt about that. The actors all did their jobs well. The audience laughed in the right places, sighed in the right places, and wept for joy in the right place for it was after all, a comedy. “The Ideal Magic” was going to secure the fame of Eaglethorpe Buxton, which is to say myself, and make me rich at the same time.

When the stage lights had gone out, and the audience had left the theater, and the stage hands were putting away the sets, I walked down the street to the Singing Siren for a pint. It was very late and most of the patrons had retired, which is to say gone home if they were locals or gone to their rooms on the second or third floor if they had taken rooms, but the Siren stays open all night. That is not to say that it is a noted hot spot. The Fairy Font, or the Reclining Dog, or even the Wicked Wench

are much livelier in the late hours. But the Siren does stay open all night. This particular night, there were one or two people lurking in the shadows— doxies and cutpurses who had finished their evening's employment mostly. I didn't know the barkeep, which is not surprising, considering the turnover at such establishments. I ordered a tankard of ale and took a seat in the center of the room.

Suddenly the door burst open and a woman strode into the tavern. She was striking. Tall. Blonde. Flashing blue eyes. They were flashing— literally flashing, which is really not normal at all. Of course if her eyes hadn't been flashing, I wouldn't have noticed them. There was all that bare skin to distract me. She wore a leather outfit that was more of a harness than an article of clothing. The lower portion was a sort of loose leather skirt made of strips of material which, though hanging down almost to her ankles, exposed most of her legs when she moved. The upper portion was little more than pair of suspenders and two small leather cups.

"Which of you low-lives is Eaglethorpe Buxton?" she snarled.

I stood up and stepped toward her, at this point still more aware of all the bare skin than either the flashing eyes or the glowing wand in her hand.

"What would you have with him, my lovely lady?" I asked.

"I am Myolaena Maetar, and I'm going to skin him alive!" she hissed through clenched teeth.

"I, um, oh. Well, he was here a minute ago," said I. "You just missed him."

"You are not him?" She pointed the wand at me, its violet halo hanging just below my nose.

"Allow me to introduce myself," said I. "I am Ellwood Cyrene, hero and adventurer."

I had been forced by the situation to think on my feet. When I thought that a sorceress was going to kill me I had, as you have no doubt surmised, substituted my own name, which is to say Eaglethorpe Buxton with another name, which is to say Ellwood Cyrene. I suppose that it is not surprising that this name would pop into my head first, for Ellwood Cyrene is my greatest friend and has traveled much of the world with me. He was in fact, the inspiration for the first dozen or so of my stories. We have faced countless dangers together and I have saved his life more than once. Truth be told, he has saved mine more than once too... or twice. Maybe thirty times.

"What are you thinking about," asked the sorceress.

"I'm thinking about Eaglethorpe Buxton..."

"Good."

"... and I'm not thinking about Ellwood Cyrene, because that is me, and I don't sit around thinking about myself, who is Ellwood Cyrene."

"Ellwood the Queen?"

"No. Ellwood Cyrene."

"No," she said. "Ellwood the queen. That's what it means. Cyrene is an old elvish world for queen."

"No, no, no," said I. "Cyrene is a very manly name, and so is Ellwood, which is good because Ellwood Cyrene is a very manly man. He has done many great... um, which is to say, I have had...um."

"Yes, I have heard of you." She lowered the wand and stepped closer. "But you are acquainted with this Eaglethorpe Buxton?"

"Oh, we are the best of friends. He has saved my life on countless occasions and..."

"So if I killed you, it would cause him pain?"

"We've had a bit of a falling out. No, we're not really that close anymore."

Chapter 2

Chapter Two: Wherein I follow through with my deception, saving my life and causing quite a bit of additional complication.

"So why are you so intent on killing me... my friend, which is to say Eaglethorpe Buxton?" I asked.

"I did not say I was going to kill him," she replied. "I said I was going to skin him alive."

"Wouldn't that kill him?"

"Not right away."

"But you said you were going to kill me, that is to say Ellwood Cyrene, which is me."

"No. I implied that I might kill you."

"Well thank you for straitening that out," said I. "A hearty goodnight to you."

I stepped past her and headed for the door, leaving I might add an almost full tankard of ale sitting on the table, and that is something I almost never do.

"Hold," she said, and I felt an invisible set of hands grasp me roughly by the shoulders and drag me back to my seat. As I plopped down into sitting position, I could see the glowing wand sweeping down to her side. "I'm not quite finished with you."

"No?"

"No."

"Um, why not?"

"I need you to lead me to Eaglethorpe Buxton." She poured herself into my lap and placed her arms around my shoulders. "I may have use for you as well, Ellwood Cyrene."

"What could Ellwood Cyrene, which is to say me, do for you?"

"You mean besides leading me to Eaglethorpe Buxton?"

"Yes, besides that."

"As I mentioned before, you are known to me."

"Not surprising," said I. "Just as it is not surprising that you have heard to my very good friend, which is to say my former friend Eaglethorpe Buxton, who is probably way more famous than Ellwood Cyrene... which is to say me."

"Ellwood Cyrene," she said, putting her ripe mouth very close to my ear. "Warrior."

"It is true," said I. "I am a warrior."

"Adventurer."

"Yes."

"Hero."

"Indubitably."

"Man's man."

"Of course... what?"

"Always in the company of great men, but eschewing the company of women."

"Chewing a company of women?"

"Eschewing. It means to abstain or to keep away from— to shun or avoid."

"Yes of course it does."

"Not one single queen, noblewoman, courtesan, tavern wench, or milkmaid has been heard to boast of having quenched the fires of Ellwood Cyrene."

"Campfires?"

"Fires of passion."

"Well that can't be right," said I. "I have seen countless women throwing flirtations toward Ellwood Cyrene... which is to say me."

"Flirtations have been thrown, no doubt," she whispered. "After all, you are handsome, though not so much as I had been led to expect. Flirtations have been thrown but none have been caught."

"That's pretty hard to believe," said I, truly puzzled.

"Indeed," she purred into my ear. "It presents something of a challenge to me."

"I'm afraid I don't follow," said I.

"I'm going to be the one to quench that fire."

"The campfire?"

"The fire of passion."

"Okay," said I. "Yes, that would be fine. Sounds good."

"You're surprisingly acquiescent," said she.

"If you have your mind made up on something," I replied, "who am I to stand in your way?"

“First though, you are going to lead me to Eaglethorpe Buxton.”

“Couldn't you quench my fire first and then I could lead you to Eaglehorn Humpton? I would be ever so much more relaxed that way.”

“Eaglethorpe Buxton,” she corrected. “And no. I don't want you relaxed. I want you focused. We find him first. Only then will you receive your reward.”

Chapter 3

Chapter Three: Wherein I hear from my harshest critic.

We stepped outside of the Singing Siren and headed up the winding stone street, the breaking waves of the ocean far below down the hill to our left. I was at something of a loss as to where to search for the famous story-teller and adventurer Eaglethorpe Buxton, not the least of which was because he was me, though I didn't say as much. I did know where I didn't want to go.

"Why don't we go back to that sorry excuse for a theater and look for him there," said Myolaena Maetar.

"No, I don't want to go there," said I. "What I mean is that I don't think we would find him there."

"Why not?"

"There are a lot of people who know me at the theater... and they know that no good Buxton, and they might see that we are after him and give him a warning. He might skip town and we would have to search the entire country of Lyrria for him."

"That's a good point," she agreed. "Where shall we look for him?"

"I have a few spots in mind," I lied. "Why don't you tell me what he has done to anger you so?"

"Have you not seen the travesty he calls a play?"

"I thought it quite a fine play," I said, truthfully.

"He maligned my character."

"Perhaps the author was misguided by some incorrect information," I suggested. "It is no doubt misinformation that you once tried to usurp the throne of the King of Aerithraine."

"No," she admitted. "That part was true."

"Well, surely you did not attempt to ensorcel the King."

"That part was true as well," she said.

"Mayhaps you did not really consort with a dragon?"

"No. That is not the part that was wrong."

"Then perhaps you could enlighten me as to exactly what element of the play brought forth your ire, which is to say, made you unhappy."

"You might note that the playwright's deus ex machina involves me accidentally falling victim to my own magic."

"God in the machine?"

"The machination of the gods—it is how poor story tellers fix holes in their plotlines."

"I thought that bit where you ensorcelled yourself was rather funny."

"Funny at my expense. That would never happen."

"And I would hardly call it a deus ex machinegun..."

"Deus ex machina."

"I don't think it qualifies at all," said I. "It's not as though that couldn't happen..."

"It couldn't happen."

"It's within the realm of possibility..."

"It is impossible."

"I don't think we have the same definition of 'impossible'."

"Not possible; unable to exist, happen, or be," she said. "Unable to be done, performed, effected, etc."

"Yes," I confirmed. "That is the definition I usually use."

"Not to be done or endured with any degree of reason or propriety."

"Well, not quite to the point, but..."

"Utterly impracticable, totally unsuitable, difficult, or objectionable."

"I suppose that last part fits your point of view better than mine," said I. "I still would not go so far as to refer to the plot's resolution as a deus ex machina..."

She glared at me.

"If that is not what happened, then what was it that alerted the King to your plan to usurp him?"

"I had my spies, but the church had its spies as well, and they preferred Justin's imperfect rule to mine."

"I suppose there is just no pleasing some people," said I.

Chapter 4

Chapter Four: Wherein we find another, more interesting tavern to visit.

"I grow weary," said Myolaena Maetar with a sigh, after we had left the fourth or fifth tavern. "I suppose I shall just kill you and blow up the playhouse."

"Blow up the playhouse!" I cried. "You can't do that!"

"I can do that."

"Well, you shouldn't..."

"Why not?"

"Eaglethorpe Buxton, which is to say me... I mean my friend, put his life into that play. Kill him if you must, but the play must continue. The play is the thing."

"What thing?"

"Just the thing." I suddenly spotted the sign above the door of the Fairy Font. "And this is just the place."

"What kind of place is it?" she asked.

"It's just the kind of place that I... that Eaglethorpe Buxton would visit.

Jumping ahead of the sorceress, I opened the tavern door and allowed her to enter, then followed. Despite the hour, now closer to morning than night, the Font was full of customers—mostly sailors. As I believe I mentioned before, the Fairy Font is known for its nightlife, especially among the rougher crowd. Pipe smoke hung in the air like fragrant fog and drinks were flowing freely.

"Six crowns cover charge," said the heavily-muscled man just inside the door.

"I'm with her," said I.

Myolaena threw a small pouch of coins at him. We waded through the sea of humanity and dwarfanity and elfanity and I think one or two trollanity and found an unoccupied table with two stools, where we sat

down. The patrons of the establishment, already loud and raucous, began chanting something and pounding their fists on the table.

