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Angelee Sailer Anderson

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THE HEARTH

Chapter Four of the Novel
"Coronation Of The Roses"
by
Angelee Sailer Anderson

In the Country of the South, in the Forest of Many Caves, where the jasmine springs up in the underwood and the coral vines cling like lovers to the rock walls, where the anise nestles between the tree roots, and the creeping fig and the firethorn thrive eternally beneath the blazing torchlight of the sun, the chieftain of the Forest tribe sat breathing himself beside the watercourse. His rough hunter's tunic was soaked through with the sweat of exertion, for it was now the fourth hour since he with his comrades had begun stalking the wild pigs and the brindled deer whose venison was the mainstay of his people. They were to be found only in the heart of the Forest, a league's trek from the tribal dwelling under a cerulean sky and heat that never but at midnight slackened. Yet Adan-erèn, like all the sable-eyed, amber-skinned men of his race, was doughty and agile and rejoiced in the challenge and hardship of the hunt.

Now as he rested on a flat rock beside the stream, he took a skin bag from his belt and with his hand slowly scooped water into it until it was filled, thus reconstituting the sun-dried mare's milk which replenished the hunters' strength. He drank deeply, then splashed his head and muscled arms with water that stained his leather wristlets dark and left his raven hair glistening with the dew of the stream around his face and upon his shoulders. Parted by many footfalls from the other hunters, he now waited in intense and unmoving silence. Sun-rays sparked like fire-flies across the coruscant surface of the stream and made his golden earring and the stones set in his sword-hilt glint like stars. Though only spears were of use in the hunt, yet for all the burden of its weight the sword was ever at his side. It was a weapon of Art and Power, and its estimation was beyond reckoning.

From above the trees came the cry of an osprey, but Adan-erèn heeded it not at all. He was deep in memory of the events of the morning, and glad of the brief solitude which permitted his meditation. Had his decision been a just one? He prayed to the Power that imbued the Art of his race that it was so; for he was a man of firm integrity, regarding his masterdom over his brothers as a duty to seek their good and never a license to afflict or to tyrannize. The banishment had been necessary for the commonweal of the tribe, yet his sensitive conscience plagued him with how that necessity might have been undone. Might the banished one have fulfilled his promise had he been treated with greater wisdom? Was the guilt of his people and prince as heavy as his in conceiving his corruption? Or had his evil animus been as surely fated as the positions of the Seven Stars? From what womb of earth or well of night had Kua-mathèn come?

* * *

Shoya-laiin had been a woman of fragile will and harried mind, yet one who hungered above all to bring to being some thing of greatness. Her essays in wielding the Art of her people had been failures, as had been her over-eager attempts to capture the love of some young man among the tribe. Yet though her



longing to excel where excellence was commonplace proved abortive, she knew beyond doubt when she felt the life stir within her womb that the man-child she carried would be a son of Power. As others named their children by strength of prophecy, so she who had not the gift of foreseeing named her own by strength of hope. His would be the blessed life which would bring to his people what most they desired: knowledge of the Power within the Art they practiced, that Power whose name and manner of being or becoming they knew not. Her son's would be a name of high glory -- Kua-mathèn, "revealer of the Power." She proclaimed this to the tribe before she bore him; and in awe they waited for the clothing of the radiant oracle in flesh. The child, the identity of whose sire they could not discover, was not of the line of chieftains and was bastard. Yet surely in the single destiny of his holy mission he would be exalted above all their kind.

Middle-nights in the Forest, when the air at last had shed the fevers of the infecting sun, were cool enough to warrant coverings of animal skins for sleep. But cold beyond nature was that midnight upon which Kua-mathèn was born; those who strayed from their cave-homes died, and many among the horse herds froze and rolled to earth in the moon-blanching clearings. Into the cold his mother screamed as he broke forth from her; cold was the silence of the midwives when they beheld what she had brought to birth. In aversion and fear they began his breathing; cringing they washed him, desiring to view no more plainly what was already clear behind the blood. Theirs was a dark and warm-blooded race, giving birth to dark children and knowing only the warmth and the darkness of their kind. But the baby boy was white -- white like the whites of their eyes, like the whiteness of their teeth against their gold-brown skin. And as though the killing frost had adopted this fatherless bantling for its heir, the child was cold as a blade of metal, or as a marble stone.

