

BERTRAND OF BRITTANY



BY
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AUTHOR OF
"A WOMAN'S WAR" "THE SLANDERERS"
"BESS OF THE WOODS" ETC.



NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
MCMVIII

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Title: Bertrand of Brittany

Date of first publication: 1908

Author: Warwick Deeping (1877-1950)

Date first posted: Mar. 5, 2018

Date last updated: Mar. 5, 2018

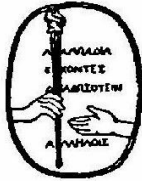
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Published April, 1908.

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TO
MY DEAR FRIEND
JULIA ORD

Bertrand of Brittany

BOOK I

YOUTH AND THE SILVER SWAN

I

IT had always been said in the Breton lands that Sieur Robert du Guesclin was a brave man, save in the presence of that noble lady, Jeanne de Malemains, his wife.

Now Dame Jeanne was a handsome, black-browed woman with a resolute mouth and a full, white chin. The Norman apple-trees had lost their bloom, so sang the romancers, when Gleauquim by the sea had stolen her as the sunlight from Duke Rollo's lands. The Lady Jeanne had brought no great dowry to her husband, save only her smooth and confident beauty, and the perilous blessings of a splendid pride. She had borne Sieur Robert children, fed them at her own breast as babes, and whipped them with the stern sense of her responsibility heavy in her hand. It was well in those days for a wife to watch strong sons growing into manhood about her husband's table. One fist the more, and the surer was the mother's honor when enemies might speak with her good man at his gate.

Proud, lovely, and masterful, the Lady Jeanne had looked to see her majesty repeated in her children. It had been but the legitimate and expectant vanity of a mother to dower her first-born with all the grace and beauty of a Roland. Poor dame, the thing had seemed as ugly as sin when it first kicked and squalled in her embroidered apron; bristling hair, a pug of a nose, crooked limbs, skin like a pig's! Every passing month had brought the brat into more obvious disfavor. Its temper appeared as ugly as its body. It would bite and yell with a verve and fierceness that made the nurse vow it was an elf's child, a changeling, or some such monstrosity. The Lady Jeanne had grieved, prayed to the saints, and yet been at a loss to discover why her motherhood should have been shamed by such a child.

Years passed, and still mother and son were no better accorded. Jeanne, proud lady, had no joy or pleasure in her eldest child. His ugliness increased: he was wild as a passage hawk, rebellious, passionate, yet very sullen. The younger children went in terror of him; the servants felt his fists and teeth; he fought with the village lads, and came home bloody and most whole-heartedly unclean. Sieur Robert might break many a good ash stick over Master Bertrand's body. His mother might storm, scold, clout, and zealously declaim; the ugly whelp defied her and her gentlewomen. He had no more respect for a lady than for Huon, the miller, whose apples he stole, and whose son he tumbled into the mill-pool.

Poor Jeanne du Guesclin! The fault was with her pride—and with no other virtue. She could not love the child, and nature, as though in just revenge,

mocked with the clumsiness of the son the vanity of the mother. Young Bertrand was starved of all affection. His very viciousness was but a protest against the indifference of those who made him. Cuffed, chided, sneered at, he grew up like a dwarfed and misshapen oak that has been lopped unwisely by the forester's bill. He was slighted and ignored for Olivier, the second son, whose prettiness atoned with Jeanne for her first-born's snub nose and ugly body. It was Olivier whom the mother loved, the sleek and clean-faced Jacob ousting poor Esau into the cold. Often Bertrand rebelled. The good child would come snivelling to his mother with a wet nose and a swollen cheek.

"See what Bertrand has done to me!"

The sneak! And Bertrand—well, he would be cuffed into the dark cellar under the solar floor, and be left there with bread and water to meditate on the beauty of motherly affection. And yet within a week, perhaps, sweet Olivier would boast another bloody nose, and the whole process be repeated.

Such was Bertrand's upbringing, with all the fierce instincts pampered in his heart, all the gentler impulses chilled and stunted for lack of love. Bertrand's figure was a slur on the Du Guesclin shield. He had no manners and no graces, and loved to herd with the peasant lads, and wrestle with ploughmen rather than listen to the romances of chivalry at his mother's knee. While Olivier had the adventures of Sir Ipomedon by heart, and knew the lays of Marie de France, his brother Bertrand robbed orchards and used his fists, growing into a brown-faced, crab-legged young rascal who looked more like a peasant's child than the son of Jeanne the Proud of Normandy.

The May-trees were white about Motte Broom in the year of our Lord 1338, the meadows were covered with tissue of gold. Dame Jeanne walked in her garden, dressed in a gown of yellow sarcenet, her black hair bundled into a silver net. To the west of the little lawn stood a yew-hedge, over which the sun was sinking, to plunge into the mystery of the darkening woods. Several tall aspens glittered in the evening light. The smoke rose straight from the octagonal chimneys of the château.

Dame du Guesclin walked on the grass round the stone vivarium with its darting fish, Sieur Robert strolling beside her, stroking his amiable and brown-bearded chin, and listening to her as to an oracle as she talked. The Lady Jeanne was in one of her masterful moods; moreover, she was tired and out of temper, and in no mind to be reasoned with, even though the tongue of an angel had pleaded the cause of the ugly son.

"Robert, I tell you Bertrand must not go to Rennes. We can leave him with Father Isidore, and Olivier will do us honor. I have been stitching some gold stuff on the lad's best côte-hardie, and sewing some of my own jewels into his

cap. Olivier will make a show among the bachelors.”

Du Guesclin’s sleepy eyes wandered for a moment over his wife’s face.

“So you would not have us take Bertrand, wife?” he repeated.

The lady pouted out her lower lip.

“Think of it, Robert—think of Bertrand in such company! Good Heavens! Why, the lad is only fit to take his meals in an ale-house; the lout would disgrace us, and set the whole town laughing. Besides, he has no clothes; his best surcoat was slit down the back last Sunday by a Picard fellow whom he threw into the church ditch. I’ll not have the young fool shaming us before all the gentlemen of Brittany.”

“The lad may take it to heart,” said the husband, troubled with recollections of his own youth.

“Nonsense!” returned Dame Jeanne, “Bertrand has no pride; his tastes are low, and he is without ambition. Often I think that the boy is mad. Moreover, Robert, there is no horse. Olivier must have the gray, and there is only Yellow Thomas, with his broken knees and stumpy tail. He is good enough for Bertrand as things go, but imagine the oaf riding into Rennes beside you on Yellow Thomas, and his surcoat split all up the back!”

Du Guesclin could not forbear a chuckle at the picture painted by his wife.

“Then we will leave Bertrand to Dom Isidore,” he said.

“Ah, Robert, you are a man of sense! I do not want to be cruel to the lad, but he has no figure for gay routs, he is no courtier—only a clumsy fool. I have no wish to be shamed by one of my own children. Olivier is quick and debonair; that lad will do us credit.”

The Lady Jeanne had hardly emphasized this last piece of treachery to her first-born by laying her large white hand on her husband’s shoulder, when there was a fierce bustling among the yew-trees, as though some young ram had been caught by the horns and was struggling to break through. The green boughs were burst asunder. A pair of hands and a black pate came burrowing through the yew-hedge into the light.

“Bertrand!”

And an ugly vagabond the lad looked, with his huge hollow chest, arms long and powerful as an ape’s, bowed legs, and head sunk between his shoulders. His green eyes were glittering under their heavy brows, his mouth working in a way that was not calculated to make him seem more serene and beautiful.

“Bertrand!”

The Lady Jeanne’s voice was hard and imperious. It is never flattery to the inner self to be overheard plotting a mean act, and the coincidence was not soothing to the lady’s temper. She was not the woman, however, to be startled out of her judicial calm. In such a case it was better to brandish the whip than

to hold out the hand.

“Bertrand, you have been eavesdropping!”

The lad had approached them over the grass, walking with that bow-legged but springy action peculiar to some men of great physical strength. His forehead was all knotted up in wrinkles, and he was breathing heavily, as though under the influence of strong emotion.

“Mother, I’ll kill Olivier! I’ll break his bones—”

“Bertrand, stand back! How dare you threaten?”

“Curse Olivier! I tell you I will go to Rennes.”

“Rennes!”

“Yes; why should I not go? I am your son, mother. By Heavens! when will you treat me as you treat Olivier?” He gulped down some great sob of feeling that was in his throat, and turned to his father with moist eyes. “Sire, say that I may go to Rennes.”

Du Guesclin winced, fidgeted, and glanced at his wife.

