

## Gacerie and the Elf-Road

Once upon a time (as time is measured by the elves) three elf-children named Yuljia, Ardu, and Gacerie lived in a place called Hoio with their parents, Enjifer and Obert, the forest-keepers for the western realm of Hoio. Enjifer was a Harper in the Elven halls, and Obert, of the line of Galandrathral, was Chronicler of the Middle Realm. Of course, you know that Hoio is a very a beautiful land not too badly spoiled by humans, but still needing the watchful and wise care of elves even in these days.

And, you probably already know that Elves grow very slowly as compared to men, giving Yuljia, an elf-maid of barely 27 years, the appearance of a girl-child in her first decade. Her sister and brother, both 6 years younger, might be mistaken at first glance for human children of tender years, but who, as elf-children, already knew far more about woods and streams, root and tree, and skies and seas than human children ever learn. And they all knew, far better than most humans of any age, the great love that the One-Who-Is has for each Elf, each human, and for all his creation.

Each elf (and perhaps every human, too, although this is a story about elves) comes into this world with special talents and a purpose ordained by the One. Yuljia had the gift of keen sight, aided by a pair of crystal eyepieces fashioned in the halls of Galandrathral especially for her. It also appeared that she might be destined to be a Harper like her mother Enjifer. Ardu and Gacerie had been twin-born, (so *very* unusual for the elven-people) and had the soul-bond of birthmates. Gacerie had the gift of speech for all the animal kingdom, and was a friend to bird and bat, mouse and moose, bear and beaver. Ardu's gift was kinship with the trees of the forests: he knew their hearts and their quiet thoughts, he understood their life of patiently waiting for sun, rain, earth, and wind. But, this story is about Gacerie, and it came about because (even among elves, who are all more agile than any human) she was as nimble and quick as a sprite and just as curious. There was no tree she could not climb, no cliff she could not scale, and she could appear and disappear so quickly that you might suspect magic if you did not know that there is no such thing, really.

Being so fleet of foot and curious about everything can sometimes lead an elf-maiden into adventures, and so it was on the day Gacerie and Ardu decided to accompany Yuljia to her Harper's lesson. The three children ran steadily and swiftly through the early morning quiet, not stopping at all until they came to a place in the trail marked by a lively patch of greensward that seemed to cross their path and disappear into the shadows at either side of their way.

"Stop!" said Gacerie. "I hear something! Or, I feel something! I think I hear, or feel like I hear elves singing! Do you hear it Yuljia? Do you hear it Ardu?"

Yuljia looked at the bright greenery on the path very closely. There *was* something different about that patch, she could see that.

“Ardu! Come and listen to these trees!” called Gacerie, who had already darted into the woods beside the path.

Ardu followed Gacerie into the woods. “You must be quiet if the trees are to tell me anything, Sister,” he said. Ardu laid his head against a fine old oak tree, closed his eyes, and *listened*. After a few minutes he said, “This tree remembers elves walking here. Many elves, singing. They were happy when they walked here”.

“Come, come” Gacerie called, running through the forest. “It’s a path, it really is! I feel it in my feet!”

Yuljia wasn’t sure what Gacerie meant, but she could see that there was definitely something more *alive* about the path Gacerie seemed to have discovered, but if they spent much more time exploring, she would be late for her lesson and that would be very disrespectful of Master Harper. She told Gacerie and Ardu that they would have to explore this strange path some other time, and they reluctantly went on their way to the Master Harper’s home.

When they arrived, Yuljia had to immediately begin her recitation. Gacerie and Ardu sat quietly, trying to be respectful of the Master Harper, but all Gacerie could think about was the strange tingling in her feet when she was on that strange path.

When Yuljia was finished, the Master Harper said, “That was very well-played, Yuljia, but I sense that your mind was elsewhere. What has captured your thoughts?”

“Oh Master Harper”, Yuljia said. “I am very sorry! I kept thinking about the strange path Gacerie found on our journey this morning.”

“It is an Elf-road, Master Harper!” Gacerie interrupted. “I just know it is! It must go someplace very special! We want to find out where!”

“And where is this ‘Elf-road’ Gacerie?” Master Harper asked.

Gacerie thought for a minute. “It is an hour east, as we journey, on the common road, near to the gaming meadows, crossing our path both to the north and south”.

At her answer, the Master Harper was lost in thought for some minutes. She seemed to be remembering something from long, long ago, and then, cradling her harp she began to strum and sing softly.

*Elven-maid and Elven-lad, Whitest garments, flower-clad,  
Journey to the marriage grove, Singing, for their hearts are glad.*

“That’s the song I heard in my feet!” Gacerie said. “That’s the song! How did you know it?”

The Master Harper smiled. “It is a very old song, from very long ago”, she said. “It has many, many verses and I will have to think deeply to recall them all.” She added, “Many of us have thought that it was just a story”.

“It is said,” she began, “that in the very long-ago times, when there were very many more elves and not a thousandths part as many humans, elf-maids and lads did not have to journey to the Elvenhalls in the north to meet and find a life-partner. A maid and a lad might meet anywhere and at mid-summer’s moon they would journey in their best robes, with flowers in their hair and silver slippers on their feet, to the marriage grove, Ef-es-see, to stand before the One-Who-Is, and be joined for life however long it may be.”

Yulgia thought about how her own parents, Enjifer and Obert, had journeyed to the great Hall of Whitensperg, and spent four whole years before they met and married. She thought the old way sounded much simpler.

“It must be a *real* story,” Gacerie said. “We found the road! Do you think it still goes to the marriage grove? It couldn’t be very far away!”

“I cannot tell you that, small sister of Yuljia”, the Master Harper said. “Ef-es-see may have been just a story, some place for young elves to dream about”.

“Well, we’re going to find it! Gacerie said. “Come on, Yuljia, Ardu!”

The elf-children started home as fast as they could so they would have time to explore. When they came to the elf-road, they were not sure which way to go, but Gacerie had a ‘feeling’ that they should go to the south. There was nothing to follow except for the tingling in Gacerie’s feet, the whispers of the trees, and the *aliveness* the Yuljia saw compared to the forest around them. They walked so far that Yuljia was beginning to be concerned about getting home before the evening meal, when Gacerie shouted, “Its here! Its here!”

And so it was. The three children found themselves in a beautiful stately grove of ancient hemlock trees, towering hundreds of feet into the sky. Before them was a waterfall flowing down an ancient rock face into a deep pool. “We found Ef-es-see” Gacerie said in wonderment.

“The trees are still singing”, said Ardu. “They remember when this was the happiest of places.”

“We need to bring Mom and Dad here”, Yuljia said, and they children all ran home as quickly as they could to share their news.

The children were not disappointed. In a very few days, Gacerie, Yuljia, and Ardu were gladdened by taking Enjifer and Obert to see Ef-es-see, and as the children watched, it was as if they could see again an elf-maid and elf-lad of olden times, standing before the One-Who-Is, joined together for however long life may be.