Yet he lived. And cold and white he remained as the channels along which that life flowed widened their beds to prepare for the torrents of manhood. What accident of birth or violent stroke at the hand

of nature had unloosed this prodigy -- whose only fleshly link with his race was the swart eyes like coals, smouldering in a colourless face framed by silver hair -- none of his dark brothers had Art to penetrate. Their belief was that, at conception or in forming, the Power had jarred him to a discord of aspect to match the fearful uniqueness of his mother's naming. Yet they looked upon him and were disturbed. The child despite his strangeness was not hideous but beautiful, flawless in feature as one not of earth. It was as though the Power had rained on them a celestial spirit in shape of a man to lead them to the truth they sought. They pondered so as they observed his beauty; yet the beauty stopped their easy breath more than a hundred misshapen grotesqueries, and they shrank back from touching his perfect hands like ice. Shoya-laiin, though regaining all her bodily strength, spoke no word beyond his birthnight but remained voiceless until she died.

As an infant Kua-mathèn also was silent, making no baby noises, nor laughing, nor crying. But his people came afterwards to believe that in those years he spoke to his mother, with the telepathic gift their race exchanged among those close akin in family or in love. What thoughts of Kua-mathèn's Shoya-laiin read cannot be known; but she aged and wasted ten hours in his every one until he arrived at his fifth year. On his fifth birthday her self-slain body was found face downward in the Forest stream. On that day Kua-mathèn began to speak in a voice as unchildlike and articulate as that of his mother that had been lost.

From his first appearing the tribe had taken great care, despite their aversion, to treat Kua-mathèn as any other child, lest by making him a pointing-stock they should destroy the spirit that was in him. Perhaps they failed, or perhaps the boy was careless beyond anything they might have done. Yet however it came to be, with the force of speech Kua-mathèn gained the force of evil; or else the slow incubation of the force at last produced its twisted offspring. His were a people gifted racially with a supernatural Art, and that Art they had ever used for the uplifting of their spirits and in the crafting of a few marvels of handiwork which belied the primitive culture of their origin. If its shadow had touched their hearts, yet never had the force of the Art to evil overwhelmed its banks to issue forth from their hands. The shadows found their conduit in the hands of Kua-mathèn.

Adan-erèn, then son of the tribal chieftain, was seventeen when Shoya-laiin's body was borne back from the stream and laid upon the ground near to her dwelling in the City of Caves. Before he could be prevented, the child Kua-mathèn wandered outside to see what the commotion might be. Beholding his mother dead, he stood staring at her in a curious stillness. He spoke one word which was his first: "Mother." Then he relieved himself over her body and walked away. An evil omen, the people murmured. Nay, said others, he is but a child and knows not what he does. Speak no ill of him, warned some, for he is the promised revealer of the Power. Into the midst of this dissension there crept a voice, a woman's whisper that each woman present denied lending utterance. It chilled their argument's heat to silence, and cast a pall of trembling upon their souls. He is a devil, it said.

And so it proved. As though a white wolf's fang or a scorpion's sting had robbed its pain in human form, so Kua-mathèn budded in pride, and so his poisoned bloom tore open to full. It began with small things, as the seeming-innocent desecration of his mother's body. The mutilating of flowers. The

wounding of tamed animals, as in accident of play. Vile words pronounced in the midst of solemn gatherings. Haughtiness and cruelty of speech to other children, as if it were they and not himself that were deviant from the fellowship of man. And none performed in temper or passion, but coldly and calmly, as though he did but do the deeds of any proper boy.