“What shall I say to the lad, Jeanne?” he asked.

“Leave him to me,” she said, quietly. “I will show the fool the honest truth.”

Sieur Robert surrendered to his wife’s discretion, and, retreating towards the château, settled himself on a bench under an almond-tree that was still in bloom. Jeanne stood watching her husband over her shoulder. Presently she turned again to Bertrand with that regal and half-contemptuous air he had known so well of old. Jeanne stared at the lad in silence for some moments, the angles of her mouth twitching, her eyes cold and without pity.

“Bertrand!”

Her tones were sharp, hard, and incisive. The lad nodded, slouching his shoulders, and looking surly and ill at ease.

“Bertrand, can you serve or carve at table?”

“No.”

“Can you sing or play the lute, dance, or make courtly speeches?”

“No.”

“Can you amuse a great lady?”

“No.”

“Where are your fine clothes, your armor, and your horse?”

“Mother, you know I have none.”

Dame Jeanne’s eyes were fixed with a malicious glitter upon his face. She knew how to crush the lad, to sting into him the realization of his unfitness for the polite pageantry of life.

“Listen to me, Bertrand: you will never make a gentleman.”

He winced, and looked at his mother sulkily under his heavy brows.

“How can such as you mix with the lords and ladies of France and Brittany

—you, who herd with ploughboys and scuffle with scullions? Bah, you fool! they would only laugh at you at Rennes, and take you for a groom who had sneaked in from the stables! Go to Rennes, indeed—to Jeanne de Penthièvre’s wedding! Who ever heard such nonsense! Where are your manners, Messire Bertrand? Where are your fine clothes, your airs and graces? Where are you going to find a horse? No, no; the honor and fortune of the family must be remembered.”

Bertrand stood gnawing his finger nails in humiliation. He knew that he was ugly, rough, and violent, and he half suspected that his mother’s words were true. And yet what chance had she ever given him to show his mettle? He had been the spurned dog since he could remember.

“Well, Bertrand, what have you to say to me?”

“Nothing,” he growled, hanging his head and staring at the grass.

Suddenly, as though to end the lad’s torture, there came the cry of a trumpet from the road across the meadows. Dame Jeanne heard it, and turned her head. Sieur Robert had risen from the seat, and climbed the stairway leading from the garden to the solar. He looked out over the palisading above the moat towards the meadows, sheeted in the sunlight like cloth of gold.

“The banner of the De Bellières!” he cried, beckoning to his wife. “Come, Jeanne, leave the lad; we must be ready to make them welcome.”

II

BERTRAND did not follow his mother, but stood watching her as she crossed the garden, the evening sunlight shining on her gown of yellow sarcenet. He saw her halt for a moment, and glance up at the window of the solar that overlooked the garden. Olivier was leaning out over the sill, waving his cap, and watching the Vicomte de Bellière's company as it wound along the road through the meadows. Bertrand knew that Dame Jeanne was smiling at Olivier—smiling at him in that fond, proud way that Bertrand had never known.

He slunk away behind the trees, for Olivier was calling to him from the window.

"Hi! Bertrand, old bandy-legs! What will you do for a new surcoat? Here are the De Bellières on their way to Rennes! You had better hide among the grooms when you come in to supper!"

The younger lad had a spiteful tongue, and the wit to realize that he held his brother at a disadvantage. Of old Bertrand would have broken out into one of his tempests, but he had learned the uselessness of avenging himself upon Olivier.

He retreated behind the yew-trees, and, going to a palisading that topped the moat, stood watching the Vicomte de Bellière's company flashing towards the château. Poor Bertrand, he had set his heart on going to Rennes! Had not his old aunt Ursula, at Rennes, persuaded her husband to give the lad a spear and a coat of mail! By stealth Bertrand had built himself a rough quintain in a glade deep in the woods about the castle. Many a morning before the sun was up he had sneaked into the stable, harnessed his father's horse, and ridden out with spear and shield to tilt at the quintain in the woods. Old Hoel, the gate-keeper, who was fond of the lad, had winked at the deception. And then as the sun came glittering over the woods, and the grass gleamed with the quivering dew, Bertrand would thunder to and fro on Sieur Robert's horse, grinding his teeth, and setting the quintain beam flying round like a weather-cock in a squall.

Great bitterness overcame Bertrand's heart that evening. He knew that he was of no great worth in the eyes of his father and Dame Jeanne, but he had never fully grasped the truth that they were ashamed of him because he was their son. Olivier was all that a vain mother might desire—pert, pretty, straight in the limbs, with a fleece of tawny hair shining about his handsome face. Bertrand supposed that it was an evil thing to be ugly, to be the possessor of a snub nose and a pair of bandy legs.

And yet he could have loved his mother had she been only just to him.

What had driven him to herding and fighting with the peasant lads? The Lady Jeanne's indifference,—nay her too candid displeasure—at his presence in the house. What had made him rough and sullen, shaggy and obstinate, violent in his moods and uncertain in his temper? His mother's sneers, her haughty preference for Olivier—even the way she shamed him before the servants. Bertrand believed that they wished him dead—dead, that Olivier might sit as their first-born at their table.

All these bitter thoughts sped through Bertrand's heart as he leaned against the palisading, and watched the line of horses nearing his father's house across the meadows. There was the Vicomte's banner—a blue chevron on a silver ground—flapping against the evening sky. Stephen de Bellière rode a great gray horse all trapped in azure with silver bosses on the harness. Beside him, like a slim pinnacle towered over by the copper-clad steeple, for the Vicomte's armor and jupon were all of rusty gold, rode a little girl mounted on a black palfrey, her brown hair gathered into a silver caul. On the other side, a boy, young Robin Raguenel, cantered to and fro on a red jennet. Behind the Vicomte came two esquires carrying his spear and shield, and farther still some half a dozen armed servants, with a rough baggage-wagon lumbering behind two black horses. The little girl had a goshawk upon her wrist, and two dogs gambolled about her palfrey's legs.

Bertrand watched them, leaning his black chin upon the wood-work, and waxing envious at heart over a pomp and glamour that he could not share. The Vicomte's horse-boys were better clad than he. And as for Stephen Raguenel, he seemed to Bertrand, at a distance, a very tower of splendor. To boast such a horse, such arms, and such a banner! The Vicomte must be a happy man. So thought Bertrand, as he gnawed his fingers and beat his knee against the fencing.

Robert du Guesclin and the Lady Jeanne had come out from the gate-house, and were standing at the head of the bridge to welcome their guests. Dame du Guesclin had her arm over Olivier's shoulder. They were laughing and talking together, and the sight of it made poor Bertrand wince. He turned away with an angry growl, and, sitting down on a bench under an apple-tree, leaned his head against the trunk, stared at the sky, and whistled.

Half an hour passed, and the Vicomte and his two children had been taken into the hall to sup. Bertrand could hear the grooms and servants chattering in the stable-yard as they rubbed down the horses. From the hall came the sound of some one playing on the cithern. Bertrand could see the window to the west of the dais from where he sat, alive with light as with the flare of many tapers. He heard Olivier's shrill laugh thrill out above the cithern-playing and the rough voices in the yard. They were very merry over their supper; nor did they miss him. No. He was nothing in his father's house.

Dusk was falling, though a rare afterglow crimsoned even the purple east. The yews and apple-trees in the garden were black as jet, and the bats darted athwart the golden west. The long grass was wet with dew. Bertrand shivered, stretched himself, sat up, and listened. He was hungry, but then he had no stomach for the great hall where no one wished for him, and where the very guests might take him for a servant. He would sneak round to the pantry and get some bread and a mug of ale from the butler's hatch.

There was a sudden rustling of the grass under the tree, a low whimpering, and a wet nose thrust itself against Bertrand's hand. Then a pair of paws hooked themselves upon his knee, and a cold snout made a loving dab at the lad's mouth.

"Why, Jake—old dame!"

The dog whimpered and shot out her tongue towards Bertrand's cheek.

"Jake, old lady, they have all forgotten me, save you."

He fondled the dog, his great brown hands pulling her ears with a tenderness that seemed strange in one so strong and ugly. He laid his cheek against Jake's head, and let her lick his neck and ear, for it was sweet to be remembered—even by a dog.

"Well, old lady, have you had your supper? What, not a bone! By St. Ives! we will go in, in spite of them, and sup together by the fire."

He rose, and the dog sprang away as though welcoming the decision, and played round him, barking, as he crossed the garden towards the court.

