

OUTLAND





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OUTLAND

OUTLAND

BY GORDON STAIRS



LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1910

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OUTLAND

I

CONCERNING THE TRAIL AT BROKEN TREE

THE trail begins at the Broken Tree with the hawk's nest. As often as we have talked of it since, Herman and I, and that is as often as the ceanothus blooms untimely for a sign of rains delayed, or there is a low moon and a following star, or a wind out of the south with the smell of wild honey in it, we have agreed together that the trail begins at Broken Tree.

There were some other landmarks I was quite as sure of at the time, but the creek makes so many turns here I could never find them again, and the second time of Herman's going in, he had altogether other things to think about: so that as often as

we have occasion to talk of it, we end by saying that it begins at Broken Tree.

I remember very well how Fairshore looked that day as we stood gazing back at it from the edge of the ploughed lands ; the pines sketched blackly against the smudgy, fawn-coloured slope, the sea as blue as lapis, and the leaning surf. I had another reason for remembering it, since it was the last time of Herman's asking and of my refusing to marry him. I don't know why Herman's being a professor of sociology should have led him to suppose that our liking the same sort of books and much the same people, and having between us an income fairly adequate to the exigencies of comfortable living, should have been reason enough for my marrying him, but he had spent a great deal of time that summer trying to convince me that it was. I recall being rather short with him that afternoon, for, in the first place, if I had meant to marry Herman I should not have put all I had into a house at Fairshore, and in the next place, though I had not got to the point of admitting it, the house was proving rather a failure. For a long time I had believed that it needed but a little space

of collected quietness for the vague presages of my spirit to burst freely into power.

Somewhere within myself I was aware of a vast, undiscovered country full of wandering lights and crying voices, from whence the springs of great undertakings should issue, but now that the house was accomplished and my position in the English Department definitely resigned, all that I had got by it was an insuperable dryness of heart and a great deal of time which hung rather heavily upon my hands. I had done no work at Fairshore that I was willing to confess to in print, and knew I should not until I could escape from this inward desertness into that quarter from whence still, at times, I could feel a wind blowing that trumpeted up all the lagging forces of my soul. And just when I was wanting most to know passion and great freedom of feeling, Herman's offer of a reasonable marriage, of which the particular recommendation was that no feeling went to it, took on the complexion of a personal affront; the more so since there was no very definite way in which I could make clear to Herman just what offended me.

He was going on that afternoon to explain to me how, in a marriage free from the disturbances of passion incidental to temperamental matings, I should be at ease to give myself wholly to the business of book-making; for, with all his understanding, Herman was fully possessed of that Academic notion that literature can be produced by taking pains instead of having them. He was very patient with me through it all, crediting my indifference to overwork and to nerves, as a man does with a woman when he is at a loss to know what is the matter with her; when the truth was, if I was tired of anything, it was of being the very things Herman most admired in me, and growing every moment more exasperated, until by the time he had got to the point of wanting to know what more there was that he could say, I had reached the pitch of replying that there could be nothing more unless he wished to say the usual thing.

“And that?” He turned to me with a sincere and astonished enquiry in his lifted brows.

“Would be merely that you love me and can't live without me.”

“Oh, if you want me to say what the grocer’s man says to the cook in the kitchen!”—he flushed—“but you know very well, Mona, that I am not going to insult your intelligence and mine with the clap-trap of passion. Certainly I’ve no such cheap sort of feeling for you, and I’m not such an infernal cad as to suppose you have —— Mona?”

It might have been the wind that blew from the country beyond Broken Tree at that moment, or something in my face, that turned that last repetition of my name upon the point of interrogation, for though it was my crying objection to Herman that he could not produce in me those raptures and alarms and whirlings to and fro, out of which I knew all creative art to proceed, yet to have him so renounce for us both the possibility of such a relation filled me with sudden wounding and affront. And for that, or at some new shadow of wonder in his eyes with the turning of his voice upon the word, I found myself so little able to give back look for look, that it was a great relief to me to discover the hawk’s nest in the Broken Tree. The creek makes a turn here, and

the stepping-stones were so far apart it was necessary for Herman to go ahead and reach me back his hand, and as I swung past him I heard him say my name again with so new a touch of shamed credulity that I was glad to put my hand up over my eyes, making believe I had not heard him, and look very attentively at Broken Tree.

It stands on the upper bank of the creek, snapped off midway by the wind, and below the break two great sweeping boughs spread either way like the arms of a guide-post, and the nest is in the splintered hollow of the trunk.

"It is a nest," I said, as though a doubt I had were the reason for my not hearing him, and Herman was so used to this sort of interruption when we walked in the woods together that I hoped it had a natural sound; at any rate he answered quite simply that if it was, it should be empty by this time of the year. At that the hawk, unfurling from the upper branches, pitched a slow downward spiral above our heads, then beat back into upper air, uttering sharp cries, and, settling slowly to the left, preened himself and neglected us; as if, being but a watch-

man, having cried our coming he had no other interest in the affair.

Just beyond the pine there was a thicket of wild lilac grown across the way, and as I put up my hand to defend my face, I saw that a light spray of it had burst untimely into bloom, for though this was the second week in October the grass was brittle as new silk and the earth was hard with drouth. I remember holding the branch toward Herman for him to see.

"Look how it calls the rain," I said, and perhaps something more, though I do not remember what, about the effort of nature to rise to its own expectancy, but I said that first because it was exactly the sort of thing I knew Herman, who thought he had entirely rationalised his attitude toward out of doors, liked least to hear me say. But, perhaps, because we were then so near to the adventure which was to prove him wrong about that and so many things, and the shadow of it was already over us, he had no answer but to reach out across my shoulder and put up his hand over mine to bear back the heavy branch; and that was so little the sort of thing I had learned to

expect of Herman, and we were both so embarrassed by it, that we could never be quite sure which of us saw it first, but when we had pushed aside the ceanothus there lay the beginning of the trail.

It began directly at the foot of the pine as though there was some reason for it, and ran shallow and well-defined through the lilac thicket and up the hill.

Herman said it was a deer trail, and to the casual eye it did resemble one of those woodland tracks made by wild creatures, beginning at no particular point, and after continuing clear and direct for a little distance, breaking off for no reason; but there was about this trail a subtlety, a nuance, slight distinctions in the way the scrub was bent back from it, in the way it took the slope of the hill, that made it plainly a man trail. More than that, I felt the slight pricking of the blood, the quick response of the intelligence to the stimulus of variations so slight the observation of them lies almost below the plane of consciousness, which Herman, wanting the witness in himself, could not believe in and was concerned over my mistake. So we

went on walking in it, Herman very well satisfied with his argument, and I saying nothing more about it, as I frequently have to do when Herman gets talking of the things which are my province.

It was very quiet in the wood that day, scarcely a bird abroad, now and then a still, winged insect threading the green and gold arcades of the great fern, or a long sigh from the sea, passing up the hill along the top of the pines.

The trail cleared the scrub and went between young trees skirting a hollow planted with lean, sombre boles where the ground beneath was white with the droppings of shadow - haunting birds. Beyond that there was more open growing among spaley-footed oaks, crusted thick with emerald moss, all a-drip from their outer branches with the filmy lace of lichen, then a pleasant grassy space of pines before the close locked redwoods began.

I do not know how long we had been following before we heard the jays, but we had come into a little open glade where lilies were, through which the trail seemed to lead to one of those places where you

have always wished to be, and we heard them crying our approach. Herman said they were jays, and the first one might have been; I know the high, strident call they have, advising of intruders, which another hears and repeats, and another, until all the wood is cautious and awake; but one jay calls exactly like every other, and about this there was a modulation that assured while it warned, that said: "I have heard; have no concern for me." And even I could not have fancied so much as that in the mere squawking of jays.

"Be still," I said to Herman, who was protesting cheerfully behind me; "you have waked the wood people and now we shan't see any of them."

"What people?"

"The people who walk in the woods and leave the meadows warm and tender, whom you feel by the beating of your heart and the pricking between your shoulders when you come upon the places where they have been. The people who made this trail, whom we heard calling one to another just now. *That* people——" And just then we came upon the faggot.

It lay close beside the trail, little sticks all in order except a last handful dropped hurriedly on top when the faggot-gatherer had started at our approach.

"Look!" I said; "that is what they were doing when we came stumbling on them."

It *was* a faggot, I shall always insist that it was a faggot, and I should have said so if nothing had happened afterward to prove it, but Herman kicked it impatiently with his foot.

"There's a literary temperament for you," he protested. "You find a trail made by wood-choppers, you hear jays squawking and see a heap of brushwood, and straight-way you create a race of people to account for them."

"You *said* it was a deer trail a while ago," I hinted, and Herman laughed.

It was still and warm in the glade, the needles lay thick and soft and no grass grew, the scent of the yerba buena stole upon us intermittently, delicate pungent gusts answering each to each like speech. All around the sunlight lay, a thing palpable, as if, like the needles, it had not been lifted for a thousand years, but mellowed there like

wine. Herman stretched himself on the brown thick litter beside me.

“Aha,” he said, “if this belongs to your wood people they know a good thing. It’s very nice of them to lend it to us for a while. I don’t seem to feel any pricks between my shoulders, but my heart beats remarkably; so don’t give me up yet, Mona.”

That was exactly like Herman, to argue with your best beliefs until you begin to think there is no other way than to subvert your whole scheme of existence or to break off all connection with him, and then to abandon his position with a suddenness that leaves you toppling over your own defences.

For a moment I thought he might be going to revert to the matter of my marrying him, but he lay tossing lightly at the dropped needles, and the even breathing silence of the wood closed in again. We sat so long that we were startled on discovering that if Herman got back to the Inn in time for the stage that was to take him to his train, we would have to run for it. And that, I suppose, was why we took so little notice of the landmarks going out, that, though I tried the very next afternoon, I could not

find the trail again. I wanted to find it too, for if I could once prove to Herman that there was a reality behind that sense of presence in the woods that he credited to the whimses of a literary imagination, I should somehow put myself in a better case for proving—well, I did not know quite what, but I wanted to find that trail.

I tried that day and the next; twice I found the glade and the sun-steeped yerba buena, for the day was warm and the scent of it carried far, and once I got past Broken Tree, but I could never come into the trail in any manner.

Then one day when I had almost given up finding it, and had been a long time in the woods without thinking about it, I found myself walking in the glade again, and the first thing I noticed was that the faggot was gone; and for all I had been so sure of its being a faggot in the first place, I was a little startled at missing it, but not in the least alarmed. The day was full of the warm dry fog that goes before a rain, it cleared the ground and curled midway of the tall, fluted trees like altar smoke. I followed along the track, which ran narrowly

between the redwood boles toward an open space at the back of which was the pool of a spring under the gloom of a leaning bay tree, silver tipped with light. The smell of dampness from the spring drew me toward the dull shine of its waters, and there beside it was a man who so matched with the colour of the dappled earth that except for the motions of his singular employment, I might have missed seeing him altogether. He was of a long clean shape, dressed as to the upper part of his body in a close-fitting coat of grey mole-skin. His feet were covered with sandals, and long bands of leather and of a green cloth, coarse like linen, were laced about, midway of the thigh. His coat had been loosened at the shoulders, baring his breast and arms, and as he lay on the bank of the pool, a very little one, he leaned above it and studied the reflection of his face. He had leaves of some strange herb in his hand which he squeezed together, and having dipped it in the water rubbed it upon his face and hair, watching the effect the while in the pool.

It was his hair that caught my attention most, for it was thick and waving, and most

singularly streaked with white, and that was the more strange because the body of him looked lithe and young. It occurred to me that he might be remedying an offensive greyness as he dipped and rubbed and stooped to mirror himself the better in the bright water, but before I had made up my mind to anything further, he turned and saw me.

The first thing he did was to thrust the hand that held the herb straight down into the water with a deliberate movement, holding my gaze the while with great fixity of purpose, as though he would not so much as let it question what he did, and presently withdrawing the hand empty, stood up.

As he drew erect and clasped the upper part of his tunic, I saw that around his body was a sort of sash of green cloth wrapped several times, and stuck through the folds of it various tools of the cruder sort of silversmiths; and that, though his figure was young, the skin of his face was drawn in fine wrinkles. He had a thin, high nose with a slightly mobile tip that seemed to twitch a little with distrust as he looked at me. The mouth below it was full and curved, his

eyes bluish black, opaque and velvet-looking, windows out of which came and looked boldness, cunning and power, and the wistfulness of the wild creature questioning its kinship with man. All this without so much as altering a muscle of his face or removing his gaze from mine. Then he stepped back a space against the yielding boughs, which seemed to give like doors, and received him without crackling or sensible displacement into the silence of the wood

II

I MEET THE OUTLIERS IN THE WOOD AND HERMAN COMES TO FIND ME

WHEN Herman got my letter concerning the dark man under the bay tree, he was wholly at loss what to make of it.

He was quite habituated to my method of making believe to be a story before writing it, and was always willing to play up to his part as soon as he learned what that was, but in this case I had neglected to tell him: and while he was reading the letter over, it occurred to him the whole thing might be merely a childish pique because he had scoffed at my wood people in the first place, and so was rather annoyed at it.

But as often as he went back to the letter he found a note of conviction in it—for I had written it immediately after the adventure—that overrode both these interpretations.

After that he was divided between the fear that I really had been overworking and a period of mild hallucination had set in, or the possibility that I could have met some sort of wild person in the forest who might do me an injury, for the most disturbing thing in the letter was the declaration that I meant to go back as soon as I could and find out all about the woodlander. The result of all this was that after having written me a separate letter based on each one of these beliefs, and having destroyed it, Herman left the University Friday morning and came down to find out, if possible, what really had occurred.

He got in on the stage that reaches Fairshore at half-past one, and as he had come directly from his lecture room, he had first to have lunch and change to his out-of-door clothes. This made it the middle of the afternoon before he reached the cottage, and he said as soon as he had a glimpse of it, he experienced a sinking of the heart that warned him that I was not there. However, he went through the formality of knocking at the front door before going round to see if I had left the key, as I did for short

absences, or had taken it to the Inn as when I meant to be away several days. He found the key in the accustomed place, and something more alarming: inside the screened porch at the back were the three little bottles of milk which the milkman had left there each evening that I had been away. So I had been gone three days!

The first thing was to make sure that I was not at Mira Monte or at Idlewild, where I went sometimes as the mood demanded. He was very cautious about making enquiries at the post-office and the Inn, for, of course, I hadn't given Herman any right to be interested in my whereabouts, and, of course, if I really had gone off to hunt for hypothetical people in the woods, I shouldn't want it talked about. At the end of an hour he had gotten nothing more definite than the certainty that if I had gone out of town it had not been by the regular stages, and nobody knew when or where.

He decided then that the occasion justified his going into the house to find out if I had taken my suit-case, or anything that would give a clue, and by the time he got back to the cottage it was past four o'clock, and the

milkman had been his round. There were now four little bottles on the ledge. This somehow seemed to Herman so alarming a circumstance, with its implication of unexpected detention, that with scarcely more than a glance about the house, he put some crackers and my travelling flask into his pocket and set out almost running for Broken Tree.

He said that he found the place with very little difficulty, and without noticing particularly the way he came, and I have thought since it might be one of the conditions of going there that you must be thinking altogether of other matters and be concerned in the going for something more than yourself.

Herman found the trail and followed it as far as the place of the faggot, and on to the point where I had seen the tall man washing his hair at the spring. Though he could have had no reasonable expectation of it, he had unconsciously counted on finding some trace of me in that neighbourhood, and, disappointed in it, was at loss what to do. The trail, which ran out indistinguishably in the meadow, began again on the

other side, and after losing half an hour in picking it up again, he came on half fearfully, anticipating he knew not what dread evidence at every turn.

The redwoods grew close here and the space between was filled with bluish gloom shot with long arrows of the westering sun, the trail ran crookedly among the clutching roots, and stumbling near-sightedly among them, he lost it wholly and so came by accident upon what else he might have missed. Where the forest sheered away from a blank, stony ledge sticking out of a hill, there was a clear space with some small ferns and a seeping spring. In the soft earth about it he found prints of feet he thought to be mine, and beside it, broad and strong, the heavy feet of men. It was by now nearly dark, and Herman was so genuinely alarmed and so poor a woodman that he knew no better shift than to dash back among the redwoods hunting wildly for the trail and shouting, "Mona! Mona!" for all the wood to hear.

What had really happened to me was alarming enough to think of, though in truth I had not been very much alarmed by it at

the time. The morning after my writing to Herman had been one of those pricking days that come in the turn of the seasons: such a sparkle on the approaching water, such a trumpeting from the hills, the high vault full of flying cloud, that I struck with great confidence into the trail some distance beyond Broken Tree.

I followed along where it ran in a space wide as a waggon track and opened into a meadow full of the airy whiteness of small bloom floating above the late yellow lilies and the glinting grass, and sat down at its farther edge, leaning against the curled roots of the redwood, and got as much comfort from it as though I had been propped by a human shoulder, so full was all the earth of friendly warmth and quietness.

There was neither sun nor shadow nor moving wind; I sat and browsed along the edge of sleep, slipped in and out, dozed and woke to watch the lilies, half sure of the sound of airy laughter far within the wood: lost myself, and snapped alert to see the eyes of a man, ruddy and well-looking, fixed upon me from between the shouldering trees. Not a twig had snapped nor one bough

clicked against another, but there he stood like a stag gazing, uncurious and at ease. When he perceived that I was aware of him he stepped toward me, throwing up his head with thick, tawny locks and a pointed, russet beard, and uttered the high strident cry of jays followed by one bird-call and another, which seemed to be answered in kind from within the forest.

He was a man of about forty, burned by the sun, with a single garment of tawny skin that came midway of his arms and thighs: there were sandals on his feet and strips of leather bound about protected him to the knees. He was belted about the body with a curious implement that might have been a sling, and from his hand swung a brace or two of quail.

The singular part of this adventure was that while he stood there communicating in his strange wordless fashion with all the birds in the woods, I was not afraid: he was standing over me in such a manner that I could not have escaped him if I would, although I had no thought of doing so, but sat looking as he looked at me, and not in the least afraid.

So occupied were we both with this mutual inspection that I did not quite know how nor from what quarter three men came out from among the trees and stood beside him. One of them was red and sturdy like the first, one was old, with a white beard curling back from his face like the surf from a rock, but exceedingly well built and with great heaps of gnarly muscles along his breast and arms, and the third was the dark man I had seen washing his hair at the pool of the Leaning Bay.

They all looked at me with amazement and some consternation. Words passed between them in a strange tongue, though it was plain they referred to the manner of their finding me, and what was to be done about it. At length, the old man having said something to the effect that whatever I might be I did not appear particularly dangerous, they laughed all of them and made a sign that I was to come with them along the trail.

We moved slowly, my captors, for so I was to regard them, so disposing themselves as we went that I was scarcely aware of them, moving without stealthiness from bole

to bole, mingling so with the tawny and amber shadows, that time by time I hesitated, thinking myself abandoned, until I heard the old man's throaty chuckle like the movement of slow water among stones, or caught the bright, regardful eyes of Ravenutzi fixed upon me from behind the interlacing boughs.

After an hour's walking we came to a bramble-fenced hollow ringed with very tall trees, smelling of the sun, where there might be a dozen of the wood folks, and four women among them, lying up like deer through the bright betraying noon.

Almost the first thing I noticed was that there was no curiosity among them of a prying sort over my appearance, and no fear, as though they had ever imagined one of my sort could do them harm, but a kind of regretfulness, particularly among the women, that appeared to be strangely for my sake, and a very grave concern. Moreover, when I spoke, for I was moved to speak at once and declare that whatever appearance my coming among them had, I meant no harm by it, they turned all toward me, as if merely by attending quietly on this

strange tongue they could make out what was said ; as I presently discovered that they had made out, and by keeping this same considered quietness, without straining or trying to think what the words were, I was able to know what went on about me ; and though it was several days before I could communicate fully, and I do not know yet, nor does Herman know, what language the Outliers spoke among themselves, we were able to get along very well in it. They drew around me in a circle, which was left open at one side to admit a man whom I guessed at once by his bearing, as well as the deference they paid him, to be some sort of chief to them.

He was of a singular and appealing beauty, so that his bodily excellence was a garment to him, and adorned the simplicity of his dress. There was that in his way of standing that moved one to go up and lay hand on him as on the stem of a young cedar, and something that stood within him that protected him more than a weapon from such impersonality. As he waited to hear the account of me which the red man gave, I felt I had never such a wish to have a

man think well of me, nor been so much at a loss how to begin it, for at the same time he seemed to be hearkening to something within himself, that, when he asked a question of the women (which passed from one to another of them with something of denial and disclaimer), seemed to speak more loudly. The question appeared to refer to something which should have settled my business then and there, the neglect of which devolved upon a woman, comely and perplexed, as though given to too great a sense of responsibility, and much overcome at being found at fault.

“No matter,” he said to her excuses, and bending a troubled look on me, the doubt in him spoke out openly.

“It was of this, I think, *she* spoke to me.”

At that slight emphasis the dark man who had the smith's tools on him, who stood a little outside the circle, detached and impersonal, looked at me with so sharp and surprising an interest that it distracted me from noticing who it was behind me asked with some eagerness:

“Of what did she speak?”

“That there was one walking toward us

on the trail bearing trouble. On the morning of our leaving, she waked me early to say it. I am thinking this is the one. If you have forgotten the cup, Evarra, it is an omen."

The interest of all the wood folk re-awakened, and they began to regard me with so much distrust that I was relieved when the chief made a sign to Noche to take me a little to one side, that they might talk more freely, looking at me from time to time, sometimes seeming to blame the woman, and sometimes praise her.

Noche was that same old man who had brought me from the neighbourhood of Broken Tree, whose mild blue eyes, set rather shallowly in a broad face, continued to reassure me.

He sat off a considerate distance, and busied himself with plaiting of leather thongs; all his features were rugged, the mouth wide, the nose broad and open at the nostrils, but blunted all as if by some yielding humour in him which fitted oddly with the knotting of his muscles; now and then he turned toward me with chuckling, slow laughter which served in place of comforting speech.

Whatever conclusion the woodlanders came

to about me, it was not to take immediate effect. They talked or lay quietly in the fern as deer lie. They slept much, but always with some on guard, dropping off with even breathing peace, and waking without start or stretching, as if wakefulness were but a wind that stirred them by times, and sleep the cessation of the stir.

Toward evening they rose and cooked a meal, of which I had my share—deer meat, wild honey in the honey-comb, and some strange bread. Two or three others came in from hunting; they were dressed much the same as the red man who had found me, and carried slings in their belts or slung upon their shoulders. The west was red and the pines black against it, there rose a light ruffle of wind and sighed through the wood, and with it passed in the camp an audible breath of expectation. One of the women stood up with water in a bowl of bark, holding it high above her head in the manner of one celebrating a ritual, crooning some words to which the others made a breathy, soft response; she turned the water out upon the fire, the ashes of which Noche deftly covered, then, extending the

bowl toward the young leader, she smiled, saying :

“The word is with you, Persilope.”

He took the vessel from her, scattering its few remaining drops westward.

“To the sea !” he said ; “down to the sea !”

“To the sea !” cried the Outliers, and laughed and girt themselves. Suddenly I found myself caught up into a kind of litter or swing made of broad bands of skin, in a position of great uneasiness to myself, between the shoulders of two men, and the whole body of woodlanders set off rapidly, but in their former noiseless fashion, going seaward.

The moon was up and the tide far out when we issued upon the promontory called Cypress Point. There was little surf, and the glimmer of the tide ran like silvered serpents all along the rocks. With a shout the Outliers stripped and cut the molten water with their shining bodies, laughed and plunged and rose again, laughing and blowing the spray as long as the moon lasted. They were at it again with the earliest light, and I should have known they were gathering sea food without what one of the women

told me, of a great occasion going forward at their home which lay far from here, and a great feast of all the tribe. When the tide allowed they gathered fish and abalones, which the women carried to some secret place among the pines to cure and dry.

When the tide was up the Outliers lay by in the dark rooms of cypress, bedded on the thick resistant boughs or stretched along the ancient trunks so wried and bent to purposes of concealment that often in the heat, when there was cessation of the low whispering tones and light easy laughter, I would rise up suddenly seeming to myself quite alone, and only by the stir of the wind on hair or garment discover the watchers lying close, untroubled and observant. While they worked I lay bound lightly under the wind-depressed cypresses, where no light reached, but strange checkered gleams of it like phosphorescent eyes.

By night I could hear the Outliers shouting strongly in the surf, and saw by day the Chinese fishing-boats from Pescadera crawl along the rocks, and the smoke of coasting steamers trailing a shadow like a dark snake on the sea's surface, polished

by the heat. The men worked with goodwill and laughter, always with watchers out, so if one moment they were hauling at the nets, at a mere squeak of warning there would not be to the unpractised eye so much as the glint of the sun on bare skin. Once a great red car came careering around the point, all the occupants absorbed in Bridge, just when the sea was at its best, a sapphire sparkle moving under an enchanted mist and the land luminous with reflected light.

We could see the casual turning of the owner's head as some invisible string from the guard's stretched, pointed finger seemed to move it like a mechanical toy, and almost before it rounded the curve, old Noche took himself out of the seaweed and blew foam at them in derision.

The care and keeping of me fell to Evarra, by whose neglect a proper dealing with me was kept in abeyance, and to old Noche, with whom I began to be very well acquainted, and through whom I got to know much of Ravenutzi. Noche had the soul of a craftsman, though no very great gift at it, and whenever the smith was busy at a forge improvised of two beach stones

and a flint, mending fish-hooks and hammering spear-heads from bits of metal picked up along the sand, Noche would choose to lie puffing his cheeks to blow the fire as Ravenutzi fitted his movements to the rhythm of the wind as it rose to cover the light clink of his hammers. Or the old man would sit with his lips a little apart and in his eyes the bright fixity of a child's, laying out iridescent fragments of abalone in curious patterns in which Ravenutzi took the greatest interest, though it was singular to me that the design the old man struggled with oftenest, the smith let pass, and I had observed this the more because I became sure that there was no smallest hint of it escaped him; and it was fixed in my mind by its revelation of a great singularity in the character of Ravenutzi himself. Time and again I had seen Noche laying out his abalone pearls in a design which, however dearly it was borne within his mind, seemed reluctant in expression.

He would place the salient points of his pattern, connecting them by tracings in the sand, and when he had taken the greatest pains with it, startled, would sweep out the

whole with his hand. There were times when its preciousness so grew upon him that he would not even commit it to the dust, but formed the delicate outline with his finger in the air.

One of those occasions, when it was full noon, and the tide charged thunderously along the coast, all the Outliers lying up in the windy gloom of the cypresses, I knew by the absorbed and breathless look of him that Noche had accomplished for once the whole of his design. He bent above it crooning in his beard, so absorbed in the complete and lonely joy of creation that he neither saw nor sensed the shifting of the stooped, twisty trunks above him to the form of Ravenutzi.

How he had come there I could not imagine, but there he bent from the flat-topped foliage, the mouth avid, the eyes burning and curious, passing from that, as the shifting of his position brought him into line with my gaze, to a fixed intentness that held me arrested even in the process of thought, and left me uncertain as to whether it were not I who had been caught spying instead of Ravenutzi, and merely to meet

that look in me had not been, after all, the object of his secret scrutiny.

And this was what separated him from the others more than his dark skin and the clipped and nasal speech, and made me sure, before I had heard a word of the Far-Folk, of some alien blood in him; for whatever one of the Outliers did, whether you agreed with him or not, there was at least no doubt about it.

That was how the days were going with me all the time Herman was writing me letters and tearing them up again, deciding that I was mad or foolish; and on the evening of the last day, about the time he had entered on the trail by Broken Tree, we were setting out for I knew not what far home of the Outliers. I was carried still in my litter, but that was more kindness than captivity, for though I count myself a good walker, I made poor work of keeping even with their light-running stride. We were not many hours out; it was after moonset, and I had lost all track of the time or the way, being a little sick with the motion, and very tired of it. I could guess this much, that we were rounding a steep

and thick-set hill by what might have been an abandoned waggon road, for our pace increased here, and suddenly the company was arrested by sharp resounding cries and the crackling of underbrush on the slope above us. So does the night estrange familiar things, that I could get no clue at all to what the cries might be, except that it was some creature blundering and crying distressfully, making as if to cross our trail.

The Outliers were themselves alarmed by it, and considered a moment whether they should halt to let it pass before us or hurry on to leave it behind. But the check and the beginning of movement had caught the attention of the lost creature, for it turned directly toward us, and began to come on more rapidly, redoubling its cries ; and now I thought, though it seemed so extraordinary, that it said "Mona!" in a wild and urgent manner, and then it seemed to have slipped or bounded, for the slope was steep, and fell with a great clatter of stones and snapping of stems directly in our trail.

Several of the men precipitated themselves upon it, there was a short struggle, muffled

groans, and quiet: then one of them struck a light from his flint and showed a man, scratched and dishevelled, lifted in the grip of Noche, lying limp and faint back from the knotted arms, and I turned faint myself to see that it was Herman.

III

I HEAR OF THE TREASURE AND MEET A FRIEND OF RAVENUTZI

IT was the very next day, and before I had learned as much of Herman's adventure as I have already set down, that I began to hear of the Treasure, and my hearing became the means of my knowing all that happened afterwards in Outland because of it.

It was the middle of the afternoon when I came out of Evarra's hut and found Herman, with his head bandaged, lying on a heap of skins in a grass walk that opened on the meadow of a stream, with old Noche on guard, plaiting raw hide for slings. He had a loop of it about one foot stretched straight before him to keep it taut as he plaited. Now and then he turned his face toward us with a wordless reassurance, but chiefly his attention was taken by the

children, who cooed and bobbed their heads together within the shadow.

Back of them the redwoods stood up thick as organ pipes, and when the wind stirred the space above was filled with the click of dropping needles and the flicker of light displaced. I was going on to enquire of Herman how it happened he came stumbling on my trail when I thought him safe at the University, but Noche making a noise of disapproval in his throat, I left off at once, and began to attend to the talk of the children, growing clear as I fixed upon it or lapsing into unmeaning murmurs as my mind wandered. There were four or five of them busy about those curious structures that children build with pebbles and potsherds and mounds of patted dust, set off by a feather or a flower; and Noche, it appeared, was very good at it, so that presently, to their great delight, he was persuaded to undertake a more imposing mound than they could manage for themselves; and presently I had made out idly that the structure in the dust was the pattern of a story he was telling them, and it was all of a king's treasure. Seventy

bracelets of gold, he said, all of fine work, chased and hammered, and belts of linked gold, and buckles set with coloured stones ; he took pebbles from the creek and petals of flowers to show them how that was, and every child was for making one for himself, for Noche to approve ; also he said there were collars of filigree, and necklets set with green stones of the colour of the creek where it turned over the falls at Leaping Water. There were cups of gold, and one particular goblet of chased work which an old king held between his knees, around the rim of which a matchless hunter for ever pursued exquisite deer. The stem of it was all of honey-coloured agate, and in the base there were four great stones for the colours of the four Quarters : blue for the North, green for the South where the wind came from that made the grass to spring, red for the Dawn side of earth, and yellow for the West. And for the same king there was a circlet for his brows of fire-stones, by which I supposed he meant opals, half a finger long, set in beaten gold. Also there were lamps, jewelled and chased, on golden chains that hung a-light above the kings.

