

**Dylan of the Foggies**  
by Kent Duryée

For Kelsey Grace:

*May God bless and keep you always,  
May your wishes all come true,  
May you always do for others,  
And let others do for you.*

*May you build a ladder to the stars,  
And climb on every rung,  
And may you stay,  
Forever young.*

Bob Dylan

## Introduction

*The "Grateful Dead" was first a name given to a style of folk tales from the Middle Ages which were passed down orally over several centuries. The style finds itself represented from Western Europe, through the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Asia. In the Twentieth Century, a band of traveling musicians took the name, and played music tinged with folk and poetry for over 20 years. This then is a story in the Grateful Dead tradition. It is not based on any one specific tale that I know of, only on the general theme of the original medieval story cycle.*

Kent Duryée  
On the Coast of California,  
July 1, 2003

## I.

Rain was falling from a heavy sky over the island's green, rolling hills. Far below at the base of the cliffs, the storming sea roared on the rocks and foam sprayed into the air. White gulls cried and careened overhead while Dylan braced himself against the wind and looked out over the water. He shaded his eyes from the rain and salt spray, and gazed heroically, (he thought to himself), out over the ocean to the south. The wind blew from the north, a sure sign that this storm had only just begun. These were the Foggy Islands, after all, and it was late winter. It was a rare winter day indeed that was cloudless and clear. His small fire of dry peat moss was sputtering against the rain, pitifully losing the battle it was waging to keep itself burning. Dylan didn't notice this, nor did he seem to care much about anything except looking out over the sea. He was looking for something, but he just wasn't sure where to find it. The sea seemed a likely place to look, and so he searched.

Roger, Dylan's horse, stamped at the ground impatiently. It had been a long morning and the horse was anxious to get somewhere, anywhere that might not be so wet and the weather not quite so threatening. The horse exhaled a long breath from between his lips, making them sputter while spraying a good bit of spit with the effort. Most of the horse spit was caught by the wind and flew straight to the back of Dylan's unprotected neck.

"Aaagh! What the..." Dylan wiped the back of his neck and looked at his hand. Telltale strands of grass and bits of the last apple he had fed the horse gave away the source of the slime. "Thanks. Thanks a LOT. Here I am busy workin and all you're doin is blowin snot all over me. Wreck of a horse!"

Roger shook his head up and down and stamped his hoof again into the wet, green grass. Then he stretched his neck, lifted his head and rolled his eyes down toward Dylan, purely for effect. He snorted and sprayed again, and Dylan cursed and lunged for the lead dangling from the halter. "Come on, then," he growled. "We'll go, all right? Is that what you want? We'll just go then."

If Dylan had said this in a tone intended to hurt Roger's feelings, it didn't have the desired effect. Roger was only too happy to start walking somewhere, anywhere that might offer a little shelter from the cold rain, and maybe a bit of oats in a dry, warm stable.

It was a long walk north, into the wind, to the nearest town where Dylan thought it might be a good idea to go, to get out of the coming storm. As they walked through the storm, Dylan didn't think to climb up on Roger's back for quite a while. Instead he slogged through the boggy grasses, cursing Roger, cursing the rain, cursing how wet the horse was because of it, cursing how much of it was coming down, and then blaming it all on the horse, stumbling on the clumps of grasses, and then cursing his luck. Roger, for his part, would occasionally roll his eyes and snort quietly to himself, then start to trot a little to see if he could hurry Dylan along. This would only result in Dylan starting to curse louder however, so ultimately the pair wound up simply trudging north through the gathering storm, heads down against the wind and miserable.

After they had gone on in this manner for several miles, Dylan stopped, looked up at the rain, cursed, wiped his eyes, stamped his foot causing mud to splash into places that hadn't got muddied yet, then climbed on Roger's back and urged him into a trot at last. Near sundown, they came to the small village that lay near the crashing water at the base of the cliffs.

Dylan and Roger had been traveling together for a long while. They had left his father's farm weeks ago in search of the necessities of life, which for Dylan consisted of seed for the

crops to be planted, which had been easy to find, and also the fine material made from the golden flax plant that grows so well in the countryside of the Foggy Islands. Of course, that material is called linen, and the Foggy Islands, where Dylan and Roger lived, were famous for it. Dylan's grandmother sewed table cloths, napkins, kerchiefs, clothes and many other knick-knacks from the shiny material, and then sold them for a tidy profit. So far, Dylan hadn't had much luck coming upon supplies of linen, however. The weather had not been kind to the flax plants lately, along with the fact that wealthy merchants from nearby islands had recently come through and bought every last bolt or strand of thread made of linen they could find.

Oh yes, there was third item on his list of necessities: Dylan was also looking for a wife.

## *II.*

Now, during his long trek from the farm, Dylan had spent most of the money his father had given him on lodgings and food, which was a tidy sum. He was not one to waste much money on gambling, as some do. He only wasted a little at it. He was also not one to waste much money in the pubs, as some do.

The word "pub" is short for "public house," and usually there would also be an inn attached to the pub where travelers could stay and sleep, while taking their meals in the pub. Pubs in the Foggy Islands have always been places where town folk gather and mix with travelers to quietly discuss local events over a glass or two of refreshment. Sometimes this discussion and drinking can turn quite lively, however.

