

# **The Wild Ride: The Fantasy Quest and the Heroine's Journey**

by

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## Once Upon a Time

As a lonely child with a lively imagination I longed for reality to be other than it was. I wanted adventures, beauty and the understanding that I was special. I developed the habit of making up stories in which I was the heroine. Almost always these stories had exotic locations in the past or in some made up world. I grew up wanting to create other worlds to live in.

I often wonder whether my attachment to fantasy comes from the fact that, the first time I remember reading effortlessly on my own, I was reading an illustrated version of “Sleeping Beauty” (Perrault, 2010; Grimm, 2016). I was six, I think. It was in a large anthology of fairy stories, quite text heavy, and my mother had no time to help me through it. So I sat in our kitchen picking my way along until suddenly, as the princess climbed the tower stairs to meet the witch with the spindle, the words became clear, the sounds formed in my head and the meaning flowed.

Did this form my taste for fantasy or was the fact I was struggling through a book a bit above my reading level a sign I was already in love with the fantastic?

In this exegesis I will explore the ways in which this early love of fantasy has evolved into my present creation — the world of Askar and my protagonist Cassie Meredith. I will trace how my initial motivation, to have fun by taking my protagonist on wild ride into fantasy land, became an exploration of the heroine’s journey into a deeper understanding of herself and her place in the world.

I’m interested in the ways the heroine’s journey differs from the hero’s journey, that is, why writing a woman’s story as if it were a man’s will not do. As Maureen Murdock writes from a psychotherapist’s point of view (1990, p. 4): “These women have embraced the stereotypical male heroic journey and have attained academic, artistic or financial success; yet for many the question remains, ‘What is all of this for?’”

When it comes to writing fiction this is the question I want to investigate — what is all of this for?

## **Life's a Whole Long Journey (Williams, 1975)**

I believe the attraction of quest narratives lies in the notion that, throughout our lives, we are on a journey and each of us has a goal in mind. I think that, at least unconsciously, this is part of most people's belief systems, whether their goal is wealth, power, significance, love, belonging, or feeling as if they have been useful in some way. Therefore, the fantasy quest, where characters set out on a journey to find an object or achieve a goal, is a powerful metaphor for life, that is, a metaphor for this drive to achieve "something" by the end.

*Eight Jewels* began at least 35 years ago as a text computer game my brother and I developed. This was at the time of the first computer adventure games. They were stored on floppy disk and displayed black and white text only. An early example is *Zork* (Infocom, 1981) which was a direct inspiration for us. I based the story of our game on *Le Morte d'Arthur* (Malory, 1968) in which the ailing king and the wounded land can only be saved by finding the Holy Grail. We didn't get very far with our game, but the world I had invented stayed with me. Later it became part of a whole invented universe. There are at least four other novels (both written and unwritten) set in this universe.

About 15 years ago my husband made a short film of a scene from the game — the scene where the player (now my protagonist, Cassie) arrives in Askar and goes into the castle to meet the ailing king. Then, about five years ago, I wrote the first draft of a novel I had developed from the game. I read the novel, a chapter a month, to my writing group. Composing it in this way meant I had the motivation to finish it and also that each chapter had a hook at the end to keep the group interested.

The idea of expanding the game into a novel came about after I wrote my first Askar novel. That had a complicated plot with politics, wars, and numerous point of view characters. I decided a novel adapted from the game could be much simpler — I could write from the “player’s” point of view only and the plot would be very linear, that is, moving from one set piece of jewel finding to the next. I developed the novel with the idea of having Cassie do the kinds of things I would like to do if I was in a fantasy world. The very first draft was purely plot driven and had no character development or defined motivation for the antagonist. It also had a happy ending in which Cassie stayed with Luca.

