



THE LAST GIANT

TRANSGRESSION

PART I



J. R. Hardesty

Lindensaga, Book 1

Hungry Horse

Golden Cocker Press

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THE LAST GIANT: TRANSGRESSION

PART 1

I**N THE BEGINNING**, the High One created the World and all that is in it. He blessed it and called it good. One of the High One's previous Creations was a race of beings who lived with Him in the Heavens and served him willingly. But one there was among them who grew jealous of the High One and His power and thought to take for himself that which was not his and so rebelled against his Lord. For this, he was punished and exiled to the great Darkness and from there he plotted his revenge. The Fallen has been known by many names throughout the ages, but most often he is simply called the Evil One, and through him, evil crept into the newly made World of Linden. The history of Linden and its peoples' struggles to free themselves from the coils of the Evil One is recorded in the Lindensaga. There are many tales in that great book. This is one of them. It is the tale of the Last Giant.

CHAPTER 1

(SUMMER OF THE WORLD 6087)

MENANNON STOOD ALONE IN THE HIGH HALL OF GATHERING, STARING THROUGH THE TALL MULLIONED WINDOWS AT THE CONSTELLATION TELURION WANDERER, THE SKY HUNTER, THE THREE BRIGHT STARS OF ITS BELT GLITTERING DOWN FROM THEIR FROSTY VAULT UNDISTURBED BY THE NEED TO CONTEND WITH THE LIGHT OF THE FULL MOON, HIS MIND FILLED WITH JOYFUL ANTICIPATION & NOT THE LEAST TOUCHED BY THOUGHTS OF SORCERERS, MAD QUEENS, VIOLENT DEATHS AND WATERY GRAVES.

NOTHING TROUBLED HIS HEART, FOR THIS DAY WOULD SEE THE CULMINATION OF EIGHT LONG SUMMERS OF EFFORT. TODAY, HE WOULD ATTAIN THE RANK OF FULL JOURNEYMAN HARPER, THE FIRST GIANT EVER SO TO DO. THERE WAS ONLY ONE MORE STEP: PASSING THE MASTER'S TRIALS TO BECOME A MASTER HARPER OF THE HARPERS GUILD OF ARIDION, THEREBY HONORING HIS SIRE'S FAITH AND SACRIFICE.

THIS DREAM HAD BEEN THE WHITE-HOT CENTER OF HIS LIFE EVER SINCE HE AND HIS SIRE HAD BEEN EXILED FROM THE GIANT LANDS OF LORNEN-NOG FOR THE CRIME OF LAUGHTER WHEN HE WAS BUT FIVE SUMMERS OLD. THEY HAD RETURNED TO THE MIGHTY ISLAND KINGDOM OF KALYRIA, LONG HIS SIRE'S DWELLING PLACE, AND THERE MENANNON HAD LEARNED OF HARPS AND HARPERS AND DISCOVERED IN HIMSELF AN EXTRAORDINARY TALENT FOR MUSIC.

WITH THE COMING OF THIS DAWN AND ITS RITUAL, THE YOUNG GIANT KNEW IN HIS HEART OF HEARTS THAT NOTHING NOW STOOD IN THE WAY OF ACHIEVING HIS DREAM, BUT HE HAD YET TO LEARN THAT SILENCE, LONELINESS AND FAILURE ARE THE BASTARD OFFSPRING OF HATE.

THE SUNLIGHT STREAMING IN through the hall's huge, mullioned windows gilded everything with intense golden light lending a dreamlike quality to the proceedings. The pews and benches were filled to capacity—even in the third choir loft high on the back wall. No surface of the great hall was left undecorated, from its intricately detailed marble floor to its fan vaulted ceiling held up by twin rows of hundred foot pillars. Despite the crowd, the acoustics of the hall were of such precision that not a soul present missed a single word of the ritual the Grandmaster was performing.

All the graduates had come forward to receive their honors in a jubilant blur of color as each discipline was called. By tradition, the new journeymen's robes were the color of their discipline: a drummer wore brown; a piper, blue; a harper, green; a singer, purple. Those who practiced the book arts wore crimson; lore masters, white; the smiths, rust and the healers, silver.

