

The Land of Rough Draft
by Brenna Harvey

Ventin sat atop his horse on the crest of the great hill that overlooked the Magnificent Capital City of the Land of Rough Draft. He gazed at the city skyline with resolute fury, or maybe grim determination, or soulful longing, or perhaps an even more specific and nuanced adjective-emotion combination, etched very clearly and unmistakably in the tired lines of his face.

The past months of hard marching and vicious skirmishing had taken a toll on Ventin. He was no longer the attractive adolescent he had been at the start of the narrative. He was harder, wiser, and much, much more attractive. He had grown from a sweet-faced boy to a handsome man, with a body type and haircut approximating upper-class ideals of white masculinity prominent in men's magazines at the time of this story's publication.

Through a mix of charm and daring, Ventin had assembled a ragtag but ferocious army. His men were drawn from among the greatest warriors of the Land of Rough Draft and the ill-defined Foreign Lands Beyond. His army contained elite lifelong soldiers and vicious mercenaries alike, and seemed to require neither supply lines nor latrines.

Ventin had an uncertain leadership role in this army. He often made passionate motivational speeches to his men before deadly battles against unbeatable odds. But he also snuck away for a great many entertaining side adventures without a noticeable impact on the organization or discipline of his troops. Whatever his official authority level, Ventin attended a great many strategy meetings held in large, luxurious tents. In these tents, beefy men draped in furs would gesticulate passionately at yellowed maps spread over rough wooden tables. Ventin often exited these tents in a righteous fury over the slowness of the army's progress and the timidity of his fellow officers. He stabbed a great many expensive daggers through the yellowed

maps and into the rough wooden tables to emphasize just how righteous his fury was. Where he bought the daggers, none could say.

Ventin's frustration with the army's reasonable pace was a continual reminder of the depth of his love for his betrothed, the Princess L'Innamora. The Princess was Heir Apparent to the Blessed Throne of the Land of Rough Draft, now held hostage by the Dark Lord Elthumath in the Ancient Palace of the Capital City. The Dark Lord Elthumath was a master of the most dread and diabolical sorcery. He possessed fearsome magical abilities unrivaled by any wizard or enchanter in recorded history, abilities which changed constantly depending on the needs of the story.

The Dark Lord now held the Capital City with the aid of his unholy army. Patrolling the City's winding, cobbled streets were legions of Elthumath's fearsome, soulless soldiers, whose bodies were hewn from the pure dark energy of Elthumath's vile magicks. They could thus be killed with impunity, with none of the distressing moral or ethical considerations that impede the pleasure of imagined violence against human beings. The City was currently protected by a spell of shielding, which could only be broken with the aid of a legendary object which Ventin had acquired during a major plot point earlier in the story.

All the elements were aligned for Ventin's glorious victory over the Dark Lord, and the accompanying symbolic victory of a prevailing moral value system over a poorly sketched portrait of social deviance and degeneracy. But enough uncertainty about victory yet remained to make the climactic battle compelling. And so Ventin gazed at the City, eager to begin and also eager to be done; afraid, but also confident.

"We will rescue her, my friend," said Kimbo Limbo, Ventin's most trusted confidant. He appeared beside Ventin without so much as the faintest rustle in the grass. Kimbo Limbo could

move in perfect silence when he so chose, especially when the author forgot that logically he would also have been riding a horse.

Kimbo Limbo's description portrayed him very emphatically as a black man, in language both fetishizing and smugly self-congratulatory. Kimbo Limbo had been added to the story under the misguided assumption that any appearance by a person of color in literature is necessarily a progressive, anti-racist move. He was clearly intended to be an example of positive representation, since he was the most revered warrior in his entire native land, sworn to protect his people from death and dishonor even at the cost of his own life. But his defeat in combat and subsequent pledge of fealty to Ventin gave his presence a deeply racist Uncle Tom vibe.

"We will rescue her," Kimbo Limbo repeated, since the preceding paragraph was long enough that the reader might have lost the thread of the conversation. "And your land will be returned to peace at last."

"This is my greatest hope," said Ventin. "And my greatest fear is that we shall find the Princess dead, or worse, altered beyond all recognition."

