

DREAM SMITH

**T**HERE ARE MANY TALES which the song-smiths beat out in burnished telling, some old and some new. And the truth of this one or that—who knows? Yet at the heart of the most improbable tale may lie a kernel of truth. So it was with the tale of the Dream Smith—though for any man now living to prove it—he might as well try to empty Fos Tern with a kitchen ladle!

Broson was smith in Ghyll, having both the greater and the smaller mysteries of that craft. Which is to say that he wrought in bronze and iron and also in precious metals. Though the times he could use tools on the latter were few and far between.

He had two sons, Arnar and Collard. Both were, in boyhood, deemed likely youths, so that Broson was looked upon, not only in Ghyll (which lies at river-fork in Ithondale), but as far off as Sym and Boldre, as a man well fortified. Twice a year he traveled by river to Twyford with small wear of his own making, wrought hinges and sword blades, and sometimes brooches and necklets of hill silver.

This was in the days before the invaders came and High Hallack was at peace, save with outlaws, woods-runners, and the like, who raided now and then from the wastes. Thus it was needful that men in the upper dales have weapons to hand.

Vescys was lord in Ithondale. But the Dalesmen saw little of him since he heired, through his mother, holdings in the shorelands and there married a wife with more. So only a handful of elderly men and a wash-wife or two were at the Keep and much of it was closed from winter's midfeast to the next.

It was in the third year after Vescys' second marriage (the Dalesmen having that proclaimed to them

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by a messenger) that something of more import to Ghyll itself occurred.

A trader came down from the hills, one of his ponies heavily laden with lumps of what seemed pure metal, yet none Broson could lay name to. It had a sheen, even unworked, which fascinated the smith. And, having tried a small portion by fire and hammer, he enthusiastically bargained for the whole of the load. Though the peddler was evasive when asked to name the source, Broson decided that the man was trying to keep secret something which might well bring him profit again. Since the pony was lame, the man consented with visible (or so it appeared) reluctance to sell, leaving in one of Broson's metal bins two sacks of what was more melted scrap than ore.

Broson did not try to work it at once. Rather he spent time studying, thinking out how best he might use it. His final decision was to try first a sword. It was rumored that Lord Vescys might visit this most western of his holdings, and to present his lord with such an example of smith work could only lead to future favor.

The smelting Broson gave over to Collard, since the boy was well able to handle such a matter. He had determined that each of his sons in turn would learn to work with this stuff, always supposing that the peddler would return, as Broson was sure he would, with a second load.

And in that he gave his son death-in-life, even as he had once given him life.

For, though no man could ever learn what had gone wrong in the doing, for all those standing by, including Broson himself, had detected no carelessness on Collard's part (he was known to be steady and painstaking), there was an explosion which nigh burst the smithy to bits.

There were burns and hurts, but Collard had taken the worst of both. It would have been better had he died in that moment. For when he dragged back into half-life after weary months of torment and despair, he was no longer a man.

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Sharvana, Wise Woman and healer, took the broken body into her keeping. What crawled out of her house was no Collard, a straight, upstanding son for any man to eye with pride, but a thing such as you see sometimes carved (luckily much weathered away) on the ruins left by the Old Ones.

Not only was his body so twisted that he walked bent over like a man on whom hundreds of seasons weighed, but his face was a mask such as might leer at the night from between trees of a haunted forest. Sharvana had an answer to that, but it was not enough to shield him entirely from the eyes of his fellows—though all were quick to avert their gaze when he shambled by.

She took supple bark and made a mask to hide his riven face. And that he wore at all times. But still he kept well out of the sight of all.

Nor did he return to his father's house, but rather took an old hut at the foot of the garden. This he worked upon at night, never coming forth by day lest his old comrades might sight him. And he rebuilt it into a snug enough shelter. For, while the accident seemed to have blasted all else, it had not destroyed his clever hands, nor the mind behind the ruined face.

He would work at the forge at night, but at last Broson said no to that. For there was objection to the sound of hammers, and the people of Ghyll wanted no reminding of who used them. So Collard came no more to the smithy.

