

Tales from The Cotting House: Stories from the Patrons

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Bailey's Tale

Cupid

Bailey Cotting grew up in the middle of the fairy enchanted Cottington Wood, in the town of Cottington in a time before, when there was a town of Cottington surrounding the Cotting House. There was a library here then, though it has long since been lost, the books there sent to various churches around the land. It was after the time of the Robber barons, when the houselands were still young, when life was sold for less than today, and violence was more common. In Bailey Cotting's time, emotions were strong, because a safe life was still not guaranteed. Just as common as hatred, and war, was love.

The Cotting House was a place where people met, from north and south, from east and west, from far and wide. Bailey was not a Cotting who was destined to host the masses. Her father was not master of the house, but brother to master of the house. Instead, with a voice like honey, Bailey sang. She sang, and when she did she fanned the hearts of those with ears to hear.

It was Bailey's undoing that where she sang most often was in the Cotting House, in the middle of the woods, in a time when travel was not so safe. Her audience, though inspired, was not Olarge.

Here was another thing. Though beautiful, and talented, and charming, Bailey was unlucky when it came to matters of the heart. It would not be true to say that her heart had been broken. It had never had the chance to break. Each and every time she found herself attracted to another, it would be the case that the other was out of reach. One man would have a wife. One woman was married to her work. The next was faithful only to the Word. Each time there was a reason why it could not begin, let alone end poorly.

And there was Violet. Violet and Bailey had been best friends since childhood. While Bailey sang, Violet was a poet. To Violet, love was everything, and True Love was the greatest thing of all. And in an uncertain way, the only way Bailey, innocent in the matters of the heart, could, Bailey believed her. So to Bailey, it was no surprise when Violet met Eustace. They loved, they fell in love, and they were wed. Their pairing was a poem to be read, a story to be told, a song to be sung.

Bailey wanted to write them a song of love, but she did not know the words.

Two years after Violet met Eustace, two weeks after they wed, Eustace left, disappearing south on the road to Faraway with his hand clasped tightly by another. In addition to the expensive dowry given to him by Violet's wealthy father so that they might start their life together, Eustace stole Violet's heart, and he crushed it.

Seeing the pain suffered by her lifelong friend, Bailey swore off love. Nothing could be worth such agony.

Violet did not recover, after years had passed. Bailey grew bitter beside her friend. The love she never found she no longer sought. She continued to sing, though, and her voice was still like honey.

Things being what they are in Cottington Woods, what came next was inevitable.

A lady of Fairy heard her song, and was spellbound. Symphony came to Cottington and listened to the woman sing, staying first outside and staying in the shadows of the trees, then growing bold and entering the house. Bailey's voice did not falter when the lady entered, though she saw the crowd parted as the wise woodlanders gave the fairy her space. When Bailey finished her song, without a word the fairy turned and left.

For a week of days it was so. Bailey learned songs to sing to keep the fairy from leaving. She was moved by the fairy's attention, and she did not want it to end. Symphony was the first person outside of Bailey's small life who showed her attention. And Bailey liked it.

On the eighth day, Symphony did not come. Bailey was sad, but also afraid. For these days she had been a star, if only for an audience of one. If the fairy ceased her visits, would that be the last of such success that Bailey would ever have?

But the next day Symphony returned. Bailey was relieved, although when she had sung all the songs that she knew the fairy turned away, and Bailey almost cried with doubt. What if the next day the fairy stayed away again? She belted out the words to another song. It was one she had already sung that night, but it caused the fairy to turn back, and by that time Bailey was rushing through the crowd to her side.

"Will you come back tomorrow?" she begged.

If Symphony was surprised by the sudden approach of the mortal woman she did not show it. As if she expected the question she said, honestly, "I don't know."

Bailey asked, "Do you tire of my songs?"

"Not at all," the fairy said.

"Then why would you stay away?"

Symphony gave the woman a sad smile. "Because, mortal child, I know that I will miss them when you are gone."

When Bailey did not understand she said so, and the fairy told her, "Your song enchants me, mortal, but it will fade. Like all your kind you will wither and die, and I will only have my memories. Too many have I met like you, and it always wounds me so. And so I deny myself, so that I will not feel that loss so strongly."

Bailey nearly cried, "I need you."

The fairy tilted her head. She was confused. "Whatever for?"

Bailey told her, "You make me feel important, like my songs have meaning. You make me feel great."

The fairy considered this. Finally she said, "You have made me feel, as only mortals can my kind. I will offer you a boon, though I warn you that I must ask for a price in return."

Now Bailey looked confused.

Symphony said, "Goodness knows you do not need me to improve your skill. Your voice is lovely. But I can make you heard. And if heard, you song will be known forever."

Bailey's mouth hung open. This could only be a dream. "What would be your price?"

Symphony said, "Sing me a song of love."

Bailey frowned. "Anything else, for that I cannot do."

"No?" Symphony asked.

"I do not know the words."

Symphony turned to go.

"Anything," Bailey cried. "Anything else. Please."

The fairy turned back, her expression one of sadness. "I would take your love."

Bailey almost laughed. She had given up hope of love. Who would want it? She almost laughed, but she was no fool. With absolute certainty she said, "Yes."

With that, the fairy was gone.

Bailey awoke early the next morning, refreshed and near certain that the encounter of the night before had been a dream. Refreshed, she was also distracted, and almost she did not notice that outside there was danger. Brigands, those who did not honor the safety the fledgling Households represented, had taken advantage of the predawn hours to sneak into the town and take what they could find. Bailey was not the only one awake, but she was hidden in the shadow of the door. She slipped quietly back within.

May had traveled late into the night to reach Cottington. She had camped, but had awakened early - she was accustomed to sleeping on the road, but she did not find it comfortable. She reached the town as the sun first touched it. When she saw the men she thought they were simply early risers like herself. She cried a greeting to one, and was rewarded when the man turned sharply toward her. Then with an alarmed snarl, he charged. May realized she had misread the situation, and immediately fled. She did not cry for help - in her fear she had not considered that option. She fled to the closest door and found it locked. The man bore down on her, and was almost upon her. May spun and faced him, facing her death bravely. She was very surprised when the door behind her opened, she was dragged within, and the lock was again engaged.

