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The Mulberry

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DEPARTURE OF THE LORDLY FOLK
Janet P. Reedman

Billowing, sea-tossed, a glimmer on the waves,
Crystal dragonstones twinkling on wind-blown sails,
A ship bourne from Faery moors in the harbour--
The last of the Lordly Folk are going home.

Wind out of water, blood from a stone,
The People of the Hills are leaving,
Mortal men have ceased their grieving,
And I am left wandering alone.

Light as air, willow-reed, flaming in sunset,
Golden-locked, green manted, on palfreys they ride
Down to the ship with its swinging misty glass lamp--
The Lordly Folk riding on the long trek home.

Sun out of shadow, life out of death
I shall follow wherever they fare,
A spirit of man bourne on the air,
A fay-soul on the wind's boreal breath.

THE MULBERRY

by
Charles Rampp

Kira had always been impatient. Fifteen years, at least all of them that she could remember, spent at a girl's boarding school had made little change in that, although now that she was older she could sometimes force what she wanted on others. But not always, like this morning -- and she had ran away, into the hills and through a strip of forest and out again into the sunlight of a meadow.

A small brook ran down from higher ground, making a soothing noise, soft and steady; and she stopped for a moment, not knowing exactly what she wanted to do. A

most pleasant place -- quiet with the gentle late spring breeze stirring up a few leaves on the trees back the way she had come. She stood tall and stretched high. It would be fun to be a tree, perhaps. Idly she wondered what it might be like, holding her arms widespread above her head.

Slow, I suppose, the standing still would take a lot of getting used to -- breathing would be different -- using the opposite part of the air -- she kicked off her sandals and let her toes play in the soft grass. And water -- natural and you wouldn't have to -- she giggled, but didn't

hear her voice. Her arms felt good up there high -- misty -- like it's going to rain -- or looking through green--

Then she knew. Not gradually, but all at once. She wasn't angry, everything seemed all right. All was different, yet she was not frightened at all. Natural, all is so natural. I'm alive, more alive all over than I -- she didn't think at all for a little, she simply enjoyed the changes.

Kira was surprised that she could hear -- though a bit dimly. She could see -- at first this was difficult, but it quickly became easier and she enjoyed the generalized sight more than before. She recognized a few people -- some had apparently come hunting for her, but they passed through the clearing -- and after a week, came there no more.

Several time she thought about being lonely -- but there seemed to be no compartments in her mind, or hooks in her feelings to hang that on, so she let it go. Quiet and beautiful, even the rain-- and the storms seemed to fit now -- the hot, muggy days were cleansed, refreshed. Surprised at her patience, and acceptance -- she quietly enjoyed her life.

The first winter was a surprise. Slowly she had become accustomed to not sleeping -- she loved the nights -- the visiting birds -- a squirrel came by from time to time -- but often at night the great owls would come -- or other night birds, she wasn't sure -- and the quiet was deep and there was just enough movement and soft sounds to be most interesting. But she grew drowsy as the leaves fell. Funny leaves, some blade-shaped, pointed -- some like little baseball mitts, and others were a sort of combination.

Sleep came on gradually, slowly -- both night and day now as the days grew colder. Am I dying? she thought -- but didn't care, not really. Whatever was, seemed right. And she slept, but not deeply. Where thoughts and sight had been different before -- they were clearer now, less diffused but not responsive to her senses so much as before.

Dimly she felt the winter snows -- the freezing cold. But the young new buds that would bring leaves in the spring -- these were coiled taut, packed with life -- her life. She could feel all of those -- unwrapping, though she knew they weren't -- growing, though they held tight and were sometimes glazed with ice. Spring was a sudden surprise -- quickly she was fully awake, the tastes of water filled with strength of minerals she somehow recognized, and the sweet air -- quickly she forgot how much she loved the winter and its sleep.