Then one of the children, who lay listening with his heels in the air, wished to know if it were true what his father had said, that there was evil in the Treasure which came out upon whoever so much as looked at it, at which there came a rueful blankness upon the face of old Noche.

“Ay,” said he, “for that it is hidden away ; and upon whoever so much as talks of it.” And he shook his neglected sling at them as though to have left off with it for the sake of a story were a very culpable matter. But the children would not have it like that at all. They flung themselves on him in a heap, and got upon his back and about his neck and rumbled his hair, declaring that he was the best old man that ever was, and he must tell them about the red necklace : and growling a little, but very glad to be beguiled by them, Noche went to say there was a necklace of rubies so splendid that every one of them was a little more splendid than the next one. Almost before he had begun upon it, and before Herman and I had heard anything louder than the unmeaning forest murmurs, we saw the children half upon their knees, rising to attention, and

scattering suddenly, with gay little splutters of laughter like the noise of water spilled along the ground, disappearing down the trails that ran darkling among the rooted columns of the trees.

There was a certain dismay I thought on Noche's face as he turned back to his work, perceiving that I had listened, and not sure how much I had understood. He began to talk to us at once about his work, as though that might have been the object of our attention, but with his hand he reached out furtively behind him and destroyed all the patterns in the dust.

Still I found my mind going back to it with some insistence, for up to that time I had seen no metal in the camp but some small pieces of hammered silver and simple tools of hard iron, and no ornaments but shells and berries; and there had been a relish in old Noche's telling that hinted at reality. I remembered the pattern which he had pondered so secretly under the cypress trees, and it came into my mind in an obscure way, without my taking any particular notice of it, that this might be the pattern of the great necklace of rubies. I

had not time to think further then, for the sound the children had answered to was of the returning hunters and the Outliers coming toward us on the trail.

It was always so that they came together about the time that the blue haze that the redwoods breed between them and the late light, rayed out long level bars across the hills. They would be awake and about at whatever hour pleased them, and take their nooning in whatever place, so that through the long days there would scarcely be so much seen of them as a woman beating fibre between two stones by a brook, or a man cutting fern on a steep slope; and so still they were by use, and so habituated to the russet earth and the green fern and the grey stone, that they could, by seeming, melt and disappear into it, so that though you heard close about you low-toned talk and cheerful laughter, you could scarcely, unless they wished it, come bodily upon them.

On this evening all those in the neighbourhood of Deep Fern had come together, not only because of the news of House-Folk brought to camp, but because this was the time set for the return of Trastevera from

some errand connected with the great occasion of which I had been told, she who had seen trouble walking with us on the trail from Broken Tree, and without whose advisement, so Evarra had already explained to me, nothing would be determined concerning Herman and me. This Trastevera was also the wife of Persilope, and whatever the business was that called her from Deep Fern it appeared she was late returning. All the Outliers had come in, and the light had left the lower reaches of the forest and began to shine level through the fan-spread boughs before Persilope came out of the grass walk where he had been pacing up and down restlessly, and, advised by some sound or sense too fine for me, lifted up his hand toward that quarter of the thick-set grove that fenced the far end of the meadow, and in the quick attentiveness that followed on the gesture, stood in the flush of rising tenderness until, with some others behind her, she came lightly through the wood. One perceived first that she was smaller than the others, most delicately shaped, and next, that the years upon her were like the enrichment of time on some rare ornament.

I do not know why in our sort of society it should always seem regrettable, when not a little ridiculous, for a woman to be ten years older than her husband, but since I have known the exquisite maturity of Trastevera's spirit, tempering her husband's passion to finer appreciation of her ripened worth, I have not thought it so. As she came lightly through the thick grass of the uncropped meadow there was, as often, a glow upon her that might have come from the business she had been abroad upon, that sustained her a little above the personal consideration, so that almost before she had recovered from the flush of her husband's embrace, she turned toward Prassade—the red man who had found me in the wood—in a manner of congratulation to say that all was as he would have wished it, and he had good reason for being pleased. This being apparently a word he had waited for, he thanked her with a very honest satisfaction; and then, with her hand still in Persilope's, he looking down on her more rejoiced with having her back from her errand than with anything she had to say about it, she turned a puzzled, enquiring glance about the camp.

“Ravenutzi?” she questioned doubtfully; but the smith smiled and shook his head, and with one consent, as if she had answered expectation, the company parted and showed us to her where we stood. Without having any previous intention about it, I found myself rising to my feet to meet her, and heard Herman scramble lamely up behind. She stood so, confronting us without a word for as long a space as it took Prassade briefly to explain how they had come by us, and why they had not done that to us which I already understood had threatened me on the first day of my captivity, and that was long enough for me to discern that she was darker than the other Outliers, that her hair must have been about the colour of Ravenutzi’s before it turned, and her eyes were grey and clouded with amber like the morning surf. She moved a step toward me, nodding her head to what the young chief said, and shaking it slowly to something in herself. Wonder and perplexity deepened in her. Delicately, as seeking knowledge of me and not realising that I could understand her speech or answer in it, she drew the tips of her fingers across my

breast. There was no more offensiveness in the touch than in the questioning fingers of the blind. Wonder and perplexity deepened in her, she turned back to Persilope.

“I grow an old woman,” she said, “I have failed you.”

He took the hand which she put out deprecatingly and held it strongly against his breast, laughing the full, fatuous man’s laugh of disbelief.

“When have you failed me?”

“I do not know,” she protested; “I cannot tell;” and I understood that the doubt referred to her failure to get from me by that contact the clue she sought.

“Surely these are they whom I feared for you to meet when you set out for the sea by the cypresses, not for what they would do to you”—her look was toward Persilope—“but for what they might bring to all Outliers. But now I am not sure.”

She spoke as much to the company at large as to her husband. The number of them had increased, until I could see the outer ring melting into the twilight of the trees, eyes in formless faces of amazement and alarm. Now at the admission of a

difficulty they turned all toward her with that courtesy of inward attention by which when one of them would understand more of a matter than lay directly before him, at a sign each turned his thought upon it gravely for a time, like so many lamps lighted in a room, and turned it off again with no more concern when the matter was resolved. But even as she smiled to acknowledge it she shook her head.

"No," she repeated, "I cannot tell." She turned and looked at me, and I gave her the look back with so deep a wish to have her understand that no trouble should come to them by me, that she must have sensed it, for her look went on by me and stopped at Herman.

"You?" she questioned.

"Tell her," said Herman, who had not caught all the words, but only the general purport of her speech, "tell her that all we ask is to go to our own homes, unharmed and harming no one."

Now that was not exactly what I had in mind, for though I would not for worlds have made trouble for the Outliers, I wished nothing so little as being sent away before I

had got to know more of them, and before I could shape a speech to that end Trastevera spoke again more lightly.

“Now that I have seen them, there seems nothing in them but kindness and well-meaning. Indeed it is so unusual a thing that House-Folk should discover us that I am not sure we ought not to pay them some little respect for it.”

She made me a little whimsical acknowledgment of this sentiment, but before I could frame a reply some slight shifting of the ringed watchers thrust forward Ravenutzi, reminding me suddenly that I had neglected to state in the midst of Prassade's explanation, that his finding me was not the first intimation I had had of the presence of Outliers in the neighbourhood of Broken Tree. Up to this time I had observed that when the Outliers had their heads together on any matter of immediate concern, it had been Ravenutzi's habit to keep a little at one side, as though not directly affected by it, but now as I saw him pushed into the cleared space by the stream side, it seemed to stir dimly in my mind that the fact of my first meeting with him, which I had not before

mentioned, might add something to the occasion, though I hardly understood how. I must have made some motion of declaring it, some slight betraying glance which the smith detected, for with the words still choking in my throat he looked at me, subtly, somehow encompassingly, as if he had projected his personality forward until it filled satisfyingly all my thought, and I no longer thought it worth while to mention where I had first seen Ravenutzi nor what I had found him doing. I was taken with a sudden inexplicable warmth toward him, and a vague wish to afford him a protection for which he had not asked and did not conceivably need. Swift as this passage was, I saw that Trastevera had taken account of it, something dimmed in her as if her mind had lain at the crossing of our two glances, Ravenutzi's and mine, and been taken in the shadow.

“And for the disposing of them,” she finished evenly, as though this had been in her mind from the first to say, “you had better take council to determine if they shall be given the Cup at once, or be kept to wait a sign.”

I saw Persilope stooping to her, urging that she was tired, that she had come too far that day, she would be clearer in the morning; but she shook her head still, looking once long at me, and once almost slyly at the smith, and then at us no more, but only at her husband, as she walked slowly in the meadow against the saffron-tinted sky, and we were taken away, Herman and I, to our respective huts.

The place called Deep Fern by the Outliers lay in the middle of three half hollow basins looking seaward, and clearing all the intervening hills. Barriers thick set with redwood, dividing the cupped space like the ridges of a shell, ran into a hollow full of broad oaks and brambles. Between the ridges brooks ran to join the creek that, dropping in a white torrent to the basin called Lower Fern, made a pool there from which it was also known as Deer Lake Hollow. The upper basin, long and narrow, was called from the falls, Leaping Water.

The camp of the Outliers lay in one of the widest of the furrows between the ridges where the redwoods marched soldierly down to the stream side, and above it, between

Deep Fern and a place called Bent Bow, lay Council Hollow. It was there, when the moon was an hour high, a battered-looking moon, yellow and low, went all the Outliers to consider what was to be done about us. It was a windy hollow where no trees grew, nothing taller in it than the shadows of the penstemon which the moon cast upon the rocks, and whenever the wind moved, a strong smell of sweet grass and yerba buena. It was oval shaped, with long white knuckles of rock sticking out along the rim, and there would have been about thirty men of the Outliers in it when we came up the ridge from Deep Fern. We halted with the women at a point where we could see, near to one end, a little fire of crossed sticks low on the ground, for the Outliers were at all times sparing of fire and cautious in the use of it.

The Council had been sitting some time, I think, upon other matters, when we took up our station on the rising ground, and Trastevera went down, winding between the rocks toward the ruddy point of fire. The moon was moving in a shallow arc not high above the ranges, and some hurrying clouds

scattered the light so that we could see little more than the stir of her going, the pale discs of faces or the shining of an arm or shoulder in the clear space between the shadows of the clouds.

She went on quietly, all talk falling off before her until she stood in the small lit circle between the leaders, and they enquired formally of her had she anything to say of importance in the business of the two strangers.

"Only this," she said, "that whereas I was greatly troubled before they came, by a sense of danger impending, I am now free from it so far as the House-Folk are concerned."

"But do you," questioned Prassade, "sense trouble still, apart from these?" He motioned toward Herman and me, who had been brought behind her almost to the circle of the flare.

"Trouble and shadow of change," she said, and after a pause: "Shall I speak?"

Without waiting for the click of encouragement that ran about the Hollow, she began:

"You know all of you that I have, through no fault, the blood of the Far-Folk, which

has been for a long time the blood of traitors and falsifiers, and yet never at any time have I played traitor to you nor brought you uncertain word, except" — I thought her voice wavered there—"in the matter of the hostage."

If there had been any wavering it was not in the councillors, whose attention seemed to stiffen to the point of expectation as she went on steadily.

"When it was a question more than a year ago that the Far-Folk should send us their best man and cunningest as a hostage for accomplished peace, you know that I was against it, but when, as I had no reason to give, beyond the unreasoning troubling of my spirit, Ravenutzi was brought into our borders, and I had met with him, there was something which sang to him in my blood and a sense of bond to replace the presentiment, as I truly admitted to you."

So still her audience was, so shadowed by the drift of cloud, that she seemed, as she stood with her face whitened by the moon, and the low fire glinting the folds of her dress, to be explaining herself to herself alone and to admit the need of explanation.

“And because,” she said, “I could not be sure if it was a foreseeing, or merely that my traitor blood made kinship to him, you took the matter to council and accepted the hostage. Are you sorry for it?”

At this, which had been so little anticipated, there went a murmur around the hollow as of doubt not quite resolved; several cried out uncertain words which a ruffle of wind broke and scattered, and Prassade, wagging his red beard, shouted:

“No! By the Friend!”

“Then,” she went on, “as it was with Ravenutzi, so with these. I saw trouble, and now I do not see it; trouble that comes of keeping them, or trouble of letting them go. That I cannot determine for you. So I say now, if you do not regret what you have done by Ravenutzi, do the same with these, accept and hold them, waiting for a sign.”

She left off, and the moon came out of the cloud to discover how they stood toward it, and went in again discovering nothing.

Then a man of them, who had already pricked himself upon my attention, stood up to argue the matter. He was short and

exceedingly stout of build, and, above the thick bands of leather that protected his lower limbs, wore no dress but a congar skin bound about the thick columnar body and held in place by a cord passing over the shoulder. He was armed with a crotched stick that had an oblong pointed stone bound in the crotch by thongs, and the handle so long that as he stood with his hands, which were wide and burned but shapely, resting on it, the head of the weapon lay upon the ground. What was most singular in his appearance, as he stood blocked solidly against the half-lit sky, was his hair, which, being all of a pale yellowness, crisp and curling, rayed out erectly from his head as though it were the emanation of some natural force or property of the man, curiously and independently alive from the square and somewhat meaningless regularity of his countenance.

“Why,” enquired he, “were they brought here to Deep Fern? Why not made to drink forgetfulness when first taken?”

“Evarra had forgotten it,” Persilope explained; “she thought it could be gathered at Broken Tree, but she had forgotten how

much further the season is advanced in that neighbourhood."

"But now," said Evarra, "I have prepared it, and there is nothing more to do." She came forward, and I observed that she held a wooden bowl against her breast from which steam arose, and an aromatic smell.

The moon had risen early on the track of the sun, the shallow lap of hills in which we stood gave directly westward to the belated glow that diffused through the moon shadows an amber bloom in which, though the faces of the Outliers shone indistinctly, every motion and purpose was discernible. I could see then that Evarra's intent to give us to drink of some herb which should cause us to forget all that had happened to us since we had crossed their borders at Broken Tree, and perhaps more beside, and so send us home again, met with so much approval that I spoke hurriedly to forestall it.

"No, no!" I cried. "We have done no harm to you that you should do so great a harm to us. If you must send us away, why, send us, and we will give you our word, and that is the best thing we have to give, that

no one shall know of what has happened these four days; but do not take away the recollection from us." I spoke so earnestly and meant so much what I said, taking Herman's hand so as to include him in the vehemence of my request, though in truth I do not think he had any particular feeling at the time, that I made some way with them.

"Nothing is farther from our thoughts," I said, seeing Evarra hesitate, "than to bring harm upon you. Not for the world would we betray to our own folk your ways nor your homes nor your Treasure——"

I do not know why I should have mentioned treasure, except that seeing old Noche's flowing head outlined against the pale luminosity of the sky that instant brought it to my mind, and the word popped out on my tongue as suddenly as it had popped in, but on the instant there was a sharp crackling of exclamations and a stir as of people rushing together when a brand has snapped out of the fire, followed by a portentous stillness. Into this bay of sound the red-pointed beard of Prassade projected itself.

“Who,” he cried, “has been telling of treasure in the hearing of House-Folk?”

“No one, no one,” I protested, anxious not to provoke blame; “it is only that I overheard the children——”

“It was I,” admitted Noche regretfully, “old fool that I am. I was telling the children, and I did not think she understood so much.”

“Fool!” said Prassade; “and twice fool for being an old one!”

But Persilope corrected him.

“At such a time it is permitted to tell the children of the King’s Desire and the keeping of it.”

“But not in the presence of House-Folk, nor by one who thinks there is no harm in a jewel if only it shines well and has a story to it.”

There was more to this which the wind broke and carried away, arms lifted and heads cast up within the shadow, turbulence and murmurs of denial, and I heard Trastevera softly say :

“Trouble come indeed, when one Outlier calls another a fool in open council.”

“It is nothing,” whispered Evarra at my

shoulder, "all this talk. Though you had the King's Desire in your hand, yet you would stay if Persilope thought she wished it."

Then the yellow head of Mancha shone in the small circle of the fire, and his face under it grotesquely blocked with light, like some ancient mask, crying :

"Signs—do we wait for Signs? Here is a Sign : first the woman comes, and then the man seeking her. Now, if they are not returned speedily to their own place who may not come looking for the two of them? And if, being kept, they escape by chance and go back talking of treasure——"

"But a Sign!" cried Persilope, interrupting him. "Outliers, here is a Sign. These House-Folk have found us, and that where none of their kind so much as mark our trails ; and within a day in our camp they have heard of the King's Desire, and talked openly of it. This is a Sign that they are more favoured by the Friends of the Soul of Man than any of their kind. Is it not a Sign?"

We could see men rising to their feet here and there, and some cried out : "A Sign! A Sign!" And then other broken phrases,

torn and trumpeted by the wind. Persilope took the bowl from Evarra, holding it out over the fire with a motion to extinguish it.

“One has seen strangers coming, and strange things have come ; shall we not wait upon her word ?” he cried, and though I could make nothing of the confused murmur which ringed the hollow, he must have read acquiescence in it, for he partially emptied the contents of the bowl upon the fire and then passed it to Mancha, Ward of the Outer Borders, to see what he would do about it, and Mancha, smiling, handed it to Trastevera as a sign of unbroken confidence, she so accepting it, and that was the last I saw of her before Evarra hurried me away, holding high the bowl, pouring slowly the ceremonial water, silvered by the moon.

IV

THE MEET AT LEAPING WATER

WITHIN five days, during which it rained and cleared, a fine long growing rain that left the world new washed and shining, the Meet of the Outliers was moved to Leaping Water.

This was the amphitheatre of the terraced basin lying next above Deep Fern, and took its name from the long leap of the creek that came flashing down arch by arch from the high, treeless ridges. Five leaps it took from Moon-Crest to the Basin, where it poured guttering, in so steep a channel that the spray of it made a veil that shook and billowed with the force of its descending waters. It trailed out on the wind that drove continually even on the stillest days, between the high wings of the mountain, and took the light as it travelled from east to west and played it through all its seven

coloured changes. It was like a great pulse in the valley, the throb and tremble of it, flushing and paling. The Basin was clear meadow land, well-flowered, close set by the creek, but opening well under the red-woods, with here some sunny space of shrubs, stretching up into the middle region of lordly firs adoze on the steeps above the water.

And it was here we began to learn about the Love-Left Ward which was the occasion of their coming together.

The very first I had of it was from Evarra's slim lad, Lianthe, who, when he was set to keep me company, would lie on the fern, propping his chin upon his hand, and sing to me in his reedy unsexed voice, of a maiden who had left loving for the sake of a great service to her tribe, and, plucking up the brown moss by the roots, examining it carefully, asked me if I thought it was really right for a girl to do that sort of thing.

“What sort?”

“Give up loving and all her friends, boys she's always—liked, you know, and keep a Ward, like Zirrilöë.”

“ Did she do that ? ”

“ Well, they chose her to be the Ward this year, and her father let her. I don't think he ought ! ”

“ Why not ? ”

Lianthe was not very clear on this point, except as it involved the masculine conception of beauty as the sign of a real inward preciousness ; Zirriloë had a way of walking, like a wind in a blooming meadow, she had a cheek as soft, as richly coloured, as the satin lining of unripened cones, which he broke open to show me, *therefore* Prassade shouldn't have let her forswear all loving for ten years.

“ She can't even look at a boy,” said Lianthe ; “ only at old men, Noche and Waddyn and Ravenutzi, and if there was—anybody—had thought of marrying her, he'd have to give up thinking about it for ten years. And anyway, what is the good of giving a girl secrets to keep if you have to watch her night and day to see that she keeps them ? ”

There was a great deal more to this than Herman had from the men and the girl's father. Prassade, whose eldest child she

was, felt himself raised to immeasurable dignity by the choice of Zirriloë, who was in fact all that Lianthe reported her, and more. To his pride it was a mere detail that during the ten years of her Wardship she was to live apart from all toward whom her heart moved her, kept by old, seasoned men, who never left her except with others older and less loverly than themselves. These six months past she had been with her watchers in a lonely place, learning by trial what it meant to have left all love to become the Ward of mysteries.

It was there Trastevera had been when I first saw her, to examine the girl and discover if her mind was still steadfast.

So she found it, and so reported it to Prassade, and all things being satisfactory, the feast of the Love-Left Ward was to take place on the fifth day from this; and when her term was done she took the Cup, and so forgetting all she had heard, returned to the normal use of women.

“But,” I said to Lianthe, once when we were gathering elderberries by the creek, “what is it all about, this secret which

Zirriiloë must keep, and is not trusted in the keeping?"

"Ah!" he exclaimed impatiently, kicking at the mossy stones in the water-bed. "Ask Noche—he is one of the keepers."

I should have taken that advice at once, but Noche was away at the Ledge, or River Ward, or wherever the girl was, and Evarra was much too busy to talk, for practically all the Outliers were expected at Leaping Water, and there was a great deal to do. As to how many there were of them, and what places they came from, I could never form any idea, for except at Council Hollow they never came together in the open. At the fight at River Ward there were forty picked men, slingsmen and hammers, but counting women and children there must have been quite four times that number at Leaping Water. They ran together like quail in the wood, and at a word melted like quail into its spacious silences.

There was that subtle essence of rejuvenation in the air that comes after rain, buds of the incense shrub were swelling and odorous, all the forest was alive and astir with the sense of invisible friendly presences and low-

toned happy talk that seemed for ever at the point, under cover of a ruffling wind or screening rush of water, of breaking into laughter.

We came often upon lovers walking in the high arched aisles, children scuttling pink and unabashed in the dappled water, or at noons, men and women half sunk in the fern deep in gossip and reminder. Such times as these we began to hear hints by which we tracked a historic reality behind what I had already accepted heartily, and Herman with grudging, the existence of the King's Desire.

They would be lying, a dozen of them in company on the brown redwood litter, the towered trunks leaning to the firs far above them, and one would begin to sing softly to himself a kind of rhymeless tune, all of dead kings in a rock chamber canted in their thrones by the weight of jewels, and another would answer with a song about a lovely maid playing in sea caves full of hollow light.

By this we knew the thoughts of all of them ran on the story which held the songs together like a thread, and of which we got to know at last that it was the history of the place from which they had come hither,

bringing the Treasure with them, pursued by the Far-Folk, or else it was they who were the pursuers, but the Treasure had been the point of their contention, and it had cost the Outliers so much that they had come to abhor even the possession of it. So having buried it they made their honour the keeping of the secret, and because the first disturbance over it that reft them from their country had been brought about by the treachery of a woman, they put a woman to the keeping, half in irony, I think, for then they had set a watch upon the woman. It was about this time that Herman waked to an interest on the occasion that nothing else had been able to arouse in him ; he thought that a community that had arrived at the pitch of understanding that the best thing to be done with wealth was to get rid of it, would repay study. I remember his wondering if the Outliers had had any more trouble with their Treasure, or what they imagined as such, for he never would credit its reality, than we had experienced with the Coal Oil Trust, but I paid very little attention to him, for all my mind was drawn away watching Ravenutzi.

From the first I had noticed that whenever there was one of those old tales or any talk of the King's Desire, for that was oftenest their name for it, something would spring up in his face, as slight as the flick of an eyelid or the ripple of muscles at the corner of his mouth, but something at which caution snapped wide-awake in me. I recall how once as we lay all together at the bottom of the wood in the clear obscure of twilight, in a circular, grassless space where the water went by with a trickling, absent sound, one of the young men began to sing, and Ravenutzi had stopped him with some remark to the effect that the Outliers could sing it so if it pleased them, but it was not so.

"Come," said the youth, "I have always wanted to know how the Far-Folk told that part of the tale so as not to be ashamed of it;" but Prassade sprang up protesting that there should be no communication between them and the Hostage on a forbidden matter, and some debate followed among the elders as to that. I could see the smith sitting in his accustomed attitude, the knees doubled, the hands clasped about them, his chin resting on his knees, the

thin faun's profile under the streaked, springy hair, the eyes black in the twilight, yet always as if they had a separate furtive intelligence of their own, and it occurred to me suddenly, that in this very debate precipitated by Ravenutzi, the Outliers were talking about the Treasure, and that he did not care in what fashion so long as they talked. Instinctively as I felt this borne forward on a rush of reminder, turning in it like a weed in the surf, I turned toward Trastevera as one turns in a dim room toward the light, holding out my mind to her as to one of better sight . . . and in the stir of my turning, slight as it was, caught the eyes of Ravenutzi, the iris opaque and velvety, disappearing under the widening pupil of his fixed gaze. I felt the rushing suggestion back away from the shore of my mind and leave it bare. There was something I knew I had meant to speak to Trastevera about, and I had forgotten what it was.

It was brought back to me the next day, which was the one before the move to Leaping Water. We were sitting in Evarra's hut, Herman and I, with Noche, for the wind

and cloud of the Council had contrived to blow up a rain that drummed aloud on the bent fern but scarcely reached us through the thick tent of boughs ; above us we could hear the wind where it went hunting like a great cat, but down at the bottom of the pit of redwoods it could hardly lift the flap of the door.

And without some such stir or movement of life within, one might have passed a trail's breadth from the house of Evarra and not suspected it, so skilfully was it contrived within one of those sapling circles that spring up all so straight and slender around the decayed base of ancient redwoods, like close-set, fluted columns round a ruined altar. Every family had two or three, not connected, not close together, but chosen with that wild instinct for unobtrusiveness with which they cloaked the processes of living. From the middle of one of these, smoke could go up through the deep well of green and mingle undetected with the blue haze of the forest, and tents of skin could be drawn against the rain which beat upon them with a slumberous sound and dripped all down the shouldering colonnade.

The tent was half drawn this morning, and no drops reached us but seldom light spatterings from high, wind-shaken boughs. Evarra was abroad looking after her family, and Noche had come over with Herman to sit housed with me, for the Outliers had, from such indifferent observation as they had made, got the notion that House-Folk were of great fragility as regards weather, and were exceedingly careful of us, though I had seen Noche laugh as he shook the wet from his body, and take the great gusts of wind as a man might the moods of his mistress. He sat opposite us now on a heap of ferns, busy at his sling-plaiting, with the placidity of a spinning Hercules, and in a frame to be entertaining. It occurred to me it might be an excellent time to beguile him into talk of the Treasure, much to Herman's annoyance, for he was of the opinion that my having been a week among the Outliers and no harm having come of it, was no sign it wouldn't come eventually.

"Don't meddle with their tribal mysteries," he protested; "if it hadn't been for their confounded Treasure we would have been on the trail for home by now."

“But consider,” I explained to Herman for Noche’s sake; “if we drink forgetfulness at the last, what does it matter how much we know before? And besides, he is suffering to tell me. Go on, Noche.”

Once you had old Noche started, his talk ran on like the involute patterns he loved to trace upon the sand, looping to let in some shining circumstance or set off some jewel of an incident. It was a wonderful treasure by his account: lamps thick with garnets, crusted with amethysts, and the cup of the Four Quarters which a dead king held between his knees.

Outside we could hear the creaking of the boughs as the wind pounced and wallowed, stalking an invisible prey: within the hut we saw in the old man’s story the summer island from which the tale began, far southward, rising from the kissing seas. All at once he left off, breathing quick, his nostrils lifted a little, quivering, his head turning from side to side, like a questing dog’s. We had heard nothing but the trickle of rain down the corrugated trunks, but Noche, turning his attention toward the doorway, twitched his great

eyebrows once, and from that broke into smiling.

“Trastevera,” he said; and then a very curious thing happened. Some patches of the red and brown that had caught my attention from time to time at the burl of the redwood opposite stirred and resolved into Ravenutzi. How long he had been there I had no notion, and though I was well acquainted with that wild faculty of the Outliers to make themselves seem, by very stillness, part of the rock and wood, I was able to be startled by it quite as much on this occasion as on the first time of my meeting them. It was as though Ravenutzi made himself known to us, not so much by a movement, as by the centring of his own attention on some other thing, as if the very force of his own thinking drew him out of obscurity. He was looking with that same curious fixity that held me when I caught him dyeing his hair at the spring, not at me, but at Trastevera approaching on the trail, holding her look with so sensible an insistence upon the fact of his being there that it seemed to shoulder out all question as to why he was there in the first place. She

came up the trail in that lifting mood with which the well body meets weather stress, as if the spirit were a sail run up the mast to catch the wind. She came lightly, dressed as the women mostly were, in an under tunic of soft spun stuff, of wood green or brown colour, but her outer garment was all of the breasts of water birds, close-fitted, defining the figure. She looked fairly back at Ravenutzi as she came, smiling from below her quiet eyes, he walking on so casually that only I could say that he had not merely been passing as she passed, though I was sure in my own mind he had been sitting close by Evarra's hut for a long time.

She gave us Good Friending as she came in, but it was not until Noche, in response to a sign from her, had taken Herman out by the brook trail, that she spoke to me directly.

"Would he, your friend, if you made a promise to me in regard to your being here and what you shall see among us, be bound by it?"

"Well, in most particulars; at any rate, he would give it consideration."

"Does he love you?"

“No,” I said. I was sure of that much.

“How do you know?”

“By the best token in the world. He has told me so.”

“Ah!” She looked at me attentively a moment, as if by that means she might discover the reason of it.

“Then in that case he will probably do as you say. If he loved you,” she smiled, “he would expect you to do as he said.”

She loosened her feather coat, shaking out the wet, and took from E'verra's wall an oblong piece of cloth, brown and yellow barred like the streakings of sunlight on the bark of pines, and disposed it so that, with the folds lying close and across the slender body and the two loose ends falling over the shoulders, she looked, sitting on a heap of fern, most like some still brooding moth that bides the rain under a sheltering tree.

“You are so much more like us,” said she, “than I have expected; so much more understanding. Have you Far-Seeing?”

“How Far-Seeing?”

“There are some among us,” she said, considering, “who can lie in their beds at

night and hear the deer crossing at Lower Fern, some who can stand in their doors and see the face of a man moving on the cliffs at Leaping Water, but I am one who can see trouble coming before the bearer of it has come to Broken Tree. Have you such?"

"I have heard of them."

"Do you know then if they see better or worse for loving?"

I could not tell her that, though I wished to, since she made such a point of it, but had to content myself with asking her how it was with herself.

"Very much better," she laughed, and coloured; "or worse." She frowned, sighing. "I will tell you how that is."

It seemed from her account that she had so unusual a faculty that the tribe had paid her, by reason of it, a distinction never before accorded, and she had planned in her heart to repay it by having no love and no interest but theirs, and it had come as a shock to her, when Persilope was made Warden of the Council, that it was agreed everywhere that she should marry him.

She had not seen him nor he her, but

knowing each by report what the other was, had accepted the best mate that the circumstance provided. They could do that, it seemed, these Outliers, apt, full natures, not being at the mercy of place and incident and tricks of dress and obscuring coquetries, therefore they could rise in the full chord each to each and love without inducement, and that was why the Outliers took no exception to what I was secretly ashamed of having noticed, that she had more years than her husband.