When Bertrand entered the hall with Dame Jake at his heels the grooms and underlings were taking their places at the trestled tables. The walls were bare, save behind the dais, where crimson hangings hung like a mimic sunset under the deep shadows of the roof. The fire was not built on a hearth in the centre of the floor, but under a great hooded chimney in the wall midway between the high table and the screens. There was no napery on the lower boards, and the servant folk used thick slices of brown bread in place of platters.

Bertrand cast a quick and jealous glance at the high table, and then went and sat himself on a stool before the fire. The logs were burning brightly on the irons, licking a great black pot that hung from the jack. Neither Dame Jeanne nor her husband had seen Bertrand enter. They were very gay and merry on the dais, the Vicomte between Sieur Robert and his wife, Olivier feeding little Robin with comfits and sugar-plums, and Tiphaïne, the child, sitting silent beside Dame Jeanne, with her eyes wandering about the hall.

Bertrand felt some one nudge his shoulder. It was old Hoel, the gate-keeper, his red face shining in the firelight under a fringe of curly hair. He held a tankard in one hand and half a chicken and a hunch of bread on a hollyhock platter in the other.

"You have not supped, messire," he said.

Bertrand glanced at the old man over his shoulder.

"Good man, Hoel, I'll take what you are carrying. Bring me a mutton-bone for Jake."

Bertrand pulled out his knife, set the tankard down amid the rushes, and, ignoring the inquisitive glances of the Vicomte's servants, fell to on the bread and chicken. There was much gossiping and gesturing at the servants' table. A man-at-arms with a pointed black beard and a red scar across his forehead was asking Sieur Robert's falconer who the ugly oaf on the stool might be. Bertrand caught the words and the insolent cocking of the soldier's eye as he looked him over and then grimaced expressively.

"'Sh, friend, the devil's in the lad."

"True, friend, true," quoth Bertrand, coolly throwing his platter at the soldier's head.

It was the first incident that had called the attention of those at the high table to the lad seated by the fire. To Bertrand the richly dressed figures loomed big and scornful before the crimson hangings, all starred and slashed with gold. He saw the Vicomte stare at him and then turn to Sieur Robert with a courtly little gesture of the hand. Dame Jeanne was sitting stark and stiff as any Egyptian goddess. Bertrand saw her flush as the Vicomte questioned her husband, flush with shame that the lad on the stool should be discovered for her son. Bertrand blushed, too, but with more anger than contrition. He heard Olivier's shrill, squealing laugh as he tossed Robin an apple and bade him throw it at "the lout upon the stool." Every eye in the hall seemed fixed for the moment upon Bertrand. He knew that the "mean" folk were mocking at him, and that the great ones on the dais—even his own mother—regarded him with a feeling more insolent than pity.

Dame Jake, oblivious to the tableau, sat up upon her hind-legs and begged. She waved her fore-paws in the air, almost as though to recall Bertrand to the fact that he had one friend in his father's hall. Bertrand took a piece of bread, rubbed it on a chicken-bone, and tossed it to her with a growl of approval. Jake swallowed the morsel and then sat with her muzzle on her master's knee, her eyes fixed upon his face.

At the high table the child with the brown hair coiled up in a silken caul had laid her hand on the Lady Jeanne's arm.

"Madame, who is that?"

Dame du Guesclin fidgeted with the kerchief pouch at her girdle and frowned.

"Who, child, and where?"

"The man on the stool, with the dog."

"That is Bertrand, my sweeting."

“And who is Bertrand?”

“Why, child, my son.”

Tiphaine’s great eyes were turned full upon the elder woman’s face. Lady Jeanne was red despite her pride, and ill at ease under the child’s pestering.

“Why does he not sit with us on the dais?”

“Why? Well, little one”—and the Lady Jeanne laughed—“Bertrand is a strange lad. He is not like Olivier or your brother Robin.”

Tiphaine had been scanning the handsome face above her, with its curling lips and its contracted brows. There was something that puzzled her about the Lady Jeanne. Why had she turned so red, why did her eyes look angry, and why did she tap with her foot upon the floor?

“Madame, may I ask Bertrand to come up hither?”

“No, child, no. See—here is the comfit-dish, or would you like a red apple? Olivier, Olivier, bring me the bowl of silver. Child, what are you at?”

For Tiphaine had risen and had slipped round the table end before Jeanne du Guesclin could lay her hand upon her arm. She sprang down lightly from the dais and moved over the rush-strewn floor and under the beamed and shadowy roof to where Bertrand sat sullen and alone before the fire.

Bertrand was sitting staring at the flames and thinking of the sights that would be seen at Rennes, when he was startled by the gliding of the child’s figure into the half-circle of light. He looked up, frowning, to find Tiphaine’s eyes fixed on his with a questioning steadfastness that was not embarrassing. For several seconds Bertrand and the child looked thus at each other, while Dame Jake lifted her head from her master’s knee and held up a paw to Tiphaine as though welcoming a friend.

The dog’s quaintness proved irresistible. Tiphaine was down on her knees amid the rushes, hugging Dame Jake and laughing up at Bertrand with her eyes aglow.

“Ah—Bertrand—the dear dog! What is its name?”

“Jake—Dame Jake.”

Bertrand was astonished, and his face betrayed the feeling. He was looking at Tiphaine as though she were like to nothing he had seen on earth before. The child had one of those sleek brown skins, smooth as a lily petal, with the color shining through it like light shining through rose silk. Her great eyes were of a beautiful amber, her hair a fine bronze shot through with gold. There would have been the slightest suggestion of impudence about the long mouth and piquant chin had not the gentleness of the child’s eyes and forehead mastered the impression. She was clad in a *côte-hardie* of apple-green samite, shaded with gold and embroidered with gold-work on the sleeves. Her tunic was of sky blue, her shoes of green leather, her girdle of silver cords bound together with rings of divers-colored silks.

Bertrand looked at her as though he had not overcome the surprise with which her coming filled him. Perhaps she was cold and had left the high table to warm herself at the fire. In the village Bertrand had won for himself something of the character of an ogre, and the children would run from him and hide in the hovels.

Tiphaine was still fondling the dog and looking at Bertrand. The lad jumped up suddenly and offered her his stool.

"Take it," he said, gruffly, thrusting it towards her.

She shook her head, however, smiling at him, her hand playing with Dame Jake's ears. Bertrand, flushing, sat down again and stared at her.

"As you will," he said. "You like the dog, eh? Yes, I have had Jake since she was a puppy."

There was a puzzled look in Tiphaine's eyes. She was wondering why the Lady Jeanne had said that Bertrand was not like Olivier or her brother Robin. He was ugly, and his clothes were shabby, and yet she discovered something in his face that pleased her. His very loneliness touched some sensitive note in the child's soul, for she was one of those rare creatures who are not eaten up with selfishness at seven.

"Why did you not sup with us?" she asked, suddenly.

Bertrand stared at her, and felt that there was no evading those brown eyes.

"Because I was not wanted," he answered.

This time it was Tiphaine who gave a little frown.

"But you are *Sieur Robert's* son!"

Bertrand winced, and then smiled with a twisting of the features that betrayed the truth.

"I am no use to them," he said.

"No use?"

"Look at me. Did you ever see such an ugly wretch? I should frighten you all at the high table—I suppose. And they tell me I have no manners. No. They would rather see me hidden among the servants."

Tiphaine looked shocked. It was plain even to her childish wisdom that she had lighted on some passionate distress, the depth and fierceness of which were strange to one who had never lacked for love.

"Are you older than Olivier?" she asked.

Bertrand nodded.

"Then why does he take your place?"

"Because he has straight legs and a pretty face; because they love him; because I am such a clumsy beast," and he shut his mouth with a rebellious growl.

Tiphaine drew herself nearer to him amid the rushes. She was still fondling Dame Jake's ears.

"I do not think that you are clumsy, Bertrand," she said.

"Ah—!"

"You look so strong, too. I like you better than Olivier. You are stronger than he is, and then—I love Dame Jake."

Bertrand glanced at her as though he thought for the moment that she might be mocking him, but the look in the child's eyes spoke to him of her sincerity. At the same instant he saw Olivier standing on the dais, beckoning and calling to Tiphaine as she sat at Bertrand's feet amid the rushes, the glow from the fire shining on the gold-work in her dress.

"Tiphaine, Tiphaine, come away, or the ogre will eat you. Prosper is going to play to us on the cithern, and sing us the lay of Guingamor."

