



The Forest

The Forest

- a kind of epic poem in seven cantos

by Christian Lanciai (2008)

"This is an old story from 1968 full of symbolisms."

Copyright © C. Lanciai 2008

The Forest

Canto I

1.

Be it far from me to have pretensions
to be any kind of poet,
but in this world and the other one
I think that anyone would certainly agree,
there are some things that can not well be told
except by words transcending sense
and the conventional reality,
as we accept and know it.
Such things I am here about to tell,
a story strange and difficult to grasp,
and lacking skills in verse and language,
my humility and poor simplicity
will hardly be sufficient to describe
this truth, that I nevertheless
experienced personally all the way,
although I never knew myself
some persons that were part of it.
Accept it as a humble offering
by me, a humble monk,
on ancient altars of tradition,
beauty, wisdom and experience,
and forbear my innocence
and incapacity to render credible
such matters that are visible
to only sentient human souls
and the mind's eye, that sees beyond
the lying sensuality
of this most insufficient limited reality.

2.

I used to take those morning walks
down to the sea as early and as soon as possible
after the sunrise, and my abbot gave me leave himself –
he knew that exercise would do me good,
and not just me, but all my influence
on others for the whole remaining day.
I used to sit down in the sands,
enjoy the rolling waves so generously coming in
sent forth from out there in eternity
to gloriously commit their foaming suicide
against the gentle shores,
caressing them with tenderness

in this eternal process;
when an object in the water caught my eye.
It was a shining object which the sun had found,
some beams had entered it in glimpses of reflection,
which went on into my eye and my attention,
striking me with wonder and amazement,
for immediately I felt it as a message meant for me.
I sat there still with my bare feet all sandy
basking in the glorious sun, as if transfixed
by sudden new and strange sensations,
as if I already was quite overwhelmed
by feelings that belonged yet to the future.
Finally I rose to carefully approach the object,
overcoming the last doubts concerning its reality.
It was indeed a bottle well closed up,
quite light and empty, but for something
that indeed made all my hairs rise in excitement.
There was a letter in it! And it came to me,
of all the people on this earth,
to me alone, there on the beach,
where I had wandered quite alone
exclusively to find this bottle!
Naturally I just had to open it.
Here is the letter, in original verbatim,
that since then has changed so many lives
by opening a world of lives of others:

3.

"My friend!
I pray you, do not judge me
for my awkwardness in language and expression,
but please try instead to understand and to investigate
my case and matter, and then judge me afterwards,
if I have given you the truth or only fabricated lovely dreams!
I am a wanderer gone totally astray
and facing death approaching in some hours,
for the ship that I am sailing on will not endure this tempest.
Seeing no chance to survive, I offer all I have of any value,
my life's secret, the one knowledge
of some consequence that I acquired,
to this stormy sea of destiny.
The fact is, that I once discovered Paradise,
and I left it as the crazy fool I was!
Now it is lost forever for my part,
and all that I can do is in my blindness to give directions
as to how it can be found again.
Just go to Winchester in Hampshire
and to Wynyard not so far away from there,
then follow the old southern road
until you pass the ruins of a castle and then cross a brook.
Get off the road and follow that brook upstream,
and you shall find the Paradise that I have lost forever

in despair and foolishness and desperation,
following my folly in my life's supremest deprivation!
All that I can do about it now
is to stand trial by myself
and let my life pass on from this life unto God."

4.

This spoke this enigmatic wondrous letter
anonymously with no signature
to me, who was unknown to this unhappy writer,
shipwrecked now, no doubt, and lost at sea
and dead and never buried.
I was totally beyond myself for pity
and committed instantly myself in tears and prayers
for the poor man's fate and soul.
And although he was dead, and I would never know him,
thus he spoke to me in graver earnest and directness
than did ever any living man
whom I met in my lifetime.

5.

My steps were burdened and slowed down
by serious pondering and wondrous feelings
on my way back to the monastery,
and my fellow monks there wondered
what had turned me so reflective
all of a sudden and tried teasing me and cheering me
with no success whatever. They had to be satisfied
with my simple explanation that I would discuss the matter
only with our abbot and with no one else –
of course, I dared not show my confidential letter.
My old abbot, like a father to us all,
sat quietly as usual in the monastery garden
busy at his roses, herbs and other lovely flowers
when I dared approach him, and he saw immediately
that there was something deeply serious
that had happened to me of some bother.
I went to the point directly,
showing him the flask and the fantastic letter
and explaining the concern of this new situation.
He immediately laid all his brows in wrinkles
and was perfectly immersed in the predicament.
He understood me wholly and looked serious about it.
Finally he spoke, and I was all attention.

6.

"My son, this is a matter of delicacy
that can not be trifled with.
Not only is it a concern of life and death,
but it is also evidently the last words and will of someone dying,

leaving a most vital message for posterity,
which he has committed to the ocean without any other choice,
which Fortune has placed in your hands,
the humblest monk among us of all people.
There is certainly a hidden meaning in this matter,
and I have to ask you to investigate it.
The directions could not be much clearer,
all you have to do is just to follow them
and see what place, if there is any,
this poor outcast shipwrecked sailor talks about.
Do not expect too much. There might be nothing in it,
but if there is something, you should certainly discover it,
fate having put his secret in your hands.
Good luck, my son, and I expect you to come back
when you are ready, with at best some very interesting report
that even might turn out intriguing.”
He turned the letter back to me,
and I was free to go, entrusted with a sacred mission
that, I can't deny, enlivened me with joyful spirits.

7.

