

3-15-1996

Feathers in the Wind

Lloyd Alan Fletcher

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle>

Recommended Citation

Fletcher, Lloyd Alan (1996) "*Feathers in the Wind*," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 1996 : Iss. 19 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol1996/iss19/11>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Mythic Circle by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Additional Keywords

Fiction; Feathers in the Wind; Lloyd Alan Fletcher

fully appeased.

"I hope the monkeys are all right," murmured Capst. "I hope I'm forgiven for what I've done. I hate destruction; it's awful."

Prisniffy, her heart unstoppably happy, held him, held him, and began to feel fillings of emptiness she never knew could be appeased. She reached up, pulled the start-cord, and sent their temporarily-stopped chair skimming into the jungle, which suddenly seemed a whole lot friendlier.

"Where do you want to go, my darling Prisniffy?" he murmured to her, for he knew, without knowing her, that he loved her, and would always be with her.

"I don't know," she said, almost crying as his touch

seressed within her wonderments like glass vases holding their breaths. They were feelings like spun song, singing honey, and milk-washed roses all at once. She thought she was inheriting some fairy tale. "I just want to ride with you, ride with you, all through the night, and let morning find us close and dear miles from anywhere we've ever been."

"As you wish, my Prisniffy," he gentled her soft, yellow hair as if he were playing a harp, and shared a long, soft wish-granting of a kiss with her.

Pulling the appropriate guide-cords, they shuttled their basket-chair onto another line and sped off through the humid, heavy-lidded jungle in search of a new dawn.

Feathers in the Wind

Lloyd Alan Fletcher

Jarred was first among the Callers. Not just according to his own opinion, but to his fellows, that dissolute guild of wanderers, he was Bird, for no one had Jarred's touch with creatures that clung to freedom so fiercely. No Caller could reach higher than the sky.

To the folk he encountered on his wanderings, noble and common alike, he was Red the Caller, on account of the flame of hair that spilled like a horse's tail down his back. Red being the color of life's blood and creative power, the few who were given such a name bore it as a mark of respect and influence. And yet, despite the accolades of citizens, the friendship of nobility, the gold that his talents brought him, he could not forget that he was, in the language of his past, simply *Jarred*: "a feather in the wind."

Jarred tried to ignore the gut-churning roll of the boat, the unnerving creak of the mast. He peered into the fog beyond which a mystery awaited him on Karad.

Rarely these days did he need to barter his talents for the price of comfort; reputation alone was enough to buy his ease. But he could not resist a request from such a source, and so now he found himself at the mercy of a cocky youngster in a leaky little boat that stank of fish: an impromptu ferry struggling out into an unwelcoming sea.

He knew the Karadin by reputation of course: merchants of renown, source of the Blue Dust. But only once had he encountered a member of the clan. Years before in the Northern Hills he had called a savage wolf pack into the deep forest, away from the settlements it had been worrying. As he was taking his payment from the local baron, a very round little man, red of face and bright of smile, arrived. The Karadin had come to trade their fine blue powder for tracts of forest. Within the year, the trees were gone and farming families had come to settle, buying up the Blue Dust by the barrel load. Jarred had not seen the

Dust used so widely until he came to the East.

He relished the Eastern Shore. Here the ocean breeze was thick with the cries of countless living things that crawled among the rocks, roamed above the dunes, scuttled across the flats: an unequaled variety of creatures that he could make dance to his whisper and sing to his will.

Now, with ten years of wandering behind him, other pleasures ranked as high as the company of birds. He had learned to savor the lavish hospitality that awaited his return to the Shore each year. The Queen of the East was a frequent client who held banquets in his honor in the palace high above the brooding sea each winter. It was she who had help spread the name of Red the Caller throughout the rich trading cities of the East.

It was to the Queen's City he had come when barely in his twentieth year, seeking the burdenless life that he hoped his talents would bring. And here he returned each winter to spend the dark months learning the complex social dances of nobility, artisans, and the wealthiest families of the East. Memories of his simple past had begun to fade with time, like legends told around the camp fire.

