



Eri Isle

O.v. Matt

Magic

Among the islands in the North sea the Eri Isle was the most prominent. It was out-of-the-way, lonely place and its gentle valleys and rocky narrow bays were covered by mist, so that the trading ships, loaded with exotic fruits and vegetables and silk and woolen fabrics could not moor to the shore. Instead they were waiting for the pale ice-eyed and fair-haired inhabitants of the Eri to reach their ships on the boats and unload the food and cloth cargo and take it off and exchange it for the jewellery, so marvelous, that the merchants fairly often sighed and shared concerns with each other that it was incredible, that human hands could create such delicate work...

One lovely summer afternoon Caramel, a young princess, the daughter of the King Magnus, peacefully ruling at the Kingdom of Eri, slid out of the Palace (from early childhood she used to flee from her nurses to the unexplored places of the isle) to the jolly lawn outside the Palace gates, enticed by the bright sunshine and dazzling flowers.

But there was someone else before her, a boy, lying in the lawn, with his left elbow set against the ground and his right hand toying with soft golden grasses.

“What are you doing?” she asked the boy in an annoyed voice, displeased by his earliest exploring the lawn. He raised his blue eyes, so resembling her own, and answered, “I am looking for bluebells for the necklace which my father is carving.” Then he plucked the velvet bluebell, growing in the grass, and handed it to Caramel. Its soft gentle petals were of deep saturated blue color and silver stamens softly swung, as she touched its glistening stalk. But in several seconds, while she was holding the flower in her hand, it hardened and its tender petals turned into deep blue sapphires and stamens became of white gold, as did the stalk and the

leaves.

This was the great secret of the Eri Isle – the jewellers here were more the botanists than the craftsmen. It was the Nature that provided them with the stuff for their work, as the flowers, being plucked, solidified to precious stones and inexperienced and naïve foreign merchants took them for skilfully carved gems.

From that day on a strong friendship between Princess Caramel and the jeweller's son Clement started, turning with years into devoted love, though both of them were not aware of it. They used to spend time together, lying at the golden grass under the yellow shadows of golden trees and watching the clouds, passing by in the bright blue sky, or striding along the golden roads, covered with golden dust, where golden nuggets were scattered all over, or climbing the shore cliffs and observing the South winds which tossed the glistening marine spray through the air in the brilliant sunshine.

They waded along the crystal-pure quick streams where golden-scaled fish ate golden seaweed and stirred its golden fins above the bottom of golden sand. They crossed the grasslands and stroked the golden fleece of the rams that grazed golden grass. Cows with golden horns, giving golden milk, followed them with their languishing eyes, while golden haired dogs guarding the herds barked greeting them.

Clement showed Caramel all flowers and herbs he knew were growing in the most remote and hidden corners of the Isle and Caramel helped Clement to gather flowers for his father's workshop, giving him all she had gathered during the day and returning to the Palace empty-handed, pretending to her nurses that she was simply strolling outdoors.

Quite often Caramel obtained from the Diamondflower Jeweller's House (well, you should know that the Diamondflower Jeweller's House belonged to the Clement's father) jewels, studded with stones, among which she recognized the flowers she had gathered herself and then she smiled to herself and her heart got warmed for some unexplainable reason.

As the time passed Clement spent more and more time in the workshop, helping his father. He beat and shaped the gold with his hammer and vague shapes played at his face in the red light of the fire in the forge when he strung on the white golden chains the moonflowers, born from the solidified rays of the Moon, and when he studded necklaces with yellow lilies, having solidified into transparent orange amber, twinkling with mysterious sparks inside its pestils, and when he embossed silver bracelets all over with bleuets, having been crystallized into transparent cold topazes.

And while he was making jewels, he was a bit absent-minded, as his mind was always busy with something

else. And I'll reveal you a secret – this “something else” was the trouble of finding the extinct species of diamond roses, as it were the jewels of this special sort of roses that had brought to the Diamondflower House fame and flourishing a long time ago.

It had been a tradition for a future wife or husband of the Prince or Princess of the Eri to come from one of the royal families from the outer islands and never leave the island after the wedding.

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And since ancient times the diamond roses were the mandatory Bride attribute of the royal wedding. These were the flowers with petals so delicate that they seemed to be transparent and when they were falling off, they solidified in the air and bright diamonds reached the ground with a tinkle.

