

WISH KNOTS

Zadam squinted out of the mouth of the tunnel, looking at the cable which swung in the wind, suspended from this cliff face to the next across the vast canyon. The whitecap waves churned far below, and the clouds themselves were in a hurry. Once in a while, the wind cut around to face the mouth of the tunnel head-on, and Zadam's loose-fitting garments all fanned out as though he were some exotic bird affronted. He was glad for the cap he had brought, with the flaps on the sides that drooped down to protect the ears, and the little knit ropes that he tied off under his chin.

Chom sat beside him. He had wrapped the dog in one of their bedding sheets, in the face of the wind, to protect the Chocolate Lab's ears. The dog had seemed appreciative at first, and had wagged, and leaned close against Zadam while in the blanket. After some while though, the dog began wrestling with the sheet to free his legs, and so Zadam had assisted the dog in taking it off and stowing it back in their pack—the pack with both of their traveling things in it, which Zadam carried.

The cable car still wasn't coming. Zadam entertained some comical idea of going across the cable hand over hand. Even if he wore his mittens, his fingers would be shredded before he made it a tenth of the way across merely this canyon, to say nothing of the rest of the way through the tangle of canyons that the cable wound through. And what of Chom, if he were to try to go hand over hand across the cable? No. It was only a silly thought. If the cable car truly wasn't coming, if they truly did

end up sitting here all through this day, as they had the last, then as tiresome as it would be, he would arrange a new car himself, going all the way back through the tunnel to the green woods, and making something of the wood there. If the cable itself was broken in some inopportune place, then he and Chom would not be able to get through to the shrine until it was properly into Winter in some months' time, when the water below would be frozen through, solid enough to walk across.

Another idea came to Zadam. He looked down at the length of white string which he held in his hands, a piece about three feet long. Small stoppers were tied at random intervals in the string's length, little knots, each knot glowing green in the dim light of the tunnel, where he and Chom sat some dozen feet in from the tunnel's end, where the mouth left off on a large cliff face, and a bad gust of wind could have pulled them off down into the water, were they foolish enough to sit with their legs and whiskers dangling over in this kind of blustery evening.

Zadam began tying another small knot in the string, in a gap between two of the existing knots. He pulled the knot tight slowly, slowly, slowly, and as he did, he said to the string, "I hope Chom will find our bed a pleasant comfort to get back to, when we get back."

The new knot glowed green, at those words. Chom wagged. Zadam smiled to the dog.

That was the game of it, while they waited here: finding things to say that were positive hopes for Chom, that would not sound to Chom like immediate promises aimed towards him. Something like "I hope Chom gets a treat" would be mean to bring up, if there was nothing on offer. Something like "I hope Chom gets a big good meal when we get back," was enough for the dog to understand that it was something about him, that there was goodness aimed towards him, but that it was on the condition of them getting somewhere.

Zadam prepared another knot, and as he pulled it tight slowly, slowly, slowly, he said to the string, "I hope Chom enjoys the ride in the cable car."

This knot began to glow green as well, and Chom again wagged.

Wish knots, they were called. A sort of talent, a gift possessed by the people of the Shrine of Levat. Tying a certain knot, whether in a heavy rope or in a thin piece of string, if one with the talent for wish knots spoke a kind and genuine wish into the knot, the knot would glow. The glow lasted for about a month persistently, and then would begin to fade, taking a day or two to wilt away to a mundane stopper. The tying of a wish knot did not cause the wish to come true, nor did the knot offer any judgment of what was done to itself after its creation: it was, in fact, a common trade for the elderly, to create ropes and nets of wish knots to be sold as decorations. Out in the world outside of the shrine, as Zadam and Chom were returning from—or, attempting to return from, waiting to return from—the talent of tying wish knots was useful for proving some association with divinity.

The wish knots could glow in many colors, each with their own unique meaning.

Red: A wish for something good to happen for a parent.

Blue: A wish for something good to happen for a child.

Bright Blue: A wish for something good to happen for a bird of the sky.

Violet: A wish for something good to happen for a quadruped which grazes the field.

Orange: A wish for something good to happen for a plant.

White: A wish for something good to happen for a lover.

Brown: A wish for something good to happen for a friend, a brother, a sister, or a cousin.

Green: A wish for something good to happen for Chom.