In fact, finding a "quiet pub" had been another of Dylan's goals for quite some time as he and Roger walked through the rain. By the time they actually reached the town, however, Dylan had decided that even a very noisy pub would do, and that was a good thing, because there has never been a single, verifiable, documented sighting of a "quiet pub".

You see, there is a strange effect that takes hold of people when they enter a pub that makes them involuntarily shout at the top of their lungs "Pints for the house!" and this always results in a very noisy hustle and bustle as the refreshments are doled out and passed around that lasts at least until the next person comes through the door and says the same thing, thereby starting the whole series of events over again. Every so often during the excitement, someone may take offense at something someone else might say, and in between the hustle and bustle of passing and doling out refreshments, a fight can break out, adding to the happy commotion. In between all the cheery noise, those that came in several hours before will want to leave, and this event will not only start a round of boisterous good-byes, but also another series of involuntary "Pints for the house!" and the whole thing starts 'round again and it is only very seldom that anyone actually leaves a pub. Given all of this, Dylan still only wasted a small portion of his money at pubs. The ale he drank on his travels was usually paid for by those entering the pub, or those attempting to leave.

Roger and Dylan pulled into town that rainy, stormy day and followed the muddy road through the center of town to the stables. The stables were well-lit and cheery looking, and were made more welcoming by the smell of fresh-cut hay flowing out the double doors and the occasional sound of a horse happily snorting while savoring the dry warmth. Roger perked his ears as they came to a stop outside. Dylan spoke with the stable master, then reached into his pocket for the purse filled with what was left of his coins. After paying for Roger's lodgings, he counted his funds and found he had even fewer than he had thought, and knew that soon he must either find a way to earn some more, or head home again with no linen, and most frustrating, without having met the woman he would marry.

Now, Dylan was looking over the sea for a reason, but most people discover that to find the woman you will marry is not something you just go out and do while gathering seeds and looking for linen. Usually there is at least some bit of mystery and surprise to the whole affair. Dylan had not yet discovered this last bit, and that may well be why Roger was so prone to eye-rolling and snorting. Dylan was certain that he would find the woman of his dreams on this trip by the same means he used to find the seeds and linen, (essentially shopping and bargaining), and he was determined NOT to go back home without her. He had been looking for a boat with a fair lass aboard, never mind that the chance was slim that there would be a boat at sea on as stormy a day as this, but Dylan was not without hope.

### *III.*

Now this is not to say that Dylan was at all dim. In fact, he was quite bright, having inherited a quick wit from his mother and a fast head for numbers from his father. Dylan was only confused in the ways of love, which we all are at one time or another in our lives and most of us never really get it figured out too well in the end anyway. He was not confused at all about the fact that he knew he wanted to find his true love; only about how to accomplish it.

Having paid someone else to watch Roger for awhile, (the horse desperately needed supervision, the snot-blowing hooligan), Dylan made his way to the pub, which not only offered company, but a meal, a bath, and a dry bed to sleep in. Dylan had been sleeping outside under his woolen blanket for five nights in a row now, and not only was he soaked through to his bones, he also desperately needed a bath, and was so hungry he could eat a horse, (but not Roger; for all his cursing, Dylan loved his horse, and the horse thought he loved Dylan, but horses are funny creatures, and love for them has different intonations than it does for people. They express their love by spitting at us, which very few people understand is a high term of equine endearment.)

Where were we? Oh, yes. The pub; the pub offered all four of the things Dylan craved at the moment, and so he hurried off across the street to try to find it.

#### *IV.*

Just then, a man came crashing through the pub door, and landed face first in the mud at Dylan's feet. A huge burst of laughter rose from inside, and the man in the mud rolled over moaning and said in a weak voice, "All right; pints for the house." Everyone inside sent up a cheer and the obvious winner of the brawl came out and helped the muddied man to his feet and offered him a towel. Dylan had found the pub.

Inside, all was warm with a huge wood fire on the hearth. (Most people in this region of the Foggy Islands burned peat, rather than the rare and expensive, but hot-burning wood. Peat is a moss that has dried a bit. Dried moss burns, but it is smoky and smells a little off.) They didn't bother burning peat moss in a place like this, and the massive timbers framing the building glowed with a brown shine and the candles lighting the room gave a golden sheen to everything their light struck. Dylan moved through the noisy crowd to the long wooden table in back and asked for a room, a bath, a meal, and a song, in order of his needs. He plunked down the gold coins that totaled up to what the young lady behind the counter asked for, and then turned to climb the stairs to the room he had been assigned.

At that moment, a huge man entered the pub and roared "Pints for the house!" as was the custom, and Dylan found himself suddenly confronted by the appearance of a pewter mug of ale in his hand. Knowing that to turn down the hospitality of a stranger in a case such as this was asking to get his head dipped in the mud rather roughly, he raised the mug, toasted the newcomer and drained a good portion of the beverage. Foam on his lip, he lowered the mug and glanced around the room. No one was obviously staring at him, so he quietly climbed the stairs, taking

pains not to make a creak or squeak, arriving at the upper landing without being noticed by the crowd below.

Only the young lady who had taken Dylan's payment from behind the table watched him, and it was only the corners of her mouth, turned up in a faint smile, which gave any clue as to what she might have been thinking.