"This is most odd," said the sorceress. "They have their drinks. What else do they want?"

"Entertainment," said I.

"We are not going to have to sit through another play, are we?" She rolled her eyes.

As if in answer, directly above our heads and directly above each of the tables in The Fairy Font, which is to say all over the taproom, small doors opened in the ceiling and little platforms were lowered on chains. When the platforms had reached the tabletops, knocking over quite a few tankards of ale as they did, we could see that upon each was a small basin filled with dark, rich, mud. Sitting on either side of the basin of mud was the tiny form of a fairy, wearing a teeny little robe cut open in the back to allow her wings to stick out.

The round basin of mud reminded me of the mud pies that we used to make as children. My sister Celia and my cousins Gervil, Tuki, and Geneva used to play on the front step of our house, which is to say Cor Cottage just outside Dewberry Hills. Celia was a master piesmith, at least of the mud variety. Interestingly enough, when she grew up, her pies at best could be considered mediocre. Tuki could make quite a fine pie as an adult—all the more strange as her childhood mud pies were the antithesis of Celia's, which is to say that they were no good at all. Geneva's mud pies were better than Tuki's but not as good as Celia's, and since she died as a child, no one can tell if she would have grown to be a decent piesmith or not. Gervil didn't make pies, though he did force me to eat more than a few.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Myolaena Maetar.

"Pies."

"Well stop it. We're here to find Buxton."

"And now the moment you've been awaitin'" said an unseen announcer. "Fairy mud-wrestling!"

A great cheer filled the room, but then all grew quiet as the audience watched the pair of fairies on each table disrobe.

"I'm Taffy," said the six inch tall red-head, as she carefully pulled the robe over her gossamer wings.

"I'm Mustard Seed," said the other fairy.

"I'm enchanted," said I.

"I'm going to vomit," said Myolaena.

The two fairies waded out into the mud, which to them was about knee-high, where they wasted no time. Mustard Seed jumped on Taffy, knocking her down and coating them both in the ooze. Taffy grabbed Mustard Seed's hair and they both rolled across the bowl, squealing in their tiny little voices.

"Come along. We're leaving," said the sorceress.

"You don't like the show?" I was frankly incredulous.

"You hussy!" shouted Mustard Seed, though I don't know if she was speaking to Myolaena or to Taffy.

"Come."

"But they're so cute and wee."

"Come now!"

"I must visit the little warrior's room first," said I.

"Fine," she said. "I will be waiting outside."

I was loath to leave, but what was I to do. I stepped out back to, um... wash my hands. Then I headed back through the taproom for the front door, stopping just a moment to help Taffy, who was floating face down in the mud, while Mustard Seed was biting her on the foot. When I exited the tavern, I found the sorceress standing with a man. I didn't recognize him until I got close—it was Ellwood Cyrene.

Chapter 5

Chapter Five: Wherein an old friend causes me some momentary discomfort and a most remarkable transformation.

"Ellwood Cyrene," I cried, so glad to see my old friend that I momentarily forgot my ruse. "Um, is me, which is to say that I am Ellwood Cyrene."

"Yes," said Ellwood stiffly. "He is Ellwood Cyrene. And I am the... ahem... great story-teller Eaglethorpe Buxton."

"Story-teller adventurer," I offered.

"Story-teller adventurer."

"Great story-teller adventurer," I added.

"I said great," said Ellwood.

"You said great the first time, but you didn't say great the second time."

"I am the great, the marvelous, the wonderful adventurer and story-teller Eaglethorpe..."

"And hero," said I.

"Never mind," said Ellwood. "He is Eaglethorpe Buxton. Go ahead and kill him. I no longer care."

"Foolish children you are," said Myolaena, her face taking on a snarl which quite detracted from the, well, if not beauty, then certainly the attractiveness that I had felt for her before. "Do you think for one moment that I could not tell who this idiot was?"

"Idiot is not quite the word you are looking for," said I. "Perhaps bard or wordsmith might be a better fit."

"Silence! I know who the true Eagle-brained Buffoon is." She turned to Ellwood Cyrene. "Just as I know who you are. You have your father's eyes."

"I met his father once and I don't think he looked anything like him," I opined. "In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he was adopted."

"That is because you are an idiot," hissed the sorceress. "What do you know of it? What do you know of anything? You write a play about the royal family of Aerithraine and you wouldn't know the Queen if she fell on you!"

"That is not so," said I. "The Queen and I are quite close. I once spent a fortnight in her company."

A smirking noise came from my friend, which he, somewhat less than valiantly, tried to suppress.

"You find this funny?" asked Myolaena.

"Well, yes," said Ellwood. "You see, he actually did spend a fortnight in the company of the Queen. It was her infantry company, and he served in it for a whole two weeks before he was drummed out for failure to carry out his duty."

"Oh varlet, villain, and false friend!" said I.

"I did not hear "liar" amongst those names," quoth he.

"Enough of this," snarled Myolaena.

"Yes, enough of this," said Ellwood. "Let this foolish hack go on his way and you and I will find some quiet place to quench your fire."

"Campfire?" I asked.

"The fires of passion!" hissed the sorceress.

She did not have the passionate look on her face that I had expected. In fact her expression was nothing like it had been when we had spoken before, when she thought I was Ellwood Cyrene. But at last she gave a curt nod.

"We shall go," she said. "But Eaglethorpe Buxton shall not go his way unscathed."

And before either Ellwood or I could do anything, she aimed her wand at me and I was engulfed in a purple light. I felt myself shrinking and had just enough awareness left to realize that I had been turned into a toad.

Chapter 6

Chapter Six: Wherein I am returned to my human self, an event you probably expected as toads seldom tell stories and most especially do not see them published in book form, and then I have a most peculiar conversation.

It is true that toads do not have much of interest in their lives. They chiefly go about their business eating bugs and other small creepy-crawlies and attempting to not get eaten themselves by cats. I honestly don't remember too much about it, no doubt a result of my toad brain having been somewhat smaller than the average pea. It did feel like quite a long time had passed. I am not sure how long toads live, but I would guess that it is somewhere in the neighborhood of a year or two and as I was a toad for at least a week, I must have aged at least seven years. The next thing I truly remember was waking in a hard bed in a room that was obviously not in one of the better inns in town, with Ellwood Cyrene leaning over me.

"Oh varlet, villain, and false friend," I said, and felt my lips crack as my swollen tongue moved around to form the words.

"Do not speak Eaglethorpe," said Ellwood, pressing the brim of a glass of cold water to my lips. "You must know that I love you."

"In a very manly way, no doubt," I croaked.

"Yes. Very manly indeed."

He took a clean white cloth and dipped it in the water, using it to bathe my brow.

"I only belittled you because I thought that it might make the sorceress let you go. You know I have the highest respect for you."

"And my storytelling?"

"And your storytelling."

"And my heroic adventuring?"

"Heavens above Eaglethorpe. If I did not love you so much, I would hate your guts."

"What happened anyway?"

"She turned you into a toad, a quite ugly one at that. It took me all of a week to locate you and three bags of silver to get an apothecary who was willing and able turn you back into yourself."

"What happened to you?"

"Oh I managed to escape her after a few hours."

"A few hours?"

"Yes."

"A few hours?"

"Yes, a few hours."

"A few hours?"

"Yes, a few hours. Did you damage your brain while you were a toad?"

"So you were with her for a few hours?"

"I believe we have established that."

"So... she made you do things."

"What?"

"You spent time with her?"

"A few hours!" Ellwood rolled his eyes in exasperation.

"She... you know."

"Know what?"

"She quenched your fire?"

"Campfire?"

"The fire of passion."

"What? No!" He stood up and began pacing back and forth across the room. "Well, I'm sure she would have liked to, but I got away long before that could happen."

"Why?" I asked.

"What do you mean why?"

"Why didn't you wait till after the quenching before you escaped?"

"Because she's a sorceress."

"So?"

"And she's evil."

"So?"

"Well, she's a... She's just not my type."

"Why not," I wondered.

"She's... too pale... and too blond... and too short."

"What complexion do you prefer for your woman?"

"A complexion about like yours."

"That's too dark. What hair color do you like?"

"About like yours, with little streaks of grey."

"Then she would be too old for you," said I. "A young man like you should have a beautiful young woman. How tall do you prefer?"

"About your height."

"That is way too tall for a woman."

"I know," said Ellwood, and then turned and rushed out of the room.

Chapter Seven: Wherein Ellwood Cyrene returns as though nothing strange had happened between us.

I didn't see anything more of Ellwood Cyrene that day, but in truth he could well have been there and I simply didn't see him, which is to say, I immediately went back to sleep and had the strangest dreams. I remember nothing about them, except that they were adventurous and heroic and very manly. Yes, they were very manly indeed. Then next morning I woke feeling a bit better and had just managed to sit upright when my friend returned, acting as though nothing strange had happened between us. I will be honest. While I was somewhat bothered by the strange dialog that we had engaged in, I was none too sure that it was not the mere workings of my imagination, which is to say a dream.

"How are you feeling?" asked Ellwood.

"Better," said I. "I am a bit bothered by our conversation of yesterday."

"You were out of your head yesterday," said he. "Anything you remember me saying is no doubt a result of your overactive imagination mixed with delirium."

"You think so?"

"It was probably all a dream."

"If it was, then it was a manly dream," said I.

"No doubt."

"That's the only type of dream that I have."

"That's very strange," said he. "That's true of me also. I have nothing but manly dreams—dreams with lots of killing and mayhem. Sometimes there is bloodlust."

"And beautiful women?" I asked.

"Yes. Oh, yes. Many beautiful woman, um... running around. Sometimes they are nude."

"Sometimes?"

"Almost all the time... all the time. They are always running around nude... with their navels and what-not showing."

"Me too," said I. "I really like women."

"I do too," said Ellwood. "Some of my best friends are women."

"Friends?"

"No, not friends. Acquaintances... um, companions? Conquests! That's what they are. They are conquests. Dozens of women. Scores! Hundreds! And all of them, running around and all of them beautiful, and not the least bit intelligent or accomplished in any way."

"That makes me feel better," said I, stopping to pull out something that was stuck in my teeth and turned out to be the wing of a fly.

"Good," said he, setting in my lap a tray, which I had here to for not noticed. "I brought you some breakfast."

"So you escaped the sorceress."

"Yes, I did," said Ellwood Cyrene. "I would have stayed to um... dally with her, but I had to find you before you were eaten by a cat and have you returned to human form."

"That makes sense," said I. "Where is she now?"

"I led her on a trail halfway to Goth and then worked my way back here. Sooner or later though, she's going to figure out what I've done. Then she'll be back here, twice as angry."

"Maybe you should have led her only half as far, then she would only be twenty percent angrier," I opined.

"Eaglethorpe, you are as good a mathematician as you are a story-teller," said he.