There were some other fine color distinctions, a yet-brighter-blue corresponding to a wish towards the weather, and other relations one could also use to arrive at brown, but it was a well remarked upon fact that a pure Green had, for the hundreds of years of the talent existing, gone uncreated, until such a time as Zadam had made a kind and genuine wish for Chom: The first wish, Zadam hardly able to grow facial hair then and Chom just a puppy, had been a wish that Chom enjoy the new toy that Zadam was planning to buy for the pup when he went in to the market that day. Zadam had then brought the surprising green knot to the temple and was subjected to several important

conversations about it, but aside from all of that, Chom had liked the toy very much, a teddy bear whose brown coat matched his own tone of brown Chocolate Lab hair. If there was a greater criteria for creating green, anything more to the category, it yet remained unknown: if anyone made a wish for good to befall this Chocolate Lab specifically, the wish knot glowed green.

Zadam, though once looking at a simple lifetime as a weaver, became something of a curiosity for being the first creator of a green wish knot, even if others proved just as easily to be able to do it, if they too could come up with a true wish for the dog. And so, well provided for by the temple, he began to study oration and philosophy, recommit himself to his religious studies towards Levat, their goddess of storms, and in time he became an ambassador.

He had secured two good trades, previously, with nearby tribes, and for the shrine's use obtained many tools crafted of iron, in exchange for elaborately written upon scrolls which, when burned, would allow those tribes to petition Levat. She was a deity who very reliably answered when called, and in fact often did more beyond what had been asked of her: There were legends of storms that had lasted in one place an entire year round, and legends of roving storms from centuries ago which went around the lands still. Her reputation was ubiquitous, and Zadam, in garments adorned in glowing strings, had found that those first two ambassadorial trade endeavors had gone well.

This last one that he and Chom were now returning from had not gone well.

Zadam turned his gaze up from his three foot string, and pitched his hands above his eyes to look better into the glaring daylight outside of the tunnel: across the vast canyon, a cable car was approaching over the cable.

"They're here," Zadam said to Chom.

Chom wagged, got up, and started pacing back and forth in the tunnel, sniffing variously at the human and at the pack, and the few items of food and comfort they had set out there nearby them, indicating to the human all of the things that should not be forgotten.

Zadam did indeed begin collecting everything up.

He stepped to the mouth of the tunnel and waved for a moment. Then he went back to where Chom politely sat, nearby the pack. He knelt there beside the dog, the both of their heads level with one another, looking at the approaching cable car.

As they waited, Zadam prepared one more wish knot in his string. As he pulled the knot tight slowly, slowly, slowly, he said to it, "I hope they will not kill me."

The knot glowed green. Chom did not give any impression of being pleased or displeased with the words—no wagging, also no concerned glance from those big orange eyes—but Zadam smiled at seeing the knot turn green. It was true: that wish, too, was for Chom.

Zadam tipped his head over to nuzzle the dog once, and then turned and gave the dog a big smooch on the top of the head. Chom wagged, and turned and licked Zadam's face, and the two kissed for a while. They did stop before the cable car's operator would have been close enough to see them, in their position in the shadows back in the tunnel. Not that there was any secret. Chom had bred with many of the female dogs in the Shrine of Levat—it was Chom's pleasure, as well as the pleasure of any owners who wanted a litter descended from the dog who was the source of so many green points of light that hung around the shrine. But it was known that Chom's love mate was Zadam. That the dog's phallus had spent more time inside of Zadam than inside of any one member of his own species. That Chom and Zadam were inseparable, at some times quite literally. The people of the Shrine of Levat were a stormy people, and loud public displays celebrated: uproarious laughter, shouting spitting anger over stubbed toes or pinched fingers, loudly moaned curses over aching joints, singing, dancing, and sexual intercourse, it could all be seen walking around the shrine's streets. Zadam had many memories of being on his hands and knees at dog level, his flowing garments lifted up so that which covered his legs instead hung up around his stomach, with Chom facing the opposite way behind him, their posteriors touching, the two of them on the side of a public street where Chom had gotten to be in the mood to show off to the people, and indeed, many people standing upright overhead above the dog and the bent human passed by going about their business,

and many glanced down to the two of them. Many seemed to be conceiving of good wishes to use later, or indeed spoke them to strings or ropes right there, and with a smile showed their new green lights to Zadam, who would smile back and bow his head in recognition and thanks.