As the last new harp healer journeyman left the dais, amidst the applause and good wishes of the crowd, a hush began to creep through the pews. The moment all awaited had finally arrived. It was time for the harper's first Giant to receive his honors. Anticipation ran through the crowd like the prickle before a lightning strike. The folk of Aridion City had taken Menannon to their hearts when he had first arrived, an all-elbows-and-knees eleven summers old child with naught to recommend him save a gift for harping and a determination to excel. They had watched him develop into a harper—whose skill some swore was fraught with the divine—and grow to a magnificent fellow who had to duck and go sideways through any door in the city save here at the harper hall alone. At nine feet, Menannon was the tallest living inhabitant of the city.

The young Giant strode proudly down the center aisle and climbed the stairs of the dais upon which stood the high altar and knelt respectfully in front of the Grandmaster's throne-like chair.

Rather than rising to continue the ritual as was usual, Grandmaster Blackmore eased around in his chair and leaned back comfortably to be better able to study his exceedingly tall apprentice. In so doing, he moved himself into a shaft of sunlight which gilded his white hair and showed his beardless face to be as wrinkled as a piece of vellum which has been cleaned far too many times. Despite his great age, being nearly six hundred five and thirty summers, his right eye held a youthful twinkle. His left was forever closed by the white scar of a long ago sword stroke, attesting to how the eye was lost, but not the circumstances. Blackmore was a short, sturdily built fellow of mixed Dwarf and Human ancestry whose parents had come from a small vale far to the northwest nestled along the Rhindolin River, sequestered between the Dwarf kingdoms of Garnet and Sythra on the east and the Dusk Sea on the west.

Not many of the Valinga, as this people were called, ever left the Vale, but the few who did had always proven of the highest worth to the lands of Aridion. Blackmore was no exception to this. He had been Grandmaster of the Harper's Guild for over four-hundred summers, his long age attributed to the Dwarven part of his ancestry, for the Humans of the Vale were as short-lived as were Humans of other lands, save for the People of the Long Ships. The Guild had prospered under his stewardship. How he came to the Guild was a story for the telling, if any knew it, but he kept it to himself to the chagrin of many a harper.

Blackmore continued his contemplation of the figure before him. The silence in the hall deepened as all wondered at this strange halt to the proceedings. He let them wonder, as he contented himself with looking long into the face of his Giant. It was a face well worth looking at: fine-boned and sensitive with high cheekbones rounding smoothly into the shadowed hollows beneath them, a strong nose and well formed, full-lipped mouth. Unruly collar-length blue-black hair curled about the high, broad forehead and a close-cropped beard softened

the edges of a finely sculpted jaw line. Thick, slightly arching eyebrows and long lashes framed midnight-black eyes which, in the right light, glinted the same cobalt highlights as his hair and beard. Just now, those eyes were staring back at him with something of a wary expression.

Blackmore hid a grin at the self-conscious blush beginning to creep over Menannon's mobile countenance as the silence stretched on. The lad was too young to be totally in control of the incredible intellect with which the High One had blessed him and he still lacked the self-confidence it deserved. That would come with time, but for now, his emotions almost always overruled his judgement.

On the table near Blackmore's right hand still lay the sole remaining journeyman's cord on a velvet pillow. Unlike the rest of the cords which had borne the single color of the new journeyman's calling, this cord was entwined with all the colors of the Guild save healer's silver alone. Instead of rising, speaking the ritual words and threading the cord onto the shoulder of youngster's robe as he had with all the rest, Blackmore continued to silently sit there, looking from Menannon, to the cord and back.

At last, the ancient Harper cleared his throat and stared hard at his very puzzled—and not a little embarrassed—apprentice.

"I'll give you this under one condition," Blackmore growled, totally ignoring the prescribed protocol. "I shall bestow this symbol of all your hard work—one you have justly earned—if and only if you give me your word you'll go home for six months and relax. Will you give me your word?"

Menannon, caught totally off-guard by this unexpected demand and break from tradition, nearly choked when he attempted to answer. The half-smothered snorts and chuckles he heard from the back of the hall where stood the other graduates did not help at all.

"I ... ah ... I so swear," Menannon stammered, his face now truly flaming.

“I didn’t ask you to swear it, son. Your word would have been good enough.” Blackmore grinned impishly as he finally stood up and signaled the youngster to lean down so he could thread the cord through the loops on Menannon right shoulder and buckle it into place. He then motioned him to rise and turn to face the hall. Blackmore hobbled to the front of the dais to address the gathering, his cane clicking loudly on the flagstones in the silence.

