LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

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"FLAVIAN OF GAMBREVAULT STOOD BOUND BEFORE HER."

LOVE
AMONG THE RUINS

BY
WARWICK DEEPING
AUTHOR OF "UTHER AND IGRAINE"

Grim work, sirs; what would you!
War is the devil.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. BENDA

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TO
MY MOTHER AND FATHER
WITH ALL LOVE AND GRATITUDE

PART I

I

The branches of the forest invoked the sky with the supplications of their thousand hands. Black, tumultuous, terrible, the wilds billowed under the moon, stifled with the night, silent as a windless sea. Winter, like a pale Semiramis of gigantic mould, stood with her coronet touching the steely sky. A mighty company of stars stared frost-bright from the heavens.

A pillar of fire shone red amid the chaos of the woods. Like a great torch, a blazing tower hurled spears of light into the gloom. Shadows, vast and fantastic, struggled like Titans striving with Destiny in the silence of the night. Their substanceless limbs leapt and writhed through the gnarled alleys of the forest. Overhead, the moon looked down with thin and silver lethargy on the havoc kindled by the hand of man.

In a glade, all golden with the breath of the fire, blackened battlements waved a pennon of vermilion flame above the woods. Smoke, in eddying and gilded clouds, rolled heavenwards to be silvered into snow by the light of the moon. The grass of the glade shone a dusky, yet brilliant green; the tower's windows were red as rubies on a pall of sables. About its base, cottages were burning like faggots piled about a martyr's loins.

Tragedy had touched the place with her ruddy hand. There had been savage deeds done in the silence of the woods. Hirelings, a rough pack of mercenaries in the service of the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault, had stolen upon the tower of Rual of Cambremont, slain him before his own gate, and put his sons to the sword. A feud had inspired the event, a rotten shred of enmity woven on Stephen's Eve in a tavern scuffle. The burning tower with its cracking walls bore witness to the extravagant malice of a rugged age.

Death, that flinty summoner, salves but the dead, yet wounds the living.

It is sport with him to pile woe upon the shoulders of the weak, to crown with thorns the brows of those who mourn. Double-handed are his blessings–a balm for those who sleep, an iron scourge for the living. The quick bow down before his feet; only the dead fear him no more in the marble philosophy of silence.

On a patch of grass within the golden whirl of the fire lay the body of Rual of Cambremont, stiff and still. His face was turned to the heavens; his white beard tinctured with the dye of death. Beside him knelt a girl whose unloosed hair trailed on his body, dark and disastrous as a sable cloud. The girl's eyes were tearless, dry and dim. Her hands were at her throat, clenched in an ecstasy of despair. Her head was bowed down below her stooping shoulders, and she knelt like Thea over Saturn's shame.

Behind her in the shadow, his face grey in the uncertain gloom, an old man watched the scene with a wordless awe. He was a servant, thin and meagre, bowed under Time's burden, a dried wisp of manhood, living symbol of decay. There was something of the dog about his look, a dumb loyalty that grieved and gave no sound. Beneath the burning tower in the heat of the flames, these twain seemed to mimic the stillness of the dead.

There was other life in the glade none the less, a red relic evidencing the handiwork of the sword. A streak of shadow that had lain motionless in the yellow glare of the fire, stirred in the rank grass with a snuffling groan. There was a curt hint in the sound that brought Jaspar the harper round upon his heel. He moved two steps, went down on his knees in the ooze, turned the man's head towards the tower, and peered into his face. It was gashed from chin to brow, a grim mask of war, contorted the more by the uncertain palpitations of the flames.

Jaspar had a flask buckled at his girdle. He thrust his knee under the man's head, trickled wine between his lips, and waited. The limp hands began to twitch; the man jerked, drew a wet, stertorous breath, stared for a moment with flickering lids at the face above him. Jaspar craned down, put his mouth to the man's ear, and spoke to him.

The fellow's lips quivered; he stirred a little, strove to lift his head, mumbled thickly like a man with a palsied tongue. Jaspar put his ear to the bruised mouth and listened. He won words out of the grave, for his rough face hardened, his brows were knotted over the dying man's stumbling syllables. The harper shouted in his ear, and again waited.

"Gam–Gambrevault, Flavian's men, dead, all dead," ran the death utterance. "Ave Maria, my lips burn–St. Eulalie–St. Jude, defend me—-"

A cough snapped the halting appeal. The man stiffened suddenly in Jaspar's arms, and thrust out his feet with a strong spasm. His hands clawed the grass; his jaw fell, leaving his mouth agape, a black circle of death. There was a last rattling stridor. Then the head fell back over Jaspar's knee with the neck extended, the

eyes wide with a visionless stare.

A shadow fell athwart the dead man and the living, a shadow edged with the golden web of the fire. Looking up, Jaspar the harper saw the girl standing above him, staring down upon the dead man's body. The red tower framed her figure with flame, making an ebon cloud of her hair, her body a pillar of sombre stone. Her face was grey, pinched, and expressionless. Youth seemed frozen for the moment into bleak and premature age.

She bowed down suddenly, her hair falling forward like a cataract, her eyes large with a tearless hunger. Pointing to the man on Jaspar's knee, she looked into the harper's face, and spoke to him.

"Quick, the truth. I fear it no longer."

Her voice was toneless and hoarse as an untuned string. She beat her hands together, and then stood with her fists pressed over her heart.

"Quick, the truth."

The old man turned the body gently to the grass, and still knelt at the woman's feet.

"It is Jean," he said, with great quietness, "Jean the swineherd. He is dead. God rest his soul!"

She bent forward again with arm extended, her voice deep and hoarse in her throat.

"Tell me, who is it that has slain my father?"

"They of Gambrevault."

"Ah!"

Her eyes gleamed behind her hair as it fell dishevelled over her face.

"And the rest–Bertrand, my brothers?"

Her voice appealed him with a gradual fear. Jaspar the harper bowed his face, and pointed to the tower. The girl straightened, and stood quivering like a loosened bow.

"God! In there! And Roland?"

Again the harper's hand went up with the slow inevitableness of destiny. The flames, as beneath the incantations of a sibyl, leapt higher, roaring hungrily towards the heavens. The girl swayed away some paces, her lips moving silently, her hair fanned by the draught, blowing about her like a veil. She turned to the tower, thrust up her hands to it with a strong gesture of anguish and despair.

A long while she stood in silence as in a kind of torpor, gazing at this red pyre of the Past, where memories leapt heavenwards in a golden haze of smoke. The roar of the fire was as the voice of Fate. She heard it dim and distant like the far thunder of a sea. Beyond, around, above, the gaunt trees clawed at the stars with their leafless talons. Night and the shadow of it were very apparent to the girl's soul.

Jaspar the harper stood and watched her with a dumb and distant awe. Her rigid anguish cowed him into impotent silence. The woman's soul seemed to soar far above comfort, following the saffron smoke into the silver æther of the infinite. The man stood apart, holding aloof with the instinct of a dog, from a sorrow that he could not chasten. He was one of those dull yet happy souls, who carry eloquence in their eyes, whose tongues are clumsy, but whose hearts are warm. He stood aloof therefore from Yeoland, dead Rual's daughter, pulling his ragged beard, and calling in prayer to the Virgin and the saints.

Presently the girl turned very slowly, as one whose blood runs chill and heavy. Her eyes were still dry and crystal bright, her face like granite, or a mask of ice. The man Jaspar hid his glances from her, and stared at the sod. He was fearful in measure of gaping blankly upon so great a grief.

"Jaspar," she said, and her voice was clear now as the keen sweep of a sword.

He crooked the knee to her, stood shading his eyes with his wrinkled hand.

"We alone are left," she said.

"God's will, madame, God's will; He giveth, and taketh away. I, even I, am your servant."

Her eyes lightened an instant as though red wrath streamed strongly from her heart. Her mouth quivered. She chilled the mood, however, and stood motionless, save for her hands twining and twisting in her hair.

"Does Heaven mock me?" she asked him, with a level bitterness.

"How so, madame?" he answered her; "who would mock thee at such an hour?"

"Who indeed?"

"Not even Death. I pray you be comforted. There is a balm in years."

They stood silent again in the streaming heat and radiance of the fire. A sudden wind had risen. They heard it crying far away in the infinite vastness of the woods. It grew, rushed near, waxed with a gradual clamour till the bare wilds seemed to breathe one great gathering roar. The flames flew slanting from the blackened battlements. The trees clutched and swayed, making moan under the calm light of the moon.

The sound thrilled the girl. Her lips trembled, her form dilated.

"Listen," she said, thrusting up her hands into the night, "the cry of the forest, the voice of the winter wind. What say they but 'vengeance–vengeance–

vengeance'?"

II

Dawn came vaguely in a veil of mist. A heavy dew lay scintillant upon the grass; a great silence covered the woods. The trees stood grim and gigantic with dripping boughs in a vapoury atmosphere, and there seemed no augury of sunlight in the blind grey sky.

A rough hovel under a fir, used for the storing of wood, had given Yeoland and the harper shelter for the night. The sole refuge left to them by fire, the hut had served its purpose well enough, for grief is not given to grumbling over externals in the extremity of its distress.

The girl Yeoland was astir early with the first twitter of the birds in the boughs overhead. Jaspar had made her a couch of straw, and she had lain there tossing to and fro with no thought of sleep. The moon had sunk early over the edge of the world, and heavy darkness had wrapped her anguish close about her soul, mocking her with the staring of a dead face. The burning tower had ceased to torch her vigil towards dawn; yet there had been no fleeing from the pale candour of the night.

A slim, white-faced woman she stood shivering in the doorway of the hovel. Her eyes were black and lustrous–swift, darting eyes full of dusky fire and vivid unrest. Her mouth ran a red streak, firm above her white chin. Her hair gleamed like sable steel. The world was cold about her for the moment, dead and inert as her own heart. As she stood there, fine and fragile as gossamer, the very trees seemed to weep for her with the dawning day.

Some hundred paces from the hut, a cloud of smoke mingled with the mist that hung about the blackened walls of the forest tower. Its windows were blind and frameless to the sky; a zone of charred wood and reeking ashes circled its base. The mist hung above it like a ghostly memory. The place looked desolate and pitiful enough in the meagre light.

The girl Yeoland watched the incense of smoke wreathing grey spirals overhead, melting symbolic–into nothingness. The pungent scent of the ruin floated down to her, and became a recollection for all time. This blackened shell had been a home to her, a bulwark, nay, a cradle. Sanguine life had run ruddy through its heart. How often had she seen its grey brow crowned with gold by the mystic

hierarchy of heaven. She had found much joy there and little sorrow. A wrinkled face had taught her these many years to cherish the innocence of childhood. All this was past; the present found her bankrupt of such things. The place had become but a coffin, a charnel-house for the rotting bones of love.

As she brooded in the doorway, the smite of a spade came ringing to her on the misty air. Terse and rhythmic, it was like the sound of Time plucking the hours from the Tree of Life. She looked out over the glade, and saw Jaspar the harper digging a shallow grave under an oak.

She went and watched him, calmly, silently, with the utter quiet of a measureless grief. There was reason in this labour. It emphasised reality; helped her to grip the present. As the brown earth tumbled at her feet, she remembered how much she would bury in that narrow forest grave.

The man Jaspar was a ruddy soul, like a red apple in autumn. His strong point was his loyalty, a virtue that had stiffened with the fibres of his heart. He could boast neither of vast intelligence, nor of phenomenal courage, but he had a conscience that had made gold of his whole rough, stunted body. Your clever servant is often a rogue; in the respect of apt villainy, the harper was a fool.

He ceased now and again from his digging, hung his hooked chin over his spade, and snuffed the savour of the clean brown earth. He thrust curt, furtive glances up into the girl's face as she watched him, as though desirous of reading her humour or her health.

"You are weary," she said to him anon, looking blankly into the trench.

The man wagged his head.

"Have ye broken fast? There is bread and dried fruit in the hut, and a pitcher of water."

"I cannot eat–yet," she answered him.

He sighed and continued his digging. The pile of russet earth increased on the green grass at her feet; the trench deepened. Jaspar moistened his palms, and toiled on, grunting as he hove his libations of soil over his shoulder. Presently he stood up again to rest.

"What will you do, madame?" he asked her, squinting at the clouds.

"Ride out."

"And whither?"

"Towards Gilderoy–as yet."

"Ah, ah, a fair town and strong. John of Brissac is madame's friend. Good. Have we money?"

"Some gold nobles."

They waxed silent again, and in a while the grave lay finished. 'Twas shallow, but what of that! It gave sanctuary enough for the dead.

They went together, and gazed on the sleeping man's face. It was grey, but

very peaceful, with no hint of horror thereon. The eyes were closed, and dew had starred the white hair with a glistening web. Yeoland knelt and kissed the forehead. She shivered and her hands trembled, but she did not weep.

So they carried the Lord Rual between them, for he was a spare man and frugal of frame, and laid him in the grave beneath the oak. When they had smoothed his hair, and crossed his hands upon his breast, they knelt and prayed to the Virgin and the saints that in God's heaven he might have peace. The wind in the boughs sang a forest requiem.

When Yeoland had looked long at the white face in the trench, she rose from her knees, and pointed Jaspar to his spade. The harper took the measure of her mind. When she had passed into the shadows of the trees, he mopped his face, and entered on his last duty to the dead. It was soon sped, soon ended. A pile of clean earth covered the place. Jaspar banked the grave with turf, shouldered his spade, and returned to the hovel.

He found the girl Yeoland seated on a fallen tree in the forest, her ebon hair and apple-green gown gleaming under the sweeping boughs. Her cheeks were white as windflowers, her eyes full of a swimming gloom. She raised her chin, and questioned the man mutely with a look that smouldered under her arched brows.

"Jaspar?"

"Madame—-"

"Have you entered the tower?"

The man's wrinkled face winced despite his years.

"Would you have me go?" he asked her in a hoarse undertone.

She looked into the vast mazes of the woods, shuddered in thought, and was silent. Her mouth hardened; the desire melted from her eyes.

"No," she said anon, turning her hood forward, and drawing a green cloak edged with sables about her, "what would it avail us? Let us sally at once."

A little distance away, their horses, that had been hobbled over night, stood grazing quietly on a patch of grass under the trees. One was a great grey mare, the other a bay jennet, glossy as silk. Jaspar caught them. He was long over the girths and bridles, for his hands were stiff, and his eyes dim. When he returned, Yeoland was still standing like a statue, staring at the blackened tower reeking amid the trees.

"Truly, they have burnt the anguish of it into my heart with fire," she said, as Jaspar held her stirrup.

"God comfort you, madame!"

"Let us go, Jaspar, let us go."

"And whither, lady?"

"Where revenge may lead."

The day brightened as they plunged down into the forest. A light breeze rent the vapours, and a shimmer of sunlight quivered through the haze. The tree-tops began to glisten gold; and there was life in the deepening promise of the sky. The empty woods rolled purple on the hills; the greensward shone with a veil of gossamer; the earth grew glad.

The pair had scant burden of speech upon their lips that morning. They were still benumbed by the violence of the night, and death still beckoned to their souls. Fate had smitten them with such incredible and ponderous brevity. On the dawn of yesterday, they had ridden out hawk on wrist into the wilds, lost the bird in a long flight, and turned homeward when evening was darkening the east. From a hill they had seen the tower lifting its flame like a red and revengeful finger to heaven. They had hastened on, with the glare of the fire spasmodic and lurid over the trees. In one short hour they had had speech with death, and came point to point with the bleak sword of eternity.

What wonder then that they rode like mutes to a burial, still of tongue and dull of heart? Life and the zest thereof were at low ebb, colourless as a wintry sea. Joy's crimson wings were smirched and broken; the lute of youth was unstrung. A granite sky had drawn low above their heads, and to the girl a devil ruled the heavens.

Before noon they had threaded the wild waste of woodland that girded the tower like a black lagoon. They came out from the trees to a heath, a track that struck green and purple into the west, and boasted nought that could infringe the blue monotony of the sky. It was a wild region, swept by a wind that sighed perpetually amid the gorse and heather. By the black rim of the forest they had dismounted and partaken of bread and water before pushing on with a listless persistence that won many miles to their credit.

The man Jaspar was a phlegmatic soul in the hot sphere of action. He was a circumspect being who preferred heading for the blue calm of a haven in stormy weather, to thrusting out into the tossing spume of the unknown. The girl Yeoland, on the contrary, had an abundant spirit, and an untamed temper. Her black eyes roved restlessly over the world, and she tilted her chin in the face of Fate. Jaspar, knowing her fibre, feared for her moods with the more level prudence of stagnant blood. Her obstinacy was a hazardous virtue, hawk-like in sentiment, not given to perching on the boughs of reason. Moreover, being cumbered with a generous burden of pity, he was in mortal dread of wounding her pale proud grief.

By way of being diplomatic, he began by hinting that there were necessities in life, trivial no doubt, but inevitable, as sleep and supper.

"Lord John of Brissac is your friend," he meandered, "a strong lord, and a great; moreover, he hates those of Gambrevault, God chasten their souls! Fonte-

naye is no long ride from Gilderoy. Madame will lodge there till she can come by redress?"

Madame had no thought of being beholden to the gentleman in question. Jaspar understood as much from a very brief debate. Lord John of Brissac was forbidden favour, being as black a pard when justly blazoned as any seigneur of Gambrevault. The harper's chin wagged on maugre her contradiction.

"We have bread for a day," he chirped, dropping upon banalities by way of seeming wise. "The nights are cold, madame, damp as a marsh. As for the water-pot—-"

"Water may be had–for the asking."

"And bread?"

"I have money."

"Then we ride for Gilderoy?"

The assumption was made with an excellent unction that betrayed the seeming sincerity of the philosopher. Yeoland stared ahead over her horse's ears, with a clear disregard for Jaspar and his discretion.

"We are like leaves blown about in autumn," she said to him, "wanderers with fortune. You have not grasped my temper. I warrant you, there is method in me."

Jaspar looked blank.

"Strange method, madame, to ride nowhere, to compass nothing."

She turned on him with a sudden rapid gleam out of her passionate eyes.

"Nothing! You call revenge nothing?"

The harper appealed to his favourite saint.

"St. Jude forfend that madame should follow such a marsh fire," he said.

They had drawn towards the margin of the heath. Southwards it sloped to the rim of a great pine forest, that seemed to clasp it with ebonian arms. The place was black, mysterious, impenetrable, fringed with a palisading of dark stiff trunks, but all else, a vast undulation of sombre plumes. Its spires waved with the wind. There was a soundless awe about its sable galleries, a saturnine gloom that hung like a curtain. In the vague distance, a misty height seemed to struggle above the ocean of trees, like the back of some great beast.

Yeoland, keen of face, reined in her jennet, and pointed Jaspar to this landscape of sombre hues. There was an alert lustre in her eyes; she drew her breath more quickly, like one whose courage kindles at the cry of a trumpet.

"The Black Wild," she said with a little hiss of eagerness, and a glance that was almost fierce under her coal-black brows.

Jaspar shook his head with the cumbersome wit of an ogre.

"Ha, yes, madame, a bloody region, packed with rumours, dark as its own trees; no stint of terror, I warrant ye. See yonder, the road to Gilderoy."

The girl in the green cloak seemed strongly stirred by her own thoughts. Her face had a wild elfin look for the moment, a beautiful and daring insolence that deified her figure.

"And Gilderoy?" she said abstractedly.

"Gilderoy lies south-east; Gambrevault south-west many leagues. Southwards, one would find the sea, in due season. Eastwards, we touch Geraint, and the Roman road."

Yeoland nodded as though her mind were already adamant in the matter.

"We will take to the forest," ran her decretal.

Here was crass sentiment extravagantly in the ascendant, mad wilfulness pinioning forth like a bat into gloom. Jaspar screwed his mouth into a red knot, blinked and waxed argumentative with a vehemence that did his circumspection credit.

"A mad scheme."

"What better harbour for the night than yonder trees?"

"Who will choose us a road? I pray you consider it."

Yeoland answered him quietly enough. She had set her will on the venture, was in a desperate mood, and could therefore scorn reason.

"Jaspar, my friend," she said, "I am in a wild humour, and ripe for the wild region. Peril pleases me. The unknown ever draweth the heart, making promise of greater, stranger things. What have I to lose? If you play the craven, I can go alone."

III

The avenues of the pine forest engulfed the harper and the lady. The myriad crowded trunks hemmed them with a stubborn and impassive gloom. A faint wind moved in the tree-tops. Dim aisles struck into an ever-deepening mystery of shadow, as into the dark mazes of a dream.

The wild was as some primæval waste, desolate and terrible, a vast flood of sombre green rolling over hill and valley. Its thickets plunged midnight into the bosom of day. On the hills, the trees stood like traceried pinnacles, spears blood-red in the sunset, or splashed with the glittering magic of the moon. There were dells sunk deep beneath crags; choked with dense darkness, unsifted by the sun. Winding alleys white with pebbles as with the bones of the dead, wound

through seething seas of gorse. In summer, heather sucked with purple lips at the tapestries of moss blazoning the ground, bronze, green, and gold. It was a wild region, and mysterious, a shadowland moaned over by the voice of a distressful wind.

Yeoland held southwards by the gilded vane of the sun. She had turned back her hood upon her shoulders, and fastened her black hair over her bosom with a brooch of amethysts. The girl was wise in woodlore and the philosophies of nature. The sounds and sights of the forest were like a gorgeous missal to her, blazoned with all manner of magic colours. She knew the moods of hawk and hound, had camped often under the steely stare of a winter sky, had watched the many phases of the dawn. Hers was a nature ripe for the hazardous intent of life. It was she who led, not Jaspar. The harper followed her with a martyred reason, having, for all his discontent, some faith in her keen eyes and the delicate decision of her chin.

There was a steady dejection in the girl's mood–a dejection starred, however, with red wrath like sparks glowing upon tinder. She was no Agnes, no Amorette, mere pillar of luscious beauty. Her eyes were as blue-black shields, flashing with many sheens in the face of day. The flaming tower, the dead figure in the forest grave, had thrust the gentler part out of her being. She was miserable, mute, yet full of a volcanic courage.

As for the harper, a rheumy dissatisfaction pervaded his temper. His blood ran cold as a toad's in winter weather. He blew upon his fingers, dreaming of inglenooks and hot posset, and the casual luxuries the forest did not promise. Yeoland considered not the old man's babblings. Her heart looked towards the dawn, and knew nothing of the twilight under the dark eaves of age.

They had pressed a mile or more into the waste, and the day was waxing sere and yellow in the west. Before them ran a huge thicket, its floor splashed with tawny splendours, the sable plumes touched with gold by the sun. Its deep bosom hung full of purple gloom, dusted with amber, wild and windless.

A sudden "hist" from his lady's lips made the harper start in the saddle. Her hand had snatched at his bridle. Both horses came to a halt. The man looked at her as they sat knee to knee; she was alert and vigilant, her eyes bright as the eyes of a hawk.

"Marked you that?" she said to him in a whisper.

Jaspar gave her a vacant stare and shook his head.

"Nothing?"

"Boughs swaying in the wind, no more."

Yeoland enlightened him.

"Tush. There's no wind moving. A glimmer of armour, yonder, up the slope."

"Holy Jude!"

"A flash, it has gone."

They held silent under the drooping boughs, listening, with noiseless breath. The breeze made mysterious murmurings with a vague unrest; now and again a twig cracked, or some forest sound floated down like a filmy moth on the quiet air. The trees were dumb and saturnine, as though resenting suspicion of their sable aisles.

Jaspar, peering over his shoulder, jerked out a word of warning. Yeoland, catching the monosyllable from his lips, and following his stare, glanced back into the eternal shadows of the place.

"I see nothing," she said.

Jaspar answered her slowly, his eyes still at gaze.

"A shadow slipping from trunk to trunk."

"Where?"

"I see it no longer. The saints succour us!"

Yeoland's face was dead white under her hair; her mouth gaped like a circle of jet. She listened constantly. Her head moved in stately fashion on her slim neck, as she shot glances hither and thither into the glooms, her eyes challenging the world. She felt peril, but was no craven in the matter–a contrast to Jaspar, who shook as with an ague.

The harper's distress broke forth into petulant declaiming.

"Trapped," he said; "I could have guessed as much, with all this fooling. These skulkers are like crows round carrion. Shall we lose much, madame?"

"Gold, Jaspar, if they are content with such. What if they should be of Gambrevault!"

The harper gave a quivering whistle, a shrill breath between his teeth, eloquent of the unpleasant savour of such a chance. It was beyond him for the moment whether he preferred being held up by a footpad, to being bullied by some ruffian of a feudatory. He had a mere bodkin of a dagger in his belt, and little lust for the letting of blood.

"'Tis a chance, madame," he said, with a certain lame sententiousness, "that had not challenged my attention. Say nothing of Cambremont; one word would send us to the devil."

"Am I a fool? Since these gentlemen will not declare themselves, let us hold on and tempt their purpose."

Thinking to see the swirl of shadows under the trees, the glimmer of steel in the forest's murk, they rode on at a lifeless trot. Nothing echoed to their thoughts. The woods stood impassive, steeped in solitude. There was a strange atmosphere of peace about the place that failed to harmonise their fears. Yet like a prophecy of wind there stole in persistently above the muffled tramp of hoofs, a dull, char-

acterless sound, touched with the crackling of rotten wood, that seemed to hint at movement in the shadows.

The pair pressed on vigilant and silent. Anon they came to a less multitudinous region, where the trees thinned, and a columned ride dwindled into infinite gloom. Betwixt the black stems of the trees flashed sudden a streak of scarlet, torchlike in the shadows. An armed rider in a red cloak, mounted on a sable horse, kept vigil silently between the boles of two great firs. He was immobile as rock, his spear set rigid on his thigh, his red plume sweeping the green fringes of the trees.

This solemn figure stood like a sanguinary challenge to Yeoland and the harper. Here at least was something tangible in the flesh, more than a mere shadow. The pair drew rein, questioning each other mutely with their eyes, finding no glimmer of hope on either face.

As they debated with their glances over the hazard, a voice came crying weirdly through the wood.

"Pass on," it said, "pass on. Pay ye the homage of the day."

This forest cry seemed to loosen the dilemma. Certainly it bore wisdom in its counsel, seeing that it advised the inevitable, and ordered action. Yeoland, bankrupt of resource, took the unseen herald at his word, and rode on slowly towards the knight on the black horse.

The man abode their coming like a statue, his red cloak shining sensuously under the sombre green of the boughs. A canopy of golden fire arched him in the west. He sat his horse with a certain splendid arrogance, that puzzled not a little the conjectures of Yeoland and the harper. This was neither the mood nor the equipment of a vagabond soul. The fine spirit of the picture hinted briskly at Gambrevault.

The pair came to a halt under the two firs. The man towered above them on his horse, grim and gigantic, a great statue in black and burnished steel. His salade with beaver lowered shone ruddy in the sun. His saddle was of scarlet leather, bossed with brass and fringed with sable cord. Gules flamed on his shield, devoid of all device, a strong wedge of colour, bare and brave.

The girl caught the gleam of the man's eyes through the grid of his vizor. He appeared to be considering her much at his leisure with a keen silence, that was not wholly comforting. Palpably he was in no mood for haste, or for such casual courtesies that might have ebbed from his soundless strength.

Full two minutes passed before a deep voice rolled sonorously from the cavern of the casque.

"Madame," it said, "be good enough to consider yourself my prisoner. Rest assured that I bring you no peril save the peril of an empty purse."

There was a certain powerful complacency in the voice, pealing with the

deep clamour of a bell through the silence of the woods. The man seemed less ponderous and sinister, giant that he was. The girl's eyes fenced with him fearlessly under the trees.

"Presumably," she said to him, "you are a notorious fellow; I have the misfortune to be ignorant of these parts and their possessors. Be so courteous as to unhelm to me."

Her tone did not stir the man from his reserve of gravity. Her words were indeed like so many ripples breaking against a rock. The voice retorted to her calmly from the helmet.

"Madame, leave matters to my discretion."

She smiled in his face despite herself, a smile half of petulance, half of relish.

"You pretend to wisdom, sir."

"Forethought, madame."

"Am I your prisoner?"

"No new thing, madame; I have possessed you since you ventured into these shadows."

He made a gesture with his spear, holding it at arm's length above his head, where it quivered like a reed in his staunch grip. A sound like the moving of a distant wind arose. The dark alleys of the wood grew silvered with a circlet of steel. The shafts of the sunset flickered on pike and bassinet, gleaming amid the verdured glooms. Again the man's spear shook, again the noise as of a wind, and the girdle of steel melted into the shadows.

"Madame is satisfied?"

She sucked in her breath through her red lips, and was mute.

"Leave matters to my discretion. You there, in the brown smock, fall back twenty paces. Madame, I wait for you. Let us go cheek by jowl."

The man wheeled his horse, shook his spear, hurled a glance backward over his shoulder into the woods. There was no gainsaying him for the moment. Yeoland, bending to necessity, sent Jaspar loitering, while she flanked the black destrier with her brown jennet. She debated keenly within herself whither this adventure could be leading her, as she rode on with this unknown rider into the wilds.

The man in the red cloak was wondrous mute at first, an iron pillar of silence gleaming under the trees. The girl knew that he was watching her from behind his salade, for she caught often the white glimmer of his stare. He bulked largely in the descending gloom, a big man deep of chest, with shoulders like the broad ledges of some sea-washed rock. He was richly appointed both as to his armour and his trappings; to Yeoland his shield showed a blank face, and he carried no crest or token in his helmet.

They had ridden two furlongs or more before the man stepped from his

pedestal of silence. He had been studying the girl with the mood of a philosopher, had seen her stark, strained look, the woe in her eyes, the firm closure of her lips. The strong pride of grief in her had pleased him; moreover he had had good leisure to determine the character of her courage. His first words were neither very welcome to the girl's ears nor productive of great comfort, so far as her apprehensions were concerned. Bluntly came the calm challenge from the casque.

"Daughter of Rual of Cambremont, you have changed little these five years."

Yeoland gave the man a stare. Seeing that his features were screened by his helmet, the glance won her little satisfaction. She knew that he was watching her to his own profit, and her discovery, for the reflex look she had flashed at him, must have told him all he desired, if he had any claim to being considered observant. There was that also in the tone and tenor of his words that implied that he had ventured no mere tentative statement, but had spoken to assure her that her name and person were not unknown to him. Acting on the impression, she tacitly confessed to the justice of his charge.

"Palpably," she said, "my face is known to you."

"Even so, madame."

"How long will you hold me at a disadvantage?"

"Is ignorance burdensome?"

She imagined of a sudden that the man was smiling behind his beaver. Being utterly serious herself, she discovered an illogical lack of sympathy in the stranger's humour. Moreover she was striving to spell Gambrevault from the alphabet of word and gesture, and to come to an understanding with the doubts of the moment.

"Messire," she began.

"Madame," he retorted.

"Are you mere stone?"

For answer he lapsed into sudden reflection.

"It is five years ago this Junetide," he said, "since the King and the Court came to Gilderoy."

"Gilderoy?"

"You know the town, madame?"

She stared back upon a sudden vision of the past, a past gorgeous with the crimson fires of youth. That Junetide she had worn a new green gown, a silver girdle, a red rose in her hair. There had been jousting in the Gilderoy meadows, much braying of trumpets, much splendour, much pomp of arms. She remembered the scent and colour of it all; the blaze of tissues of gold and green, purple and azure. She remembered the flickering of a thousand pennons in the wind, the fair women thronging the galleries like flowers burdening a bowl. The

vision came to her undefiled for the moment, a dream-memory, calm as the first pure pageant of spring.

"And you, messire?" she said, with more colour of face and soul.

"Rode in the King's train."

"A noble?"

"Do I bulk for a cook or a falconer?"

"No, no. Yet you remember me?"

"As it were yesterday, walking in the meadows at your father's side–your father, that Rual who carried the banner when the King's men stormed Gaerlent these forty years ago. Not, madame, that I followed that war; I was a mass of swaddling-clothes puking in a cradle. So we grow old."

The girl's face had darkened again on the instant. The man in the red cloak saw her eyes grow big of pupil, her lips straightened into a colourless line. She held her head high, and stared into the purple gloom of the woods. Memories were with her. The present had an iron hand upon her heart.

"Time changes many things," he said, with a discretion that desired to soften the silence; "we go from cradle to throne in one score years, from life to clay in a moment. Pay no homage to circumstance. The wave covers the rock, but the granite shows again its glistening poll when the water has fallen. A Hercules can strangle Fate. As for me, I know not whether I have soared in the estimation of heaven; yet I can swear that I have lost much of the vagabond, sinful soul that straddled my shoulders in the past."

There was a warm ruggedness about the man, a flippant self-knowledge, that touched the girl's fancy. He was either a strong soul, or an utter charlatan, posing as a Diogenes. She preferred the former picture in her heart, and began to question him again with a species of picturesque insolence.

"I presume, messire," she said, "that you have some purpose in life. From my brief dealings with you, I should deem you a very superior footpad. I gather that it is your intention to rob me. I confess that you seem a gentleman at the business."

The man of the red cloak laughed in his helmet.

"To be frank, madame," he said, "you may dub me a gatherer of taxes."

"Explain."

"Being unfortunates and outcasts from the lawful ways of life, my men and I seek to remedy the injustice of the world by levying toll on folk more happy than ourselves."

"Then you condemn me as fortunate?"

"Your defence, madame."

The girl smiled with her lips, but her eyes were hard and bright as steel.

"I might convince you otherwise," she said, "but no matter. Why should I

be frank with a thief, even though he be nobly born?"

"Because, madame, the thief may be of service to the lady."

"I have little silver for your wallet."

"Am I nothing but a money-bag!"

She looked up at him with a straight stare; her voice was level, even imperious.

"Put up your vizor," she said to him.

The man in the black harness hesitated, then obeyed her. She could see little of his face, however, save that it was bronzed, and that the eyes were very masterful. She ventured further in the argument, being bent on fathoming the baser instincts of the business.

"Knight of the red shield," she said.

"Madame?"

"I ask you an honest question. If you would serve me, speak the truth, and let me know my peril. Are you the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault, or no?"

The man never hesitated an instant. There was no wavering to cast doubt upon his sincerity, or upon his intelligence as a liar.

"No, madame," he answered her, "I am not the Lord of Gambrevault and Avalon, and may I, for the sake of my own neck, never come single-handed within his walls. I have an old feud with the lords of Gambrevault, and when the chance comes, I shall settle it heavily to my credit. If you have any ill to say of the gentleman, pray say it, and be happy in my sympathy."

"Ha," she said, with a sudden flash of malice, "I would give my soul for that fellow's head."

"So," quoth the man, with a keen look, "that would be a most delectable bargain."

IV

The stems thinned about them suddenly, and the sky grew great beyond a more meagre screen of boughs. To the west, breaking the blood-red canopy with an edge of agate, rocks towered heavenwards, smiting golden-fanged into a furnace of splendour. Waves of light beat in spray upon the billowy masses of the trees, dying in the east into a majestic mask of gloom.

Yeoland and the man in red came forth into a little glade, hollowed by the

waters of a rush-edged pool. A stream, a scolloped sheet of foam, stumbled headlong into the mere, vanishing beyond like a frail white ghost into the woods. A fire danced in the open, and under the trees stood a pavilion of red cloth.

The man dismounted and held the girl's stirrup. A quick glance round the glade had shown her bales of merchandise, littering the green carpet of the place, horses tethered in the wood, men moving like gnomes about the fire. Even as she dismounted, streaks of steel shone out in the surrounding shadows. Armed men streamed in, and piled their pikes and bills about the pines.

At the western end of the glade, a gigantic fir, a forest patriarch, stood out above the more slender figures of his fellows. The grotesque roots, writhing like talons, tressled a bench of boughs and skins. Before the tree burnt a fire, the draught sweeping upwards to fan the fringe of the green fir's gown. The man in the black harness took Yeoland to the seat under the tree. The boughs arched them like a canopy, and the wood fire gave a lusty heat in the gloaming.

A boy had run forward to unhelm the knight in the red cloak. Casque and sword lay on the bench of boughs and skins. The girl's glance framed for the first time the man's face. She surveyed him at her leisure under drooping lids, with a species of reticent interest that escaped boldness. It was one of those incidents to her that stand up above the plain of life, and build individual history.

She saw a bronzed man with a tangle of tawny-red hair, a great beak of a nose, and a hooked chin. His eyes were like amber, darting light into the depth of life, alert, deep, and masterful. There was a rugged and indomitable vigour in the face. The mouth was of iron, yet not unkind; the jaw ponderous; the throat bovine. The mask of youth had palpably forsaken him; Life, that great chiseller of faces, had set her tool upon his features, moulding them into a strenuous and powerful dignity that suited his soul.

He appeared to fathom the spirit of the girl's scrutiny, nor did he take umbrage at the open and critical revision of her glances. He inferred calmly enough, that she considered him by no means blemishless in feature or in atmosphere. Probably he had long passed that age when the sanguine bachelor never doubts of plucking absolute favour from the eyes of a woman. The girl was not wholly enamoured of him. He was rational enough to read that in her glances.

"Madame is in doubt," he said to her, with a glimmer of a smile.

"As to what, messire?"

"My character."

"You prefer the truth?"

"Am I not a philosopher?"

"Hear the truth then, messire, I would not have you for a master."

The man laughed, a quiet, soundless laugh through half-closed lips. There was something magnetic about his grizzled and ironical strength, cased in its

shell of blackened steel. He had the air of one who had learnt to toy with his fellows, as with so many strutting puppets. The world was largely a stage to him, grotesque at some seasons, strenuous at others.

"Ha, a miracle indeed," he said, "a woman who can tell the truth."

She ignored the gibe and ran on.

"Your name, messire?"

The man spread his hands.

"Pardon the omission. I am known as Fulviac of the Forest. My heritage I judge to be the sword, and the shadows of these same wilds."

Yeoland considered him awhile in silence. The firelight flickered on his harness, glittering on the ribbed and jointed shoulder plates, striking a golden streak from the edge of each huge pauldron. Mimic flames burnt red upon his black cuirass, as in a darkened mirror. The night framed his figure in an aureole of gloom, as he sat with his massive head motionless upon its rock-like throat.

"Five years ago," she said suddenly, "you rode as a noble in the King's train. Now you declare yourself a thief. These things do not harmonise unless you confess to a dual self."

"Madame," he answered her, "I confess to nothing. If you would be wise, eschew the past, and consider the present at your service. I am named Fulviac, and I am an outlaw. Let that grant you satisfaction."

Yeoland glanced over the glade, walled in with the gloom of the woods, the stream foaming in the dusk, the armed men gathered about the further fire.

"And these?" she asked.

"Are mine."

"Outcasts also?"

"Say no hard things of them; they are folk whom the world has treated scurvily; therefore they are at feud with the world. The times are out of joint, tyrannous and heavy to bear. The nobles like millstones grind the poor into pulp, tread out the life from them, that the wine of pleasure may flow into gilded chalices. The world is trampled under foot. Pride and greed go hand in hand against us."

She looked at him under her long lashes, with the zest of cavil slumbering in her eyes. Autocracy was a hereditary right with her, even though feudalism had slain her sire.

"I would have the mob held in check," she said to him.

"And how? By cutting off a man's ears when he spits a stag. By splitting his nose for some small sin. By branding beggars who thieve because their children starve. Oh, equable and honest justice! God prevent me from being poor."

She looked at him with her great solemn eyes.

"And you?" she asked.

He spread his arms with a half-flippant dignity.

"I, madame, I take the whole world into my bosom."

"And play the Christ weeping over Jerusalem?"

"Madame, your wit is excellent."

A spit had been turning over the large fire, a haunch of venison being basted thereon by a big man in the cassock of a friar. Certain of Fulviac's fellows came forward bearing wine in silver-rimmed horns, white bread and meat upon platters of wood. They stood and served the pair with a silent and soldierly briskness that bespoke discipline. The girl's hunger was as healthy as her sleek, plump neck, despite the day's hazard and her homeless peril.

Dusk had fallen fast; the last pennon of day shone an eerie streak of saffron in the west. The forest stood wrapped in the stupendous stillness of the night. An impenetrable curtain of ebony closed the glade with its rush-edged pool.

Fulviac's servers had retreated to the fire, where a ring of rough faces shone in the wayward light. The sound of their harsh voices came up to the pair in concord with the perpetual murmur of the stream. Yeoland had shaken the breadcrumbs from her green gown. She was comforted in the flesh, and ready for further foining with the man who posed as her captor.

"Sincerity is a rare virtue," she said, with a slight lifting of the angles of her mouth.

"I can endorse that dogma."

"Do you pretend to the same?"

"Possibly."

"You love the poor, conceive their wrongs to be your own?"

Fulviac smiled in his eyes like a man pleased with his own thoughts.

"Have I not said as much?"

"Well?"

"I revere my own image."

"And fame?"

He commended her and unbosomed in one breath.

"Pity," he said, "is often a species of splendid pride. We toil, we fight, we labour. Why? Because below all life and effort, there burns an immortal egotism, an eternal vanity. 'Liberty, liberty,' we cry, 'liberty and justice man for man.' Yet how the soul glows at the sound of its own voice! The human self hugs fame,

and mutters, 'Lo, what a god am I in the eyes of the world!'"

V

Silence fell between them for a season, a silence deep and intangible as the darkness of the woods. The man's mood had recovered its subtle calm, even as a pool that has been stirred momentarily by the plashing of a stone sinks into rippleless repose. He sat with folded arms before the flare of the fire, watching the girl under his heavy brows.

She was very fair to look upon, slim, yet spirited as a band of steel. Her ears shone out from her dusky hair like apple blossoms in a mist of leaves. Her lips were blood-red, sensitive, clean as the petals of a rose. Her great grief had chastened her. From the curve of her neck to the delicate strength of her white hands, she was as rich an idyll as a man could desire.

Fulviac considered her with a thought that leant philosophically towards her beauty. He had grown weary of love in his time; the passions of youth had burnt to dry ashes; possibly he had been luckless in his knowledge of the sex. He had married a wife of irreproachable birth, a lady with a sharp nose and a lipless mouth, eyes of green, and a most unholy temper. She was dead, had been dead many years. The man had no delirious desire to meet her again in heaven. As for this girl, he had need of her for revolutionary reasons, and his mood to her was more that of a father. Her spirit pleased him. Moreover, he knew what he knew.

Gazing at the flames, he spread his hands to them, and entered again on the confines of debate. His voice had the steady, rhythmic insistence of a bell pealing a curfew. Its tone was that of a man not willing to be gainsaid.

"Therefore, madame, I would have you understand that I desire in some measure to be a benefactor to the human race."

"I take your word for it," she answered him.

"That I am an ambitious man, somewhat vain towards fame, one that can glow in soul."

"A human sun."

"So."

"That loves to be thought great through warming the universe."

"Madame, you are epigrammatic."

"Or enigmatic, messire."

"As you will," he answered her; "your womanhood makes you an enigma; it is your birthright. Understand that I possess power."

"Fifty cut-throats tied to a purse."

"Consider me a serious figure in the world's sum."

"As you will, messire. You are an outlaw, a leader of fifty vagabonds, a man with ideals as to the establishing of justice. You are going to subvert the country. Very good. I have learnt my lesson. But how is all this going to help me out of the wood?"

Fulviac took his sword, and balanced it upon his wrist. The red light from the fire flashed on the swaying steel.

"Our hopes are more near of kin, madame, than you imagine."

"Well?"

"Flavian of Gambrevault's raiders burnt your home, slew your father, exterminated your brethren. This happened but a day ago. You do not love this Flavian of Gambrevault."

Her whole figure stiffened spasmodically as at the prick of a sword. Her eyes, with widely open pupils, flashed up to Fulviac's face. She questioned him through her set teeth with a passionate whisper of desire.

"How do you know this?"

His face mellowed; the arm bearing the sword was steady as the limb of an oak.

"I am wiser in many ways than you imagine," he said. "Look at me, I am no longer young; I hate women; I patronise God. You are a mere child; to you life is dark and perilous as this wilderness of pines. Your trouble is known to me, because it is my business to know of such things. It was my deliberate intent that you should fall into my hands to-day."

The girl was still rigidly astonied. She stared at him mutely with dubious eyes. The man and his philosophy were beyond her for the moment.

"Well?" she said to him with a quaver of entreaty.

"First, you will honour me by saying that I have your trust."

"How may I promise you that?"

"Because I am surety for my own honour."

She smiled in his face despite the occasion.

"You seem very sure of your own soul," she said.

"Madame, it has taken me ten years to come by so admirable a state. Self-knowledge carried to the depths, builds up self-trust. I may take it for granted that you hate the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault?"

"Need you ask that!"

Her eyes echoed the mood of the flame. Fulviac, watching her, saw the strong wrack of wrath twisting her delicate features for the moment into pathetic

ugliness.

"You have courage," he said to her.

"Ample, messire."

"Flavian of Gambrevault is the greatest lord in the south."

"I am as wise."

"On that score, this Flavian and Fulviac of the Forest are irreconcilable as day and night."

The man stood his sword pommel upwards in the grass, and ran on.

"Some day I shall slay this same Flavian of Gambrevault. His blood will expiate the blood of these your kinsfolk. Therefore, madame, you will be my debtor."

"That is all?" she asked him with a wistfulness in her voice that was even piteous.

Fulviac looked long into the fire like a man whose thoughts channel under the crust of years. Pity for the girl had gone to the heart under the steel cuirass, a pity that was not the pander of desire. His eyes took a new meaning into their keen depths; he looked to have grown suddenly younger by some years. When he spoke again, his voice had lost its half-mocking and grandiose confidence. It was the voice of a man who strides generous and eager into the breach of fate.

"Listen," he said to her, "I may tell you that your sorrow has armed my manhood. Give me my due; I am more than a mere vagabond. You have been cruelly dealt with; I take your cause upon the cross of my sword."

"You, messire?"

"Even so. I need a good woman, a brave woman. You please me."

"Well?"

"You are a necessity to me."

"And why, messire?"

"For a matter of religion and of justice. Trust to my honour. You shall learn more in due season."

Yeoland, smitten with incredulity, stared at the man in mute surmise. Here was an amazing circumstance–robbery idealised, soul, body, purse, at one bold swoop. In her mystification, she could find nothing to say to the man for the moment, even though he had promised her a refuge.

"You are very sure of yourself," she said at length.

"I am a man."

"Yet you leave me in ignorance."

"Madame, we are to undertake great deeds together, great perils. I could hold up an astonishing future to your eyes, but for the present I keep silence. Rest assured that you shall be accorded such honour as the Virgin herself could desire. Remember that I give you promise of vengeance, and a home."

The girl drew a deep breath, as though taking the spirit of the hour into her bosom.

"If I refuse?" she said to him.

"You cannot refuse," came the level retort.

"And why, messire?"

"Your consent, though pleasant, is not necessary in the matter. I have long ago determined to appropriate you to my ambition."

VI

Fulviac's lair lay deep within the waving wilderness of pines. Above the spires of the forest, a massive barrier of rock thrust up its rugged bartisans into the blue. East and west it stretched a mile or more, concavitated towards the north, and standing like a huge breakwater amid the sea of boughs.

The rocky plateau above was peopled by pines and rowans, thatched also with a wild tangle of briar, whin, and heather. Crannies cleft into it; caves tunnelled its massive bosom; innumerable minarets of stone mingled with the wind-wracked trees. The cliffs rose like the walls of a castle donjon from the forest floor, studded with dwarf trees, bearded with ferns and grass. The plateau was inaccessible from the forest save by a thin rocky track, where the western slope of the cliff tailed off to merge into the trees.

The significance of the place to Fulviac lay in the existence of a cavern or series of caves piercing the cliff, and opening both upon the southern and northern facades of the mass. A wooden causeway led to the southern entry, bridging a small gorge where a stream foamed under the pines. The yawn of the southern opening had been built up with great blocks of stone, and the rough walls pierced by narrow squints, and a gate opening under a rounded arch.

Within, the roof of the main cavern arched abruptly upwards, hollowing a great dome over the smooth floor beneath. This grotesque and rock-ripped hall served as guard-room and dormitory, a very various chamber. Winding ways smote from it into the black bowels of the cliff. The height of the main cavern dwindled as it tunnelled northwards into the rock. A second wall of stone partitioned the guard-room from a second and smaller chamber, lit always by a great lamp pendent from the ceiling, a chamber that served Fulviac as state-room.

From Fulviac's parlour the cavern narrowed to a throat-like gallery that

had been expanded by human craft into a third and smaller room. This last rock chamber was wholly more healthy and habitable than the others. Its walls stood squarely from floor to rocky roof, and it was blessed with a wide casement, that stared northwards over a vista of obeisant trees. A postern gave entry to the room from a narrow platform, and from this ledge a stairway cut in the flank of the cliff dwindled into the murk of the forest below.