The cable car came close enough that Zadam could see the face of its operator: Oifim, who was indeed usually the one who took the cab out to check for people arriving. The man was built like a bear, and wore a grand moustache that curled upwards to each side like scimitars adorning his smile.

The cable car arrived into the tunnel, and Oifim stepped out, stretching and giving a loud groan which echoed down the tunnel behind Zadam and Chom's backs. Chom went up to the cable car driver and began sniffing him up and down, tail flying back and forth behind him. Oifim stopped his stretch short, and brought his hands down to the dog, rubbing the dog's ears and petting down the Chocolate Lab's back.

Oifim then looked up to Zadam, and bellowed, "WELCOME BACK!"

Zadam answered, "SHE GIVES!"

The humans each slapped their hands against their own breasts and then raised their arms upwards in Vs.

Chom returned to Zadam's side, as Zadam hefted up his pack. He carried it over to the cable car, and began securing it to the small cargo shelf, using the ropes already tied to the car nearby the shelf—there were also ropes within his pack that he could have dug out, if they had been needed. The people of the Shrine of Levat were a people quite glad to carry ropes, and strings.

"How did it go?" Oifim asked.

Zadam answered, "Dreadfully."

"Oh."

Zadam sighed, and then stood from the secured pack, and said, "I'll tell you on the way."

Zadam opened the rear compartment of the cable car for Chom. Chom leapt in, and stood inside on the cushioned seat. Zadam closed that door and secured it, and he and Oifim climbed in to the front.

Oifim asked, "Are you weary from travel?"

"I will push and I will pull."

“Many thanks.”

The two humans both leaned forward, and grabbed the bar which ran across the cable car in front of their seat. Together, the two of them pressed it forward, and began turning the crank, and the car began to move backward on the cable, retreating out of the mouth of the tunnel, soon leaving the tunnel behind as the men pushed and pulled.

“So,” Oifim began, as they were halfway across this first chasm. “Krenna and Ogen’s men had no interest in storms after all?”

“They did, I think.”

“Oh?” Oifim prodded. As they talked, they did not stop at turning the crank bar. There was a momentum to it that made the work easier while the car was already in motion. Oifim mentioned, “They did quite some work getting a messenger to us.”

“They did. But when I arrived to the conference with their ambassadors, we did not get to the point of talking about storms and trade before I left.”

Zadam left the statement at that. He would gladly never talk about what had happened, if no one would ask him.

There was a long ride ahead of them, and he did not think too confidently about his odds of getting through it unasked.

But he left it at that, not saying what had happened.

Oifim asked, “What happened?”

Zadam turned away to face outward, and shouted, “HELLS! RATS! ROT! SHIT!”

The canyon walls spoke back to him in a chorus of his own voice, on hells, rats, rot, and shit.

Oifim suggested, “If you don’t want to speak on it, we will not.”

“I will,” Zadam answered. “It is a story I will have to tell many times in the coming days, at this rate. I may as well find out the words of it.”

“All the time you need,” Oifim said.

The two continued on in silence, as the cable car swung back and forth in the wind, until they had arrived at the wall opposite the tunnel mouth. There they slowed, for a turn in the cable, and

then continued on along the canyon's side, as they would go along for the next mile.

Zadam told his tale.

"Krenna and Ogen are of course quite far. Well beyond the trees that we know, off into lands of hard grass and sand. Little of substance lives there, other than the men themselves who live there. There are no squirrels or birds. There is no possibility of growing crops, and even quadrupeds which graze the field cannot eat the grass there, it is too harsh for them. The men, quite alone as lifeforms, eat the manna of their god Vinyok, a rather tasteless substance, like hard grain, but which can be mashed and then baked into a rather tasteless bread. From the manna, they also ferment beer, so that they might get drunk.

"My mate and I arrived upon the place of the conference one day as the sun was beginning to set, and darkness beginning to rise across the desolate grounds. A circular edifice made of pale stones, large enough that sport could be played inside of it, though not so large that much of an audience could be contained within it to watch them. One and twenty tents surrounded, of various constructions, all small personal dwellings.

"Outside of the edifice, where the meeting would be to take place, several of the men, including the three ambassadors I was to speak with, stood around a large fire. Fires, too, were spawned of a liquid substance from their god Vinyok: they stood there in the desert around a flaming puddle. When my mate and I arrived, I bade him linger behind as I approached first.