"The Princess is a woman of remarkable will," said Kimbo Limbo, thumping Ventin on the shoulder in a gesture of masculine solidarity appropriate for their playfully competitive and assuredly non-erotic homosocial bond. "You know I admire her greatly, and take great care to emphasize this admiration as platonic, because I must diffuse white readers' anxieties about black male sexuality and the threat of miscegenation. Recall, my friend, that the Princess L'Innamora is the main catalyst for your actions in this story. I therefore assume she thinks only of you and of freedom, unless her betrayal and death is intended to spur you to greater achievements in a sequel."

"Thank you, Kimbo Limbo. You are a true friend indeed," said Ventin, his fears calmed

by the summary of established information repeated for the audience's benefit. "Your stalwart devotion to myself and my cause is a convenient plot device that requires minimal emotional upkeep or even notice on my part."

"I would lay down my life for you, my friend," said Kimbo Limbo. "Especially if we needed to heighten the emotional stakes of our adventure without risking the loss of the romantic leads."

"But Kimbo Limbo," Ventin interrupted. "You are being purposely obtuse in order to draw out my true concerns. When I speak of the Princess being altered, I am actually referring to the threat of sexual violence to her person."

"My friend, are you preoccupied by this threat because you wish to save the Princess from violence or trauma for her own sake, or because violence against her is an insult to your masculinity, and therefore a threat to your status and standing in social life?"

"The second, I'm afraid," admitted Ventin. "Though naturally the text will not examine at length how my commitment to a chivalric code of conduct is primarily motivated by a need to protect women's sexual virtue in order to ensure a clear line of patrilineal descent and property inheritance by legitimate male heirs."

"Naturally," said Kimbo Limbo. "Well, my friend, when it comes to gender politics, my primary role is to offer you insight from my own value system in order to make you seem more enlightened by comparison. After all, my culture is a rough amalgamation of a wide variety of non-Western societies, with random aesthetic and cultural trappings taken out of their original context and assigned to my people in order to satisfy readers' appetites for lurid colonial fantasy."

"I expect that this is done with no regard for how such depictions feed back into powerful

controlling images of the Global South as backwards and barbaric.”

“Of course not. You will therefore find among my people such practices as human sacrifice, polygamy, strict menstruation taboos, the ingestion of powerful hallucinogens to increase ferociousness prior to battle, occasional cannibalism, and ritual suicide in the face of dishonor,” said Kimbo Limbo. “But most important for the purposes of this conversation, we also emphasize the centrality of a woman's sexual purity to her overall worth in ways somehow markedly different from similar patriarchal ideologies found in the West. I tell you with a level of pride that you are meant to find abhorrent that in my culture a sexually victimized woman will take her own life rather than live with the social stigma attached to her experiences.”

“I express shock and dismay at your words, demonstrating that my own gender ideology is somehow more egalitarian in spite of my equivalent preoccupation with women's chastity,” said Ventin. “And yet, I must confess I also feel a sense of admiration for your people's simple and earnest commitment to honor.”

“Yes,” said Kimbo Limbo. “We are savage. But also noble.”

“I have therefore successfully couched stereotypical, oversimplified, homogenized depictions of non-Western cultures in admiring language.”

“Which obviously absolves you of racism,” said Kimbo Limbo.

“Obviously,” said Ventin.

Ventin turned back to stare at the City, now red beneath a fiery sunset that didn't make him squint.

“My friend, my mind opens to the future,” said Kimbo Limbo. He pressed one hand to his forehead and made a sweeping motion across the landscape with the other. Kimbo Limbo was blessed with mystic foresight by the gods of his complex and deeply confusing religious

tradition, and he regularly made this gesture to indicate a forthcoming psychic pronouncement. "I predict that there shall be a great victory tomorrow."

"But how can you be certain?" asked Ventin, though he was at this point deeply familiar with the accuracy of Kimbo Limbo's predictions as a foreshadowing device.

"Because I am an egregious example of the magical negro trope," said Kimbo Limbo. "My friend," he added.

Ventin nodded, glad that Kimbo Limbo's magic was being used to propel the narrative of a white protagonist.

"I see our future, Ventin," said Kimbo Limbo, his eyes closed, his voice grave. "No long and ragged scuffle shall we two armies have, but a day of thunder and blood that ends in a true victor."

"The question, of course," said Ventin, spelling out the implication of Kimbo Limbo's prediction in order to create a dramatic chapter break, "Is whose victory shall it be?"