Clement's Granddad had told him that the last diamond roses were cut for the wedding of the Caramel's Grandmother. And with the extinction of this species the fame of the Diamondflower House had waned...

Time passed and there came the day of Caramel's seventeenth birthday. And that jolly day fair King Magnus said to his daughter, “My dear Caramel, you have seen many foreign isles and you know that they differ from our native one. At the outer islands the grass and leaves of the trees are soft and green and people cut trees and burn the wood to warm their houses and they make swords of iron and all of them have the unquenchable thirst for gold which is scarce in their lands. From the ancient times we were under the constant threat of invasion and centuries ago the Elders decided to make kinship with the most bellicose tribes in the realm. Accepting the foreign Prince or Princess into our family, we enlisted support of the mighty ally in the face of the warlike royals, ready to defend their son or daughter with arms.

So, when you was one year old, you was betrothed to prince Ulrik, the son of Olaf, the King of Arland Isle. Your rings were exchanged in order to cement your alliance and affirm you would get married when you turn eighteen. Ulrik is a fierce warrior and, having settled at Eri to become his home, he would defend it from any enemy. Thus you should start preparing for the wedding as you will have much to do in advance.”

Now the time came to tell you a bit more about the Princess. The point is that the Princess Caramel had magic powers which she had inherited from her mother at birth in the same way as all women in her kin had been obtaining it from their mothers from generation to generation and, though she had never seen Prince Ulrik, she was feeling his iron ring at her finger and she was conscious of his pale face, his sea-grey eyes, his long hair, black as a stream of subsurface water, his thin lips, curving in a mocking smile to his wicked thoughts about his lust for power and gold, his love of blood and his mercilessness both to his enemies and to his siblings.

Having known all these, she resorted to cunning and said to her father, the King Magnus, “O, my King and Father, I shall not be prince Ulrik’s wife until the Eri jewellers carve a crown of diamond roses for me as our tradition states, in order it set off my beauty in front of him.”

“No one can do this, as the diamond roses had vanished many years ago,” the King answered. “Then I would burn to ashes with the shame of our poverty in front of the Prince,” Caramel said in a doomed voice.

The King Magnus didn’t want to mourn at the site of the pyre, so he summoned an assembly of all the jewellers of the Eri. Seated on his throne, wearing his golden crown with seven high points of red tulips, solidified into rubies, topping stalks of white gold, shining with silvery sheen, Princess Caramel upon his right hand and the wisest nobles upon his left one, and the jewellers in ranks before him, he told them the wish of the Princess Caramel to obtain the crown of diamond roses for the wedding with Prince Ulrik.

“And now,” said the King in the end of his speech, “I am to announce a reward for your endeavors. The one who would find diamond roses and carve the crown for the Princess wedding I would grant the fulfillment of one his wish, whatever it would be. I will it and so be it!” Princess Caramel was sitting nigh her father, smiling happily.

The same night Caramel slid out of the Palace and told the whole story to Clement and added, “I would never marry neither Ulrik nor anyone else. Though Father would never approve our marriage I would always be together with you in my thoughts, Clement.” But Clement didn’t share her happiness and was very sad and despondent and sunk into some deep thoughts.

A year passed and the eighteenth birthday of Princess Caramel came. All day long she had been accepting congratulations that she had reached full age but she could not make out Clement and was guessing where he had vanished.

And Clement was in the Flowerdale, sitting at the bank of the stream, flowing out of the foot of the Mountain called Brann and known for white will-o’-wisps, emerging on the mountain slopes at night and flickering in the dense mist. Several months ago, when he was sitting there in the night, pondering on the forthcoming wedding of Princess Caramel and trying to collect his thoughts together, he saw in the dusk the will-o’-wisps, soaring bottom up the mountain-side, as if being strung on some invisible thread.

Clement approached the mountain wall and reached out his hand to touch a fidgety shimmering will-o’-wisp, but the flaming ball receded, caught up with another will-o’-wisp and darted away at once to vanish somewhere behind the top of the cliff.

