

Lily Was Here

By Jerri Willmore

Any comments? Please email me at jerrriw@aol.com.

Deke didn't know what time it was. He only knew was early afternoon; on a fall day in 1195. He stood atop the hill where he had often come to think, over the years. It was said to be haunted.

Down below, the annual harvest festival was going on. He had wanted no part in it. He'd passed through it earlier, and people had turned to look at him; a tall man with shoulder length light blond hair, limping badly. In his arms he'd been carrying a toddler, female with dark hair and eyes. Everyone *knew* it wasn't his child. Where was he taking her? He couldn't care less.

Also, some girls turned around and gave him glances. He didn't notice that either.

The toddler twisted in his arms. He didn't dare put her down.

He stood there reminiscing.

He'd been born the youngest child to fiftyish serf parents. A miracle baby. His brothers and sisters were far older. When he was ten, his parents, unable to support him sent him to live with the most wealthy serf of the village, who did carpentry work for the Lord. His hut had two rooms. Palatial.

Bart (Bartholamew) was the youngest; picked on by his five older brothers. They became fast friends. So much so that when king Richard called for troupes, and Bart and his brothers had to go- thier father being friends with the Lord and all- it was only natural for him to go too.

Outside Jeruselem, he, Bart and two others-on a scouting mission- were attacked by Sarecens. Deke surprised everyone (including himself) by diving under the lead thug's scimitar and stabbing upward, leaping out of the way just in time. Then they fought. He was to kill more than the others, who may have died. After the last one was felled, they had run for thier lives,Deke badly wounded in the leg.

Back home, Bart inherited the house, his brothers being dead. He cultivated a beard; Deke remained clean-shaven. He married his sweetheart; no one would have

Deke, who lived Bart, as he he was lame. She died giving birth to Lillian- or Lily- and it fell upon Deke to care for her while Bart worked the fields or in this case, went down to Festival to search for a wife.

And if he finds one I'm gone. I'll just be in the way. There was a large storage-shed in back, about the size of a small room. He suspected he would have to live there. Bart thinks he loves me- but he'll get along without me fine. And the girl- will she remember me at all?

She broke his reverie. "Daddy!"

He laughed. "I'm not your daddy!"

He heard a noise.

It was coming from the center of the hill, where the grass grew long. Whispers and voices. The hair on his arms stood up. it was they those people. The "fairies." Ever since childhood, he'd felt he was being watched. Well now, he was going to investigate!

He carried the child over to the nest of ferns and laid her down. "if you love me- and I know you do- then don't move!"

Then he strode, slowly, to the center and looked around. *Just what was was the source of that n-*

Lily had been by Bart's side just a minute ago. Now the 8-year old seemed to have vanished. "Lily" Barthlomew called out. ""Lily!"

Five years had gone by since his friend Deke had , on that hill, vanished into thin air. Five years ago at the Festival, he had had an odd feeling about Deke; that something had gone wrong with him. He'd seen him go by on the way to the hill; he followed him up there. He'd found Lily shrieking her head off in the nest of ferns; she'd not moved. Everyone knew how much he loved Lily. He wouldn't leave her.

He heard someone call "Over here!" Turning he saw a tall man with light hair, Lily beside him. To his great relief, he recognized it as his child. At first he thought the

man was his friend, returned from the "dead". But he'd gotten it wrong. He was much too tall.

Walking over to her, he grabbed his daughter by the hand. "I was just talking to him, daddy!" she said. Bart bowed to the man. "thank you," he said. Leading her away, he glanced back. The man had vanished, as though he had never been.

Just as I'd figured.

"I told you this before." he said. When you meet a person who is not familiar to you- who is tall, and looks ot be in his early twenties- *stay away from him.*"

"Was he one of *them*, daddy?" she asked.

"Yes, I believe it was. When I turned around to look at him, he was gone. Just like that. You know...they probably took Deke."

"Could you talk to me more about that? How did he go away?"

"I don't know," he said in a heavy tone of voice. "Please. I don't want to discuss this anymore." But he could and did. No one else would listen to him; about the Crusades, and tales of the fairies. About Deke, most of all. Not even his wife, for he had remarried. Bart needed someone to talk to. And the only person he could *really* communicate with was his daughter.

*"Sh*t! F***! Damn!"*

Deke only understood one of those words. Just minutes before, something had tripped him. He dared not look up.

"Seems like we have a visitor" someone said.

He did not look up. "Please sir. You can sit up now." this was spoken in a woman's voice. He could see her feet.

He sat up, and beheld 3 men and 2 women. All looked to be in thier early 20s. The men stood about a head taller and the women nearly as tall. Beyond them he could see squarish building with green feathery stuff on top- he figured them to be trees

(he was right.)

"You are fairies, aren't you?"

"No, we are not" a man said. "We're not. There's no such thing as fairies. We are exactly like you but with one exception. We don't age."

(As they were telepaths, they actually spoke to him in his lingo.)

"Then where am I?" He tried to keep his voice calm.

One looked at the other, who said: "Tell him."

"You haven't gone anywhere. this is the 31st century."

"Oh," was all he could say.

One of the women- she wore white, and a long red braid- said, "Now sit there and don't move! Don't ask any more questions. We'll get you home straight away, inside of ten minutes."

"Ten minutes! I left a little girl back there. It might be too late!"

"You'll arrive only seconds after you departed." she said.

The immortals left Deke and stood by the by the small machine at the edge of the circular clearing where he had found himself. "Bad news" one of them muttered. "We can't send him back now. The machine's not working right; that is what got our friend into this; there was a time leakage. He heard something, and came up to investigate."

"Which is bad for poor little Ivanhoe here." This was spoken by the woman with the long red braid.

"He's just a *serf*, Jeanine." the other woman said.

"He was wounded in the Second Crusade. Couldn't have happened to a nicer guy. I've been watching him."

