THE GLITTERING PLAIN; OR, THE LAND OF LIVING MEN.

BY WILLIAM MORRIS, AUTHOR OF "THE EARTHLY PARADISE."

CHAPTER VII.

ALLBLITHE pondered his answer a while with downcast eyes and said at last: "Have ye a mind to ransom me, now that I have walked into the trap?"

"There is no need to talk of ransom," said the elder; "thou mayst go out of this house when thou wilt, nor will any meddle with thee if thou strayest about the Isle when I have set a mark on thee and given thee a token; nor wilt thou be hindered if thou hast a mind to leave the Isle, if thou canst find means thereto; moreover as long as thou art in the Isle, in this house mayst thou abide, eating and drinking and resting with us."

"How then may I leave this Isle?" said Hallblithe.

The elder laughed: "In a ship," said he.

"And when," said Hallblithe, "shall I find a ship that shall carry me?"

Said the old carle, "Whither wouldest thou my son?"

Hallblithe was silent a while thinking what answer he should make; then he said: "I would go to the Land of the Glittering Plain."

"Son," said the elder, "a ship shall not be lacking thee for that voyage; thou mayst go to-morrow morn. And I bid thee abide here to-night, and thy cheer shall not be ill. Yet if thou wilt believe my word, it will be well for thee to say as little as thou mayst to any man here, and that little as little proud as maybe: for our folk are short of temper and thou knowest there is no might against many. Indeed it is not unlike that they will not speak one word to thee, and if that be so, thou hast no need to open thy mouth to them. And now I will tell thee that it is good that thou hast chosen to go to the Glittering Plain. For if thou wert otherwise minded, I wot not how thou wouldest get thee a keel to carry thee, and the wings have not yet begun to sprout on thy shoulders, raven though thou be. Now I am glad that thou art going thy ways to the Glittering Plain to-morrow; for thou wilt be good company to me on the way; and I deem that thou wilt be no churl when thou art glad."

"What!" said Hallblithe, "art thou wending thither, thou old man?"

"Yea," said he, "nor shall any other be on the ship save thou and I, and the mariners who wait us; and they forsooth shall not go aland there. Why should I not go, since there are men to bear me aboard?"

Said Hallblithe, "And when thou art come aland there, what wilt thou do?"
"Thou shalt see, my son," said the long-hoary. "It may be that thy good wishes shall be of avail to me. But now since all this may only be if I live through this night, and since my heart hath been warmed by the good mead, and thy fellowship, and whereas I am somewhat sleepy, and it is long past noon, go forth into the hall, and leave me to sleep, that I may be as sound as Eld will let me be to-morrow. And as for thee, folk, both men and women shall presently come into the hall, and I deem not that any shall meddle with thee; but if so be that any challenge thee, whatsoever may be his words, answer thou to him, 'The House of the Undying,' and there will be an end of it. Only look thou to it that no naked steel cometh out of thy scabbard. Go now, and if thou wilt, go out of doors; yet art thou safer within doors, and nigher unto me."

So Hallblithe went back into the main hall, and the sun had gotten round now, and was shining into the hall through the clerestory windows, so that he saw clearly all that was therein. And he deemed the hall fairer within than without; and especially over the shut-beds were many stories carven in the panelling, and Hallblithe beheld them gladly. But of one thing he marvelled, that whereas he was in an island of the strong-thieves of the waters and in their very home and chiefest habitation, there were no ships or seas pictured in that imagery, but fair groves and gardens, with flowery grass and fruited trees all about. And there were fair women abiding therein, and lovely young men, and warriors, and strange beasts and many marvels, and the ending of wrath and beginning of pleasure and the crowning of love. And amidst these was pictured oft and again a mighty king with a sword by his side and a crown on his head; and ever was he smiling and joyous, so that Hallblithe, when he looked on him, felt of better heart and smiled back on the carven image.

So while Hallblithe looked on these things, and pondered his case carefully, all alone as he was in that alien hall, he heard a noise without of talking and laughter, and presently the patterning of feet therewith, and then women came into the hall, a score or more, some young, some old, some fair enough, and some hard-featured and uncomely, but all above the stature of the women whom he had seen in his own land.

So he stood amidst the hall-floor and abided them; and they saw him and his shining war-gear, and ceased their talking and laughter, and drew round about him, and gazed at him; but none said aught, till an old crone came forth from the ring, and said: "Who art thou standing under weapons in our hall?"

He knew not what to answer, and held his peace; and she spake again: "Whither wouldest thou, what seekest thou?"

Then answered Hallblithe: "The House of the Undying."

None answered, and the other women all fell away from him at once, and went about their business hither and thither through the hall. But the old crone took him by the hand, and led him up to the dais, and set him next to the midmost high-seat. Then she made as if she would do off his war-gear, and he would not gainsay her, though he deemed that foes might be anear; for in sooth he trusted in the old carle that he would not bewray him, and moreover he deemed it would be unmanly not to take the risks of the guesting, according to the custom of that country.

So she took his armour and his weapons and bore them off to a shut-bed next to that wherein lay the ancient man, and she laid the gear within it, all save the spear, which she laid on the wall pins above; and she made signs to him that therein he was to lie; but she spake no word to him. Then she brought him the hand-washing water in a basin of latten, and a goodly towel therewith, and when he had washed she went away from him, but not far.

This while the other women were busy about the hall, some swept the floor down, and when it was swept strawed thereon rushes and handfuls of wild thyme: some went into the buttery and bore forth the boards and the trestles: some went to the chests and brought out the rich hangings, the goodly bankers and dorsars, and did them on the walls: some bore in the stoops and horns and beakers, and some went their ways and came not back a while, for they were busied about the cooking. But whatever they did, none hailed him, or heeded him more than if he had been an image, as he sat there looking on. None save the old woman who brought him the fore-supper, to wit a great horn of mead, and cakes and dried fish.

So was the hall arrayed for the feast very fairly, and Hallblithe sat there while the sun westered and the house grew dim, and dark at last, and they lighted the candles up and down the hall. But a little after these were lit, a great horn was wined close without, and thereafter came the clatter of arms about the door, and exceeding tall
weaponed men came in, one score and five, and strode two by two up to the foot of the dais, and stood there in a row. And Hallblithe deemed their war-gear exceeding good; they were all clad in ring-locked byrnes, and had steel helms on their heads with garlands of gold wrought about them, and they bore spears in their hands, and white shields hung at their backs.

Now came the women to them and unarmed them; and under their armour their raiment was black; but they had gold rings on their arms, and golden collars about their necks.