Clement pondered, to what secret place they were vanishing and how to trace them and with this idea he got up and headed along the rocky wall to come upon the path, leading up the mountain slope. He scrambled along the path in the ledge across the mountain side to observe the will-o'-wisps, streaming through the smooth door of stone, set in the rocks. He tried to push it in before him but it did not move. In great wonder Clement sat on the rock, admiring the white dancing flames, getting over the door as if it was not of rock but of air. Evoked by the fantastic view, the favourite saying of his granddad in their Old Language (his Granddad was humming it all the time while working in the forge) flashed his mind:

Lys og brann,
blomstrer diamant,

which meant:

In fire and light,
Blooms the diamond.

Involuntary he spoke the saying aloud and with his last word the door flew open unexpectedly. In great anxiety Clement passed through, and the door closed behind him noiselessly. He went along the ancient tunnel, hewn through the solid rock, following the bright white will-o'-wisps, flying to some destination point in the end of the tunnel from where the glimpse of some red gleam could be caught. Clement passed the last turn of the passage and it was the end of it as it opened to the cave.

He was looking with all eyes and still could not believe them. Under the thick layer of mountain crystals, the liquid substance, pink in hue at the edges of the cave, changing colour to orange, then yellow and finally to shining white in the middle of the cave, was emitting bright glow, illuminating the crystal glade above it where transparent roses bloomed, shining and sparkling, as if in embrace of the eternal sunset fire, and butterflies, as the tiny golden sparks, were hovering above them... So he had found the diamond roses...

Now, at the daylight, he was sitting at the bank of a stream and thinking, whether the thing he was going to do this day, would be a right one. The sun was setting and its shafts shaped the stairs in the yellow sky, with steps of soft orange, pink and red. Clement plunged out of his gloomy thoughts, dazzled with the sight of the sky stairs, resembling the stairs at the King Palace, and with the words, "I should do this or the rest of my life I would regret, I have not made an effort" he rose and headed to the town.

It was warm mid-August evening and light golden lanterns soared in the air above his head, while he was

striding the streets of the town. On the occasion of the Princess Birthday fire breathers ignited sugar to produce stripes of caramel, resembling Princess hair and flambéed crème brûlée and poured caramel sauce on the top of the custard flan and poured gauffres with chocolate, so that liquid chocolate was dripping to the floor, and ignited whisky, blended with flammable golden milk. Flashes of fire in the darkness illuminated excited and happy faces of the throng of town dwellers, crowding at the Palace square around the Princess Birthday Cake in the form of Princess Caramel statue, ten feet in height, with caramel hair, dressed in the gown with a twenty feet wide skirt of whipped cream, glazed by algae of tender light green color, crystallized with sugar.

The Palace stood pink in the shafts of the setting sun, its golden towers and turrets and steeples glistening like bonfires and reaching to the sky with their tops, being lost in the pink clouds, casting strange shadows.

Clement went up the golden stairs, holding in his hands a bundle, folded in thick cloth. He asked the guards to take him before the King as he had the urgent matter to His Majesty. The guards let him in and led him through the halls and corridors and he was amazed at magnificence and luxury that he saw lay all about him. In floors of golden tiles, ceilings of mountain crystal, inlaid with the net woven of the golden strings, golden pillars with bas-reliefs of beasts and birds whose eyes were of sapphires and emeralds, statues, cast of gold, with garments folds engraved, man-height mirrors of amalgamated gold he recognized the style of his fellow goldsmiths. The Palace seemed to be purely golden.

The guards passed the long gallery, full of thick blue twilight, and brought Clement to the garden at the inside court of the Palace, lit by the torchlight. A long table was standing on the golden grass and baked sturgeon, smoked muskun and fried salmon were already upon the tables. In the head of the table Princess Caramel, dressed in a simple white lacy gown, in the crown of zephyr roses was sitting nigh her father King Magnus, and the nobles were sitting at both sides of them. The air was filled with the sweet melodies of violins and ringing of crystal trickles of fountains.

Clement was watching Caramel, holding her glass of sparkling champagne with edible gold leaves, floating at its bottom, when their eyes met. Clement immediately turned his eyes away and bowed in homage to the King. The King, red-faced of wine, smiled graciously to Clement and asked, "Clement, the son of Donan Dimondflower, what has brought you here?"