“Your Majesties, gentlewomen, worthies of the court, students, faculty, good folk of the city, all attend! For the first time in its history, the Harper’s Guild has been presented with an enigma: an apprentice who does not fit the normal framework of our guild. An apprentice whose talent, dedication and effort have so far exceeded all others who have passed through these doors that he has qualified to be made journeyman in all of the arts practiced by this Guild save one, and that through no fault of his own. To rightly honor this apprentice, the Masters of this Guild met in convocation to create a new rank among journeymen.” Blackmore hobbled aside and pointed to Menannon with his cane.

“May I present to you for the first time, but surely not the last, Master Journeyman Menannon.” Blackmore nearly crowed and the entire hall burst into spontaneous cheering, stomping and applause.

The young Giant stood still, not knowing quite what to do, the unusual cord glittering in the sun in stark contrast to the blackness of his robes, since his were still the color worn by the apprentices.

Dame Larisa, the Mistress of Seamstresses for the guild, had been hard-pressed to decide in what color to dress a fellow who was a journeyman in all of the disciplines of the guild, save only harp healing, as this question had never before arisen. She had wracked her brain for nearly the entire last summer of the Giant’s training trying to come up with a suitable solution. She had finally thrown up her hands and decreed that such a fellow

would wear black, stating as the reason that the creation of black dye required an infusion of all the other colors. The fact that it also emphasized the dark mystery of Menannon's eyes pleased her fancy as well, which of course, she was not about to admit.

As the crowd continued to cheer and Menannon still stood there in embarrassed silence, Blackmore could not help a twinge of fatherly pride, for he had personally refined and nurtured this extraordinary talent into being. It had taken a light hand at the reins. Only one thing remained now and that was for the lad to pass his master's trials, then the world would be his oyster and the Harper's Guild the more fortunate.

"Well, young man," the Grandmaster with a grin, "don't stand there like a statue. Take a bow, if you will."

The young Giant and object of the crowd's pleasure took a bow as instructed, albeit a rather hasty one and made his escape, the sound of applause and cheering chasing after him like a determined bloodhound. At last, it was over.



OVERHEAD, gulls were wheeling and calling to each other, their very activity attesting to the nearness of dawn. Each bird seemed to have its own opinion of the deep-draft trading vessel below them, one adorned with a figurehead of a Great Stone Drakta. It was propelled by a square sail when the wind blew right, as it was now, and when it did not, by 50 oarsmen, 25 to a side in extended galleries built just below deck level, outside of the main hull to preserve the central space for passengers and cargo. Below-decks was partitioned into sleeping chambers and storerooms. The wealthiest passengers were given the cabin next the captain's own in the sterncastle in the shadow of the drakta's recurved tail.

Standing at the bow that he might catch sight of his beloved Kalyria that much the sooner, the salt smell of the sea air wafting over him was turning Menannon's head like fine wine. Until the ship had left port and gained the open sea six evenings ago, he had not realized just how homesick he had been or how much he missed the smell of the sea and the call of the gulls.

It had taken the best part of a fortnight to follow the road from Aridion City along the river Ari to Bridge Town and Koresh then north to Blue Bay, the port nearest the isle of Kalyria, his home and destination. He and several others of his fellow journeymen had set off the morning after graduation on a well-earned holiday before returning to the Master Hall in the fall. The majority of them would be posted to one of the far-flung harper halls that dotted greater Aridion, but some few, naught but a handful in fact, would be invited to stand the master's trials directly and of those, few would pass.

The harpers had joined a band of Dwarven traders to make the trip to Blue Bay. Upon reaching the port, all the rest save Menannon's best friend Leènoviilek, had taken ship for elsewhere. Menannon himself was heading east for the island of Kalyria & Lee, as his friends called the journeyman, had decided to accompany him, as that young gentleman had never seen the fabled island Menannon called home.

The great island lay in the midst of the Dawn Sea, a once mighty shield volcano that had long ago destroyed itself leaving behind a crescent-shaped island blessed by fertile soil and a mild climate beneficial for growing all crops, both good for food and pleasing to the eye. The white spires and golden roofs of its capital city, Kirith Kalyria, shone out from that island like a beacon, even in the darkest watches of the night.

Menannon stepped up onto the lower beam of the railing. He could not help himself in his eagerness to be home. From this slight increase in his vantage point, he strained his eyes to the northeast, but saw only azure blue sky with wisps of white

cloud on the horizon.

One of the crewmen, possessed of iron-grey hair and a grizzled, weather-beaten face, paused momentarily in his task of mending a cargo net. His green over-tunic marked him as a senior seaman in the Guild of Mariners & Docksmen, one of the only craft guilds in all Linden not owing allegiance to the Harpers' Guild.