So they strode up the dais and took their places on the high seat, not heeding Hallblithe any more than if he were an image of wood. Nevertheless that man sat next to him who was the chieftain of all and sat in the midst of the high seat; and he bore his sheathed sword in his hand and laid it on the board before him, and he was the only man of those chieftains who had a weapon.

But when these were set down there was again a noise without, and there came in a throng of men armed and unarmed who took their places on the endlong benches up and down the hall; with these came women also, who most of them sat amongst the men, but some busied them with the serving: all these men were great of stature, but none so big as the chieftains on the high-seat.

Now came the women in from the kitchen bearing the meat, whereof no little was flesh-meat, and all was of the best. Hallblithe was duly served like the others, but still none spake to him or looked on him even; though amongst themselves they spoke in big, rough voices so that the rafters of the hall rang again.

When they had eaten their fill the women filled round the cups and the horns to them, and those vessels were both great and goodly. But ere they fell to drinking uprose the chieftain who sat furthest from the midst of the high-seat on the right and cried a health: “The Treasure of the Sea!” Then they all stood up and shouted, women as well as men, and emptied their horns and cups to that health. Then stood up the man furthest on the left and cried out, “Drink a health to the Undying King!” And again all men rose up and shouted ere they drank. Other healths they drank, as the “Cold Keel,” the “Windworn Sail,” the “Quivering Ash” and the “Furrowed Beach.” And the wine mead flowed like rivers in that hall of the Wild Men. As for Hallblithe, he drank what he would, but stood not up, nor raised his cup to his lips when a health was drunk; for he knew not whether these men were his friends or his foes, and he deemed it would be little-minded to drink to their healths, lest he might be drinking death and confusion to his own kindred.

But when men had drunk a while, again a horn blew at the nether end of the hall, and straightway folk arose from the endlong tables, and took away the boards and trestles, and cleared the floor and stood against the wall; then the big chieftain beside Hallblithe arose and cried out: “Now let man dance with maid, and be we merry! Music, strike up!”

Then flew the fiddle-bows and twanged the harps, and the carles and queens stood forth on the floor; and all the women were clad in black raiment, albeit embroidered with knots and wreaths of flowers. A while they danced and then suddenly the music fell, and they all went back to their places. Then the chieftain in the high seat arose and took a horn from his side, and blew a great blast on it that filled the hall; then he cried in a loud voice: “Be we merry! Let the champions come forth!”

Men shouted gleefully thereat, and straightway ran into the hall from out the screens three tall men clad all in black armour with naked swords in their hands, and stood amidst the hall-floor, somewhat on one side, and clashed their swords on their shields and cried out: “Come forth ye Champions of the Raven!”

Then leapt Hallblithe from his seat and set his hand on his left side, but no sword was there; so he sat down again, remembering the warning of the Elder, and none heeded him.

Then there came into the hall slowly and mournfully three men-at-arms, clad and weaponed like the warriors of his folk, with the image of the Raven on their helms and shields. So Hallblithe refrained him, for besides that this seemed like to be a fair battle of three against three, he doubted some snare, and he determined to look on and abide.

So the champions fell to laying on strokes that were no child’s play, though Hallblithe doubted if the edges bit, and it was but a little while before the Champions of the Raven fell one after another before the Wild Men, and folk drew them by the heels.
THE GLITTERNING PLAIN; OR, THE LAND OF LIVING MEN. 757

out into the buttery. Then arose great laughter and jeering, and exceedingly wroth was Hallblithe; howbeit he refrained him because he remembered all he had to do. But the three Champions of the Sea strode round the hall tossing up their swords and catching them as they fell, while the horns blew up behind them.

After a while the hall grew hushed, and the chieftain arose and cried: "Bring in now some sheaves of the harvest we win, we lads of the oat and the arrow!"

Then was there a stir at the scree doors, and folk pressed forward to see, and, lo, there came forward a string of women, led in by two weaponed carles; and the women were a score in number, and they were barefoot and their hair hung loose and their gowns were ungirt, and they were chained together wrist to wrist, yet had they gold at arm and neck: there was silence in the hall when they stood amidst of the floor.

Then indeed Hallblithe could not refrain himself, and he leapt from his seat and on to the board, and over it, and ran down the hall, and came to those women and looked them in the face one by one, while no man spake in the hall. But the Hostage was not amongst them; nay forsooth, they none of them favoured of the daughters of his people, though they were comely and fair; so that again Hallblithe doubted if this were aught but a feast-hall play done to anger him; whereas there was but little grief in the faces of those damsels, and more than one of them smiled wantonly in his face as he looked on them.

So he turned about and went back to his seat having said no word, and behind him arose much mocking and jeering; but it angered him little now; for he remembered the rede of the elder and how that he had done according to his bidding, so that he deemed the gain was his. So sprang up talk in the hall betwixt man and man, and folk drank about and were merry, till the chieftain arose again and smote the board with the flat of his sword, and cried out in a loud and angry voice, so that all could hear: "Now let there be music and minstrelsy ere we wed bedward!"

Therewith fell the hubbub of voices, and there came forth three men with great harps, and a fourth man with them, who was the minstrel; and the harpers smote their harps so that the roof rang therewith, and the noise though it was great, was tuneable, and when they had played thus a little while, they abated their loudness somewhat, and the minstrel lifted his voice and sang:

The land lies black
With winter's lack,
The wind blows cold
Round field and fold;
All folk are within,
And but weaving they win.

Where from finger to finger the shuttle flies fast,
And the eyes of the singer look fain on the cast,
As he singeth the story of summer undone
And the barley-sheaves hoary ripe under the sun.

Then the maidens stay
By the blue web's side,
The light hung sley,
While hand in hand
And the shuttles bide
With the carles they stand.

But ere to the measure the fiddles strike up,
And the elders yet treasure the last of the cup,
There stand they a-hearkening the blast from the lift,
And e'en night is a-darkening more under the drift.

There safe in the hall
Of the valiant stead;
They bless the wall,
And the hands they praise
And the roof o'er head
Of the olden days.

Then through the storm's roaring the fiddles break out,
And they think not of warring, but cast away doubt,
And, man before maiden, their feet tread the floor,
And their hearts are unladen of all that they bore.

But what winds are o'er-cold
For the undoomed to die?
For the heart of the bold?
Dark night and dread wind,
What seas are o'er-high
But the haven we find.

Then ashore mid the flurry of stone-washing surf!
Cloud-hounds the moon worry, but light lies the turf;
Lo the long dale before us! the lights at the end,
Though the night darkens o'er us, bid whither to wend.
THE GLITTERING PLAIN; OR, THE LAND OF LIVING MEN.