My fellows in the dormitory turned of course quite curious
when I packed my rucksack for a journey of some week or so,
but I said nothing to them of my errand,
but: “When I return I'll let you know,
but how can I inform you of my journey's mission
when I haven't started on it yet
and knowing nothing of where I am going?”
They were satisfied with that and let me go.
And so I started on the first and greatest journey of my life.

8.

It was not difficult but only pleasurable,
leaving everything behind in basking sunshine
as the spring was entering triumphantly
and light was king all round the world.
The walk was nice and long,
I passed the site of Glastonbury on the way
and visited my uncle, who was bishop in old Winchester,
who wondered greatly at my errand.
“Why on earth are you let loose?
Don't tell me you've been sent upon a mission!”
I could only gratify his worst suspicions,
and I told him everything and showed the letter,
whereupon he laughed his sides off
rattling all his vicarage and Winchester
to its foundations, whereupon he let me go
as soon as we had finished a most glorious dinner,
that would last for days and better than supplies.

9.

Thus I went on and followed the instructions of the letter.
They were clear enough, and not even the weather
offered me the slightest difficulty.
I walked swiftly on and found the river and the bridge
and started following the brook upstream.
I felt the strangeness of this moment
of some destiny of truth unknown
and wondered in what fairy-tale
this wonderful adventure would project me.
I was soon enough to know,
as gradually the country grew less habited
and wilderness grew more apparent
as the brook led me into a forest finally.
It was an ancient forest mainly of majestic beeches,
and the prevalent characteristic mood was peace
and quiet of a most inspiring and awesome nature,
so as almost some old chapel or cathedral
was to be expected somewhere near.
And then I came to what I almost felt
that had to be the centre of the forest sanctuary,
where silence ruled and everything was still
and where the waters of the brook was like a mirror
parted in two streams that joined together
peacefully and formed a little island.
Then I couldn't keep my feelings any more inside me.
They freaked out, and I freaked out with them
in a most irresistible exhilaration
that knew no bounds but burst out laughing
in a joy of universal freedom and release,
the like of which I never had experienced before.
It was sensational and could not be contained,
as if I suddenly had found the formula of world salvation
but could not explain it. I just had to sit down,
relax and laugh my heart out
in this greatest joy of bliss that came from nowhere
but replenished, permeated, overwhelmed
and influenced so palpably all life around me
that I knew for sure I had to have arrived
in paradise itself and nowhere else
directly, manifestly, definitely and demonstrably.

10.

As I calmed down the greatest miracle of all awaited me.
There was a house! It was a small house by the stream,
magnificently pretty in its humble aspects,
built with love undoubtedly, with lovely wooden carvings;
but what baffled me the most was the apparent fact
that someone lived there, and – my heart made quite a leap –
was even there at home! My heart made many thumping leaps
as I with quaking expectations neared the lovely house

and slowly and more slowly by each step,
until I finally dared move the handle of the door.
Yes, it was open, and it was not even fully shut.
And at that very moment, that most gentle voice
was heard, that spoke directly to my heart:
"Welcome, my friend! You have been long expected!"
I dared then push the door more open,
and there was but one most spacious comfortable room
with some small space for cooking in a corner,
and close by the window there was someone sitting in an armchair.
I had never seen a more resplendent youth in all my life.
It was a young man clad in white with hair so golden
as if he was actually an angel, but he wasn't.
"I am Gabriel," he continued gently to present himself.
"What message do you bring? For you must have been sent here
certainly by someone of my friends. Am I correct?"
I could not speak a word, but found the letter
which I pulled out of my pocket to present to him.
He read it with some consternation, and his brow was bent in sorrow.
"Did you actually receive this by a flask?" he asked me finally.
I told him the whole story. Then I asked him to tell his.
"What do you want to know?" he asked,
"where do you want me to begin?"
"My first most thirsting question is about this forest.
I feel such a beatitude in here. How is it possible?
Where does it come from?"
"You are not the first one to feel that sensation,
and you boldly step right into the main issue here.
My friend, relax. You shall remain here for some days
as my most celebrated guest, and I shall tell you the whole story.
It begins in fact with this our friend, this very man called Manuel,
who was the first one who came here, a sailor lost
and roaming round the country, fleeing from some fault,
some trauma or injustice. He found peace in here
and was enchanted by a tiny thing that glimmered in the water
just where these two streams join up together.
Go thou and do likewise, watch what you can find,
and then come back here, and I'll tell you all about it."
I was naturally most intrigued and followed his advice.

11.

As I lay down there by the stream and searched into the waters,
what I found was something most extraordinary.
Shining on the bottom of the brook there was a golden ring
of such amazing regularity and charm and beauty,
that I could not leave it by my sight.
And there, I realized immediately, was the whole story.
I had to tear myself away by force,
returned to Gabriel in the house and told him
what I had discovered. "I could read the story
in its beaming force of wonder, but I would prefer
to hear it more exactly from yourself," I told him.

"You were wise, my friend, to keep away from touching it, and your reward shall be of course to hear it all, the full account of this most fundamental love story of all, as Manuel read it from the ring, and as I lived it through myself with my own parents and especially my mother. But it is a lengthy narrative indeed, so I suggest we start our session with a cup of tea. Is that all right?" Of course that was the best way of an introduction, so the last thing I did was to protest. He prepared the tea, I had some milk in it, he didn't, and then he sat down and started to recount the most intriguing fairy tale that I so far had heard. The character of his amazing story suited him so well, since he was actually a child of it, with his long golden hair that flowed so generously down his back to reach his bottom and his simple but so perfectly white dressing that could certainly have matched the clothes of Christ. And this is now his matchless story.

Canto II

1.