The lock was strong, the door solid, and the man outside hammered on the door. May found herself staring into Bailey's eyes. The beating of her heart skipped, which had nothing to do with fear. Bailey swallowed, entranced, her mouth gone suddenly dry.

From that moment on, for Bailey and May, nothing mattered but each other.

Time passed too quickly for them, and almost one year passed since that early morning. At first Bailey did not question what she felt. Then, when she did, she did not understand.

It was Violet, poor Violet of the broken and un-mended heart, who told her the truth. "You love her."

"I can't." Bailey said.

Violet said, "And yet you do."

Bailey met with May for a picnic lunch later that same day. May knew that Bailey was excited - she frequently was when they were together, but today was something more. "Stop," May said, laughing, when Bailey could not stand still.

Bailey did, but she did not stop while standing. Instead she knelt and looked up at the woman she loved. May wore a confused smile of her own, and Bailey hesitated. "I..."

But the world drew back, all things becoming small compared to the figure that appeared suddenly behind May. Symphony looked sad when she looked past May to Bailey. She said, "I would rather have the song." Then, before the next moment, both May and the fairy were gone.

This is not a tale with a happy ending. Bailey was devastated. She had not found love in her life, not up until she had, and then it was whisked away. She had thought that Symphony had taken her ability to love from her, and when she realized that such was NOT the case she was overjoyed. She never once wondered, then, what the fairy would take.

Bailey lingered in Cottington for a time, but eventually she left, and was not seen again. Some folks believe she found a way to Fairy, where she searches for May still. Others say she found her, and that they pass endless days in Fairy, or that they returned in flight from Symphony and lived their lives in secret from her. One thing is true: that Symphony kept her word. Sometimes to this day, in the corners of Cottington Woods, Bailey can still be heard humming her unfinished song.

The Story of the Boy Who Hoped the Harrow

There was, once upon a time, a boy who dared to hope.

He was a farmer's son, born in the woods near Westall. In so many ways this boy was like every other boy around him. He dreamt the dreams of the innocent, and therein he built things of wonder and beauty. But he also dreamt of dark things, the things of the night that creep, and bite.

And claw.

Other children in the woods near Westall dreamed as well, and sometimes this boy would stumble from his own dreams and into theirs. When he did, it was often the case that the terrors of the night followed. He thought that these were his own dreams still, until he spoke with the other children around him. They thought that he was odd, but when he mentioned the terror that skulks, and bites, and claws - that thing that saw them when their eyes were closed, they became frightened, and they hid from the boy, as if he was favored by the patron, the Harrow, himself.

Alone, dreaming only his own dreams, the boy struggled against the darkness that was within him. Afraid that this thing of nightmare was, in fact, the patron Harrow himself, the boy directed his words and cried out, "Go away! I hate you! I don't want you!"

...

The patrons do their work, putting power to Word, and word to paper. The most that any man can hope for from them is to be completely overlooked.

Yet the boy called to me.

...

That thing that bites... and claws... was it the patron himself? No. But it was a thing of power, given life by the dreams of the boy, and given strength by those whose dreams it crept within. When the boy cried for it to leave, it did. And when it did, for the first time the boy dared to hope.

But when the next morning a neighbor's child failed to rise, the boy who hoped knew why. It had been him, or rather, the thing that he had made. It had left him, and it had found someone else.

More afraid than ever, the boy vowed to never sleep again.

But, as one must, he did.

When he heard it creep he became powerfully afraid, and he ran. In his flight he brushed a dream, and into that dream the terror went. It returned in no time and chased him again. So tight were the Dreamscapes that they slowed him down as he forced his way through them. And into each one he touched, the terror went.

In horror and nightmare, with those around him in the waking world never to wake again, the story could have ended here. The boy could have been lost. He could have died. He could have wandered in the nightmares of the Slumberland forever.

But the story doesn't end there.
Because for the second time, the boy dared to hope.

His hope came in the form of a hand that reached for him, and a soft voice that called to him and said, "Take my hand. I can help you. Take my hand."

It was not easy for him, reaching out to take that offered hand. His inner demon was strong, and the cries of those he had killed as they died around him were almost paralyzing.

But reach out he did, and he awoke, and when he did he discovered that so many of those around him were dead, or trapped in slumber, or maddened by dreams from which they could not fully wake.

Awake, he thought that his ordeal was over. The thing that rose from his nightmares left him, and he was able to live in peace. For a time he was safe. But though it was gone from him it was not gone. It fought sandmen in the Slumberland, ripping them apart.

And then it found the man.

The man was flawed. The man had a weakness. And the nightmare used it. It threatened the life of the man's love, and promised her safety in exchange for the power it would gain from his hatred, his fear and his anger. The man murdered his friend and his mentor to save his love. In doing so, he lost himself.

There is danger in feeding nightmares. There is danger in empowering the nightmare of another's imagination with the fear, and hatred, and anger of your own. This gives the nightmare power beyond its original creator. That allows the nightmare to transcend, to step freely in the Slumberland and to forge a life of its own. This is how Terrors are made.

The boy created the thing. The man set it free. And now it roams.

Empowered, the terror walked free, bringing its terror to others and letting its legend grow. The boy had been too afraid of it to give it a name. But others, those who survived long enough to whisper something before they awoke, called it what the boy had feared that it was. It became the Harrow of Nightmares, and it gained strength with every whisper of that name.

The boy? The boy grew, too, and of course he still carried that which made the Terror. And now it comes full circle. The boy must face his Terror. The Terror must face its maker. I can say this: the boy dared to hope two times before, and it was for naught. Now he hopes again.

I cannot tell you the end of this tale, for it hasn't happened yet. But on this most dark evening of dark evenings, when you lay your head down to sleep... The Harrow of Nightmares is very real. If tomorrow you do not wake, will it be his claws who ripped your soul away?

A WinterFire Tale (unfinished)

Festia

WinterFire has always been a celebration of comfort, times spent in good company around a warm hearth with food and drink to spare, and consideration for those around us. It began long ago, when the word "fire" was first written, much like "wolf", in the middle of Cottington Woods. But as "wolf" was meant to be a warning, "Fire" brought protection against the cold. It brought people together.

Somewhere along the line, Nicholas the carpenter made a toy horse and gifted it to a boy with little joy, and that became the first gift of WinterFire. After the first toy came others, until it was common for all the children of Cottington Woods to receive toys on WinterFire, although in those early days they never knew who it was who made them.