“ We have a custom when we are married,” she said, “ of choosing where it shall be, and set forth for it each from his own home, all our friends being apprised of it and wishing us well, and when we come to the place, each by his own trail, meet there under no eyes. When a month is done we go home to our friends, who make a great to-do for us. There is a hill I know, looking seaward, a full day from here. There are pines at the top and oaks about the foot, but the whole of it is treeless, grassy, with flowers that sleep by day among the grasses. It is neither windy nor quiet, but small waves of air run this way and that along the grass,

and make a changing pattern, and here I chose to meet Persilope. All day I went down by Deer Leap and River Ward to meet my man, and he came up by Toyon and the hiving rocks to meet me; all day I felt him come, and the earth felt him: news of him came up through the grasses and touched my finger-tips." She flushed a little, and finished simply: "When we came back," she said, "I had reason to believe I had lost the gift of Far-Seeing. It was while we were away that the Far-Folk had opened the matter of the hostage, and the Council waited only for Persilope to determine it, for the people were for the most part glad to have an end of quarrelling."

This was the first time of my realising that there was another sort of woodlanders beside the Outliers, for up till this time, when I had heard mention Far-Folk, I thought it perhaps another sort of name for us, House Livers, as they called us indifferently, or Diggers, or They of the Ploughed Lands, as people will speak of a wild species, very common but of too little interest to be named or known.

"So soon as I had heard of it," she went

on, "I was against it, chilled with prescience of disaster, and said so freely, but when Ravenutzi came to council, and I had looked him through, I was warm again. You heard how I said last night that I could not tell if it was the blood of the Far-Folk playing traitor in me, of it there was, in fact, no shadow coming. So I was obliged to say to the Council, and they on their own motion, without any help from me, accepted him. No one has blamed me"—she mused a little, with her chin upon her hand—"but all the time I am afraid lest around him there might have been some intimation of coming evil which my joy, going from me to all I looked upon, dispelled as a bubbling spring breaks up a shadow."

She rose and walked from me a little space, returned, and stood before me so intent upon getting some answer more than the words said, that I thought it best to let no words trouble her. Presently she went on:

"Since then I have had no serious forecasting that concerned the Outliers at large, but some days before Prassade first found you, I had a vision of Broken Tree and a bird rising from it crying trouble, and there

was shadow lying on my world, and dread of loss and change; but this is strangest, that when I had seen you . . . I saw more than that . . . between you and Ravenutzi there was some bond and understanding."

"No, no!" I protested; "on his part, yes, some intention toward me, some power to draw me unaware to meet some end of his, and yet. . . ."

"And yet you like him?"

I admitted it. Though I had no special confidence in his purpose, I felt my soul invite his use.

"And that," said Trastevera, "is why I have kept you here and advised that you be told anything it is lawful for an Outlier to know. Ordinarily when we find House-Folk among us we give them the Cup and let them go, but though you are to drink forgetfulness at last, before that you may be of use to me."

"But how?"

Though I had more curiosity than concern, I could see doubt pulsing in her like the light breathing of a moth before she resolved at last.

"Even if you betray me, there is still the

Cup," she said. "You have already been of use to me, for as I came into camp last night I felt the shadow; it was not on you when I looked, but when Ravenutzi looked at you I saw it fall, and it fell from him."

She considered me attentively to see what I would make of this, but I, not willing to say until I had considered it myself, spoke of the Cup, beginning to take it seriously for the first time.

"Of what," said I, "will it make me forgetful?"

"Everything at first, but by degrees the past will clear; only around all that happens here, and of the circumstance of your drinking it, there will be the blank of perfect sleep."

"But why are you so sure in sparing me that I shall be able to serve you?"

"How could you help it?" She looked at me in quick surprise. "You are not such as your friend is who says this is good or not good, and that is the end of it, but one in whom the vision clouds and colours. By the colour of your mind when it falls under Ravenutzi's I shall learn perhaps whether to

trust my old distrust of him or my present friendliness.

“Oh!” she cried, perceiving so readily at that instant the half conviction, half credulity, of my mind toward her that she was embarrassed by it. “Is it so among House-Folk that they must always explain and account for themselves? An Outlier would not have questioned it.”

“But what am I to do?”

“Hold the will to help me. Be friends with the smith if he is friendly, and say nothing to any one of this, and when your time comes to take the Cup I will see that it is made light for you.”

It did not sound very difficult, and perhaps I did not take it very seriously; at any rate I gave the promise, and unwinding herself from the striped cloth like a moth coming out of a chrysalis, she resumed her feather coat and left me with that suddenness I had learned to expect of the Outliers, as of a flitting bird or a weasel slipping in the chaparral.

On the very first occasion of our being alone together after that, I demanded of Evarra what Trastevera had meant by saying

that she was of the blood of Ravenutzi, and that the blood was traitorous. I could ask that safely, because I had learned that except in one important matter, the Outliers had no skill in concealments and no knowledge whatever of indirection, though you might not understand how that was except to realise that they were also without malice. It was as if somewhere in their history they had so sickened of the stuff of treachery that their teeth were set on edge at the mere attitudes of it, tricks, pretensions and evasions.

So I knew well that if I opened a forbidden matter, Evarra would tell me so flatly, and that would be the end of it, but if it was permissible to speak at all, would do me no such discourtesy as not to speak freely.

It was a very old affair, she said, but one well known among the Outliers, that during their quarrels with the Far-Folk one of their women was taken and kept, and afterward returned to her home by purchase, that she had had a child shortly after, begotten upon her unwillingly, and from that child Trastevera was descended. The blood of the Far-Folk, said Evarra, was a foul strain, but they

had mixed it with the best of theirs, and there was no more treason left in it than there was soiling of last season's rains in the spring that watered Deep Fern, and none of the Outliers had remembered it until Ravenutzi came. But as for these Far-Folk, they were to the Outliers all that cat was to dog, hill-dwellers, seeking treeless spaces, holes in the rock and huts of brush; wiry folk, mocking and untruthful, and such inveterate craftsmen that a man of them could sooner smudge himself at a forge making a knife to trade you for a haunch of venison, than go a-hunting for it himself. It was so most of the iron implements I had noticed among the Outliers were come by, for they were no smithiers, nor cared much for tools, casting themselves joyously forth on the day to come back well furnished by their own hands.

But a man of the Far-Folk would sit all day with his nose to a bit of hammered metal, graving on it strange patterns of beasts and whorls and lacing circles, and when it was done there was no great pleasure in it, said Evarra, for it would not glitter as a bit of shell, nor brown nor brighten as a

string of berries, nor be cast every hour in a new pattern like a chaplet of flowers, but remained set for ever, as the Far-Folk in their unkempt ways.

They were pilferous too, and lived in such relation as weasels might to the people of the Ploughed Lands; went down by night across the borders of the Outliers to the farmyards for their scraps of metal, and ate fruit from their orchards. It was in fact to purchase free passage for such expeditions through disputed territory that they had given hostage to their foes at Deep Fern; free leave to go and come from Deer Leap to the River Ward, and between Toyon and Broken Head, and up to this time the compact had been scrupulously kept, though it was evident from Evarra's manner of admitting it, she begrudged any good opinion I might have of the Far-Folk on account of it.

"And what harm have you had of Ravenutzi?"

Ah, that was as might be, if you counted the failure of Trastevera's visions and his making a fool of old Noche with his smith's tricks. The old man had thought of little

this year past but forge work and designs—and prating to the children of the King's Desire. "If it had been my child listening to him," finished Evarra, "I should have smacked him."

All of which I told to Herman at the first opportunity. And also that I should never be happy one moment until I had found out what fact, if any, lay behind the story of the King's Desire.

"What's the good of finding out," said Herman gloomily, "if we have to take their everlasting dope on top of it?"

"And within three days of the most sophisticated society on earth," I reminded him. "They are having the golf tournament at Mira Monte this week. Could you believe it?"

"Oh, I don't believe a word of it," he insisted. "This is just one of the tales you've made up, and you've hypnotised me into going through with it, but I don't believe it at all."

V

THE LOVE-LEFT WARD

I WAS sitting under a toyon tree watching Evarra brew forgetfulness in a polished porphyry bowl, when Herman came by. It was the morning of the Meet, the Cup was wanted for her who was the Ward, and Evarra took a great deal of pains with it, heating the bowl slowly and, when the dry leaves began to smoke and give off an odour of young fir, dropping water gently and setting it to steep in the sun. I had hoped to discover what plant it might be, but there was little to be guessed except that it had a blue flower taken in the bud, and smelled like a wood path in the spring as Evarra sat and stirred under the toyon and answered my questions or not as she was so inclined.

“Do you know any sort of an herb,

Evarra, that will turn grey hair black again?"

"That I do; and black hair grey if you so wish it." But I got no further than that, when Herman came along, bursting full of news. He was looking almost handsome that morning, for he had put on the dress of the Outliers for the first time, and though he had managed it so as to cover more of him than was their fashion, it became him very well. As if he had laid off something other than dress which had come between me and what I had wished of him, some satisfying quality streamed from him, according with the day.

"Come up the trail with me; I have some news for you," he began. "May she?"

This last to Evarra, for though with all the basin of Deep Fern and Leaping Water full of their own folk we had been let freely about among them, there was still a form of keeping us under guard.

"Go up," said Evarra, probably glad to get rid of me, "as far as Fallen Tree, where you can see the Leap between that and the clearing, and I will join you presently. You can see the procession best

from there, where it first comes out of the wood."

The dew was not yet gone up from the shadows nor the virgin morning warmed a whit toward noon; the creek sang at the curve, I felt the axles of the earth sing as it swung eastward. I spread out my arms in the trail and touched the tips of the growing things, and felt the tide of abundant life rise through my fingers. Herman strode in the trail ahead and called over his shoulder:

"What are you laughing at back there, Mona?"

"News," I answered, for I had remembered suddenly something Trastevera had said to me.

"What news?"

"How should I know, except that it is good news? The meadowsweet told it to me. What's yours?"

"That Treasure you're so keen about, they've really got it. I've talked with men who've seen it."

"Noche?"

"He hasn't come back yet, but Waddyn, one of the keepers—there were four of them—dug it up ten years ago and reburied it."

“But why?”

“That’s my news. On account of Trastevera. She was the Ward ten years ago, and because of her gift of Far-Seeing, as they call it, they were afraid to give her their wretched drug lest they should destroy it. So they took counsel and decided to change the hiding-place. Prassade said it wasn’t an altogether popular movement. Some of the Wards haven’t taken kindly to the Cup when their turn came, and they feared the precedent. But anyway they did it. They made a cordon round the place where it was hid, three days’ journeys wide, and the four old men went in and dug up the Treasure and buried it again.”

“All those jewels and beaten gold?”

“Whatever it is they’ve got, coloured pebbles most likely. It wouldn’t have been so bad, Prassade says, changing the place of it; that has happened several times in their history; but while they had it up they had a look at it, and Noche’s head has been turned by it.”

“I should think it might. It’s all true, then?”

“Folk tales, likely; all tribes have them.”

Though his face was turned from me on the trail, I could feel Herman's professional manner coming on again. "It is extraordinary, though, how nearly like their social organisation is to what you would expect of a highly civilised people thrown suddenly back on the primal means. Take their notions of property now——"

What he was going to say must have been very interesting, but just at this point we came to Fallen Tree, and saw the irised banner of the Leap floating before its resounding crash of waters. A little spit of grassy land ran here from the clearing into the dense growth, and the trail entered by it. Beyond it, pale late lilies censed the shadows of the redwoods, and below in the meadow there was nothing fairer than the bleached, wind-blown hair of the children, as they ran and shouted through the scrub about the day's performance. Evarra came hurrying with the Cup against her breast. Prassade and Persilope took up a station of some prominence on the point opposite us, with Mancha behind them, leaning on his long weapon, and presently the flutes began.

The sound of them stole upon us softly from far within the redwoods, keyed a little under the bell tones of the creek, and rising through it to the pitch at which the water note seems for ever at the point of breaking into speech, emerging, as it skirted the meadow, in a tune fetching and human. Now you heard the swing of blossoms by runnels in the sod, the beat of spray on the broad bent leaves by the water borders, and then the melody through it, curling and uncurling like the ringlets on a girl's neck straying in the wind. With the music some sort of procession passed, boys and girls wreathed and dancing, forming as they wound in the wood glooms, breaking and dissolving where the trail led through the bright, sunned space of the meadow. You could hear where they went, from the Outliers ranged about the clearing, light applause of laughter like the patter that follows the wind in the quaking asp.

It circled the open space around which rippled the curved blade of the creek, and came to halt behind Persilope and the others. Then a drum-beat arose and rolled through it as the four keepers came out of the wood ;

Noche and Waddyn and two others I did not know or observe, except that they were not young and carried the occasion solemnly. These took up their station on either side of the meadow, and the two foremost, saluting, passed on a little beyond the chief, and into the hollow square thus formed for her came the maiden Ward.

First as she stood there one realised in her figure the springing pose of immaturity, in her gaze the wraptness and fixity of the devotee, and beyond that she was of so exquisite a finish and delicacy that one would wish to have plucked her like a flower. She was dressed in a smooth, seamless bodice of tawny skin, baring the throat and rounded upper arm; below that a skirt of thin green, shaped to her young curves by the vagrant wind. Her hair, which was all of burnt gold, powdered with ashes of gold, was drawn loosely back and confined close to her head, but falling free to her hips, blown forward, defining her like the sheath of a flower.

Her brows also were touched with gold, and the eyes under her brows like agates at the bottom of a brook. She wore no jewels,

but a thread of scarlet berries that, in its revealing femininity, in the way it took the curve of her slender throat and ran into the little hollow between her breasts, so seemed to me that I had never seen a more endearing ornament. As she appeared among us, for though she had walked very quietly out of the forest there was that appealing quality of her loveliness that gave her coming the swiftness of a vision, as she appeared thus it loosed somewhere within me a spring of smiling that ran sensibly about the hushed, observing circle.

She moved in the exultation of her shining mood, unconscious of the way her feet went or what eyes were upon her, to the sound of the shallow drums and the delicate high flutes. Soon as the music dropped she stopped before Persilope, who stood forward a little with some formal words of ritual or salutation, and, her face being turned from me, all my attention was taken up for the moment with what had happened to Mancha. He had been standing just behind the chief, and in the brief interval while Zirriloë had come ten steps or so out of the shadow, he had passed, as though her beauty had been

some swift, vivifying shock, from being a grave beholder to an active participant of the occasion. Deep red surged up in his face and left it pale again, his eyes, which were blue, burned amber points and took her like a flame. He shook as though the joints of his spirit were loosed, and took the full red under-lip in his teeth to keep back the tide of strength that came on him as he looked at her. You saw the soul of the man lithe and rippling in him, the glint of his eyes, his breath which came purringly, tawny colour of his hair and dress and burned bare skin, the mass and thickness of his body incredibly lifted and lightened by the consciousness of the Mate. He did not know what had happened to him, but he laughed to himself his joy in her, as she moved wrapped in her high errand down the still, summer glade, and across to the meadow.

“Herman! Herman! Did you see?” I whispered.

He was sitting on the fallen tree next to me, and as I moved my hand toward him in that vague pang that followed quick on the shock of inexpressible beauty, I felt his

fingers cold. His lips were open and I saw his tongue move to wet them, like a man unconsciously athirst.

Beyond the clearing, thick purplish trunks of the redwood upbore the masses of foliage like a cloud, choked between with laurel and holly and ceanothus, pierced by long tunnels that the deer had made. Down one of these the two foremost of the keepers plunged and were lost behind the mask of loose wild vines that festooned the front of the wood, lifting and falling in the wind that by mid-morning began to set seaward from the high ridges.

But the girl, some ten steps behind them, still in her half-seeing mood, missed the moment of the out-streaming of the vines, checked and faltered; the wind caught her dress and wrapped her in it, the drapery of vines swung out and caught her hair. But before the other keepers could come up with her, the long arm of Ravenutzi reached out from his point of vantage on a heavy, slanting trunk and gathered up the offending vines, holding them high and guardedly until the girl could pass. The detention was slight, but long enough for the annoyance

of it to have pierced her abstraction, and before he let it fall almost on the heads of the hurrying keepers, long enough for her to have looked up and accorded to him the first conscious recognition of her solemn passage. Whatever flattery there might have been in that, it could not draw so much as a backward glance from him, as with the swish of the long vines flung back upon the wall of boughs, he sprang forward from his perch toward the quarter where his gaze was, and as if that action had been the signal for it, seeming to draw with him a ring of staring faces all fixed toward the grassy spit by which the trail entered.

The music, which during the ritual had melted into the undertone of forest sounds, emerged again more pointedly human and appealing, as if it summoned from the bluish glooms an interest so personal and touching that it drew the Outliers from the shy wildness of their ways. The ring of watchers surged forward a step, the music rose like a sigh of expectation and ushered in a group of women who, without any order or solemnity, but with a great and serious kindness, supported in their midst her who

had been the Ward and was now to receive forgetfulness.

As soon as I saw Trastevera, upon whose arm she leaned, I understood that these were the former Wards, come to afford her such comfort as their experience justified, though it was not until I saw her mother hurry forward crying: "Daria! Daria!" that I began to realise what need of comfort there must be. Evarra beside me stirred the Cup, and the faint aromatic odour of it was of a cold and sickly dread, reflected from Daria's widened eyes on some secret surface of myself.

She was a pretty girl, warm-tinted, eyes of a wet grey, broad brow and the sensitive short lip of women whose happiness centres in approval; easy to read in her face that of all the restrictions of her Wardship the one against loving had been hardliest borne; plain to be seen now in the way she clung to her mother, who took the face between her hands, that of all the forfeitures that lay in the blue flower of forgetfulness that one of loving was most dread to be paid.

"O mother, mother," she said, "I cannot bear it!"

She shuddered sick, looking on all she had lived among and knowing that she should never know them again with the self of her, seeing the meadow and the wood, and understanding that there was not one of all its trails, if she set foot in it to-morrow, that she would know where it went or what she might meet in it. She was to die in effect, to leave life and memory, shames, petulancies, regrets, remembered laughter, to wake mutilated in the midst of full-bodied womanhood, without childhood, girlhood, parents, intimates.

“O mother,” she said, “I cannot bear it!”

She clung crying to her mother’s hand, while the other women crowded comfort upon her.

“Indeed, Daria,” one assured her, “but I knew my mother. There were four others with me when I woke, but I knew her. I did not know what she was to me, nor any name to call her, but my heart chose her from among the rest, and I held out my arms.”

They came crowding close and said that it was so, and many more things to this

purport, and the girl still turned her face to her mother's bosom as though she admitted all this, but it did not touch her case.

Then her father, coming forward, distressed for her, but somewhat more concerned for the situation, taking her by the shoulders, recalled her to herself.

"Daughter," he said, "have you carried the honour of the Outliers so many years to fail us at the last? How do you make life worth remembering with broken faith? And who will respect you if you respect not your word?"

She cleared a little at that and recovered, so that she was able to go through with some dignity the farewells which the elders now came forward to bestow with fixed cheerfulness, but when these were done and next after came the young companions of her years, saying, "We have nothing ill to remember of you, Daria," and "Goodwaking, Daria," she broke out again, desperate rather than despairing.

"Do not say so to me, I shall not drink it!"

"Shall not?" It was Persilope taking the Cup from Evarra, and moving forward

as he spoke. "It is a word that has never been heard before from a Ward."

Quick red leaped in Daria's face, which she turned this way and that, searching the meadow for some prop to her determination. It seemed that she found it, though there was nothing to be read there but commiseration and disapproval.

"Shall not," she breathed; and then quite low, sweeping his countenance once with her glance, and then fixing it steadily on the ground: "*She* did not drink it."

The emphasis was slight, slighter than the flicker of her eyes toward Trastevera, but the impact of her meaning drove the chief's wife from her, so that you scarcely saw how she moved, only that there was now a rift between the two women, which widened with the shocked perception in the listening circle. Persilope's recovery was instant, some sternness with it.

"What had been done," he said, "was done by all the Council with good reason. But what reason is here beyond a girl's protesting fancy?"

Again Daria's mutinous eyes searched the

meadow, and her resistance rose visibly in advance of its support.

“Reason enough!” The group of young persons at the foot of the circle turned upon itself, and released the figure of a young man about thirty, tall and personable.

“I have reason”—his voice shook, as though the words had been too long repressed in him and escaped bubblingly—“the best of reasons, for I . . . we love . . .”

He had hesitated an instant over the admission, wanting some quick assurance which flashed between the girl and him, but not so quickly that the certainty of it brought from the women, in whose care and keeping she had chiefly been, quick cries of protest and denial, falling almost on the stroke of his declaration.

“But you”—Persilope voiced the general knowledge—“you have been these three years at River Ward, you have not seen her.”

“Not for three years,” admitted the lover, “for as soon as I knew that I loved her I went away, that I might keep her honour and mine.” He choked an instant, and went on steadily: “I have always loved her, but

I had not spoken when it came to my turn to serve with Mancha, and while I was away you chose her to be the Ward, so I went back and served my time. When I came again I saw her walking with the women in the cool of the morning and knew that I loved her. That was the year the water came down from Water Gate and tore up the valley. In the flood I carried her——”

He smiled; the inexpressible joyousness of the woodlander broke upward in the remembrance.

“The next day,” he said, “she sent me word to go back to River Ward, and I knew by that that she loved me. So I went, and by the evidence of the work I have done *you* know how I have loved her.”

“By the evidence of the faith I have kept,” said Daria, “you know how I have loved him.”

All this time I could see the faces of the men, especially of the girl’s father and of Prassade, growing sterner, Trastevera looking down, studying the pattern of the meadow grass, Persilope biting his lip in the midst,

with the Cup in his hand, and the lover growing bolder.

“Is love so cheap a thing to you, Persilope, that you take it from us before we have tasted? It is Daria I love as she is, as I have seen her grow from a child into a woman, not a stranger, looking at me with unremembering eyes. Let the men take up the Treasure and bury it again, as they did for Trastevera.”

“There was a reason,” the chief began, and stopped, as if he knew that to argue was to lose.

“Oh, a reason——” I do not know by what imperceptible degrees and mutual consentings the lovers had got across the open space to each other, but there they were, hand-fast, confronting him. “Reason you thought you had, but what account are your reasons seeing she has neither been able to advise nor forewarn us for whose sake the reason was. Let them bury the Treasure again—or give it to the Far-Folk, for all I care, since nothing comes of it but wars and forgettings.”

He caught the girl to him fiercely as he spoke, irritated by the hardening of the

elders' minds against that very touch of wildness and rebellion by which he urged the disregard of custom. Whatever advantage he had with Persilope because of the precedent, he had lost by the hint of its insufficiency.

"If," said the chief, holding the bowl before him, "there had arisen any occasion, which I do not allow: *if* there had arisen such an occasion for doubting the wisdom of our former breach, it were the greater cause for our not admitting it now. Do you think"—forestalling the rising thought—"to bring it to Council? Look around you and see that we who make the Council are of one mind." And it was so; as the eyes of the young couple travelled about the group, they saw regret, but no relenting.

"If she forgets you," said the chief more kindly, "she forgets also the pain of her forgetting, and you shall teach her to love again."

"Girl," said her father, "if you shame me there is no forgetfulness deep enough for that."

I suppose that the mere acknowledgment of their love had eased the tension of dread,

had waked, perhaps, that foolish human certainty of passion to survive the loss even of its own identity, and perhaps they had never had any real hope of avoiding the issue; insensibly, too, as the matter had increased in gravity, the young listeners had melted into the circle, leaving a ring of older, sterner faces, in which there was no flinching, and before which they felt their resolution fail; we saw the girl turn piteously in her lover's arms.

"You," she said, "at least do not forget me."

"I do not forget."

"See," Perislope smiled faintly, and shaking a little of the pale green liquid from the bowl, "I have made it light for you."

"And I am yours," she urged; "whether or not I remember, I am yours."

"Knowing or unknowing," he assured, "I call these to witness that you are mine."

She put out her hand and took the bowl from Persilope, but her lover put his hand upon it over hers, holding it back until he charged her soul again.

She lifted the Cup and shuddered as she drank; once she faltered, but he pressed it

firmly to her lips. None moved of the listening circle. The wind was busy with the forest boughs, we saw the redwoods bend and the curdling of the water at the falls. We saw Daria's head bowing on its slender stalk, like the wild white columbine which the wind shook behind her.

"You will remember," still her lover warned her.

"I will remember."

She drooped, all her body lax with sleep, but still he propped her on his bosom. Her mother took up the girl's flaccid hand in hers and fondled it softly; she did not urge her claim.

"Daria, Daria," pleaded the lover, "say you will remember."

She could not answer now except by the turning of her head upon his bosom; colour, drained away by the drug, forsook her, the lips were open and a little drawn. He would have gathered her up then, but a motion from the elders stayed him.

"Remember, oh remember," he called upon her soul, and the soul struggled to reassure him, but it lay too deep under Forgetfulness. With a shudder she seemed almost to cease

to breathe. Evarra, stepping softly, lifted the relaxed lids and showed the eyes rolled upward, the pupils widened. She made a sign at which the circle parted and made way for him down the green aisles through which he bore her to his house.

VI

IN WHICH I AM UNHAPPY AND MEET A TALL WOMAN IN THE WOOD

WHEN the vines dropped back from Ravenutzi's hand upon the wall of boughs through which the Ward and the keepers passed, it was as if the step that carried them out of sight of the Outliers had also carried them out of knowledge. Not an eye that any other eye could discover, nor any enquiring word strayed upon their vanished trail. In the three days before they returned to the Meet, or it was proper to mention them, they would have visited the King's Desire, and Zirriloë would be apprised of all that pertained in that connection.

In that time no Outlier concerned himself with their whereabouts lest he should be thought by that evidence to have some con-

cern where the Treasure was, and that no Outlier had, as I believe. It had been so long since any man had seen it, that until Noche's account of what the cache contained began to be current, I think they had not any clear idea what the Treasure might consist in; all the phrases of it, like the words of a well-worn creed, taking on a hollow dryness. It served them chiefly in this, that it was something that the Far-Folk wanted and the Outliers did not mean they should get, and the struggle kept alive in them integrity and the relish for supremacy.

The practice of not speaking of it during the three days' absence of the Ward had taken on a rigidity of custom which Herman and I did not feel ourselves bound to observe. We could talk of the Treasure and of Zirriiloë, and we did that same morning.

When the shadows were gathered close under the forest border, and even to our accustomed eyes there was no sign under the Leap or by the lillied meadow of the presence of the Outliers, other than the subdued sense of gladsome life spread abroad on the pleasant air, I found me a place

where the creek went close about the roots of the pine between shallow sandy shoals, and there Herman came to talk to me of the Love-Left Ward. And the first thing I noticed, as he sat there at my feet pitching stones into the shallows, was that that effulgence of personality which had streamed from him at the opening of that day, now, though it lay about him and suffused his manner with an unaccustomed warmth, lay quite beyond my natural reaching toward some close communion with him that the occasion seemed to urge.

Some of the dread with which Daria had met the obliteration of memory and identity pricked me to draw from Herman an assurance that nothing could quite wipe out from him all recollection of the understanding and fellowship and the good times we had had together. It began to appear an alarming contingency that I should be turned out at any moment in a strange country to find my way back to life in company with a man I did not know and whose disposition toward me was still to be learned. It would have become Herman to be very nice to me at this juncture, and while I sat feeling blankly

for the communicating thread, he began to talk of the Ward.

"Some of the women should have gone with her," he said; "somebody interested in her. It's all stiff chaparral from here to the ridge. The girl will never stand it."

"You don't really know where they have gone," I hinted, "and Daria doesn't seem to have suffered from it."

"Oh, Daria! But this girl needs looking after. You can see that it means a lot to her, losing—everything. She would have appreciated—things. That string of red berries now—she would have done justice to rubies."

"The great rubies? Well, she probably knows where they are by this time."

"A lot better use for them than keeping them in a hole in the ground," Herman insisted, "especially when it costs the youth of a girl like that to keep them there."

"I know at least one Outlier who will agree with you."

"Who, then?"

"Mancha."

"Did he say that? What makes you think it?"

I have examined myself often to know if my disclaimer of any knowledge of Mancha's state of mind sprang from the natural revolt against the betrayal of what I had not come by openly, or some instinctive foreknowledge that if I did speak out what had come into my mind when I saw the Ward of the Outer Borders looking at Zirriloë and she looking at nothing at all, Herman would be influenced by it; and I have wondered oftener, if I had spoken, if anything would have come of it different or less grievous than what did come. Whatever prevented me, I answered only that he seemed to me a man less bound and observant of custom and superstition than his fellows, and Herman agreed with me.

"But I can tell you," he said, "that Zirriloë wouldn't hear of it. You can just see how her whole soul is bound up in the keeping of her vows. She could be true as death to anybody"—going on to say how he derived this assurance from the way the sun-touched colour of her cheek spread into the whiteness of her neck, and from the blueness of the vein that ran along her wrist, and her springy walk, and taking my agreement very much

for granted. What I really had thought was that in spite of her beauty and wraptness, the girl had rather a shallow face and would be as likely to be as much engrossed and as sure of herself in any other circumstance which gave her the occasion, and that none of the things he mentioned were any more proof of personal fineness than the want of them was witness of its lack; and I was so much disappointed at Herman's extraordinary failure of perception that I could not allow myself to say anything about it, lest the sound of it in my voice should give to my argument that personal note which I felt unreasonably to attach to any woman's attempt to show that a more beautiful one is not necessarily of more worth. And I was so irritated with myself for being irritated that I was very glad to hear Evarra calling down by the willows, and to leave Herman pitching pebbles into the shallows, though as it turned out, Evarra was asleep under a madroño and nobody had called me.

During that three days while the Ward and the keepers were away, there was a great deal going on in the fenced meadows

and by Deer Lake and at the bottom of deep wells of shade in the damp cañons. It was a broken, flying festival, no two events of which took place successively in the same quarter, for the Outliers wished not to occupy ground long enough to leave upon it any mark of use by which House-Folk might suspect them, though they need not, if they had known, have taken so much trouble. So the great events of the Meet went on in so many places that nobody ever saw the whole of them; and that was why I had no more talk with Herman and saw him but once or twice until Zirriloë came back again. I heard of him, though, and that in a manner and matter that surprised me very much.

The morning of the second day I went up with the girls to race in the Leaping Water. We left the Middle Basin by a trail that took the side of the hill abruptly and brought us out at the foot of the second fall, above the long white torrent of the reach. They meant to come down with it to the meadow again, and the game went to the one who was least out of water in that passage. I followed the windings

of the creek as near as the undergrowth allowed and heard their laughter, now louder and now less than the water noises, and saw between the trees the flash of foam change to the glancing of white limbs, and the flicker of the sun on smooth water to the shine of fair bodies as they drifted through the shallows. They took the falls feet foremost, curving to its flying arch, white wreathed arms trailed backwards and wet hair blowing with the spray. And it was so as I strayed along streamside, that the swimmers so mixed themselves with the movement of the water and the well-sunned, spacious day, that they seemed no more apart from it than the rush of the creek or the flicker of light on leaf surfaces displaced by the wind, they were no more in it than that mysterious sense of presence out of which men derive gods and the innumerable fairy host.