He grew older, and his interior darkness grew with him. Animals found tortured, their blood drained for drink or for concocting of foul potions. Young girls whispering together, shuddering as they told of things he had said to them in secret. As he gained his twenties it was rumoured that he took to himself women from over the Mountains -- daughters of a decadent tribe with whom his own was forbidden to mingle. There were rumours also of experiments in the Art, of demons conjured and talismans created for desire and torment. Reluctant to resign to the Power's wrath what might yet be saved, the Forest chieftain and the son who succeeded him held back their hands in watchful clemency.

* * *

"All these things we have tolerated, Kua-mathèn, though our hearts rebuked them as detestable. We ourselves are but frail flesh, and we hoped that your infirmity like our own might still be healed. We have been willing to have patience, for as yet you have not lifted your hand in violence against any man. But this which you now have done is as grievous a sacrilege as murder, and it may not go unpunished. For you have sought to desecrate and to destroy the roses which grow on the Plain around the holy Tower; beyond this, you have sought to enter the Tower itself, which is reserved for sacred use. So great a crime against our people has not been known. Yet for our part we have done nothing to earn your unfriendship, but rather have nurtured you with all the little wisdom we possess."

"You have departed from the ancient path of our Art, and have chosen instead to devise perversities and to delight within your thought in all that is cruel and terrible. Yet for this you feel no sorrow as becomes a man of conscience, but rather are the more confirmed and unrepentant in your pride. Lest therefore this your disease for which you desire no cure should spread to infect and injure my people, it is my duty, my burden, and my grief as chieftain now to banish you from among our race. You are commanded to go far from us, and never to return until you have found the grace of a better heart. Leave us, Kua-mathèn."

The voice of Adan-erèn ceased. The scent of the sandarac trees floated heavily on the air, and the ceremonial mantle he wore at council rested as heavily on him with weight of the authority it symbolized. He, and the other men and women in council with him who represented the tribe, prayed silently for this hour to be over. Adan-erèn was perhaps most conscious of the bitter burden of judgement; but all of them equally wished themselves away from the onerous presence of the man before them. They had suffered him to dwell among them for nigh on thirty years, and yet had never become inured to the deathly skin as pale as the selenite that wanes and waxes with the moon, to the eyes like those of a succubus which drink dry their victim's will. The council could not bear to look at him steadily, lest being once drawn into those tenebrious depths they should slay their mortal souls in seeking exit. The gooseflesh prickled along their arms, and their teeth were set on edge to see how he stood stonestill, a wax carving untrammelled by any ardency

or compassion of the love that redeems nature. Beholding him, they beheld one who had left the order of the divine harmonies which dance from each to each among all the lives, instead to embrace the naked chaos and the single note of self.

A sharp sound broke from Kua-mathèn's lips. Perhaps it was meant for laughter, though it bore more semblance to the noise of glass cracking or the bones that snap when the amorous boa hugs close its prey. His eyes shone hard and many-faceted as diamonds, and the ghost of a frigid smile lurked at the corners of his mouth. At last he spoke, words oozing as smooth as oil yet keen-edged as knives along the sickening sweetness of his breath. Like an exhalation from an opened grave, his voice coiled among his hearers, strangling and suffocating.

"I stand accused, O noble brothers and fair sisters -- and you most fair and noble, Shai Adan-erèn -- of many and diverse crimes against my people. These crimes I here admit -- yea, revel in. It only grieves me that you have made such short shift in naming them. This I will now amend."

The exhalation grew more foul, enveloped them wholly, as he proceeded to rehearse every obscenity and depraved deed to enter the hearts of men, and some no man but he could ever conceive. Whether all these acts were within his commission or some only within his corrupt thought they could not be sure; for he spoke of each in simple triumph as though each were of his first inventing. Beneath the scourge of his tongue the council remained inert, gripped by a choking nausea and powerless to bid him cease. He did so finally without their command. There was a pause, too brief for respite. Then he continued:

"These, my sisters and my brothers, are the untold sins of which I am guilty -- yet, truly, my sin is but one. I, a man at the summit of his potency, stand convicted of sowing the seed of life which nature has given me as it has given to each of you. For I sojourn, alas, in a society of eunuchs, who castrate their children soon as they are born that they might never see the fullness of their procreative Power yield its fruit. I stand accused and convicted of keeping back my Power from the blade."