I am Festia, and some would say it was my written words that made Nicholas into a legend. I, on the other hand, would say he made himself worthy of legend on the day he fashioned the horse. Still, I acknowledge that I spread his tale, and that without my words his deeds would have been limited to those children he could reach within the lands surrounding Cottington.

Nicholas became my husband, his tale became mine to tell, and he became Papa Jingle, the figure loved by children and, let's face it, by adults all across the Written World. How could they resist?

In Papa Jingle's workshop, the kringle elves work year round to fashion enough gifts to bring joy to every celebrant who hears the bells of WinterFire. Papa Jingle, my Nicholas, is an example for them all, with his constant good cheer.

Or rather, he was.

This year was harsh, perhaps the coldest since the evil Fairy Queen, Baeldannen, was overthrown almost a dozen years ago. Throughout the woodland, especially, folks have been sluggish and quick to forget the joy of WinterFire. Even Nicholas suffered. I believed that as his special day got closer he would come around, but while October came and went he remained taciturn, and as November began his mood still not change.

With the help of Lanny and Wayne, I set in motion Project Jolly Old Soul.

Because it is the practice of vendors all across the Houselands to begin promoting WinterFire themed wares as early as the beginning of October, and because we both believe that three months in practice for the holiday makes the day itself seem less special, we declared long ago that we would not decorate the house or the workshop until early December at the absolute earliest.

This year was to be the exception. My dear Nicholas needed a dose of holiday spirit, and he needed it bad. I send Lanny and Wayne into the woods to find the perfect tree, which they brought promptly into the house. We hung our special stockings by the hearth, one each for Papa and I, and one each for Lanny and Wayne, and each of the other elves. It cluttered the hearth mightily, but as you can

well imagine we have a special hearth built just for this occasion. Ours is, in fact, one of the few hearths outside of the royal castles or bakeries that Nicholas needs no hearth magic to cross through.

The kringles are essentially fairies of WinterFire, and because it is their nature they are never without the holiday spirit, and so they set about the early preparations for our special day with their characteristic enthusiasm. I was gladdened by this, because it is the nature of Nicholas to likewise never be without the holiday spirit, and I worried that if he was somehow without, then they might be as well, and such was not the case.

So, with the house done up in woodland greens and berry reds, with chains of popped corn, with bells and countless other ornaments and decorations, we awaited the arrival of the Hearthfather, who, while we worked was himself at work, although without apparent joy, crafting gifts for the expectant people of the world.

When at last he came home he was in an uncharacteristically foul temper. As he crossed through the door I held before me a tray of his favorite stocking and bell shaped cakes and cookies, but I could see right away that he wanted none of it.

“What’s this?” he asked, looking around at the kringles who barely could contain their joy at having done their job well.

I told him, “We thought you could use an extra dose of holiday cheer, Papa Jingle.” I smiled, although I was fraught with worry.

And, it would seem, rightfully so, for Nicholas snapped at us all, “What I could have used was the help of my kringles to build presents for the ungrateful masses.”

That erased the smiles off the faces of his elfish helpers, and right quick. Papa and I do not argue often, but when we do it is wisest if we are not observed. My own smile vanished, and the look that came to my face was enough to send the kringles scurrying for cover.

Nicholas ignored them as they fled. He tossed his coat onto the hangar by the door and collapsed onto his stuffed armchair. He pinched his fingers against the bridge of his nose and held them there. When after many long minutes he let his hand fall I still had not moved, and he demanded only, “Oh, what!?”

I told him, “Nicholas, you need to break out from beneath this cloud and you need to do it now.”

“Please,” he said, as if my words bore a terrible weight. “Leave me be. I haven’t the strength to deal with your anger on top of all the other disappointments I feel of late.”

I sat across from him on my own chair. I said, “Tell me what’s wrong.”

He leaned back, his eyes closed but anger and resignation still clear on his face. He had become ageless, but then he just looked old. He told me, “No one believes, Festia. WinterFirre has no meaning.”

We celebrate winter, Nicholas and I, but at that moment I felt a chill that made me wish for the heat of the hottest summer day. I told him, “That’s just not true.”

“It is,” he snarled, and the sound gave me pause. We fought, and sometimes we fought hard. We are married after all, and our marriage has lasted hundreds of years. But that was the first time I ever heard him make a sound like that.

Still, while I was worried, I was still a patron. I stood up. While I am shorter than Nicholas I can make myself huge, and I spared no amount of my talent at that moment. “Now listen here,” I told him. “You are Nicholas, the Hearthfather, Papa Jingle. It does not matter what others believe – you ARE the spirit of WinterFire! You do not do what you do because others believe in you. You do what you do because you believe in them. I do not know what has gotten into you of late, but it does not matter. You just think of the children. They need you, and you will not let them down.”

Nicholas regarded me. I saw anger in him, then a tiredness that was ages old. Maybe he was going to say something. He opened his mouth, then closed it. I waited. Then Nicholas rose to his feet again. “I’m sorry, Festia,” he muttered. He took up his coat again and carried it with him to the door.

“Where are you going? I asked him.

He told me, “Just out. I need to cool off.” He pulled the door open and beyond him I could see the heavily falling snow.

I said, “It’s a good night for that.”

“Ha,” he said, without an ounce of humor. He stepped outside and pushed the door shut behind him.

I stared after him for a long time. Finally I put pen to paper, as I often do when I need to organize my thoughts. He is out there still, and it has grown late. I need to stop writing and go out and find him.

Old Mother Goose

Elizabeth Goose

Old Mother Goose,
When she wanted to wander,
Would ride through the air
On a very fine gander.

Jack rode to his mother,
The news for to tell;
She called him a good boy
And said it was well.

Then Jack went a-courting
A lady so gay,
As fair as the lily,
And sweet as the May.

But then the old Squire
Came behind his back,
And began to belabour
The sides of poor Jack.

Then old Mother Goose,
That instant came in,
And turned her son Jack
Into famed Harlequin.

So then with her wand,
Touched the lady so fine,
And turned the rat once
Into Sweet Columbine.

The old egg in the sea
Was thrown away then--
When Jack jumped in,
And got it back again.

Jack's mother came by,
And caught the goose soon,
And mounting its back,
Flew up to the moon.