A more romantic atmosphere had swept into the bleak galleries of the place that winter. Plundered stores were ransacked, bales of merchandise ungirded, caskets and chests pilfered as for the endowing of the chamber of a queen. The northern room in the cliff blossomed into the rich opulence of a lady's bower. Its stone walls were panelled with old oak carvings taken from some ancient manor. There were tapestries of green, gold, and purple; an antique bed with a tester of silver silk, its flanks blazoned with coloured escutcheons. Painted glass, azure, red, and gold, jewelled the casement, showing also Sebastian bound to his martyr's tree. A Jew merchant plundered on the road had surrendered a set of brazen ewers, a lute inlaid with pearl, a carpet woven on the looms of the purple East. There were mirrors of steel about the walls. A carved prayer-desk, an embroidery frame, a crucifix wrought in ivory: Fulviac had consecrated all these to Yeoland, dead Rual's daughter.

A white lily amid a horde of thistles! The girl's life had drawn under the black shadow of the cliff, and into the clanging torrent of these rough men of the sword. It was a wild age and a wild region. Fulviac's rogues were like wolves in a forest lair, keen, bloody, and relentless. There was a rude strain of violence running through the strenuous mood of the place, like the song of Norse rovers, piercing the roar of the sea. Mystery enveloped the girl, war, and the sound of the sword. She fumbled at the riddle of Fate with the trembling fingers of one who unbars a prison gate in the hush of night. It was all strange and fantastic beyond the riot of a dream.

"Madame," Fulviac had said to her when he had hung a key at her girdle, "I have bidden you trust me; remember that I trust you in turn. Take this room as your sanctuary. Lock me out when you will. I prepare, among other things, to perfect your vengeance."

Yeoland suffered him and her necessity. She was shrewdly wise in the conviction that it would be useless to rebel against the man. Though overmasterful and secretive, his purpose appeared benignant in the opulence of its favour. Moreover, the forest was as a vast web holding her within the maze of the unknown.

"I have no alternative," she said to him, "I am in your power. And yet, I believe you are no villain."

"Your charity pleases me. I am a man with a strong purpose."

"For good?"

"Do I not need you?"

"Am I then so powerful a person?"

"You will learn anon."

"You seem something of a mystic," she said to him.

"Madame," he retorted, "trust my discretion. In due season I shall unfold to you certain aspects of life that will kindle your sympathies. I shall appeal to the woman in you. When you are wise you will commend my ambition."

"You speak in riddles."

"Wait. As yet you see through a glass darkly."

From the mountainous north to the warm southern sea, from the wooded west to the eastern fens, the good King ruled, holding many great barons in feudal faith, and casting his fetters of gold over Church and State. Chivalry moved through the world to the clangour of arms and the songs of the troubadour. Lutes sounded on terrace and in garden, fair women bloomed like roses, bathed in a sensuous blaze of romance. Baron made war upon baron; glory and death were crowned together. The painter spread his colours in the halls of the great; the goldsmith and the carver wrought wondrous things to charm the eye. Church bells tolled. Proud abbots carried the sword, and made fine flutter among the women. Innumerable saints crowded the avenues to heaven. It was a fair age and very lovely, full of colour and desire, music and the odour of romance.

And the poor? Their lot hung largely on the humour of an overlord, or the state of a gentleman's stomach. They had their saints' days, their games, their pageants, their miracle plays. They had hovels of clay and wattle; labour in wind and rain; plagues and pestilences in the rotting filth of their city alleys. They marked the great folk go by in silks and cloth of gold, saw the pomp and opulence of that other life, remembered their own rags and their squealing children.

And yet, consider the broad inclinations of the world. To eat, to be warm, to satisfy the flesh, to ease a lust, to drink beer. There was no very vast gulf betwixt the rich man and the poor. The one feasted to music, the other scraped a bone to the dirge of toil. They had like appetites, like satisfactions, and hell is considered to be Utopian in the extreme. The poor man envied the rich; the rich man ruled the poor. Envy, that jingling demagogue, has made riotous profit out of such a stew since the world was young.

Fulviac's cliff was shut out from the ken of man by leagues of woodland, moor, and waste. The great pine forest girded it in its inmost bosom. No wayfarers rode that way; no huntsman ranged so deep; the place had an evil rumour; many whom it had welcomed had never returned. Romancers had sung of it, the lay of Guingamor. Horror ruled black-browed over its pine-cumbered hills, its gloomy depths. Solitude abode there, as over a primæval sea, and there was no

sound save the moan or storm-cry of the wind over its troubled trees.

According to legend lore, Romulus peopled Rome with the offscourings of Italy. Fulviac had emulated the device with the state-craft of a strong conspirator. The forest stood a grand accomplice, abetting him with its myriad sentinels, who gossiped solely with the wind. The venture had been finely conceived, finely edificated. A cliff, a cave, five-score armed men. Not a vast power on the face of it to threaten a system or to shake a throne. Superficialities were fallacious, the surface false and fair as glistening ice. The forest hid more than a company of ruffians banded together to resist tyranny. Enthusiasm, genius, vigour, such torches, like a burning hovel, can fling a city into flame.

As for the girl Yeoland, she was more than mocked by the swift vagaries of life. Two days of mordant realism had erased from her heart the dream visions of childhood. To be declared homeless, kinless, in one day; to be bereft of liberty the next! To what end? She stared round the richly-garnished room into which Fate had thrust her, fingered the pearl-set lute, gazed at her own face in the steel mirrors. She was the same woman, yet how differently circumstanced! Fulviac's mood had not hinted at love, or at any meaner jest. What power could he prophesy to his advantage in the mere fairness of her face? What was the gall of a woman's vengeance to a man who had conceived the downfall of a kingdom?

Her knowledge of psychology was rustic in the extreme, and she had no wit for the unravelling of Fulviac's subtleties. There were certain convictions, however, that abode with her even in her ignorance. She could have taken oath that he was no mere swashbuckler, no captain of outlaws, no mere spoiler of men. Moreover, she believed him to be the possessor of some honour, and a large guerdon of virility. Lastly, pity appealed her as a sentiment not to be discarded. The man, whoever he might be, appeared desirous of putting his broad shoulders betwixt her and the world.

Fulviac grew perspicuous sooner than she could have prophesied. He had a fine, cloud-soaring way with him that seemed to ignore the mole-hills of common circumspection. He had wit enough also to impose his trust on others with a certain graceful confidence that carried bribery in the very generosity of its hardiness.

March was upon them like a spirit of discord, wild, riotous weather, with the wind thundering like storm-waves upon the cliff. The pines were buffeting each other in the forest, and reeling beneath the scourgings of the breeze. Fulviac came to the girl one windy noon, when the caverns were full of the breath of the storm. His manner to her seemed as a significant prelude, heralding the deep utterance of some human epic.

Fulviac took the girl by a winding stair leading from the guard-room–a stair that circled upwards in the thickness of the rock some hundred steps or more,

and opened into a basin-shaped pit on the plateau above. Dwarf trees and briars domed the hollow, giving vision of a grey and hurrying sky. The pair climbed a second stair that led to a rock perched like a pulpit on the margin of the southern precipice. The wind swept gusty and tempestuous over the cliff. It tossed back the girl's hood, made her stagger; she would have fallen had not Fulviac gripped her arm.

Below stretched an interminable waste of trees, of bowing pine-tops, and dishevelled boughs. The dull green of the forest merged into the grey of the cloud-strewn sky. On either hand the craggy bulwarks of the cliffs stretched east and west, its natural bartisans and battlements topped by a cornice of mysterious pines. It was a superb scene, rich with a wild liberty, stirred by the wizard chanting of the wind.

Fulviac watched the girl as she stood limned against the grey curtain of the sky. Her hair blew about her white throat and shoulders in sombre streams; her eyes were very bright under their dusky lashes; and the wind had kissed a stronger colour into her cheeks. She was clad in a kirtle of laurel-green cloth, bound about the waist with a girdle of silver. A white kerchief lay like snow over her shoulders and bosom; her green sleeves were slashed and puffed with crimson.

"Wild country," he said, looking in her eyes.

"Wild as the sea."

"You are a romanticist."

She gave a curt laugh.

"After what I have suffered!"

"Romance and sorrow go hand in hand. For the moment my words are more material. You see this cliff?"

She turned to him and stood watching his face.

"This cliff is the core of a kingdom. A granite wedge to hurl feudalism to ruins, to topple tyranny."

She nodded slowly, with a grave self-reservation.

"You have hinted that you are ambitious," she said.

"Ambition would have stormed heaven."

"And your ladder?"

The man made a strong gesture, like one who points a squadron to the charge. His eyes shone with a glint of grimness under his shaggy brows.

"The rabid discontent of the poor, fermenting ever under the crust of custom. The hate of the toiler for the fop and the fool. The iron that lies under the rusting injustice of riches. The storm-cry of a people's vengeance against the tyrant and the torturer."

Yeoland, solemn of face, groped diligently amid her surmises. The man

was a visionary by his own showing; it was impossible to mistake him for a fool. Like all beings of uncommon power, he combined imagination with that huge vigour of mind that moves the world. A vast element of strength lay coiled in him, subtle, yet overpowering as the body of some great reptile. The girl felt the gradual magic of his might mesmerising her with the inevitableness of its approach.

"You have brought me here?" she asked him.

"As I promised."

"Well?"

"To tell you something of the truth."

She looked at him with a penetrating frankness that was in spirit–laudatory.

"You put great trust in me," she said.

"That I may trust the more."

He sat himself down on a ledge of rock, and proceeded to parade before her imagination such visions as were well conceived to daze the reason of a girl taken fresh from a forest hermitage. He spoke of riot, revolution, and revenge; painted Utopias established beneath the benediction of a just personal tyranny, a country purged of oppression, a kingdom cleansed of pride. He told of arms stored in the warrens of the cliff, of grain and salted meat sufficient for an army. He pointed out the vast strength of the place, the plateau approachable only by the stairway in the cliff, and the narrow causeway towards the west. He described it as sufficient for the gathering and massing of a great host. Finally, he swept his hand over the leagues of forestland, dark as the sea, isleting the place from the ken of the world.

"You understand me?" he said to her.

She nodded and waited with closed lips. He gazed at the horizon, and spoke in parables.

"The King and the nobles are throned upon a pile of brushwood. A torch is plunged beneath; a tempest scourges the beacon into a furnace. The kingdom burns."

"Yes?"

"Consider me no mere visionary; I have the country at my back. For five years the work has gone on in secret. I have trusted nothing to chance. It needs

a bold man to strike at a kingdom. I–Fulviac, am that man."

VII

The free city of Gilderoy climbed red-roofed up a rocky hill, a hill looped south-east and west by the blue breadth of the river Tamar. Its castle, coroneting the central rock, smote into the azure, a sheaf of glistening towers and turrets, vaned with gold. Lower still, the cathedral's sable crown brooded above a myriad red-tiled roofs and wooden gables. Many fair gardens blazoned the higher slopes of the city. Tall walls of grey stone ringed round the whole, grim and quaint with bartisan and turret. To the north, green meadows dipped to the billowy distance of the woods. The silver streak of the sea could be seen southwards from the platforms of the castle.

Gilderoy was a rich city and a populous, turbulent withal, holding honourable charters from the King, exceeding proud of its own freedom. Its Guilds were the wealthiest in all the south; the coffers of its Commune overflowed with gold. Nowhere was fairer cloth woven than in Gilderoy. Nowhere could be found more cunning smiths, more subtle armourers. The mansions of its rich merchant folk were wondrous opulent and great, bedight with goodly tapestry and all manner of rare furniture. Painters had gathered to it from the far south; its courtezans were the joy of the whole kingdom.

Two days after his confessions on the cliff, Fulviac took horse, mounted Yeoland on a white palfrey, and rode for Gilderoy through the forest. The man was upholstered as a merchant, in a plum-coloured cloak, a cap of sables, and a Venetian mail cape. Yeoland wore a light blue jupon edged with silver, a green kirtle, a cloak of brocaded Tartarin. She rode beside the man, demure as a daughter, her bridle of scarlet leather merry with silver bells. Two armed servants and some six packhorses completed the cavalcade.

Fulviac had fallen into one of his silent moods that day. He was saturnine and enigmatic as though immersed in thought. The girl won nothing from him as to the purpose of their ride. They were for Gilderoy; thus much he vouchsafed her, and no more. She had a shrewd belief that he was for giving her tangible evidence of the hazardous schemes that were fermenting under the surface of silence, and that she was to learn more of the tempest that was gathering in the dark. Being tactful in her generation, she asked him no questions, and kept her

conjectures to herself.

They broke their ride to pass the night at a wayside hostelry, where the road from Gambrevault skirted the forest. Holding on at their good leisure on the following day, they entered Gilderoy by the northern gate, towards evening, with the cathedral bell booming a challenge to the distant sea. Crossing the great square with its tall mansions of carved oak and chiselled stone, they plunged into a narrow highway that curled downhill under a hundred overhanging gables. Set back in a murky court, a tavern hung out its gilded sign over the cobbles, a Golden Leopard, that groaned in the wind on its rusty hinges. The inn's casements glowed red under the gloom of roof and bracket. Fulviac rode into its stone-paved court with its balustraded gallery, its carved stairways, its creaking lamps swaying under the high-peaked gables.

Their horses were taken by a lean groom, blessed with a most malevolent squint. On the lower step of the gallery stair stood a rotund little man, with a bunch of keys reposing on his stomach, the light from a lantern overhead shining on his bald pate, as on a half sphere of alabaster. He seemed to sweat beef and beer at every pore. Shuffling his feet, he tilted his double chin to the sky, as though he were conducting a monologue under the stars.

"No brew yet," he hummed in a high falsetto, throaty and puling from so ponderous a carcase.

Fulviac set one foot on the stairs.

"St. Prosper's wine, fat Jean," he said.

The rotund soul turned his face suddenly earthwards, as though he had been jerked down by one leg out of heaven.

"Ah, sire, it is you."

"Who else? What of the good folk of Gilderoy?"

"Packed like a crowd of rats in a drain. Will your honour sup?"

The man stood aside with a great sweep of the hand, and a garlic-ladened breath given full in Yeoland's face.

"And the lady, sire, a cup of purple; the roads are dry?"

Fulviac pushed up the stairs.

"We are late, and supped as we came. Your private cellar will suit us better."

"Of a truth, sire, most certainly."

"Send the men back with the horses; Damian has his orders, and your money-bag."

"Rely on my dispatch, sire."

"Well, then, roll on."

Fat Jean, sweaty deity of pot and gridiron, took the keys from his girdle and a lantern from a niche in the wall. Going at a wheezy shuffle, he led them by a long passage and two circles of stairs to a cellar packed with hogsheads, tuns,

and great vats of copper. From the first cellar a second opened, from the second, a third. In the last vault Jean rolled a cask from a corner, turned a flagstone on its side, showed them a narrow stairway descending into the dark.

Fulviac took the lantern, made a sign to Jean, and passed down the stairway with Yeoland at his heels. The tavern-keeper remained above in the cellar, and closed the stone when the last gleam of the light had died down the stair. He rolled the cask back into its place, and felt his way back by cellar and stairway to the benignant glow of his own tavern room.

Fulviac and the girl had descended the black well of the stair. Tunnels of gloom ran labyrinthine on every hand; a musty scent burdened the air, and fine sand covered the floor. Fulviac held the lantern shoulder-high, took Yeoland's wrist, and moved forward into a great gallery that sloped downwards into the depths of the rock. The place was silent as the death-chamber of a pyramid. The lantern fashioned fantastic shadows from the gloom.

Yeoland held close to the man with an instinct towards trust that made her smile at her own thoughts. Fulviac had been in her life little more than a week; yet his unequivocating strength had won largely upon her liking–in no sentimental sense indeed, but rather with the calm command of power. Possibly she feared him a very little. Yet with the despair of a wrecked mariner she clung to him, in spirit, as she would have clung to a rock.

As they passed down the gallery with the lantern swinging in Fulviac's hand, she began to question him with a quiet persistence.

"What place is this?" she said.

For retort, Fulviac pointed her to the wall, and held the lantern to aid her scrutiny. The girl saw numberless recesses excavated in the rock; some had been bricked up and bore tablets; others were packed with grinning skulls. There were scattered paintings on the walls, symbolic daubs, or scenes from scriptural history. The place was meaningless to the girl, save that the dead seemed ever with them.

Fulviac smiled at her solemn face.

"The catacombs of the city of Gilderoy," he said; "yonder are the niches of the dead. These paintings were made by early folk, centuries ago. A veritable maze this, a gallery of skulls, a warren for ghosts to squeak in."

Yeoland had turned to scan a tablet on the wall.

"We go to some secret gathering?" she asked.

Fulviac laughed; the sound echoed through the passages with reverberating scorn.

"The same dark fable," he said, "telling of vaults and secret stairs, passwords and poniards, masks and murder. Remember, little sister, you are to be black and subtle to the heart's chords. This is life, not a romance or an Italian fable. We are

men here. There is to be no strutting on the stage."

The girl loitered a moment, as though her feet kept pace with her cogitations.

"I am content," she said, "provided I may eschew poison, nor need run a bodkin under some wretch's ribs."

"Be at peace on that score. I have not the heart to make a Rosamund of you."

Sudden out of a dark bye-passage, like a rat out of a hole, a man sprang at them and held a knife at Fulviac's throat. The mock merchant gave the password with great unconcern, putting his cap of sables back from off his face. The sentinel crossed himself, fell on one knee, and gave them passage. Turning a bluff buttress of stone, they came abruptly upon a short gallery that widened into a great circular chamber, pillared after the manner of a church.

A flare of torches harassed the shadowy vault, and played upon a thousand upturned faces that seemed to surge wave on wave out of the gloom. In the centre of the crypt stood an altar of black marble, and before it on the dais, a priest with a cowl down, a rough wooden crucifix in his hand. A knot of men in armour gleamed about the altar, ringing a clear space about the steps. Others, with drawn swords, kept the entries of the galleries leading to the cavern. A great quiet hung over the place, a silence solid as the rock above.

A group of armed men waited for Fulviac at the main entry to the crypt. He merged into their ranks, exchanging signs and words in an undertone with one who seemed in authority. The ring of figures pressed through the crowd towards the altar, Fulviac and Yeoland in their midst. Fulviac mounted the steps, and drew the girl up beside him. He uncovered his face to the mob with the gesture of a king uncovering to his people.

"Fulviac, Fulviac!"

The press swayed suddenly like the black waters of a lake, stirred by the rush of flood water through a broken dam. The ring of armed men gave up the shout with a sweeping of swords and a clangour of harness. The great cavern took up the cry, reverberating it from its thundering vault. A thousand hands were thrust up, as of the dead rising from the sea.

Yeoland watched the man's face with a mute kindling of enthusiasm. As she gazed, it beaconed forth a new dignity to her that she had never seen thereon before. A sudden grandeur of strength glowed from its weather-beaten features. The mouth and jaw seemed of iron; the eyes were full of a stormy fire. It was the face of a man transfigured, throned above himself on the burning pinnacle of power. He towered above the mob like some granite god, colossal in strength, colossal in courage. His manhood flamed out, a watch-fire to the world.

As the cry dwindled, the priest, who still kept his cowl down over his face,

held his crucifix on high, and broke into the strident cadence of a rebel ballad. The people followed as by instinct, knowing the song of old. Many hundred voices gathered strenuously into the flood, the massed roar rolling through the great crypt, echoing along the galleries like the sound of some subterranean stream. It was a deep chant and a stirring, strong with the strength of the storm wind, fanatic as the sea.

The silence that fell at the end thereof was the more solemn in contrast to the thundering stanzas of the hymn. Under the flare of the torches, Fulviac stood forward to turn the task from the crucifix to the sword.

"Men of Gilderoy."

A billow of cheering dashed again to the roof.

"Fulviac, Fulviac!"

The man suffered the cry to die into utter silence, before leaping into a riot of words, a harangue that had more justification in it than appeal. His voice filled the cavern with its volume and depth. It was more the voice of a captain thundering commands to a squadron of horse than the declamatory craft of the orator. Fulviac knew the mob, that they were rough and turbulent, and loved a demagogue. Scholastic subtleties could never fill their stomachs.

"Men of Gilderoy, I come to you with the sword. Bombast, bombast, come hither all, I'll laden ye with devilry, puff you up with pride. Ha, who is for being strong, who for being master? Listen to me. Damnation and death, I have the kingdom in the palm of my hand. Liberty, liberty, liberty. We strike for the people. Geraint is ours; Gore is ours; all the southern coast waits for the beacons. Malgo of the Mountain holds the west like a storm cloud under his cloak. The east raves against the King. Good. Who is for the stronger side, for Fulviac, liberty, and the people?"

He halted a moment, took breath, quieted all clamour with a sweep of the hand, plunged on again like a great carrack buffeting tall billows.

"Are there spies here? By God, let them listen well, and save their skins. Go and tell what ye have heard. Set torch to tinder. Blood and fire, the country would be in arms before the King could stir. No, no, there are no spies in Gilderoy; we are all brothers here. By my sword, sirs, I swear to you, that before harvest tide, we shall sweep the nobles into the sea."

A great shout eddied up to answer him. Fulviac's voice pierced it like a trumpet cry.

"Liberty, liberty, and the people!"

Sound can intoxicate as well as wine. The thunder of war, the bray of clarions, can fire even the heart of the coward. The mob swirled about the altar of black marble, vociferous and eager. Torches rocked to and fro in the cavern; shadows leapt grotesquely gigantic over the rough groinings of the roof. Yet

Fulviac had further and fiercer fuel for the fire. At a sign from him, the circle of armed men parted; two peasants stumbled forward bearing a cripple in their arms. They carried him up the steps and set him upon the altar before all the people, supporting him as he stared round upon the sea of faces.

He was a shrivelled being, yellow, black of eye, cadaverous. He looked like a man who had wallowed for years among toads in a pit, and had become as one of them. His voice was cracked and querulous, as he brandished a claw of a hand and screamed at the crowd.

"Look at me, mates and brothers. Five years ago I was a tall man and lusty. I forbade the Lord of Margradel my wife. They racked and branded me, tossed me into a stinking pit. I am young, young. I shall never walk again."

A woman rushed from the crowd, grey-haired, fat, and bloated. She climbed the altar steps, and stretched out her hands in a kind of frenzy towards the people.

"Look at me, men of Gilderoy. Last spring I had a daughter, a clean wench as ever danced. Seek her from John of Brissac and his devils. Ha, good words these for a mother. Men of Gilderoy, remember your children."

Fulviac's pageant gathered grimly before the mob. A blind man tottered up and pointed to his sightless eyes. A girl held up an infant, and told shrilly of its father's murder. One fellow displayed a tongueless mouth; another, a face distorted by the iron; a third had lost nose and ears; a fourth showed arms shrivelled and contracted by fire. It was a sinister appeal, strong yet piteous. The tyranny of the age showed in the bodies of these wronged and mutilated beings. They had been mere carrion tossed under the iron heel of power. The granite car of ruthless opulence and passion had crushed them under its reddened wheels.

At a gesture from Fulviac, the priest upon the steps threw back his cowl and stood forward in the torchlight. His face was the face of a zealot, fanatical, sanguine, lined with an energy that was prophetic of power. His eyes smouldered under their straight black brows. His hands, white and bony, quivered as he stretched them out towards the people.

They knew him on the instant; their clamour told as much. Often had the shadow of that thin figure fallen athwart the parched highways of stricken cities. Often had those hands tended death, those lips smitten awe into the souls of the drunkard and the harlot.

"Prosper, Prosper the Preacher!"

There rang a rude, rough joy in the clamour that was spontaneous and eloquent. It was the heart's cry of the people, wild, trusting, and passionate. Men and women broke through the circle of armed men, cast themselves upon the altar steps, kissed the friar's gown, and fawned on him. He put them back with a certain awkward dignity, and a hot colour upon his almost boyish face.

The man had a fine humility, though the strenuous ideals of his soul ran in fire to the zenith.

Anon he signed a benediction, and a hush descended on the place.

"God's peace to you, people of Gilderoy!"

The clamour revived.

"Preach to us, preach to us!" came the cry.

The friar stretched forth his hands; his voice rang strong and strident over the packed upturned faces.

"Children, what need have we of words! To-night have we not seen enough to scourge the manhood in us, to bear forth the Holy Cross of war? The evil beast is with us even yet; Mammon the Mighty treads you under foot. Ye saints, what cause more righteous since the martyrs fell? Look on these scars, these wrongs, these agonies. Preach! I am dumb beside such witnesses as these."

The crypt thundered to him when he lowered his hands. It was the cry of men bankrupt of liberty, thirsty for revenge. Fulviac grappled the climax, and stood forward with uplifted sword. His lion's roar sounded above the din.

"Go, people of Gilderoy," he cried, "go–but remember. When castles burn, and bolts scream, when spears splinter, and armies crash to the charge, remember your children and your wrongs. Strike home for God, and for your liberty."

VIII

The crowd had streamed from the cavern, swirling like black water under the tossing torches, the hollow galleries reverberating to the rush of many feet. Prosper had gone, borne away by the seditious captains of the Commune and the armed burghers who had guarded the entries. A great silence had fallen upon the crypt. Fulviac and the girl were left by the altar of black marble, their one lamp burning solitary in the gulf of gloom.

Fulviac had the air of a man whose favourite hawk had flown with fettle, and brought her quarry tumbling out of the clouds. He was warm with the zest of it, and his tawny eyes sparkled.

"May the Virgin smile on us!" he said. "Gilderoy will serve our ends."

The girl's eyes searched him gravely.

"You make holy war," she charged him.

"Ha, my sister, it is well to profess a strong conviction in the justice of

one's cause. Tell men they are heroes, patriots, martyrs, and you will make good fighting stuff. Applaud fanaticism, make great parade of righteousness, hail the Deity as patron, assemble all the saints under your banner. Ha, trust me, that is a way to topple a kingdom. Come, we must stir."

By many labyrinthine passages, strange galleries of death, they passed together from the dark deeps of the catacombs. At one point the roof shone silvered as with dew, and the air stood damp as in a marsh on a winter's eve. The river Tamar flowed above them in its rocky bed, so Fulviac told the girl. Anon they came out by a narrow stair that opened by a briar-grown throat into a thicket of old oaks in the Gilderoy meadows. The stairhead was covered by a species of stone trap that could be covered and concealed by sods. In the thicket a man awaited them with the bridles of three horses over his arm. Fulviac held Yeoland's stirrup, and they rode out, the three of them, from under the trees.

A full moon swam in a purple black sky amid a shower of shimmering stars. Gilderoy, with its climbing towers and turrets, stood out white under the moon. The city walls gleamed like alabaster in the magic glow. In the meadows the ringlets of the river glimmered. Far and distant rose the nebulous midnight of the woods.

Fulviac had bared his head to an inconstant and torpid breeze. They were riding for the west along a bridle track that curled grey and dim through the sombre meadows. The calm, soundless vault of the world rose now in contrast to the canopies of stone and the passion-throes of the catacombs. Human moil and effort seemed infinitely little under the eternal scrutiny of the stars. So thought the man for the moment, as he rode with his chin sunk upon his breast, watching keenly the girl at his side.

Yeoland was young. All the roses of youth were budding about her soul; idealism, like the essence of crushed violets, hovered heavy over the world. Her soul as yet was no frayed and listless lute, thrummed into discords by the bony hand of care. She was built for love, a temple of white marble, lit by lamps of rubeous glory. Colours flashed through the red sanctuaries of the flesh. Yet pain and great woe had smitten her. The grim destinies of earth seemed bent on thrusting an innocent pilgrim into the turbulent contradictions of life.

The pageant in the catacombs that night had stirred her strangely beyond belief. The fantastic faces, the zeal, the hot words of gesturing enthusiasm, these were things new to her, therefore the more vivid and convincing. New worlds, new passions, seemed to burst into being under the stars. She was utterly silent as she rode, looking forth into the night. Her hood had fallen back; her face shone white and clear; her eyes gleamed in the moonlight. Fulviac, like a chess-player who had evolved some subtle scheme, rode and watched her with a smile deep in his eyes. For the moment he was content to leave her to the magic of her own

thoughts.

At certain rare seasons in life, virgin light floods down into the heart, as from some oriel opened in heaven. The world stands under a grander scheme of chiaroscuro; men comprehend where they once scoffed. It was thus that Yeoland rose inspired, like a spiritual Venus from a sea of dreams. As molten glass is shaped speedily into fair and exquisite device, so the red wax of her heart had taken the impress of the hour. Gilderoy had stirred her like a blazoned page of romance.

Fulviac caught the girl's half glance at him; read in measure the meaning of her mood. Her lips were half parted as though she had words upon her tongue, but still hesitated from some scruple of pride. He straightened in the saddle, and waited for her to unbosom to him with a confident reserve.

"Well?" he said at length, since she still lingered in her silence.

"How much one may learn in a day," she answered, drawing her white palfrey nearer to his horse.

Fulviac agreed with her.

"The man on the end of the rope," he said, "learns in two minutes that which has puzzled philosophers since Adam loved Eve."

She turned to him with an eagerness that was almost passionate even in its suppressed vigour.

"How long was it before you came to pity your fellows?"

"Some minutes, not more."

"And the conversion?"

"Shall satisfy you one day. For the present I will buckle up so unsavoury a fable in my bosom. Tell me what you have learnt at Gilderoy."

Yeoland looked at the moon. The man saw great sadness upon her face, but also an inspired radiance that made its very beauty the more remarkable. He foresaw in an instant that they were coming to deeper matters. Superficialities, the mannerisms of life, were falling away. The girl's heart beat near to his; he felt a luminous sympathy of spirit rise round them like the gold of a Byzantine background.

"Come," he said, with a burst of beneficence, "you are beginning to understand me."

She jerked a swift glance at him, like the look of a half-tamed falcon.

"You are a man, for all your sneers and vapourings."

"I had a heart once. Call me an oak, broken, twisted, aged, but an oak still."

Yeoland drew quite close to him, so that her skirt almost brushed his horse's flank. Fulviac's shadow fell athwart her. Only her face shone clear in the moonlight.

"I have ceased," she said, "to look upon life as a stretch of blue, a laughing

dawn."

"Good."

"I have learnt that woe is the crown of years."

"Good again."

"That life is full of violence and wrong."

"A platitude. Yes. Life consists in learning platitudes."

"I am only one woman among thousands."

"A revelation."

"You jeer."

"Not so. Few women learn the truth of your proverb."

"Lastly, my trouble is not the only woe in the world. That it is an error to close up grief in the casket of self."

Fulviac flapped his bridle, and looked far ahead into the cavern of the night. He was silent awhile in thought. When he spoke again, he delivered himself of certain curt cogitations, characteristic confessions that were wholly logical.

"I am a selfish vagabond," he said; "I appeal to Peter's keys whether all ambition is not selfish. I am an egotist for the good of others. The stronger my ambition, the stronger the hope of the land in generous justice. I live to rule, to rule magnanimously, yet with an iron sceptre. There, you have my creed."

"And God?" she asked him.

"Is a most useful subordinate."

"You do not mean that?"

"I do not."

She saw again the mutilated beings in the catacombs, aye, even her own home flaming to the sky, and the white face of her dead father. Faith and devotion were great in her for the moment. Divine vengeance beaconed over the world, a torch borne aloft by the hand of Pity.

"It is God's war," she said to him with a finer solemnity sounding in her voice; "you have stirred the woman in me. Is that enough?"

"Enough," he answered her.

"And the rest?"

"God shall make all plain in due season."

Gilderoy had dwindled into the east; its castle's towers still netted the moonlight from afar. The meadowlands had ceased, and trees strode down in multitudes to guard the track. The night was still and calm, with a whisper of frost in the crisp, sparkling air. The world seemed roofed with a dome of dusky steel.

Before them a shallow valley lay white in the light of the moon. Around climbed the glimmering turrets of the trees, rank on rank, solemn and tumultuous. The bare gable ends of a ruined chapel rose in the valley. Fulviac drew

aside by a bridle path that ran amid rushes. To the left, from the broken wall of the curtilage, a great beech wood ascended, its boughs black against the sky, its floor ankle-deep with fallen leaves. The chapel stood roofless under the moon. Hollies, a sable barrier that glistened in the moonlight, closed the ruin on the south. Yews cast their gloom about the walls. A tall cross in the forsaken graveyard stretched out its mossy arms east and west.

The armed groom took the horses and tethered them under a clump of pines by the wall. Fulviac and the girl Yeoland passed up through weeds and brambles to the porch. A great briar rose had tangled the opening with a thorny web, as though to hold the ruin from the hand of man. The tiled floor was choked with grass; a rickety door drooped rotten on its rusty hinges.

Fulviac pushed through and beckoned the girl to follow. Within, all was ruinous and desolate, the roof fallen, the casements broken.

"We must find harbour here," said the man, "our horses go far to-morrow."

"A cheerful hostel, this."

"Its wildness makes it safe. You fear the cold. I'll see to that."

"No. I am hungry."

The high altar still stood below the small rose window in the east, where the rotting fragments of a triptych hid the stonework. There was a great carved screen of stone on either side, curiously recessed as though giving access to an ambulatory. The altar stood in dense shadow, with broken timber and a tangle of briars ringing a barrier about its steps. On the southern side of the nave, a patch of tiled flooring still stood riftless, closed in by two fallen pillars. The groom came in with two horse-cloaks, and Fulviac spread them on the tiles. He also gave her a small flask of wine, and a silver pyx holding meat and bread.

"We crusaders must not grumble at the rough lodging," he said to her; "wrap yourself in these cloaks, and play the Jacob with a stone pillow."

She smiled slightly in her eyes. The groom brought in a saddle, ranged it with a saddle cloth covering it, that it might rest her head.

"And you?" she said to Fulviac.

"Damian and I hold the porch."

"You will be cold."

"I have a thick hide. The Lady of Geraint give you good rest!"

He threaded his way out amid the fallen stones and pillars, and closed the rickety gate. The groom, a tall fellow in a battered bassinet and a frayed brigantine, stood by the yew trees, as on guard. Fulviac gestured to him. The man moved away towards the eastern end of the chapel, where laurels grew thick and lusty about the walls. When he returned Fulviac was sitting hunched on a fallen stone in the corner of the porch, as though for sleep. The man dropped a guttural message into his master's ear, and propped himself in the other angle of the

porch.

An hour passed; the moon swam past the zenith towards the west; a vast quiet watched over the world, and no wind rippled in the woods. In the sky the stars shivered, and gathered more closely their silver robes. In the curtilage the ruined tombs stared white and desolate at the moon.

An owl's cry sounded in the woods. Sudden and strange, as though dropped from the stars, faint music quivered on the frost-brilliant air. It gathered, died, grew again, with a mysterious flux of sweetness, as of some song stealing from the Gardens of the Dead. Flute, cithern, and viol were sounding under the moon, merging a wizard chant into the magic of the hour. Angels, crimson-winged, in green attire, seemed to descend the burning stair of heaven.

A sudden great radiance lit the ruin, a glory of gold streaming from the altar. Cymbals clashed; waves of shimmering light surged over the broken walls. Incense, like purple smoke, curled through the casements. The music rushed in clamorous rapture to the stars. A voice was heard crying in the chapel, elfin and wild, yet full of a vague rich sanctity. It ceased sudden as the brief moan of a prophecy. The golden glow elapsed; the music sank to silence. Nought save the moonlight poured in silver omnipotence over the ruin.

From the chapel came the sound of stumbling footsteps amid the stones. A hand clutched at the rotting door, jerked it open, as in terror. The girl Yeoland came out into the porch, and stood swaying white-faced in the shadow.

"Fulviac."

Her voice was hoarse and whispering, strained as the overwrought strings of a lute. The man did not stir. She bent down, dragged at his cloak, calling to him with a quick and gathering vehemence. He shook himself, as from the thongs of sleep, stood up and stared at her. The groom still crouched in the dark corner.

"Fulviac."

She thrust her way through the briars into the moonlight. Her hood had fallen back, her hair loose upon her shoulders; her eyes were full of a supernatural stupor, and she seemed under the spell of some great shock of awe. She trembled so greatly, that Fulviac followed her, and held her arm.

"Speak. What has chanced to you?"

She still shook like some flower breathed upon by the oracular voice of God. Her hands were torn and bloody from the thorns.

"The Virgin has appeared to me."

"Are you mad?"

"The Virgin."

"Some ghost or phantom."

"No, no, hear me."

She stretched out her hands like one smitten blind, and took breath swiftly

in sudden gasps.

"Hear me, I was but asleep, woke, and heard music. The Virgin came out upon the altar, her face like the moon, her robes white as the stars. There was great light, great glory. And she spoke to me. Mother of God, what am I that I should be chosen thus!"

"Speak. Can this be true?"

"The truth, the truth!"

Fulviac fell on his knees with a great gesture of awe. The girl, her face turned to the moon, stood quivering like a reed, her lips moving as if in prayer.

"Her message, child?"

"Ah, it was this: 'Go forth a virgin, and lead the hosts of the Lord.'"

Fulviac's face was in shadow. He thrust up his hands to the heavens, but would not so much as glance at the girl above him. His voice rang out in the silence of the night:–

"Gloria tibi, Sancta Maria! Gloria tibi, Domine!"

IX

Faith, golden crown of the Christian! Self-mesmerism, subtle alchemy of the mind! How the balance of belief swings between these twain!

A spiritual conception born in a woman's brain is as a savour of rich spices sweetening all the world. How great a power of obstinacy stirs in one small body! A pillar of fire, a shining grail. She will bring forth the finest gems that hang upon her bosom, the ruby of heroism, the sapphire of pity. She will cast all her store of gold into the lap of Fate. Give to her some radiant dream of hope, and she may prove the most splendid idealist, even if she do not prove a wise one. Remember the women who watched about the Cross of Christ.

There had been trickery in the miracle, a tinge of flesh in the vision. The Virgin, in the ruck of religion, had suffered herself to be personated by a clever little "player" from Gilderoy, aided and idealised by a certain notorious charlatan who dealt in magic, was not above aiding ecclesiastical mummeries on occasions, and conspiring for the solemn production of miracles. A priest's juggling box, a secret door at the back of the altar used in bygone days for the manipulation of a wonder-working image, musicians, incense, and Greek fire. These had made the portent possible. As for Fulviac, rugged plotter, he was as grave as an abbot over

the business; his words were wondrous beatific; he spoke of the interventions of Heaven with bated breath.

It was a superstitious age, touched with phantasy and gemmed with magic. Relics were casketed in gold and silver; holy blood amazed with yearly liquefactions the souls of the devout; dreamers gazed into mirrors, crystals, finger-nails, for visions of heaven. Jewels were poured in scintillant streams at the white feet of the Madonna. It was all done with rare mysticism, colour, and rich music. The moon ruled marriage, corn, and kine. The saints, like a concourse of angels, walked with melancholy splendour through the wilds.

As for the girl Yeoland, she had the heart of a woman in the noblest measure, a red heart, pure yet passionate. The world waxed prophetic that shrill season. She was as full of dreams and phantasies as an astrologer's missal. Nothing amazed her, and yet all earth was mysterious. The wind spoke in magic syllables; the trees were oracular; the stars, white hands tracing symbols in the sky. She was borne above herself on the pinions of ecstasy, heard seraph wings sweep the air, saw the glimmer of their robes passing the portals of the night. Mysticism moved through the world like the sound of lutes over a moonlit sea.

One March morning, Fulviac came to her in the northern chamber of the cliff. Yeoland had masses of scarlet cloth and threads of gold upon her knees, for she was broidering a banner, the banner of the Maid of Gilderoy. Her eyes were full of violet shadow. She wore a cross over her bosom, emeralds set in silver; a rosary, dangling on her wrist, told how her prayers kept alternate rhythm with her fingers. Fulviac crooked the knee to the crucifix upon the wall, sat down near her on a rich bench of carved cedar wood.

The man was in a beneficent mood, and beamed on her like a lusty summer. He had tidings on his tongue, tidings that he hoarded with the craft of an epicure. It was easy to mark when the world trundled well with his humour. He put forth smiles like a great oak whose boughs glisten in the sun.

"You will tire yourself, little sister."

She looked at him with one of her solemn glances, a glance that spoke of vigils, soul-searchings, and prayer.

"My fingers tire before my heart," she said to him.

"Rest, rest."

"Do I seem weary to you?"

"Nay, you are fresh as the dawn."

He brushed back the tawny hair from off his forehead, and the lines about his mouth softened.

"I have news from the west."

"Ah!"

"We gather and spread like fire in a forest. The mountain men are with us,

ready to roll down from the hills with hauberk and sword. In two months Malgo will have sent the bloody cross through all the west."

The golden thread ran through the girl's white fingers; the beads of her rosary rattled; she seemed to be weaving the destiny of a kingdom into the device upon her banner.

"How is it with us here?" she asked him.

"I have a thousand stout men and true camped upon the cliff. Levies are coming in fast, like steel to a magnet. In a month we shall outbulk a Roman legion."

"And Gilderoy?"

"Gilderoy and Geraint will give us a score thousand pikemen."

"The stars fight for us."

Fulviac took her lute from the carved bench and began to thrum the chords of an old song.

"Spears crash, and swords clang,
Fame maddens the world.
Come battle and love.
Iseult–
Ah, Iseult."

He broke away with a last snap at the strings, and set the lute aside.

"Bear with me," he said.

Her dark eyes questioned him over her banner.

"I offer you the first victim."

"Ah!"

"Flavian of Gambrevault."

An indefinite shadow descended upon the girl's face. The inspired radiance seemed dimmed for the moment; the crude realism of her thoughts rang in discord to her dreams. She lost the glimmering thread from her needle. Her hands trembled a little as she played with the scarlet folds of the banner.

"Well?"

"A lad of mine bears news–a black-eyed rogue from the hills of Carlyath, sharp as a sword's point, quaint as an elf. I sent him gleaning, and he has done bravely. You would hear his tale from his own lips?"

She nodded and seemed distraught.

"Yes. Bring him in to me," she said.

Fulviac left her, to return with a slim youth sidling in behind him like a shadow. The lad had a nut-brown skin and ruddy cheeks, a pair of twinkling eyes, a thatch of black hair over his forehead. Bred amid the hills of Carlyath,

where the women were scarlet Eves, and the land a paradise, he had served in Gilderoy as apprentice to an armourer. Carlyath's wilds and the city's roguery had mingled in him fantastic strains of extravagant sentiment and cunning. Half urchin, half elf, he stood with bent knees and slouched shoulders, his black eyes alert on Fulviac, his lord.

The man thrust him forward by the collar, with an eloquent gesture.

"The whole tale. Try your wit."

The Carlyath lad advanced one foot, and with an impudent southern smirk, remarked–

"This, madame, is an infatuated world."

Thus, sententiously delivered, he plunged into a declamation with a picturesque and fanciful extravagance that he had imbibed from the strolling romancers of his own land.

"In the city of Gilderoy," he said, speaking very volubly and with many gestures, "there lives a lady of surpassing comeliness. Her eyes are as the sky, her cheeks as June roses, her hair a web of gold. She is a right fair lady, and daily she sits at her broad casement, singing, and plaiting her hair into shackles of gold. She has bound the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault in a net starred with poppies, scarlet poppies of the field, so that he ever dreams dreams of scarlet, and sees visions of lips warm as wine. Daily the Lord Flavian scours the country between Avalon and the fair city of Gilderoy, till the very dust complains of his fury, and the green grass curses his horse's heels. But the lady with the hair of gold compasses him like the sunset; she has stolen the eyes of heaven, and the stars are blind."

Fulviac smiled over the extreme subtlety of the rendering. It was a delicate matter, delicately handled. The Carlyath lad had wit, and a most seraphic tongue.

"What more?"

"There is yet another lady at Avalon."

"Well?"

"A lady whose name is Duessa, a lady with black hair and a blacker temper. Lord Flavian has a huge horror of her tongue. Therefore he rides like a thief, without trumpets, to Gilderoy."

"Yet more."

The lad spread his hands with an inimitable gesture, shrugged, and heaved a most Christian sigh.

"The Lady Duessa is the Lord Flavian's wife," he said.

"Surely."

"Therefore, sire, he is a coward."

The lad drew back with a bow and a scrape of the foot, keeping his eyes on the floor with the discretion of a veteran lackey. At a sign from Fulviac, he

slipped away, and left Yeoland and the man alone.

The girl's hands were idle in her lap; the great scarlet banner trailed in rich folds about her feet. There was a white mask of thought upon her face, and her eyes searched the distance with an oblivious stare. All the strong discords of the past rushed clamorous to her brain; her consecrated dreams were as so many angels startled by the assaults of hell.

She rose from her chair, cast the casement wide, and stood gazing over the forest. Youth seemed in the breeze, and the clear voice of the Spring. The green woods surged with liberty; the strong zest of life breathed in their bosoms. In the distance the pines seemed to beckon to her, to wave their caps in windy exultation.

Fulviac had stood watching her with the calm scrutiny of one wise in the passionate workings of the soul. He suffered her to possess her thoughts in silence for a season, to come by a steady comprehension of the past. Presently he gathered the red banner, and hung it on the frame, went softly to her and touched her sleeve.

"Shall they kill him on the road?" he asked.

She pondered a moment, and did not answer him.

"It is easy," he said, "and a matter of sheer justice."

The words seemed to steel her decision.

"No," she said, "let them bring him here–to me."

"So be it," he answered her.

Fulviac found her cold and taciturn, desirous of solitude. He humoured the mood, and she was still staring from the window when he left her. The woodland had melted before her into an oblivious mist. In its stead she saw a tower flaming amid naked trees, a white face staring heavenwards with the marble tranquillity of death.

X

Down through the woods of Avalon rode the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault, down towards the forest track in the grey face of the dawn. In the meadows and beyond the orchards, water shone, and towers stood mistily. The voice of Spring pulsed in the air, songs of green woods, the wild wine of violets, pavements of primrose gold. Birds piped lustily in wood and thicket, and the ascending sun lavished his

glittering archery from the chariots of the clouds.

The Lord Flavian was inordinately cheerful that morning, as he rode in green and red through the prophetic woods. Heart and weather were in kindred keeping, and his youth sang like a brook after April rains. The woods danced in dew. Far on its rocky hill the towers of Gilderoy would soon beckon him above the trees. Beneath the shadow of the cathedral tower stood a gabled house with gilded vanes and roofs of generous red. There in Gilderoy, in a room hung with cloth of purple and gold, white arms waited, and the bosom of a golden Helen held love like a red rose in a pool of milky spikenard.

Picture a slim but muscular man with the virile figure of a young David, a keen, smooth face, a halo of brown hair, eyes eloquent as a woman's. Picture a good grey horse trapped in red and green, full of fettle as a colt, burly as a bull. Picture the ermined borderings, the jewelled clasps, brigantine of quilted velvet, fur-lined bassinet bright as a star. Youth, clean, adventurous, aglow to the last finger-tip, impetuous to the tune of thirty breaths a minute. Youth with all its splendid waywardness, its generosities, its immense self-intoxications. Youth with the voice of a Golden Summer in its heart, and for its plume the gorgeous fires of eve.

Wealth often breeds apathy and parsimonious instincts. It is the beggar whose purse bursts with joy, whose soul blazes generous red upon the clouds. As for Flavian of Gambrevault and Avalon, he was rich but no miser, proud yet not haughty, sanguine but not vicious. Like many a man inspired by an instinctive idealism, his heart ran before his reason: they not having come cheek by jowl as in later years. He was very devout, yet very worldly; very ardent, yet over hasty. Mark him then, a lovable fool in the eyes of philosophy; a cup of mingled wine, both white and red. He was a great lord; yet his serfs loved him.

The Lady Duessa's parents, good folk, had been blessed with aspirations. Gambrevault and Avalon had bulked very gloriously under the steel-blue vault of pride. Moreover, their daughter was a sensuous being, who panted for poetic surroundings, and lived to music. A boy of twenty; a passionate, dark-eyed, big-bosomed houri of twenty and five; bell, book, and ring–such had been the bridal bargain consummated on church principles five years ago or more. A youth of twenty is not supremely wise concerning the world, or his own heart. The Lord Flavian's marriage had not proved a magic blessing to him. Parentally sealed marriage deeds are the edicts of the devil.

Quickly are the mighty fallen, and the chalices of love broken. It was no mere chance ambuscade that waited open-mouthed for Flavian, Lord of Gambrevault and Avalon, Warden of the Southern Marches, Knight of the Order of the Rose, as he rode that morning to Gilderoy, a disciple of Venus. In a certain perilous place, the road ran betwixt walls of rock, and under the umbrage of over-

hanging trees. Twenty men with pike and gisarme swarming out of the woods; a short scuffle and a stabbed horse; a gag in the mouth, a bandage over the eyes, a mule's back, half a dozen thongs of stout leather. That same evening the Lord Flavian was brought like a bale of merchandise into Fulviac's guard-room, and tumbled on a heap of straw in a corner.

They were grim men, these forest rangers, not given to pity, or the light handling of a feud. A poniard point was their pet oath, a whip of the sword the best word with an enemy. They bit their thumb nails at creation, and were not gentle in the quest of a creed. Fulviac heard their news, and commended them. They were like the ogres of the old fables; the red blood of a lusty aristocrat smelt fresh for the sword's supper.