"Laddie, even if ya had the eyes of a drakta, ya wouldn't see it for at least a twoday more." the old fellow teasingly informed him. "If the wind holds, with this followin' sea, we'll have ya there by sunset on the third day hence."

Menannon stepped back onto the rolling deck, his high cheekbones coloring slightly.

At the sight of his blush, the old sailor laughed outright, his clear, blue eyes twinkling good-naturedly. "Do'na be ashamed lad. 'Tis normal to long for the sight of home. How long ya been gone?"

"Eight summers and a threeday," Menannon informed him without even having to think about it.

" 'Tis a long time, that. What ya been doin'? School, I'd warrant. From the look of ya, I'd say ya can't be more'n about twenty summers now."

"Nineteen, actually. I just finished my journeyman's training at the Master Harper Hall in Aridion City."

"So, 'tis a Harper ya are, then. A right honorable profession is that," the sailor nodded approvingly. "What ya specialize in? The drums?" he asked, tapping out a quick rhythm on one of the packing crates beside him.

"Nah," a new voice broke into the conversation.

Menannon and the sailor turned to see Lee coming towards them. Despite the heat, he still wore his brown Harper's robe over his clothes with his solid brown journeyman's cord prominent on his right shoulder marking him for a drummer in the guild. Menannon, however, had shed his harper's over-robe leaving himself dressed only in the loose-fitting white

chemise, black hose and knee-high soft leather-laced boots which he normally wore under his robe.

“He’s a Jack,” said Lee, grinning wickedly at Menannon, his white smile in stark contrast to his dark skin. His wine-dark eyes were alight with mischief. The light of the midday sun, highlighting his full-lipped mouth and hawk-like nose, showed that his dark brown hair cut warrior short was as curly as a new wool clip. All of these things marked him as being from the young city state of Crenanoc located far to the south beyond the Watheran Wastes on the southernmost tip of greater Aridion, a city famous for its healers and horses.

“What’s a ‘Jack’?” The myriad lines around the sailor’s eyes deepened in puzzlement.

“Why, a Jack-of-all-trades, of course.” The drummer made himself comfortable on a crate near Menannon. “He couldn’t make up his mind, so he specialized in all the arts of the hall and made journeyman in all of them.”

“Some talent, is that.” The old fellow whistled admiringly, slightly in awe of this young prodigy.

“Nah, in his case, it’s just bull-headed determination.” Lee grinned at Menannon who returned him a playfully disgusted look.

“I love you, too, Drum Journeyman Leènoviilek. Besides, I didn’t specialize in everything. I’m not a harp healer.”

The drummer turned back to the sailor. “Harp healing’s not something you can learn,” he said. “The High One either gifts you with the talent or He doesn’t. The Harpers just help you perfect it. So he didn’t have any choice in that one, but I still saw him going into the healer classes, so he at least knows the theory even if he can’t practice the art. You mark my words, this boy is going to be Grandmaster Harper one of these bright days! Then the High One help us all, ’cause he’ll expect all of us to be as overly conscientious as he is.” Lee had himself barely scraped through the other required classes in history, lore, and the arts, due not to a lack of intelligence, but rather to

a general lack of interest. His heart and love was for music and drumming alone and all else went in one ear and out the other and was not missed.

“I’m not overly conscientious. I just respect my guild,” Menannon objected.

“Oh, sure you do and didn’t I see not only your harp in your kit, but your notes for studying for the Master’s trials as well? And those aren’t to be held until next June. And you’re supposed to be on holiday and are under strict orders from Grandmaster Blackmore himself to relax and get drunk every night.” Lee winked at the sailor.

“He did not include ‘get drunk every night’ in that order!” Menannon snorted and shook his head at that suggestion.

“Yes, he did,” Lee assured the old sailor, who was very much enjoying the verbal sparring between the two. “And what, may I ask, is wrong with relaxing and getting drunk?” This last he addressed to the old salt.

“Nothin’ I can think of,” the old fellow grinned back.

“You see? He agrees with me.” Lee turned back to Menannon. “So?”

Menannon leaned back against the railing and cast another quick glance to the northeast before answering. “Well, I can think of two very good reasons. The first is that I’m a Giant and Giants don’t get drunk and secondly and far more importantly, my father would hurt me.”

“And why should that make you cry off?” the drummer queried gleefully.

“You’ve not seen my father, my friend, or you’d not even think such a thing, much less voice it,” Menannon assured him with total conviction.

