

The daylight was wan and heaven bleak, when he left the borough's tilled ground, and set foot upon raw earth, damp and rich brown in hue, sundry pebbles and mineral motes mixed therein.

Quickly the ground rose up a step and from its height its holt of thick-boughed, bright-green-leaved trees overlooked him, who stood on the stony, grassy turf beneath.

When he trod up the one small step needed to reach the upper ground, he went on and into the wood right before him.

Many of the boughs hung low, meaning he had to stoop over at first to keep going. The path he walked on was narrow but straight, mostly. Dew leftover from that morning's heavy rain abode on the glass-smooth leaves, and a few times he shook the boughs to loosen the little drops into his hands, from which he drank. The water was clean and cool, as was the wind swaying the far-above treetops.

He himself was not wholly aware why he was daring into the woods that nigh-evening; but he went forth all the same, barely shunning getting soaked from all the leaves' wetness, and the air's dampness.

Water in drops, steady, fell from the higher-up, unseen, boughs, keeping the earth freshly wet.

His hair beginning to get stirred, and his way forward growing thicker of young, green stalks of sundry saplings and worts, he boldly kept forward, as if seeking something.

Soon there was a short stretch of trees' overgrowth making him bow deeply to go through; but, as swiftly as it came, it went, and the trees stood at their former height.

It was when he and the path came to a leigh (albeit hardly better-sunlit than the thicket), that he stopped. He stooped to the wet, afterstorm ground, and picked up the lone white feather that lay, bright yet unproud, in the leigh's utter middle.

It was clean, not sullied by a mote of dust; sheer white. Soft it was when he felt it mildly with his keenest finger; and its shaft was unmarred. None of the

strings were shed, and what little light from above shone on it, it somehow glew back brighter; so that, as he upheld the feather at half arm's-length before his eyes, its sight outdid that of everything else behind it: darkening green leaves; brown, sharp stems; even the otherwise bright nearby yellow and red blossoms of a shrub slightly beyond the edge of the leigh. The feather's white overcame all other sights, hues.

Its tip — as he further pored over it — whence it was shed from the fowl, was still sharp, though yielding; the shaft's inside was hollow, maybe biding to be filled with dye, for rough writing.

He sought nearby, in the evening's waning light, for another kindred feather; but found none: only a drenched mash of sticks, long-fallen leaves, and mud. The ground sank where he stepped, if it were not under the shielding boughs of that little wood's tall trees.

The clouds grew no nearer to sundering as he stood there in the open "light" which they fully shrouded and bleached, and he chose, rather than tread even farther, to wend back and bear his feather warily in hand.

Somehow his will overcame, and he walked, tired and now in twilight's hardly-reaching leftovers dimly fordriving darkness, out of the holt, still holding that feather fast yet lithely, so as not to harm any of its flawless shape or uncloven fullness.

True night had fallen by the time he had reached his house, now back in the borough, though toward its wilder edge.

He set the feather in a little cup on his living-room bookshelf, where it long abode— maybe forever.