



Well, Well, Well...

Book III of "A Wonderful Week for a Quest"

Michael D. Young

THE THIRD QUEST GOES DEEPER

Well, Well, Well...

Book Three by Michael D. Young



Peace is wonderful. Sir Roderick is miserable.

Six quiet months have left the Beandom rebuilt, Bellissimo celebrated, and Sir Roderick dangerously comfortable. With no one left to rescue and one proposal still unplanned, the restless knight decides that what his life truly needs is a villain.

THIS SAMPLE INCLUDES

Chapter 1 Sunrise

New to the quest? Book Three follows Oxen and Morons, with a fresh mystery, familiar heroes, argumentative magic mirrors, and footnotes that still refuse to behave.

TURN THE PAGE. THE MIRROR HAS OPINIONS.

Chapter 1: Sunrise

“Hey, magic mirror? How did I get here?”

The mirror stayed silent.

Sir Roderick had always dreamed of the good life. He had chased it for many years. But he never imagined when he caught it, that it would feel so much like a prison.

He looked down from his high vantage point in the turret of his regal palace. The whole rebuilt Beandom sprawled before him, glimmered like a finely cut jewel. This was home and that above all else made him grateful.

But as he stood and looked down, he saw something that dropped a wet blanket on that spark of gratitude.

A paunch. It was hardly the kind you would see here on a great glutton troll, (comment) but it was still there. For the first time in his life, he could no longer see the definition of his abs.

““Mirror, I’m not going to call you Alexa. It’s weird. You’re being awfully cheeky for something made of glass!” He cried at his magic mirror. “How did I get here?”

The mirror’s surface ripples, revealing a the image of a perturbed blonde woman’s face. “I don’t want you to call me Alexa. Alexa was your last mirror sprite. I’m Sirsi. And I don’t appreciate being yelled at this early in the morning.”

Sir Roderick doubled checked his silicons by glancing toward the window. “The sun has fully risen! I think Bell has been rubbing off on you.”

Sirsi rolled her eyes. “By rubbing off you mean that she actually remembers to clean me, then yes. She’s like my dame from another frame.”

Sir Roderick took a deep breath, steepling his fingers together. “All right, I’ll give you a fantastic cleaning if you’ll just answer my question. How did I get here?”

Sirsi cocked an eyebrow. “Biologically or philosophically?”

Balling his fists, he resisted the urge to chuck something at the mirror. Instead, he held out his hands. "Enough. You know how greasy my fingers are." He ran them through his hair a few times. "Suddenly, I have the urge to make them dance all over your surface."

Sirsi made a wrenching expression. "You wouldn't dare."

Sir Roderick spread his fingers on both hands, drawing them ever close to the mirror's pristine surface.

"All right, all right!" Sirsi cried. "One backstory, coming right up." She cleared her throat. "Some enchanted evening, your father saw a fair damsel across a crowded tavern..."

"Not that far back," he said, shuddering at the thought of going into that much detail. "Skip to the part right after that business with the giants. After the night that I told Bell I loved her for the first time."

"As you wish," she said with exaggerated deference. "We'll, there was lots of nauseating carousing and carrying in between the two of you. Should I skip that too?"

"Yes, I remember *that* well enough. After that."

"Well, everything changed when the king appointed Bell as the official envoy to the Giant Congregation and you as her official bodyguard. Now, you live like a spoiled prince and peace has broken out everywhere. With the giants as our allies, no one dares cause even a minor brouhaha."

"A what?" Sir Roderick asked. "Have you been hanging out with that wordsmith sprite again?"

"His name is MaW and yes, he gives me elocution lessons. I always wanted to be a dancer but now, my big mouth is all I have."

Another pixie's face appeared in the mirror, this one with a short cropped gray beard and half-moon glasses.

"Brouhaha," he stated. "A noisy and overexcited reaction or response to something. Would you like me to use it in a sentence?"

Sir Roderick glared back at the mirror. "I would like you to not interrupt my conversations. Bring back Sirsi."

MaW grinned. "Cheerio!"

Sirsi's face returned a moment later. "You were saying?"

Sirsi yawned. "Now I was enjoying a siesta. I'm sure MaW would enjoy defining that—"

"No, no. I got it from context. Continue."

"Well, then you've spent like six months being her shadow and going back a little too often for seconds at the Royal nacho bar. If you ask me, you're eating your feelings."