He trekked to his room, as tired as only a person can be who's been sleeping on the ground in the rain for five days, opened the door and went inside. The ale tasted good, so he drained the rest of it, set the mug and the bag containing his worldly possessions on the table below the window and turned to look for the wash basin and the bed. The light was getting low as the sun was setting behind the clouds, and he peered around the darkened room.

Inns at this time usually housed two or more people in each room. In addition to the empty bed under the window next to the table, there was a bed against the far wall, and it slowly became apparent that someone was in it. Dylan made noises to alert the sleeping person that someone had entered the room, but the personage made no move and uttered no welcome. Politely, Dylan coughed once, twice, three times, but the sleeping figure didn't move. His eyes becoming accustomed to the room's dim light, he found another table set against the far wall. He gave it a good nudge, scraping the legs against the wooden floor. Quiet filled the room in the exact proportion that Dylan had wanted it to dissipate. The sleeping person didn't move.

As Dylan peered through the gathering darkness, in fact, he saw that the sleeping person was not moving at all. He approached the bed and looked closely at the figure. He coughed again, and cleared his throat, then stomped violently on the floor, just as Roger would do in an impatient huff, wanting to get the formalities of introduction over with so that the bath and the long evening with folks down in the pub and then the sleeping could be got on with.

The sleeping figure didn't stir. Dylan shook the sleeper's shoulder. There was a strange give to the body, as if all the muscles had been fused so that it moved as one piece. (Which was in fact the case; the quiet figure was not asleep, but actually dead, and was exhibiting the first signs of rigor mortis, the stiffening of the body after death.) This was something that Dylan hadn't expected, and he recoiled at the touch of the cold, lifeless body.

V.

What was Dylan supposed to do in the position he found himself in? What, in fact, would you have done? He could have screamed and alerted the others downstairs to his plight. He could also have straight-headedly gone directly to the authorities, for there are always those about, and reported the presence of a dead body in the room he wished to sleep in. He could have also bundled the lifeless form out into the hallway and let someone else deal with the un-pleasantries. On the other hand, he could have left immediately and not have worried about the consequences, though that that thought never crossed his mind. What crossed his mind at the moment was that this body was really in his way. So he immediately...pulled the body out of the bed and let it drop to the floor.

– Thump –

Then, and only then, did he consider the consequences and sense for the first time the repercussions of his actions. Apparently the unfortunate soul had been dead for quite some time, as was evidenced by the odor that billowed through the room.

At this point Dylan changed his plans mid-stream, and finally decided that it would be best to get some help, after all. He trudged down the stairs and found the young lady who had taken his money for the room.

He excused himself, and she turned around. When she saw him, the corners of her mouth curled up again, and her eyes seemed to grow larger and shine a little brighter, but Dylan didn't notice this, worried as he was about the issue of the corpse in his bedroom. He told her of his plight, and the little smile and bright eyes extinguished themselves, although they did extinguish rather slowly. She asked what the deceased looked like, and from Dylan's description, she recognized the man as a kindly old gentleman who had fallen on hard times late in life. She had taken to letting the man sleep in a room on cold wet nights, because she couldn't stand the thought of him out in the muddy streets alone. She had to keep this very quiet, however, because the innkeeper, her father, wouldn't have allowed it, being the businessman that he was. The old man certainly had more than his share of problems, and it was well known that he owed several of the town's businessmen fairly large sums of money from past ventures. For this reason, he was not very welcome in town, money being what it is, and people being what some of them are.

## VI.

She didn't burden Dylan with the complexities of the man's life, but instead decided, because she liked the looks of the young man, to ask him to help her remove the man from the inn after closing time, in order to hide the fact that she had allowed him in. "Would you be so kind...er...I mean...well, I know that you probably don't care, but I was hoping that you'd help me remove him later...", and she went on to tell him about her father, who was a decent man but simply wouldn't understand the whole affair.

Dylan listened to her story and as she spoke, something inside of him stirred. He noticed for the first time that her hair was the same color as flax, and her eyes were blue saucers. She was, he decided, incredibly beautiful. By the time she had finished telling him about why she needed his help, he was utterly, fantastically, entirely and hopelessly in love with this young

woman, and if she had asked him to swim across the ocean, his only question would have been something along the lines of "And how fast would you like me to do that, Miss?"

There was an awkward silence after she finished her tale, and it occurred to Dylan that it was his turn to say something. Eloquently, he asked "Whaaaa?"

She narrowed her eyes and knit her brow in an utterly, fantastically and entirely cute but serious fashion, "What did you say?"

Dylan attempted speech again: "Wh-what's your name?" Her eyes brightened and she smiled at him like people do when they finally understand what a two-year-old is saying to them.

"My name's Brynn, what's yours?" Dylan felt the earth shake and the blood rush up to his face; his brain was attempting back flips inside his head. "Dyanalalalnnn."

"Pardon?" Again with the fascinatingly adorable scrunching of the eyebrows and quizzical expression.

Dylan felt his knees beginning to fail him. He cleared his throat and made another stab at it, this time approaching his actual name, "Dylannn." He still trailed the last "n" a bit too long, but it was sufficient for Brynn to understand.