"Our race possesses a gift, a mighty force of magic Art. We might erect great cities of pure marble, command ten thousands of slaves, bring to exposing light all the secrets of creation to serve our bidding. This we might do, and reign undisputed in a world of inferior minds. And what do we, Adan-erèn? We dwell in caves like savages, expending our Art on sweet-sounding instruments and pretty pendants. We forge swords of steel for show and will not use them; we lay our minds' treasures bare to thievery from one another's Power and thought. We worship we know not what, but that it is the source of our Power yet commands of us impotency. We might do all. We do nothing. We are nothing, Adan-erèn."

"But no longer will I say 'we.' For I am much -- and I shall be more hereafter. 'Kua-mathèn,' my whimpering mother named me: 'revealer of the Power.' That name I reject, and I now name myself anew. The Power's blade I reject -- for I myself am that Power. Kua mis: 'I am the Power.' Kuamis."

The council listened to his pronouncement, with deeper horror than any deed named or nameless could invoke. They had heard the final blasphemy; and yet they lived, and the one who had spoken it lived also. Adan-erèn could find no words to answer. He and others had reasoned with Kua-mathèn countless times concerning the purpose in the simplicity of their way of life; how that by their poverty the tribe kept themselves free to receive every treasure the Art might bestow. They told him how they had

chosen in humility to cleave to nothing and become empty, that they might by the Power's infilling encompass all. He had never understood, nor in his self-made blindness could he, as Adan-erèn now saw. When the chieftain spoke at last, it was not to persuade the unbelieving but to reaffirm in the person of their prince his people's faith.

"The Power to which all minds lie bare knows you, Kua-mathèn. From its blade of truth you will never escape."

Kua-mathèn sneered. In unchained mastery to bring to breaking all but the strong, he answered, "Kuamis, Adan-erèn. I am Kuamis. And in my blade is the only truth and the Power of life. You thought to have thwarted my achievement in the Art. You have failed. This have I achieved. This have I created."

From beneath his tunic he drew forth a dagger. Suspended on a heavy chain around his neck, its thin length gleamed nakedly black, unilluminated and unwarmed beneath the sun. Whatever metals, in his perversion of the Art, he had merged to form it, they had been seared to pitch by the hell-born fires behind his eyes. He held the dagger aloft.

"By the Art I have bled my life's Power into this dagger, and in loving turn it feeds me with Power sevenfold. No point of sword now may pierce me, no creeping senility of age come upon me; nor can any Power not my own rob me of its Power. I am -- Kuamis -- and shall ever be. But you will die, Adan-erèn, while I live on to do such injury to your every work of Art and love that in the deadlands your wraith will wail to witness it and to know how truly nothing you have become. Despair, Adan-erèn, and know how great is the Power of life to confer death without surcease."

He raised the dagger as though to strike. From the depths of his throat broke forth a cry, a maniacal howling of pure will purged empty of reason and soul. The cry re-echoed in agony, while Kua-mathèn stood gazing at Adan-erèn one moment more. Then letting the dagger fall to his chest, he turned, and walked away into the Forest.

* * *

Drops of agony appeared upon Adan-erèn's brow, ornamenting its furrowed amber like a crown of pearls. Though the sun smote hard upon the rock where he tarried by the stream, yet he felt himself oppressed by a numbing cold. He had done what must be done and now he could not rest with the deed. "He is a devil" -- it was Shoya-lain who had breathed forth these words in death, she who alone knew her son's thought and had held so great a hope for him. Kua-mathèn had been the hope of all the tribe, the embodied sign and promised comprehending of the Power that wielded them. That hope was banished; the chieftain's hope with that of his people had been in a devil. He had done what must be done, and he could not rest.