“So, yer a Giant, lad? I was wonderin’.” The sailor finished his work and shoved a crate over and sat on it then pulled an old battered pipe from his belt pouch and began to fill and light it as he studied Menannon thoughtfully. “I was taken ya for a Teluri with as tall and fine built as ya are. Yer a sight hand-

somer than most Giants I've met and I've met my share." The old fellow pointed his pipe stem at Menannon and winked at him.

"I spent a winter in New Belitarra once. That there's a whole village of Giants inland from Gormidad. I'm not sayin' that Giants ain't a good lookin' folk, 'cause they're as good lookin' as any other folk and some of them New Belitarra lassies are downright breath terminatin', but you're better lookin' than any of the other fellows I've seen and you're a darn sight sh...." The old fellow gulped a bit and sort of mumbled to a halt, then took a long pull on his pipe. Menannon and Lee exchanged a grin.

"It's alright, you can say it ... I am a 'darn sight shorter' than any other full-grown Giant you've e'er seen." Menannon's smile lit his entire face, his black eyes twinkling.

"I was meanin' no offence, lad," the sailor said gruffly.

"And none was taken, sir, I assure you. Truth is truth and cannot give offence. I personally don't find my lack of height a problem, though what my father will think, I cannot say." Menannon glanced away a bit uncomfortably, then shrugged and looked back. "I can only hope he is not too disappointed at my size, as I am the same as when last he saw me, though I am three summers older."

"Disappointed!" the drummer burst out incredulous. "The High One in glory, Menannon! You're as tall as a tree and as solid as a mountain. What more could he possibly desire?"

"Didn't you pay attention to the teaching scrolls? If you had, you would know that for my folk, I'm about the size of a half-grown lad of, say, thirteen summers. As our good sailor here will tell you, I'm a midget." He glanced at the sailor who nodded in agreement, a bit embarrassed at the admission.

"A midget? Surely you jest!" Lee's question came out a cross between a snort of disbelief and a chuckle.

"No," Menannon assured him with a serious shake of his head.

“Aye, he’s tellin’ ya the High One’s own truth, lad,” the sailor agreed.

“My father stands a full fifteen feet, three inches tall and he’s just barely above average. I, on the other hand, stand exactly nine feet tall and that is two and a half feet shorter than the shortest Giant heretofore ever recorded. To give you a true idea of how tall my father is, consider this: you have about six feet in height, correct?” Menannon asked.

“Six feet and two,” Lee nodded, intrigued.

“Alright, if you stood on top of my head and stretched up to your full height you would just about be able to look my father in the eye. Even on his knees, he’s still over two feet taller than I.” There was a long silence then as the three of them contemplated Menannon’s words. Overhead, a gull flashed white in the sun as it wheeled and swung above the ship.

“A Giant from Kalyria,” the old sailor’s mumbled to himself as he drew thoughtfully on his pipe. “A Giant from Kalyria . . .!” Suddenly, his eyes got big and he took the pipe stem from between his teeth and pointed it at Menannon.

“Yer Lord Gorlanndon’s lad! By the Great Hornèd Orlandine, I’ve actually been talkin’ to Lord Gorlanndon’s heir an’ I never tumbled . . .” his grin turned to a look of horror and he jumped to his feet as though he had been stung.

“ ’Tis sorry I am to be sittin’ without permission and bein’ so informal. I’m beggin’ yer pardon, me Lord.”

The fellow’s words nearly tumbled over each other in his haste to apologize for acting so in the presence of such an august personage as this young passenger. Beside him, Lee was staring at him in stunned surprise and Menannon could not decide whether to laugh or cringe.

“What are you talking about, man, not sitting in his presence? He’s just a Journeyman Harper even if he is a rather tall one,” Lee burst out.

“Nay, lad!” the old fellow interrupted him. “He’s the heir of the First Councillor of Kalyria, the finest, most powerful trader

in all the Dawn Sea. There ain't a sailor in these parts as what wouldn't give his left hind leg to be sailin' for Lord Gorlanddon. Why, lad, yer friend here is a prince, even if he don't have a crown. And ya'd best be treatin' him with the respect due his station on this ship!" the old sailor snapped.

"No, please...", Menannon began, but the sailor had puffed himself up with importance and was backing away with a salute.

"I'll just go an inform Cap'n and make sure Cook does us proud by ya." He nearly ran down the deck, calling for his mates, leaving Menannon and Lee to look after him in some consternation. Finally, Lee turned to his friend, one quizzical eyebrow raised.