"Very pleased to meet you Mr. Dylan. Here, let me give you the key to another room so you can get cleaned up."

Dylan had completely forgotten the fact that he had mud and horse snot in every crease and crevice of his body. Again with the blood to his face; he was sure he must have been lighting up like a beacon, but Brynn only smiled that curly little smile of hers and handed him a key, along with the coins he had paid her with. "If a customer finds anything wrong with their room, they stay free. It's a Boar's Head Inn policy" she shrugged. "I don't think anything could have

been more wrong for you than finding someone dead in your bed. I'll just tell my father that you saw a rat or something" she whispered.

Dylan appreciated the girl's quick grip on the obvious, "Th-th-thanks." He stammered.

She smiled. "No sir, thank you."

He stared wide-eyed back at her. Time stretched out silently.

"Go! Get cleaned up and come back down; it's almost time for supper" she said, and turned back toward the counter.

With a lurch Dylan's brain stopped its happy twisting, vibrating, and frolicking inside his skull, and he remembered where he was and what he was supposed to be doing, so he smiled and went back up the stairs, quite a different young man than he had been the first time he had climbed them, only a few minutes before.

In his new, thankfully empty room, Dylan cleaned himself quickly, forgoing the long, warm bath he'd been dreaming about, in favor of a short scrub. His heart was simply not up to the task, because his mind was traveling in so many directions at once: On the one hand, he was consumed by the issue of how to get the poor dead man's body out of the inn without arousing suspicion, and what to do with it assuming they succeeded in that task; on the other, he was totally enraptured by merely the sound of the young lady's name: "Brynn." He turned the name over and over in his mind and he could see her standing in the glow of the candles with her hair and eyes...then his thoughts would rocket back to the dead man in the other room. He would think about that, and then think about Brynn's name, and her hair and her eyes. He finally tried to quit thinking altogether, but that didn't work because she was so entirely beautiful, so the cycle started all over again, and continued in a loop that showed no sign of easing. Who can sit

in a tub of warm water and take a leisurely bath under these conditions? Certainly Dylan could not.

Finally the chore of cleaning himself was complete, and he put on his cleanest set of somewhat dirty clothes, ran his hand through his hair, cursing the fact he hadn't thought to bring a brush, and went back down the stairway. Brynn was hurrying from table to table with plates of hot steaming food, but all Dylan saw was her smile. He found a table, and soon she came up with a bowl of hot lamb stew, the inn's specialty. He smiled at her, and having had some time to compose himself, was able to thank her without hemming and hawing as he had earlier. He ate the stew and watched her move about the place.

He simply watched. Could this be the young lady he'd been looking for? It certainly seemed that way to him. But what did she think of him? Did she even remotely like him? Was he the type of person she was attracted to? What did she like? What did she not like? Was he, in short, interesting to her at all?

He obviously hadn't been paying close enough attention. Dylan was making important discoveries about love while sitting in the pub eating lamb stew and watching Brynn move about the place. Love wasn't a seed-buying, linen-hunting expedition. Love involved mystery and surprise. Dylan wasn't dim, just new to the whole affair of love and the ways of mystery, romance and life.

He watched the girl move from table to table, and then his thoughts turned back to the ghastly mission in store for them later on, and the loop of thoughts began its course all over again.

Time passed, as it usually does, and closing time finally arrived. The guests began to wander up the stairs and out the door, and a quiet began to grow in the pub.

"For once, a quiet pub" Dylan thought and smiled. Brynn started clearing the tables and cleaning up for the night. She wandered over to his table and bestowed another smile on Dylan, and his heart took up the acrobatics that his brain had been up to for so long. He thought he might have to catch it after it jumped out of his chest, but gratefully, that athletic feat didn't prove necessary.

"Why don't you go up to your room? I'll be up in a while after father goes to sleep" she whispered to him.

"Right. Good idea. Yes. What are we going to do with him?" Dylan asked, whispering and pointing up toward the room.

Still whispering, she said "I don't know. There's a problem you see. Normally we could just take him to the undertaker down the street, but he owed so many debts, the law says that he can't be buried in the cemetery, and the undertaker can't do anything with him. I thought we might be able to get him down to the ocean. He was a fisherman once, and always loved the sea."

Dylan thought about this. Then he thought some more.

Brynn whispered, "Go upstairs and we can figure it out tonight."

"Ok. Right! Ok then, I'll see you then...I guess."

This was indeed a strange turn of events. He rose to go upstairs, then had an idea. They would need to have some sort of transportation to avoid walking through town, late at night with a corpse draped over their shoulders, so he ducked outside and crossed the muddy street to the stables to get Roger.

The clouds had parted, a break in the storm, allowing what moon there was to shine down on the muddy streets and low buildings of the town. He knocked on the stable keeper's door and apologized for the late hour and asked if he might take his horse out for a short time. He claimed insomnia as the reason. He knew this to be a lie, but was sure that he could be excused just this once for it, and so he waited as the stable keeper brought the horse out of the stall. Roger was led around the corner, and he had the unmistakable look in his eye that he was perturbed. Who wouldn't be perturbed being led out of a warm stable with one's new-found friends and dry straw and fresh oats in the middle of the night, to run who-knew-what errand in the rain. He shook his head, snorted and rolled his eyes.