The girl Yeoland was at her prayer-desk with a blazoned breviary under her fingers, when Fulviac came to her with tidings of the day's capture. She knelt with her hands crossed upon her bosom, as Fulviac stood in the darkened doorway. To the man she appeared as the Madonna in some picture of the Annunciation, the yellow light from the lamp streaming down upon her with a lustre of sanctity.

"They have brought the boar home."

"Dead?"

"Nay; but his corpse candle walks the cavern."

For the girl it was a descent from spiritual themes to the stark realism of life. She left her prayer-desk with a little sigh. Her hands trembled as she drew a scarlet cloak about her, and fastened it with a girdle of green leather. Her eyes dwelt on Fulviac's face with a species of dusky pain.

"Come," he said to her.

"Whither?"

"To judge him."

"Not before all, not in the guard-room."

"Leave it to me," he said. "Be forewarned. We deal with no mere swashbuckler."

They went together to Fulviac's parlour, where a great brazen lamp hung from the roof, and a book bound in black leather lay chained on the table. Yeoland took the man's carved chair, while he stood behind her leaning on the rail. She was paler than was her wont. Now and again she pressed a hand to her breast, as though to stay the too rapid beating of her heart.

Two guards bearing partisans came in from the guard-room with a man bound and blindfold between them. A third followed, bearing a two-handed sword naked over his shoulder. He was known as Nord of the Hammer, an armourer like to a Norse Volund, burly, strong as a bear. The door was barred upon them. One of the guards plucked the cloth from the bound man's face.

In the malicious imagery of thought, Yeoland had often pictured to herself this Flavian of Gambrevault, a coarse, florid ruffian, burly and brutal, a fleshly demigod in the world of feudalism. So much for conjecture. What she beheld was a straight-lipped, clean-limbed man, slim as a cypress, supple as good steel. The face was young yet strong, the grey eyes clear and fearless. Moreover there was a certain lonely look about him that invoked pity, and angered her in an enigmatic way. She was wrath with him for being what he was, for contradicting the previous imaginings of her mind.

Flavian of Gambrevault stood bound before her, an aristocrat of aristocrats, outraged in pride, yet proud beyond complaint. The self-mastery of his breeding kept him a stately figure despite his tumbling and his youth, one convinced of lordship and the powerful splendour of his name. The whole affair to him was illogical, preposterous, insolent. A gentleman of the best blood in the kingdom could not be hustled out of his dignity by the horse-play of a bevy of cut-throats.

Possibly the first vision to snare the man's glance was the elfin loveliness of the girl, who sat throned in the great chair as on a judgment seat. He marked the rose-white beauty of her skin, her sapphire eyes gleaming black in certain lights, her ebon hair bound with a fillet of sky-blue leather. Moreover, it was plain to the man in turn that this damoisel in the red gown was deciphering his features in turn with a curiosity that was no vapid virtue. As for Fulviac, he watched them both with his amber-brown eyes, eyes that missed no movement in the mask of life. To him the scene under the great brazen lamp was a study in moods and emotions.

The aristocrat was the first to defy the silence. He had stared round the room at his leisure, and at each of its motionless figures in turn. The great sword, slanted in gleaming nakedness over Nord's shoulder, appeared to fascinate him for the moment. Despite his ambiguous sanctity, he showed no badge of panic or distress.

Ignoring the woman, he challenged Fulviac, who leant upon the chair rail, watching him with an enigmatic smile.

"Goodman in the red doublet," quoth he, "when you have stared your fill at me, I will ask you to read me the moral of this fable."

Fulviac stroked his chin with the air of a man who holds an adversary at some subtle disadvantage.

"Messire," he said, "address yourself to madame–here; you are her affair in the main."

The Warden of the Southern Marches bowed as by habit. His grey eyes reverted to Yeoland's face, searching it with a certain courteous curiosity that took her beauty for its justification. The woman was an enigma to him, a most magical sphinx whose riddle taunted his reason.

”Madame,” he began.

The girl stiffened in her chair at the word.

”You hold me at a disadvantage, seeing that I am ignorant of sin or indiscretion against you. If it is a question of gold—-”

”Messire!”

He swept her exclamation suavely aside and ran on mellifluously.

”If it is a question of gold, let me beseech you to be frank with me. I will covenant with you instanter. My seneschal at Gambrevault will unbolt my coffers, and ease your greed. Pray be outspoken. I will renounce the delight of lodging here for a purse of good rose nobles.”

There was the faintest tinge of insolence in the man’s voice, an insolence that exaggerated to the full the charge of plunder in his words. Whether he hinted at blood money or no, there was sufficient poison in the sneer to fire the brain and scorch the heart to vengeance.

The woman had risen from her chair, and stood gripping the carved woodwork with a passion that set her arms quivering like bands of tightened steel. The milk-white calm had melted from her face. Wrath ran riot in her blood. So large were her pupils that her eyes gleamed red.

”Ha, messire, I bring you to justice, and you offer me gold.”

The man stared; his eyes did not quail from hers.

”Justice, madame! Of what sin then am I accused? On my soul, I know not who you are.”

She calmed herself a little, shook back her hair from her shoulders, fingered her throat, breathing fast the while.

”My name, messire? Ha, you shall have it. I am Yeoland, daughter of that Rual of Cambremont whom you slaughtered at the gate of his burning house. I–am the sister of those fair sons whom you did to death. Blood money, forsooth! God grant, messire, that you are in honest mind for heaven, for you die to-night.”

The man had bent to catch her words. He straightened suddenly like a tree whose throat is loosed from the grim grip of the wind. He went grey as granite, flushed red again as a dishonoured girl. The words had touched him with the iron of truth.

”Hear me,” he said to her.

”Ah, you would lie.”

”By Heaven, no; give me an hour’s justice.”

”Murderer.”

”Before God, you wrong me.”

He stood with twitching lips, shackled hands twisting one within the other. For the instant words eluded him, like fruit jerked from the mouth of a thirst-maddened Tantalus. Anon, his manhood gathered in him, rushed forth redly like

blood from a stricken throat.

"Daughter of Rual, hear me, I tell you the truth. I, Flavian of Gambrevault, had in my pay a company of hired 'spears,' rough devils from the north. The braggarts served me against John of Brissac, were half their service drunk and mutinous. When Lententide had come, their captain swore to me, 'Lording, pay us and let us go. We have spilt blood near Gilderoy,' scullion blood he swore, 'give us good bounty, and let us march.' So at his word I gave them largesse, and packed them from Gambrevault with pennons flying. Methought they and their brawlings were at an end. Before God and the saints, I never knew of this."

Yeoland considered him, strenuous as he seemed towards truth. He was young, passionate, sanguine; for one short moment she pitied him, and pondered his innocence in her heart. It was then that Fulviac plucked at her sleeve, spoke in her ear, words that hardened her like a winter frost.

She stared in the man's eyes, as she gave him his death-thrust with the sureness of hate.

"Blood for blood," were her words to him.

"Is this justice!"

"I have spoken."

"Monstrously. Hear me—-"

"Messire, make your peace with Heaven, I give you till daylight."

The man stumbled against the table, white as the moon. Youth strove in him, the crimson fountain of life's wine, the wild cry of the dawn. His eyes were great with a superhuman hunger. Fulviac's strong voice answered him.

"Hence, hence. At dawn, Nord, do your duty."

XI

Give doubt the password, and the outer battlements are traitorously stormed. Parley with pity, and the white banner flutters on the keep.

Provided her emotions inspire her, a woman is strong; let her take to logic, and she is a rushlight wavering in the wind. In her red heart lies her divinity; her feet are of clay when reason rules her head.

The girl Yeoland took doubt to her chamber that night, a malicious sprite, sharp of wit and wild of eye. All the demons of discord were loosed in the silence of the night. Pandora's box stood open, and the hours were void of sleep;

faces crowded the shadows, voices wailed in the gloom. Her thoughts rioted like frightened bats fluttering and squeaking round a torch. Sleep, like a pale Cassandra, stood aloof and watched the mask of these manifold emotions.

Turn and twist as she would amid her fevered pillows, a wild voice haunted her, importunate and piteous. As the cry of one sinking in a stormy sea, it rang out with a passionate vehemence. Moreover, there was a subtle echo in her own heart, a strong appeal that did not spare her, toss and struggle as she would. Decision fluttered like a wounded bird. Malevolence rushed back as an ocean billow from the bastion of a cliff that emblemed mercy.

With a beating of wings and a discordant clamour, a screech-owl buffeted the casement. A lamp still burnt beneath the crucifix; the glow had beaconed the bird out of the night. Starting up with a shiver of fear, she quenched the lamp, and crept back to bed. The darkness seemed to smother her like a cloak; the silence took to ghostly whisperings; a death-watch clicked against the wall.

The night crawled on like a funeral cortège. Baffled, outfaced, sleepless, she rose from her tumbled bed, and paced the room as in a fever. Still wakefulness and a thousand dishevelled thoughts that hung about her like her snoodless hair. Again and again, she heard the distant whirr and rattle of wheels, the clangour of the wire, as the antique clock in Fulviac's chamber smote away the hours of night. Each echo of the sound seemed to spur to the quick her wavering resolution. Time was flying, jostling her thoughts as in a mill race. With the dawn, the Lord Flavian would die.

Anon she flung the casement wide and stared out into the night. A calm breeze moved amid the masses of ivy, and played upon her face. She bared her breast to its breath, and stood motionless with head thrown back, her white throat glimmering amid her hair. Below, the sombre multitudes of the trees showed dim and ghostly, deep with mystery. A vague wind stirred the branches; the dark void swirled with unrest, breaking like a midnight sea upon a cliff. A few straggling stars peeped through the lattice of the sky.

She leant against the sill, rested her chin upon her palms, and brooded. Thoughts, fierce, passionate, and clamorous, came crying like gusts of wind through a ruined house. Death and dead faces, blood, the yawn of sepulchres, life and the joy of it, all these passed as visions of fire before her fancy. Vengeance and pity agonised her soul. She answered yea and nay with the same breath; condemned and pardoned with contradicting zeal. Youth lifted up its face to her, piteous and beautiful. Death reached out a rattling hand into her bosom.

Presently, a far glow began to creep into the sky; a gradual greyness absorbed the shadows of the night. The day was dawning. From the forest, the trembling orisons of the birds thrilled like golden light into the air. Unutterable joy seemed to flood forth from the piping throats. Even the trees seemed to quiver

to the sound. With a rush of bitter passion, she closed the casement, cast herself upon her bed, and strove to pray.

Again came the impotent groping into nothingness. A dense mist seemed to rise betwixt her soul and the white face of the Madonna. Aspiration lessened like an afterglow, and dissolved away into a dark void of doubt. Prayer eluded her; the utterances of her heart died in a miserable endeavour, and she could not think.

The spiritual storm wore itself away as the dawn streamed in with a glimmer of gold. Yeoland lay and stared at the casement, and the figure of Sebastian rendered radiant by the dawn, the whiteness of his limbs tongued with dusky rills of blood, where the barbs had smitten into the flesh. Sombre were the eyes, and shadowy with suffering. A halo of gold gilded the youthful face. The painted glass about him blazed like a shower of gems.

The Sebastian of the casement recalled to her with wizard power the face of the man whom death claimed at dawn. The thought woke no new passion in her. The night's vigil had left her reason like a skein of tangled silk, and with the day she verged towards a wearied apathy. The voice of pity in her waned to an infrequent whisper that came like the rustling of leaves on a summer night. She realised that it had dawned an hour or more; that the man had knelt and fallen to Nord's sword.

Suddenly the silence was snapped by a far outcry sounding in the bowels of the cliff. Gruff voices seemed to echo and re-echo like breakers in a cavern. A horn blared. She heard the thudding of a door, the shrilling of mail, the clangour of iron steps passing up the gallery.

Shivering, she raised herself upon her elbow to listen. Were they bringing her the man's head, grey and blood-dabbled, with closed lids and mangled neck? She fell back again upon her pillows, pressed her hands to her face with a great revulsion of pity, for the image had burnt in upon her brain.

The clangour of harness drew near, with an iron rhythm as of the march of destiny. It ceased outside the door. A heavy hand beat upon the panelling.

"Who knocks?"

Her own voice, strained and shrill, startled her like an owl's hoot. Fulviac's deep bass answered her from the passage.

"Unbar to me, I must speak with you."

She started up from the bed in passionless haste, ran to a closet, drew out a cloak and wrapped it about her shoulders. Her bare feet showed white under her night-gear as she slid the bolt from its socket, and let the man in. He was fully armed save for his salade, which he carried in the hollow of his arm. His red cloak swept his heels. A tower of steel, there was a clangorous bluster about him that bespoke action.

The girl had drawn apart, shivering, and gathering her cloak about her, for in the gloom of the place she had thought for an instant that Fulviac carried a mangled head.

"A rider has brought news," he said to her. "John of Brissac's men have taken Prosper the Preacher, to hang him, as their lord has vowed, over the gate of Fontenaye. They are on the march home from Gilderoy, ten lances and a company of arbalestiers. I ride to ambuscado them. Prosper shall not hang!"

She stood with her back to the casement, and looked at him with a restless stare. Her thoughts were with the man whose grey eyes had pleaded with her through the night. Her fears clamoured like captives at the gate of a dungeon.

"What is more, this vagabond of Avalon has been begging twelve hours' grace to scrape his soul clean for Peter."

"Ah!" she said, with a sudden stark earnestness.

"I will give him till sunset—-"

"If I suffer it—-"

"The dog has spirit. I would thrust no man into the dark till he has struck a bargain with his own particular saints."

She drew back, sank down into a chair with her hair half hiding her face.

"You are right in being merciful," she said very slowly.

Magic riddle of life; rare roseate rod of love. Was it youth leaping towards youth, the cry of the lark to the dawn, the crimson flowering of a woman's pity? The air seemed woven through with gold. A thousand lutes had sounded in the woods. Voiceless, she sat with flickering lids, amazed at the alchemy that had wrought ruth out of hate.

Fulviac had drawn back into the gloom of the gallery. He turned suddenly upon his heel, and his scabbard smote and rang against the rock.

"I take all the men I have," he said to her, "even the dotard Jaspar, for he knows the ways. Gregory and Adrian I leave on guard; they are tough gentlemen, and loyal. As for the lordling, he is well shackled."

Yeoland was still cowering in her chair with the mysterious passions of the moment.

"You will return?" she asked him.

"By nightfall, if we prosper; as we shall."

He moved two paces, stayed again in his stride, and flung a last message to her from the black throat of the passage.

"Remember, there is no recantation over this business. The man is my affair as well as yours. He is a power in the south, and would menace us. Remember, he must die."

He turned and left her without more palaver. She heard him go clanging down the gallery, heard the thunder of a heavy door, the braying of a horn. A

long while she sat motionless, still as stone, her hands lying idle in her lap. When an hour had passed, the sun smote in, and found her kneeling at her prayer-desk, her breviary dewed with tears.

XII

Fulviac passed away that morning into the forest, a shaft of red amid the mournful glooms. Colour and steel streamed after him fantastically. The great cliff, silent and desolate, basked like a leviathan in the sun.

Of the daylight and its crown of gold, the girl Yeoland had no deep joy. When she had ended her passion over the blazoned pages of her breviary, and mopped her tears with a corner of her gown, she rose to realism, and turned her mood to the cheating of the dues of time.

The hours lagged with enough monotony to degenerate a saint; Yeoland was very much a woman. The night had left her a legacy of evil. She had shadows under her eyes, and a constant swirl of thoughts within her brain that made solitude a torture-house, full of prophetic pain. There was her lute, and she eschewed it, seeing that her fingers seemed as ice. As for her embroidery, the stitches wandered haphazard, wrought grotesque things, or lost all method in a stupor of sloth. She threw the banner aside in a fume at last, and let her broodings have their way.

The forenoon crawled, like a beggar on a dusty high-road in the welt of August. Time seemed to stand and mock her. Hour by hour, she was tortured by the vision of steel falling upon a strong young neck, of a white face lying in a pool of blood, of a dripping carcase and a sweating sword. Though the vision maddened her, what could her weak hands do? The man was shackled, and guarded by men with whom she dared not tamper. Moreover, she remembered the last look in Fulviac's keen eyes.

Towards evening she grew rabid with unrest, fled from the cave by the northern stair, and took sanctuary amid the tall shadows of the forest. The pine avenues were ever like a church to her, solemn, stately, sympathetic as night. There was nought to anger, nought to bring discord, where the croon of the branches soothed like a song.

It was as she played the nun in this forest cloister, that a strange thought challenged her consciousness under the trees. It was subtle, yet full of an incom-

prehensible bitterness, that made her heart hasten. Even as she considered it, as a girl gazes at a jewel lying in her palm, the charm flashed magic fire into her eyes. This victim for the sword lay shackled to the wall in the great guard-room. She would go and steal a last glance at him before Fulviac and death returned.

Stairway, bower, and gallery were behind her. She stood in Fulviac's parlour, where the lamp burnt dimly, and harness glimmered on the walls. The door of the room stood ajar. She stole to it, and peered through the crack left by the clumsy hingeing, into the lights and shadows of the room beyond.

At the lower end of a long table the two guards sat dicing, sprawling greedily over the board, the lust of hazard writ large in their looks. The dice kept up a continuous patter, punctuated by the intent growls of the gamesters. By the sloping wall of the cavern, palleted on a pile of dirty straw, lay the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault, with his hands shackled to a staple in the rock. He lay stretched on his side, with his back turned towards the light, so that his face was invisible to the girl behind the door.

She watched the man awhile with a curious and dark-eyed earnestness. There was pathos in the prostrate figure, as though Hezekiah-like the man had turned to the bare rock and the callous comfort despair could give. Once she imagined that she saw a jerking of the shoulders, that hinted at something very womanish. The thought smote new pity into her, and sent her away from the cranny, trembling.

Yeoland withdrew into Fulviac's room, and thence into the murk of the gallery leading to her bower. A sudden sense of impotence had flooded into her heart; she even yearned for some shock of Fate that might break the very bonds that bound her to her vengeance, as to a corpse. On the threshold of her room, a sudden sound brought her to a halt like a hand thrust out of the dark to clutch her throat. She stood listening, like a miser for thieves, and heard much.

A curse came from the guard-room, the crash of an overturned bench, the tingling kiss of steel. She heard the scream as of one stabbed, a smothered uproar, an indiscriminate scuffling, then—-silence. She stood a moment in the dark, listening. The silence was heavy and implacable as the rock above. Fear seized her, a lust to know the worst. She ran down the gallery into Fulviac's room. The door was still ajar; she thrust it open and entered the great cavern.

Her doubts elapsed in an instant. At the long table, a man sat with his head pillowed on his arms. A red rivulet curled away over the board, winding amid the drinking horns, isleting the dice in its course. On the floor lay the second guard, a smudge of crimson oozing from his grey doublet, his arms rigid, his hands clawing in the death-agony. At the end of the table stood the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault, free.

Three cubits of steel had tangled the plot vastly in the passing of a minute.

The climax was like a knot of silk thrust through with a sword. The two stood motionless a moment, staring at each other across the length of the table, like a couple of mutes over a grave. The man was the first to break the silence.

"Madame," he said, with a certain grand air, and a flippant gesture, "suffer me to condone with you over the lamentable tricks of Fortune. But for gross selfishness on my part, I should still be chastening myself for the unjust balancing of our feud. God wills it, seemingly, that I should continue to be your debtor."

Despite her woman's wit, the girl was wholly puzzled how to answer him. She was wickedly conscious in her heart of a subtle gratitude to Heaven for the sudden baulking of her malice. The man expected wrath from her, perhaps an outburst of passion. Taking duplicity to her soul, she stood forward on the dais and tilted her chin at him with dutiful defiance.

"Thank my irresolution, messire," she said, "for this reprieve of fortune."

He came two steps nearer, as though not unminded to talk with her in open field.

"At dawn I might have had you slain," she continued, with some hastening of her tongue; "I confess to having pitied you a little. You are young, a mere boy, weak and powerless. I gave you life for a day."

The man reddened slightly, glanced at the dead men, and screwed his mouth into a dry smile.

"Most harmless, as you see, madame," he said. "For your magnanimity, I thank you. *Deo gratias*, I will be as grateful as I may."

She stood considering him out of her dark, long-lashed eyes. The man was good to look upon, ruddy and clean of lip, with eyes that stared straight to the truth, and a pose of the head that prophesied spirit. The sunlight of youth played sanguine upon his face; yet there was also a certain shadow there, as of premature wisdom, born of pain. There were faint lines about the mouth and eyes. For all its sleek and ruddy comeliness, it was not the face of a boy.

"Messire," she said to him at last.

"Madame."

"He who lurks over long in the wolf's den may meet the dam at the door."

He smiled at her, a frank flash of sympathy that was not devoid of gratitude.

"Haste would be graceless," he said to her.

"How so?" she asked him.

"Ha, Madame Yeoland, have I not watched my arms at night before the high altar at Avalon? Have I not sworn to serve women, to keep troth, and to love God? You judge me hardly if you think of me as a butcher and a murderer. For the death of your kinsfolk I hold myself ashamed."

There was a fine light upon his face, a power of truth in his voice that was not hypocritic. The girl stared him over with a certain critical earnestness that

boasted a gleam of approval.

"Fair words," she said to him; "you did not speak thus to me last eve."

"Ah!" he cried, beaming on her, "I was cold as a corpse; nor could I whine, for pride."

"And your shackles?"

He laughed and held up both hands; the wrists were chafed and bloody.

"It was ever a jest against me," he said, "that I had the hands of a woman, white and meagre, yet strong with the sword. Your fellows thrust a pair of wristlets on me fit for a Goliath, strong, but bulky. My hands have proved my salvation. I pulled them through while the guards diced, crept for a sword, gained it, and my freedom."

She nodded, and was not markedly dismal, though the wind had veered against her cause. The man with the grey eyes was a being one could not quarrel with with easy sincerity. Probably it did not strike her at the moment that this friendly argument with the man she had plotted to slay was a contradiction worthy of a woman.

The Lord of Avalon meanwhile had drawn still nearer to the girl upon the dais. His grey eyes had taken a warmer lustre into their depths, as though her beauty had kindled something akin to awe in his heart. He set the point of the sword on the floor, his hands on the hilt, and looked up at the white face medallioned in the black splendour of its hair.

"Madame," he said very gravely, "it is the way of the world to feel remorse when such an emotion is expedient, and to fling penitence into the bottomless pit when the peril is past. I shall prove to you that mine is no such April penitence. Here, on the cross of my sword, I swear to you a great oath. First, that I will build a chapel in Cambremont glade, and establish a priest there. Secondly, I will rebuild the tower, refit it royally, attach to it cottars and borderers from mine own lands. Lastly, mass shall be said and tapers burnt for your kinsfolk in every church in the south. I myself will do such penance as the Lord Bishop shall ordain for my soul."

The man was hotly in earnest over the vow–red as a ruby set in the sun. Yeoland looked down upon him with the glimmer of a smile upon her lips as he kissed the cross of the sword.

"You seem honest," she said to him.

"Madame, on this sword I swear it. It is hard to believe any good of an enemy. Behold me then before you as a friend. There is a feud betwixt us, not of my willing. By God's light I am eager to bridge the gulf and to be at peace."

She shook her head and looked at him with a sudden mysterious sadness. Such a pardon was beyond belief, the man's pure ardour, nothing but seed cast upon sand. Fulviac, a tower of steel, seemed to loom beyond him–an iron figure

of Fate, grim and terrible.

"This can never be," she said.

His eyes were honestly sorrowful.

"Is madame so implacable?"

"Ah!" she said, "you do not understand me."

He stood a moment in thought, as though casting about in his heart for the reason of her sternness. Despite her wrongs, he was assured by some spirit voice that it was not death that stalked betwixt them like an angel of doom. As he stood and brooded, a gleam of the truth flashed in upon his brain. He went some steps back from her, as though destiny decreed it that they should sever unabsolved.

"Your pardon, madame," he said to her; "the riddle is plain to me. I no longer grope into the dark. This man, here, is your husband."

She went red as a rose blushing on her green throne at the coming of the dawn.

"Messire."

"Your pardon."

"Ah, I am no wife," she said to him. "God knows but for this man I should be friendless and without home. He has spread honour and chivalry before my feet like a snow-white cloak. Even in this, my godless vengeance, he has served me."

The man strode suddenly towards the dais, with his face turned up to hers. A strange light played upon it, half of passion, half of pity. His voice shook, for all its sanguine strength.

"Ah, madame, tell me one thing before I go."

"Messire."

"Have I your pardon?"

"If you love life, messire, leave me."

"Have I your pardon?"

"Go! ere it is too late."

Like a ghostly retort to her appeal came the sound of armed men thundering over the bridge. Their rough voices rose in the night's silence, smitten through with the clash and clangour of arms. Fulviac had caught John of Brissac's company in the woods by Gilderoy. There had been a bloody tussle and much slaughter. Triumphant, they were at the gate with Prosper the Preacher in their midst.

The pair in the cavern stared at each other with a mute appeal.

"Fulviac," said the girl in a whisper.

"The door!"

"It is barred."

They were silent and round-eyed, as children caught in the midst of mischief. Mailed fists and pike staves were beating upon the gate. A babel of impatience welled up without.

"Adrian, Gregory!"

"Lazy curs!"

"Unbar, unbar!"

Mocking silence leered in retort. Yeoland and the Lord of Avalon were still as mice. The din slackened and waned, as though Fulviac's men were listening for sound of life within. Then came more blows upon the gate; fingers fumbled at the closed grill. The man Gregory lay and stared at the rocky roof; Adrian sat with his face pooled by his own blood.

A fiercer voice sounded above the clamour. It was Fulviac's. The girl shivered as she stood.

"Ho, there, Gregory, Adrian; what's amiss with ye?"

Still silence, mocking and implacable. The lull held for the moment; then the storm gathered.

"Break down the gate," roared the voice; "by God, we will see the bottom of this damned silence."

The Lord Flavian of Avalon had stood listening with the look of a man cooped in a cavern, who hears the sea surging to his feet. He glanced at the dead guards, and went white. To save his soul from purgatory it behoved him to act, and to act quickly. A single lamp still burnt in the oratory of hope. He went near to the girl on the dais, and held up the crossed hilt of his sword.

"By the Holy Cross, mercy!"

She cast a frightened glance into his eyes, and continued mute a moment. The thunder grew against the gate, the crash of steel, a rending din that went echoing into all the pits and passage-ways of the place. Fulviac's men had dragged the trunk of a fallen pine up the causeway, and were charging the gate till the timber groaned.

The man, with his sword held like a crucifix, stood and pleaded with his eyes.

"Mercy!" he said; "you know this warren and can save me."

"Are you a craven?"

"Craven? before God, no, only desperate. What hope have I unharnessed, one sword against fifty?"

For yet another moment she appeared irresolute, dazed by the vision of Fulviac's powerful wrath. He was a stark man and a terrible, and she feared him. The timbers of the gate began to crack and gape. Flavian of Avalon lifted up his voice to her with a passionate outburst of despair.

"God, madame, I cannot die. I am young, look at me, life is at its dawn. By

your woman's mercy, hide me. Give me not back to death."

His bitter agitation smote her to the core. She looked into his eyes; they were hungry as love, and very piteous. There could be no sinning against those eyes. Great fear flooded over her like a green billow, bearing her to the inevitable. In a moment she was as hot to save him as if he had been her lover.

"Come," she said, "quick, before the gate gives."

She led him like the wind through Fulviac's parlour, and down the gallery to her own bower. It was dark and lampless. She groped to the postern, fumbled at the latch and conquered it. Night streamed in. She pushed the man out and pointed to the steps.

"The forest," she said, "for your life; bear by the stars for the north."

A full moon had reared her silver buckler in the sky. The night was sinless and superb, drowned in a mist of phosphor glory. The man knelt at her feet a moment, and pressed his lips to the hem of her gown.

"The Virgin bless you!"

"Go—-"

"I shall remember."

He descended and disappeared where the trees swept up with wizard glimmerings to touch the cliff. When he had fled, Yeoland passed back into the cavern, and met Fulviac before the splintered gate with a lie upon her lips.

PART II

XIII

Fra Balthasar rubbed his colours in the chapel of Castle Avalon, and stared complacently upon the frescoes his fingers had called into being.

A migratory friar, Fra Balthasar had come from the rich skies, the purple vineyards, the glimmering orange groves of the far south. Gossip hinted that a certain romantic indiscretion had driven him northwards over the sea. A "bend sinister" ran athwart his reputation as a priest. Men muttered that he was an infidel, a blasphemous vagabond, versed in all the damnable heresies of antiquity.

Be that as it may, Fra Balthasar had come to Gilderoy on a white mule, with two servants at his back, an apt tongue to serve him, and much craft as a painter and goldsmith. He had set up a *bottega* at Gilderoy, and had cozened the patronage of the magnates and the merchants. Moreover, he had netted the favour of the Lord Flavian of Avalon, and was blazoning his chapel for him with the lavish fancy of a Florentine.

Fra Balthasar stood in a cataract of sunlight, that poured in through a painted window in the west. He wore the white habit of Dominic and the long black mantle. A golden mist played about his figure as he rubbed his palette, and scanned with the egotism of the artist the *Pietà* painted above the Lord Flavian's state stall. That gentleman, in the flesh, had established himself on a velvet hassock before the altar steps, thus flattering the friar in the part of a sympathetic patron. The Lord of Avalon had dedicated his own person to art as an Eastern King in the splendour of Gothic arms, kneeling bare-headed before the infant Christ.

Fra Balthasar was a plump man and a comely, black of eye and full of lip. His shaven chin shone blue as sleek velvet. He had turned from the *Pietà* towards the altar, where a triptych gleamed with massed and brilliant colour. The Virgin, a palpitating divinity breathing stars and gems from her full bosom, gazed with a face of sensuous serenity at the infant lying in her lap. She seemed to exhale an atmosphere of gold. On either wing, angels, transcendant girls in green and silver, purple and azure, scarlet and white, made the soul swim with visions of ruddy lips and milk-white hands. Their wings gleamed like opals. They looked too frail for angels, too human for heaven.

The Lord of Avalon sat on his scarlet hassock, and stared at the Madonna with some measure of awe. She was no attenuated, angular, green-faced fragment of saintliness, but by every curve a woman, from plump finger to coral lip.

"You are no Byzantine," quoth the man on the hassock, with something of a sigh.

The priest glanced at him and smiled. There were curves in lip and nostril that were more than indicative of a sleek and sensuous worldliness. Fra Balthasar was much of an Antinous, and doted on the conviction.

"I paint women, messire," he said.

His lordship laughed.

"Divinities?"

Balthasar flourished his brush.

"Divine creatures, golden flowers of the world. Give me the rose to crush against my mouth, violets to burn upon my bosom. Truth, sire, consider the sparkling roundness of a woman's arm. Consider her wine-red lips, her sinful eyes, her lily fingers dropping spikenard into the soul. I confess, sire, that I am a

man."

The friar's opulent extravagance of sentiment suited the litheness of his look. Balthasar had enthroned himself in his own imagination as a species of Apollo, a golden-tongued seer, whose soul soared into the glittering infinitudes of art. An immense egotist, he posed as a full-blooded divinity, palpitating to colour and to sound. He had as many moods as a vain woman, and was a mere fire-fly in the matter of honour.

"Reverend sire," quoth the man on the footstool with some tightening of the upper lip, "you bulk too big for your frock, methinks."

Balthasar touched a panel with his brush; cast a glance over his shoulder, with a cynical lifting of the nostril.

"My frock serves me, sire, as well as a coat of mail."

"And you believe the things you paint?"

The man swept a vermilion streak from his brush.

"An ingenuous question, messire."

"I am ever ingenuous."

"A perilous habit."

"Yet you have not answered me."

The friar tilted his chin like a woman eyeing herself in a mirror.

"Religion is full of picturesque incidents," he said.

"And is profitable."

"Sire, you shame Solomon. There are ever many rich and devout fools in the world. Give me a gleaming Venus, rising ruddy from the sea, rather than a lachrymose Magdalene. But what would you? I trim my Venus up in fine apparel, put a puling infant in her lap. *Ecce–Sancta Maria*."

The man on the footstool smiled despite the jester's theme, a smile that had more scorn in it than sympathy.

"You verge on blasphemy," he said.

"There can be no blasphemy where there is no belief."

"You are over subtle, my friend."

"Nay, sire, I have come by that godliness of mind when man discovers his own godhead. Let your soul soar, I say, let it beat its wings into the blue of life. Hence with superstition. Shall I subordinate my mind to the prosings of a mad charlatan such as Saul of Tarsus? Shall I, like each rat in this mortal drain, believe that some god cares when I have gout in my toe, or when I am tempted to bow to Venus?"

The man on the hassock grimaced, and eyed the friar much as though he had stumbled on some being from the underworld. He was a mystic for all his manhood.

"God pity your creed," he said.

"God, the inflated mortal—-"

"Enough."

"This man god of yours who tosses the stars like so many lemons."

"Enough, sir friar."

"Defend me from your mass of metaphor, your relics of barbarism. We, the wise ones, have our own hierarchy, our own Olympus."

"On my soul, you are welcome to it," quoth the man by the altar.

Balthasar's hand worked viciously; he was strenuous towards his own beliefs, after the fashion of dreamers delirious with egotism. The very splendour of his infidelity took its birth from the fact that it was largely of his own creating. His pert iconoclasm pandered to his own vast self-esteem.

"Tell me for what you live," said the man by the altar.

"For beauty."

"And the senses?"

"Colours, odours, sounds. To breathe, to burn, and to enjoy. To be a Greek and a god."

"And life?"

"Is a great fresco, a pageant of passions."

The Lord of Avalon sprang up and began to pace the aisle with the air of a man whose blood is fevered. For all his devoutness and his mystical fidelity, he was in too human and passionate a mood to be invulnerable to Balthasar's sensuous shafts of fire. The Lord Flavian had come by a transcendental star-soaring spirit, an inspiration that had torched the wild beacon of romance. He was red for a riot of chivalry, a passage of desire.

Turning back towards the altar, he faced the Madonna with her choir of angel girls. Fra Balthasar was watching him with a feline sleekness of visage, and a smile that boasted something of contempt. The friar considered spirituality a species of magician's lanthorn for the cozening of fools.

"What quip have you for love?" said the younger man, halting by the altar rails.

Balthasar stood with poised brush.

"There is some sincerity in the emotion," he said.

"You are experienced?"

"Sire, consider my 'habit.'"

The friar's mock horror was surprising, an excellent jest that fell like a blunted bolt from the steel of a vigorous manhood. The Lord Flavian ran on.

"Shall I fence with an infidel?" he asked.

"Sire, a man may be a man without the creed of Athanasius."

"How much of me do you understand?"

Fra Balthasar cleared his throat.

”The Lady Duessa, sire, is a rose of joy.”

”Monk!”

”My lord, it was your dictum that you are ever ingenuous. I echo you.”

”Need I confess to you on such a subject?”

”Nay, sire, you have the inconsistency of a poet.”

”How so?”

”Well, well, one can sniff rotten apples without opening the door of the cupboard.”

The younger man jerked away, and went striding betwixt the array of frescoes with something of the wild vigour of a blind Polyphemus. Balthasar, subtle sophist, watched him from the angle of his eye with the sardonic superiority of one well versed in the contradictions of the world. He had scribbled a shrewd sketch of the passions stirring in his patron’s heart. Had he not heard from the man’s own lips of the white-faced elf of the pine woods and her vengeance? And the Lady Duessa! Fra Balthasar was as wise in the gossip of Gilderoy as any woman.

”Sire,” he said, as the aristocrat turned in his stride, ”I ask of you a bold favour.”

”Speak out.”

”Suffer me to paint your mood in words.”

The man stared, shrugged his shoulders, smiled enigmatically.

”Try your craft,” he said.

Balthasar began splashing in a foreground with irritable bravado.

”My lord, you were a fool at twenty,” were his words.

”A thrice damned fool,” came the echo.

Balthasar chuckled.

”And now, messire, a golden chain makes a Tantalus of you. Life crawls like a sluggish river. You chafe, you strain, you rebel, feed on your own heart, sin to assert your liberty. Youth slips from you; the sky narrows about your ears. Well, well, have I not read aright?”

”Speak on,” quoth the man by the altar.

”Ah, sire, it is the old tale. They have cramped up your youth with book and ring; shut you up in a moral sarcophagus with a woman they call your wife. You burn for liberty, and the unknown that shines like a purple streak in a fading west. Ah, sire, you look for that one marvellous being, who shall torch again the youth in your heart, make your blood burn, your soul to sing. That one woman in the world, mysterious as the moon, subtle as the night, ineffably strange as a flaming dawn. That woman who shall lift you to the stars; whose lips suck the sap of the world; whose bosom breathes to the eternal swoon of all sweet sounds. She shall light the lust of battle in your heart. For her your sword shall leap, your

towers totter. Chivalry should lead you like a pillar of fire out of the night, a heroic god striving for a goddess."

The Lord of Avalon stood before the high altar as one transfigured. Youth leapt in him, red, glorious, and triumphant. Balthasar's tongue had set the pyre aburning.

"By God, it is the truth," he said.

The friar gathered his brushes, and took breath.

"Hast thou found thy Beatrice, O my son?"

"Have I gazed into heaven?"

Balthasar's voice filled the chapel.

"Live, sire, live!" he said.

"Ah!"

"Be mad! Drink star wine, and snuff the odours of all the sunsets! Live, live! You can repent in comfort when you are sixty and measure fifty inches round the waist."

XIV

Dame Duessa had come to Avalon, having heard certain whisperings of Gilderoy, and of a golden-haired Astarte who kept house there. Dame Duessa was a proud woman and a passionate, headstrong as a reformer, jealous as a parish priest. She boasted a great ancestry and a great name, and desires and convictions in keeping. She was a woman who loved her robe cupboard, her jewel-case, and her bed. Moreover, she pretended some affection for the Lord Flavian her husband, perhaps arrogance of ownership, seeing that Dame Duessa was very determined to keep him in bonded compact with herself. She suspected that the man did not consider her a saint, or worship her as such. Yet, termagant that she was, Dame Duessa could suffer some trampling of empty sentiment, provided Fate did not rob her of her share in the broad demesne and rent-roll of Gambrevault.

Avalon was a castle of ten towers, linked by a strong curtain wall, and built about a large central court and garden. A great moat circled the whole, a moat broad and silvery as a lake, with water-lilies growing thick in the shallows. Beyond the moat, sleek meadows tufted with green rushes swept to the gnarled piers of the old oaks that vanguarded the forest. The black towers slumbered in a mist of green, girded with sheeny water, tented by the azure of a southern sky.

Dame Duessa, being a lady of silks and tissues, did not love the place with all her soul. Avalon of the Orchards was dull, and smacked of Arcady; it was far removed from that island of fair sin, Lauretia, the King's city. Moreover, the Lord Flavian and his ungallant gentlemen held rigorously to the northern turrets, leaving her to lodge ascetically in her rich chamber in a southern tower.

Her husband contrived to exile himself as far as Castle Avalon could suffer him. If the pair went to mass, they went separately, with the frigid hauteur of an Athanasius handing an Aryus over to hell. When they hunted they rode towards opposite stars. No children had chastened them, pledges of heaven-given life. The Lady Duessa detested ought that hinted at caudle, swaddling-clothes, and cradles. Moreover, all Avalon seemed in league with the Lord Flavian. Knights, esquires, scullions, horse-boys swore by him as though he were a Bayard. Dame Duessa could rely solely on a prig of a page, and a lady-in-waiting who wore a wig, and perhaps on Fra Balthasar, the Dominican.

Meanwhile, the Lord of Avalon had been putting forth his penitence in stone and timber, and an army of craftsmen from Geraint. The glade in Cambremont wood rang to the swing of axes and the hoarse groaning of the saw. The tower had been purged of its ashes, its rooms retimbered, its casements filled with glass. A chapel was springing into life under the trees; the cleverest masons of the south were at work upon its pillars and its arches. Fra Balthasar, the Dominican, held sway over the whole, subtle in colour and the carving of stone. Flavian could have found no better pander to his penitence. Rose nobles had been squandered. Frescoes, jewel bright, were to blaze out upon the walls. The vaulted roof was to be constellated with glimmering gold stars, shining from skies of purple and azure.

To turn to Fulviac's great cliff hid in the dark depths of the forest of pines. The disloyal chaff of the kingdom was wafted thither day by day, borne on the conspiring breeze. The forest engulfed all comers and delivered them like ghosts into Fulviac's caverns. An army might have melted into the wilds, and the countryside have been none the wiser. Amid the pines and rocks of the cliffs there were marchings and countermarchings, much shouldering of pikes and ordering of companies. Veterans who had fought the infidels under Wenceslaus, drilled the raw levies, and inculcated with hoarse bellowings the rudiments of military reason. They were rough gentlemen, and Fulviac stroked them with a gauntlet of iron. They were to attempt liberty together, and he demonstrated to them that such freedom could be won solely by discipline and soldierly concord. The rogues grumbled and swore behind his back, but were glad in their hearts to have a man for master.

To speak again of the girl Yeoland. That March night she had met Fulviac over the wreckage of the broken gate, and had made a profession of the truth,

so far, she said, as she could conjecture it. She had been long in the forest, had returned to the cliff to find the guards slain, and the Lord Flavian gone. By some device he had escaped from his shackles, slain the men, and fled by the northern postern. The woman made a goodly pretence of vexation of spirit over the escape of this reprobate. She even taunted Fulviac with foolhardiness, and lack of foresight in so bungling her vengeance.

The man's escape from the cliff roused Fulviac's energies to full flood. The aristocrat of Avalon was ignorant of the volcano bubbling under his feet, yet any retaliatory meddling on his part might prove disastrous at so critical an hour. Fulviac thrust forward the wheels of war with a heavy hand. The torrents of sedition and discontent were converging to a river of revolt, that threatened to crush tyranny as an avalanche crushes a forest.

The Virgin with her moon-white face still inspired Yeoland with the visionary behest given in the ruined chapel. The girl's fingers toiled at the scarlet banner; she spent half her days upon her knees, devout as any Helena. She knew Fulviac's schemes as surely as she did the beads on her rosary. The rough rangers of the forest held her to be a saint, and knelt to touch her dress as she passed by.

Yet what are dreams but snowflakes drifting from the heavens, now white, now red, as God or man carries the lamp of love? The girl's ecstasy of faith was but a potion to her, dazing her from a yet more subtle dream. A faint voice summoned her from the unknown. She would hear it often in the silence of the night, or at full noon as she faltered in her prayers. The rosary would hang idle on her wrist, the crucifix melt from her vision. She would find her heart glowing like a rose at the touch of the sun. Anon, frightened, she would shake the human half of herself, and run back penitent to her prayers.

It was springtide and the year's youth, when memories are garlanded with green, and romance scatters wind-flowers over the world. Many voices awoke, like the chanting of birds, in Yeoland's heart. She desired, even as a swallow, to see the old haunts again, to go a pilgrim to the place where the dear dead slept. Was it yearning grief, or a joy more subtle, the cry of the wild and the voice of desire? Mayhap white flowers shone on the tree of life, prophetic of fruit in the mellow year. Jaspar the harper heard her plea; 'twas wilful and eager, but what of that! Fulviac, good man, had ridden to Gilderoy. The girl had liberty enough and to spare. She took it and Jaspar, and rode out from the cliff.

Threading the sables of the woods, they came one noon to the open moor. It was golden with the western sun, solitary as the sea. The shadows were long upon the sward when Cambremont wood billowed out in its valley. There was no hope of their reaching the tower before dusk, so they piled dead bracken under a cedar, where the shelving eaves swept to the ground.

They were astir early upon the morrow, a sun-chastened wind inspiring the

woodlands, and sculpturing grand friezes from the marbles of the sky. The forest was full of the glory of Spring, starred with anemones and dusted with the azure campaniles of the hyacinth horde. Primroses lurked on the lush green slopes. In the glades, the forest peristyles, green gorse blazed with its constellations of gold.

To the dolt and the hag the world is nothing but a fat larder; only the unregenerate are blind of soul. Beauty, Diana-like, shows not her naked loveliness to all. The girl Yeoland's eyes were full of a strange lustre that May morning. Many familiar landmarks did she pass upon the way, notched deep on the cross of memory. There stood the great beech tree where Bertrand had carved his name, and the smooth bark still bore the scars where the knife had wantoned. She forded the stream where Roland's pony had once pitched him into the mire. Her eyes grew dim as she rode through the sun-steeped woods.

The day had drawn towards noon when they neared the glade in the midst of Cambremont wood. Heavy wain wheels had scarred the smooth green of the ride, and the newly-sawn pedestals of fallen oaks showed where woodmen had been felling timber. To Jaspar the harper these signs were more eloquent of peril than of peace. He began to snuff the air like an old hound, and to jerk restless glances at the girl at his side.

"See where wheels have been," he began.

"And axes, my friend."

"What means it?"

"Some one rebuilds the tower."

The harper wagged his head and half turned his horse from the grass ride.

"Have a care," he said.

"Hide in the woods if you will."

She rode on with a triumphant wilfulness and he followed her.

As they neared the glade, the noise of axe and hammer floated on the wind, and they saw the scene flicker towards them betwixt the great boles of the trees. The tower stood with battlements of fresh white stone; its windows had been reset, the blasting touch of fire effaced from the walls. The glade was strewn with blocks of stone and lengths of timber; the walls of a chapel were rising from the grass. Men were digging trenches for the foundations of the priest's cell. Soldiers idled about gossiping with the masons.

There was a smile in the girl's eyes and a deeper tint upon her cheeks as she stared betwixt the trees at the regarnished tower. Those grey eyes had promised the truth in Fulviac's cavern. She was glad in her heart of the man's honour, glad with a magic that made her colour. As for the harper, he stroked his grey beard and was mute. He lacked imagination, and was no longer young.

On a stump of an oak tree at the edge of the wood sat a man in a black

mantle and a habit of white cloth. He had a panel upon his knee, and a small wooden chest beside him on the grass. His eyes were turned often to the rolling woods, as his plump hand flourished a brush with nervous and graceful gestures.

Seeing the man's tonsure, and his dress that marked him a Dominican, Yeoland rode out from the trees, casting her horse's shadow athwart his work. The man looked up with puckered brow, his keen eye framing the girl's figure at a glance. It was his destiny to see the romantic and the beautiful in all things.

The priest and the girl on the horse eyed each other a moment in silence. Each was instinctively examining the other. The churchman, with an approving glint of the eye, was the first to break the woodland silence.

"Peace be with you, madame."

His tone hinted at a question, and the girl adopted therewith an ingenuous duplicity.

"My man and I were of a hunting party," she said; "we went astray in the wood. You, Father, will guide us?"

"Madame has not discovered to me her desire."

"We wish for Gilderoy."

Balthasar rose and pointed with his brush towards the ride by which they had come. He mapped the road for them with sundry jaunty flourishes, and much showing of his white teeth. Yeoland thanked him, but was still curious.

"Ah, Father, whither have we wandered?"

"Men call it Cambremont wood, madame."

"And these buildings? A retreat, doubtless, for holy men."

Balthasar corrected her with much unction.

"The Lord Flavian of Avalon builds here," he said, "but not for monks. I, madame, am his architect, his pedagogue in painting."

Yeoland pretended interest. She craned forward over her horse's neck and looked at the priest's panel. The act decided him. Since she was young and comely, Balthasar seized the chance of a chivalrous service. The girl had fine eyes, and a neck worthy of a Venus.

"Madame has taste. She would see our work?"

Madame appeared very ready to grant the favour. Balthasar put his brushes aside, held the girl's stirrup, and, unconscious of the irony of the act, expatiated to Yeoland on the beauties of her own home. At the end of their pilgrimage, being not a little bewitched by such eyes and such a face, he begged of her the liberty of painting her there and then. 'Twas for the enriching of religious art, as he very properly put it.

Dead Rual's grave was not ten paces distant, and Jaspar was standing by it as in prayer. Thus, Yeoland sat to Fra Balthasar, oblivious of him indeed as his fingers brought her fair face into being, her shapely throat and raven hair. His

picture perfected, he blessed her with the unction of a bishop, and stood watching her as she vanished down the southern ride, graceful and immaculate as a young Dian.

XV

Hardly had an hour passed, and Fra Balthasar was still touching the study he had made of Yeoland's face, when a company of spears flashed out by the northern ride into the clearing. At their head rode a knight in harness of burnished steel, a splendid figure flashing chivalry in the eyes of the sun. On his shield he bore "a castle, argent, with ports voided of the field, on a field vert," the arms of the house of Gambrevault. His surcoat was diapered azure and green with three gold suns blazoned thereon. His baldric, a splendid streak of scarlet silk, slashed his surcoat as with blood. His troop, men in half armour, rode under the Pavon Vert of the demesne of Avalon.

They thundered into the open stretch of grass with a clangorous rattle of steel. Flavian, bare-headed, for his salade hung at his saddle-bow and he wore no camail, scanned the glade with a keen stare. Seeing Fra Balthasar seated under a tree, he turned his horse towards him, and smiled as the churchman put his tools aside and gave him a benediction. The man made a fine figure; judged by the flesh, Balthasar might have stood for an Ambrose or a Leo.