"There are some fundamentals of this strange existence we call life, which simply aim at not exacerbating it but on the contrary, at making it more easy and agreeable, endurable and nice. The heart of these recommendations concern of course the strange phenomenon on such a universal bearing on us all, that everything depends on it. Love is of course to everlastingly be cherished, cultivated, practised and disseminated but with care and always kindly. It must not be enforced, for then the only consequence is backfire which can lead to anything destructive. You shall hear our story, which is all about the consequence of love, for good, for worse, but never without consequences."

2.

Thus spoke the fairest man that I had ever seen, all clad in white, with golden hair down to his waist, not even twenty, but still with such a wisdom as if he had been an old soul ever with experience enough to teach all mankind how to make it better and get more aware and wiser.

3.

"He was a kind of rover of the sea,
no roots ashore although he was a doctor,
shunning his own kind and living only for the aliens,
innocents of wilderness, the undestroyed of nature,
preferably of some romantic pure environment
of virgin beauty, ocean shores and mountains,
like Tahiti and the southeast Asian archipelago,
but most of it had already been spoilt and ruined.
There were still, however, some few archipelagos
unknown to white men's greed,
and one of them was only known to him.
It was the seven islands of Jagánde
far away beyond all maps and charts of knowledge,
and it was his habit once a year to go there
selling trinkets and some medicines
for pearls and costly handicrafts and jewels,
which he then would sell on the Calcutta market
at some modest profit. Thus his only use of his monopoly
was to preserve it, keep it virgin and unknown
and act as its protector, while he modestly enjoyed
the local fame of being venerated as the only white man
known at all to all the natives of Jagánde.
But one year he brought a fellow with him.

4.

He was of some dark romantic hue,
a sailor born and famous for his legendary seamanship,
as he once as a youngster actually had managed quite alone
to bring a ship without its captain through a storm.
He was from Venice but, like doctor Magnus,
kept roaming about around the world
with no safe haven to find peace and rest in.
They had met at some bazaar in Bombay or Calcutta,
and at that time doctor Magnus needed some spare hands,
the storms, typhoons and hurricanes around the Indian Ocean
growing worse, so that he felt the need to play it safer,
going out to remote islands beyond any chart
without a single person knowing where he was.
As you grow older, loneliness becomes an alien company,
while instead the urge of sharing grows more imminent.
Quite simply, doctor Magnus asked his newfound mate:
"Would there be any interest on your part
to come along with me to unknown South Pacific isles
which no one in geography has ever heard of?"
The Venetian sailor asked immediately:
"That is exactly what I need.
Do such islands still exist?"
And he was on.

5.

They reached the islands early after dawn
one morning, and people gathered everywhere
along the shores to greet them
with a wondrous song of welcome,
which they sang in parts
in clear and stupefying harmony,
preparing garlands to receive the yearly visitor;
but the activity and eagerness along the shores
among the steadily increasing groups of curious people
were enhanced when it was noticed,
that their loved friend the doctor
this year had brought with him a companion,
who looked interesting indeed.

6.

As they were fetched ashore by outriggers,
the king himself embarking on his sumptuous royal boat
to offer them a very special welcome,
as they almost were submerged in garish garlands,
they were lifted up on shoulders of the natives on the shore
to then be promptly carried to the king's house
for a most pacific banquet,
while the singing and the celebrating went on enthusiastically.
After all, the best friend of the natives
paid them annually one visit only,
and since now they were two persons,
that must needs have double celebrations.

7.

As they sat down to their royal banquet in the king's house,
there was no end to the affluence
of the most exquisite delicious cooking of the south seas.
Present at the presentation of the king's whole family
with wives and sons and other relatives
whose status and relationships were out of definition,
there was also the king's one and only daughter,
a fair maid of perfect and exotic beauty
in her best age and not yet in full bloom.
As the sailor's eyes discovered her,
she went under his skin immediately and stayed there,
and he could not concentrate on any matter else
all through the overwhelming dinner.
Doctor Magnus saw that something dangerous had happened
and gave him a friendly warning:
"Mind you, as the only daughter of the king,
she is everything to him, and he will never part with her.
There have been suitors, lots of them,
but no one will get through without some testing.
If the test is failed, the suitor's life is lost."

Appalled but not deterred, the sailor asked:
"Have many suitors thus been executed?"
"They can not be counted," was the somber answer.

8.

Naturally, the more the sailor's interest grew
in that most fascinatingly attractive princess
with her dark brown olive-reddish hair
in most intoxicating generosity and richness
flowing far beneath her bottom,
especially as she did not remain for dinner
but departed suddenly as soon as she had seen him.
That could only mean one thing,
and he was well aware of it.

9.

He had no interest, therefore, in remaining
bored and stuffed by far too many dishes
at the royal table, but as soon as it was possible
for him to break and move out from the culinary slavery,
he made polite excuses, indicating natural demands
and went out for a vital breath of fresher air.
He instantly made out his bearings
and soon found himself a total stranger
in the middle of a capital but alien village,
but was nonetheless led by a higher instinct
to pursue a very special course,
like by a higher scent and sense,
and suddenly stopped short at a most touching scene.
There she was, the royal princess,
in a very humble cottage, helping a sick family in need,
where obviously the mother lying on a bed was dying.
The dark sailor with his most romantic aspects
of a wild and dashing stranger from beyond the seas
knew perfectly how to control himself
and therefore did not interfere with anything
but stood apart in reverence and kept his silence
absolutely still, while the young princess worked
and did her best to soothe the dying mother's pains
and ease the last remaining moments of her life,
while her two children, crying silently,
kept equally perfectly still in mute despair.
The moment came when the afflicted patient
breathed her last. The princess had to finally give up
and tenderly embraced the orphaned children,
giving them the comfort of her sharing with them all their tears.
She then looked up at the observant and respectful sailor
as if she had known him all her life
and gave him unmistakably a sign
for him to help her cleaning up
and managing the ruined household.

