

## The Quest of the Silver Fleece

by W.E.B. Du Bois

Night fell. The red waters of the swamp grew sinister and sullen. The tall pines lost their slimness and stood in wide blurred blotches all across the way, and a great shadowy bird arose, wheeled and melted, murmuring, into the black-green sky.

5           The boy wearily dropped his heavy bundle and stood still, listening as the voice of crickets split the shadows and made the silence audible. A tear wandered down his brown cheek. They were at supper now, he whispered—the father and old mother, away back yonder beyond the night. They were far away; they would never be as near as once they had been, for he had stepped into the world. And the cat and  
10 Old Billy—ah, but the world was a lonely thing, so wide and tall and empty! And so bare, so bitter bare! Somehow he had never dreamed of the world as lonely before; he had fared forth to beckoning hands and luring, and to the eager hum of human voices, as of some great, swelling music.

15           Yet now he was alone; the empty night was closing all about him here in a strange land, and he was afraid. The bundle with his earthly treasure had hung heavy and heavier on his shoulder; his little horde of money was tightly wadded in his sock, and the school lay hidden somewhere far away in the shadows. He wondered how far it was; he looked and harkened, starting at his own heartbeats, and fearing more and more the long dark fingers of the night.

20           Then of a sudden up from the darkness came music. It was human music, but of a wildness and a weirdness that startled the boy as it fluttered and danced across the dull red waters of the swamp. He hesitated, then impelled<sup>1</sup> by some strange power, left the highway and slipped into the forest of the swamp, shrinking, yet following the song hungrily and half forgetting his fear. A harsher, shriller note  
25 struck in as of many and ruder voices; but above it flew the first sweet music, birdlike, abandoned, and the boy crept closer.

30           The cabin crouched ragged and black at the edge of black waters. An old chimney leaned drunkenly against it, raging with fire and smoke, while through the chinks winked red gleams of warmth and wild cheer. With a revel of shouting and noise, the music suddenly ceased. Hoarse staccato<sup>2</sup> cries and peals of laughter shook the old hut, and as the boy stood there peering through the black trees, abruptly the door flew open and a flood of light illumined the wood.

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<sup>1</sup> Impelled: Driven

<sup>2</sup> Staccato: Short, clear-cut playing or singing of tones or chords

## **"Home"**

*by Rupert Brooke, 1913*

I came back late and tired last night  
    Into my little room,  
To the long chair and the firelight  
    And comfortable gloom.

5

    But as I entered softly in  
        I saw a woman there,  
The line of neck and cheek and chin,  
    The darkness of her hair,  
10      The form of one I did not know  
        Sitting in my chair.

I stood a moment fierce and still,  
    Watching her neck and hair.  
I made a step to her; and saw  
    That there was no one there.

15

    It was some trick of the firelight  
        That made me see her there.  
It was a chance of shade and light  
    And the cushion in the chair.

20

    Oh, all you happy over the earth,  
        That night, how could I sleep?  
I lay and watched the lonely gloom;  
    And watched the moonlight creep  
From wall to basin, round the room,  
    All night I could not sleep.

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