

The Glass of Beauty

by Ana Mohan

Huguard of Onrée, son of the great king, Armundus, now sat in the almost empty grand hall. With him was a stranger from some unknown land, who told his tales of adventure with such skill that Huguard sat spellbound. The weather-beaten man told one tale in particular which seemed to his listener to be the most wondrous of all. The story began this way.

“In the land to the East of this castle, it is said, that in the depth of the wood nearby there lives a wizard—a wizard of great renown, one who has in his possession a most marvelous piece of glass through which the greatest beauty of this world can be seen. Many have tried to see the magic glass for themselves.”

Here the traveler paused and Huguard asked, “What befell those who went upon the quest?”

“They were never heard of again” the man finished simply.

Before dawn the next day the traveler departed, but Huguard could not forget the story the man had told, and he longed to find the magic glass for himself. The desire increased, until one day, after preparing for the journey, he mounted his horse and turned to the East. For many days he travelled over hills and streams and through valleys. And then, one day, as evening began to fall, Huguard caught sight of a light in the distance. As he approached, he found that what he had seen was the light of a candle from a herdsman’s small cottage. Weary from many days’ travel he stopped to rest. The goatherd who lived there was a kind old man and when he heard that Huguard needed a somewhere to rest he led him to a place by the hearth and gave him food to eat.

“What brings you to this wild country?” the goatherd asked after they had finished the meal.

“I am on a quest,” said Huguard, “riding in search of a magical glass that is said to show things of wondrous beauty. Have you heard of it?”

“Indeed, I have, for two young men have passed this way before you, with the same quest. I will tell you what I told them. Go home while you still can.

Why look for a glass when beauty is all about you? I am contented, because when I look around, I see beauty in all the little things of life. I suggest you do the same.”

The old man sighed and began to get up when Huguard said, “I thank you, grandfather, for your advice, but I must continue. Why stop when I have got this far? ’Twould be cowardly to turn back now, and curiosity has got the better of me.”

That night Huguard fell asleep to the sound of the goatherd’s flute. In the morning, after thanking the goatherd for his hospitality, Huguard set off on the road his host had shown him. He was closer now to the forest and by the afternoon a dark fringe of trees was visible on the horizon. Stopping his horse at the edge of the forest, Huguard could see the small path ahead of him, until it curved and disappeared among the trees. In every tree of the forest there was beauty, but the young knight was intent upon his quest, and rode his horse swiftly down the path. The ancient trees spread their canopies overhead, and every so often a leaf fluttered down onto the beaten track. Except for the occasional twitter of a bird and the sound of the horse's hooves, the forest was extraordinarily still. Then Huguard heard a sound in the distance, at first faintly, then increasingly louder. As he rounded the next bend in the path, he saw a swiftly flowing brook across which was an old bridge. Cautiously Huguard led his horse forward, when suddenly the steed reared, almost knocking him down. Before him, clad in river foam stood a dryad, her wet hair was streaming behind her and around her grew plants that wound around her arms and hands, so she was held fast.

“At long last, a traveler through this Forest! For years now I have been imprisoned in these chains.” she said, “You, good knight, could free me, if only you would bring to me the snow drops that grow in a forest glade nearby. They alone have the power to free me from this enchantment that a cruel magician cast upon me as he traveled this way. If you do as I ask, I will give you leave to cross my bridge.”

“Very well my lady,” responded Huguard, “If only you will tell me the way to the castle of the wizard of this forest. For I am upon a quest to look for the magic glass in his possession.”

“If you so wish, I will show to you the way. But listen to me first. Do not look for beauty in a wizard’s glass. I myself can show you many things of beauty in this forest if you will tarry awhile.”

But Huguard did not heed her advice and after procuring for her the flowers she had requested, went on his way, over the bridge and down the path shown to him by the dryad. Soon enough he rode out into a large clearing. Before him was a tower made of stone with an open window at the very top. Leaving his horse behind, Huguard knocked at the large entryway. There was no response. So, drawing his sword and taking a torch with him, he began to make his way up a flight of stone steps.

It seemed as if he could have climbed five towers before he came upon an oaken door. Strange inscriptions were carved on the lintel and in the middle of the door was an iron knocker. Grasping the knocker firmly, Huguard gave three sharp raps on the door.

“Come in.” came a voice from inside. Opening the door Huguard found himself inside a kind of study. The walls were covered in books, the tables were covered in books and the chairs were covered in books. Upon the walls were old maps and a strange mirror. The remaining space was occupied by phials, some filled with liquid, and the wizard himself. His hoary head was bent over a large folio.

“You have come about the magical glass I presume?” he asked, turning around. His white hair made a halo around his wrinkled face and his beard danced as he spoke.

“Yes, my name is Huguard of Onree, and I have come to ask to look just once into your magical glass.” said the young knight.

“Very well, come with me,” the wizard said as he went to the open window of the tower. Beneath was a wooden chest Huguard had not noticed before. The hinges creaked as the heavy lid swung open and from within the wizard produced a piece of glass surrounded by a golden frame, which he gave to Huguard.

“Look and you will see great beauty” was all he said, before turning back to his work. In mounting excitement Huguard lifted up the glass and he looked through it. Confused at first and then angry, Huguard turned to the

wizard. "Have you tricked me you charlatan? I see nothing of beauty! Everything is the same, the books, the table, the forest through the window, why even the wooden chest!" Angrily, he stormed from the tower, mounted his horse and rode off through the woods. And the magician, watching from the tower window sadly shook his head.