

THE THREE OF THEM
by Olga Folda, 1920's

"Wouldn't you love if your mother had the kind of hair my mine has?" They are sitting on a beach rock, a tiny wee boy and a great, tall man. And all about them the sea was murmuring so loud that they had to raise their voices to hear each other. The great tall man smiled in quite an elderly way. It made the little boy wonder if he can be serious with him. "And just what kind of hair has your mother?" "Oh -" the little boy sighed and leaned his elbows on the rock. "I never could tell you - you see I never could tell myself!" "But you could try" was the suggestion. The boy waved his hand out to the water and watched full flight of a seagull before he made a sound. "Well," he took a long look at his companion, "Sometimes I think it is like this - full of sun, and then, I've often seen it just the color of the moon. Would you believe it - kind of soft, fiery yellow? It's different in the morning and night, and then when a day is rainy it's different too. And when I brush it it is full of hidden stars that sparkle!" The boy stopped suddenly. He saw that the man put his hand upon his eyes and was looking very intently at the damp sod that clung around their feet. It would have hurt the little boy if he thought he had not been listening. "It's too bad your mother hasn't hair like that" he said. And there was such a slow, wan smile on the tall man's face as he lifted it. He touched child's pink hand. "But you see, my mother can't have hair like that. I couldn't have so young a mother as all that. It's different with you and me!" "Well then, it's too bad you haven't somebody with gold hair, it is, really." Suddenly the little boy was startled with the way the young man caught his two hands, pulled him into the circle of his arms. What a look in his eyes! As if he were going to cry - But the little boy stood silently looking into his face, hardly daring to breathe. It almost hurt the way his arms were grasped in the man's fingers. "Yes, I know! It was hard to hear you say that! Don't be afraid of me little boy, let me tell you something. I want you to listen to me-" He loosened his hold and drew the child to his feet. They were both quiet for some moments, as if they were listening to the wind and the ocean, as if it were very important that they should not miss those sounds. The sun dipped behind a white gauze cloud and the sand was covered with a shadow. And here they were the strange little boy, and the strange tall man, sitting together in the arms of a rock, as if they had grown there together, as if they belonged together.

The little boy waited. No one would ever know how his heart was beating, how it made little thumps in his breast. He wondered why. It was all strange. "There are times I think I cannot live without her" he began, "this woman with the sun-starred hair. You understand me, don't you? Think of this, think of your mother - if the way you look at her - the way you hold her face in your hands and pat her hair and lay your cheek against it. Then - think of losing her, not in death, in life! Think of someone else taking her away from you, and then, when you are alone you can only remember the way she was, and a dull, grey ache will settle on your heart and you will begin to think "she never loved me, or she could not have gone away-" There was such a pause - and "Don't cry child, it is not like that with you. You have your mother. And I'm a man - I can bear up - perhaps." But the little boy could not help crying and when the man brushed the tears from his face fresh ones came tumbling down his cheeks. He wished the man would cry too. It would be much better that to see his eyes, so far away, so deep, as if they held pools in their depths - too deep to cry. "And did you have a lady like that - and did someone take her away from you?" "Yes," answered the man, so quietly that the boy scarcely heard him. He thought he must be the saddest man in the world; he could not imagine anything sadder than losing a lady who had hair like mommy's. So someone had taken her away. Someone had taken the little boy's father away too - mommy told him that. But that was different. It was not the same - losing a man. Suddenly the little boy felt his heart thumping again. What if he should run back home and find --- He could hardly dare to think it

- and find mommy gone. What would he do! What would happen! he knew how he would feel. He knew how the great tall man must be feeling now, as if he could weep his life away. Oh - it must not be.

The little boy stood straight up, facing the sun, and put his two hand on the man's shoulders. He felt how the man straightened up. "Do you think you like to have me share my mother with you, sir? I could, you know. I share her with lots of people - most of those who haven't ladies with yellow hair, I guess. Maybe that would help you not to be - not to be - so sad." The little boy looked straight to the eyes of the tall man. He saw tears now - the deep pools had broken. But they did not run down his cheeks, as little boy's tears would do. The stayed swimming in the back of his grey eyes and then melted away. He saw the man close his eyes for an instant and lean back to the rock. "Don't you think" he said slowly and thoughtfully to the little boy "that seeing her would make it harder - perhaps?" "Oh, no," the child assured him "seeing her never makes things harder. You just wait here with me for awhile and she'll come walking down the beach at five. She knows where to meet me - on this rock." And so they sat quietly together, watching the waves lap, watching the tide. And presently, when the little boy heard a whistle in the air he stood on the highest point of the rock and waved his two bare arms. "There she is - my mother." She was approaching rapidly, running down the beach in a soft, white dress. "You stay hidden, please - till I say ready!" So the tall man crouched down into the deepest cleft of the rock and tried to hide his broad shoulders. She approached, and saw the shoulders and wondered. "Now, Mommy, here is a man who lost a lady. She had hair like yours, he says, but somebody took her away and left him alone, and he says he thinks sometimes he cannot live without her. I guess I know how he feels. Mummy I've got to share you with him."

And suddenly there they were - the woman and the man - facing each other, alone under the bread blue sky, between heaven and earth - For a moment the little boy could not understand why they clung to each other and cried. The great tall man was kissing Mommy's hair - so full of stars, so much the light of summer moon. "I know it" whispered the boy to himself, "I knew it must be like this - And - he can't be crying because - he's laughing - and Mummy's laughing -"

If you could have seen the three of them walking home along the beach - the great tall man, and the woman with golden hair and the wee little boy!