Who beateh the door
By the foot-smitten floor?
What guests are these
From over the seas?
Take shield and sword
For their greeting-word.

Lo, lo, the dance ended! Lo, midst of the hall
The fallow blades blended! Lo, blood on the wall!
Who liveth, who dieth? O men of the sea,
For peace the folk crieth: our masters are ye.

Now the dale lies grey
At the dawn of day;
And fair feet pass
O'er the wind-worn grass:
They turn back to gaze
On the roof of old days.

Come tread ye the oaken floored hall of the sea!
Be your hearts yet unbroken; so fair as ye be,
That kings are abiding unwedded to gain
The news of our riding the steeds of the main.

Much shouting and laughter arose at the song's end; and men sprang up and waved their swords above the cups, while Hallblithe sat scowling down on their merriment. Lastly arose the chieftain and called out loudly for the good-night cup, and it went round and all men drank. Then the horn blew for bed, and the chieftains went to their chambers, and the others went to the out-bowers or laid them down on the hall floor, and in a little while none stood upright thereon. So Hallblithe arose, and went to the shut-bed appointed for him, and laid him down and slept dreamlessly till the morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

HALLBLITHE TAKETH SHIP AGAIN.

When he awoke, the sun shone into the hall by the windows above the buttery and there were but few folk left therein. But when Hallblithe was clad, the old woman came to him, and took him by the hand, and led him to the board, and signed to him to eat of what was thereon; and he did so; and by then he was done, came folk who went into the shut-bed where lay the long-hoary, and they brought him forth bed and all and bare him out a doors. Then the crone brought Hallblithe his arms and he did on byrny and helm, girt his sword to his side, took his spear in his hand and went out a-doors; and there close by the porch lay the long-hoary upon a horse litter. So Hallblithe came up to him and gave him the seel of the day: and the elder said: "Good morrow, son, I am glad to see thee. Did they try thee hard last night?"

And Hallblithe saw two of the carles that had borne out the elder, that they were talking together, and they looked on him and laughed mockingly; so he said to the elder: "'Even fools may try a wise man, and so it befel last night. Yet, as thou seest, mumming hath not slain me."

Said the old man: "What thou sawest was not all mumming; it was done according to our customs; and well nigh all of it had been done, even hast thou not been there. Nay, I will tell thee; at some of our feasts it is not lawful to eat either for the chieftains or the carles, till a champion hath given forth a challenge, and been answered and met, and the battle fought to an end. But ye men, what hindereth you to go to the horses' heads and speed on the road the chieftain who is no longer way-worthy?"

So they ran to the horses and set off down the dale by the river-side, and just as Hallblithe was going to follow afoot, there came a swain from behind the house leading a red horse which he brought to Hallblithe as one who bids mount. So Hallblithe leapt into the saddle and at once caught up with the litter of the long-hoary down along the river. They passed by no other house, save here and there a cot beside some fold or byre; they went easily, for the way was smooth by the river-side; so in less than two hours they came where the said river ran into the sea. There was no beach there, for the water was ten fathom deep close up to the lip of the land; but there was a great haven land-locked all but a narrow out-gate betwixt the sheer black cliffs. Many a great ship might have lain in that haven; but as now there was but one lying there, a round-ship not very great, but exceeding trim and meet for the sea.

There without more ado the carles took the elder from the litter and and bore him aboard, and Hallblithe followed him as if all had been so appointed. They laid
the old man adown on the poop under a tilt of precious web, and so went aback by
the way that they had come; and Hallblithe went and sat down beside the long
hoary, who spake to him and said: "Seest thou, son, how easy it is for us twain to
be shipped for the land whither we would go? But as easy as it is for thee to go
thither whereas we are going, just so hard had it been for thee to go elsewhere.
Moreover I must tell thee that though many an one of the Isle of Ransom desireth
to go this voyage there shall none else go, till the world is a year older, and he who
shall go then shall be likest to me in all ways, both in eld and in feebleness, and in
gibing speech, and all else; and now that I am gone his name shall be the same as
that whereby ye may call me to-day, and that is Grandfather. Art thou glad or
sorry, Hallblithe?"

"Grandfather," said Hallblithe, "I can scarce tell thee: I move as one who hath no
will to weld one way or other. Meseems I am drawn to go thither whereas we are
going; therefore I deem that I shall find my beloved on the Glittering Plain: and
whatever befalleth afterward, let it be as it will!"

"Tell me, son," said the Grandfather, "how many women are there in the
world?"

"How may I tell thee?" said Hallblithe.

"Well, then," said the elder, "how many exceeding fair women are there?"

Said Hallblithe, "Indeed I wot not."

"How many of such hast thou seen?" said the Grandfather.

"Many," said Hallblithe; "the daughters of my folk are fair, and there will be
many other such amongst the aliens."

Then laughed the elder, and said: "Yet, my son, he who had been thy fellow
since thy sundering from thy beloved would have said that in thy deeming there is but
one woman in the world; or at least one fair woman: is it not so?"

Then Hallblithe reddened at first, as though he were angry; then he said: "Yea,
it is so."

Said the Grandfather in a musing way: "I wonder if before long I shall think of
it as thou dost."

Then Hallblithe gazed at him marvelling, and studied to see wherein lay the gibe
against himself; and the Grandfather beheld him, and laughed as well as he might,
and said: "Son, son, didst thou not wish me youth?"

"Yea," said Hallblithe, "but what ails thee to laugh so? What is it I have said
or done?"

"Nought, nought," said the elder, laughing still more, "only thou lookest so
mazed. And who knoweth what thy wish may bring forth."

Thereat was Hallblithe sore puzzled; but while he set himself to consider what the
old carle might mean uprose the hale and how of the mariners; they cast off the
hawisers from the shore, ran out the sweeps, and drove the ship through the haven-
gates.

It was a bright sunny day; within, the green water was oily smooth, without
the rippling waves danced merrily under a light breeze, and Hallblithe deemed the
wind to be fair; for the mariners shouted joyously and made all sail on the ship; and
she lay over and sped through the waves, casting off the seas from her black bows.
Soon were they clear of those swart cliffs, and it was but a little afterwards that the
Isle of Ransom was grown deep blue behind them and far away.

CHAPTER IX.

THEY COME TO THE LAND OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN.

As in the hall, so in the ship Hallblithe noted that the folk were merry and of many
words one with another, while to him no man cast a word saving the Grandfather. As
to Hallblithe, though he wondered much what all this betokened, and what the land
was whereto he was wending, he was no man to fear an un boded peril; and he said to
himself that whatever else betid, he should meet the Hostage on the Glittering Plain;
so his heart rose and he was of good cheer, and as the Grandfather had foretold, he
was a merry faring-fellow to him. Many a gibe the old man cast at him, and whiles
Hallblithe gave him back as good as he took, and whiles he laughed as the stroke
760 THE GLITTERING PLAIN; OR, THE LAND OF LIVING MEN.

got home and silenced him; and whiles he understood nought of what the 
elder said.