The Magician's Apprentice

Humphrey

which incidentally is an excellent charm to enable even the clumsiest person to fly great distances with no effort whatsoever. Ah! That (by "that" I mean, I suppose, charm plus clumsiness plus no effort) puts me in mind of an awkwardness that an apprentice-magician of mine once visited upon himself.

Some few years ago, a clever impetuous young fellow went to Laketower to study magic. He did not notice that he was impetuous, but he was *quite* aware that he was clever; sitting alone at the head of his class, his interest tarnished by a lack of competition, he realized he needed a more brilliant master than any of those then available to him. So he questioned and sought, and by attending to whispers and carefully watching for the subtlest clues he discovered a hidden trail of breadcrumbs that he followed up, up, to an obscure spire where dwelt (temporarily, in a sort of visiting-professorship) an old wizened magician whose name appeared on no list of Laketower's faculty. Shamefully non-pointed cap in hand he confronted the old fellow, half-beseeking, half-demanding to become his apprentice.

The Patron Humphrey (*Oh. I suppose I could have left that secret identity as an exercise for the reader. Ah well, 'tis done.*)

The Patron Humphrey calmly set down his delicious sandwich, source of the abovementioned breadcrumbs, and considered. Waving his hands over a bubbling cauldron he caused the smoke to rise, to contort; the young man watched it take the shape of a grimacing bat-thing that seemed to say *You will never learn the right lesson*; he saw it twist further and then fill with light of diverse rainbow-colors, and it was a luminous moth whose silence said *You will conjure beauty from darkness*; then Humphrey made one more complicated pass and there was a staggering flicker and flash of white light, and he said:

"You're still here? Yes, all right, yes, if you must, be my apprentice."

The young man stared. The old one yawned. "Hrrrm," he said. "I'm off upstairs for a moment; while I'm gone, I think, you had better clean this place up. Hadn't you?"

Then the master climbed into the unreachable shadows at the top of the spire, and the newly-made apprentice was left with a sanity-assailing amount of clutter and what-have-you. Little, quarter-full bottles of spoiled reagents. Dented copper retorts decorated with colorful poisonous residues. Books a foot thick. Books . . . he took a step toward the nearest stack and flipped the topmost one open, seeing the words *A CHARM TO BRING PURPOSEFUL*

"Ehm. I dare say . . ." The old magician had poked his head down the stairs. The apprentice stepped quickly back from the book.

"I dare say you hadn't better start with the books. It's the words in them, you see: much too heavy for you to carry about. Bottom up's the way to do it; get that floor clean first. There's a bucket or two in . . . let me see, the closet next to the second-year students' refectory." The second-year students' refectory was thirteen flights of stairs down the Tower.

Down and up, down and up tiredly, down and up frustratedly and exhaustedly the young fellow climbed. Each trip up was two buckets of clean water; then he'd mop out what seemed like a tiny part of the vast dark space, and bring two buckets of filthy water back down. (*Why not dump them out a window? Well, the story was, years ago someone had done just that, tipped a bucket of something out of one of Laketower's many narrow little windows and left a stain down the side. The dozen variants on "What sort of creature were they turned into?" and "Does their ghost still pace the hall outside the Chancellor's office, endlessly rewording a letter of apology?" reveal some **fascinating** layers of inventive student anxiety, and perhaps I had better list and retell them here, beginning with*

— *no, all right, perhaps not.*)

On each trip, he walked past the stack of books; each time he couldn't resist looking again at the intriguing text, and so he got it in little morsels:

A CHARM TO BRING PURPOSEFUL MOTION TO A NON-

A CHARM TO BRING PURPOSEFUL MOTION TO A NON-LIVING THING SO

*A CHARM TO BRING PURPOSEFUL MOTION TO A NON-LIVING THING SO THAT IT WILL
ACT AS YOUR SERVANT IND —*

Ohoho, that was enough for the young man! He set down the heavy buckets and began to read. Demanding, this charm — he flexed cramping fingers, twisted them experimentally into the first of the secret signs — but not too bad. No, not too bad at all! He looked about for something to enchant. His eye fell on an unused broom, oaken and hefty.

Ten minutes later, of course, the magician's apprentice was quite at sea. The broom had squared its broomy shoulders and brought up bucket after bucket, unceasingly dumping them onto the floor; a little puddle had formed, and then it ceased to be little. In his newfound idleness, the apprentice had had time to read

*A CHARM TO BRING PURPOSEFUL MOTION TO A NON-LIVING THING SO THAT IT WILL
ACT AS YOUR SERVANT INDEFINITELY, NEVER STOPPING UNTIL THE COUNTER-CHARM
IS ADMINISTERED (SEE PAGE 1,224)*

But then he'd knocked the book over and it had disappeared under the soapy tide, its useful page 1,224 forever lost.

At this point it wasn't even clear where the broom was *getting* its water-filled buckets, though some confused shouts from below suggested that it was having adventures down there. Fairly soon, the water would rise to the little ledge at the edge of the room, and then it would well over and begin running down the stairs. The apprentice couldn't stop imagining Laketower as an enormous fountain, with all its books lying at its base in a mushy ruin and water spouting from every window.

But lo! He'd found something a few moments ago that showed a lot of promise: a big sturdy sharp axe. The broom was on its way back up the stairs. He could hear it creak under the weight of two fresh buckets. As soon as its knobby top was in sight he raised the axe and with youthful assurance struck downward...

Now, I think you'll agree that this situation spurs some very interesting notions. The broom: obviously not a golem, but infused with a person-like purpose and leeway in interpreting its master's first wish. (And zero interest in interpreting subsequent wishes.) To what extent was it a sovereign creature, with its own agency and will? To what extent were the two smaller brooms — the result of the apprentice's axework — separate agency-bearing entities, as they instantly set about bringing more water? What of the many, many tiny brooms created when the apprentice began running madly about, splashing and slashing and bisecting every animate broomstick he could find? One broom or many? A single distributed broom-soul or a hundred separate, identical broom-souls? Did the little brooms contend among themselves, argue over water sources for their tiny buckets? Did their host, swirling up and down the stairs, create patterns almost Scientific in their mysteriousness, such that the apprentice's mind was beset by rapture?

