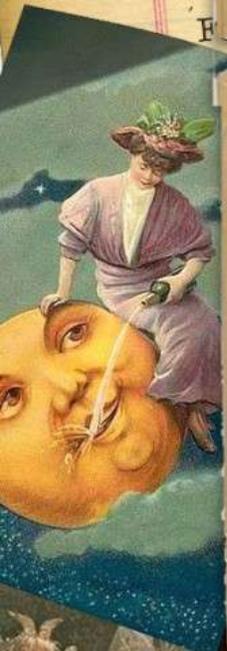


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The Occasional
Writings of
Gregory Edward Flood

A DJINN, LOTTA FAIRIES & SUNDRY GDS

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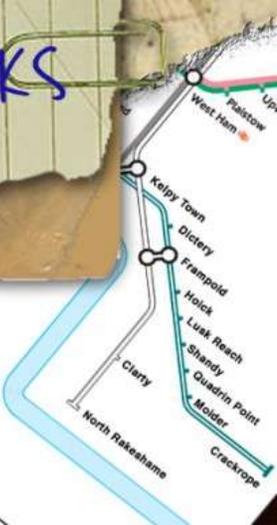


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A Djinn, Lotta Fairies and Sundry Gods

Gregory Edward Flood

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About the Author

Gregory Edward Flood is the author of *Seven God Limit* and *The Last of the Dire Dwellers*, both available from Koios Books. He has gone through three literary agents, all of whom died on him. He's afraid to get another one because he doesn't want to be responsible.

But during his had-an-agent days his work was passed around to all the major publishing houses. Their reactions all pretty much went like this: "Great new writer. Wonderful, strong prose style, gorgeous sense of place, fascinating, unusual characters, cutting edge fantasy concepts and, uh..we can't publish this." One editor held on to one of his books for a year-and-a-half before letting go of it ("but we might still want it for our paperback line.") Gregory pretty much gave up after the last agent. But then the eBook revolution started and he decided that, since all those high-end New York professionals said his work was *so damn good*, he'd try going the digital route.

As you can see, he had much greater success this time.

You can find Gregory on Facebook and [LinkedIn](#) and you can find his novels and other work at www.koiosbooks.com.

The Djinn's Tale

Aref Sedeghi, a merchant of Hashtpur, in the province of Gilan, on the shore of the Caspian Sea, had a wife who weighed 600 pounds.

Oh, this was not to say that she had always weighed 600 pounds. This was not to say that she had weighed 600 pounds on their wedding day.

Aref was not a merchant of the conventional kind. His activities were winked at by the authorities but disapproved of officially. Aref was a purveyor of merchandise from what was then the Soviet Union. From a destination within Azerbaidzhan he received shipments at the tiny airport in Hashtpur: televisions, stereo equipment, computers, microwave ovens, toasters, blenders, coffee pots, and other household electronics. From there these goods were flown to the capital city of Tehran where they were sold at exorbitant prices on the black market.

Aref Sedeghi was a smuggler.

This was not to his discredit. In a time and place where the best of things were not available to any but the privileged few, Aref was a man who wanted the best of everything. And in a country where certain luxuries were prohibited, what else could he do but import them covertly from the outside?

To the people of his town Aref was not a criminal but a hero. And yet, his actions were officially unlawful and, however much the local police chief might admire him—in fact, they were business partners—he was required to disguise his wealth. And so, Aref lived as did the desert sheiks of old, presenting a public facade of poverty and reserving his displays of wealth to the sequestered interior of his home.

This was not to say that no one knew he was rich. Oh, quite the contrary. But his circumspection rescued his friend the police chief from any embarrassment.

So, when it came time for Aref to marry, he wanted the best of brides.

To his mind there was no question as to the identity of his intended. Her name was Rualla, the daughter of a former mayor of the town, though much fallen in her station after her father's death. She was now being raised by her greatuncle, an aged imam, a man whose piety and holy austerity were not feigned. He kept Rualla in plain simplicity

at his somber residence at the end of town. They lived near the house of Aref, though the great contrast between their's and Aref's financial position was known to them.