The child pretended not to hear him. She had caught the hot flush that had rushed over Bertrand's face; nor was she tricked by Olivier's insolence. That pert youth, seeing that she did not stir, came running down the hall, winking at the servants as though to hint to them how much finer a fellow he was than his shabby brother. Bertrand sat stolidly on his stool, staring into the fire and snapping his fingers at Dame Jake.

"Tiphaine, you must come back to the high table. Bertrand hates girls; they always laugh at his crooked legs."

He shot a sneer at his brother and held out his hand to the child, who was still seated on the floor. Bertrand was grinding his teeth together, and striving to master the great yearning in him to swing his fist in the little fop's face.

"I do not want you, Messire Olivier du Guesclin."

"Ho, but you cannot sit among the grooms and servants. Bertrand does not matter."

Tiphaine rose up very quietly and looked Olivier straight in the face.

"I will come if Messire Bertrand will give me his hand."

"Well, that is good!"

"And sit with me at the high table."

She turned, and with a graciousness that was wonderful in one so young looked at Bertrand and held out her hand.

"Messire Bertrand, you will come with me. I do not wish to go with Olivier."

Bertrand had risen, oversetting the stool in rising. He held his head high, a slight flush upon his face, his eyes shining, half with tenderness, half with the light of battle. Tiphaine's hand was clasped in his. He shouldered Olivier aside, and moved towards the dais, a rough dignity inspired in him by the child's presence.

"Mother, I have come to take my place at the table."

Jeanne smiled at him, the smile of cold and unpleased necessity.

"You were long in coming, Bertrand," she said.

“Perhaps,” he answered. “I was waiting till some one made me welcome.”

And Bertrand and Tiphaine sat down together and drank wine out of the same cup.

III

BERTRAND was astir early the following morning. He scrambled up from his truss of straw in one corner of the great hall, shook himself, and looked round at the Vicomte's men who were still snoring on the rushes and dry bracken. The sunlight was streaming in through the eastern window, falling on the polished surface of the high table and the crimson tapestry threaded with gold. One of Olivier's favorite hawks was bating on its perch under the window. Bertrand whistled softly to the bird, and glanced at the place by the fire where he had talked with Tiphaine the night before. The three-legged stool was still lying where he had left it, but from the spot where Tiphaine had throned herself amid the rushes the stertorous and gaping face of the Vicomte's farrier saluted the rafters from a bundle of heather.

Bertrand's eyes twinkled. He passed out of the hall into the court-yard, walking with the slightest suggestion of a swagger that seemed to betray unusual self-satisfaction. Tiphaine's comradeship had lifted him suddenly out of his sullen hopelessness, and Bertrand's pride was ready to try its wings. In the yard one of Sieur Robert's grooms was seated astride a bench polishing his master's war harness. He grinned at Bertrand as though a mere showing of the teeth was sufficient salutation for the unfavored son.

Bertrand walked straight up to the man, and with one sweep of the hand knocked him backward off the bench.

"Hello, where are your manners?"

The fellow's heels were still in the air, his astonished face visible to Bertrand between his legs.

"Get up, and make your bow, friend."

Bertrand left the fellow to settle his impressions, and, opening the wicket that led into the garden, stood looking round him and whistling softly through his teeth. The sky was blue above the apple-trees, whose snowy canopies hid groins of spreading green. Bluebells were hanging in the long, rank grass of the orchard, and the boughs of the aspens glittered in the sunlight.

In the centre of the lawn lay the Lady Jeanne's vivarium, a little pool, clear as rock crystal, ringed round with a low wall of stone. Three steps led down to the water, and under the lily leaves fish shimmered to and fro. Bertrand crossed the grass, leaned over the low wall, and looked at the reflection of his face in the water. Even the owner could not forbear a grimace at the ugliness thereof. It was no mirror of Venus as far as Bertrand was concerned, and the water would serve him better for a morning wash than for the recording of snub noses and a stubble of coarse black hair. Bertrand, kneeling on the steps,

plunged his head into the pool and sluiced the water over his neck and arms. The fish went darting into the depths, unused to such desecration and to such troublings of the public peace.

Bertrand was shaking the water from his eyes and running his fingers through his hair when he heard a merry laugh coming from the direction of the house. The shutters of the bower-window had been pushed open, and a brown head was catching the morning sunlight above the trees. It was Tiphaine herself, sleek and fresh as a ripe peach, her eyes sparkling with delight and mischief.

“Bertrand! Bertrand! is that you?”

Bertrand was mopping his face with a corner of his surcoat. He put his wet hair back from his forehead and went and stood under the window, laughing.

“I was frightening the fish with my face,” he said.

“Hist!”

The child gestured to him from above.

“Madame is still asleep. I crept out of the truckle-bed and dressed. Bertrand, do you think I could jump out of the window?”

The lad was blushing a little, and showing his teeth in a broad smile. He darted away amid the apple-trees, and came back carrying a rough ladder that was kept slung against the garden wall. Planting it, he climbed up till he was on a level with the window.

“What mischief, Bertrand!”

The lad smiled because Tiphaine was smiling.

“Can you carry me down?”

“Try me,” he said, as though he would have carried Goliath into Gath.

In a moment she was on the sill, and holding out her hands to Bertrand with a confidence that thrilled even the rough lad’s heart. He took her in his arms, holding her very sacredly, and so carried her down the ladder. Tiphaine’s face was turned to his, and she was smiling at him out of her wonderful eyes—eyes that seemed to make him live anew. He set her down upon the grass, though one long strand of her hair still lay upon his shoulder.

“How strong you are, Bertrand!”

“Am I?” And he blushed and chuckled sheepishly, flattered by this maid of seven.

“Yes, and you are gentle, too. How can they call you clumsy! What a lovely morning! See how the white clouds glisten! I should like a ride in the meadows, Bertrand.”

It was as though her word were law with the lad. He bade her sit down on a bench by the fish-pond, and, running into the stable, he saddled and bridled her palfrey with his own hands. Then, blundering into the kitchen quarters, he found the pantler polishing wooden platters in his den. The man glanced up as

Bertrand darkened the doorway, and, paying no heed to him, went on with his work.

“Jehan, the key of the wardrobe. Quick!”

Jehan stared.

“What may you want?” he asked, indifferently, not troubling to be courteous.

“Want, you monkey! Comfits and fruit for the Lady Tiphaine. Quick with you, or I’ll break one of your own platters over your head!”

The pantler still demurred, but, being a little man, he surrendered when Bertrand caught him by the girdle.

“Go your ways, Messire Bertrand,” he said. “Take the key, but your father shall hear of it. I am an honest servant, St. Padarn’s bones upon it.”

“St. Padarn be ducked!” quoth the thief, taking the key, and leaving the pantler to his platters.

In a few minutes he had flung the key into the kitchen, and was back in the garden pouring his spoil into Tiphaine’s lap. Sweetmeats, comfits, sugared fruit, they made a brave show in the hollow of the child’s tunic.

“Oh, Bertrand!” And she began to store them deliberately in her kerchief pouch, yet giving him some for his own delectation.

“I have saddled the palfrey,” he said, thrusting a sugar-plum into his capacious mouth.

“Bertrand, I love sweetmeats.”

Bertrand chuckled.

“So does Jehan, the pantler,” he said, licking his lips.

Away they went across the bridge with the breath of the May morning sweeping over the meadows. Bertrand had lifted Tiphaine into the saddle, and shouted to Dame Jake, who lay asleep in the court-yard with her nose on her paws. Bertrand ran with his hand on the bridle, looking up into the child’s face, laughing when she laughed, delighted with her delight. Youth was in the air, youth and the joy thereof. Bertrand forgot his ugliness and his shabby clothes as the palfrey cantered along the road with Dame Jake barking and bounding under her nose.

Away over the meadows with their dew-drenched green and gold stood a clump of old thorn-trees white as driven snow. Tiphaine pointed to them with a thrill of innocent wonder.

“See, Bertrand, the great thorns! I should like a white bough to carry into Rennes.”

Bertrand turned the palfrey into the meadows, and they were soon racing over the wet grass for the thorns. The trees grew in a circle about a great stone cromlech that rose gray as death amid the revelry of spring. There were other stones lying half hidden in the grass, the fallen pillars that the black Iberians

had heaved up of old. The gray cromlech seemed to cast a shadow across the face of the morning, as though grim Ankrou still lurked in the woods and wastes.

Tiphaïne's face fell a little as the granite rose amid the green.

"Bertrand, there is a wizard's table. I hate these old stones; they make me think of ghosts."

Bertrand was not an imaginative lad, and somewhat of a sturdy sceptic with regard to many of the Breton superstitions.