*Practical metaphysics can readily and boringly answer several of these questions. It would never, I promise, rob you of the experience of wondering about them! Indeed, questions such as these were foremost in the Patron Humphrey's mind as he arrived on the scene, absently spoke the countercharm, pointed out to his new apprentice that now he really had some cleaning to do I mean my **heavens** so much mess, pointed out the location of the glue-pot that the apprentice was now bound to apply to the flinders of a perfectly good broom to make it whole again, and asked him (quite seriously) whether he'd experienced anything valuable during the first fifteen minutes of his 'prenticeship or whether he was still adamantly, Diamondishly focused on some arbitrary "end-state" such as "clean room" or "magician who, having completed his studies, becomes, himself, the teacher." Yes, yes, I knew his story would end with him teaching at the Regent Spire, and I'm sure there's some lesson here for him if he only listened about those who cannot do teach, and perhaps if he was less singularly-focused, he'd have imparted such wisdom on his son, who maybe then he'd have been much less interested in Dragons as a means of social mobility.*

*If you imagine that this is a story with a "punch-line," I suppose you will be satisfied to learn that the apprentice, watching the waters recede from the devastated landscape of the chamber, did wish he had a broom to sweep up with. But which is much **more** interesting is*

(Note added by Scholar Greene: like many of Humphrey's tales, this meanders and lacks both the beginning and the end)

Experimentations of Daedalus

Curious Ross

Daedalus' most relevant¹ assets, as of tower imprisonment day 13, short list

Material	Immaterial
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Empty picture-frames, 212; variously of cedar, copper, oak, pine, rosewood, walnut, hung empty with wires of copper or steel ❖ Books, 384, uniformly blank; bound variously in leather, wood, cloth, or pasteboard; paper generally heavy and of good quality² ❖ Candles, 74; 11–17 ounces in weight, beeswax, with flint and tinder ❖ Water, food, and wine, unlimited; clean and nourishing but flavorless ❖ A singular absence of unsightly and disturbing toys, which customarily would have strained their mismatched limbs to climb the tower and present themselves³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Will to persevere despite environmental incitement to forget the passage of time and recede into memoryless inaction ❖ Certain secret techniques of planning and constructing ❖ Faith of son in any master plan devised by father⁴ ❖ Curiosity of son ❖ Peerless sense of direction⁵ ❖ Vertiginous view from the high windows of the tower, specifically miles of the Fairy Sea, perceptually infinite in any direction, inspiring a sense of freedom just beyond the limiting rough stone windowsill ❖ Youthful potential of son contrasted with the present arrangement, suggesting a future of waste and despair as the years wound on untallied and Icarus sat in the tower and waited for more nothing to happen

Daedalus had already broken down the books and (using water, elements of several breakfasts, the book-covers, and certain secret techniques of planning and constructing) wrought a pair of sturdy wing-frames. He had been pleased with the results: they had a springy resilience even though they were hollow in the fashion of bird-bones. He held the smaller one up before his son, who looked excited at the prospect of putting it to use.

The flight surfaces had struck him as a simpler matter, given the piles of liberated, bookless paper now piled about the room. But these had proven less useful than he'd expected; even treated with his cunning methods, the pages lacked several bird's-wing properties that now seemed essential.

In an agony of regret that his labors might have ruined resources he would need for his next plan—and forced to consider that he *had* no next plan—Daedalus carefully hung the frames on the picture-hooks (he had set the wires aside to thread through his now-unhelpful paper “feathers”). He regarded Icarus, the son of his genius and his deftness, and grimly set about jollity, seeking to convince his young fellow-prisoner that all was well and would soon be better. Inwardly he drew closer to the conclusion that the problem of escape would remain unsolved, barring the entry of a new variable.

¹ In my appendices I record with joy, with joy, all of the assets he rated as irrelevant. Thus I do for so many of you. I study your quietest, most neglected thoughts, and so I know you well; even so I am occasionally surprised at your willingness to omit so much of your lived experience from the category *relevant*.

² Absent from the tower: pens, ink, pencils, any intended method of writing. The objective was to erode the memory; the place was a nothing-place.

³ Included in this column because such toys would have perforce contained cannibalizable materials in significant quantity. Daedalus would have been forced to weigh each button eye or creepily articulated arm or other potentially useful object against his sons' welfare and his own; in assessing each case, he would certainly have deemed it unpalatably cruel to deprive some toy of one of its barely functional parts, but this assessment would have cost time and energy and furthermore would have distracted him from the value of the other material available in the tower.

⁴ Near-total but alas, alas, not total.

⁵ Categorization problematic; possibly refile under *Assets, material*. Peerless sense of direction constructed using tiny magnets and weights, fashioned to be worn upon the brow as a necessary asset in the design and construction of the Labyrinth.

Day 14 brought, therefore, surprise and relief. White-winged, quite large: a riding-goose, fabulously lost. All morning Daedalus watched her launch herself upwards into the clouds, return in a state of puzzlement, and try again; at lunch-time she sailed into the tower's largest window and settled in for a roost.

Daedalus: tower escape plans seriously considered, short list

Rejected	Explored, then rejected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Assemble climbing equipment; descend from tower to island (grounds: physically too exhausting, also island below tower likely devoid of supplies for escape across sea) ❖ Incrementally dismantle tower; reassemble into bridge (grounds: unconcealable after early stages, also rather silly) ❖ Abandon thought of escape (grounds: embarrassingly nonproductive) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Assemble personal flying devices, one large and one small; use these not merely to exit the tower but also to pass the Fairy Sea (grounds: available feather option proved unsuitable)

Daedalus: motivations for assisting goose

❖ Altruism	❖ Interest in transaction involving oversized goose-feathers
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The goose told a tale of grand motivations: the search for an adored partner (the steed incidentally of a colleague of mine) who was known to be somewhere up in the clouds. Daedalus listened patiently. Once he caught on to the practical side of what she wanted so ardently, he saw that he was in a position to be very helpful indeed. He took up spare pieces of wire, gently removed the peerless sense of direction⁶ from his brow, and wove a light flexible goose-shoulder-sized harness for it. This he presented to his houseguest.⁷

Daedalus: most relevant assets, day 14 supplement

Material
❖ Goose-feathers , oversized, elegant, sturdy, potent

The goose, with the sense of direction now indicating to her exactly where she needed to be, considered how she could reward the two captives. After a moment she screwed up her beady goose-eyes in an anticipatory grimace, took a long sip of Daedalus' wine, and assailed the less essential parts of her plumage with her enormous goose-beak.