"Thank you. Where am I, anyway?"

"This is the third floor of The Reclining Dog. Finish your breakfast and come down to the taproom. We will plan our next move."

Chapter Eight: Wherein I am reminded of one of the more obvious problems in a friendship with Ellwood Cyrene.

I ate my breakfast, which was very tasty indeed. It was a traditional An-triadorian breakfast: two eggs, white pudding, three large sausage links, two strips of bacon, fried potatoes with onions, beans, kippers, mustard greens with olive oil, and of course a ham steak. I know what you are thinking. You are thinking “What? No flapjacks?” In fact, Ellwood had brought a stack of four very nice looking flapjacks along with some dis-consolateberry syrup, but conscious as I am of keeping fit and trim, I had only ten or twelve bites. And I also did not eat the mustard greens.

After I got up and washed my face, I must say that I felt great, which is to say not at all like someone who was turned into a toad. I did find that as I walked across the room, there was more bounce in my step than was typical, but by the time I had gone down two flights of stairs, the bounce was gone, and I was walking in a far less toadly and a far more manly way.

It was mid-day and the taproom at The Reclining Dog was full. You may remark on the fact that as I tell my tale, I mention that I go into this establishment and the room is full, or I go into that establishment and the room is full. All I can say is: that’s An-triador! It is a party town. I have been to big cities and small cities, to villages, to hamlets and to towns of all sizes— industry towns, farm towns, and college towns, but to my mind, none of them has so many taverns, pubs, and saloons as An-triador. Not only that, as I mentioned already, they are usually full, which is to say a lot of people are in them.

Though the room was full, it was not difficult to spot Ellwood Cyrene, who had a table to himself right in the center. I had just reached his table, when someone called out “where is Ellwood Cyrene? I want to buy him a drink!” Naturally, I called back “I am right here!” It was then that I spied eight warriors moving through the crowd toward our table.

I drew my sword as the first approached. His attention was completely on Ellwood Cyrene and not on me, and he continued to not notice me as I smacked him across the face with the flat of my blade. He went down with blood spewing from his nose.

Two of the other warriors were quickly upon me. Meanwhile, pandemonium broke out in the bar. People ducked under tables and headed for the exits. Both my new opponents swung their swords at me. In an incredible feat of dexterity and agility, I dodged both, while at the same time slicing into the middle of the first and kicking the second. Then whipping around, I ran through the one that I had kicked, all the while tossing a pair of throwing stars from my sleeve, hitting two more across the room. The first warrior, which is to say the one that I had hit in the nose, lunged for me. I grabbed him by his leather jerkin and swung him around to use as a shield as two daggers flew at me from two of his friends. I tossed his body aside as the remaining three warriors all attacked at once, and in what could only be described as the greatest demonstration of swordsmanship that the world has ever seen, I dispatched the three of them without so much as a cut on my finger.

I immediately sat down and began to write some notes, while Ellwood Cyrene climbed out from beneath the table where he had been hiding.

"What are you doing?" said he.

"I'm taking some notes for when I write the story of how Eaglethorpe Buxton defeated ten swordsmen while Ellwood Cyrene hid beneath the table."

"I counted only six swordsmen."

"Oh, there were ten."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh yes. Don't worry. This is going to be a very accurate account."

"It will be accurate, will it?"

"Oh yes."

"Then you are going to explain how someone called out "where is Ellwood Cyrene? I want to buy him a drink!" and you called back "I am right here!" causing the warriors to mistake you for me? Are you then going to describe how the Eaglethorpe Buxton fighting the swordsmen was actually Ellwood Cyrene and the Ellwood Cyrene hiding under the table was actually Eaglethorpe Buxton?"

"I don't really think that's important to the story," I explained. "What is important is that one of us fought twelve warriors and defeated them single-handed, not which of us did it."

"I see your point," said Ellwood.

"Thank you."

"And it's on your head," he muttered.

"I'll tell you what," said I. "I will write the story your way, if you tell me why people are always trying to kill you."

"Write it however you wish," said he.

Chapter 9

Chapter Nine: Wherein we stop at the well at Potter Town.

Taking into account that a group of sword-wielding would-be assassins, fifteen strong, had found and the gone after Ellwood Cyrene, attempting to kill him, notwithstanding my valiant efforts on his behalf, we decided that it was probably a good idea if we found some other location for ourselves. To wit, which is to say therefore, we left. Ellwood had brought my horse Hysteria and had her stabled nearby along with his own, so we quickly packed and set off for Potter Town, which was an area of simple houses and low class eating establishments just outside the northern city gate. Ellwood offered that it was a good idea to get out of Antriador entirely, but I was loath to leave as I was still expecting to make a sizable fortune from my play. Ten percent of gross receipts are nothing to sneeze at. We stopped at the local well to discuss the matter.

A word about the well in Potter Town. This particular well was a relic of some earlier civilization who had inhabited the promontory where now sits Antriador. It was made of stone, which is to say the well was made of stone and not the previous civilization, though a good many of the monuments from that civilization are indeed made of stone. This well had carved all around the outside, fanciful images of people now long forgotten. Its center was formed of a round silo some eight or nine feet tall, and above this was constructed a wind-mill to take advantage of the plentiful breezes that made their way up the slope from the sea. The windmill turned a long shaft with a screw which pumped up the water from some unseen underground aquifer. The water poured out of about twenty spouts cut into the stone silo and flowed into a pool thirty feet around. This three foot deep pool was enclosed by close-cut stone walls, which too were carved into the images of people, and it was this pool which the local people dipped their buckets into for their daily water. This alone would have made it an interesting landmark, but there was more. Shooting off from the pool in three directions, like three spokes of

a wheel, were stone horse troughs. Water flowed into these troughs when there was an excess in the pool and they were six inches lower than the pool itself, so there was no backflow. From each of these horse troughs, a series of gutters spread out like the branches of a tree, carrying the small amount of overflow away. What need of the builders of this system was fulfilled by these gutters, one may only guess, but the locals today use them to bring water to their gardens.

As Hysteria and Ellwood's horse drank from the troughs, he and I talked over our options.

"I know you don't want to leave for any length of time," said Ellwood, "but you should at least leave for a few days."

"I don't see how leaving for a few days will help pie."

"What?"

"Pie. I smell pie."

"Oh no," said he.

"Oh yes," I replied.

I scanned the little square until I could see that which I could smell, which is to say a pie. A chubby little red-head with a checkered apron and a brown bonnet stood in an open doorway holding a pie.

"Eaglethorpe."

"Hmm?"

"Eaglethorpe!"

"What?"

"As I have no desire to interfere with the love of your life..."

"I've never even seen her before," said I.

"I meant the pie," Ellwood continued. "As I have no desire to interfere, I'll be leaving you now."

"Where are you going?"

"I have business in Auksavl, but I'll be back to Antriador in five days."

"That will be the twelfth night."

"Twelfth night of what?"

"It will be the twelfth night of this business with the sorceress."

"Is that significant?"

"Not really."

"You are so odd, Eaglethorpe."

Chapter 10

Chapter Ten: Wherein I taste a disconsolateberry pie and other things happen too, but the pie is the part that I remember best.

I waved goodbye to my friend, but did not dally, for though a man may well wait for a pie, it is a verifiable truth that a pie seldom waits for a man. So, leaving Hysteria where she was, I hopped over to the where the chubby little red-head with a checkered apron and a brown bonnet held her pie.

“Good day, lovely piesmith,” said I, bowing at the waist.

“Good day, Sir.”

“Might I inquire whether that pie is bound for an inn or perhaps the market?”

“Indeed it is neither, Sir.”

“Then might I purchase it?” I asked.

“Might I ask first your name, Sir? You seem to be a man of heroic bearing and noble manner.”

“You are very perceptive, my pretty piesmith, for indeed I am Eaglethorpe Buxton, famous storyteller and adventurer. Really of late I have been more of an adventurer than a story-teller, for though my tales of the great heroes and their adventures have been repeated far and wide across the land, I find myself having even more wondrous adventures than any of the characters in my stories. Still, the appellation, which is to say the name of Buxton and of Eaglethorpe, is best known for stories so I still introduce myself as first a storyteller and then an adventurer.”

“It is so very nice to...”

“Now that I think about it, I should introduce myself as Eaglethorpe Buxton, playwright, adventurer, and storyteller, as my play ‘The Ideal Magic’ is such a success that I am sure I will be doing much more of that.”

“I’m very pleased to...”

"On the other hand, it might seem strange to say playwright, adventurer, and storyteller, seeing as how storytelling and play writing are so closely related. Perhaps one ought not to separate them from one another by placing them on either side of adventuring. And it is worth noting that I have been doing quite a bit of adventuring since writing the play."

"Do you want pie or not?" she asked, one hand on her hip and the other holding up the delectable object in question.

"Oh yes. Pie please."

"Come inside," she said, leading me into a simple but clean little cottage, where I sat down at the only chair at the old but serviceable table.

She very fetchingly began to cut a generous piece of the pie. Though it smelled wonderful, I couldn't quite place the combination of spices.

"What kind of pie is it?" I wondered.

"Disconsolateberry pie," said she.

Disconsolateberries seem to be common in this area. I just tasted some disconsolateberry syrup and the other night I had my first bowl of disconsolateberry wine. Though I have yet to taste disconsolateberry chutney, I hear it is very good indeed."

"They are indeed common all over southern Lyrria," she said, setting the slice in front of me. "I had considered making it toad pie."

I took a large bite. "What?" I asked with my mouth full.

"I baked that pie especially for you, Eagletwirp Buckethead." Though she still had the appearance of the chubby little red-head with a checkered apron and a brown bonnet, now her eyes were flashing green.

"You are the sorceress," I said, taking another bite.

She picked up a wooden spoon and waving it before her, she changed into her normal slender, blond, attractive self. The wooden spoon took on the appearance of her flashing wand. I was surprised, though not so surprised as to stop eating.

"Are you familiar with alliteration, Eagletwit Bumpkin?" she asked.

"It's Eagletwirp... I mean Eaglethorpe... Of course I'm familiar with alliteration. I'm a talented writer."

"How's this then? Poisoned pie punishes poetic pinhead."

"I don't follow," I said, taking another bite.

"When I said that I made that pie especially for you," said she, "I meant to imply that I had poisoned the pie. And then when I added the bit about alliteration, you see, I actually told you that I poisoned the pie."

"Did you in fact poison it?" I asked, taking another bite.

"Yes."

"What a waste of a perfectly fine pie."

“And you’re still eating it!”
“I can’t help it. It’s yummy.”

Chapter 11

Chapter Eleven: Wherein we discuss evil, the secret to good pie crust, and a writer of little importance.