A snort. "I'll bet you have."

She waved her hand. "Never mind that. I have something in mind for him."

"You mean we don't just freeze him?" a man said.

"No, I've a better idea. Send him to our world headquarters in New York. They'll see fit to study him, I think."

There were groans all around.

I'm serious. I see something special in him. And after what he's been through, why not give him some fun? Even though he won't....."

"Very well, Jeannie, you tell him."

Deke saw the woman separate herself from the others and walk over to him. He knew that it was bad news.

"I am sorry," she said. But we cannot send you back right now after all."

"Why?" he said.

"The machine is broken. If we sent you back now we would be risking your life. It will be a month until we get a replacement. But we have something in mind for you."

"What is that?"

We will send you over to the city of New York. That's where our main anthropological center is. After a month you will be returned here, and you will still arrive home only seconds after you left. And if you decide to stay- or something happens to you- we will see to it that no harm befalls the child."

He sighed. "Do I have a choice?"

"Yes you do. We could freeze you in time for that period- from what I've heard it is not very pleasant."

"The answer is yes, then."

The girl turned away from him, expecting him to follow, like an obedient dog. He did so; but he bent over and winced. His old wound was acting up.

She turned. "Is something wrong?"

"War wound. It is hard for me to walk. Could you possibly help?"

She turned to one of the men, who shrugged. He pulled an instrument out of his belt, then ran it along Deke's leg. The pain went away immediately.

The four walked out of the clearing, Deke following, asking "Would you mind telling me where New York is?"

He was carried across the Atlantic in a 3-story craft which sped across the ocean at a height of 50 feet. While they had airplanes in this era- closer to shuttlecraft actually- they suspected taking him on it might give him a heart attack. They were right about that.

He was given a large room to stay in, and spent almost all his time there. With him was a taciturn male immortal whose job was to look after him. They said little to one another.

On the third day he was informed that that afternoon they would be docking in New York. Nervously he'd wolfed down his breakfast- a kind of fairy dish known as "flapjacks"- and followed his companion up the rickety metal stairway to the observation deck.

There he beheld the New York skyline, which looked much the same as a thousand years ago. The afternoon sun had turned it golden. And at the Statue of Liberty too; she had been faced in white granite, and in her hand she carried a sword.

"Look upon this Deke," said his normally silent companion. "Here is where all the legends began. Some of those we send back- we allow to keep some of their memories."

"Oh,Oh."

He pointed to the statue. "Who is that?"

"Liberty Enlightening the World," he said. "It is supposed to stand for freedom, about a thousand years old. Long ago, the sword was a torch. We once were attacked, you know. I would have liked the torch better."

Then he was herded (he thought the term applied) into a smaller craft; it took him to the shore. He got out and saw a woman detach herself from a knot of people and run to him across the sand- for this was now a beach. Tiny (for an immortal) and dressed in pastels, with layered reddish-brown hair. She looked like Susan Sarandon at age 20. She took both his hands in hers.

"My name is Valerie. Call me Val. I am the assistant director, and during your stay here you will be living with me."

They were taken via motorboat up the many canals which wound through Manhattan. For the sea level had risen. The buildings, which came down to the water's edge, looked very old; they had moss on them too, as did the huge trees at the shoreline.

It was a beautiful city.

It was getting near evening when they came to the centuries-old building where she lived. he was led up a flight of stairs to the 5th story. Once inside, she sat him down on the overstuffed couch, gave him water and something called a "sandwich." She told him she would be leaving for a couple hours, and for him to be sure not be sure not to touch anything.

He listened to her retreating footsteps, then got up. He looked around the room, which was about the same size as the main room in Barts's house. *Is this how fairies live?* He gazed on the strange looking wicker furniture, piled with pillows. A house gecko darted nearby to behind a picture on the vine-laced wall.. At the end of the room was a picture window, half hidden by crocheted curtains. He walked over to it, and gingerly drew it aside.

He looked at the top of a nearby building, 5 stories down. He saw a treed courtyard with a swimming pool. Other nearby buildings had vines cascading off the balconies, some with large bright flowers.

Oh, such beauty.

But he did not want to stay.

She returned after nightfall. Her face was set; she told him, "I don't know what they are planning on doing with you." Silently they had their evening meal, a traditional dish of old, called a "TV dinner". When he was done eating, he looked toward the picture window. She saw that, and walked over to it. She drew the curtain aside. As he gazed at the lit-up buildings, she said, "Here is the source of the legends, Deke."

"I was told that, yes."

Then she took him to his bed- a small inflatable cot in the corner of the living room. She was almost motherly as she pulled the blankets over him and touched his cheek. Then she turned out the lights and was gone, back to her own room, where she was not to sleep for some hours. He could see the crack of light under her door. For some time he lay there, looking out at the cold buildings, thinking.

He'd never been frightened his life. Or lonely, or homesick.

Or excited.

"Tell me more about the war, daddy."

Bart and Lily lay in the grass looking up at the sky. They shared between them a bag of ale. They often got together like this, after the midday meal.

"Had a rough day, Lily?" He tried to change the subject.

"They flung clods at me, yes."

"Oh, those children..."

"I was hoping..."

"I know. And I don't want to talk about it."

"I wouldn't ask. But I dreamt about him last night."

"I'm not surprised," he said softly. "He was quite a saint, that Deke was, and a hero to boot." (Of course, he was exaggerating.)

"I dreamed that he showed up on our doorstep."

He looked into her dark eyes. Inwardly, he shivered.

"Whatever you say," he said, squeezing her. "I just hope that wherever he is, he's being treated well."

"Deke, have you ever been with a woman?" He waited a moment before replying.

"Not all the way, no."

They lay on the the coverlet of Valeries' vast bed, oddly enough in the same position of Bart and Lily. Val took drags on a joint. She seemed to be far away.

"When we were docking in France," Deke said, Bart and two others put thier money together and put me together with....this whore....but nothing happened."

