

# Of the Old Wood, which some call the Ealdwood

Things there are in the world which have never loved Men, which have been in the world far longer than humankind, so that once when Men were newer on the Written Word and the woods were greater, there had been places a Man might walk where he might feel the age of the world on his shoulders. Forests grew in which the stillness was so great he could hear stirrings of a life no part of his own. There were brooks from which the magic had not gone, mountains which sang with voices, and sometimes a wind touched the back of his neck and lifted the hairs with the shiver of a presence at which a Man must never turn and stare.

But the noise of Men grew more and more insistent. Their trespasses became more bold. Death had followed them, and the knowledge of good and evil, and this was a power they had, both to be virtuous and to be blind.

Axes rang. Men built houses, and holds, rooted up stone, felled trees, made fields where forests had stood from the foundation of the world; and they brought bleating flocks to guard with dogs that had forgotten they were wolves. Men changed whatever they set hand to. They wrought their magic on beasts, to make them dull and patient. They brought fire and the reek of smoke to the dales. They brought lines and order to the curve of the hills. Most of all they brought the chill of cold iron, to sweep away the ancient shadows.

But they took the brightness too. It was inevitable, because that brightness was measured against that dark. Men piled stone on stone and made warm homes, and tamed some humbler, quieter things, but the darkest burrowed deep and the brightest went away, heartbroken.

Save one, whose patience or whose pride was more than all the rest.

So one place, one untouched place in all the world remained, a rather smallish place in the heart of the Wood in the wilds of the Houselands and near humankind, keeping a time different than elsewhere.