As the sorceress said, disconsolateberries grow all over the southern coast of Lyrria. As you may know, disconsolate is a word meaning sad. It is a medium powerful word for sad, which is to say that it is more sad than crestfallen, but not so sad as woebegone. A disconsolate person is somewhat worse off than a person who is merely downcast, but not in nearly so bad a shape as a person who is inconsolable. You might suppose that the name of the berry comes from the feeling that one may feel after eating a few disconsolateberries, but you would be mightily mistaken. If anything, disconsolateberries lighten the mood of anyone who eats a few handfuls of them. It is my understanding that their name comes from a young man who lost his love. Wandering the hills along the coast, he was determined to die of starvation, but was unable to because he tasted one of the berries and thereafter kept eating them, despite his sadness and desire to die.

"You just made that up," said the sorceress.

"Made what up?"

"That bit about the young man who lost his love."

"Were you reading my thoughts?"

"No, you said that aloud."

"I did?"

"I heard that the disconsolateberry got its name because being so tasty that one cannot stop eating them when out picking them, one can never gather enough to make a whole pie, leaving the maiden who is trying to do so, disconsolate."

"I like my story better," said I. "Although your story does have the benefit of having a pie in it."

"I see you've finished your piece," said Myolaena. "Would you like more poison pie?"

"Yes please."

"I was being sarcastic."

"So I can't have any more?"

"Why would you keep eating the pie, once I told you it was poisoned?"

"For one thing, being evil, you are probably lying about the poison..."

"I'm not evil."

"Evil people never think they are."

"What about Shakespeare's Richard III? He is determined to play the villain."

"I've never heard of him."

"Who? Richard III or Shakespeare?"

"Neither one of them."

"One was a king in a faraway country. The other is the greatest writer of all time."

"Which is which?" I wondered. "Never mind. I don't care about a king in a faraway country, and clearly I am the greatest writer of all time."

"That is a matter for some debate," said she.

"Anyway, for another thing, once I've been poisoned and I'm going to die anyway, it seems a shame to deprive myself of one last piece of delicious pie."

"You really think it's delicious?"

"Yes. Did you use magic to create it or did you kill some poor cook and take her pie?"

"Neither. I made it myself."

"You did? Really? How about the crust?"

"Of course I made the crust. You can't have good pie without good crust. It's one of the simplest recipes and yet it is so important."

"That is so true," I agreed.

"The trick is that the butter must be chilled."

"Really?"

"Absolutely. And you must work it in enough to incorporate it, but not so much as to warm it up all the way."

"It is so nice that you took the time to make it right," said I. "So many people just go through the motions now-a-days."

"That is true."

"So tell me the truth. You didn't really go to all that trouble of making such a fine pie, just to poison it."

"No," she said. "I went to all that trouble of making such a fine pie to poison you."

Suddenly the room began to spin. I slid from my seat and flopped back, smacking my head on the dirt floor and stared up at the wooden ceiling. Myolaena moved around the table to peer down into my face.

“Goodbye moron,” she said.

Chapter 12

Chapter Twelve: Wherein, as you probably guessed, I don't die of poison.

"Wake up, Master Buxton, wake up." I felt a gentle slap upon my right cheek and then my left. "Here. Drink this."

The mouth of a small bottle was pressed between my lips and cool sweet liquid flowed over my tongue and down my throat.

"Is that an antidote?" I asked.

"Antidote to what?"

I looked into the face above me. It was one of the most beautiful faces that I had ever seen. Very large brown eyes, like cow eyes, but in a good way, which is to say large and brown, and with long lashes. A cute little nose. Perfect lips.

"I've been poisoned."

"How?"

"You are the most beautiful woman that I've ever seen. Kiss me quickly before I die."

"What poisoned you?"

"Quickly, the kiss."

"I don't think I had better kiss you if you've been poisoned. I might get some of the poison on my tongue."

"Don't use your tongue. Just use your lips."

"Well, that's not really much of a kiss, is it?" quoth she.

"I like the way you think," I said, sitting up. "If you didn't know I was poisoned, what was that liquid you just gave me?"

"That was water from the well outside. It's supposed to be naturally healthful."

"I feel much better, but 'naturally healthful, does not quite equal 'antidote to poison'."

"I ask again. With what were you poisoned?"

"That pie over there."

The young woman got up from my side and walked across the room to where the remainder of the pie still sat. From my vantage point, I could see that, as beautiful as her face was, it was nothing compared to her body, especially that part of her body which she presented as she walked away across the room. In a word she was fetching, which is to say very attractive.

“Is this a disconsolateberry pie?” she asked.

“Yes. It was one of the finest buttocks I’ve ever had.”

“What?”

“I said it was one of the finest pies I’ve ever had.”

“Well you can’t poison somebody with disconsolateberries,” she said, walking back over to me and kneeling down. “They are a natural counteragent.”

“That’s very breast for me,” I said, getting up.

“What?”

“I said that’s very lucky for me.”

“They are full of natural antioxidants too,” said she.

“Is that good?”

She nodded. “Would you like that kiss now?”

Then it was my turn to nod, as I was suddenly but momentarily mute. She put her hand on my cheek and gave me one of the best kisses that I have had in my entire life. The only better ones that I can think of off the top of my head, which is to say within easy reach of my memory, are the kiss that I received from the Queen of Aerithraine, in whose company I once had the pleasure of spending a fortnight, and my cousin Tuki, who was the first girl I ever kissed and was also a first-rate kickball player.

“What are you thinking about?” the beautiful young woman asked.

“Kickball.”

“Well, stop it. I want you to think about me.”

“I don’t even know your name, or how you found me, or how you know me, or what you want, or how you were able to squeeze into that dress, or how much pie is left.”

“My name is Megara Fennec, and I’ve been looking for you for more than a week. I want to be an actress in your play.”

Chapter 13

Chapter Thirteen: Wherein I hear the story of two star-crossed lovers.

I stood looking at the young woman, whom might well be the most beautiful creature that I had ever seen. She struck a pose and tossed her thick locks of dark brown hair back over her shoulder.

"You are so beautiful," I said. "Why would you want to go into such a disreputable business as acting? You could do anything you wanted."

"It's not what I want; It's all that I have left," she replied. "You see, my family the Capillaries..."

"I thought you said your name was Fennec."

"That's my stage name," she explained. "My real name is Megara Capillarie. And my family and other family, the Montenegroes, have been involved in a feud for dozens of generations."

"Is it the kind of feud in which you fight the other family, or the kind in which you challenge them to some type of word game?"

"It is the kind in which you fight and kill the other family."

"Hmm," said I. "Those types of feuds can be bad, especially if you are the one being fought and killed."

"But there's more. I met a lovely young man and fell in love with him, only to find out later that he was none other than Henri Montenegro, the son of my family's great enemy. We met and exchanged fair words and fair kisses. But then yesterday there was a fight in the street and Henri, beautiful, sweet Henri killed my cousin."

"So you don't love him anymore? You hate him now."

"Of course I don't hate him! I love him! But we can never be together. He has been banished to Oordport, and I shall never see him again."

"It so happens that I already have all the actresses that I need to portray the characters in my play," said I.

"You are one short," Megara said, tossing her hair back. "Two days ago, the Sorceress Myolaena Maetar arrived at the theater just after the

performance and turned your lead actress Angelletta Seedling into a tree."

"Oh bother," said I. "I suppose though, that with a name like Seedling you have to expect that sort of thing. I guess I will have to find someone who can change her back."

"I'm afraid that won't be possible. You see the locals are in constant need of firewood, and well..."

"They didn't."

"I'm afraid so," she said.

"I find myself in need of an actress then," said I. "But I could not claim the names of Buxton and of Eaglethorpe, which is to say Eaglethorpe Buxton if I were to take advantage of your unfortunate predicament, which is to say your situation, for my own gain. Before you settle for the life of the stage we must see if we cannot reunite you with your lost love."

"You would do that for me?"

"Of course," I replied. "I am Eaglethorpe Buxton, friend to the friendless, protector to the defenseless, finder of lost children and reuniter of lost lover. And I have a plan."

Chapter 14

Chapter Fourteen: Wherein I divulge my plan to reunite the lovers.

I led the beautiful Megara Fennec, which is to say Megara Capillarie from the home of some unknown person, who was no doubt a chubby little red-head with a checkered apron and a brown bonnet, and out into the town square of Potter Town, where the shadows were growing long, which is to say it was getting late. My valiant steed Hysteria still waited patiently at the well. As we walked, I explained my plan.

"The plan is thus," said I. "I will fetch from the apothecary a dram of a potion that is known as living death. You will go home and make peace with your parents and then take this potion. It will make you fall into a coma, a semblance of death itself. From you there will be no evidence that you still live: no breath, no heartbeat, and no body warmth. Your family will think that you are dead and place your body in the family crypt. In the meantime, I will send a message to your beloved in Oordport, telling him the entire plan and he will rush to your side, to reach you just as you return to life, having experienced nothing more than a pleasant sleep."

We reached Hysteria's side and I turned to smile at my lovely companion, but she was frowning.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Your plan seems fraught with unnecessary problems," she replied.

"How so?"

"If the apothecaries of the area are wont to sell drams of 'living death', won't someone suggest that perhaps I have been given 'living death' when I appear to die of unknown causes?"

"Living death is pretty secret," said I.

"How secret?"

"Really secret."

"But not so secret that just anyone can purchase it from an apothecary?"

"No, not so secret as that."

"What if, when I die, they decide to burn my body instead of placing it in the family crypt?"

"Why would they do that?"

"To save space."

"You are a member of the family, are you not?"

"Yes, but I'm just a girl, and I'm young. I haven't had a chance to do anything grand or impressive that would warrant entombing me in a place of honor. Our family has had that crypt for at least a dozen generations and there have been a lot of us. It's getting pretty full."

"But you are Lord Capillaries' only daughter."

"I am the only child of his current wife, true. But my mother is his fourth wife and I am his sixteenth daughter."

"I see."

"Now that I think about it," she continued. "I don't think that I would want to wake up in that crypt anyway. It's got to be pretty rank in there, and there is always the possibility of zombie attacks."

"Yes, I forgot about zombies."

"The only people who can afford to forget about zombies are those people with no brains."

"That is true," I agreed. "I suppose we could plan to have your body sequestered somewhere else."

"And here's another thing," she said. "What if your message doesn't get to my beloved in time? Suppose he hears about me dying before he finds out about your plan. He might do something rash—like hurt himself."

"He wouldn't do that would he?"

"He might. He's very passionate."

"He's passionate enough to kill himself?"

"Oh yes. He thinks about it all the time."

"So what do you propose?" I asked.

"Why don't we climb on your horse and you just give me a ride to Oordport, where I can meet beautiful, sweet Henri and live together with him there."

"Well, it is not nearly so poetical a plan as mine," said I. "But I will do it."

Chapter 15

Chapter Fifteen: Wherein we are accosted on the road to Oordport.