The boat began to pitch more violently as it headed from the lee of the headland into the open sea. The boy gave an exuberant cry as the sails hammered madly against the mast and the spray splattered the deck.

Jarred gripped the gunwales, wishing now that he'd stifled his impatience and taken the long road north to one of the ports to wait for a merchantman; but the message had been insistent, and signed by the Grand Karad himself.

"Yer not gonna lose yer guts, are ya mister?" yelled the boy, grinning.

Jarred shook his head, but that made him feel worse. He fixed the boy with a stern eye. He was unaccustomed

to such uncouth talk, although this rough village boy reminded him of his own half-forgotten childhood.

"Yer first time to the Karad, is it?" asked the young fisherman, as he fought with the tiller and smirked at Jarred.

"Yes, first time." He found that talking made him forget the discomfort of the boat.

The boy grimaced into the spray, the lines around his eyes the marks of a young face already weathered by the sea. "It's a stupid-bad time to go across!"

Jarred paused, wondering if this impudence was merely the jesting in which the common folk liked to engage. "My presence was requested by the Grand Karad himself. You do not keep such people waiting," he sniffed.

The boy whistled. "A friend of the Grand Karad, no less!"

Not a friend, thought Jarred. He had never met the Exalted Merchant of the Karadin, Lord of the Blue Dust, Richest Man in the East.

"But yer no merchant, sir. You must be a minstrel or an artisan, am I right?"

Rumor had it that the Karadin "collected" the greatest artists and musicians. The Queen had told him that some stayed for decades in the employ of the Karadin; some never left the Eyeless Palace.

"No," Jarred said simply, "I have other business." Although he had no idea what it was.

The boy scratched his head. "Not a teller of tales then, nor builder, nor a great cook—the Karadin do love their food!" he laughed.

"None of those," said Jarred, beginning to tire of the boy's unseemly interrogation.

"What are you then, sir?" asked the boy, the smirk creeping back to the corners of his mouth.

Jarred sat up straight, pulling his great coat around him. "A Caller."

"A Caller?" the boy breathed, almost letting go of the tiller, "A Caller, by the Life!"

"That is it." Jarred looked casually away from the boy, beyond the stern to where the dark cliffs were sinking into the mist.

The boy was quiet for a moment.

"There was a Caller once in our village, when my grandad was alive," he said finally with a reflective look. "Back when the herring had been gone five years. The village found the gold for a Caller from the South.

"He stood out there in the bay in my grandad's boat." He jerked his head in the direction of the rocky cove, now almost vanished behind him. "Stood there all day, humming and singing and talking to the water. He called sea creatures all right, but they was eels and dolphins, even a family of seals; none of which we could eat or trade."

"There must have been no herring to be called," Jarred said sharply, leaping to the defense of one of his fellows.

"That's what he said, and he was right, for they've

never been seen again. So he gave back our money and went on his way."

Jarred wondered who it could have been. Tiger had a way with sea beasts: he'd once called a family of whales against raiders along the Southern Passage. The great beasts had destroyed the pirate ships, leaving the trading routes in the power of the Southern Syndicates. But Jarred hadn't seen or heard of Tiger in years.

"What was his name, boy?" asked Jarred. The boy shrugged.

There had once been a Caller named Salt, one of the old breed whom Jarred had never known. It was said Salt never accepted gold for a Calling, only food and drink and a bed, though Jarred doubted that tale. He had heard the old man was still alive somewhere in the far West. Perhaps it had been Salt who tried to call the herring, finally realizing the reward of gold for his skills?

Jarred had never had the knack with fish, as he had not with insects or worms. But as a boy, he had found within him a strange urge to stand on the shore of the Winter Lake and call away the gulls when the fleet came in. He remembered the sky flapping with angry white wings, feathers flying, hungry beaks snapping in frustration as the catch was landed, eyeing the prize that Jarred would not let them have. His father would wade ashore laughing at his son covered in gull feathers, "You're well named, boy!"

"Is it fishes the Karad wants you to call?" the ferry boy asked.

"We shall see."

"It must be fishes he wants, now the mining is dying the death."

Jarred had heard rumors in the Queen's Court. A thousand years of mining, and the Karadin had nearly exhausted the source of their incredible wealth.