Dylan had decided that it might be a good idea to at least visit the town undertaker. He didn't relish the thought of taking the man's body and simply dumping him in the ocean. That somehow did not seem to be the right thing to do. He asked for directions to the undertaker's from the stable keeper, who looked at him with questioning eyes, but Dylan offered no explanations. Thanking the keeper and apologizing again for the late hour, he and Roger headed down the street together to the undertaker's.

Knocking on an undertaker's door in the middle of the night presents its own set of strange feelings and sensations. Dylan didn't find any of these particular feelings and sensations pleasant, but he was determined to find out what could be done, and so he did it. He knocked three times on the door and waited. The undertaker finally answered the door, and the thought occurred to Dylan that the undertaker might well be his own next customer. He was an old man, very thin, with a hooked, vulture-like nose, and each bone in his hands and arms was clearly visible under thin, loose, pale blue skin that protruded from a black night robe. In short, he was

skeletal. Funereal. A man perfectly suited for his line of work. All he needed was a sickle, and he would have been the Grim Reaper.

"Yes, may I help you?" the undertaker wheezed in a gravelly, coarse voice that reminded Dylan of a crow's rasp and cackle.

"Yes" Dylan answered bravely, "I seem to have a problem. You see; a man has died, and I understand that since he was a debtor in his life, that you cannot bury him in the cemetery. This is sad indeed, and I would like to know if there's anything that can be done to help the poor man."

"Ah, Greely must have passed on. I knew he was sick, and talked with him just days ago to find out what he could do. At this point young man, I can tell you that he owed money to nearly every business man in town. For my part, I loaned him the money to bury his wife when she died many years ago, and he still owes me that sum. I think that if that debt were repaid, I could take care of him, but I won't be the most popular man in town...not that I am anyway."

This remark was followed by a wheezing, gargling laugh from deep in the undertaker's lungs that sent shivers up and down Dylan's spine and made him want to run away screaming into the night while pulling out his hair. But he stood his ground, and asked how much the debt was. Dylan was astounded when the man told him. It happened to be the exact amount of money he had remaining in his purse. If Brynn had not given him his coins back for the room, he would not have had enough. Quickly, and without thinking of himself for more than a few seconds, he removed his pouch and paid the man's debt to the undertaker. He told the old man that he would bring the body later, and as quickly as he could, without hurting the man's feelings, fled back to Roger, leaped on the horse bare back, and rode away through the thin moonlight.

Traveling back to the inn, Dylan began to wonder what it was exactly that he had done. He was now penniless, far from home, and it was then it began to rain again. "Great. This is just great. What am I going to do?" Roger shook his head and snorted. Dylan could sense the eye-rolling that was happening, though he couldn't see it while sitting on the horse's back.

Now back at the inn, Dylan dismounted, and led Roger around the back of the inn and tied him out of sight behind a tangle of shrubs under two tall trees. He went back around to the front of the pub, tried the door, and whispered thanks that it was unlocked. Again, he silently made his way up the stairs, listening to the sounds of Brynn and her father talking and cleaning things in the kitchen.

He opened the door to his room, saw the empty bed against the wall, and fell onto it. In a moment, he was sound asleep. To Dylan, it seemed a matter of seconds before Brynn softly tapped on his door, but in fact it was several hours later. He rose and opened the door. She stood there and he simply looked at her. He firmly decided that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and his heart melted for perhaps the thousandth time that night.

"What shall we do?" he asked.

"First let's put him in this" she held up an empty canvas bag. "It's my laundry bag and if my father sees me with it full won't suspect anything, because I told him I was going to get the sheets from the empty rooms and wash them. You're a different story, though. Please try to stay hidden as best you can."

Dylan blurted, "I visited the undertaker earlier."

"What?"

"I visited the undertaker earlier tonight after I got my horse from the stable. I paid the man's debt to the undertaker and he agreed to take the body."

It was Brynns' turn to stare at Dylan. "That is simply the most wonderful thing I've ever heard of anyone doing. That was a grand thing you did, Mr. Dylan. You are very generous and kind. Or you have no mind for money."

"Perhaps it's both, then. It was either that or drop the poor bugger in the sea. I couldn't live with myself if we did that, and I wouldn't want you to live with that, either."

Another silence grew between them, but this time it wasn't uncomfortable. They simply looked at each other, and at that moment, it was absolutely the perfect thing to do.

"Let's get started, then. I haven't been looking forward to this at all. Poor Greely. Everyone knew he had been sick, but no one knew how bad it was, I guess" Brynn lamented.

They went down the hall to the room where the man's body lay, still on the floor. The smell poured out of the room and Brynn had to catch her breath. "Unpleasant, that" she said, covering her mouth and nose, suppressing a gag. They gingerly rolled and coaxed the body into the canvas bag; a delicate, distinctly disagreeable job, then tied the top of the bag. The smell was reduced, but was still suffocating. They looked at each other again, this time with the knowledge of the difficult task ahead of them.

"Ok, I tied my horse around the back of the building. Is there a back stairway?" "Yes, it's just at the other end of the hallway. Ready?"

"Yes."