"Herald of heaven, how goes the work?"

"Sire, we emulate Pericles."

"What have you there, a woman's head, some rare Madonna?"

Balthasar showed his white teeth.

"A pretty pastoral, messire. The study of a lady who had lost her way hunting, and craved my guidance this morning. A woman with the face and figure of a Dian."

"Ha, rogue of the brush, let us see it."

Balthasar passed the parchment into the other's hand. Flavian stared at it, flushed to the temples, rapped out an ejaculation in ecclesiastic Latin. His eyes devoured the sketch with the insatiable enthusiasm of a lover; words came hot off his tongue.

"Quick, man, quick, is this true to life?"

"As ruby to ruby."

"None of your idealisations?"

"Messire, but an hour ago that girl was sitting her horse where your destrier now stands."

"And you sketched this at her desire?"

"At my own, sire; it was courtesy for courtesy: I had shown her our handiwork here."

"You showed her this tower and chapel?"

"Certainly, sire."

"She seemed sad?"

"Nay, merry."

"This is romance!" He lifted the little picture at arm's length to the sun, kissed it, and put it in his bosom. His face was radiant; he laughed as though some golden joy rang and resounded in his heart.

"A hundred golden angels for this face!"

Fra Balthasar was in great measure mystified. The Lord of Avalon seemed an inflammable gentleman.

"Messire, you are ever generous."

"Man, man, you have caught the one woman in the world."

"Sire—-"

"The Madonna of the Pine Forest, the Madonna of Mercy; she whose kinsfolk were put to the sword by my men; even the daughter of Rual whose tower stands yonder."

The priest comprehended the whole in a moment. The dramatic quaintness of the adventure had made him echo Flavian's humour. He laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Romance, romance! By all the lovers who ever loved, by Tristan and the dark Iseult, by Launcelot and Guinivere, follow that picture."

"Which way went she?"

"By the southern ride, towards Gilderoy."

The man was in heroic humour; his sword flashed out and shook in the sun.

"By God, I'll see her face again, and yet again, though I burn in hell for it. Roland, Godamar, come, men, come, throw away your spears. Ride, ride, we chase the sunset. Life and desire!"

He sprang away on his great bay horse, a shimmering shaft of youth–youth that flashed forth chivalry into the burgeoning green of Spring. The sunlight webbed his hair with gold; his face glowed like a martyr's. Balthasar watched him with much poetic zest, as he swept away with his thundering knights into the woods.

The friar settled to his work again, but it was fated that he was to have no

lasting peace that morning. He was painting in a background, a landscape, to a small Crucifixion. His hand was out of touch, however; the subject was not congenial. A pale face and a pair of dusky eyes had deepened a different stream of thought in the man. Themes hypersensuous held his allegiance; from prim catholic ethics, he reverted to his glorious paganism with an ever-broadening sense of satisfaction.

He was interrupted once more, and not unpleasantly, by a lady, with two armed servants at her back, riding in from the forest by the northern ride. The woman was clad in a cloak of damask red, and a jupon of dark green, broidered with azure scroll work. Her hood, fallen back, showed her purple black hair bound up in a net of gold. Her large dark eyes flashed and smouldered under their long lashes. She had high cheek-bones, a big nose, lips full as an over-ripe rose. She was big of body, voluptuous to look upon, as an Eastern odalisque, a woman of great passions, great appetites.

Fra Balthasar tumbled his brushes and paints aside, and went to meet her as she rode over the grass. There was a smile on the man's lips, a flush upon his sleek face, as he walked with a courtly and debonair vanity. The woman caught sight of him and wheeled her horse in his direction. The autumn splendour of her cheeks told of hard riding, and her horse dropped foam from his black muzzle.

Fra Balthasar crossed himself with much meekness.

"Good greeting, Madame Duessa," were his words, as he kept his eyes on the ground.

The woman scanned the glade with the strenuous spirit of a Boadicea.

"My Lord Flavian?"

"Madame?"

"He has been here."

"But is here no longer."

"These buildings?"

"Are the Lord Flavian's."

"And you?"

"I am his architect."

"Morally, messire monk?"

"Madame, I do not edificate souls."

The woman stared him over with a critical comprehensiveness.

"Balthasar."

The man half glanced at her.

"Look me in the face."

He gave a sigh, made a gesture with his hands, looked melancholy and over-ecstasied to the point of despair.

"Madame, there are thoughts beyond one's liberty."

"Well?"

"There are women, a woman, one dares not look upon. There are eyes, well–well, that are too bright. Pardon me, I would serve you."

She took a deep breath, held out her hand to him, a big, warm hand, soft and white. The man's lips burnt upon it. She touched his cheek and saw him colour.

"Well?"

"My Lord Flavian is not here."

"But has been. Where now?"

"Away hunting."

"Ha, what?"

"Madame, what do men hunt and burn for?"

"Sometimes a stag, a hare, a standard, a woman."

"Sometimes–a woman."

Balthasar, looking slantwise under half-closed lids, saw her eyes flash and her lips tighten.

"Which way?"

"The southern ride, towards Gilderoy."

Duessa shook her bridle, and threw one look into Balthasar's eyes.

"Remember," she said, "remember, a woman loves a friend, a true friend, who can tell a lie, or keep a secret."

Balthasar watched her ride away. He stood and smiled to himself, while his long fingers played with the folds of his mantle. Red wine was bounding in his blood, and his imagination revelled. He was a poetic person, and a poet's soul is often like tinder, safe enough till the spark falls.

"*Gloria*," he said to himself with a smirk, "here's hunting with a vengeance. Two women and a man! The devil is loose. Soul of Masaccio, that woman has fine eyes."

That day, when the sky was growing red over the woods, Flavian and his troop drew close on the heels of Yeoland and the harper. The man, for all his heat, had kept his horse-flesh well in hand. Once out of Cambremont wood, they had met a charcoal-burner, who had seen Yeoland and her follower pass towards the west. They had hunted fast over fell and moor. While not two miles behind came Duessa of the Black Hair, biting her lips and giving her brute lash and spur with a woman's viciousness.

Yeoland, halting on a slope above the pine woods, looked back and saw something that made her crane her neck and wax vigilant. Out of the wine-red east and the twilight gloom came the lightning of harness, the galloping gleam of armed men. Jaspar's blear eyes were unequal to the girl's. The men below were riding hard, half under the lea of the midnight pines, whose tops touched

the sunset. A half-moon of steel, their crescent closed wood and moor. They had the lead in the west; they were mounting the slope behind.

Jaspar saw them at last. He was for galloping. Yeoland held him in.

"Fool, we are caught. Sit still. We shall gain nothing by bolting."

A knight was coming up the slope at a canter. Yeoland saw his shield, read it and his name. She went red under her hood, felt her heart beating, wondered at its noise.

Youth, aglitter in arms, splendid, triumphant! A face bare to the west, eyes radiant and tender, a great horse reined in on its haunches, a mailed hand that made the sign of the cross!

"Madame, your pardon."

He drew Balthasar's picture from his bosom and held it before her eyes.

"My torch," he said, "that led me to see your face again."

The girl was silent. Her head was thrown back, her slim throat showing, her face turned heavenwards like the face of a woman who is kissed upon the lips.

"You have seen your home?"

"Yes, messire."

"God pardon me your sorrow. You see I am no hypocrite. I keep my vows."

"Yes, messire."

"Madame, let me be forgiven; you have trusted one man, trust another."

She turned her horse suddenly and began to ride towards the black maw of the forest. Her lips were tightly closed, and she looked neither to the right nor the left. Flavian, a tower of steel, was at her side. Armed men ranged in a circle about them. They opened ranks at a sign from their lord, and gave the woman passage.

"Madame—-"

"Messire—-"

"Am I to be forgiven?"

She was mute a moment, as in thought. Then she spoke quietly enough.

"Yes, for a vow."

"Tell it me."

"If you will never see my face again."

He looked at her with a great smile, drew his sword, and held the point towards her.

"Then give me hate."

"Messire!"

"Hate, not forgiveness, hate, utter and divine, that I may fight and travail, labour and despair."

"Messire!"

”Hate me, hate me, with all the unreason of your heart. Hate me a hundred times, that I may but leap a hundred times into your life. Bar me out that I may storm your battlements again and again.”

”Are you a fool?”

”A glorious, mad, inspired fool.”

They were quite near the trees. Their black masses threw a great shadow over the pair. Higher still the sky burnt.

”Madame, whither do you go?”

”Where you may not venture, messire.”

”God, I know no such region.”

She flashed round on him with sudden bitterness.

”Go back to your wife. Go back to your wife, messire; remember her honour.”

It was a home-thrust, but it did not shame or weaken him. He sheathed his sword, and looked at her sadly out of his grey eyes.

”What a world is this,” he said, ”when heaven comes at last, hell yawns across the path. When summer burns, winter lifts its head. Even as a man would grow strong and pure, his own cursed shackles cumber him. To-night I say no more to you. Go, madame, pray for me. You shall see my face again.”

He let life vanish under the pines, and rode back with the sunset on his armour, his face staring into the rising night. His men came round him, silent statues of steel. He rode slowly, and met his wife.

Her eyes were turbulent, her lips red streaks of scorn.

”Ha, sire, I have found you.”

”Madame, I trust you are well?”

They looked at each other askance like angry dogs, as they rode side by side, and the night came down. The men left them to themselves, and went on ahead. A wind grew gusty over the moor.

[image]

”THEY LOOKED AT EACH OTHER ASKANCE LIKE ANGRY DOGS.”

”Messire, I have borne enough from you.”

”Madame, is it fault of mine?”

His whole soul revolted from her with an immensity of hate. She cumbered, clogged, crushed him. Mad brutality leapt in his heart towards her. He could have smitten the woman through with his sword.

”Five years ago—-” she said.

”You did the wooing. Damnation, we have been marvellously happy.”

She bit her lip and was white as the moon.

”Have a care, messire, have a care.”

”Threats, threats.”

”Have a care—-”

”Look at my shield. Have I quartered your arms with mine? God’s blood, there is nothing to erase.”

”Ha!”

”We have no children.”

”Go on.”

”I shall send gold and an embassage to the Pope.”

She clenched her hands and could not speak for the moment.

”You dare do this?”

”I dare ten thousand greater things than this.”

”By God, messire.”

”By God, woman, am I going down to hell because you are my wife!”

She grew quiet very suddenly, a dangerous move in a woman.

”Very well,” she said, ”try it, dear lord. I am no fool. Try it, I am as strong as you.”

And so they rode on towards Avalon together.

XVI

It is impossible for two persons of marked individuality to be much together without becoming more or less faceted one towards the other. We appeal by sympathy, and inspire by contrast. What greater glory falls to a man’s lot than to be chastened by the warm May of some girl’s pure heart! Yeoland had felt the force of Fulviac’s manhood; the more eternal and holier instincts were being stirred in him by a woman’s face.

The man’s life had been a transmigration. In his younger days the world had banqueted him; new poignancies had bubbled against his lips in the cup of pleasure. Later had come that inevitable weariness, that distaste of pomp, the mood that discovers vanity in all things. Finally he had set his heart upon a woman, a broken reed indeed, and had discovered her a hypocrite, according to

the measure of her passions. There had been one brief burst of blasphemy. He had used his dagger and had disappeared. There had been much stir at the time. A ruby had fallen from the King's crown. Some spoke of Palestine, others of a monastery, others of a cubit of keen steel.

Fulviac had begun life over again. He had fallen back upon elemental interests–had gone hungry, fought for his supper, slept many a storm out under a tree. The breath of the wilderness had winnowed out luxury; rain had scourged him into philosophic hardihood. He had learnt in measure that nothing pleases and endures like simplicity. Even his ambition was simple in its audacious grandeur.

Now the eyes of the daughter of Rual were like the eyes of a Madonna, and she stood in a circle of white lilies like the spirit of purity. Fulviac had begun to believe in her a little, to love her a little. She stood above all other women he had known. The ladies of the court were superb and comely, and marvellously kind, but they loved colour and contemned the robe of white. They were like a rich posy for a man to choose from, scarlet and gold, azure, damask or purple. You could love their bodies, but you could not trust their souls.

As for the girl Yeoland, she was very devout, very enthusiastic, but no Agnes. Her rosary had little rest, and with the suspicions of one not utterly sure of herself, she had striven to make religion and its results satisfy her soul. In some measure she had succeeded. Yet there is ever that psychic echo, that one mysterious being, subtle as the stars, that may come before Christ in the heart. Transcendent spirit of idolatry! And yet it is often heaven-sent, seeing that it leads many a soul to God.

It had become Yeoland's custom to walk daily in the pine wood at the foot of the stairway leading from the northern room. She had discovered a quaint nook, a mile or more from the cliff, a nook where trees stood gathered in a dense circle about a grassy mound capped by a square of mouldering stone. It was a grave, nameless and without legend. Perhaps a hermit had crumbled away there under the sods, or the bones of some old warrior slept within rusty harness. None knew, none cared greatly. Fulviac's men had hinted at treasure, yet even they were kept from desecrating the place by a crude and superstitious veneration for the dead.

She had wandered here one day and had settled herself on the grassy slope of the grave. The ribbon of her lute lay over her shoulder. A breeze sang fitfully through the branches, and a golden haze shimmered down as from the clerestory windows of a cathedral. Her lute seemed sad when it made answer to her fingers. Thought was plaintive and not devotional, if one might judge by the mood of the music, and the notes were wayward and pathetically void of discipline.

It was while the girl thrummed idly at the strings that a vague sound floated down to her with the momentary emphasis born of a fickle wind. It was foreign

to the forest, or it would not have roused her as it did. As she listened the sound came again from the west. It was neither the distant bay of a hound nor a horn's solitary note. There was something metallic about it, something musical. When it disappeared, she listened for its recurrence; when she heard it again, she puzzled over its nature.

The sound grew clearer at gradual intervals, and then ceased utterly. The girl listened for a long while to no purpose, and then prepared to forget the incident. The decision was premature. She was startled anon by the sound breaking out at no great distance. There was no doubt as to its nature: it was the clanging of a bell.

Yeoland wondered who could be carrying such a thing in such a place. Possibly some of Fulviac's men were coming home with stolen cattle, and an old bell-wether from some wild moorland with them.

The sound of the bell came very near; it seemed close amid the circling ranks of pines. Twigs were cracking too, and she heard the beat of approaching footsteps. Then her glance caught something visible, a streak of white in the shadows, moving like a ghost. The thing went amid the trees with the bell mute. The girl's doubts were soon set at rest as to whether she had been seen or no. The figure in grey slipped between the pines, and came out into the grass circle about the grave, cowled, masked, bell at girdle, a leper.

The girl stared at it with a cold flutter at her heart. The thing stood under the boughs motionless as stone. The bell gave never a tinkle; a white chin poked forward from under the hood; the masked face was in shadow. Then the bell jangled, and a gruff voice came from the cowl.

"Unclean, unclean!" it said; "avoid the white death, and give alms."

Yeoland obeyed readily enough, put a portion of the grave betwixt herself and the leper, fumbled in her pouch and threw the man a piece of silver. He came forward suddenly into the light, fell on his knees, put his hood back, plucked off the mask.

It was the face of the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault.

The girl stood and stared at him with unstinted astonishment.

"You," she said, "you?"

"Madame, I said that you should see my face again."

She conceived a sudden impetuous desire to turn and leave him on his knees, but some inner potency of instinct restrained her. She looked down at the man, with no kindling kindness upon her face. She did not know what to say to him, how to tune her mood. The first thought that rushed into her mind was seized upon and pressed into service, discretion or no discretion.

"Madman, they will kill you if they find you here."

"No woman ever loved a coward."

"For Heaven's sake, go away."

He rose from his knees and lifted up his frock. The girl saw harness and a sword beneath it. This young leopard of the southern shores had fettle enough, and spirit. He was a mixture of imperturbable determination and sanguine Quixotism, as he faced her under the trees.

"This dress is privileged; my bell warns folk away; who would fall foul of a miserable leper? If this frock fails me, I have my sword."

She looked at him with the solemnity of a child, hand folded in hand.

"I cannot understand you," she said.

"Not yet."

"Are you the man whose life I saved? That breath of death on your brow, messire, should have made you thoughtful of your soul."

"Let me plead a moment."

"For what?"

"My honour."

"Why your honour?"

"Because I want you to believe that I have a soul."

He was vastly earnest, and his eyes followed her, as though she were some being out of heaven. She had never seen such a look in a man's eyes before; it troubled her. She questioned her own heart, laughed emptily, and gave in to him.

"We are both mad," she said, "but go on. I will listen for one minute. Keep watch lest any one should come upon us suddenly."

She sat down on the grass bank, while he stood before her, holding his lazar bell by the clapper.

"Look at this dress," he said.

"Yes?"

"It is how I feel in soul when I look at you."

She frowned visibly.

"If you wax personal, messire, I shall leave you."

"No, no, I will keep to my own carcase, and play the egotist. Well, I will be brief. Look at me, I am the first lord in the south, master of an army, one of the twelve knights of the Order of the Rose."

"Go on."

"When I was twenty years old, certain clever people found me a wife, a woman five years my senior in time, twenty years my superior in knowledge of the world. Well, six months had not passed before I hated her, hated her with my whole soul. My God, what a thing for a boy to begin life with a woman who made him half the bounden vassal of the devil!"

"You seem generous. The faults were all on her side."

"Madame, I say nothing against the woman, only that she had no soul. We

were incompatible as day and night, fire and water. The thing crushed the youth out of me, made me desperate, and worse, made me old beyond my years. I have done my best. I have groped along like a man in the dark, knowing nothing, understanding nothing, save that I had a warm heart in me, and that life seemed one grim jest. The future had no fire for me; I drank the wine of the present, strove to please my senses, plunged into the abysses of the world. Sometimes I tried to pray. Sometimes I played the cynic. The eternal beacon of love had gone out of my life. I had no sun, no inspiration for my soul."

She sprang up suddenly, breathing fast like one who is near tears.

"Why do you speak to me of this?"

"God knows."

His voice was utterly lonely.

"What am I to you? You have hardly seen me three hours in your life. Why do you speak to me of this?"

He put a hand to his throat, and did not look at her.

"Madame, there are people who come near our hearts in one short hour, people who are winter to us to eternity. Do not ask me to explain this truth; as Christ's death, I know it to be true. I trust you. All the logicians of the world could not tell me why. I do not know that I could bring forward one single reason out of my own soul, save that you showed me great mercy once. And now–and now—-"

He broke down suddenly, and could not speak. Yeoland appealed to him out of the quickness of her fear.

"Messire, messire, your promise."

"Let me speak, or I stifle."

"Go, for God's sake, go!"

He flung his hands towards her with a great outburst of passion.

"Heaven and God's throne, you shall hear me to the end. Woman, woman, my soul flows to you as the sea ebbs to the moon; deep in the sky a new sun burns; the stars are dust, dust blown from the coffins of the dead who loved. Life leaps in me like another chaos. All my heart glows like an autumn orchard, and I burn. The world is red with a myriad roses. God's in the heaven, Christ bleeds on quaking Calvary."

She ran to him suddenly and seized his wrist.

"GO—-!"

"I cannot."

"Men are coming, I hear them in the woods, they will kill you!"

"I hear them too."

"Go, go, for my sake and for God's."

He kissed her sleeve, pulled his cowl down, and fled away into the woods.

XVII

The Lady Duessa stood in the chapel of water-girded Avalon, with Fra Balthasar the Dominican beside her. She had slipped in without his noticing her, and had watched him awhile in silence at his work. The jingling of her chatelaine had brought him at last to a consciousness of her presence. Now they stood together before the high altar and looked at the Madonna seated on her throne of gold, amid choirs of angel women.

The Lady Duessa's intelligence had waxed critical on the subject.

"You have altered the Virgin's face," she said.

Balthasar stared at his handiwork and nodded.

"The former has been erased, the latter throned in her stead."

The words had more significance for the lady than the friar had perhaps intended. A better woman would have snubbed him for his pains. As it was, he saw her go red, saw the tense stare of her dark eyes, the tightening of the muscles of her jaw. She had a wondrous strong jaw, had the Lady Duessa. She was no mere puppet, no bright-eyed, fineried piece of plasticity. Fra Balthasar guessed the hot, passionate power of her soul; she was the very woman for the rough handling of a cause, such as the Lord Flavian her husband had roused against her.

"I suppose," she said, "this alteration was a matter of art, Balthasar?"

"A matter of heart, madame."

"So?"

"My Lord Flavian commanded it."

"And yonder face is taken from life?"

"Madame, I leave the inference to your charity."

She laughed a deep, cynical laugh, and went wandering round the chapel, looking at the frescoes, and swinging a little poniard by the chain that linked it to her girdle. Balthasar made a pretence of mixing colours on his palette. Worldly rogue that he was, he knew women, especially women of the Lady Duessa mould. He had a most shrewd notion as to what was passing in her mind. Morally, he was her abettor, being a person who could always take a woman's part, provided she were pretty. He believed women had no business with religion. To Balthasar,

like fine glass, their frailty was their most enhancing characteristic. It gave such infinite scope to a discreet confessor.

The Lady Duessa strolled back again, and stood by the altar rails.

"Am I such a plain woman?" she asked.

"Madame!"

"You have never painted me."

"There are people above the artist's brush."

"But you paint the Madonna."

"Madame, the Madonna is anybody's property."

"Am I?"

"God forbid that a poet should speak lightly of beauty."

She laughed again, and touching her hair with her fingers, scanned herself in a little mirror that she carried at her girdle.

"Tell me frankly, am I worth painting?"

"Madame, that purple hair, those splendid eyes, the superb colour of those cheeks, would blaze out of a golden background as out of heaven."

She gave a musical little titter.

"Heaven, heaven, ha–ha."

"I should be grateful for so transcendent a chance."

"And you would do me justice?"

"Where inspiration burns, there art soars."

"You would be true?"

"To the chiselling of a coral ear."

"And discreet?"

"To the curve of a lip."

"And considerate?"

"My hands are subtle."

"And your heart?"

"Is ingenuous as a little child's."

She laughed again, and held out her hands. Balthasar kissed the white fingers, crowded with their gems. His eyes were warm as water in the sun; the colours and the glimmering richness of the chapel burnt into his brain.

"You shall paint me," she said.

"Here, madame, here?"

"No, my own bower is pleasanter. You can reach it by my Lord Flavian's stair in the turret. Here is the key; he never uses it now. Avalon has not seen him these six days."

"Madame, I will paint you as man never painted woman before."

Dame Duessa's bower was a broad chamber on the western walls, joining the south-western tower. A great oriel, jewelled with heraldic glass, looked over

the mere with its dreaming lilies, over the green meadows to the solemn silence of the woods.

Calypso's grotto! The bower of a luxurious lady in a luxurious age! The snuff of Ind and Araby tingled in Balthasar's nostrils. The silks of China and Bagdad, the cloths of Italy, bloomed there; flowers crowded the window, the couches, every nook. Blood-red hangings warmed the walls.

The Lady Duessa sat to Balthasar in the oriel, with her lute upon her bosom. She was in azure and violet, with neck and bosom showing under a maze of gossamer gold. Her arms were bare to the shoulder, white, gleaming arms, subtle, sinuous, voluptuous. Her hair had been powdered with gold. Her lips were wondrous red, her eyes dark as wells. Musk and lavender breathed from her samites; her girdle glowed with precious stones.

Fra Balthasar sat on a stool inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ivory. An embroidery frame served him as an easel. The man was living under the many-constellationed vault of beauty. All the scent and floweriness of the room played on his brain; all the wealth of it pandered to his art; all the woman's splendour made molten wax of his being.

As he painted she sang to him, an old lay of Arthurian love, so that he might catch the music in her eyes, and watch the deep notes gathering in her throat. He saw her bosom sway beneath her lace, saw the inimitable roundness of her arms. Often his brush lingered. He might gaze upon the woman as he would, drink her beauty like so much violet wine, open his soul to the opulent summer of her power. His heart was in a sunset mood; he lived the life of a poet.

"And the green spring grew subtle," sang the dame,
"With song of birds and laughter, and the woods
Were white for maying. So fair Guinivere
Loosed her long hair like rivulets of gold
That stream from the broad casement of the dawn.
And her sweet mouth was like one lovely rose,
And her white bosom like a bowl of flowers;
So wandered she with Launcelot, while the wind
Blew her long tresses to him, and her eyes
Were as the tender azure of the night."

Of such things sang Duessa, while the friar spread his colours.

And then she questioned him.

"Love you the old legends, Balthasar?"

"Madame, as I love life."

"Ah! they could love in those old days."

”Madame, men can love even now.”

She put her lute aside, and knelt upon the couch before the window, with her elbows on the cushioned sill. Her silks swept close upon her shapely back, her shoulders gleamed under her purple hair. In the west the world grew red; the crimson kisses of the sunset poured upon the ecstasied green woods. The mere was flaked with a myriad amber scales. The meadows broidered their broad laps with cowslips, as with dust of gold.

”Balthasar.”

”Madame?”

”Look yonder at the sunset. You must be tired of gazing on my face.”

He rose up like one dazed–intoxicated by colours, sounds, and odours. Duessa’s hand beckoned him. He went and knelt on the couch at her side, and looked out over the flaming woods.

”And the other woman?” she said.

”The other woman?”

”This Madonna of my lord’s chapel.”

”Yes?”

”She amuses me; I am not jealous; what is jealousy to me? Tell me about her, Balthasar; no doubt it is a pretty tale, and you know the whole.”

”I, madame?”

”I, Duessa.”

”But—-”

”You are my Lord Flavian’s friend; he was ever a man to be garrulous: he has been garrulous to you. Tell me the whole tale.”

”Duessa!”

”Better, better, my friend.”

She put her hands upon his shoulders, and stared straight into his eyes. Her lips overhung his like ripe red fruit. Her arms were fragrant of myrrh and violet; her bosom was white as snow under the moon.

”Can you refuse me this?”

”God, madame, I can refuse you nothing.”

XVIII

The girl Yeoland saw nothing of the leper for a season. For several days she did

not venture far into the pine forest, and the nameless grave heard not the sound of her lute. The third night after the incident, as she lay in her room under her canopy of purple cloth, she heard distinctly the silver clangour of a bell floating up through the midnight silence. She lay as still as a mouse, and scarcely drew breath, for fear the man in grey should venture up the stairway. The casement was open, with a soft June air blowing in like peace. The bell continued to tinkle, but less noisily, till it vanished into silence.

Other folk from the cliff had seen the leper, and Yeoland could not claim to have monopolised the gentleman. One of Fulviac's fellows had seen him one morning near the cliff, gliding like a grey ghost among the pines. Another had marked him creeping swiftly away through the twilight. It was a superstitious age and a superstitious region. The figure in grey seemed to haunt the place, with the occasional and mournful sounding of its bell. Men began to gossip, as the ignorant always will. Fulviac himself grew uneasy for more material reasons, and contemplated the test of a clothyard shaft or a bolt upon the leper's body. The man might be a spy, and if the bolt missed its mark it would at least serve as a sinister hint to this troublesome apparition.

It was then that Yeoland took alarm into her woman's heart. There was great likelihood of the man ending his days under the tree with a shaft sticking fast between his shoulders. Though he was something of a madman, she did not relish such a prospect. The day after she had heard the bell at midnight near the stair she haunted the forest like a pixie, keeping constant watch between the cliff and the forest grave. Fulviac had ridden out on a plundering venture, and she was free of him for the day.

It was not till evening that she heard the faint signal of the bell, creeping down through the gold-webbed boughs like the sound of a distant angelus. The sound flew from the north, and beckoned her towards the forest grave. Fearful of being caught, she followed it as fast as her feet could carry her, while the deepening clamour led her on. Presently she called the man by name as she ran. His grey frock and cowl came dimly through the trees.

"At last you are merciful," was his greeting.

She stood still and twisted her gown restlessly between her two hands. Anarchy showed in her face; fear, reason, and desire were calling to her heart. The intangible touch of the man's soul threw her being into chaos. She feared greatly for him, stood still, and could say nothing. Flavian put his cowl back, and stood aloof from her, looking in her face.

"Seemingly we are both embarrassed," he said.

She made a petulant little gesture. He forestalled her in speech.

"It is best to be frank when life runs deep. I will speak the truth to you, and you may treat me as you will."

Yeoland leant against a tree, and began to pull away the brittle scales of the bark.

"If you stay here longer, messire—-" she began.

"Well, madame, what then?"

"You will be shot like a dog; you are suspected; they are going to try your leper's gown with a crossbow bolt."

The man smiled optimistically.

"And you came to tell me this?"

"Yes."

"I thank you."

The wind moved through the trees; a fir-cone came pattering through the branches and fell at their feet. On the cliff a horn blared; its throaty cry came echoing faintly through the trees.

Flavian looked towards the gold of the west. His mood was calm and deliberate; he had his enthusiasms in leash for the moment, for there were more mundane matters in his mind–matters that were not savoury, however crimson shone the ideal years.

"I have thrown down the glove," he said, "for good or evil, honour or dishonour. I will tell you the whole truth."

Yeoland, watching his face, felt her impatient dreads goad her to the quick.

"Will you talk for ever?" she said to him.

"Take the core then. I am going to rend my bonds as I would rend flax. I have appealed to the Church; I have poured out gold."

"To the point, messire."

"I shall divorce my wife."

He threw his head back, and challenged the world in her one person. Her good favour was more to him than the patronage of Pope or King. It was in his mind that she should believe the worst of him from the beginning, so that in some later season he might not emulate Lucifer, toppled out of the heaven of her heart. She should have the truth from the first, and build her opinion of him on no fanciful basis. Even in this justice to the more sinister side of his surroundings, he was an idealist, thorough and enthusiastic.

"So you must understand, madame, that I am not without blemishes, not without things that I myself would rather see otherwise. With me it is a question of going to hell for a woman, or getting rid of her. Being an egotist, I choose the latter alternative."

Yeoland still evaded his eyes.

"And the woman loves you?"

"Not an atom; she only cares to be called the Lady of Gambrevault, Signoress of Avalon, the first dame in the south."

"Why do you tell me this?"

"Madame, have I need of more words? It is for this: that you might not picture me as I am not, or form any false conception of me. I have bared my moral skeleton to you. Perhaps you will never know what it costs a man at times to make his mind as glass to the woman he honours above the whole world."

"Well?"

"It is because I honour you that I have goaded myself to tell you the whole truth."

Her verdict was more sudden and more human than he might have expected.

"Messire, you are a brave man," she said; "I believe I am beginning to trust you."

The sky flamed into sunset; the tracery of the trees seemed webbed with gold into shimmering domes and fans of quivering light. In the distance, the great cliff stood out darkly from the scarlet caverns of the west. The pine tops rose like the black spires of some vast city. Above, floated clouds, effulgent mounts of fire, hurled from the abysmal furnace of the sun.

Flavian came two steps nearer to the woman, leaning against the tree.

"Give me my due," he said; "I have uncovered the difficult workings of my heart, I have shown you the inner man in his meaner mould. Suffer me to speak of my manhood in godlier words. I have shown you Winter; let me utter forth Spring."

Yeoland turned and faced him at last.

"You have risked your life and my honour long enough," she said, "I am going back to the cliff."

"And I with you, as far as the stairway."

"To the threshold of death."

"What care I if I tread it at your side?"

She turned homewards with obstinate intent, and the mild hauteur of a good woman. The man followed her, went with her step for step, looking in her face.

"Hear my confession," he said; "you shall have it before you leave me. For the sake of your honour, I hold my soul by the collar. But–but, I shall win liberty, liberty. When I am free, ah, girl, girl, I shall flash golden wings in the face of the sun. I shall soar to you that I may look into your eyes, that I may touch your hands, and breathe the warm summer of your soul. I want God, I want purity, I want the Eternal peace, I want your heart. I have said the whole; think of me what you will."

Twilight had gathered; all the violet calmness of the night came down upon the world. Under the shadows of the tall trees, the girl was deeply stirred beyond

her own compassion. She halted, hesitated, went suddenly near the man with her face turned heavenwards like a new-spread flower. Her eyes were very wistful, and she spoke almost in a whisper.

"You have told me the whole truth, you have shown me your whole soul?"

"As I serve you, madame, I have kept nothing back."

"Ah, messire, I will speak to you the truth in turn. God be merciful to me, but you have come strangely near my heart. These are bitter words for my soul. Ah, messire, if you have any honour for me, trust me that I aspire to heaven. I cannot suffer you to come deeper into my life."

The man held out his hands.

"Why, why?"

"Because in following me, you go innocently to your death."

He lifted up his arms, and leapt into heroics like an Apollo leaping into a blood-red sky.

"What care I; you speak in riddles; can I fear death?"

"Messire, messire, it is the woman who fears. I tell you this, because, because–God help me—-"

She fled away, but that night he did not follow her.

XIX

As a wind sweeps clamorous into a wood, so Modred and his fellows, household knights, streamed into the great hall of Avalon, where the Lord Flavian sat at supper. Bearers of angry steel, fulminators of vengeance, vociferous, strong, they poured in through the screens like a mill race, bearing a tossed and impotent figure in their midst. Their swords yelped and flashed over this bruised fragment of humanity.

A gauntlet of steel was dashed often into the white face. Hands clawed his collar, clutched his body. Dragged, jerked onwards, buffeted, beaten to his knees, he sank down before the Lord Flavian's chair, blood streaming from his mouth and nostrils, specking his white habit, drabbling the floor. Then only did the flashing, growling circle recede like waves from a fallen rock.

Modred, a black man, burly, a bigot to honour, stood out a giant before his fellows. His great sword quivered to the roof; his deep voice shook the rafters.

"Blood, sire, blood."

The man in the white habit quailed, and held up his hands.

"Let me smite him as he kneels."

"Sirs, give me the courtesy of silence."

Flavian started from his chair and looked at the man, who knelt, huddled into himself, at his feet. It was a scene replete with the grim cynicism of life. Here was a man of mind and genius, cowering, quivering before the strong wrath of a dozen muscular illiterates. Here was the promulgator of bold truths, an utter dastard when the physical part of him was threatened with dissolution. Not that this event was any proof against the moral power of pagan self-reliance. Not that there was any cause for the bleating of sanctimonious platitudes, or the pointing of a proverb. A true churchman might have carved a fine moral fable out of the reality. It would have been a fallacy. Fra Balthasar was a coward. He had none of the splendid mental anatomy of a Socrates. He would have played the coward even under the eye of Christ.

Silence had fallen. Far away, choked by the long throats of gallery and stair, rose the wild, passionate screaming of a woman. It had the rebellious, blasphemous agony of one flung into eternal fire. Without modulation, abatement, or increase, malevolent, impotent, ferocious, piteous, it pealed out in long, tempestuous bursts that swept into the ears like some unutterable discord out of hell.

The kneeling man heard it, and seemed to contract, to shrink into himself. His white habit was rent to the middle; his ashy face splashed over with blood. He tottered and shook, his hands clasped over the nape of his neck, for fear of the sword. His tongue clave to his palate; his eyes were furtively fixed on the upreared yard of steel.

Torches and cressets flared. Servants stared and shouldered and gaped in the screens; all the castle underlings seemed to have smelt out the business like the rats they were. Modred's knights put them out with rough words and the flat of the sword. The doors were barred. Only Flavian, the priest, and Modred and his men took part in that tribunal in the hall of Avalon.

Flavian stood and gazed on Balthasar, the man of tones and colours. The Lord of Gambrevault was calm, unhurried, and dispassionate, yet not unpleased. The man's infinite abasement and terror seemed to arrest him like some superb precept from the lips of a philosopher. He had the air of a man who calculates, the look of a diplomat whose scheme has worked out well. From Balthasar he looked to Modred the Strong, the torchlight lurid on his armour, his great sword quivering like a falcon to leap down upon its prey. The distant screaming, somewhat fainter and less resolute, still throbbed in his ears. He thought of Dante, and the *bolgias* of that superhuman singer.

Going close to the Dominican, he spoke to him in strong, yet not unpitying tones. Balthasar dared not look above the Lord Flavian's knees.

"Ha, my friend, where is all your fine philosophy?"

The man cringed like a beggar.

"Where are all your sonorous phrases, your pert blasphemies, your subtleties, your fine tinsel of intellect and vanity?"

Balthasar had no word.

"Where is your godliness, my friend, where your glowing and superhuman soul? Have we found you out, O Satanas; have we shocked your pagan heroism? Be a man. Stand up and face us. You could hold forth roundly on occasions. Even that Saul of Tarsus was not afraid of a sword."

Balthasar cowered, and hid his face behind his hands. He began to whimper, to rock to and fro, to sob. The grim men round him laughed, deep-chested, iron, scoffing laughter. Modred pricked the priest's neck with the point of his sword. It was then that Balthasar fell forward upon his face, senseless from sheer terror.

Flavian abandoned philosophic irony, and addressed himself to Modred and his knights.

"Put up your swords, sirs; this man shall go free."

"Sire, sire!" came the massed cry.

"Trust my discretion. The fellow has done me the greatest service of my life."

"Sire!"

"He has given me liberty. He has gnawed the shackles from my soul. You are all my witnesses in this, and may count upon my gratitude. But this man here, he has danced to my whim like a doll plucked by a string. For my liberty has he sinned; out of Avalon shall he go scatheless."

The men still murmured. Modred shot home his sword into its scabbard with a vicious snap. Flavian read their humour.

"Do not imagine, gentlemen," he said, "that your vigilance and your loyalty to my honour can go unrewarded. Modred, your lands are heavily mortgaged, I free you at a word, with this my signet. To you, Bertrand, I give the Manor of Riesole to keep and hold for you and yours. To all you, good friends, I give a hundred golden angels, man and man. And now, sirs, as to madame, my wife."

They gathered round him in curious conclave, Balthasar lying in their midst.

"Sir Modred, you will order out my state litter, set the Lady Duessa therein, and have her borne with all courtesy to Gilderoy, to her father's house. Then you will take these gentlemen who are my true friends and witnesses, and you will ride to Lauretia, to make solemn declaration before Bishop Hilary. He has already received my earlier embassage. After this affair, we have no need of ethical subtleties and clerical conveniences. You will obtain a dispensation at his

hands. *Ex vinculo matrimonii.* Nothing less than that."

They bowed to him and his commands, like the loyal gentlemen they were. Modred pointed to the prostrate Balthasar, who was already squirming back to consciousness, with his fingers feeling at his throat, as though to discover whether it was still sound or no.

"And this fellow, sire?"

"Pick him up."

Balthasar had found his tongue at last. He was jerked to his feet, and held up by force, with the handle of a poniard rammed into his mouth to stem his garrulity.

Flavian read him an extemporary lecture. There was something like a smile hovering about his lips.

"Go back to your missal, man, and forswear women. They are like strong wine, too much for your flimsy brain. I have more pity for you than censure. Say to yourself, when you patter your prayers, 'Flavian of Gambrevault saved me from the devil once.' And yet, my good saint, I have a shrewd notion that you will be just as great a fool two months hence."

The man gave a scream of delight, and attempted to throw himself at Flavian's feet. His superlative joy was almost ludicrous. Half a dozen hands dragged him back.

"Take him away–who cares for such gratitude!"

As they marched him off, he broke like an imbecile into hysterical laughter. Tears streamed from his eyes. He mopped his face with the corner of his habit, laughed and snivelled, and sang snatches of tavern ditties. So, with many a grim jest, they cuffed Fra Balthasar out of Avalon.

At the end of the drama, Flavian called for tapers, and marched in state to the chapel. He knelt before the altar and prayed to the Madonna, whose face was the face of the girl Yeoland.

XX

"Fulviac, I cannot fasten all these buckles."

The man waited at the door of her room, and looked at her with a half-roguish smile in his eyes.

She stood by the window in Gothic armour of a grandly simple type, no

Maximilian flutings, no Damascening, the simple Gothic at its grandest, nothing more. Her breast-plate, with salient ridge, was blazoned over with golden fleur-de-lis. The pauldrons were slightly ridged; vam-brace and rere-brace were beautifully jointed with most quaint elbow-pieces. She wore a great brayette, a short skirt of mail, but no tassets. In place of cuishes, jambs, and solerets, she had a kirtle of white cloth, and laced leather shoes. It was light work and superbly wrought; Fulviac had paid many crowns for it from an armourer at Geraint.

Her beauty, mailed and cased in steel, seemed to shine upon the man with a new glory. When he had played the armourer, she stood and looked at him with a most conscious modesty, a warm colour in her cheeks, eyes full of tremulous light, her masses of dark hair rolling down over her blazoned cuirass. A hand and a half sword in a gilded scabbard, a rich baldric, and a light bassinet lay on the oak table. Fulviac took the sword, and belted it to her, and slung the baldric over her shoulder. His hands moved through her dark hair. For a moment, her eyes trembled up at him under their long lashes. He gave the helmet into her hands, but she did not wear it.

A sudden gust of youth seized the man, an old strain of chivalry woke in his heart. Grizzled and gaunt, he went on his knees in front of her and held up his hands as in prayer. There was a warm light in his eyes.

"The Mother Virgin keep you, little woman. May all peril be far from your heart, all trouble far from your soul. May my arm ever ward you, my sword guard your womanhood. All the saints watch over you; may the Spirit of God abide with you in my heart."

It was a true prayer, though Fulviac stumbled up from his knees, looking much like an awkward boy. He was blushing under his tanned skin, blushing, scarred and battered worldling that he was, for his heart still showed gold to the knife of Time. Yeoland thought more of him that moment than she had done these four months. A shadow passed over her face, and she touched her forehead with her hand.

Fulviac, a far-away look in his eyes, was furling her great scarlet banner upon its staff. Yeoland spoke to him over her shoulder.

"I am in your hands," she said.

Fulviac smoothed out a crease.

"What is your will, you have not yet enlightened me?"

He looked at her gravely for a moment.

"You are ours," he said, "a woman given to us by heaven," he hesitated, as over a lie; "you are to shine out a star, a pillar of fire before the host; every man who follows you will know your story; every man who follows you will worship you in his heart. You will inspire us as no mere man could inspire; your blood-red banner will wave on heroes, patriots. You will play the comet with an army for

your tail."

Some sudden emotion seemed to sweep over her. She stood motionless with clasped hands, looking at her crucifix. There was a strange sadness upon her face, a tragic sanctity, as on the face of a woman who renounces the world, and more. For a long while she was silent, as though suffering some lustre light out of heaven to stream into her heart. Presently she answered Fulviac.

"God help me to be strong," she said, "God help me to bear the burden He has put upon my soul."

"Amen, little woman."

"And now?"

"Prosper is preaching to all our men upon the cliff. He is telling them your story. I take you now to set you before them all, that they may look upon a living Saint. I leave the rest to your soul. God will tell you how to bear yourself in the cause of the people. Come, let us pray a moment."

They knelt down side by side before the crucifix, like effigies on a tomb. Fulviac's face was in shadow; Yeoland's turned heavenward to the Cross. It was her renunciation. Then they arose; Fulviac took up the scarlet banner, and they passed out together from the room.

Traversing parlour and guard-room, finding them empty and silent as a church, they came by the winding stairway in the rock to the hollow opening upon the platform above. Two sentinels stood by the rough door. Above and around, great stones had been piled up so as to form a species of natural battlement. Fulviac, bearing the banner, climbed the rocks, and signed to Yeoland to follow. They were still within a kind of rude tower, walled in by heaped blocks of stone on every side. They were alone save for the two sentinels. Above, they saw Prosper the Preacher standing on a great square mass of rock, his tall figure outlined against the sky.

They could see that the man was borne along by the strong spirit of the preacher. His arms tossed to the sky as he bent forward and preached to those invisible to Fulviac and the girl. His oratory was of a fervid, strenuous type, like fire leaping in a wind, fierce, mobile, passionate. They could see him stride to and fro on his platform, gesticulate, point to heaven, smite his bosom, strike attitudes of ecstasy. His voice rang out the while, full of subtle modulations, the pathetic abandonments, the supreme outbursts of the orator. Much that he said fell deep into the girl's heart. The man had that strange power, that magnetic influence that exists in the individual, defying analysis, yet real as the stirring witchery of great music, or as the voice of the sea.

Anon they saw him fall upon his knees, and lift his hands to the heavens. He had cast a quick glance backward over his shoulder. Prosper had soared to his zenith; he had his men listening as for the climax of some great epic. Fulviac

thrust Yeoland forward up the slope. She understood the dramatic pause in an instant. Prosper's words had been like the orisons of birds preluding the dawn. She climbed the rocks, and stepped out at the kneeling monk's side.

The scene below dazed her for the moment. Many hundred faces were turned to her from the slopes at her feet. Innumerable eyes seemed fixed upon her with a mesmeric stare. She saw the whole cliff below her packed with men, every rock crowned with humanity, even the pine trees had their living burden. She saw swords waving like innumerable streaks of light; she had a confused vision of fanaticism, exultation, power. Deep seemed calling unto deep; a noise like the noise of breakers was in her ears.

Then the whole grew clear on the instant. The sky seemed strangely luminous; every outline in the landscape took marvellous and intelligent meaning. Strange Promethean fire flashed down into her brain. She felt her heart leaping, her blood bounding through her body, yet her mind shone clear as a crystal grael.

Below her, she had humanity, plastic, inflammable, tinder to her touch. An infinite realisation of power seemed to leap in her as at the beck of some spirit wand. She felt all the dim heroism of dreams glowing in her like wine given of the gods.

Holy fire burnt on her forehead and her tongue was loosed. She stood out on the great rock, her armour flashing in the sun, her face bright as the moon in her strength. Her voice, clear and silvery, carried far over cliff and wood, for the day was temperate and without a wind.

"Look upon me well. I tell you the truth. I am she to whom the Madonna appeared from heaven."

Great silence answered her, the silence of awe, not of disbelief or disapprobation. Her voice rang solitary as the voice of a wood-fay in the wilderness. The huddled men below were silent as children whose solemn eyes watch a priest before the altar. She spoke on.

"I am she whose tale you have heard. God has given me to the cause of the poor. To your babes and to your womenfolk I lift my hands; from the Mother of Jesus I hold my command. Men of the land, will you believe and follow my banner?"

A thousand hands leapt to the sun, yet hardly a voice broke the silence, the calm as of supreme revelation. All the simple mediæval faith shone in the rough faces; all the quaint reverence, the unflinching fidelity, of the unlettered of the age shone in their hearts. They were warm earth to the seed of faith.

"Men of the land, I hear great noise of violence and wrong, of hunger and despair. Your lords crush you; your priests go in jewels and fine linen, and preach not the Cross. Your babes are slaves even before they see the light. Your children, like brute beasts, are bound to the soil. Men of the land, give me your strength,

give me your strength for the cause of God."

She drew her sword from its sheath, pressed the blade to her lips, held it up to heaven. Her voice rang over rock and tree.

"Justice and liberty!"

Her shrill hail seemed to lift the silence from a thousand throats. The human sea below gave up its soul to her with thundering surges and vast sound of faith. As roar followed roar, she stood a bright, silvery pinnacle above the black fanaticism beneath, transcendent Hope holding her sword to the eternal sun.

Behind her, Fulviac unwrapped the great scarlet banner she had wrought. Its cross of gold gleamed out as he lifted the staff with both hands. Prosper, erect and exultant, stood pointing to its device. Then, in sight of all men, he bowed down before the girl and kissed her feet, as though she had been some rare messenger out of heaven.

XXI

The day had done gloriously till noon, but the sky's mood changed as evening advanced. Clouds were huddled up in grey masses by a gathering and gusty wind, and the June calm took flight like a girl in a new gown when rain threatens.

By nightfall, a storm held orgy over the cliff. Billow upon billow of wind came roaring over the myriad trees. The pines were sweeping a murky sky with their black brooms, creaking and moaning in chorus. Rain rattled heavily, and over the cliff the storm thundered and cried with the long wail of the wind over rock and tree.

In Yeoland's chamber the lamp flared and smoked, and the postern clattered. Rain splashed upon the shivering casement; the carpet breathed restlessly with the draught under the door. It was late, yet the girl was still at her devotions. Her thoughts were dishevelled and full of discords, while between her fingers the beads of her rosary moved listlessly, and her prayers were broken by the anathemas of the storm.

The dual distractions of life had come in her to grappling point again. She could boast no omnipotence in her own heart, and could but give countenance to one of the two factions that clamoured for her favour. As her mood changed like the mood of a fickle despot none too sure of his throne, so tumult and despair were let loose time after time into the echoing courts and alleys of her soul. She

had neither the courage nor the force of will for the moment to compel herself either to satisfy her womanhood or sacrifice her instincts to a religious conviction. Man and God held each a half of her being. The man's face outstared God's face; God's law overshadowed the man's.

She had been carried into the palpitating azure of religious exaltation. The world had rolled at her feet. She had bathed her forehead in the infinite forethought of eternity; she had heard the stupendous sounding of the spheres. Then some mischievous sprite had plucked the wings from her shoulders, and she had fallen far into an abyss. After spiritual exaltation comes physical depression. Neither is a normal state; neither strictly sane to the intellect. Peter-like, she had trod the waves; faith had played her false; the waters had gone over her soul.