"Our folk call it the Maid's Gate," he said, with a twinkle. "On midsummer night the wenches who want husbands run through it at midnight in their shifts. I was here last midsummer."

"Oh, Bertrand!"

"I hid in one of the thorn-trees, and when the silly hussies came sneaking up I set up such a croaking and a growling that they took to their heels and ran like rabbits. Tiphaïne, how I laughed, till I nearly fell right out of the tree! Dom Isidore came up next day with his Mass Book—and a cup of holy-water—and drove the devil out of the stones."

Tiphaïne laughed, but there was less joyousness in her laughter than before. The perfume of the thorns drifted on the air, their white knolls rising against the sky's blue and deepening the green of the long grass. The child sprang down from the saddle, defying the dew, and patted Dame Jake, who came to rub her head against Tiphaïne's hand.

Bertrand broke a bough from one of the trees. Tiphaïne had turned to the cromlech, and, seating herself on one of the fallen stones, she stared at it wistfully, as though it had some mystery for her she could not fathom. Bertrand watched her, wondering at the seriousness that so suddenly possessed the child.

"Bertrand."

He stood beside her, holding the white bough in one hand, the palfrey's bridle in the other.

"Bertrand, you are coming with us to Rennes?"

The lad's face clouded on the instant, and he frowned thoughtfully at the great cromlech.

"Madame Jeanne does not wish it," he said. "Olivier has my place."

"Olivier!"

"Yes. You see—they are proud of him, Tiphaïne, but they are ashamed of me."

He spoke out bluntly, yet with a bitterness that he could not hide.

"Bertrand, they are ashamed of you?"

"Well, I am not a pretty fellow; I have no manners; but, by Holy Samson, I swear that I can fight!"

Tiphaine turned her face away, her right hand caressing Dame Jake's head, her left fingering the moss and lichen on the stone.

"But you will come to Rennes," she said, suddenly. "You are braver than Olivier. I don't like Olivier; he is a conceited fellow."

Bertrand stood twisting the bridle round his wrist.

"I am eighteen," he said, "and there is no man here—nor in Rennes, for that matter—who can wrestle with me. But I have no armor and no clothes."

"Are you ashamed, Bertrand?"

"Ashamed!" and he flushed. "I would fight any man who made a mock of me."

Tiphaine held out her hand to him, looking up steadily into his face.

"I like you, Bertrand," she said; "you are strong, and you can tell the truth. I will speak to Madame Jeanne—no, I will go to Sieur Robert."

Bertrand stared at her in blank astonishment.

"You, Tiphaine!"

The child seemed perfectly sure of her own dignity, though there was no ostentation in her confidence.

"If I ask your father, he will give you a horse."

"Yellow Thomas, perhaps."

"Who is Yellow Thomas?"

"The old cart-horse," quoth Bertrand, with a grin.

Mistress Tiphaine was as good as her word, and the child's serene loveliness made her a power even at the age of seven. When the trumpet blew for dinner that morning, and the Vicomte and Sieur Robert had washed their hands in the basin that young Olivier carried, Tiphaine set herself before Du Guesclin at the high table, and held out her hands to him across the board.

"Messire, I—Tiphaine Raguenel—would ask of you a boon."

Du Guesclin's sleepy but good-tempered face beamed with amusement as he looked into the child's eyes.

"Well, Lady Tiphaine, I grant it you without a bargain."

Tiphaine spoke out calmly, with a slight deepening of the color on her warm brown cheeks.

"Bertrand must come to Rennes with me."

"Bertrand!"

"Yes, messire, for I have chosen him my bachelor."

IV

THE bells pealed in Rennes, and the narrow streets were hung with banners and with tapestry, gay squares of color falling from the windows, making the old town blaze like some magic forest in autumnal splendor. The Mordelaise gate had been covered with May-boughs, and the streets strewn with rushes and with flowers. Duke John had ridden into the town with Charles of Blois—that lean and godly youth—beside him, and all the Breton nobles and seigneurs at his back. There were the Rohans, the Châteaubriants, the Beaumanoirs, and many score more, the bishops of the seven sees, the great abbots, and even Jean de Montfort from Laval. Jeanne de Penthièvre was lodged in the abbey of St. Melain within the town, and already her ladies were about her with the bridal silks and jewels, ready to braid her hair for the wedding mass in the cathedral of Notre Dame.

By ten the wedding mass was over, and the lords of Brittany had sworn fealty to Charles of Blois as heir to the duchy on Duke John's death. By noon the feasting was over also, and the whole town went crushing and elbowing to the meadows without the walls, where the tournament was to be held in honor of Charles and of Jeanne de Penthièvre, his lady. Many pavilions were pitched in the meadows, and there was a brave clanging of clarions, and a fluttering of pennons and streamers in the wind. The green fields were swamped with color, a carpet of green and gold checkered with scarlet, azure, and white. Hither came the Sieur de Rohan and his company, yonder Olivier de Clisson, with his wife, Jane de Belleville, at his side. (Poor lady, she would remember Rennes when she avenged her husband's death with blood, and saw Galois de la Heuse, with his eyes torn out, writhing in agony at her feet.) The Sieur de Beaumanoir was to be the Marshal of the Lists that day. He and the heralds were already at their posts, waiting for the gentry to take their places in the galleries. Duke John and Charles of Blois, with Jeanne de Penthièvre and her ladies, were seated on the dais that had been built under a canopy of purple cloth. Charles had the arms of Brittany embroidered upon his surcoat, the fatal minever, that was to bring him death at the battle of Auray.

The Raguenels and the Du Guesclins had held together in Rennes, dining together at the Duke's house and riding in one company through the streets. And now the Vicomte, who was fat and too lazy to joust, had established himself with the Lady Jeanne at the southern end of the great gallery and near to the pavilion of the Sieur de Rohan. Robin Raguenel and Tiphaine were beside their father, while Olivier lolled over the balustrade and grumbled at his mother because she had implored him not to join his father in the tilting, and

he, noble fellow, had sacrificed his prowess to her fears. Messire Olivier was just sixteen. He looked a handsome slip of a lad in his embroidered surcoat and with his mother's jewels in his cap. He had been striving to win Tiphaine's favor from his brother, chiefly because he was jealous that any creature should set Bertrand above himself. As for Tiphaine, she had no patience with the fop, but sat very quiet beside her father, looking a little shy and sad.

And what of Bertrand? Bertrand was walking Yellow Thomas to and fro at a good distance from the crowd, gnawing at his finger nails, and cursing himself in that he had been fool enough to come to Rennes. It had been one long moral martyrdom for the lad, an ordeal that had tried his patience to the core. His kinsfolk were ashamed of him; he had known that from the first. Nor had it mended matters when some of the ribalds in the streets of Rennes had singled him out for their taunts and jeers, and belabored him with mockery till the lad had been ready to weep.

"Ho, for the lad on the primrose horse!"

"Did ye ever see a prettier face, messieurs?"

"Mother of Mercy! Why, he'll frighten the old cathedral out of the town, and she'll go and split herself in the meadows!"

Poor Bertrand. He had caught Olivier's savage sneer when certain of the young grandees had seen fit to jest at dinner at the shabbiness of Bertrand's clothes. Sieur Robert had looked as though his shoes pinched him; nor could Bertrand forget the gleam of resentment in his mother's eyes. Even Tiphaine's companionship had galled the lad's pride, for it was bitter for him to see her share his shame.

Thus Bertrand walked Yellow Thomas to and fro over the grass, keeping at a distance from the lists, and eating out his heart with wrath and humiliation. His ears still tingled with the jeers of the ribalds and the insolent persiflage of the smart bachelors and gaudy squires. What a blind fool he had been to come to Rennes! Yet if only he had a horse and harness he would show these butterflies that he could fight. And Tiphaine? Surely Tiphaine must be laughing at him with the rest. Perhaps she had been mocking him all the while, and yet—no—even in his anger he could not suspect the child of that.

Already the tilting had begun in the lists. Bertrand could hear the thunder of the horses, the crackling of the spears, the loud shouts of the crowd, the braying of the trumpets. He was alone in the deserted meadow, for even the grooms and horse-boys had crowded to see the play, and the press was thick about the barriers. Pride and a fierce eagerness to watch the spear-breaking warred together in Bertrand's heart. He edged Yellow Thomas nearer to the lists, and, gaining boldness as no one heeded him, he drew towards the southern end of the gallery, where hung the Vicomte de Bellière's shield.