Now she measured time by the seasons -- enjoying them all in her very quiet,

gentle way. Five times the seasons circled fully around the tree, and spring came and summer arrived, and in the first heat of it she felt the new buds again -- new life. The berries were green and white and red -- strange, like the leaves, all different, but they ripened slowly and turned deeply richly purple-black. There wasn't real pain -- but something like it, the fruit developing caused changes and she was aware of them, but didn't understand except the drawing of strength away from herself -- but the birds came and ate and she was glad, and they sang as if saying "Thank you."

Then on a golden afternoon about the time of the beginning of what she had called "July" before, she saw a young man coming out of the woods toward her. He was carrying a heavy pack strapped to his shoulders, and tall and young and strong as he was, he seemed quite weary. Red, curling hair and beard -- a giant of a man -- though he was young. He has fine, sensitive eyes, she thought as he put down his burden, and began to pick the mulberries he could reach.

His hands touched the three kinds of leaves gently -- great, freckled hands, broad and strong. She liked him. Quietly he sat down, leaning against the small tree trunk, opened his pack, which she now saw was full of books, and began to read. She watched as he took a notebook, well-worn and dark along the edges with much thumbing and turning. He wrote a little -- looked into his book, took out another -- seemed to be comparing them, wrote a little more, put up his pencil, and lay down, his head on the rolled up end of his pack and went to sleep.

The evening and the night were quiet. I like him, she thought. I would like to be his sister. I am in a way -- but I would like him to react to me -- to speak... Suddenly she had remembered her voice, which now, apparently didn't exist. The young man stirred uneasily in his sleep, muttered something, rolled over onto his other side.

Oh God -- her mind said to herself, and immediately she had the idea that maybe it wasn't to herself -- not all of it -- I knew a word for you, but now I know you, and one of your names is "Patience". I haven't asked anything for a long time -- I want to be like him -- human again, and then she remembered that the other change had been her own -- I'll make this one my own too -- but I want you to help, Patience, God -- it's your will I've been doing -- we've been doing -- and she became very quiet, for she was getting confused, and didn't think that would help.

He woke with the sunrise that next morning, and beside his pack, sat a tall, slim brown-skinned girl in a plain brown



dress. He sat up and saw quickly that she was smiling, she was pretty, and her feet were dirty -- toenails full of black earth -- but the long fingers of the hands folded in her lap were clean and perfect.

"Who are -- what -- where's the -- ?" he stopped and began to laugh. "I'm still dreaming."

"Then perhaps you dreamed me," she said quietly. "The name given me was Kira -- but I call myself 'Patience'. May I go with you?"

"You are very lovely," he said quietly.

His eyes really are as nice as I thought. She got up slowly, smoothed down her dark brown dress, which was as large and loose as the tree's bark had felt tight

and secure -- but she knew she was slim and straight inside the cloth. "So are you," she said evenly. "Tell me about yourself -- I would like to be your sister, if that is possible."

"Only my sister?"

He isn't teasing. She felt her cheeks growing warm. "Let's start with that and see what we will be like in the next few hours."

"My name is George. I have wandered over a good deal of the world looking for wisdom and gaining skills at what interests me. Right now I am returning to my Father's farm -- in the mountains, North. Then I -- I don't know. Come with me." He smiled, she thought a little shyly. "You will like the farm, Patience."

She nodded. "I like you, and I will come -- as your sister, George." Patience dropped to her knees, then sat down. "If you have rope, you could tie up some books for me to carry."

"All right; they are heavy." He sorted out five of roughly the same size and tied them with twine from his pack. She held her finger on the knot, as he drew it tight. "Your feet are -- well, dirty." He had started a sentence that he wished he hadn't but he finished it reluctantly.

Patience extended one leg and wriggled her toes. "I'll wash them in my creek."

"We are near a city," he told her. "The direct route to the farm lies that way, but we can cross a college campus and there's a highway." He looked at her bare feet questioningly. He was wearing sturdy hiking boots.

He held her hand as she waded in the stream beside which she had stood for the last five years. She didn't seem to feel bad about leaving it -- but -- "Could we come back here sometime, George?"