I could give myself to you right now. In the spirit of friendship, of course."

"I am honored lady. But I...I can't."

He'd always been shy with the girls anyway; this one was rather too much to handle. He could sense her age. He felt her bare arm on his; it was cold. She was so alien to him.

She laughed. "Scared, huh? Well, I am at least ten times older than you are."

"That is why, yes".

"Better that we just remain friends, then," she muttered. "I see you as the son I shall never have. But still, I'm disappointed, as I too come from the past. The early 1970s to be exact."

"You cannot have a child," he said shocked.

"Its not that I cannot. I am not allowed to. There are far too many people, Deke."

"But when I traveled through this world, back in England, it did not look crowded. I saw few people."

"That's because most of our dwellings are mostly or entirely underground. That's where the people are, most of the time. To make way for the plants, which provide air to breathe. Without them we'd die. "

"I have heard tell that fairy villages are underground. I didn't know that is why. But what of New York?"

"We kept the towers because of thier beauty. I was alive when they were voting not to tear them down, and I'm glad they didn't. But at times, as I walk down these streets I can hear the ghosts of my time. I feel as though I were living in a mausoleum, not a city."

He decided to change the subject. he shivered.

"What is that thing you're holding in your mouth?"

"Flowers of the hemp, courtesy of *my* era. It is said to harm mortals if they use it too much. Of course it doesn't hurt us. Nothing does. Like to try it?"

"Why, if you say it will harm me?"

"I don't think it can, not if it's just a few times. I am a scientist, so I should know. And I know ho homesick you are. I think this will cheer you up.'

So silently he watched while a joint for him. Then she taught him how to inhale. She was right- it *did* make him feel better.

This was after a week in her Manhattan apartment. Days earlier, she'd led him down the stairs to the basement, to a walkway. It now housed bullet trains which went to every city in the US- half of which were underground. The walked alongside the tracks on the broad crowded walkway; on the other side of the tracks

was a canal, lit from below, which carried the city's water. People were swimming and boating; disease was unknown here.

"Try not to stare," she whispered, "act normal." (He found it hard to do, as half of the women had no tops on.)

They exited into the lobby of another building; underground also. The next couple hours passed in a blur. He was taken into a dimly lit room, and given something to drink; he lay down upon a hospital bed. Then, as he lay asleep, all of his memories were recorded.

He was glad that later in the day he was actually given someone to talk to, who would even answer some of his questions.

He was shown into his office, of a very young looking man with shoulder-length red hair, tied back. Deke supposed he was at least a hundred.

He looked at Deke as though he were a friend not seen at a long while. Other immortals had looked at him like that. It struck him how much the men of this era resembled him. The pale skin, the long hair, the beardlessness. It did not make him feel comfortable at all.

"Are you enjoying your stay here, Zeke?" he was asked after he settled into his chair.

"My name is Deke."

"I'm sorry.. I'll answer any questions that you may have." "How is your..... people.....can travel through time? And what do you want with us?"

"Time slippages have always existed, Deke. For example, sometimes when you look into the west, you can view the towers of New York, the sun turning them golden-"

"I've heard of that, yes." Deke breathed. "Fata Morgana. As for what we want with people of your time, your legends tell of us. We want to close the circle, that's all. "What must be must be"- that's our motto."

"Oh" he said.

"And I've been going over your statistics. You have no close attachments, eh?"

"Just a man and a little girl. And I daresay" he added almost bitterly, "They won't be missing me very long."

"Oh, I don't know about that," the immortal murmured. But if you like you can stay us, Deke?"

"Why are you offering me this?"

"We see something special in you. You will not have to age if you stay. And as we've told you before, no harm will befall the little girl, who you left on the hill."

"I don't think I can accept your kind offer. This isn't where I belong."

"I knew you'd say that. But if you were 10 years older- or 20- you might be whistling a different tune."

"I know" he said, shivering inwardly. He'd heard tale of people taken by the "fairies", who elected to stay, and had the aging process halted or even reversed. The older they were, he knew, the more they were inclined to stay here.

"I'm a little disappointed, Deke. We need...new faces....from time to time. But don't worry, Deke. We'll get you home."

He smiled now, as he thought of the immortal's promise. The joint had completely burned down.

"Tell you what," Valerie said, "I don't think a couple more could hurt you. I will give them to you with a book of matches, and if you are in pain missing your home, they could help."

She gave these to him in a pouch. He put them in the pocket of his jerken, and forgot about it. So did she.

The hours spent in Valerie's apartment were endless, as Deke had nothing to do. He couldn't read; she showed him thier equivelent of a TV program, but he could he could not understand much of it. Then at night she would call him into her

bedroom, to show him something she called Movies. They lay upon her bed; overhead was a circular screen. Once he was actually able to understand the setup, he found himself enjoying them.

Toward the end of the month she showed him one he thought would reverbrate in his head forever. "It's a thousand years old," she said, but I know you'll like this Deke." She explained to him that it was all a fantasy- the Lion, the scarecrow, and the Tin Woodman. Then she turned off the light and fell asleep, leaving him to watch it alone.

He saw with interest this story of a girl- she looked familiar to him, but he didn't know why- and her struggles to get home. In the last scene, she found out it had all been a dream, with the faces of those she loved all around her. As she said "There's no place like home!" he was surprised to find himself in tears. Embarrassed, he looked over at Val, but she was sound asleep, curled up. She looked as though she had not a care in the world. *That's how immortals are.* He considered- just once- putting his hand on her thigh. He found he could not do it.

He sighed and got up, and went back into the living room, to his own small bed.

Lillian, age 18, lay on the on underneath her new friend Will. His hand was between her thighs, trying to push them apart.