As she knelt brooding before her crucifix, under the wavering lamp, she was smitten into listening immobility, her rosary idle in her hand. A cry had come to her amid the multitudinous voices of the storm, a cry like a hail from a ship over a tumbling sea at night.

She waited and wondered. Again the cry rose above the babel of the wind. Was it from Fulviac's room; or a sentinel's shout from the cliff, seized upon and carried by the wind with distorting vehemence? Midnight covered the world, and the girl was in an impressionable mood. She took the lamp from its bracket and, opening the door, peered down the gallery that led to Fulviac's room.

A sudden sinister sound made her start back into the room, the lamp flashing tremulous beams upon the walls, and striking confusion into the shadows. A hand was beating heavily upon the postern.

She set the lamp in its bracket, crept to the door, put her ear to the lock and listened. The knocking had ceased, and in a momentary lulling of the wind she even fancied she could hear the sound of deep breathing. Her heart was hurrying, but suspense emboldened her.

"Who's there?"

A sudden gust made such a bluster that her voice died almost unheard in the night. There was a vague clangour without, as of arms, and the knocking re-echoed sullenly through the room. A lull came again.

"Who knocks?"

This time an answer came back to her.

"I–Flavian."

She caught her breath and shivered.

"What do you want at midnight, and in such a storm?"

"Let me in. Open to me."

"No–no."

"Open to me."

"Are you still mad?"

Silence held a moment. Then the voice rose again, with the hoarse moan of the wind for an underchant.

"Liberty, liberty, I am free, I am free."

She shrank aside against the wall.

"The night gave me my chance; I have men in the wood. Let me in."

"Ah, messire."

"I plead for love and my own soul. I come to give you life, sword, all. I cannot leave you; I am in outer darkness; you are in heaven. Let me in."

She stood swaying like a reed in a breeze. Her brain glowed like some rich scheme of colour, some sun-ravished garden. The massed moan of a hundred viols seemed to sweep over her soul. God, for the courage to be weak!

"Yeoland! Yeoland! have you no word for me?"

Her hand trembled to the door; her fingers closed upon the key. She hesitated and her dangling rosary caught her glance; sudden revulsions of purpose flooded back; she stumbled away from the door like one about to faint.

"I cannot, I cannot," she said.

"I will break down the door."

The threat inspired her.

"No, no, not thus can you win me."

"I will break in."

"Attempt it, and I will call the guard. You will lose hope of me for ever. I swear it."

Her voice rang true and strong as a sword. With her judgment, silence fell again, and ages seemed to crawl over the world. When the man spoke again, his voice was less masterful, more pathetic.

"Have you no hope for me?" it said.

"I have given you life."

"What is life without love?"

She sighed very bitterly.

"Messire, you do not understand," she said.

"No, you are a riddle to me."

"A riddle that you may read anon; time will show you the truth. I tell you I am given to God. Only in one way can you win me."

"Are you solemn over this?"

"Solemn as death."

"Tell me that only way."

"Only by breaking the bonds about my soul, by liberating me from myself, by battle and through perils that you cannot tell."

"War and the sword!"

"Yet not to-night. You would need ten thousand men to take me from this

cliff. I advise you for your good. Only by great power and the sword can you win your desire."

"By God, then, let it be war."

An utter sense of loneliness flooded over her. She sobbed in her throat, leant against the door, listened, waited. The wind roared without, the rain beat upon the quaking casement, and she heard the multitudinous moaning of the pines. No voice companioned her, and the night was void.

A sudden access of passion prompted her. She twisted at the key, tore the bolts aside, flung the door open. The stairway was empty. Rain whirled in her face, as she stood out in the wind, and called the man many times by name. It was vain and to no purpose.

Presently she re-entered the room, very slowly, and barred the door. Her rosary rolled under her feet. She picked it up suddenly and dashed it away into a corner. The face on the crucifix seemed to leer at her from the wall.

PART III

XXII

Aurelius, physician of Gilderoy, flourished on the fatness of a fortunate reputation. He was a rubicund soul, clean and pleasant, with a neatly-trimmed beard, and a brow that seemed to dome a very various and abundant wisdom. He combined a sprightly humour and an enlivening presence with the reverent solemnity necessary to his profession.

As for the ladies of Gilderoy, they reverenced Master Aurelius with a loyalty that became perhaps less remarkable the more one considered the character of the worthy charlatan. Aurelius was an Æsculap in court clothing. He was ignorant, but as no one realised the fact, the soul of Hippocrates would have been wasted in his body. Discretion was his crowning virtue. He was so sage, so intelligent, so full of a simple understanding for the ways of women, that the frail creatures could not love him enough. The confidences granted to a priest were nothing compared to the truths that were unmasked to his tactful ken. The physician is the priest of the body, a privileged person, suffered to enter the

bed-chamber before the solemn rites of the toilet have been performed. He sees many strange truths, beholds fine and wonderful transfigurations, presides over the confessional of the flesh. And Aurelius never whispered of these mysteries; never displayed astonishment; always discovered extraordinary justification for the quaintest inconsistencies, the most romantic failings. He carried a sweet and sympathetic air of propriety about with him, like a perfume that exhaled a most comfortable odour of religion. His salves were delectable to a degree, his unguents and cosmetics remarkable productions. Dames took his potions in lieu of Malmsey, his powders in place of sweetmeats. Never did a more pleasant, a more tactful old hypocrite pander to the failings of an unregenerate world.

Aurelius stood in his laboratory one June morning, balancing a money-bag in his chubby pink palm. He seemed tickled by some subtlety of thought, and wonderfully well pleased with his own good-humour. He smiled, locked the money-bag in a drawer that stood in a confidential cupboard, and, taking his cap and walking-staff, repaired to the street. Pacing the narrow pavement like a veritable potentate, pretentious as any peacock, yet mightily amiable from the superb self-satisfaction that roared in him like a furnace, he acknowledged the greetings of passers-by with the elevation of a hand, a solemn movement of the head. It was well to seem unutterably serious when under the eyes of the mob. Only educated folk can properly understand levity in a sage.

In the Erminois, a stately highway that ran northwards from the cathedral, he halted before a mansion whose windows were rich with scutcheons and proud blazonry. Aurelius prospered with the rich. The atmosphere of the mean quarters was like a miasma to him; he loved sunlight and high places where he might bask like a lizard. He passed by a great gateway into the inner court, and was admitted into the house with that ready deference that speaks of familiarity and respect.

Aurelius climbed the broad stairway, and sailed like a stately carrack into my lady's chamber. A dame in blue and silver greeted him from an oriel. The compounder of cosmetics bowed, disposed his staff and velvet cap upon a table, and appropriated the chair the lady had assigned to him.

"Superb weather, madame."

"Too sultry, though I am a warm-souled person."

"True, madame, true, Gilderoy would be fresher if there were no mean folk to stifle up the streets like weeds. The alleys send up such an unpleasant stench upon the breeze, that it makes the cultured sense revolt from poverty."

The Lady Duessa's lips curled approvingly,

"Poverty, poverty, my dear Aurelius, is like a carcase, fit only for quicklime. If I had the rule of the place, I would make poverty a crime, and cram all our human sweepings into lazar quarters."

The man of physic nodded for sympathy.

"Exactly so, madame, but one would have to deal with the inevitable religious instinct."

"That would be simple enough," she simpered. "I should confine religion to shadows and twinkling tapers, lights streaming in through enamelled casements upon solemn colours bowing before dreamy music; pardons and absolutions bought with a purse of gold. It is sad, Aurelius, but who doubts but that religion makes scavengers of us all? Away with your smug widows, your frouzy burgher saints, your yellow-skinned priest-hunters! I would rather have picturesque sin than vulgar piety."

The man of herbs sighed like an organ pipe.

"Everything can be pardoned before coarseness," he said; "give me a dirty heart before a dirty face, provided the sinner be pretty. I trust that madame was satisfied with my endeavours, that the perfumes were such as she desired, the oil of Arabia pleasant and fragrant?"

"Magical, my Æsculap. The oil makes the skin like velvet, and the drugs are paradisic and full of languors. Ah, woman, set the tray beside Master Aurelius' chair."

The man's eyes glistened over the salver and the cup. He bowed to his hostess, sniffed, and pursed his lips over the wine.

"Madame knows how to warm the heart."

"Truth to you. Who have you been renovating of late? What carcase have you been painting, you useful rogue?"

"Madame, my profession is discreet."

"I see your work everywhere. There is the little brown-faced thing who is to marry John of Brissac. Well, she needed art severely. Now the lady has a complexion like apple-blossom."

The old man's eyes twinkled.

"Madame is pleased to jest," he said, "and to think her fancies–realities. Were all ladies as fresh as Madame Duessa, what, think you, would become of my delectable art, my science of beauty? I should be a poor bankrupt old man, ruined by too much comeliness."

Aurelius always had the wit to say the pleasantest thing possible, and to press the uttermost drop of honey from the comb of flattery. A surly tongue will break a man, a glib intelligence ensure him a fortune. Aurelius earned many a fee by a pretty speech, or a tactful suggestion. Then of course he was never hindered by sincerity.

"Holy Dominic," laughed the lady, "I have proved a good patron to you in many ways."

"And I trust I shall always deserve madame's trust."

"A discreet tongue and a comfortable obedience are sweet things to a

woman, Aurelius."

"Madame's voice recalls Delphi."

"Ah, the Greeks were poets; they knew how to fit their religion to their pleasures. 'Tis only we, poor fools, who measure sin by a priest's pardon. Give me a torch before an aspergill."

The man of physic sipped his wine, cogitating over it with Jovian wisdom.

"The chief aim in life, madame," he said, "should be the perfecting of one's own comfort. 'Tis my contention that a fat bishop is a finer Christian than a lean friar. The truism is obvious. Is not my soul the more mellifluous and benign if its shell is gilded and its vest of velvet?"

Duessa chuckled, and flipped her chin.

"Give me a warm bed," she laughed, "and I will pity creation. The world's saints are plump and comely; the true goddess has a supple knee. Am I the worse for being buxom!"

"Madame," said the sage with great unction, "only beggars denounce gold, and heaven is the dream of diseased souls. The cult of pleasure is the seal of health. Discontent is the seed of religion."

The door opened a few inches, and there was the sound of voices in muffled debate in the gallery. The Lady Duessa listened, rose from her chair, appeared restless. The man of physic comprehended the situation, and with that tact that characterised him, declared that he had patronage elsewhere to assuage. The lady did not detain him, but dismissed him with a smile–a smile that on such a face as hers often took the place of words. So Master Aurelius took his departure.

Five minutes later Sforza, Gonfaloniere of Gilderoy, occupied the vacant chair in the oriel.

There are many ways to fame. By the broad, embattled gate where the Cerberus of War crouches; by the glistening stair of glass where all the beauty of the world gleams as in a thousand mirrors; by the cloaca of diplomacy and cunning, that tunnels under truth and honour. Sforza of Gilderoy was a man who never took his finger off a guinea till he had seen ten dropped into the other palm. He was a narrow-faced, long-whiskered rat, ever nibbling, ever poking his keen snout into prospective prosperity. He had no real reverence for anything under the sun. To speak metaphorically, he would as soon steal the sacrificial wafer from the altar as the cheese from a burgher's larder. When he lived in earnest, he lived in moral nebulosity, that is to say, he had no light save his own lantern. Publicly, he appeared a sleek, dignified person, quick with his figures, apt at oratory, a man who could quote scripture by the ell and swear by every saint in the calendar.

Sforza, Gonfaloniere of Gilderoy, sat and faced Dame Duessa over a little table that held wine and a bowl of roses. His large hands rested on the carved

arms of the chair. He had a debonair smirk on his face, a mask of complacency that suffered him to be vigilant in a polite and courteous fashion.

"Madame has considered my proposition?"

The woman leant back in her chair and worked her full lower lip against her teeth.

"I recognise your infallibility, Gonfaloniere."

"Only to the level of human foresight, madame."

"You have a longer nose than most men."

"I take the insinuation as a compliment."

He contemplated her awhile in silence.

"How am I to know that you are sincere?" he said.

"Need you disbelieve me?"

"It is my custom to disbelieve in everybody."

"Till they have satisfied you?"

"Exactly."

Duessa looked out of the window, and played with her chatelaine.

"You know women?"

"I would never lay claim to such an arrogance of cunning."

"Nevertheless you are no fool."

"I am no fool."

"And you imagine my protestations are not sincere, even after what I have suffered?"

He smiled at her most cunningly.

"You want proof?"

"I do not like unsigned documents."

She started forward in her chair with a strangely strenuous look on her face.

"Fanatic fools have often made some show of fortitude," she said, "by thrusting a hand into the fire, or the like. See now if I am a liar or a coward."

Before he could stay her she drew a small stiletto from her belt, spread her left hand on the table, and then smote the steel through the thick of the palm, and held it there without flinching as the blood flowed.

"My signature," she said, with her cheeks a shade paler.

"Madame, you have spirit."

"Do you believe in me?"

"I may say so."

"You will include me in your schemes?"

"I will."

"You remember our mutual bargain?"

"I remember it."

She withdrew the stiletto and wrapped her bleeding hand in her robe.
"You will initiate me–at once."
"To-morrow, madame, you shall go with me to the council."

XXIII

Castle Gambrevault stood out on a great cliff above the sea, like a huge white crown on the country's brow. It was as fine a mass of masonry as the south could show, perched on its great outjutting of the land, precipiced on every side, save on the north. Hoary, sullen, stupendously strong, it sentinelled the sea that rolled its blue to the black bastions of the cliffs. Landwards, green downs swept with long undulations to the valleys and the woods.

That Junetide Gambrevault rang with the clangour of arms. The Lord Flavian's riders had spurred north, east, and west to manor and hamlet, grange and lone moorland tower. There had been a great burnishing of arms, a bending of bows through all the broad demesne. Steel had trickled over the downs towards the tall towers of Gambrevault. Knights, with esquires, men-at-arms, and yeomen, had ridden in to keep feudal faith. The Lord Flavian had swept the country for a hundred miles for mercenary troops and free-lances. His coffers poured gold. He had pitched a camp in the Gambrevault meadows; some fifteen hundred horse and two thousand foot were gathered under his banner.

From the hills cattle were herded in, and heavy wains laden with flour creaked up to the castle. There was much victualling, much blaring of trumpets, much blowing of pennons, much martial stir in the meadows. It seemed as though the Lord Flavian had a strenuous campaign in view, and there was much conjecture on the wind. The strange part of it was, that none save Sir Modred had any knowledge for what or against whom they were to fight. It might be John of Brissac, Gambrevault's mortal enemy; it might develop into a demonstration against the magistracy of Gilderoy. Blood was to be spilt, so ran the current conviction. For the rest, Flavian's feudatories were loyal, and left the managing of the business to their lord.

The men had been camped a week, and yet there was no striking of tents, no plucking up of pennons. Sir Modred had ridden out to bring in a body of five hundred mercenaries from Geraint. The Lord Flavian himself, with a troop of twenty spears, was lodged for a few days in Gilderoy, in the great Benedictine

monastery, where his uncle held rule as abbot. He was negotiating for arms, fifty bassinets, two hundred gisarmes, a hundred ranseurs, fifty glaives, and a number of two-handed swords. He had found the Armourer's Guild peculiarly insolent, and disinclined to serve him. He had little suspicion that Gilderoy was seething under the surface like so much lava.

Thus, while the Lord Flavian was preparing for his march into the great pine forest, Fulviac had completed his web of revolt. He had heard of the gathering at Gambrevault, and had hurried on his schemes in consequence. Five thousand men were ready at his back. He would gain ten thousand men from Gilderoy; seven thousand from Geraint. These outlaw levies, free-lances, and train-bands would give him the nucleus of the vast host that was to spring like corn from every quarter of the land. Malgo was to head the rising in the west, and to concentrate at Conan, a little town in the mountains. In the east, Godamar was to gather a great camp in Thorney Isle amid the morasses of the fens. Fulviac would himself overthrow the lords of the south. Then they were to converge and to gather strength for the march upon Lauretia, proud city of the King.

It would be a great war and a bitter, full of fanatical fierceness and revenge. Fulviac had given word to take, pillage, and burn all strong places. Destiny stood with wild hands to the heavens, a bosom of scarlet, and hair aghast. If the horde conquered, the seats of the mighty would reek amid flame; there would be death, and a great silence over proud cities.

XXIV

In an antechamber in the palace of Sforza of Gilderoy stood the Lady Duessa, watching the day die in the west over a black chaos of spires and gables. Before her, under the casement, lay the palace garden, a pool of perfume, banked with tall cypresses, red with the fire of a myriad roses. As night to the sunset, so seemed this antechamber to the garden, panelled with black oak, a dark square of gloom red-windowed to the west. The place had a sullen, iron-mouthed look, as though its walls had developed through the years a sour and world-wise silence.

The Lady Duessa was not a woman who could trail tamely in anterooms. A restless temper chafed her pride that evening, and kept her footing the polished floor like a love-lorn nun treading a cloister. The casements were open to the garden, and the multitudinous sounds of the city flooded in–the thunder of the

tumbrils in the narrow streets, the distant blare of trumpets from the castle, the clangour of the cathedral bells. A solitary figure companioned the Lady Duessa in the anteroom, cloaked and masked as was the dame herself. It was Balthasar the Dominican, who followed her now in secular habit, having forsworn his black mantle and taken refuge in her service. From time to time the two spoke together in whispering undertones; more than once their lips touched.

The Lady Duessa turned and stood by a casement with her large white hands on the sill. She appeared to grow more restive as the minutes passed, as though the antique clock on the mantle clicked its tongue at her each gibing second.

"This is insolence," she said anon, "holding us idling here like ragged clients."

Balthasar joined her, soft-footed and debonair, his black eyes shining behind his mask.

"Peter kept Paul before the gate of heaven," quoth he, with a curl of the lip. "Sforza is a meddler in many matters, a god-busied Mercury. As for me, I am content."

Their hands touched, and intertwined with a quick straining of the fingers.

"Pah," said the woman with a shiver, "this room is like a funeral litter; it chills my marrow."

Balthasar sniggered.

"See, the sky burns," he said; "yon garden is packed with colour. We could play a love chase amid those dark hedges of yew."

She pressed her flank to his; her eyes glittered like amethysts; her breath hastened.

"My mouth, man."

She pouted out her full red lips to his; suffered his arms to possess her; they kissed often, and were out of breath. A door creaked. The two started asunder in the shadows with an impatient stare into each other's eyes.

Sforza the Gonfaloniere stood on the threshold, clad plainly in a suit of black velvet, with a sword buckled at his side. He bowed over Duessa's hand, kissed her finger tips, excusing himself the while for the delay. He was very suave, very facile, as was his wont. The Lady Duessa took his excuses with good grace, remembering their compact, and the common purpose of their ambitions.

"Gonfaloniere, we wait our initiation."

Sforza's eyes were fixed on Balthasar with a keen and ironical glitter.

"Very good, madame."

"Remember; Lord Flavian's head, that is to be my guerdon."

"Madame, we will remember it. And this gentleman?"

"Is the friend of whom I spoke."

"A most loyal friend, methinks?"

"True."

The Gonfaloniere coughed behind his fingers, and spoke in his half-husky tenor.

"You are ready to risk everything?"

Duessa reassured him.

"Expect no blood and thunder ceremonial," he said to them; "we are grim folk, but very simple. Your presence will incriminate you both. Be convinced of that."

He led them by a little closet into the state-room of the palace, a rich chamber lit by many tapers, its doorway held by a guard of armed men. Statues in the antique gleamed in the alcoves. The panelling shone with gem-brilliant colouring. Armoires and carved cabinets stood against the walls. The ceiling was of purple, with the signs of the Zodiac in gold thereon.

In the centre of the room, before a slightly raised dais, stood a round table inlaid with diverse-coloured stones. Scrolls, quills, and inkhorns covered it. Some twoscore men were gathered round the table, staring with masked faces at a map spread before them–a map showing all the provinces of the south, with towns and castles marked in vermilion ink thereon. A big man in a red cloak stood conning the parchment, pointing out with a long forefinger certain marches to the masked folk about him.

Sforza pointed Duessa and Balthasar to a carved bench by the wall.

"Have the patience to listen for an hour," he said, turning to join the men about the table.

A silver bell tinkled, and a priest came forward to patter a few prayers in Latin. At the end thereof, the masked Samson in the red cloak stood forward on the dais with uplifted fist. Instant silence held throughout the room. The man in red began to speak in deep, full-throated tones that seemed to vibrate from his sonorous chest.

His theme was the revolt, his arguments, the grim bleak facts that bulked large in the brain of a leader of men. He dealt with realism, with iron detail, and the strong suggestions of success. Revolt, in the flesh, bubbled like lava at a crater's brim, seething to overflow and scorch the land. It was plain that the speaker had great schemes, and a will of adamant. His ardour ran down like a cataract, smiting into foam the duller courage of the multitude.

When he had ended his heroic challenge to the world, he took by the hand a girl who stood unmasked at his side. She was clad all in white with a cross of gold over her bosom, and her face shone nigh as pallid as her mantle. The men around the table craned forward to get the better view of her. Nor was it her temporal beauty alone that set the fanatical chins straining towards her figure.

There was a radiance as of other worlds upon her forehead, a glamour of sanctity as though some sacred lamp shed a divine lustre through all her flesh.

At the moment that the man in the red mask had drawn the girl forward beside him on the dais, Balthasar, with a stifled cry, had plucked the Lady Duessa by the sleeve. She had started, and stared in the friar's face as he spoke to her in a whisper, a scintillant malice gathering in her eyes. Balthasar held her close to him by the wrist. They were observed of none save by Fulviac, whose care it was to watch all men.

As Balthasar muttered to her, Duessa's frame seemed to straighten, to dilate, to stiffen. She did not glance at the friar, but sat staring at the girl in white upon the dais. The Madonna of the chapel of Avalon had risen before her as by magic; her dispossessor stood before her in the flesh. Balthasar's tongue bore witness to the truth. In the packed passion of a moment, Duessa remembered her shame, her dishonour, her hunger for revenge.

The girl upon the dais had been speaking to the men assembled round her with the simple calm of one whose soul is assured of faith. For all her fierce distraction each word had fallen into Duessa's brain like pebbles into a well. A mocking, riotous scorn chuckled and leapt in her like the laughter of some lewd faun. She heard not the zealous mutterings that eddied through the room. Her eyes were fixed on the man in the red cloak, as he bent to kiss the girl's slim hand.

She saw Fulviac turn and point to a roll of parchment on the table.

"We swim, sirs, or sink together," were his words; "there can be no traitors to the cause. In three days we hoist our banner. In three days Gilderoy shall rise. Sign, gentlemen, sign, in the name of God and of our Lady."

The leaders of Gilderoy crowded about the table where Prosper the Preacher waited with quill and testament, Sforza standing with drawn sword beside him. Fulviac had headed those who took the oath, and had drawn back from the press on to the dais. Meanwhile Duessa, with Balthasar muttering discretions in her ear, had skirted the black knot of conspirators and come close upon Fulviac. While Sforza and the rest were intent upon the scroll, she plucked the man in red by the sleeve, and spoke to him in an undertone.

"A word with you in an alcove."

Fulviac stared, but drew aside from the group none the less and followed her. She had moved to an oriel and sat down on the cushioned seat, her black robe sweeping the crimson cloth. Fulviac stood and faced her, thus closing her escape from the oriel. Midway between them and the table, Balthasar stood biting his nails in sullen vexation, ignorant of where the woman's headstrong passions might be bearing them.

Duessa soon had Fulviac at the tongue's point.

"You are the first man in this assemblage?" she had asked him.

"Madame, that is so."

"I have a truth to make known."

"Unmask to me."

She hesitated, then obeyed him.

"Possibly I am known to you," she said.

Fulviac stood back a step, and looked at her as a man might look at an old love. A knot of wrinkles showed on his forehead.

"Duessa of the Black Hair."

"Ah, in the old days."

"What would you now, madame?"

"Let me see your face."

"No."

"You hold me at a disadvantage."

"That is well. Tell me this tale of yours."

His voice was cold as a frost, and there was an inclement look about him that should have warned the woman had she been less blinded by her own malice. She had lost her cunning in her fuming passion, and denounced when she should have suggested, blurted the whole when a hint would have sufficed her.

"I was the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault's wife," she said.

"That man!"

"That devil!"

Fulviac drew a deep breath.

"Well?" he said.

"The fellow has divorced me; I will tell you why. You are the man they call Fulviac. It was you who took the Lord Flavian in an ambuscade, to kill him, for the sake of Yeoland of Cambremont, who stands yonder. The whole tale is mine. It was that girl who let the Lord Flavian escape out of your hands. A fine fool she is making of you, my friend. A saint, forsooth! Flavian of Avalon might sing you a strange song."

Duessa took breath. She had prophesied passion, a volcanic outburst. Fulviac leant against the wainscotting with folded arms, his masked face impenetrable, and calm as stone. He stirred never a muscle. Duessa had ventured forth into the deeps.

The man thrust a question at her suddenly.

"You can prove the truth of this?"

Duessa pointed him to Fra Balthasar.

"The priest can bear out my tale. I will beckon him."

"Wait."

"Ah!"

"Does Sforza know of this?"

"None know it, save I and yonder priest."

"Then I uncover to you."

He jerked his mask away, and stood half stooping towards her with a peculiar lustre in his eyes. Duessa stared at him as at one risen from the dead. Her face blanched and stiffened into a bleak, gaping terror, and she could not speak.

"Your tale dies with you."

He smote her suddenly in the bosom with his poniard, smote her so heavily that the blow dragged her to her knees. She screamed like a trapped hare, pressed her hands over her bosom, blood oozing over them. A last malevolence leapt into her eyes; she panted and strove to speak.

"Listen, sirs, hear me—-"

Fulviac, standing over her like a Titan, smote her again to silence, and for ever. With arms thrust upwards, she fell forward along the floor, her white face hidden by her hood. A red ringlet curled away over the polished oak. Fulviac had sprung away with jaw clenched, his face as stone. He drew his sword, plucked Balthasar by the throat, hurled him back against the wainscotting.

"A spy, poniard him."

The great room rushed into uproar; the guards came running from the door. Fulviac had passed his sword through Balthasar's body. The friar rolled upon the floor, yelping, and clutching at the swords that stabbed him. It was soon over; not a moan, not a whimper. Sforza, white as a corpse, gripped Fulviac by the shoulder.

"Know you whom you have killed?"

"Well enough, Gonfaloniere."

"What means it?"

"That I am a brave man."

Sforza quailed from him and ran to the oriel, where several men had lifted the woman in their arms. Her lustrous hair fell down from under her hood; her hands, stained with her own blood, trailed limply on the floor. She was a pathetic figure with her pale, fair face and drooping lids. The men murmured as they held her, like some poor bird, still warm and plastic, with the life but half flown from her body.

Fulviac stood and looked down into her face. His sword still smoked with Balthasar's blood.

"Sirs," he said, and his strong voice shook, "hear me, I will tell you the truth. Once I loved that woman, but she was evil, evil to the core. To-night she came bringing discord and treachery amongst us. I have done murder before God for the sake of the cause. Cover her face; it was ever too fair to look upon. Heaven

rest her soul!"

XXV

Two days had passed since the secret assembly in the house of Sforza, Gonfaloniere of Gilderoy. They had buried Duessa and Balthasar by night in the rose garden, by the light of a single lantern, with the fallen petals for a pall. It was the evening before the day when the land should rise in arms to overthrow feudal injustice and oppression. On the morrow the great cliff would be desolate, its garrison marching through the black pine woods on Avalon and Geraint.

Towards eve, when the sky was clear as a single sapphire, Fulviac came from his parlour seeking Yeoland, to find her little chamber empty. A strange smile played upon his face as he looked round the room with crucifix, embroidery frame, and prayer-desk, with rosary hung thereon. He picked up her lute, thrummed the strings, and broke broodingly into the sway of some southern song:

"Ah, woman of love,
With the stars in the night,
I see thee above
In a circlet of light.
On the west's scarlet scutcheon
I mark thy device;
And the shade of the forest
Makes gloom of thine eyes,
God's twilight
To me."

He ended the stanza, kissed the riband, and set the lute down with a certain quaint reverence. The postern stood open and admonished him. He passed out down the cliff stairway to the forest.

An indescribable peace pervaded the woods, a supreme silence such as the shepherd on the hills knows when the stars beckon to his soul. Fulviac walked slowly and thought the more. He felt the altitude of the forest stillness as of miles

of luminous, windless æther; he felt the anguishing pathos of a woman's face; he felt the strangeness of the new philosophy that appealed to his heart. Nothing is more fascinating than watching a spiritual upheaval in one's own soul; watching some great power breaking up the crust of custom and habit; pondering the while on the eternal mysteries that baffle reason.

He found Yeoland amid the pines. She had been to the forest grave and was returning towards the cliff when the man met her. She seemed whiter than was her wont, her dark eyes looking solemn and shadowy under their sweeping lashes. She seemed marvellously fair, marvellously pure and fragile, as she came towards him under the trees.

Something in Fulviac's look startled her. Women are like the sea to the cloudy moods of men, in that they catch every sun-ray and shadow. An indefinite something in the man's manner made her restless and apprehensive. She went near to him with questioning eyes and laid her hand upon his arm.

"You have had bad news?"

"Nothing."

"Something has troubled you?"

"Perhaps."

She looked at him pensively, a suspicion of reproach, pity, and understanding in her eyes.

"Is it remorse, your conscience?"

"My conscience? Have I had one!"

"You have a strong conscience."

"*Deo gratias.* Then you have unearthed it, madame."

A vein of infinite bitterness and melancholy seemed to glimmer in his mood. It was a moment of self-speculation. The girl still looked up into his face.

"Why did you kill that woman?"

"Why?"

"Her dead face haunts me, I see it everywhere; there is some strange shadow over my soul. O that I could get her last cry from my ears!"

Fulviac, with a sudden burst of cynicism, broke into grim laughter, a sound like the rattling of dry bones in a closet. The girl shrank away with her lips twitching.

"Why cannot you trust me with the truth?"

"Truth is not always beneficent. It was a matter of policy, of diplomacy."

"Why?"

"Discords are bad at the eleventh hour. That woman could have half-wrecked our cause. It was policy to silence her and the man. I made sure of it by killing them."

Yeoland's face had a shadow of repugnance upon it; her eyes darkened. The man seemed in a callous, scoffing humour; it was mere glittering steel over the bitterness within.

"You will tell me her name?"

"What is it to you?"

"She haunts me."

"Forget her."

"I cannot."

"Have the truth if you will. She was the wife of the Lord Flavian of Gambrevault."

The girl stood motionless for a moment; then swayed away several steps from Fulviac under the trees. One hand was at her throat; her voice came in a whisper.

"What did she tell you?"

"Many things."

"Quick, do they touch me?"

Fulviac choked an oath, and played with his sword.

"Then there was some truth in her?" he said.

The girl grew imperious.

"I command you to tell me all."

"Madame, the woman declared you were a traitress, and that this lordling, this Flavian of Gambrevault, loved you."

"And you killed her—-"

"For your sake and the cause. She might have cast our Saint out of heaven."

Yeoland went back from him and leant against a tree, with her hands over her eyes. Sunlight splashed down upon her dress; she shivered as in a cold wind, and could not speak. Fulviac's voice, level and passionless, questioned her as she stood and hid her face.

"You let the Lord Flavian escape?"

"I did."

"Have you seen him since?"

"I have."

"Thanks for the truth."

Her responses had come like chords smitten from the strings of a lute. She started away from the tree and began to walk up and down, wringing her hands. Her face was like the face of one in torture, and she seemed to struggle for breath.

"Fulviac, I could not kill the man."

The words came like a wail.

"He was young, and he besought me when your men were breaking down the gate. What could I do, what could I do? He was young, and I let him go by

the postern and told you a lie. God help me, I told you a lie."

The man watched her with arms folded. There was a look of deep melancholy upon his face, as of one wounded by the truth. His voice was sad but resolute.

"And the rest?"

She rallied suddenly and came to him with truth in her eyes; they were wonderfully piteous and appealing.

"God knows I have been loyal to you. The man tempted me, but I withstood him; I kept my loyalty."

"And you told him—-?"

"Nothing, nothing; he is as innocent as a child."

Fulviac looked down at her with a great light in his eyes. He spoke slowly and with a deeper intonation in his voice.

"I have dealt with many bad women," he said, "but I believe you are speaking the truth."

"It is the truth."

"I take it as such; you have been too much a woman."

"Ah, if you could only forgive."

He stepped forward suddenly, took her hands, and looked down at her with a vast tenderness.

"Little woman, if I told you I loved you, would you still swear that you have spoken the truth?"

"God judge me, Fulviac, I have been loyal."

A strange light played upon his face.

"And I, ye heavens, have I learnt my lesson in these later days? Girl, you are above me as the stars; I may but kiss your hands, no more. You are not for worldly ways, or for me. Battered, war-worn veteran, I have come again by the heart of a boy. Fear me not, little woman, there is no anger in a great love, only deep grieving and unalterable honour."

XXVI

It was dawn; mists covered the forest; not a wind stirred or sobbed amid the boughs. A vast grey canopy seemed to tent the world, a mysterious veil that tempered the sun and spread a spiritual gloom over rock and tree.

The noise of horns played through the misty aisles–horns many-tongued, faint, clamorous, like the trumpeting of forest elves. There was the dull, rhythmic onrush of many thousand feet, the hurrying, multitudinous tramp of men marching. Armour gleamed through the glooms; casque and bassinet, salade and cap of steel flowed on and on as phosphorescent ripples on a subterranean stream. Pike, glaive, gisarme shone like stubble over the forest slopes. The sullen tramp of men, the clashing clamour of arms, the blaring of a solitary clarion, such were songs of the great pine forest on that July morning.

Yeoland, rebel lady and saint, on a great white horse, rode at Fulviac's side in full armour, save for her helmet. Her horse was cased in steel–chamfron, crinet, gorget, poitrel, croupiere gleaming like burnished silver. She made a fine and martial figure enough, a glittering dawn star for a heroic cause. About her rode her guard, the pick of Fulviac's men, some fifty spears in all, masses of steel, each bearing a scarlet cross blazoned upon his white jupon. Nord of the Hammer bore the red banner worked by the girl's own hands. They were hardy men and big of bone, sworn to keep and guard her to the death.

Fulviac and Yeoland rode side by side like brothers in arms. All about them were rolling spears and rocking helmets moving among the myriad trees. The sound of arms surged round them like the ominous onrush of a sea. War followed like a thunder-cloud on their heels.

Fulviac was in great spirits, somewhat solemn and philosophic, but full of the exultation of a man who feels his ship surging on the foaming backs of giant billows. His eyes were proud enough when they scanned the girl at his side. His heart thundered an echo to the grim tramp of his men on the march.

"To-day," he said, making grandiose flourishes with his sword, "the future unrobes to us. We plunge like Ulysses into the unknown. This is life with a vengeance!"

She had a smile on her lips and a far-away look in her eyes.

"If you love me," she said, "be merciful."

"Ah, you are always a woman."

"There are many women such as I am; there are many hearts that may be wounded; there are many children."

He looked at her meditatively, as though her words were both bitter and sweet in his mouth.

"You must play the philosopher, little woman; remember that we work for great ends. I will have mercy when mercy is expedient. But we must strike, and strike terror, we must crush, we must kill."

"Yet be merciful."

"War is no pastime; men grip with gauntlets of iron, not with velvet gloves. Fanaticism, hate, revenge, patriotism, lust of plunder, and the rest, what powers

are these to let loose upon a land! We have the oppression of centuries red in our bosoms. War is no mere subtle game of chess; the wolf comes from the wilderness; the vulture swings in the sky. Fire, death, blood, rapine, and despair, such are the elements of war."

"I know, I know."

"To purge a field, we burn the crop. To convert, we set swords leaping. To cleanse, we let in the sea. To move the fabrics of custom and the past, a man must play the Hercules. God crushes great nations to insure the inevitable evolution of His will. To move the world, one must play the god."

It was noon when the vanguard cleared the trees, and spread rank on rank over the edge of a moor. A zealous sun shone overhead, and the world was full of light and colour, the heather already a blaze of purple, the bracken still virgin, the dense dark pines richly green against the white and azure of the sky.

Fulviac, Yeoland, and her guards rode out to a hillock and took station under the banner of the Cross. The forest belched steel; rank on rank swept out with pikes glittering; shields shone, and colours juggled mosaics haphazard. Horse and foot rolled out into the sun, and gathered in masses about the scarlet banner and the girl in her silvery harness on the great white horse. The forest shadows were behind them, they had cast off its cloak; the world lay bare to their faces; they were hurling their challenge in the face of Fate. Every man in the mass might well have felt the future glowing upon his brain, might well conceive himself a hero and a patriot. It was a deep, sonorous shout that rolled up, when a thousand points of steel smote upwards to the heavens. Yeoland, amid her guards, had dim visions of the power vested in her slender sword. Where her banner flew, there brave men would toss their pikes with a cheer for the charge home. Where her sword pointed, a thousand blades would leap to do her bidding. Even as she pondered these things, the trumpets sounded and the men of the forest marched on.

Fulviac's plans had been matured but a week. His opening of the campaign was briefly as follows. He was bearing north-west towards Geraint, and Geraint was to rise that night, massacre the King's garrison, and come out to him. Avalon lay in Fulviac's path. He was to smite a blow at it on his march, surprise the place if possible, and then hold on for Geraint. The same night, Gilderoy would rise; the castellan, who was with the townsfolk, would open the gates of the castle and deliver up all arms and the siege train that was kept there. From Geraint, Fulviac trusted to ride on with a single troop to take command at Gilderoy, leaving Nord, Prosper, and the girl Yeoland in command at Geraint. With his numbers raised to some twenty thousand men, he would have his force divided into two bodies–ten thousand at Gilderoy, ten thousand at Geraint. These two bodies would sweep up by forced marches, converge on Gambrevault, crush the Lord Flavian's small

armament, shut him up in his castle. Assault or leaguer would do the rest. Meanwhile the peasantry would rise and flock in to the standard of the people.

Free of the forest, Fulviac sent on a troop of horse towards Geraint to warn the townsfolk of his advance. With the main mass of the foot, he held northwards over hill and dale, and towards evening touched the hem of the oak woods that wrapped the manor of Avalon. The place was but feebly garrisoned, as the Lord Flavian had withdrawn most of his men to Gambrevault, dreaming little of the thunder-storm that was shadowing the land.

Fulviac had his plan matured. Fifty men-at-arms in red and green, the Gambrevault colours, were to advance with a forged pennon upon the place, as though sent as a reinforcement from Gambrevault. The main body would follow at a distance and lie ambushed in the woods. If the ruse answered, and it was an old trick enough, the barbican and gate could be held till Fulviac came up and made matters sure. Thus Avalon would fall, proto-martyr on the side of feudalism.

Nor were Fulviac's prognostications at fault. There were not sixty men in Avalon, and Fulviac's fifty gained footing in the place and held their ground till the rest came up. The affair was over, save for some desultory slaughter on the turrets, when Fulviac galloped forward over the meadows with Yeoland and her guard. The man kept the girl on the further side of the moat, and did not suffer her to stumble too suddenly on the realities of war. He feared wisely her woman's nature, and did not desire to overshock her senses. The butchery was over when they neared the walls. They heard certain promiscuous yelpings, and saw half a dozen men-at-arms, who had made a last stand on a tower, tumbled headlong over the battlements into the moat below. Fulviac did not suffer the girl to cross the bridge. What passed within was hidden by the impenetrable massiveness of the sullen walls.

Thus Avalon, fair castle of the woods and waters, sent out her wistful prophecy to the land. In her towers and galleries men lay dead, bleak and stiff, contorted into fantastic attitudes, with pike or sword sucking their vitals. Blood crept down the stairs; dead men cumbered the beds and jammed the doors. There had been much screaming among the women; even Fulviac's orders could not cool the passions of the mob; it was well indeed that he kept Yeoland innocent in the meadows.

Fanaticism, ignorance, lust were loose in Avalon like evil beasts. All its fairness was defamed in one short hour. Hangings were torn down, furniture wrecked and shattered, chests and cupboards spoiled of all their store. In the chapel, where refugees had fled to the altar, there had been slaughter, merciless and brutal. Bertrand, the old knight and seneschal, lay dead on the altar steps, with a broken sword and fifty rents in his carcase. Men were breaking the images, defacing the frescoes, strewing all the place with blood and riot. Nord of the

Hammer stood over the cellar door with his great mace over his shoulder, and kept the men from the wine. Elsewhere the mob rooted like a herd of swine in the rich chambers, and worked to the uttermost its swinish will.

When the day was past, Fulviac and his men, as hounds that have tasted blood, marched on exultantly towards Geraint. Night and great silence settled down over Avalon. The woods watched like a host of plaintive mourners over the scene. The moon rose and shone on the glimmering mere and swooning lilies, and streamed in through shattered casements on men sleeping in their blood, on ruin, and the ghastly shape of death.

XXVII

Gilderoy had risen.

It was midnight. A great bell boomed and clashed over the city, with a roar of many voices floating on the wind, like the sullen thunder of a rising sea. Torches flashed and ebbed along the streets, with hundreds of scampering shadows, and a glinting of steel. Knots of armed men hurried towards the great piazza, where, by the City Cross, Sforza the Gonfaloniere and his senators had gathered about the red and white Gonfalon of the Commune. All the Guild companies were there with their banners and men-at-arms. "Fulviac," "Saint Yeoland," "Liberty and the Commune": such were the watchwords that filled the mouths of the mob.

Cressets had burst into flame on the castle's towers, lighting a lurid firmament; while from the steeps of the city, where stood the palaces of the nobles, smoke and flame began to rush ominously into the night. Waves of hoarse ululations seemed to sweep the city from north, south, east, and west. Trumpets were clanging in the castle, drums beating, fifes braying. Through the indescribable chaos the great bell smote on, throbbing through the minutes like the heart of a god.

It will be remembered that the Lord Flavian was in Gilderoy for the purchasing of arms. At midnight you would have found him in his state bed-chamber in the abbot's palace, tugging at his hose, fumbling at his points and doublet, buckling on his sword. He was hardly awake with the single taper winking in the gloom. The shrill ululations of the mob sounded through the house, with the clash of swords and the crash of hammers. The Lord Flavian craned from the

window, saw what he could, heard much, and wondered if hell had broken loose.

"Fulviac and the Commune!"

"Saint Yeoland!"

"Down with the lords, down with the priests!"

The man at the window heard these cries, and puzzled them out in his peril. Certainly he was a lord; therefore unpopular. And Yeoland! Wherefore was that name sounding on the tongues of brothel-mongers and cooks! Was he still dreaming? Certes, these rallying-cries carried a certain blunt hint, advising him that he would have to care for his own skin.

Malise, his page, knelt at the door with his ear to the key-hole. The boy was in his shirt and breeches, and trembling like an aspen. Flavian stood over him. They heard a rending sound as of a gate giving, a roar as of water breaking through a dam, a yelp, a scream or two, a confused medley of many voices.

Flavian told Malise to open the door and look out into the gallery. He did so. A man, more zealous than the rest, sprang out of the dark and stabbed at the lad's throat. He fell with a whimper. Flavian plunged his sword home, dragged Malise within, barred the door again. Very tenderly he lifted the boy in his arms. Malise's hands clung about his lord's neck; he moaned a little, and was very white.

"Save yourself, messire!"

Flavian bore him towards a door that stood open in the panelling. He felt the lad's blood soaking through his doublet; entreaties were poured into his ears.

"I die, I die; oh, the smart, the burn of it! Leave me, messire; let me lie still!"

"Nonsense—-"

"It is no use; I have it deep, the man's knife went home."

Flavian felt the lad's hands relax, saw his head droop on his shoulder. He turned and put him down on the bed, and knelt there, while Malise panted and strove to speak.

"Go–messire."

Flavian was trying to staunch the flow from the boy's neck with a corner of the sheeting. His own doublet was drenched with blood. In a minute he saw the futility of such unconscious heroism; the flickering taper by the bed told that Malise's life would ebb before its own light would be gutted. Blows were being dealt upon the door. Flavian kissed the lad, took the taper, and passed out by the panel in the wainscotting.

A stairway led him to a little gate that opened on the abbot's garden. He more than thought to find the passage disputed, but the place stretched quiet before him as he came out with sword drawn. The scent of the flowers and fragrant shrubs was heavy on the night air, and the shouts of the mob sounded over the black roofs, and rang in his ears with an inspiriting fury.

There was a gate at the far end of the garden, opening through a stone wall into a narrow alley, and Flavian, as he scoured the paths, could see pike points bobbing above the wall, and a flare of torches. Men were breaking in even here, and he was caught like a rat in a corner. In an angle of the wall he found a big marrow bed, and crawling under the leaves like a worm, he smeared dirt over his face and clothes and awaited developments. In another minute the garden gate fell away, and a tatterdemalion rout poured in, strenuous and frothy as any tavern pack. They spread over the garden towards the house, shouting and blaspheming like a herd of satyrs. Flavian saw his chance, plunged from his dark corner, and joined the mob of moving figures. Dirty face and dirtier clothes were in kindred keeping. He shouted as lustily as any, and by dint of gradual and discreet circumlocutions, edged to the gate and escaped into the now-deserted alley.

Running on, he skirted the abbey and came out into the square that flanked the abbey church, and the great gate. A hundred torches seemed moving behind the abbey windows. The square teemed and smoked with riot. Flavian went into the crowd with drawn sword, screeching out mob cries like any huckster, smiting men on the back, laughing and swearing as in excellent humour. His gusto saved him. As he passed through the mob he saw heads, gory and mangled, dancing upon pikes; he saw women drunk with beer and violence, waving a severed foot or hand, kissing men, hugging each other, mouthing unutterable obscenities in the mad delirium of the hour. He saw whelps of boys scrambling and struggling for some ghastly relic; scavengers and sweeps dressed up in the habits of the Benedictines they had slain. One man carried in his palm an eye that had been torn from its socket, which he held with a leer in the faces of his fellows. Further still, he saw half a dozen beggars dragging the dead body of a lady over the stones by cords fastened to the ankles, while dogs worried and tore at the flesh. He learnt afterwards that it was the body of his own cousin, a young girl who had been lately betrothed. Last of all, he saw a carcase dangling from a great iron lamp bracket in the centre of the square, and understood from the crowd that it was the body of the abbot, his uncle. Men and women were pelting it with offal.

And he, an aristocrat of aristocrats, dirty and dishevelled, rubbed shoulders with the scourings of the gutter, shouted their shouts, echoed their exultation. At first the grim humour of the thing smote him in grosser farcical fashion; but the mood was not for long. He remembered Malise, whimpering and quivering in his arms; he remembered the body dragged about the square and worried by dogs; he remembered the carcase swinging by the rope; he remembered the dripping heads and the fragments of flesh tossed about by the maddened and intoxicated mob. It was then that his eyes grew hot with shame and his blood ran like lava through his veins. It was then that the spirit of a vampire rushed into his heart,

and that he swore great solemn oaths by all the bones and relics of the saints. God give him a hale body out of Gilderoy, and this city scum should be scourged with iron and roasted by fire.

He got across the square by dint of his noisy hypocrisy, and turned morosely into a dark alley that led towards the walls. Hot-hearted gentleman, the mere panic-stricken thirst for existence had cooled out of him, and he was in a fine, rendering passion to his finger-tips, a striding, blasphemous temper, that longed to take the whole city by the throat and beat a fist in its bloated face. He wondered what had become of his knights, esquires, and men-at-arms. It was told him in later days how they died fighting in the abbey refectory, died with the Benedictines at their side, and a rare barrier of corpses to tell of the swing of their swords.

Flavian dodged into a dark porch to consider his circumstances and the baffling influence of the same. He had caught enough from the mob to comprehend what had occurred, and what was to follow. Certainly for many months he had heard rumours, but, like other demigods, he had turned a deaf ear and smiled like a Saturn. The largeness of the upheaval stupefied him at first; now, as he pondered it, it gave a more heroic colour to his passions.

To be free of Gilderoy: that was the necessity. He guessed shrewdly enough that the gates would be well guarded. And the walls! He smote his thigh and remembered where the river coursed round the rocky foundations, and washed the walls. A big plunge, a swim, and he would have liberty enough and to spare.

He set off instanter down alleys and byways, through the most poverty-stricken quarter of the city. The place had a hundred stenches on a hot summer night. Naturally enough, such haunts were deserted, save for a few hags garrulous at the doorways, and a few fragments of dirt, called by courtesy, children. The rats had gone marauding, leaving their offal heaps empty.

Keen as a fox, he threaded on, and came before long to the walls, a black mass, rising above the hovels packed like pigsties to the very ramparts. Avoiding a tower, he held along a lane that skirted the wall, looking for one of the many stairways leading to the battlements. It was here, in the light of a tavern window, that he came plump upon two sweaty artisans, rendered somewhat more gross and insolent by the fumes of liquor. The men challenged Flavian with drunken arrogance; they had their password, to the devil. All the accumulated viciousness of an hour tingled in his sword arm. He fell upon the men like a Barak, kicked one carcase into the gutter, and ran on.