They pulled together, and the burden lifted off the floor. They maneuvered the dead weight to the door, and faced their first obstacle. They had to reposition the body in the bag before it would fit through the doorway. Dylan did this next disagreeable chore quickly while Brynn listened for any sounds from her father, who thankfully appeared to be asleep in his darkened room downstairs after a long day.

The door situation negotiated, their next challenge was to get down the stairs silently. Dylan wondered to himself how many times it was possible in one day to have to move silently up or down a flight of stairs. It occurred to him that there probably wasn't a hard and fast answer to this, and that it would be best to concentrate on the task at hand, rather than struggle with rhetorical questions just at this moment. He was probably right.

Halfway down the stairs, the canvas slipped from Brynn's hand, and there was a loud THUMP as the bag and body hit the steps. Involuntarily, Dylan cautioned "Shhhhh!" which it occurred to him only afterward was probably ineffectual and, at worst, a pretty useless thing to do under the circumstances. He knew that she understood the value of silence and stealth at the moment, after all. For her part, Brynn said not a word. They regained their grip on the bag and continued down to the bottom of the stairwell.

It was this moment that Brynn chose to tell Dylan that her father's bedroom window faced out over the back of the building, so that they would have to be incredibly quiet while getting the load up on the horse. Dylan rolled his eyes and would have snorted had the thought occurred to him. It was still raining, of course, and so the two of them hauled their grisly cargo across the open area and around the tangle of bushes. Brynn glanced over her shoulder at her father's darkened window and breathed a sigh of relief.

Roger was waiting for them. He knew they were coming no matter how quiet they might have been attempting to be, because being a horse, he had a highly developed sense of hearing. In fact, he quite possibly heard the two huffing and puffing while coming down the hall upstairs. He was also an intelligent horse, and he knew that now was not the time to show displeasure over having been tied up outside in the rain for several hours while his fellow stable mates, (including a roan filly he quite fancied), remained warm and dry and well-fed. He didn't know

that the two were actually planning on placing a dead person on his back, however. Had he known that, things may have been quite different. As it was, Dylan and Brynn had a very difficult time trying to lay the body over Roger's back, but they eventually succeeded and together led Roger and Mr. Greely's remains down the dark, soggy streets.

#### X.

Brynn's father loved this time of night. It had been his habit for many years to sit quietly in his room with the light off and simply think, alone with himself and his memories after a long day's work. As he sat on his bed staring out the window, he wondered what the two could possibly have in that bag, and why they were being so secretive with each other about the fact that they were quite obviously in love. He smiled, shook his head, giggled to himself about youth, and finished the last bit of brandy in his glass. Tonight he remembered his own midnight walks in the rain and mud with Brynn's mother. He missed her, but she visited him every night in his dreams, so the pain of being separated was bearable, at least until they could be together again.

#### XI.

When they arrived at the undertaker's, Brynn and Dylan knocked and the undertaker answered in the same way: "Yes, may I help you?" Then he recognized Brynn, and told her that the "young man" with her was very generous, having paid the debt of a man he did not know, and who would obviously never be able to repay the favor.

She looked across at Dylan, "Yes, he told me of his visit. I'm quite impressed," she said with a smile. "Where shall we take him?"

"Why don't you bring the departed around the back of the building? I have a cart back there. If you can just help me get him on that, I can take care of the rest. I apologize for my state

of attire, I'm afraid it's so late that I completely forgot I still had on my night clothes." The undertaker was only a frightening looking man, you see. In reality, he was kind and only looking out for his interests, though they revolved mainly around money and personal gain. These nuances were lost on Dylan at the moment, who was sure the undertaker was a hound straight from the bowels of the netherworld. Many young people fear age, but as will be shown, age has much to teach youth.

Dylan apologized once again for the hour, and made some comment about the fact that a man dressed in his night clothes in the middle of the night was completely understandable, but he failed miserably, because inside, he was actually thinking how nice it would have been if the undertaker indeed had a few more clothes draping his skeletal frame. They negotiated Roger and Mr. Greely around to the back of the building and helped the undertaker place the body on the cart.

They thanked him and left, Dylan walking a little faster than Brynn; he didn't like the undertaker or being "around the back" of the mortuary, and wanted time and space separating them from the man and his environment very soon.

When they had made a discrete distance from that death-place, Dylan turned and looked at Brynn. He was now alone with the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and had just completed an intensely grueling task with her. He chose that moment to realize that he didn't have the foggiest clue as what to say next. He was quite literally tongue-tied. Brynn looked at him and kindly asked "Where are you from?"

Relieved, he said "I live on my family's farm in Woodshire on the north end of the island."

"You're a long way from home. What are you doing here in the south?"

Dylan thanked whatever force it was that had somehow intervened to provide a topic of conversation, so he introduced Roger to her formally, to a round of snot blowing from the horse. Roger truly liked the young woman, and approved of her wholeheartedly.

Wiping the mucus aside, Dylan told her about buying seeds and looking for linen. He left out the part about looking for a wife. Brynn delicately wiped Roger's drool from off her front. Dylan described the fine needle work that his grandmother performed with linen, told her about the day-to-day boredom of living on a farm, then asked her what it was like to live in a pub. She listed the good and the bad, and they found that they had a lot in common. Both of them loved to take long horseback rides, and each of them disliked horseradish intensely.