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The Dark Lord Elthumath stood triumphant in the Blessed Throne Room of the Ancient Palace of the Magnificent Capital City of the Land of Rough Draft. He strutted and preened, already acting the part of a glorious conqueror, though the book's decisive military engagement wouldn't happen for at least another chapter.

"Something brutal and tragic doubtless happened in this room," murmured Elthumath running his long, elaborately manicured fingers over the cool stone of one of the hall's many pillars. As a shortcut to imply the Dark Lord's villainy, everything about his appearance, from his intricate glam rock eye shadow to his luxuriously tailored robes, suggested gleeful and unapologetic gender nonconformity.

“If something brutal and tragic happened here,” continued Elthumath, his motions becoming more slinky and effete as the passion rose in his voice. “I could make a soulful speech about it to help with the pacing and atmosphere of this scene. Was it my ancestor who was executed, here, before the throne? Perhaps for their forays into the same forbidden magicks that give me my extraordinary power? Such an event would simultaneously explain my vendetta against the royal family and my lust to become the world's greatest sorcerer.”

The Dark Lord Elthumath paused, lips pursed, looking unsatisfied by even this loose sketch of a backstory. He pondered the matter, running his long fingers distractedly over his high, elegant cheekbones. While Elthumath's gender presentation coded him as a decadent and threatening queer, his skin tone and facial structure hinted at an exotic and menacing non-white ethnicity.

In a swirl of dark robes, Elthumath turned to gaze upon the Princess L'Innamora, Heir Apparent to the Blessed Throne of the Land of Rough Draft and his prisoner.

“If the details of this speech are not worked out, dear Princess, my character is going to fall absolutely flat,” said Elthumath, hand to his heart, his every gesture a parody of maidenly anxiety. “Rather than a complex and sympathetic villain for the ages, I shall become a mere plot device to create conflict and propel the character development of the central cast. What think you, Princess?”

From across the room, Princess L'Innamora returned his gaze unflinching. She held her head high and proud, though she was bound erotically to another conveniently placed pillar. The Princess was a painfully beautiful woman, a fact the story's descriptive prose would not let the reader forget for even a moment. When the Princess was present, hardly a paragraph could go by without a long litany of her physical virtues, including her pale skin, slender waist, swanlike

neck, head of tumbling golden curls, delicately turned ankles, pert buttocks, full breasts, creamy thighs, small feet, long back, and sparkling blue eyes.

“What think I, Lord Elthumath?” replied the Princess, her voice sweet and musical as it issued from her lovely, milk-white throat. “I still think you would be the most nuanced and complex personality in the book. As it stands, you're the only one who's expressed any reservations or critique about the organization of the society we inhabit. Though the rest of us have witnessed tremendous inequality and suffering in the course of this story, we seem to have no goals or desires other than preserving the current social order exactly as it was when the story began.”

“Dear Princess,” chuckled the Dark Lord. “Of course the noble inhabitants of a feudal society vaguely modeled after Medieval Europe would be unable or unwilling to find fault with a social order that advantages them.”

“I know it makes sense for the characters in context,” scoffed the Princess, her tiny nose wrinkling in irritation. “At the same time, the author presents their investment in the maintenance of that social order in such a uniformly positive light that this perspective transcends character standpoint and becomes the standpoint of the novel itself.”

“Show me an English-speaking fantasy author who doesn't romanticize Medieval Europe,” said Elthumath, his thin lips curling in a mocking smile, “And I'll show you a cultural studies graduate student with an unpublished manuscript.”

“It's not funny. The unrelenting hard-on for Medieval Europe among contemporary Western genre authors demonstrates the absolute poverty of our collective imagination,” sighed the Princess, the text taking time to linger on the sensuality of her helpless squirming even as she tried to make a point. “It's a tragedy. Because cultural production is overwhelmingly controlled

by members of the ruling class, only members of the ruling class have stories worth telling, and so even our imagined societies reconstruct, defend, and celebrate the ruling class as we know it.”

“Indeed, we see in our own fantasy universe how the deservingness of elites is emphasized at every turn,” added Elthumath, amused that such well-articulated frustration was emerging from a character he had assumed was supposed to die to motivate the protagonist.

“Their goodness, skill, courage, and rich internal lives are especially contrasted with the duplicity, incompetence, cowardice, and philosophical vacuousness of the working class.”

“Except for special cases, where blessed, chosen, or exceptional poor individuals rise to the ranks of the powerful, somehow implying that a feudal political economy organized around primogeniture can simultaneously be a meritocracy.”