The memory of good, and the backward glancing of good to come wept into his heart with its succouring warmth. His thought reached out to Danu-sin, the woman of his cherishing, his beloved wife now big with child and soon to give birth. He and she together had longed for an heir to succeed him in lordship, and had remained without fruit a full score of years from their joining. Now that their lives' tale of years had grown to two score and Danu-sin was near-past the age of bearing she had conceived; and the man-child within her, for a son they foresaw it should be, gathered strength in his womb-prison and made haste towards his release. Though moments-near to being born, they had not yet bestowed on him his name of prophecy. In their Art's wisdom, they

perceived that the purpose to which he was destined would become apparent at his coming forth, and so should not be spoken until that time. In the patience and still intensity of their race they waited upon his revealing.

In the still, strong arms of his wife Adan-erèn would find rest. He would return to her, to their dwelling in the Rock that walled the Forest edge, in the City of Caves. She would stretch out her hands to him, and he would sit beside her and lay his head against her swollen belly to hear the beating of their son's heart. And she would give him wine of pomegranates to ease his thirst, and let down her hair till it surged in black waves about his face. And he would sleep; and, waking, together they would pass through the Cleft in the Rock to the Plain of the Tower, and watch the white roses lap like seafoam around the foot of the Tower of Dancing. Toward the Tower they would pray; then they would turn again to their cave and he would rest once more, and Danu-sin and his son beside him.

A sudden noise came from behind of leaves parting to let pass. Footsteps rustled in the undergrowth. His comrades in hunting had found him, and Adan-erèn was glad; for his solitude no longer seemed good to him. He hoped that they had slain the wild pigs and the brindled deer in plenty in his absence. He had no more heart for the hunt, but only to seek his home.

"Ill hail, Adan-erèn."

The voice was not one among his comrades, nor the voice of one who is a comrade to any. It was the voice of his agony, now renewed -- a voice of which he had prayed to have heard the last, unless the demon behind the voice should turn angelic. It had not.

Instinctively, though he had never drawn weapon on any man, Adan-erèn grasped at the hilt of his sword. A heavy boot against his back prevented him; it bore him down until he lay prone upon the rock with his face just above the water. The sound of breathing as of a man in lust hovered over him.

"Despair and die, Adan-erèn. I am the Power. Kuamis."

He felt the black dagger drive between his shoulder-blades and slice down along his backbone as he would carve a deer. He slumped forward, and blood ran from his mouth to stain the stream crimson. Hands struggled with his sword-belt. Then a clamour of men's voices broke through the trees, and the hands left him.

So he who had been and was no longer Kua-mathèn departed, cursing his failure to procure the sword of his chieftain which might have been of great use to him. He was discovered, and must with the weapon forgo his intent of visiting the dead man's wife and unborn child before his exodus, his flight in victory, across the sea.

But Adan-erèn, pulled from the stream by the hunters, departed into the Power without fear, and without regret save for the son he would not now clasp hands with this side of death. He knew, as Kuamis did not yet, that the mating of the dagger with blood had abated its virtue; so that never might it mate again in the hand of the one who had forged that union, and never might it forsake the forger's touch and still protect him. In his passing thought, Adan-erèn spoke to Danu-sin where unsuspecting in their home she waited, and conveyed to her his bequest of love and the name and destiny of their child which now in death he saw. Then he commended his spirit to the Power.



In their dwelling in the Rock, the wife of the tribal chieftain played gently upon her instrument and yearned towards her husband's return. The cave-abode was crude yet clean, filled with lambent light springing from the exchange of love and vision between the two who shared its hearth.

Seated on a heap of skins on the cave floor, Danu-sin plucked absordedly at the instrument's strings, her thought travelling far from her surroundings to seek the quiet depth of the Forest. With her grey-flecked midnight hair bound in its sequined netting and her pale green sari through which the dark points of her breasts could just be seen, she possessed a beauty that, far from regretting its own decline, glorified itself in the autumnal richness of her age. At her right side was set an earthenware bowl of stream-water in which tree peonies floated; and in a dish at her left was a reed burning in oil, a lamp kept always aglow even when the westering sun flooded the cave entrance in the hours after noon. Around her slender neck was a pendant -- like the instrument, one of the prides of her people's Art -- carved in rewel-bone in the form of a rose crown. Her belly was large with the fruition of hope, with the future prince of all her race.