When I first started turning the game into a novel, I made an automatic decision to use the first person point of view. After a few chapters I realised I had limited myself. I could not explain how Luca and Gina came to arrive in Kaweka; I could not explain about Gina’s marriage or her missing husband; and I could not get a clear view of Cassie’s interior struggles. This last was because I had characterised her as very guarded, both internally and externally, so, for example, she was unable to admit to herself her attraction to Luca. However, after four or five chapters I understood that the first person narration from the point of view of a modern character gave the narration a sense of irony and a different perspective to the classic quest narrative. For example, Cassie and her Askan companions are continually misunderstanding each other. The following is from about the middle of the story where Cassie has found her grandfather’s watch in her great grandfather’s tomb:

I wound it and put it to my ear. There was a satisfying ticking. No batteries to worry about with old technology. I strapped it to my wrist.

“What’s that?” Luca asked.

“A watch,” I replied.

“What’s it for?”

“To tell time.”

“How can you tell time?”

“I mean it tells you exactly what the time is, if you keep it wound. I think it’s around 11 o’clock.”

“What does that mean?”

“It’s not quite midday.”

“I could have told that without the watch.”

“But it gives you more exact timing.”  
“Why do you need that?”  
“Well, so you know what the time is.”  
“What for?” (Calder, 2019, p. 203)

An advantage of having the story told by a stranger to the world was that I could include a lot of exposition as Cassie seeks explanations of what’s going on around her.

When I had finished the first draft I understood I had written a narrative about a woman finding meaning and belonging. *Eight Jewels* is the story of Cassie’s quest for identity and a place in the world.

## Shape Shifting

I wrote a prologue to explain Gina’s marriage, the dawn attack, and her finding her way to Kaweka, but I cut that, and the idea of including a map. These are both features of classic quest fantasies and serve to situate the reader in the world before the story gets under way. However, as I started work on the second draft, I decided that my story was being told by Cassie in her native modern idiom and she wouldn’t bother with these devices. Also, as I said above, Cassie is a stranger to Askar, so a lot of the exposition performed by a prologue and a map could be easily presented by her asking questions and having them answered (or, sometimes, not). I also deleted the chapter titles, chopped the chapters into smaller units and changed the title from *The Eight-Jeweled Sword* to *Eight Jewels* because I thought that seemed more like a modern novel title.

The main thing I changed in the second draft was the ending. The idea for the revision first came about when my writing group declared they didn’t believe in Luca and Cassie’s relationship. I had been aware, as I was writing the first draft, that I was forcing them together. The issues they had — Luca’s seeming continued attachment to Melusina, especially through their son; Cassie’s modern understandings about relationships and how the

world works; Luca's lack of education; Cassie's expectations of life that would not be met in Askar, for example, in relation to her health and that of any children she might have; and the fact that they only knew each other through crisis and not through the workings of day to day life — all meant that their relationship was not on very firm foundations. In my mind I was writing about a real woman in fantasy land, and a real woman would have these concerns.

During the first draft I had avoided considering why Meredith (Cassie's grandfather) had suddenly decided to go home, leaving his powerful magic scattered around the realm in various jewels guarded by odd people. In the second draft I knew I had to address this issue: figure out why he was so desperate that he made some faulty decisions. I realised he had to go home because either our world or Askar was in danger (maybe both). Travelling between worlds had opened a hole through which anything could travel and the modern world was leaking its own brand of evil into Askar. And, having reached that conclusion, I reluctantly realised that Cassie was going to have no happy ever after with Luca.

One of the tropes of quest fantasy is that the hero usually goes home (Vogler, 2007, p. 187). So I broke Cassie's heart. But I also gave her a token of the change she has undergone in Askar: Luca's child. She has learned to love. She has learned to know what it is to belong, to have a family, a purpose, and a goal, all of which she lacked before. She has learned to value her grandfather's house that she had just wanted to sell. The legacy of the house includes Askar and the child. The house becomes a home for her and her child. She now has a stake in the future so she must organise her life and stop opting out of it.