The boy read his thoughts, "Will be a dozen years before it's gone, so the miners say. Then what may they do? There is nowt else there but fishes!"

"I think the Karadin have enough gold put aside to keep them happy for generations," said Jarred, dismissing the idea of the great merchants reduced to fishmongering.

"I hope it is so; we can't compete with their likes!" the boy laughed. "Look!" he said suddenly, pointing away to port. There the headland still lingered in the mist, a thick black finger dipping into the sea. "See there, at the point."

Jarred followed the boy's arm. Where the shadow of the cliffs met the gray churn of the sea, a huge white rock rose out of the water like a wave frozen on the point of breaking.

Jarred squinted into the mist. "Is that chalk?"

"Some think it is, until they gets close by. Can you not guess it, sir?"

Jarred was in no mood to play games with a ferry boy. He frowned. "It is not ice; is it sand?"

"Nay, sir. It's birds!"

Jarred looked again. The great white rock seemed to shimmer at the edges, as if pieces were flaking off to be

carried away by the wind towards the dark expanse of the headland beyond. Now he could make it out: the rock was covered by a living mass of birds. An immense colony the like of which he had never seen. There must be tens of thousands, he thought. He imagined he could hear their cries now echoing through the mist: gulls, white cormorants, gray-tailed waders, rockwhite, perhaps some Eastern varieties he did not know.

"White Bird Rock," the boy said, "the rock itself is white with their leavings!" he chuckled.

A broad shape like an upturned dish began to emerge from the mist. "There it is," said the boy flatly, "Karad: ugliest place this side of the sun."

As they approached, the upturned dish became a jagged crown of red rocks that rose steeply from a broad band of salt marsh around the island's base. The marshland was hemmed in on the seaward side by a jumble of rocks that held back the dunes and sea grass along the shore.

The boy turned the boat toward a narrow opening to a cove where the harbor lay. "The Eyeless Palace!" he said, pointing further up the shore. Jarred followed his arm: a massive gray wall rose from the edge of the flats where they joined the red cliffs. The palace narrowed in a series of tiers until a single tower surpassed the rim of the cliffs and thrust into the sky, ending in an unostentatious turret a hundred feet above. The castle was unmarked by windows or decoration.

"But see there," said the boy, pointing in the other direction. About a mile further south were the miners' camps, wooden huts in neat rows stretching from the edge of the marshland down to the shore.

At the mouth of the cove, two large pillars of stone rose out of the sea. A scaffold atop one of them told Jarred that they were hand-made, perhaps construction for a new harbor wall. No, he noticed four or five more of the great pillars rising from the sea offshore from the miners' camp.

The port was very orderly and neat, unlike most sea towns Jarred had visited. Above the harbor wall, a paved road led off to north and south, encircling the island. Along this, groups of miners trudged towards one of the larger harbor buildings from which raucous music and laughter spilled.

"Miner's Rest," said the boy as he tied the boat to a bollard, "the only place of pleasure for a miner's year on this rock."

A small welcoming party waited for Jarred at the harbor master's office. One of the roundest people Jarred had ever seen stood smiling warmly between two dour mercenaries.

"Elith Karad," the round person announced in a clear and pleasant voice. Her entire appearance spoke of wealth. The expansive gown was of deep blue velvet encrusted with sapphires that made her shape sparkle even in the fading evening light. Her smile shone as brightly as the loops of

gold around her neck. Her eyes were like two tiny emeralds set in a smooth round boulder, almost hidden by the folds of bronze flesh.

The ferry boy departed quickly for the Miner's Rest, agreeing to meet Jarred at noon the next day for the return journey. Elith directed Jarred to a simple open coach pulled by eight oxen. The mercenaries mounted the lead beasts and began up the road towards the Eyeless Palace.

Elith and Jarred exchanged pleasant formalities in the short time it took to reach the gate. She was niece of the Grand Karad, and was to be Jarred's host during his stay. The Grand Karad was very busy and would meet him in the morning to discuss business.