Now, with the remaining wires, with bits of the candle-wax that had dripped and pooled into stout yellow-white spires on the flagstones, did Daedalus begin his intricate work. His mind journeyed along the wing of the goose, reviewing the economical working of her muscles as she beat upwards into the cold gray clouds. His fingers threaded, positioned, drew taut. I take enormous satisfaction in the state of his mind in those hours: leaf upon leaf of diagrams, hidden behind his wide eyes. Icarus sat enthralled for fifteen minutes or so, then tromped about the tower in idleness.

Daedalus and Icarus: selected thoughts, beginning at four hours after noon, day 14 of imprisonment in tower

Daedalus	Icarus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Nothing for it but to leap and trust to the skill in my hands. ❖ Blast. Blast. Falling. need to work out how to— ❖ —There, I see. A little effort and—upward. ❖ Ha! There goes the tower, behind us. The ocean ahead. This is rather pleasant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Here we go! ❖ There goes Daedalus! Ha, he hasn't figured out how to . . . he's going to be all right, isn't he? ❖ Okay, phew. ❖ Whee!

⁶ See note 5.

⁷ Interesting and worthy of inquiry: why did Daedalus bargain before giving her what he'd fashioned? He had, after all, a very specific need and her ability to meet it was plain. But no, in such moments you often do not stop; your actual motivations are swift and silent and quickly set adrift from your memory.

Daedalus is a being who makes things for people; presented with a problem of art he could restrain himself neither from devising a solution nor from handing over his handiwork for the use of another.

❖ Best we . . . hmph, Icarus. I did warn him about too much altitude given how clear the sky is, yes?

❖ He'd better not—oh no, no, *no*.

❖ My boy! The wax! **No!** My beautiful boy, he is

❖ Wheeeeeee! Hey, I bet I can . . .

❖ Yes! I can! WHEEEEEEE

❖ And up and—wait. Feels wrong. Something is, it's breaking, it's *aaaaa.AAAAAAA*

It is not my custom to dwell upon the grand feelings, as they often obscure the subtler motions of the engine.

Instead I will note that the perfect diagrams laid down in Daedalus' mind, carefully delineating primary feathers from secondaries from tertials from marginal coverts and onward, assessing how to array the limited number of available feathers for maximal effect, contemplating alternate wax formulations, these were yet bright in his thoughts as he glided onward into the sunny, suddenly lightless day. That artful mind never relented from its art. From noting that the feathers of his own wings were unharmed in their moorings of wax and still bore their virtue. From calculating the height and temperature at which Icarus' wings had passed the nonrecovery point; from investigating, silently, what specific amendments he might have made to secure any other outcome, any other outcome at all to that terrible day.

One of Us

Delivered by Longstride

This is a song written by the Bard, Heather Dale, during the days before Johanna was a Patron, when she received the visions that the Undead would Rise and sought to convince the Early Church and the Households that the First Patron had indeed sent her a Vision that none other had seen. In the end, she would form what would grow to become the Order of Paladins after her untimely and horrific death.

One of Us

Verse 1 (A)

Before I got to fighting (or when fighting got to me)
I looked to find examples on the field of chivalry
I saw mighty arms much stronger than my arms would ever be
And I thought perhaps the field was not for me

Verse 2 (A)

But I stayed and watched the fighting 'til one figure stood apart
In armour newly fashioned and a helm more pot than art
But each blow was thrown with honour and a lightness of the heart
So I took that step which soon became a start

Chorus (B)

'Cause she was not the biggest fighter nor one to raise a fuss
But I remember being proud that she was one of us
And we might never stand together in the shield-wall side by side
But because of her I lift my sword with pride

Verse 3 (A)

She was ladylike and lively, not the type you would expect
With a braver heart than many and a slot-shot to respect
I guess she'd once decided this was where she'd like to be
And I thought if she could do it, why not me

Chorus (B)

Verse 4 (A)

So now as I gather armour, bits and pieces here and there,
I think about examples: how you act, and what you dare
'Cause you never know who's watching or how far the story goes
And where'er that Lady is I hope she knows

Chorus (B)

We may never stand together in the shield-wall side by side
But because of her I lift my sword with pride!

(Out of Game: This song was written by Heather Dale – www.heatherdale.com)

The White Wolf

Johanna the Warrior

The white wolf pup sits alone at the edge of the glade, watching with longing eyes as his sibs tumble and play at his mother's feet. Their eager noises of excitement and joy seem to dig holes into his heart, and he whines softly. Without really intending to, he rises to snowy paws and takes a single step toward his pack.

But he knows what will happen if he completes his movement. It has been moons since his pack welcomed him. They do not, yet, snap at him and drive him from their circle. Instead, they pull away from contact with him, then eventually move out of his reach altogether, to settle in a different location with their backs to him, murmuring quietly to themselves. His entire pack seems to resent, perhaps even fear, him for his difference, his strangeness.

Out of the shadows behind him, a silent shape slinks to the pup's side. The wolf is old, so old that his pelt has become mostly white, and to the white pup, the elder wolf seems huge, lumbering out of the darkness to enshadow the pup.

"Come, youngling," the grizzled wolf grumbles. "Come with me. It is time you learn your place in the pack. The stars tell me that a great destiny awaits you." He moves past the pup, circling back toward the darkness beyond the glade.

The white wolf pup hesitates, sniffing the air and wagging his tail a few times towards his sibs, desperately wanting them to respond with invitation, knowing bleakly that they will not. He heaves a sigh. "Why do they hate me, elder?"

The old wolf pauses between the pup and the edge of the glade, casting a scornful look back toward the pack. "You are different, young one. For many, that is enough. For the rest... Even they can sense the power and strength you will have when you mature. Those, they do not hate you. They fear you and what you may do."

The white pup follows the old wolf into the woods. He is somewhat surprised at how quickly and silently the shaman moves through the woods, slipping from shadow to shadow, never tripping on a stone, breaking a branch, or letting the moonlight touch him for more than the briefest of moments. The white pup tries to emulate the elder, but even to his own ears, his passage seems loud and graceless in comparison. Determined to prove himself to this powerful wolf, the white pup focuses on where he puts his feet, trying to move silently through the night.