Giving her a child also performed the important role of reassuring the reader that this has not just been some sort of dream. Some classic fantasy relegates the fantasy land to a dream. But Tolkien says:

Next ... I would also exclude, or rule out of order, any story that uses the machinery of Dream ... to explain the apparent occurrence of its marvels. At the least, even if the reported dream was in other respects in itself a fairy-story, I would condemn the whole as gravely defective: like a good picture in a disfiguring frame. ... if a waking

writer tells you that his tale is only a thing imagined in his sleep, he cheats deliberately the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder. ... It is at any rate essential to a genuine fairy-story, as distinct from the employment of this form for lesser or debased purposes, that it should be presented as “true”. ... since the fairy-story deals with “marvels”, it cannot tolerate any frame or machinery suggesting that the whole story in which they occur is a figment or illusion. (Tolkien, 2008, p. 326)

I agree. Deciding that it didn't really happen most often makes me feel as if there's no point in what has gone before and I wasted my time reading it. Despite such classics as *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 2010) and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, 2007) employing this trope, I feel strongly that what happens in fantasy land has to have actually happened.

Bennett and Royle (2009, p. 35) discuss different types of the “uncanny” that can occur in literature, including motifs such as the doppelganger, déjà vu, and anthropomorphism. Their broad definition of the uncanny is “something unfamiliar that appears in the heart of the familiar”. So, two Askans invading Cassie's inherited house to take her to fantasy land is an occurrence of the uncanny. But Bennett and Royle's definition can encompass any number of realistic explanations. In my opinion, if the “uncanny” or “fantastic” aspects turn out to have realistic explanations, the story is no longer fantasy but either science fiction or psychological thriller. For example, *Doctor Who* (Newman/Lambert, 1963) always explains “spooky” events in scientific terms (albeit often wacky science fictional scientific terms), and *The Turn of the Screw* (James, 2018) leaves the supernatural events ambiguous so you could be reading a story about the psychological pathology of the governess. A book I read recently that has gone on to my favourites list is *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce, 2014). This was almost spoiled for me by ambiguity over the relationship between the old ladies' dreams and her memories of Tom's visits to the garden, that is, are they just her dreams or did they really happen when she was a child? In this instance the ambiguity, for me, comes down just on the right side of the equation.

It is my belief that, if you're sure you're writing fantasy, in the world of the story the fantastic should be real.

## **The Heroine's Journey (Murdock, 1990)**

Cassie is a woman who tries to be clear-eyed and unsentimental. I sought to write her as a real woman with real worries about how she is going to manage in fantasy land. She pretends she doesn't need people, but really she does. She tries to be independent and fierce, but she is really looking for connection. At the beginning she is unaware of her neediness.

Cassie is not a kick arse woman warrior. She is tempted to keep the red silk gown she finds in the Sand Castle and treasures a tube of lipstick. These things signify her attachment to her femininity, while she is grappling with the less traditional role of warrior hero. Cassie's "hero" role is not easily worn. She feels embarrassed when Gina catches her with the lipstick because she is uncertain of her heroine status (Calder, 2019, p. 178).

But then she learns about bravery, so that, by the end, even with her confessed physical weaknesses (she suffers from seasickness, can't ride horses, and has little upper body strength — I did make her a strong swimmer, though), she can step up to the job:

"I will have to go on alone," I said before I even knew I was going to.

"What do you mean?" It was Melusina, sharp and suspicious.

"I want to go to Syrestia and stay with Luca until he is well. And then I want to go back to Askar and start again. And take him and Gina with me, as I was meant to. But I can't. Gina is gone and I haven't got time to wait for Luca. I have to go now. I can't even go to Syrestia to say goodbye to him."

They didn't try to dissuade me. Luca would have. I resented that. They didn't point out to me that I would be alone in the wilderness with nothing but a bag of magic stones. That, apart from the magic that I didn't really understand, I was defenceless and I had no idea how to find Satyana. I knew all these things. They knew I did; they didn't say anything.