It's not important how that subject of conversation came up, only that they shared an intense dislike for the condiment, which they found entertaining because, after all, both of them liked horses. This is what happens when two young people first begin to explore and find out about each other. They talked like this and laughed all the way back to the stable where they restored Roger to his warm stall and the roan filly, and then made their way across the street to the inn, which was much too short a distance for Dylan's liking. He wanted the time with Brynn to fold out in an unending, seamless fabric like a long, shimmering bolt of linen, but time usually doesn't do what you want it to; it asserts its superior self on all of us with impunity, and rarely if ever apologizes for the inconvenience it causes. "I have to get to bed. Morning comes early around here" Brynn said as they approached the door.

"I suppose it does. I'll have to be leaving tomorrow. I gave my last cent to the undertaker."

She stopped and turned toward Dylan, "You can't go. We just met. There's so much more..." she trailed off. "There must be something we can do."

"Yes. It was wonderful meeting you. You're nothing if not an adventure; do you always live like this, or was tonight a rarity?"

"Definitely a rarity," she said, "Usually I get up, cook, serve and clean, then go to bed so I can get up and do it again the next day."

Dylan smiled, "Alright, if you think of anything, have any brainstorms, let me know. I don't want to leave." He looked at her, and she looked back at him. She quickly gave him a kiss on the cheek, said good night again, then turned and went to her room off the kitchen. She turned and looked from her door; Dylan was still standing there, watching her. She smiled and waved her small fingers at him, opened the door wide, and went inside, taking the halo of her beauty with her behind the door. Dylan shook his head, sighed, and made his way, quietly, up the stairs one last time that night.

## *XII.*

Morning did indeed come early at the inn. Dylan and Brynn's adventure the previous night had lasted until nearly 4 o'clock, and the first hungry customers at the inn came in just past six o'clock in the morning. Dylan heard the commotion beginning downstairs, and decided to get up and see what could be done about getting some money together. He washed and dressed, again in dirty but not-so-dirty clothes, and began to make his way down to the tables in the pub.

At the top of the stairs, an old man who Dylan hadn't seen before was coming up to the rooms. Dylan greeted the man, who stopped and smiled. "Young man," he said, "I'm in a unique situation, here. I happen to be overloaded with several hundred bolts of linen. Do you know where I might get rid of these bolts? It's the finest available anywhere in the Foggies, and I would very much like to be rid of it." He used the local flax-growers' term for the islands, "the Foggies," and so Dylan was reassured that the man was likely speaking the truth. And he without

a penny. His jaw hit the floor—his father would kill him. "I would love to buy your bolts, sir, but sadly I have no money. My grandmother does fine needle work, and I am on a search for fine linen, but I haven't seen any for sale on the entire island in weeks. I have no money left to buy your store of it."

The old man squinted at Dylan. "You look like a smart young lad. How's your reading?"

"Pardon me sir, my reading?"

"Yes boy, do you read and write?"

"Oh, why yes of course. My mother schooled my brother and sister and I in all the classics while we were growing up."

"Fine, fine, my boy. Don't worry about your present lack of coin. I'm staying here at the inn for the next few weeks, and need someone to do some writing for me. These old eyes and fingers aren't much use to me anymore. You see, I've led an interesting life, and before I take my leave, I want to leave behind something that might be of record. Would listening to an old man's stories and writing them down be worth your room and board here at the inn for two weeks? At the end of which time, as your bonus, I'll throw in the bolts of cloth. Have we a deal?"

Dylan smiled and sighed. "I have my horse across the street at the stables."

"Can't let the horse go hungry, can we boy? Of course he'll be taken care of as well. Is it a deal then?"

"Yes sir! When do we start?"

"After you get some hot food in that bony frame of yours. Come up to my room when you've finished and we'll get started. It's this room, right here" he said, as he opened the door to

the very room Brynn had sent Dylan to the day before at the start of all of the recent adventures, the dead man's room.

"When did you come in sir, if you don't mind my asking?" Dylan wondered, feeling the need to ask for some reason, having had a large episode in his life play out in that very room.

"To the inn? Oh, why just this morning, my boy. By the way, what's your name?"

"Dylan, sir. Dylan."

"Fine, fine strong name. Mine's Ian. Go have some food, now and come up when you're ready." As he entered the room, Dylan heard the man say to himself, "Gawds it smells like someone died in here...where's the window?"

"Yes sir!" Dylan considered the man as he moved into the room and shut the door. Something was strange, but he couldn't place his finger exactly on what it was. All he knew for certain was that for the next few days, he would be close to Brynn and that things would take their course.

He bounded down the stairs, for once not worrying about being quiet on them and relishing his new found freedom. Brynn saw him from across the room and smiled her smile. Even with hardly any sleep, she was a vision to Dylan, and all he could see was the beauty that that seemed to glow around her. Brynn's father, from within the kitchen, saw Dylan looking at Brynn and smiled. He still wondered what was contained within the bag the previous night, but deciding it was probably better not to ask, he continued to observe the young man observing his daughter. He looked at Brynn and saw the halo of her beauty also. He thought of her mother and jabbed strips of bacon with a fork, turning them while considering halos and beauty, and knew exactly what the young man was thinking.