The three of us rode down the road to Oordport: myself, the lovely Megara Fennec, and my valiant steed Hysteria, which is to say my horse. Night had fallen, and while one could caution that it is a very good idea not to set out from one city to another in the dead of night, but to take a room at an inn and start instead the next day, I have seldom been one to follow a good idea. It was a day and a half ride from Antrador to Oordport and I wanted to make it there and back within three days. My play was no doubt in difficulty without a lead actress, though she did have an understudy, and I wanted to put things right, and maybe even settle with Myolaena Maetar before Ellwood Cyrene returned from Auksavl in five days.

"So what gave you the idea to act in my play?" I asked the lovely young woman who was pressed up against my back. "Other than hearing that my actress had been turned into a tree, I mean."

"I read a review of *The Ideal Magic* in the local broadsheet."

"Really? What did it say?"

"Well..."

"Come on girl, and tell me. We writers are a thick-skinned lot."

"It said that your play was made of big words on small matters."

"What a most excellent review," said I.

"It is a terrible review."

"No, it is a wonderful review. Big words on small matters. Why, that is exactly how I write."

We rode all through the night. Hysteria having been well fed and watered the previous day was more than happy to clop along at a leisurely pace. After a while our conversation lagged however and I dozed off in my saddle. You might wonder that this is possible—falling asleep and sleeping while riding. I do it all the time. In fact, it is probably my single best equestrian skill, which is to say thing I can do on a horse.

Unknown to me at the time was that Miss Fennec had dozed off as well. While no doubt far less skilled than me at horsemanship, she was pressed against me so tightly and had her arms wrapped around me so well, that she didn't fall off either. Neither of us even knew we were asleep until we were awakened by a shout.

“Stop knave, and prepare to meet your maker!”

Chapter 16

Chapter Sixteen: Wherein hot blood is spilled.

Now might be a good time to mention that while I purchased Hysteria, for thirteen crowns silver, as a warhorse, she has a number of deficiencies that make her inadequate to the task. Oh, don't misunderstand me, she is a very fine animal, in good health, and she has almost never failed to carry anything that I asked of her. Warhorses though need to be of quite stern stuff. Hysteria was never comfortable with the sound of sword on sword, or sword on shield, or sword on body, or shield on body, or shield on shield. In fact, she's not too fond of the shhtink sound that a sword makes as it comes out of a scabbard. It was just this sound which accompanied the shout of "stop knave, and prepare to meet your maker," and it was no doubt this sound that caused her to rear up and toss Megara and myself to the ground. I was not unduly bothered by this, not only because I had been thrown by Hysteria on a number of occasions, but also because I landed on Megara and she was quite nicely padded. She on the other hand had more than a lung-full of air knocked from her by my weight suddenly landing on her. I jumped to my feet and drew my own sword.

"Identify yourself or die," said I, striking an intimidating pose.

"I am Cleveland Normandy and I am here to put an end to your days of steeling young women."

"-'s hearts," said I.

"What?"

"-'s hearts. You are going to put an end to my days of steeling young women's hearts. That's what you meant to say."

"No it isn't," said he. "I am here to put an end to your days of steeling young women's bodies."

"I've never... almost never stolen a body in my entire life. Seven, eight times at the most. And why would you care anyway?"

"I care because I am Cleveland Normandy, and I am Megara Capillarie's true love."

"No you aren't," said Megara, having successfully refilled her lungs with air and climbed back to her feet. She tossed back her hair and struck a pose. "You are my father's one true love."

"What?" Cleveland and I both said at the same time.

"He is the one my father has betrothed me to, but I don't love him, don't want him, can't stand him, and don't want to look at him."

"She sounds pretty emphatic," said I.

"I don't know what that means," said he.

"It means that she has strongly expressed her desire with great emphasis or..."

"I don't care what it means." He jumped to within sword-reach of me. "You are standing in the way of true love."

"I don't think we have the same definition of 'love', or of 'true', and probably not of 'way'," said I. "I guess we're okay with 'standing'. I guess it all really hinges on what your definition of 'is' is."

My clever wordplay was apparently too much for Cleveland Normandy, for rather than replying with rhetoric, he replied with his sword, thrusting directly at me. Fortunately I am even quicker with my sword than I am with my tongue. Of course with a tongue, speed is not so important as wit. And now that I think about it, with a sword, speed is not so important as swordsmanship. So tongues and swords are quite a bit alike. I parried his blow and swung my sword up, intending to take of his head, but I was wide of the mark and took off only part of his right ear. He squealed like a little girl and turning, ran away.

Chapter 17

Chapter Seventeen: Wherein I deliver the young woman to her intended and hurry back to Antriador.

The bit with Cleveland Normandy and our swordfight was the only real adventure on the way to Oordport, with the exception that when we got there and found Miss Capillarie's true love, he was enjoying the company of a young woman named Roxanne. I personally didn't think this Roxanne was anything to write home about, but I suppose there is something to the old saying 'a decent looking girl in the hand is worth a beautiful one in a faraway city'. I didn't stick around to find out how things worked out with Megara and beautiful, sweet Henri, instead leaving just as she was beating him about the head and shoulders. I noted that Roxanne had wisely made a hasty retreat, no doubt unable to match Megara either in beauty or in fisticuffs.

I left Oordport, which is a lovely city only about a third the size of Antriador and is chiefly in the business of sheep, forthwith. That is, I left forthwith. Not that the sheep were forthwith, which doesn't even make any sense, now that I think about it, so never mind. I stopped just outside the city wall at a little meadow to let Hysteria, who was still a bit upset, eat some clover and take a drink of water. I intended to ride her much harder on the way back than I had on the way there. While she was thus engaged, I took a pleasant nap beneath a tree. When I was well rested, having dreamed only manly dreams, and so was my noble steed, which is to say Hysteria, I set off once again.

I made good time, especially considering that most of the trip was taken in darkness. Lyrria is one of the few lands where a trip in darkness is easily made. The roads are paved with nice smooth stones and the wild beasts and robbers have for the most part been chased away. I arrived at the gate of Antriador less than twenty four hours later, and reached the playhouse just as the audience was filing in to their seats.

Mr. Burbage, a fine gentleman despite having been in his youth an actor, stood outside the playhouse door watching as the crowd filed in. If

anything, there were more people here to see my work than there were on opening night and that gave me a warm feeling deep inside as I thought of my ten percent of gross ticket receipts.

"Mr. Burbage," I said, as I tossed a coin to a stable boy to have Hysteria taken care of. "I heard about what happened to our lead actress. Have you put the understudy on in her place?"

Burbage rolled his eyes. "You know she's not right for the part. She's too dark and too tall."

"What matters that?" I cried. "She knows the words! The words are the important part! The show must go on!"

"My dear Buxton," said he. "Fret not. The show will go on. The show has gone on for more than a week since I saw you last. Fear not. I have hired an actress for the lead role, and she is perfect if I do say so myself."

"I hope you are right," said I.

"I am right. I believe that I am right, and more importantly the audiences believe that I am right. Attendance has been up every day since the unfortunate tree incident. That didn't hurt either. You know there really is no such thing as bad publicity."

"You know better than me," said I. "And that is something I almost never say."

I took the side door entrance into the theater and found a comfortable seat in the upper gallery so that I could watch it along with the throngs of my many fans. I didn't have long to wait for the lights to dim and the curtain to rise revealing the stage decorated to resemble the streets of the great city of Illustria. The actors playing the parts of street vendors wandered around on stage, among the citizens, singing their lines. Then came the first bit of excitement: Penny the thief cuts the purse of the apple vendor and leaves the stage. Then the new actress playing the lead part stepped on stage. She was tall and striking and moved just as a sorceress should move. She sauntered across the stage and delivered her lines.

"It's a lovely day in Illustria, the jewel of Aerithtraine, nay the very jewel of all Celestria. The people are happy. The kingdom is prosperous. The king sits well upon his throne."

Next, the actress playing Luna came onto the stage to deliver her soliloquy, wherein she spills her heart so the audience can feel her loneliness. The sorceress then casts a spell of love upon her and she leaves, giving the sorceress a chance for to give her own speech, setting up the plot of the play.

“There you see magic. But it is a small thing for me. I am Myolaena Maetar, the court magician—sorceress, thaumatageur, prestidigitator, diviner, seer, mystic— I am spellcaster, mage, conjurer, and necromancer. I am all that.

“I am she who keeps the kingdom running well. I am she who keeps King Justin on his throne. I bring prosperity and fair weather. I am all that.

“I can read minds! I can shape creations of matter and energy. I can brew potions of love or hate or death. I can let you fly through the air, or stew in your own juices. I can summon up the wise men of all the ages, or the most horrifying monsters. I am all that... and a bag of chips.

“I should be openly acknowledged as the mighty ruler I am. I should be Queen. But though I am not, I have cast my spells and laid my plots. I am like the spider in the center of a vast web. And I will devour my prey, after my own fashion.”

It was only as she delivered the final line “And I will devour my prey, after my own fashion,” that I realized whom I was watching. The actress playing Myolaena Maetar was none other than Myolaena Maetar herself.

Chapter 18

Chapter Eighteen: Wherein I have my final confrontation with sorceress Myolaena Maetar.

“You can’t do anything to me. You need me. Who will protect you from the hordes of goblins and monsters? Who will enchant your armor, breed your winged horses, or transport your armies through the ether? You need me.”

The actress playing Myolaena, which is to say Myolaena herself, delivered her lines with feeling. It was as though she had lived through the situation before, which of course she had, and had spoken the lines before, which she hadn’t because I just made most of it up. It was poetic license. As she spoke her last line and exited stage left with the actor playing Priss the Dragon, there was a thunderous ovation. The actors were called out to make three bows. I waited patiently for someone to call “author, author” and when no one did, I began the call myself. Others nearby took up the call and soon, many around the theater were calling as well. I stood up and took my own bow from my seat.

Now I account myself brave, and I have faced many dangers that would have cowed another, weaker man. Still facing off with a sorceress, one who might well be the most powerful in the world, is akin to charging a dragon in his lair, and what man, even a brave man would not think twice before doing that? Myolaena Maetar had much to answer for though, so I headed to the stage and made my way back behind it.

Backstage the actors were milling around with a few dozen theater fanatics and other hangers-on, but I did not see hide nor hair of the woman for whom I was looking. I asked and was directed to a dressing room with a star and a moon on the door. I opened the door and quietly stepped inside. Myolaena Maetar was sitting in front of a great mirror removing her stage make-up. I was pleased to see that from the angle I entered I did not appear in the mirror. Slowly drawing my sword, I stealthily crept toward her. When I was only about four feet away, she

suddenly raised her wand and I found myself frozen in place. My sword grew suddenly white hot and I dropped it clattering to the floorboards.