So wore the day and still the wind held fair, though it was light; and the sun set 
in a sky nigh cloudless, and there was nowhere any forecast of peril. But when 
night was come Halliblith lay down on a fair bed, which was light for him in the poop, 
and he soon fell asleep and dreamed not save such dreams as are but made up of 
bygone memories, and betokened nought, and are not remembered.

When he awoke, day lay broad on the sea, and the waves were little, the 
sky had but few clouds, the sun shone bright, and the air was warm and sweet-
breathed.

He looked aside and saw the old man sitting up in his bed, as ghastly as a dead man 
dug up again: his bushy eyebrows were wrinkled over his bleared old eyes, the long 
white hair dangled forlorn from his gaunt head; yet was his face smiling and he 
looked as happy as the soul within him could make the half-dead body. He turned 
now to Halliblith and said: "Thou art late awake: hast thou been waking earlier, 
the sooner had thine heart been gladdened. Go forward now, and gaze thy fill and 
come and tell me thereof."

"Thou art happy, Grandfather," said Halliblith, "what good tidings hath morn 
brought us?"

"The land! the land!" said the Long-hoary; "there are no longer tears in this 
old body, else should I be weeping for joy."

Said Halliblith: "Art thou going to meet some one who shall make thee glad 
before thou diest, old man?"

"Some one?" said the elder; "what one? Are they not all gone? burned, and 
drowned, and slain and died abroad? Some one, young man? Yea, forsooth some 
one indeed! Yea, the great warrior of the Wasters of the Shore; the Sea-eagle who 
bore the sword and the torch and the terror of the Ravagers over the coal-blue sea. It 
is myself, MYSELF that I shall find on the Land of the Glittering Plains, O young 
lover!"

Halliblith looked on him wondering as he raised his wasted arms toward the bows 
of the ship pitching down the slope of the sunlit sea, or climbing up it. Then again 
the old man fell back on his bed and muttered: "What fool’s work is this! that thou 
wert draw me on to talk loud, and waste my body with lack of patience. I will talk 
with thee no more, lest my heart swell and break, and quench the little spark of 
life within me."

Then Halliblith arose to his feet, and stood looking at him, wondering so much at 
his words, that for a while he forgot the land which they were nearing, though he had 
cought glimpses of it, as the bows of the round-ship fell downward into the hollow of 
the sea. The wind was but light, as hath been said, and the waves little under it, but 
there was still a smooth swell of the sea which came of breezes now dead, and the ship 
swallowed thereon and sailed but slowly.

In a while the old man opened his eyes again, and said in a low peevish voice: 
"Why standest thou staring at me? why hast thou not gone forward to look upon the 
land? True it is that ye Ravens are short of wits."

Said Halliblith: "Be not wrath, chieftain; I was wondering at thy words, which 
are exceeding marvellous; tell me more of this land of the Glittering Plain."

Said the Grandfather: "Why should I tell it thee? ask of the mariners. They all 
know more than thou dost."

"Thou knowest," said Halliblith, "that these men speak not to me, and take no 
more heed of me than if I were an image which they were carrying to sell to the next 
mighty man they may hap on.—Or tell me, thou old man," said he fiercely, "is it 
perchance a thrall-market whereto they are bringing me? Have they sold her there, 
and will they sell me also in the same place, but into other hands?"

"Tush!" said the Grandfather somewhat feebly, "this last word of thine is folly; 
there is no buying or selling in the land whereto we are bound. As to thine other 
word, that these men have no fellowship with thee, it is true: thou art my fellow, 
and the fellow of none else aboard. Therefore if I feel might in me, may be I will tell 
thee somewhat."

Then he raised his head a little and said: "The sun grows hot, the wind faileth us, 
and slow and slow are we sailing."

Even as he spoke there was a stir amidsthips, and Halliblith looked and beheld the
mariners handling the sweeps, and settling themselves on the rowing-benches. Said the elder: "There is noise amidships, what are they doing?"

"They are running out the long oars," said Hallblithe.

The old man raised himself a little again, and cried out in his shrill voice: "Good lads, brave lads! Thus would we do in the old time when we drew anear some shore, and the beacons were sending up smoke by day, and flame benights; and the shore-abiders did on their helms and trembled. Thrust her through lads! Thrust her along!" Then he fell back again, and said in a weak voice: "Make no more delay, guest, but go forward and look upon the land, and come back and tell me thereof, and then the tale may flow from me. Haste, haste!" So Hallblithe went down from the poop, and into the waist, where now the rowers were bending to their oars, and crying out fiercely as they tugged at the quivering ash; and he clomb on to the forecastle and went forward right to the dragon-head, and gazed long upon the land, while the dashing of the oar-blades made the semblance of a gale about the ship's black sides. Then he came back again to the Sea-eagle, who said to him:

"Son, what hast thou seen?"

"Right ahead lieth the land, and it is still a good way off. High rise the mountains there, but by seeming there is no snow on them; and though they are not blue like the mountains of the Isle of Ransom. Also it seemed to me as if fair slopes of woodland and meadow come down to the edge of the sea. But it is yet far away."

"Yea," said the elder, "is it so? Then will I not wear myself with making words for thee. I will rest rather, and gather might. Come again when an hour hath worn, and tell me what thou seest; and may happen then thou shalt have my tale!"

And he laid him down therewith and seemed to be asleep at once. And Hallblithe might not amend it; so he waited patiently till the hour had worn, and then went forward again, and looked long and carefully, and came back and said to the Sea-eagle:

"The hour is worn."

The old chieftain turned himself about and said: "What hast thou seen?"

Said Hallblithe: "The mountains are pale and high, and below them are hills dark with wood, and betwixt them and the sea is a fair space of meadow-land, and methought it was wide."

Said the old man: "Sawest thou a rocky skerry rising high out of the sea a-nigh the shore?"

"Nay," said Hallblithe. "If such there be, it is all blended with the meadows and the hills."

Said the Sea-eagle: "Abide the wearing of another hour, and come and tell me again, and then I may have a gainful word for thee."

And he fell asleep again. But Hallblithe abided, and when the hour was worn he went forward and stood on the forecastle. And this was the third shift of the rowers, and the stoutest men in the ship now held the oars in their hands, and the ship shook through all her length and breadth as they drove her over the waters.