The dull exterior of the palace concealed the kind of accommodations Jarred relished. He was shown to a spacious room fitted with thick carpets from the Desert country; colorful tapestries depicting Karadin feasts and merriment hung from the walls. He flopped down on the huge Karadin-sized bed.

Jarred felt his joints begin to loosen as he sprawled among the plump cushions. He looked up at the ceiling where an intricate plasterwork of Karadin cherubs feasted on mountains of food and danced among piles of gold.

The room was lit with ornate oil lamps, but there were no windows. He itched to discover what wildlife inhabited this place. On the short journey from the harbor he had noticed weedwaifs and sandfinches hopping daintily in and out of the marsh grass, but there were no gulls, none of the large waders or diggers or scavengers he so often found along the shore. The air had seemed stale without the clamor of gulls, the raspy cries of rooks and crows; not even the tiny birds in the marsh were singing.

Jarred had barely washed away the stink of the boat when Elith arrived with two gaunt servants and led him away to supper.

The menu was prodigious: huge platters of fruit and smoked meat, several kinds of bread, jugs of sweet wine. There was a saying in the courts of the East: the only reason a Karadin leaves a feast is to go to another one!

"An interesting tapestry," said Jarred with practiced tact, nodding in the direction of a garish scene on the far wall. It seemed to depict the various uses of the Blue Dust: a beefy herder cast a handful of dust into a barrel, while another dipped his sheep; a vintner cast a pinch of dust into a fire to ward off beetles from her grapes; a farmer spread a cart-load of dust over the springtime earth, and next to that, the same farmer harvested the bounteous result.

"The artist Qiosh," said Elith with pride. Jarred was impressed. Qiosh was perhaps the greatest painter who had ever lived in the East, her work had decorated the halls of the wealthy for decades, yet Jarred had never seen a tapestry under that great name.

"I didn't know she..."

"From her design," interrupted Elith. "A dozen weavers and sewers were commissioned to turn the scenes into

fabric. If you look closely, you will see that it is made from feathers: colored feathers woven into the silk. Thousands of feathers of various sizes and sorts!"

Jarred looked more closely. Where could they have found so many birds of such variety? And how had they persuaded them to donate their plumage in such great quantities? Birds who owned the open places were subject to no rule without force; only a Caller might make them do his bidding, and then only for a short time.

"Qiosh lived out her last years in this palace in the time of my grandfather," said Elith, beaming.

Jarred was barely paying attention, still wondering about the feathers. What price would a Caller demand for such a task? Would he even agree to such a thing? Jarred had never refused a task for the right price. Not since he first turned his talents to profit; but that memory he would rather have left behind on the Winter Lake. Yet it ached in him like an old wound.

A boy of ten, he had entertained his friends by calling a doe, mesmerizing it with his sweet young voice, trapping it in a thicket while his brother crept up behind and slit its throat as Jarred held it with his whispers. His friends had given him five coppers for that trick.

"Yes, only the best for the Karadin," Elith was saying. "That is why you are here, I believe." She smiled pleasantly at him before plunging in to her third round of bread and meat.

Elith's words helped Jarred fend off the old memories that had come to call. Certainly there had been youthful excesses, mistakes, but now he was known as the greatest of the Callers, a Caller to kings and queens, his services sought by the mighty and wealthy. He picked up a large pear and began to cut into it, forgetting about the tapestry and the feathers and the deer.

After the meal Elith led Jarred along a broad carpeted hallway, through a heavy oak door, and into a dim, cavernous room. "Perhaps you would like to spend some time in here before retiring?" she suggested, as a servant lit a large oil lamp in the center of the room. "The Grand Karad maintains a library for the benefit of guests and employees." The glow from the lamp began to reveal stacks of books rising out of the gloom. "Architects and artists require such things I understand."

Jarred stepped into the center of the room, surrounded by shadows.

"You might enjoy the Grand Karad's collection." Elith pointed towards a dark corner where the servant was lighting another lamp, "since your specialty is birds."

Jarred walked to the corner where a large glass case squatted between shelves of dusty books. In the center of the case a whitethorn tree, bare of leaves, spread its stout branches to nudge the panes of glass. On each branch a dozen or more birds of various types perched in a life's frozen moment. Their jeweled eyes strained to sparkle in the gloom of the library.