"As I said, my father is very impressive," Menannon shrugged with a somewhat sheepish grin and led the way back towards the stern of the ship to prepare for what he knew was going to be a luncheon with the captain fit for royalty.

"A prince, the man said," observed Lee as they walked, "a prince! You? A prince?" Lee could not hide the laughter in his voice, nor did he try. Menannon's blush was all he needed to burst out in a full guffaw. "A prince! Now, that is rich. Wait 'til the gang back at the Hall hears this!" Menannon just shot him a glare, which set Lee off even more, but he contained himself as they neared the stern and the captain's quarters. The meal went exactly as Menannon expected, and he could not free himself from the stiff formalities quickly enough.



THE MORNING OF THE THIRD DAY after his conversation with the old sailor found Menannon again standing on the bow rail, his eyes glued to the eastern horizon, squinting into the newly risen sun for a first glimpse of his home. In truth, though he was fond of his native island and preferred it to any other

place he had lived or visited, it was his sire who was drawing on his heart so strongly. Since the hour they had come forth from Lornennog, they had been inseparable companions and friends. While it had been a great honor to be sent to the Master Hall for his training, the separation from his beloved sire had been the hardest trial yet in Menannon's young life and it had not improved over time.

Gorlanndon had made it a point to bring his flagship into port at Blue Bay and rendezvous there with his son during spring holiday each of the first five summers Menannon had spent in Aridion City. Then affairs at home had kept him close to Kalyria and he came no more to Blue Bay. This lack had begun to prey on Menannon's mind, filling him with a mounting anxiety he was not free to assuage in person. Menannon had received and sent many a letter, but naught else for the best part of three summers. The thing which loomed largest in his mind as a cause of his unease was the fact that his sire had not been able to attend his graduation, a failure that was wholly unlike him. The families of Lee and several others had even come all the way from far southern Crenanoc for the occasion, an arduous trip of many fortnights. Gorlanndon had explained his absence quite logically, if a bit too glibly. Now, however, Menannon was free to find out for himself whether or no all was well with his sire and his city.

As he reluctantly stepped back down onto the deck once more, a small voice within whispered to him, branding him a liar, telling him that it was not only his sire who concerned him. Nay, it told him, there was someone else . . .

Without any willing on his part, deep purple eyes seemed to suddenly look back at him from the eastern horizon, eyes which had haunted his sleep and disturbed his waking hours all the long summers he had been gone, proving there was someone else on Kalyria who had a claim on his heart: Nirna. At the thought of her, his pulse quickened, leaving him in no doubt that his feelings for his former playmate were still there

and, it seemed, stronger than he had realized. She was like a sister to him, and perhaps something more He halted his thoughts there, unwilling to take them further, firmly forcing himself to look across the waves again towards the horizon, towards home and his sire. Yet her face and her name intruded upon him, distracting him. Nirna ... Nirna. Forever in his heart, yet never to be his.

Nirna was Human, and more, she was the Princess Royal of Kalyria and as such, far beyond his reach by both law and custom, though that had never stopped them being childhood friends and playmates. Now, however, both were adults and so this homecoming was going to be, well, a bit complicated. Despite that, Menannon was determined to see Nirna as soon as civilly possible. It would have to wait a few days, of course, until he could politely leave Lee to his own devices, as there was no possible way he was going to re-acquaint himself with his dearest childhood friend with another dear friend along. It would not be fair to either one of them.

It lacked but a little of mid-day when the sailor at the masthead finally called down, "Land! Land to the east, me lord." It had gotten around the ship like wildfire that Menannon was Gorlanndon of Kalyria's son and heir and he had been treated like royalty ever since, much to his embarrassment, but out of respect for his sire, he had born their attitude with good grace. The ship's master had accorded Menannon and Lee every courtesy, for he would not have it said that he failed in his duty to such a respected competitor as Gorlanndon. Besides, such failure might well have a very negative impact on the shipowner's business and thus on his own employ and he hadn't gotten where he was through lack of acumen.

"Where away?" Menannon called back. He stepped up onto the rail again and strained his eyes eastward.

"Ten degrees nor' east," came the answer and the Giant turned his gaze quickly in the direction given. Though his vision was sharper than a Human's, the curve of the world itself

prevented him seeing what the sailor above could see. He waited impatiently, his gaze glued to the mark until at last he saw it: a dark smudge on the horizon like a low-lying cloud. He remained where he was for the greater part of the day watching as the island grew larger until it nearly filled the entire eastern horizon, floating like a great bird upon the waves.