I had walked thus in that awakened recognition of sentience in the wild, in which all Outland had become a dream which hunts along the drowsy edge of sleep, and had continued in it for perhaps half an hour, in such a state that though I had no idea

where we were on the map, I believe I could have set out suddenly in the right quarter for home, when, though I had not heard my name pronounced, I began to be aware within myself that some one had called. I was so sure of it that, though I had no intimation yet of any presence, I began to look about me to see from whence it might proceed, and after a little trouble made out Trastevera on the opposite bank, between the willows, making signs that she would speak to me, and yet enjoining silence. The creek widened here and the girls were coming down, following like trout, and when I saw her press back among the swinging boughs as they went by, I understood that something more than the ordinary occasion of the day was astir. Presently, when we heard from below the splash of laughter as the swimmers struck the rapids, she came across to me.

“Where were you yesterday when Daria took the Cup?” she asked immediately.

“By Fallen Tree, not twenty steps from you—but you were so taken up with that affair that you did not see me.”

“You heard, then, what her young man

said about"—she flushed sensitively—"his reasons for her not drinking. Have you heard anything of that in the Meet?"

"Nothing that need disquiet you."

This was not strictly true, for Evarra had told me that all those who had opposed Trastevera's exemption ten years before were now justifying themselves in Daria's rebellion.

"They are saying what I feared," she said, "that it is a mistake to release the possessor of gifts from the common obligation."

"They are wrong, then, for nothing has come of it but the momentary outburst of a sensitive spirit. After all, Daria fulfilled her vows."

She looked at me curiously for a moment, as if she were not sure what to make of me. We were walking up and down behind the trees, her dress a-flutter, her small hands clasping and unclasping, her body rippling with the expressive accompaniment of excitement which was as natural to her as the unstrained stillness of repose.

"Do you think no wrong," she said, "when the findings of the Council are

scorned, and I — even I — make secret occasion to talk of forbidden things?”

She wheeled upon me suddenly :

“And this notion which is hatched between your man and Mancha, perhaps you see no wrong in that?”

She was too guileless herself to have taken that method of any purpose, but I felt my spirit curling like a dried leaf out of all proportion to her news, though I managed to answer steadily.

“He is not my man”—and it did not occur to me until afterward that it would have been a surer form of denial not to acknowledge so readily what man—“and as for any plans he may have with Mancha or any other, I do not know them, nor would I be interested except that I see it troubles you.”

All the time I was resenting unreasonably that Herman should have any plans with anybody and not broach them first to me.

“I do not know very well what it is myself,” she said more quietly, “except that it grows out of this unhappy episode of Daria’s, and must refer to the Wardship, since it is talked about that the Meet, instead

of breaking up on the evening when the keepers come back, will hold over another day for Council, and that must be because they wish to talk of matters that may not be opened before. It is Mancha, I think, who wishes it, for when some of the elders thought to reprove Daria's lover for having allowed himself to love a Ward, and speaking so lightly of the Keeping, Mancha said very shortly that a man could not help where his heart went, and that there was too much truth in what the young man said for reproving. Myself, I cannot account for it."

"I can," I said, "and though you might not feel at liberty to question me, I at least may tell you that it has to do with the Ward. He is in love with her." And I told her all that I had seen or surmised.

"And your friend?"

"Not knowing what his plan is, I cannot give his reasons."

"Ah!" she said for all answer, and we walked on without saying anything further until I asked her what had become of Daria.

"Gone on her wedding month; they went away this morning as soon as she was fully

recovered, having seen no one; they went out by Singing Ford. And even in that," she added, "there is something to criticise, for it is not customary for any one to go away from the Meet while the keepers are abroad. Oh," she cried, striking suddenly upon her breast, "it is through me, through me, that all this breaking of custom comes."

"Why do you care so much? All customs pass and in the end are replaced by better ones."

"If it be not so," she said, "if it be not so, Daria's lover was right—what is my gift worth if it is not more than these?"

She walked a little from me and bit her hands, as though she would have eaten down the mortification of one who sees harm come through what is best in him, and having recovered herself a little came to ask me when I had last seen Ravenutzi, and if I had observed anything unusual in him. I had not, and naturally wished to know if she had.

"The shadow," she said, "the long shadow."

"Has it come again?"

"It lies at his feet, it stretches behind him

and blots out the good day, it runs before him and covers the Outliers when they sit happy and at ease. Oh, I am weary because of it, and yet I can find no fault with him. During the last three days, which must have tried him, he has been most discreet. But did you think"—she turned to me—"when he broke in upon the singing to provoke debate, he had some purpose to turn it to some other meaning than it had?"

"I thought so."

"Then I am sure of it. Listen," she said; "if this is true what you tell me about Mancha I shall have enough to watch, for the greatest danger will be when the Ward comes home again."

"Why then?"

"She will have been six months away from her friends, she will be tired in body and the glow of the ceremonial will be gone, her heart will turn toward her kind, and the secret will weigh upon her; then, if ever, she will need counsel and support—when she comes back—when she first comes." She said the words over to herself. "Mancha I can trust as far as I can trust any man in love; but the girl—I will say no more of

her than that she is much like other girls. I shall be busy there ; Ravenutzi I cannot watch, he disturbs me too much. Do you see as much of him as possible and bring me word."

There being no reason why I should not, I promised readily, and so concluded the interview.

I was anxious though to see Herman as soon as possible, and sent Lianthe that evening to ask him to come to the middle meadow when the stars came out in the blue above the dim, receding ranges. But he did not come, though I walked there a long time and saw the dark well out of the cañons, and felt the night scents begin to stir with the little winds, and the tall sequoias bend their tops and talk together, and my heart cracked with expectancy with every snapped twig and rustling of wild things going down to drink. I shouldn't have minded his not coming if he had anything else to do, but I minded being kept waiting for him ; still more the next morning when I met him at Fallen Tree and he said, quite as if he had not thought of it until that time :

“Oh, by the way—I was down at the Hollow last night with Mancha and some of the others. Was it anything particular you wanted to say to me?”

Well, of course, I had supposed it was rather particular when I had given him such an opportunity to tell me all about his plan and get forgiven for not telling it before, and to warn him that Trastevera, and so, of course, Persilope, had reason to distrust his mixing himself too much in the affairs of Outland; but of course if he didn't see it that way himself there was no occasion for me to be concerned about it. So I said:

“No, nothing particular.”

“Well,” he said, “when this affair is all over”—just as if it were in any wise his affair—“we must get together and have a good talk somewhere.” And though it was mid-morning and nothing whatever to do if he wished to talk, he went off up the creek, and that was the last I saw of him until evening.

Directly after noon I took Lianthe with me and went out toward the Leap and then up the bank of a tributary rill, and so into a part of the wood where the Outliers did

not much frequent. Lianthe, who was a great talker, grew more and more quiet as my replies were more absent, and the way grew steeper. We could see the ground rising in front of us through the trees, and hear the noise of the creek falling far behind.

The boy was walking very close to me, and there was a shy colour coming in his cheek; he glanced right and left under his half long lashes and came very close.

“Well, isn’t she?” he said. “Isn’t she as beautiful as I said—you know who?”

“Zirrioloë?”

“Well, isn’t she?”

“Lianthe,” said I, “if you think I have brought you out here to give you a chance to talk about forbidden things, you are mistaken. I came because I wished to be alone. I’m going a little farther amongst the trees, and don’t you come until I call you.”

He was helping me up over a broken ledge as I spoke, and stopped there looking at me irresolutely.

“You aren’t going to try and run away, are you? You look as though you were—from something.”

“Only from you. You can give the call, and if I don't answer you can come to look for me.”

I had learned already many of the Outland methods of communicating by forest notes rather than trust to the betraying, high-pitched human voice, and of these none was of more use to me than the call for refuge. If any Outlier had wish to be private in his place, he raised that call, which all who were within hearing answered, and whoever was on his way from that place hurried in it, and whoever was coming toward it stayed where he was until he had permission to move on, and so, though Lianthe was somewhat taken aback at it, I knew I should have some little space unmolested to myself.

I climbed on between great roots of pines where the litter lay in hummocks between the tracks of winter torrents, and Lianthe had called twice before I bethought myself to answer him and claim a longer time; I lay down at last in a place where the scrub was a screen to me, and before I understood what had happened, the labouring breath of my climbing had burst into thick, choking

sobs. I lay face down on the pine litter and was most terribly shaken with the grief of some dumb, wounded thing in me that did not know its hurt, but wrenched and cried a long time unrelievingly. It was so new a thing for me to cry and so strange, that though I knew this was what I had come there for, I did not know why I was torn so almost to the dividing of soul and spirit. It lasted a long time, and I was so exhausted by it that it was only by faint degrees I became aware of eyes upon me, and roused up hastily, afraid lest in the violence of my grief I had failed to answer some enquiry of Lianthe's and he had come to find me.

Instead I met the curious, commiserating eyes of a woman fixed on me through the leafage of the scrub. As soon as she perceived that I saw her she parted the brush and came through, holding it still in her hands behind her, as though it were a door of exit to be kept. I saw at once by her figure, which was slight and tall, by her dark hair and by her dress, that she was not one of the Outliers. Over her tunic she had wound a long cloak of dark stuff, concealing

her limbs, and over that bound vines with the leaves on and wreathed them in her hair, whether for adornment or concealment, so disposed that as she stood in the shadow there was little to be discerned of her but the thin oval of her face and the long throat clasped by linked silver ornaments finely wrought.

“You are not of the Outliers?” she questioned, though I felt she was already aware of it.

“I am their prisoner.”

I thought she seemed glad of that, more glad if, with a swift searching of my swollen eyes, I could have answered yes to her next question.

“They do not treat you well? But no”—answering herself—“it is not so that captives cry. What is your name?”

“Mona.”

She said it over two or three times to fix it in her memory; and then, caution and curiosity struggling in her:

“You have just come from them? You know them?”

“Yes.”

“Do you”—I could see the pulse of her

long throat and the bushes shake behind with her agitation—"do you know Ravenutzi?"

"I know him."

"Is he well? How does he look? Is he happy?" Impossible to conceal now what the question meant to her.

"He is well. As to his looks—sometimes he looks younger, sometimes older. His hair, I think, is not so grey."

"Not so grey?"

"I think he dyes it." I do not know why I should have said this, except as I saw that no detail of him was too small to seem trivial to her.

"Oh!" she said, startled, looking at me queerly. "Oh!" she gave a short laugh, "you think he dyes it. Is he happy?"

I considered.

"You are one of the Far-Folk, I believe, and though I am prisoner, the Outliers have been friends to me. I am not sure I ought to answer you."

She let go of the bushes and came a step nearer in her anxiety.

"As you are a woman who has wept in secret, and by the hurt which brought your tears," she said, "only tell me if he is well

and happy. Surely that cannot touch your honour."

"I have already said he is well. He has the vigour of a young man. As for happiness—he says very little, and that not of himself. At least he is not openly unhappy."

"Tell me," she urged, "if you could imagine that in his own land he is well loved, that there is one there who lives in him, dreams of him, counts the hours; could you say that he found the time of his hostage heavy because of her?"

"He is thoughtful at times, and walks by himself. Otherwise I could not judge, I have not loved myself."

For answer she let her eyes wander pointedly over my disfigured face and fallen hair.

"Tell me again," she said after an interval. "This girl who is the Ward, is she very beautiful?"

"Very;" but not so beautiful as you, I thought, for there was in the vivid red of her fine lips, in the purple of her eyes and the delicate tragic arch of her brows, in the long throat and bosom all that fire and

motion of passion and the capacity for continuing in it which the Ward's face hinted at elusively, and I was casting about for a way of saying this to her not too boldly when I was advised by the tapping of her foot on the needles that she would not be turned from her enquiry.

"And Ravenutzi, is he interested in her, is he much about her, does she care for him?"

"She is the Ward," I said, "she may not think of men; and besides, she is but a girl, her thought would hardly turn to a white head."

"True, true"—she pinched her lip with thumb and forefinger—"I had forgotten; as you say, he is a very old man; no doubt he might be judged old enough to have speech with her."

I, not seeing fit to reply to that, rose and stood looking at her, very curious on my own account, but knowing very well that I should get nothing from her except what pleased her.

"Shall I tell him you enquired for him?" I wished politely to know, and was startled at her whiteness.

“Ah, no, no! Do not tell him—tell no one lest he hear of it; he would be very angry, he would——” She recovered herself. “Ravenutzi is very honourable, he would not wish to break the terms of his hostage, which are that he should not communicate with the Far-Folk for three years. It is a long time,” she said piteously.

“A long time.”

“Then,” she said, “if you could understand how I—how his friends would wish to assure themselves that he is well, you can see that we would not wish him disturbed by knowing how much he is missed.”

“I understand very well.”

“Then”—relieved—“you will perhaps tell no one that you have seen me, and if I could come so near again—I could not have managed it except that they are all busy at their Meet—if I could let you know, you would not deny me?”

I suppose the exhaustion of long sobbing had left me in a yielding mood. I saw no harm in satisfying her anxiety, and said so, though I added that I might not be long myself among the Outliers.

“If you are there I will find a way to let you know,” she assured me, and with that she threw herself into the arms of the waiting wood, which received her and seemed to snatch her from my view.

VII

HERMAN DEVELOPS HIS IDEA

ON the third day, when the shadows were all out full length in the upper basin, the sun blinking them palely from behind a film of evening grey, falling seaward, the Maiden Ward came back. Some children paddling for trout in the soddy runnels saw her come and ran crying the word among the evening fires, at which the women came all together distractedly, declaring that there could be no proper welcome with no men about. And that I thought was very well noted by the girl, glancing this way and that, losing a little of the high carriage and manner as she saw how few observed it.

She was white, her eyes strained wide in dark circles of fatigue ; streakings of her fair body showed through the torn dress. I saw the girl check and stumble, putting out her

hands blindly, over-burdened by her hair, and remembering what importance Trastevera had attached to this returning, looked about for her, ready to serve or see; but before I could reach her, her leaping thought had called up Ravenutzi from his pot of coals and anvil of flint stone down where the rush of the cascade covered the tinkle of his hammers. You saw what likeness there was between them as he came, putting off his smith's apron ready to her use like a proffered tool. Some nods, I think, a gesture or two of Trastevera's, were all that passed between them. Some essential maleness leapt up in him at the motions of those small talking hands to take command. I found myself running with the women at his word to spread skins for the Ward to rest upon, and ordering the children in two lines to some show of ceremonial welcome. There were some young brothers of hers in that band, and as she kissed them heartily I saw tears stealing, and realised how young she was and how hard a thing she had undertaken. She stood with a palm behind her flat against a pine to support her trembling, overtired and wanting her mother, no doubt,

who was not allowed to come to her, and compelled her lips to a studious rejoinder. Finally the women took her away to rest.

In all this I had never seen Ravenutzi show to so great advantage. When we were quite alone Trastevera put out her hand to him as she did not often in the presence of Outliers.

“Kinsman,” she said, and it was the first time I had heard her call him that, “I owe you thanks for this.”

She meant more than that he had contrived some warmth for what must otherwise have seemed to Zirriloë a cold returning, but also that it had been his wrinkles and streaked greyness to meet the Ward rather than the hot eyes and shining curls of Mancha.

“I do not know how it is,” said she, “for I never felt it for myself, but somehow this pink girl seems to be pitied in the keeping of her bond.”

“Any bond,” said Ravenutzi, “will wear at times,” and said it with so wistful a backstroke of self-consideration as caused me to think swiftly of several things: that in his own place he must have been more the man than the Outliers conceded to any smith, on

whom the condition of tame cat, which his hostageship incurred, pressed more heavily than they were advised. Also I thought of the tall woman, but I did not on that account deliver the comforting reassurance about her which came readily to my tongue, for there was so intimate and personal a quality in his brief surrender to our sympathy as made the mention of another woman an intrusion. It began to seem likely that she could not be so much to him as he to her, which would account for her anxiety not to have him know of her enquiry, and for his not having mentioned her to Trastevera.

We continued walking up and down under the linked pines without many words, but with a community of understanding, which led later to Trastevera's opening to him more of her concerns than she was aware.

When there was a hard, bright moon in a pale ring deepening to green, and the breath of the young year stealing through the forest, they brought the Ward back again, and made her a little entertainment of compliments and songs.

Prassade sang, and Evarra's man and old Noche. The women sang all together rock-

ing, as they sat, but Ravenutzi sang the most and most movingly. Mancha sang nothing, sat off fondling his weapon, and drank the girl's looks—she was very lovely, had got back a little of her saint's separateness which became her, and the conscious support of being admired—until, if she had looked at him, she might have seen his heart swimming under his gaze, but I could not see that she did. What favour she was disposed to show went to Ravenutzi, praising his songs and affecting to be affected, though I thought she need not have built so much on the mere incident of his having been alone of the men to meet her, since it grew out of the nature of his work not taking him far from the Meet; but it was natural, perhaps, to have rewarded him for it. The women took her away early, and nothing whatever had happened.

The next day, which ordinarily would have seen the parting of the Meet, occurred the Council, which broke up in some disorder, without having accomplished anything. Very early a blind fog came nosing up from the sea, cutting between the round-backed hills, shouldering them like a herd-dog

among sheep. It threaded unsuspected cañons, and threw up great combs of tall, raking trees against its crawling flanks. It gripped the peaks, spreading skyward, sagged and dropped in the basin, whirling upon itself in a dry, ghostly torrent. The chill that came with it drove us down toward Deep Fern, to a sun-fronting hollow defended by jutting horns of the country rock, full of oaks, scant of foliage, except where the new green leafage began to show at the tips. Shed leaves crackled under us, the wind and fog were stayed by the tall pines at our backs, the sun warmed whitely through the hurrying mist.

Evarra and some others of the women were there, ZirriLö and the two keepers whose daily turn began, and Ravenutzi, sitting with his long knees drawn up under his clasped hands; and somewhere out of sight the men were holding council on a matter they had not seen fit to speak to us about. We had scarcely settled ourselves so on the warm leaf-drift when one of them came to the head of the Hollow and shouted for Noche, and though, there were so many of us about, the old man could have safely

left the Ward, it seemed to him scarcely courtesy to do so with her Wardship yet so new. He glanced around through the smother of the fog and found not another man who could be spared to that duty until he hit upon Ravenutzi, with his chin upon his knees, and his velvety opaque eyes looking idly at nothing, but aware of our slightest stir; Noche clapped him heavily on the shoulder.

"Hey, smith," he said, "will you take a watch for me? I am wanted."

At that the man who leaned to us dimly from the rim of the Hollow gave a grunt.

"What," he said, "will you set the Far-Folk to watch a Ward? These are gentle times."

"Why, he is as grey as I am, and twice as wrinkled," answered Noche, mightily disconcerted. "Would you have him come to the Council instead?"

The other laughed shortly.

"No, not to the Council, though I dare say it will come to that yet."

He released the young tree upon which he leaned, which sprang back with a crackling sound, and from his silence Noche drew

consent to his half-jesting proposal and, smiling embarrassedly, like a chidden child, swung his great body up by the trunk of a leaning oak and disappeared behind the smoky fog. So and by such intimations we knew there was something going forward among the men, but we did not know how much of this the Ward, who was most involved by it, surmised. She might have guessed from our not referring to it that it concerned the Treasure and the keeping of it. She was uneasy, started at sounds, would have Trastevera to hold her hand, was in need of stroking and reassuring.

The fog increased, hurrying and turning upon itself; runnels of cooler air began to pour through it, curling back the parted films against the trees; now and then one of these air-streams, deflected by the rim of the Hollow, would rush up its outer slope, blowing leaves and dust like a fountain, and, subsiding, leave us settling, more sensible of warmth and ease, into the thick leaf litter below the oaks.

As if his half-imposed authority had been his warrant for enforcing himself upon the quiet hour, Ravenutzi came over to

Trastevera, who sat holding the Ward's hand, and stretched himself at her feet, smiling up at her his fawn's smile, to wheedle her from too much thoughtfulness, holding up his hand between him and the pale smear of sunlight with one of those slight, meaningful gestures so natural to him that it served as a more delicate sort of speech to say: "Surely to-day not even I can cast a shadow?"

And she, like one too deep in thought to rise to the surface of words, smiled back to signify that though she was somewhat troubled, he had nothing to do with it; so he, not finding himself in disfavour, ventured a little more to lure her from disturbing meditation, turned upon his side, leaning on his elbow, and began to sing. His voice was mellow and of a carrying quality, with a tang in it like the taste of the honeycomb in wild honey, and some half-governed energy of passion, well held under his breath as the warmth of the earth under the smother of the fog. It was a song of the Far-Folk, I know, for there were some words in it not common to the Outliers, but it had their method of carrying the mood in the move-

ment and the mind of the singer, rather than in the words.

“ ‘Oh, a long time,’

it said,

‘Have I been gathering lilies in the dawn-dim
woodland.

Oh, long—long!’”

and ran on into a sound like the indrawing of breath before tears, and began again :

“Scented and sweet is the house

And the door swings outward,

It is made fair with lilies :

But there are no feet on the trail to the house

And the door swings outward.

Long, O long, have I been gathering lilies.”

Just that, three times over ; and the first time of the singing it was a girl wreathing herself with flowers and looking down the trail, sure of her lover but sighing for his delay ; and the next time it was the tall woman I had met in the wood, keeping her empty house with fierce loyalty through the years of his hostage.

“Long, O long, have I been gathering lilies !”

Now it was a heart made fair with unrequited tendernesses, singing to itself through all the unimpassioned years, and

it was, strangely, I singing that song and walking through it in a bewildered mist of pain.

I do not know how long after Ravenutzi ceased before I could separate myself from the throbbing of the song, but I was recalled sharply by the wish to comfort Zirrioloë, whose young egotism, suffering perhaps in the withdrawal of attention from herself, had startled us all by turning her face on Trastevera's shoulder and bursting into tears. It was pure hysteria, I thought, but she was so very pretty in it, the appeal of childishness, the red, curling lip, the trembling of her delicate bosom, that I was drawn in spite of myself into the general conspiracy to restore her to the balance of cheerfulness; and Ravenutzi, conceiving that his song might be in a manner to blame for it, was so embarrassed in his dismay and so wistful of our good opinion, that the girl was obliged to come out of her tears to reassure him. He, to requite the forgiveness, began to be at once so gay and charming in his talk that in a very little time we had returned to that even breathing lightness of mood which was the habit of the

Outliers. Content welled out of the earth and overflowed us like some quiet tide not to be disturbed except some sharp jet of human emotion sprang up fountain-wise momentarily beyond the level, and dropped back again to vital, pulsing peace.

We had no more disturbances that day, and I felt that Trastevera, much as she was concerned about the Council, could only have been thankful for so commonplace an occasion, and glad that the quick-blooded Mancha had any business, even of his own devising, which kept him out of the way until the Ward had recovered a little from the self-consciousness of her situation. When about three hours had gone over us, Persilope came stooping under the hanging boughs, gave us Good Friending somewhat briefly, and took his wife away with him. From time to time after that one or another woman slipped away, answering some call of her mate out of the mist, and when we heard the fluttering shriek of a hawk given rapidly twice, and again impatiently, without space left for replying, they laughed.

“That is your man, Evarra! One would think the woods were a-fire!”

Evarra blushed.

"Assuredly, he would set them a - fire when he is in that mind if he did not find me." She made a sign to me. "Come," she said; "now we shall hear what it is all about."

The Council, so Evarra's husband told us, was not the immediate outcome of the incidents of the Meet; matter for it had been growing these ten years past, ever since the unearthing and reburial of the Treasure had been undertaken on Trastevera's account. It had been so long since they had any feeling of its reality, except as the point on which their honour hung! But after Noche had seen it, the craftsman's soul of him was for ever busy with the wonders of it, brooding on the fire of its jewels as a young man on the beam of a maiden eye. All the children who had come to maturity these ten years past had been nourished on the Treasure tale, livened and pointed by Noche's account. With the advent of the hostage, interest in the King's Desire as a possession had rather increased by the awakened appreciation of smith's work among them, for Ravenutzi had made

curious ornaments for the women of bits of metal found in deserted summer camps, the patterns of which reproduced, so far as the Far-Folk remembered them, the wrought gold of the King's jewels.

Now both the matters which had brought about this liveliness of curiosity, the exemption of Trastevera and the consequent re-burial of the Treasure, and the acceptance of the hostage, had been strongly opposed by part of the Council, who thought themselves justified by the turn of events; who thought further that the incident of Daria and her lover called loudly for measures which should stem this current of departure from old use before it had swept down all established custom. A Ward had been released from her obligation of forgetfulness; another had ventured in her example to plead for it; a young man had loved a Ward and dared to avow it in the term of her Wardship; here was one of the Far-Folk teaching smitheyng to the Outliers; here were House-Folk going about among them talking of forbidden things; matter enough for Council if ever Council was. More disconcerting, here was Mancha, Ward of the Outer Borders, Mancha of the

Hammerers, who had opposed the hostage and stood for the inviolateness of obligation, Mancha who had reached the term of years when his leaning was toward the men of sober and conservative judgment, come out suddenly as the leader, the precipitator, of revolt. Everra's man fumed over this and the probable reason for it, upon which point, though I was at no loss myself, I did not see fit to enlighten him.

The Council had begun soberly in the consideration as to whether some formal penalty should be visited on the Ward who had dared to love, and the man who had ventured to love her, and been disrupted widely by the question, which seemed to spring up simultaneously among the younger men, as to why there should be a Ward at all.

Now, it was the nature and the exquisite charm of the life of Outland that it could not carry superfluous baggage either of custom or equipment, so that the question might not have arisen had there not run before it some warning of dead weight, like the creaking of a blasted bough about to fall. Such warning they had in the incidents about which the Council was met, and the

mere question was not so disquieting as the speech Mancha made upon it, a speech which, proceeding from an impulse perhaps not very well defined in his own mind, and not guessed by his audience, simply to get Zirriloë free that he might make love to her, was neither very direct in its process nor clear in its conclusion.

Why, said Mancha, waste the youth of a girl, always the chiefest and loveliest, keeping a Treasure which the Far-Folk had ceased to struggle for, preferring pilferings of House-Folk, and selling their best man for a free passage to the Ploughed Lands? Honour, said he, had been kept alive by the custom of the Maiden Ward; but was honour so little among them that they should buy it at the price of a girl's love-time?

Moreover, declared Mancha of the Hammerers, it was a form of honour which they did not trust her to keep, and besides keeping was the business of men, and if there had been enough to do at the borders for Daria's young man, he would have had small time to think of loving. And moreover, said the Ward of the Outer Borders,

not having made it very clear where his speech tended up to this point, in the matter of keeping the Treasure effectively out of reach of the Far-Folk, costing them nothing in the keeping, there was a way which he had learned, of which, since it was new to him, and he no speech-maker—this much was sufficiently clear at any rate—he begged leave to let Herman of the House-Folk put for him. And this was what broke and scattered the Council like a blast of wind on burning leaves, they blew out this way and that, sparking and flaring, saying it was an incredible thing and impossible that the House-Folk should come to Council, or, coming, should have anything to say worth hearing, some blaming Mancha and some the occasion. Some there were who laughed, blew out their breath as one does to a child's pretending, unbound their slings and went hunting. Said they :

“This is mere child's talk, when you have business afoot call us.”

Others, deeply angered at the flouting of old customs, went out suddenly, picked up their women with a sign and set out without farewells for their own places, not to have

touch with their kind again until a greater occasion grown out of that same slighted Council called them.

There were many, however, and these chiefly of the younger men, who stayed to hear Herman's idea, which, as he explained to me a little later at the pine tree by the shallows, was perfectly feasible.

"It is quite impossible, you know, that they should go on living like this indefinitely. They are practically cut off from the sea already, and every summer there are more and more campers. Think how these hills would be overrun, and with what sort of people, if we went back to Fairshore and told what we know of the Treasure?"

"Well, we aren't going to be allowed to. Do you remember last summer how one of a hunting party in these same hills wandered away from his companions and was found afterwards, dazed and witless? He was thought to have had a fall or something, but——"

"That may work very well when they get us singly, but a whole party of campers now—the wonder is they have been exempt so long. Their trails go everywhere."

I could have reminded Herman then of one who walked in their trails and believed them trodden out by deer, who caught them nearly at their faggot gathering and thought only of wood-choppers ; or asked him if even now he could find any Outlier in the woods who did not wish to be found, but I waited to hear the whole of his idea.

“ They are getting nò good out of their Treasure as it is, and paying too dear for its keep. A girl like Zirriloë ought to be married, you know . . . with all that capacity for loving . . . what a wife she would make . . . for . . . anybody.” I had not said anything to the contrary, but Herman took on an insisting tone. “ She would pick up things,” he said, “ and her beauty would carry her anywhere——” He broke off, staring into the brown shallows as if he were aware of that beauty carrying her somewhere out of the bounds of her present life, and the seeing pleased him.

“ But your idea ? ”

“ Well, it’s only that they should take up their Treasure, abolish all this business of the Ward, and with the proceeds of the jewels buy themselves a tract of land in which the

law could protect them from the encroachments of House-Folk and Far-Folk alike. I know a man in the forestry bureau who would be able to tell me how it could be managed."

He said that with so easy a consciousness of my consenting to it, with so great an implied indifference to any objection I might entertain, that I began to feel a very quick resentment rising toward whatever had turned him from that old inclusive sympathy, and to wonder if it had ever been at all, if indeed it had not grown, as I felt this whole Outland experience to have done, out of my expectant wish for it.

"It would mean so much to us . . . to those of us who care about such things," he corrected himself, as if already a little less sure of me, "to have their social system working in plain sight. Their notions of the common good . . . I've talked with the men a bit . . . what they've worked out without any of our encumbrances, if they could take it up now with all our practical advantages—the University might establish a sort of protectorate—— But you don't seem to care for the idea, Mona."

I don't know what I thought of the idea

as a solution of the troubles of the Outliers, though I thought of a great many practical objections afterward, but I knew what I thought of Herman just then for proposing it, and I could not bear it.

They were our Outliers—or I might have said *my* Outliers, for I had imagined them, believed in them and discovered them; it was only Herman's interest in me which had brought him within their borders. It was a unique and beautiful experience, and it was ours; we had said that and had felicitated ourselves so many times that it was an experience we were having together, that if we forgot it we must have even our forgetfulness in common as we had so many things—and here was Herman willing to throw it open to the world as an experiment in sociology. And, of course, if Herman felt that way about it, how was I to claim that exquisite excluding community of interest in which the adventure had begun!

“I daresay,” I answered quickly, for I had thought all this while he talked to me, “that it is as good as most ideas of yours, but it doesn't interest me.” And I walked away and left him staring into the water.

VIII

IN WHICH HERMAN'S IDEA RECEIVES A CHECK

To the dry fog succeeded showers and intervals of super clearness, with great blunt-headed clouds blundering under a high, receding heaven; brown croisers of the fern uncurled from the odorous earth, some subtle instinct responded to the incessant stir of sap. The Outliers left debating to run together flockwise in the recrudescence of the year; the wet wood was full of whispering, all hours of the night feet went by bearing laughter, not loud but chuckling and daring.

Nevertheless, the clearing of the weather did not scatter them. Some there were whose affairs had called them at the end of the Meet; a few had gone in displeasure at the turn of the Council; chiefly the young men, and they were Mancha's supporters, remained

in the neighbourhood of Leaping Water and Deep Fern, to which we had moved when the rain began. You could see fretted argument go on where two or three of the men were met, disrupting suddenly; there was a sense of expectancy abroad; men watched the Ward for more than her beauty as she went with the keepers in a green gown like the sheath of a bud, her face a flower.

