

Sweet Sir Galahad

by Angie

And here's to the dawn of their days
- Joan Baez



Summer in Connecticut had always been time with her dad. Cathy loved the lake and just lazing around. There was no one for miles around. She didn't care that this was so - except that one summer, when she was 14 - almost 15.

She felt at one with the peaceful scenery, as she often did in their cottage. There was no pressure on her to smile, dress to the nines, meet friends, or attend social functions. Her father didn't pressure her on any of these, of course, but Cathy knew he was proud of her and wanted her with him on some occasions.

She loved her father, and since her mother died, she felt she should do what she could to please her father, to do what her mother might have done at her father's side. It wasn't a hardship. Both of them missed her mother intensely. The social whirl served to push that grief into the background.

Up here at the cottage, they felt her loss even more, for there were reminders everywhere - photos, craft projects on the wall, driftwood pieces artfully arranged on the fireplace mantelpiece. Even the kitchen seemed to be full of her - as it should. She had always cooked up a storm at the cottage.

At least here, the memories here were bittersweet, not painful. They had always been happy here, the three of them. Here, her ghost was benign, watchful but indulgent, as if she wanted her husband and daughter to enjoy their summer. And they did.

Cathy decided to borrow the canoe one sunny Friday, leaving her father to entertain a neighbour in their once-every-summer poker game. She put on a wide-brimmed sun hat and carefully applied the sun tan lotion to her legs and arms and neck. She sensibly wore a loose top and wrap-around skirt over her bathing suit. She packed a couple of towels into a beach bag and a light lunch and bottle of orangeade into the small cooler they used for picnics into the woods.

She pushed off and soon got into the rhythm of the paddling, moving at a speed that ate up the miles. She had no destination in mind, and didn't care when she returned. It was a freedom she was

seldom able to indulge and she gloried in it. There was nothing dangerous on this lake, and most of the motorboats didn't venture out until the weekend.

There was not much to see as she neared the far end of the lake, just the odd cottage set back from the shore, an Adirondack chair artfully placed here and there on the rough ground or stone outcrops in front of them, a scattering of wooden docks.

She cast her eyes at the curve and turned to follow it wanting to keep well away from shore and any rocks there might be. She had never been down this far before.

Suddenly, as she passed a stand of large pines that reached almost to the shoreline, a massive home came into view. It couldn't be a cottage, she thought, but a permanent home. The house was wood and glass, probably had an indoor swimming pool, and had its own man-made harbour, half encircled by a narrow breakwater. A second arm held a helipad.

Cathy's jaw dropped and she almost forgot to paddle. So engrossed was she that the noise that had been building over the past few minutes didn't register until it was almost upon her. She turned, finally, to see a motorboat whiz past, pulling a water skier behind it. The boat was a safe distance, but the skier had decided to make a wide arc and he was close - too close. The waves he kicked up rocked her canoe before she had a chance to point it into them properly. She held on desperately, but the canoe overturned dumping her and all her stuff into the water. She came up quickly and grabbed the canoe, then found that she could almost touch the lake bottom. She pushed the overturned canoe until she could reach bottom, then tried to right it. It was recalcitrant.

She looked around and realized the arm of the little harbour was close by now. She pushed the canoe over to the rocks and carefully beached it, still upside down. Then she swam back to snag the cooler, which floated, and her beach bag, which was mostly submerged, and hauled them onto the rocks of the mole as well.

The rocks were rough, but she found a large enough flat stone where she could empty the beach bag and spread out the wet towels, as well as her blouse and skirt. Then looking in the cooler, she realized it had not taken on water and abruptly decided to eat her lunch - if it was still edible. She had worked up an appetite.

There was no one around, and she was well hidden from the house. Whoever had swamped her was gone, she had no idea where. He must have disappeared into one of the properties because there was no sign of either he or the boat. The lake was quiet again.

Not the place she would have chosen for a picnic, but the day was pleasantly warm, even with the stiff breeze which had picked up. She wouldn't catch cold sitting in the sun like this and the wind would help her dry off. Mercifully, the water had not reached her sandwiches in their plastic bag.

She was just taking the last swig of her orangeade when a voice rang out from behind her. The wind blew the words away. She turned to see a young man standing precariously on the end of the breakwater, some height above her. She recognized his orange swim trunks and realized he was the one who had swamped her. She grew angry.

"Jerk!" she shouted at him, fully aware that he would be able to hear her quite clearly. She could have sworn he blushed to his trunks.

He scrambled gingerly down the rocks - he was barefoot - and finally found a foothold not far from her. Somewhat out of breath, he looked at her and blushed again.