“Well, I’d say we’ve almost reached our destination,” Lee observed coming to the rail beside him. “What do you intend to do first when we reach port?”

“Report to my father, of course,” Menannon said.

“Report to your sire? That’s a rather odd way of putting it.” Lee gave the Giant a quizzical look. Menannon grinned rather sheepishly.

“It’s a holdover from the first time I sailed with him. I’d be skylarking in the rigging or something like when I was supposed to be studying or doing my chores. It never failed. I’d just get comfortably settled to watch for the albatross and I’d hear the first mate holler... Menannon! I see you! Report yourself to your sire, young man! Ever since then I’ve reported to him.”

“So what would he do when you reported?” Lee could not help a grin at the thought of the responsible-to-a-fault Menannon ever being caught skylarking, even as a young boy.

The Giant could not help a slight rise in color at the memory of his child’s self approaching his sire’s cabin as though it were a drakta’s lair. He cleared his throat and grinned.

“I’d go to his cabin with my knees knocking together. He’d be sitting at his desk writing in his ledgers. He’d stop and look at me. Never said a word—just looked at me—then he would motion me in and I’d sort of sidle up to his desk and he’d pick me up and stand me on an old parrot’s perch he had in the corner so I could look him in the eye. He’d just sit there in his big chair and look at me, then he would get the most bitterly disappointed look on his face and my heart would drop into my boots and I’d start to cry and promise I’d try to be better. He’d

nod as though we had just hand sealed a bargain, then start to turn away to go back to work, but he would always turn back. He'd grin and hold out his hands and I'd jump into his arms and he'd give me a great hug then stick me under his arm like a rolled up piece of vellum and stand up as straight as he could, given the low ceiling, and head for the door. Just as we were about to leave the cabin, he'd stop and look at me and say, "So, did you see the albatross?" and I'd have to tell him I hadn't, but then I'd assure him as how I would keep looking and he'd laugh his great laugh and we'd go out to the deck and he would get me settled to my work or studies."

There was a music in Menannon's voice Lee had never heard before as the Giant spoke of his sire. For just a moment, the drummer could not help a twinge of jealousy. He had a loving family complete with three mothers, five brothers and three sisters, but there was a closeness between Menannon and his sire Lee had never experienced and could only imagine what it must be like. He shook off his momentary lapse as being both unworthy and undeserved and grinned up at his friend.

"So, did you ever see the albatross?" he asked.

"No," Menannon chuckled, "but it wasn't for a lack of watching."

"Why were you looking for the blasted bird anyway?"

"Well, my father told me on our very first voyage together if I could spot the albatross over sea water, good luck would be ours for that voyage and always, because it would mean the High One was paying particular attention to us, but I think he just said it because I was a bit seasick and rather frightened of being surrounded by so much water, so he gave an imaginative five-summers old child something else to think about." Menannon could not help coloring slightly again at this memory.

Lee had to chuckle over that thought and went back to watching as details of the island begin to sort themselves from the general mass on the horizon.

The tip of Kalyria's Crown, the highest point of the island, was the first feature to stand out. It was the remnant of the last of the six original volcanic peaks that had formed the ancient island and it stood thirteen thousand four-hundred fifty and eight feet above the surrounding sea. Next to appear was the great rampart of the Marble Cliffs that enclosed the Fields of Morr, the best ground for tillage on the entire island. The ship began its swing south and east to skirt the island and enter the mooring basin fronting Kirith Kalyria on the southern shore.

The captain kept his vessel well out from the land, as there were sunken ledges and pinnacles like teeth surrounding the entire visible landmass. The sun was casting long shadows beyond the bow of the ship by the time they cleared the western reaches of the Plain of Pelar and the City itself came into view.

Lee caught his breath in wonder. Two white towers flanked the mooring basin's mouth, set atop the Crescent which formed a natural breakwater for the city, their roofs, made of the finest gold, glittered blindingly in the setting sun. Beyond, the city seemed to well-nigh burn with white light as the sun's rays reflected from the gold-and-silver-veined marble used in its construction where it lay like a richly woven carpet draped across the four hills upon which the city was built. There were so many ships within the mooring basin it looked as though an entire phalanx of clouds had settled down to the land. Even coming from a port city himself, Lee had never seen anything like this place. Beside him, Menannon was grinning slightly, enjoying his friend's reaction to his homeland.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" he murmured softly so as not to break the drummer's mood.