Sir Roderick laughed half-heartedly. "What would you know about my feelings? I just enjoy the company of nachos!"

Sirsi lifted one eyebrow and tilted forward. "In the middle of the night, three to four nights a week? Does Bell know about that?"

"Wally was there too!" he insisted. "With his crystal ball and his creepy talking spider. I thought 'twas a trick of mind when I first laid eyes on it." The knight deflated somewhat. "Don't tell Bell. She has so much on her mind now that's so important and celebrated. But like it or not, I rescue people in distress. When I look out of my window each morning, I see hordes of smiling, happy people! No one's in distress!"

Sirsi nodded sagely. "Ah, yes, I think we've now arrived on how you got here. Have you talked to Bell about all this? She could probably find you something else to do."

Sir Roderick hung his head. "Oh, I don't know. I don't want to bother her with my troubles. I'm afraid I'll bog her down now that she's so happy."

Sirsi barely held in a snort that quickly broke out into full-on laughter. "Oh, you think she's happy, do you? Wow, all this time on your hands and so little off it spent thinking. If you'd spend less time stuffing your face, you might see what's actually going on."

The knight narrowed his eyes to slits. He was not about to be lectured by a mirror sprite. "What do you know?" he demanded, raising his greasy fingers once again.

“Enough,” Sirsi replied. “The other sprites and I trade gossip sometimes. Word on the pane is that you she’s waiting for you to make your next move.”

Sir Roderick groaned. He wanted more than anything to make his next move. But he felt like a Gobs and Hobs player (Comment) who had gotten himself pinned into a corner while everyone else looked on and laughed.

“What do you mean ‘my next move’?”

Sirsi rolled her eyes. “Then let me put these in a language you understand—stuffy knightese: If this fondest the damsel to be pleasing in thy sight, thou shoulder procure a minute band of gold and adorn her finger therewith.”

Somehow, the courtly language cut through his brain fog. “You mean she’s waiting for me to propose? Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“Some days,” Sirsi said with a forced smile, “I wish I could reach out of this mirror and shake some sense into you. I’m just your assistant, not your wedding planner. I’m staying as far away from this one as possible. You, on the other hand, need to think about it as much as possible.”

Sir Roderick flung himself back onto his bed, staring at the ceiling. He had been so focused on his own struggles that he hadn’t seen the real dragon in the dungeon. He let his mind wander, putting all his mental strength into forming a plan.

A few minutes later, he leaped to his feet. “Sirsi, how’s this? I’m going to put on a shirt, run to her bedroom, throw open the drapes, and get down on one knee. The first thing she’ll see today is me professing my undying adoration and asking for her hand in holy matrimony.” He got down on one knee and held his hand out to demonstrate. “What about that? See, now I have formulated a plan.”

Sirsi’s face remained impassive. “Hey, MaW, define ‘egregious’.”

MaW jovial, studious face reappeared in the mirror. “Gladly. Egregious: outstandingly bad; shocking. Would you like me to use it in a sentence?”

Sirsi's face reappeared. "Allow me. If Sir Roderick carries out his egregious plan, Bellissimo will throw him off the balcony. How's that?"

MaW returned, shaking his head. "I can't say that I condone the violence, but yes, that is a proper use in context."

Slowly, Sir Roderick rose and returned to his thinking position on the bed. "You're right. This requires more than a few minutes' thought. And what was I thinking, dragging her out of bed? Such audacity would take a braver man than I." He returned to pondering, but no matter how hard he tried, "Plan E" (comment) kept returning to his mind.

Admitting defeat, he swung his feet over the side of the bed. "I cannot do this in my current state. I have heard the peasants speak of the proverbial rut or being removed from one's proverbial groove. But I never thought it would happen to me. I need something to help me feel like myself again."

He walked back out onto the balcony and stared down at the Beandom. There was no darkness anywhere, either literally or figuratively. He was sure this led to a contented, peaceful existence for many. But for him, it felt like a cage.

"I need a conflict," he said. "And for a conflict, I require a villain."

The problem was he didn't know any villains. ELM, whose initials now officially stood for Edward Louis Merriwether, still styled himself a 'dark lord,' but since his caper with the Uppercase Prophecy six months ago, he hadn't caused anything but minor mischief.

