

The Oak and the Rose

In a far land near the shores of a great salt ocean that stretches unbroken towards the rising sun there lies a hidden shadow dappled glen resembling a wild untended garden untouched by the hand of man. Located at its heart amongst softly waiving grasses there stands a gently rising knoll carpeted with fallen leaves and new spring flowers overtopped by a towering moss-draped oak, its spreading limbs lifting a lush mantle of green high above the surrounding sward. The massive fissured trunk of mottled grays and browns encircled round by the stem of an ancient rose, the two dissimilar species grown together seemingly as one. Gnarled oak bark wreathed by a thick ropey vine covered with talon shaped thorns standing eternal vigil against all, ever ready to rend and tear any foolish enough to venture too close yet never piercing the oak, rather holding it tenderly in a lover's embrace. At their base among equally entwined and interwoven roots lies the broken and weathered remnants of a marble tomb that once held the remains of two whose names have been lost in the many turnings of the Wheel since their deaths so many Ages ago. But while their names are lost to us, the story of their love has been passed down orally from bard to pupil, mother to daughter, and even sometimes, around lonely campfires, from father to son, for while it is a story of love it is also a warrior's tale. So year after year as winter turns to spring and slumbering oaks awake to unfurl their verdant crowns once more to the golden sun, then do the bards, mothers, and even fathers once more take up the oft told tale of The Oak and the Rose.

Many Ages past in a land of honorable upright men and women, a people enamored of freedom from tyranny and oppression, gentle folk, yet fierce fighters and implacable enemies when roused to anger, there was born a boy child shortly following the end of a great world engulfing war. Born of a line of noble fighters, this future warrior would one day add even more battle honors of his own to those already recorded by his ancestors and kin, but he was destined to be known for bringing enlightenment to many while wielding a weapon far mightier than any sword. In a tale of growth and change almost equaling the epic masterpiece that the Wheel would weave forth from this warrior turned bard, he traveled northward from his native soil unto the largest city of that youthful land lying between the world's two great oceans, a city of vast proportion and population yet dank and dark having fallen under the shadow and been forsaken of the light. Deep in the heartland of his people's eternal foe lay this forsaken city, but bravely did he go forth to ply his chosen trade, as bravely as ever he faced an enemy with weapon in hand did he face his uncertain future, far from hearth and home, among a strange people with even stranger ways. There in that dirty city of steel, glass, and stone, alone among crowded humanity where mighty edifices vied ever upward, raising dark skeletal fingers as if straining to grasp the very sky, lost among the milling masses of people rubbing shoulders yet remaining ever alone did this lonely bard meet that which many a soul unknowingly searches for, but so few actually find, the missing half of himself. Fair was to she to look upon, this one who could complete him, and maybe most shockingly also strayed from that same fair southern land as he. Knowing instinctively that to find true happiness and contentment that he must bind her heart to himself as she

had began ensnaring his upon their first meeting, he began plying his considerable wit and charm in a desperate bid to win her affection, while using his bardic mastery to confuse and befuddle those whom held her fast in their dreary city through the chains of obligation and duty to her craft. Great were the maneuverings of our enthralled hero in the consuming battle for the hand of his intended ladylove and many were the wounds he did shrug off in pursuit of his noble goal, but through great perseverance and fortitude he did woo and win her love and carry her back with him to his Keep, known as Tradd, lying hard by the great salt waters in the grand old city of Charlz-by-the-bay in the land of Sesech.

Our mighty warrior bard now safely ensconced at Tradd, with his fair ladylove to shield and protect him, did once more take up his pen and began his great work of bringing forth the light of truth to a world growing dim. Valiantly did he endeavor to bring the color of hope to lands and minds held in perpetual shadow by those false prophets who teach that there is no black or white only shades of gray and no sin or evil if it does no obvious harm to others. Long did he bring forth the words with his lady's faithful support, and many were their trials and tribulations, yet ever did she counsel wisely and protect him as he fought with a warrior's heart and a bard's golden voice. Their years of happiness and joy were many fold until finally surrounded by their kith and kin and mourned by millions who had been touched by his words; he and his lady did transcend their love to a higher plane. Their mortal remains were interred atop a small grassy rise in a simple marble tomb marked only with his signal, a salamander, and these few words; "He was the word but she was his breath. Without breath there can be no words, only death."

The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and go, and with its turnings an oak sprouts at the head of a long forgotten tomb marked only with a single worn glyph and strange characters whose meanings are lost in the turnings of the Wheel. As the oak grows a rose vine begins to entwine itself around its trunk, the two growing in unison so that the oak almost seems to bloom with bright red blossoms. A wandering bard sees this strange sight in the lonely glade and decides to incorporate this strange sight growing at the head of a forgotten tomb into an old story of a warrior bard and his fair lady, using the oak and rose entwined to mark the sight of their burial. The addition is so popular with the local folk it is quickly incorporated into the tale they pass to their children, almost as if it should have been a part from the very beginning.