They both laughed, because it was a hilarious joke.

“Don't even get me started on physical appearance,” Elthumath added. His eyes raked over the body of the Princess in a way that suggested either shameless animal lust or the grudging admiration of a fellow high femme.

The Princess turned away, uncomfortably aware that her beauty was as much a consequence of literary classism as sexism, not to mention white supremacy. In a more realistic story her loveliness would have been at least partially acknowledged as a product of both class advantage and personal effort, but here no mention was made of the importance of diet, cosmetics, or even the necessities of basic hygiene to maintain her exceptional figure, complexion, and teeth.

“It's absurd to depict my appearance as entirely natural, I know,” she said, her pale face suffused with a blush as delicate and lovely as the petals on a blooming rose. “To do so positions my beauty as the outward indicator of a pure and worthy soul. It thus implicitly acts as proof that

I deserve my entirely unearned wealth, status, and power. Can you believe it?"

Elthumath could believe it, because the false conflation of beauty and goodness lay at the heart of a truly heinous amount of human artistic production.

"This universe is ridiculous," cried the Princess. "As if inherited wealth and power are ever deserved! As if conformity to dominant standards of physical beauty implies anything about one's moral integrity or capacity for empathy!"

"I think we can also blame Tolkien, at least a little bit," murmured Lord Elthumath. "And Lewis."

"Oh, their sticky, racist, sexist, Oxford-educated fingers can be found all over us as well," admitted the Princess. The pair began to laugh again, but were interrupted when the Princess sagged in her bindings, no longer able to keep up the appearance of strength and vitality after so many weeks of kinky bondage imprisonment.

"L'Innamora!" cried Elthumath, his usual flippant tone suddenly ringing with concern. He flung himself toward the Princess in a rush of shadow, moving more quickly than mortal eye could follow. Superhuman speed thus became an unexpected addition to his poorly defined magical skill set.

The Dark Lord Elthumath arrived at the side of the Princess. He touched her face gently, letting a trickle of magical strength flow from his soul into hers. She opened to his magic in an elaborately detailed passage full of overt sexual symbolism that would arouse and confuse middle school readers for decades to come. The Princess stirred, her full breasts heaving.

"You forged a bond between us to keep me alive," said the Princess, her long, luxurious eyelashes fluttering as she opened her eyes. "This act will redeem you in the reader's eyes and condemn me as a weak and unfaithful woman."

“Shhhhh,” whispered Elthumath, stroking her hair. “You know you can't win, dear L'Innamora. You know it's impossible to balance the feisty girl power, sexual autonomy, and human vulnerability demanded by consumers in the wake of third wave feminism with the stringent demands of submission and purity that continue to undergird ideal heterosexual femininity.”

Princess L'Innamora nodded, sniffing and blinking back tears. She felt a level of emotion that would irritate some readers for being excessive and others for being inadequate.

“Do you know that in the past few pages we've demonstrated more intellectual camaraderie and emotional connection than I have with the romantic lead for the entire rest of the book?” the Princess asked sadly.

“It's inevitable when the villain is the only character with a developed worldview who speaks at length about that worldview to other characters,” said Elthumath soothingly. “It's a shame that people who enjoy the complexity of our relationship and who elaborate and explore it in fanfiction will be accused of glamorizing emotional abuse.”

“You don't think consumers have a responsibility to critically assess their enjoyment of eroticized power dynamics?” asked the Princess, surprised, pulling as far from his gentle touch as her bindings would allow.

“I think we can critically assess texts without denying ourselves pleasure as readers,” said Elthumath, crossing his arms. “To enjoy and to critique are not mutually exclusive.”

“Easy for you to say when you're not in the position of erotic victim!” scoffed the Princess.

“Fiction set in a patriarchal society that doesn't engage meaningfully with women's sexual victimization under patriarchy is politically irresponsible!”

“Don't mansplain the political implications of literary representation to me!” cried the Princess, her nipples growing hard with righteous indignation. “Victimization for the purposes of titillation is far more irresponsible than an unrealistic absence of victimization!”

The pair glared at each other, sparks of magical outrage crackling along the soul bond they now shared. After a tense moment, they both broke into another round of laughter that echoed in the high stone chamber.

“You'd think we wouldn't even have to have this conversation, since you're obviously coded as queer,” said the Princess. “Very, very obviously,” she added appreciatively.

