

LEGENDS II

EDITED BY ROBERT SILVERBERG



BALLANTINE BOOKS

LEGENDS II

*New Short Novels
by the Masters of Modern Fantasy*

EDITED BY
ROBERT SILVERBERG



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*For George R. R. Martin
who baited the trap*

*And Terry Brooks
for valiant help from an unexpected quarter*

INTRODUCTION

The first *Legends* anthology, which was published in 1998, contained eleven never-before-published short novels by eleven best-selling fantasy writers, each story set in the special universe of the imagination that its author had made famous throughout the world. It was intended as the definitive anthology of modern fantasy, and—judging by the reception the book received from readers worldwide—it succeeded at that.

And now comes *Legends II*. If the first book was definitive, why do another one?

The short answer is that fantasy is inexhaustible. There are always new stories to tell, new writers to tell them; and no theme, no matter how hoary, can ever be depleted.

As I said in the introduction to the first volume, fantasy is the oldest branch of imaginative literature—as old as the human imagination itself. It is not difficult to believe that the same artistic impulse that produced the extraordinary cave paintings of Lascaux and Altamira and Chauvet, fifteen and twenty and even thirty thousand years ago, also probably produced astounding tales of gods and demons, of talismans and spells, of dragons and werewolves, of wondrous lands beyond the horizon—tales that fur-clad shamans recited to fascinated audiences around the campfires of Ice Age Europe. So, too, in torrid Africa, in the China of prehistory, in ancient India, in the Americas: everywhere, in fact, on and on back through time for thousands or even hundreds of thousands of years. I like to think that the storytelling impulse is universal—that there have been storytellers as long as there have been beings in this world that could be spoken of as “human”—and that those storytellers have in particular devoted their skills and energies and talents, throughout our long evolutionary path, to the creation of extraordinary marvels and wonders. The Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh is a tale of fantasy; so, too, is Homer’s *Odyssey*, and on and on up through such modern fantasists as E. R. Eddison, A. Merritt, H. P. Lovecraft, and J. R. R. Tolkien, and all the great science-fiction writers from Verne and Wells to our own time. (I include science fiction because science fiction, as I see it, belongs firmly in the fantasy category: It is a specialized branch of fantasy, a technology-oriented kind of visionary literature in which the imagination is given free play for the sake of making the scientifically impossible, or at least the implausible, seem altogether probable.)

Many of the contributors to the first *Legends* were eager to return to their special worlds of fantasy for a second round. Several of them raised the subject of a new anthology so often that finally I began to agree with them that a second book would be a good idea. And here it is. Six writers—Orson Scott Card, George R. R. Martin, Raymond E. Feist, Anne McCaffrey, Tad Williams, and myself—have returned from the first one. Joining them are four others—Robin Hobb, Elizabeth Haydon, Diana

Gabaldon, and Neil Gaiman—who have risen to great fame among fantasy enthusiasts since the first anthology was published, and one grand veteran of fantasy, Terry Brooks, who had found himself unable at the last minute to participate in the first volume of *Legends* but who joins us for this one.

My thanks are due once again to my wife, Karen, and to my literary agent, Ralph Vicinanza, both of whom aided me in all sorts of ways in the preparation of this book, and, of course, to all the authors who came through with such splendid stories. I acknowledge also a debt of special gratitude to Betty Mitchell of Del Rey Books, whose sagacious advice and unfailing good cheer were essential to the project. Without her help this book most literally would not have come into being.

—ROBERT SILVERBERG

February 2003

REALM OF THE ELDERLINGS



ROBIN HOBB

THE FARSEER TRILOGY:

ASSASSIN'S APPRENTICE (1995)

ROYAL ASSASSIN (1996)

ASSASSIN'S QUEST (1997)

THE LIVESHIP TRADERS TRILOGY:

SHIP OF MAGIC (1998)

MAD SHIP (1999)

SHIP OF DESTINY (2000)

THE TAWNY MAN TRILOGY:

FOOL'S ERRAND (2002)

GOLDEN FOOL (2003)

FOOL'S END (2004)

The first Robin Hobb trilogy, *The Farseer Trilogy*, took place in the Six Duchies. It is the tale of FitzChivalry Farseer. The discovery that this bastard son exists is enough to topple Prince Chivalry.

ambition for the throne. He abdicates, ceding the title of heir to the throne to his younger brother Verity and abandoning the child to the care of the stablemaster Burrich. The youngest prince, Regal, has ambitions of his own, and wishes to do away with the bastard. But old King Shrewd sees the value of taking the lad and training him as an assassin. For a bastard can be sent into dangers where a trueborn son could not be risked, and may be given tasks that would soil an heir's hands.

And so FitzChivalry is trained in the secret arts of being a royal assassin. He shows a predilection for the Wit, a beast magic much despised in the Six Duchies. This secret vice in the young assassin is tolerated, for a partnership with an animal may be a useful trait in an assassin. When it is discovered that he may possess the hereditary magic of the Farseers, the Skill, he becomes both the King's weapon and an obstacle to Prince Regal's ambitions for the throne. At a time when the rivalry for the throne is intense, and the Outislanders and their Red Ship raiders are bringing war to the Six Duchies, FitzChivalry discovers that the fate of the kingdom may very well rest on the actions of a young bastard and the King's Fool. Armed with little more than loyalty and his sporadic talent for the old magic, Fitz follows the fading trail of King Verity, who has traveled beyond the Mountain Kingdom and into the realm of the legendary Elderlings, in what may be a vain hope to renew an old alliance.