In the cave with her were the midwives, speaking among themselves in low voices. If their skill well served them, Danu-sin's pains should begin within the hour. She was no longer young, and it would be a difficult birthing. The women had prepared their unguents and powders, their charms of camphor to ward off infection; and on a brazier of hot coals they warmed a mixture of wine and honey with medicinal herbs in anticipation of the mother's need. And so they waited through the long spring afternoon.

And Danu-sin waited, her fingers slowed to near inaction upon the strings. Their faint quivering mingled with the hum of bees among the coral flowers outside the cave, and the play of sunbeams through the shadows of trees upon the ancient ground seemed to hold her force of vision within a trance. Softly she began to sing to herself a lullaby for her unborn son. She sang of how his flesh would be formed of the earth, his breath of wind; how the beauty of blossoms would live in his eyes and his sweat be like

the dew; of how his tears would be of the salt cast on the shore by the plunging surf, and the Power of the stars of heaven shine in his Art and his heart's love.

"And your name," she sang, "and your name will be Daryan-dèn."

Her hands upon the strings froze; the bloom withered from her cheeks. She gave forth a strangled cry, signifying to the midwives that her hour was come. They hurried to her side, but she seemed not to see them. For with her inner senses Danu-sin beheld her lord's blood-encloaked body and heard him speak his last farewell to her, bequeathing her the duty to name and lay destiny upon their child. Daryan-dèn, "interceding one," reconciler of the pain imposed upon his people by their enemy, avenger of his father's murder in whom the soul of vision and the spirit of truth would burn undimming. Adan-erèn was dead; and she, whose purpose beyond her travail was broken off, would die with him. Alone in the hands of the Power would Daryan-dèn their son fulfill his doom.

Again she cried, and her voice now rang unhindered in torment. She fell backward, writhing in her agony while the child struggled to escape from her as one who could no longer be restrained from the burden and passion of his fated task. Danu-sin laboured, and the midwives ministered to her. The child, consuming her inwardly with his impatient flame, came forth in fire to meet the sun.

* * *

Shades of a bitter dusk had begun to haunt the Forest when the hunters returned to the City of Caves bearing the body of their slain chieftain and their news of grief. Outside the cave wherein Danu-sin lay dying with her son in swaddling bands upon her breast, a man's voice called out, requesting permission to enter. One of the midwives pulled aside the skin covering at the cave's mouth and put out her head to rebuke him; then she caught sight of what his comrades carried on the rough bier between them. She motioned him to step inside. He did so; and when his glance fell on the chieftain's wife and newborn son, the weight of his sorrow brought tears to his grim and angry eyes.

"I cannot tell her," he whispered hoarsely.

"She knows already," the midwife answered. "She passes with him."

Danu-sin, her hair now unbound and matted with sweat against her fevered temples, her eyes unchained from all belonging to earth but for the gossamer link of flesh that suckled at her breast, began to speak.

"Daryan-dèn, your name is Daryan-dèn, who will suffer to revoke the curse upon your people, who will intercede for them and for many. Threefold will be the love offered you, and three will suffer in your sufferings: the one for your light, the second for your darkness, the last to an end unseen and in suffering greatest. You who bear the blessing of pain to many in darkness and in light, your name is Daryan-dèn, Daryan-dèn. . . ."

The midwife and the hunter looked gravely at one another, and crossed their hands palm-outward before their faces against the fell foreshadowing which endured her words. The hunter left the cave, and re-entered with Adan-erèn's sword. Believing that she was now past seeing, he knelt down at Danu-sin's side and held the weapon out before her.

"Shai Danu-sin," he said slowly, "I bring to you the sword of our chieftain -- the sword of your son."