He did never hesitate but did his best,
and so they worked together,
comforting the children, talking with the relatives,
preparing for the funeral and obsequies,
until she could breathe out as she had done her work.
She rose, the children were now taken care of by the relatives,
she moved towards the entrance, where the stranger stood
quite still, as he had done the whole time as if in devotion,
gave him but one glance, – and ran for it.
She ran away like an escaping deer,
and he took up the hunt –
that glance had told him far too much
not to be challenged.

10.

She ran like a stag, and she was a good runner,
so for all his excellent condition,
he had to put some effort into it,
while she remained far ahead of him
and he could but keep pace with her.
She ran all the way out of the village
and did not at all seem tired of it
as she finally made suddenly a halt
and turned around to meet her lover,
laughing heartily for a most natural welcome.
He could not believe his eyes.
There she was, the fairest princess in this world,
waiting for him, well outside the village,
in perfect safety and complete intimacy
with the most warm welcoming laughing welcome.
Checked, he hesitated for a moment,
but for just a fragment of a moment,
before he accepted her opening to him
and made the final and irrevocable advance.

11.

When they both were tired out
and rested in the shadows of the hiding palms,
she gently stroke his rich dark longish hair
that matched her own most perfectly
in shades of darkness with some dark blond streaks,
as his was growing also, as all hairs will ever do,
although not as far beneath his shoulders as did hers,
and told him intimately warm with tenderness:
"My father will cut off your head for this."
He read her thoughts and got her warning message,
as the worried tender eyes were not to be mistaken,
and he thought: "I would not have loved you for less."
They rested still, remaining in each others arms and harmony,
enjoying the relaxing peace and quiet after the exertion,
while they mixed each other's hairs

as a silent promise never to let them unmix again,
while he delighted in completely burying himself in hers,
unwilling ever to get out of her again.
At last she rose, as she felt ready,
and he knew the moment was at hand
of truth and confrontation.

12.

They walked together through the village
hand in hand, as natural as any lovers,
while the villagers who saw them did not mind at all
but took them as they were,
accepting them completely without reservations,
noticing at once that they were natural as lovers
and a most becoming pair at that:
they hardly could have matched each other better.
One or other aged villager perhaps looked down
with some foreboding afterthought,
like, "I sincerely hope this suitor finally will be the one,"
too well aware of the ordeal that was awaiting him.

Canto III

1.

"My love, I do not fear your father
although he be king and might cut off my head,
but I am sure he can't do that for love,
and my sincerest love of you
is of a greater power than of any king."
She did not understand him but the meaning
and took firmly hold of her protector's hand
and led him without hesitating
promptly to her father's home and royal hall.

2.

"I know it all already," said the king,
not in the least nonplussed by the young couple's boldness –
he had seen too many suitors to his daughter in his life
and seen them all end up as failures.
"Leave us, daughter. Your new suitor
and myself will have a chat together,
since he needs to be informed of what awaits him."
She had been through this procedure several times before,
so she did not object, just pressed her lover's hand a little
as a small but definite encouragement, and left.

3.

"My honoured guest, you know of course
the consequences of your importunity?"
"I love her. That is all," the sailor said,
"and I am willing to accept the whole responsibility."
"You don't have to. You may still be free
and leave our islands never to come back a living man."
"I would prefer to stay here as a living man and as your son-in-law."
"So you insist. My friend, I pity you,
for no one has proved worthy of my daughter,
nor will no one ever do so, since it is impossible."
"How so?" "So you are willing to go through the trial,
even well aware that it may cost your life?"
"Of course. Or else I would not love her.
Love alone will prove me worthy of her."
"I pity you the more. But since you are the friend
of my best friend the doctor, and he brought you here himself,
I shall make an exception for you. If you fail,
which you will naturally do like all the others,
I will let you leave our islands with my doctor
without execution, on condition that you never will return."
"I will not fail." "Not even with the utterly impossible?"
"Just try me, noble king, and I will risk whatever."

4.

Not even to himself the king could quite deny,
that he was just a little bit impressed
by this romantic stranger's stalwart courage,
and he wondered at his lack of hesitation
and did almost think: "How sad that he will not become my son-in-law."
Instead he said: "All right. You take it on yourself.
Just face the consequences, then. The trial is as follows.
You shall prove your love by accomplishing a ring
that proves love's sovereignty over any power.
You shall make that ring of gold but out of nothing,
and with that ring on my finger I shall manage
to have any wish that I might come to think of realized."
"A ring of gold to manifest whatever you may wish?"
"Precisely. Don't say it is possible. You are still free to pull out."
"And is that all?" "What do you mean?"
"The ring." "Of course that's all. What could there more be to it?
Of all wishes, that's the most impossible to ever have accomplished."
"Let me try at least." "Of course you may.
That's why I have presented you with the ordeal, for you to have a try."

5.