Ravenutzi got from Herman what silver coins he had, and smithied them into a brooch for her; it was rumoured that you would find the twin of that pattern in the King's Desire. Women grew curious, questioned me how the House-Folk lived and loved; laughed and looked sidewise, but listened.

All this curious possibility of Herman's idea, and the pricking sense of stir and change, drew off attention from Mancha's passion, which burned up to the betraying point. Trastevera, who remained steadily aware of it, credited to it mistakenly all her unease and intimations of disaster. Trouble ranged openly in the wood, but hid its face. It seemed to swell at times toward betrayal:

you saw small hair bristling on the necks of the men when they had sat quietly together, one would throw up his head like an uneasy hound. I think as the newness of Herman's proposal began to wear down, some of them became aware of Mancha's state, saying nothing lest, uncovered too much in speech, it would burst the quicker into scandal.

He had very little talk with the girl even in company, as was allowed, and made no special occasions. Anywhere in her trail you might come upon him mooning upon a flower she had dropped, the bough she had leaned upon, the crumpled fern. He would sit in the pleasant pauses of the noon, the joints of his face loosened, his gaze swimming as he looked at her, his hair above his face was like pale fire. He was all molten white with passion; if the girl breathed upon him he would have burst ravening into flame.

Trastevera was afraid that the Ward, quick, for all her simple seeming, to observe her effect upon men, would become aware of it and kindle her imagination at the vanity of this conquest; a man worth so much as men are accounted worth, any girl might

well have been touched by it. Ravenutzi knew, and managed to make his knowledge seem to have grown out of his wish to relieve the perturbation of Trastevera, of which he was considerably observant.

There was always a quick sympathy of instinct between those two dark ones, and he served her always with that fatal appeal to women, of sweetness struggling with some baser attribute toward her good opinion. He had the air when in her presence, and under her approbation, of having climbed into it out of some native unworthiness, into which he sank again when she removed from him.

It was an air calculated to make any woman so estimated generous in the bestowal of her company, and by degrees Trastevera fell into the way of letting him serve her by interposing a screen between Zirrioloë and the Hammerer's too unguarded gaze, or by making a diversion to draw attention himself, singing or relating one of his long tales when in the still noons Mancha's adoring mind burned through all the drowsy silences.

For my part, though, I was not so sure

either of Mancha's inarticulateness or of Zirriloë's unconsciousness.

I have times now of believing that she had observed it, and contrived ways to keep our attention turned on the possible occasion of its coming to a head, though I cannot now name any single circumstance that points the suspicion, except as I came finally to believe her capable of any duplicity! and as I remember how Lianthe attached himself to Mancha with what seemed then the natural devotion of youth to a hero, but now appears as a subtle movement of jealousy, always to have him in view, and to bring himself more to attention by keeping in conspicuous company.

The girl herself had got some trick lately of turning her head, little fluttering, nesting movements as she sat, pretty pursing of the lips, as of a woman knowing herself adored. She had a way, when left to herself, of letting her work fall in her lap, lips a little apart and dreaming eyes, a soft flutter of her young breast like a dove's, a woman owned adorable.

There was more, though it never got to the point where I was justified in speaking

of it. Once in the clear interval between the rains, all the near foliage wet and shiny, all the far ridges deeply thunderously blue, all the creeks up and shouting at the falls, I walked beside the tributary rill that watered the meadow of Deep Fern and saw the Ward sitting close against a bank that faced abruptly on the open, clothed thick with laurel and azaleas, an impenetrable screen. She had been helping Noche and one of the women strip willows for fish-weirs, and the two keepers were down by the streamside, steeping the white wands and turning them in the water in full sight of her and scarcely out of earshot. Whatever Noche and the woman might have been saying was cut off by the frothy gurgle of the creek, and, at any rate, they said it to one another without so much as an over-shoulder glance at Zirrioloë, who sat there by the laurel bank *listening*.

Plainly she listened ; with her head turned a little aside and the lips curling and the lids half drawn on the luminous dark eyes, and the flush high up on the cheek ; a woman beguiled if ever there was one. And behind her the laurel swayed slightly though

there was no wind. It swayed and showed the light underside of leaves, and then was still as I came walking by the waterside and Noche called to me.

I had to walk some distance down the creek to the stepping-stones and across them into the tongue of the forest which ran toward the laurel bank, and, mounting behind it, encompassed all the front of the hill; but before I had got very far on that trail I met Ravenutzi returning by it, and I had no sooner caught sight of him than there flashed up in him that suffusing spark of personality, so excluding of all other considerations that it gave to our casual meeting the appearance of a thing done for its own sake, so that I found myself turning in the trail to walk back with him, quite as if, as his manner assumed, I had come out on it expressly to meet him. He began to tell me at once, as if that were the object of his excursion, that he had not found some herbs on the high bank that Evarra was wishful of, and that he thought they could hardly be out of the ground yet.

“And did you meet any one in the wood as you came through?” I remember asking.

“Only Mancha.”

He gave me an odd, quick, sidelong look as he spoke, and began to talk of other things, so that I might have guessed he had seen more than that and did not mean to tell of it. Whether he had kept the same inviolacy with Trastevera, or she herself had seen somewhat, the very next day she sought out the Hammerer in a place of clustered columns clear of undergrowth, sitting on the burl of redwood, nursing his hammer between his knees, and taxed him with his passion for the Ward and its unworthiness.

He admitted the first, but not that it discredited him. He would not remind Trastevera that she had been excused from part of the obligation of her Wardship, but he said :

“Am I worth so little to the Outliers that they would not excuse this girl to be my wife? Ay, I want her,” he confessed; then as his stout-built body thrilled at the thought, threw out his arms, reddening, and laughed shamelessly.

“Do you know the rocking-stone on the top of the ledge by The Gap, that four men

can barely stir on its pivot? I could rock it into the river to-day with the strength of my wanting."

"And what would come in through the River Wall if you did?" said she; but Mancha would not talk of that.

"Do you know," he said, "what the years of my life are to me, the years I have gone mateless? They are the stops in a pipe that plays a tune to my need of her; I hear them piping behind me and my blood runs to the music."

"It shall play you a ten years' measure yet," she answered him, "before it pipes you your desire."

"Not ten moons," he insisted.

"Then," said she, "it will pipe death to you and to your honour."

He hid his face in his hands at that, groaned and bit upon his fingers; at last:

"I thought I should have had sympathy from you who have loved so well," he said.

She could not deny him the comfort he so sorely needed on that point, but neither could she let him go without advising him what confusion must come of his persistence in his unhappy passion; and he heard her,

sliding his great hammer from hand to hand as though it were the argument balancing this way and that in his mind.

"True, true," he would admit; "it is all true that you say." And more quietly, as she went on with an ingenuity of entreaty and explication: "You are right, Trastevera, you are always right;" and at last: "I thank you for this, Trastevera; now I see what I must do."

He stood up, putting her aside, for she had got down on the ground attempting to stay the rocking of his hammer as she would have stopped the wavering of his mind; he stretched himself under the redwood and rapped so loudly with his weapon on the trunk that the squirrels and nuthatches in the upper stories came out to see, and wood bees droned discontentedly within.

"It is true that she may not be loved during the time of her Wardship," said he; "there must be an end to that, or worse will come of it."

"And you will end it, Mancha, for your honour's sake?"

"As soon as may be; I have dawdled too long. Where is Herman?"

“With Persilope at Lower Fern. What do you want of him?”

“What you wished: to put an end to this business of the Ward.”

“Mancha, Mancha! What will you do?”

“I will find Herman first;” and she heard him rapping his purpose to the fore on the deep-sounding trunks of trees as he went.

You may guess how much comfort Trastevera got out of this interview, of which she told me very little at this time, perhaps because she conceived that she had failed, and perhaps because of an incident occurring about that time which put it wholly out of mind. One of the Outliers who had set out for home on the breaking up of the Council had found a suspicious circumstance, and came crying with it all the way up by River Ward to Deep Fern and Deer Lake Hollow.

He with his wife and young brood passing over Singing Ford into the district of broad-headed oaks, in a place where there was low scrub of lupin and rhus, had met Daria setting snares in the rabbit runways. He had sung out a greeting to her, for the moment forgetting what her state was, and she had stood up in the knee-high lupin with

her hand across her eyes, taken unawares, and called him by his name. It had popped out, startling at sight of him like a rabbit from a burrow, and then when he stood still with astonishment she checked and stammered, recalled the word, protested that she had mistaken him for another, blundered, and at last broke and fled crying through the chaparral. The Outlier, a just man but a little slow, considered the circumstance, went on, in fact, a whole stage of his journey before he arrived at a conclusion. Whereupon he set on his family toward home, and came back all the way to Deep Fern with his news, which had grown upon him momentarily as he travelled. Daria remembered! How much?

Had the drink been made too light for her; had the tumult of her mind resisted sleep; or had her soul been so upborne by love, floating clear of the drug that drowned her sense?

No one of the women had been with her when she recovered, all they whose custom it was to watch the Ward into wakefulness delicately withdrawing for the lover's sake.

"Remember, oh remember," he had insisted

to the last, and she had remembered the name and face of a man not in her own district: how then would her memory stand toward familiar things?

This was disconcerting news indeed. There were some who blamed Persilope, who had poured out a portion of the drink, others blamed the women for not staying by her. Trastevera blamed herself, and was tormented afresh, seeing in it the departure from good usage of which she herself was source and centre. Mancha and Herman saw in it new occasion for pushing their idea, which the Hammerer by this time openly avowed. As if his admission of his passion had in a measure defined him to himself, he had shaken off the outward evidence of it, and was concerned chiefly in bringing his purpose to completion. He had not spoken to Zirriloë since his talk with Trastevera, sat no more mooning in the woods, but went about everywhere among the young men with Herman at his shoulder making adherents.

“But what is your objection to it?” Herman had asked of me, sitting under the drawn flaps of Evarra’s hut, upon which

the rain drummed hollowly. I had a great many objections, based upon my conviction that no amount of Treasure would buy immunity for the Outliers once they were made known to men, but they would have lacked their proper cogency with Herman, who was like the Outliers in being too honourable to premise dishonour on the part of others. Besides, of course, I knew too little of business to forecast the hindrances likely to fall in the way. All I was sure of was that it was a mistake, first and last it was bound to be a mistake, and very little progress of the affair would prove it.

"If you think so well of their way of life," said I, "why do you wish to change it? They wouldn't be happy in our way; it wouldn't agree with them."

"If you're thinking about happiness, how about Daria? And Zirriiloë; do you call it happiness to be cut off from all that belongs to youth and loveliness? Why, the girl was made for loving."

"But I thought that was something you didn't believe in."

He had the grace to blush here and to be disconcerted, but he protested:

“They believe in it—and I—sometimes I think I am only learning what it is to be alive, and not just the intellect of me, like mistletoe at the top of a tree. And it’s good”—he scuffed with his feet strongly on the ground as though he liked the sting of it—“so good that I want to make it sure.” But before I could ask him what that had to do with making a sociological experiment of the Outliers, he had turned the argument again.

“Besides, Mona,” with almost an injured air, “I’m thinking of you. We know too much ever to be allowed to leave here in possession of all our faculties. Unless we go in some such way as I suggest, as emissaries to arrange for the title to their lands——”

“Yes,” I assented; “I hadn’t thought of that. We could go out that way, and then we needn’t say any more about it.”

“Well,” he admitted doubtfully, “that wasn’t exactly what I had in mind. That doesn’t seem quite—right, does it?”

I thought it would be as right as turning loose on the Outliers all the ills of our social disorder, but I didn’t feel like saying any-

thing further just then. I sat and watched the sheeted rain that veiled the world a rod beyond our door, saw the sun break and silver it, and heard the wind calling from the high ridges.

"It is either to go back that way," Herman insisted, "or stripped and unremembering."

"If you were to forget all you know and had to begin over again," I suggested, "there would be a sociological experiment for you."

"Mona, you don't really want to forget all this?"

"I don't know," I said; "a little forgetting is good medicine." And singularly I thought of the tall woman in the woods, and wondered when I should see her again, and what she would have thought of Herman's idea.

This was the last of the rains, and the very morning of the day when the Outlier from beyond the Singing Ford came back with the word about Daria. Messengers were sent to fetch her and her husband, and all we of Deep Fern went down half a day to meet them, the messengers having

found them on their way, drawn by our wish and their own willingness. Love had made them subservient, emptied them of self.

The examination took place in a half hollow full of trees. What sunlight there was lay in white patches like a stain; all up the green and golden slope the women sat listening, now discovered by the stirring of the wind on their loose garments, now disappearing in stillness. Daria stood up among the men and answered faithfully. It was true, she admitted, that she remembered things. Some things. She did not know how much. She had just begun to connect facts with the vague sense of familiarity. Questioned, the memories revealed themselves but sticks and straws, wreckage of experience, a name here, there a trivial circumstance, and there a blank, all of them such images as might have been floating in her mind at the time, or a little before she drank forgetfulness.

Did she remember the place of the Treasure?

The question, when it came, took her fairly. She spun about, rocking her arms,

burst into dry sobbing. Give her the Cup, she said, she would take the Cup again if they wished it, but let her not be questioned any more. In a broad splash of sunlight I could see her shiver, but not her judges; their faculty for quiescence served them better than speech.

Did she remember?

How could she say? She had not remembered that there was a treasure until her husband explained her situation to her. And then suddenly while he talked there had come into her mind a place in the hills, rocks, pine trees, she did not know quite where, all the rest of the country cut off in a mist like a landscape in a dream; but there it was, young pines posturing for the dance, and all her attention centred on a certain spot. If she happened upon that district she thought she could have gone straight to that spot. She broke off: begged them to deliver judgment. But there were other considerations; members already scattered to their homes must be summoned—there were formalities. The meeting broke up quietly. Daria moved over and placed herself beside Zirrioloë

between the keepers, her husband did not come to her, nor she look toward him. She was in Ward again.

There was a sense of urgency now on all the Outliers that led on quickly to a final adjustment. Everybody talked openly of the King's Desire and of Herman's plan, of which they had no very clear idea, I think, beyond its being a more effectual way of hiding the Treasure, with the merit of keeping their district clear of House-Folk who fouled the meadows and made them unlivable.

I sought out Trastevera and said what I could, with no success except to augment her unease.

"This is no doubt what I saw entering by Broken Tree with you," she said, "but now it is so close upon us my opinion is no better than another woman's, nor so good, I think. I see trouble coming from afar and declare it, but if I forget what I have declared, I fall into it myself."

I looked for Herman then and found him at Lower Fern.

"So," I said, "you are determined to go on with this?"

“What else?” He looked surprised, and then reproachful. “If you would stop to think, Mona, what it might mean to me, to all of us, to take back to our world, where as yet we have only theorised about it, news of a social order already accomplished where every man's greatest benefit is the common good——”

“No,” I said, “I haven't. What I'm thinking about is what we would bring to the Outliers, and having found such a state to destroy it.”

“Of course, if you look at it that way——”

“And there is something you ought to think of, and that is if you promise to buy land and protection for them, whether you have the price of it. You haven't really seen the Treasure, you know.”

“But—but—Mona,” he expostulated, “it's all been so real. I never thought—that ceremony—the Ward and all—of course I haven't seen it——”

“It may be pebbles,” I said, “or coloured glass.”

“But I thought you believed in it? You were the very first to believe it.”

That was just like Herman. Of course I believed in it.

I can believe six impossible things before breakfast if it suits me, but Herman never could be got to understand the difference between a literary belief and a working certainty.

“At any rate,” I said, “before you guarantee the price of the King’s Desire, you would best have a look at it.”

IX

HOW THE KING'S DESIRE WAS DUG UP, AND BY WHOM

How Herman injected into the hot plans of Mancha this cold doubt, I do not know. If he accepted it as a check to his enterprise there was no visible abatement of its urgency. He was for ever and fatiguingly busy ; crossing over Singing Ford and returning between two days, passing beyond Moon Crest he visited Alderhold and Bent Bow, fetching a circle almost to Broken Tree to make adherents, going still and hungry as to his inner want, but outwardly as noisy as a bear or a man, rapping the trunks of hollow trees or prodding the soft earth with his hammer ; and if in the wood at Deep Fern or Deer Lake Hollow he met with his young men, he passed them without greeting. It

is doubtful if he saw them. Plainly the man was ravined with desire.

All this time he gave no trouble to the Ward or her keepers. When she went by the young fern, by the budding willows, he did not seek her, never talked of himself in her company. It was as if the eye of his mind, so fixed upon the Mate, passed over the Maid she was; otherwise I do not know how he could have withstood her, for she went flushed and glorious. Trastevere, I know, had expected tears and pining, was relieved to find her still sustained by ecstasy, grew more at ease and trusted Ravenutzi.

For the rest of the Outliers the hesitation of Herman's enterprise on the probable unworth of the jewels proved no disappointment, was, in fact, a means of hurrying the movement for removing it from its present cache. Though it proved no desire of the House-Folk, it was something the Far-Folk wanted very much; the keeping of it provided an occupation, and the promised unearthing an excitement for which their long truce with the Far-Folk gave them an appetite. In any case it must come up

and be hidden again, or they must administer the Cup to Daria a second time, a wrenching of their sympathies they were unwilling to endure, even if it lay in justice to twice enforce her; and they were the readier for the enterprise since it appeared not necessarily to involve the acceptance of Herman's idea.

Prassade and Persilope then, with Mancha and Herman, of course, two of the keepers—the same who had buried it—and several strong men beside, set out for the cache of the King's Desire. They went north and seaward by a shorter route than the Ward had made, with no doubling for concealment. They passed the upper limit of redwoods and came to a region of thin spiked spruce and pines, knuckly promontories encrusted with lichen sticking out of a thin, whitish soil. By afternoon they struck into a gulley where an opaque stream purled in shallow basins and spilled in thin cascades to gravelly levels. Here they began to take note of landmarks and measure distances. First there was a sheer jut of country rock, stained black by the dribble of a spring, below it a half moon of pond as green as malachite.

Directly up from that, on the shoulder of stony hill, five pines, slender and virginal, stood circlewise, bent somehow by weather stress to the posture of dancing. They balanced in the wind and touched the tips of their stretched maiden boughs.

From here, ascending, the stream spindled to a thread, and led the eye under the combe of the ridge to a high round boulder, pitching into it, gripped midlong of its fall by the curled roots of a pine, and under the boulder was the cache of the King's Desire.

I asked Herman afterward how soon the intimation of what they were to find there began to reach them, and he said, to himself not at all. He remembered Prassade asking of Noche, who pointed out the way, if this was the trail they had taken with the Ward, and the old man's quick, sidewise glance that questioned why he asked. He remembered as they came by the green water, one of the keepers stooping to examine something, and Noche beginning to twitch and bristle like a dog striking an unwelcome trail. They came to the boulder; signs of the recent rains were all about, the half-uprooted pine that braced it showed a slight but fresh

abrasion of the bark. The two keepers had their heads together, whispering apart.

They would not believe it ; even when the first scraping of the wooden shovels showed the soil loose and yielding, and below the percolating dampness of the rains they found filling of fresh dry gravel and surface weathered stones, they would not believe the cache had been rifled.

The jewels were in a great chest, red and rotten, corded up with skins, half a man's length under ground ; so said Noche who had buried them. They dug ; they were waist deep, they were up to their armpits ; they dug steadily.

Suddenly there was a sound of the shovels striking solid. They exclaimed with relief. Noche was old, and in ten years had forgotten ; then the diggers cleared the ground and showed the solid country rock.

Whoever had lifted the Treasure had done it most cleverly ; every particle of the soil removed had been taken out on skins and put back again with filling brought ready for the purpose, so that no sinking of the surface should betray the loss. It had been done recently, between the rains. On the white,

abraided bark of the pine there were splatterings of the rapid downpour of the last heavy shower.

Let but a few weeks of stormy weather go over it, and it had been impossible to say that the place had been visited.

They might have gone on guarding an empty cache for generations ; they shuddered back from such a possibility like men suddenly upon a brink. They were, in fact, so shocked and astounded by it that their faculties were all abroad. They dug wide and furiously, Noche pawing over every crumbling clod with a whimpering sound like a hound at a fox's earth.

High up as the place was, higher ridges made a pit of it which now they flung full of blackness ; on the combe above, the young pines were black against pale twilight, dancing and deriding.

Night-eyed as the Outliers were, they dared not risk the loss of the faintest clue by trampling heedlessly. The theft and the cunning manner of it pointed to one thing—the Far-Folk. On that point they were sure ; and on one other.

The King's Desire was gone, it should

come back again. They swore it. One of them lifted up his hand to take the oath, as the custom was, by the honour of the Maiden Ward.

“Stop!” said Prassade.

I do not know what things leaped together in the man's mind, what circumstance but half observed, what weakness of his blood yet unconfessed, what scrupulosity of honour to be the first to denounce where it would be most keenly felt, but, “Stop!” he said, and the swearer's hand slacked limply; but Mancha propped it up fiercely with his own.

“By the honour of the Maiden Ward,” he swore, “it comes back again.”

Prassade gurgled in his throat; in the grey light as they looked at each other, it grew upon them that the loss of the Treasure meant betrayal. Daria, Zirriloë, the four keepers, where should they apportion dishonour? From that time, said Herman, no man looked full at his neighbour or spoke freely what he thought until they came to Deep Fern.

In the meantime it had occurred to me that I was not seeing as much of Ravenutzi as was implied in my promise to Trastevera,

and that it might be interesting to know what he thought of the redisposal of the King's Treasure, concerning which I had followed the use of the Outliers up to this time in not speaking to him. I was sitting between the roots of a redwood steeped in the warm fragrance and langour of the breath of a pine forest in the spring, when this notion occurred to me with the insistence that might have arisen from Trastevera's wishing it at that moment, or Ravenutzi's being engaged on some business that made my presence advisable, intimations that reach so readily in a frame of life when there is nothing more urgent to do than attend to them. Accordingly I looked for him in the accustomed places, where, in the fulfilment of his hostage, he made a point of being unobtrusively and contentedly about, and oftenest with Noche, the only one of the men who afforded him an unaffronting companionship. But this morning I could not find him in the Fern, nor at his smithy under the fall, nor with the fishers at the creek, and it was quite by accident that I came upon him some hours later sitting on a stump in an artificial clearing not much frequented by

the Outliers, since it had been a hunters' camp and had the man taint about it. As he sat turning over some small matters in his hand, his brow knitting and unknitting, the whole man seemed to bristle with some evil, anxious intent. If there had been flames jutting from him, green spitting flames from eye and brow, they could not have given to him an aspect more sinister and burning; the mobile tip of his nose twitching slightly, the full, gracile lips drawn back, bracketed by deep, unmirthful lines, the whole personality of the man pulsing and wavering with the fury of his cogitations, which, when he looked up and saw me, he gathered up with a gesture and disposed of like a snake swallowing its skin. From the moment that his eyes lighted on mine his look neither flinched nor faltered, but all the evil pre-occupation of him seemed to retreat and withdraw under their velvet, yielding, as it seemed to me he always did yield, gratefully to my understanding and the security of sympathy. He had been busy as I came up with bits of leaves and blossoms and sticks, all of special significance, by which the Outliers could communicate as well as

by letter, tying them in a bundle, which, as soon as he saw me, he began to untie and scatter as though there had been no object in it but mere employment.

Seeing him set his foot on some shredded petals of a sentimental significance, I thought no more of it than that he might have composed a message to some woman of his own, to her who had come to me at Leaping Water perhaps, and destroyed it as one tears verses written in secret, and I was quite willing to help him from any embarrassment of being caught at it by falling in with his first suggestion.

“Come,” he said, making room on the stump beside him, “it is a good day for teaching you to be completely the Outlier that I believe you are at heart, some changeling gotten among House-Folk by mistake.”

He lifted a heap of twigs and flowers, chose a spray of laurel and berries of toyon, with two small sticks, one of which was carefully measured three-fourths of the length of the other.

“Now what does this say?”

“The toyon means courage, but taken with

the laurel probably means a place where they grow together," I answered, proud of knowing so much; "two things of the same kind mean time—two days—no, one day and three-quarters."

He laughed delightedly.

"Say to-morrow at mid-afternoon." Then he considered, and added a small feather. "And this?"

I was doubtful.

"Speed," I hazarded.

He gave the two low, warning notes of the quail, and I clapped my hands.

"Be quick and cautious!"

He laughed encouragement, and then shyly, after some consideration, he bound them all together with a sprig of a vine that spells devotion, and stuck it in his girdle.

"See," he declared, "you have sent me a message appointing a secret meeting, and I shall wear it openly to show that, old as I am, I am not too old to appreciate ladies' favours."

He roughed his streaked grey hair as he laughed again with a delicate whimsicality that took off the edge of offence.

"Sometimes, Ravenutzi, I think you are not so old as you look."

"Ah, when?"

"Just now when I came upon you, and when they talk of the King's Desire. From the way you look when they talk of selling it for land, I gather the Far-Folk won't be very well pleased with that disposition."

"Would you expect it, seeing that it belongs to us?"

"But does it?"

"Who but our fathers brought it from the Door of Death? It makes no difference with belonging that they have kept us out of it so many years."

"If it comes to that," I said, "it doesn't seem to me to belong to either of you."

"It was ours in the beginning, be sure it comes in the end to our hand again."

"Was that what you were thinking about when I came up?"

"I suppose so. I often think about it. An ill subject for a good day." He rose up to dismiss it. "Let us go and see if the spring is full."

We went up through the tall timber through a chain of grassy meadows, little

meadows planted fair with incense shrub and hound's tongue and trillium, nibbled sprigs of young fir, surprised birds at their mating and a buck pawing in the soft earth. I do not remember if the spring was full or not, but I recall very well that as we came back skirting the edge of under-grown forest, stiff with stems like a wall, Ravenutzi made a great to-do because he had lost my token; and that was strange to me, because a little time before when he helped me over a bog I had seen it sticking quite firmly in the crossing of his girdle. He would not go back to look for it, insisted rather that we should go around by the Laurel Bank where toyon grew and gather its belated berries to console him. So being very gay about it, and laughing a great deal, we got back to camp with Ravenutzi's dress stuck full of laurel and toyon about the time the treasure diggers, setting three of their party on the faint trail they had found, turned back toward Deep Fern.

They arrived about two hours before sunset, went straight to Persilope, talked with him apart, remained otherwise separate and uncommunicable. Already some in-

visible warning of their approach ran about the basin and drew the Outliers in from whatever business they were abroad upon. They came hurrying and crowding into the long narrow meadow between the creek and the wood, fluttered and full of questioning. Their unexpected return, empty handed, the lessening of the party, their grave silences, Noche's distracted appearance, Mancha's head held high, Prassade's hung down, all these kept enquiry and supposition rife.

The wood began to resound with calls, which were answered from far and near as the belated ones came hurrying from fishing and hunting and isolated huts. In the middle meadow the treasure hunters sat together on the ground; Persilope walked up and down. Around the edge of the wood ran the whisper and jostle of fresh arrivals. Now and then Persilope took note of them, awaiting the last impatiently for a time to speak. The sun travelled seaward, and the fan-spread, vaporous rays of blueness ranged through the redwoods and melted into twilight. The noise of coming fell off by degrees, and every man began to count and question to know for

whom they waited. It appeared the Maiden Ward was still abroad; she had gone that afternoon with the one keeper and two women to the ridge behind Deep Fern to dig certain roots for dyeing; she was late returning. Two or three stars had come out in the twilit space when far back under the redwoods there was the sound of a man running. The *pad, pad* of his feet on the thick needles drew near, burst upon us, cleared the ring of listeners and carried the man full into the open, gasping and panting.

"Gone! Gone!" he shouted. "Lost! Seized and stolen!"

The words, sharp and startling, brought all the sitters to their feet like the cracking of a whip.

"Who? Who, and where?" cried Prassade, taking the man, who was the fourth keeper, by the shoulders and wheeling him round face to face. "Is it my daughter? What have you done with her?"

"Gone!" he declared again in the midst of panting.

"Of her own will? When? In what direction?" With every question Prassade

shook him as if he would have jolted the answer out of him in default of words.

“Let me breathe. Just now. I came as fast as I could. Not of her own will, I think. There were others—one other.”

The man struggled with his agitation. Persilope counselled patience; the hearers closed round him in a ring, as he grew more coherent.

They were out, he said, where the sodden ground was, along the foot of the Laurel Bank, he and the two women digging roots, Zirriloë straying along the lower edge of the Bank.

There was a toyon bush, full berried, grown up among the laurels, and she gathered the scarlet clusters for her hair.

She had been a long time at it, pushing close among the branches, reaching for the handsomest berries, some thirty paces from them, but never out of sight; they could see her dress among the leaves. Yes, they were all sure of that. He could not say how long it was before it occurred to them as strange that she should stand there so long in the toyon, nor how long after that they became convinced it was not she but

her dress which they looked at hanging there in the chaparral, stirred by the wind. One of the women went to look, and found her outer garment stuck shoulder high among the branches. They thought it a prank at first, bent back the boughs, peering and calling. Beyond the close outer wall of foliage it was open enough for careful passage ; they pushed into the thickest stems, suspecting her in ambush. One of the women some paces ahead, beginning to be annoyed, searching rapidly, spied something slipping from hollow shade to shade, began an exclamation of discovery which changed to fright as a man shot out from the laurels in front of her and disappeared, crouching and running under the low branches up the slope.

They had spent little time after that looking about them ; it was already dusk in the chaparral, he had left the women behind, and come on rapidly to send some one younger on the darkling trail. He turned toward the girl's father as he spoke, as being naturally the most interested. I could see Prassade's face set and harden with the narrative, the line of his mouth thinning ;

now it widened to let out two sharp questions.

“Did you see any sign of struggle or capture?”

“Not a leaf disturbed, not a twig broken, but indeed we went only a little way——”

“What sort of a man was it?”

“He was dressed as an Outlier.”

“Ah!” The trap of Prassade’s lips went shut again, he had got what he waited for.

“But you did not think him one?” It was Persilope took up the question.

“It was very dark under the laurels, he ran fast.”

“Was he Far-Folk?”

“So the woman thought.”

I could see in the dusk the lift of Prassade’s shoulders, and the slight inclination of his palms outward. He had had all that day and the night for considering what his daughter’s part in that business might have been; perhaps—who knew?—some unadmitted fact had gone to the shaping of his conclusion. He turned to Persilope, and his voice cracked with hardness.

“It seems to me,” he said, “we have

affairs more important than the flight of a dishonoured girl."

"No, by the Friend!" cried a man, one of those who had gone with the Treasure party. "It seems to me that it is all one affair, and we shall find the girl when we find the King's Desire. They have gone together."

At this, which was the first announcement of the loss so plainly intimated by the demeanour of the party, there ran a sound of unbelief and bewilderment around the camp.

"Gone!" they cried, and "Gone!" in every accent of incredulity and surprise.

"Ay, gone," said Prassade, "seized, stolen away," unconsciously repeating the words of the keeper, "gone with my honour and the faith of the Outliers."

While the keeper told his story the listeners, in the manner of crowds, surged forward, closing between him and the dispirited Treasure party; now, at the declaration of his dishonour, they were disrupted suddenly by sharp, explosive sounds which I knew for the rapping of Mancha's hammer. At the instant of the keeper's announcement I had seen him rise and gird himself,

beginning to look about like a man missing some necessary thing, too perturbed to be aware of it. One of his young men slipped his hammer into his hand, and at the feel of its familiar handle a little of the strained look left his face, kindling for action, before the crowd swallowed him in its eagerness to hear what Prassade and the keeper said.