So Hallblithe came aft to the old man and found him asleep; so he took him by the shoulder, and shook him and said: "Awake, faring-fellow, for the land is a-nigh."

So the old man sat up and said: "What hast thou seen?"

Said Hallblithe: "I have seen the peaks and cliffs of the far-off mountains; and below them are hills green with grass and dark with woods, and thence stretch soft green meadows down to the sea-strand, which is fair, and smooth, and yellow."

"Sawest thou the skerry?" said the Sea-eagle.

"Yea, I saw it," said Hallblithe, "and it rises sheer from out the sea about a mile from the yellow strand; but its rocks are black, like the rocks of the Isle of Ransom."

"Son," said the elder, "give me thine hands and raise me up a little." So Hallblithe took him and raised him up, so that he sat leaning against the pillows! and he looked not on Hallblithe, but on the bows of the ship, which now pitched but a little up and down, for the sea was laid quiet now. Then he cried in his shrill, piping voice: "It is the land! It is the land!"

But after a little while he turned to Hallblithe and spake: "Short is the tale to tell: thou hast wished me youth, and thy wish hath thriven; for to-day, ere the sun goes down thou shalt see me as I was in the days when I reaped the harvest of the
sea with sharp sword and hardy heart. For this is the land of the Undying King, who is our lord and our gift-giver; and to some he giveth the gift of youth renewed, and life that shall abide here the Gloom of the Gods. But none of us may come to the Glittering Plain and the King Undying without turning the back for the last time on the Isle of Ransom: nor may any men of the Isle come hither save those who are of the House of the Sea-eagle, and few of those, save the chieftains of the House, such as are they who sat by thee on the high-seat that even. Of these once in a while is chosen one of us, who is old and spent and past battle, and is borne to this land and the gift of the Undying. Forsooth some of us have no will to take the gift, for they say they are lifer to go to where they shall meet more of our kindred than dwell on the Glittering Plain and the Acre of the Undying; but as for me I was ever an overbearing and masterful man, and meseemeth it is well that I meet as few of our kindred as may be: for they are a strifeful race."

Hereat Hallblithe marvelled exceedingly, and he said: "And what am I in all this story? Why am I come hither with thy furtherance?"

Said the Sea-eagle: "We had a charge from the Undying King concerning thee, that we should bring thee hither alive and well, if so be thou camest to the Isle of Ransom. For what cause we had the charge I know not, nor do I greatly heed."

Said Hallblithe: "And shall I also have that gift of undying youth, and life while the world of men and gods endureth?"

"I must needs deem so," said the Sea-eagle, "so long as thou abidest on the Glittering Plain; and I see not how thou mayest ever escape thence."

Now Hallblithe heard him, how he said "escape," and thereat he was somewhat ill at ease, and stood and pondered a little. At last he said: "Is this then all that thou hast to tell me concerning the Glittering Plain?"

"By the treasure of the sea!" said the Elder, "I know no more of it. The living shall learn. But I suppose that thou mayest seek thy troth-plight maiden there all thou wilt. Or thou mayest pray the Undying King to have her thither to thee. What know I? At least, it is like that there shall be no lack of fair women there: or else the promise of youth renewed is nought and vain. Shall this not be enough for thee?"

"Nay," said Hallblithe.

"What!" said the elder, "must it be one woman only?"

"One only," said Hallblithe.

The old man laughed his thin mocking laugh, and said: "I will not assure thee but that the land of the Glittering Plain shall change all that for thee so soon as it touches the soles of thy feet."

Hallblithe looked at him steadily and smiled, and said: "Well is it then that I shall find the Hostage there; for then shall we be of one mind, either to sunder or to cleave together. It is well with me this day."

"And with me it shall be well ere long," said the Sea-eagle.

But now the rowers ceased rowing and lay on their oars, and the shipmen cast anchor; for they were but a bowshot from the shore, and the ship swung with the tide and lay side-long to the shore. Then said the Sea-eagle: "Look forth, shipmate, and tell me of the land."

And Hallblithe looked and said: "The yellow beach is sandy and shell-strewn, as I deem, and there is no great space of it betwixt the sea and the flowery grass; and a bowshot from the strand I see a little wood amidst which are fair trees blossoming."

"Seest thou any folk on the shore?" said the old man.

"Yea," said Hallblithe, "close to the edge of the sea go four; and by seeming three are women, for their long gowns flutter in the wind. And one of these is clad in saffron colour, and another in white, and another in watchet; but the carle is clad in dark red; and their raiment is all glistening as with gold and gems; and by seeming they are looking at our ship as though they expected somewhat."

Said the Sea-eagle: "Why now do the shipmen tarry and have not made ready the skiff? Swillers and belly-gods they be; slothful swine that forget their chieftain."

But even as he spake came four of the shipmen, and without more ado took him up, bed and all, and bore him down into the waist of the ship, whereunder lay the skiff with four strong rowers lying on their oars. These men made no sign to Hallblithe,
THE GLITTERING PLAIN; OR, THE LAND OF LIVING MEN. 703

nor took any heed of him; but he caught up his spear, and followed them and stood by as they lowered the old man into the boat. Then he set his foot on the gunwale of the ship and leapt down lightly into the boat, and none hindered or helped him; and he stood upright in the boat a goodly image of battle with the sun flashing back from his bright helm, his spear in his hand, his white shield at his back, and thereon the image of the Raven; but if he had been but a salt-boiling carle of the sea-side none would have heeded him less.

CHAPTER X.

THEY HOLD CONVERSE ON THE GLITTERING PLAIN.

Now the rowers lifted the ash-blades, and fell to rowing towards shore: and almost with the first of their strokes, the Sea-eagle moaned out: "Would we were there, oh, would we were there! Cold growth eld about my heart. Raven's Son, thou art standing up; tell me if thou canst see what these folk of the land are doing, and if any others have come thither?"

Said Hallblithe: "There are none others come, but kine and horses are feeding down the meadows. As to what those four are doing, the women are putting off their shoon, and girding up their raiment, as if they would wade the water toward us; and the carle, who was barefoot before, wendeth straight towards the sea, and there he standeth, for very little are the waves become."

The old man answered nothing, and did but groan for lack of patience; but presently when the water was yet waist deep the rowers stayed the skiff, and two of them slipped over the gunwale into the sea, and between them all they took up the chieftain on his bed and got him forth from the boat and went toward the strand with him; and the landsfolk met them where the water was shallower, and took him from their hands and bore him forth on to the yellow sand, and laid him down out of reach of the creeping ripple of the tide. Hallblithe withal slipped lightly out of the boat and waded the water after them. But the shipmen rowed back again to their ship, and presently Hallblithe heard the hale and how as they got up their anchor.