The sailor left the king's house deep in thought,
while the presumptuous king again just could not help
considering: "It would have been a splendid son-in-law in spite of all."
The sailor walked out of the village down to the lagoon

with lingering and thoughtful steps as the pacific afternoon
soon started glowing before sunset
turning everything to gold and rosy red.
He found the beach and beyond it a lonely rock
which matched his own predicament and loneliness completely,
wherefore he made his position there
and simply went into the deepest meditation
as the evening turned the universe all red
to quietly fade out like dying embers
for the metamorphosis into night.
When all the stars were kindled, lo,
there also rose the moon to join them all,
and by coincidence it happened to be full.
So there the man sat lonely and immovable
in meditation like a statue
while the moon transcended gloriously all brightness of the shining stars
and triumphed through the night
like really trying to inspire the unanswering man
who did not seem to pay the least attention
to the magic efforts of the moon, who started to decline
as morning gradually was to be introduced.
But then, just as the moon was lowering herself
to sink into the ocean with the brightness of the night,
the man just raised his hand with thumb and index
like to catch the last ray of the moon
and thereby shape something into the air;
and there it was, a golden ring, that hung like in a spider's thread
so delicately in the last ray of the moon;
and as that last ray finally was spent,
the morning rising and the moon resigning finally,
the man picked down the ring from that last ray
and held it in his hand, as if it could not be more obvious
that a golden ring had been accomplished in that fashion.
And then, as the sun presented her first morning beams,
the man at last rose from his meditation
with the ring committed in his hand
and started confidently to return back
to the village, to reality, to humankind and to his love.

6.

The king could also find no sleep this night
since all that he could think of was that blasted would-be son-in-law
whose failure would turn his daughter once again most miserable,
as if there had not been enough before of failed suitors.
In his sweat he rose quite early in the morning in despair
and thought: "Maybe for once I just should cancel my presumptions
and let love, my daughter and her suitor, have their way without objections?"
In that very moment, the young sailor entered through his door
and met the king without a word. The king looked questioningly at him.
Still without a word, the sailor left the ring
delivered safely in the king's own hand,
and all the king could do was just to look perplexed

and watch the sailor leave for other business,
namely to at last now after a long night's hard work
go to his love and tenderly take care of her.

7.

The king looked at the ring and wondered at its marvel.
"Maybe he just had it in his luggage,
like a present from the doctor's own considerable store."
It therefore simply had to be a fake. To prove that fact,
the king decided to express a wish
but found it hard to wish for anything, since he had everything.
But then he had a bright idea:
The one thing he had lacked in life
was a good singing voice.
So that's what he decided on to wish.
He laughed at the idea, of course it was impossible
that he now after croaking all his life
should have a voice of quality,
but then his laughter struck him as melodious.
It was musical! He could sing!
The ring had worked! It actually had been accomplished!

8.

There was naturally then a splendid wedding
while the doctor still was present at Jagánde,
while the happy couple were content
to ever remain there at their pacific paradise
by the white beaches on the coral shores
with only beauty all around them
in the people and in nature and from all the sea
with blue and purple golden sunsets every day
with music singing them to sleep each night
by magic whisperings from ever rolling waves.
As doctor Magnus left without his steward,
music also followed his departure
as the people in three voices sang their praise
and thanks to him that had delivered to them
such a perfect lover for the perfect beauty of their princess.

Canto IV

1.

The king however felt misgivings at the power of the ring
and was afraid that it might one day be abused.
He never dared again to wish for anything
since that one wish had so astounded him by coming true.
To make it certain to exclude all possible abuse,
he went out to the far point of his island

where the river mouthed into the sea,
and there he flung the ring into the current,
hoping it would bring it out into the ocean
there to bury it forever.

But however there was one small fish
that saw the golden object glimmer in the water,
and just not to let it go, he simply caught it
in his mouth and wondered what to do with it.
"I know!" he thought. "I shall deliver it
as present to the fairest of all mermaids,
to the ocean king's own daughter I shall give it
as a humble token of my even humbler adoration."

2.

But it was no easy quest our little fish
had found to his commitment, for the sea was vast
encompassing the entire globe,
and the sweet mermaid lived in its profoundest depths
far from the ordinary streams and currents,
but our fish knew how to seek her out.
There was a special natural phenomenon
deep down in the remotest South Atlantic
where the storms make traffic sparse,
and where the billows are notorious for their devastating size,
a whirlpool coming from the bottom of the sea
as the unique accessibility and entrance to the sea-king's dwelling-place,
where also our fairest mermaid had her premises.
Our fish sought out the outskirts of the whirlpool
and allowed himself to follow and get caught therein;
and so he soon was on his way down to the bottom of the sea
where lights increase the further down you get,
the whirlpool being constantly illuminated by the brightest plankton
and the smallest living beings carrying their own light.

3.

Thus gradually the fish was willingly dragged down
into the slowly brightening profoundest abyss
of the South Atlantic where the sea king had his palace.
He had visited the mermaid princess once before,
so he knew well his ways into the royal virgin chamber
where the princess at the moment was quite busy
combing out her long and flowing greenish silken hair.
"My fish! You have returned!" she cried for joy
as she immediately did recognize the small but friendly fish.
"My princess, yes, and with a mission, for I have a present for you."
And the fish delivered what he so by chance had found.
She took it up and marvelled at its perfect rounded form.
There never was a circle made so perfect as this ring,
and she did greatly wonder as to how it had been made
and could not guess, of course, that it had once been shaped
from the last ray of a full moon at morning at its very fullest.

4.

She could not in any other way show her enormous gratitude than by indulging in a kiss between the eyes of the small fish, which made him blush considerably.

Never had he been so overwhelmed by such a royal grace.

He swam away beatified, while she had put the ring upon her finger and resumed her combing;

but of course, like combs so often do, it suddenly got stuck in that rich hair of hers, and she lost all her patience.

"Useless comb! I wish I had one that would never more get stuck!"

And suddenly there was another comb beside her.

"Where did that come from?" she thought and used it, and it pleased her greatly by not getting stuck at all, which made her wonder even more.

5.

As the days passed, she now and then again was taken by surprise by the alarming fact that her small petty wishes suddenly came true, and she began to think about how this phenomenon had started.

She remembered well the visit of her small admirer the fish and tried for luck the innocent experiment

of daring to express a wish without the ring upon her finger.