Now as it broke back from him and the sound of his whirling hammer, I saw the pale blotch of his face and hair distinctly in the twilight.

“Oh, Persilope,” he said, “take what measures you will for the recovery of the King’s Desire, but this is my business. Here should be no talk of honour or dishonour, but simple outrage. A man of the Far-Folk has crossed into our country and stolen the Maiden Ward: let no man put other name to it until I have brought her back again. But first bring me the smith, for before I go I would enquire of him how it is, while the hostage stands, men of his breed have trespassed on my borders. Where is Ravenutzi?”

The crown turned upon itself. They had a system, though I could never get to

understand it, by which they could locate and account for the tribesmen when called upon, as though they were one body which examined its members and declared them ; so now on the asking the rustle and movement began, hesitated on the fact, and grew rapidly into a deep excited hum of resentment as the word passed from group to group that among them there was no Ravenutzi.

X

THE LEDGE

BETWEEN the morning and the dead hours of night I was awakened in the hut, feeling Evarra's hands go over me lightly as squirrels as she gathered up her belongings.

"What are you doing, Evarra?"

"Making ready."

"For what?"

"Child, the Ward is stolen and the Far-Folk have taken the King's Desire, and you ask me that!"

"What is that sound I hear, Evarra, like a wounded creature?"

"It is the mother of the Ward."

"It hurts to hear it; may I go to her?"

"You! What could you say to her? Besides, it is better for her to have her cry out before she comes where her man is."

"Where is Prassade?"

“Where we must be at mid-morning, at the Ledge.”

“And Mancha?”

“Where he should have been this month past, at River Ward. It was there the stealers came through.”

“Have you any word?”

“Before the Council parted one came from the trackers who had found a sign. They went through by Broken Head. Sleep now,” she said.

I heard the light scrape of her feet on the threshold, and I lay still at the bottom of a pit of blackness from which at unutterable heights I could make out a point of light or two cut off at times by the indistinguishable stir of boughs.

Between the trees the lights of the Outliers as faintly illumined the space under the shut branches as the lights in crypts that show where the bones of saints are laid. I lay revolving in my mind all the circumstance of my coming here and of my connection with the Ward and Ravenutzi: until suddenly there flashed forth, like a picture on a screen, the incident of that letter which I had helped Ravenutzi to

make and he had worn so gaily and lost so unaccountably. It had been a veritable token dropped conveniently for one who waited for it, and I grew sick and hot in the dark thinking how he had used me. I must have dozed after that, for I thought the sound of crying increased outside, and it was no longer the Ward's mother, but the tall woman of the woods who called me by my name to upbraid me, and it was Evarra calling me awake.

As yet no beam shone or bird sang; I saw the shapes of the women blocked indistinguishably in the mouse-coloured mist; as by that wild faculty of theirs to cover their traces as the fox covers its tracks, I saw them draw, as it were, the surface of the forest over all the signs of their occupancy, dry fern rotting above the caches, leaf litter where the hearths had been. When I rose and went out to them, Evarra touched my bed with her foot once, twice, and it was no bed, but the summer drift about the roots of trees. As we went hillward silence spread behind us in the meadows and took the wood with desolation.

By the ridge between Deep Fern and

Deer Lake Hollow the women with young children turned off toward some safe secret centre, there to wait word from their men, but Evarra and the more active women, I with them, not being wanted very much, but because in the hurry of Council no other provision had been made for me, kept on to the Ledge.

To understand all that went on after that in the business of the King's Desire, it is well to be precise. Deep Fern is as far from Broken Tree as a strong man can go in twelve or fourteen hours, walking steadily, and the Ledge is ten hours from Deep Fern. It runs, a great dyke of porphyry, with the contour of the hills, at the upper limit of tall trees over a great stretch of country, and makes a boundary between Outland and the Far-Folk. Beginning and end of it I never saw, but from a place called Windy Cover to River Ward I knew it very well. In this place it passes over shallow, stony soil, in which nothing grows of more than knee height, except on the lee side of a strong hill where a triangular space of shrubs, ceanothus and toyon, reaches quite up to the rocky wall. The chaparral is tall enough

for a man or a deer to walk in it upright, and certain small winds forever straying and whirling here, ruffling the tops of the scrub and stirring the branches, make it possible for such a passage to take place unobserved ; the stir of his going, indistinguishable from the running movements of the wind, gives the place its name of Windy Covers.

From here the Ledge goes high and impassable, following the hills, until it reaches the Gap where the river comes through. There it leaves off for a crow's flight, and the river continues that boundary until it touches the Ledge again ; and the whole of this space being thickly wooded and the river running shallowly at seasons, it was here the Far-Folk trespassed most of old time, and by this the filchers of the King's Desire had come. It was known as River Ward, and Mancha kept watch over it. Beyond its second point of contact with the dyke, called Broken Head, the Ledge went on south a very great distance, of which I never heard the end, though from something that I heard at Windy Covers I gathered that the Outliers possessed all the district south as far as the Sur. Just

beyond Broken Head the river widens and makes a turn where there is easy passing, called from the sound of it going over the smooth stones, Singing Ford, over which Daria and her man had gone on their wedding month; but all the other places I have named lay north of the river between it and the Ledge.

We came to Windy Covers a little after midday, and I should have said, looking up its green steep, level grown as a mown field, that all the Outliers were there before us, for the tops of the scrub were all ashake; the lilacs tossed, the buckthorn turned and whitened, lines of wavering showed in it like the stir of a meadow when rabbits run in the grass. But it turned out we were hours ahead of the men.

“Ah, I told you it was good cover,” said Evarra, as we came in by the green tunnels that the deer had made.

I had gathered from the talk of the women that we were to lie there, guarding that pass and keeping out of River Ward where Mancha was now, hoping not to excite the Far-Folk by too active pursuit, so that they should escape southward into wild country.

It was not known yet if the lifters of the Treasure had passed beyond River Ward or if Ravenutzi had joined them, if indeed he might not yet be on our side the Ledge with the Ward. There were some other points in the connection on which I wished to satisfy myself, and when I saw Lianthe mousing along under the wall, I crept after him, unsuspected, until we came into a little bay of bitten scrub and a well-trodden track that led up the stony, broken back of the Ledge. This way the bucks had come when at the end of mating they ranged afar and fed on the high ridges. This way they came again to seek the does, and along this trail I saw Lianthe pawing breathlessly, nose to the thick mosses like a snuffing hound.

“They must have come this way,” he said.

“Yes,” I assented, thinking of the deer.

“If they have crossed there should be some trace of them. They must have come in the night and could not have gone so carefully.” He scrutinised little heaps of leaf litter in the crevices, and squinted along the ground. “And the trackers have not been here either. They cannot have crossed at all.”

All at once I understood that he was talking about Ravenutzi and the Ward.

"There is no other way," he said, "no other way possible for—a girl."

"Lianthe, where is Herman?"

He left off pawing over the trail and walked on toward the rim of the Ledge.

"Gone after her,"

"Zirriloë?"

He nodded.

"But why?"

"Mancha sent him."

"Why should he take so much trouble? She went where she chose. You heard what the keeper said?"

"Ah!" he cried woundedly, "you women are all against her!"

We had come by this to the top of the Ledge overlooking the Far-Folk country. It was all open, rounded grassy hills, stony, full of shallow hollows, of scant, depressed trees, lying in the thin, airy shadows that fall so singularly in high places from every inconsiderable crest. It was all still, two or three crows flying over, and far up under the blue a buzzard sailing.

"It's no use looking out for them,"

objected Lianthe. "They'll not show themselves while we are here."

"Do you think they know?"

"Huh! Do rabbits know when coyotes hunt? If they know about the King's Desire what wouldn't they know?"

He was sitting on a heap of stones picking the moss out of the crannies and pitching it down below. His throat and chin were strained and tight as though no songs could come that way again.

"When I think of her hands," he said, "and the parting of her hair, as white as a dove's egg . . . if she loved anybody she wouldn't have thought of anything else."

"Evidently she didn't," I insisted cruelly. "But why do you care so much? Even if she hadn't run away with Ravenutzi it wouldn't have been you she would have married, it would have been Mancha."

To look at the boy you would have said his songs were not all dead, one of them rose and struggled to go the accustomed way, and it was a song of boy's love and wounded trust; he bit it back at last.

"He was the only one good enough for

her," he choked. He was done with the moss now, and was aiming small stones carefully at empty space. "I would have wanted her to have the best."

"At any rate she took what she wanted."

He stood up, flushed and tormented.

"You're just down on her because Herman is in love with her," he said.

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't know; you can always tell if you're that way yourself. I don't want to talk about it any more," walking away from me.

Presently he came back stiffly.

"You must come with me," he said; "you can't stay here. I was told to look after you."

"What time did Herman go?" I asked as we went down together.

"Just after Council. Mancha wanted to go, but they said his place was at River Ward. If he had been there all this time the Far-Folk mightn't have got through. They let Herman do what he liked, because if it hadn't been for him they wouldn't have found out about the stealing so soon. And look here"—he showed me a spray of toyon

berries—"I went and found this after the trackers had gone. I felt around in the dark and found it. It was the last thing she touched. It was only half broken off. She hadn't expected to go away; she was surprised and she left it half broken off." He put it up in his tunic again. "I don't know why she went away with Ravenutzi, but I know she never told him where the Treasure was."

He was so certain of that, I had no heart to trouble him. As we came down the trail we saw the top of Windy Covers all alive, rippled and streaked with motion.

"Some one is coming," Lianthe volunteered.

"It looked just like that this morning. How can you tell?"

"Oh, I can't tell that. I knew how just before you asked me, just the way I know Zirriloë didn't tell Ravenutzi about the King's Desire; I just know."

It was, in fact, some of the Outliers who had not been at Deep Fern, drawn from their own places by that mysterious quality of evil news to spread. They came hurrying all that day and the next. The Covers

were peopled thick as a rabbit warren : coveys of quail whirred up from it with a sharp explosive sound and broke toward the wooded land ; except for that, and the fact that the quail did not come back again, there was no sign. Men sat close in the tunnels, and it was dreadful to see the working in them of their resentment of betrayal, so much the worse that they knew it half invited. They had accepted a hostage of the Far-Folk, who never spoke straight nor did truly.—What wonder, then, if he had done after his kind? They knew : at this point resentment rose to its burningest ; they had always known, and, knowing, could not have done otherwise. Ravenutzi came under honourable conditions, and they had served him honourably, being so much the debtor to their own natures. They were not only sick to be dishonoured, they sickened of dishonour. As they sat in the green glooms of Windy Covers their bodies heaved and flushed, eyes reddened, hands wrenching at invisible things ; now and then, at the mention of a name or a circumstance, some quick, explosive breath would struggle with a curse ; the gorge of the spirit rose.

Never among the Outliers had I found myself so unfriended. I felt myself burned upon by their rages, but they cared nothing for my burning; to have harped resentment was to advertise a witness of their betrayal. I judged best to be as little in evidence as was compatible with not seeking abroad to be a target for the Far-Folk, and was as lonely in it as could well be expected.

Late of the second day I got down to the edge of the chaparral where the trees began to invade it, standing apart and singly, and the chaparral had made itself small to run under the trees. I found an island of dry litter under a pine, cleared of pushing vetch and fern, fenced and shadowed, and drew up in it out of that pervading sense of bitterness and betrayal flooding so fiercely under Windy Covers. It was incredibly still of all life here; neither bird hopped nor insect hummed. The shadows shook in the wind, which I thought to increase near me, and to draw into a long whisper which was my name, and this fancy so comforted me with the notion that whoever abandoned me, the wood was still my own, that as I sat with my head against the pine and my eyes

closed, I heard it several times before a crackling in the bushes aroused me to observe another woman struggling anear through the thick stems of manzanita, and as she crept and wormed toward me she drew on to her knees in the open space under the tent of the pine, and I saw that she was the tall woman who had loved Ravenutzi. I saw more than that; she had come to me through great difficulty and by hard ways, her dress was torn, her hands scratched and bleeding, her hair, which was bound under a leathern snood, dishevelled; but by whatever difficulties, they had not marred her so much as the passions which wasted within. She was more beautiful, the long, flushed throat, the red, scorning lip, the eyes darkened and hollow, but she was so plainly gnawed upon by grief that as we knelt there, I half risen on my knees and she on hers confronting me, I could think nothing but pity for her to be so changed.

“You!” I whispered dryly.

“Speak low,” she said, though indeed we had done nothing else, so did the stillness of the place weigh upon us in that ring of shadow, the chaparral coming up to the

outer boughs of the pine, and the fan-spread branches black to meet it a foot above our heads.

“I have waited for you all day. Tell me, have you found him? Where has he taken her?”

“I do not know. We have no trace of them.”

“But which way did they go? From what point did they leave the Meet? Something—surely you know something?” She clasped her cut palms together, and I saw a slight flinching at the pain they gave her, which she cast off impatiently as though it were an interruption to her understanding.

“Tell me first what you are to him, that you should ask?”

“His wife!”

“You—so young——”

I had an instant vision of Ravenutzi's white hair, and then of the smith as I had first seen him washing his hair at the pool of the Leaning Bay, and at that, and perhaps a slight flicker of amusement in her face, the two things leaped together in my mind.

“Was that also a pretence?”

“There are herbs which will bleach the

colour from the hair and draw the skin in wrinkles," she said. "He had more years than I, but we were young."

"And the hostage, too, was it all a pretence from the beginning?"

"What else?" impatiently. "The King's Desire was ours, and we schemed to get it back as we had first won it. I was as willing as the rest when we began it. If I was not to see him again for three years, that was my part of the service and I was proud to pay it. But I never thought of this. Oh no, never this!"

She crept up to me and eased the strained position of her limbs.

"I will tell you everything," she moaned, "if you will only answer me. Ravenutzi was to make friends with the Ward, and have the secret from her. We were to lift the King's Desire as soon as known, and nothing said about it until the hostage was over. Then if they discovered the loss, who could be blamed for it? He was to stay the full time of the hostage, for if he came away violently, they would suspect, and go and look if their Treasure had been moved. I knew, or thought I knew, that if he got

anything from the Ward she would have to love him. I thought he could manage it. He is very wise in women. Even you——”

I checked her there; it was evident the Far-Folk were acquainted with everything that went on at Deep Fern, but I was not going to discuss my part of it with Ravenutzi's wife.

“You had never heard, then,” I broke in upon her, “that the Outliers chose their most beautiful to be the Ward?”

“Oh, I had heard.”

She put up her hands to her face in some quick, indefinable shame, so that I understood Ravenutzi had contrived to keep her convinced of the supremacy of her own loveliness.

“When it was all arranged,” she said, “and we learned that on account of all this talk of the House-Folk it was certain that the lifting of the Treasure would be discovered, though we did not think it would be so soon, we sent to bring Ravenutzi away, and while the Far-Folk waited, came one of the party back to say that Ravenutzi had gone to make the Ward safe in some secret place and would come shortly. That was all, no

word to me——” Anger swallowed up her speech.

I tried to soothe her.

“It was the least he could do if she had told him. The Outliers would have killed her had they found her out.”

“What matter to him if they had? We have killed Outliers before now when it was a question of the King’s Desire. Why should he be concerned about her, unless—unless he loves her?”

In the anguish of that conviction she struck with her wounded palm against the tree, and sinking her head upon that arm that Ravenutzi had rested on, with what bliss it gave her the keener anguish to remember, set her teeth in the bared, tender flesh. I let her be, writhing like a wounded snake, for a time, and then, as the best cure, began to tell her with particularity all I could recall of the circumstance of the flight of the smith and the Ward from Deep Fern.

She questioned as she listened, would have me be precise.

She had never been any nearer to Deep Fern than the place where I had found her

the second day of the Meet ; should she reach it best from here by way of Leaping Water or otherwise ? just how far was the Laurel Bank from the long meadow, and how could one get at it ? I could see the purpose grow in her to strike that trail and follow it to whatever end. She listened and hardened.

“Tell me well how she looks,” she said, “so that if I find this flagrant girl I may not mistake her,” and I saw her blench as I named the points of the Ward’s beauty. She jerked and quivered, little sentences escaped from her like phrases of a delirium, of the utterance of which I think she was unconscious.

“Little fair hands,” she said, “a trivial heart . . . hair of two colours . . . a snare, a snare . . . a crumpled lip goes with a false tongue . . .” Her jealousy kept pace. “Kill her, would they ? . . . Let them . . . does he think to keep her who could not keep her word ? Does he lie safely with this false Ward while his people wait for him at——”

“Stop !” I said. “I have told you all that concerns you personally, as one woman to another, but I advise you, I am for the

Outliers, if you say anything of value to them I shall not keep it."

She bit her lip.

"What do I know of what the people do in my absence, or where they foregather? It is of him I think; does he imagine me waiting in my house like a faithful wife——"

She threw out her arms, rocking on her knees.

. . . "Long, oh long, have I been gathering lilies! . . ."

I do not know whether she uttered these words in the delirium of her jealousy, or if something in the anguished gesture sent the refrain of Ravenutzi's song sounding through and through me with all the pregnancy of the spoken word. I heard it shaken like an organ somewhere about the sound of tears.

. . . "Long, oh long, have I been gathering lilies . . .

Ah, but I shall do more than wait."

She stood up as well as she could under the bent pine, to draw her dress into order, and asked me who had gone on the trail of Ravenutzi. I named all the men, and then Herman.

"He too!" She looked at me with curious mocking. "All the men are mad, I think.

Now I have a mind to go and see what this girl is like who sets all people by the ears, and when I have found her I shall come to tell you."

She smiled sidewise whimsically as she stooped to the chaparral again, and though there was inordinate hate in her look and insuperable hardness, that warned me what she would do when she had found them, there was that in her fierce, tormented spirit so laid hold on me that I neither put out my hand nor raised my voice to stay her as she went.

XI

HOW THE OUTLIERS CAME UP WITH THE FAR-FOLK AT A PLACE CALLED THE SMITHY, AND HERMAN CAME BACK TO RIVER WARD

NOTHING in all that struggle set on by the lifting of the King's Desire pleased me so much as the way the Far-Folk outreached themselves by their own cunning. They had chewed the cud of the old grudge so much, disgorging and regorging, that life smacked no other savour for them, and they imagined none other to obtain among their enemies. That slow treachery of Ravenutzi's, while it burned against the honour of the Outliers, conserved something of the stuff of treachery in themselves. They wasted themselves upon the method and left not much to reckon with beyond the fact of possession.

Let them once get their hands upon the

King's Desire ; they asked no more than that, planned very little more. Communication with Ravenutzi was difficult ; never greater than as the time of the Meet approached from which they hoped so much, when the thought of the Treasure was uppermost in every man's mind. It was a hope that overrode precaution and drew them, when they had need to keep most in the dark, to cluster in a place of scant cover just beyond River Ward, like wastrels above the water where the dead are about to rise. There, had he not had other business for his thoughts, Mancha should have discerned them. But this same preoccupation of the Hammerer's, though it saved them then, served them worse when it hurried the unearthing of the King's Desire.

News of this move only reached them as they lay all together, with no preparation for flight or siege, in a shallow cañon back of River Ward, like a hive about to swarm, humming with excited talk, awaiting the return of the lifters. The mere hint of frustration fanned them into a fury, to which, when the Treasure was actually in camp, succeeded gross, babbling boastfulness and

exultation. Close on this came word from Ravenutzi that he had fled the Outliers with the Ward, and to await him in a place called the Smithy.

If they wondered with his wife why he should have taken so much trouble for a girl who had served her turn, they had either less concern for his relation to her, or trusted him more. What did concern them was that the same message apprised them that by now the Outliers were in a fair way to know what had become of the King's Desire.

They judged they would be tracked and set upon, and made a defence against that which was in keeping with what they thought the probable estimate of themselves held by the Outliers with some justice up to that time. They reasoned that the Outliers would be expecting lies in the enemy's country, and left a boy behind them to watch their coming; if they went another way he was to run and bring the Far-Folk word, if they struck the trail to the Smithy he was to turn them from it by the simple truth. And here is where they overdid themselves, for the Outliers, not yet inured to lies, believed him.

They caught the boy—one with some spirit in him meriting a better employment—crawling through the scrub half a day beyond River Ward, and brought him before Persilope, where he scratched and cursed awhile and then fell sullen under their questioning. Let them kill him, he said, but he would not tell where his people were, nor how to get at them.

“Nay, we will not kill you, lad,” Noche reassured him, “we love you so much.” Here he wrapped his great arms about the boy, handfast behind his back as he was, and lifted him against his breast.

“So,” he laughed, “will you not tell me where the Far-Folk are for love?”

“No.” The boy’s face flushed purple, the breath came whistling through his teeth.

“One,” said Noche, and the muscles of his back began to swell.

“Two,” said Noche.

“Yes-s-s-s!” sung the boy’s rattling breath.

And when Noche, who would have cracked the ribs of a grown man as well, set him down, the boy staggered and was sick, and admitted they were at the Smithy. He had

been entirely within his instruction in that, but he must have seen the unwisdom of it when the Outliers set out immediately in that direction. His distress was evident and genuine, he moaned and whimpered, came fawning to Persilope.

“Why, what ails the boy?” said he, perplexed. “We want no more of you.”

“But, oh, I have lied to you,” whined the lad. “I have lied; you will kill me when you learn how I have lied. They are not at the Smithy.”

“Where then?”

“Oh, oh, I do not know. Over there. At Eagle Rock, perhaps. But certainly not at the Smithy.”

His anxiety undid him; Noche came close.

“Shall I say three to you, my youngling?”

The boy fell silent and shivering, all the rest of that going Noche kept him serviceable by the mere motion of his arms.

The place called the Smithy lies in the pit of a blind cañon, all of rusty red volcanic stone, half-cooled it seems, smudged black with smoke, encrusted with flakes of dark lichen like soot. Some Junipers grow there,

wind depressed, all asquat above the rocks like dwarfed, warty things crept out of the ruins to take the sun, and in the middle of the pit half a score of pines staggered together all awry as if with labour at the cold forges. Here the Far-Folk repaired to wait the smith and gloat upon his work, and here, when the earth melted in its own shadow under a sky of dusky blueness, whitening to an unrisen moon, the Outliers found them. The Far-Folk had eaten, and sat about on the broken stones gloating; even in repose, and from the top of the hill where the Outliers looked down at them, they had the attitudes of exultation. The King's Desire lay uncorded in their midst, the little low fire struck a thousand bright reflections from it. Red eyes of gems winked from behind a screen of golden fret. At the head of the circle sat the chief of the Far-Folk, and the Cup of the Four Quarters was between his knees. This Oca merits attention: he was a lithe man, well bronzed, of a singular, wild, fearless bearing; he had a beard of thick, wavy locks that he blew back from his lips as he talked, accommodated to the carriage of his head like sculptor

work. Around his mouth there was the evidence of something half-formed, undependable, as of the wood-creatures, but in his eyes, which were bright and roving, and on his brow, the witness of extraordinary intelligence. He had a laugh, short and bubbling, that came always at the end of his words and belied their pertinence ; it was as if some sardonic half-god sat in him and laughed at his assumption of being a man. He laughed now as the Outliers looked down on him, lifting the Cup of the Four Quarters, blowing back his long lip locks to drink.

The Outliers had come, I say, to the top of the cañon at dark, for they had not been very sure of the way, and had scorned to squeeze further help from their captive. They hung there straining through the dusk to take the lay of the land and for the moment forgot the lad, who must have had some good stuff in him, going all that afternoon white with high resolve when they thought him merely frightened, revolving mischief stilly ; for while they halted where the coiled and undulating strata flowed down the sides of the cañon like water lines in old

bas-reliefs, parting about the basin of wiry trees under which they made out sparkles of red and green and figures moving, the boy contrived, by slipping on a pebble, to bring his throat a space from Noche's hand and to let out from it a cry formless and anguished, breaking off in mid-utterance like a trumpet torn asunder. To it succeeded the sound of a limp body dropping among disjointed stones, the rush of the Outliers going down, and the scuttling of the Far-Folk in the blind gulley like scared sheep in a runway.

It was very quickly over. The cry had done its work and the advantage of the ground was all to the Far-Folk; dark people as they were, the dark befriended them. When the Outliers loosed their slings it took them into cover. You heard the crack of the sling stones and some sharp groans, but by the time our men got down to the twisty trees there was not a spark of the Treasure nor one of the Treasure lifters. They stumbled on some of their women though, run to wake the children sleeping, and took them, with a good part of their baggage. By the time the moon came up there was no more to be seen of either party than one

slim body of a lad, with his back broken, growing cold in a deep cairn of stones.

Persilope set on to keep the trail of the Far-Folk warm, and Mancha, being the readier for that business as he hoped for news of the Ward, came back with the captives to River Ward.

In the early half light, as they travelled, they were aware of a tall woman with long hair blowing, who came and stood on a hill overlooking them for a space long enough to have counted all the captives, and when she had told them over, she wrung her hands and bit upon them, and vanished into the morning mist. By that I knew it must have been Ravenutzi's wife, that she was still looking for some clue of him and had not found it.

We moved, all of us, from Windy Covers that day to a place beyond the Ledge, but near enough to the Gap for us to fall back upon our own country if need was, and that night, before Mancha got in from the Smithy, Herman came back again. It was the pale end of night, the moon was gone ghost white, and the wind was awake that runs before the dawn. I was laid sleepless in

my bed under the buckthorn, staring upward till I could make out the dim shape of its foliage beginning to stir against the sky, when I heard the whisper of their arrival on the far side of the camp.

I had said to myself that I owed Herman no welcome on this returning, for though there was no personal tie, there was in our common condition of aliens among the Outliers, an obligation, and here was I left to he knew not what pains and inconveniences while he ran after this wild girl and a faithless, dishonoured man. And the more I considered on this the less of satisfaction came of it. For whatever the pitiableness of the girl's case, and I felt there might be something in that, it was no affair of Herman's to set himself beside her and against all other women who had kept right and true by what pains and passionate renunciations I seemed now to feel myself seized and participated: whom now I perceived to be affronted by any excusing of her. That my friend should so excuse her pointed and made personal the offence.

I was so sure of this resentment and so overwhelmed in it past the old confident

sense of comradeship, and it was so palpable a barrier in my own mind to the renewal of intimacy, that when Herman, before he had eaten or rested, came stealing among the stretched figures, with long, stooping pauses where an arm thrown up or a drawn cover concealed an identity, I could not imagine what he was looking for until he came to where I lay, wrapped in a cougar skin under the buckthorn, and I knew by the full stop, and by the long breath of easement after the strain, strangely, that it was I.

He sat down a very little way from me, on the hillock of a broken pine, and though I could not see his eyes in that light I made out that his face was turned toward me, and that he leaned it upon his hand. Whether he felt some emanation of my resentment going from me and was troubled by it, or whether from weariness, he moved uneasily and sighed. He must have grown more accustomed to the dark by travelling in it, for presently he reached out to brush lightly some small twigs and leaves that had fallen on my bed, and felt or saw the barely perceptible stir I made.

“Mona?” he whispered.

"Well?"

"Did I wake you? I did not mean to. Do you wish to sleep again?"

"I am not asleep."

I suppose he expected some question which would give him leave to begin with what his mind was full of, but I had already heard the whisper, handed from bed to bed, what ill success they had, and I had no wish to hear Herman's part in it. I lay still and made out the faint movement in the leaves of the buckthorn, until, by the slow clearing of the dark, I could see the droop of his figure with fatigue, and I was not proof against that.

"You are very tired; why do you not go and lie down?"

"If you don't mind I would rather talk."

He moved over nearer and seemed to get some comfort from the proximity, for he began without any further encouragement to tell me how they had followed fruitlessly on faint clues, and finally with no clues at all, and had come to no conclusion except that the fugitives must be still on the Outlanders' side of the Ledge, for the track

had gone far north of Windy Covers and there was no other passage known for so great a distance as to be impracticable.

“There is a way,” said I.

And as soon as I had said it I was taken with the swift certainty that this secret way by which Ravenutzi and the girl had gone must be the same one the wife had come through with her torn hands, and ventured so much to ease her desire of him by talking to me; and I was so lifted past my own condition to think that by just the time she had taken to wait for me at Windy Covers she had missed seeing Ravenutzi help the girl tenderly over that pass by which she had entered with so great pains, that I began at once to tell Herman about it, to his great amazement.

“You did that,” he said; “you talked to her and let her go, knowing what harm she had it in her mind to do?”

“She was a desperate woman, she could have killed me before help came if I had given the alarm; but I would not have given it, because she trusted me. But no harm will come of it. This is a private quarrel.”

“That poor girl,” he said, “if she should come up with her!”

“In that case,” said I, “would you back Ravenutzi to back his wanton or his wife?”

“Mona—you have no proof!”

“You said—the day she came out of the woods by Leaping Water—that she was the sort to do anything for the man she loved. Well—she is that sort.”

“Mona!”

“Perhaps it was not for love then. You said she could appreciate—things. Perhaps Ravenutzi promised her a——”

“Mona! Mona!” he said, with so sharp an anguish that if I had not felt I owed it to all honourable women to show him where he stood, I should have left him to his dear illusion; yet to see him so excusing for the sake of a shade of the cheek or the way a wrist was turned set me white, hot and throbbing.

“Would you rather,” I said, “she had done it for love or for the King’s Desire?”

I could not see his face, but his voice was troubled with amazement.

‘Mona—I—I was not prepared for this.’ It was too dark to see, but I guessed the

pauses to be the swallowings of his throat. "I thought you would be glad to have me go to that poor girl and make things as easy for her as I could. You never seem to think how she must have suffered before she came to this."

"She hid it well. And depend upon it, Herman, whatever sufferings a woman has in such a case, whatever struggles, they are *toward* the thing she would do, not away from it." I do not know how I knew this, but the moment I had spoken I was quite sure. "If she struggles," I said, "it is to justify her right to do it, to quiet compunction, to appease her fears. Zirriloë came to the end too quickly to have suffered much."

We were both still after that, while the heavens whitened and gave me to see a little of how worn he was and what marks of the trail were on him. I suppose he must have felt the melting of my mood toward him, for presently his hand stole toward me and began to finger the loose end of my cougar skin.

"You never seem to think, Mona"—he hesitated—"what this might mean to me."

“Well, what does it mean?”

I tried, I think I tried, that my voice should not sound so yielding as he should suppose me softened toward the shame and wrong of it, nor so hard that he might imagine the hardness grew out of my caring what it meant to him, and must have fallen a little to one side or the other, for it was a long time before he began again.

“I don’t know,” he said, “I am hardly sure myself. There was a time before we came to Outland—how long ago was that, Mona?—when there was much that you said and thought that I fell short of. Something in books and poetry and music, especially in music, that you were always expecting me to understand, and the expectation irritated me; and I fell to denying and despising that something, and trying—I am afraid succeeding too, in making myself feel that it sprang from some superiority in me not to understand . . . Are you listening, Mona?”

“Yes, Herman.”

“It was not that I felt the want of it so much in myself, but other people—you, Mona—missed it in me. There was a door to all that, about to swing upon the latch . . .

and I could never swing it. And then we came to this free life . . . and Zirriiloë. . . . Did you think I was in love with her, Mona?"