Down below, the festival was going on. That was where she had met him, and invited up here. She had been feeling lonely, which was her usual case, but rarely did she seek to do anything about it. She had no close female friends. As for the boys, she liked some of them. But they were nothing compared to the man who showed up in her dreams, whom her father expected to turn up on thier doorstep any moment. She'd always dremt of Deke; now they were taking a different turn. She didn't dare speak of this to anyone.

But still, she had brought him up here. It seems as though she'd bitten off rather more than she could swallow.

"Give it up, Lil. No one would want to marry you anyway."

"Then I'd rather not, thank you." She looked over his shoulder into the darkness, at something that was not there.

She cried suddenly, "Oh god, look at that!"

"Don't take the- Oh!" He saw where she was looking. He beheld a tall man very short white hair, young appearing, wavering in and out of sight.

"Those people are watching over me," she said calmly. "Because of *him*. he sent them."

"Our Lord had nothing to do with it." (he misunderstood.) Those people are evil. But be gone with you!" He said to the apparition, nervously: "Don't worry, I won't hurt her."

Very slowly she got up and drew around herself her heavy woolen cloak. With a dignity she had not possessed before, she walked slowly away from them, into the mist.

We'll see to it that no harm befalls the child.

They never spoke again.

Did she hear "fairy laughter" or was she imagining things?

Just two days were left before Deke would have to depart. That night, he found himself unable to sleep. At about midnight, he heard the sound of singing, coming in from the window. He got up and went over to it. There on the building directly below- in the square with the swimming pool- people were singing. Sparklers shone down on thier upturned, young faces.

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!*

*For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.*

"What is that song?" he whispered. "It's so beautiful."

"Ode to the New Year." she said. Oh, I know, it looks a lot like spring, not January. A lot of things have changed."

Shivering a little, and avoiding her gaze, he went back to bed. For a moment- he'd almost changed his mind. And she knew it.

She accompanied him on the hoverflight back to England. "Just want to see you off." she laughed. But he also got the idea she wanted to protect him from something. He didn't know what it was.

When he arrived, he was shown to his quarters- a tiny room with a cot and a primitive toilet (one of the many things he'd found wondrous about the future was the commodes.) He had the feeling they were done with pampering him. He was right.

This was the night before he was set to depart. He slept restlessly; he came awake to someone shaking him. It was Val.

Does she want to.... But she only put her hand on his mouth. She drew him to his feet. "I'm sending you back myself."

"Why is that?"

"I just found out. When they will set the controls on the machine to send you back in time, they will also set it to erase your memory of all that befell you here. That would upset you of course, but you'll never know. You got in by mistake, and we told you too much. That's dangerous, Deke. You could change history. But you are my friend and my charge; I know how important those memories are to you. So I will do it myself, and let them do what they like to me."

"Thanks," he said.

They walked out of the building and into the square. Deke saw the AstroTurf circle, a squat machine at one end, and an arching sign which said "Timegate centre 22" "Why is this place not guarded? He asked in a quiet voice.

"Because," she said, "we trust each other so much."

"Is it still true," he asked hopefully, "I'll arrive seconds after I departed?"

"About 15 to 20 seconds, yes."

"Could you not cut it closer than that? She's an active child-" "I dare not cut it closer than that. You could die or- worse." She shivered. "Oh," he said.

She led him to the center of the circle.

"Well this is goodbye." For just a second she was in his arms. She gave him a quick kiss...like a sister.

"Thank you for everything."

"Thank *you* for everything."

She walked over to the device and crouched down. As she started to work with the controls, it looked to him like she was shaking.

He thought nervously, *is she thinking- do I remember how to work this thing?*

She was indeed thinking, *do I remember how to work this thing?*

She straightened up. "There, it's done. Hold on tight, Deke!"

He felt a blow from behind, as before. He plunged into darkness, and fell upon his knees onto the long grass. He buried his face in it.

He was home.

Bart was worried about Lillian, age 23. Still living at home, she had no interest in acquiring a marriage partner. She was indeed attractive; tall, with long kinky light brown hair, large dark eyes, rounded features and figure. But she had little interest in the young serf men of that village, nor they in her.

She was cut off even from her half-siblings. Her worst relationship was with "Deke the second", born 5 years after her. He couldn't have been more different than his

namesake. She called him "Deke the dolt" (or the medieval equivalent thereof,) he had similar insults for her. She spent long hours walking in the fields and woods by herself; at home, she brooded. That was part of the problem. That, and the fact that ever since childhood, he'd been filling her head with talk about Deke.

Unconsciously, she compared the village lads to him. They always came up short.

But that wasn't the worst thing. There was also having been abandoned on the hill. What horrors had she experienced, when Deke put her down and didn't return. She always said she didn't remember. But before she was a happy and playful little girl. Afterwards, she was something different.

Lily was lost. And as he gazed up at the hill, over the years, he couldn't help but feel *that* was at fault.

Remembering Lily, he pulled himself to his feet. "Lily," he called. "*Lily!*"

He ran to the patch of ferns. She was nowhere to be seen.

There was no sign in fact, that she had ever been there. Not even an impression her body would have left. "Oh, he moaned. He should have known that this would happen. How could they lie to him? But no- apparently his friend had just made a mistake. He guessed that he had been off, by a day or two. Hopefully the girl had been found. At least there were no signs of violence here, as though a wolf had gotten to her.

Still- he expected Bart would be mad at him, But what would he say?

He walked over to the edge of the hillside. Looking down at the town, he thought there might have been some changes. But as it was getting dark, he couldn't really be sure. Slowly, he walked down and into the village, on the way to Bart's hut. It was the same place it had always stood.

Upon arrival, he poked his head through the cloth flap which served as the doorway. "I'm home!" he said.

He beheld a group of people he'd never seen before. One of them, Bart, had had his back turned- he turned around to stare at him, as though he were a stranger.

"Bart, don't you know it's me?" he said. "I've come back. Do I have a story to tell you! Is Lillian all right?"