"I'm sorry," he shouted at her. "It was a stupid thing to do"

"Yeah!" she shouted back.

"Wait there and I'll come and help you."

He scrambled back up the rocks and she packed up her garbage into the cooler and her wet garments into the beach bag.

A few minutes later, she heard the chug of a large boat, then it rounded the end of the mole and approached her, driven by an adult man. The youth was in the back and giving directions. They threw down an anchor and eased the rear end of the boat close to her position. The boy jumped down and gave her his hand to help her into the boat. Then he returned to the rock and picked up first her cooler and then her beach bag and put them in the boat. Then he expertly lifted the canoe into the water, grabbed its tow line and tied it to the rear of the boat. The boat carefully turned and carried them into the small harbour.

Cathy said nothing, and neither did the youth, although he glanced at her once or twice.

When they reached the dock, he jumped out and again offered his hand. She refused and jumped out on her own, then waited while he lifted out her cooler and bag and tied the canoe to the dock.

Cathy looked around and almost laughed. The harbour had a large cabin cruiser in residence and her canoe looked like a toy. Then she shrugged. She hadn't asked to be here.

"Please be my guest - or at least come over and get dried off," the youth addressed her tentatively.

She looked at him and realized he was probably only a little older than herself. He had long blonde hair and a good physique, but the sun was too bright behind him for her to see details. A pampered son of the ultra-rich, she thought dismissively.

But she knew her manners and was beginning to feel cold now that they were out of the sun.

"Thank you, that would be appreciated," she told him. She followed him up a stairway and along a covered path to the main house. He waited for her at the door to the patio and beckoned her in. The man who had driven the boat followed them.

"Welcome to Paradise Harbour," he said, when they were inside "Can I get you anything?"

"A dry towel would be nice," Cathy admitted. She could see him now. He had a pleasant face, marred slightly by a large circular birthmark that curved over his jaw and down the right side of his neck. He was blushing, she realized, but forgot all that when she met his eyes, which were an amazing shade of turquoise.

The man nodded and left.

"Thanks John," the boy called after him. John waved a hand and disappeared into the depths of the house.

"I'm Glad," the youth told her.

Cathy wondered what he was glad about, and must have looked puzzled, although she said nothing.

"That's my name," he explained, blushing even deeper. "Short for Galahad."

Cathy looked at him and quickly found her poise, although she wanted to giggle.

"I'm Catherine," she said at last, not quite sure why she used her full name. It just sounded more adult, she decided.

"Pleased to meet you, Catherine. Please come and sit down. You must be cold. John will find you something to put on."

Cathy looked around at the furniture and could not bring herself to sit on any of it in a wet bathing suit.

"Um, I shouldn't," she said at last. "I'm soaked."

She was spared any further discussion by the return of John with an armload of clothing and towels.

"Come with me," John said and she followed him into the house, where he stopped and pointed to a door. "That's our main powder room. Please change and take a shower if you wish."

Cathy thanked him and entered the room, closing the door behind her. The light was on immediately and she gazed around her in awe. The walls were pink marble and the floor tiled in pink and black marble. She wandered through another door and was in a shower room larger than her bedroom.

Putting the clothing onto a nearby counter, she stripped quickly and went into the shower stall and closed the door. The warm water revived her and she made use of the shampoo to wash her hair. The soap was pleasantly herbal. She emerged feeling like a new woman.

Drying off on the very soft and very large towel, Cathy sighed. She was not unused to luxury, but this was a level above those rich families she knew.

Who were they? she wondered. She had never heard of anyone called Galahad. She almost snickered, but got herself under control. Perhaps his mother had been a King Arthur romantic. Lord knows there had been a rash of novels on that subject lately. She had read them with interest, but soon discovered that the poverty of real history meant that they had little new to add. So she had moved on to other bestsellers.

She was dry and wondered if she should just put on her bathing suit again. The thought of wearing that damp, cold thing made her cringe, so she looked at the pile of clothes she had been handed and found that John had guessed her size fairly accurately and found her a jumpsuit with a front zipper. There was also a pack with three pairs of paper underwear. Goodness, did they keep such things as underwear here, in all sizes, just in case? She had heard about paper underwear, but had never seen any. She extracted a pair from the clear package and felt it. It was soft, so she shrugged and put it on. Well, better than going nude. She found a small tank top as well and was grateful for once that she was small. Maybe Galahad had a younger sister.

Feeling much better and at least properly dressed, she rolled up her wet suit into a towel and left the powder room. She retraced her steps to the patio and found Galahad. She must remember to call him Glad as he seemed to wish. He was waiting for her with a tall glass of something in front of him. Another waited for her and he rose as she approached and gave her a smile.

