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## Prologue

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# Prologue

## *Part One*

by James Silver

Imagine a tangl'd African forest,  
hid' from Humanity's sisters and brothers,  
left four centuries unblemished  
by shrill tones of "Heathen!"  
guttering forth from mouths so pure,  
soaked in fire and cleansed with blood—  
and there we'll set the stage.

Branches, loaded thickly with all manner  
of rich greenery, sprawl skyward and high  
from a breathing, vibrant base,  
reaching for sun and air;  
they mangle, by sheer force of number,  
what little of the wide expanse  
they could share, by grasping thievishly  
for breath and heat, contracting  
and thrusting out again  
even in the stillest breeze,  
while throbbing roots squirm searchingly  
in the ooze soil beneath, stretching  
and straining to quench their thirst for darkness.

The subtle mazes that compose this jungle—  
twisting, indecisive streams, trees and plants  
So alive they seem to shift their ground at will—  
Protect it also from fame and the despoiling  
acts of conquest, War, and dissimulation.

For any traveler who ever has  
Found a way into the jungle's  
Most secret retreats  
Has never found the same  
Or any other way out—  
But has lived, died, and vanished  
In the shade of these obscure bowers.



Fragile buds in gentle rain  
close up their lips and draw themselves within  
to endure the sprinkling of mist  
upon their soft stalks and dewy heads;  
only when the sun shines again,  
unchecked amidst the radiant discord  
of the forest, do the first vulnerable  
buds awaken and rise up,  
splaying their petals to let sunlight  
dance upon velvet, thus revealing  
the earth's richest array  
of dazzling shades and hues, which,  
sensed together with ripe odors  
issuing forth, produce within the mind  
effects like calm intoxication.

Colors measure infinity as they sway,  
one way, and another, with undulating ease—  
dark and earthy green to purples, reds, and violets  
follow each other's graces with the smoothness  
and unfocused periphery of a dream, for which  
the hostess, this all-enduring, ever breathing  
forest of life and all that is of Nature  
which we may desire to call hope, provides  
the sweets and enticements for them all.