So intent is his focus that he does not pay attention to the other smells on the wind, or the sounds of other beings in the night. Suddenly another shape looms at him out of the darkness, a form he has never seen before, and something pliable, yet strong, lands across his body, tangling his feet so that he lands hard on the ground. He yelps in fear, struggling madly against the tough, vine-like strands that seem to have surrounded him completely.

There are several of the huge, oddly-shaped creatures moving around him. They smell very bad, acrid and like dead things. They are very loud now that they are moving upright on their hind legs. They bark strangely at each other in long strings of unintelligible sounds. One of them seems to be in disagreement with the others, but they bark louder than she does, and she bows her head in submission.

Suddenly, from someplace not too far from him, though still hidden in the brush, the white wolf pup catches the scent of the shaman of his pack. "I am sorry, young one," the old wolf's quiet rumble is nearly inaudible under the noise of the strange creatures. "This is part of your destiny. You are not meant for the company of wolves. This is the best answer, both for you and for the pack."

The old wolf's words seem impossible to follow. He is leaving the white pup in the clutches of these creatures. His pack has abandoned him, betraying him to some unknown fate. The pup howls in despair and is startled into quiet when one of the creatures lashes him across the muzzle. He is startled again a moment later when the same creature picks him up and tucks him gently against its chest. The smell is intense, but the creature's own heart beats next to the wolf's, soothing him. The frenzy of fear and the desolation of abandonment have taken its toll on both the physical and emotional endurance of the wolf pup. He is being touched gently, if firmly, and held close to another living being, something he has been denied for a long time. Unable to resist any longer, he falls into a deep sleep.

With time, the white pup learns to understand some of the grunts and growls of these creatures, these "humans". He comes to learn that one series of sounds, "Ovinhur", means him. They are frequently harsh with him, using their lashes when he does not obey commands, and keeping him tied to a pole so he cannot run out into the woods. Yet, they can be oddly gentle as well, bringing him good cuts of meat and teaching him to hunt. He learns their way of hunting, which does not come naturally to the pup, all ranks and files and straight lines, large groups and straightforward attacks. He earns himself many lashings during this time of training, and longs to break free and visit retribution upon the ones that beat him.

He grows and becomes stronger, faster, and much, much bigger. The white wolf starts to join the human warriors on raids. During one such raid, he first encounters a taste sweeter than any meat yet given to him: human blood.

Despite his resistance to training and the consequential harsh treatment, the wolf comes to be aware that these humans value him for his strength and skills. They come to rely on him during their raids as a weapon of fear as much as destruction. One human among them does not seem to value him, however. The same woman who once argued against his capture tries to kill him on multiple occasions. She is prevented each time by the other humans or by the wolf himself, but she leaves him with yet more scars and a burning hatred.

Finally, during a raid on another village of humans, he has his revenge. They have just entered the village when the white wolf sees the woman, his tormentor, and something within him breaks. He can no longer understand the words of the humans around him as rage overtakes him and he attacks. He cares for nothing now except the taste of human blood on his tongue. A strength he has never known before fills him, and he begins to kill all humans in sight, not differentiating between friend and foe.

His injuries grow to be severe, as he is slashed by the swords of the humans he kills. The white wolf trails bloody pawprints as he limps his way towards a single man who stands alone at the edge of the town. Easy prey, thinks the wolf, but his body will not support him and he falls at the man's feet, waiting for a fatal blow to fall. Surprisingly the blow does not come. Instead, the man lays gentle hands on the wolf's sides, warmth and renewed strength coursing through him. The man speaks to him in soothing tones, and the wolf understands. The man intends to help the wolf escape.

Ever suspicious of humans, the white wolf waits with muscles tensed until the healing is finished. As soon as the man lifts his hands, the wolf leaps back into the fray to finish his self-imposed duty of killing every human in sight. The glory of blood drives all thoughts of the man from his mind, and when there are no humans left to stand against him, he runs into the woods, towards the south and freedom.

The wolf wanders for some time in the woods before meeting the man again. Remembering the help the man gave him, the wolf decides not to kill the man, so he ignores him and continues on his way, believing the man weak enough to pose no threat. But the man is not gentle this time. He demands that the wolf bow down and bare his throat in submission. This angers the wolf, who thinks himself the biggest and strongest around. He roars at the man, snapping at him, expecting him to cower in fear, only to freeze in shock when the man's form changes into that of a large grey wolf! Taking advantage of the white wolf's surprise, the grey wolf lunges forward, quickly pinning the other to the ground and earning the white wolf's submission.

The man commands that the white wolf protect him and go to war for him. The white wolf is tasked to gather as many wolves into his pack as he can, and to teach them the methods of war that he practiced with the humans, the "Frostwroth", as he learns they are called. The white wolf despises this, as it is these very tactics that allowed them to capture him in the first place, but as the pack grows and becomes stronger, he has to admit that these strategies are effective. The thrill of leading so many wolves in the hunt helps to calm his rage and now he waits eagerly for his leader's command, leaping into action for the joy of the kill.

Journal Entry, Callahan Cotting

It is strange the difference in perspective you have when you are trapped, locked away by accident and yet by your own intent. When the world and your family are but echoes, sometimes reaching you like voices in another room down the hall. You write down those words, those stories, because someone should. And because it's all you have of what you left behind. So you bear Witness.

I don't regret the choices that I made, because they were mine to make. But I do regret all those affected by my choice, as important as it was. Especially my brother Dante. I may be lost, but at least I am home. He is just lost, forever desiring to come home, and forever unable, unless someone else who is equally lost finds him. Once found, perhaps there is a way home? I would dearly love to see him again.

Or maybe that just is the fate of all those who Dream the unending dreams of the Slumberland. I heard a woman's voice say once, to those gathered around her, that nothing is ever truly lost in the Slumberland. But if you are touched by the madness of those dreams, are you not already gone?

I loved Dante with all my heart. But I am a man of the Word, and he was a man who Dreamt, touched by Glamour and by something beyond his ken, whose dabblings in Magic was always in search of something forever just beyond his reach. Like a word on the tip of your tongue that you can't quite find. He wanted what the Fairy Mists might show you, rather than the Truth of what was before him. Now he is lost, and all I have of him are the words I write.