Aref made the mistake of thinking that marriage to the lovely Rualla would be merely a financial transaction. So, when he came to ask for the girl's hand in marriage, he was astonished to have his enormous cash offer summarily turned down by the angry old man. Sputtering with indignation, Aref demanded that Rualla be asked for her opinion in the matter. This was a most unusual request, and Aref would never have asked it had he not been desperate to obtain the beautiful damosel.

Knowing what would happen, the old imam called for his grandniece. She came dutifully, with downcast eyes. Even wrapped in the black obscurity of the domino—an antiquated style of dress that the women of Iran had abandoned but her uncle required of her at home—her beauty filled the room, and Aref's cupidity intensified.

But she would have none of him. Aref's swagger and elegance did nothing to endear him to her. And so, speaking only to the old man, she said it was her wish to remain where she was. All this she said with her usual sweetness of tone and mildness of demeanor. But she could not be persuaded to change her mind.

Aref stormed out of their house, and swore loudly that they had not seen the last of him. The wise old imam was left with a terrible sense of foreboding.

Months passed, and Aref's rage smoldered. Then, one dry, clear day he achieved the means to his heart's desire.

He and his partner the police chief, whose name was Mohsen, were watching a new shipment coming into the tiny Hashtpur airstrip. The deep-bellied quadriplane coasted down from the cloudless sky against the gold and green background of the mountain range which guarded the region to the west and south. The wind was hot and smelled of the sea.

On the side of the airport not girded by mountains, the land fell away in cultivated tiers of tobacco. As the two smugglers walked across the tarmac to congratulate their pilots and inspect their cargo, they heard cries of protest and anger from the direction of the tobacco farm.

Suddenly alert, they ran to the edge of the slope and witnessed a murder.

Outside a small maintenance hut of corrugated metal, two men grappled over a parcel. One was frail and elderly, dressed in rags, the other was larger and more powerful with a brutish and menacing demeanor. The hut stood by the highway that cut through the farm and had apparently been chosen by the two as a rendezvous point.

Before the horrified eyes of Aref and Mohsen, the larger man drew a dagger from his boot and stabbed the smaller man, who fell dead. As the murderer fled with the package

clutched in his bloodstained hands, Mohsen drew his revolver—he was in his police uniform—and dropped the fleeing ruffian with one shot.

The pair crashed through the rows of short, broad leaved plants, Mohsen running to the man who had been shot, Aref to the man who had been stabbed. Both were dead.

Aref and Mohsen walked toward each other along the deserted highway. Aref saw that Mohsen carried the fatal parcel under his arm.

“We will take it down to police headquarters,” said Mohsen. It is evidence.

Aref was not fooled. He and the police chief had been rivals since they were boys. Mohsen was not of Persian descent like Aref, but was of Kurdish extraction, and the hostility between their two races informed their friendship. And Aref knew that Mohsen knew that whatever the package contained was worth a murder.

As for that, the contents of the package were easily discernible by its shape: the package contained a large bottle, fully one meter from stopper to base. What the bottle contained must have been something of great value. And so, after some goodnatured bickering—the proximity of new wealth had erased the two dead men from memory—the two smugglers agreed to unwrap the bottle on the spot.

I do not need to describe their process of discovery, for you already know what the bottle contained: another of my kind, a djinn. In this case the inhabitant was one Muharq, an emir of the sea djinn whose people had ruled the many bodies of water in that part of the world before their incarceration eons ago.

It was Mohsen who unwrapped the magical bottle, and when he saw the tiny djinn sitting dejectedly in his prison of glass, he, that is, Mohsen, hurled the bottle to the ground with a cry of superstitious dread. The bottle did not break, to be sure, and poor Muharq was bounced around within it as it tumbled down the slope.