The mother of the sword's new master made no sign. After a moment the hunter began to withdraw the weapon; but suddenly Danu-sin reached forth with

both hands to clasp its hilt. He resisted her, for the heavy sword strained even his hard muscles and might easily crush her with her child if it should fall upon her. Yet with a firm and mysterious strength she wrenched it from him, unsheathing it, and lowered its massive flat till it lay poised like a shield an inch above her tiny son. Again she spoke to him, now through their ever more slender bridge of thought; and none knew her heart's final testament but the child.

"Behold your father's sword and the masterwork of his Art, my interceding one. With its blade you will compass the destruction and lay bare the heart of that pretender who names himself the Power; and the Power that is truly will aid you through your Art. By the pretender's means will you make sure the hope which he himself has cast aside, and reveal their long desire unto your people. Bear the sword in faith, my strong son. And let your Art fashion you an instrument for your joy and the joy of love -- for I may not leave to you mine. Its song is silenced upon the earth forever."

As though he understood how stretched to near-breaking was the chain which still joined him with her who had given him life, the boy began to cry. Danu-sin let the sword drop to her side, and with all her now feeble strength clasped him to her. In a lulling whisper she bestowed on him her last blessing, with the words her tribe spoke over each of its children before sleep.

"Shatu, lai va tedale na Kua, se Daryan-dèn. Rest silent, and the Power will dance within, my interceding one." Shatu, shatu, se Daryan-dèn. . ."

The straining link snapped. Daryan-dèn's crying fell silent upon the breast of his dead mother, and the midwife gathered the sleeping baby in her arms. The hunter spread a veil over Danu-sin's face. Then he left the cave to help prepare a pyre for the sacred burning of the bodies.

* * *

The bereavement in a day of both their spiritual father and mother was one from which the Forest tribe did not recover. Great wisdom and great love had passed with them; but the deeper loss was of a kind more subtle and more enduring. Whether Kuamis's curse upon Adan-erèn's works had implanted the scathing seed or merely shocked it from dormancy to burgeoning life, yet a weakened purpose and a slow decay of trust made its settled bed in the heart's-soil of the tribe. Had murder before now been wrought among them, it was in a time beyond the ranges of their long memory. Their chieftain's slaying, and the calamity of evil sacrilege by one whom they had spawned awoke in them a fear they had not hitherto known. If the Power that held them in hand had permitted such a shaking as this, they could not now reckon what sure foundation of their Art and thought might heave and crumble beneath them into formless dust. The noon's candle of their simplicity guttered; and they entered into a twilight of wary protectiveness, desiring above all things to be shielded against the recurrence of outrage.

Upon Adan-erèn's work of most precious intimacy the curse rode heaviest. The prophetic burden placed upon Daryan-dèn by Danu-sin at his naming was known and spoken of with trembling among all his people. Shoya-lain's ill-foreseen hope in her son might easily have shattered their faith in all foreseeing; instead it mutilated their joy in the tide of fate to leave only the dread of its crushing fury. They recoiled from their infant prince as they had not from his father's assassin. And though their sense of right duty prevented them from maltreating the

child or casting him out, yet they made no attempt, as they had attempted and failed with Kua-mathèn, to give to the boy their love. The promise that Daryan-dèn would revoke their curse was not remembered; they recalled only the utterance that those who received him in love would suffer. He was foretold to be the bearer of pain -- before the curse they had counted pain as they did all else among their blessings. But now the horror of its maiming edge and its wrecking fire reigned as tyrant in them, and pain's fearing became their pain and their deep tragedy.

Received by none as friend, longed for by none as lover, tolerated but undesired Daryan-dèn grew to manhood. In his earliest years he had bared his thought to those around him; but though they pitied him, the approaches to their tenderness were walled fast against him. He came in time to seek the solitary places and the company of the stars as an only refuge from his rejection; yet in solitude he did not escape the sting. His tribe, in falling from their vision of losing themselves that they might gain all, had unknowingly nurtured that vision to near-perfection in his person. Alone as no man has been lonely, destitute of all gifts and passions but what had descended to him from his parents or radiated through the Power's Art, Daryan-dèn was conscious of no identity beyond that with which he had been coronated at birth. Kuamis had spit in the face of destiny; the one he most injured became its consummate embodiment, for in Daryan-dèn's life he owned nothing else and was permitted to embrace nothing but what was spoken of him. All men possess choice. Yet of what there was, in inclining or in will, that might be chosen apart from the stark singleness of his existence, Daryan-dèn had not become aware.