The big man slowly walked up to him and searched his face. he could tell that Bart's own had some lines in it. *Oh no*. Then Bart engulfed him in his arms. "Oh I knew this would happen," said he between sobs. "Why did you take so long?"

Holding onto his friend (not knowing what else to do) Deke gazed upon the people in the room. he felt a chill.

"Bart", he said, "are these your children?"

"Yes," Bart said heavily.

"You married again?"

"Yes. My wife is dead."

He untangled himself from Bart. "Please tell me, how long have I been away."

"Don't you know?"

"No, I do not."

"It will have been 20 years this October."

"Oh. Oh."

Bart sighed. "May as well introduce you to the children. Here's Lillian-wait! I thought she was here just now. Well here's Deke my oldest, age 18." Deke smiled. "Here's Mary age 16- he pointed to a blonde girl who curtsied- here's Stuart, here's Peter. And here's Dorothy."

"Dorothy!" He smiled at the 10 year old girl. "What a coincidence! I'll explain later. I'll tell you all where I've been, but I want Lillian to hear it. Didn't you say she was just here?"

"I saw her slip out," the oldest son said. "She recognized you, I think, and could not take the shock."

Deke then remembered: before Bart had embraced him he'd seen a girl in the back of the room, tall, with long curly hair. But he wasn't sure.

"Is she still living at home? I thought she'd be married by now. If the woman I saw was her, then she's pretty enough."

"That's so, " Bart began heavily, "but she-"

Deke "Jr" cut in- "I'm sorry, but I don't want to spend all evening discussing my sister. We've done enough of that! Please, dear sir, tell me where you went and what they've done to you. You haven't aged a day!"

Deke looked at namesake annoyed.

"I don't go anywhere. I traveled into the distant future. At the top of the hill, I heard something and went to investigate."

"The future," Bart said.

"It's true. I was watching your daughter then I heard a noise- people speaking- on the top of the hill. I sent up there to investigate and fell in. The people there are just like us- the only thing is that they do not age. They would have sent me back within minutes, and wiped my memory too no doubt, since I had seen so much. But the device was damaged. So I had to stay for a month, and when they did send me back a terrible mistake was made. I was supposed to arrive seconds after I had left; instead it took years."

"I see, said Bart. Well, dinner is about to be served. You will tell us of all that befell you there, won't you?"

As they sat around the table, the conversation lasted for hours. They never tired of asking questions about New York, and hearing his descriptions of the place. He held nothing back from them. Everyone forgot about Lily.

Finally Bart said to his children,

"I don't want anything said here to leave this room."

The children groaned.

"No, it's true. You know how dangerous it is that he kept his memory. If any of you talk, who knows what will happen."

He turned to Deke.

"You ought to take on another name, no? Your eldest sister moved out of town, you could be her son. You could be her child. I'll name you Richard, after His Highness. As for what your quarters are going to be, I have a building out back where I keep my wood and tools, and it's much too big. It is about the size of one of our bedrooms. You can have it for now."

Deke sighed. He'd expected that.

After the children went to bed, the two men sat in the Common room quietly, feeding the fire. Then Bart turned to him.

"I told them everything about you," he said. "I wanted to keep your memory alive, as I know you would be returning any day. Folk laughed at me, but you were right. Here you are."

"Here I am," he said.

Before he went to sleep, his eyes scanned the hut by the light of the fire.

He saw something on the opposite wall.

He'd guessed right- it was a picture of himself. He wore a shirt of chain mail; he looked out at the viewer with a calm expression. In his hand he brandished a sword.

He stared at it. *Is that really what they thought I was?* He restrained himself-just barely- from tearing it down and ripping it up.

Then he went to bed.

Daybreak came, and he was still asleep. He did not awaken until around noon, at which point he rolled over and looked at the ceiling; thinking of how lucky he was.

After all, he was home, none the worse for wear. He'd lost 20 years, but that wasn't as bad as that could have been. Unlike some other people in his place, he did not long for the world of the future. He did not care whether he ever saw it again. Most important of all, he still had his memory of the time he'd spent there.

He frowned suddenly.

The girl.

Lillian.

They had promised her that no harm would befall her. But they had been wrong. It just wasn't the sort of "harm" you could see.

He would have to make it up to her. She was his charge, after all. It had been in a way, his fault. As he lay, he watched the ceiling trying to think of what to do next. For an hour, he didn't move.

Finally he sat up; he walked to the doorway. He stretched his arms, and sighed.

Someone was coming up the walkway. Her head was down; He only saw her hair. It was because of it that he knew her.

He walked down to the path to her. "Lillian?" he said.

Slowly, very slowly she looked up at him. Something in her gaze made him feel cold. Though she looked a lot like the girl in the Wizard Movie (hair excepted.)

"Lily?" I've come back."

She didn't say anything.

He held out his palm, and she took it. Her hand felt cool. There was dirt under her fingernails, and on her bare feet.

"We need to talk," he said.

He led her back into the hut. Dorothy was at the fire, stirring the evening's stew. She jumped a little when she saw him.

"Does your father have any ale in the house? Or wine?"

"Yes I do believe we do." she disappeared into Bart's room, and returned with a skin of ale.

She poured the ale onto two mugs and handed them over to him. Her hand trembled a little. He decided not to comment on it.

The great hero comes home.

He handed one of them to Lily. He removed the furs and sack of straw from the bench where he'd been sleeping. they sat down.

They went through a third of the ale without looking at one another.

There were so many things he wanted to say. He found he could not say them.

"This ale has done something to my head." she said suddenly. "I am sorry. I'll speak with you later." She got up and walked into the bedroom she shared with her siblings, he heard her throw herself down on the bed she shared with Mary.

Bewildered, he stared after her. Then he heard someone enter the hut. It was the oldest son. Big and dark, with a feathery beard that would one day be like his dad's. "May I have the rest of that?" he said, refering to Lily's ale.

