

THE HEART OF THE ANCIENT WOOD

Chapter I

The Watchers of the Trail

NOT indolently soft, like that which sifts in green shadow through the leafage of a summer garden, but tense, alertly and mysteriously expectant, was the silence of the forest. It was somehow like a vast bubble of glass, blown to a fineness so tenuous that a small sound, were it but to strike the one preordained and mystic note, might shatter it down in loud ruin. Yet it had existed there flawless for generations, transmuting into its own quality all such infrequent and inconsequent disturbance as might arise from the far-off cry of the panther, or the thin chirp of the clambering nuthatch, the long, solemn calling of the taciturn moose,