

T H E W I L D O L I V E

toward the north, and down over the brow of the plateau on which for a mile or two its evenness had been sustained. It was a new sign that it was tending toward some habitation. Half an hour ago he would have taken this to mean that he must dash into the forest again; but half an hour ago he had not been hungry. He did not say to himself that he would venture to any man's door and ask for bread. So far as he knew, he would never venture to any man's door again; nevertheless, he kept on, down-hill, and down-hill, nearer and nearer the lake, and farther and farther from the mountain and the lairs of safety.

Suddenly, at a turning, when he was not expecting it, the wood-road emerged into a rough clearing. Once more he stopped to reflect and take his bearings. It had grown so dark that there was little danger in doing so; though, as he peered into the gloom, his nerves were still taut with the expectation of shot or capture from behind. Straining his eyes, he made out a few acres that had been cleared for their timber, after which Nature had been allowed to take her own way again, in unruly growths of saplings, tangles of wild vines, and clumps of magenta fireweed.

Without quite knowing why he did so, he crept down the slope, feeling his way among the stumps, and stooping low, lest his white shirt, wet and clinging limply to his body, might betray him to some keen-eyed marksman. Presently one of the old root-hedges, common to the countryside, barred his path—a queer, twisted line of long, gray tentacles that had once sucked sustenance from the soil, but now reached up idly into a barren element, where the wild grape was covering their grotesque nakedness with masses of kindly beauty. Below him he saw lights shining clearly like the planets, or faintly like the mere star-dust of the sky, while