Aref was a citybred man of some education and was not so easily frightened as his business partner. (Would that he had been!) He chased the bottle down the slope, half sliding, half tumbling, until he and it came to a stop in a clump of tobacco plants.

Mohsen shouted warnings, but Aref had already made his decision, indeed had decided instantaneously upon first seeing the little djinn in his bottle prison and realizing the nature of the opportunity that lay before him. Without hesitation, he twisted the stopper from the bottle and thereby shattered the Seal of Solomon.

Nothing happened.

Muharq pulled himself painfully to his tiny feet and put his clothing back into order after the tumble down the slope and straightened his hair, which was, in fact, seaweed. He looked up at Aref, his round eyes filled with melancholy.

Aref placed the bottle on the ground and stood back. Muharq only looked up silently, his spare body motionless.

Blinking in confusion, Aref said, "Come forth, genie."

Muharq came forth. He flew up the neck of the bottle and lighted on the soft, moist earth.

Nothing happened.

Aref frowned. None of this was as he had expected it to be.

"You are my slave," he roared.

Muharq bowed silently.

Nothing happened.

"What is your name, slave?" Aref said.

"Muharq," said Muharq. But he was so small that his voice was inaudible to the anxious human.

"Speak so that I may hear you." Aref shouted.

Muharq sighed. He took a series of deep breaths, expending his flat chest and delicate ribs to their fullest capacity, and exhaling weakly. With each deep inhalation he grew in stature, until he was the same height as Aref.

"Muharq, master," he said, quite audibly this time.

"Very good! Am I correct in assuming that you are the slave of whoever frees you?"

"So it has been decreed," Muharq said gloomily. "It is within my power to fulfill any desire, master."

Aref laughed wickedly and rubbed his hands together, his head filled with visions of wealth, power, and sensual satisfactions. "Very good, Muharq! We have much to do, you and I."

"It is within my power to fulfill any desire, Master," said Muharq, "but know this: magic carries with it the justice of the world."

Aref narrowed his eyes. "Explain."

Muharq shrugged. "I meant merely what I said, Master."

"And what," said Aref, "did you mean by 'the justice of the world?'"

"Magic is not a product of this realm," Muharq replied. "Its energies are drawn from...elsewhere. It is not part of human life, and where it intrudes, the natural patterns of life are destroyed."

"Of course, stupid genie! That is what makes it magic."

"I do not mean to offend, Master. But I tell you now that despite your most careful wording of requests, and my best intentions, my magic will carry to you equal harm with the good. This is the justice of the world."

Aref abused the djinn in Farsi. Then he said, "And that is justice? That the glories of your magicks should be enjoyed only by shadow creatures like yourselves who dwell in the abandoned spaces of human life? Entities without ambition? Without desire?"

Aref was assuming a great deal, to be sure, for in truth he had no direct knowledge of the djinn race and its character.

Muharq shook his head sadly. "I can deny you nothing, Master. The spell that bound me to the bottle, and which now binds me to you, prohibits it. Indeed, so powerful is the enchantment that it seems to me as if I serve you of my own free will."

"Then you will do as you are told! And you will indulge in no sly attempts to pervert my requests."

Muharq opened his palms. "I have no desire to do you harm, Master. But in this world the bitter cannot be parted from the sweet, the fruit from the ripening. Nor can the sensual sweet be parted from the spiritual sweet."

"Enough, genie." Aref said angrily. The djinn's strange words jumbled about in his head, seeking a foothold. "Your kind forever seeks to spread confusion and pain! You will not unman me! Now, take me home! No! Wait." He paused and thought over his request carefully, for the djinn's warning troubled him. "Take me to the following address." And very carefully he described his abode to his new servant, specifying the street, the day, the time, the month, and year. He made sure there was no room left for misinterpretation.

"There is no need for such caution, Master," Muharq said. "Your home is known to me, for I can see it on the surface of your mind." And with that he reached out and took Aref's arm.