"You!" said Myolaena, turning to look at me with astonishment. "I was sure that I had killed you."

"It was the disconsolateberries," said I. "They are a natural proof against poison."

"Huh. I just assumed that they would work like incarnadineberries, which enhance any poison in them."

"You know what they say about assuming."

"No, what?"

"Um, that it's not good."

"Well, my dear Buckethead. I am glad that you survived. I have decided that your play is not so bad after all."

"Of course it isn't," I agreed. "It's a fine play—a wonderful play. It is perhaps the greatest play ever written."

"Whatever," said she. "I have decided that playing a sorceress on stage is a far more enjoyable pastime than actually being a sorceress. I think acting really is in my blood. I'm going to take it up full time."

"You're going to give up being sorceress?"

"Sure, why not?"

"How could you... how could anyone give up all that power?"

"Oh, I admit that it frightens me a bit. Still, you know what they say—power corrupts. I've had so much power for such a long time. I used to be a nice person, you know. I don't know if I could be again, but at least if I become an actor, people won't expect me to be nice, at least not all at once and not all the time. I'm going to take my wand and bury it so deep in the ground that nobody will ever be able to find it, and I'm going to drop my spellbook into the deepest depths of the ocean."

"Even so, I can't let you go," said I. "I can forgive you for trying to poison me, but you turned an innocent young actress into a tree and then she was cut down for firewood."

"Angeletta Seedling is not so young or so innocent, and she is also not dead. She's right down the street starring in "A Mighty Heart."

"You didn't change her to a tree?"

"Yes, I did. But I changed her back long before anyone could cut her down. The worst thing that happened to her was that a bird built a nest on her."

"Oh. I guess all's well that ends well."

Chapter 19

Chapter Nineteen: Epilog.

The taproom of the Singing Siren, which is far nicer and has better ale by far than the taproom at the Reclining Dog, was filled with patrons and pipe smoke. I sat down after regaling the patrons with the first draft of my just completed adventures. There was more than a smattering of applause, but neither Myolaena Maetar nor Ellwood Cyrene who filled the other two chairs at my table, took part in the clapping. They both looked at me strangely.

"What?" I asked.

"I don't think this story is as good as your others," said Ellwood.

"And it's full of lies," said Myolaena.

"It doesn't have much cohesion," continued Ellwood. "It just kind of meanders around. It's as if you took a dozen stories from someone else and tried to weave them together with your own life to make a story."

"And it's full of lies," said Myolaena.

"I don't know how you can say that... either one of you," said I. "I think this might be my best tale ever, and note I did not say story, I said tale. The word story has an implication that it might not be truthful, whereas my story..."

"...is full of lies," said Myolaena.

"Did I not meet you right here, just as I said?" I asked the sorceress.

"As if I could mistake you for one moment for anyone but Ethelred Buckleberry. And what is this about a toad? How could you say I turned you into a toad?"

"And what was all that about our strange conversation in your room?" asked Ellwood. "Are you trying to imply that I'm in love with you? That's just crazy. If anything, you're in love with me."

"A frog is not a toad," said Myolaena.

"I mean look at you," said Ellwood. "You're much older than me, and you're getting a bit thick in the middle."

"Toads are altogether different."

"And your hair is going gray."

"And I didn't try to kill you," said Myolaena. "Do you know how you can tell I didn't try to kill you? You're not dead, that's how."

"And what about this Megara Capillarie," said Ellwood. "I've never heard of her."

"I didn't see her," said Myolaena. "And she would have passed me as I was leaving and she was entering the house. Besides, I have lived here in Antriador for years and I've never heard of any family called the Capillaries."

"Maybe you just missed her," said I. "And maybe I had to change her name for legal reasons."

"And maybe you kissed her," said Ellwood.

"I did kiss her."

"Did you? Or was it just part of the story?" He blinked as if fighting back tears. "Did you enjoy it?"

"Oh, enough of this." Myolaena stood up, and swirling her wand around her head three times, she disappeared.

"There. You have to admit that part was complete fiction," said Ellwood. "No one could give up the power of a sorceress, least of all that particular woman. She's still got the magic."

"Maybe," I said. "Or maybe you're not even here. Maybe I'm having this entire conversation in my head. In fact, next time I tell the story, it will be."

"Good night Eaglethorpe." And with that, Ellwood got up and left the taproom.

Chapter 20

Chapter Twenty: Second Epilog, or Post-Epilog, or maybe Epi-epilog.

I did not get up with Ellwood Cyrene. Nor did I leave the taproom at that time. There were too many people who wanted to buy me a drink in exchange for one of my stories. I told the story of how I fought an entire goblin army to rescue an elven princess. I told the story of how I saved a poor farm girl from a werewolf with only a fork. And I told the story of the Queen of Aerithraine, in whose company I once had the pleasure of spending a fortnight. I told that story four times.

When I got to my room on the third floor of the Singing Siren, I was tired. I was too tired to even light a lantern. Instead, I opened the shutters and let the moonlight stream into the room. I breathed in the night air as I sloughed off my jerkin and my breeches.

It was then that I noticed a light across the inn's courtyard. In the other wing of the building, also on the third floor, someone had their window open—someone with a well-lit room. This had barely come to my attention, when a figure in that room stepped into my line of sight. It was Ellwood Cyrene. As I stood there, he started to disrobe, removing his jerkin and breeches just as I had done. I was about to close the shutters when I noticed that beneath his shirt, his entire torso was wrapped in a massive bandage. Naturally concerned, I wondered just what kind of horrible wound he had sustained that would require such a dressing.

Then he began to unwind it. I watch as he carefully removed the wrapping, and when I saw what lay beneath, I sat back, entirely missing the bed and landing on the hard wood floor. Ellwood Cyrene, my friend and companion through countless adventures, was a woman!

Appendix I: Wherein I present the complete play “The Ideal Magic” for your appreciation and enjoyment.

The Ideal Magic
A Play in One Act
By Eaglethorpe Buxton
Presented here in its entirety:

Characters:

Myolaena Maetar, Court Magician of Aerithraine
King Justin, King of Aerithraine
Queen Beatrix, Queen of Aerithraine
Sir Thomas, Knight of Aerithraine
Sir David, Knight of Aerithraine
Sir Reginald, Knight of Aerithraine
Britomart, Lady Knight
Prissus Draco Noventus, Possibly a dragon
Phoebe, Queen's Lady in Waiting
Krabbi, Apple Seller
Luna, Serving Wench
Bud, Flower Seller
Mack, Fishmonger
Penny, Cutpurse
Waiting Women, Chorus
Knights' Girls, Chorus
Citizens

(In front of Aerithraine Castle. Present are Krabbi, Luna, Bud, Mack, and citizens.)

Krabbi:
Apples! Apples! Get your apples here!

Mack:
Fish! Fish for Sale! Fresh Fish!

Bud:
Petunias! Carnations! Red, red roses!

Krabbi:

We are the vendors who sell in the marketplace,

Mack:

Here in the city, the jewel of the world,

Bud:

We do our best to put on the best place,

Krabbi:

Here in the city known as Illustria,

Mack:

Where fortunes are made and banners unfurled.

Bud:

I peddle my flowers to all with a spare coin,

Krabbi:

I sell my apples to young and to old,

Mack:

I sell my fish for a silver or gold coin,

Bud:

He'll gladly take a brass penny,

Krabbi:

His fish are a week old.

Mack:

We're growing rich in the market, rich and quite fat,

Bud:

The people are thronging along the city streets,

Krabbi:

No one goes hungry, can you imagine that?

Mack:

I love Illustria, the capital of Aerithraine,

Bud:

It's a marvelous city where everyone eats.

(Enter Penny)

Penny:

(Aside) Not everyone eats, Merchant. For every fat street vender there are four hungry brats with no silver or gold, or no brass penny neither. There are those of us who beg in the streets and there are those of us who skim the sewers. Then there are those of us who take what we can.... (picks pocket) Pardon me. I am off to reap what the merchants have sown. (Exit)

Krabbi:

Apples for Sale! Nice Apples! Not a worm in sight!

Mack:

I could use some worms. Fish are gettin' so they don't bite on corncocks no more.

Krabbi:

Here, help yourself. I've worms a plenty. The whole crop this year is wormy.

Mack.

That's a good lad. Are you ready to sup, Krabbi. They've a mutton stew at the Angry Rooster for three pence.

Krabbi:

I'm for it, Mack. (Exit Krabbi and Mack. Enter Myolaena.)

Enter Myolaena.

Myolaena:

(Aside) It's a lovely day in Illustria, the jewel of Aerithraine, nay the very jewel of all Celestria. The people are happy. The kingdom is prosperous. The king sits well upon his throne...

Luna:

I'm just a serving wench out for some fresh air,
I've spent all the night in the tavern down yon',
It's such a delight to sit here in the fresh air,
No fighting with pipe fumes from dusk until dawn,

I'm just a serving wench out in the morning air,
My world is the tavern, the rogues, and the ale,
I somehow can't see why the world is so bright,
It makes my life seem somehow oh so pale,

I'm just a serving wench, but I am so much more,
I sing and I dance and I play a mean lyre,
If a kind man could find my heart's door,
I would gather his hearthstones and light his fire.

Myolaena:

(Aside) They young maid is lonely. She needs someone. (Wiggles her finger at Bud).

Bud:

(To Luna) A flour for you, Luna. No charge.

Luna:

Thank you. It is a pretty thing, isn't it?

Myolaena:

Ah, yes. Love is the ideal magic. But the lass isn't saying what she truly feels. (Wiggles her finger at Luna)

Luna:

Oh you sweet thing! (Jumps on Bud and kisses him) I love you Bud!
Take me away and let's be wed.

Myolaena:

There you see magic. But it is a small thing for me. I am Myolaena Maetar, the court magician— sorceress thaumatageur, prestidigitator, diviner, seer, mystic— I am spellcaster, mage, conjurer, and necromancer. I am all that.

I am she who keeps the kingdom running well. I am she who keeps King Justin on his throne. I bring prosperity and fair weather. I am all that.

I can read minds! I can shape creations of matter and energy. I can brew potions of love or hate or death. I can let you fly through the air, or stew in your own juices. I can summon up the wise men of all the ages, or the most horrifying monsters. I am all that... and a bag of chips.

I should be openly acknowledged as the mighty ruler I am. I should be Queen. But though I am not, I have cast my spells and laid my plots. I am like the spider in the center of a vast web. And I will devour my prey, after my own fashion.

(Exit Luna and Bud. Enter the Waiting Women. They step forward to deliver their lines as a chorus)

Wait' Women:

We are three maids who wait on the Queen,
She's the sweetest sovereign the world has yet seen,
Though she has one pain that many speak of,
The King and the Queen have never known love.