What he did no man knew, and he came to be almost forgotten. The next summer, when his brother married Nicala of the Mill, he never appeared at the wedding, nor ventured out in those parts of the yard and garden where those of the household might see him.

It was in the third year after his accident that Collard did come forward, and only because another peddler came into the forge. While the trader was dicker-ing with Broson, Collard stood in the shadows. But when the bargain for a set of belt knives was settled,

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the smith's son lurched forward to touch the trader's arm.

He did not speak, but motioned to a side table whereon he had spread out a square of cloth and set up a series of small figures. They were fantastical in form, some animals, some men, but such men as might be heroes from the old tales, so perfect were their bodies. As if poor Collard, doomed to go crooked for as long as he lived, had put into these all his longing to be one with his fellows.

Some were of wood, but the greater number of metal. Broson, astounded at viewing such, noted the sheen of the metal. It was the strange stuff he had thrown aside, fearing to handle again after the accident.

The trader saw their value at once and made an offer. But Collard, with harsh croaks of voice, brought about what even Broson thought a fair bargain.

When the man had gone Broson turned eagerly to his son. He even forgot the strangeness of that blank mask which had only eyes to give it the semblance of a living man.

"Collard, how made you these? I have never seen such work. Even in Twyford, in the booths of merchants from overseas— Before—before you never fashioned such." Looking at that mask his words began to falter. It was as if he spoke not to his son, but to something as alien and strange as those beings reputed to dance about certain stones at seasons of the year, stones prudent men did not approach.

"I do not know—" came the grating voice, hardly above an animal's throaty growl. "They come into my head—then I make them."

He was turning away when his father caught at his arm. "Your trade—"

There were coins from overseas, good for exchange or for metal, a length of crimson cloth, two knife handles of carven horn.

"Keep it." Collard might be trying to shrug but his convulsive movement sent him off balance, so he must clutch at the tabletop. "What need has such as I to lay up treasure? I have no bride price to bargain for."

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"But if you wanted not what the trader had to offer—why this?" Arnar, who had been watching, demanded. He was a little irked that his brother, who was younger and, in the old days had no great promise, could suddenly produce such marketable wares.

"I do not know." Again Collard slewed around, this time turning his bark mask in his brother's direction. "I think I wished to know if they had value enough to attract a shrewd dealer. But, yes, father, you have reminded me of another debt." He took up the length of fine cloth, a small gold coin which had been looped so that one might wear it on a neck chain. "The Wise Woman served me as best she could."

He then added: "For the rest—let it be for my share of the household, since I cannot earn my bread at the forge."

At dusk he carried his offering to Sharvana. She watched as he laid coin and cloth on the table in her small house, so aromatic of drying herbs and the brews from them. An owl with a wing in splints perched on a shelf above his head, and other small wild things, here tame, had scuttled into cover at his coming.

"I have it ready—" She went to the cupboard, bringing out another mask. This was even more supple. He fingered it wonderingly.

"Well-worked parchment," she told him, "weather-treated, too. I have been searching for something to suit your purpose. Try it. You have been at work?"

He took from the safe pocket of his jerkin the last thing he had brought her. If the trader had coveted what he had seen that morn, how much more he would have wanted this. It was a figure of a winged woman, her arms wide and up as if she were about to take to the skies in search of something there seen and greatly desired. For this was to the figures he had sold as a finished sword blade is to the first rough casting.

"You have seen—*her*?" Sharvana put out her hand as if to gather up the figure, but she did not quite touch it.

"As the rest," he grated. "The dreams—then I awaken. And I find that, after a fashion, I can make the dream

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people. Wise Woman, if you were truly friend to me, you would give me from your stores that which would make me dream and never wake again!"

"That I cannot do, as you know. The virtue of my healing would then pour away, like running water, through my fingers. But you know not why you dream, or of what places?" Her voice became eager, as if she had some need to learn this.

"I know only that the land I see is not the Dales—at least the Dales as they now are. Can a man dream of the far past?"