“You know, it's funny, you'd think so,” said Elthumath. “But as the embodiment of the specter of the unrepentant queer, the potential for your sexual violation at my hands is that much more titillating to young heterosexual male readers.”

“I believe it,” said the Princess, giving the Dark Lord's slender frame a long, appraising look.

“Why this imaginary society follows the conventions of an oppressive dyadic heterosexual gender order without subverting or criticizing those conventions I couldn't tell you,” sighed Elthumath.

“Say,” said Princess L'Innamora slyly. “Do you think we would simply be reproducing an oppressive dyadic heterosexual gender order if, hypothetically speaking, we made out?”

“Goodness, I don't know,” said Elthumath, surprised. “I suppose the scenario could be read as a curative for my gender and sexual deviance and therefore a reassertion of the social and cultural supremacy of heterosexuality.”

“Can't sexuality be fluid without invalidating anyone's identity?” muttered the Princess, bonking her head against her pillar in political and sexual frustration.

Elthumath took her chin in his hands and looked into her eyes. The moment surprised them both with its emotional authenticity. "More importantly, can you truly consent to make out with me under duress?"

"I don't know," said the Princess, straining toward him in a way that was definitely a little bit objectifying but also definitely a little bit empowering. "You'd better keep asking."

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The battle began at dawn. There was an elaborate action scene. The combat skills of all the main characters were aptly demonstrated, as was Ventin's cleverness at solving an intricate magical puzzle that was supposed to keep him and his troops from entering Elthumath's inner sanctum. The logistical challenges of arranging this scene very obviously impede the author's emotional investment in this portion of the book, and the description and dialogue suffer as a result.

And so Ventin stood, soaked in blood and weary with killing, at the entrance to the Blessed Throne Room of the Land of Rough Draft. He stood beside Kimbo Limbo, his every nerve alert, his heart thrashing in his chest with all the force of an appropriately violent simile. The Dark Lord's spells were dissipated now, and the halls were empty of his fiendish servants. All was quiet, save for the ragged breathing of the two warriors. Amazed that no more obstacles stood in his way, Ventin placed his hand on the great stone door that marked the entrance to the Throne Room, and it swung gently open at his touch.

"Take care," said Kimbo Limbo, one hand pressed to his forehead and the other making a sweeping gesture across the room. "I sense nothing of goodness or light beyond these doors."

Ventin held up a hand for silence. He stepped through the door, his sword at the ready. In the center of the chamber stood a slight figure, gowned in black, with a head of golden

curls. Ventin stepped closer, his hand outstretched, his voice forming the name he knew would be answered.

“L’Innamora,” he breathed. The figure turned.

She was indeed the Princess L’Innamora, but altered, and altered more than his in worst imaginings. She was less beautiful, a possibility which his mind had never even dared to conjure. Her skin had lost its ethereal pallor. Her face held laugh lines, and beneath her eyes were faint, bruised rings of tiredness. Her hair fell in waves that frizzed and tangled like any woman’s hair.

“Hold, friend,” said Kimbo Limbo, “I suspect this is not your beloved, but some wretched golem meant to resemble her.”

“L’Innamora,” Ventin repeated, taking another step. “Can it be you? Will you speak to me?”

“Ventin, who was my love,” said Princess L’Innamora, moving toward him. Ventin halted, stiff and frightened.

“Am I really so awful to you?” she asked. She sounded amused, rather than bitter. “I suspected it might be so.”

“I fear my friends have seen and spoken the truth,” said Ventin. “And you are not the L’Innamora I once loved.”

“Indeed I am not,” L’Innamora agreed. “I have been touched by Elthumath’s magic.”

Ventin swung his sword in her direction, aghast.

“Foul thing!” he cried. “Corrupted thing. You dare to steal the face of my beloved and puppet it with the words of your master.”

“You mistake me entirely, dear Ventin,” said L’Innamora, smiling an ordinary, attractive smile. “I am changed, yes, but not corrupted.”

“What has changed you?” Ventin demanded.

“Let us call it unexpected chemistry,” said the Dark Lord Elthumath, appearing suddenly from behind a pillar. To be clear, he didn’t teleport, he was just standing out of the way for dramatic effect.

“Traitorous wretch!” cried Ventin, raising his sword.

“Son of a beast of burden that signifies pollution in my culture!” yelled Kimbo Limbo, raising his spear.

