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It Is Our Pleasure to Serve You

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Morning found the people in great spirits. All Zephantia took holiday. In honor of the king, the great castle was thrown open to the populace, who flocked in holiday attire to the vast hall of the Zephantian kings. The great room was paneled in gold leaf with streaks of delicate arabasques like the soft shadow of pearls on creamy feminine flesh, with floor of smooth onyx—that it was a wonder to see and caused gasps at its loveliness.

And the old manuscript tells of how that the king entered and made himself known to the people and sat himself on the throne of his fathers and demanded the voting commence.

Those of the order of knighthood began to step forth from the crowd. Singly they drew their gleaming blades, to lay them at their sovereigns feet and cast their votes for their favorites. But when those who wore the armorial trappings of the Gorillis drew forth the swords from their scabbards, they were aghast to behold the hilts fastened to swords of lath. So they stepped not forward to present wooden swords to their prince, for such would have been an insult and a mockery. As each new wooden sword was withdrawn, the crowd greeted it with scornful laughter. The visages of the Gorillis became grisly as the spirit of raillery caught on with the gathering. For such is the nature of laughter—that it can subdue where barbed words or keen edges faileth.

When all who dared had voted, the ballots were counted, and lo! Mary Valeria, the true maiden, had won. Great was the stir in the ancestral hall of the Zephantian monarchs.

After a space, the beautiful Mary Valeria was brought forth, was caparisoned in the royal purple, and was placed on the king's right. The good king himself set the crown of amethysts on her unmarried tresses while her praises were sung by blind bards from the east. She smiled on the glad company.

But little gay was Peregrinne, the fool. Little did he enter into the merry making, but from a secluded spot, through heavy lidded eyes, he viewed those who laughed and danced and sang and knew their youth. Sleepless had been the past night for him. Sleepless, too, would be the nights for days . . . but not for him only. He yawned.

Great was the feasting that day. Full many a flagon of ale and spiced wine was drunk to the king and his fair queen, for, indeed, was she not dazzling to look upon? All were happy and quite stuffed. So they made merry far into the softening hours.