Breakfast was uneventful. Dylan told Brynn of his conversation with the man at the top of the stairs, and she smiled and his heart continued to melt. He finished a large breakfast, and journeyed back up the stairs to the man's room.

The old man Ian had laid out paper and a pen with ink, and was going through some of his belongings when Dylan knocked. He opened the door and greeted Dylan, ushering him inside and asked him to have a seat at the table near the open window. Thus began an odyssey for Dylan that took him through the course of one man's life, each turn and circle guided and informed by decisions that weren't always right, nor were they always wrong. The mistakes were tallied up exactly the same as the successes, each in Dylan's neat script on the pages the old man supplied. The old man withheld nothing. Each mistake, error, triumph and tragedy were recorded. Dylan wrote until his hands cramped, and the old man would then make his way to the bed and lay down to sleep. By the end of the first week, Dylan's mind was awash, both in the complexities of the old man's life, and in the complexities of love. Brynn, for her part, grew further and further in love with Dylan, and he with her, and love blossomed like spring between the two.

By the end of that first week, Dylan had written up nearly half the man's life. The old man said that he was tired on that seventh day, however, and so it was declared a day of rest for both of them. Dylan and Brynn walked to the beach that afternoon, and as the gulls cried overhead, they shared their first kiss, the sound of the waves crashing on the rocks, the mist-laden salt air was tinged silver with the first, weak rays of the springtime sun. During the second week, the old man's story became sad. He lost his wife, things did not go well for him in business, and he had become withdrawn and alone, taking to fishing to earn his living. It was a hard chore for Dylan to continue writing the man's story. Too many things had happened that

came back to the old man in ways utterly unforeseen and tragic. At night, Dylan would sit quietly at a table at the inn, watch Brynn and think of the old man and the incredible life he had led.

Incredible, he thought to himself, except that it was the story of a life that anyone might have led. The man was not famous, wealthy or in any other way worthy of note, except for the fact that he indeed had led his life, and was now making note of it. That was all that distinguished his life from countless others that have been led by men and women throughout the centuries of human existence; only the mere fact of bothering to write it down made it noteworthy. Dylan came to understand that this was a man's life written at the end of a great adventure, and he appreciated the lessons and ideas that the man's story provided.

On the 13th day of writing, the old man finished his tale. "Yes Dylan, and that brings me to the end of the story. After that, I met you at the top of the stairs, and the rest is, as they say, history. I want to thank you for your assistance in writing this memoir, and I hope that I haven't bored you with it. You will find your bolts of linen stored at the stables across the street with your horse. Here is a bit of pocket change for you, and now I'm afraid I must go to sleep. The narration of my life seems to have exhausted me," he said with a twinkle in his eyes as he handed Dylan a small leather purse. Dylan agreed that rest would be beneficial, and closed his notes for the last time.

### *XIII.*

"Thank you for sharing your life with me" he said earnestly to the old man. "And thank you for sharing your youth with me, my boy. You will grow into a fine man, I have no doubt." Alistair rose and put his hand on Dylan's shoulder, "Thank you again, my boy." They embraced each other as old friends, and Dylan wandered downstairs to the pub, the knowledge heavy in his

mind that he had been given a great gift by the old man. Now if only he knew what to do with it. He sat down at a table near the window and opened the purse the old man had given him. Inside was a sum greater than ten times what he had left his farm with. Along with it, a note with only the words "Thank you, I am grateful" scrawled in the hand of an old man on a tattered sheet of paper.

Dylan ran up the stairs to ask the old man if had lost his mind, giving away a sum of money like this. He knocked at the door, but there was no answer. He turned the handle. Unlocked, the door gave to his push. There was no trace of the old man. Dylan's manuscript was still on the table and he went over to look at it. Written in the same hand as the words on the paper in the purse was a title for the manuscript: "My Life, by Ian Greely", and another small note, placed with care on top of the manuscript pages: "Thank you Dylan. Your actions of the past weeks have been extraordinary. I hope the ramblings of an old man might be of some use to you. I trust you and Brynn will live long and happily together. Yours, Ian Greely."

A breeze blew through the open window, and Dylan noticed the rain had stopped and the sun was shining brightly on the green, green grass of the island. He heard a familiar snort from the stables across the street, then a noise from behind him. He turned to see Brynn standing in the doorway, her mouth upturned at the edges, looking at him with one, single question in her eyes:

"What now?"

Dylan answered, "Everything!"

### *Epilogue*

And so the tale of Dylan of the Foggy Islands ends, but the story of Dylan and Brynn goes on. Life is an unbroken chain of endings and beginnings. Our good deeds are rewarded at least ten-fold, we only must be receptive to the offerings. These offerings often come from the

least expected avenues and through the most unanticipated of events—they might be controlled by fate or destiny, or something else, far beyond our imagination. The mysteries of life and love are wondrous, and that wonder will eventually overwhelm those who are open and honest, and who look life and love fully in the face and inhale deeply. Love will flower in your life if given half the chance, always in freedom, and on its own terms and in the willingness to take a chance and to risk everything for the sake of love itself.

Someday you may look out over a stormy ocean, the spray blowing in your face, gulls and terns careening and crying overhead, and hear in them the calls of all the good deeds and loves *you* have had and done in all the days of all your years. Then you will know you have found your own way home.