The Liveship Traders Trilogy takes place in Jamailia, Bingtown, and the Pirate Isles, on the coast far to the south of the Six Duchies. The war in the north has interrupted the trade that is the lifeblood of Bingtown, and the Liveship Traders have fallen on hard times despite their magic sentient ships. At one time, possession of a Liveship, constructed of magical wizardwood, guaranteed a Trader's family prosperity. Only a Liveship can brave the dangers of the Rain Wild River and trade with the legendary Rain Wild Traders and their mysterious magical goods, plundered from the enigmatic Elderling ruins. Althea Vestrit expects her families to adhere to tradition and pass the family Liveship on to her when it quickens at the death of her father. Instead, the *Vivacia* goes to her sister Keffria and her scheming Chalcedean husband, Kyle. The proud Liveship becomes a transport vessel for the despised but highly profitable slave trade.

Althea, cast out on her own, resolves to make her own way in the world and somehow regain control of her family's living ship. Her old shipmate Brashen Trell, the mysterious woodcarver Amber, and the *Paragon*, the notorious mad Liveship, are the only allies she can rally to her cause. Pirates, a slave rebellion, migrating sea serpents, and a newly hatched dragon are but a few of the obstacles she must face on her way to discovering that Liveships are not, perhaps, what they seem to be, and may have dreams of their own to follow.

The Tawny Man Trilogy, a work still in progress at this writing, picks up the tale of Fitz and the Fool some fifteen years after the Red Ship wars. Queen Kettricken is determined to secure her son's throne by arranging a marriage between Prince Dutiful and Elliana, the daughter of their old enemy in the Outislands. But the Six Duchies themselves are restless. The Witted are weary of persecution and may choose to topple the throne of the Farseers by revealing that young Prince Dutiful carries an old taint in his blood. The Narcheska Elliana sets a high price on her hand: Dutiful must present her with the head of Icefyre, the legendary dragon of Aslevjal Island.

Meanwhile, to the south, the Bingtown Traders continue to wage war against the Chalcedeans, and seek to enlist the Six Duchies into the effort to obliterate Chalced. Bingtown's temperamental ally, the dragon Tintaglia, has her own reasons for supporting them in this, reasons that may lead not only

the restoration of the race of dragons but also to the return of Elderling magic to the Cursed Shores.

HOMECOMING



ROBIN HOBB

Day the 7th of the Fish Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

Confiscated from me this day, without cause or justice, were five crates and three trunks. This occurred during the loading of the ship *Venture*, setting forth upon Satrap Esclepius' noble endeavor to colonize the Cursed Shores. Contents of the crates are as follows: One block fine white marble, of size suitable for a bust, two blocks Aarthian jade, sizes suitable for busts, one large fine soapstone, tall as a man and as wide as a man, seven large copper ingots, of excellent quality, three silver ingots of acceptable quality, and three kegs of wax. One crate contained scales, tools for the working of metal and stone, and measuring equipment. Contents of trunks are as follows: Two silk gowns, one blue, one pink, tailored by Seamstress Wista and bearing her mark. A dress-length of mille-clot green. Two shawls, one white wool, one blue linen. Several pairs hose, in winter and summer weight. Three pairs of slippers, one silk and worked with rosebuds. Seven petticoats, three silk, one linen and three wool. One bodice frame, of light bone and silk. Three volumes of poetry, written in my own hand. A miniature by Soiji, of myself, Lady Carillion Carrock, née Waljin, commissioned by my mother, Lady Arston Waljin, on the occasion of my fourteenth birthday. Also included were clothing and bedding for a baby, a girl of four years, and two boys, of six and ten years, including both winter and summer garb for formal occasions.

I record this confiscation so that the thieves can be brought to justice upon my return to Jamailia City. The theft was in this manner: As our ship was being loaded for departure, cargo belonging to various nobles aboard the vessels was detained upon the docks. Captain Triops informed us that our possessions would be held, indefinitely, in the Satrap's custody. I do not trust the man, for he shows neither my husband nor myself proper deference. So I make this record, and when I return this coming spring to Jamailia City, my father, Lord Crion Waljin, will bring my complaint before the Satrap's Court of Justice, as my husband seems little inclined to do so. This do I swear.

Lady Carillion Waljin Carrock

Day the 10th of the Fish Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

Conditions aboard the ship are intolerable. Once more, I take pen to my journal to record the hardship and injustice to preserve a record so that those responsible may be punished. Although I am noble born, of the house of Waljin, and although my lord husband is not only noble, but heir to the title of Lord Carrock, the quarters given us are no better than those allotted to the common emigrants and speculators, that is, a smelly space in the ship's hold. Only the common criminals, chained in the deepest holds, suffer more than we do.

The floor is a splintery wooden deck, the walls are the bare planks of the ship's hull. There is much evidence that rats were the last inhabitants of this compartment. We are treated no better than cattle. There are no separate quarters for my maid, so I must suffer her to bed almost alongside us! To preserve my children from the common brats of the emigrants, I have sacrificed three damask hangings to curtain off a space. Those people accord me no respect. I believe that they are surreptitiously plundering our stores of food. When they mock me, my husband bids me ignore them. This has had a dreadful effect on my servant's behavior. This morning, my maid, who also serves as a nanny in our reduced household, spoke almost harshly to young Petrus, bidding him be quiet and cease his questions. When I rebuked her for it, she dared to raise her brows at me.

My visit to the open deck was a waste of time. It is cluttered with ropes, canvas, and crude meals with no provisions for ladies and children to take the air. The sea was boring, the view only distant foggy islands. I found nothing there to cheer me as this detestable vessel bears me ever farther away from the lofty white spires of Blessed Jamaillia City, sacred to Sa.

