

Chapter XII. The wearing of four days  
in the Wood beyond the World.

**H**E arose betimes, but found no one to greet him, neither was there any sound of folk moving within the fair house; so he but broke his fast, and then went forth and wandered amongst the trees, till he found him a stream to bathe in, and after he had washed the night off him he lay down under a tree thereby for a while, but soon turned back toward the house, lest perchance the Maid should come thither and he should miss her.

**I**T should be said that half a bow shot from the house on that side (i.e. due north thereof) was a little hazel brahe, and round about it the trees were smaller of kind than the oaks and chestnuts he had passed through before, being mostly of birch & quicken beam and young ash, with small wood betwixt them; so now he passed through the thicket, and, coming to the

edge thereof, beheld the Lady and the Walter King's Son walking together hand in hand, full lovingly by seeming. He deemed it unmeet to draw back & hide him, so he went forth past them toward the house. The King's Son scowled on him as he passed, but the Lady, over whose beauteous face flickered the joyous morning smiles, took no more heed of him than if he had been one of the trees of the wood. But she had been so high and disdainful with him the evening before, that he thought little of that. The twain went on, skirting the hazel copse, and he could not choose but turn his eyes on them, so sorely did the Lady's beauty draw them. Then befell another thing; for behind them the boughs of the hazels parted, and there stood that little evil thing, he or another of his kind; for he was quite unclad, save by his fell of yellowy brown hair, and that he was girt with a leathern girdle, wherein was stuck an ugly two-edged knife; he stood upright a moment, and cast his eyes at Walter & grinned, but not as if he knew him; and scarce

mayst wax in strength for our helping" Said Hallblithe: "I need not rest; I may not rest; I will not rest." Said the sad man: "It is lawful for thee to rest. So say I, who was once a master of law." Said the long/hoary elder: "And I command thee to rest; I who was once the king of a mighty folk."

**I**N sooth Hallblithe was now exceeding weary; so he laid him down and slept sweetly in the stony wilderness amidst those three seethers, the old, the sad, and the very old.

**W**HEN he awoke he felt well and strong again, and he leapt to his feet & looked about him, and saw the three seethers stirring, and he deemed by the sun that it was early morning. The sad man brought forth bread and water & wine, and they broke their fast; and when they had done he spake & said: "Abideth now in wallet and bottle but one more full meal for us, & then no more save a few crumbs and a drop or two of wine if we husband it well." Said the second elder: "Get we to the road, then, and make haste. I have been seeking, and meseemeth, though the way be long, it is now utterly blind for us. Or look thou, Raven-son, is there not a path yonder that leadeth onward up to the brow of the ghyll again? & as I have seen, it leadeth on again down from the said brow."

**F**OR SOOTH there was a track that led through the stony tangle of the wilderness; so they took to the road with a good heart, and went all day, and saw no living thing, and not a blade of grass or a trickle of water: nought save the wan rocks under the sun; and though they trusted

in their road that it led them aright, they saw no other glimpse of the Glittering Plain, because there rose a great ridge like a wall on the north side, and they went as it were down along a trench of the rocks, albeit it was whites broken across by ghylls, and knolls, and reefs.

**S**O at sunset they rested and ate their victual, for they were very weary; and thereafter they lay down, & slept as soundly as if they were in the best of the halls of men. On the morrow betimes they arose soberly and went their ways with few words, and, as they deemed, the path still led them onward. And now the great ridge on the north rose steeper and steeper, and their crossing it seemed not to be thought of; but their half-blind track failed them not. They rested at even, and ate & drank what little they had left, save a mouthful or two of wine, and then went on again by the light of the moon, which was so bright that they still saw their way. And it happened to Hallblithe, as mostly it does with men very travel-worn, that he went on and on scarce remembering where he was, or who his fellows were, or that he had any fellows. So at midnight they lay down in the wilderness again, hungry and weary. They rose at dawn and went forward with waning hope: for now the mountain ridge on the north was close to their path, rising up along it, a sheer wall of pale stone over which nothing might go save the fowl flying; so that at first on that morning they looked for nought save to lay their bones in that grievous desert where no man should find them. But, as beset with famine, they fared on heavily down the narrow track, there came a hoarse cry from Hall-