"Sure," said Deke. His namesake took it from his nerveless hand.

He drained it in one gulp, and winked. "Don't tell my father."

H seemed to sense what had occurred. "You met my sister? She's a wild one, eh?"

"I wouldn't say that." Then he described what had happened.

He let out a heavy sigh. "I don't know what's up with my sister. But our father told her so much about you." He laughed and winked. "Methinks she's besotted."

"With *me*? Oh, you're joking."

"Could be, I don't know. but she was closest to our father. And he all but built a shrine to you, following your disappearance. Because he blames himself for it, I

imagine." He nodded at the picture on the wall. Deke looked at it also; he shuddered.

"That's not me at all," he quietly said. "There's nothing special about me. And remember, I was only away just a month."

"A month. a month. Sure looks that way to us."

That night at dinner, he held the children spellbound with talk about New York. He described the city in as much detail as possible. The young people could not get enough of it.

Everyone, that is, save Lily. She sat away from the others, her knee drawn up to her chest. Her face was half hidden by her hair. She looked morose. The wizard of Oz, Dorothy had looked familiar to him. Now he knew why. Lily's late mother had been almost a ringer for Judy Garland. So was Lily.

If only she'd look him in the face!

"Lily," said Bart after awhile, do you have anything to say?"

"I saw the city once, said she. "In a dream. I flew over the sea, and saw the lady with the spiky crown." She still did not look up.

Peter said, "My sister's is spoiling the party as usual." He said it through a laugh.

Obviously something was eating the girl. And he thought, it had something to do with him.

He decided he would speak to her away from the others. He also remembered the "magic" fairy-herb Val had given him. Maybe, he thought, it would help her open up.

As they were settling down for bed, as she was about to enter thier bedroom, he walked up to her and took her arm. She quivered. "Lily, he said, I would like to speak with you alone. Let's go walking tomorrow."

She paused for a second before answering.

"Yes."

The following afternoon, he met her outside of the after the noon meal. Without a word, she took his hand and he led her down from the village to where they would be alone, following a stream they waded through to the base of a small cliff.

Looking down at her- her head was bent- he had a strange feeling of deja vu. Well, he had been half in love with her mother, when she was alive. They settled down. She sighed, and drew up her knees to her chest, her arms around her heavy wool skirt. As usual. he felt he couldn't speak. Like her.

"I have something for you" he said, finding his voice at last. She looked over and he held out his hand, which held a couple joints and matches. She looked at it quizzically. "It's from the fairies." he said. "It will make you feel better."

"Do we eat them?"

"No. Do as I do."

He lit the two joints and handed one to her. His hands were shaking; he almost scorched himself. So were hers.

They sat and smoked in silence. After a while he looked over at her, and saw that a change had come over her. The muscles in her relaxed; her jaw became unclenched. She threw her head back, and the sun shone down on her exposed neck and her hair. He hadn't noticed before how lovely she was.

He also realized- as he hadn't before- what had been gnawing at the girl. It did not faze him at all.

He felt it too.

Presently she threw herself backward, after stubbing out the joint with her bare foot. He sat beside her feeling more calm than he had in months.

Then he turned to her. Lily?"

She said nothing.

"Lily. Are you awake?"

She gave a closed-lipped smile.

Surprising himself, he bent over her face and kissed it, quickly. *'t believe I did that.*

Maybe it was the pot but she didn't seem surprised at all. She did not shrink away. She held out her hand, and he pulled her up.

Shyly she wet her lips with her tongue. "Oh, I was so certain you wouldn't want me....."

Another moment (quite a long one) later, once again he looked her in the eyes. To his surprise, he still saw fear.

"Don't be so nervous Lily! We're just two normal 23 year olds, enjoying a beautiful day. There is nothing wrong with what we just did."

She stared. "Did you not spend 20 years among those people?"

No, not at all. More like a month."

"A month? How could that be?"

"I wish you were there when I explained everything. I was promised I would be returned seconds after I had left. But a woman I knew there took pity upon me, as they were planning on erasing my memory. I had seen too much. But she made a mistake, probably, as it should have been seconds. Instead," he said flatly, "it was years."

"Oh, she said. I thought you had become like one of them. That's one reason I was afraid, I think. But that's not so? You're not immortal?",

"No, I'm not. And I'm glad, though if I were older I wouldn't be. This is the happiest day of my life, Lily. What do you want to do?"

"Let's lay down and look at the sky." she said dreamily. My father and I used to do that, long ago. You know- I don't think we should tell him."

"You're right, Lily. Not just yet."

And so, together they lay down and lay there, thier heads lightly touching, watching the drifting clouds for over an hour.

Right through the shocked, transparent heads of four immortals, standing on the cliff above them.

Bart looked thoughtfully over at Deke, during the evening meal. He looked a lot happier. So did his daughter. He didn't care what had bappened.

He just was glad Deke was home.

They were a couple after that, meeting always in secret, as Deke didn't know how Bartholamew would take the news. (They did not, as yet, consummate thier relationship.) Not that he hmself saw anything wrong with it. They were the same age after all, and hardly blood relatives. it was not as though he'd spent the last twenty years watching her grow up. Both had been lonely prior to this, and had similar personalities. Most important of all- there seemed something unreal about this thing. As it had been with the girl in the Movie- she opened her her eyes, and found out it had only been a dream.

So when he walked with Bart- they were still close friends, and he'd become an apprentice carpenter, (though not a very good one) he found he could not tell. Occasionally Bartholamew would bring up this or that girl had been giving Deke the eye- he wasn't lame anymore after all. Deke said he would follow up on it. Of course, he never did.

Never very far away from the couple, when they were out-of-doors, were the immortals. They'd rendered themseles invisible, and spoke only with thier minds. Among them was Valerie, who had been held accountable. Thier original plan had been to abduct Deke, wipe his memory, and return him to his original destination. But she was able to stall them on that. She was actually was able to, as she had some power and authority. With Valerie was Alfredo, the morose director; Jamie, his assistant from Edinburgh; and Marjorie, her African-American best friend from

New York. She'd sent her a message, and she was on the next plane out.