So the next morning they set sail, leaving me alone on the beach in the middle of a tropical jungle in another universe with no way home. (Calder, 2019, p. 269)

In the second draft I made an effort to cast minor characters with no regard to regular gender stereotypes. So my fisherman is a woman and my senior healer is a man. The only decent mother (Melusina) is also a successful business woman. I had unthinkingly cast characters in their gender roles in the first draft, for example, I had Brin succeeding to the throne ahead of his mother.<sup>1</sup> In the second draft I understood that there was no reason why Melusina (Brin's mother and the younger sister of the recently deceased king) shouldn't become queen in her own right. The tribe at Kayuga always has a headwoman (Calder, 2019, p. 249). They are the keepers of the tribal traditions of Askar and it is from this that the egalitarian approach to gender roles comes. However, the matriarchy has become diluted. Urkan, the neighbouring southern kingdom, has a slightly more patriarchal world view and, as Askar becomes more worldly ("civilised"), it takes on some characteristics of its neighbour. For example, the current trouble has been triggered by Satyana being overlooked in the succession in favour of her younger brother. It is not spelled out why this has happened, but I understand that her dabbling in sorcery was not considered suitable for a queen.

## **The Tough Guide to Fantasyland (Wynne Jones, 2006)**

When writing genre fiction it is important, I think, for the writer to understand the difference between trope and cliché.

Tropes are the signifiers of a genre that can be used thoughtfully to effect, or twisted, or even overturned. So, for example, a quest fantasy always involves a setting that is not quite real (either a fantasy world or this world slightly twisted) and a protagonist or group of protagonists on a journey looking for something or to achieve something. Twists of these tropes would be to have the protagonist(s) discover the thing is not worth finding, or a major

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<sup>1</sup> As Henry VII (1443–1509) succeeded ahead of his mother, Margaret Beaufort, even though it was through her that he was able to claim the English throne.

ally is an enemy, or the world is not as they thought it was. Each of these twists happens in *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999) and Saruman is an ally turned enemy in *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 2007).

However, my intention in writing *Eight Jewels* was to tell a relatively straightforward fantasy quest story, but make it as realistic as possible so my readers could imagine living it. Therefore I have only tweaked the tropes of quest fantasy, for example, my protagonist is not a young woman, she doesn't fall for a young hero, she is neither a kick arse warrior woman nor a wilting damsel in distress. But, nevertheless, there is a quest which is achieved and, after a great deal of personal sacrifice, the realm is saved — although we can only infer this from the text; it is not spelt out.

I have written *Eight Jewels* as realistically and straightforwardly as possible because I like to imagine living in the story. For example, one thing that always bothered me as a child was how people lived in these exotic environments. I used to watch *Lost in Space* (Irwin Allen, 1965) and *Thunderbirds* (AP Films, 1964) on television and wonder about what they ate, where they slept and how they went to the toilet. In *Eight Jewels* I have tried to answer these questions, and added ones about being a woman in a rugged ancient environment — how does Cassie deal with her period, keeping clean and birth control?<sup>2</sup>

Diana Wynne Jones considers many of the clichés of fantasy in her book, *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (2006), and I have tried to avoid the more thoughtless ones (for example, not considering how the questers eat, what they carry, how the people in the countryside live, etc). Some clichés are based on assumptions that are no longer acceptable. For example, there are the males who know best (Attebery, 2014, p. 77) and who will always

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<sup>2</sup> On the topic of contraception I consulted <http://mentalfloss.com/article/83685/9-forms-birth-control-used-in-ancient-world>; on the topic of ancient methods of dealing with menstruation I consulted <https://www.knixteen.com/blogs/the-rag/the-history-of-periods> The birth control method I chose was the least invasive and objectionable. Silphium was used by the Romans and is now extinct, so it is not known how or whether it worked.

protect or save the woman. In *Eight Jewels* Luca tries to be protective of Cassie. He does help her when she has to ride a horse. But she has to face most of her challenges alone. The classic quest protagonist often faces the ultimate challenge alone (Vogler, 2007, p 12). In *Eight Jewels* the only male character who carries out a rescue is Lord Flying Fire, the chief of the dragons, when he rescues Cassie from his “people”.

