

JEHANE OF THE FOREST

CHAPTER I

APRIL IN THE FOREST

THERE was quiet at the house of the Woodward in the April dawning ; quiet, but not silence, peace, but not stillness; for the living woods are never quite still, neither are they ever quite silent : they breathe, and their breathing is audible.

To those who love the sea a day out of hearing of its voice is a sad unhomely day ; even more so to a forest dweller is a treeless world a sad one, brooded over by a weary silence. Nay, his loss is the greater, for the song of the tide comes and goes, with the waiting hours of ebb between, while the tree-voices never fail, even in the sultry summer noons, even in the winter nights of frost.

Never in their lives had Ursula and Jehane slept out of hearing of the song of trees. The convent of Our Lady of Petitions at Clee, where their childhood was spent, was lapt in a nest of foliage. Chestnut groves closed close about the walls, and at every