"A man dreams of his own past. Why not, were the gift given, of a past beyond his own reckoning?"

"Gift!" Collard caught up that one word and made it an oath. "What *gift*—?"

She looked from him to the winged figure. "Collard, were you ever able to make such before?"

"You know not. But to see my hands so—I would trade all for a straight back and a face which would not fright a woman into screaming!"

"You have never let me foresee for you—"

"No! Nor shall I!" he burst out. "Who would want that if he were as I am now? As to why this—this dreaming and the aftermaking of my dream people has come upon me—well, that which I was handling in the smithy was no common metal. There must have been some dire ensorcelment in it. That trader never returned so we could ask about it."

"It is my belief," said Sharvana, "that it came from some stronghold of the Old Ones. They had their wars once, only the weapons used were no swords, nor spears, no crossbow darts, but greater. It could be that trader ventured into some old stronghold and brought forth the remains of such weapons."

"What matter?" asked Collard.

"Only this—things which a man uses with emotion, fashions with his hands, carries with him, draw into themselves a kind of—I can only call it 'life.' This holds though many seasons may pass. And if that remnant of emotion, that life, is suddenly released—it could well pass in turn into one unwary, open—"

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"I see." Collard ran fingertips across the well-scrubbed surface of the table. "Then as I lay hurt I was so open—and there entered into me perhaps the memories of other men?"

She nodded eagerly. "Just so! Perhaps you see in dreams the Dales as they were before the coming of our people."

"And what good is that to me?"

"I do not know. But use it, Collard, use it! For if a gift goes unused it withers and the world is the poorer for it."

"The world?" his croak was far from laughter. "Well enough, I can trade these. And if I earn my bread so, then no man need trouble me. It is young to learn that all one's life must be spent walking a dark road, turning never into any welcoming door along the way."

Sharvana was silent. Suddenly she put out her hand, caught his before he could draw back, turning it palm-up in the lamplight.

He would have jerked free if he could, but in that moment her strength was as great as that of any laboring smith, and she had him pinned. Now she leaned forward to study the lines on the flesh so exposed.

"No foreseeing!" He cried that. The owl stirred and lifted its sound wing.

"Am I telling you?" she asked. "Have it as you wish, Collard. I have said naught." She released his wrist.

He was uneasy, drawing back his hand quickly, rubbing the fingers of the other about that wrist as if he would erase some mark she had left there.

"I must be going." He caught up the parchment mask—that he would try on only in his own hut where none could see his face between the taking off of one covering and the putting on of another.

"Go with the good will of the house." Sharvana used the farewell of their people. But somehow those words eased his spirit a little.

Time passed. All avoided Collard's hut, he invited no visitors, not even his father. Nor did another trader come. Instead there was news from the greater world



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outside the Dale, a world which seemed to those of Ghyll that of a songsmith.

When the Lord Vescys had wedded, his second wife had had already a daughter, though few had heard of her. But now the story spread throughout all of Ghyll and to the out-farms and steads beyond.

For a party had ridden to the Keep, and thereafter there was much cleaning and ordering of the rooms in the mid-tower. It was that Vescys was sending his daughter, the Lady Jacinda, to the country, for she sickened in the town.

"Sickened!" Collard, on his way to the well, paused in the dark, for the voice of his sister-in-law Nicala was sharp and ringing in the soft dusk. "This is no new thing. When Dame Matild had me come into the rooms to see how much new herb rushing was needed for the undercarpeting, she spoke freely enough. The young lady has never been better than she is now—a small, twisted thing, looking like a child, not a maid of years like to wed. Not that our lord will ever find one to bed with her unless he sweetens the bargain with such dowry as even a High Lord's daughter could bring!

"The truth of it is, as Dame Matild said—the new Lady Gwennan, she wants not this daughter near her. Very delicate she is, and says she cannot bear my lord a straight son if she sees even in bower and at table such a twisted, crooked body."

Collard set his pail noiselessly down and moved a step or two nearer the window. For the first time in seasons curiosity stirred in him. He willed Nicala to continue.