I have no friends aboard the ship to amuse or comfort me in my heaviness. Lady Duparge has called on me once, and I was civil, but the differences in our station make conversation difficult. Lord Duparge is heir to little more than his title, two ships, and one estate that borders on Gerfen Swamp. Ladies Crifton and Anxory appear content with one another's company and have not called upon me at all. They are both too young to have any accomplishments to share, yet their mothers should have instructed them in their social responsibility to their betters. Both might have profited from my friendship upon our return to Jamaillia City. That they choose not to court my favor does not speak well of their intellect. Doubtless they would bore me.

I am miserable in these disgusting surroundings. Why my husband has chosen to invest his time and finances in this venture eludes me. Surely men of a more adventurous nature would better serve our Illustrious Satrap in this exploration. Nor can I understand why our children and myself must accompany him, especially in my condition. I do not think my husband gave any thought to the difficulties this voyage would pose for a woman gravid with child. As ever, he has not seen fit to discuss his decisions with me, no more than I would consult him on my artistic pursuits. Yet my ambitions must suffer to allow him to pursue his! My absence will substantially delay the completion of my *Suspended Chimes of Stone and Metal*. The Satrap's brother will be most disappointed, for the installation was to have honored his thirtieth birthday.

Day the 15th of the Fish Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Exalted Satrap Esclepius

I have been foolish. No. I have been deceived. It is not foolishness to trust where one has every right to expect trustworthiness. When my father entrusted my hand and my fate to Lord Jathan Carrock, I believed he was a man of wealth, substance, and reputation. My father blessed Sa's name that my artistic accomplishments had attracted a suitor of such lofty stature. When I bewailed the fate that would come to a man so much my senior, my mother counseled me to accept it and to pursue my art and to establish my reputation in the shelter of his influence. I honored their wisdom. For these last ten years

as my youth and beauty faded in his shadow, I have borne him three children, and bear beneath my heart the burgeoning seed of yet another. I have been an ornament and a blessing to him, and yet he has deceived me. When I think of the hours spent managing his household, hours I could have devoted to my art, my blood seethes with bitterness.

Today, I first entreated, and then, in the throes of my duty to provide for my children, demanded that he force the Captain to give us better quarters. Sending our three children out onto the deck with their nanny, he confessed that we were not willing investors in the Satrap's colonization plan but exiles given a chance to flee our disgrace. All we left behind, estates, homes, precious possessions, horses, cattle . . . all are forfeit to the Satrap, as are the items seized from us as we embarked. My genteel respectable husband is a traitor to our gentle and beloved Satrap and a plotter against the Throne Blessed by Sa.

I won this admission from him, bit by bit. He kept saying I should not bother about the politics, that it was solely his concern. He said a wife should trust her husband to manage their lives. He said that by the time the ships resupply our settlement next spring, he would have redeemed our fortune and we would return to Jamailian society. But I kept pressing my silly woman's questions. All your holdings seized? I asked him. All? And he said it was done to save the Carrock name, so that his parents and younger brother can live with dignity, untarnished by the scandal. A small estate remains for his brother to inherit. The Satrap's Court will believe that Jathan Carrock chose to invest his entire fortune in the Satrap's venture. Only those in the Satrap's innermost circle know it was a confiscation. To win this concession, Jathan begged many hours on his knees, humbling himself and pleading for forgiveness.

He went on at great length about that, as if I should be impressed. But I cared nothing for his knees. "What of Thistlebend?" I asked. "What of the cottage by the ford there, and the moneys from it?" That I brought to him as my marriage portion, and humble though it is, I thought to see it passed to Naris when she wed.

"Gone," he said, "all gone."

"But why?" I demanded. "I have not plotted against the Satrap. Why am I punished?"

Angrily, he said I was his wife and of course I would share his fate. I did not see why, he could not explain it, and finally told me that such a foolish woman could never understand, and bid me hold my tongue, not flap it and show my ignorance. When I protested that I am not a fool, but a well-known artist, he told me that I am now a colonist's wife, and to put my artistic pretenses out of my head.

I bit my tongue to keep from shrieking at him. But within me, my heart screams in fury against the injustice. Thistlebend, where my little sisters and I waded in the water and plucked lilies to pretend we were goddesses and those our white and gold scepters . . . gone for Jathan Carrock's treacherous idiocy.

I had heard rumors of a discovered conspiracy against the Satrap. I paid no attention. I thought I had nothing to do with me. I would say that the punishment was just, if I and my innocent babes were not ensnared in the same net that has trapped the plotters. All the confiscated wealth has financed the

expedition. The disgraced nobles were forced to join a Company composed of speculators and explorers. ~~Worse, the banished criminals in the hold, the thieves and whores and ruffians, will be released to join our Company when we disembark.~~ Such will be the society around my tender children.

Our Blessed Satrap has generously granted us a chance to redeem ourselves. Our Magnificent and Most Merciful Satrap has granted each man of the company two hundred leffers of land, to be claimed anywhere along the banks of the Rain Wild River that is our boundary with barbarous Chalced, and along the Cursed Shores. He directs us to establish our first settlement on the Rain Wild River. He chose this site for us because of the ancient legends of the Elder Kings and their Harlot Queens. Long ago, it is said, their wondrous cities lined the river. They dusted their skin with gold and wore jewels above their eyes. So the tales say. Jathan said that an ancient scroll, showing their settlements, had recently been translated. I am skeptical.