"Beautiful?" Lee turned shining eyes on the Giant. "To say Kirith Kalyria is beautiful is like saying the Throne of the High One is a middling tall hill rather than the highest mountain in Aridion! The tales do not do this place justice. The High One in glory! It's gorgeous!"

“Aye, that it is!” Menannon agreed.

They stood in silence for several moments, enjoying the sight of the city as it drew closer until they could just make out the green of trees and riotous patches of color marking the gardens and streets. Color and life were everywhere, all highlighted to perfection in the last golden rays of the setting sun.

The High One help me, it’s good to be home. Menannon had to blink a mist from his eyes. He looked away quickly so Lee would not see the momentary lapse in his demeanor. He turned back again to the land and the city before them and looked hungrily up to the top of its western-most hill, his eyes glued to the spot where he knew his sire’s villa stood within its walled close and garden, though he could not yet distinguish it. There was a brief flash of light as though the sun had just glinted off from a newly cleaned window. Menannon stiffened and strained his eyes. Yes! There it was again! He lunged onto the rail and stretched up as high as he could and raised his hand in a salute.

“What’s happening? Who are you waving to?” Lee looked hard to see what had caused his friend to suddenly wave at the city.

“My father!”

The joy on Menannon’s face was breathtaking. Lee could not help an answering grin, but he was still puzzled.

“How can he possibly see you at this distance? We are just barely able to see the buildings of the city.”

“Do you see that flashing?” Menannon pointed. Lee strained his eyes, but saw only the glitter of the city itself.

“Where?” he demanded.

“Up there to the left. Do you see it? There!” Menannon raised another salute, this time with both hands. “Do you see the flashing like the sun glinting from a window?” Lee followed along Menannon’s pointing arm and finally caught the tiny flashes to which his friend was referring. They did indeed

resemble sunlight glinting from newly cleaned glass.

“How could he possibly see you from there? It would be a wonder if he can even see this ship yet,” Lee asked, incredulous.

“He is using his long-vision instrument,” Menannon replied while keeping his gaze locked on the top of the hill from which the light still flashed intermittently.

“His what?” By now, Lee was beginning to believe his friend was having him on. Yet the look on Menannon’s face was such a mixture of joy and relief he had to be serious.

Menannon looked down at his friend and grinned rather self-consciously and schooled his face back to the calm mien a gentleman was expected to display, but he just could not keep the sparkle out of his eyes.

“My father invented what he calls a Long-seeker. It’s like a series of spectacle lenses put together in a long metal tube which allows you to focus on distant objects and see them as though they were nearly within hand’s reach. Each lens by itself can be used to make small things look large. As a child I was punished several times for taking the lenses in their metal circlets out of the tube and putting them over my eyes and holding them there with my cheek muscles to study tiny things like ants and beetles. In self defense and to prevent damage to an important tool, my father gave me some circles of glass and taught me how to grind lenses for myself. I used to be quite good at it.”

Lee could not help a derisive snort at this. At the harper hall, it was positively axiomatic that there was nothing that Menannon was not “quite good at.”

Beside him, Menannon grinned self-consciously at Lee’s reaction and hurried on with his explanation. “When he’s at home, my father keeps the Long-seeker in the summerhouse behind his villa so he can watch his trading ships come and go from the mooring basin below the city. When he moves it just right, the sun flashes off from the last lens. See? Like that! He’s

still watching us.” Menannon turned his attention back to the distant point of light.

“I’m coming, my father,” he whispered. “I’m almost home.”

Lee carefully hid his grin, not wanting Menannon to know he had overheard what was obviously a very private comment. Lee could not help turning his gaze from Menannon’s intense face to the top of the far hill and back the entire time their ship was making its way beneath the mighty lighthouses and into the mooring basin alive with maritime traffic. The light continued to flash as they approached, proving beyond the shadow of a doubt someone up on that hill was as interested in their progress as they were interested in progressing.

It took a full turn of the hour more before their ship was able to tie up at a public wharf. Gorlanndon had his docks in another section of the mooring basin where others among the larger merchants had their private docks, wharves and warehouses. The deck came alive with activity as the crew saw to setting the ship to rights and the rest of the passengers gathered at the gangway to disembark. Lee gave Menannon a salute and went back to gather his belongings. The wharf whirled with activity and color as bearers came with sedan chairs and litters to escort returning masters and mistresses to their estates or sell their services to others and all other manner of sailors, hawkers, family, friends and total strangers came out to greet the ship and the rest of its passengers and crew.

Home at last!