“You look warmer now,” he said. “Please join me.”

She sat down across from him and they were soon chatting about their summer activities. His were much more interesting, so Cathy simply said she was with her father, on a brief holiday from New York. They’d be going back around Wednesday the following week. Her father had a case he had to see to. Glad looked a little saddened by that last, and Cathy invited him to visit them. She knew her father wouldn’t mind. He liked to see her with people from their higher social sets. Her father was a successful corporate lawyer and might even know Glad’s family, whom, it seemed, were in clothing or something. He seemed a little reluctant to go into details.

But their talk soon gravitated to other topics, and both seemed surprised to find they enjoyed so many similar interests. They talked for what seemed like hours.

Cathy looked outside and realized it was probably time she got going, before her father began to worry about her. She said as much to Glad and he nodded.

“I’ll take you to the dock. Do you want me to have John take you back?”

“Oh no, there’s still plenty of daylight left. I’ll paddle the canoe - if you don’t mind me borrowing these clothes until I see you again.”

“Of course you can,” Glad laughed. “Those are some of what we have around here from guests, who always seem to forget something when they leave.”

Cathy smiled. “I thought perhaps you have a sister.”

“No, just the odd cousin. I’m an only child.”

“So am I,” Cathy admitted. She got up then and he led her out, snagging her beach bag on the way.

“John dried your towels for you,” he explained, “but he couldn’t do much about the bag, so he put them in a plastic bag inside it.”

Cathy put the bag over her shoulder and thanked him.

"Can you come to my place on Monday, for lunch - say around 11 am?" she asked him. She definitely wanted to see him again.

"Sure," Glad replied.

They walked back along the walkway and down the stairs to the dock where her canoe was tied up. He pulled it along to a handy set of stone stairs and she clambered into her canoe while he held the rope. He handed her the cooler and her bag, then threw her the rope. She thanked him and smiled.

"We're over on the south side of the lake," she told him and gave him more precise directions.

"Wait!" Glad shouted. "Almost forgot. Will you be around tomorrow? Perhaps we can go to the Concord fair. I can pick you up around 10 am, and we can stay there for lunch ... my treat," he offered.

"That sounds like fun," Cathy told him. "See you tomorrow then."

Glad waved at her and watched her leave. She turned once and he was still there. She raised her paddle and he waved again.

Cathy now made even better time than she had coming, being eager to get back and tell her father of her adventure. She pulled into their dock as the sun was setting and lugged her stuff up the path to the cabin. She unwrapped the wet bathing suit and hung it over the line on the back porch, with the borrowed towel.

Her father came out as she was pinning the stuff onto the line and greeted her.

"Have a good time?" he asked.

"Wonderful," she answered. "I had a little 'accident' and met a nice fellow by the name of Galahad Bloom.

"Bloom," her father repeated. "Would his father be Josiah?"

"Yes," Cathy replied. "So he did know Glad's family!"

"Hmm, well you certainly had a lucky accident," her father remarked.

Cathy waited for more, but her father did not elaborate. She knew better than to press him. Perhaps the family was one of his clients. Best she didn't know. He didn't seem displeased, and that was the most important thing.

"He invited me to go to the Concord fair with him tomorrow. It's just across the lake, isn't it?"

"Sure is. Sounds like fun for you," her father replied. "I had an invitation from Bob to visit his place, so we'll have another day of seeing who can win the most pennies. I'll let him know I'll be there, now that you have other plans. You and your friend enjoy yourselves. Summer is for the young."

"Oh, Daddy, you know I like to relax as well, but Glad seems nice and we did seem to hit it off well.

"Oh, I also invited him to come here for lunch on Monday," Cathy remembered. "He gave me some clothes to wear - which I have to wash and return to him. I thought you'd want to meet him and maybe we can have a barbecue or something.. Hope that's ok."

"Don't see why not," her father replied. "I can go into town and bring us anything you want, food-wise."

Cathy frowned. Suddenly she was at a loss. What did people that rich eat? Caviar, lobster? She didn't like either. She hadn't seen a barbecue at Glad's house, but maybe they had a cook to do that kind of thing. It was best in this hot weather. She suggested burgers, baked potatoes and corn on the cob. Nothing fancy, she decided.

"I think I can manage that," he said with a smile. He wasn't a bad cook, but liked to keep things simple. Barbecues were one of their joys here at the cabin. Not exactly the kind of thing one did on a penthouse patio in New York!

"Maybe we can make a nice punch or something," she suggested. "That one mom used to make would be nice. I've never had it anywhere else."