To what Clement responded, "O King of Eri, you willed the crown of the diamond roses for the Princess Caramel and according to your royal wish I have carved it." And with these words he drew forth the bundle and

threw the cloth off it.

The shining of the diamond roses crown dazzled the eyes of all the present. Princess Caramel whitened while the King Magnus, wondering in amazement the marvel, his face lit up with joy, exclaimed, "Clement, during many years nobody has delighted as much as you did. Where have you got these fair flowers?"

Clement, who could not turn his eyes away from the Princess face, said, "At the heart of the mountain I found these fair flowers to adorn Princess Caramel at her wedding. But Princess Caramel beauty surpasses the beauty of these flowers by thousand times."

The King nodded and said, "Ask then what you wish for this crown and I would fulfil any your desire."

Then Clement diffidently knelt and said, "O King of Eri, my only and ardent desire is to take Princess Caramel for my wife."

The music stopped playing, the conversations ceased. The deafening silence fell. The King was sitting stricken and speechless. Then the murmur of indignation rose among the nobles. And a noble, sitting the nighest to the King, stood up and said, "'O King of Eri, never yet had the daughter of a King been given in marriage to any, save a Prince of violent fighters. Who would defend our home from Prince Ulrik's ire when he got to know that Princess Caramel became the bride of the jeweller?"

Princess Caramel, white as snow, rose impetuously and said, "O Father, it was your word to fulfil any wish of the person who would carve the wedding crown for me. I am ready to keep the King's word and I would become Clement's wife."

Then King, being indulged in reveries, at length broke the silence and said with an effort, "Clement, I can fulfil any your wish within reason. So think of another wish or if you really want to take my daughter for your wife, I would give you a chance. My Grandfather, King Marcus, had told me about the jeweler who had wrought the crown of white light many centuries ago. The one, who possessed it, would be the most powerful person in the world. Bring me the crown of hammered light and I would consent to your marriage with the Princess."

Clement, pale and trembling, rose from the knees and stepped forward, "O my King, I would bring you yonder crown at any cost." He handed the crown of diamond roses to the King, cast the last glance at Princess Caramel and ran out of the garden.

Princess Caramel turned to the King her white face and asked, "O Father, the crown of white light really exists?" The King burst into laughter and answered, "Of course not, these are old tales for kids. I hope, poor Clement would be searching for the impossible for all his life and we would get rid of him forever."

In fury Princess rose and cried, "You are a dishonest liar! Have you no daughter from now on! I would follow Clement! Forget me forever!" And having evaded the grip of the guards, she ran off the garden after Clement. The laughter of the King turned into bad cough and then into wheeze, while he tried to call, "Come... come... back..."

Caramel was running, crying "Clement, wait for me, I will go with you!" But nobody replied to her. She wandered to a dale with silvery grass and then stepped in an unfamiliar wood of transparent pines. It seemed to her that she made out grey-haired maids with young faces, twice the stature of a woman, in white gowns, hiding behind the trees and peeping out from behind the trunks, but the images dissolved shortly. The wind began to pipe up. And transparent pines bent under the wind with horrible creak and swayed and rocked and moaned to Caramel's pleas, "He's gone, he's gone." And then it started raining heavily. Wet to the skin and sobbing bitterly, Caramel collapsed to the ground and lied there under the rain ere dawn.

In the early morning she trudged through the wood and having found the path, leading to her home, plodded to the Palace. Standing at the foot of the stairs, she didn't dare to ascend it, when the Head of the Royal Guards came out of the Palace and knelt down before her and bowed his head and said, "O Princess Caramel, your Father, the King of Eri, is dead."

Having had the grave news the Princess swooned into his arms. When she opened her eyes, her only words were, "René, I pray you, find Clement..."

Ere long the Head of the Guards entered the Chambers of the Princess who came down with a fever and said to her, "We had found out that one of the boats is missing. Clement must have left the Isle." Having listened to his report, Caramel turned away to the wall and drowned in tears...

Meanwhile Caramel was proclaimed the Queen of Eri and the first thing she did after accession to power was the sending of a herald to the Arland Isle with the message of breaking the betrothal with the Prince Ulrik. The reply of the Prince came soon. One bright frosty day the patrol men noticed the fleet of darksailed ships, moving to the Isle. The ships have not reached the shore, when the boats were dropped from them and they rowed to the Eri Isle.

