

II.

Julia was the eldest daughter of the King, and the throne went with her hand, according to the custom of the people.

A plague of smallpox had ravaged the oak-groves ten years earlier when she had seen eight summers, and left her sole survivor of the royal family, except Claudia, a child of three years old. All her other sisters were therefore much younger than she; her brothers had gone afield to seek their fortune in strange places. The plague had not left her wholly scathless; she bore a few small pocks on her forehead and cheek. But these tended rather to increase the fascination of her beauty. She was lithe and long, but robust and well developed for her years. Her head was small and well-poised upon a pillar throat, the face oval, the eyes large and very lustrous, the nose long and straight, the mouth beautifully curved, with a long upper lip which shone with faint down. But her greatest beauty lay perhaps in her hair, which was extraordinarily fair, the very lightest shade imaginable of brown, with a certain ashen tinge which made it almost transparent to the sunlight. The length of it, and its abundance, were the wonder of the people, who saw therein a good omen of the vigor of the royal house.

In the time of the plague, and the harsh years of building up the community again from it, that followed, she and her father had drawn very close together. He had come to rely on her almost exclusively, for there was no one else so near that he could trust. On her side, too, the whole warmth of her nature went out to him. She was of fierce temper, but slow smouldering; of purpose inscrutable and indomitable. Often her stubbornness had strengthened the hands of the king, her father, when he hesitated; she had pushed him through doubt and through disaster to success.

Her occupation as Vestal had left her utterly innocent; she knew what god she worshipped, and she knew that she was the bride of the fire, and would one day bear children to it; but she had formulated no connection in her mind between these facts and those of human nature. She was the daughter of God; the people were as far beneath her as the stones under her feet. That she should sink to their level by any acceptance of their limitations was to her mind unthinkable; hence the passionate horror aroused in her soul by her misinterpretation of the omen of the flame.

The impression which had been made soon faded; three weeks later the festivities of spring drove everything else from her mind. The quaint figure of the Green Man, with his wreaths of oak and his fantastic mask, his weird and intense dances, and the ceremony of drenching him with water, made a mark on her mind which it had never done before. So deep was it that for three nights successively she dreamed of the dances, and on each night she heard voices from the sacred storehouse where the fire-drills represented the ancestors of the royal house; it seemed that they were talking together. She caught the tone of excitement, but could make nothing of the words; for of course they were speaking in the secret language of the gods, which only her father, of all the Sylvii, knew.

Then for a week or two things seemed to slip into the old routine. But now came something new and quite beyond nature into her; she became for the first time conscious of herself. Instead of seeing the

King's House about her, she saw herself moving in the house. It was not merely the fire on which she threw the boughs; she saw herself throwing boughs on to the fire. External things became subordinate. With that, she discovered that she was restless; time, which had hitherto meant nothing to her, instead of flowing unperceived, became insistent. Unable to forget herself, she began to analyze herself. She noticed that she was always pacing to and fro, and wondered why. Her body became an obsession.

Soon she acquired the habit of lying down before the fire, and gazing into it. Here, with her head resting upon her hands, she would remain for hours, motionless save for one leg, which she would swing on toe and knee from side to side, now fast, now slow. The whole of her being would concentrate in the muscles of that leg; she would be conscious of nothing else, and she would analyze the sensation in it, which would become extraordinarily acute and voluptuous. She delighted in feeling the different rhythms of its movement. She would halt them deliberately, torturing herself with exquisite anticipation of the moment when she would begin again. It is hard to record such subtleties of thought. Somewhat thus, perhaps, they danced. "Fast and slow—tense and slack. How hard can I push down? How hard can I pull up? Side to side—to and fro. Circular movements. All concentration in the foot; toe by toe extension and contraction. Which toes can I move separately? Could I balance my leg by its own weight without supporting it by stiffening a muscle?—most exquisite, subtle and voluptuous problem! Tap—tap—tap; that is my heel upon the floor of that hut; I understand. Now Tap tap—tap—tap—tap tap—another rhythm, another world of music and beauty. Now slow, now fast; every rhythm has infinite capacities of modulation. I am alive in a live world of infinite ecstasies—abyss after abyss opening at each timid step. Eternity cannot exhaust the variations of delight that can play on this one muscle! What a world to live in! Ah! Ah! Ah!" After a while this would become too overpowering; the possibilities of pleasure would appal her by their multiplicity; and she would rub her thumb and forefinger slowly together with every kind of motion, watching intently, and so drinking in the wonder and splendor of life through sight as well as touch.

One very curious thing she noticed. Now and again the moving muscles seemed to take up an independent personality, to wish to assert themselves as individual wills, and to impose themselves upon the rest of the body by causing it to join in their movement. She would nearly always resist this, though sometimes the thumb and forefinger would set the muscles of the arm and shoulder twitching, and sometimes the leg would communicate its swing to the whole body. But for some reason, or rather in accordance with some instinct, she resented the domination of the other will. But the pressure constantly increased upon her; and one day she gave way completely. She never knew what happened; her memory told her nothing; but when she came to herself, she found that she had slept for hours; her clothes were bathed in sweat, and the dust of the floor was wetted here and there by drops of it. From the footprints, too, she divined that she must have been dancing; evidently until exhaustion, and sleep, supervened.

Of this she told her father. "Julia!" said he, "there is nothing to fear. The ancestors themselves