Which she did, though he gained little more facts. Until Broson growled he wanted his mulled ale, and she went to clatter at the hearth. Collard, once more in his hut, did not reach for his tools, but looked into the flames in the fireplace. He had laid aside his mask, and now he rubbed his hands slowly together while he considered word by word what he had overheard.

This Lady Jacinda—so she was to be thrust out of sight, into a country Keep where her kin need not look at her? Oh, he knew the old belief that a woman

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carrying dared not see anything or anyone misshapen, lest it mark the babe in her womb. And Lord Vescys would certainly do all he could to assure the coming of a son. There would be no considering the Lady Jacinda. Did she care? Or would she be glad, as he had, to find a place away from sight of those who saw her not like them?

Had she longed to be free of that and would be pleased to come to Ghyll? And was it harder for her, a maid, to be so, than it was for him? For the first time Collard was pulled out of his dreams and his bitterness, to think of someone living, breathing, walking this world.

He arose and picked up the lamp. With it in hand, he went to a wall shelf and held the light to fully illumine the figures there. There were a goodly company of them, beasts and humanoid together. Looking upon them critically, something stirred in his mind, not quite a dream memory.

Collard picked several up, turned them about. Though he did not really look at them closely now, he was thinking. In the end he chose one which seemed right for his purpose.

Bringing the figure back to the table he laid out his tools. What he had was a small beast of horselike form. It was posed rearing, not as in battle but as if it gambled in joyous freedom. But it was not a horse, for from between its delicate ears sprang a single horn.

Laying it on its side, Collard went to work on the base. It was cockcrow when he was done. And now the dancing unicorn had become a seal, its base graven to print a J with a small vine tracery about it.

Collard pushed back from the table. The need which had set him to work was gone. Why had he done this? He was tempted almost to sweep the piece into the melting pot so he could not see it again. But he did not, only pushed it away, determined to forget his folly.

He did not witness the entrance of the Lord Vescys and his daughter, though all the rest of Ghyll gathered. But he heard later that the Lady Jacinda came in

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a horse litter, and that she was so muffled by cloaks and covers that only her face could be seen. It was true that she was small and her face very pale and thin.

"Not make old bones, that one won't," he heard Nicala affirm. "I heard that Dame Matild has already sent for Sharvana. The lady brought only her old nurse and she is ailing, too. There will be no feasting at Ghyll Keep." There was regret in her voice, not, Collard believed, for the plight of the Lady Jacinda, but rather that the stir at the Keep would be soon over, with none of the coming and going which the villagers might enjoy as a change in their lives.

Collard ran fingers along the side of his mask. For all his care it was wearing thin. He might visit Sharvana soon. But why, his hard honesty made him face the truth, practice such excuses? He wanted to hear of the lady and how she did in a body which imprisoned her as his did him. So with the coming of dark he went. But at the last moment he took the seal, still two-minded over it.

There was a light in Sharvana's window. He gave his own private knock and slipped in at her call. To his surprise she sat on her stool by the fireplace, her journey cloak still about her shoulders, though its hood had slipped back. Her hands lay in her lap and there was a kind of fatigue about her he had never seen before.

Collard went to her quickly, took her limp hands in his.

"What is it?"

"That poor little one, Collard, cruel—cruel—"

"The Lady Jacinda?"

"Cruel," she repeated. "Yet she is so brave, speaking me fair and gentle even when I needs must hurt her poor body. Her nurse, ah, she is old and for all her love of her lady can do little to ease her. They traveled at a pace which must have wracked her. Yet I would judge she made no word of complaint. Just as she has never spoken out against her banishment, or so her nurse told me privately after I had given a

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soothing draught and seen her asleep. But it is a cruel thing to bring her here—”

Collard squatted on his heels, listening. It was plain that the Lady Jacinda had won Sharvana's support. But at length she talked herself quiet and drank of the herb tea he brewed for her. Nor did she ask why he had come, seemed only grateful that he was there. At last, to shake her out of bleak thoughts, he took the seal out of his belt wallet and set it in the lamplight.