“Ah yes, that is a good one, and suitable for your age group,” her father agreed. It was a fizzy combination of ginger ale, cranberry cocktail and orange juice.

“And maybe we can find a nice dessert at the bakery.”

“Something like cream puffs, you mean?” her father chuckled.

“Yes, exactly,” Cathy laughed. Her love of that treat was notorious.

“Well, you’ve had a busy day. You must be tired.”

Cathy realized he was right and realized she must be looking the part.

“I am, but I have to change out of these clothes and wash and dry them.”

You just get changed. I’ll do the washing,” her father offered

“Thank you. I think I am tired,” she admitted. “That was a long canoe trip.”

She went into her bedroom changed into her pajamas, then took out the clothing to her father and kissed him good night.

She was tired, but it took her a while to get to sleep. Tomorrow, she told herself, you have to be rested for tomorrow! She eventually dropped off.

She woke early to the smell of bacon frying and after washing and dressing in something sensible for walking around a fairground, she emerged to find her father serving out a full breakfast. She loved breakfast at the cabin, although she seldom indulged at home. She seemed to be always hungry here.

“What time are you leaving?” her father asked.

“Glad said he’d pick me up at 10 am in his boat.”

“He drives a motorboat?”

“No, at least he didn’t when I saw him. I think John will drive it and probably either join us or wait until we’re ready to return.”

“Good. I don’t like the idea of a young man with all that power under him.”

“Why ever not, Daddy?”

“Because, my dear, you’re a beautiful young woman and young men like to show off - sometimes with unfortunate results.”

Cathy said nothing to this, knowing full well he was right. She remembered how one of her classmates had died after being thrown from his motorcycle over a bridge railing onto a lower road. He had been showing off his new machine to some friends. She had not known the boy well, but the shock of the empty seat had been a sobering reality in that classroom for some weeks.

The clock said 9:45 am when Cathy finally decided on what purse to use and what sun hat to wear with her jeans and checked cotton shirt. She could always roll up the sleeves if she got too hot.

She walked down to their dock with her father and they waited, chatting about the beauty of the day and the cloudless sky. He would be leaving shortly, but wanted to see her off.

She heard the boat before she saw it, the lake being clear of other water craft. As she suspected, John seemed to be the pilot. She could see Glad waving from the boat and waved back.

John pulled alongside their dock and she gave her father a hug and a kiss and ran down the dock. Glad helped her into the boat and all three waved to her father as they left.

“I hope your father doesn’t mind me taking you away,” Glad commented.

“Oh no, he’s going to visit a friend. They don’t really want me there and there’s nothing to do except play with the dog. They’ll play poker or something.”

The boat ride was fairly short and they found a place to moor the boat. John got out with them and said he wanted to visit a few of the booths for some good home-made cooking. They agreed to meet back

at the dock at 3 pm.

Five hours! Cathy nearly jumped for joy. Glad took her hand and they wandered around the fair, looking in all the tents, admiring the crafts and home baking. They talked about their friends, their school courses and their teachers. Although Glad went to a different school, it seemed that it wasn't very different. Same complaints about gym class, same glee club prima donnas. Only the names were different.

When noon rolled around, they sat down in a big tent and had a Coke and a sausage on a bun - after a soft ice cream cone.

"Delicious," Cathy told him, and he laughed.

"John doesn't like me to eat this kind of junk. He's worse than a mother hen. Says I should be eating real meat and fresh vegetables. But he knows I won't do that here. I'll have to pay penance tomorrow when he makes something healthy. That home baked stuff looked good though. I could handle that!"

"It sure did," Cathy agreed. "I'd better take some back for my father or he'll never forgive me."

"We can do that after we finish here," Glad said, taking another huge bite of his hot dog.

"Are you alone in your house?" Cathy asked. She had only seen John and was intensely curious.

"Yes. My father sometimes comes down on Sundays, but he hasn't called to say yet. If he does come, I'll have to stay home. He likes to see me there and we plan for a day of games, or take a drive. I miss him during the week, but I don't want to be in New York in this weather. It's so much cooler here, and I love the water."

"I love it here too," Cathy told him, finished her hot dog and drink. "I think I'm ready to see do some serious shopping," she told him. "Hope you don't mind."

"Of course not! I want to find something for John. He's like a big brother. We get along very well, and will always help me out of a scrape - like yesterday. I can't really buy him something when he's around. Now it'll be a surprise."

Cathy laughed. "What better friend could you have? Do you often harass canoeists?"

Glad looked shamefaced. "No, you're the first. I usually don't see anyone at all. However, I'm glad we "bumped" into each other."