But when Hallblithe was come ashore, and was drawn near the folk of the land, the women looked at him askance, and they laughed and said, "Welcome to thee also, O young man!" And he beheld them, and saw that they were of the stature of the maidens of his own land; they were exceeding fair of skin and shapely of fashion, so that the nakedness of their limbs under their girded gowns, and all glistening with the sea was most lovely and dainty to behold. But Hallblitte knelt by the Sea-eagle to note how he fared, and said: "How is it with thee, O chieftain?"

The old man answered not a word, and he seemed to be asleep, and Hallblithe deemed that his cheeks were ruddier and his skin less wasted and wrinkled than aforetime. Then spake one of those women: "Fear not, young man; he is well and will soon be better." Her voice was as sweet as a spring bird in the morning; she was white-skinned and dark-haired, and full sweetly fashioned; and she laughed on Hallblithe, but not mockingly; and her fellows also laughed as though it were strange for him to be there. Then they did on their shoon again, and with the carle laid their hands to the bed whereon the old man lay, and lifted him up, and bore him forth on to the grass, turning their faces toward the flowery wood aforesaid; and they went a little way and then laid him down again and rested; and so on little by little, till they had brought him to the edge of the wood, and still he seemed to be asleep. Then the damsel who had spoken before, she with the dark hair, said to Hallblithe: "Although we have gazed on thee as if with wonder, this is not because we did not look to meet thee, but because thou art so fair and goodly a man: so abide thou here till we come back to thee from out of the wood."

Therewith she stroked his hand, and with her fellows lifted the old man once more, and they bore him out of sight into the thicket.

But Hallblithe went to and fro a dozen paces from the wood, and looked across the flowery meads and deemed he had never seen any so fair. And afar off toward the hills he saw a great roof arising, and thought he could see men also; and nigher to him were kine pasturing, and horses also, whereof some drew anear him and stretched out their necks and gazed at him; and they were goodly after their kind; and a fair stream of water came round the corner of the wood and ran down the meadows to the
sea; and Hallblithe went thereto and could see that there was but little ebb and flow of the tide on that shore; for the water of the stream was clear as glass, and the grass and flowers grew right down to its water; so he put off his helm and drank of the stream and washed his face and his hands therein, and then did on his helm again and turned back again toward the wood, feeling very strong and merry; and he lay down on the grass till the four folk of the country came out of the wood again, after they had been gone somewhat less than an hour, but the Sea-eagle was not with them: and he rose up and turned to them, and the carle saluted him and departed, going straight toward that far-away roof he had seen; and the women were left with Hallblithe, and they looked at him and he at them as he stood leaning on his spear.

Then said the black-haired damsel: “True it is, O spearman, that if we did not know of thee, our wonder would be great that a man so young and lucky-looking should have sought hither.”

“I wot not why thou shouldest wonder,” said Hallblithe; “I will tell thee presently wherefore I be come hither. But tell me is this the Land of the Glittering Plain?”

“Even so,” said the damsel, “dost thou not see how the sun shineth on it? Just so it shineth in the season that other folks call winter.”

“Some such marvel I thought to hear of,” said he; “for I have been told that the land is marvellous; and fair though these meadows be they are not marvellous to look on now: they are like other lands, though it may be fairer.”

“That may be,” she said; “we have nought but hearsay of other lands. If we ever knew them we have forgotten them.”

Said Hallblithe, “Is this land called also the Acre of the Undying?”

As he spake the words the smile faded from the damsel’s face; she and her fellows grew pale, and she said: “Hold thy peace of such words! They are not lawful for any man to utter here. Yet mayst thou call it the Land of the Living.”

He said: “I crave pardon for the rash word.”

Then they smiled again, and drew near to him, and caressed him with their hands, and looked on him lovingly; but he drew a little aback from them and said: “I have come hither seeking something which I have lost, the lack thereof grieveth me.”

Quoth the damsel, drawing nearer to him again: “Mayst thou find it, thou lovely man, and whatsoever else thou desirest.”

Then he said: “Hath a woman named the Hostage been brought hither of late days? A fair woman, bright-haired and gray-eyed, kind of countenance, soft of speech, yet outspoken and nought timorous; tall according to our stature, but very goodly of fashion; a woman of the House of the Rose, and my troth-plight maiden.”

They looked on each other and shook their heads, and the black-haired damsel spake: “We know of no such a woman nor of the kindred which thou namest.”

Then his countenance fell, and became piteous with desire and grief, and he bent his brows upon them, for they seemed to him light-minded and careless, though they were lovely.

But they shrank from him trembling and drew aback; for they had all been standing close to him beholding him with love, and she who had spoken most had been holding his left hand fondly. But now she said: “Nay, look not on us so bitterly! If the woman be not in the land this cometh not of our malice. Yet maybe she is here. For such as come hither keep not their old names, and soon forget them what they were. Thou shalt go with us to the King, and he shall do for thee what thou wilt; for he is exceeding mighty.”

Then was Hallblithe appeased somewhat; and he said: “Are there many women in the land?”

“Yea, many,” said that damsel.

“And many that are as fair as ye be?” said he. Then they laughed and were glad, and drew near to him again and took his hands and kissed them; and the black-haired damsel said: “Yea, yea, there be many as fair as we be, and some fairer,” and she laughed.

“And that King of yours,” said he, “how do you name him?”

“He is the King,” said the damsel.

“Hath he no other name?” said Hallblithe.

“We may not utter it,” she said; “but thou shalt see him soon, that there is nought but good in him and mightiness.”
CHAPTER XI.

THE SEA-EAGLE RENEWETH HIS LIFE.

But while they spake together thus came a man from out of the wood very tall of stature, red-bearded and black-haired, ruddy-cheeked, full-limbed, most joyous of aspect; a man by seeming of five and thirty winters. He strode straight up to Hallblithe, and cast his arms about him, and kissed his cheek, as if he had been an old and dear friend newly come from over seas.

Hallblithe wondered and laughed, and said: “Who art thou that dearest me so dear?”

Said the man: “Short is thy memory, Son of the Raven, that thou in so little space hast forgotten thy shipmate and thy faring-fellow; who gave thee meat and drink, and good rede in the Hall of the Ravagers.”

Therewith he laughed joyously and turned about to the three maidens, and took them by the hands and kissed their lips, while they fawned upon him lovingly.

Then said Hallblithe: “Hast thou verily gotten thy youth again, which thou badest me wish thee?”

“Yea, in good sooth,” said the red-bearded man; “I am the Sea-eagle of old days; and I have gotten my youth, and love therewithal, and somewhat to love moreover.”