We wait and we pray for we know our duty,
We must take care of our majestic beauty,
This duty is clear and our faith is too true,
But until true love comes there is nothing to do.

The Queen hails from Goth, a land far away,
But we lover her so, and wish her to stay,
The people adore her, as do her sons,
Of riches and wealth, you know she has tons,

If only the king would wake up and take notice,
He'd see that beside him sits a true Venus,
Though none can say where angels have been,
Angels are nothing when they're next to our Queen.

(Exit Waiting Women. Enter Phoebe)

Phoebe:
Queen Beatrix calls for you, Sorceress.

Myolaena:
Am I the Queen's serving woman, that she calls for me thus? Am I the Queen's lacky?

Phoebe:
You are the Queen's subject and are at her command.

Myolaena:
I am the Sorceress Supreme! I could change that woman into a newt.

Phoebe:
The Queen is protected by powerful magics and cannot be so affected.

Myolaena:
True. But you are not. (Phoebe looks scared and exits quickly.)

The wench is correct. I cannot simply eliminate the Queen. But what if the King's eye should wander in my direction? Can one refuse a King? Nay! I have laid plots and spells. Now I go to answer the wretched Queen. (Exits)

(Enter Knights' Girls)

Knights' Girl 1:
(Dreamily) Did you see Sir Reginald? He is to die for!

Knights' Girl 2:
(Dreamily) He touched my arm when he shoved me out of the way.

Knights' Girl 3:
How about Sir David?

Knights' Girl 1:
Just leave me alone with him and a can opener!

Knights' Girl 2:
Keep dreaming girl. He likes me better.

Knights' Girl 1:
He likes me more!

Knights' Girl 3:
Well, he likes me almost as much as he likes himself.

Girls 1&2:
Really?

(Knights' Girls step forward to deliver their lines as a chorus.)

Knights' Girls:
We are the girls who follow the knights,
We hear all their adventures and watch all their fights,
They are dreamy, all dressed in their shiny steel armor,
Just watching them makes our hearts feel much warmer.

Sir Thomas is sweet, but stupid it's true,
Sir David is boring, but he's handsome too,
Sir Reginald touches every girl's heart,
The one we can't stand is that Britomart.

Where does she get off being a knight,
For a girl to wear armor, it just isn't right.

(Exit Knights' Girls)
(Enter Sir Thomas and Sir David)

David:
Protecting the King is our primary duty. Protecting the King is what
we became knights for.

Thomas:
Yup.

David:
Why, even if we were five minutes near death ourselves, we should
Rise Up and protect the King.

Thomas:

Yup.

David:

Still, if a dragon were in the area, it would be duty as well to slay it.

Thomas:

Yup.

David:

Dragons are nasty fiends, you know. Have you studied them?

Thomas:

Nope.

David: I made a comprehensive study of them with Sir Drake and the Weapons Academy. They are wily creatures—more frightening than the most horrible ogre—stronger than the greatest giant—smarter than most sages. They are the ultimate foe. And if I am ever so fortunate to see a dragon, I will quickly eliminate the wyrm.

Thomas:

Worm?

David:

Yes, all the great authorities refer to the beasts as wyrms. It is from the root word wyrd, in the ancient tongue of scholars.

Thomas:

Okay.

(Enter Myolaena)

Myolaena

(Aside) Here you see two foolish knights who think their swords keep this nation state strong. If they were to meet a real dragon, they would find themselves petrified. He wouldn't need to lift a claw or a wing. He wouldn't need to breath fire. His very aura could drive them away crying like babies, or compel them to do anything at all.

The first is a great braggart and thinks he knows far more than he does. If I had a gold crown for each time he made a fool of himself, I should buy the kingdom. The other is such a dullard. He once locked himself in his own suit of armor.

(Enter Sir Reginald)

Reginald:
Sir David!

David:
Hail Sir Reginald, knight of the Black Shield.

Reginald:
Don't hail me! I come to challenge you! You accused me of having uncertain ancestry.

David:
Tut, tut, fellow. I merely said that you were not as noble in blood as I.

Reginald:
I can trace my ancestry back fourteen generations, to Tiberian the Black King!
(Reginald attacks. They fight back and forth across the stage.)

David: Still, I can trace my ancestry back to the grandparents of Adam and Eve.
(They fight more.)

Reginald:
Your mother was an orphan scullery maid, and your father was my father's squire.

David:
Tut, tut, fellow. You mistake me for someone else.
(They continue to fight. Reginald strikes a glancing blow. David falls.)

Myolaena:

(Aside) Oh, no. I cannot let this bragging oaf be killed. The king might find a captain of the guards who actually knows what is going on.
(To Reginald) Pain.

Reginald:
Oh! I am slain! I go for a leach!
(Exits)

David:
(Standing up) I am the victor!

Myolaena:
(Aside) He is a pin-head.

David:
My honor is vindicated!

Myolaena:
(Aside) His idiocy is proved. That other Spam in a can will be fine, but it will be some time before he decides to challenge Sir Full-of-himself to a duel again.

(Exit Thomas and David. Enter Krabbi, Mack, and Bud. Myolaena steps to the side of the stage.)

Mack:
Fish for Sale. Fresh fish!

Krabbi:
Apples! Bushel a pence!

(Enter Penny. She walks up to Mack and slaps him on the shoulder in a friendly way.)

Penny:
Hello, good fishmonger! (Steals Mack's purse) It is a lovely day today.

Mack:
Hello friend. (Exits, unknowing.)

Penny:
(Opens up purse and takes out a coin) I'll have one of your fine apples, vendor. Keep the change. (Steals Krabbi's purse.)

Krabbi:
Thank you citizen. (Exits)

(Enter David and Thomas)

Penny:
I do think I shall have a carnation for my lapel. Here you go good fellow. (Hands Bud a coin and steals his purse.)

Thomas:
What? Here! (Grabs Penny)

David:
What a piece of knavery we have here!

Thomas:
A thief.

Bud:
Why, she's stolen my purse!

David:
(Searching Penny) Looks as though the thief has more than one.

Bud:
Why she's stolen my two purses!

David:
Here you go, vendor. One. Two. It is lucky for you that we came along when we did.

Bud:
It certainly is. Very lucky indeed. (Exits, pleased)

David:

And one purse for His Majesty's soldiers. (Pockets the other purse.)

(Enter Justin and Beatrix)

King:

Sir David? Sir Thomas? What have we here?

David:

My partner and I have uncovered an errant piece of knavery. Her we have a little thief.

Thomas:

Yup.

King:

Sorceress! Can we allow such crime to run rampant in our streets?

Myolaena:

(Shrugs)

King:

You must weave some magics to protect the honest folk.

Myolaena:

(Sighs) I do what I can, Majesty.

(Aside) If I got rid of all the dishonest people, he'd have no guardsmen at all.

King:

Well, Sir David. You must carry out my orders and execute the sentence. For thievery in Illustria, we... What is it we do again?

Queen:

You must cut something off, Dear.

King:

Yes, I know that. But what? Is it the right hand or the left hand?

Queen:

Perhaps a foot, Dear.

Penny:
(Aside) I like this not!

King:
Foot! Foot! Perhaps in your father's backward kingdom! Not here!
Foot! Why ever did I wed such a dullard?

David:
To prevent recurrence of the crime, it should be the head, Majesty.

King:
Take her hence, and cut off... oh, cut off whatever you please. (Exits)

Penny:
(To the Queen) Majesty! Mercy, please!

Queen:
Of course, Dear. (To David) Make it a nice clean cut. And don't leave
a mess. (Exits)

David:
We hear our charge and will obey.

Thomas:
Yup.

David:
What shall we cut off?

Penny:
Please Sir Knight! Can't we come to an understanding?

David:
Save your breath girl, for we are the King's men.

Myo:
(Aside) They are the King's fools, the King's lapdogs, the King's drips.

Thomas:

Yup.

David:
What shall we cut off? Her right hand?

Thomas:
Hair!

David:
Perhaps both legs?

Thomas:
Hair!

David:
I have always been partial to cutting off the nose. It spites the face, you know.

Thomas:
Hair!

Myolaena:
(Aside) He's not the sharpest sword in the armory, is he?

David:
We shall split the difference, partner. Off with her head.

Thomas:
Okay.

Myolaena:
(Waving hands) Time stop. (David, Thomas, and Penny freeze.) Perhaps here we have a tool for my design, a cog for my wheel, a fly for my web. Thank heavens for metaphor!

(Myolaena snaps her fingers and Penny unfreezes.)

Penny:
Who are you?

Myolaena:

I am your savior. I am your friend. I will deliver you from certain death.

Penny:

Thank you, Mistress.

Myolaena:

In exchange, you will do a thing for me.

Penny:

What can I do? Steal something?

Myolaena:

Perhaps you can do just that. I have brewed this potion. One drop will bring forth the greatest amore— love, devotion, and kind affection. With it, you will steal the King's heart for me. You will sneak into the castle and pour this dram upon the King's head as he sleeps. He will fall horribly in love with the first woman he sees wearing a golden locket, as indeed I will be wearing.

Penny:

I know not what I should do,
But one thing's sure, I am through,
No matter which way that I turn,
My lot's beheading or a slow burn.

To turn on the King is treason, true,
But you don't know HER, like I do,
There's nothing worse than magic ladies,
Not scary giants, not burning Hades.

What a fix my deeds have wrought,
Oh what a prize my sins have bought,
I sought with guile to fetch my bread,
So they want to part me from my head.

Oh wretched me, a pretty child,
Whose way went out a little wild,
I can't escape to foreign lands,

So I do as she commands.

I will do as you instruct. (Exits)

Myolaena:

And when you pour this liquid on the King, he will have you killed. And I will have no witnesses to my designs, and nothing these buffoons could ever uncover.

(Myolaena exits. David and Thomas unfreeze.)

Thomas:

What?

David:

I was just saying that I have a mind to go find a dragon and kill it.

(Enter Priss)

Priss:

Did I hear someone mention dragonslaying?

David:

Yes, citizen.

Priss:

Aren't you afraid? Dragons are over two hundred feet long. They can fly. They can breath fire and cast magic spells. They can shoot beams of energy from their eyes.

David:

I can see that you know much of dragons, friend. What is your name?

Priss:

Prissus Draco Noventus Augustus, but my friends all call me Priss.

David:

Well, Priss. Did you know dragons can use magic to take on human form?

Priss:

(Incredulous) Really? Then how can you tell they are dragons?

David:

It's not easy. They have coppery complexions, not unlike yourself. But unlike you Priss, they have very long names.

Priss:

I see. Are they dangerous in human form?

David:

Quite. And they walk among the cities to study men so that they may trick them. But we are way too smart to be fooled by a dragon.

Thomas:

Yup.

Priss:

Oh, I can see that. Would you mind if I tagged along to see the dragon?