He was soon up a stairway, and on the walls, finding them absolutely deserted. The city stretched behind him, a black chaos, emitting a grim uproar, its dark slopes chequered here and there with angry flame. Before him swept the river, and he heard it swirling amid the reeds. Further still, meadows lay open to

the stars, and in the distance stood solemn woods and heights, touched with the silver of the sky.

He moved on to where a loop of the river curled up to wash the walls. The water was in full flood at the place, and he heard it gurgling cheerily against the stones. Flavian took a last look at Gilderoy, its castle red with burning cressets, its multitudinous roofs, its uproar like the noise of a nest of hornets. He shook his fist over the city, climbed the battlements, jumped for it, plunged like a log, came up spluttering to strike out for the further bank.

In the meadows the townsfolk kept horses at graze. Flavian, aglow to the finger-tips, with water squelching from his shoes, caught a cob that was hobbled in a field hard by the river. He unhobbled the beast, hung on by the mane, mounted, and set off bare-back for the road to Gambrevault.

XXVIII

Dawn climbing red over pinewoods piled on the hills; dawn optimistic yet ominous, harbinger of war and such perils as set the heart leaping and the blood afire; dawn that cried unto the world, "Better one burst of heroism and then the grave, than a miserable monotony of nothingness, a domestic surfeiting of the senses with a wife and a fat larder."

Out of the east climbed the man on the stolen horse, riding out of the dawn with the lurid phantasms of the night still running riot in his brain. No sleep had smoothed the crumpled page, or touched the memory with unguent to assuage the smart. Maledictions, vengeances, prophecies of fire and sword rushed with the red dawn over the hills.

With forty miles behind him, he came on his jaded, sweaty beast towards his own castle of Gambrevault, forded his own stream, saw his mills gushing foam, heard the thunder of the weir. How eternally peaceful everything seemed in the dewy amber light of the dawn! Away rolled the downs, billows of glorious green, into the west. Gambrevault's towers rose against the blue; he saw the camp in the meadows; his own banner blowing to the breeze.

The meadows that morning were quiet as a graveyard, as the Lord Flavian rode through to the great gate of Gambrevault. Soldiers idling about, stiffened up, saluted, stared in astonishment at the grim, morose-faced man, who rode by on a foundered horse, looking neither to the right hand nor the left. He cut

something of a figure, as though he had been in a tavern brawl, and had spent the night snoring in a cow-house. Yet there was an indescribable power and dignity in the tatterdemalion rider for all his tumbled look. The compressed lips, knotted brow, smouldering eyes spoke of phenomenal emotions, phenomenal passions. Not a man cheered, and the silence was yet more eloquent than clamour. He rode in by the great gate, and parrying the blank glances and interrogations of his knights, called for two esquires, and withdrew to his own state rooms.

His first trouble was to acknowledge such necessities as hunger and cleanliness. He contrived to compass both at once, eating ravenously even while he was in the bath. His next command was for his harness, and his esquires armed him, agog for news, even waxing inquisitive, to be snubbed for their pains.

"Assemble my knights and gentlemen in the great hall," ran his order, and after praying awhile in his own private oratory, he passed down to join the assemblage, solemn and soul-burdened as a young Jove.

There is a certain vain satisfaction in being the possessor of some phenomenal piece of news, wherewith to astonish a circle of friends. The dramatic person blurts it out like a stage duke; the real epicure lets it filter through his teeth in fragments, watching with a twinkling satisfaction its effect upon his hearers. The Lord Flavian's revelations that morning were deliberate and gradual, leisurely in the extreme. Many a man waxes flippant or cynical when his feelings are deep and sincere, and he is disinclined to bare his heart to the world. Flavian addressed his assembled knights with a certain stinted and pedantic courtliness; when they had warmed to his level, then he could indulge his sympathies to the full. The atmosphere about those who wait to hear our experiences or opinions is often like cold water, somewhat repellent till the first plunge has been tried.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I regret to inform you that the Abbot Porphyry, my uncle, is numbered with the saints."

So much for the first confession; it elicited a sympathetic murmur from those assembled, a very proper and respectable expression of feeling, but nothing passionate.

"I also have to inform you, with much Christian resignation, that Sir Jordan and Sir Kay, Malise, my page, and some twenty men-at-arms are in all human probability dead."

This time some glimmer of light pervaded the hall. There was still mystification, silence, and an exchanging of glances.

"Finally, gentlemen, I may confess to you that a great insurrection is afoot in the land; that Gilderoy has declared against the King and the nobility; that the scum of a populace has made a great massacre of the magnates; that I, gentlemen, by the grace of God, have escaped to preach to you of these things."

A chorus of grim ejaculations came from the knights and the captains as-

sembled. Astonishment, and emotions more durable, showed on every face. Flavian gained heat, and let his tongue have liberty; at the end of ten minutes of fervid oratory, the men were as wise as their lord and every wit as vicious. Gilderoy had signalised her rising in blood; mob rule had been proclaimed; the peasantry and townsfolk had thrown down the glove to the nobles. These were bleak, plain facts, that touched to the quick the men who stood gathered in the great hall of Gambrevault. Not a sword was in its scabbard when Modred's deep voice gave the cry–

"God and St. Philip–for the King."

Then like a powder bag flung into a fire came the news of the storming and wrecking of Avalon. A single man-at-arms had escaped the slaughter, escaped by crawling down an offal shoot and hiding till the rebels evacuated the place and marched under cover of night for Geraint. The man had crept out and fled on foot from the stricken place for Gambrevault. It was a tramp of ten leagues, but he had stuck to it through the night like a Trojan, and, knowing the road well, had reached Gambrevault before the sun was at noon. They brought him before Flavian and the rest, fagged to the fifth toe, and hardly able to stand. He told the whole tale, as much as he knew of it, in a blunt yet dazed way. His senses appeared numbed by the deeds that had been done that night.

Flavian leant back in his escutcheoned chair, and gnawed at his lip. This last thrust had gone home more keenly than the rest. That castle of lilies, Avalon the fair, was but a friend of wood and stone, yet a friend having wondrous hold upon his heart. He had been born there, and under the shadows of its towers his mother had taken her last sacrament. Men can love a tree, a cottage, a stream; Flavian loved Avalon as being the temple of the unutterable memories of the past. Desolation and ruin! Bertrand, his old master at arms, slain! He sprang up like an Achilles with the ghost of Patroclus haunting his soul.

"Gentlemen, shall these things pass? Hear me, God and the world, hear my oath sworn in this my castle of Gambrevault. May I never rest till these things are reprieved in blood, till there are too few men to bury the dead. Though my walls fall, and my towers totter, though I win ruin and a grave, I swear by the Sacrament to do such deeds as shall ring and resound in history."

So they went all of them together, and swore by the body and blood of the Lord to take such vengeance as the sword alone can give to the hot passions of mankind.

That noon there was much stir and life in Gambrevault. The camp hummed like a wasp's nest when violence threatens; the men were ready to run to arms on the first sounding of the trumpet. Armourers and farriers were at work. Flavian had sent out two companies of light horse to reconnoitre towards Gilderoy and Geraint. They had orders not to draw rein till they had sure view of such rebel

voices as were on the march; to hang on the horizon; to watch and follow; to send gallopers to Gambrevault; on no account to give battle. Companies were despatched to drive in the cattle from the hills, and to bring in fodder. The Gambrevault mills were emptied of flour, and burnt to the ground, in view of their being of use to the rebels in case of a siege. Certain cottages and outhouses under the castle walls were demolished to leave no cover for an attacking force. The cats, tribocs, catapults, and bombards upon the battlements were overhauled, and cleared for a siege.

Towards evening, human wreckage began to drift in from the country, bearing lamentable witness to the thoroughness of Fulviac's incendiarism. Gambrevault might have stood for heaven by the strange scattering of folk who came to seek its sanctuary. Fire and sword were abroad with a vengeance; cottars, borderers, and villains had risen in the night; treachery had drawn its poniard; even the hound had snapped at its master's hand.

Many pathetic figures passed under the great arch of Gambrevault gate that day. First a knight came in on horseback, a baby in his arms, and a woman clinging behind him, sole relics of a home. Margaret, the grey-haired countess of St. Anne's, was brought in on a litter by a few faithful men-at-arms; her husband and her two sons were dead. Young Prosper of Fountains came in on a pony; the lad wept like a girl when questioned, and told of a mother and a sire butchered, a home sacked and burnt. There were stern faces in Gambrevault that day, and looks more eloquent than words. "Verily," said Flavian to Modred the Strong, "we shall have need of our swords, and God grant that we use them to good purpose."

So night drew near, and still no riders had come from the companies that had ridden out to reconnoitre towards Gilderoy and Geraint. Flavian had had a hundred duties on his hands: exercising his courtesy to the refugees, condoling, reassuring; inspecting the defences and the siege train; superintending the victualling of the place. He had ordered his troops under arms in the meadows, and had spoken to them of what had passed at Gilderoy, and what might be looked for in the future. There seemed no lack of loyalty on their part. Flavian had ever been a magnanimous and a generous overlord, glad to be merciful, and no libertine at the expense of his underlings. His feudatories were bound to him by ties more strong than mere legalities. They cheered him loudly enough as he rode along the lines in full armour, with fifty knights following as his guard.

Night came. Outposts had been pushed forward to the woods, and a strong picket held the ford across the river. On the battlements guards went to and fro, and clarions parcelled out the night, and rang the changes. In the east there was a faint yellowish light in the sky, a distant glare as of a fire many miles away. In the camp men were ready to fly to arms at the first thunder of war over the hills.

Flavian held a council in the great hall, a council attended by all his knights

and captains. They had a great map spread upon the table, a chart of the demesnes of Gambrevault and Avalon, and the surrounding country. Their conjectures turned on the possible intentions of the rebels, whether they would venture on a campaign in the open, or lie snug within walls and indulge in raids and forays. And then–as to the loyalty of their own troops? On this point Flavian was dogmatic, having a generous and over-boyish heart, not quick to credit others with treachery.

"I would take oath for my own men," he said; "their fathers have served my fathers; I have never played the tyrant; there is every reason to trust their loyalty."

An old knight, Sir Tristram, had taken a goodly share in the debate, a veteran from the barons' wars, and a man of honest experience, no mere pantaloon. His grey beard swept down upon his cuirass; his deep-set eyes were full of intelligence under his bushy brows; the hands that were laid upon the table were clawed and deformed by gout.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have not the fitness and youth of many of you, but I can lay claim to some wisdom in war. To my liege lord, whom, sirs, I honour as a man of soul, I would address two proverbs. First, despise not, sire, your enemies."

Modred laughed in his black beard.

"Reverence the scum of Gilderoy?"

"Ha, man, if we are well advised, these folk have been breathed upon by fanaticism. I tell you, I have seen a meanly-born crowd make a very stubborn day of it with some of the best troops that ever saw service. Secondly, sire, I would say to you, turn off your mercenaries if the sky looks black; never trust your neck to paid men when any great peril threatens."

Flavian, out of his good sense, agreed with Tristram.

"Your words are weighty," he said. "So long as we are campaigning, I will pay them well and keep them. If it comes to a siege, I will have no hired bravos in Gambrevault. And now, gentlemen, it is late; get what sleep you may, for who knows what may come with the morrow. Modred and Geoffrey, I leave to you the visiting of the outposts to-night. Order up my lutists and flute-players; I shall not sleep without a song."

He passed alone to the outer battlements, and let the night expand about his soul, the stars touch his meditations. From the minstrels' gallery in the hall came the wail of viols, the voices of flute, dulcimer and bassoon keeping a mellow under-chant. He heard the sea upon the rocks, saw it glimmering dimly to end in a fringe of foam.

So his thoughts soared to the face of one woman in the world, the golden Eve peering out of Paradise, whose soul seemed to ebb and flow like the moan of the distant music. He fell into deep forecastings of the future. He remembered

her words to him, her mysterious warnings, her inexplicable inconsistencies, her appeal to war. Gilderoy had taught him much, and some measure of truth shone like a dawn spear in the east. A gulf of war and vengeance stretched from his feet. Yet he let his soul circle like a golden moth about the woman's beauty, while the wail of the viols stole out upon his ears.

XXIX

Little store of sleep had the Lord of Gambrevault that night. War with all its echoing prophecies played through his thought as a storm wind through the rotting casements of a ruin. He beheld the high hills red with beacons, the valleys filled with the surging steel of battle. Gilderoy and its terrors flamed through his brain. Above all, like the moon from a cloud shone the face of Yeoland, the Madonna of the Forest.

He was up and armed before dawn, and on the topmost battlements, eager for the day. The sun came with splendour out of the east, hurling a golden net over the woods piled upon the hills. Mists moved from off the sea, that shimmered opalescent towards the dawn. Brine laded the breeze. The waves were scalloped amber and purple, fringed with foam about the agate cliffs.

The hours were void to the man till riders should come in with tidings of how the revolt sped at Gilderoy and Geraint. The prophetic hints that had been tossed to him from the tongues of the mob had served to discover to him his own invidious fame. Gambrevault, on its rocky headland, stood, the strongest castle in the south, a black mass looming athwart the perilous path of war. The rebels would smite at it. Of that its lord was assured.

At noon he attended mass in the chapel, with all his knights, solacing his impatience with the purer aspirations of the soul. It was even as he left the chapel that Sir Modred met him, telling how a galloper had left the woods and was cantering over the meadows towards the headland. The man was soon under the arch of the great gate, his sweating horse smiting fire from the stones, dropping foam from his black muzzle. The rider was Godamar, Flavian's favourite esquire, a ruddy youth, with the heart of a Jonathan.

Modred brought him to the banqueting-hall, where Flavian awaited him in full harness, two trumpeters at his back.

"Sire, Geraint has risen."

"Ha!"

"They are marching on Gambrevault."

"Your news, on with it."

Godamar told how the troop had neared Geraint at eve and camped in the wood over night. At dawn they had reconnoitred the town, and seen, to their credit, black columns of "foot" pouring out by all the gates. The Gambrevault company had fallen back upon the woods unseen, and had watched the Gerainters massing in the city meadows about a red banner and one in armour upon a white horse. Godamar had lain low in a thicket and watched the rebels march by in the valley. They had passed between two hundred paces of him, and he swore by Roland the Paladin that it was a woman who rode the great white horse.

Flavian had listened to the man with a golden flux of fancy that had divined something of the esquire's meaning.

"Godamar," he said.

"Sire?"

"You rode with me that day when we tracked a certain lady from Cambremont glade towards the pine forest."

"Sire, you forestall me in thought."

"So?"

"I could even swear upon my sword that it is Yeoland of Cambremont who rides with the Gerainters."

Flavian coloured and commended him. Godamar ran on.

"I threaded the thicket, sire, made a detour, galloped hard and rejoined our company. The Gerainters were blind as bats; they had never a scout to serve them. We kept under cover and watched their march. They came due west in three columns, one following the other. Six miles from Geraint, Longsword gave me a spare horse and sent me spurring to bring you the news."

Flavian stroked his chin and brooded.

"Their numbers?" he asked anon.

"Ten thousand men, sire, we guessed it such."

Before Godamar had ended his despatch, a second galloper came in breathless from Gilderoy. He had left Fulviac's rebels massing in the meadows beyond the river, and had kept cover long enough to see the foremost column wheel westwards and take the road for Gambrevault. The scout numbered the Gilderoy force at anything between eight and twelve thousand pikes. Fulviac had been on the march three hours.

The Lord of Avalon stood forward in the oriel in the full light of the sun. Sea, hill, and woodland stretched before him under a peerless sky. There was the scent of brine in the breeze, the banner of youth was ablaze upon the hills. A red heart beat under his shimmering cuirass, red blood flushed his brain. It was a

season of romance and of lusty daring, an hour when his manhood shone bright as his burnished sword.

Thoughts were tumbling, moving over his mind like water over a wheel. Geraint stood ten leagues from Gambrevault, Gilderoy thirteen. The Geraint forces had been on the march six hours or more, the men of Gilderoy only three. Hence, by all the craft of Araby, they of Geraint were three hours and three leagues to the fore. Bad generalship without doubt, but vastly prophetic to the man figuring in the oriel, his fingers drumming on the stone sill.

Strategy stirred in him, and waxed like a dragon created from some magic crystal into the might of deeds. The Lord of Gambrevault caught the strong smile of chivalry. A great venture burnt upon his sword. It was no uncertain voice that rang through the hall of Gambrevault.

"Gentlemen, to horse! Trumpets, blow the sally! Let every man who can ride, mount and follow me to-day. Blow, trumpets, blow!"

The brazen throats brayed from the walls, their shrill scream echoing and echoing amid the distant hills. Their message was like the plunging of a boulder into a pool, smiting to foam and clamour the camp in the meadows. Swords were girded on, spears plucked from the sods, horses saddled and bridled in grim haste. In one short, stirring hour Flavian rode out from Gambrevault with twelve hundred steel-clad riders at his back. Those on the walls watched this mass of fire and colour thundering over the meadows, splashing through the ford, smoking away to the east with trumpets clanging, banneroles adance. There was to be great work done that day. The sentinels on the walls gossiped together, and swore by their lord as he had been the King.

Gambrevault and its towers sank back against the skyline, its banner waving heavily above the keep. Flavian's mass of knights and men-at-arms held over the eastern downs that rolled greenly above the black cliffs and the blue mosaics of the sea. A brisk breeze laughed in their faces, setting plumes nodding, banneroles and pensils aslant. Their spears rose like the slim masts of many sloops in a harbour. The sun shone, the green woods beckoned to the glittering mass with its forest of rolling spears.

Flavian's pride whimpered as he rode in the van with Modred, Godamar, who bore the banner of Gambrevault, and Merlion d'Or, his herald. The man felt like a Zeus with a thunderbolt poised in his hand. A word, the flash of a sword, the cry of a trumpet, and all this splendid torrent of steel would leap and thunder to work his will. The star of chivalry shone bright in the heavens. As for this woman on the white horse, the Madonna of the Pine Forest, God and the saints, he would charge the whole world, hell and its legions, to win so rich a prize.

Turning northwards, with scouts scattered in the far van, they drew to wilder regions where the dark and saturnine outposts of the great pine forest

stood solemn upon the hills. Dusky were the thickets against the sapphire sky, the cloud banners trailing in the breeze. The very valleys breathed of battle and sudden peril of the sword. Rounding a wood, they saw riders flash over the brow of a hill and come towards them at a gallop. The men drew rein before the great company of spears. Their leader saluted his lord, and glanced round grimly upon the sea of steel dwindling over the green slopes.

"Sire, we are well-fortuned."

"Say on."

"Ten thousand rebels from Geraint are on the march two miles away. Godamar has given you the news. We are on the crest of the wave."

Flavian tightened his baldric.

"Good ground to the east, Longsword?"

"Excellent for 'horse,' sire."

"To our advantage?"

"Half a mile further towards Geraint there lies a grass valley, a league long, four furlongs from wood to wood. The rebels will march through it, or I am a dotard. There stands your chance, sire. We can roll down on them like a torrent."

Flavian took time by the throat, and called on his man of the tabard.

"Make me this proclamation," quoth he: "'Gentlemen of Gambrevault, strike for King and chivalry. Let vengeance dye your swords. As for the lady riding upon the white horse, mark you, sirs, let her be as the Virgin out of heaven. We ride to take her and her banner. For the rest, no quarter and no prisoners. We will teach this mob the art of war.'"

The man of the tabard proclaimed it as he was bidden. The iron ranks thundered to him like billows foaming about a rock. Modred claimed silence with uplifted sword.

"Enough, gentlemen, enough. No bellowing. Muzzle your temper. We make our spring in silence, that we may claw the harder."

A line of hills lay before them, heights crowned with black pine woods, save for one bare ridge like a great scimitar carving the sky. Flavian advanced his companies up the slopes, halted them in a broad hollow under the brow of the hill. A last galloper had ridden in with hot tidings of the rebels. The Lord of Gambrevault, with Sir Modred and Longsword, cantered on to reconnoitre. They drew to a thicket of gnarled hollies on the hilltop, and looked down upon a long grass valley bounded north and south by woods.

Half a mile away came the rebel vanguard, a black mass of footmen plodding uphill, their pikes and bills shining in the sun. Pennons and gonfalons danced here and there, while in the thick of the column flew the red banner of the Forest, girt about by the spears of Yeoland's guard. She could be seen on her white horse in the midst of the press. The Gerainters were split into three columns, the

second column half a mile behind the first, the third somewhat closer upon the second. They were marching without outriders, as though thoroughly assured of their own safety.

Modred chuckled grimly through his black beard, and smote his thigh.

"Fools, fools!"

"Devilish generalship," quoth Longsword under his beaver. "We can crush their van like a wheatfield before the rest can come up. What say you, sire, fewtre spears, and at them?"

Flavian had already turned his horse.

"No sounding of trumpets, sirs," he said; "we will deal only with their van. Call up our companies. God and St. Philip for Gambrevault!"

Over the bare ridge, with its barriers of sun-steeped trees, steel shivered and spears bristled, rank on rank, wave on wave. With a massed rhythm of hoofs, the flood crested the hill, plunged down at a gallop with fewtred spears. Knee to knee, flank to flank, a thousand streaks of steel deluged the hillside. Their trumpets throated now the charge; the iron ranks clashed and thundered, rocked on with a rush of glittering shields.

As dust rolling before a March wind, so the horsemen of Gambrevault poured down on the horde of wavering pikes. The storm had come sudden as thunder out of a summer sky. Before the hurtling impact of that bolt of war, the palsied ranks of foot crumbled like rotten timber. The Gerainters were too massed and too amazed to squander or give ground, to stem with bill and bow the rolling torrent of death. They were rent and trampled, trodden like straw under the stupendous avalanche of steel that crushed and pulverised with ponderous and invincible might.

"God and Gambrevault, kill, kill!"

Such was the death-cry thundered out over the rebel van. The column broke, burst into infinite chaos. Yeoland's guards alone stood firm, a tough core of oak amid rotten tinder. Over the trampled wreckage the fight swirled and eddied, circling about the knot of steel where the red banner flapped in the vortex of the storm.

Yeoland sat dazed on her white horse, as one in the grip of some terrific dream. Nord was at her side, snarling, snapping his jaw like a wolf, his great iron mace poised over his shoulder. The red banner flapped prophetic above their heads. Around them the fight gathered, a whirlwind of contorted figures and stabbing steel.

Yeoland's eyes were on one figure in the press, a man straddling a big bay horse, smiting double-handed with his sword, his red plume jerking in the hot rush of the fight. She saw horse and man go down before him; saw him buffet his way onward like a galley ploughing against wind and wave. His leaping sword

and tossing plume came steady and strenuous through the girdle of death.

Fear, pride, a hundred battling passions played like the battle through the woman's mobile brain. She watched the man under the red plume with an intensity of feeling that made her blind to all else for the moment. Love seemed to struggle towards her in bright harness through the fight. She saw the last rank of the human rampart pierced. The man on the bay horse came out before her like some warrior out of an old epic.

None save Nord stood between them, shaggy and grim as a great Norse Thor. She watched the iron mace swing, saw it fall and smite wide. Flavian stood in the stirrups, both hands to the hilt, his horse's muzzle rammed against the opposing brute's chest. The blow fell, a great cut laid in with all the culminating courage of an hour. The sword slashed Nord's gorget, buried its blade in the bull-like neck. He clutched at his throat, toppled, slid out of the saddle and rolled under his horse's hoofs.

[image]

"THE SWORD SLASHED NORD'S GORGET, BURIED ITS BLADE IN THE BULL-LIKE NECK."

The man's hand snatched at the girl's bridle; he dragged her and her horse out of the press. She had a confused vision of carnage, of stabbing swords and trampling hoofs. She saw her banner-bearer fall forward on his horse's neck, thrust through with a sword, while Modred seized the banner staff from his impotent hand. The rebel column had deliquesced and vanished. In its stead she was girdled by grim and exultant horsemen whose swords flashed in the sun.

Trumpets blew the retreat. A thousand glittering riders swarmed about her and the knight with the red plume. She had his words confusedly in her ears, strong, passionate words, heroic, yet utterly tender. They rode uphill together amid the clangour of his men. In a minute they had won the ridge, and were swinging down the further slope with their faces towards Gambrevault.

XXX

Paris and Helen have been dead centuries, yet in that universal world of the

mind they still live, young and glorious as when the Grecian galleys ploughed foam through the blue Ægean. The world loves a lover. Troilus stages our own emotions for us in godlier wise than we poor realists can hope to do. We owe an eternal gratitude to those who have stood for love in history. All men might well desire to play the Tristan to Iseult of the Irish eyes. We forget Gemma Donati, and follow with Dante's wistful idealism the gleaming figure of Beatrice in Paradise.

Now the Lord Flavian was one of those happy persons who seem to stumble into heaven either by prodigious instinct or remarkable good-fortune. God gives to many men gold; to others intellect; to some truth; to few, a human echo, a harmony in the spirit, the right woman in the world. Many of us are such unstable folk that we vibrate vastly to a beautiful face and hail heaven in a pair of violet eyes. The chance is that such a business turns out miserably. It is a wise rule to search the world through to find your Beatrice, or bide celibate to the end. Happy is the man whose instinctive choice is ratified by all the wisest poetry of heaven. Happy is he who finds a ruby as he rakes the ephemeral flower-gardens of life, a gem eternally bright and beautiful, durable, unchanging, flashing light ever into the soul. It is given to few to love wisely, to love utterly, to love till death.

That summer day Flavian saw life at its zenith, as he rode through the woods on the way to Gambrevault. The horse had dropped to a trot, and the man had taken off his helmet and hung it at his saddle-bow. He was still red from the mêlée; his eyes were bright and triumphant. The girl at his side looked at him half-timidly, a tremor upon her lip, her glances clouded. The terrific action of the last hour still seemed to weigh upon her senses, and she seemed fated to be the sport of contending sentiments. No sooner had she struggled to some level of saintliness than love rushed in with burning wings, and lo, all the tinsel of her religion fell away, and she was a mere Eve, a child of Nature.

Flavian watched her with the tenderness of a strong man, who is ready to give his life for the woman he serves. Love seemed to rise from her and play upon him like perfume from a bowl of violets; her eyes transfigured him, and he longed to touch her hair.

"At last."

"Lord?"

"Treat me as a man, I hate that epithet."

"You are a great signor."

"What are titles, testaments, etiquettes to us! I am only great so long as you trust and honour me."

"Your power might appear precarious."

"As you will."

"Yet war is loose!"

He looked round upon the sea of men that rolled on every hand.

"And war at its worst. I have seen enough in three days to make me loathe your partisans and their principles."

"Perhaps."

"It is a wicked and inhuman business."

"What are you going to do with me?" she said.

"Remove you from the hands of butchers and offal-mongers; put you like a pearl in a casket in my own castle of Gambrevault."

"You incur the greater peril."

"Have I not told you that no woman loves a coward?"

She was silent awhile, with her eyes wistful and melancholy, as though some spiritual conflict were passing in her mind. Bitterness escaped in the man's words for all his tenderness and chivalry. He needed an answer. Anon she capitulated and appeared to surrender herself absolutely to circumstance. She began to tell Flavian of her adoption by Fulviac, of her vision in the ruined chapel, of the part assigned to her as a woman ordained by heaven. He heard her in silence, finding quaint pleasure in listening to her voice, having never heard her talk at such length before. Her voice's modulations, its pathos, its many tones, were more subtle to him than any music, and seemed to steep in oblivion the grim realities of the last few days. He watched the play of thought upon her face, sun and shadow, calm and unrest. He began to comprehend the discords he had flung into her life; she was no longer a riddle to him; her confessions portrayed her soul in warm and delicate colouring–colouring pathetic and heroically pure. He had a glorious sense of joy in an instinctive conviction that this girl was worthy of all the highest chivalry a man's heart can conceive of.

Though he had a strong suspicion that he could humanise her Madonna for her, he refrained from argument, refrained from dilating on the iniquities her so-called crusades had already perpetrated. Moreover, the girl had opened her heart to him with a delicious and innocent ingenuousness. He felt that the hour had blessed him sufficiently; that personalities would be gross and impertinent in the light of that sympathy that seemed suddenly to have enveloped them like a golden cloud. The girl appeared to have surrendered herself spiritually into his keeping, not sorry in measure that a strong destiny had decided her doubts for her. They were to let political considerations and the ephemeral turmoils of the times sink under their feet. It was sufficient for them to be but a man and a woman, to forget the forbidden fruit, and the serpent and his lore. God walked the world; they were not ashamed to hear His voice.

So they came with their glittering horde of horsemen to Gambrevault, and rode over the green downs with towers beckoning from the blue. The Gilderoy forces were still miles away, and could not have threatened the retreat on Gambrevault had they been wise as to the event. Yeoland rode close at Flavian's side.

He touched her hand, looked in her eyes, saw the colour stream to her cheeks, knew that she no longer was his enemy.

"Yonder stands Gambrevault," were his words; "its walls shall bulwark you against the world. Trust me and my eternal faith to you. I shall see God more clearly for looking in your eyes."

He lodged her in a chamber in the keep, a room that had been his mother's and still held the furniture, books, and music she had used. Its window looked out on the castle garden, and over the double line of walls to the meadows and woods beyond. Maud, the castellan's wife, was bidden to wait upon her. Flavian gave her the keys of his mother's chests, where silks, samites, sarcenets galore, lace and all manner of golden fripperies, were stored. The ewers of the room were of silver, its hangings of violet cloth, its bed inlaid with ivory and hung with purple velvet. It had a shelf full of beautifully illumined books, a prayer-desk and a small altar, a harp, a lute, an embroidery frame, and numberless curios. Thus by the might of the sword Yeoland was installed in the great castle of Gambrevault.

So Duessa and Balthasar were dead. The girl had told Flavian what had passed in Sforza's palace; the news shocked him more than he would have dreamed. The dead wound us with their unapproachableness and the mute pathos of their pale, imagined faces. They are like our own sins that stare at us from the night sky, irrevocable and beyond us for ever. Flavian ordered tapers to be burnt and masses said in the castle chapel for the souls of these two unfortunates. He himself spent more than an hour in silent prayer before he confessed, received penance and absolution.

That evening, at Flavian's prayer, Yeoland came down to meet him in the castle garden, with the castellan's two girls to serve her as maids of honour. She had put aside her armour, and was clad in a jacket of violet cloth, fitting close to the figure, and a skirt of light blue silk. In the old yew walk, stately and solemn, amid the bright parterres and stone urns gushing colour, the two children slipped away and left Yeoland and the man alone.

She seemed to have lost much of her restraint, much of her independence, of her reserve, in a few short hours. Her mood inclined towards silence and a certain delightful solemnity such as a lover loves. Her eyes met the man's with a rare trust; her hands went into his with all the ideal faith he had forecast in his dreams.

They stood together under the yews, full of youth and innocent joy of soul, timid, happily sad, content to be mere children. Flavian touched her hands as he would have touched a lily. She seemed too wonderful, too pure, too transcendent to be fingered. A supreme, a godly timidity possessed him; he had such love in his heart as only the strong and the pure can know, such love as makes a man a saint unto himself, a being wrapped round with the rarest chivalry of heaven.

Their words were very simple and infrequent.

"I have been thinking," said the girl.

"Yes?"

"How war seems ever in the world."

"How else should I have won you?"

She sighed and looked up over his shoulder at the sunlight glimmering gold through the yews.

"I have been thinking how I bring you infinite peril. They will not lose me easily. What if I bring you to ruin?"

"I take everything to myself."

"They believe me a saint."

"And I!"

"My conscience will reproach me, but now—-"

"Well?"

"I am too happy to remember."

Their eyes met and flashed all the unutterable truths of the soul. Flavian kissed her hand.

"Forget it all," he said, "save the words I spoke to you over that forest grave. Whatever doom may come upon me, though death frown, I care not; all the sky is at sunset, all the world is full of song. I could meet God to-morrow with a smile, since you have shown me all your heart."

From a little stone pavilion hidden by laurels the voices of flutes and viols swirled out upon the air. The west grew faint, and twilight increased; night kissed and closed the azure eyes of the day. Under the yew boughs, Flavian and Yeoland walked hand in hand; the music spoke for them; the night made their faces pale and spiritual under the trees. They said little; a tremor of the fingers, a glance, a sigh were enough. When the west had faded, and the last primrose streak was gone, Flavian kissed the girl's lips and sent her back to the two children, who were curled on a bench by the laurels, listening sleepily to the music of flute and viol.

The man's soul was too scintillant and joyous to shun the stars. He passed up on to the battlements, and listened to the long surge of the summer sea.

And as he paced the battlements that night, he saw red, impish specks of flame start out against the black background of the night. They were the rebel watchfires burning on the hills, sinister eyes, red with the distant prophecy of

war.

XXXI

It would be difficult to describe the thundercloud of thought that came down upon Fulviac's face when news was brought him of the capture of the girl Yeoland and the decimation of the vanguard from Geraint. There was something even Satanic upon his face for the moment. He was not a pleasant person when roused, and roused he was that day like any ogre. His tongue ran through the whole gamut of blasphemy before he recovered a finer dignity and relapsed into a grim reserve. His men spoke to him with great suavity. He had decreed that Nord of the Hammer should be hanged for negligence, but the decree was unnecessary, since Flavian's sword had already settled the matter.

The Gilderoy forces therefore turned northwards, with their great baggage and siege train, and in due course came upon the Gerainters bivouacking on the ridge where the battle had taken place. The green slopes were specked with dark motionless figures, dead horses, and the wreckage of war. Men were burying the dead upon the battlefield. Yeoland's guard had been slaughtered almost to a man; and the whole affair had damped very considerably the ardour of certain of the less trustworthy levies.

But Fulviac was not the man to sit and snivel over a defeat; he knew well enough that he had good men behind him, tough fighting stuff, fired by fanaticism and a long sense of wrong. He harangued his whole force, black-guarded with his lion's roar those concerned in the march from Geraint, treating them to such a scourging with words that they snarled and clamoured to be led on at once to prove their mettle. Their leaders had been at fault, nor did Fulviac keep their spirits cooling in the wind. The power of his own personality was great, and he had twenty thousand men at his back, who knew that to fail meant death and torture. They had received a check from the Lord of Gambrevault; it was absolutely essential to the cause that they should wipe out the defeat, recapture their Saint and sacred banner, crush Gambrevault once and for ever. To this strenuous tune they marched on towards the sea, and that night lit their fires on the hills that ringed Gambrevault on the north.

As the sun climbed up and spread a curtain of gold over down and upland, those on the walls of Gambrevault saw steel glinting on the hills, the pikes and

casques of Fulviac's horde. Yeoland saw them from her casement, as she stood and combed her hair. Flavian, watching with certain knights on the keep, confronted the event with a merry smile. The shimmering line of silver on the hills had broadened to a darker band, splashed lavishly with steel. The rebel host was coming on in a half moon, with each horn to the sea. Its centre held towards the ford and the dismantled Gambrevault mills, positions strongly held on the southern bank by a redoubt and stockaded trenches.

The criticisms delivered by those watching from the keep were various and forcible.

"By Jeremy–a rare mob!"

"Let them grip at Gambrevault," said Modred, "and they shall clutch at a cactus. Look at that long baggage train in the rear. Damn them, I guess they have the siege train from Gilderoy."

"We shall sweat a trifle."

Quoth Tristram, "They have little time to spare for a leaguer, rotting in trenches, if they are to make the country rise. They'll not leaguer us."

Flavian watched the advance under his hand.

"Fortunately or unfortunately, gentlemen," he said, "we have taken their Saint, their oracle, and their sacred banner. I imagine they will do their best to dispossess us. It is time we made for the meadows; I reckon we shall have hot work to-day."

When leaving the keep, Flavian crossed the castle garden, and caught under the tunnel of yews the flutter of a woman's gown. Sunlight glimmered through and wove a shimmering network in the air. Green and violet swept the stones; a white face shone in the shadows.

He went to her and kissed her hands. His eyes were brave and joyous as she looked into them, and there was no shadow of fear upon his face. Trumpets were blowing in the meadows, piercing the confused hum of men running to arms.

"War, ever war!"

"You are sad?"

"Fulviac has the whole kingdom at his back."

"If he led the world, I should not waver."

"With me it is different; I am a woman and you know my heart."

"So well that I seek to know nothing else in the world, I desire no greater wisdom than my love. You are with me, and my heart sings. No harm can come to you whatever doom may fall on Gambrevault."

"Think you my thoughts are all of my own safety?"

"Ah, golden one, never fear for me. What is life? a little joy, a little pain, and then eternity. I would rather have an hour's glory in the sun than fifty years of grey monotony. It is something to fight, and even to die, for the love of a

woman. There is no shadow over my soul."

There was a great heroism in his voice, and her eyes caught the light from his. She touched his cuirass with her slim white fingers.

"God keep you!"

"Ha, I do not smell of earth to-day, nor dream of requiems."

"No, you will come back to me."

"Give me your scarf."

She took the green silk and knotted it about his arm; a rich colour shone in her cheeks, her eyes were warm and wonderfully luminous.

"God keep you!"

So he kissed her lips and left her.

The rebel horde had rolled down in their thousands from the hills. Flavian saw their black masses moving from the woods, as he rode down from the great gate. It was evident to him that Fulviac would try and force the ford and win his way to the open meadows beyond. The river ran fast with a deep but narrow channel, and there was only one other ford some nine miles upstream. His own men were under arms in the meadows. With his knights round him, Flavian rode down to the redoubt and trenches by the river-bank, packed as they already were with archers and men-at-arms. He was loudly cheered as he reined in and scanned the rebel columns moving over the downs.

Fulviac had ridden forward with a company of spears to reconnoitre. He saw the captured banner of The Maid hoisted derisively on Gambrevault keep; he saw the redoubt and the stockades covering the ford; the foot massed in the meadows; Flavian's mounted men-at-arms drawn up under the castle walls. Sforza and several captains of note were with Fulviac. The man was in a grim mood, a slashing Titanic humour. The passage of the river was to be forced, Flavian's men engaged in the meadows. He would drive them into Gambrevault before nightfall. Then they would cast their leaguer, bring up the siege train taken from Gilderoy, and batter at Gambrevault till they could storm the place.

Early in the day Fulviac detached a body of two thousand men under Colgran, a noted free-lance, to march upstream, cross by the upper ford, and threaten Flavian on the flank. The fighting began at ten of the clock, when Fulviac's bowmen scattered along the river and opened fire upon the stockades. Flavian's archers and arbalisters responded. A body of five thousand rebels advanced with great mantlets upon wheels to the northern bank and entrenched themselves there. A second body, with waggons laden with timber and several flat-bottomed boats, poured down to the river a mile higher up, and began to throw a rough, raft-like bridge across the stream. At half-past ten masses of men-at-arms splashed through the water at the ford, under cover of a hot fire from the archers lining the bank, and began an assault upon the redoubt and the stockades.

By twelve o'clock the bridge higher up the stream had been completed, and a glittering line of pikes poured across, to be met on the southern bank by Geoffrey Longsword and a body of men-at-arms. It was hand to hand, and hot and strenuous as could be. Men grappled, stabbed, hacked, bellowed like a herd of bulls. Flavian had reinforced the defenders of the ford, who still held Fulviac at bay, despite a heavy archery fire and the almost continuous assaults poured against the stockades. Yet by one o'clock Fulviac's levies had forced the passage of the bridge and gained footing on the southern bank. Longsword's men, outnumbered and repulsed, were falling back before the black masses of foot that now poured into the meadows.

The situation was critical enough, as Flavian had long seen, as he galloped hotly from point to point. Fulviac's rebels had shown more valour than he had ever prophesied. Flavian packed all his remaining foot into the trenches, and putting himself at the head of his knights and mounted men-at-arms, rode down to charge the troops who had crossed by the pontoons. Here chivalry availed him to the full. By a succession of tremendous rushes, he drove the rebels back into the river, did much merciless slaughter, cut the ropes that held the bridge to the southern bank, so that the whole structure veered downstream. The peril seemed past, when he was startled by the cry that the redoubt had been carried, and that Fulviac held the ford.

Looking south, he saw the truth with his own eyes. His troops were falling back in disorder upon Gambrevault, followed by an ever-growing mass, that swarmed exultantly into the meadows. The last and successful assault had been led by Fulviac in person. Flavian had to grip the truth. The rebels outnumbered him by more than five to one; and he had underrated their discipline and fighting spirit. He was wiser before the sun went down.

"Come, gentlemen, we shall beat them yet."

"Shall we charge them, sire?"

"Blow bugles, follow me, sirs; I am in no mood for defeat."

That afternoon there was grim work in the Gambrevault meadows. Five times Flavian charged Fulviac's columns, hurling them back towards the river, only to be repulsed in turn by the fresh masses that poured over by the ford. He made much slaughter, lost many good men in the mad, whirling mêlées. Desperate heroism inspired on either hand. Once he stood in great peril of his own life, having been unhorsed and surrounded by a mob of rebel pikes. He was saved by the devotion and heroism of Modred and his household knights. With the chivalry of a Galahad, he did all that a man could to keep the field. Colgran's flanking column appeared over the downs, and Fulviac had his whole host on the southern bank of the river. The masses advanced like one man, pennons flying, trumpets clanging. Flavian would have charged again, but for the vehement

dissuasion of certain of his elder knights. He contented himself with covering the retreat of his foot, while the great gate of Gambrevault opened its black maw to take them in. Many of his mercenaries had deserted to the rebels. So stubborn and bloody had been the day, that he had lost close upon half his force by death and desertion; no quarter had been given on either side. He heard the surging shouts of exultation from the meadows, as he rode sullen and wearied into Gambrevault. The great gates thundered to, the portcullises rattled down. Fulviac had his man shut up in Gambrevault.

XXXII

The leaguer was drawn that night about the towers of Gambrevault, and the castle stood clasped betwixt the watch-fires and the sea. Fulviac's rebels, toiling from evening until dawn, banked and staked a rampart to close the headland. From the north alone could Gambrevault be approached, precipices plunging south, east, and west to front the sea. Athwart the grassy isthmus Fulviac drew his works, running from cliff to cliff, brown earth-banks bristling with timber. Mortars, bombards, basilics, and great catapults had been brought from Gilderoy to batter the walls. Redoubts, covered by strong mantlets, were established in the meadows. Several small war galleys guarded the castle on the side of the sea.

Nor was this labour permitted to pass unrebuked before the leaguered folk upon the headland. There were sallies, assaults, bloody tussles in the trenches, skirmishes upon the causeway. Yet these fiercenesses brought no flattering boon to the besieged. The knights and men-at-arms were masterful enough with an open field to serve them, but behind their barricades Fulviac's rebels held the advantage. The command went forth from Modred the seneschal that there were to be no more sorties delivered against the trenches.

On the second day of the leaguer the cannonade began. Bombard and mortar belched flame and smoke; the huge catapults strove with their gigantic arms; arbalisters wound their windlasses behind the ramparts. Shot screamed and hurtled, crashed and thundered against the walls, bringing down mortar and masonry in rattling showers. The battlements of Gambrevault spouted flame; archers plied their bows in bartisan and turret. A shroud of dust and smoke swirled about the place, the chaotic clamour of the siege sending the gulls wheeling and wailing from the cliffs.

On the very second day Flavian was brought low by a shot hurling a fragment of masonry upon his thigh and bruising it to the bone. Stiff and faint, he was laid abed in his own state room, unable to stir for the twinging tendons, loth enough to lie idle. Modred, bluff, lusty smiter, took the command from him, and walked the walls. Hourly he came in to his lord's chamber to tell of the cannonade and the state of the castle. Even Flavian from his cushions could see that the man's black face looked grim and sinister.

"How do they vex us?" was his question, as the thunder came to them from the meadows.

Modred clinked his heels against the wainscotting of the window seat, and strove to sweeten his looks. He was not a man given to blandishing the truth.

"Their damned bombards are too heavy for us. We are dumb."

"Impossible!"

"Sire, we shall have to hold Gambrevault by the sword."

The man on the bed started up on his elbow, only to fall back again with a spasmodic twitching of the forehead.

"And our bombards?" he asked.

"Are toppled off their trunnions."

"Ha!"

"For the rest, sire, I have ordered our men to keep cover. The bowmen shoot passably. The outer battlements are swept."

"And the walls?"

Modred grimaced and stroked his beard.

"There are cracks in the gate-house," quoth he, "that I could lay my fist in."

What goodlier fortune for a man than to lie bruised when Love bears to him the bowl of dreams! What softer balm than the touch of a woman's hand! What more subtle music than her voice! The girl Yeoland had betrayed a new wilfulness to the world, in that she now claimed as her guerdon the care of the man's heart. She was in and about his room, a shadow moving in the sunlight, a shaft of youth, supple and very tender. Her eyes had a rarer lustre, her face more of the dawn tint of the rose. Love stirred within her soul like the sound of angels psaltering on the golden battlements of heaven.

As she sat often beside him, Flavian won the whole romance from her, gradual as glistening threads of silk drawn from a scarlet purse. She waxed very solemn over her tale, was timid at times, and exceeding sorrowful for all her passion. Some shadowy fear seemed to companion her beside the couch, some wraith prophetic of a tragic end. She loved the man, yet feared her love, even as it had been a sword shimmering above his head. Peril compassed them like an angry sea; she heard the bombards thundering in the meadows.

"Ah, sire," she said to him one morning, as she thrust the flowers she had

gathered in the garden into a brazen bowl, "I am heavy at heart. Who shall pity me?"

He turned towards her on his cushions with a smile that was not prophetic of the tomb.

"Do I weary you?"

"Ah no, not that."

"Why then are you sad?"

She held up a white hand in the gloom of the room, her hair falling like a black cloud upon her bosom.

"Listen," she said to him.

"I am not deaf."

"The thunder of war."

"Well, well, my heart, should I fear it?"

"It is I who fear."

"Ah," he said, taking her hand into his bosom, "put such fears far from you. We shall not end this year in dust."

A week passed and the man was on the walls again, bold and ruddy as a youthful Jove. Seven days had gone, swelling with their hours the great concourse in the meadows. Pikes had sprouted on the hills like glistening corn, to roll and merge into the girding barrier of steel. The disloyal south had gathered to Fulviac before Gambrevault like dust in a dry corner in the month of March. A great host teemed betwixt the river and the cliffs. Through all, the rack and thunder of the siege went on, drowning the sea's voice, flinging a storm-cloud over the stubborn walls. In Gambrevault men looked grim, and muttered of succour and the armies of the King.

Yet Flavian was content. He had taken a transcendent spirit into his soul; he lived to music; drank love and chivalry like nectar from the gods. The woman's nearness made each hour a chalice of gold. He possessed her red heart, looked deep into her eyes, put her slim hands into his bosom. Her voice haunted him like music out of heaven. He was a dreamer, a Lotos-eater, whose brain seemed laden with all the perfumes of the East. Ready was he to drain the purple wine of life even to the dregs, and to find death in the cup if the Fates so willed it.

And Fulviac?

War had held a poniard at his throat, turning him to the truth with the threat of steel. Grim and implacable, he stalked the meadows, bending his brows upon the towers of Gambrevault. This girl of the woods was no more a dream to him, but supple love, ardent flesh, blood-red reality. Lean, leering thoughts taunted the lascivious fears within his brain. His moods were silent yet tempestuous. Gambrevault mocked him. Vengeance burnt in his palm like a globe of molten iron.

His dogged temper roused his captains to strenuous debate. Fifty thousand men were idle before the place, and the siege dragged like a homily. Their insinuations were strong and strident. The countryside was emptying its broad larder; Malgo and Godamar of the Fens were marching from east and west. Ten thousand men could leaguer Gambrevault. It behoved Fulviac to pluck up his spears and march on Lauretia, proud city of the King.

For a season Fulviac was stubborn as Gambrevault itself. His yellow eyes glittered, and he tossed back his lion's mane from off his forehead.

"Till the place is ours," so ran his dogma, "I stir never a foot. See to it, sirs, we will put these skulkers to the sword."

His captains were strenuous in retort.

"You mar the cause," said Sforza over the council-board, thin-lipped and subtle.

"Give me ten thousand men," quoth Colgran the free-lance, "by my bones I will take the place and bring the Maid out scatheless."

Prosper the Priest put in his plea.

"You are our torch," he said, "our beacon. Malgo is on the march; Godamar has massed behind the creeks of Thorney Isle. The country waits for you. Leave Gambrevault to Colgran."

And again the free-lance made his oath.

"Give me ten thousand men," quoth he, "by Peter's blood the place shall tumble in a month."

That same evening, as a last justification of his stubborn will, Fulviac sent forward a trumpeter under a white flag to parley with the besieged. The herald's company drew to the walls as the sun sank over the sea, setting the black towers in a splendour as of fire. Fulviac's troops were under arms in the meadows, their pikes glittering with sinister meaning into the purple of the coming night. The Lord of Gambrevault, in full harness, met the white flag, his knights round him, a crescent of steel.