Jarred felt a chill tickle over his shoulder blades and down his spine; the birds seemed to stare at him accusingly.

Here was a red-beaked guillemot; once, he'd called a hundred of these down on a plague of rock worms in the city of Sea Beast, receiving thirty gold for saving the harbor wall. Here was a Dappled Owl, largest of the night creatures and not seen for years in the East, not since he'd called a family of them to flap comically around the birthday party of a Syndicate elder's daughter at Mountain Top. And here was a Piping Chaffinch, sweetest of songsters; he'd persuaded a chorus of these to attend the appointment of Baron Aral at Desert's Edge.

Jarred marveled at the collection. "I do not recognize all of them, except perhaps from books. Were they all birds from the island?" he asked Elith.

"Yes, most once lived here. Though some not for a hundred years or more, and even then only in small numbers. Many were great delicacies at the Karad table. All gone now. Only the small marsh birds remain. And they are of no use."

Elith said goodnight, leaving Jarred alone in the library with the birds staring at him from their glass tomb: the squat dump fisher, renowned for its prolific breeding, the crab catcher, known for its tenacity, and its prolific waste! The common blue-breasted gull, friend and foe of fishermen. And near the foot of the tree in wing-spread splendor, there sat a myth.

The gold-winged flying leopard. Every child knew the old hearth tales: the flying leopard's blood was fabled to be as precious as gold; just a drop on barren soil would cause a tree to sprout there. Jarred had not believed in this creature until now.

The Grand Karad was the largest man Jarred had ever seen. His flowing robes seemed designed to emphasize his bulk. But like all the Karadin, he was pleasant-featured and bright-eyed, with a permanent smile and a rich, laughing voice.

They ate breakfast in one of the state dining rooms. The Grand Karad polished off two plates of oysters and a game pie before Jarred had finished his small bowl of fruit.

Between mouthfuls, the Grand Karad regaled Jarred with the feats of his ancestors. He recounted how the best architects and builders had been employed to add a new tier to the palace every hundred years to accommodate the expanding Karadin clan. He reveled in the names of the great entertainers who had performed here. He chuckled over the tales of how royal contracts had been won and lost. He mused over the exotic, distant lands acquired but never seen by their Karadin owners.

After breakfast, the Grand Karad led Jarred on a tour, climbing slowly higher and higher in the palace.

"I notice that all your servants are off-islanders, your grace," observed Jarred.

"Indeed," said the Karad, "No one born on this island

has ever had the need to labor.”

Eventually they came to a plain door at the end of a long passageway. After climbing a short flight of dusty steps beyond, they reached another door that led out onto a turret and the open sky.

Jarred looked out over the parapet towards the sea far below. The water was calmer today, but still in a gloomy winter mood. Gray clouds gathered in the north, whipping the sea into a foamy boil near the horizon.

The harbor was already bustling: tiny specks moving to and fro in clumps and columns, a barge pulling out from the quay, a square-rigged trader approaching from the North loaded with timber.

Jarred followed a line of miners as they pushed carts up into the red cliffs that guarded the center of the island. He followed their direction and at last looked down into the middle of Karad.

Even the Great Desert was beautiful compared to this utter wasteland.

A smoky haze hung over the white heart of the island. The land inside the crown of cliffs was featureless, save for an immense pit where the center of the island had been scooped out over the centuries. The expanse of white itself was wearing thin in places: red rock showed through like open wounds in pale flesh.

“It is not an attractive sight,” said the Grand Karad with a wry smile.

Jarred shrugged. “It is a mine, after all, your grace.”

“Indeed,” said the Karad, brightening, “it is the greatest open mine ever known, the source of incredible wealth!”

“How long will it last, your grace?” asked Jarred, examining the places where the white gave way to red.

“That is what I wish to discuss with you.”

The Grand Karad ushered Jarred to the edge of the parapet on the seaward side and pointed out into the bay. “You see the stone columns at the edge of the shore?”

Jarred looked to where a flat boat carrying blocks of stone, wooden hoists, barrels of mortar, had moored next to one of the pillars. “Yes, your grace, I was wondering about them.”