The shore was hidden in the mist and the sea was raging at the strand. The waves overturned many boats and many boats struck hidden rocks and sank. Still many warriors managed to reach shallow water either on boat or by swimming, struggling hard with the nature for their lives. They waded ashore and then climbed over the slippery rocks of the beach.

And then horror seized their hearts as they saw in front of them the pale savage beasts, their golden hair flying in the air and demons dancing in their flaming icy eyes. They leapt from the cliffs to the beach, shooting golden arrows in a splendid speed and brandishing with their transparent swords so hard and sharp that they cut the heads of their enemies from their dirty shoulders in a single blow.

Caramel was standing in the North Watch Tower that was hanging above the raging foamy sea. She watched the battle, ready to leap to the abyss, in case the battle was lost.

The Arland warriors fought ferociously but their iron swords were cut to pieces with diamond swords of the Eri defenders, The attackers faced their death with dignity, pouring the rocky beach with their black blood. The every man of invaders was killed that night but there were victims among the Eri warriors and their wives were mourning over them, cursing Caramel in their grief as the cause of their men death.

And then Caramel promised to herself that no more man would give his life for her. She still wore the iron ring of Ulrik and soon after the battle she listened to the ring and heard Ulrik, saying, "I wish the old fool Magnus would alive in order I could assault Caramel in front of him and them slaughter the old bastard and turn Caramel to my slave." With his face being twisted, he gripped the arms of the throne with such a rage that they broke into pieces. Caramel shrank back in a shudder and the vision at once faded.

She was trembling of fear and soon she became afraid of sleeping, awaiting for invasion. Sinking into light drowsiness, she shortly awakened all in a cold sweat, her heart beating like that of a bird, thinking Prince Ulrik was standing near her bed, and not being able to get back to sleep again.

Then she used to sleep at daytime but, harassed by nightmares, she was weeping in her dreams and woke up with tears, streaming down her cheeks.

She wandered the town in the night, wrapped in the grey cloak, the hood shading her face. Unrecognized, she looked in the windows, from where the firelight flowed, and tried to seize a sense of home and envied those, who were safe and appeased and confident in happy future in the family circle, which she herself lacked.

Once in the evening she woke up and walked down the stairs in the dusk, directed by the reflection of the fire glow, coming from under the kitchen door. In the kitchen Caramel poured a glass of golden milk from the milk jug and when she was already going to leave, she noticed a golden goose, sitting in a basket near the fire. It was so jolly with her feathers of pure gold and golden beak and golden feet. Caramel made out that the cook was going to bake it with the apples to roasted crust for the dinner. The Golden Goose was sitting quietly in the basket and looking calmly at Caramel with a close gaze of her clear and nice blue eyes. Then Caramel stepped

up to the basket and picked the goose up and brought it to her bedchamber.

Having been placed into the silk armchair bottom, the Golden Goose shifted from one foot to the other to make herself comfortable and ruffled and preened her feathers. Princess Caramel was stroking her golden feathers when René, the Head of the Guards, came in.

“Look, René, whom I had found in the kitchen,” smiled Caramel, “lucky gaining, I suppose. Maybe if fed with the golden corn she would be laying golden eggs?” René beamed in reply to two pairs of blue eyes that were looking at him.

This was a tall and slender man, very handsome and comely, clad in the spear-repelling armour of diamonds under the cloak of crossed white and yellow golden threads. His long golden hair was of golden strings and slightly tinkled as he walked and his light eyes blazed with blue flame when he looked at Princess Caramel.

“René, I had long wanted to ask you about the wood of transparent pines. Maybe you have been there and have seen them? What substance are these trees made of?”

René smiled and said, “It is strange that the Queen of Eri doesn’t know this. Look at my swords,” and he folded the laps of his cloak aside. He was wearing two swords – at the right and at the left sides of him, “they are of diamond. Of diamond pines armourers cut out deadly swords for us. Namely these swords were cut for me by a friend of mine, an armourer Incrustarg, out of the hardest pine in the Diamond wood.”

Caramel ran her finger over the smooth surface of the sword and then René covered her tender palm with his hand.