In return for this chance to carve out new fortunes for ourselves and redeem our reputations, O Glorious Satrap Esclepius asks only that we cede to him half of all that we find or produce there. In return, the Satrap will shelter us under his protective hand, prayers will be offered for our well-being, and twice yearly his revenue ships will visit our settlement to be sure we prosper. A Charter for our Company, signed by the Satrap's own hand, promises this.

Lords Anxory, Crifton, and Duparge share in our disgrace, though as lesser Lords, they had less fate to fall. There are other nobles aboard the other two ships of our fleet, but no one I know well. I rejoice that my dear friends do not share my fate yet I mourn that I enter exile alone. I will not count upon my husband for comfort in the disaster he has brought upon us. Few secrets are kept long at court. Is that why none of my friends came to the docks to bid me farewell?

My own mother and sister had little time to devote to my packing and farewells. They wept as they bade me farewell from my father's home, not even accompanying me to the filthy docks where the ship of banishment awaited me. Why, O Sa, did they not tell me the truth of my fate?

At that, though, a hysteria fell upon me, so that I trembled and wept, with occasional shrieks bursting from me whether I would or no. Even now, my hands tremble so violently that this desperate scrawl wanders the page. All is lost to me, home, loving parents, and, most crushing, the art that gave me joy in life. The half-finished works I left behind will never be completed, and that pains me as much as a child stillborn. I live only for the day that I can return to gracious Jamaillia by the sea. At this moment—forgive me, Sa—I long to do so as a widow. Never will I forgive Jathan Carrock. Bitterness rises in my throat at the thought that my children must wear this traitor's name.

Day the 24th of the Fish Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

Darkness fills my soul; this voyage to exile has lasted an eternity. The man I must call husband orders me to better manage our household, but I scarcely have the spirit to take up my pen. The children weep, quarrel, and complain endlessly, and my maid makes no effort to amuse them. Daily her contempt grows. I would slap her disrespectful scowl from her face if I had the strength. Despite my

pregnancy, she lets the children tug at me and demand my attention. All know a woman in my condition should experience a serene existence. Yesterday afternoon, when I tried to rest, she left the children napping beside me while she went out to dally with a common sailor. I awoke to Narissa crying and had to arise and sing to her until she calmed. She complains of a painful belly and a sore throat. No sooner was she settled than both Petrus and Carlmin awoke and started some boyish tussling that completely frayed my spirit. I was exhausted and at the edge of hysteria before she returned. When I chided her for neglecting her duties, she saucily replied that her own mother reared nine children with no servants to aid her. As if such common drudgery were something I should aspire to! Were there anyone else to fulfill her duties, I would send her packing.

And where is Lord Carrock through all of this? Why, out on deck, consulting with the very nobleman who led him into disgrace.

The food grows ever worse and the water tastes foul, but our cowardly Captain will not put in shore to seek better. My maid says that her sailor has told her that the Cursed Shore is well named and that evil befalls those who land there as surely as it befell those who once lived there. Can even Captain Triops believe such superstitious nonsense?

Day the 27th of the Fish Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

We are battered by storm. The ship reeks of the vomit of the miserable inhabitants of its bowels. The constant lurching stirs the foul waters of the bilge, so that we must breathe their stench. The Captain will not allow us out on the deck at all. The air down here is damp and thick, and the beams drip water on us. Surely, I have died and entered some heathen afterlife of punishment.

Yet in all this wet, there is scarcely enough water for drinking, and none for washing. Clothing and bedding soiled with sickness must be rinsed out in seawater that leaves it stiff and stained with salt. Little Narissa has been most miserable of the children. She has ceased vomiting but has scarcely stirred from her pallet today, poor little creature. Please, Sa, let this horrid rocking and sloshing end soon.

Day the 29th of the Fish Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

My child is dead. Narissa, my only daughter, is gone. Sa, have mercy upon me, and visit your justice upon treacherous Lord Jathan Carrock, for his evil has been the cause of all my woe! They wrapped my little girl in canvas and sent her and two others into the waters, and the sailors scarcely paused their labors to notice their passing. I think I went a little mad then. Lord Carrock seized me in his arms when I tried to follow her into the sea. I fought him, but he was too strong for me. I remain trapped in this life his treachery has condemned me to endure.

Day the 7th of the Plow Moon

Year the 14th of the reign of the Most

Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

My child is still dead. Ah, such a foolish thought to write, and yet still it seems impossible to m
Narissa, Narissa, you cannot be gone forever. Surely this is some monstrous dream from which I w
awake!

Today, because I sat weeping, my husband pushed this book at me and said, "Write a poem t
comfort yourself. Hide in your art until you feel better. Do anything, but stop weeping!" As if h
offered a squalling baby a sugar teat. As if art took you away from life rather than plunging yo
headlong into it! Jathan reproached me for my grief, saying that my reckless mourning frightens o
sons and threatens the babe in my womb. As if he truly cared! Had he cared for us as a husband and
father, never would he have betrayed our dear Satrap and condemned us to this fate.

But, to stop his scowl, I will sit here and write for a time, like a good wife.

A full dozen of the passengers and two crewmen have died of the flux. Of one hundred sixteen wh
began this voyage, ninety-two now remain. The weather has calmed but the warm sunlight on the de
only mocks my sorrow. A haze hangs over the sea and to the west the distant mountains smoke.

Day the 18th of the Plow Moon

Year the 14th of the reign of the Most

Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

I have no spirit to write, yet there is nothing else to occupy my weary mind. I, who once composed th
wittiest prose and most soaring poetry, now plod word by word down a page.

Some days ago we reached the river mouth; I did not note the date, such has been my gloom. All th
men cheered when we sighted it. Some spoke of gold, others of legendary cities to plunder, and sti
others of virgin timber and farmland awaiting us. I thought it marked an end to our voyage, but still
drags on.