Mohsen watched this interchange from a safe distance. When Muharq's hand came to rest upon his new master's arm, the two of them vanished in a blink, leaving behind only the discarded bottle and the shattered wax seal.

Mohsen shrieked in horror and, a good Moslem by his own estimation, fell to his knees and pressed his forehead to the dirt.

Aref and Muharq spent the rest of the day in a frenzy of magicks. Muharq conjured up all the abundance that Aref's long-nurtured greed could invent. He filled the basement storage rooms with riches of every imagining and all the spectacular technological devices known to the world; Muharq was not so knowledgeable about electronics and solid state circuitry, but his expansive djinn mentality wove itself into the fabric of these modern curiosities and quickly comprehended their nature.

As the mounds of riches grew, Aref calculated gleefully the wealth he could accrue selling this magically created merchandise throughout the Middle East. Imagine a retail operation that required no purchasing of inventory!

But then upon further reflection it occurred to him that no such sales would be necessary. What use had he of money when his djinn slave could create unlimited wealth with only a word and a gesture?

Now, another man might have answered that question: “Why, as a service to the world, of course! Just think of how I can now feed and clothe the poor and homeless! My djinn can save countless lives, create peace for my country, and all countries.” But Aref Sedeghi was not of such a turn of mind.

And besides, Aref was a man whose sense of self-importance came from his skills as a merchant and entrepreneur. Now that his possession of a djinn had rendered all business activities irrelevant, he felt quite dislocated from life though he could not bring himself to admit this—and whatever connection he felt to his fellow man was crumbling along with his previous identity. Cut loose from their moorings of his material life, Aref's thoughts turned in upon themselves and he sought out the darker longings that lingered unsatisfied in the corners of his mind.

And, of course, he thought of Rualla.

He phrased his next request to the djinn very carefully. He remembered Muharq's warning about the 'justice of the world,' and he was careful not to bring upon himself any unintended experiences as a result of incautious wording.

“It is my wish that the beautiful Rualla fall in love with me as I am, and continue to love me no matter what use I make of my free will. She is to love me spontaneously and with her own nature.”

Muharq sadly shook his head. “What you ask, Master, is beyond the capacities even of magic. She cannot be spellbound and spontaneous at the same time. Surely you can see that the enchantment would compromise her free will utterly.”

“Do not seek to thwart me, genie.” he shouted. “I will have her, and you will make it so! You will find away.”

Muharq sighed, and bowed.

That night, Rualla was beset by sinister dreams.

In her small room in her greatuncle's home, amidst her pillows and draperies, she turned and moaned on her bed. She dreamed that a strange being with seaweed hair and round, liquid eyes descended from the darkness above her and squatted upon her belly. The sadfaced visitor, like some creature from some magical realm beneath the waves, stared miserably into her eyes, for her eyes were open in this dream. It reached down to

her, not with its hands but with its gaze, and intruded into the privacy of her mind. It foraged through her innermost thoughts, picking up one here or there, examining them like shells found on a beach, while poor Rualla cried out in horror at this invasion.

Then the thing began its work.

Deep within the dark chambers of Rualla's consciousness he shifted about the contents that he found there. He pushed some items onto back shelves or into deep closets and he drew forth into the light of day old desires, and habits of thought that had never had much power over Rualla's character. He brought forward memories of Rualla's stern father, mingled them with a long-forgotten romantic interest in a domineering old tutor, and attached these to her desire for physical love; and this last desire he amplified to an intensity just short of madness. Her love of gentleness in others, especially men, was cast into a pit from which it could exert little influence over her new appetites. The black shining pelt of a childhood pet took on the shade and texture of Aref's hair. Her love of simplicity and plain dealings was molded into a new desire to have all her decisions made for her and a distaste for personal responsibility.

In sort, the djinn took the contents of Rualla's mind just as he found them and, without the addition of any new thing, he rearranged the components so as to make Aref Sedeghi the perfect and inevitable fulfillment of her most compelling subconscious desires.