“The sun has set,” Caramel looked at the window and pulled away from the Guards Head, “Let us go to the rampart, I want to be on sentry tonight. And I would take Miss Goosey with me to take the fresh air.”

They set out to the rampant, built behind the cliffs of the beach, surrounding the town. René pinched the Golden Goose and ran away at some distance, laughing, when she started hissing and honking in offended tone. When they were standing at the rampant and looking at the wild foamy North sea, Caramel took René’s hand and squeezed it, “René, I noticed that you have reinforced the patrols and sentinels. But I pray you – if you warn me about the attack before the foes surmount the rampant, your warriors would not need to fight.”

René kissed her palm and said, “O my Princess, how would such a fair lady stop the foreign army?” Caramel stroked his bended head and said, looking to the distant and not visible Isles, “I have a plan.”

After the night sentry René went to sleep and Caramel was returning to the Palace in the full darkness, that condensed in the hour before the dawn, when the Golden Goose, whom she was bringing in her arms,

suddenly started honking loudly and flapping her wings frantically and tearing herself from Caramel's embrace. Caramel was trying to calm her, whispering, "Hush, hush, my little Goosey." But the Golden Goose bit Caramel with her beak and screeched and then a large transparent tear rolled down her fluffy cheek. And then Caramel saw with her inner vision the boats of the warriors of Arland, creeping over the coastal waters and landing at the beach under the cover of night, so clearly, as if she was standing behind their backs. The time slowed down for her. Unconsciously had she set the Golden Goose aside and in the clear sky she drew her hands to the sky, summoning those, whom mortal people don't dare to summon,

"O my sister Moon, help me in this noon!

O my brother Wind, your brisk breath I need!

O my sister Frost, lives are at the cost!"

And when her voice quietened down, the universe around startled. Severe wind flew from the world's end to blow away the thick clouds, shielding the full Moon, that instantly flooded the whole Isle with its light and Frost came from over the sea and touched the Isle with its chilling breath.

Caramel was standing alone in the shimmering moonlight and the snow storm was raging round her, while she was hastily weaving the net of the cold moonlight, and when she had finished, she threw yonder net over the Isle and thousands of sparkling threads of the moonlight scattered in all directions, concealing the island. The whole Isle froze over and stopped in perfect stillness, as it became empty. With the energies of the world Caramel was transforming the sheer essence of the Isle of Eri, changing it into the chilly desert...

The Arland fighters, frightened and bewildered by the absence of resistance, surmounted the rampant. The Moon was dazzling their eyes. In silence, under the silver shine, the warriors moved along the streets to see the pavements and houses of ice and white bonfires of the Palace silver towers in the distance, radiant in the moonbeams. The ice was crackling under their feet.

The warriors could make out the outlines of transparent silvery ghosts, walking along the pavements, entering and departing the houses, mounting studs, driving wagons, carrying heavy load. The Frost was getting harder. Chilled air numbed light-clad invaders to the loss of sensitivity. Seeking for the shelter from the cold, growing unbearable, they burst into the night hut. The dwelling was deserted. One of the warriors stepped at the lovely comb, carved with flowers, and it cracked under his feet into pieces of ice. Seized with fear, they started flinging open the doors of all the buildings in the

street. One was the smithy – stunned, the warriors observed the silver ghost, smiting the moonlight at the anvil with the pallid hammer. Thoughts being ice-frozen in their minds, they simply stood and stared at the hammer, evenly falling and rising in the ghostly light.

At last the instinct of survival pushed them away from the enchanted place. And they headed back to the white wilderness, as ice and snow were lying in all directions and the gusts of chilled Wind took them in their backs. Many invaders froze to death that night, but many rescued and the survivors told to the folk of the Northern Isles that the Eri Isle wallowed in sin and magic and the charms destroyed the Kingdom and it turned into frozen desert under the moonlight...

Caramel crept to the house, where René slept and bent over him and kissed his brow and whispered, “I did all I could in order you live.” That night she put on ten years. She had spent almost all her living power and could not find a tiny grain of energy to return the caramel color to her hair that turned grey. The Eri dwellers knew she had saved their lives, but they were afraid of her and were tattling behind her back.