Therewith he turned to the fairest of the damsels, and she was white-skinned and fragrant as the lily, rose-cheeked and slender, and the wind played with the long locks of her golden hair, which hung down below her knees; so he cast his arms about her and strained her to his bosom, and kissed her face many times, and she nothing loth, but caressing him with lips and hand. But the other two damsels stood by smiling and joyous; and they clapped their hands together and kissed each other for joy of the new lover; and at last fell to dancing and skipping about them like young lambs in the meadows of Spring-tide. But amongst them all stood up Hallblithe leaning on his spear with smiling lips and knitted brow; for he was pondering in his mind in what wise he might further his quest.

But after they had danced a while the Sea-eagle left his love that he had chosen and took a hand of either of the two other damsels, and led them tripping up to Hallblithe, and cried out: “Choose thou, Raven’s baby, which of these twain thou wilt have to thy mate; for scarcely shalt thou see better or fairer.”

But Hallblithe looked on them proudly and sternly, and the black-haired damsel hung down her head before him and said softly: “Nay, nay, sea-warrior; this one is too lovely to be our mate. Sweeter love abides him, and lips more longed for.”

Then stirred Hallblithe’s heart within him and he said: “O Eagle of the Sea, thou hast thy youth again: what then wilt thou do with it? Wilt thou not weary for the moonlit main, and the washing of waves and the dashing of spray, and thy fellows all glistening with the brine? Where now shall be the alien shore before thee, and the landing for fame, and departure for the gain of goods? Wilt thou forget the ship’s black side, and the dripping of the windward oars, as the squall falleth on when the sun hath arisen, and the sail tuggeth hard on the sheet, and the ship lieth over and the lads shout against the whistle of the wind? Has the spear fallen from thine hand, and hast thou buried the sword of thy fathers in the grave from which thy body hath escaped? What art thou, O Warrior, in the land of the alien and the King? Who shall heed thee or tell the tale of thy glory, which thou hast covered over with the hand of a light woman, whom thy kindred knoweth not, and who was not born in a house wherefrom it hath been appointed thee from of old to take the pleasure of woman? Whose thrall art thou now, thou lifter of the spoil, thou scarer of the freeborn? The bidding of what lord or King wilt thou do, O Chieftain, that thou mayst eat thy meat in the morning and lie soft in thy bed in the evening?”

“O Warrior of the Ravagers, here stand I, Hallblithe of the Raven, and I am come into an alien land beset with marvels to seek mine own, and find that which is dearest to mine heart; to wit, my troth-plight maiden the Hostage of the Rose, the fair woman who shall lie in my bed, and bear my children, and stand by me in field and fold, in thwart and gunwale, before the bow and the spear, by the flickering of the cooking-fire, and amidst the blaze of the burning hall, and beside the bale-fire of the warrior of the Raven. O Sea-eagle, my guester amongst the foemen, my fellow-farer...”
and shipmate, say now once for all whether thou wilt help me in my quest, or fall off from me as a dastard?" Again the maidens shrank before his clear and high-raised voice, and they trembled and grew pale.

But the Sea-eagle laughed from a countenance kind with joy, and said: "Child of the Raven, thy words are good and manly: but it availeth nought in this land, and I wot not how thou wilt fare, or why thou hast been sent amongst us. What wilt thou do? Hadst thou spoken these words to the long-hoary, the Grandfather, yesterday, his ears would have been deaf to them; and now that thou speakest them to the Sea-eagle, this joyous man on the Glittering Plain, he cannot do according to them, for there is no other land than this which can hold him. Here is he strong and stark, and full of joy and love; but otherwhere he would be but a gibbering ghost drifting down the wind of night. Therefore in whatsoever thou mayst do within this land I will stand by thee and help thee; but not one inch beyond it may my foot go, whether it be down into the brine of the sea, or up into the clefts of the mountains which are the wall of this goodly land.

"Thou hast been my shipmate and I love thee, I am thy friend; but here in this land must needs be the love and the friendship. For no ghost can love thee, no ghost may help thee. And as to what thou sayest concerning the days gone past and our joys upon the tumbling sea, true it is that those days were good and lovely; but they are dead and gone like the lads who sat on the thwart beside us, and the maidens who took our hands in the hall to lead us to the chamber. Other days have come in their stead, and other friends shall cherish us. What then? Shall we wound the living to pleasure the dead, who cannot heed it? Shall we curse the Yuletide, and cast foul water on the Holy Hearth of the winter feast, because the summer once was fair and the days fit and the times change? Now let us be glad! For life liveth."

Therewith he turned about to his damsels and kissed her on the mouth. But Hallblithe's face was grown sad and stern, and he spake slowly and heavily:

"So is it, shipmate, that whereas thou sayest that the days fit, for thee they shall fit no more; and the day may come for thee when thou shalt be weary, and know it, and long for the lost which thou hast forgotten. But hereof it availeth nought for me to speak any longer, for thine ears are deaf to these words, and thou wilt not hear them. Therefore I say no more save that I thank thee for thy help whatsoever it may be; and I will take it, for the day's work lieth before me, and I begin to think that it may be heavy enough."

The women yet looked downcast, and as if they would be gone out of earshot; but the Sea-eagle laughed as one who is well content, and said:

"Thou thyself wilt make it hard for thyself after the wont of thy proud and haughty race; but for me nothing is hard any longer; neither thy scorn nor thy forebodings of evil. Be thou my friend as much as thou canst, and I will be thine wholly. Now ye women, whither will ye lead us? For I am ready to see any new thing ye will show us."

Said his damsel: "We will take you to the King, that your hearts may be the more gladdened. And as for thy friend the Spearman, O Sea-warrior, let not his heart be downcast. Who wotteth but that these two desires, the desire of his heart, and the desire of a heart for him, may not be one and the same desire, so that he shall be fully satisfied."

As she spoke she looked sidelong at Hallblithe, with shy and wheeling eyes; and he wondered at her word, and a new hope sprang up in his heart that he was presently to be brought face to face with the Hostage, and that this was that love, sweeter than their love, which abode in him, and his heart became lighter, and his visage cleared.

CHAPTER XII.

THEY SEE THE KING OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN.

So now the women led them along up the stream, and Hallblithe went side by side by the Sea-eagle; but the women had become altogether merry again, and played and ran about them as gamesome as young goats; and they waded the shallows of the clear bright stream barefoot to wash their limbs of the seabrine, and strayed about the meadows, plucking the flowers and making them wreaths and chaplets, which they did
upon themselves and the Sea-eagle; but Hallblithe they touched not, for still they feared him.