His work completed, Muharq withdrew from the sleeping girl's mentality and, with one last, sad look at her troubled loneliness, took flight.

Rualla, exhausted physically and mentally by the cruel enchantment, fell into a profound slumber.

Aref's wedding to Rualla was a large and gaudy affair with Aref's friends—who were not actually friends but business associates—thronging the small home. Rualla's only relative, the imam, did not attend.

On the night of Rualla's ensorcelment, Aref had been awakened by her frantic pounding on his front door. In anguished cries that were overheard by many of the neighbors, she begged to be let in. Smiling in triumph, Aref opened his door to her and, overwhelmed by the onslaught of her desire, had his way with her in the foyer of his home. Aref had become the paradigm of all Rualla's romantic fantasies, and she all but forced him into a proposal of marriage before even he had thought it possible.

Thirty days into their marriage, the trouble began.

Muharq lavished material wealth upon the newlyweds. Every gift Aref could imagine for Rualla was given to her. But the gentle damsel, despite the magical alteration of her

character, had little interest in such baubles, for she still possessed the simplicity of dress and manner that her holy uncle had instilled in her.

This soon began to rankle in her husband's mind. By this time his now unnecessary business empire had begun to deteriorate and he had grown noticeably fatter from his intake of Muharq's magical cuisine. So, his attention was increasingly focused upon the cluttered rooms of his home and the bride with whom he shared them.

"She keeps to her room," Aref growled to his djinn.

"And her garden," said Muharq.

"Surrounded by untold riches she restricts herself to a bare room and a pauper's diet."

"Her room is simple and lovely," the djinn said, "not bare. She is content."

Well, I am not." Aref roared." She must partake of my abundance! She is an affront to me! She disdains what I hold dear."

Muharq said nothing, for he sensed some new disaster in the making. Aref tapped the ends of his fingers together." I must word the request very carefully, must I not, tricky genie?"

"I make no attempt to trick you, Master."

Aref laughed harshly." I am pleased to hear it, thing of darkness. Then know my desire: it is time for my bride to experience the pleasure of wealth. It is my command that Rualla shall enjoy this prosperity just as I enjoy it."

Muharq sighed, and bowed." So shall it be, Master. She shall enjoy this as you enjoy it."

And so Rualla suffered another night of fearful dreams.

For a time, Aref was delighted by the transformation of his wife.

Upon the following sunrise she awoke and called for Muharq. She commanded him to conjure up a morning repast of an elegance uncharacteristic of her. She then allowed herself to be magically attired in silk gowns and heavy jewels. And by the stroke of noon she and Aref were disporting themselves in the mountains of treasure that filled the house, laughing with greedy glee and making love in piles of gold coins.

It was at this time also that Rualla began to eat.

And eat.

And eat.

For Muharq had been constrained to make Rualla enjoy his magical creations in the same way Aref enjoyed them. And so the djinn had peered deeply into his master's mind and seen there the pattern of fear and lovelessness that inspired Aref's desperate need

for material security. The djinn then recreated that pattern in the mind of Rualla. And so Aref's long-suppressed passion for food became a part of her as well.

But whereas Aref had an eye for surfaces, Rualla did not, for her nature had always been one of honesty and openness. Aref's appetite was tempered by his vanity regarding his appearance and his concern for the good opinions of other men. But Rualla's matching rapacity was an artificial imposition upon her personality and so did not bring with it the mental defenses that tempered and sublimated Aref's cravings.

The change in her became obvious to all who looked at her, for her lissome figure soon became submerged beneath ever deepening layers of fat. The neighborhood buzzed with gossip about this strange transformation, and dark rumors began to circulate about Aref and his supposed mistreatment of his bride—though even the most fantastic of these theories could not approach the truth.

Why did Aref not stop her? Why did he not order Muharq to undo the enchantment, or to at least magically restore Rualla's appearance? It is difficult to know.

