

## Two Fantasies

—Catherine Moore

(A legend they tell of the notorious Duchess of Penyra says that once in her childhood she saw the Sea Maid. Segramar includes a highly ambiguous account of it in his *Dark Ladies*.)

Down at the edge of the sea two children were playing. A little girl, a little boy. The tropical sun beating down on their bare heads made blue highlights on the black hair of the boy, but the girl's bright curls blazed defiance in the face of the sun, and every sparkle was a glint of red gold. Under the burning of it her eyes were stormy, dark, and her face and her beautiful little golden body gave promise already of the turbulent years to come.

Now she wore a single torn garment, and her feet were bare and her hair a mop of ragged glory. Save for that ominous brightness there was no way to tell her rank from that of her playmate; no one could have guessed that here by the sea a Duchess sat digging in the sand.

The children were absorbed in their sport, and they did not see the tall lady who came walking along the edge of the sea—walking like a queen in her long green gown. She must have been down at the water's edge, for the trailing hem of her dress left little pools of brine along the beach, and every footprint that she made filled up with sea water. She came to the children playing together in the sand and stood for a moment bending above them, quietly. At her presence the boy looked up, startled. Whatever he saw in the deep eyes above him, he scrambled to his feet and fled.

The little girl sat still, very still, and her eyes traveled slowly up the green skirts—the hems dripping brine—up very slowly to the



bending face above her. She looked deep into green seas . . . fathomless waters . . . ice and amber and the echo of a Song . . . .

She sat very still. She did not feel the lady's hand—her foam-white hand—that stretched out above her head, hovering over it, touching with infinite lightness the burning gold of her curls. She felt sea wind in her hair . . . she saw the shifting tides and sank fathoms deep through green seas. For so long as the lady stood there, as if she were warming her hands at the bright-blazing hair, the child did not stir.

Then the tall woman straightened. She looked down at the little girl, deep-eyed, silent. She did not smile, she did not speak; she only gazed at her, long, and with all the green seas in her eyes. Then she turned away and went off along the sand, walking like a queen. In the footprints behind her salt water welled slowly up, and her long skirt-hems trailed brine behind her as she walked.

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Yellow Brian Doom swung his sword to the frosty stars. The wind was in his hair, and his horse's mane tossing, and his cloak flowed out behind him. Over his shoulder he called eternally to his vanished legions. Yellow Brian in bronze bestrode his rearing horse under the winter stars, and the wind wailed eerily about him down the Square—Yellow Brian, shouting with upflung sword. Brian Doom, King of Gradenborg. His voice was in the wind. The tramp of his legions sounded down the storms. Yellow Brian, surnamed the Damned.

Brian Doom, with his yellow hair and his yellow lion's eyes, had ridden into Gradenborg a hundred years ago, the wind in his cloak and his horse stepping high, singing as he came. Yellow Brian was king, and his hands were red and the steps to the throne slippery, but he sat there with the crown on his head and defied the world to take it off. He ruled stormily for seven years, and died with the taste of blood in his mouth.

Yellow Brian was twenty-five when he came to the throne, six feet three, muscled like a bull, ruthless and blithe. He had a cruel, ugly face and eyes like yellow jewels and a harsh mouth and a charming smile. Women were fascinated by him—splendid and ugly and gentle, and he loved no one and no thing, and yet . . . . There is a story of Brian Doom and the Princess Margaret, and it is a strange,

wild, tender tale, but it ends half-finished in a whirlwind of steel and shouts, with a young man lying face down on the cobbles, his cheek against a lady's velvet shoes and the taste of blood in his mouth.

There was never any happiness about him. He brought black ruin to his friends and red ruin to his enemies, and something more to the lady he might have loved; and he stole a throne and ruined a kingdom and died on the cobbles with blood on his tongue.

They say he swaggers through Hell merrily, his stolen crown over one ear—Yellow Brian the Damned.