It had been fashioned of that same strange metal which had been his bane. He was drawing on that more and more, for it seemed to him that those pieces he fashioned of that were his best and came the closest to matching his dream memories. Now it glowed in the light.

Sharvana drew a deep breath, taking it up. When she looked upon the seal in the base she nodded.

“Well done, Collard. I shall see this gets to her hand—”

“Not so!” Now he wanted to snatch it back but somehow his hand would not obey his wish.

“Yes.” She was firm. “And, Collard, if she asks—you will bring others. If for even the short space of the fall of a drop of water you can make her forget what her life is, then you have done a great thing. Bring to me the happy ones, those which will enchant her—perhaps even make her smile.”

So Collard culled his collection, startled to find how few he had which were “happy.” Thus he set to work, and oddly enough now his dream people he remembered as beautiful or with an amusing oddness.

Twice had he made visits to Sharvana with his offerings. He was working only with the strange metal now and found it easy to shape. But the third time she came to him, which was so unusual he was startled.

“The Lady Jacinda wants to see you, to thank you face to face.”

“Face to face!” Collard interrupted her. His hands went up to cover even that mask in a double veiling of his “face.”

Then Sharvana's eyes flashed anger. “You are—or you

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were—no coward, Collard. Do you so fear a poor, sick maid who wants only to give you her thanks? She has fretted about this until it weighs on her mind. You have given her pleasure, do not spoil it. She knows how it is with you, and she has arranged for you to come by night, through the old posten gate, I with you. Do you now say 'no'?"

He wanted to, but found he could not. For there had grown in him the desire to see the Lady Jacinda. He had been, he thought, very subtle in his questioning of Sharvana, perhaps too subtle for the bits he had learned he had not been able to fit into any mind picture. Now he found himself agreeing.

Thus, with Sharvana as his guide, Collard came to the bower of the Lady Jacinda, trying to walk as straight as his crooked body would allow, his mask tightly fastened against all eyes, most of all hers.

She was very small, even as they said, propped with cushions and well covered with furred robes, as she sat in a chair which so overtopped her with its tall back that she seemed even smaller. Her hair was long and the color of dark honey, and it lay across her hunched shoulders in braids bound with bell-hung ribbons. But for the rest she was only a pale, thin face and two white hands resting on the edge of a board laid across her lap for a table. On that board marched all the people and beasts he had sent to her. Now and then she caressed one with a fingertip.

Afterward he could not really remember their greeting to one another. It was rather as if two old friends, long parted, came together after many seasons of unhappiness, to sit in the sun and just enjoy warmth and their encounter. She asked him of his work, and he told her of the dreams. And then she said something which did linger in his mind:

"You are blessed, Collard-of-the-magic-fingers, that you can make your dreams live. And I am blessed that you share them with me. Now—name these—"

Somehow he began to give names to each. And she nodded and said:

"That is just right! You have named it aright!"

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It was a dream itself, he afterward thought, as he stumbled back to the village beside Sharvana, saying nothing as he wavered along, for he was reliving all he could remember, minute by minute.

With the morn he awoke after short hours of sleep with the urgency to be at work again. And he labored throughout the day with the feeling that this was a task which must be done and he had little time in which to do it.

What he wrought now was not any small figure but a hall in miniature—such a hall as would be found, not in the small Keep of Ghyll, but perhaps in the hold of a High Lord. Scented wood for paneling, metal—the strange metal wherever it could be used.

Exhausted, he slept. He ate at times when hunger pinched him hard, but time he did not count—nor how long before he had it done.

He sat studying it carefully, marking the furnishing. There were two high seats upon a dais. Those were empty—and that was not right. Collard rubbed his hand across his face, the rough scar tissue there for the first time meant nothing to him. There was something lacking—and he was so tired. He could not think.

He staggered away from the table, dropped upon his bed. And there he slept so deeply he believed he did not dream. Yet when he woke he knew what it was he must do. Again came that feeling of time's pressure, so he begrudged the moments it took to find food to eat.