"Were you in love with her?"

"I don't know . . . she made the door swing back . . . she had such a way of walking . . . and that little smile of hers coming and going . . . she was all those things made manifest. A man would understand. I liked to do things for her, it was a way of serving all the loveliness of women . . . it was serving you, Mona . . ."

"Ah," I said, "I would have understood better if the service had been paid in person."

"I suppose so."

He was both humble and reluctant in his acknowledgment, and paused so long a time after it that I could mark the ebb of the dark from the highest hills and the full slopes rounded with verdure emerging, but I found I had nothing to say to him in all this, and perhaps he expected nothing.

"If she could have stayed so . . ." he began again, "as long as she stayed so, I could feel . . . what was it you used to say? . . . the roll of the world eastward. . . . But to have it end so . . . in meanness and betrayal

. . . I wish I might have brought her back with me!"

"Best not, considering what she would come back to meet. If she loved Ravenutzi she is having her happiness now, and if she suffers at all it is not for what she has done but for what you may think of it. And if there is any deep-felt misery going on in this anywhere, it is in Ravenutzi's wife."

"Ah, I had forgotten there was a wife."

I meant he should not forget nor lose for that shallow girl any of the deeper opprobriousness that should attach to the double betrayal, and I was taken by surprise to have him turned by that suggestion quite in another direction.

"A desperate woman, by your account of her," he said. "Promise me, Mona, that you will not hold any further communication with her, and that you will not go out of the camp without an escort. It isn't safe, and it isn't quite fair, is it, to parley with the enemies of the Outliers?"

If he had stopped with the consideration of my safety, I should probably have consented meekly like any woman when any

man takes an interest in her, but that suggestion of unfairness set me at odds again.

"I shall not do anything imprudent," I said; "but as to its relation to the Outliers, that is a matter which you must leave me to decide for myself."

"I suppose so," said Herman ruefully. "I beg your pardon. I don't know how it is, Mona, I let other women do pretty much as they like with me, but I always find myself getting irritated if you don't do exactly as I say."

I was certain Herman had never said anything like this to me before, yet it had so familiar a ring to it that I found myself going back in my mind for the root of it and so heard not too attentively the far faint cry of coyotes going by. But there must have been some nuance in it not of the beasts' cry, for the Outliers began springing up around us, listening and intent. It came again and one answered it, and by that we were made aware it was Mancha returning from the Smithy.

XII

HOW AN OUTLIER SAW A TALL WOMAN FOLLOWING A TRAIL AND MANCHA MET THE SMITH AGAIN

I HAVE no notion how long we lay in the neighbourhood of River Ward, for by this time we had lost all track of the calendar, Herman and I, and the Outliers had none except the orderly procession of the season's bloom and fruit and mating time. Great umbrageous clouds came up behind the hills and were cut down by the wind: clear days succeeded one another, matched so perfectly for warmth and colour that the consciousness took no account of the dividing nights: crowns of foothills lying seaward showed increasing green and then faint flecks of poppy colour. These were our quietest days, for though there was fighting and following, Herman and I had no active part in it.

Consider how few we were in a great land, and no trumpeting, no shock of guns, no daily bulletin; ten men setting out on the mere stirring of an animal sense that beyond a certain hill or in a known hollow lurked the breeders of offence, and then no news of them except as they came or did not come again: companies of Far-Folk and Outliers aware of each other in league-wide slips of trees between the water courses, fencing all day each to come at the other unsuspected: flights and evasions and sharp encounters in such deeps of leafage as dulled all sound: and all this covered, swept over as carefully as the wild creature hides its ways.

Often now walking on the tawny-coloured hill that sleeps above the bay with the Mission between its paws, I look back at the warm-tinted slopes on which the sun plays summer long, beyond the reach of the encroaching fogs, and wonder where we were in them, under what peaks, between what long blue ranges we lay that season, and what tumult and warfare goes on in those still spaces unregarded. But we have never, as I said in the beginning, got any nearer to it than Broken Tree.

The Outliers stuck to the track of the Far-Folk, and had so much the better of them in readiness and organisation that before a long time they had taken the most of their women, and had sought out their homes, abandoned so hurriedly, in the shallow, brush-grown cañons, and had burned and broken what they found. That Ravenutzi had joined the Far-Folk we knew, for once when they had come to parley over a wounded man who was too badly hurt to move, but whose person the Outliers were wishful to retain, they saw the hostage at Oca's back directing the Council by such knowledge of them as his long residence had acquired, and Oca blowing out his long beard, laughing as he listened.

I knew too from one of the captive women that he still kept from his wife the place where he had concealed the Ward, having made such explanation to Oca of the use he should make of Zirriloë's person in the game that was yet to be played, as set that chief chuckling in his beard like a cataract, from which long locks of grizzled hair blew out like spray.

But to his wife he had denied seriousness :

laughed, kissed her burned throat, blinded, bound her with an ingenuity of charm and tenderness until she grew tame under his hand, but raged the more bitterly when he was away, suspecting him with the girl in some safe hiding, flaming with jealousy until his return found her burned out, white and faint, creeping humbly to his caress.

This, I say, I had from one of the captives, for I talked of her to the Outliers only with Trastevera; but I think the woman's story was known to them, for though she was seen often flitting from some post of observation when they came with prisoners, and though it was certain she had been twice inside the Ledge seeking the place where Zirriiloë lay hidden, no motion was made to take her, they judging her no doubt hunted by a more remorseless enemy; the same that drove on Mancha's trail and wasted him in the night. It was strange to me at first when I looked on the Hammerer's passion-hollowed face, to see how it was belied by the youthful fuzziness of his blond hair and the round stalwartness of his frame, until I saw that his body had become what his hammer was in part, the instrument of his

satisfaction, and he nursed it to that end. But here the invisible enemy had him at point; eat he could, and bath, and exercise himself and rough the handle of his hammer to his grasp, and tighten the thongs, but in the night sleep and jealousy contended, and he turned in his bed and set his teeth upon his hands. His eyes reddened at the lids, and when he would be sitting among us his attention would be for ever wandering, and there would be a half inadvertent movement of those same hands as if to rend and tear. That he came but half out of some burning preoccupation to attend to whatever his men brought to his notice, and slipped back into it even between the utterance of two words, like a drowned insect in a glass, was plain to me, must have been to the Outliers, who had the quicker sense for observing, for he was seldom at River Ward, seeming easier to be on the trail and in action. And that there was only one trail that concerned him was perfectly evident; he cared nothing whatever for the recovery of the Treasure if only he might come at Ravenutzi and find where the Ward was laid. And as often as Outliers and Far-

Folk came together in running fights his men fell apart tacitly to afford him the craved-for occasions; and as we knew afterward, by Oca's express direction, the Far-Folk closed round the smith to oppose him, so that Mancha came back unslaked, his new whetted fury turning on himself. Bitter as these frustrated encounters were, they were less so than those times when they surprised their enemy and found Ravenutzi not with them, for where was he then but lingering in some shut quarter with the Ward! One would know that this had occurred when the Hammerer sat upon the edges of his bed the night long goading himself with recollections.

"Give over; give up," cried Trastevera to him. "She never thought of you; and what do you but suck poison from the thought of her?"

"And what," said he, "shall I think of, if I do not think of her? Do you advise me to think of *him*?"

"Think of your work, how you are to win back the King's Desire for us."

"And how shall I think to win the King's Desire and not think of how it was lost?"

And so having worked round in a circle again he did think of it ; what looks and sighs and wooing touches had gone to that betrayal. "If I could come at him," he cried, "if I could but come at him ;" and groaned and struck with his stone hammer deep into the soft, fecund earth.

It was the more difficult for Trastevera, who alone partook of his stormy confidences, to hold with his consuming thought, as she was herself the happier, being restored to her ascendancy and free of the obsession of Ravenutzi. For the Outliers had remembered well how she had been against him in the beginning, and blamed themselves for overriding with their weighty reasons that delicate presentiment which now by this support put forth again and assured them of success. She burned with foreknowledge in those days, that kept time like a poised and constant needle with what went on afar behind what wooded hills and in what secret valleys as we had no other way to guess. Often as we lay in the chaparral and heard the bees fumble at the flagons of the wild currant, and saw the young rabbits rising to drink delicately of

dew in the shallow cup of leaves, she would start up bright and hot, sniffing battle, and as she drooped and grieved, or snatches of triumphant song burst from her, we guessed what went on between our men and Oca's a day's journey south and west.

It was in that quarter they defended themselves for as long as the enjoyment of the King's Desire exceeded all other considerations. It was all of steep hills, set close, well covered, narrow cañons choked with chaparral, rain-fed springs, trailless steep barrancas. Here they kept like foxes, quick and slinking, and the Outliers hunted them, not often with success, for the cover was too thick for slings, and the ways too steep to come at them with the hammers. They showed themselves and ran, and involved the Outliers in a maze of blind gullies, and came out unscathed and mocking on hills above them. They made elaborate false clues for them and set traps which at the last moment they wanted the courage to spring, but never came to any open issue because of the King's Desire. They had the Treasure in hand, and could not be persuaded to leave it. Where it was they

hung like flies at a honey-pot. You could never find the Far-Folk very far nor very long from one another. They would have out the jewels and pore upon them, tracing the patterns, holding them this way and that to catch the light, tried on the collars and the armlets, pranked in the crowns, fed upon the mere sight of them as an antidote to defeat. All this was very well for a time, but the drawing of their forces together about the King's Desire served their enemies more than it served them. Threescore men in a bunch were easier hunted than two or three. By keeping in close order they left betraying traces in the forest surface, and brought down Mancha's hammerers; to avoid this they made the longer flights, swift, uncalculated leaps, and their women and children, unable to keep up with them, were gathered up by the Outliers and carried to River Ward. It began to appear that they must make temporary disposition of their trove until they had possession of their families again, and could make off with them into that wooded country south where there were no man traces and no Outliers could come.

They buried the Treasure once, and then the whole party sat upon the place like brooding quail, and betrayed it by their guarding. So they had it up again, and Ravenutzi and Oca made a plan between them. They were to send the jewels on south under convoy, then by means of the person of the Ward they were to draw Mancha off from River Ward to such a quarter as left free field to the main body of the Far-Folk to raid the camp at River Ward and recapture their women, and by devious ways to make south where the Treasure was to new lands and times. An old man of them was to have himself taken by Mancha's men in order to convey to the women what rescue waited them, and the Ward, who lay still in some secret place of Ravenutzi's contriving, was to be brought to that quarter where it was to their advantage to have Mancha get word of her. A good plan, and worthy of the smith who planned it, and was well agreed to except in one point. No one of them trusted another one to take away the Treasure, and after much argument they fell upon the notion of dividing it. It was so evident that as it remained

in the common custody no man was free to fight and run as his fighting humour was, but must stay standing and strike merely as the occasion served. But give every man his own to carry about with him and he would know what he was fighting for, not with one eye over his shoulder to see how the common object fared. Good logic and sound, answering in many a better case, singularly not in this, for settling on a division of the King's Desire was a much easier matter than dividing it. They were two days wrangling over the manner of it, and another trading and bargaining and matching lots among themselves. Then followed the period of inaction, planned to give the Outliers the notion that they had withdrawn from that part of the country, meaning well to have them go seeking in the direction where it was to be made known to Mancha the Ward was to be seen. Ravenutzi had gone to prepare her for her part in it; poor child, if it were willingly or not, if she consented at all, or even if she had any clear idea what was required of her, who can say?

In the meantime there were the Far-Folk lying separate, very quiet, every man with

his treasure in his bosom to finger and fondle, with the south open before him and the spring coming on by leaps and bounds, smell of sap, mating cry of quail and poppy fires kindling seaward; not much to put the fighting humour in a man.

But it was not quite the case with the Outliers; they were wronged, robbed, betrayed, they distrusted every move of their enemies, kept watches out. From the meeting of the river and the Ledge to where the dip of the ranges east began, there was a line of solitary outposts, patrolling all the passages, so while the Far-Folk played fox in the thorny covers south, there was in reality a stopped earth between them and their women and the places they had known. The posts beat eastward half a day each from his own station to the next and back. One of these, going as still as a snake, saw a tall woman with long, coiling hair wrapped about her body, wasted and lovely, following a track in the woods. She followed so patiently, and with so much intention and such sureness, poring above it as though every footprint stabbed her, and she hugged the stabbing to her breast, urged forward on

it with such anguished purpose, held back from it by such torturing fears—who else but a jealous woman follows in such fashion on the trail of the man she loves? The Outlier counted himself a poor guesser if this were not Ravenutzi's wife following Ravenutzi. He followed, too, at a discreet distance, though he might, perhaps, have come alongside her without attracting her attention, so intently was it stayed upon what lay before her, and could not withhold herself from seeking, and was afraid to find. Now she hurried on it with a kind of fury of discernment, and now she turned aside to compose her anguished bosom the better to read its traces where it looped and turned to baffle and bewilder. He followed. Trees gave place to scrub, and that to knee-high chaparral, and that to open hill crowns and broken stony ledges. Here he must skulk behind hills and at a considerable distance, because of the betraying openness, and presently he lost her. He had made so sure that she was headed for a certain sag in the crest of the hill, and that by coming around the brow of another one he would have full sight of her, that he was astounded

and chagrined to find her, as it seemed, sunk into the earth. There was no cover and no woman; below him lay a slight hollow full of loose boulders, opening out of that the natural passage of the hills; toward this the trail, if trail there was, must have led, and he would have been of a mind to hurry on to discover if she had not passed that way, except for being so sure she had not had time to make it. He lay still where he was, under the jut of a bald hill, and considered.

Presently he saw a fox come out of its hole on the opposite side and begin to trot across the hollow; it made to pass between tall boulders, but swerved, went sidewise, muzzle pointed with suspicion. Within the ring of boulders then something stirred that was neither stick nor stone, though from his post the watcher could not say very well what it was until the shadows had shrunk by about an hour. And then he saw the woman. She lay flat, face downward, waiting.

"If you wait, my girl," said he, "it is because he you follow is at the end of his trail and returns upon it soon."

He saw the tortured woman writhing with

impatience, saw the shadows shorten toward noon, and crows flying over, and then he saw Ravenutzi. He came over the sag of the hills, walking steadily, with apparently nothing on his mind but to get on to the place where he was going. He passed the woman lying among the boulders. The Outlier saw her crowding her face in the dust as he went by, as if she feared she must have cried out and run to him if she had looked. He passed the hill where the watcher lay, and struck into his former trail, deeply cogitating, looking neither down nor about to discover if he had been followed. When the smith was quite out of the hollow the woman rose and ran the way he had come, and the watcher considered; he thought most likely the Ward was at the end of that trail, but he had no particular interest in her, it was Ravenutzi who bred mischief and must be looked after. Accordingly he kept him in sight. As they passed the neighbourhood of River Ward going back, the Outlier whistled one of his fellows out of the wood and sent word to Mancha.

That was how it happened when the Far-Folk came together to have their last

direction from the smith that there was an Outlier tracked him quite to that place, and behind him, following a slot of bent twigs and broken leaves, were Prassade and Persilope with the slingsmen and Mancha with the hammerers.

It was late of the afternoon and the light low enough to dazzle in the eyes. The place was rather level and open, with thin-branched pines and scant fern; behind it a sharp hill breaking abruptly. Oca sat below the hill where a glade opened, and the thick locks of his beard, heavy and waved like sculptor's work, were gathered in his hand. He had on his head the circlet of fire stones that gleamed as he turned, red, blue, and green like some strange insect's eyes, his body was half bare and his arms from the elbow up were banded with circles of beaten gold. The smith whispered behind him, and as the chief nodded, the eyes of his circlet changed from blue to green and red again as though they took their colour from his thought; and around stood the Far-Folk, eager, pleased with themselves, more interested in the cunning of their scheme than anxious over its success, making the

necklets and armlets to shine on their dark skins. They laughed, boasting together like boys, then crowding one another to stillness to hear what went on among the leaders debating round Oca with some show of order, half girt and pluming themselves upon the morrow, the ring of unguarded backs turned outward. And in the midst of this came a sharp winging like the flight of birds—but no birds so swift—and a heavy pelting as of hail—but no hail rapped so loudly on the trees or thudded so sickeningly on human flesh : then a surging of the outer ring of the Far-Folk toward the middle, and a rush of those within outward, and then the pleasant wood all full of racing figures and hurtling noises.

It had come so quickly and from so many quarters, the light shining so low took the Far-Folk so squarely in the eyes, they were withal so little prepared for standing fight, that the best men of them must have known from the beginning what the end was to be. After the first scattering rush they made a ring about Oca and Ravenutzi, and then the curse of the King's Desire began to work. Standing so in close order they made a

better mark for the pelting of the slings, not to be endured. But had they any reason for keeping so, they might by sheer weight have broken through the ranks of the Outliers, thinned to enclose them, but they broke scattering, and Mancha's men dealt with them singly as they came. You heard the rapping of the slings, like the snapping of coals in the fire, and after the slings left off the hammers began.

Always as the ring about Oca melted into the scuffle and disorder of the fight, they caught the shine of Mancha's hair as he ate like flame through the ranks toward Ravenutzi.

I suppose the smith saw him come and saved himself for what was before him; at least no man saw him strike a blow until his time came. They had edged the old king forward through the press, keeping toward a clear space of cañon down which they might have made away. But at the last Oca saw a son of his lifted high in Noche's arms, one hand cast up like a crest, squealing with anguish, and leapt back, avoiding the whirling hammers, leaving the smith uncovered. Oca's men rushed to

back him, and Mancha's, wheeling to prevent it, carried the fight to another quarter. The sound of it receded from Mancha's ears, filled with the rushing of his own blood as he came face to face with Ravenutzi.

When the fighting mass cleared away and left them so confronting one another, the advantage seems to have been all to the smith. He was unwinded and wary. Mancha was hot and driven, hate rocked him where he stood like drunkenness.

They looked full each upon the other for two or three short breaths, and Ravenutzi took a slight step backward. It was in reality to bring him in a better position with the light, but Mancha took it for flinching: with a cry he rushed upon him, whirling his stone hammer; the smith parried and thrust.

The hammer struck glancing, the smith reeled from it and dropped his pike. Mancha threw away his weapon and took the swaying body in his arms. He was head and shoulders shorter, but the lift of his back was tremendous, and Ravenutzi dizzy from the blow. Mancha had him down, but the long legs and arms of the smith clung and bound him; they were down together and

up again and down, rolling and writhing, as they turned in a heap. Mancha was aware of one of the Far-Folk running toward them frothed with rage, weapon lifted, but he would not loosen his hold nor look away from Ravenutzi; he expected a blow from behind, and then he heard the shock of men coming together that told him how the blow was intercepted. He had the smith down now and under him, and struggled to loose the binding arms, and he heard a voice calling: "Mancha! Mancha!" and thought it was the voice of Lianthe, too young to come to battle, who had been allowed by Mancha's friendship to run between the creek and the fighting men to bring stones as they might be needed, to the slingsmen; and once he had heard the whistling of the slings, had come bounding like an unbroke hound to bay around the skirts of the fight.

"Mancha! Mancha!" said the voice, "I have him. He shall not get you."

"Good lad!" said Mancha, but he would not look away from the smith's eyes lest he should lose the hint of motion in them.

"Mancha, Mancha, I am hurt." He heard the sounds of mortal agony in the fern, but

they were not louder to him than the coming and going of his own breath.

“Hold him,” he said to the voice behind him. He had his knee on the pit of the smith’s stomach and the arms were loosening.

“Mancha!”—the voice was nearer—“he is dragging me. I cannot——”

Mancha had one of Ravenutzi’s arms twisted under the smith’s own body and his own hand at the smith’s throat.

“Mancha! Manc——” The voice broke with a bubbling sound.

He had the smith’s windpipe under his thumb, he was shaking him and grinding his head into the earth. A hand from behind clutched upon his heel. He kicked out and heard a wet cough, followed by a groan, but he could not turn to see what came of it. He shook and wried the smith’s head as it blackened under his hand.

“Where is she? Tell me where she is,” he cried, short and gaspingly, and with every repetition of the word he lifted the smith’s head and ground it into the earth. He saw surrender in the bitten tongue and the protruding eyes. He rested a little, but as yet he would not spare the time to look

behind him. Ravenutzi came slowly back to consciousness.

“Tell me where she is.” The answer came thickly.

“Far from here.”

“Where, where——” There was a motion of the choking and grinding to begin again.

“How can I tell you? . . . in a place known only to me.”

“If I let you up will you take me to it?”

“Breath,” said Ravenutzi, “give me breath.”

Mancha let his throat be while he bound the man's arms.

“Do you promise, smith?”

“I will know first what is forward. What is that across my feet?”

“A dead man, I think.” Mancha glanced slightly over his shoulder.

“Where is my king?”

“Prassade has taken him.”

“And my friends?”

“One of them is across your feet; a lad of mine killed him. I do not know where the others are, it is some moments since I heard fighting.”

“It is all to you, then?”

“All to us . . . *you dog* . . . if I let you up . . . *if* . . . will you take me . . . where she is?”

“I will take you.”

But it was not until Mancha had bound and rebound him that he left the smith to go and turn over the stiffening body of Lianthe and wipe the bloody froth from his lips.

XIII

HOW THEY FOUND THE RUBIES, AND THE SMITH'S ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF

NEWS of the fight reached River Ward before midnight, but before that, about the dusk, we heard Trastevera singing, walking up and down on a low hill scented and white with gilies, hymning of victory. And after I had lain down in my accustomed place I heard the women all about me, fevered with expectation, rising to intimations of approach too fine for me. From that part of the camp where the women of the Far-Folk were, there arose a stir of arrival; now and then some sharp accent of dismay and grief, succeeded by the nearly mortal dejection of defeat. Unable at last to bear the night so full of noises and suspense, I rose and walked to the edge of the wide, bushgrown shallow

where the Outliers lay at that time, and met Herman coming to find me.

“Do not go where the women are,” he said; “the wounded are there, and besides they do not want us.”

Very softly we skirted the edge of the swale and climbed to the foot of a knoll overlooking it. Some oaks grew here, and the prostrate trunks were strong to lean against. The moon was gone on her last quarter, and the figures of men moving in the swale were large and vague against it. There was a wind stirring that kept up a whimpering whisper in the tops of the chaparral; it took the voices as they rose through it and rounded them to indistinctness; only by listening attentively could we distinguish between the acclamations of victory and cries of loss and pain.

“But tell me,” I insisted of Herman, “you have been among the men, have they brought back the King’s Desire?”

“Look,” he said, “at that man moving there as he turns against the moon; do you see the line of light that runs about his forehead? And there! what glitters on that outstretched arm? Hardly a man of them

but has some gold about him, but they have not said a word."

"And who has the Cup of the Four Quarters?"

"Noche took it from Oca's son; I saw him studying it by the reflected moon, but when I came up he hid it in his bosom."

"And the great rubies?"

"They have not come in."

"Herman," I said, after a long pause, "what do you think they will do with it—and us?"

"The King's Desire? Bury it, I hope. With us? Do you know, Mona, I am no longer anxious about what they will do to us."

"No; they have been good friends of ours."

"Nor afraid of the Cup," finished Herman, "for I have come to feel that I have found something here in Outland that not even Forgetfulness can take away. . . . What I said to you the other night . . . the door . . ."

"Yes . . . the door that Zirriloë swung back."

"Oh, I thought it was she. . . ." He stopped and considered. ". . . And that

she had shut it again on cheapness and affronting shame. . . . It left a mark on me."

"Such experiences do, Herman."

"But she is gone . . . and the door swings wide. It is open to-night; and that is what I have gotten here in Outland that I shall never let go again."

What he really had was my hand, which he seemed not to be aware of, beating it softly between his palms as he talked, and I could not withdraw it without seeming to point an emphasis.

"And being so sure of *that*," said Herman, "makes it difficult to believe that all this should be taken away from us."

He made a gesture with the hand that held mine toward the swale of River Ward, the silvered line of the willows, the low moon, the fair light, the smell of the packed earth breaking up to bloom.

"Do you know, it is very strange, Mona, I have not the least idea where we are, but I think I could start out to-night direct for home and find it. Have you ever felt so?"

"Not since the Meet at Leaping Water."

"But to-night?"

“To-night I feel it.”

“How far away the Outliers seem to-night. Look down there in the hollow, there is not one stirring. How could one say there is now any grief or captivity down there? Mona, do you really believe there *are* any Outliers?”

“Ah, I’m good at believing.”

The moon dropped down behind the hill till there was but one shining jewel point of it winking on the world. The chill that comes before the morning began to temper the air and I shivered under it.

“You are cold,” cried Herman; “wait.” He slipped away in the scrub and brought back skins in which he wrapped me. “Have you had any sleep at all to-night? Where is your hand, Mona?” He drew it through his arm. “Now, if you will lean back against the oak here, and against my shoulder, so: now you may get some rest.”

I leaned against the oak and touched his sleeve with my cheek. I had not meant to do more than that nor yet to sleep, but the oak swayed a little comfortingly, so still and soft and dark the night was—suddenly there was the morning freshness all about and Trastevera calling me awake.

I saw the dark green of the earth shining wet, the faint, ineffable green of the dawn, and between them spread a veil of silvery mist. Down in the hollow the Outliers were all astir; rearward two lines of them moved toward the Gap. I saw them disappear in the willows and emerge again in the stream rounding the point of the Ledge; they walked mid-thigh in the turbid water and braced themselves against the force of its running; I saw the lines bend and right themselves like the young willows. They were the Far-Folk moving under guard toward Leaping Water. In the open below us as we came down the knoll were Mancha, Prassade, Noche and some others, with one in their midst whom, as they turned and looked toward us expectantly, I recognised as Ravenutzi. He looked dry, I thought, and stripped; his glance, which took me dully, when at last it was aware of me, appeared to turn inward for an instant as if to call that old excluding charm of personality; I felt it flicker and expire. But all that group continuing to look toward us curiously as we went down, I enquired of Trastevera what it meant,

“It is Herman,” she said. “They wait for him. Mancha has asked if he is of a mind to go a day’s journey with them.”

“He will go,” I answered for him, for I knew at once whither that journey tended, and what they would find at the end of it, but to this day I do not know what prompted Mancha to invite him. Whether he thought so much due to him who had first gone on the trail of that unhappy girl, whether he had some inkling of Herman’s state of mind or divined in him an excusing understanding of his own hopeless infatuation, at any rate he would not part on that day’s business without Herman. And that was how we came to know what happened in the Place of Caves, half a day beyond Windy Covers, and as much as was ever known of what had been between Ravenutzi and the Maiden Ward, no maid by now and in a more inviolable wardship.

They were afoot nearly all of that day, for besides having far to go, the men were stiff with battle. And this was their order—first Ravenutzi, limping a little, and Mancha stumbling close upon his heels; neither of these spoke a word more than necessary the

whole of that going ; then Prassade, who groaned at times and made a gesture with his hands as though his heart were torn out of him and he saw it in the trail there and trampled on it with his feet ; and Noche, who muttered in his beard and seemed at times to rehearse the incidents of battle, lifting and hugging somewhat in his arms and shaking his huge shoulders. After these came Herman and the men, among whom was that one who, following the tall woman, had found the smith and so betrayed the Far-Folk to capture.

They came behind the others a space and whispered by times among themselves ; they talked of Mancha's fight with the smith and, how Oca went mad with rage bestriding the dead body of his son, and struck so furiously with his pike he could not fetch it back again, and how Prassade had taken him from behind.

They told also how the women of the Far-Folk had come in from some bleak hill-top where they hung like buzzards, and surrendered, asking no privilege but to tend their wounded. Once it occurred to Herman to ask if Ravenutzi's wife was among these,

and the men said no. At that they looked at one another and the same thought was in the eyes of both, but they kept it to themselves. About an hour after midday it began to appear that they had done wisely in bringing with them this man who, following Ravenutzi's wife, had found Ravenutzi walking in the way, for the smith seemed of a mind to mislead them. He wished to turn out of his earlier trail very far to the right, and could not understand why this man protested so much nor why Mancha regarded him.

"This is the way," he said; "who should know it if not I?"

"By the Friend, smith, it may be your way," said the man, "but it was not the way your woman took following your trail, and I hard upon hers."

"You saw that?" cried Ravenutzi. "A woman, my wife, following me to—to the place where we are going?" Herman said it was the first time he had seen Ravenutzi beside himself; he grew grey, a film came before his eyes through which the pupils opened, blank pits of horror.

"You saw that," he cried, "and you let her go!"

“Ah,” said the man, “but I judged you the better game.”

Ravenutzi twisted like a man on a rope. He set off running.

“This is the way,” he said, “it is shorter so.” And the rest ran on to keep pace with him. They came in this running fashion to the place of the boulders where the woman had lain face downward in the dust, and passed over the sag in the hills where she had been last seen disappearing. Beyond this was stony country; great boulders huge as houses lay all a-heap at the foot of a steep ridge, and smaller stones and rubble from the slope had drifted down and choked the upper crannies between the boulders, so that below them, so roofed, were windy galleries and spacious caves. No game was there nor foodful plant, only coarse tufts of grass between wide stones, nothing to draw men, only shelter and safe hiding.

When they came near this place, Ravenutzi began to go more slowly, forewarned perhaps and afraid of what he should find there. He raised a call, cautiously at first, got no answer, called loudly, grew anxious, set off running again, the men hard behind him. The place

fronted westward ; the shadows retreating inward gave to the caverns under the rocks a shallow look. The men could not have told from the outside which of them would have yielded passage, but Ravenutzi plunged into one, which proved an arched passage opening into a sort of court, from which a water-worn gully led up by steep scrambling to a ledge on which opened a cave overhung and guarded at the entrance by fire-blackened stones. They were slow enough going up this steep to observe a woman who sat at the mouth of the cave with her knees drawn up under her hands, and her head bent upon them. They saw that she was tall and had long hair that coiled flatly about her throat and between her breasts.

She looked up from her knees as they climbed and clustered on the narrow platform before the cave, and there was neither astonishment nor fear in her eyes, only weariness, as of one who has accomplished what she has long sought and found that after it nothing mattered. Some colour sprang in her face as Ravenutzi stood before her, the faint tinge of expectancy, but he never looked at her.

“Where, *where* is she?”

It was Ravenutzi who asked, and got no answer except as by the turning of the long throat she indicated the cave behind her, and resting her head upon her knees, the tall woman went on looking quietly at nothing.

The floor of the cave sloped downward ; it was low at the mouth, and the men stooped walking through it. It was large and airy, and had been hung with tawny and dappled skins ; some light broke through high crannies in the roof and showed them in the midst of these the Ward. She was very beautiful ; the sparkling masses of her hair drifted out on either side the cameo face ; over the eyes, that were brown like agates at the bottom of a brook, the pale lids half drooped like the rims of snow that lie along brook borders in the cold. She was partly dressed, the bosom bare, and over its soft curves ran a line of blood-red stones, the great rubies, wickedly afire on that cold breast, tremblingly, shiftily alive in the light that sifted through the crannies of the rocks, round the throat and in the hollow of the bosom, drawn away to the left until they led the eye down where they melted,

and ran in redness and spread dully on the floor, still wet and dripping.