David:

Sure! Come along! (Exit David and Priss)

(Enter Knights' Girls who step forward and deliver their lines as a chorus.)

Knights' Girls:

They hunt for a dragon, and we say OH MY!
Some fellow among them might possibly die,
Dragons are scary and can make one dead,
Then there'd be one less bachelor to wed.
Nothing good comes from hunting dragons,
These boys should stick to baseball and red wagons.

(Exit Knights' Girls. Enter Britomart, who confronts Sir Thomas.)

Britomart:

Halt Knight!

Thomas:

Okay.

Britomart:

I am Britomart, Lady Knight. I am cursed to challenge all the knights in Celestria until I am defeated.

Thomas:

Okay. (They fight)

Britomart:

Alas, you are doomed, Knight. You see I am destined to slay every foe I face until I meet the simplest man in the realm. (They continue to fight.)

Thomas:

Okay. (He strikes and she falls.) Goodbye. (Thomas exits.)

Britomart:

But Wait!

(Steps forward and speaks to the sky.)

Oh, great guardians above,
Can this thing I feel be love,
I've been defeated by his sword,
But his face has struck a chord,
Of love within this sad, sad breast,
I now of men have found the best!

(Exit Britomart)

(Enter the Queen)

Queen:

Alas! Why is it that I was not married to a man who could love me? I have been a dutiful daughter and a dutiful wife. I have born two strong young Princes to be heirs to my husband. All I desire in life is love, and love is the one thing I do not have.

(Folds her hands in prayer)

I ask the sky and stars above,
Why is it I cannot have love,
Though many years we two are wed,
He does not care if I am dead,
A cold and wintry life is this,
If never falls a wedded bliss,
If he shall never know love true,
Then I forever shall be blue.

(Enter Phoebe)

Phoebe:
Your Majesty. Your royal father has sent you a gift.

Queen:
What is it?

Phoebe:
This royal locket. It was forged high in the mountains by the cloud giants for Queen Nepsis of the Antediluvians. Now it is yours.

Queen:
It is very beautiful. Pity it cannot bring me love.

Phoebe:
Take heart, Majesty. Love will come for you someday. You will get what you deserve. Everyone does.

Queen:
You always know what to say, Phoebe. (Exit Queen)

Phoebe:
It is my duty and my charge, Your Majesty, to always say the right thing. Even when there is no right thing to say, I still say it. And who appreciates it? Only the Queen. No one else. (Exit Phoebe)

(Enter the King)

King:

I am tired of ruling. Perhaps I should give the city over to a regent and go upon a crusade against the goblins or the Eskimos.

(More Poetry)

The crown lies heavy on the head,
And chases sleep from out my bed,
The people, nobles— beggars too,
All count on me. You know it's true,
And who have I to count upon?
None but those who grovel and faun,
On Myo's arm I sometimes lean,
Though she has prove she's quite mean,
For the Prince's help I would be pleased,
But his tutors say he's RPCed,
So I'm alone and feeling weary,
I order all eyes to be teary!

(The king lies down to sleep. Enter Penny, sneaking. She pours a potion on the king's head.)

King:
(Waking) What is this? An assassin! (Grabs Penny) Guards!

Penny:
Alas, I am always being grabbed.

King:
You shall squeal.

Penny:
Like a stuck pig, Your Majesty.

King:
You will spill the beans.

Penny:
Like a rotten gunny-sack, Your Majesty.

King:

You will tell me your master's name.

Penny:

Like a scared school girl!

(Enter the Queen, wearing the locket and Phoebe)

King:

(Seeing the Queen) Oh sweet angel. Oh blessed thing! Oh object of my desires! Where did you come from?

Queen:

Well, I've been here all the time.

King:

Was I so blind that I could not see such a goddess, such a creation, such a vision?

Queen:

Yes. Yes you were.

King:

Come with me. We will never be apart again.

(Exit King and Queen)

Phoebe: I must confess that I know not what to say. (To Penny) You had best come with me.

Penny:

Yes.

(Exit Phoebe and Penny. Enter Myolaena.)

Myolaena:

Here's one of my pretty plots brought to ruin by wretched chance. Fear not. I have others. (Exits)

(Enter Waiting Women, who step forward and deliver their lines as a chorus.)

Waiting Women:

Our dreams have been answered: Hooray for the Queen,
We're happier now than we've ever been,
No more will we have to mop up her tears,
We shall sit and enjoy her laughter for years.

The timing is perfect for this to come 'bout,
The Prince is grown up and about to move out,
We are so happy for the Queen we do love,
And wish that all the world might find love.

Unfortunately we're all mired in such bogs,
Life would be better if men weren't such dogs.

(Enter David, Thomas, and Priss)

Priss:

Well, we've searched every cave and cavern in the countryside.

David:

I don't understand why the dragon wasn't there.

Priss:

Perhaps he flew south for the winter.

David:

Sir Drake never mentioned anything about that at the academy.

Priss:

Perhaps the dragon heard you were coming and was frightened away.

David:

That's probably it! And what dragon wouldn't be frightened to see us coming?

Priss:

(Steps forward to address the audience with his poem.)

Oh what fools these humans be,
And they have yet to watch TV,

I'll be you gold coins to tomatoes,
They turn into old couch potatoes,
They dance like puppets on little strings,
When I feel the need to stretch my wings,
And when I feel the need to play,
Like tennis balls they mark the day,
There is one fair human maid,
In quest of whom some plans I've laid,
And she may soon be quite dismayed,
And that...

David:

(Steps forward and interrupts Priss with his own poem.)

The gods above have shined on me,
And shed their tears for they can see,
That among them, none's my match,
And for women, I'm a catch.
I have the sharpest rapier wit,
Of knowledge, I have every bit,
Of beauty, there can be none better,
All women love but none can fetter,
I must be free to roam and venture,
Till I am old, and... um... and need a denture.

(Enter Myolaena)

Myolaena:

I would be happy. I would be merry. If they'd burn the rhyming dictionary!

Thomas:

What? Ho!

David:

Stop Sorceress! The king has ordered your arrest.

Myolaena:

Arrest me? How can a fuzzy kitten arrest me? You are a fuzzy kitten!
(Waves her hands to cast a spell, but nothing happens.) What's wrong?
You are a fuzzy kitten!

David:

It's no use Sorceress. My friend Priss has given me a charm to protect me from your spells.

(Enter the King)

King:

You have conspired against me, Myolaena. You must be punished.

Myolaena:

You can't do anything to me. You need me. Who will protect you from the hordes of goblins and monsters? Who will enchant your armor, breed your winged horses, or transport your armies through the ether? You need me.

King:

Quite right, and besides the results of your plots have rendered me a certain service, in providing me with the most delightful creation of womanhood.

(Enter the Queen. She takes the King's hand.)

King:

But you must be kept in check. I have decided you must be married. Your husband will become the object of your plots, and save the rest of us much trouble. You shall marry Sir David!

David:

Sire! I like this not!

Myolaena:

No! I'll not be given over to that braggart. I'd turn myself into a toad first. I would rather marry that great fool, Sir Frontal Lobotomy (gestures at Thomas).

King:

Very well. Marry Sir Thomas.

Thomas:

Okay.

(Enter Britomart)

Britomart:

Hold! I claim this man by right of his conquest. No man has ever made me feel the way that he has.

Myolaena:

Supreme. Another melon-head heard from.

Britomart:

Can you imagine going through life with the thought that there may be no one for you to love? Can you imagine living such a terrible life?

Queen:

I understand your pain, Lady Knight.

Myolaena:

Oh, can we just get on with this?

King:

Very well. Sir Thomas will marry the lady warrior.

Thomas:

Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
I have a wife now,
Yup.

King:

We will have to find another husband for you, Sorceress.

Priss:

If it please your Majesty, I will have the wench.

King:

Fine. The wedding will be on the morrow. (Exit King, Queen, Knights)

Priss:

Come now my wife to be. I will show you whom your husband really is.

Myolaena:

I cannot marry just anyone. My husband must be of noble ancestry.

Priss:

My dear. I can trace my family back to the dinosaurs.

Myolaena:

What is it about you that I find strangely compelling? It's as if I can refuse you nothing.

Priss:

Oh, how I have wanted you. I've laid plots and cast spells to bring all this about. I will show you arcane mysteries that you can only imagine.

Myolaena:

Oooh, keep talking that way.

The End.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wesley Allison lives in Henderson, Nevada with his wife Victoria, daughter Rebecca, his son John, and their iguana Cissy. He has taught English and History at B. Mahlon Brown Junior High School for sixteen years.

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Mysteriously transported to the artificial hollow world of Ecos, Earth man Alexander Ashton finds himself in the middle of a millennium-long war between the reptilian Zoasians and the humanoid Amatharians. Adopted by the Amatharians, Ashton must conform to a society based on honor and altruism, ruled by Knights whose power comes from the curious energy forms known as "souls" which inhabit their supernaturally powerful swords, and rife with its own peculiarities and prejudices. When the Princess of Amathar, whom Ashton has longed for since first seeing her, is captured by the Zoasians, he must cross an alien world, battle monstrous creatures, and face unknown dangers to save her. Princess of Amathar is a sword-swinging novel of high adventure in the tradition of Edgar Rice Burroughs. It is the story a strange world filled with alien races, aerial battleships, swords and energy weapons, amazing adventures and horrible dangers, and the man who must face them all for the love of a woman he has never met.

His Robot Girlfriend (2009)

Mike Smith's life was crap, living all alone, years after his wife had died and his children had grown up and moved away. Then he saw the commercial for the Daffodil. Far more than other robots, the Daffodil could become anything and everything he wanted it to be. Mike's life is about to change.

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All American Girl fights gun-runners and supervillains in downtown Chicago, as she hopes for a magazine deal of her very own.

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Super-villains bring the fight to All American Girl's front door, and she has to deal with a new rival in town.

Eaglethorpe Buxton and the Elven Princess (2009)

Eaglethorpe Buxton, famed adventurer and story-teller, friend to those in need of a friend and guardian to those in need of a guardian. He is a liar and braggart, not to be trusted, especially around pies. Who are we to believe? Buxton himself leads us through his world as he comes to the aid of... a poor orphan? An elven princess? Who can guess with Eaglethorpe himself telling the tale?

Tesla's Stepdaughters (Preview) (2010)

In an alternate 1975, where men are almost extinct due to germ warfare, someone is trying to kill history's greatest rock & roll band. It falls to Science Police Agent John Andrews, only recently arrived from the distant male enclaves, to protect them. As the band continues their come-back tour across North America, Andrews must negotiate a complicated relationship with Ep!phanee, the band's lead singer; drummer Ruth De Molay, bassist Steffie Sin, and the redheaded clone lead guitarist Penny Dreadful, as he protects them and tries to discover who wants to kill the Ladybugs.



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