Once more he wrought and worked with infinite care. When he had done, with that passing of time he did not mark, he had the two who must sit on those high seats and he placed them therein.

She—no twisted, humped body, but straight and beautiful, free to ride, to walk, to run as she never had been. Yet her face, it was Jacinda and none could deny it.

The man—Collard turned him around, surveying him carefully. No, this was no face he knew, but it had come to him as the right one. And when he put them

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both into the high hall, he looked about the hut with new eyes.

He rose and washed and dressed in his poor best, for to him for some years now clothing was merely to cover the body, not for pleasure. Then he put away all his tools, those he had made himself. Afterward he gathered up all the figures, those which were too grotesque or frightening, the first he had made. These he threw one by one into the melting pot.

Putting a wrapping of cloth about the hall he picked it up. It was heavy to carry and he must go slowly. But when he went outside the village was astir, lights of street torches such as were used only on great occasions were out. And the Keep was also strung with such torches.

A cold finger of fear touched Collard, and he hobbled by the back way to Sharvana's cottage. When he knocked upon her door he was sweating, though the wind of night was chill enough to bring shivers to those it nipped.

When she did not call, Collard was moved to do what he had never done before; his hand sought the latch and he entered unbidden. Strange scents filled the air and the light of two candles set one at either end of the table burned blue as he had never seen. Between those candles lay certain things he guessed were of the Wise Craft: a roll of parchment spread open with two strange-colored rocks to hold it so, a basin of liquid which shimmered and gave off small sparks, a knife crossed with a rune-carved wand.

Sharvana stood there, looking at him. He feared she might be angry at his coming, but it seemed more as if she had been waiting for him, for she beckoned him on. And though heretofore he had been shy of her secrets, this time he went to her, with the feeling that something was amiss and time grew shorter with each breath.

He did not set down his burden on the table until Sharvana, again without speaking, waved him to do so. She pulled free the cloth and in the blue candle flame the small hall—Collard gasped. For a moment or two

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it was as if he had stood at a distance and looked into room which was full-sized—real.

“So—that is the answer.” Sharvana spoke slowly. She leaned closer, studying it all, as if she must make sure it was fit for some purpose of her own. She straightened again, her eyes now on Collard.

“Much has happened, you have not heard?”

“Heard what? I have been busied with this. The Lady Jacinda—?”

“Yes. The Lord Vescys died of a fever. It seems that his new lady was disappointed in those hopes which made it necessary to send the Lady Jacinda here. His only heir is his daughter. She is no longer forgotten, and by those who mean her no good. The Lady Gwennan has sent to fetch her—she is to be married forthwith to the Lady’s brother Huthart, that they may keep the lands and riches. No true marriage, and how long may she live thereafter—with them wishing what she brings—not her?”

Collard’s hands tightened on the edge of the table as he listened. Sharvana’s words were a rain of blows, hurting more than any pain of body.

“She—she must not go!”

“No? Who is to stop her, to stand in the path of those who would fetch her? She has bought a little time by claiming illness, lying in bed. Her nurse and I together have afrighted the ladies of the household sent to fetch her by foreseeing death on the road. And that they fear—*before* she is wedded. Now they speak of the Lord Huthart riding here, wedding her on her deathbed if this be it.”

“What—”

Sharvana swept on. “This night I called on powers which I have never dared to trouble before, as they can be summoned only once or twice by a Wise Woman. They have given me an answer—if you will aid—”

“How?”

“There is a shrine of the Old Ones—high in the northern craigs. That power which once dwelt there—perhaps it can be summoned again. But it must have a focus point to work through. You have that—” *she*



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pointed to the hall. "There sits the Lady Jacinda as she should be, wrought of metal once worked by the Old Ones themselves. How better can power be summoned? But this must be taken to the shrine, and the time is very short."

Collard once more looped the cloth about the hall. He was sure of nothing now save that Sharvana herself believed in the truth of what she said. And if she was right— If she was wrong, what could he do? Try to strike down those who would take the lady away or wed her by force? He—the monster one?