The Lord of Clisson and Sir Hervé de Leon had just run a course, and were

taking new spears from the squires who served them. Bertrand's face kindled at the sight. He pushed his nag closer to the crowd, watching everything that passed with the alertness of a hawk. There was a rush of horses, a clangor of steel, and Sir Hervè had smitten the Lord of Clisson out of the saddle, whereat a great cheer went up from the barriers, for the Clissons were not popular with the citizens of Rennes. More brave work followed. Bertrand saw his own cousin, young Olivier de Manny, whom he recognized by the white hart upon his shield, run three courses without a fall, and then ride back towards the town to disarm at his hostelry. It was then that a lull came over the lists, the Sieur de Beaumanoir having stopped the tilting for a moment to speak with Godamar du Fay of France, who had been wounded by De Manny in the shoulder.

Bertrand, in his eagerness, had edged his horse closer and closer to the crowd. Just as the break came in the tilting Yellow Thomas set his fore foot on the heel of a butcher, who was leaning forward with his elbows on the shoulders of two friends. The man gave a yelp, clapped his hand to his foot, and turned a furious red face on Bertrand, cursing him with butcher-like and whole-hearted gusto.

"The devil strike you dead, boy! Keep your ugly beast off honest men's heels!"

Bertrand was every whit as ready to quarrel as was the butcher.

"Boy! Keep your tongue civil to a gentleman, you sticker of pigs. If my horse trod on your toe it was because he could not abide the villainous reek of your blouse."

There was an immediate stir among the crowd. All the gossips were agog, and a pavement of grinning faces seemed turned to Bertrand on his sorry nag. He became the centre of interest for the moment. The butcher had a dozen friends about him, and they were soon wagging their tongues, much to Bertrand's discomfort.

"Why, look ye, John, the lad's stolen his master's old surcoat. I'll warrant his hose are patched. How much did you give for that noble horse, boy?"

"Tell you, neighbor, he's stolen the miller's nag."

"And pulled off its tail—for a disguise!"

"The skin is rather a tight fit, Stephen. D'ye feed him on saffron, most noble baron?"

"Baron forsooth," said a fat woman with a red kerchief tied over her black hair. "Why, it is one of the Sieur de Rohan's grooms. Look at his legs, sirs; they are as round as though they taught him to straddle a cask when he was a baby."

Bertrand, white with fury, glared from one to another as they laughed and jeered at him. He could not fight the whole crowd, much less the women, who were more malicious than the men. Ridicule is not an easy yoke to be borne by

the shoulders of youth, and more so when the victim has learned to hate his own grotesqueness with the sensitive fierceness of a proud nature. Bertrand ground his teeth, and fumbled with the dagger that hung at his girdle, tempted to let blood in answer to their insolence.

The whole squabble had been overheard by the gentry in the gallery above. Olivier, who had taken a peep over the balustrading, turned with a grin to his mother, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Bertrand—of course," he said.

Dame du Guesclin bit her lip.

"Why did the fool come with us? I knew how it would be."

She glanced round towards where Tiphaine had been seated, but the child had slipped away from her father's side, and was on the top step of the stairway leading to the grassland at the back of the lists.

"Olivier, the child! Stop her! She is mad!"

Olivier sprang towards Tiphaine, but her flashing eyes sobered him. She went slowly down the stairs, keeping her face towards him, her toy poniard naked in her hand, a sting that Olivier did not relish. He laughed, and turned back to the Vicomte and Dame Jeanne.

"The lady will have her way," he said, setting his cap a little more jauntily on his head, and affecting surprise when Stephen de Bellière frowned at him.

"Leave the child alone, lad," said her father, quietly, "she has more wit than most wenches of twenty."

Bertrand, ready to weep with wrath and vexation, was backing Yellow Thomas out of the crowd, when he felt a hand laid upon his bridle. Glancing down, he saw Tiphaine standing beside him, looking up with deep color on her brown-skinned face, her eyes shining under their dark lashes.

"Tiphaine!"

She held out her hands to him.

"Take me up upon your saddle."

In a moment Bertrand had lifted her with his long arms, and had seated her before him. The townsfolk had fallen back in silence. The child had her father's arms emblazoned upon her dress, and it was easy to see that she was of gentle birth.

"Messire Bertrand du Guesclin, why do you quarrel with these wretches?"

She looked down upon the rough townsfolk with a scorn that was marvellous in its vividness on the face of one so young. No one mocked at her. Even the women held their tongues when her shrill voice carried over the heads of the people.

"Tiphaine," said the lad, "I was a great fool to come to Rennes."

She put her small hand over his mouth.

"You are unkind," she said; "was it not I who brought you hither?"

Bertrand had drawn Yellow Thomas free of the crowd. The trumpets were sounding again, and the fickle faces of the people were turned once more towards the lists. In a moment Tiphaine, Bertrand, and his yellow horse were forgotten.

“Tiphaine.” He colored to the stubble of his coarse, black hair.

“Yes, Bertrand.”

“You have saved me from cutting a butcher’s throat. You must go back, child, and see the tilting.”

She looked at him steadily, and her eyes were within a cubit’s breadth of his.

“What will you do?” she asked.

He was sitting round-shouldered in the saddle, staring sullenly towards the lists. Suddenly his eyes brightened. He gave a short cry. Tiphaine felt his right arm tighten about her.

“I have it; I have it.”

She looked at him questioningly.

“Well?”

“Wait, and you shall see.”

He put her gently from him, and, swinging her to one side, let her drop lightly on the grass.

“Go back, child,” he said, looking older and more sure of himself of a sudden. “I have a plan. Go back, and God bless you.”

He smote his heels into Yellow Thomas’s ribs, and, waving his hand to Tiphaine, went cantering over the meadows towards the town. The child watched him till he had almost reached the walls, and then, turning, she went back slowly up the stairway, and creeping close to her father, clasped her hands about his arm.

“Well, what of Bertrand?”

“Wait and see,” quoth Tiphaine, with an air of mystery, gazing defiantly at Dame Jeanne.

Bertrand rode into the nearest gate, and, meeting two esquires with fresh horses for Sir Ives de Cadoudal and Sir Geoffrey de Spinefort, hailed them and inquired whether they knew where Olivier de Manny lodged. Bertrand’s rough exterior seemed to amuse the young gentlemen not a little. They gave him the news he needed, however, and disappeared under the arch of the gate, laughing together at “the black brigand on the yellow horse.”

Olivier de Manny’s hostel stood in a narrow street branching from the cathedral close. Bertrand recognized the sign the two esquires had described to him, a large gilt buckle on the end of a beam. Dismounting and hitching Yellow Thomas’s bridle over a hook in the door-post, he plunged into the guest-room on the ground floor, and found his cousin sitting in a carved chair

with a cup of Muscadel beside him on the table. Olivier de Manny was using the empty guest-room as his robing-chamber. His heavy tilting bassinet and vambraces lay on the table, and a servant was kneeling and unbuckling the greaves from off his master's legs.

"Olivier, lend me your armor and a horse."

De Manny looked up in astonishment, and recognized in the half-threatening and dogged-faced pleader his cousin from Motte Broon.

"Bertrand, what brings you to Rennes?"

"Ask me no questions, but lend me your armor and a horse."

"St. Ives, my dear coz, why should I grant you so great a favor?"

Bertrand ground his teeth and tore at his surcoat with his hands, so fierce and passionate was his desire.

"I must have them, Olivier."

"Gently, sir, gently."

"See here—I'll fight you for them—here in the guest-room. Come, get up, or I'll call you a coward."

Olivier de Manny lay back in his chair and laughed. His honest blue eyes twinkled as he studied Bertrand's black and impatient face. He had always liked Bertrand, despite his ugliness, for there was a fierce sturdiness about the lad that pleased such a virile smiter as Olivier de Manny. Moreover, Olivier had ridden well that day, and had unhorsed one of the Sieur de Rohan's knights, a rival of his in a certain love affair, and therefore Olivier was in the best of tempers.

"Gently, dear lad, gently," he said, pulling his feet into a pair of embroidered shoes. "Don't glare at me as though I were your worst enemy. My armor's my own, I suppose, and no man ever saw my back. Do you want to tilt?—is that the passion?"

Bertrand nodded.

"What of Sieur Robert?"

"My father thinks I am a fool. They have all been laughing at me. By God, Olivier, I will show them that I can ride with the best!"

He stamped up and down the room, gesticulating and casting fierce and covetous looks at the armor upon the table. De Manny was watching him with secret sympathy and approbation. The lad had the true spirit in him, and the strength and fury of an angry bear.

"Bertrand."