"The men greeted me cordially, we all bowed to one another. They gave me bread and water, and uttered assurances that they looked forward to making agreements the following day. I made no objection, of course. I had come a long way to arrive there, the meeting did not need to be done that hour. Maybe if I had insisted it be done that hour, I would in fact be returning with racks of fine rapiers and drums of liquids which generate fire. I agreed to what they suggested though, uttering assurances that I looked forward to the following day as well.

"It became apparent to me that the men were drunk, and that they intended to continue drinking around the fire throughout the night. Though I did drink from their offered water, I had

none of their beer or bread. I told them again I looked forward to the next day, and I began to leave, telling them truthfully that I hoped to set up my tent while there was yet light.

“The men then pleaded, stay, stay, there is a tent empty for you, tonight we shall feast. I assured them that I appreciated their offer, but that I preferred my own dwellings. Truly I more believed my mate would better enjoy our familiar dwellings, and truly I had been away from him for some time by this point and desired to haste back to him to assure him that all was well.

“The men would not give me a polite moment to leave, and pleaded more, stay, stay, tonight we shall feast, bring forth your beast and we will cook it expertly.

“Were it a quick thing to do, I could have been moved to call down storms from Levat upon them at that very instant. Still, being an ambassador, and having come a long way to get a job done that was better done with good impressions, I merely told them, the dog is not an offering, I will not allow him to be eaten.

“They insisted, pleading, you will have to bring it no further, it will be a good taste unto us, we will have a glad celebration as we eat and drink. My responses that the dog would not be eaten were talked over. Though no polite moment was given to me to leave, I turned and left all the same, even as they jeered at my back. I will note I did not see swords among any of them, or I may not have been so bold as to make my exit with my back turned. I returned to my mate, and did not deceive him that I did not like what had just happened, but I did tell him that we would get through it all the same.

“An appreciable distance from any of the men’s structures, I set up our tent. The mouth faced their structures, and my mate and I sat within the tent and watched for any man to approach, though none did. When night fell, my mate and I fled the tent, sealed it up behind ourselves, and retreated far back into the barren lands, until finding a gully to pass the night in in hiding.

“In the early morning, my mate and I began towards the edifice and its grounds once more. Through the night, I had been wracked with tempestuous doubts in one direction and then the other, again and again as a flag in dire winds. I had, by the morning, decided that I would still meet the men as I had

come to, and with talk, smooth over any bad impressions, on either of our sides, from the night before.

“When I came over a ridge, and could see the edifice, I witnessed that no man stirred save for the three ambassadors, who stood at the entrance of the edifice with scabbards.

“Clearly, they were intent on rectifying the last night, by killing my mate at that moment, likely with the assistance of the other men who I believe were not still sleeping, but were lying in ambush, within the nearby tents and within the edifice.”

The two men in the cable car pushed and pulled on the metal bar in front of them for some while without speaking.

As they left the side of the canyon to begin the next crossing, across an intersecting canyon, Zadam concluded, “I did not attend the conference. I turned and left with my mate, believing at that point that the best I could hope to accomplish would be to not lose an asset to Levat. That much, returning him safely, is all that I can say proudly I have done.”

A stronger wind rocked the cable car greatly for a moment, as the two men continued to push and pull.

The car swung, and swung, many times, and then eventually settled to its small rocking.

The cable car driver responded, “You have brought back two assets to Levat: You brought back yourself as well. If such was the conduct of those men, there was no conference at all, and then, no conference you failed to attend to.”

The two men each clapped their nearby arms over each other’s shoulders.

As they got back to devoting all arms to turning the crank, Oifim began to tell Zadam of all the goings on since he had left, promotions, new couples, losses, new structures, new theories on the shrine’s images, new songs, and a new play which he did not tell of in too many details, to preserve the joy of the surprises of it, but he shared that it was worth stopping in to.

Night had fallen by the time the cable car arrived at the shrine. Sprawling over a vast plateau, protected within a yet vaster landscape of canyons, the shrine itself had many arms and nooks and facets, besides all of the homes of thatched roofs and stick walls, and other facilities that had been built on the plateau as well.

Zadam went to the back of the cable car and let Chom out. Chom leapt upon Zadam, and stood on his hind legs as Zadam held his forepaws, and the two of them kissed. Chom then trotted ahead to sniff around.