He was so moved by that sight, Herman said, and for the moment so little believing in it, that he had no consciousness of how the others looked at it nor what went on in them, and he was first roused to take note of his companions seeing the smith turn from it with a movement of deprecation and the sudden swinging of Mancha's hammer into position; he heard it click as it rose against the low roof of the cave, he heard an exclamation but could not tell for the life of him whether himself had uttered it or another, and then he saw the hammer caught from behind by Prassade.

"Mine," he said; "mine, not yours."

There was justice in that, he was as fierce upon the point as if some one had denied it: his the greater offence, to him the punishment; and then as quietly as Mancha's hammer dropped, the wrath of Prassade fell off before the unimpassioned quietness of the Ward; a stillness seemed to rise from her and crowd them out of the narrow chamber into the overhung and guarded entrance where the woman sat winding and unwinding

the long coils of her hair. They did not look at the Ward again nor back at what Prassade did; it was a relief to watch the woman. She stood up and her head was high, her lip was bitten red, two spots of colour glowed upon her cheeks. She looked at Ravenutzi as a child might who has broken a delicate thing and refuses to be chidden for it.

“The place was too small for us both,” she said, and then after a little: “I thought you would never come,” with a gesture of weary, ineffable tenderness. “Oh, I thought you would never come.”

She was all alive to him and very beautiful, so flushed and so alive you could not understand that death could be so close behind her; all the rushing of her blood to him and the swaying of her slender figure demanded of him what, even with death behind, he could not deny. He took her in his arms, he put up his hand to turn her face on his shoulder away from the hard eyes of the men, and could not conceal as he did so the flush upon his own and the tremor of renewal.

Whatever the girl had been to him, she

was now the evidence of how much his wife had loved him ; *that* much ; it was a declaration which shamed him by its publicity but purchased him anew to passion and protecting tenderness. They stood so, she superbly conscious of her right to a place she had cleared for herself, and he still shielding her, and nobody spoke a word. Behind in the cavern Prassade put back the dead girl's hair from her soiling blood and covered up her breast. Presently he called Mancha, and the others by one consent moved down the water-worn way, out of the sound of them. Ravenutzi's arm was still about his wife. At the foot of the ascent he put her from him quietly.

"Go wait by the outer caves," he said. "They will not wish to see you when they come out." And she, lifting up her head from his breast, went quietly, all gentleness and submission, never seeing where the others were nor how they looked at her, never taking her eyes from him till the boulders closed on her and hid her from their view.

"I should say to you," said Ravenutzi; "what, perhaps, I may not have time to say again"—for he thought then and the others

thought, that Prassade would kill him when he came out of the cave, and it was to spare her he sent his wife away—"and what you may say to the others when they are able to hear it, that much you may have been thinking of that fair child is wrong. She never told me where the King's Desire was hid.

"She never told," he insisted, "not of her own consciousness"—looking about for some point of interest or attention to fix upon, and settling upon some small stones which he pushed together with his foot—"something I had from her unwitting . . . but there were others"—here his gaze rested an instant on Noche, and dropped to the stones again—" . . . several others . . . in whose minds the facts lay like trout in a lake for him to make rise who was able. . . . Among my people there is great skill in this. . . . You yourselves gave me the opportunity . . . all your minds ran full of it as a creek after the rain."

He looked up from his stones, which he had pushed into line as though they were a class who could nowise hear him until they had been so ordered, and must

have found some hint of believing in Herman's face, for he addressed himself to that more confidently.

"It is true I wooed her . . . so as to have an open road to her mind . . . she had no chance against me . . . but she never knowingly told. . . . I do not think I could have persuaded her."

I believe the man spoke truth; for a certainty he felt death close upon him; whether the men believed him or not they honoured his intention to clear the girl. Some slight easement of their manner toward him made it possible to say more openly :

"I meant no harm to her . . . she had none at first. . . . I brought her away because I thought you would not believe . . . you would have killed her . . . she came . . ."

He stopped full at that, there was no need to say how she came nor what believing. They were all still together, thinking what he had done and despising him too much to question at all. He essayed to speak once or twice after that, and Herman observed that look to come upon his face which he had often remarked there, the faun's look, half wishful, half defiant, as of a wild creature

that abates none of its creature ways, but is desirous to have touch with man.

“How fine a piece of work she was,” he said. “. . . The way her chin was fitted into her throat . . . the gold fret of her hair. . . . I was the smith . . .”

He stopped; there was nothing in the faces of the men that gave him leave to say his craftsman's delight in her who was to them the injured daughter of their friend.

Prassade came out presently and Mancha with him. They looked nor spoke to no one as they came down the gully, but each took up a stone, walking with it laboriously, and laid it at the cave's mouth. Then one of the men went and did the same, and the others, and Herman, and at last Ravenutzi, seeing no one hindered him, took up a stone and went up and down with them, carrying, until the mouth of the cave was quite full. Presently Ravenutzi's wife, grown tired of waiting, crept back through the stone arch and stood watching them with red bitten lip, coiling and uncoiling the long strands of her hair.

XIV

THE KING'S DESIRE, AND WHAT BECAME OF IT

THE party of us that came up from River Ward to Leaping Water turned aside from the meadow where the Meet had been, and settled in one of the galleries of that amphitheatre looking down on its veiled cascades. The shouting of the falls came up to us mixed with the faint, incessant murmur given off by a great forest. From here the rim of the world sank westward into the thin blue ring of the sea.

We had come so slowly, being joined at times by families of Outliers come out of safe hiding and already furnished with news, that we were scarcely well settled in the place when word of the death of the Ward began to circulate among them in that mysterious way of news to travel in the open. Doubtless it came by way of runners

stationed out toward Windy Covers, by which trail the seekers of the Ward returned, but rumour of it was rife in the camp a full hour before Mancha and Prassade came in. There was very little said about it, they were at all times as private in their griefs as wild creatures, but I think they felt it well that the natural progress of her betrayal had furnished its own punishment and spared them the pangs of that.

Herman came and told me, walking at dusk on an open hill front where there was long grass blowing and shut-eyed heavy flowers among the grasses. But it was a long time before he would talk freely of that intimation of excusing put forth by Ravenutzi, which lay in his craftsman's soul, and the appeal to it of the girl's bodily perfection; that fair contrivance which he had no more been able to resist taking into his hand than any other jewel of gold and fine stones, and its turning to flesh and blood under his touch, a bitter and unavoidable consequence. I think Herman's inarticulateness grew out of feeling himself involved in the common culpability of men in the ruin of a lovely woman, a vase

which they have pulled about among them in admiring and dropped and shattered.

I say I think Herman felt this, for though I do not now recall any words that passed between us, yet I was at that time so much nearer to understanding that beguilement of beauty and pain of its bafflement which drives men to create of words and paint and stone, forms of it by which no confusion can come, that when I saw Ravenutzi sitting among the Far - Folk, in his accustomed attitude, with his knees drawn up under his hands and his delicate faun's profile bent above them, looking out at me in the old way, at once wishful and compelling, the look I sent back to him was almost kind.

The whiteness of his hair had been cut away, the drawn look of his skin smoothed out, so that one saw how young he was, and a little of what those two women had seen who had been drawn by it to death and killing. His wife sat with her head propped against his shoulder, and for so long as she sat there, assured, accepted, it was plain there was for her neither anxiety nor pained remembrance, nor any other thing.

One supposes death at all times so natural that the wound of it heals by its own processes. It was so with the Outliers that no later than the next morning much of the bitterness of loss had drained away with the dark. The business of the Ward being finished they turned without discursiveness on the disposition of Ravenutzi, the Far-Folk and the King's Desire. Though we could form no inkling, Herman and I, what would be done to the smith, we felt it would be just, and what to the Far-Falk, more than kind; but concerning the Treasure there must some command have gone about, for though we had seen it glinting in the camp at River Ward—there was scarcely a man who had not brought some away with him from the last fight—there was now not so much as the red sparkle of a jewel to be seen at Leaping Water.

The Council met early on the second morning, going down toward Council Hollow before the dew was dried upon the fern, and all the camp, scattered as it was in a great treeless tract, hung in the breathless quiet of suspense. There was scarcely any stir of talk or movement except now and

then among the Far - Folk, who lay all together like cattle on a warm hill slope, turning toward the sun.

Herman and I, since no one seemed to regard us, had a mind to go down and revisit the meadow and the lovely open water below the Leap, but the expectant sense that brooded over the camp bound us to the consideration of what might come to us personally out of the Council. If we looked afar at the sea rim, trying to make out at what point we were, we looked suddenly back to see if the councillors were not coming up the hill; if we heard a lark sing, rising with its breast all brightening yellow from some grassy water border, we listened the more anxiously immediately after to hear if one had not come to call us in to judgment.

When the shadows were gone far toward midday we heard what might have been the breaking out of bird songs low and urgently through all the open woodland, the sound of feet moving all together, and then one calling us by name. The men were coming up from the Hollow and the Outliers crowded up to them to hear what they would say.

They said nothing whatever until we were all come into hearing and ranged, the Far-Folk on one side and we on the other, on the crown of a hill open enough for seeing and having a large grassy space beyond it.

I thought then, and I have not since reconsidered it, that of all times the noon is the most solemn to deliver judgment in, when all the earth is quiet, shadows folded up, no bird singing, no beast abroad, all the outer sense drowsing under the sun glare ; at such a time to hear a voice crying punishment and doom is more terrible than any hour of night : and it was the more unusual, as this was by the habit of the Outliers the reposeful time of day. A convocation of wolves in the open sun would not have seemed more singular, but this was not a business which could await a gentler time.

We could see Persilope standing up, all expression beaten out of his face by the sun, like leaf under the gold beater's hand, and presently when we were all well quieted, beginning in a voice pitched for carrying, but toneless as the light, ordering some skins to be spread before him, and then that all the Outliers who had anything of the

King's Desire should bring it to that place. He held up as he spoke the circlet which he had taken from Oca's head, and as he turned it in the sun, it melted and ran a ring of changing fire; and when he had done speaking he cast it down with so much force that the setting, which was old and delicate, burst and sent the stones scattering like broken coals. There was a little pause after that, and then Noche, springing up from behind him, held up the King's Cup, but neither so high nor so steadily. A little laggard of perception, as the very strong commonly are, the point of what Ravenutzi had said of the way in which he had come to know of the place of the Treasure had driven slowly to the old man's brain and now troubled his countenance; his eyes were dark sockets between the drift of his brows and beard. He held up the vase in his hands.

"Cup of the Four Quarters," he said, "O Cup of Tears!" His strength surged in him with recollection, the bowl crumpled in his grip, he bent back the base upon the stem and dropped it on the ground.

After him came every man with what he had, armlets and buckles and chains of

wrought and beaten gold and jewels, and the jewelled lamps and vessels: the heap grew; it glittered and darted pain into the eyes; it had green and blue and ruby gleams in it that winked and mocked the sun. When it was all in—all but the great rubies which lie still in a place known only to some few of us who are not likely to go there to fetch them—and the men sat down again, Persilope began.

He spoke steadily and without passion, saying what was well known to them, that a curse was laid on whoever lifted the King's Desire, for the truth was, the curse lay in the mere having of it by whatever means; as if one should expect to keep a viper in his house and not himself be stung by it. Itlan had been destroyed for it, and all those of their own people who had kept it since had purchased nothing but wars and trouble with it. All of which being within their knowledge and true, it was agreed for the safety of the Outliers so to cast out the King's Desire as men would a poison snake which they had found among the huts.

At this there was a spark, a quiver of expectancy among the Far-Folk, as if they

had conceived, eyeing it so greedily, that the treasure heap, of no more esteem among the Outliers, was to be handed over to them as it lay not so very unlike the snake of his comparison, coiled glisteningly upon itself with red jewelled eyes.

Such an expectation, if it amounted to that, died with Persilope's next sentence, which was, briefly, to the effect that for all these reasons it had been determined that morning that when it was buried again, as it shortly would be, it was to be followed by a forgetfulness from which there would be no revival, and of such a fashion—here he looked over at Ravenutzi and the bleakness of his delivery augmented—that there would be no picking of their brains afterward.

I could see that the news of this conclusion had already spread and been accepted by the Outliers, and thought it not strange perhaps, in the eye of all that had recently passed in that connection, they should accept it with so much gravity, and among the women with some consternation.

I looked over at Trastevera where she sat as near to her husband as the occasion allowed, and observed her to look doubtfully

and to write with her finger in the dust; and then I saw that no Outlier looked at any other, but down or up and never at the side where his friend was, and I thought I understood that though they agreed with the judgment, there was no one of them wished to say who should assume the responsibility and drink so deeply of the Cup, for I had then no other notion of how such forgetfulness was to be had.

I saw Persilope search his people slowly with his glance before he spoke in a voice well heard to the outer ring of them.

“Outliers, are you all here?”

It was followed by the rustle and murmur by which they took account of themselves and of those left beyond River Ward with the wounded, which, swelled to affirmation, passed from group to group and was handed up to him by the nearest councilmen.

“We are all here.”

“Know then,” he said, his voice and words shaping to formality and sounding drearily in the white aching noon, “that there is a service to be performed for the common good, and penalty to be undertaken, for which the Council leaves it open to any

man who loves the common good so much, now to offer himself. Is there any so offers?"

And still the eye of no Outlier sought any other eye, only I saw Trastevera look up from her drawing and, leaning a little past the others, gaze steadily toward some spot beyond her with a long, compelling gaze, but before I could follow it to its point of attention, almost before Persilope had done speaking, I saw Noche getting on his feet, blinking a little as though the light abashed him, and fumbling embarrassedly at his girdle like a child.

"If I should be counted worthy . . . if I could be trusted again . . ." He shook with eagerness. "Tribesmen, it is my right, for it was through my doddering old tongue the secret escaped. . . . Ask him." He pointed to Ravenutzi. "He said so; ask *them*." His great, gnarly arm, like the stump of an oak, was stretched toward Prassade and Mancha, and it trembled like an oak when the axe is at it. "Ask them if he did not say so at the Place of Caves . . . though I would have died rather . . ."

"I also . . ."

This was the voice of Waddyn, who rose up in his place behind Noche, tall and very gaunt, as some old wolf of the wilderness.

“It was from my hand the Ward was loosed . . . under my eyes he seduced her mind . . . fool, fool!” He struck himself on the breast. “We are old men,” he said, “shall we have discredit at the last? Chief, are we accepted?”

In their eagerness he and Noche had struck hands together like two children come to beg a holiday, dropping apart in the murmur of acceptance which ran among the Outliers and made them men again, and, “You are accepted,” announced Persilope. So they sat down again, each in his place, quite contented.

There was a little pause here, and I was trying from where I sat to have a glimpse of Ravenutzi, to discern how this affected him, if at all, when I heard some disturbance behind me, and a voice crying out :

“No, no, I cannot lose you both !”

I turned, and I saw Prassade standing to disengage his knees from his wife’s clinging, and so holding her from him by the shoulders, begin to speak.

"Outliers," he said, and by the hollowness of his voice and the sinking of his cheek under the red beard one saw what havoc grief and disgrace had made in him, "Outliers, it is through my blood dishonour came, and one of my blood must cure it. There is none but me."

At that there was a general outcry of dismayed protest and assurance.

"Not you, Prassade, not you . . ."

"No fault of yours . . ."

"She has paid . . ."

"She was but a child, she has paid in full . . ."

And then from the woman at his feet :

"Think of *me*, Prassade."

"Think of what I think on day and night," cried Prassade, "and let me go."

"Prassade," said the young chief, greatly troubled, "in that which we propose to do, when this business is settled, I shall have great need, as in the past I have had great benefit, from your prompting and advising . . ."

"No, no! . . ." The man's voice was a desperate gasp merely. "Never shall I give counsel who could not advise my

own against dishonour"—holding his wife from him still, though the poor creature worked toward him on her knees. "Never shall I beget children again who have been betrayed by my own child. . . . Ah . . . let me go . . . let me go . . . and by service . . . by forgetting . . ." There was something almost of madness in his wounded desperation. I suppose his wife must have seen that, for she left off to entreat and took his hand, fondling it quietly, turning as she was upon her knees toward Persilope and the elders, quite broken and submissive.

"It is best you let him go," she said, "he will be happier so."

Prassade caught at this, his lip was wet with eagerness.

"Ay, ay, how can I know happiness again? She knows I cannot."

"Are you sure," said Persilope to the wife, "that you are prepared for . . . that you understand?"

"I understand," she answered back, neither of them looking at the man in question. "If it means peace for him, I am. . . ." She threw out her hands to show

with that and her drooping figure how obedient she was to destiny.

“Am I accepted, chief; am I accepted?” The man trembled with the hope of deliverance.

“You are accepted,” the chief admitted, seeing there was no one who had a mind to deny him; and then there was a space of stillness in the bright palpitating noon before Persilope, measuring the heap of gold and jewelled vessels with his eye, had turned back and said: “It wants yet another.”

Then I saw his wife leaning a little from where she sat with her glance still fixed and compelling, and I followed it past the line of elders and found it end at Ravenutzi; and before I could well fix in my mind what lay behind it, what wordless urgency of entreaty, I saw the smith rising slowly, and stepping carefully among the rows of seated captives, come and stand beside Prassade and the two others, and I saw Trastevera sink backward in her seat with the look of one justified in a long belief.

“I,” he said, “offer myself.”

At this simple and unexpected intrusion

of the smith into the situation there burst from the Outliers a sudden sharp hiss of refusal and indignation, followed instantly after by harsh ironical laughter. Cries sounded, here and there two arms and a head cast up, like the crest of a wolf out of a pack, protestingly, and hands pulled him down again.

“The smith, the smith!” they cried. “A reparation, a reparation!”

They were fierce for the moment with the irony of the situation and their grim enjoyment of it. Yet, though there was a kind of justice in making the man who had dared most to possess the King's Desire all unwittingly the keeper of it, I thought they might easily have found a better punishment, for if he was, as I believed, a man of great sensibility, there must have been many things in that connection he would be wishful to forget. And I could not understand why his willingness to take the Cup in such company confirmed in Trastevera a hope of a latent nobleness in him which excused her former kindness, any more than I could understand the unmirthful humour of the Outliers.

Nor, I think, did the Far-Folk then understand it, looking askance and half hopeful, as if in spite of everything they expected Ravenutzi's wit to bring something out of it to their profit. But the Outliers continuing to shout: "The smith, the smith! A reparation!" Persilope was obliged formally to announce his acceptance.

Ravenutzi's part in the rehidng of the Treasure being so settled, the four men went about to cord it up convenient for carrying, and without further ceremony they took tools for digging and went out from the camp with the Treasure swung between them. They went toward the deep forest and by such a trail that, when they had passed over a little rise of ground a few hundred yards from us, there was no one could see the way they went, and no one moved from his place lest he should accuse himself of a wish to do so.

We sat and saw below us the banner of the Leap stream through its irised changes, saw the shadows shrink and stretch toward afternoon. Sat so still that a little black bear came out of the manzanita and *whoofed* and ran across the outstretched legs of the

Outliers, and a troop of deer trotted up from the valley and stared soft-eyed at us skirting the rim of the hollow. Two, three hours went over us and hawks began to come out of the scrub to hunt before we heard the four returning. They were tired, overdone, but they had bathed at the creek and set in order their clothing, no soiling traces betrayed where they had been.

They came up and delivered themselves as for inspection to Persilope. What followed was very brief.

“Is it accomplished?” said the chief.

“It is accomplished.”

“You are prepared, then?”

“We are prepared.”

Some slight bequests followed concerning articles of property, which the chief took as executor.

“My young sons . . .” said Prassade.

“Are mine.”

“Then we are ready.”

All this time Ravenutzi had not said a word. One by one the Outliers, as I had seen them do with Daria, came up to take their leave. It was done with a deep and

moving brevity. I came in my turn and cried a little over old Noche.

"Have you forgiven me for overhearing what you never meant for me?" said I.

"Child, I bless you for it: but for you we might not have had back again what my prattling lost."

All this time no one spoke to Ravenutzi. Trastevera stopped before him for a little space, and some wordless assurance of reconciliation passed between them. He had not asked for farewells from his own people and the Outliers had not suggested it. All being over, the four men began to walk from the camp a little and away from the sun. As they passed the old King of the Far-Folk, he stood up, biting his long beard.

"Oh, my King," said Ravenutzi, speaking loud that the Outliers might suspect no hidden communication, "I have done what I could."

"O smith," said Oca, bitter with impotence, "it shall be remembered."

They passed on until they had reached a knoll that lifted them clear of intervening scrub. They stood there, turned facing us; the light, strong against them, made them

indistinct, the wind blurred the folds of their garments.

I looked about expecting one with the Cup, and saw instead a score of the slingsmen measuring off their ground.

They stood with the sun to their backs and swung their slings lightly to free them for action. Until that moment I had not a notion what was really forward, nor I think had the Far-Folk. When they heard the slight preparatory whistling of the slings I saw the wife of Ravenutzi start as if they had stung upon her flesh. She looked up and saw the four standing so quietly and the young men with their slings drawn to position across the grassy intervening space. Noiselessly she sprang up and began running—swiftly as she cleared the space between her and Ravenutzi it was not swift enough. The word was given, the slings were up and whirling; swifter than birds the stones took their flight. I saw her leaping on the knoll and her husband's arms opened to receive her, then I heard the singing of the stones and saw them go down, with her body across his, all so quietly, as grass is mown in summer.

XV

HOW HERMAN AND I CAME BACK TO BROKEN TREE

BEFORE any bird awoke, and while the wood was morning grey, the Outliers began to move westward next day from Leaping Water. No morning broke, in fact, only a widening of the grey space, a warming of the slight wind, and the chill again that settled into weeping fog. Blunt crowns of hills peered at us through the parting mist, and seemed mysteriously to move behind it and peer upon us at the next lifting from another quarter. Dim files of trees marched down upon us from obscurity and marched away again. Away to the left we heard the rain charging the river cañon, and the stir of invisible cohorts enfillading behind the locked ranges.

I could not make out where we were,

except that our general movement was toward lower ground, and from the position of a pale yellow blur that appeared in the sky about midday, I gathered that we had moved south and west. In this space of half obscurity, wet mist, sodden grass, pale shadow and pale sun, the Far-Folk moved with us, neither they nor Herman nor I caring to ask what was meant toward us, nor speculating as to what we should do about it. I suppose no philosophy could have devised more justice in the end of those affairs that were already settled than the working of their own natures had brought to pass. Whoever had met death in this occasion had met it so much of his own act that it left no sense of mal-adjustment, and with them died remorse and recrimination.

We had got to have by this time, Herman and I, a large faith in the reasonableness of nature. Whatever came to us, we felt the processes of life rising to heal it like the sap to a tree's scar.

We kept close together, saying little, going all that day in intermitting fog and rain, until the sky cleared well toward sunset. We had come to a halt an hour past

on a wild open headland, and saw huge uncouth shapes of cloud hurrying to caverns of the sun. Fog lay thick in the hollows, hills islanded above it; as it cleared and sunk and the dry land appeared we saw how large and good the country was, hills upon hills, and hills beyond, wooded and bare, broken and rolling land, not a man trace, no smoke going up from the cañons, nor window lights below the trees. To the west the fog lay unpierced, stretching seaward, level and roughed on the surface like waves beginning to take a red tinge from the sun. It was not until then that we had some hint of why we had halted in this place of no cover, when we saw the Outliers drawn up into some sort of order, with the Far-Folk opposing, and the two kings between.

We hurried and came up to that privileged place near Trastevera which her favour reserved for us, and I observed that the eyes of Oca burned red like a weasel's, as he turned them this way and that on the emerging hills, fingering his great beard; the glitter of wet on his shoulders like bronze, touched with reflected colour of the

westering fires, the bear-skins that clothed him below, and the blowing of long lip locks gave him an appearance most wild and befitting the hour. He looked, and Persilope looked, standing poised and at ease as a stag gazing.

“It is a good land,” said the King of the Outliers.

“Good enough.”

“And large.”

“As you say, large,” admitted the King of the Far-Folk, looking askance, his hands for ever busy with his bread.

“Large enough for two peoples to live in it, each unmolested?”

Oca’s eyes roved over the whole circle of it before he answered.

“Large enough.”

“Oca,” said the young man, not the least troubled by this curtness nor put out by it, “you have done us as much harm as you could, which is not so much as you wished. I leave you to count what good you have got by it. It was an old quarrel, but it occurs to me that since the chief cause of it has . . . ceased to exist, there is small use in quarrelling. But no reason on that

account why we should be friends. Do you follow me?"

"You are plain enough."

"I will be plainer. Not only do we wish no quarrel with you but we wish never to set eyes on you again, nor so much as to come on the places where you have been. Therefore if you will choose you out a quarter of this land, which, as you say, is large enough, you and your people will have leave to go seven days in that direction, after which you shall see no more of us. But all this part where we have been, from the Ledge to Broken Tree, is forbidden ground. Neither you nor any generation of yours to set foot in it. We will see to that."

He spoke with a controlled and quiet energy that fell on the old man's fury of defeat like steady rain.

"As for us, we shall go south from here a great distance; so," said Persilope, "if you choose, to-morrow my men will set you on your way, and you shall have no more to do with us except of your own seeking."

Oca looked back over his people standing

sullen and attentive, and read but one thought in them.

“We would go now,” he said.

“As you will. Only choose.”

It was a generous offer, but perhaps Persilope knew his man. Oca looked north and south: he must have had by his wild instinct a better knowledge of the country, he might have seen by that unstinted gaze some trace—pale smoke ascending or pointed roof—that advised him of the neighbourhood of men, men to be plotted against, evaded, pilfered from, to give to his life the zest of cunning that it craved. He stretched his hand northward.

“I will go there,” he said.

“From those three far peaks, then, to this broken headland, and from hence as the crow flies to the sea. Do you accept the conditions?”

“O Persilope, what else is there to do?”

“Go then.”

On the motion of Persilope stepping back all the Outliers fell back a little also to give them room. We saw the Far-Folk set in motion. Oca himself went a few paces, but he was, after all, a king; words

of thanks stuck in his throat no doubt; he dragged them out, perhaps by the process of tugging at the locks of his beard.

“Your offer is just. We will keep faith with you. My thanks to you,” he said, and when Persilope had dismissed it with a gesture he turned his back in departing and did not look our way again.

We saw them go down the hill and drown in the lake of mist and after an interval come out on the other side rounding a hill front, after which we saw them no more. It was a visible relief to the Outliers to be rid of them, they moved a space down the headland, made cover from the rain and slept quietly.

In the night all the tide of mist and fog drained out to sea and left the heavens tender.

By the sun we saw that we had come much nearer the coast than I had realised; we saw the sapphire spangled belt of the sea lying low under the hills, and suspected a faint odour of drying weed mixed with the breath of the budding forest. Gladness came up with the sun and sang the love of life awake.

Spread abroad seeking food, we heard the Outliers laughing in the well sunned spaces. It was still very early and the shadows airy when they called to us. They came about us in a ring of friendly faces, and it was so good a day to be alive in, we had forgotten to be afraid what they should do with us.

"You heard us say last night," began Persilope, when we had been brought before him in a grass walk between the madroños, "how we should go south from here where the forest comes down to the sea and there are no House-Livers. The places where you knew us we shall not know again." He saddened at that, and a shadow of sadness fell on all faces. "But I doubt"—here he smiled—"if we were still there, whether you could find us again."

"Not without your consent."

"You came to us strangely," he went on, "in a strange time, and trouble entered with you."

"Not of our making," Herman reminded him, "nor our wishing."

"We are sensible of that, and also that we had good of you. Therefore"—he looked

about on the Outliers and the nudging and whisper of agreement ran from group to group of them—"we wish to give you good in return. We have nothing to give you such as House-Folk value, nothing but your memory of us, which we hope you may hold as lovingly as we do yours."

"We do so," said Herman.

"Will you take that memory then, as our gift of parting, so to keep it as the best we have to offer?"

"So to keep it as the best we have to keep," consented Herman solemnly, and I after him.

"Why then," said Persilope, "there is nothing more for it but to set you on your way to Broken Tree again and to wish you Good Friending."

The good-byes were said very quickly; they came about us with light laughter and good wishes and broke and parted into the wood again; the sun and the spring and the wind out of the south called them. I sent messages to Evarra, who was still in the wood beyond River Ward to bury Lianthe. Trastevera and some others came down the hill with us. When we had travelled rapidly

for an hour they showed us the moon-shaped bay and the moon-white curve of the beach around it, and the point of cypress running far into the blue water; later we could see the white specks of the houses, and then no more as we got down except the close shouldering hills and the moss-hung pines, and the oaks leaning all one way of the wind, and the sea-blue slopes of ceanothus. As we went our companions slipped from us, melted between sunny space and woody shadow, and mixed with brown and green of the wood side. Now we saw bright regardful eyes and fingers laid on lips—who knew what men folk might be stirring? And now we felt to right or left the friendly presences. And then when we had been walking I do not know how long, suddenly there was only Herman and I in the wood, and no other.

“Herman, Herman!” I said, “they are gone, we shall never see them again.”

He looked and listened; nothing moved but the flicker of sun on a wind-stirred leaf or a winged insect in the green arcades of fern. Far back we heard the call of jays ending in a light high note of mocking laughter.

“Herman, shall we never find them?”

“Perhaps, who knows? The trail is very plain here. If we take pains to notice it, we might come this way again.”

“Yes, let us keep the trail at least. We must find the place again. They have not forbidden us.”

We followed it close where it left the trees and ran in the grass between the blossoming lilacs, wet folded poppies bent above it.

“It was a good time we had with them. I cannot bear to think it will never come again.”

“Yes, it was a good time. How long was it, Mona?”

“How should I know? Do you remember the first day we went in by Broken Tree there was the first spray of lilac blossoming?”

“I remember.”

“And now all the slopes are blue and the air too sweet with them. How long is that?”

“A long time, I think. I was a professor of Sociology then.”

“And what are you now?”

“Something more, I hope; and, Mona, I think we are taking the best part of Outland away with us.”

I agreed to that too, as we walked between the blue sprayed fountains of ceanothus, and felt the swing of the earth under us.

“Are you happy, Mona?”

“Yes. Though we have lost them, and I shall never walk alone in the wood again without hoping to find them. I am happy, but I do not know why.”

“And have you quite forgiven me?”

“For what, Herman? I have nothing to forgive you.”

“For not being more, seeing more in the first place—for such a number of things. Have you—quite?”

“Yes, quite.”

We walked on and saw the curdled line of the surf, and heard the long sigh that passes up from the sea along the pines, and smelled the beeches. All at once I was aware of the soft thick springing of the grass under foot.

“Herman! Herman! Where is the trail? Look! We have lost it.”

We looked, and there was the locked wood behind, and the soft, untrodden turf before.

“It was here by the buckthorn, I think.”

“By the ceanothus ; it came out between two pines.”

But though we looked and ran, it was not in either of these places.

“Herman, we shall never find the trail to that country again.”

“Yes, Mona.”

“Ah, look for it, Herman, come and look !”

Herman stood by the ceanothus and looked at me instead.

“Mona,” he said, “the trail is here.”

“Where, Herman ?” But I could not look at him where he stood because of the shining of his eyes.

“Here, Mona,” he answered with a gesture, “here !”

And I turned and found it on his breast.

THE END

PRINTED AT THE EDINBURGH PRESS,
9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET.