"Me too," Cathy told him.

They rose and continued on their exploration of the fair. They watched the Ferris Wheel, and Cathy was tempted, but decided not to try it or any other ride on a full stomach. The one time she had, she had learned a lesson the hard way. Glad seemed to know this too and didn't even suggest it.

They explored the booths and Cathy found some hand-made chocolates and small lemon cakes that she knew her father would love. She also bought a jar of cherry jam and some home-made bread. The smell almost made her hungry again.

They sauntered happily around the fairground, watching children ride donkeys and admiring the shining coats of the livestock on display. Some had ribbons attached to their harness. For two people from New York, the sight of so many domestic animals was a treat. Even the fruity smell fit the place. Cathy breathed it in with a smile and Glad looked at her in surprise.

"It's a well-cared for farm smell," she told him. "My grandmother had a small hobby farm. I loved visiting the stables and feeding the horses."

Glad nodded but said nothing. She laughed and took his arm to the area where a small group of artisans had their booths.

Glad looked intently at some semi-precious and silver jewellery at a small booth with a woven grass umbrella, but seemed unable to make a choice.

Cathy was stunned at the workmanship. She bought a beautifully carved pin of a lion with a tiger eye

pearl as its eye. On impulse she also bought a fang-shaped, beautifully polished piece of turquoise on a leather thong. It was a beautiful colour and reminded her of Glad's eyes, although she didn't say so. The artist put both purchases into separate draw string bags and she tucked them into her purse. Glad finally decided on a silver tie-pin in the shape of a hawk in flight. "Because John watches over me, but never too closely," Glad explained.

He looked at his watch. Time had flown and it was now approaching 3 pm.

"I think we'd better get back to the boat," Glad told her, reluctantly.

"I've had a wonderful time," Cathy told him, squeezing his hand, which was again in hers.

They ran back to the dock to find John loading the boat with several carrier bags.

"Did you buy the place out?" he asked as they approached him.

"No, but it looks like you did," Glad commented with a chuckle.

"Well, your father will probably be down tomorrow, and I want him to enjoy some of this fine country fare."

He helped them into the boat and they made their way back to the Chandler dock. Cathy sighed and looked at Glad. He smiled at her.

"Don't forget you have a date at my place on Sunday," she said. "John is welcome to come too."

"Hmm, perhaps your father and I can play chess or something," John remarked.

"He'd like that," Cathy told him. I can play chess, but he says I don't have the right face for it. I give too much away."

"Just what a poker player might say," Glad laughed.

"I'm just not very good," Cathy admitted. She did not have enough patience for it, to be truthful. Maybe if she played Glad she would, though. It was a thought.

Cathy was wondering if she should kiss Glad goodbye, when he took the initiative and gave her a quick, soft kiss on her lips. She looked into his eyes and saw that he was as affected as she. He jumped out on the dock and helped her out of the boat. She hugged him and then waved as he and John left.

She watched until he was out of sight, then trotted up to the cabin with her back of goodies.

Her father had not returned, so she sat on their deck and reminisced about the most wonderful day of her life, munching on some honeycomb candy - what her mother had called sponge toffee.

Her father returned around 5 pm and they exchanged news about their day. He didn't miss the flush that animated his daughter's face when she talked about Glad.

"So the Monday barbecue is on?" he asked, knowing what the answer would be.

"Oh, yes. I want you to meet he and John. John wants to play chess with you."

"Well, that's something to look forward to," her father chuckled. "You might give me a challenge some day, but you'd have to stop thinking about other things."

"Oh, Daddy, I'm just not good at it."

"I think you could do anything you set your mind to, Chicken. But don't worry, there's plenty of time to take up chess.

"By the way I bought us six cream puffs. The bakery won't be open tomorrow and they're closed Monday too. These will keep. Fresh made today. I picked up the meat and other things too."

"Wonderful, Daddy. Thank you!"

Sunday, Cathy and her father relaxed, ate lunch, then played a game of croquet. The ground was not as flat as it could be, and some of the hoops kept falling over because there wasn't enough soil over the

rocky patches, but that just made the game more fun. They were both kept busy chasing errant wooden balls. They gave up trying to score and just tried to finish the course. It took them far longer than usual, but they were laughing so hard they both got sore stomachs. Cathy was sure they had not laughed so much since her mother was alive. She could always find something funny in every situation.

Monday arrived and Cathy tried not to seem as eager as she was. She tried to stay in one place for more than a few minutes, but kept looking out at the lake, as if she expected it to disappear, or a storm to blow in, before lunchtime. Neither happened.