On the platform the cable car had come to, several ropes hung across the edges of the platform, to mark the dropoff. The ropes were tied with wish knots, which glowed in a variety of colors: often at places of symbolic importance, such as here, the entrance to it all, an effort was made to include every color. Zadam's heart was warmed to see where one of the rope's knots glowed green, the color for good wishes for Chom. They had been away longer than the duration that these glowing knots lasted: someone, while Chom had been away, had sent the Chocolate Lab good wishes.

Zadam grabbed his pack off of the cable car, and put it on.

"Many thanks," Zadam said, to the cable car driver.

"I serve," Oifim answered, and smiled below his moustache.

Ahead, there was a wide stone staircase, leading up towards the main thoroughfares of the shrine. However, beside the stairs, was an unassuming doorway, a tunnel used none too frequently, but which would take Zadam and Chom beneath the bustle of the shrine, and, with the right turns within the tunnel taken, deposit them into the quiet outskirts where their home was.

Oifim stammered, "Oh ah, taking the, that way?"

Zadam, stopped by conversation, turned to Oifim, and answered, "We are weary, more than I had let on before. Whatever tomorrow may bring, it will bring, and we will face it all then. For now, I hope to get us the last of the way to home. Though this passage is a little longer in its turns and doubling back, I worry at what or who might stay us if we march about above."

"Good!" Oifim said. "Yes, I, I was going to suggest—yes, well, good, good. I will not be the one to stay you either."

"You I would forgive for it, you have moved me quite a ways."

Oifim bellowed out a laugh, and bade the two, "I hope the best for the return of these mates to their den."

Zadam bowed, and then made towards the passage, Chom following beside.

In spite of his travel-sore body, Zadam found himself running, skipping, with Chom prancing alongside. Zadam let out cheers, and Chom echoed some of them in barks, as the two made their way through, below it all. “WE’RE HOME!” Zadam shouted, and the halls echoed back an affirmation in his own voice, “home-home-home...”

When the two emerged out into a forest, dark and with the sound of a few crickets around, Chom wagged as he did a big circle around some trees, and then lead the way towards their dwelling.

Their home was not anything grand, but indeed much like the others. Walls made from sticks, that the wind may pass in. A roof overhead. And, all that Zadam looked forward to just then, a bed. A bed which he and his mate had spent so many nights cuddled together on, and, although the cuddles in their tent had been perhaps even closer as they cozied in for body heat, it would be nice to be in their den again, as the cable car driver had so rightly put it.

Coming through the woods, Zadam felt confused at something: ahead, something in the night shined brightly, brighter than anything he could recall being in this area—he had thought they were nearly home. He continued to march ahead, until finally, he came upon it: his den, Chom’s den, covered inch by inch from rooftop to floor in nets of green wish knots. The green points of light covered the home, and swept out over the yard, a glowing floor of good wishes to the dog.

There also in the yard, some tables were set out, and many of Zadam’s friends—and a very out of breath Oifim—were gathered. Seeing the arrival of the dog and the ambassador, several of the friends blasted trumpets. Chom ran around between everyone, his body bending to one side and then the next as he wagged so hard at all of the petting and praises and familiar people.

Zadam’s best friend, Caua, stepped away from the excitement surrounding Chom, and towards Zadam, who lingered there at the edge of the woods.

She shouted, “WELCOME BACK!”

He answered, “SHE GIVES!”

The humans each slapped their hands against their own breasts and then raised their arms upwards in Vs.

As Caua brought her arms down, she made a passing swipe at messing up Zadam's hair.

She said to him, "Heard you had a rough time. We'll save the celebrating for tomorrow, and leave you to bed. Good to see you back."

Zadam made the rounds among his friends, as Chom already had, sharing quick thanks and good wishes.

Many odds and ends of meats and breads were shared with Chom, and the dog ate well. Zadam declined any of it for the time being, and all the more of it went to the dog.

And, true to their word, Caua and Oifim and the rest were soon all departed, leaving the tables on the yard in preparation of the next day, but leaving the mates to their rest until then.

Zadam took off his pack, and set it down outside by the front door.

He opened the door for Chom. The Chocolate Lab went inside first, and sniffed around at the little table, the trunks, the shelf, the basin, and the bed. Arriving at the bed, the dog did not turn away to investigate anything further, but rather, crawled up onto the bed, laid down on his side of it, and looked up at Zadam.

Zadam undressed from his light garments, and crawled onto the bed, and snuggled there with his mate. As a wind blew through the walls, Zadam and Chom were plenty warm in one another's embrace, sound asleep together through the night.