

After the decisive battle, they moved further into the land and came across what first appeared to be a mountain but was in fact an extraordinary, mountainous knot. The knot was so vast that they supposed it would take them two days to march around it. So they camped there at its foot to decide what they ought to do next, and endured a night that was utterly dark yet filled with the uncertain intimations of voices. In the morning they began their attempts to untie the knot; one of them had suggested that the voices were promising riches or other destinies in the knot's deep interior. It quickly became clear that the rope, as thick as ten men together, was made up of many thinner strands, that each of those strands was knotted to others, that indeed there were countless thousands of knots at the heart of this one mountainous knot. They started to work in earnest, all of them picking and grasping and in fact tearing at it. They continued into the night with its voices, and into the days beyond. This is how their enemies found them, and how the battle was engaged once more. With one hand they pulled at the knot and with the other they swung the sword. Their enemies, too, found themselves caught between a desire for vengeance and a desire to disentangle. Because war never fails utterly, blood was shed. It soaked into the ropes and, as it dried, tightened them, first around hands, then around arms and bodies. By this time, all were quite unable to move. Nonetheless, the fighting found a way to continue, and the knot continued to tighten.