Perhaps shame is what stopped him.

It is one thing to deny the existence of one's blackest traits within the privacy of one's own thoughts; but to see those same traits transferred to another, to see someone good and loving transformed into a grotesque reflection of one's self, was more than poor Aref could countenance.

And so Rualla ran wild, eating and expanding and all but exhausting Muharq with her demands for more and more. Aref's humiliation before his neighbors and former associates became so intense that he finally confined her to the house.

But soon he could not bear even the sight of her in private and so he ordered Muharq to confine her in the basement and to feed her only enough food to sustain health and life.

The djinn created a deep pit, a dungeon large enough to accommodate mountains of treasures, but too deep from which to escape. And when the work was done, and the destroyed, monstrously obese Rualla was consigned to her luxurious prison, Aref sat by the side of the pit and wept.

That night, Muharq waited upon Aref on the terrace of their house, which overlooked the flat roofs and tawny streets of the town.

Aref had changed. Whereas his wife had ballooned to hideous proportions, he had become gaunt. His own appetites, reflected back to him in the person of Rualla, now repelled him. He ate only enough to hold together his attenuated frame. He stared out at the lights of Hashtpur and wracked his brain.

“What do I ask for, genie?” he said. “Tell me. How do I use your magic in a way that creates only good, only happiness?”

Muharq shook his head. “Master, to ask for magic that does good without harm is to seek to avoid the justice of the world.”

Aref rubbed his eyes wearily. “The justice of the world. How I wish I could understand what that is.”

“Please be careful what you say, Master.”

And suddenly Aref thought he saw the solution to his misery rise to the surface of his consciousness.

“That is it, genie! That is the wish! The wish that should have been the first wish.”

“Master?”

“Genie, you will give me wisdom.”

Muharq sighed, and bowed.

Meanwhile, things had not gone well for Mohsen. His role in the partnership had always been a merely protective one. Being the law’s representative, he had been able to keep the law away. But now, bereft of Aref’s business acumen, the financial empire they had shared had begun to fall apart.

Faced with encroaching financial ruin, Mohsen had complained bitterly to Aref, and had begged him to return. But Aref had accused him of being merely jealous of Aref’s acquisition of a magical slave, and harsh words had passed between them.

From that point on, Mohsen was regularly visited by Muharq, who bore gifts from Aref. Apparently this was some indirect attempt at reconciliation. Mohsen was a superstitious peasant and did not appreciate these visitations from what he considered to be a creature of darkness. But he feared Muharq’s powers and so spoke politely to the djinn and accepted the bizarre, spectacular gifts. And besides, Muharq was the only accurate source of information about Aref and Rualla.

That night, Muharq presented Mohsen with another magical gift. It was some jewel encrusted, gilded grandiosity of no importance to my story.

“Aref does not look well,” Mohsen said to the djinn.

“Indeed no,” Muharq sighed. “My master suffers from the justice of the world.”

“It is rumored that he hasn’t got long to live. That he is thin and ill.”

Muharq made no reply.

“And you, genie? How long will you live?”

“Sir? What do you mean?”

“You are immortal, are you not?”

“Yes, friend of my master.”

“And Aref? He, too, is now immortal?”

“No, not he. Not even a djinn’s magic can release a human from that final debt.”

“And when he dies, you are free?”

“No, not free. No, never. My services pass on to the one who inherits my master’s estate.”

This was as Mohsen had suspected. And the information was significant to him, for before Rualla had become bound to Aref, Mohsen was to be the inheritor of Aref’s estate, and was still so mentioned in Aref’s will.

“It strange he does not build a palace of his own.”

“His needs are few, Mohsen.”

“Take me to him,” said Mohsen.

And Muharq brought Mohsen to the house of Aref. They trudged through piles of gold and jewels and pearls until they reached the door to a basement that had not been there before in Mohsen’s memory of the building. And they went down.

Finally they came to the bottom of the last set of stairs, and before them they beheld the massive square pit into which Rualla had been exiled.