She helped her father set up a table and prepared a cooler to keep the drinks cold. Her father dragged the barbecue into the middle of the deck and made sure he had all his tools to hand. Then he went back inside and prepared the hamburgers, and wrapped up the corn and potatoes in foil. She didn't keep running back into the cabin to check on this or that, didn't ask her father if he had the meat - but she wanted to.

She was wearing a bathing suit under a terry-cloth jumper, short enough to show her legs, but somewhat baggier at the top to make her look as if she had a bust.

Lunch time arrived finally, and her eyes kept moving to the dock. Unable to prevent herself, she walked down to the dock and walked out to the end, staring down the lake as far as she could.

She couldn't see Glad's place, it being in a bay, but she was sure she would see a boat coming from that direction. Yet the lake was calm, the skies were clear and there was little activity. This was not unusual on a Monday. The weekend trippers were gone and life settled down to deep quiet for those still in residence. Some had what amounted to permanent homes, like Glad's, and stayed all summer, but not many.

Cathy was now getting worried. It was after 1 pm and still there was no sign of her guest. Her father had heated up the barbecue, but left them hamburgers in the fridge with the salads and condiments. He sat on a garden chair now, sipping a beer. He looked half asleep.

He didn't look particularly worried. Cathy tried to remember what she had told Glad. Had she said lunch? She was pretty sure she had specified 11 am, now she thought of it.

She flung off her sandals and jumper and let herself into the water. She was hot and the water, although so shallow it only came up to her thighs, was just cool enough to be pleasant. She stayed in for a while, swimming out a few dozen yards and then back, practicing her stroke. After what she felt was at least half an hour, she heaved herself out onto the dock and sat there until she dried.

Finally, she gave up her watch and shuffled back to where her dad was now obviously asleep, snoring gently.

Cathy sighed. Something had gone wrong. She had no way of finding out, at least not until they returned to New York. She had no idea how to contact Glad. The cabin had a phone, but there was no phone book and their number was unlisted. There was no TV or radio either. Her father didn't want to know what the world was going while they were here. He didn't care.

She made a decision. She was now very hungry, so she brought out the hamburgers and began to fry a couple of them on the barbecue, which luckily still had enough heat to do the job. It was now almost 3 pm! She had to accept that her guest wasn't going to come.

She flipped the burgers and then added some onion rings. Her father awakened and walked over to her and put his arm around her shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Cathy. He must have had an unexpected engagement. I'm sure he would not have missed seeing you again for the world."

"I guess so, Daddy," she replied, trying to sound as if she didn't care much. She turned and gave him a smile and then put the burgers onto a plate.

“Lunch is served,” she told him brightly.

They went inside and made short work of the burgers and a good portion of the salads. They finished off with a cream puff. The corn and potatoes would be fine for the next day, their last day before returning home.

By 8 pm that night, Cathy was tired, and wondering what to do with herself. It was too light for bed. She picked up a book and had just started to read when she heard a motorboat. She looked up, expecting it to tear by as they usually did, but it cut its motor suddenly and she saw it drift into their dock. Her father came out of the cabin and they both ran down to meet the boat.

It was John, and he was alone. He made a show of tying up the boat and then jumped onto the dock. His face, when he finally looked at Cathy, said it all. She couldn't speak.

Her father looked between them and took the initiative.

“I'm Charles Chandler,” he introduced himself, approaching the other man and holding out his hand.

“John Newell,” the other replied shaking the offered hand softly. “I'm sorry to have to bring you this news, but Galahad would have wanted me to.” He stopped and gulped.

“He ... he was in a motorcycle accident early this morning, out along the highway. We're not exactly sure what happened, but he ended up under a transport truck. He died at the scene.”

Cathy had put her hand to her mouth and seemed rooted to the spot. She didn't know what to say. With a great effort she got her tongue to form words.

“Please give my sincere condolences to his father,” she said. “He thought of you as his brother, so you must be very upset too. I .. I'm so sorry.”

Her face crumpled and she turned and ran, unable to stop the tears.

Charles took the other man by the arms, sensing that he needed some support.

“Can I offer you a drink of something?” he asked at last.

“No, but thanks. I must be getting back. His father will want me to make the arrangements. He just sits in his chair, as if stunned. He needs me. He did tell me to come and let you know. I'm sorry it has taken so long, but we had to talk to the police and answer endless questions, then and arrange for Ga .. the body ... to be taken to New York.”

“Thank you for coming. My daughter was quite taken with the boy.”

“He was a good kid, but sometimes a little wild. He was an only child. I'm not sure what happens now. I feel a bit lost myself.”

“If there's anything I can do, please contact me at my office - Chandler and Associates in New York.”