Better believe that Sharvana was right. No one could deny that the Old Ones could still show power if they would; there were too many tales of such happenings. Sharvana had caught up a bag, pushed into it two unlit candles, a packet of herbs.

"Set what you carry on mid-stone," she told him, "light a candle on either side of it, even as you see them here. Give a pinch of herb powder to each flame when it is lit. Call then three times upon Talann. I shall go back to the Keep, do what I can to delay matters there. But hurry!"

"Yes." He was already on his way to the door.

Run he could not. The best he could produce was a shambling trot and that was hard to keep over rough ground. But at least he was near the craigs. Doubtless the house of the Wise Woman had always been there for a reason to be close to the shrine of the Old Ones.

Crossing the fields was not too hard, but the climb which followed taxed all his strength and wit. There was a path—perhaps in fairer weather was it easier to follow. But now it proved hard in the dark. Until Collard saw that there was a faint glow of light from what he carried, and he twitched off part of the cloth so that there was radiance from the metal showing.

Twice he slipped and fell, both times rising bruised and bloody, yet he kept on doggedly, more careful of what he carried than his own warped body. He was so tired that he must force himself on inch by painful inch. Now and again overlying that nightmare way he

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could see the white face of the Lady Jacinda, and there was that in her eyes which kept him struggling.

So he came to the ancient shrine. It was a cleft in the rock, smoothed by the arts of men—or whatever creatures once gathered here—and there was a band of badly eroded carving. Collard thought he could make out in that hints of his dream creatures. But he focused his attention to the stone set directly before the cleft. It was shaped like the crescent moon, its horns pointing outward so Collard stood between them as he set the hall on the altar and took away the covering.

With shaking hands he put up the candles, drew out his tinderbox to light them. Then the pinch of herb for each. His hand shook so he had to steady it with the other as he followed Sharvana's orders.

There was a puff of scented smoke. Collard leaned against the moon altar as he cried out in the best voice he could summon—no louder than the hoarse croak of a fen frog:

“Talann, Talann, Talann!”

Collard did not know what he expected. The Old Power was fearsome—he might be blasted where he stood. But when nothing came, he fell to the ground, not only overcome by weariness, but in black despair of mind. Old Power—perhaps too old and long since gone!

Then—was it in his mind?—or did it echo from the rocks about him, tolled in some deep voice as if the ridge itself gave tongue?

“What would you?”

Collard did not try to answer in words; he was too dazed, too awed. He made of his feelings a plea for the Lady Jacinda.

From where he crouched on the frost-chilled rock his eyes were on a level with the hall. It shone in splendor, more and more as if a hundred, a thousand lamps were lit within. He thought he could hear a distant murmur of voices, a sound of lute-playing—warmth—sweet odors—and life—swelling life!

For Jacinda—life for her! Like this—as it should have been! No words—just the knowledge that this was **what**

## SPELL OF THE WITCH WORLD

should have been had matters not gone fearfully astray in another time and place.

Warmth—light—around him! He was not crouched in the cold, he was sitting—looking down a hall—around him— No! For a moment he remembered what must be the truth—he was dreaming again!

But this dream—he pushed aside all doubts. This dream he could claim, it was his to keep, to hold forever! His dream—and hers!

Collard turned his head. She was watching him, a small smile on her lips, welcoming— And in her eyes—what glory in her eyes! He put forth his hand and hers came quickly to meet it.

“My lord—”

For a moment he was troubled. “We dream—”

“Do we? Then let us claim this dream together, and claiming it, make it real!”

He did not quite understand, but she answered his uncertainty somehow. He began to forget, as she had already resolutely forgotten.

There was a shining pool of strange metal on the altar. It began to flow, to cascade to the ground, to sink into the waiting earth which would safe-hide it forever.

In the Keep Sharvana and the nurse each snuffed a candle by a curtained bed, nodded thankfully to one another.

But in the hall wrought by Collard there was high-feasting and an everlasting dream.