Then there is the warrior woman cliché. This is a woman who acts like a male hero; who is heroic in traditional male action figure terms. The clichéd warrior woman, because she is a really just a bloke with boobs, presents no challenge to men. She might be able to beat them in a fight, but she makes no demands on them. She is not complicated. Patrick Rothfuss (2011) presents a whole society of warrior women who eschew committed relationships so the men don’t need to worry about taking any responsibility for families, children, or even the feelings of their partners. There are no consequences for being involved with these women. In *Eight Jewels* Luca and Cassie’s relationship has consequences. When they are forced apart they feel the full weight of grief, and there is a child.

My character Gina mostly conforms to the warrior woman cliché. Gina is a classic warrior woman, except, I think, she is a little more nuanced. She is beset by self-doubts and the need to constantly prove herself “tough”. She is contemptuous of Cassie, who isn’t “tough” in her terms, but learns to respect her. She also has a weakness for worthless men.

When thinking of the warrior woman character I have been puzzling over the characterisation of Wonder Woman in the recent film of the same name (P. Jenkins, 2017). This movie presents an extremely powerful woman who is also vulnerable, warm and sympathetic. She is presented as a real woman who just happens to be a superhero. I find her more believable than many other female superheroes who seem to be mainly about kicking arse and being sexy. But it is a subtle thing, which I think I ascribe to the director being a

woman. In many ways Gina is an unevolved Wonder Woman. She hasn't yet learned that being warm and sympathetic doesn't negate her strength and "toughness".

I have tried to make most of my female characters multi-dimensional. Gloriana, the fierce Ghari chieftain, is both a very formidable warrior, and a wife and mother; Tuilia, the weirdly unnerving shaman of the Corb, is also a grandmother; even the scary-looking Mariana (shaved head and sharpened teeth) has a husband and children, and is seen dancing with them in evening celebrations. These are all women who achieve their power and status by having "real jobs" but who also fulfil the nurturing roles of wife and mother. On the other hand, Melusina, who is primarily seen as a mother to Brin and an ex-partner to Luca, is also a successful businesswoman and eventually becomes the queen of Askar. Perhaps my casting Sabra as a whore is gender stereotyped, but I needed someone suitable for Cassie to ask about contraception and I felt she would only get up the courage to ask someone she knew for sure would use it. My female guardian characters (the priestess, the witch and the Mist Maid) are more types than characters, although each of them also had a relationship with Meredith (Cassie's grandfather) and so each has an element of the human that makes her distrust and suspicion understandable, and, in the case of the witch, her villainy at least explainable.

Sometimes, in genre narratives, it is hard to tell why the villain is evil. That is, what is their motivation? The best villains all have reasons for their evil and, from their point of view, they're perfectly justified in their villainy. They are often also psychopaths, that is, they don't have any empathy for the people they perceive as in their way, so they have no problem using and/or eliminating them. So my villain, Satyana the witch, is motivated by being passed over in favour of her younger brother for the throne. She is also motivated by a desire for power. For this reason she sought to learn sorcery from Cassie's grandfather. Her lack of empathy has led to her cursing her husband when he got in the way of her journey to power, and

kidnapping and trying to control the Mist Maid's children. And she is bent on revenge against Cassie's grandfather who rejected her.