At first the rising tide aided our upriver progress. Now the crew must labor at their oars for eve
ship-length we gain. The prisoners have been taken from their chains and utilized as rowers in tin
boats. They row upriver and set anchors and drag us against the current. By night, we anchor and liste
to the rush of the water and the shrieks of unseen creatures from the jungle on the shore. Daily th
scenery grows both more fantastic and threatening. The trees on the banks stand twice as tall as o
mast, and the ones behind them are taller still. When the river narrows, they cast deep shadows ov
us. Our view is a near-impenetrable wall of greenery. Our search for a kindly shore seems folly. I se
no sign that any people have ever lived here. The only creatures are bright birds, large lizards that su
themselves on the tree roots at the water's edge, and something that whoops and scuttles in th
treetops. There are no gentle meadows or firm shores, only marshy banks and rank vegetatio
Immense trees root stiltlike in the water and dangling vines festoon them, trailing in the chalky wate
Some have flowers that gleam white even in the night. They hang, fleshy and thick, and the win

carries their sweet, carnal breath. Stinging insects torment us and the oarsmen are subject to painful rashes. ~~The river water is not potable; worse, it eats at both flesh and wood, softening oars and ulcerating flesh.~~ If left to stand in vessels, the top layer of the water becomes drinkable, but the residue swiftly eats leaks in the bucket. Those who drink it complain of headaches and wild dreams. One criminal raved of “lovely serpents” and then threw himself overboard. Two crewmen have been confined in chains because of their wild talk.

I see no end to this horrid journeying. We have lost sight of our two companion vessels. Captain Triops is supposed to put us off at a safe landing that offers opportunity for a settlement and farming. The Company’s hope of open sunny meadows and gentle hills fades with every passing day. The Captain says that this fresh water is bad for his ship’s hull. He wishes to put us ashore in the swamp, saying that the trees on the shore may be concealing higher land and open forest. Our men argue against this, and often unroll the Charter the Satrap has given us and point out what was promised us. He counters by showing the orders the Satrap gave him. It speaks of landmarks that don’t exist, navigable channels that are shallow and rocky, and cities where only jungle crawls. Sa’s priests made this translation and they cannot lie. But something is very wrong.

The entire ship broods. Quarrels are frequent, the crew mutters against the Captain. A terrible nervousness afflicts me, so that tears are never far away. Petrus suffers from nightmares and Carlmi, always a reclusive child, has become near mute.

Oh, Fair Jamaillia, city of my birth, will I ever again see your rolling hills and graceful spire? Mother, Father, do you mourn me as lost to you forever?

And this great splotch is Petrus jostling me as he climbs upon my lap, saying he is bored. My ma is next to useless. She does little to earn all the food she devours, and then she is off, to slink about the ship like a cat in heat. Yesterday, I told her that if she got with child from her immoral passions, I would immediately turn her out. She dared to say she did not care, for her days in my service were numbered. Does the foolish slat forget that she is indentured to us for another five years?

Day the 22nd of the Plow Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

It has happened as I feared. I crouch on a great knee of root, my writing desk a chest of my meagre possessions. The tree at my back is as big around as a tower. Strands and tangle of roots, some as big around as barrels, anchor it in the swampy ground. I perch on one to save my skirts from the damp and tussocky earth. At least on the ship, in the middle of the river, we were blessed with sunlight from above. Here, the foliage overshadows us, an eternal twilight.

Captain Triops has marooned us here in the swamp. He claimed that his ship was taking on water and his only choice was to lighten his load and flee this corrosive river. When we refused to disembark, there was violence as the crew forced us from the ship. After one of our men was thrown overboard and swept away, our will to resist vanished. The stock that was to sustain us they kept. One of our men frantically seized the cage of messenger birds and fought for it. In the tussle, the cage

broke, and all our birds rose in a flock to disappear. The crew threw off the crates of tools, seed, and provisions that were supposed to aid us in establishing our colony. They did it to lighten the ship, not to help us. Many fell in deep water, out of reach. The men have salvaged what they could of those that fell on the soft riverside. The muck has sucked the rest down. Now we are seventy-two souls in this forsaken place, of which forty are able-bodied men.

Great trees tower over us. The land trembles under our feet like a crust on a pudding, and where the men marched over it to gather our possessions, water now seeps, filling their footprints.

The current swept the ship and our faithless Captain swiftly from our sight. Some say we must stay where we are, beside the river, and watch for the other two ships. Surely, they say, they will help us. But I think we must move deeper into the forest, seeking firmer land and relief from the biting insects. But I am a woman, with no say in this. The men hold council now, to decide leadership of our company. Jathan Carrock put himself forward, as being of the noblest birth, but he was shouted down by other former prisoners, tradesmen, and speculators who said that his father's name had no value here. They mocked him, for all seem to know the "secret" that we are disgraced in Jamaillia. I walked away from watching them, feeling bitter.

My own situation is a desperate one. My feckless maid did not leave the ship with us, but stayed aboard, a sailor's whore. I wish her all she deserves! And now Petrus and Carlmin cling to me, complaining that the water has soaked their shoes and their feet sting from the damp. When I shall have a moment to myself again, I do not know. I curse the artist in me, for as I look up at the slanting beam of sunlight slicing through the intervening layers of branch and leaf, I see a wild and dangerous beauty to this place. Did I give in to it, I fear it could be as seductive as the raw glance of a rough man.

I do not know where such thoughts come from. I simply want to go home.

Somewhere on the leaves above us, it is raining.