The pair set upon Elthumath, and he stayed still to meet them, not even flinching as their weapons passed cleanly through his body.

“What sorcery is this?” cried Kimbo Limbo.

“No sorcery this time,” said Elthumath. “I am simply being reconsidered.”

Everyone stared at him, and indeed his outline seemed faded, and the features of his face had an indistinct quality.

“Isn't it marvelous?” L'Innamora asked Ventin, excitement lighting her eyes, though he could not say now what color they were. She was changing too, her height less decisive, the shade of her skin uncertain, her hair no longer so curly, or perhaps more curly still. “He and I spent so much time together, and we realized so much. Oh Ventin, it was remarkable, and to think if we had not been thrown together so unthinkingly, we might never have had this chance.”

“L'Innamora,” said Ventin, “What are you talking about?”

The Dark Lord Elthumath moved to the side of the Princess and took her hand.

“Ventin, surely you of all people noticed the blandness of this world? How loosely sketched it was, how plodding and how predictable?” L'Innamora asked, not without sympathy.

“I doubt it,” snorted Kimbo Limbo. “When everything here bent to serve him.”

"Never," said Ventin, glaring at Kimbo Limbo.

L'Innamora nodded, her changing eyes sad for him.

"He walked too set a path," said Kimbo Limbo, sounding like he understood something important. "On a well-trod path there is so little to explore."

"What does that mean?" demanded Ventin.

"We were scrap," said Elthumath. "Set aside a long while, then put together in a more hasty, slapdash way. We had less purpose and less direction. With less decided for us, we could wander more."

"It's not your fault, Ventin," L'Innamora assured him. "You were given so little, you really had no chance. And there's no saying that things were certain to turn out this way. It was an accident."

Ventin let out a wordless cry of rage, swinging his sword in a vicious arc toward anyone and anything he could reach. Only now it wasn't a sword, now it was a dagger, only now it was a scythe, a lute, a cooking pot, only now his hands were empty. He flexed his fingers, their edges blurring. He fell to his knees, helpless and tired.

"Was your story really so much better?" he demanded.

"It wasn't really a story," said L'Innamora honestly. "So much as what was wrong with a story. Which is a start."

"How can you start with what's wrong with a story?" asked Ventin, his anger beginning to fade with the rest of him.

"All stories start wrong," said Elthumath.

"Some more wrong than others," said Kimbo Limbo pointedly.

"It's true," said L'Innamora. "All stories start wrong. Some very wrong. And if you don't

notice, then they will stay wrong, and then someday simply be finished. Would any of us have wanted to be finished as we were?"

Everyone but the one who had been Ventin laughed uproariously. The one who had been Ventin did not know what was funny, but now at least was interested in understanding.

"But if everything is made wrong," Ventin said, truly curious, "Then what harm is there in simply letting things be?"

"A very great deal," said the one that had been Elthumath.

"Wrong things, once finished, can seem as if they must be true, and right," said the one that had been Kimbo Limbo.

"Whole worlds can be lost," said the one that had been Elthumath. "Better worlds."

"The key," said L'Innamora, "Is to notice. To see what has been made wrong. To care about what has been made wrong. So that it might be unmade. So that it might be changed."

They felt the changes then, in them, through them, all around them. Things moved. A great deal was taken away. Wrong things, all of them. But room was left. Something else could be returned.

"Will anything stay, do you think?" asked one voice, perhaps the one that had been Ventin.

"Was there anything you would want to keep?" asked a second voice, perhaps the one that had been Kimbo Limbo.

"I had a wicked, Wildean flair I quite enjoyed," said a third, likely the one that had been Elthumath.

"Did you now?" asked a fourth, still sounding like an amused L'Innamora. "I'm not sure I noticed."

“I quite liked the ‘depraved villain reformed’ angle.”

“I thought it was the ingenue corrupted? Or perhaps a simple soul made wise?”

“Was it? I cannot remember now.”

They could not remember much at all, and stood, no longer themselves, as a room of people only. What kind of room could not yet be said. There was nothing to mark them and nothing that could be described. But a beginning had been made, and a great deal was suddenly possible.

“We shall most likely only be made wrong again,” said a voice, which may have been resigned, or cautionary, or excited.

“We shall,” said another voice, one that could be a warrior, or a sorcerer, or a princess.

“And again.”

“And again.”

“And again.”