“Thank you Mr Chandler.”

John untied the rope, jumped into the boat and eased it away from the dock before starting the engine. He looked back to wave at Charles and then sped off.

She had known Glad such a short time, but Cathy couldn't forget him. Even her closest friends didn't know about what had happened that summer. What was there to say? They commiserated when they did find out, but she didn't want their sympathy. She wanted Glad.

She was left with nothing except the memory of his eyes, so blue they mesmerized her, and a voice that she remembered in her dreams.

That summer was the worst. All her dreams and hopes had crashed with him, leaving a huge emptiness that she was sure would be with her forever.

Her father, understanding the depth of her grief - after all, he had lost his wife while Cathy was still young - tried to fill the gap. He took her to Paris for a whirlwind couple of weeks and they packed their

days with all the places she loved - the art galleries, the monuments, the little cafes, the markets. They had returned with suitcases full of treasures, but the grief had only been put on hold, not eliminated.

“It will ease, Chicken, I promise you,” her father had said. She had nodded, unused to thinking about the long term. She still wanted to put some distance between herself and the city.

So Cathy, desperate to leave New York and its associations, asked to go to the west coast, to stay with an elderly aunt in San Francisco, and her father had agreed. It was 1972 and she found some solace in wandering the steep streets of the city and exploring the parks and markets. Her aunt said nothing to her, but tried to engage her in projects that would keep her busy, but Cathy had no aptitude or interest in the quiet arts. They gave her too much time to think.

But she couldn't escape the song that reminded her of her loss. She had heard it on the radio during the summer, and now in San Francisco it seemed to be following her around. It made her eyes burn every time she heard it. “*Sweet Sir Galahad*”. Why that song now, she kept asking herself.

Finally, she decided she couldn't run away from her grief any longer and she wanted to be with her father. She returned to New York, began a new year in high school in September, and threw herself into the social scene. When not in class, she spent her days doing whatever would take her away from her thoughts.

It was now late autumn and one bright day in late afternoon, when the chill heralding winter was in the air, Catherine strolled into Central Park. She breathed deeply under the old maple trees and felt the large knot trapping her heart begin to loosen.

She looked around her. She hadn't been watching where she was walking, but she knew the Park well. She was near the carousel. It was silent now, so late in the year, but that silence was welcome. For the first time in months, she welcomed the quiet. She sat down on a nearby bench and regarded the bright colours that carpeted the ground and the trees around her. The whole world seemed ablaze in red and gold.

Her father had been right. The pain was still with her, but it had become more of an emptiness, a dull ache in a place she couldn't reach. At least she didn't feel like she was suffocating anymore.

Staring at the horses in the carousel, Catherine's eyes were drawn by a slight movement in the shadows. The sun caught a flash of gold and she realized there was someone inside the locked compound, in the middle where the mechanism was housed. She waited and sat very still, only her eyes moving, as if afraid of frightening away a timid bird.

She saw a shadow extract itself from the centre and watched as it crouched to keep a horse between it and her, then gained the area beyond the carousel, the area near at the covered entrance where she had often waited for her turn as a child. She had just decided that the person had found an exit out of her line of sight, when she caught a glimpse of gold again and saw a face surrounded by a halo of hair, long enough that she guessed it hung below his shoulders. She thought it was a boy, but she could not see his features, between the sun glare and deep shadow. But what she could see of the figure looked achingly familiar.

“Glad?” she whispered, wondering why she was seeing him now, after so many months. She felt like crying, or running to the carousel fence to see better. She did neither. The moment was too precious to interrupt. She gazed at the figure, which hadn't moved.

No, she told herself, she was dreaming. Glad was dead. She looked down at her hands and clasped them together, their solid feel reassuring her. Then she caught her lip between her teeth and pressed until it hurt. No, this definitely wasn't a dream.

She looked up, and wasn't surprised to see that no one was there now - if there ever had been. She sighed. She wanted to believe her friend had found a way to say goodbye to her. She realized she had been unreceptive in her grief, to everyone. Her thoughts had been turned inward as she wallowed in self-pity. She realized the truth of that thought now. What a joy she must be to those around her, she

berated herself.

Catherine rose from the bench and walked over to the carousel. Nothing to be seen there, so she walked around to the entrance, intending to leave by a path that would take her home. She passed the side of the fence near where she had seen the figure and a blob of red caught her eye.

She stopped and realized it was a rose, carefully placed where it would rest in a junction of the iron fence.



She looked at it closely, then extracted it slowly, so as not to damage it - and to avoid any thorns. But there were none, she realized when she was holding it at last. They had been carefully removed. She could see the slightly lighter patches where they had been.