Day the 24th of the Plow Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

I was jolted from sleep before dawn, thrown out of a vivid dream of a foreign street festival. It was as if the earth leapt sideways beneath us. Then, when the sun was fairly up in the unseen sky, we again felt the land tremble. The earthquake passed through the Rain Wild about us like a wave. I have experienced earthquakes before, but in this gelid region, the tremor seemed stronger and more threatening. It is easy to imagine this marshy ground gulping us down like a yellow carp swallowing a breadcrumb.

Despite our inland trek, the land remains swampy and treacherous beneath our feet. Today, I came face to face with a snake hanging down from a tangle of green. My heart was seized by both his beauty and my terror. How effortlessly he lifted himself from his perusal of me to continue his journey along the intertwining branches overhead. Would that I could cross this land as effortlessly!

Day the 27th of the Plow Moon

Year the 14th of the reign of the Most

Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

I write while perched in a tree like one of the bright parrots that share the branch with me. I feel both ridiculous and exhilarated, despite hunger, thirst, and great weariness. Perhaps my headiness is a side effect of starvation.

For five days, we have trekked ponderously through soft ground and thick brush, away from the river, seeking drier ground. Some of our party protest this, saying that when our promised ship comes in spring, it will not be able to find us. I hold my tongue, but I doubt that any ship will come up the river again.

Moving inland did not improve our lot. The ground remains tremulous and boggy. By the time our entire party has passed over it, we leave a track of mud and standing water behind us. The damp inflames our feet and rots the fabric of my skirt. All the women go draggle-hemmed now.

We have abandoned whatever we could not carry. Every one of us, man, woman, and child, carries as much as possible. The little ones grow weary. I feel the child inside me grow heavier with each sucking step.

The men have formed a Council to rule us. Each man is to have one vote in it. I regard this ignoring of the natural order as perilous, yet there is no way for the outcast nobles to assert their right to rule. Jathan told me privately that we do best to let this happen, for soon enough the Company will see that common farmers, pickpockets, and adventurers are not suited to rule. For now, we heed their rule. The Council has gathered the dwindling food supplies into a common hoard. We are parceled out a pittance each day. The Council says that all men will share the work equally. Thus Jathan must stand night watch with his fellows as if he were a common soldier. The men stand watch in pairs, for a solo watchman is more prone to the strange madness that lurks in this place. We speak little of it, but all have had strange dreams, and some of our Company seem to be wandering in their minds. The men blame the water. There is talk of sending out exploring parties to find a good dry site for our settlement.

I have no faith in their brave plans. This wild place does not care for our rules or Council.

We have found little here to sustain us. The vegetation is strange, and the only animal life we have seen moves in the higher reaches of the trees. Yet amidst this wild and tangled sprawl, there is still beauty, if one has an eye for it. The sunlight that reaches us through the canopy of the trees is gentle and dappled, illuminating the feathery mosses that drape from the vines. One moment I curse it as we struggle through its clinging nets, and in the next, I see it as dusky green lace. Yesterday, despite my weariness and Jathan's impatience, I paused to enjoy the beauty of a flowering vine. In examining it, I noticed that each trumpetlike flower cupped a small quantity of rainwater, sweetened by the flower's nectar. So forgive me that I and my children drank well from many of the blossoms before I told the others of my find. We have also found mushrooms that grow like shelves on the tree trunks, and a vine that has red berries. It is not enough.

It is to my credit that we sleep dry tonight. I dreaded another night of sleeping on the damp ground ~~awakening wet and itching, or huddled atop our possessions as they slowly sink into the marsh~~ ground. This evening, as the shadows began to deepen, I noticed bird nests dangling like swinging purses from some of the tree limbs. Well do I know how cleverly Petrus can climb furniture and even drapes. Selecting a tree with several stout branches almost at a level, I challenged my son to see if he could reach them. He clung to the vines that draped the tree while his little feet found purchase on the rough bark. Soon he sat high above us on a very thick limb, swinging his feet and laughing to see us stare.

I bade Jathan follow his son, and take with him the damask drapes that I have carried so far. Others soon saw my plan. Slings of all kinds now hang like bright fruit in these dense trees. Some sleep on the wider branches or in the crotches of the trees, others in hammocks. It is precarious rest, but dry.

All praised me. "My wife has always been clever," Jathan declared, as if to take the credit from me and so I reminded him, "I have a name of my own. I was Carillion Waljin long before I was Lady Carrock! Some of my best-known pieces as an artist, *Suspended Basins* and *Floating Lanterns* required just such a knowledge of balance and support! The difference is one of scale, not property. At this, several of the women in our party gasped, deeming me a braggart, but Lady Duparge exclaimed, "She is right! I have always admired Lady Carrock's work."

Then one rough fellow was so bold as to add, "She will be just as clever as Trader Carrock's wife for we will have no lords and ladies here."

It was a sobering thought to me and yet I fear he has the right of it. Birth and breeding count for little here. Already they have given a vote to common men, less educated than Lady Duparge or I. The farmer has more say in our plans than I do.

And what did my husband mutter to me? "You shamed me by calling attention to yourself. Succumb to vanity to boast of your 'art accomplishments.' Occupy yourself with your children's needs, not bragging of yourself." And so he put me in my place.

What is to become of us? What good to sleep dry if our bellies are empty and our throats dry? I pined so the child inside me. All the men cried "Caution!" to one another as they used a hoist and sling to lift me to this perch. Yet all the caution in the world cannot save this babe from the wilderness being his birthplace. I miss my Narissa still, and yet I think her end was kinder than what this strange foreboding may visit upon us.