"Well, are you going to fight?"

"No, but I'll lend you my armor and my horse."

"Olivier!"

"You must do me justice, lad."

"Olivier, I'll love thee forever out of the bottom of my heart."

He ran forward, threw himself upon his cousin, embraced him, and almost wept upon his neck. De Manny, who hated any display of emotion, and yet was touched by the lad's passionate outburst of gratitude, put Bertrand aside and smote him softly on the cheek.

"I've conquered you by love, lad," he said, laughing. "Come, be quick. I'll help you to fasten on the steel. Guy, pull off my hauberk; unstrap these demi-brassarts. That's the way. Bertrand, you can wear your surcoat inside out and tie a cover over the shield. St. Ives for the unknown knight! By the lips of my lady, I will come down and see you break a spear!"

He bustled about like the manly and good-hearted gentleman that he was. Bertrand, his eyes gleaming with delight, pulled on his cousin's hauberk, and suffered Olivier and the servant to buckle on the arm and leg pieces and to lace the visored bassinet. He was tremulous for the moment with the fever of his joy. De Manny patted him on the shoulder and looked searchingly into his face.

"Can you handle a spear, lad?" he asked.

"I can."

"Aim for the shield; it is surer. On my oath—I love thee for a lad of spirit."

"Give me your hand, Olivier. I shall not forget this nobleness."

"There, lad; take care of my fingers."

Olivier bustled away to get the horse out of the stable and tighten up the harness with his own hands. He led Yellow Thomas into the yard, grimacing as he looked at the poor beast's knees and at the way his bones elbowed through the skin.

"Poor lad!" he thought; "they are devilish mean with him, and yet I will swear he is a better man than his father."

In a few minutes they had shortened the stirrups, and Bertrand was in the saddle, with Olivier's shield about his neck and a spear in his right hand. He flourished it as though it had been a willow wand, beamed at his cousin, and then clapped to his visor.

"God bless thee, Olivier!" he shouted, as he trotted off briskly down the street. "Now they shall see whether I am a fool or not."

V

IT so happened that when Bertrand rode down to the lists on his cousin's horse a certain Sir Girard de Rochefort held the field, having emptied saddle after saddle, and astonished the crowd with his powerful tilting. Lord after lord had gone down before him, till the elder men grew jealous of their dignity, and left him to be flown at by the ambitious hawks among the squires. Sir Girard had made short work of the adventurous youngsters, and it seemed that he would have the prize and the place of honor, and the wreath from the hands of Jeanne de Blois. Already he boasted no less than ten falls to his spear, and had unhorsed such riders as the Lord Peter Portebœuf and Sir Hervè de Leon.

Bertrand rode down into the lists, the cheerful audacity of youth afire in him, ready to fight any mortal or immortal creature, man or devil. What was the splendor of Sir Girard's past to him? What did it signify that De Rochefort had hardened his sinews fighting for three years under the banner of the Teutonic Knights, and that he had carried off the prize at a great tourney at Cologne? Bertrand was as strong in his ignorance as he was heavy in the shoulders. He came fresh and raw from the country, contemptuous of all odds, and untroubled by any self-conscious magnifying of the prowess of his opponents. He was there to fight, to break his neck, if needs be, and to prove to his kinsfolk that the ugly dog could bite.

The Sieur de Beaumanoir, who saw him enter, sent one of the heralds to him to ask his name. The spectators were eying him indifferently, yet noticing that his shield was covered and his surcoat turned so as to hide the blazonings. They supposed that he would follow the fate of those before him, for Sir Girard had just taken a fresh horse, and the dames in the galleries had already voted him invincible in their hearts.

"The Marshal would know your name, messire."

"Tell him I am called 'The Turncoat,' " roared Bertrand through the bars of his visor.

"But your name, messire?"

"Curse your meddling; you shall have it anon. I am a Breton man, and my father carries arms upon his shield."

The herald, repulsed by Bertrand's roughness, returned to the Sieur de Beaumanoir, and told him how the knight with the covered shield desired to conceal his name. The Marshal, who was a shrewd gentleman, smiled at the title Bertrand had chosen to inflict upon himself, and gave the heralds word to prepare for another course.

Bertrand was sitting motionless on Olivier de Manny's horse, his eyes

fixed on the towering figure of Sir Girard de Rochefort across the rent and hoof-torn turf. The man bulked big and ominous, and his red shield, with its golden "bend," seemed to blaze tauntingly before Bertrand's eyes. The lad was breathing hard and grinding his teeth, a species of mad impatience gathering in him as he gripped his spear and waited for the trumpet-cry that should launch him against De Rochefort's shield. Once only had he swept his eyes towards the gallery and looked for Tiphaine in her green gown embroidered with the blue and silver of her father's arms. He saw her sitting beside the Vicomte, her eyes fixed on him with a dreamy and half-questioning look, as though she waited for some mystery to reveal itself. From that moment Bertrand forgot the ladies in cloth of silver and of gold, the great seigneurs, the crowd about the barriers, even Duke John himself. He was like some savage and high-spirited hound straining to be let loose upon the quarry.

Down sank the Sieur de Beaumanoir's marshal's staff; the trumpets blew, a dull roar rose from the people crowding about the barriers. Bertrand heard it, like the sound of an angry sea or the crying of wolves through the forest on a winter's night. His blood tingled; all the fierceness of a wild beast seemed to wake in him at the cry. Dashing his heels into De Manny's horse, he brought the animal into a gallop that made the dust fly from the dry grass like smoke. Girard de Rochefort's scarlet shield was rocking towards him, with the bright bassinet flashing in the sunlight above the rim. Bertrand crouched low, drove his knees into the saddle, and gathered all his massive strength behind the long shaft of his feutred spear.

In a flash they were into each other like a couple of beaked galleys driven by a hundred lashing oars. There was a whirl of dust, the splintering of a spear, the dull ring of smitten steel. Bertrand, dazed, felt the girths creak under him, his horse staggering like a rammed ship. For a moment he thought himself down in the dust under the weight of De Rochefort's spear. Then the tumult seemed to melt away, and he found himself staring at an empty saddle and at Sir Girard rolling on the turf, his mailed hands clawing at the air.

A great shout went up from the barriers.

"Sir Girard is down! Look, his horse has the staggers still."

"Who is the other fellow? He charges like a mad bull."

"Sir Turncoat—the heralds called him. I would wager it is De Montfort playing one of his brave tricks."

Bertrand, his ears ringing, and the breath driven out of him for the moment, stood up in the stirrups and brandished his spear. A fierce joy leaped in him, driven up like fire by the gusty cheering of the crowd. The rough quintain in the woods had taught him well, and he—Bertrand the despised—was crossing spears with the Breton chivalry. He looked towards the place where Tiphaine was seated. Yes, her eyes were fixed on him, and she was waving her hand.

Bertrand wondered whether she guessed who it was who fought with his surcoat turned and his shield covered, and had given the fall to De Rochefort, the rose-crowned champion of Cologne.

Bertrand felt a hand touch his bridle. It was the Sieur de Beaumanoir, in his red jupon, covered with the blazonings of Brittany, his eyes fixed curiously upon the closed and gridded bassinet.

“Bravely ridden, sir. Will it please you to uncover to me, that the heralds may shout your name?”

Bertrand bent forward in the saddle and whispered to the Marshal through the bars of his visor:

“Your patience, sire. I have borrowed my cousin’s arms to prove to my father that I am no magpie.”

Beaumanoir nodded.

“On my honor—you can trust me,” he said.

“I am Bertrand du Guesclin, no man’s man.”

“What, the lad on—”

“Yes, sire, the lad on the yellow horse. All Rennes has been mocking me, God curse them, as if a man is of no worth without brave clothes and a handsome face.”

The Marshal patted Bertrand’s knee with his gloved hand.

“Well done, Messire Bertrand du Guesclin!” he said. “I should like to have the knighting of you. And is your heart still hungry?”

“Hungry, sire! I am ready to fight any man with any weapons he may choose.”

And fight Bertrand did that day with a fierceness and a devil’s luck that seemed never to desert him. Though it was his virgin tournament, he showed no rawness in the handling of a spear, and saw many a man’s heels kicking towards the blue. The crowd took to idolizing him as time after time he thundered down the lists to hurl some rival out of the saddle. Nothing came amiss to him, hardly a stroke went wide. He was the popular hero for the moment, the cock of the chivalric barn-yard, and a mysterious stranger, so far as the great ones were concerned. Who was he? Some said an Englishman; others, a Fleming. The truth stood that the clumsily-built fellow in the turned surcoat held the field against all comers, and that the ugly lad from Motte Broon found himself lifted high on the wave of martial splendor.