I suppose it's fair to say that we knew each other, but we never truly understood each other.

But as I walk this maze, as I write these words, as I keep going to the lock we made so long ago, as I keep hidden that which I guard, my thoughts keep going back to my brother.

And to my love, dear Carda, who made my home her own and whom I would have wed. I would have gladly given my life in exchange for hers, had not all our careful plans gone awry on that fateful day. But I cannot think of her without thinking of her blood spilled upon my hearth's floor, cannot think of how, of all the ghosts that haunt me still, hers passed beyond me, because she was not yet in my Family. And in all that time she now spent in the Deathlands, I imagine her ghost has long forgotten who I am. I hope, at least, she is at peace. Carda Hestian, I have not forgotten you, nor stopped loving you, and I will write your name till I can write no more.

Ah, the many times she would interrupt Dante and I as we quarreled, a warm smile on her face as she reminded us that we loved each other and told us to eat. She was never phased by Dante's tormented ramblings, the fevered dreams that gripped him. He's Touched, others would whisper, and shy away, but not Carda.

Dante was convinced that dreams were real, as real as the Fairy Mists at least, and his life was spent trying to reach that place, shape that place. Most thought him mad. I confess I did not understand it. I wonder what he would think now to know that Asylum exists, and the Sandman. What he would think

of how the Sandman came to be, and all that came after, and that the Slumberland are as real as he says they are. Well, as I said, as real as the Fairy Mists, which is to say they are like how one imagines a Word, but they are not a Word. The thought around a Word, perhaps.

Dante was not afraid of the Fairies. He learned their magic, their illusions, their Glamour. He could weave such fanciful imaginings! Were it not for him, we would not have had the aid of the Great Fairies and their ancient magic. Like night and day those Two, and awed and afeared I was in their presence. We could not have been successful without them, I do not think, and yet... yet I cannot help but wonder if they had their own plans that day, and if we were somehow their pawns in a greater ploy. I cannot help but wonder if it would have been safer to leave the Fair Folk out of it.

If only you could hear me, Dante. If only you could read these words. I, who do not mind the solitude, am never without the echoes of all those who came after. And you, who cherished your home and family, do you wander alone, lost, forever looking for home and family?

Do you remember home, in your fanciful dreams? If you could remember, perhaps you could find your way here. Memories are like breadcrumbs, leading one back sometimes. I remember how you would gather acorns and unusual stones; how you would keep them with you when you slept: breadcrumbs to lead you home when you were lost, you would say. To keep you safe from the nightmares that might hunt your dreams.

I remember your first illusion, the music you called up in the hall. So beautiful. I remember how you then weaved it into a bird, black wings reflecting greens and purples in the light, dark like your torments but singing as if it were the most glorious songbird.

I remember how you would play with the orphan children, the ones no one wanted to adopt. They were lost awake like you were lost asleep, you would say, and they were young and not afraid of you like the adults were; they would listen to your stories of the Peter who never grew up and the children without parents like them.

I remember how you felt that being awake was more surreal than being asleep, and how you would weep sometimes as you tried to reach for a dream beyond your grasp. And yet your dreams were like great giant woods in which you'd be lost, and you wanted to be home where you were safe.

I remember holding you when the worst of the torments came, when you would claw at your eyes or pull at your hair, when you would scream of the unspeakable things that you had felt in your nightmares.

I remember how you begged me not to leave home, when I went off to learn more of the Word, and how you gave me a stone so I could find my way home. I remember how tightly you hugged me when I came home again. I remember you saying it was not home without me.

Well, my brother, it is not quite home without you. I hope someday, like all the others, we are able to welcome you home again. If only somehow you could find your way.

Written by my Hand,
~Cal

An End of the Tales Told in the Cotting House Longstride

I am Longstride, also called the Wanderer. My feet have touched on every land, and there is no place upon the Written World that I have not been.

Every land has its tales, and this land, the Houelands, is no different. As Patron, I am told it is improper to have favorites, but if I did, it would be the tales of the Houelands, and those tales told about the fairy enchanted Cottington Woods. Cottington Woods is at the center of all things, it seems, connected by the secret ways, and the fairy ways, and the various doors to strange and wonderful places.

In Cottington Woods there is a grove, and in that grove is a Willow Tree. In that willow tree was an axe. How that axe got there is one of those stories of Cottington Woods that interests me. Why that tree? Why that axe? Why those hands to wield it? Who lived and who died?

In the end that tree, and that grove, became the worst kept secret in Cottington Woods, and for that there would be a terrible price, not just to the fairy of winter who sought it out, or to the one who guards it, but to those who failed to keep the secret safe. Some things are best not known. For reasons.

Some wounds cannot be healed, at least not completely, and they leave scars. But there are those who will never fail to try to heal an open wound. You, woodlanders, are of those people.

What was done was done again, and what was undone was put to right. The wound was healed. The scar remained.

The Fairy Mists came at the call of the Fairy of the Woods. They rolled over the woodlanders, and over that grove of that Willow Tree. They rolled out and over Cottington Woods, the secret ways, and the fairy ways. They rolled over the Cotting House and those doors to strange and wonderful places.

Things changed, or they would change. Things get swept up when Change Winds pass. The woodlanders caught up in the Change Winds could look ahead to a future filled with uncertainty. Some will emerge from the mists immediately to have new adventures. The goose will sing her way to the Cloud Lands. The Cat, again a cat, will fight beside the hero Mouse in battles that will grow each time they tell of it. The Man of Science will tinker away, satisfied, and heedless of explosions that could no longer harm his parents who, now, to him at least, could never die.

Others will also exit the Mists, immediately, or months later, and have adventures of their own, but those tales aren't mine to write. Some, more fortunate or less, will return to the world a year from now, and would be unaware of the passage of time, except that those heroes are here, listening to me now.

There will be new tales written, new lands discovered, new foes fought, in Cotting Woods, in the Written World, and in other strange and wonderful places. For now, however, there are the Mists. The Mists herald change, a beginning and an end to many things.

Tonight, tomorrow, there will be those beginnings, but for now, right at this moment, they herald an end.

This is the end of these Tales from the Cotting House.

It is bittersweet.

[*Game Over.*]

[*Tales from the Cotting House Over.*]