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A Lost Page from The Red Book of Westmarch

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The maid was an offering of moon to the land, her eyes warm with wonder and with wisdom, promising spring of grace, spring in jonquils and the west wind in grass, the grass of Rohan foot-deep in growing and in earth. But the spring she foretold was a spring he would not see, perhaps lark's song and strong pulsing rain on lands out of mind, lands, so legend said, far to the west, not scarred like these with the wounds of ancient hates, hates enough to cut the very ribs of earth. Spring out of mind, perhaps a promise of blessing that was itself a springtime.

The fairness of the maid was a fairness of the stock of Dunedan and to her slender ness there was a grace, a state not common in girl growing to woman, warmth and yet distance. Her eyes he knew he could not forget, holding both the brown warmth of earth and the fragility of song, of old song, old beyond time, of legend, of grace and peace and of sorrow beyond clear song of horn on crest of fading Minas Ithil, of planting too, and brown hands and brown mead, of sable of kings and ancient greatness passed. And he knew with wonder that the maiden was life, life not for his time, life that he saw with distance, for his life had long turned to thoughts of death, to the sword heavy-swung, to death become a profession. To Boromir it was all the same, death in the name of Gondor, death to save a kingdom that could not be saved.

He followed the maiden to the heavy-beamed hall, hall of hewn beams which seemed not diminished in strength despite their obvious age, their grain dark with smoke of many fires, the swords and pikes which adorned them wrought in an elfen character not hammered since the sinews which swung them had passed from the memory of the living.

He had skirted the brown lands, near death for his horse, to avoid the deeps and enchantments of Lothlorien, yet this maiden, with lightly freckled high color held faerie in the oldest of tales (told by old men haunted by youth and melting into past, of an age of voyage and wonder lost beyond their scarred hearts)--this maiden partook of the enchantment said of women born of the children of men and elves.

And they sat the rude tables of that hall, and a chalice of silver was set before him, bejeweled and heavy, of wondrous work, emblemed with faces with maiden's eyes like her eyes, wonder of roe at morning, of wheat at sun, and the imaged past swam by him like a ship at sail, of fair, high-browed queens, of young-hearted willow-grace passed into time, into the world's time and into his.

He seized the chalice, his heavy, broken-nailed hands brought it brimming to his lips and he drank deep, deep, and smashing it to the boards the wine streamed across his wrist like his life's blood. And beholding his white-scarred hand, he felt the wounds of world's fight stir in his chest, the hot blood rose in his throat.

"I have drunk," he said, "to world's ending, and to the death which I and mine owe tribute for life. For we are stewards of life, but the fairness of this maid is passed with the star-brushed towers of Gondor, died with the immortal white trees—eternity poisoned by time—and I stand on border of a past turning to story, my scarred hands my token of youth ended and too soon ended. And as time flowers I shall die, as is way of earth, for I am tired as this maid is young and though she is young, and though fair beyond hope, she is not born for this hard heart and these hands with whitened scars. For these scars bespeak of death unredeemed even by the wonder of her eyes. And this blessing is as an omen and yet not far, lingering between Lothlorien and the western seas."
Now the Second Valar, and the others, understood, and the understanding weighed heavy upon them, bowed their shoulders at the shock of this cold hard wave.

Never since the beginning had Eru spoken as such.

And Sauron was strong, and drew himself to his full height. His eye looked about, nothing escaped his vision there. He knew his advantage.

It lay in shadow.

He spoke:

"If you are truly above me, and if you are truly just, then you must know that my punishment will be just."

Eru knew.

"Then I ask, Almighty One, that you grant me that I punish myself."

The darkness of Sauron scorned those about him, defied the twilight, challenged the throne.

Now, the words that came of Eru spread as rays from sun.

"Because I am above you, I grant you your request."

"Then I request that you let me sit where you sit, and have what you have!"

If those words had been spoken on Middle-earth, a tremor would have run through an entire realm, and cracks in the land thrown up black smoke to choke the living.

But Eru knew.

"Granted, here is my Throne."

Thus Sauron mounted, and in that second the flames leaped to the stars, and the dark figure lost all substance, his fragments scattered, his charred bit swept away by the winds of the Undying Lands.

And the Valar knew.

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And closing his tired eyes he felt himself borne on the flood of time, the great torrent of liquid silver plunging through buds and leaffall, tumbling into possibility, rolling into mystery like the white roll of Andurien down the falls of the Rauros. And roaring brimmed his senses. The scene stole from his unwilling eyes, like bees from the jonquils of a fading summer—stole into dream and into sun-blessed fields passed, ever so far, into the harvests of time.

So he passed, to world's ending, to fire and red ruin from which he knew he must not escape, as the pounding of hooves were a wonder he could not escape, the wonder of coming peace in the slow pulse in the throat of the maiden far beyond fair. And as he passed the world beyond the world he knew, he sang a song...