Fulviac's trumpeter proclaimed his terms. They were insolently simple, surrender absolute with the mere blessings of life and limb, a dungeon for the lords, a proffer of traitorous service to the men. Yeoland the Saint was to be sent forth scatheless. The castle was to be garrisoned and held by the rebels.

Flavian laughed at the bluff insolence of the demand.

"Ha, sirs," he said, "we are the King's men here. Get you gone before my gate. Say to yonder traitor in the meadows, 'We quail not before scullions and at the frowns of cooks.'"

Thus, under the red canopy of the warring west, ended the parley at the gate of Gambrevault. The white flag tripped back behind the trenches; the castle trumpets blew a fanfare to grace its flight. Yeoland the Saint heard it, and her

lamp of hope burnt dim.

That night Fulviac paced the meadows, his eyes scanning the black mass upon the cliffs. Dark as was his humour, reason ruled him at the climax, powerful to extort the truth. Primæval instincts were strong in him, yet he put them back that hour out of his heart. Robust and vigorous, he trampled passion under foot. At dawn his orders went forth to the captains and the council.

"Colgran shall command. Ten thousand men shall serve him. Let him storm the place, grant no terms, spare Yeoland the Maid alone. Let him butcher the garrison, and let the ruin rot. When all have been put to the sword, let him march and join me before the city of Lauretia."

XXXIII

So Fulviac with his host passed northwards from Gambrevault, leaving Colgran and his ten thousand to guard the trenches. Flavian saw the black columns curl away over the green slopes, their pikes glittering against the blue fringe of the horizon, their banners blowing to the breeze. The red pavilion stood no longer in the meadows; the man on the black horse rode no more behind the barricades. Ominous was the marching of the host over the hills, a prophecy of many battles before the King's men could succour Gambrevault.

The gate-house stood in ruins, a shattered pile of masonry barriering the causeway from the meadows. The outer curtain wall on the north had been pierced between two towers; the stone-work crumbled fast, opening a gradual breach to the rebel sea dammed behind the trenches. The battlements were rent and ruinous; many a turret gaped and tottered. Still the bombards thundered, hurling their salvos of shot against the place, belching flame even through the night, while the arms of the great slings toiled like giant hands in the dark.

As for the girl Yeoland, her joy was dim and flickering, mocked with constant prophecies of woe. The sounds of the siege haunted her perpetually. Shafts wailed and whistled, bombards roared, the walls reeked and cracked. A corner in the garden under the yew walk was the single nook left her open to the blue hope of heaven. The clamour of the leaguer woke a hundred echoes in her heart. Above all shone the man's strong face and passionate eyes; above the moon, the stars, the blue vault of day, death spread his sable wings, a cloud of gloom.

On the sixteenth day of the siege, Colgran made an assault in force upon

the ruins of the gate-house. Despite its chaotic state, Flavian clung to the ruin, and held the stormers at bay. Thrice Colgran's rebels advanced to the attack, and came hand-to-hand with the defenders over the crumbling piles of stone; thrice they were beaten back and driven to retreat upon their trenches. Colgran renounced the gate-house as impregnable; the slings and bombards were turned upon the outer wall to widen the breach already made therein.

It was plain enough even to Yeoland that the siege was bearing slowly yet surely against Gambrevault. More than half a month had passed, and still no succouring spears shone upon the hills, no sail upon the sea. Poor food and summer heat, the crowding of the garrison had opened a gate to fever and disease. She saw the stern and moody faces of the soldiery, their loyalty that took fresh and hectic fire from the courage of their lord. She saw the broken walls and ruined battlements, and heard the rebels shouting in their trenches.

As the man's peril grew more real and significant, a fear more vehement entered into her heart. Sleep left her; she began to look white and weary, with dark shadows under her eyes. The man's warm youth accused her like a tree that should soon be smitten by the axe. His fine heroism was a veritable scourge, making the future full of discords, a charnel-house glimmering with bleached bones. She began to know how closely their lives were mingled, even as wine in a cup of gold. He was lord and husband to her in the spirit. Her red heart quaked for him like the shivering petals of an autumn rose.

On the day of the assault upon the gate-house, he came back to her wounded in the arm and shoulder. He was faint, but brave and even merry. She would suffer none to come in to him, as he sat in a carved chair in her room that opened on the garden. The sight of blood when harness and gamboison were taken from the caked wounds quickened her fears into a fever of self-torture. She bathed the wounds and dressed them with fragrant oil and linen. Twilight filled the room, and it was not till her tears fell upon his hand that the man found that she was weeping.

He drew her towards him with sudden great tenderness, as she knelt and looked into his face. Her eyes swam with tears, her lips quivered.

"My life, why do you weep?"

She started away from him with sudden strength, and stood by the window, trembling.

"Give me my armour and my banner," she said; "let me ride to the trenches and barter terms by my surrender. Sire, let me go, let me go."

He looked at her sadly under his brows, with forehead wrinkled.

"You would leave me?"

"Ah yes, to save you from the sword. Is it easy for me to ask you this?"

"You crave more than I can give."

"No, no."

"I cannot surrender you."

"And for love, you would doom all Gambrevault!"

"Ah!" he cried, "I am wounded, and you would wound me the more."

She gave a whimper of pain, ran to him, and crept into his arms. As her sobs shook her, he bent many times and kissed her hair.

"Weep not for me," he said; "even when the end comes no harm can touch you. I cannot parley with these wolves; there are women and children under my roof; should I open my gates to a savage mob?"

"This is your doom," she said to him.

"I take it, child, from heaven."

She wept no more, for a richer heroism took fire within her heart. She knelt to the man while he held her face betwixt his hands, bent over her, and kissed her forehead.

"Courage, courage, what is death!"

"My God, to lose you."

"There, am I not flesh and blood? God knows, I would rather have death than give you to these vultures."

She knelt before him with her face transfigured.

"And death, death can touch me also."

XXXIV

August came in with storm and rain, and a dreary wind blew from the south-west, huddling masses of cloud over a spiritless sky. Southwards, the sea tumbled, a grey expanse edged with foam, its great breakers booming dismally upon the cliffs. The wind swept over Gambrevault, moaning and wailing over battlement and tower, driving the rain in drifting sheets. The bombards still belched and smoked under their penthouses, and the arms of the catapults rose and fell against the sullen sky.

The eighteenth night of the siege came out of the east like a thunder bank, and the grey shivering ghost of the day fled over the western hills. When darkness had fallen, the walls of Gambrevault were invisible from the trenches. Here and there a light shone out like a spark in tinder; the sky above was black as a cavern, unbroken by the crack or cranny of a star.

Flavian, fully armed, kept watch upon the breach with a strong company of men-at-arms. He had taken the ugly measure of the night to heart, and had prepared accordingly. Under the shelter of the wall men slept, wrapped in their cloaks, with their weapons lying by them. The sentinels had been doubled on the battlements, though little could be seen in the blank murk, and even the keep had to be looked for before its mass disjointed itself from the background of the night.

It was treacherous weather, and just the season for an adventurous enemy to creep from the trenches and attempt to rush the breach. Flavian leant upon his long sword, and brooded. The black ends of the broken wall stood up hugely on either hand; rubble and fallen masonry paved the breach, and a rough rampart of debris had been piled along the summit. Around him shone the dull armour of his men, as they stood on guard in the rain.

The storm deadened soul and body, yet kept Flavian vigilant with its boisterous laughter, a sound that might stifle the tramp of stormers pouring to the breach. He was not lonely, for a lover can do without the confidences of others, when he has a woman to speak with in his heart. In fancy he can lavish the infinite tenderness of the soul, caress, quarrel, kiss, comfort, with all the idealisms of the imagination. The spirit lips we touch are sweeter and more red than those in the flesh. To the true man love is the grandest asceticism the world can produce.

Flavian's figure straightened suddenly as it leant bowed in thought upon the sword. He was alert and vigilant, staring into darkness that baffled vision and hid the unknown. A dull, characterless sound was in the air. Whether it was the wind, the sea, or something more sinister, he could not tell. Calling one of his knights to his side, they stood together listening on the wreckage of the wall.

A vague clink, clink, came in discord to the wind, a sound that suggested the cautious moving of armed men. A hoarse voice was growling warily in the distance, as though giving orders. The shrilling noise of steel grew more obvious each moment; the black void below appeared to grow full of movement, to swirl and eddy like a lagoon, whose muddy waters are disturbed by some huge reptile at night. The sudden hoarse cries of sentinels rose from the walls. Feet stumbled on the debris at the base of the breach; stormers were on the threshold of Gambrevault.

A trumpet blared in the entry; the guard closed up on the rampart; sleeping men started from the shadows of the wall, seized sword and shield as the trumpets' bray rang in their ears. Colgran's stormers, discovered in their purpose, cast caution to the winds, and sent up a shout that should have wakened all Gambrevault.

In the darkness and the driving rain, neither party could see much of the other. The stormers came climbing blindly up the pile of wreckage in serried

masses. Flavian and his knights, who held the rampart, big men and large-hearted, smote at the black tide of bodies that rolled to their swords. It was grim work in the dark. It was no sleepy, disorderly rabble that held the breach, but a tense line of steel, that stemmed the assault like a wall. The stormers pushed up and up, to break and deliquesce before those terrible swords. Modred's deep voice sounded through the din, as he smote with his great axe, blows that would have shaken an oak. There was little shouting; it was breathless work, done in earnest. Colgran's men showed pluck, fought well, left a rampart of dead to their credit, a squirming, oozing barrier, but came no nearer forcing the breach.

They had lost the propitious moment, and the whole garrison was under arms, ready to repulse the attacks made at other points. Scaling ladders had been jerked forward and reared against the walls; men swarmed up, but the rebels gained no lasting foothold on the battlements. They were beaten back, their ladders hurled down, masonry toppled upon the mass below. Many a man lay with neck or back broken in the confused tangle of humanity at the foot of the castle.

Colgran ordered up fresh troops. It was his policy to wear out the garrison by sheer importunity and the stress of numbers. He could afford to lose some hundred men; every score were precious now to Flavian. It was a system of counter barter in blood, till the weaker vessel ran dry. The Lord of Gambrevault understood this rough philosophy well enough, and husbanded his resources. He could not gamble with death, and so changed his men when the opportunity offered, to give breathing space to all. Conscious of the strong stimulus of personal heroism, he kept to the breach himself, and fought on through every assault with Modred's great axe swinging at his side. He owed his life more than once to those gorilla-like arms and that crescent of steel.

In the outer court, certain of the women folk with Yeoland dealt out wine and food, and tended the wounded. In the chapel, tapers glimmered, lighting the frescoes and the saints, the priest chanting at the altar, the women and children who knelt in the shadowy aisles praying for those who fought upon the walls. Panic hovered over the pale faces, the fear, the shivering, weeping, pleading figures. There was little heroism in Gambrevault chapel, save the heroism of supplication. While swords tossed and men groped for each other in the wind and rain, old Peter the cellarer lay drunk in a wine bin, and lame Joan, who tended the linen, was snivelling in the chapel and fingering the gold angels sewn up in her tunic.

Five times did Colgran's men assault the breach that night, each repulse leaving its husks on the bloody wreckage, its red libations to the swords of Gambrevault. The last and toughest tussle came during the grey prologue before dawn. The place was so packed with the dead and stricken, that it was well-nigh

impassable. For some minutes the struggle hung precariously on the summit of the pass, but with the dawn the peril dwindled and elapsed. The stormers revolted from the shambles; they had fought their fill; had done enough for honour; were sick and weary. No taunt, command, or imprecation could keep them longer in that gate of death. Colgran's rebels retreated on their trenches.

And with the dawn Flavian looked round upon the breach, and saw all the horror of the place in one brief moment. Cloven faces, hacked bodies, distortions, tortures, blood everywhere. He looked round over his own men; saw their meagre ranks, their weariness, their wounds, their exultation that lapsed silently into a kind of desperate awe. Some tried to cheer him, and at the sound he felt an unutterable melancholy descend upon his soul. The men were like so many sickly ghosts, a wan and battered flock, a ragged remnant. He saw the whole truth in a moment, as a man sees life, death, and eternity pass before him in the flashing wisdom of a single thought.

And this was war, this cataclysm of insatiate wrath! His men were too few, too bustled, to hold the breach against such another storm. His trumpets blared the retreat, a grim and tragic fanfare. They dragged out their wounded, abandoned the pile of rubbish for which they had fought, and withdrew sullenly within the inner walls. Colgran, though repulsed, had taken the outer ward of Gambrevault.

As one stumbling from a dream, Flavian found himself in the castle garden. The place was full of the freshness that follows rain; and it was not till the scent of flowers met him like an odour of peace, that he marked that the sky was blue and the dawn like saffron. The storm-clouds had gone, and the wind was a mere breeze, a moist breath from the west, bearing a curious contrast to the furious temper of the night.

Flavian, looking like a white-faced debauchee, limped through the court, and climbed the stairway of the keep to the banqueting hall and his own state chambers. Several of his knights followed him at a distance and in silence. He felt sick as a dog, and burdened with unutterable care, that weighed upon him like a prophecy. He had held the breach against heavy odds, and he was brooding over the cost. There was honour in the sheer physical heroism of the deed; but he had lost old friends and tried servants, had sacrificed his outer walls; there was little cause for exultation in the main.

He stumbled into the banqueting hall like a man into a tavern.

"Wine, wine, for the love of God."

A slim figure in green came out from the oriel, and a pair of dark eyes quivered over the man's grey face and blood-stained armour. The girl's hands went out to him, and she seemed like a child roused in the night from the influence of some evil dream.

"You are wounded."

She took him by the arm and shoulder, and was able to force him into a chair, so limp, so impotent, was he for the moment. His face had the uncanny pallor of one who was about to faint; his eyes stared at her in a dazed and wistful way.

"My God, you are not going to die!"

He shook his head, smiled weakly, and groped for her hand. She broke away, brought wine, and began to trickle it between his lips. Several of his knights came in, and looked on awkwardly from the doorway at the girl leaning over the man's chair, with her arm under his head. Yeoland caught sight of them, coloured and called them forward.

The man's faintness had passed. He saw Modred and beckoned him to his chair.

"Take her away," in a whisper.

Yeoland heard the words, started round, and clung to his hand. There was a strange look upon her face. Flavian spoke slowly to her.

"Girl, I am not a savoury object, fresh from the carnage of a breach. Leave me to my surgeon. I would only save you pain. As for dying, I feel like an Adam. Go to your room, child; I will be with you before long."

She held both his hands, looked in his eyes a moment, then turned away with Modred and left him. She was very pale, and there was a tremor about her lips.

Irrelevant harness soon surrendered to skilled fingers. No great evil had been done, thanks to the fine temper of Flavian's armour; the few gashes, washed, oiled, and dressed, left him not seriously the worse for the night's tussle. Wine and food recovered his manhood. He was barbered, perfumed, dressed, and turned out by his servants, a very handsome fellow, with a fine pallor and a pathetic limp.

His first care was to see his own men attended to, the wounded properly bestowed, a good supply of food and wine dealt out. He had a brave word and a smile for all. As he passed, he found Father Julian the priest administering the Host to those whose dim eyes were closing upon earth and sky.

Modred, that iron man, who never seemed weary, was stalking the battlements, and getting the place prepared for the next storm that should break. Flavian renounced responsibilities for the moment, and crossed the garden to Yeoland's room. He entered quietly, looked about him, saw a figure prostrate on the cushions of the window seat.

He crossed the room very quickly, knelt down and touched the girl's hair. Her face was hidden in the cushions. She turned slowly on her side, and looked at him with a wan, pitiful stare; her eyes were timid, but empty of tears.

”Ah, girl, what troubles you?”

She did not look at him, though he held her hands.

”Are you angry with me?”

”No, no.”

”What is it, then?”

She spoke very slowly, in a suppressed and toneless voice.

”Will you tell me the truth?”

He watched her as though she were a saint.

”I have had a horrible thought in my heart, and it has wounded me to death.”

”Tell it me, tell it me.”

”That you had repented all—-”

”Repented!”

”Of all the ruin I am bringing upon you; that you were beginning to think—-”

He gave a deep cry.

”You believed that!”

She lay back on the cushions with a great sigh. Flavian had his arms about her, as he bent over her till their lips nearly touched.

”How could you fear!”

”I am so much a woman.”

”Yes—-”

”And something is all the world to me, even though—-”

”Well?”

”I would die happy.”

He understood her whole heart, and kissed her lips.

”Little woman, I had come here to this room to ask you one thing more. You can guess it.”

”Ah—-”

”Father Julian.”

She drew his head down upon her shoulder, and he knelt a long while in silence, with her bosom rising and falling under his cheek.

”I am happy,” he said at last; ”child-wife, child-husband, let us go hand in hand into heaven.”

XXXV

So with Colgran and his rebels beating at the inner gate, Flavian of Gambrevault took Yeoland to wife, and was married that same eve by Father Julian in the castle chapel. There was pathetic cynicism in the service, celebrating as it did the temporal blending of two bodies who bade fair by their destinies to return speedily to dust. The chant might have served as a requiem, or a dirge for the fall of the mighty. It was a tragic scene, a solemn ceremony, attended by grim-faced men in plated steel, by frightened women and sickly children. Famine, disease, and death headed the procession, jigged with the torches, danced like skeletons about a bier. Trumpets and cannon gave an epithalamium; bones might have been scattered in lieu of flowers, and wounds espoused in place of favours. For a marriage pageant war pointed to the grinning corpses in the breach and the clotted ruins. It was such a ceremony that might have appealed to a Stoic, or to a Marius brooding amid the ruins of Carthage.

Peril chastens the brave, and death is as wine to the heart of the saint. Even as the sky seems of purer crystal before a storm, so the soul pinions to a more luminous heroism when the mortal tragedy of life nears the "explicit." As the martyrs exulted in their spiritual triumph, or as Pico of Mirandola beheld transcendent visions on his bed of death, when the Golden Lilies of France waved into luckless Florence, so Flavian and Yeoland his wife took to their hearts a true bridal beauty.

When the door was closed on them that night, a mysterious cavern, a spiritual shrine of gold, came down as from heaven to cover their souls. They had no need of the subtleties of earth, of music and of colour, of flowers, or scent, or song. They were the world, the sky, the sea, the infinite. Imperishable atoms from the alembic of God, they fused soul with soul, became as one fair gem that wakes a thousand lustres in its sapphire unity. To such a festival bring no fauns and dryads, no lewd and supple goddess, no Orphean flute. Rather, let Christ hold forth His wounded hands, and let the wings of angels glimmer like snow over the alchemy of souls.

Flavian knelt beside the bed and prayed. He had the girl's hand in his, and her dark hair swept in masses over the pillow, framing her spiritual face as a dark cloud holds the moon. Her bed-gown was of the whitest lace and linen, like foam bounding the violet coverlet that swept to her bosom. The light from the single lamp burnt steadily in her great dark eyes.

Flavian lifted up his face from the coverlet and looked long at her.

"Dear heart, have no fear of me," he said.

She smiled wonderfully, and read all the fine philosophy of his soul.

"God be thanked, you are a good man."

"Ah, child, you are so wonderful that I dare not touch you; I have such grand awe in my heart that even your breath upon my face makes me bow down

as though an angel touched my forehead."

"All good and great love is of heaven."

"Pure as the lilies in the courts of God. Every fragment of you is like to me as a pearl from the lips of angels; your flesh is of silver, your bosom as snow from Lebanon, girded with the gold of truth. Oh, second Adam, thanks be to thee for thy philosophy."

She put out her hands and touched his hair; their eyes were like sea and sky in summer, tranquil, tender, and unshadowed.

"I love you for this purity, ah, more and more than I can tell."

"True love is ever pure."

"And for me, such love as yours. Never to see the wolfish stare, the flushed forehead, and the loosened lip; never to feel the burning breath. God indeed be thanked for this."

"Have no fear of me."

"Ah, like a white gull into a blue sky, like water into a crystal bowl, I give myself into your arms."

XXXVI

A week had passed, and the Gambrevault trumpets blew the last rally; her drums rumbled on the battlements of the keep where the women and children had been gathered, a dumb, panic-ridden flock, huddled together like sheep in a pen. The great banner flapped above their heads with a solemn and sinuous benediction. The sun was spreading on the sea a golden track towards the west, and the shouts of the besiegers rose from the courts.

On the stairs and in the banqueting hall the last remnant of the garrison had gathered, half-starved men, silent and grim as death, game to the last finger. They handled their swords and waited, moving restlessly to and fro like caged leopards. They knew what was to come, and hungered to have it over and done with. It was the waiting that made them curse in undertones. A few were at prayer on the stone steps. Father Julian stood with his crucifix at the top of the stairway, and began to chant the "Miserere"; some few voices followed him.

In the inner court Colgran's men surged in their hundreds like an impatient sea. They had trampled down the garden, overthrown the urns and statues, pulped the flowers under their feet. On the outer walls archers marked every

window of the keep. In the inner court cannoneers were training the gaping muzzle of a bombard against the gate. A sullen and perpetual clamour sounded round the grey walls, like the roar of breakers about a headland.

Flavian stood on the dais of the banqueting hall and listened to the voices of the mob without. Yeoland, in the harness Fulviac had given her, held at his side. The man's beaver was up, and he looked pale, but calm and resolute as a Greek god. That morning his own armour, blazoned with the Gambrevault arms, had disappeared from his bed-side, a suit of plain black harness left in its stead. No amount of interrogation, no command, had been able to wring a word from his knights or esquires. So he wore the black armour now perforce, and prepared to fight his last fight like a gentleman and a Christian.

Yeoland's hand rested in his, and they stood side by side like two children, looking into each other's eyes. There was no fear on the girl's face, nothing but a calm resolve to be worthy of the hour and of her love, that buoyed her like a martyr. The man's glances were very sad, and she knew well what was in his heart when he looked at her. They had taken their vows, vows that bound them not to survive each other.

"Are you afraid, little wife?"

"No, I am content."

"Strange that we should come to this. My heart grieves for you."

"Never grieve for me; I do not fear the unknown."

"We shall go out hand in hand."

"To the shore of that eternal sea; and I feel no wind, and hear no moaning of the bar."

"The stars are above us."

"Eternity."

"No mere glittering void."

"But the face of God."

A cannon thundered; a sudden, sullen roar followed, a din of clashing swords, the noise of men struggling in the toils.

"They have broken in."

Flavian's grasp tightened on her wrist; his face was rigid, his eyes stern.

"Be strong," he said.

"I am not afraid."

"The Virgin bless you."

The uproar increased below. The rebels were storming the stairway; they came up and up like a rising tide in the mazes of a cavern. A wave of struggling figures surged into the hall: men, cursing, stabbing, hewing, writhing on the floor, a tangle of humanity. Flavian's knights in the hall ranged themselves to hold the door.

It was then that Flavian saw his own state armour doing duty in the press, its blazonings marking out the wearer to the swords of Colgran's men. It was Godamar, Flavian's esquire, who had stolen his lord's harness, and now fought in it to decoy death, and perhaps save his master. The mute heroism of the deed drew Flavian from the dais.

"I would speak with Godamar," he said.

"Do not leave me."

"Ah! dear heart; when the last wave gathers I shall be at your side."

Yeoland, with her poniard bare in her hand, stood and watched the tragic despair of that last fight, the struggling press of figures at the door–the few holding for a while a mob at bay. Her eyes followed the man in the black harness; she saw him before the tossing thicket of pikes and partisans; she saw his sword dealing out death in that Gehenna of blasphemy and blood.

A crash of shattered glass came unheard in the uproar. Men had planted ladders against the wall, and broken in by the oriel; one after another they sprang down into the hall. The first crept round by the wainscotting, climbed the dais, seized Yeoland from behind, and held her fast.

As by instinct the poniard had been pointed at her own throat; the thing was twisted out of her hand, and tossed away along the floor. She struggled with the man in a kind of frenzy, but his brute strength was too stiff and stark for her. Even above the moil and din Flavian heard her cry to him, turned, sprang back, to be met by the men who had entered by the oriel. They hemmed him round and hewed at him, as he charged like a boar at bay. One, two were down. Swords rang on his harness. A fellow dodged in from behind and stabbed at him under the arm. Yeoland saw the black figure reel, recover itself, reel again, as a partisan crashed through his vizor. His sword clattered to the floor. So Colgran's men cut the Lord Flavian down in the sight of his young wife.

The scene appeared to transfer itself to an infinite distance; a mist came before the girl's eyes; the uproar seemed far, faint, and unreal. She tried to cry out, but no voice came; she strove to move, but her limbs seemed as stone. A sound like the surging of a sea sobbed in her ears, and she had a confused vision of men being hunted down and stabbed in the corners of the hall. A mob of wolf-like beings moved before her, cursing, cheering, brandishing smoking steel. She felt herself lifted from her feet, and carried breast-high in a man's arms. Then

oblivion swept over her brain.

PART IV

XXXVII

Fortune had not blessed the cause of the people with that torrential triumph toiled for by their captains. The flood of war had risen, had overwhelmed tall castles and goodly cities, yet there were heights that had baulked its frothy turmoil, mountains that had hurled it back upon the valleys. Victory was like a sphere of glass tossed amid the foam of two contending torrents.

In the west, Sir Simon of Imbrecour, that old leopard wise in war, had raised the royal banner at his castle of Avray. The nobles of the western marches had joined him to a spear; many a lusty company had ridden in, to toss sword and shield in faith to the King. From his castle of Avray Sir Simon had marched south with the flower of the western knighthood at his heels. He had caught Malgo on the march from Conan, even as his columns were defiling from the mountains. Sir Simon had leapt upon the wild hillsmen and rebel levies like the fierce and shaggy veteran that he was. A splendid audacity had given the day as by honour to the royal arms. Malgo's troops had been scattered to the winds, and he himself taken and beheaded on the field under the black banner of the house of Imbrecour.

In the east, Godamar the free-lance lay with his troops in Thorney Isle, closed in and leaguered by the warlike Abbot of Rocroy. The churchman had seized the dyke-ways of the fens, and had hemmed the rebels behind the wild morasses. As for the eastern folk, they were poor gizardless creatures; having faced about, they had declared for the King, and left Godamar to rot within the fens. The free-lance had enough ado to keep the abbot out. His marching to join Fulviac was an idle and strategetical dream.

Last of all, the barons of the north–fierce, rugged autocrats, had gathered their half-barbarous retainers, and were marching on Lauretia to uphold the King. They were grim folk, flint and iron, nurtured amid the mountains and the wild woods of the north. They marched south like Winter, black and pitiless, prophetic

of storm-winds, sleet, and snow. Some forty thousand men had gathered round the banner of Sir Morolt of Gorm and Regis, and, like the Goths pouring into Italy, they rolled down upon the luxurious provinces of the south.

Fortune had decreed that about Lauretia, the city of the King, the vultures of war should wet their talons. It was a rich region, gemmed thick with sapphire meres set in deep emerald woods. Lauretia, like a golden courtesan, lay with her white limbs cushioned amid gorgeous flowers. Her bosom was full of odours and of music; her lap littered with the fragrant herbs of love. No perils, save those of moonlit passion, had ever threatened her. Thus it befell that when the storm-clouds gathered, she cowered trembling on her ivory couch, the purple wine of pleasure soaking her sinful feet.

In a broad valley, five leagues south of the city, Fulviac's rebels fought their first great fight with Richard of the Iron Hand. A warrior's battle, rank to rank and sword to sword, the fight had burnt to the embers before the cressets were red in the west. Fulviac had headed the last charge that had broken the royal line, and rolled the shattered host northwards under the cloak of night. Dawn had found Fulviac marching upon Lauretia, eager to let loose the lusts of war upon that rich city of sin. He was within three leagues of the place, when a jaded rider overtook him, to tell of Malgo's death and of the battle in the west. Yet another league towards the city his outriders came galloping back with the news that the northern barons had marched in and joined the King. Outnumbered, and threatened on the flank, Fulviac turned tail and held south again, trusting to meet Godamar marching from the fens.

He needed the shoulders of an Atlas those September days, for rumour burdened him with tidings that were ominous and heavy. Godamar lay impotent, hedged in the morasses; Malgo was dead, his mountaineers scattered. Sir Simon of Imbrecour was leading in the western lords to swell the following of the King. Vengeance gathered hotly on the rebel rear, as Fulviac retreated by forced marches towards the south.

It was at St. Gore, a red-roofed town packed on a hill, amid tall, dreaming woods, that Colgran, with the ten thousand who had leaguered Gambrevault, drew to the main host again. Fulviac had quartered a portion of his troops in the town, and had camped the rest in the meadows without the crumbling, lichen-grown walls. He had halted but for a night on the retreat from Lauretia, and had taken a brief breath in the moil and sweat of the march. His banner had been set up in the market-square before a rickety hostel of antique tone and temper. His guards lounged on the benches under the vines; his captains drank in the low-ceilinged rooms, swore and argued over the rough tables.

It was evening when Colgran's vanguard entered the town by the western gate. His men had tramped all day in the sun, and were parched and weary. None

the less, they stiffened their loins, and footed it through the streets with a veteran swagger to show their mettle. Fulviac came out and stood in the wooden gallery of the inn, watching them defile into the market-square. They tossed their pikes to him as they poured by, and called on him by name–

"Fulviac, Fulviac!"

He was glad enough of their coming, for he needed men, and the rough forest levies were in Colgran's ranks. Ten thousand pikes and brown bills to bristle up against the King's squadrons! There was strength in the glitter and the rolling dust of the columns. Yet before all, the man's tawny eyes watched for a red banner, and a woman in armour upon a white horse, Yeoland, wife of Flavian of Gambrevault.

In due season he saw her, a pale, spiritless woman, wan and haggard, thin of neck and dark of eye. The bloom seemed to have fallen from her as from the crushed petals of a rose. The red banner, borne by a man upon a black horse, danced listlessly upon its staff. She rode with slack bridle, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, but into the vague distance as into the night of the past.

Around her tramped Colgran's pikemen in jerkins of leather and caps of steel. The woman moved with them as though they were so many substanceless ghosts, stalking like shadows down the highway of death. Her face was bloodless, bleached by grievous apathy and chill pride. The bronzed faces round her were dim and unreal, a mob of masks, void of life and meaning. Sorrow had robed her in silent snow. The present was no more propitious to her than a winter forest howling under the moon.

Before the hostelry the column came to a halt with grounded pikes. The woman on the white horse stirred from her stupor, looked up, and saw Fulviac. He was standing with slouched shoulders in the gallery above her, his hands gripping the wooden rail. Their eyes met in a sudden mesmeric stare that brought badges of red to the girl's white cheeks. There was the look upon his face that she had known of old, when perilous care weighed heavy upon his stubborn shoulders. His eyes bewildered her. They had a light in them that spoke neither of anger nor reproach, yet a look such as Arthur might have cast upon fallen Guinivere.

They took her from her horse, and led her mute and passive into the steel-thronged inn. Up a winding stair she was brought into a sombre room whose latticed casements looked towards the west. By an open window stood Fulviac, chin on chest, his huge hands clasped behind his back. Colgran, in dusky harness, was speaking to him in his rough, incisive jargon. The woman knew that the words concerned her heart. At a gesture from Fulviac, the free-lance cast a fierce glance at her, and retreated.

The man did not move from the window, but stood staring in morose si-

lence at the reddening west. Hunched shoulders and bowed head gave a certain powerful pathos to the figure statuesque and silent against the crimson curtain of the sky. The very air of the room seemed burdened and saturated with the gloomy melancholy of the man's mood. War, with its thousand horrors, furrowed his brow and bowed his great shoulders beneath its bloody yoke. Her woman's instinct told her that he was lonely, for the soul that had ministered to him breathed for him no more.

He turned on her suddenly with a terse greeting that startled her thoughts like doves in a pine wood.

"Welcome to you, Lady of Gambrevault."

There was a bluff bitterness in his voice that forewarned her of his ample wisdom. Colgran had surrendered her, heart and tragedy in one, to Fulviac's mercy. A looming cloud of passion shadowed the man's face, making him seem gaunt and rough to her for the moment. She remembered him standing over Duessa's body in Sforza's palace at Gilderoy. Life had too little promise for her to engender fear of any man, even of Fulviac at his worst.

"I trust, Madame Yeoland, that you are merry?"

The taunt touched her, yet she answered him listlessly enough.

"Do what you will; scoff if it pleases you."

Fulviac shrugged his shoulders, and tossed his lion's mane from his broad forehead.

"It is a grim world this," he said; "when thrones burn, should we seek to quench them with our tears! Whose was the fault that God made you too much a woman? Red heart, heart of the rose, a traitorous comrade art thou, and an easy foe."

She had no answer on her lips, and he turned and paced the room before her, darting swift glances into her face.

"So they killed him?" he said, more quietly anon; "poor child, forget him, it was the fate of war. Even to the grave he took the love I might never wear."

She shuddered and hid her face.

"Fulviac, have pity!"

"Pity?"

"This is a judgment, God help my soul!"

"A judgment?"

"For serving my own heart before the Virgin's words."

The man stopped suddenly in his stride, and looked at her as though her words had touched him like a bolt betwixt the jointings of his harness. There was still the morose frown upon his face, the half closure of the lids over the tawny eyes. He gripped his chin with one of his bony hands, and turned his great beak of a nose upwards with a gesture of self-scorn.

"Since the damned chicanery of chance so wills it," he said, "I will confess to you, that my confession may ease your conscience. The Madonna in that forest chapel was framed of flesh and blood."

"Fulviac!"

"Of flesh and blood, my innocent, tricked out to work my holy will. We needed a Saint, we cleansers of Christendom; ha, noble justiciaries that we are. Well, well, the Virgin served us, and tripped back to a warm nest at Gilderoy, reincarnated by high heaven."

Yeoland stood motionless in the shadows of the room, like one striving to reason amid the rush of many thoughts. She showed no wrath at her betrayal; her pale soul was too white for scarlet passion. The significance of life had vanished in a void of gloom. She stood like Hero striving to catch her lover's voice above the moan of the sea.

Fulviac unbuckled his sword and threw it with a crash upon the table. He thrust his arms above his head, stretched his strong sinews, took deep breaths into his knotted throat.

"The truth is out," he said to her; "come, madame, confess to me in turn."

Yeoland faced him with quivering lips, and a tense straining of her fingers.

"What have I to tell?" she asked.

"Nothing?"

"Save that I loved the Lord Flavian, and that he is dead."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

"Ah, you are avenged," she said, "you have crushed my heart; may the thought comfort you."

Her parched apathy seemed to elapse of a sudden, and she lost her calmness in an outburst of passion. She was athirst for solitude, to be cloistered from the rough cavil of the world. Colour glowed upon her sunken cheeks as she stretched out her arms to the man with a piteous vehemence.

"Fulviac—-"

"Girl."

"Ah, for God's love, end now this mockery. Take this armour from me, for it burns my bosom. Let me go, that I may hide my wounds in peace."

"Peace!" he said, with a twinge of scorn.

"Fulviac, can you not pity me? I am broken and bruised, men stare and jeer. Oh, my God, only to be out of sight and alone!"

The man stood by the window looking out into the sky with lowering brows. The west burnt red above the house-tops; from the street came the noise of men marching.

"Do not kill yourself," he said with laconic brevity.

"Why do you say that?"

"There is truth in the suspicion."

"Ah, what is life to me!"

"We Christians still have need of you."

The man's seeming scorn scourged her anguish to a shrill despair. The hot blood swept more swiftly through her worn, white body.

"Cursed be your ambition," she said to him; "must you torture me before the world?"

"Perhaps."

"I renounce this lying part."

"As you will, madame; it will only make you look the greater fool."

"Ah, you are brutal."

He turned to her with the look of one enduring unuttered anguish in the spirit. His strong pride throttled passion, twisting his rough face into tragic ugliness.

"No, believe it not," he said; "I desire even for your heart's sake that you should make the best of an evil fortune. Learn to smile again; pretend to a zest in life. I have fathomed hell in my grim years, and my words are true. Time loves youth and recovers its sorrow. Know this and ponder it: 'tis better to play the hypocrite than to suffer the world to chuckle over one's tears."

XXXVIII

The royal host had massed about the walls of Lauretia, and marched southwards to surprise Fulviac at St. Gore. Half the chivalry of the land had gathered under the standard of the King. Sir Simon of Imbrecour had come in from the west with ten thousand spears and five thousand bowmen. The Northerners under Morolt boasted themselves twoscore thousand men, and there were the loyal levies of the midland provinces to march under "The Golden Sun" upon the south. Never had such panoply of war glittered through the listening woods. Their march was as the onrush of a rippling sea; the noise of their trumpets as the cry of a tempest over towering trees.

Chivalry, golden champion of beauty, had much to avenge, much to expurgate. The peasant folk had plunged the land into ruin and red war. Castles smoked under the summer sky; the noble dead lay unburied in the high places of pride. To the wolf cry of the people there could be no answer save the hiss

of the sword. Before the high altar at Lauretia, the King had sworn on relics and the Scriptures, to deal such vengeance as should leave the land cowering for centuries in terror of his name.

Southwards from St. Gore there stretched for some fifteen leagues the province of La Belle Forêt, a region of rich valleys and romantic woods, green and quiet under the tranquil sky. Its towns were mere gardens, smothered deep in flowers, full of cedars and fair cypresses. Its people were simple, happy, and devout. War had not set foot there for two generations, and the land overflowed with the good things of life. Its vineyards purpled the valleys; its pastures harboured much cattle. Its houses were filled with rich furniture and silks, chests laden with cloth of gold, caskets of gems, ambries packed with silver plate. The good folk of La Belle Forêt had held aloof from the revolt. Peace-loving and content in their opulence, they had no fondness for anarchy and war.

It was into this fair province that Fulviac led his arms on the march south for Gilderoy and the great forest by the sea. Belle Forêt, neutral and luxurious, was spoil for the spoiler, stuff for the sword. Plundering, marauding, burning, butchering, Fulviac's rebels poured through like a host of Huns. Strength promised licence; there was little asceticism in the cause, though the sacred banner flew in the van with an unction that was truly pharisaical. From that flood of war, the provincials fled as from a plague. It was Fulviac's policy to devastate the land, to hinder the march of the royal host. Desolation spread like winter over the fields; Fulviac's ravagers left ruin and despair and a great silence to mark their track.

The march became a bloody parable before three days had passed. Fulviac had taken burning faggots upon his back, and the iron collar of war weighed heavy on him that autumn season. It was a grim moral and a terrible. He had called up fiends from hell, and their antics mocked him. Storm as he would, even his strong wrath was like fire licking at granite. Death taunted him, and Murder rode as a witness at his side. The mob of mad humanity was like a ravenous sea, hungry, pitiless, and insatiate. Even his stout heart was shocked by the bestial passions war had roused. His men were mutinous to all restraint. Fight they would when he should marshal them; but for their lusts they claimed a wolf-like and delirious liberty.

Yeoland the Saint rode on her white horse through La Belle Forêt, like a pale ghost dazed by the human miseries of war. A captive, she had surrendered herself to Fate; her heart was as a sea-bird wearied by long buffetings in the wind. There was no desire in her for life, no spark of passion, no hope save for the sounding of a convent bell. She imagined calmly the face of death. Her grave stretched green and quiet to her fancy, under some forest tree.

Even her hebetude of soul gave way at last before the horrors of that bloody

march. She saw towns smouldering and flames licking the night sky, heard walls crack and roofs fall with a roar and an uprushing of fire. She saw the peasant folk crouching white and stupefied about their ruined homes. She heard the cry of the children, the wailing of women, the cracked voices of old men cursing Fulviac as he rode by. She saw the crops burnt in the fields; cattle slaughtered and their carcases left to rot in the sun.

The deeds of those grim days moved in her brain with a vividness that never abated. War with all its ruthlessness, its devilry, its riotous horror, burnt in upon her soul. The plash of blood, the ruin, the despair, appalled her till she yearned and hungered for the end. Life seemed to have become a hideous purgatory, flaming and shrieking under the stars.

She appealed to Fulviac with the vehemence of despair. The man was obdurate and moody, burdened by the knowledge that these horrors were beyond him. His very impotence was bitterness itself to his strong spirit. In the silent passion of his shame, he buckled a sullen scorn about his manhood, scoffed and mocked when the woman pleaded. He was like a Titan struggling in the toils of Fate, flinging forth scorn to mask his anguish. He had let war loose upon the land, and the riot mocked him like a turbulent sea.

One noon they rode together through a town that had closed its gates to them, and had been taken by assault. On the hills around stood the solemn woods watching in silence the scene beneath. Corpses stiffened in the gutters; children shrieked in burning attics. By the cross in the market-square soldiers were staving in wine casks, the split lees mingling with the blood upon the cobbles. Ruffians rioted in the streets. Lust and violence were loose like wolves.

Fulviac clattered through the place with Yeoland and his guards, a tower of steel amid the reeking ruins. He looked neither to the right hand nor the left, but rode with set jaw and sullen visage for the southern gate, and the green quiet of the fields. His tawny eyes smouldered under his casque; his mouth was as stone, stern yet sorrowful. He spoke never a word, as though his thoughts were too grim for the girl's ears.

Yeoland rode at his side in silence, shivering in thought at the scenes that had passed before her eyes. She was as a lily whose pure petals quailed before the sprinkling plash of blood. Her soul was of too delicate a texture for the rude blasts of war.

She turned on Fulviac anon, and taunted him out of the fulness of her scorn.

"This is your crusade for justice," she said to him; "ah, there is a curse upon us. You have let fiends loose."

He did not retort to her for the moment, but rode gazing into the gilded glories of the woods. Even earth's peace was bitter to him at that season, but bitterer far was the woman's scorn.

”War is war,” he said to her at last; ”we cannot leave the King fat larders.”

”And all this butchery, this ruin?”

”Blame war for it.”

”And brutal men.”

”Mark you,” he said to her, with some deepening of his voice, ”I am no god; I cannot make angels of devils. The sea has risen, can I cork it in a bottle, or tie the storm wind up in a sack? Give me my due. I am human, not a demi-god.”

She understood his mood, and pitied him in measure, for he had a burden on his soul sufficient for a Hercules. His men were half mutinous; they would fight for him, but he could not stem their lusts. He was as a stout ship borne upon the backs of riotous waves.

”Well would it have been,” she said, ”if you had never raised this storm.”

”It is easy to be wise at the eleventh hour,” he answered her.

”Can you not stay it even now?”

”Woman, can I stem the sea!”

”The blood of thousands dyes your hands.”

He twisted in the saddle as though her words gored him to the quick. His face twitched, his eyes glittered.

”My God, keep silence!”

”Fulviac.”

”Taunt me no longer. Have I not half hell boiling in my heart?”

Thus Fulviac and his rebels passed on spoiling towards Gilderoy and the sea, where Sforza lay camped with forces gathered from the south. The great forest beckoned them; they knew its trammels, and hoped for strategies therein. Like a vast web of gloom it proffered harbour to the wolves of war, for they feared the open, and the vengeful onrush of the royal chivalry.

Meanwhile, the armies of the King came down upon Belle Forêt, a great horde of steel. From its black ashes the country welcomed them with the dumb lips of death. Ruin and slaughter appealed them on the march; the smoke of war ascended to their nostrils. Fierce was the cry for vengeance in the ranks, as the host poured on like a golden dawn treading on the dark heels of night.

XXXIX

In a cave whose narrow mouth cut a rough cameo from the snow and azure of the

sky, a man lay sleeping upon a bed of heather. The surge of the sea rose from the bastions of the cliff, where foam glittered and swirled over the black rocks that thrust their dripping brows above the tide. Gulls were winging over the waves, whose green crests shone brilliant under the sun. On a distant headland, bleak and sombre, the towers of a castle broke the turquoise crescent of the heavens.

In one corner of the cave a feeble fire flickered, the smoke therefrom curling along the roof to vanish in a thin blue plume of vapour. Beside the bed lay a pile of armour, with a broken casque like a cleft skull to crown it. Dried herbs and a loaf of rye bread lay on a flat boulder near the fire. The figure on the heather was covered by a stained yet gorgeously blazoned surcoat, that seemed an incongruous quilt for such a couch. Near the cave's entry a great axe glittered on the floor, an axe whose notched edge had tested the metal of many a bassinet.

Down a rough path cut in the face of the cliff scrambled a gaunt, hollow-chested figure, doubleted in soiled scarlet, battered shoes on feet, a black beard bristling on the stubborn chin. A red cloth was bound about the man's head. He breathed hard as he clambered down the cliff, as though winded by fast running. Sweat stood on his forehead. Beneath him ran the sea, a pit of foam, swirling and muttering amid the rocks.

He reached the entry of the cave and dived therein like a fox into an "earth." Standing by the bed, he looked for a moment at the unconscious figure with the air of one unwilling to wake a weary comrade from his sleep. At last he went down on his knees by the heather, and touched the sleeping man's cheek with the gentle gesture of a woman. The figure stirred at the touch; two thin hands groped over the green and azure quilt. The kneeling man gripped them in his great brown paws, and held them fast.

"Modred."

The voice was toneless, husky, and without spirit.

"Sire."

"Ah, these waking moments. It had been better if you had let me rot in Gambrevault."

"Courage, sire, you wake to a better fortune."

"There is new life in your voice."

"The King has come at last."

The man on the heather raised himself upon one elbow. His face looked grey and starved in the half gloom of the cave. He lifted up one hand with a gesture of joy.

"The King!"

Modred of the black beard smiled at him like a father. His hands trembled as he put the man back gently on the heather, and smoothed the coverlet.

"Lie still, sire."

"Ah, this is life, once more."

"Patience, patience. Let us have no woman's moods, no raptures. Ha, I am a tyrannous dog. Did I drag you for dead out of Gambrevault to let you break your heart over Richard of Lauretia! Lie quiet, sire; you have no strength to gamble with as yet."

The man on the heather reached out again for Modred's hand.

"The rough dog should have been born a woman," he said to him.

Modred laughed.

"There is a great heart under that hairy chest of yours."

The moist mutterings of the sea came up to them from the rocky shore beneath. Clouds in white masses pressed athwart the arch of day. Modred, seated on a boulder beside the bed, eyed the prostrate figure thereon with a gaunt and tender pity. He was a stark man and strenuous, yet warm of heart for all his bull's strength and steely sinew. Youth lay at his feet, thin and impotent, a white willow wand quivering beside a black and knotty oak.

Modred rose up and stood by the opening of the cave, his broad shoulders well-nigh filling the entry as he looked out over the sea. Far over the amethystine waters, a hundred pearl-white sails glimmered beyond the cliffs of Gambrevault. The sun smote on gilded prow and blazoned bulwark, and upon a thousand streamers tonguing to the breeze.

Modred stretched out his great arms and smiled, a grim shimmer of joy over his ruffian's face. Standing at the mouth of the cave, he began to speak to the man couched in the inner gloom.

"Yonder, beyond Gambrevault," he said, "I see a hundred sails treading towards us over the sea. They are the King's ships: God cherish them; their bulwarks gleam in the sun."

Flavian twisted restlessly amid the heather.

"A grand sight, old friend."

Modred stood silent, fingering his chin. His voice broke forth again with a bluff exultation that seemed to echo the roar of the waves.

"St. Philip, that is well."

"More ships?"

"Nay, sire, they raise the royal banner on the keep of Gambrevault. I see spears shine. Listen to the shouting. The King's men hold the headland."

This time the voice from the cave was less eager, and tinged with pain.

"Modred, old friend, I lie here like a stone while the trumpets call to me."

"Sire, say not so."

"Ah, for an hour's youth again, one day in the sun, one moment under the moon."

"Sire, I would change with you if God would grant it me."

"Bless you, old friend; I would not grant it you if I were God."

A trumpet cried to them from the cliff, sudden, shrill, and imperious. Modred, leaning against the rock with his hand over his eyes, started from the cave, and began to climb the path. He muttered and swore into his beard as he ascended, queer oaths, spasmodic and fantastic. His black eyes were hazy for the moment. Contemptuous and fervid, he brushed the tears away with a great brown hand.

On the green downs above him rolling to the peerless sky, he saw armour gleam and banners blush. A fanfare of trumpets rolled over the sea. It was Richard the King.

Modred bent at the royal stirrup, and kissed the jewelled hand. Above him a keen, steely-eyed visage looked out from beneath a gold-crowned bassinet. It was the face of a soldier and a tyrant, handsome, haughty, yet opulently gracious. The red lips curled under the black tusks of the long moustache. The big, clean-shaven jaw was a promontory of marble thrust forth imperiously over the world.

"Well, man, what of our warden?"

Modred crossed himself, pointed to the cliff, muttered a few words into the King's ear.

"So," came the terse response, "that was an evil fortune. So splendid a youth, a bright beam of chivalry. Come, lead me to him."

The royal statue of steel dismounted and stalked down with knights and heralds towards the cliff. Leaning upon Modred's shoulder, Richard of the Iron Hand trod the rough path leading to the little cave. He bowed his golden crown at the entry, stooped like a suppliant, stood before the Lord Flavian's bed.