Day the 29th of the Plow Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

I ate another lizard tonight. It shames me to admit it. The first time, I did it with no more thought than a cat pouncing on a bird. During a rest time, I noticed the tiny creature on a fern frond. It was green as a jewel and so still. Only the glitter of its bright eye and the tiny pulse of life at its throat betrayed it to me. Swift as a snake, I struck. I caught it in my hand, and in an instant I cupped its soft belly against

my mouth. I bit into it, and it was bitter, rank, and sweet all at once. I crunched it down, bones and all, as if it were a steamed lark from the Satrap's banquet table. Afterward, I could not believe I had done it. I expected to feel ill, but I did not. Nevertheless, I felt too shamed to tell anyone what I had done. Such food seems unfit for a civilized human, let alone the manner in which I devoured it. I told myself it was the demands of the child growing in me, a momentary aberration brought on by gnawing hunger. I resolved never to do it again, and I put it out of my mind.

But tonight, I did. He was a slender gray fellow, the color of the tree. He saw my darting hand and hid in a crack of the bark, but I dragged him out by his tail. I held him pinched between my finger and thumb. He struggled wildly and then grew still, knowing it was useless. I looked at him closely, thinking that if I did so, then I could let him go. He was beautiful, his gleaming eyes, his tiny claws, and lashing tail. His back was gray and rough as the tree bark, but his soft little belly was the color of cream. There was a blush of blue on the soft curve of his throat and a pale stripe of it down his belly. The scales of his belly were tiny and smooth when I pressed my tongue against them. I felt the pattering of his tiny heart and smelled the stench of his fear as his little claws scabbled against my chapped lips. It was all so familiar somehow. Then I closed my eyes and bit into him, holding both my hands over my mouth to be sure no morsel escaped. There was a tiny smear of blood on my palm afterward. I licked it off. No one saw.

Sa, sweet Lord of all, what am I becoming? What prompts me to behave this way? The privation of food, hunger or the contagious wildness of this place? I hardly know myself. The dreams that plague me in sleep are not those of a Jamaillian Lady. The waters of the earth scald my hands and sear my feet until they heal rough as cobs. I fear what my face and hair must look like.

Day the 2nd of the Greening Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

A boy died last night. We were all shocked. He simply did not wake up this morning. He was a healthy lad of about twelve. Durgan was his name, and though he was only a tradesman's son, I share his parents' grief quite strongly. Petrus had followed him about, and seems very shaken by his death. He whispered to me that he dreamed last night that the land remembered him. When I asked what he meant by that, he could not explain, but said that perhaps Durgan had died because this place did not want him. He made no sense to me, but he repeated himself insistently until I nodded and said perhaps he was right. Sweet Sa, do not let the madness be taking my boy. It frightens me so. Perhaps it is good that my boy will no longer seek the companionship of such a common lad, yet Durgan had a wide smile and a ready laugh that we will miss.

As fast as the men dug a grave, it welled full of murky water. At last his mother had to be taken away while his father condemned his son's body to the water and muck. As we asked Sa's peace of him, the child inside me kicked angrily. It frightened me.

Day the 8th of the Greening Moon (I think. Marthi Duparge says it is the 9th.) Year the 14th of

the reign of the Most Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

We have found a patch of drier ground and most of us will rest here for a few days while a chosen party of men scouts for a better place. Our refuge is little more than a firmer island amidst the swamp. We have learned that a certain type of needled bush indicates firmer ground, and here it is quite dense. It is resinous enough to burn even when green. It produces a dense and choking smoke, but it keeps the biting insects at bay.

Jathan is one of our scouts. With our child soon to be born, I thought he should stay here to help me care for our boys. He said he must go, to establish himself as a leader among the Company. Lord Duparge is also to go as a scout. As Lady Marthi Duparge is also with child, Jathan said we could help one another. Such a young wife as she cannot be of much use at a birthing, and yet her company will be preferable to none at all. All of us women have drawn closer as privation has forced us to share our paltry resources for the good of our children.

Another of the women, a weaver's wife, has devised a way to make mats from the abundant vines. I have begun to learn this, for there is little else I can do, so heavy have I become. The mats can be used as bed-pallets and also laced together into screens for shelter. All the nearby trees are smooth-barked with the branches beginning very high, so we must contrive what shelter we can on the ground. Several women joined us and it was pleasant and almost homey to sit together and talk and work with our hands. The men laughed at us as we raised our woven walls, asking what such frail barriers could keep out. I felt foolish, yet as dark fell, we took comfort in our flimsy cottage. Sewet the weaver has a fine singing voice, and brought tears to my eyes as she sang her youngest to sleep with the old song "Praise to Sa in Tribulation." It seems a lifetime since last I heard music. How long must my children live with no culture and no tutors save the merciless judgment of this wild place?

As much as I disdain Jathan Carrock for bringing about our exile, I miss him this evening.

Day the 12th or 13th of the Greening Moon Year the 14th of the reign of the Most Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

A madness came upon our camp last night. It began with a woman starting up in the darkness shouting, "Hark! Hark! Does no one else hear their singing?" Her husband tried to quiet her, but then a young boy exclaimed that he had heard the singing for several nights now. Then he plunged off into the darkness as if he knew where he was going. His mother ran after him. Then the woman broke free of her husband, and raced off into the swamp. Three others went after her, not to bring her back but crying, "Wait, wait, we will go with you!"