Nothing happened. She again tried that experiment, without and with the ring alternately,

and thus, empirically, she found out the secret of the ring.

"This goes beyond me and my limited capacity," she thought and went with this new worrying problem to her father.

She explained it all to him, he shook his head and couldn't quite believe it, but she proved the fact to him, which turned him serious.

6.

"My daughter," finally the sea king said,

"this gift from out of nowhere, from a small red herring, offers us a terrible responsibility,

and we shall have no choice but to apply it well."

She nodded, since her train of thoughts had been the same.

"You know, that all our oceans with all wildlife seriously are threatened by the recklessness of man.

Our entire world is being poisoned and polluted by his ignorance and self-indulgent carelessness,

as if he was alone and easily could do alone without all nature and without all other forms of life,

forgetting that he is dependent on the echo systems and that they will work and flow without disturbance,

keeping naturally the whole planet clean,

while he alone keeps ruining it with dirt and rubbish.

Several of our rarest species have already been exterminated by his carelessness and egoistic folly.

Let us do something about it, since we here now have the means."

7.

She instantly caught on and was completely with him.
Thus they went together for the strangest quest
abandoning the safety of their royal palace
at the bottom of the South Atlantic
to embark upon a journey that would last for all their lives,
preserving natural resources everywhere, restoring paradises,
saving species and creating safe environments,
protection areas and wildlife havens
inaccessible to man, the all invading monster,
for the preservation and protection of all kinds of life.

8.

The very last thing they created was this forest,
where they left the ring right at the heart of it
where these two brooks together join to form a junction
and a little island by it, at the bottom of a tiny whirlpool,
where it has been lying undisturbed and unused all since then;
but still its power secretly invisibly pervades the entire forest,
the effect of which is that impurity can not exist here.
Everyone who enters is completely purified in soul and body
in a natural etheric process, which no one can fail to be affected by
most positively, which of course you felt yourself.

9.

When thus they had accomplished their life's work,
the saving of the planet and all wildlife with all nature,
they gave up their earthly sealife and were taken up
to join the spirits of the air, in which community
they still are active even more invisibly
and even more inspiringly constructively
than when they worked concretely physically present
here on earth among us, but we shall not know for certain
how they go on working spiritually
until we one day perhaps will join them."
Thus completed Gabriel his story.

Canto V

1.

Brother Malcolm was astounded. "Is that all?
Then what about the houses and yourself?
For surely you must have a story of your own to tell."
"Indeed," said Gabriel, "but that is a more complicated one
and not entirely pleasant, for, you see, it is a tragedy."
"A tragedy? How come? How is it possible?"

In this consummate paradise of peace and harmony?
You must be kidding. That would be the utterly supremest paradox."
"I am not joking, although I can understand your incredulity,
but all things here, as you can see, are utterly incredible,
but on the other hand, my friend, there's nothing
nor in heaven nor on earth or in the seas that is impossible.

2.

The first one who arrived here, as you know, was Manuel,
a stranded Spaniard from Alicante, wayward lost
and something of an exile, who around the world
sought desperately for a chance of a retreat
from humankind and all their troubles, strifes and sorrows.
He came here just getting out of town
and seeking for a possibility for a recluse
to get away from baseness, vanity, vulgarity and superficiality.
He lost his way, of course, and ended up by chance in here,
where he found every possibility of what he always had been looking for.
He stayed, of course, and built the first small cottage,
which he called 'The House', for he was skilful as a craftsman.

3.

Here he lived alone until one day there was a couple,
young and innocent, eloping from their families
who would not let them have each other –
by restricting them and setting up conditions,
failing to accept that love is unconditional.
They came here leaving all civilization far behind
and hoping they would be forgotten by their own and all society
and were received most overwhelmingly and heartily by Manuel,
who by that time had begun to long for company.
That couple was my father David and my mother Celia.
Of course, the house of Manuel was too little for all three,
so Manuel and David built together one more better place
for what they hoped would soon become a family.

4.

A shepherd was the fourth one to arrive,
a man who had been prosecuted but for nothing
but his innocence, which he had failed to prove,
and he was forced to leave society and just abscond from justice
which had proved abortive in his case.
His name was Daniel, and that's where the tragedy began,
for he fell hopelessly in love with Celia.
The problem would have been avoided if not Celia
also desperately fell in love with him.

5.

I was expected then already, but before I had been born
it was a fact that Celia already had known her lover,
while my father David had resigned in sadness more or less.
He built the last house here a bit in further up the forest,
which you can not see from here, to live there by himself.
So I was born not only out of wedlock but of double wedlock,
since I was received not by my father but by Daniel."
"And did your father not object? Was there no jealousy,
no natural defence for his so violated fatherhood?"
"There was no quarrel, only conversation.
'Celia,' he said, 'why did you do it?'
'David, love is not resistible. It is, as you well know,
completely unconditional, and Daniel took me by a storm.
I fell in love with him, and there was nothing I could do about it.'
'But our son, did you not owe his father any loyalty?'
'A child comes with the stork. It is a gift by providence,
no matter who the father is, and is a person independent
of his father and his mother spiritually from his birth.
You have no right of property to him, neither have I,
and neither have you any right of property to me.
We are all independent but with some responsibility
towards our son and for each other in survival
but as friends and without bonds.
We came here to be free, and there is nothing more important
than that freedom for our lives and our community.'
And David left the others to be lone and sad
while Celia and Daniel stayed together
to assume the full responsibility for me
and for my well-being and health as infant.

6.