What were you thinking, Val, when you gave him that weed? And he got the girl stoned too!

Silent laughter. *I just felt sorry for him, that's all. I didn't think he'd take it back into the past. They won't be getting anymore.*

I know that, and I'm glad. But him and the girl.....I don't know.

Freddy, please leave them alone! I see myself in that girl. I know every thought in her head. She was, I believe, myself in a past life."

Maybe she was, maybe she wasn't. But you've no right to meddle with Time like this Val. We'll just keep an eye on them. For now.

That was in May. In August of that year the serf girl ventured, alone into the Lord's woods. She was searching for dinner, as ever since she was a girl she knew what herbs were safe to eat. She knew this place like the back of her hand.

"Ah, mushrooms," she whispered. *Chanterelles*. She stuffed them into the cloth bag she carried with her, turned, slinging it over her shoulder. Had she heard a noise?

Her eye traveled up, then she saw him. An unnaturally tall man, somewhat translucent looking, with short brown hair. It was one of them, she was sure.

She turned to run, but it was like going through molasses. Somehow he was there, in a millisecond, holding her by the wrist. The person doing that was James, in fact.

She fought to stay calm. You're one of the future people, aren't you? Well we've always known we were being followed."

"Yes, we have been watching you. I was supposed to be invisible in fact, but I forgot.

She smiled. "Do they all have funny accents like you?"

"I come from north of here- dies not matter. Your man Deke- you love him very much, eh?"

She stared. "You know that about us?"

"I'm sorry, but we might have to put and end to it, because you see it could...."

She didn't wait to hear the rest. "Oh, we'll see about that." Viciously she jerked her arm loose and spend off, running down the trail. To her immense relief, he did not follow her.

Deke stirred in his sleep. He'd had a big dinner the evening before; also Lily looked troubled. He had been used to her telling him everything. A look had been on her face, but he could not get to her alone to speak to her.

As he turned over, he heard a noise. It was He got to his feet and went to her standing in the doorway.

She embraced him hard. "This is unseemly," he said. "If someone sees us now...."

"I saw one of them in the woods," she said. "A man. He told me that those people from the future will be putting an end to what is between us. They will take either you or me- I don't know."

"Oh, I don't understand them. I don't understand them at all."

"What are you doing?" he asked nerviously. "It isn't warm in here, is it?"

"You might have to leave tomorrow," she said. "If you do, I want to take something with me."

"No," he said. But she was halfway out of her clothes. "This could be our last wedding night, Deke," was the last thing she said. Angrily, she kicked her dress out the door.

He awoke the next morning, the sun shining down on his body though the

doorway. He felt a bit nauseated, but happy. He couldn't believe what had just happened.

Sorry, Bart, I don't know how to tell you this. Your daughter and myself are to be married. You see that we....we....

Laying there, he realized he could not do it. Slowly he got to his feet, for his day's work in the fields.

They were to have two more months together. Things got pretty awkward between them at first; but in the end they were closer. The immortals left them alone; though they were always silently watching. They thought that Bart didn't know.

In the start of the second month, Lillian found a burned-out cottage in the woods that was said to be haunted. She decorated it with wildflowers and leaves from the forest, making seem to them like it was thier home, that they were married. They spent a lot of time there.

On the day of October 14, they sat outside the small abode talking in the easy way they now had, having napped (and done more) on a bed of ferns two hours later. Just out of thier sight stood the immortals. Waiting.

"Have you ever felt anything for Valerie?" she said. After all you told me about her, I am surprised you didn't stay."

"Well, she had no vulnerability, unlike yourself. That is why we are better suited, I think. But there was this one time- I almost decided to stay. I looked out of the window and it was like a spring morning, and these people were singing- this song about the changing of the year. Then I turned around and looked at her- she almost seemed like a lost child. I almost changed my mind, I think."

She laughed hoarsely. "I am glad you did not. But the lady- I would like to meet her." (Little did she know that Val was standing 20 paces away.)

"I know. But there is one thing immortals cannot have. Children."

"Is that so?" She put her hand on her belly. He felt as though he had been caught in a plunging elevator.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know before this week. I was going to tell you tomorrow at Festival, as a surprise. My father too."

"We'd better tell him now, Lily," he said. He jumped to his feet and held out his hand. "We are running out of time." (He didn't know how right he was.)

The immortals silently watched the couple walk out of the clearing, then conferred.

What are those people to you, Val? Your children?

Yes, and what's that to you?

You don't get it, do you? We finally know the outcome of your little experiment

Such as.....

The girl is with child. It's descendent could become the next Hitler, or Ghandi, or.....don't you know what a mess we are in?

I didn't realize.....we could make her drop the baby, then render her sterile, without realizing it. They could adopt kids....

No, no, it's too late! We have to put an end to it!

I.....think I know what you mean by that. But could you give them one more day?

What difference would that make? Are you planning to tell ?

What good would that do? But they are holding a festival tomorrow, and those people are looking forward to it. I want them to be happy for just 24 hours. I will return the favor, I promise!

Very well. We'll do it for the sake of those poor people. But believe me, you owe us on this Val.....

Deke, Bart, and Lillian stood at the top of the hill where it had all begun. They had decided they had might as well tell him here.

Bart sighed heavily. "I have always known," he said, "right from the first. Almost from the first time you went out walking together. I saw how happy she was. I was astounded at first, but then came to understand. I've been waiting for you to tell me."

"We've been waiting for you to tell *us!* Think of all the time we've wasted! We could be married by now!"

"I know. I'm sorry. Just couldn't come up with the words. Day after Festival, will you be seeing the priest?"

"Of course. And will you give us your blessings?"

