

The Sad, Wise Fool

[A manuscript has recently been found which is supposed to have been the work of one J. Jester Jarles, a moronic old scrivener, said to have lived in the eleventh century. The portion offered here appears in Book Seven, Canon Three. The complete work is soon to be published under the title "Before the Days of Floating Soap." It should be remembered that much of the charm and naivete of the original is lost in translation.]

AS TWILIGHT DESCENDED, Peregrinne led Mary Valeria to a high place on the turret and bade her look down on Zephantia. Over all this would she be queen, he had said. But Mary Valeria was incredulous. Why should she believe the prophecy of a court jester? For a fool, Peregrinne was, a fool. Mary Valeria smiled to herself. Irony that the hunchback should so love her. Ironical more, had she been in love with him.

So she looked on him and pitied him, thinking she understood. "No, Peregrinne, no. It is not to be. Never can I be queen of the festival while that the house of Gorillis plots against us."

Peregrinne only shrugged his deformed shoulders. His eyes narrowed. "My Lady, the morrow shall tell!" And he turned.

Mary Valeria caught his hand and pressed it. Then she was gone. Passion born of loneliness became loneliness reborn of passion. Peregrinne remained standing on the turret. Long and long he gazed after her.

Then his glance returned to the scene beneath him. Tomorrow was the festival in honor of the natal day of Kenelm, batchelor prince of all Zephantia. The little town and the highroads leading to it were alive with activity—gay knights riding into the courtyard, their horses filling the castle stables, their corteges overcrowding the village inns. And the old tale relates how that Giles had come out of Dexter for the occasion. And there was Cadwallader, the belligerent, from purple Aubrey-strom, as well as Elbert and Egbert, the brothers who had vanquished the Hillarians, and many others whose names have long been forgot, since no bards sang of them.

So the jester mused. And he stroked his knavish chin.

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