## **And They Lived Happily Ever After**

Above I have argued that the quest fantasy is a metaphor for the journey of life. This idea is the basis of Joseph Campbell's and others' work on the monomyth (Campbell, 2008). That is, the story of the hero's quest to quell the monsters and gain the prize which is prevalent in many mythologies around the world. Attebery points out the shortcomings of Campbell's thesis:

The problem with Campbell's monomyth as an analytical tool is that it always works because it simplifies every story to the point where nothing but the monomyth is left. It ignores the many mythic stories that do not have questing heroes, and it leaves out culturally defined values and symbols that make each tradition unique. (Attebery, 2014, p 107)

So, in fact, as a framework for cultural and psychological interpretation, the monomyth model is deeply flawed. And, although it is useful for considering the ways a quest fantasy is structured, it can lead to a gender biased rendering of the language and symbolism around the quest. The fundamental structure of the quest fantasy is that the protagonist (not "hero") embarks on a journey, during which they meet a mentor, threshold keepers, friends and allies, enemies and monsters, have a major showdown, and return triumphant. This pattern can be seen very clearly in the most dominant quest fantasies in the west in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for example, *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 2007), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997), and *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977).

In a quest fantasy these stages of the protagonist's journey can all literally happen. In other genres they become metaphoric as the protagonist embarks on a quest for love, identity, or the solution to another real world problem. An example is *Moonlight* (B. Jenkins, 2016), a

movie about the search for identity of a young gay black man. The young man has a mentor (the local drug dealer), a mother who is inadequate and a mother figure who provides refuge (the drug dealer's girlfriend), tests and trials (betrayal by his friend and lover, a stint in prison), and finally a measure of redemption through healed relationships, although not necessarily a happy ever after ending.

The best quest narratives are not just about achieving the original goal (for example, finding the eight jewels) but also about achieving wholeness for the world. This is the goal of the granddaddy of quest fantasies, the quest for the Holy Grail (Malory, 1968). In that Arthurian tale the ailing king can only be revived when the grail is returned. The point of the story is that the grail will revive the king and when he returns to health the whole realm will become peaceful and prosperous again. In my story Cassie doesn't manage to heal the king (a late inspiration in my second draft — I realised finding all the jewels had taken too long for the king to survive) and she hasn't succeeded in healing the land either, although she has killed the most immediate threat, the witch. It isn't until she goes home and seals up the evil of our world to keep Askar safe that she has finished her task.

In past ages writing by women about women typically revolved around them finding love and happiness. The Romance genre is still focused on this. It is easy to suggest that the greatest women novelists of the past (Austen, Brontë, Eliot, etc) were preoccupied with getting their heroines married off. However, careful consideration of their stories shows that they are much more concerned with the female protagonists finding their best mates and many of them are prepared to forego marriage completely rather than marry the wrong man. In these societies marriage was the preferred vocation for a woman, so the best thing she could do for herself was make sure she married the man who was right for her. Alternative vocations for a respectable middle class woman were employment as a governess or teacher. Working class women had the options of the factory or the street. None of these options

worked well for an older woman. Marriage was a particular preoccupation of Austen's. Her protagonists all marry for love, although they also all marry the "right" man, both for them and for society. In *Pride and Prejudice* (2008) Austen presents the two alternatives to marrying the right man. Lydia marries impetuously for love and Charlotte marries for expediency. In Austen's judgment they have both made mistakes.

Austen herself never married, but was able to live on the generosity of a wealthy brother. This was not possible for all single women. Austen's heroines are heroic — they take a stand to marry only if it is right for them. Fanny Price, the often maligned (because perceived as passive) heroine of *Mansfield Park* (Austen, 2011) risks her entire future by refusing to marry a man deemed a very good match for her because she does not like his character. She is proved right about him.

A more modern example of a woman's heroic journey is *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005). This is the story of Penelope, the extraordinarily long suffering wife of Odysseus, who was absent from her for 20 years while he fought the Trojan War and then journeyed home. *The Penelopiad* tells of Penelope's struggle to keep her city state together, especially to preserve it for her son. She is besieged by suitors who, she knows, want to take Ithaca from her and her son, and are a threat to her and her child's life. She tells them she cannot consider marriage until she has finished weaving a shroud for her father-in-law, and lengthens the process interminably by unravelling each day's work at night. While she can keep the suitors at bay she is safe. In classic monomyth terms there is no action (except when Odysseus returns and puts the suitors and his wife's maids to the sword) so there is apparently no heroic journey. But we can see that there is. Penelope is using all her wits, and all of the small power she has, to fight for herself, her son and her kingdom.