"Some wise men say you can never go back -- the place is not the same." He held her hand as she climbed out, sat down on a rock, and borrowed his knife and with its point, manicured her nails roughly, then walked into the creek again. As they started away, he saw her look back, and said quickly "But we'll try," and saw her smile widen.

In a few hours, they were on the edge of the city, and she didn't like the cement sidewalks, and tried walking in the sometimes grassy spots between the walk and the curb -- but there was broken glass there, and she was happy when they could cut across the wide green field, set with a few scattered trees. George told her the college was around it. People were walking around -- not very many, and mostly they ignored her, but one old woman looked at her bare feet, glanced away and then stared back.

Patience noticed clusters of people -- young people. One, composed of girls,

headed directly toward them. Two girls seemed to single out George, and moved away from the others, one on each side of him, taking his arms, linking theirs through his elbows. One girl had very fair, long, lovely hair -- a rather tight blue dress that reached almost to the concrete. The other girl had short, red hair that bounced as she moved -- and wore very tight pants that stretched on her body -- close to the breaking point, she thought, feeling suddenly how poorly dressed she was.

"Come with us --" they told George. "Obviously you are a man of wisdom -- look over there -- our huge library -- the great laboratories. They all connect to the places where money is to be made -- to the centers of our economy. Come now, you have knowledge -- we will show you where and how it changes to strength, power, and security."

The blue skirt swirled -- They are lovely dancers, she watched, standing beside a wooden bench by some rocks, under a small shade tree, conscious of what she felt to be her awkwardness and the plain dress, along with her bare feet.

I think he's going with them, she thought, but suddenly he turned and hurried back, and her heart felt warm and she smiled. But he took the five books she had been carrying, and as he turned away, not meeting her eyes, he said "Wait for me--" and something else she couldn't quite hear, and he was gone, up the steps of one of the great buildings, following the girls.

She stood watching the doors which were fastened open. Inside the building seemed dark, she could see nothing, so she sat down on the bench and waited. At least the earth under the bench where the grass was worn off, was cool to her feet -- the concrete sidewalks had been very hot. Think about George, she ordered her mind. Will he come back?

Calmness and peace are what I need, patience too. It had been very quiet and lovely in the little clearing where she had been -- the time as she thought about it seemed much longer than it actually was. Am I twenty years old now? Or does the time count the same--? What does it really matter? Is he coming back?

I don't think so. If he hadn't taken

those books -- if I'd said something -- But I can't go on thinking like this. Behind the bench, three large rocks, gray and very old-looking lay between the tree that gave her shade and some little bushes which had flowered earlier in the season -- but now had small, dried up little brown left-overs of the vanished flowers. I could be a rock, I suppose. I doubt if they feel much. She swallowed, closed her eyes, then opened them wide. No.

George was back, standing by the end of the bench, and suddenly he sat down beside her, holding his knapsack in one hand by the strap. It seemed very light.

"Where are the -- young ladies?" Patience asked, moving a few inches further away from him.

"I guess they're still in the building--" he pointed, and when she didn't follow his indication with her eyes, his hand remained quietly in the air, his forefinger extended. "They said they wanted to show me--" his voice faltered to a stop, as she didn't seem interested. His head nodded up and down a little.

The girl felt sorry for him. "What did they want?" She tried to speak as coolly and as disinterestedly as she could, but was not pleased with her effort.

"Knowledge, wisdom -- they said." He sighed. "I guess they wanted me."

She looked at the empty book bag. "So you gave them your books -- your knowledge instead."

"Not all of it," and he produced from his back pocket the worn notebook, rolled up, and she now noticed his pencil stuck above his ear, held by the heavy, tight red curls.

He's almost smiling. She saw that the eraser end, which protruded, had not been used -- it was fresh and clean. They wanted you -- I want you too. "Shall we start again for the farm?"

He nodded. "Let's stay clear of the city -- the sidewalks are -- they must be hard -- and hot for your feet." He pointed away from the building he had entered. "If we go North we may have to climb a few fences -- but we can stay off the road."

"I'd like that," she said quietly, and standing up, took his hand and began to walk North, through the lovely, soft grass.

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