“A cage,” the Grand Karad said simply, “I have the best builders in the known world working here. In five years there will be a structure over the island.” With a broad gesture he shaped a dome in the air. “Great columns rise and then arch landward, a network of timbers and cables in the sky, then a net of steel, and a net of rope to complete the covering.”

Jarred pictured the ugly little island with a helmet of stone and netting. “A cage? To what purpose?”

The Grand Karad held his gaze for a moment, then stared into the sky. “We wish the birds to return.”

Jarred gaped. The Karadin would have the largest bird cage ever built. A cage that could hold all the colonies on the Eastern Shore, and perhaps more.

And Jarred was to call them.

The Grand Karad seemed to know his thoughts. “You can call that many birds?”

Jarred pondered. “I don’t know...yes, certainly. Perhaps not all at once, but...”

Jarred’s head spun at the thought of holding them long enough to be imprisoned.

“I hear great reports of you from the Queen of the East. Did you not bring a mighty flock down for her amusement at the jubilee?” the Grand Karad asked.

“Yes, more than a thousand geese and swans.” Jarred remembered the event with pride. He had persuaded them to circle the turrets of the castle where the Queen stood reviewing the parade, until some had begun to drop with exhaustion. “But to hold them in one place...”

The flock he had called down on the locusts near the Great Desert had been his greatest work. It had exhausted him, his chanting and humming becoming weaker as he called them to the desert’s edge where none of them wanted to be: “Come and eat! Come and eat!” he had whispered on the breath of the wind. The hundred gold had barely seemed enough for his recuperation.

The Grand Karad shrugged. “You will not need to hold them for long, just call them, and we will close the net quickly.” He slapped his hands together as if springing a trap.

Jarred imagined the furious cry that would ensue once the Karadin closed the dome over the birds: talons raking the cage, a cloud of feathers, tiny bodies crashing against the mesh, falling back to the white desert below, painting the dust red with their blood like the rock.

Jarred shook his head.

“Is it the price you ponder?” asked the Karad, grinning.

“I’m sure you can offer me the right amount,” Jarred replied, quadrupling his usual fee in his head and adding half as much again.

“I know that Bird has never refused a Calling,” said the Grand Karad. Jarred flinched on hearing the name only his fellow Callers used.

The Grand Karad smiled. “Will ten thousand gold be sufficient?”

It was more than Jarred had earned in the entire ten years of his wandering.

“Let us not haggle, now,” said the Grand Karad, “If that is not enough, name your price!”

“That is more than enough, your grace.”

“Then it is agreed?” asked the Grand Karad excitedly. “In three springs we must begin to bring the birds. I will give you an advance of half the amount to secure your services, and of course you will stay in the safety of the palace until the time comes.”

“Three years?” exclaimed Jarred.

“If you will not take the contract, then it may take years to find one your equal. But I think you will take it. No artist has ever refused the Grand Karad, and you have never refused a Calling, is that not so?”

Jarred considered for a moment. "May I inquire," he said, still weighing the fortune in his mind, "why you wish to turn the island into a giant aviary?"

The Karad turned away. He looked out to sea where the clouds were drawing in and drew a long breath. "Do you know what the Blue Dust of Karad means to us?" he said softly.

Jarred shrugged. It meant incredible wealth.

The Grand Karad continued. "This island is the purest, richest source. No other can compare. Yet our stocks dwindle. In less than ten years it will be gone. And it takes centuries to replenish by natural means.

"Certainly we have our investments abroad, but my people care nothing for life outside this island. This has been our home for a thousand years. The source of our prosperity, and it will be so, even to the last generation. From the beginning, the coupling of birds of the free air and the red rock of Karad has been our source of life."

Jarred thought of the wonders he had seen in the library, but remained puzzled. "Can birds, even in such great numbers, give you that? A monopoly perhaps on rare sea pheasant eggs, or delicacies of the rock snipe?" He hesitated to mention the Flying Leopard.

"Such things are possible," said the Grand Karad vaguely, waving a hand in the air. He had lost his smile.