## **The Keys to the Kingdom**

When I had completed my first draft I discovered several recurring images, or motifs in the text (for example, fire and flame, light through windows). I have chosen to concentrate on motifs around doors, keys, barriers and clues, and images connected with language, understanding and interpretation. These can be seen as thematically linked as correct understanding of language/signs gives the key or solution to the problem. Cassie's grandfather has "left" her some languages so she can get around in the world. Her ability to communicate is an important part of her inheritance, a key to her discovering what she needs to discover.

But even though she can speak their language, she has some difficulties with the Askans, especially when it comes to negotiating her romantic relationship with Luca. For example, when he takes her to his ex-mistress's house she is angry and torn with jealousy and he has no idea why. Even beginning their physical relationship is difficult because he can't read her intentions. Here, very much outside her comfort zone, Cassie confronts Luca early in their relationship:

"I need a word with you," I whispered.

He looked into my eyes.

"I need to talk about what happened. About you kissing me."

He opened the door wide and gestured me in. We closed out the world.

"I don't understand," I said. I stood a distance from him. He didn't seem to be inviting any closer connection. It was very awkward. I wanted to run. "Do you want me or not?"

"I don't know what sort of woman you are."

"What does that mean?"

He looked very confused and a bit frightened.

"It means," he said. "I can't tell if you just want sex or if you are more serious minded. If I get it wrong we will both be hurt."

"Oh." I wasn't used to men thinking that far ahead under the circumstances.

"I have been wrong before and hurt many women."

He didn't seem the type.

"I don't know how to say this to you." He looked at his hands. "How do you feel toward me?" (Calder, 2019, p. 111)

Another motif is the house that Cassie has inherited, connected as it is to the fantasy world and the various fortresses/houses that Cassie stays/lives in there. This connects to

questions about where her home is. She is a rootless person with no fixed abode, significant relationships, job, or money until she inherits the house. At first her grandfather's house only represents to her an opportunity to make money. By the end she is settling into it and making it into a home for her and her child. While in Askar there are some indications that she is more connected to home than she thought. For example, she is connected to the sea in a way that reminds her of home. The following passage comes quite early in the quest when Cassie and her companions are still travelling towards the first major confrontation on the Sacred Isle:

As the sun came up I was sitting on the beach, wrapped in my coat, enjoying the scent of sea and salt that reminded me of home, but exhausted and cold and ready to be leaving this place. (Calder, 2019, p. 116)

So, while she would have said she had nothing to go home for, her soul is yearning to the place of her childhood and bringing up her child in her own house makes sense to her in the end.

## **The Wild Ride**

As a grown up I still find making up fantasy worlds fun. I like fanciful things and stories that have fantasy or mythic elements. I agree with Tolkien when he writes:

It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give a child or man [sic] that hears it, when the "turn" comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality. (Tolkien, 2008, p. 385)

*Eight Jewels* is firstly about the adventures of one woman in fantasy land. It is wild wish fulfilment. But, in line with my belief that the best fantasy actually explores the human soul in symbolic ways, my protagonist learns about love and belonging, and then about sacrifice. I have given her a boon in giving her a child of her love with Luca.

Cassie is me, really — but much younger, much more outspoken and much more cynical. She is a real woman. She gets angry and jealous. She has trouble being empathetic. She is physically weak, but brave when she has to be. And she learns the value of love and sacrifice. She has been on a wild ride, but, as all our lives can be, it has been both exciting and scary, and she has learned a lot.

In the end I wanted to take a real woman on an adventure. A woman who has periods that she has to cope with in an ancient desert. A woman who doesn't want to get pregnant in the middle of a dangerous quest. A woman who knows she's as good as a man, but doesn't want to be like a man. A woman who privately fears she's not good enough, but proves her own worth to herself.

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