* * *

On the day he turned two and twenty Daryan-dèn stood on the Plain of the Tower, a desert wind from over the eastern Mountains whipping through his hair as he gazed upon the tall monolith encircled by white roses which was the sacred symbol and the sanctuary of his people. The Tower's white, diamantine stone scintillated in the hard light, unseamed and unjointed, as if in some lost mastery of the Art or the very creation-throes of earth itself it had been conceived, crafted, and set in place in one flawless stroke. To enter the Tower of Dancing was permitted to none but the tribal chieftain, and that once only in a year, on a day in late spring. There and at that time, the chieftain would pray for the Power's renewed descent upon his race and on their Art, and would strip himself wholly of will to stand naked in the will of the Power. For one hour he would remain standing at the Tower's summit in a state like sleep; without motion, without sense, while his spirit bent like a blown branch to the movement of the Dance of life and knew the harmony of all souls beneath the vault of heaven. Then with the Power's music clothing him, he would bear the renewed blessing back to his people.

On this day two and twenty years ago, Daryan-dèn's sire had sought the Tower of Dancing before the fateful council and its aftermath; and the Tower had stood inviolate by human footfalls since. Adan-erèn's sister's son, who ruled in Daryan-dèn's name when he was yet a child, had not the authority to enter the Tower while the heir of the last entrant lived. Now that that heir had reached maturity his cousin ruled still, and still the Tower of Dancing remained unsought.

Knowing that his sisters and brothers did not

desire him as their prince, Daryan-dèn had done nothing to persuade them of his birthright, still less to enforce it upon them. He was a burden and a dread to them, and his unreturned love for them brought them shame. "Shai" Daryan-dèn they called him, in the form of address his race used to one of reverence; yet secretly they prayed that he would go from them. They did not lack conscience or possess cruelty enough to banish him, and he had determined in his heart to spare them that agony. Alone as he had entered the world and dwelt among them he would depart, to find the fulfilling of those things foretold of him, to seek the truth within his mother's dying thought that had lain buried beneath his mind--heard through childhood slowly to dawn inside his consciousness as he became a man. But before his leave-taking, he would ascend as was his right into the Tower and there receive into himself the Power's anointing.

He approached the shaft of stone, his father's sword against his hip, his Art strong in him, his boots thorn-scraped by the rose ring which guarded the Centre of being. The roses also were sacred, and might not be plucked but for the single purpose of sealing the holy and mystic union between woman and man. Excluded as any leper from that union, yet the beauty and force of its reciprocal rhythms pulsed in Daryan-dèn's stride as he entered the Tower of Dancing to be united to One unnamed.

He climbed the Tower steps, and attained the summit. What befell him there in his still hour cannot by another be known; yet at last he descended. And with the sole possessions of his sword and the instrument he had made, he sought out the small boats used by his tribe in harvesting the fragments of rewl-bone which the tides cast up as plentiful as driftwood upon their offshore islands. These fragments they carved into the ornaments worn by all their women who had embraced wedlock. The rose circle signified the woman herself, and in her the impoverished people; the unseen Tower at the pendant's centre signified the man and the imparting Power.

So launching his skiff upon the girdle of ocean, Daryan-dèn turned his prow from the City of Caves and the Country of the South, as the man with whom his fate was interlocked had turned before him. Besieged by many a ravaging wind his oars cut the dark deep; and he saw the sea-snakes intertwine in their cold bed of love, and saw the moonpath upon the water, and was admitted to the brotherhood of terror and mystery as he wandered for a year of days and strange-starred nights. At last, where the boreal sun softly stroked his heat-born skin and its light smote sweetly pale into his glare-hardened eyes, he beheld the combers caressing the seabeach and heard the cries of the land birds returning, and knelt to kiss with thankful lips the northern shore.