The Grand Karad pressed for an answer that Jarred could not give. "I beg your grace to allow me some time. This is a great undertaking and not without implications: what will the Queen say if all the birds vanish from her shores?"

The Karad waved the idea away: "The Queen will be compensated; I shall give her a selection of birds for the palace if she so worries over them."

"If I may, a month to think, to plan how it may be done. Then I will send word."

The Grand Karad thought for a moment, his expression stiffening. "Let it be so," he said finally, and pressed a pouch into Jarred's hand. "And a hundred gold to make the decision easier. But I know you will not refuse!"

Jarred had company on the journey back to the mainland: two miners returning in wealth after their year on "the Filthy Rock."

"Stinking place!" said one, a thin young man with a wispy beard.

"Good riddance," said his mate, spitting over the side of the boat in the direction of the island, now lost in the distant haze. She looked at Jarred across the deck and winked. "One of the seven hells; but the suffering is eased by the price!" She chuckled.

The miners' hair was graying to almost white, yet their pale faces were still young. "See the marks of the Karad miner?" said the ferry boy privately to Jarred. "The dust don't wash out after a time."

The grumbling of the miners turned to laughter as they speculated on how they should deploy their new wealth. Jarred whispered to the boy, "The Karad dust I have seen is always blue. I did not know it was white in its pure form."

The boy stifled a chuckle. "It's white in *any* form, even the rough stuff they dig from the mountain caves up North. The Karadin dye it blue, though most folk don't know."

"Yes, I suppose so. The smoke from a Karad fire is blue, the ashes white. I had never thought about it."

The boy began to laugh, "Caller, do you not know what Karad is?"

Jarred had given it no more thought than how gold or salt were made.

The boy continued. "See the birds?" He pointed to White Bird Rock, emerging now from the mist at the edge of the land. "Visit that rock in a hundred years, and you'll be knee-deep in Karad dust of the finest quality! You'll make a fortune!"

The miners caught his words and laughed. "The Queen should sell that rock to the old Karad. He's running out of the stuff!" joked the young man. His companion slapped him on the back and joined in: "Perhaps we could buy it from her and sell it to the old man for a tidy profit?" Their mirth rocked the boat.