Even in a paradise like this,
life can become monotonous and boring.
One day, longing for a change, my mother Celia
took a walk and left the forest,
just to see if the world outside still was there.
It was, and with a vengeance.
As she passed a field, there was a bunch of villains
sitting in the shadow of a tree
and almost lurking in a ditch.
They were the first new people she had seen for years,
so she accosted them quite naturally.
She had been for years among most intimate and trusted friends
in this the safest of environments in all the world
and therefore was incapable of thinking any evil
or suspicion about any man, but was instead
and on the contrary uplifted by at last a meeting with new people
utterly ignoring and forgetting they were total strangers.
As bad luck would have it, they were lurid strangers too
with minds bent only on their bestial desires,

desperate as bandits and quite ruthless in their lawlessness.

7.

With joy she joined them with her waistlong golden hair,
blue eyes and dressed in white like any virgin angel,
hoping for some friendly conversation with new friends.
But they were overcome by her spontaneous beauty,
and exchanging looks and understanding they were all together
of the same mind with but one idea, they ravished her.
They left her bleeding in the ditch with torn clothes,
dirty and unconscious where she lay as dead.
The evening came and then the night, and she did not wake up
until the morning, freezing terribly.

8.

There was a young man then coming slowly down the road
together with his cow that he was leading.
As he saw a strange young lady in a critical condition
sticking up her head out from a ditch,
he wondered whether he was dreaming or experiencing a fay
or banshee or whatever, but she had a voice
and definitely needed help, and that decided him.
"Who are you?" She just shook her head.
"How come that you are here?" She did not know.
And gradually it dawned upon him:
she had had a terrible calamity and shock
and in the process lost her memory.

9.

At home among her lovers in the forest
they of course began to worry as to where she was
and why she stayed away so long.
"She must have left us," David said the third day,
but both Daniel and Manuel thought differently,
that something must have happened to her,
and on the fourth morning Daniel left
to search for her and left me to my father.
Daniel was never heard of any more and nevermore came back.
After a week my father left me to the care of Manuel
and went out searching too but promised to be back.

10.

My mother had been taken care of well by Joseph,
as the young man's name was who was with the cow,
but she was restless and would not remain at home with him
one day beyond the restoration of her health
but earnestly insisted on that she must find again
what she had lost. She didn't even have a hunch
about what had occurred to her or anything out of her history.

The only thing she knew and knew for certain was
that she had lost a priceless thing that had to be recovered.
Nothing could restore her memory, no therapy, no rest,
no cure, no deep research into her mind.
Her grave amnesia seemed complete and hopeless,
but she would go searching for her losses anyway –
a quest and search in total blindness in the dark.
But Joseph felt responsibility and would assist her
following her destiny as if it was his own.
They had already left the forest far behind
as he went down with her, down to his farm in the next county,
and as now they wandered forth, they went unknowingly
completely in the wrong direction.

11.

As they wandered aimlessly at random,
they one sunny afternoon came down and faced the sea.
"I think," said Celia, "that what I am searching for
might not be here in England." Joseph acquiesced,
and consequently they embarked upon a ship
that would cross over into Flanders.
But they were persecuted by bad luck
as suddenly a gale came sweeping from Biscaya,
an outrageous storm that brought the ship into the North Sea
where it perished in the tempest of the waves.
The last thing Joseph did was saving Celia's life
by giving her a flotsam that would carry her
while he was miserably drowned.
Unconscious once again, she landed on the Danish coast.
When she woke up, well taken care of by a valiant Dane,
she could remember nothing from before her waking up in Denmark.
All she knew was that she was in search of something most important
that could never be abandoned, interrupted or deserted.
Meanwhile David came exhausted back to us here in the forest.
He had found a trace but feared that Celia had left England.
He went out again to go on searching endlessly if need must be.

Canto VI

1.

The Dane who found the shipwrecked Celia on the shore
deserted naked in the wreck of what had been a lifeboat
was a humble man of gentle disposition with the name of Isak.
As she gradually recovered, he learnt all about her story –
that she had forgotten it completely and had none to tell,
except that there was something she had lost that had to be recovered.
Isak was intrigued by her mysterious case and, just like Joseph,
would do anything to help her. She felt not at home in Denmark,
Scandinavia was too cold and slow in mind for her,

so she believed she had to search the continent for what she needed. Thus their strange odyssey started, that would take them through a number of exotic and romantic countries.

2.

They wandered through all Germany down to the Boden Sea where for some time they lingered in the beautiful surroundings until she was certain there was nothing for her there to find. They walked on eastwards and finally arrived in Vienna. There she found herself in spirit slightly liberated by the fact that Vienna was a capital of music, talented composers being active everywhere, especially a small man wearing spectacles who was distressed and driven to despair by some dilettante orchestra that could not get his music right, no matter how much he rehearsed and tried again, as if the music was too beautiful to be made justice, It was something of a ballet opera called "Rosamunde".

3.

There was also a most jovial composer with a most impressing beard with pea soup in it playing hard at cards with an eccentric colleague with a most unpractical moustachio, if he was to drink whatever or eat soup. It was, as it was said, the waltz king and the king of symphony. But Vienna was not theirs for anything to find in spite of all the splendid music, so they just moved on, passed Graz and into Italy.

4.

In Venice they were asked to pose as models for a picture by an aged master, who found something very striking in the homeless searching pair. He boasted he was almost ninety-nine years old and active as a painter still, although his eyesight gave him problems and he used his hands instead of brushes. There was also an American, a bearded melancholy fellow from Key West who seemed quite sentimental; but in Venice, as in Vienna, they found nothing. So they just continued south as far as Sicily, returned from there to take a ship to Greece, which Celia loved and felt at home in, but still nothing was recovered. They continued into Turkey, Syria and Israel but there decided to return to Europe.