As much as he hated to admit it, he needed help. He returned to the mirror. "Magic mirror on the wall, who's the..."

"...not you, I'm sad to say," Sirsi said. "You've fallen to three on the list of the Beandom's most eligible knights."

Feeling a headache coming on, he rubbed his eyes with a thumb and forefinger. "That's not what I was going to ask. At least wait until I have finished my sentence. I was going to say, 'Who's the greatest villain of all?'"

Siri's face froze in place for several seconds. "I don't have enough information for that. The EBI doesn't allow me access to their records."

"The EBI?" Sir Roderick asked. "Who in the Beandom is that?"

"Try to keep up," Siri said with a wink. "The EBI is the Elven Bureau of Investigation, the premiere crime investigative group of the Beandom. They keep detailed records of all known villains and track their whereabouts. If you're looking for a villain, they would be the one to ask."

This was it. A glimmer of darkness in this sea of all-pervasive light and hope. He sucked in his gut and fastened on his armor. "Mirror, you're brilliant. Where do I find these investigative elves?"

"They have a floating complex on the Quantiflow River. They usually only work with other elves, but who knows? Your reputation might be enough to get them to help you."

"Yes," he said, strapping on his helmet and fastening his gauntlets, "That's the very place where I slew the Great McKracken. (Comment) Can you tell Bell where I've gone?"

"I'll talk to her sprite," Sirsi said, her eyes following his retreat. "Hey!"

Sir Roderick turned in the doorway. "What?"

"Aren't you forgetting something?"

The mechanisms of the knight's brain spun and ground for a few moments until his eyes fell upon the cleaning cloth. He snatched up the fuzzy cloth and rubbed it vigorously over the mirror's surface. The promised cleaning complete, he tossed the rag to the side and turned to go.

Sirsi cleared her throat.

"What? Can't you see I'm trying to make my heroic exit?"

"You missed a spot," she said, her eyes pointing toward the top-left corner of the frame.

Grumbling, he snatched up the cloth again and rubbed out the tiny speck he had neglected. He bowed low, his eyebrows raised. "Your majesty."

Before she could demand anything else, he tossed the cloth onto the top of the mirror and ran into the hallway.

THE SURFACE IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

Ready to go deeper?



Sir Roderick's search for a proper villain leads toward the Elven Bureau of Investigation, a dangerous mystery, and questions whose answers may be hiding far below the surface.

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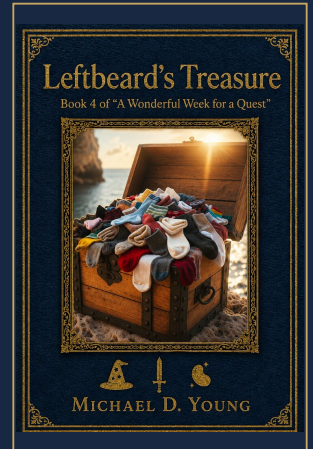
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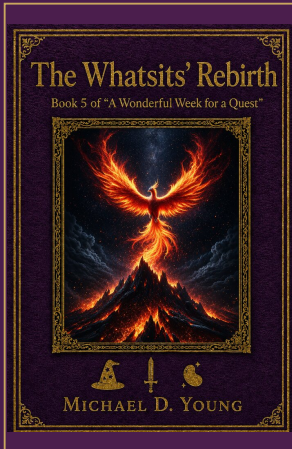
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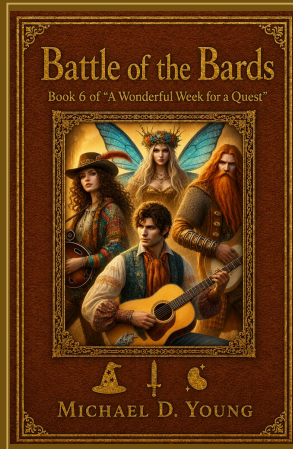
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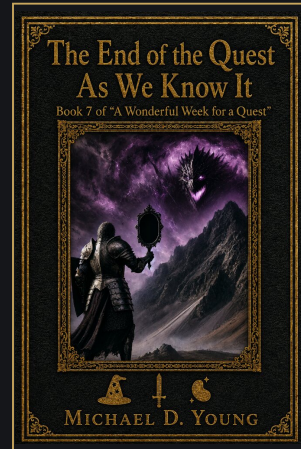
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