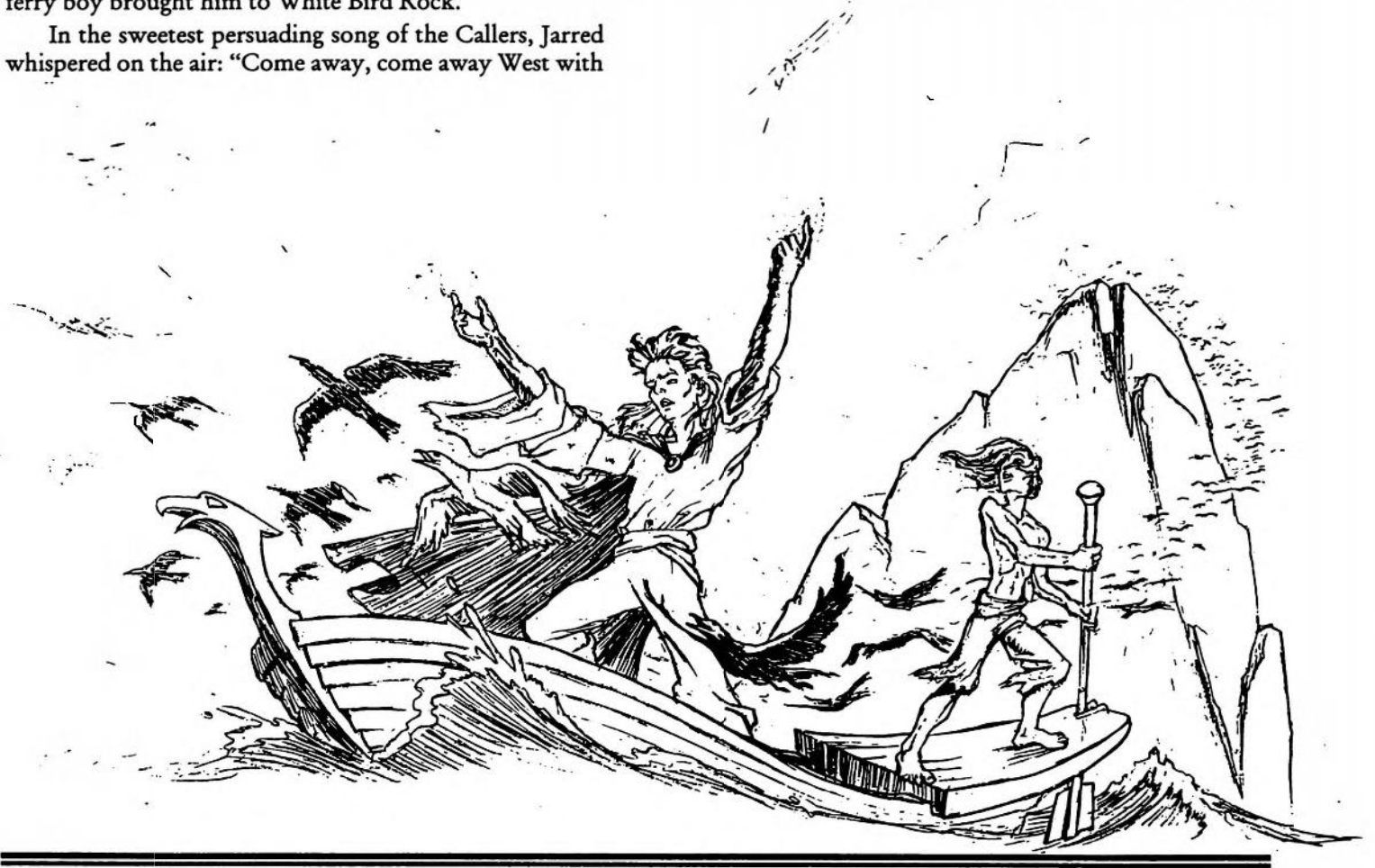
Jarred stared back at White Bird Rock with its tiny flecks that were feathered creatures circling free against the black cliffs beyond.



In the spring, Red the Caller slipped quietly into the Eastern Shore again, bypassing his usual noble hosts. The ferry boy brought him to White Bird Rock.

In the sweetest persuading song of the Callers, Jarred whispered on the air: "Come away, come away West with

At sunset, a cloud of white and gray and black rose from the shore and merged with the orange of the Western sky.



USED FURNITURE

Bill Embly

Grandfred Dubow and I were out on Hidden Lake, running a broad reach up North Cape Ridge toward the Army Corps dam in Cumberland. This was about a month before he died. Lashing the tiller to a cleat, he kicked his long legs up on the gunwale and leaned back against the transom to tell me a story. He told a good story, and typical of his best, they began in the here and now and ended up somewhere I'd never been before. "Mark and his Granddad were out for a day sail," he began, "when the old man clutched at his heart and fell dead in the bottom of the boat."

"Grandfred," I said, "what kind of story is this?"

"Now be still," he said. "Close your eyes and watch the sunlight playing on your eyelids. The old man was just that, old, and his time had come. The boy knew well enough what had happened. He put a cushion under the old man's face to keep it out of the bilge water, he brought the boat up into the wind, and he sat there listening to the

lap slap of the sea, trying to figure what he should do. It was a difficult situation, but he didn't panic. He began to sort through his thoughts as if picking at a tangled knot and pretty soon he located the bind. If I take Granddad back, he thought, they'll only lay him out in a satin lined box and plant him in the cold ground. Granddad, he thought, had always wanted to be buried at sea, and the sooner the better so he could be reunited with his dear Eleanor once again. How many times had he heard Granddad say, 'It's the bottomless deep for me, and no sad farewell¹.'"

I opened one eye, as he had me worried, but with a nod of his hand to reassure me, he went on, "Mark tied the anchor line around old Granddad's ankle and threw him overboard. There, that wasn't so bad, was it? Think of all the trouble he'd saved for everyone, not to mention, he'd just cheated the undertaker out of his fee. Granddad was

¹ *Crossing The Bar*, Alfred Lord Tennyson