5.

David found their trace in Danish Esbjerg,
and from there he tracked them down through Germany
and Austria to Italy and Greece,
but there he lost their trail.

6.

He still keeps searching for them
somewhere on the European continent
and mainly around the Mediterranean,
and he is quite certain that he ultimately
once will bring them back again.
The sad thing is, that they have never found their way,
in spite of all their wanderings, back home to England
and not even into France, but keep on wandering
and searching constantly but in the wrong direction.
If my mother, when she woke up in the ditch,
had just sought shelter in the nearest forest,
I am sure she would have instantly been saved;
but she instead went searching constantly astray,
as if the merest effort of her search was a blind alley.

7.

David now and then came back,
but each time after an extended search
and longer journey, so the periods he was gone
grew longer every time. Now he has not been back
for seven years, and when the fourth year came,
my last friend Manuel here set out to help him.

8.

Daniel is lost forever, there is no hope of his reappearance
after sixteen years by now, and who knows where my father is.
And finally there was a stranger coming here, and it was you,
a lovable and humble monk with, I regret to say,
the worst news possible of Manuel's death.
I'm sure he aimed at coming back here with some news,
but what that news was we shall never know.
And out there somewhere, David, my good father, keeps on searching
for his love, my mother Celia, who with Isak
keeps on wandering all over Europe, maybe also Asia,
for the search of what she never can recover.
I have given up all hope now after sixteen years
and am content with just remaining here
as something of a hermit and preserving all their memories,
the memory of her and what she lost,
and keeping up their homes in case of their return,
maybe after another ten or fifteen years.

9.

The last thing David told me just before he left last time was something strange about my mother. When she last was seen in Israel ten years ago she was still young and fresh without a trace of age, as if her tragedy had fixed her in unchanging youth, still blonde with very long and golden hair and with no wrinkle and not even crow's feet in the corners of her eyes; and Isak also has remained as young as he was when he found her. Her mysterious age has halted up, it seems, and according to a sage and rabbi in Jerusalem, they will continue staying young unchanged as long as they continue on their search – another case of Ahasverus but of opposite characteristics."

Canto VII

1.

Thus concluded Gabriel his story. Malcolm looked at him aghast with admiration and compassion, turbulent mixed feelings but was more impressed than he had ever been, especially by Gabriel's personality, which seemed serenity itself in perfect harmony and consummation of maturity and beauty all embalmed in this fair youth of timeless charm. "If you are like your mother," Malcolm finally commented, "then indeed she must be the most beautiful of ladies in the world." "I take it as a compliment," said Gabriel, "not to myself but to my mother."

2.

Gabriel invited Malcolm to remain, of course, as long as he desired, and the monk was glad to do so for some days at least. He spent the days in Gabriel's company in long discussions, spiritual conversations and hard work in the organic gardens with some necessary updating repairs on the three cottages. For years, and taught by Manuel, Gabriel had kept it up all by himself but was now glad to have some help.

3.

But finally the hour was come for Malcolm to depart. "I would not want my abbot to start worrying, and surely he expects me back with some anxiety, and so do many others." Gabriel agreed.

"Of course you must return and tell the others
of our sanctuary here and of its story,
whether they can manage to believe it or will disregard it,
but this place exists, which no one can deny,
and I am here to verify it.

Naturally, I expect you back."

"I know the way and can not miss it,"
answered Malcolm, and they were agreed.

4.

And then it came to pass, that Malcolm left the forest.
The same day, he made it down to Winchester
and found the bishop there, his cousin
cordially expecting him with an enormous dinner.
Malcolm entertained him all the evening with his story,
and the bishop laughed his sides off
better every time he started a new round of laughter
that shook all the vestry and all Winchester to its foundations.

5.

Just a few days afterwards, the monk came back to Devon
and found on a rosy morning his beloved abbot
in his garden tending to his roses.

"Well, my friend," the abbot said most naturally calm,
"what did you find? And what did you expect to find?
Don't tell me you were disappointed."

"On the contrary, my father, I found much more
than I ever could expect. I found a forest."

"Tell me what you mean," the abbot said,
and he was mighty serious. Malcolm had no choice
but to relate the entire story from beginning to the end
without omitting any details.

6.

Afterwards the abbot kept his silence
for a long while thinking deep and thoroughly digesting
Malcolm's strange account, as if to ponder
whether he could take it seriously or as a fake.

At last the abbot spoke but without raising his grave looks.

"My friend," he said, "this verifies what I believed in always.
You have found a forest, but it's not unique.

Each forest in the world is no less sacred
than the one that destiny has led your footsteps to.

In ancient days we worshipped every tree,
especially the oaken ones, because they were the oldest,
therefore the most venerable of all life manifestations.

Every kind of life is sacred, and not just your forest,
although it may be the very ultimate unalienable evidence
of the eternal sanctity of every kind of life."

7.

And thus the forest soon became a place of pilgrimage and worship. One of the three houses, Manuel's, the first one, was transformed into a chapel, and our brother Malcolm was bequeathed with the responsibility of taking care of it. As monk in charge thereof, he spent more time with Gabriel in the forest than at his own monastery.

8.

Once a wayward wanderer came back from far abroad. It actually was David, who had found a trace of Celia and Isak far away in Persia and India. That's where he was heading next. He could not stay, he said, for more than a few days but was impressed and enthusiastic about what the monks had done to cultivate the forest, raising it to a more sacred status than it had before and making it a busy place for pilgrimage.

9.

And thus the story ends. We know not whether David finally succeeded in his quest for bringing Celia and Isak home, but there is always hope he did, although it can't be verified.

The End.

Manali, September 2nd, 2008.