

"Ho!" he said, as he took his stance before me, breathing considerably. "Never did I expect to meet another adventurer in all my travels! Where do you call home, friend?"

I ate blackberries, taking him in, observing his uniform and varied patches, leather tools carefully inserted into slots in his belt. "Just south of here," I said and waved my hand north just for fun. I spat on the ground and rubbed it in with my foot. I said, "So what sort of adventure are you on?"

"Oh, many adventures, of any and all kinds," he said, speaking with great conviction, exhaling deeply and unable to look at me for long, very much caught in wonder over the great earth all around us. "Surely you must see what a wondrous land this is? Well, of course it is." He looked around himself wistfully. He had a pack on with a bed roll under it. "I have requested here three months now, and it's only just begun. I am a conservation scientist, a forester and an adventurer." (He said this 'adventurism' as if he were British.) "My dream is to never stop learning, to never shy away from a pursuit, to engage the whole world directly, and that's precisely what I'm doing! I left the hubbub of city life, with its distractions and its women, and have supplanted myself in this fine, bounteous land of secrets." He beamed at me, a brave smile, and his glasses were bright white.

I said nothing and he didn't wait for me to reply, he just said, "This land doesn't give up its secrets easily. In fact, I would say they are totally sealed off! But if you find the right spot and you give it a little tickle, why it's like an orchid that opens right up! Don't you think that's an apt description?"

"It's not bad," I said.

"Not quite, it's spot on!" he cried. "Don't give me that! Don't you give me that, why when I was in the city, they used

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