They went on as the stream led them up toward the hills, and ever were the meads about them as fair and flowery as might be. Folk they saw afar off, but fell in with none for a good while, saving a man and a maid clad lightly as for midsummer days, who were wandering together lovingly and happily by the stream-side, and who gazed wonderingly on the stark Sea-eagle, and on Hallblithe with his glittering spear. The black-haired damsel greeted these twain and spake something to them, and they laughed merrily, and the man stooped down amongst the grasses and blossoms of the bank, and drew forth a basket, and spread dainty victuals on the grass under a willow-tree, and bade them be his guests that fair afternoon. So they sat down there above the glistening stream and ate and drank and were merry. Thereafter the newcomers and their way-leaders departed with kind words, and still set their faces toward the hills.

At last they saw before them a little wooded hill, and underneath it something red and shining, and other coloured things gleaming in the sun about it. Then said the Sea-eagle: "What have we yonder?"

Said his damsel: "That is the pavilion of the King; and about it are the tents and tilts of our folk who are of his fellowship: for oft he abideth in the fields with them, though he hath houses and halls as fair as the heart of man can conceive."

"Hath he no foesmen to fear?" said the Sea-eagle.

"How should that be?" said the damsel. "If perchance any came into this land to bring war upon him, their battle-anger should depart when once the bliss of the Glittering Plain had entered into their souls, and they would ask for nought but leave to abide here and be happy. Yet I trow that if he had foesmen he could crush them as easily as I set my foot on this daisy."

So as they went on they fell in with many folk, men and women, sporting and playing in the fields; and there was no semblance of evil on any of them, and no scar or blemish or feebleness of body or sadness of countenance; nor did any bear a weapon or any piece of armour. Now some of them gathered about the new-comers, and wondered at Hallblithe and his long spear and shining helm and dark gray byrny; but none asked concerning them, for all knew that they were folk new come to the bliss of the Glittering Plain. So they passed amidst these fair folk little hindered by them, and into Hallblithe's thoughts it came how joyous the fellowship of such should be and how his heart should be raised by the sight of them, if only his troth-plight maiden were by his side.

Thus then they came to the King's pavilion, where it stood in a bight of the meadow-land at the foot of the hill, with the wood about it on three sides. So fair a house Hallblithe deemed he had never seen; for it was wrought all over with histories and flowers, and with hems sewn with gold, and with orphreys of gold and pearl and gems.

There in the door of it sat the King of the Land in an ivory chair; he was clad in a golden gown girt with a girdle of gems, and had his crown on his head and his sword by his side. For this was the hour wherein he heard what any of his folk would say to him, and for that very end he sat there in the door of his tent, and folk were standing before him, and sitting and lying on the grass round about; and now one, now another, came up to him and spoke before him.

His face shone like a star; it was exceeding beauteous, and as kind as the even of May in the gardens of the happy, when the scent of the eglantine fills all the air. When he spoke his voice was so sweet that all hearts were ravished, and none might gainsay him.

But when Hallblithe set eyes on him, he knew at once that this was he whose carven image he had seen in the hall of the Ravagers, and his heart beat fast, and he said to himself: "Hold up thine head now, O Son of the Raven, strengthen thine heart, and let no man nor god cow thee. For how can thine heart change, which bade thee go to the house wherefrom it was due to thee to take the pleasure of woman, and there to pledge thy faith and troth to her that loveth thee most, and hanketh for thee day by day and hour by hour, so that great is the love that we twain have built up."

Now they drew nigh, for folk fell back before them to the right and left, as before men who are new come and have much to do; so that there was nought between them
and the face of the King. But he smiled upon them so that he cheered their hearts with the hope of fulfilment of their desires, and he said: "Welcome, children! Who be these whom ye have brought hither for the increase of our joy? Who is this tall, ruddy-faced, joyous man so meet for the bliss of the Glittering Plain? And who is this goodly and lovely young man, who beareth weapons amidst our peace, and whose face is sad and stern beneath the gleaming of his helm?"

Said the dark-haired damsel: "O King! O Gift-giver and assurer of joy! this tall one is he who was once oppressed by eld, and who hath come hither to thee from the Isle of Ransom, according to the custom of the land."

Said the King: "Tall man, it is well that thou art come. Now are thy days changed and thou yet alive. For thee battle is ended, and therewith the reward of battle, which the warrior remembereth not amidst the hard hand-play: peace hath begun, and thou needest not be careful for the endurance thereof: for in this land no man hath a lack which he may not satisfy without taking aught from any other. I deem not that thine heart may conceive a desire which I shall not fulfil for thee, or crave a gift which I shall not give thee."

Then the Sea-eagle laughed for joy, and turned his head this way and that, so that he might the better take to him the smiles of all those that stood around.

Then the King said to Hallblithe: "Thou also art welcome; I know thee who thou art: messemeth great joy awaiteth thee, and I will fulfill thy desire to the uttermost."

Said Hallblithe: "O great King of a happy land, I ask of thee nought save that which none shall withhold from me uncursed."

"I will give it to thee," said the King, "and thou shalt bless me. But what is it which thou wouldst? What more canst thou have than the Gifts of the Land?"

Said Hallblithe: "I came hither seeking no gifts, but to have mine own again; and that is the bodily love of my troth-plight maiden. They stole her from me, and me from her; for she loved me. I went down to the sea-side and found her not, nor the ship which had borne her away. I sailed thence to the Isle of Ransom, for they told me that there I should buy her for a price; neither was her body there. But her image came to me in a dream of the night, and bade me seek her hither. Therefore, O King, if she be here in the land, show me how I shall find her, and if she be not here, show me how I may depart to seek her otherwhere. This is all my asking."

Said the King: "Thy desire shall be satisfied; thou shalt have the woman who would have thee, and whom thou shouldst have."

Hallblithe was gladdened beyond measure by that word; and now did the King seem to him a comfort and a solace to every heart, even as he had deemed of his carven image in the Hall of the Ravagers; and he thanked him, and blessed him.

But the King bade him abide by him that night and feast with him. "And on the morrow," said he, "thou shalt go thy ways to look on her whom thou oughtest to love."

Therewith was come the eventide and beginning of night, warm and fragrant and bright with the twinkling of stars, and they went into the King's pavilion, and there was the feast as fair and dainty as might be; and Hallblithe had meat from the King's own dish, and drink from his cup; but the meat had no savour to him and the drink no delight, because of the longing that possessed him.

And when the feast was done the damsels led Hallblithe to his bed in a fair tent strewn with gold about his head like the starry night, and he lay down and slept for sheer weariness of body.

(To be continued.)