"I know you both too well not to. But if you had stayed, Deke, and now asked for her hand....I don't know."

"How could you think that of me? I could never see her in such a way, nor she myself. I would be just an uncle to her, nothing more. Plus I would be married by now. Or dead."

"Well," Lily muttered, "We've one thing to thank the fairies for."

"I wonder where we will live," said Deke. "After we start a family the shed would be too small."

He couldn't bear to bring up her pregnancy.

"I shall add on two rooms. It should make a nice house."

"I am grateful, but.....there is something I forgot to tell you. Lily met one of them in the woods, who told her that they plan to put and end to what is between us. I gather they plan to take me again."

"I won't allow that to happen," said Bart.

"How?"

Bart drew himself up. "Let's make a solemn vow, the three of us. I know they are listening. That whatever happens, us three shall be together."

He raised his hand and said, "I do swear."

"I do swear."

"I do swear."

"There," he said grimly, "If God is listening at all, we will never be separated."

At Festival the next day, it was unseasonably warm. The Lord's minion's had caught pheasant and venison; there was plenty of ale and wine. The threesome walked among the crowd telling of the marriage, and Lily had never looked lovelier, in a low-cut dark blue dress, and a wreath of dried flowers in her hair.

Deke sat down upon a bench with his ale. Lily was talking with some serf girls who had previously snubbed her; Bart had gotten up to get some more.

He sat there feeling totally at peace. Then he overheard someone talking about him. It was a friend of one of his nephews; of course he didn't know who he was. "Have you heard of who mad Lillian is going to marry?"

"Oh, that handsome lad. though from what I've heard he's pretty simple." (Deke bridled.)

"Oh, there is more to it than that. Her father, Bart- he had a close friend, Dirk or Derek or something like that. He disappeared on the hill up there. My father tells me he's a dead ringer." "He was my uncle, yes," another voice chimed in. "But what difference would that make? He disappeared when she was three."

"Oh, he still spoke much about him to her, and all of us. As though he was such the hero." (Deke smiled to himself.) And as though he was to be brought back, looking no older than the day he'd left. Creepy, that!"

"Well, what if that did happen?"

(Deke almost dropped his mug.)

"Oh, that's nonsense!"

Bart sat down beside Deke. "How do you feel?"

"I feel as though this is the happiest day of my life. But it is like a dream."

"Ah, dreams. I had this last night, Deke. I was watching you and Lily's children play on the grass. They were beautiful."

There's one in the oven already, Bart.

"Yours are a handsome lot too." He winked.

They looked at Lily, who was laughing with the girls. She had not done that before.

"She's changed so much," said Bart.

"Thanks to me, yes."

"Think, later on you will dance with her?"

He smiled. "I think so."

After the Festival's end, the three serfs lingered long talking with friends. It was long after dark that they set out for home, thier arms around each other's waists. The girl was in the middle.

"The stars look like the buildings of New York." Deke said. There are so many windows....."

"Impressive," Bart said.

Deke laughed nervously. "I've a feeling those buildings are above me- that they are going to crash down on us."

"Don't talk like that!" Lily cried. "Teach us that song you spoke of earlier- that ode

to the new year."

"Sure. It goes like this...."

Soon they were singing:

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!*

Still singing, they rounded a corner.

"What's that?" said Lily.

A man was standing in the middle of the road. He seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. In the starlight they could see he had two black braids down his chest. He was Alfredo, in fact, head of the Project.

They kept walking toward him. What else could they do?

"I would like you to stand as close together as possible. Oh. I see you are already doing that."

"You've come for me havn't you?" Deke said quietly.

"No. In a way, I've come for all three of you."

Deke blinked. "you are taking all three of us into the future?"

"Not exactly. But you'd better say your goodbyes now, Deke."

Tears started in his eyes. "I thought you were finally finished with me."

"We thought so too. But something happened which cannot be permitted."

"It's me and Lily, isn't it? Because she's my friend's daughter? Is that like incest to you?"

"No, it's not. It's the baby."

"*What* baby?" cried Bart.

Before he could answer, Deke cut in: "What do you plan to do with us?"

He gazed at them with compassion. "I'm sending you back to where you were."

Then he reached into his pocket.

Lily felt thier hands gripping thier shoulders; saw the immortal take the device out of his pocket and point it at them. The last thing, she thought, she'd ever see. *This is like death*. With a final burst of energy, she threw back her head and screamed.

"Deke?"

"Yes?"

Deke turned around and saw his friend trudging up the hill. He felt as though hours had just passed, but how could that be? The sun was still high in the sky.

"Is something the matter?"

I was down at Festival, when I don't know- I got a funny feeling. I saw you weren't at home, so I came up here. Is everything all right?"

"Yes, it is, though Lillian's been cranky." He handed her back to her father, almost in relief.

Bart rocked her. "There, there."

Bart met his friend's gaze, held it. "You've been thinking of going away, havn't you?"

"Yes....but I don't know, I've changed my mind."

"That's good. How's your leg?"

Funny...feels better than ever."

"Thanks to *them*, no doubt." He shivered, and crossed himself.

Said Deke, "I don't recall seeing any."

" Then let's be gone from this place and never return.! It's said to be haunted. Come down to Festival with me, it's not too late. I saw some girls give you the eye."

Deke smiled. "Is that so!"

"And when you marry, don't move out. I will add on two rooms to the shed in back. It should make a nice house."

"I'm honored. I'm not going anywhere."

"And the same will be true for Lily- when she marries I will build a house for them close by."

He smiled. "I'd like that too."

"Then let's make a vow, the three of us," Bart said playfully. "I think the fairies are listening. Let's swear *that whatever happens, us three will be together.*"

He raised his hand. "I do swear."

"I do swear," said Deke. "What about you, Lily.?"

She raised her small hand. " 'Do swear."

They all laughed.

Then started down the hill.