The gloom troubled him for a moment. Anon, he saw the recumbent figure on the heather, the pile of harness, the brown loaf, and the meagre fire. He throned himself on the boulder beside the bed, and laid a white hand on the sick man's shoulder.

"Lie still," he said, as Flavian turned to rise; "to-day, my lord, we can forego ceremony."

Courtesy is the golden crown of power, forged from a poet's song, and the wisdom of the gods. The royal favour donned its robe of red that day, proffered its gracious signet to the lips of praise, held forth the sceptre of a radiant pity. Even the iron of truth becomes as silver on the lips of kings. Justice herself flatters, when ranged in simple white before a royal throne.

"My Lord of Gambrevault," quoth Richard of the Iron Hand, "be it known to you that your stout walls have saved my kingdom. You held the barbican of loyalty till true friends rallied to the country's citadel. Bravely have you sounded your clarions in the gate of fame. My lord, I give to you the gratitude of a king."

Flattery strutted in the cave, gathering her robes with jewelled hand, gor-

geous as an Eastern queen. Concerning the fate of a certain rebel Saint, the royal pardon waxed patriarchal in laconic phrases.

"Say no more, my lord; the boon is yours. Have I not a noble woman queening it beside me on my throne, flinging the beams of her bright eyes through all my life? This quest shall be heralded to the host; I will offer gold for the damsel's capture. Take this ring from me, no pledge as betwixt Jews, but as a talisman of good to come."

So spoke the royal gratitude. When the King had gone, Modred returned to carry his lord heavenwards to the meadows. He found him prone upon the heather, covering his eyes with his thin hands as the western sunlight streaked the gloom.

"Sire," said Modred, kneeling down beside the bed.

The effigy on the heather stirred itself and reached out a hand into Modred's bosom.

"Man, man, I am in great darkness of soul. Who shall comfort me!"

Modred bent to him, laid a great palm on the white forehead.

"Courage, sire, courage."

"Ah, the pity of it, to lie here like a log when swords ring and peril threatens her."

"Sire, we shall win her back again."

"My God, only to touch her hands once more, to feel the warmth of her pure bosom, and the thrill of her rich hair."

"We shall win her, sire. Doubt it not."

"All life is a doubt."

"Before God, I swear it!"

"Modred!"

"Before God, I swear it!"

He sprang up, thrust out his arms till the sinews cracked, filled his great chest with the breath of the sea. Suddenly he stopped, strained at a rock lying at the cave's mouth, lifted it, and hurled it from him, saw it smite foam from the water beneath.

"Fate, take my gauge," he cried, with a fierce glorying in his strength; "come, sire, put your hands about my neck. I will bear you to your castle of Gambrevault."

XL

Fulviac and his rebels had plunged into the great pine forest for refuge from the multitudinous glitter of the royal spears. The wilderness engulfed them, throwing wide its sable gates to take the war wolves in. The trees moaned like tall sibyls burdened with prophetic woe. The gold had long fallen from the gorse; the heather's purple hills were dim. Mystery abode there; a sound as of tragedy rose with the hoarse piping of the autumn wind.

From the north and from the west the royal "arms" had drawn as a glittering net towards the sea of pines. A myriad splendid warriors streaked the wilds, like rich rods flowering at some magic trumpet cry. The King's host swept the hills, their banners blazing towards the solemn woods. Gambrevault was theirs, and Avalon of the Mere. Morolt's northerners had marched upon Geraint, to find it a dead city, empty of life and of human sound. Only Gilderoy stood out for Fulviac. The King had failed to leaguer it as yet, for reasons cherished in his cunning brain.

Some twoscore thousand men had marched with Fulviac into the forest's sanctuary. Over the hills the royal horse had pressed them hard, cutting down stragglers, hanging on their rear. Fulviac's host was a horde of "foot"; he had not a thousand riders to hurl against the chivalry of the King. On the bold, bleak uplands of the north and west the royal horsemen would have whelmed him like a sea. Necessity turned strategist at that hour. Fulviac and his rebels poured with their stagnant columns into the wilds.

The thickets teemed with steel; the myriad pike points glittered like silver moths through the dense green gloom. Once more the great cliff echoed to the clangour of war and the sword. Fulviac had drawn thither and camped his men upon the heights, and under the shadow of its mighty walls. Watch-fires smoked on the hills. Every alley had its sentinel, a net of steel thrown forth to await the coming of the King. Fulviac had gathered his cubs into this lair, trusting to trammel the nobles in the labyrinths of the forest. It was a forlorn hope, the cunning purpose of despair. The spoilers of Belle Forêt were wise in their generation; little mercy would they win from the Iron Hand of Richard of Lauretia.

Like a pale pearl set in ebony, Yeoland the Saint had been established again in her bower of stone. The room was even as she had left it that misty summer dawn. Prayer-desk, lute, and crucifix were there, mute relics of a passionate past. How much had befallen her in those packed weeks of peril; how great a guerdon of woe had been lavished on her heart! Love was as the last streak of gold in a fading west; only the stars recalled the unwavering lamps of heaven.

The cliff-room and its relics tortured her very soul. She would glance at the Sebastian of the casement, and remember with a shuddering rush of woe the man in whose arms she had slumbered as a wife. Death had deified him in her heart. She remembered his grey eyes, his splendid youth, his passion, his pure chivalry.

He gazed down on her like a dream hero from a gloom of dusky gold. The bitter ecstasy of the past spoke to her only of the infinite beneficence of death. The grave yearned for her, and she had no hope to live.

Those drear days she saw little of Fulviac. The man seemed to shirk her pale, sad face and brooding eyes. Her grief stung him more fiercely than all the flames nurtured in the glowing pit of war. Moreover, he was cumbered with the imminent peril of his cause, and the facing of a stormy fortune. His one hope lay in some great battle in the woods, where the King's mailed chivalry would be cumbered by the trees. He made many a feint to tempt the nobles to this wild tussle. The cliff stood as adamant, a vast bulwark to uphold the rebels. Yet Nature threatened him with other arguments. His stores were meagre, his mouths many. Victory and starvation dangled upon the opposing beams of Fate.

If Fulviac feared procrastination, Richard of Lauretia favoured the same. Wise sluggard that he was, he curbed the vengeance of his clamorous soldiery, content to temporise with the inevitable trend of fortune. His light horse scoured the country, garnering food and forage from the fat lands north of Geraint. Time fought for him, and the starving wolves were trapped. Sufficient was it that he held his crescent of steel upon the hills, leaving unguarded the barren wilds that rolled on Gilderoy towards the east.

A week passed, dull and lustreless. The forest waved dark and solemn under the autumn sky; no torrents of steel gushed from its sable gates; no glittering squadrons plunged into its shadows. The King's men lay warm about their watch-fires on the hills, fattening on good food, tingling for the trumpet cry that should herald the advance. Richard of the Iron Hand smiled and passed the hours at chess in his great pavilion pitched on the slopes towards Geraint. Simon of Imbrecour held the southern marches; Morolt and his northerners guarded the west.

It was grey weather, sullen and storm-laden, eerie of voice. The Black Wild tossed like a sombre sea over hill and valley, its spires rocking under the scurrying sky, its myriad galleries shrill with the cry of the wind. There was no rest there, no breathless silence under the frail moon. The trees moaned like a vast choir wailing the downfall of a god. The wild seemed full of death, and of the dead, as though the souls of those slaughtered in the war screamed about Fulviac's lair. The sentinels, grey figures in a sombre atmosphere, watched white-faced in the thickets. The clarions of the storm might mask the onrush of the royal chivalry.

Yeoland the Saint lay full length upon a carved settle before a dying fire. She was listening to the wind as it roared over the cliff, amid the shrill clamour of the trees. It was such an eve as when Flavian had rattled at the postern to offer her love, and a throne at Avalon. She had spoken of war, and war had sundered them, given death to desire, and a tomb to hope. The glow of the fire played upon

the girl's face and shone in her brooding eyes. Night was falling, and the gloom increased.

She heard footsteps in the gallery, the clangour of a scabbard against the rock. The door swung back, and Fulviac stood in the entry, clad in full harness save for his casque. There were deep furrows upon his forehead. His lids looked heavy from lack of sleep, and his eyes were bloodshot. The tinge of grey in his tawny hair had increased to a web of silver.

He came in without a word, set his hands on the back of the settle, and stared at the fire. Yeoland had started up; she sat huddled in the angle, looking in his face with a mute surmise. Fulviac's face was sorrowful, yet strong as steel; the lips were firm, the eyes sullen and sad. He was as a man who stared ruin betwixt the brows, nor quailed from the scrutiny though death stood ready on the threshold.

"Cloak yourself," he said to her at last; "be speedy; buckle this purse to your girdle."

She sprang up as the leather pouch rattled on the settle, and stood facing Fulviac with her back to the fire.

"Whither do we ride?"

"I send you under escort to Gilderoy."

"And you?"

He smiled, tightened his sword belt with a vicious gesture, and still stared at the hearth.

"My lot lies here," he said to her; "I meet my doom alone. What need to drag you deeper into the dark?"

She understood him on the instant, and the black thoughts moving in his mind. Disasters thickened about the cliff; perils were clamorous as the wind-rocked trees. Fulviac feared the worst; she knew that from his face.

"You send me to Gilderoy?" she said.

"I have so determined it."

"And why?"

"Need you doubt my discretion?"

The flames flashed and gleamed upon his breastplate, and deepened the shadows upon his face. His eyes were sorrowful, yet full of a strenuous fire.

"The sky darkens," he said to her, "and the King's hosts watch the forest. I had thought to draw them into the wilds, but the fox of Lauretia has smelt a snare. Our stores lessen; we are in the last trench."

She moved away into a dark corner of the room, raised the carved lid of a chest, and began to draw clothes therefrom, fingering them listlessly, as though her thoughts wavered. Fulviac leant with folded arms upon the settle, seemed even oblivious of her presence under the burden of his fate.

"Fulviac," she said at last, glancing at him over a drooping shoulder.

He turned his head and looked at her.

"Must I go then to Gilderoy?"

"The road is open," he answered, with no obvious kindling of his sympathy; "there will be bloody work here anon; you will be safer behind stone walls."

"And the King?" she asked him.

He straightened suddenly, like a man tossing some great burden from off his soul.

"Ha, girl! are you blind as to what shall follow? Richard of the Iron Hand waits for us with fivescore thousand men. We shall fight–by God, yes!–and make a bloody end; there will be much slaughter and work for the sword. The King will crush us as a falling rock crushes a scorpion. There will be no mercy. Death waits. Put on that cloak of thine."

She stood motionless a moment, listening to the moaning of the wind. The man's grim spirit troubled her. She remembered that he had bulwarked her in her homeless days, had dealt her much pity out of his rugged heart. He was alone now, and shadowed by death. Thus it befell that she cast the cloak aside upon the bed, and stood forward with quivering lips before the fire.

"Fulviac."

"Little sister."

"Ah! God pardon me; I have been a weak and graceless friend. You have been good to me, beyond my gratitude. The past has gone for ever; what is left to me now? Shall I not meet death at your side?"

He stood back from her, looking in her eyes, breathing hard, combating his own heart. He loved the girl in his fierce, staunch way; she was the one light left him in the gathering gloom. Now death offered him her soul. He tottered, stretched out his hands to her, snatched them back with a great burst of pride.

"No, this cannot be."

"Ah!"

"I have dared the storm; alone will I fall beneath its vengeance. You shall go this night to Gilderoy."

She thrust out her hands to him, but he turned away his face.

"Ah! little sister, this war was conceived for God, but the devil leavened it. I have gambled with fire, and the ashes return upon my head. I give you life; 'tis little I may give. Come now, obey me, these are my last words."

She turned from him very quietly in the shadow, hiding her face with her arm. Picking up her cloak, she drew it slowly about her shoulders, Fulviac watching her, a pillar of steel.

"They wait for you in the forest," he said; "go down the stair. Colgran rides with you to Gilderoy. He is to be trusted."

She drooped her head, staggered to the door, darted back again with a low cry and a gush of tears.

"Fulviac."

"Little woman."

"God keep you! Kiss me, this once."

He bent to her, touched her forehead with his lips, thrust her again towards the door.

"Go, my child."

And she went forth slowly from him, weeping, into the night.

XLI

The prophecies of the King proved the power of their pinions before fourteen suns had passed over the Black Wild's heart. Richard of Lauretia had plotted to starve Fulviac into giving him battle, or into a retreat from the forest upon Gilderoy. The royal prognostications were pitiless and unflinching as candescent steel. It was no mere battle-ground that he sought, but rather an amphitheatre where he might martyr the rebel host like a mob of revolted slaves.

Whatever tidings may have muttered on the breeze, riders came in hotly to the royal pavilion towards the noon of the fourteenth day. There was soon much stir on the hills hard by Geraint. Knights and nobles thronged the royal tent, captains clanged shoulders, gallopers rode south and west with fiery despatches to Morolt and Sir Simon of Imbrecour. Battle breathed in the wind. Before night came, the King's pavilion had vanished from the hills; his columns were winding round the northern hem of the forest, to strike the road that ran from Geraint to Gilderoy.

The royal scouts and rangers had not played their master false. A river of steel was curling through the black depths of the wild, threading the valleys towards the east. The King's scouts had caught the glimmer of armour sifting through the trees. They had slunk about the rebel host for days while they lay camped in their thousands about the cliff. Colgran and his small company had passed through unheeded, but they were up like hawks when the whole host moved.

That midnight Fulviac's columns rolled from the outstanding thickets of the wild, and held in serried masses for the road to Gilderoy. The King's pro-

crastination had launched them on this last desperate venture. They would have starved in the forest as Fulviac had foreseen; their hopes lay in reaching Gilderoy, which was well victualled, throwing themselves therein, making what terms they could, or die fighting behind its walls. Thus under cover of night they slipped from the forest, trusting to leave the King's men guarding an empty lair.

The brisk forethought of Richard of Lauretia had out-gamed the rebels, however, in the hazardous moves of war. They were answering to his opening like wild duck paddling towards a decoy. Ten miles west of Gilderoy there stretched a valley, walled southwards by tall heights, banded through the centre by the river Tamar. At its eastern extremity a line of hills rolled down to touch the river. The road from Geraint ran through the valley, hugging the southern bank of the river after crossing it westwards by a fortified bridge. Fulviac and his host would follow that road, marching betwixt the river and the hills. It was in this valley that Richard of Lauretia had conceived the hurtling climax of the war.

Forewarned in season, Sir Simon of Imbrecour and his bristling squadrons were riding through the night on Gilderoy, shaping a crescent course towards the east. Morolt and the giants of the north were striding in his track, skirting the southern spires of the forest, to press level with the rebel march, screened by the hills. The King and his Lauretians came down from Geraint. They were to seize the bridge across the Tamar, pour over, and close the rebels on the rear.

It was near dawn when Fulviac's columns struck the highroad from Geraint, and entered the valley where the Tamar shimmered towards Gilderoy. Mist covered the world, shot through with the gold threads of the dawn. The river gleamed and murmured fitfully in the meadows; the southern heights glittered in the growing day; the purple slopes of the Black Wild had melted dimly into the west.

The mist stood dense in the flats where the Geraint road bridged the river. The northern slopes seemed steeped in vapoury desolation, the road winding into a waste of green. Fulviac and his men marched on, chuckling as they thought of the royal troops watching the empty alleys of the forest. Fulviac took no care to secure the bridge across the Tamar. With the line of hills before them breasted, they would see the spires of Gilderoy, glittering athwart the dawn.

The columns were well in the lap of the valley before two light horsemen came galloping in from the far van, calling on Fulviac, who rode under the red banner, that the road to Gilderoy had been seized. Fulviac and Sforza rode forward with a squadron of horse to reconnoitre. As they advanced at a canter, the mists cleared from the skirts of the encircling hills. Far to the east, on the green slopes that rolled towards the Tamar, they saw the sun smite upon a thousand points of steel. Pennons danced in the shimmering atmosphere, shields flickered, armour shone. A torrent of gems seemed poured from the dawn's lap upon the

emerald bosoms of the hills. They were the glittering horsemen of Sir Simon of Imbrecour, who had ridden out of the night and seized on the road to Gilderoy.

Fulviac halted his company, and standing in the stirrups, scanned the hillside under his hand. He frowned, thrust forth his chin, turned on Sforza who rode at his side.

"Trapped," he said with a twist of the lip; "Dick of the Iron Hand has fooled us. 'Twas done cunningly, though it brings us to a parlous passage. They hold the road."

The Gonfaloniere tugged at his ragged beard, and looked white under the arch of his open salade.

"Better advance on them," he said; "I would give good gold to be safe in the streets of Gilderoy."

Fulviac sneered, and shook his head.

"There are ten thousand spears on yonder slopes, the lustiest blood in the land. Count their banners and their pennons, the stuff tells an honest tale. Pah, they would drive our rapscallions into the river. Send back and bid our banners halt."

They wheeled and cantered towards the long black columns plodding through the meadows. Far to the west over the green plain they saw spears flash against the sun, a glimmering tide spreading from the river. The Lauretians had crossed the bridge and were hurrying on the rebels' heels. Fulviac's trumpets sounded the halt. He thundered his orders to his captains, bade them mass their men in the meadows, and hedge their pikes for the crash of battle.

A shout reached him from his squadrons of horse who had marched on the southern wing. They were pointing to the heights with sword and spear. Fulviac reined round, rode forward to some rising ground, and looked southwards under his hand. The heights bounding the valley shone with steel. A myriad glistening stars shimmered under the sun. Morolt's northerners had shown their shields; the hills bristled with their bills and spears.

Fulviac shrugged his shoulders, lowered his beaver, and rode back towards his men. He saw Yeoland the Saint's red banner waving above the dusky squares. He remembered the girl's pale face and the hands that had toyed with the gilded silks in the dark chamber upon the cliff. Though the sun shone and the earth glistened, he knew in his heart that he should see that face no more.

Richard of Lauretia had forged his crescent of steel. South, east, and west the royal trumpets sounded; northwards ran the Tamar, closing the meadows. Fulviac and his men were trapped in the green valley. A golden girdle of chivalry hemmed the mob in the lap of the emerald meadows. All about them blazed the panoply of war.

Fulviac, pessimist that he was, took to his heart that hour the lofty tran-

quillity of a Scandinavian hero. His courage was of that stout, sea-buffeting fibre that stiffened its beams against the tide of defeat. He set forth his shield, tossed up his sword, rode through the ranks with the spirit of a Roland. Life leapt the stronger in him at the challenge of the Black Raven of death. His captains could have sworn that he looked for victory in the moil, so bluff and strenuous was his mood that day.

Sforza came cringing to him, glib-lipped and haggard, to speak of a parley. Fulviac shook his shield in the man's white face, set his ruffians to dig trenches in the meadows, and to range the waggons as a barricade.

"Parley, forsooth," quoth he; "talk no more to me of parleys when I have twoscore thousand smiters at my back. Let Dick of the Iron Hand come down to us with the sword. Ha, sirs, are we stuffed with hay! We will rattle the royal bones and make them dance a fandango to the devil."

His spirit diffused itself through the ranks of the rough soldiery. They cheered wheresoever he went, kindling their courage like a torch, and tossed their pikes to him with strenuous insolence.

"My children," he would roar to them as he passed, "the day has come, we have drawn these skulkers to a tussle. See to it, sirs, let us maul these velvet gentlemen, these squires of the cushion. By the Lord, we will feast anon in Gilderoy, and rifle the King's baggage."

As for Richard of the Iron Hand, he was content to claim the arduous blessings of the day. He held his men in leash upon the hills, resting them and their horses after the marchings of the night. Wine was served out; clarions and sackbuts sounded through the ranks; the King made his nobles a rich feast in his pavilion pitched by Sir Morolt's banner. As the day drew on, he thrust strong outposts towards the meadows, ordered his troops to sleep through the long night under arms. Their watch-fires gemmed a lurid bow under the sky, with Tamar stringing it, a chord of silver. In the meadows the rebel masses lay a black pool of gloom under the stars.

Fulviac sat alone in his tent at midnight, his drawn sword across his knees. His captains had left him, some to watch, others to sleep on the grass in their armour, Sforza the Gonfaloniere to sneak in the dark to the King's lines. Silence covered the valley, save for the voices of the sentinels and the sound of the royal trumpets blowing the changes on the hills. Their watch-fires hung athwart the sky like a chain of flashing rubies.

Fulviac sat motionless as a statue, staring out into the night. Death, like a grey wraith, stood beside his chair; the unknown, a black and unsailed sea, stretched calm and imageless beneath his feet. Life and the ambition thereof tottered and crumbled like a quaking ruin. Love quenched her torch of gold. The man saw the stars above him, heard in the silence of thought a thousand worlds

surging through the infinitudes of the heavens. What then was this mortal pillar of clay, that it should grudge its dust to the womb of the world?

And ambition? He thought of Yeoland and her wounded heart; of Gambrevault and Avalon; of La Belle Forêt smoking amid its ruins. He had torched fame through the land, and painted his prowess in symbols of fire. Now that death challenged him on the strand of the unknown, should he, Fulviac, fear the unsailed sea!

His heart glowed in him with a transcendent insolence. Lifting his sword, he pressed the cold steel to his lips, brandished it in the faces of the stars. Then, with a laugh, he lay down upon a pile of straw and slept.

XLII

Dawn rolled out of the east, red and riotous, its crimson spears streaming towards the zenith. Over the far towers of Gilderoy swept a roseate and golden mist, over the pine-strewn heights, over Tamar silvering the valley. A wind piped hoarsely through the thickets, like a shrill prelude to the organ-throated roar of war.

The landscape shimmered in the broadening light, green tapestries arabesqued with gold. To the east, Sir Simon's multitudinous squadrons ran like rare terraces of flowers, dusted with the scintillant dew of steel. Westwards dwindled the long ranks of the Lauretians. On the heights, Morolt's shields flickered in the sun. About a hillock in the valley, the rebel host stood massed in a great circle, a whorl of helmets, bills, and pikes; Fulviac's red pavilion starred the centre like the red roof of a church rising above a town.

On the southern heights, Richard of Lauretia had watched the dawn rise behind the towers of Gilderoy. He was on horseback, in full panoply of war, his gorgeous harness and trappings dazzling the sun. Knights, nobles, trumpeters were round him, a splendid pool of chivalry, while east and west stretched the ranks of the grim and gigantic soldiery of the north.

Hard by the royal standard with its Sun of Gold, a corpse dangled from the branch of a great fir. It swayed slightly in the wind, black and sinister against the gilded curtain of the dawn. It was the body of Sforza the adventurer from the south, Gonfaloniere of Gilderoy, whom the King had hanged to grace his double treachery.

As the light increased, sweeping along the glittering frieze of war, Morolt of Gorm and Regis stood forward before the King. He was a lean man, tall and vigorous as a bow of steel, his black eyes darting fire under his thatch of close-cropped hair. The nobles had put him forward that morning as a man born to claim a boon upon the brink of battle. Fierce and virile, he bared his sword to the sun, and pointed with mailed hand to the rebel host in the valley.

"Sire, a boon for your loyal servants."

The King's face was as a mask of steel heated to white heat, ardent and pitiless. He had the spoilers of his kingdom under his heel, and was not the man to flinch at vengeance.

"Say on, Morolt, what would ye?"

"We are men, sire, and these wolves have slaughtered our kinsfolk."

"Am I held to be a lamb, sirs!"

A rough laugh eddied up. Morolt shook his sword.

"Give them into our hand, sire," he said; "there shall be no need of ropes and dungeons."

The iron men cheered him. Richard the King lifted up his baton; his strong voice swept far in the hush of the dawn.

"Sirs," he said to them, "take the Black Leopard of Imbrecour for your pattern, rend and slay, let none escape you. Every man of my host wears a white cross on his sword arm. Let that badge only stay your vengeance. As for these whelps of treason, they have butchered our children, shamed our women, clawed and torn at their King's throne. To-day who thinks of mercy! Go down, sirs, to the slaughter."

A roar of joy rose from those rough warriors; they tossed their swords, gripped hands and embraced, called on the saints to serve them. Strong passions were loose, steaming like the incense of sacked cities into heaven. There was much to avenge, much to expurgate. That day their swords were to drink blood; that day they were to crush and kill.

In the valley, Fulviac's huge coil of humanity lay sullen and silent, watching the spears upon the hills. Their russets and sables contrasted with the gorgeous colouring of the feudalists. The one shone like a garden; the other resembled a field lying fallow. The romance and pomp of war gathered to pour down upon the squalid realism of mob tyranny. Beauty and the beast, knight and scullion faced each other on the stage that morning.

Gallopers were riding east and west bearing the King's commands to Sire Julian, Duke of Layonne, who headed the Lauretians, and to Simon of Imbrecour upon the hills. The King would not tempt the moil that day, but left the sweat and thunder of it to his captains, content to play the Cæsar on the southern heights. His commands had gone forth to the host. The first assault was to be

made by twenty thousand northmen under Morolt, and a like force under Julian of Layonne. The whole crescent of steel was to contract upon the meadows, and consolidate its iron wall about Fulviac and his rebels. Simon of Imbrecour was to leash his chivalry from the first rush of the fight. His knights should ride in when the rebel ranks were broken.

An hour before noon, the royal trumpets blew the advance, and a great shout surged through the shimmering ranks.

"Advance, Black Leopard of Imbrecour."

"Advance, Golden Sun of Lauretia."

"Advance, Grey Wolf of the North."

With clarions and fifes playing, drums beating, banners blowing, the whole host closed its semilune of steel upon the dusky mass in the meadows. The northerners were chanting an old Norse ballad, a grim, ice-bound song of the sea and the shriek of the sword. Sir Simon's spears were rolling over the green slopes, their trumpets and bugles blowing merrily. From the west, the Lauretians were coming up with their pikes dancing in the sun. The thunder of the advance seemed to shake the hills.

Fulviac watched the feudalists from beneath his banner in the meadows. His captains were round him, grim men and silent, girding their spirits for the prick of battle.

"By St. Peter," said the man under the red flag, "these fireflies come on passably. A fair host and a splendid. If their courage suits their panoply, we shall have hot work to-day."

"Faith," quoth Colgran, who had returned from Gilderoy, "I would rather sweep a flower-garden than a muck-heap. We are good for twice their number, massed as we are like rocks upon a sea-shore."

"To your posts, sirs," were Fulviac's last words to them; "whether we fall or conquer, what matters it if we die like men!"

Billows of red, green, and blue, dusted with silver, Morolt and his Berserkers rolled to the charge. They had cast aside their pikes, and taken to shield and axe, such axes as had warred in the far past for the faith of Odin. Fulviac's rebels had massed their spears into a hedge of steel, and though Morolt's men came down at a run, the spear points stemmed the onrush like a wall.

Despite this avalanche of iron, the rebel ring stove off the tide of war. They were stout churls and hardy, these peasant plunderers; death admonished them; despair tightened their sinews and propped up their shields. The shimmering flood swirled on their spear points like tawny billows tossing round a rock. It lapped and eddied, rushed up in spray, seeking an inlet, yet finding none. The Lauretian feudatories had swarmed to the charge. Fulviac withstood them, and held their panoply at bay.

Richard the King watched the battle from the southern heights. He saw Morolt's men roll down, saw the fight seethe and glitter, swirl in a wild vortex round the rebel spears. The war wolves gathered, the tempest waxed, and still the black ring held. Like steel upon a granite rock the onslaughts sparked on it, but clove no breach. Under the late noon sun the valley reeked with dust and din. The royal host was as a dragon of gold, gnashing and writhing about an iron tower.

It was then that the King smote his thigh, plucked off his signet, sent it by Bertrand his herald to Sir Simon and his knights.

"Go down at the gallop," ran the royal bidding, "cleave me this rock, and splinter it to dust. Spare neither man nor horse. Cleave in or perish."

The black banner of Imbrecour flapped forth; the trumpets clamoured. Sir Simon's knights might well have graced Boiardo's page, and girded Albracca with their stalwart spears. They tightened girths, set shields for the charge, and rode down nobly to avenge or fall.

As a great ship sails to break a harbour boom, so did the squadrons of the King crash down with fewtred spears on Fulviac's host. They rode with the wind, leaping and thundering like an iron flood. No slackening was there, no wavering of this ponderous bolt. It rushed like a huge rock down a mountain's flank, smoking and hurtling on the wall of spears.

The corn was scythed and trodden under foot. Ranks rocked and broke like earth before a storm-scourged sea. The spears of Imbrecour flashed on, smote and sucked vengeance, cleaving a breach into the core of war. The knights slew, took scarlet for their colour, and made the moment murderous with steel. Into the breach the King's wolves followed them; Morolt's grim axemen stumbled in, rending and hurling the black mass to shreds. Battle became butchery. The day was won.

What boots it to chronicle the scene that travelled as a forest fire in the track of Sir Simon's chivalry? The iron hand of the King closed upon the wrecked victims in the valley. Knight and noble trampled the peasantry; rapine and lust were put to the sword. The Blatant Beast was slain by the spear of Romance. The boor and the demagogue were trodden as straw before the threshing-floor of vengeance. The fields were a shroud of scarlet; Tamar ran like wine; thorn and bramble were fruited red with blood. On the heights the tall pines waved over the splendid masque of death.

It was late in the day when Morolt and his hillsmen, with certain of Sir Simon's knights, forced their way through the wreckage of the fight, to the hillock where stood the banner of the Saint. South, east, and west the rout bubbled into the twilight, a riot of slaughter seething to the distant woods. About Yeoland's banner had gathered the last of the Forest brotherhood, grey wolves red to the

throat with battle. Sullen and indomitable, they had gathered in a dusky knot of steel as the day sped into the kindling west. Even Morolt's fierce followers stood still, like hounds that had brought the boar to bay. Simon of Imbrecour spurred out before the spears, lifted a shattered sword, and called on Fulviac by name.

"Traitor, we challenge ye."

A burly figure in harness of a reddish hue towered up beneath the fringe of the banner of the Saint. He carried an axe slanted over his shoulder, as he stood half a head above the tallest of his men. As Sir Simon challenged him, he lifted his salade, and bared his face to the war dogs who hemmed him in.

"Black Leopard of the West, we meet again."

The Lord of Imbrecour peered at him keenly from under his vizor.

"Come, sirs, and end it," quoth the man in red, "buffet for buffet, and sword to sword. I fling ye a gauge to death and the devil. Come, sirs, let us end it; I bide my time."

Morolt sprang forward with sword aloft.

"Traitor and rebel, I have seen your face before."

Fulviac laughed, a brave burst of scorn. He tossed his axe to them, and spread his arms.

"Ha, Morolt, I have foined with ye of old. Saints and martyrs, have I avenged myself upon the lap-dogs of the court! Here will we fight our last battle. Bury me, sirs, as Fulk of Argentin, the King's brother, whom men thought dead these seven years."

A sudden silence hovered above that remnant of a beaten host. The red banner drooped, hung down about its staff. Morolt, uttering a strange cry, smote his bosom with his iron hand. Old Simon crossed himself, turned back and rode thence slowly from the field.

Morolt's voice, gruff and husky, sounded the charge. When he and his war dogs had made an end, they took Fulviac's head and bore it wrapped in Yeoland's banner to the King.

XLIII

Under the starry pall of night, the last cry of the clarion of tragedy sounded over wood and meadow. Gilderoy, proud city of the south, had closed her gates against the royal host, wise at the eleventh hour as to the measure of the King's

mercy. The wreckage from the battle in the valley had washed on Tamar's bosom past the walls, corpses jostling each other in the stream of death. Vultures had hovered in the azure sky. There was no doom for Gilderoy save the doom of the sword.

The moon rose red amid a whorl of dusky clouds, veiled as with scarlet for the last orgies of war. Gilderoy had been carried by assault. Morolt's barbarians were pouring through the streets; the gates yawned towards the night; bells boomed and clashed. The townsfolk were scurrying like rats for the great square where the remnant of the garrison had barricaded the entries, gathering for a death-struggle under the umbrage of the cathedral towers.

Richard the King had ridden into Gilderoy by the northern gate with Sir Simon of Imbrecour and a strong guard of knights and men-at-arms. Fulviac's head danced on a spear beside the Golden Banner of Lauretia. The citadel had opened its gates to Sire Julian of Layonne. In the square before the ruined abbey of the Benedictines the King and his nobles gathered to await the judgment of the hour.

A great bell boomed through the night, a deep panting sound in the warm gloom. Torrents of steel clashed through the narrow streets, gleaming under the torch flare, bubbling towards the last rampart of revolt. From the cathedral square arose a wild, whimpering outcry, the wailing of women mingling with the hoarse clamour of the last assault.

Word was brought to the King by one of Morolt's esquires, that the townsfolk were holding the great square behind their barricades, and pouring a hot fire from the houses upon his troops. Morolt desired the King's ring and his commands before taking to the resource of the sword. Richard of the Iron Hand was in no mood for mercy. His decree went forth from before the gate of the ruined abbey.

"Consider no church as a sanctuary. Fire the houses about the square. Gilderoy shall burn."

The city's doom was sealed by those iron words. The torch took up the handiwork of the sword. A gradual glow began to rise above the house-tops; smoke billowed up, black and voluminous, dusted with a myriad ruddy stars. Flames rose from casement and from gable, from chimney, spirelet, roof, and tower. The houses were faced with wood, dry as tinder, crisp for the torch as a summer-bleached prairie. The flames ran like a red flood from roof to roof, with a roar as from huge reptiles battling in a burning pit. The great square, with the glittering pinnacles of its cathedral, was girded in with fire and sword.

Men were stabbing and hewing upon the barricades where Morolt's feudatories had stormed up from the gloom of the streets. Beneath the light of the burning houses, swords were tossed, the dead forgotten and trodden under foot.

It was not long before the barriers were carried by assault and the avengers of Belle Forêt poured pitiless into the great square.

The citizens of Gilderoy had packed their women and children into the sanctuary of the cathedral choir. They were penned there amid the gorgeous gildings of the place, a shivering flock swarming in the frescoed chapels, huddled beneath the painted figures of the saints. The glow of the burning city beat in through the jewelled glass, building the huge aisles in a glittering cavern windowed with living gems. Darkness and dawn struggled and fought under the thundering vaults. From without came the wild babel, the hoarse death-moan of a people.

In the great square the fight went on, a ruthless mêlée, strong and terrible. Gilderoy had slaughtered her noblesse. She made expiation for the deed that night with the heart's blood of her children. Vengeance and despair grappled and swayed in that great pit of death. The blazing streets walled in a red inferno, where passions ran like Satanic wine. Gilderoy, proud city of the south, quivered and expired beneath the iron gauntlet of the King.

Modred of Gambrevault moved through the press with Morolt of the North fighting at his side. They had a common quest that night, a common watchword, chastening the vengeance of their men.

"Seek the Saint. Save Yeoland of Gambrevault."

It was as a hoarse shout, feeble and futile amid the bluster of a storm. What hope was there for this pale-faced Madonna amid the burning wreck of Gilderoy? She was as a lily in a flaming forest. Modred sought for her with voice and sword, thinking of Flavian and the vow upon the cliff. Though the city lightened, black Modred's heart was steeped in gloom. Death and despair seemed armed against his hope.

On the eastern quarter a little court stood back from the great square. A fountain played in the centre, the water-jet, thrown from a mermaid's bosom, sparkling like a plume of gems. The walls of the court were streaked with flame, its casements tawny with yellow light. The breath of the place was as the breath of a furnace; a quaking crowd filled it, driven to bay by the swords shining in the square.

Modred was a tall man, a pine standing amid hollies. Staring into the murk of the court wreathed round with a garland of fire, he saw, above the heads of the crowd, a woman standing on the steps of the fountain, leaning against the brim of the basin. Her hair blew loose from under her open bassinet; her white face like a flower was turned mutely to the night. A cuirass glimmered under her cloud of hair. Modred, when he saw her, sent up a shout like that of a wrecked mariner sighting a sail over tumbling waves. He tossed his sword, charged forward into the court, began to buffet his way towards the figure by the fountain.

A knot of soldiery, taking his shout as a rallying cry, stormed after him into the court. There was a great crush in the entry, men tumbling in, and using their swords as poniards. The townsfolk were scattered like blown leaves towards the burning houses. In the hot turmoil of the moment the girl was swept from the fountain steps, and carried by a struggling bunch of figures towards a corner of the court. Modred lost sight of her for the moment, as he ploughed forward through the press.

Flames were rushing from casement and from roof; the breath of the place was as the breath of a burning desert. The Gilderoy rebels pent in the court were being put to the sword. Through the swirl of the struggle Yeoland's bassinet shone out again. Modred saw her standing alone, shading her face with her hands like some wild, desperate thing, knowing not whither to escape. He pushed on, calling her by name. Before he could reach her the gabled front of a house undermined by the fire lurched forward, tottered, and came down with a roar.

A blazing brand struck Modred on the helmet. He staggered, beheld a shower of sparks, felt a scorching wind upon his face. The stones were littered with crackling woodwork, glowing timber, reeking tiles. He was stunned for a moment as by the blow of a mace. Flames were leaping heavenwards from the houses, wiping out the mild faces of the stars with their ruthless hands.

With a great cry Modred had started forward like a charging bull. He dragged aside the smouldering wreckage of gable and roof, tore the rafters aside, nor heeded the heat, for his harness helped him. His great body quivered as he drew the girl out and lifted her from the stones. Her green kirtle was alight, and with the strong instinct of the moment he ran with her to the fountain and plunged her bodily in the broad basin.

Panting, he bore her across the great square in his arms. Yeoland was making a little moaning whimper, but for all else lay quiet as a half-dead bird. Modred dared not look into her face; the scent of her scorched hair beat up into his nostrils. He ground his teeth and cursed Fate as he ran. Was it for this that they had bulwarked Gambrevault?

XLIV

Autumn had cast her scarlet girdle about Avalon; the woods were aflame with the splendours of the dying year. The oaks stood pavilions of green and gold;

the beeches domes of burnished bronze; from their silver stems, birches fountained forth showers of amber. It was a season of crystal skies, of cloud galleons, bulwarked with gold, sailing the wine-red west. Wild Autumn wandered in the ruined woods, her long hair streaking the gilded gloom, her voice elfin under the stars. Even as she passed, the crisp leaves swirled and fell, a pall for the dying year.

Avalon slumbered amid her lilies and the painted woods, gorgeous as rare tapestries, curtaining her meadows. Her mere laughed and glimmered amid the flags and lily leaves, and lapped at the lichened bases of her towers. Avalon had arisen from her desolation. No longer were her chambers void, her gates broken, her courts the haunt of death. The bat and the screech-owl had fled from her towers. She had lifted up her face to the dawn, like a mourner who turns from the grave to gaze again upon the golden face of joy.

Time with his scythe of silver rested on the hills. The black dragon of war had crawled sated to the labyrinths of the past; the red throne of ambition had been consumed by fire. Peace came forth with her white-faced choir, swinging their golden censers, shedding a purple perfume of hope over the blackened land. The death wolves had slunk to the wilds, the vultures had soared from the fields. A splendid calm had descended upon the land, a silence as of heaven after the hideous masque of war. The cloud-wrack and thunder had passed from the sky. Men heard again the voice of God.

Six weeks had gone since the sacking of Gilderoy, and dead Duessa's bower in Avalon had been garnished for a second mistress. A white rose lurked in a whorl of green. The oriel, with its re-jewelled glass, looked out upon the transient splendours of the woods. Tapestry clothed the walls, showing knights and maidens wandering through flowering meads. Rare furniture had been taken from the wrecked palaces of Gilderoy and given to the Lord Flavian by the King.

That autumntide Modred played seneschal in Avalon. He had cleansed and regarnished the castle by his lord's command, and garrisoned it with men taken from the King's own guard. Moreover, in Gilderoy he had found an old man groping miserlike amid the ruins, filthy and querulous. The pantaloon when challenged had confessed to the name of Aurelius, and the profession of Medicine by royal patent in that city. The townsfolk had spared his pompous neck for the sake of the benefits of his craft. From the fat, proud, prosperous worthy he had cringed into a wrinkled, flap-cheeked beggar. Him Modred had caught like a veritable pearl from the gutter, and brought with other household perquisites into Avalon.

In this rich refuge Aurelius awoke as from an unsavoury and penurious dream. He regained some of his plump, sage swagger, his rotund phraseology, his autocratic dogmatism in matters Æsculapian. The atmosphere of Avalon agreed

with his gullet. Above all things, he was held to be a man of tact.

In dead Duessa's bower there still hung her mirror of steel, whose sheeny surface had often answered to her languorous eyes and moon-white face. Duessa's hair had glimmered before this good friend's flattery. Gems, necklet, broideries, and tiars had sunk deep into its magic memory. The mirror could have told truths and expounded philosophies, had there been some Merlin to conjure with the past.

Aurelius of Gilderoy played the necromancer under more rational auspices. He was a benignant soul, subtle, sympathetic to the brink of dotage. His professional hint was that dead Duessa's mirror should be exiled from the bower of Avalon. The oracle spoke with much beneficence as to the delusions of the sick, and the demoniac influence of melancholy upon the brain. Yet his wisdom was withstood in the very quarter where he had trusted to find obedience and understanding. Dead Duessa's mirror still hung in the Lady Yeoland's bower.

One calm evening, when the west stood a great arch of ruddy gold, a slim girl knelt in the oriel with her face buried in her hands. She was clad in a gown of peacock blue, fitting close to her slight figure, and girded about the hips with a girdle of green leather. Her black hair poured upon her shoulders, clouding her face, yet leaving bare the base of her white neck where it curved from her pearly shoulders. She drooped her head as she knelt before the casement, where the light entered to her, azure and green, vermilion and purple, silver and rose.

Anon she rose softly, turned towards the mirror hanging on the wall, gazed into its depths with a species of bewitched fear. One glance given, she turned away with a shudder, hid her face in her hands, walked the room in a mute frenzy of self-horror. Presently she knelt again before the window-seat, struggled in prayer, turning her face piteously to an open casement where the golden woods stood under the red wand of the west. The light waned a little. She rose up again from her knees, shook her hair forward so that it bathed her face, trod slowly towards the mirror, stared at herself therein.

The crystal bowl was broken, the ivory throne dishonoured! The blush of the rose had faded, the gleam of the opal fallen to dust. Youth and its sapphire shield had passed into the gloom of dreams. The stars and the moon were magical no more.

She wavered away from the window to a dark corner, hid her face in the arras. The same wild cry rang like a piteous requiem through her brain. The man lived and loved her, and she had come to this! Burning Gilderoy had stolen her beauty, made her a mockery of her very self. God, that Fate should compel her to lift her scars to the eyes of love!

In the gathering dusk, she went again to the mirror, peered therein, with strained eyes and a tremor of the lip. The twilight softened somewhat the bitter-

ness of truth. She shook her hair forward, saw her eyes gleam, fingered her white throat, and smiled a little. Presently she lit a taper, held it with wavering hand, peered at the steel panel once again. She cried out, jerked away, and crushed the frail light under her foot.

Darkness increased, seeming to clothe her misery. She wandered through the room, twisting her black hair about her wrist, moaning and darting piteous glances into the gloom. Once she took a poniard from a table, fingered the point, pressed her hand over her heart, threw the knife away with a gesture of despair. On the morrow the man would come to her. What would she see in those grey eyes of his? Horror and loathing, ah God, not that!

Anon she grew calmer and less distressed, prayed awhile, lit a lamp, delved in an ambry built in the wall. That night her hands worked zealously, while the moon shimmered on the mere, setting silver wrinkles on its agate face. The woods were still and solemn as death, deep with the voiceless sympathy of the hour. Black lace hung upon Yeoland's hands; the sable thread ran through and through; her white fingers quivered in the light of the lamp.

Her few hours of sleep that night were wild and feverish, smitten through with piteous dreams. On the morrow she bound a black fillet about her brows, and let the dusky mask of lace fall over face and bosom. She prayed a long while before her crucifix, but she did not gaze again into dead Duessa's mirror.

That same evening Modred the seneschal blasphemed Aurelius in the garden of Avalon. The man of the sword was in no easy humour; his convictions emerged from his hairy mouth with a vigour that was not considerate.

"Dotard, you have no more wit than a pelican."

"My lord, I embrace truth."

"Damn truth; what eyes have you for a goodly close!"

Aurelius spread his hands with the air of a martyr.

"The physician, my lord," he said, "should ever deserve the confidence of his patron."

For retort, Modred shouldered him into the thick of a rose bush.

"Pedant," quoth he, "crab-apple, say a word on this matter, and I will drown you in the moat."

Aurelius gathered his robes and still ruffled it like an autocrat.

"Barbarity, sir, is the argument of fools."

"Bag of bones, rot in your wrinkled hide, keep your froth for sick children."

"Sir!"

"You have as much soul as a rat in a sewer. Come, list to me, breathe a word of this, and I'll starve you in our topmost turret. Leave truth alone, gaffer, with your rheumy, broken-kneed wisdom. You have no wit in these matters, no, not a crust. Blurt a word, and I pack you off to grovel in Gilderoy."

The man of physic shrugged his shoulders, seemed grieved and incredulous, prepared to wash his hands of the whole business.

"Have your way, my lord; you are too hot-blooded for me; I will meddle no further."

"Ha, Master Gallipot, you shall acknowledge anon that I have a soul."

XLV

Trumpets were blowing in Avalon of the Twelve Towers, echoing through the valley where the sun shone upon the woods, the sere leaves glittering like golden byzants as they fell. The sky was a clear canopy, drawn as blue silk from height to height, tenting the green meadows. Avalon's towers rose black and strong above the sheen of her quiet waters.

From Gambrevault came the Lord Flavian to claim his wife once more. Through the brief days of autumn Aurelius of Gilderoy had decreed him an exile from the Isle of Orchards, pleading for the girl's frail breath and her lily soul that might fade if set too soon in the noon of love. In Gambrevault the Lord Flavian had moped like a prisoned falcon, listening to the far cry of the war, hungry for the touch of a woman's hand. Modred had snatched the Madonna of the Pine Forest from burning Gilderoy. She had been throned at last above the tides of violence and wrong.

That day the Lord Flavian rode in state for Avalon, even as an Arthurian, prince coming with splendour from some high-souled quest. The woods had blazoned their banners for his march. Trumpets hailed him from the towers and battlements. The sun, like a great patriarch, smoothed his gold beard and beamed upon the world.

Over the bridge and beneath the gate, Modred led his master's horse. The garrison had gathered in the central court; they tossed their swords, and cheered for Gambrevault. Trumpets set the wild woods wailing. Bombards thundered from the towers.

In the court, amid the panoply of arms, Flavian dismounted, took Modred's hand, leant upon the great man's shoulder.

"Old friend, is she well?"

"Ah, sire, youth turns to youth."

"Let my minstrels play below the stair some old song of Tristan and Iseult.

And now I go to her. Lead on."

In dead Duessa's bower a drooping figure knelt before a crucifix in prayer. Foreshadowings of misery and woe were stirring in the woman's heart. She had heard the bray of trumpets on the towers, the thunder of cannon, the shouts of strong men cheering in the court. She heard lute, viol, and flute strike up from afar a mournful melody sweet with an antique woe.

Time seemed to crawl like a wounded snake in the grass. The figures on the arras gestured and grimaced; the jewelled glass in the oriel burnt in through the dark lattice of her veil. She heard footsteps on the stairs; Modred's deep voice, joyous and strangely tender. A hand fumbled at the latch. Starting up, she ran towards the shadows, and hid her face in the folds of the arras.

The door had closed and all was silent.

"Yeoland."

The cry smote through her like joy barbed with bitterness. She shuddered and caught her breath, swayed as she stood with the arras hiding her face.

"Wife, wife."

With sudden strength, compelling herself, she peered round, and saw a figure standing in the shadow, a man with white face turned towards the light, his hands stretched out like a little child's. She stood motionless, breathing fast with short, convulsive breaths, her lips quivering beneath her veil.

"I am here," she said to him, husky, tremulous, and faint.

"Yeoland."

"Ah!"

"I hear your voice; come near to me."

She wavered forward three steps into the room, stood staring strangely at the figure by the door.

"Yeoland, are you near?"

"My God!"

"I give myself to you, a broken man. Ah, where are your hands?"

Sudden comprehension seized her; she went very near to him, gazing in his face.

"Speak."

"Wife, I shall never see the sky again, nor watch the stars at night, nor the moon, nor the sea. I shall never look on Avalon, her green woods and her lilies, and her sleeping mere. I shall never behold your face again. I am blind, I am blind."

She gave a great cry, tore the veil from her face, and cast it far from her.

"Husband, I come to you."

His hands were groping in the dark, groping like souls that sought the light. She went near him, weeping, caught his fingers, kissed them with her lips. The

man's arms circled her; she hung therein, and buried her head in his bosom.

[image]

"HIS HANDS WERE GROPING IN THE DARK."

"My love, my own."

"I am blind; your hair bathes my face."

"Ah, you are blind, mine eyes are yours, and I your wife will be your sun. No more pain shall compass you; there shall be no more grieving, no more tears."

"Yeoland."

"Husband."

"God in heaven, I give Thee thanks for this."

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