It was the kind of thing Glad would probably have done for her. He had a kindness in him, always thinking of her, as he had demonstrated at the fair. Her eyes burned at the thought, but she brought the flower to her nose and inhaled its rich tea-like scent. She was suddenly very sure that the rose had been left for her by whomever she had seen. Had her grief been that obvious, even today when she was feeling much better?

It didn't matter. She realized she felt happier just knowing that someone had left her the flower. And even if it wasn't some ghost of her Galahad, she owed them her thanks. She decided she had to leave them something in return. She suspected they were still nearby to see her reaction. Why else place the rose so carefully?

She opened her purse and extracted the small turquoise fang in its fabric bag. It had served its purpose. She didn't need it to remind her of Glad anymore - and perhaps it was best she let someone else enjoy it. She thought a guy might like it, or he could give it to someone who would.

Catherine carefully tied the bag to the fence where the rose had been and blew a kiss in the general direction of the carousel.

Then she walked swiftly home, her feet now feeling as light as the falling leaves. She smiled, feeling the stiffness of long-unused muscles in her face.

Many years later, Catherine was sitting on her balcony with Vincent when she heard the old haunting song from an apartment nearby. She hadn't thought about "*Sweet Sir Galahad*" for a long time, nor the person whose name it invoked in her memory.

She must have stiffened, because Vincent looked at her, a question on his lips.

She looked at him, thinking that she had found the perfect antidote to Galahad, someone she would never have suspected was remotely possible, certainly not the wonderful reality of the man beside her.

She smiled at him.

"It was just an old memory, Vincent, triggered by that song. And a rose stuck in a wrought iron fence by the carousel some months later."

"And a small bag with a turquoise fang on a thong?" he asked.

Catherine turned her body to regard him, rendered speechless. It was some moments before she got back her voice.

"You?"

Vincent nodded. "I had been missing Devin and went to the carousel. I couldn't wait until dark. It seemed imperative I go immediately. I managed to avoid being seen, until you sat on the bench. I didn't know what to do, so I did nothing. I sensed you were sad, and I had already picked a rose to give to Mary, and removed the thorns.

"A bribe?"

Vincent chuckled. "Mary didn't one, but I liked to bring her flowers from the park. She never went above."

"Instead, you left me the rose."

"Yes. I wanted to make you happy, if only for a moment."

"You did, Vincent. I had been so very sad, for months, at the loss of a friend."

They were silent for long moments, Catherine realizing that Vincent must have had a premonition about her - perhaps without realizing it. Why had he been drawn to the carousel just then otherwise? Just as he had been drawn to the park to find her, the night she had been left for dead there.

She looked at him and he guessed her thoughts, although he said nothing. No words were needed. Both had accepted that Fate seemed to take an inordinate interest in them.

"And two years ago, you gave me a rose," Vincent commented, at last.

"And you gave me a piece of eternity, a rock of a different kind. Did you recognize me from back then?"

"No. I had forgotten about it - although I still have the turquoise in its little bag among my treasures. Father never found out, but I swore I would never take such a risk again."

Catherine leaned over and gave him a soft kiss on the lips. She sighed.

"That's to replace the kiss I blew you all those years ago."

"Thank you, Catherine."

He kissed her back, then drew her into a hug.

"Life is strange," he observed.

"But strangely full of wonders," she replied.

"Yes."

"And we not the least of them."

To that, Vincent had nothing to say.

END

SWEET SIR GALAHAD

(Words and Music by Joan Baez)

*Sweet Sir Galahad
came in through the window
in the night when
the moon was in the yard.
He took her hand in his
and shook the long hair
from his neck and he told her
she'd been working much too hard.
It was true that ever since the day
her crazy man had passed away
to the land of poet's pride,
she laughed and talked a lot
with new people on the block
but always at evening time she cried.*

And here's to the dawn of their days.

*She moved her head
a little down on the bed
until it rested softly on his knee.
And there she dropped her smile
and there she sighed awhile,
and told him all the sadness
of those years that numbered three.
Well you know I think my fate's belated
because of all the hours I waited
for the day when I'd no longer cry.
I get myself to work by eight
but oh, was I born too late,
and do you think I'll fail
at every single thing I try?*

And here's to the dawn of their days.

He just put his arm around her

*and that's the way I found her
eight months later to the day.
The lines of a smile erased
the tear tracks upon her face,
a smile could linger, even stay.
Sweet Sir Galahad went down
with his gay bride of flowers,
the prince of the hours
of her lifetime.*

*And here's to the dawn
of their days,
of their days.*