Mohsen’s eyes bugged out, first at the gilded, jewel-encrusted squalor of the place and then at the condition of its resident. Rualla had expanded to elephantine proportions. Muharq had dressed her hair, festooned her with jewels and draped her unspeakable corpulence in Persian silks, but this made the overall effect of her appearance even more horrible.

Rualla shrieked at Mohsen, imploring him to intercede for her with her cruel jailer, who gave her all the necessities of life except food. She yowled that she had eaten only bread and fruit, and that all of two hours ago.

Mohsen could see that she was mad with hunger, or to put it more accurately, with lust for food. She screamed epithets at Aref and threatened to smother him with her own colossal bulk should he ever draw near her again.

Mohsen looked over at Aref, who stood by the pit, his eyes averted from the horrible spectacle of his demented wife.

It is difficult to know now why Aref did not struggle with Mohsen, nor cry out for help even though there was no one to hear him. It is especially strange that he did not cry out to Muharq, who would have harkened his master’s call had he slept in a cave at the bottom of the ocean. Perhaps Aref’s own shame prevented him. Perhaps some desire for punishment and absolution. Perhaps he had learned too much about himself and so had lost the zest for life.

Mohsen stepped forward and pushed Aref into the pit.

Rualla howled with savage anticipation as Aref landed clumsily on a pile of silk carpets and cloth-of-gold. She reared up unsteadily on her overburdened legs and lumbered towards him, her once dainty hands bent into talons.

“Defend yourself,” Mohsen said calmly. He threw a pistol down to him.

As Rualla approached, Aref scrambled for the gun. He stood and, with shaking hand, brought Rualla’s heart into line with the sight.

Quite mad with hunger and rage, she did not stop.

Filled with gratitude to his friend Mohsen, who had forced him to do the thing that he, Aref, had dreamed of so many times, he fired.

Rualla fell dead.

Aref turned with the gun dangling at his side. He looked up tearfully at Mohsen.

“How can I thank you, my friend?” he said.

Mohsen shot him in the head.

“Wife-killer,” the policeman said.

And so, as the bullet penetrated his skull and passed into the soft tissues of his brain, Aref learned the wisdom of the world, which is the product of experience.

As for the further career of Muharq, as the slave of Mohsen, that is a tale for another night.

White Smyth's Tale

This story is a deleted section from a novel that will make its debut in 2017. There's nothing second-rate about it; the novel just went in a different direction. Of the characters, our narrator Strephon Larkinstreet, Anhedonia, White Smyth, Dolven and Wolken made the final cut though under other names. Glev remains Glev. Kavieng is still a night club owner in the novel, but an entirely different person. Larkinstreet is 1/8 shelleycoat, 1/8 kornbock and 1/8 Chinese storm dragon with a smidgen of vodianoy on his mortal mother's side. Do your own math.

This is White Smyth's last tale. I guess that makes it important. It's the last thing I can tell you about White Smyth, and then my story goes on without him. If you don't want to read this part, you can skip over it, but I think you should read it.

Kavieng's was jumping. Ensnared in the dark cluster of box-shaped warehouse buildings on the city's near north side, it glowed and sparkled below us like a mortal carnival.

White Smyth set us down at the front door. Humans walked past, oblivious to our presence, humans with worn jeans and dilated eyes darting beneath shocks of hair dyed coal black. Kavieng's was not in a nice part of humantown.

The whole building was slouched. It belonged to some mortal landlord, but Kavieng had simply appropriated it with Masque. Once the magick settled into place, even the owner would forget about his property until Kavieng was done with it. It was customary for any fairy who had usurped real estate in this way to compensate the landlord with a miracle or two. Or the guy's children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren, depending on how long the fairies held on to the place.

The doorman was Kavieng himself.

"Mr. Larkinstreet," he said in his sighing, night dweller's voice. "And this would be the extraordinary White Smyth."

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