One evening, when she tossed and turned in her bed, sleepless, she got up and went downstairs to the kitchen to drink a glass of golden milk. And when she approached the kitchen door, she heard the cook backbiting, “Even if prince Ulrik conquer the Isle, he would never take this grey-haired hag for his wife!” Another cook laughed and added, “Don’t get me started about Clement, who would run as fast as his legs would carry him from her –” Caramel recoiled from the kitchen door in a shudder. Then she plugged up her ears with her fingers in order not to hear their insults, and rushed out of the Palace, quickening her pace with every step so that when she approached the Diamond Wood she was almost running.

There she leant against the transparent trunk and closed her eyes, not giving vent to tears, choking her throat. Twig crackled over her shoulder, startling her. She swirled around and confronted a dark silhouette. It was Clement. Tears dried up in her bright eyes in an instant and she rushed to him, beaming and crying, “I couldn’t bear your absence a moment longer!”

But it was a cold and smooth diamond trunk, which she embraced.

The tears burst out of Caramel eyes, she was sobbing and gasping for air and then she turned her face, beslobbered with tears, to the sky and yelled,

“Oh, sweet Mother Sky!

Time came I should die,

I don’t want to live,

I can't stand my grief!"

No answer followed and she stopped crying and stroked the pines, mumbling in an unclear voice, "No human being aids me, no one sympathizes with me, only you, Sisters Pines, understand me, console me, help me. Humans are wicked, malicious. Only my little Pines are kind to me..."

A seal of madness distorted her jolly features, a wandering look of her blazing eyes couldn't find anything to linger on, she dashed desperately among the trunks, delirious with grief, shivering and wringing her hands frantically and lamenting, "Sisters Pines, spare me, be merciful, take me to your circle! I beseech you!"

And then her legs took roots and her arms stretched into twigs and she turned into the diamond pine as other unfortunate miserable girls had done many centuries before...

Under the cover of the night a tiny boat drew nigh to the shore in the shallow water and moored at the safe landing-place. A man, wrapped in a black cloak, went ashore and stood at the beach, looking around, as if getting accustomed to the new place.

Then he saw a figure, whose back was bent under the weight of heavy piles and bundles. He spoke to a passerby, "All hail, good lad! How fares it with you?" And without a halt he went on, "Do you know whether the King Magnus is at the Palace?" The passerby stopped in amazement and asked, "Who are you and why do you ask me about our King?"

Then Clement (and this was Clement, indeed!) threw back his hood and said, "I am Clement Diamondflower, I have returned from alien lands and I have the matter to the King." The lad exclaimed, "How, you don't know anything? The King Magnus died three years ago, the day you fled away from here, and Princess Caramel vanished in the Diamond Wood several months ago. You picked unlucky day to return, old chap, Prince Ulrik allied with the Kings of all other Isles against us to assure the inexhaustible supply of fighters. Now, when Princess Caramel is missing, and would not defend us, he is sure he would grab the treasures of Eri. He thinks that as our Princess and he were engaged, he has the right for the gold of Eri. So we had packed our belongings and are going to leave the Isle. But before our departure we would of course burn all the stuff that we can't take with us. So you'd better leave the Isle, as soon it would be very hot here!"

Having had such news with a straight face, Clement spoke through his clenched teeth, "Their dirty feet would not deface our golden grass." With these words Clement withdrew a bundle, wrapped in a rag, from beneath his cloak and threw the rag away. "O my!" the lad caught his breath, as glorious and pure, the globe of white light, cast in the crown of white gold, lit the night with its shining sparkles. "O the Master of the Light! How

late have you come!” moaned the lad with genuine pain. “I am right in time to save your poor soul,” answered Clement grimly and threw the crown to the ground.

“My dear Caramel, I would join you in the Eternity,” with these words he took the huge rock from the sand and struck the radiant globe of white light, which cracked into two pieces...

The blast wave of radiant white light swept along the beach and bared the bottom of the sea, which became the last haven for the army under the Prince Ulrik’s command, thirsting for the Eri treasures, and raised the heavy waves, high as the sky that crushed all the Isles nearby the Eri and buried them in the sea depths...

Next morning it was a calm bright day. The sun shone in the cloudless sky, the sea was still and quiet, and small waves softly splashed, whispering the old songs of the sea about the abandoned thrones, lost battles and faded glory of the Past...

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