I rose and held on to both my sons, lest the madness take them. A peculiar undark suffuses the jungle by night. The fireflies are familiar, but not an odd spider that leaves a glob of glowing spittle in the middle of its web. Tiny insects fly right into it, just as moths will seek a lantern's fire. There is also a dangling moss that gleams pale and cold. I dare not let my lads know how gruesome I find it. I told them I shivered because of the chill, and in concern for those poor benighted wretches lost in the swamp. Yet it chilled me even more to hear little Carlmin speak of how lovely the jungle was by

night, and how sweet the scent of the night-blooming flowers. He said he remembered when I used to make cakes flavored with those flowers. We never had such flowers in Jamaillia City, yet as he said I almost recalled little brown cakes, soft in the middle and crispy brown at the edges. Even as I write the words, I almost recall how I shaped them into blossoms before I cooked them in hot bubbling fat.

Never have I done such cooking, I swear.

As of midday, there is no sign of those the night-madness took. Searchers went after them, but the search party returned wet and insect-bitten and disconsolate. The jungle has swallowed them. The woman left behind a small boy who has been wailing for her most of the day.

I have told no one of the music that haunts my dreams.

Day the 14th or 15th of the Greening Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

Our scouts still have not returned. By day, we put a fine face on it for the children, but by night Marthi Duparge and I share our fears while my boys sleep. Surely our men should have returned by now, only to say that they found no better place than this boggy island.

Last night Marthi wept and said that the Satrap deliberately sent us to our deaths. I was shocked. Sa's priests translated the ancient scrolls that told of cities on this river. Men dedicated to Sa cannot lie. But perhaps they erred, and grievously enough to cost our lives.

There is no plenty here, only strangeness that lurks by day and prowls amongst our huts by night. Almost every night, one or two folk awake shrieking from nightmares they cannot recall. A young woman of easy virtue has gone missing for two days now. She was a whore for coin in Jamaillia's streets, and continued her trade here, asking food from the men who used her. We do not know if she wandered off or was killed by one of our own party. We do not know if we harbor a murderer in our midst, or if this terrible land has claimed another victim.

We mothers suffer the most, for our children beg us for more than the meager rations allotted us. The supplies from the ship are gone. I forage daily, my sons at my side. I found a heaped mound of loosened earth a few days ago and, poking through it, discovered eggs with brown speckled shells. There were almost fifty of them, and though some of the men refused them, saying they would not eat snake or lizard eggs, none of the mothers did. One lilylike plant is difficult to pull from the shallow water, for inevitably I am splashed with stinging water and the roots are long and fibrous. There are nodules on the roots, no bigger than large pearls, and these have a pleasantly peppery flavor. Sewet has been working with the roots themselves, making baskets and recently a coarse cloth. That will be welcome. Our skirts are in tatters up to our calves, and our shoes grow thin as paper. All were surprised when I found the lily pearls. Several people asked how I knew they were edible.

I had no answer to that. The flowers looked familiar somehow. I cannot say what made me pull up the roots nor what prompted me to pick the pearly nodules and put them in my mouth.

The men who stayed here constantly complain of standing watches by night and keeping our fire alight, but in truth I think we women work as hard. It is taxing to keep our youngsters safe and fed and clean in these circumstances. I confess I have learned much of managing my boys from Chellia. She was a laundress in Jamaillia, and yet here she has become my friend, and we share a little hut we have built for the five children and ourselves. Her man, one Ethe, is also amongst the explorers. Yet she keeps a cheerful face and insists that her three youngsters help with the daily tasks. Our older boys will send out together to gather dry dead wood for the fire. We caution them never to go beyond the sound of the camp, but both Petrus and Olpey complain that no dry wood remains nearby. Her daughters Pij and Likea watch Carlmin while Chellia and I harvest the water from the trumpet flowers and scavenge whatever mushrooms we can find. We have found a bark that makes a spicy tea; it helps to stave off hunger as well.

I am grateful for her company; both Marthi and I will welcome her help when birth comes upon us. Yet her boy Olpey is older than my Petrus and leading him into bold and reckless ways. Yesterday the two were gone until dusk, and then returned with only an armful of firewood each. They told of hearing distant music and following it. I am sure they ventured deeper into this swampy forest than was wise. I scolded them both, and Petrus was daunted but Olpey snidely asked his mother what else should he do, stay here in the mud and grow roots? I was shocked to hear him speak so to his mother. I am sure that he is the influence behind Petrus' nightmares, for Olpey loves telling wild tales full of parasitic specters that float as night fogs and lizards that suck blood. I do not want Petrus influenced by such superstitious nonsense, and yet what can I do? The boys must fetch wood for us, and I cannot send him alone. All the older boys of our Company are given such chores. It grieves me to see Petrus, the descendant of two illustrious bloodlines, put to such work alongside common boys. I fear he will be ruined long before we return to Jamaillia.

And why has Jathan not returned to us? What has become of our men?

Day the 19th or 20th of the Greening Moon
Year the 14th of the reign of the Most
Noble and Magnificent Satrap Esclepius

Today three muddy men and a woman walked into our campsite. When I heard the hubbub, my heart leapt in excitement, for I thought our men had returned. Instead, I was shocked to discover that the party was from one of the other ships.

Captain, crew, and passengers were flung into the river one evening when the ship simply came apart. They had little opportunity to salvage supplies from the foundering vessel. They lost more than half the souls aboard it. Of those that made it to shore, many took the madness, and in the days following the shipwreck ended their own lives or vanished into the wilds.

Many of them died in the first few nights, for they could find no solid ground at all. I covered many ears when they spoke of people falling and literally drowning in the mud. Some woke witless and raving after experiencing strange dreams. Some recovered, but others wandered off into the swamps never to be seen again. These three were the vanguard of those who remained alive. Minutes later others began to arrive. They came in threes and fours, bedraggled and bug-bitten, and horribly scalded.

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