Bertrand had run his twelfth course, and was waiting for yet another rival to appear. He was sweating furiously under his harness, and his face glowed like a winter sun. The shield-cover was rent to tatters, and his cousin’s blazonings exposed. Yet all the gentry knew that Olivier de Manny stood in the gallery making love to Yolande of Vitré. He alone knew the secret of the borrowed arms, and would confess nothing, even to Yolande when she smiled

at him.

Bertrand had broken two spears. His heart was beating like a bell, and he was drunk with delight, yet very grim for all his glory. Again the trumpets were screaming and another falcon ready to fly in the face of the young eagle of the Breton moors. Bertrand wheeled his horse into position, put forward his battered shield, set his teeth, and feutred his spear. One more burst for the glory of Tiphaine—the child of seven!

There was a shout from the crowd. Bertrand had swerved, when at full gallop, and drawn aside with his spear raised. Suddenly, on the approaching shield, he had seen the red eagle of the Du Guesclin's, his father's arms, and had wheeled aside in time to escape the spear. Sieur Robert drew his horse up heavily upon its haunches, astonished and not a little angry at the way that Bertrand had faltered and refused to tilt with him.

Mocking shouts came from the barriers. The common people were fickleness itself, and were ready to jeer at their late hero as though he had tricked them into praising him beyond his due.

"He is afraid! Sir Turncoat is afraid!"

"Shame, shame, to shirk a gentleman!"

"The fellow's cowed; he'll not face the Eagle."

Bertrand whipped his horse round and rode close up to the barriers, brandishing his spear.

"Who says I am afraid?" he roared.

No one answered him.

"Come out, any of you—rich or poor. Let any man call me coward—and I'll fight him with axe—or club—with bare fists. Let him only choose."

This time the crowd cheered him. It was the touch of temper that swayed them back towards applause.

Bertrand, his eyes flashing, turned his horse, and, riding past his father, saluting him as he passed, approached De Beaumanoir, who understood the meaning of what had happened. The Marshal came to meet Bertrand, and stood close to him, so that they could speak without being overheard.

"Sire, I cannot tilt against my father."

"Well said, lad."

"Carry Sieur Robert du Guesclin my courtesies, and tell him I have a vow upon me not to ride against his family."

The Marshal nodded.

"And, sire, of your kindness send me another man to smite that I may show these scullions that I am not tired."

Beaumanoir gave Bertrand his hand, and went to speak with Robert du Guesclin, who was sitting his horse in the centre of the field, not a little incensed against the man who had shirked his challenge. He broke forth into

angry accusations as De Beaumanoir approached him, and pointed scornfully at Bertrand with his spear.

"Peace, man!" said the Marshal; "listen to me—"

"The fellow has tricked me."

"Messire, it is your son."

Du Guesclin nearly dropped his spear.

"What! Who?"

"Your son Bertrand, messire. The lad had the courage to dare the crowd's taunts rather than tilt against his father."

Sieur Robert bore himself like a man bewildered, as much so as if De Beaumanoir had offered him a hundred gold pieces for that "priceless destrier"—Yellow Thomas.

There was a slight tinge of scorn in the Marshal's voice. He guessed how matters stood between Du Guesclin and his son.

"The lad has behaved with honor."

The knight of the Eagle acknowledged the contention.

"Messire de Beaumanoir, he has conquered his own father with courtesy."

Therewith Du Guesclin put spurs to his horse, and, cantering up to Bertrand, held out his hand to him.

"Lad," he said, "forgive me; I will keep your secret."

And they shook hands and saluted each other in the eyes of all.

Bertrand was not kept tarrying for further rivalry. A Norman knight, Sir Guy of Lisieux, came cantering into the field, having sworn to discover the name of the man who had sent so many gentlemen hurrying out of their saddles. Bertrand took ground against him, and they were soon galloping over the smoking grass. The Norman aimed for Bertrand's bassinet, Bertrand for Sir Guy's shield. The spear-head struck the Breton lad full and firmly on the visor. He staggered for an instant, recovered himself, and found the cool wind playing upon his face, and his bassinet, with the laces broken, rolling behind him on the grass. As for the knight of Lisieux, he had shared the fate of his predecessors, and was lying on his back, half stunned, while his horse galloped riderless towards the barriers.

The people were shouting and pointing to Bertrand, the ladies leaning from the galleries. All eyes were fixed upon him as he sat his horse in the middle of the field, looking round him a little sheepishly, his face aglow, his eyes turned towards the Raguenels' benches.

Every one was asking the same question of his neighbor.

"Who is he?"

"God knows! A boy."

"And an ugly one—to boot."

For a moment Bertrand appeared dazed by the thousand faces that were

turned on him, the fluttering kerchiefs, the shouts and counter-shouts of the crowd. It was all strange to him, he who had been scowled into a corner and treated with contempt by his own kinsfolk. The glare of triumph puzzled him. Then, as by instinct, he picked up the bassinet on the point of his spear and rode slowly towards the place where Tiphaine sat beside her father.

“Bertrand!—see, it is Bertrand!”

She sprang up, clapping her hands, her face glorious, her eyes sparkling with delight. Dame Jeanne sat like one smitten dumb, staring at Bertrand as he drew near on his cousin’s horse. No illusion flattered the good lady’s malice. It was Bertrand without doubt, Bertrand the unbeautiful, Bertrand whom she had mocked and ridiculed. Jeanne du Guesclin’s pride seemed to return with a clatter upon her head. She flushed a hot crimson as she caught Stephen Raguenel’s eye. The Vicomte was twinkling, palpably tickled at the way madame had overreached herself.

“Bertrand!” she said, mouthing the words with hardly a sound.

She glanced at Olivier. The sweet fellow had a scowl upon his pretty face.

“Who would have dreamed of it?” he muttered. “Bertrand must have been praying to the devil.”

Tiphaine was leaning over the balustrading, clapping her hands and smiling till her eyes seemed filled with light. Bertrand had ridden close to the gallery. His face was transfigured as he lifted the bassinet to her on the point of his spear. The child took it between her hands, kissed it, and stood smiling at Bertrand, her hair turned into tawny gold by the sun.

“Was I not right, Bertrand?” she said.

“Yes,” he answered her, “we have earned our triumph, Tiphaine, you and I.”

And catching sight of Olivier’s sulky face, Bertrand burst out laughing. Tiphaine turned and saw the reason of his mirth. Her eyes sparkled, her mouth curled with childish triumph.

“Never look so sour, little Olivier,” she said; “some day your brother shall teach you how to play the man.”

And thus it was that the buffoon and the beggar upset the prejudices of the mighty, and that the rough and unpolished pebble changed under Dame Fortune’s wand into a precious stone of splendor and of worth. Bertrand was crowned Lord of the Lists that day. He sat beside Jeanne de Penthièvre at supper, with Tiphaine laughing and sharing the red wine in his cup. Before them on the board stood the swan of silver, with rubies for eyes, that Bertrand had won at the tourney. He had given it to Tiphaine, even because she had found his soul for him, and had stood by him when others mocked.

BOOK II

“HOW A MAN MAY FIND HIS SOUL AGAIN”

VI

AN autumn evening, with a flare of red and gold in the west, white mists rising in the hollows, and a sky above streaked and banded with burning clouds. On every hand the rust-red slopes of a wild moor, gilded with dwarf gorse and splashed with knots of tawny bracken. Everywhere emptiness and silence, a raw and pungent solitude that seemed to welcome the coming of the night.

Straggling along a ridge of the moor and outlined against the sky-line came a company of "spears," with one solitary rider twenty paces in the van. The sunlight glittered on their shoulder-plates and bassinets, and beamed a last benediction on their baggage-cattle hobbling in the rear. They were rough gentlemen, shaggy and none too clean, with an air of devil's philosophy about them that spoke of rough living and of rougher speaking.

Several pack-horses followed the main body, and a couple of peasants, who trudged along as though they lived in constant fear of a whip or a spear-staff falling across their shoulders. Many of the riders carried sacks slung across their saddle-bows, one the carcass of a dead pig, a second a couple of stone bottles, another some half-dozen loaves of rye bread, strung together on a cord like beads. Last of all came three tired hacks, stumping along over the tough heather and ridden by three gaudily dressed women, who were laughing and chattering like starlings on a chimney. One, black of hair and black of eye, with a red mouth and a patch of color on either cheek, wore a garland of bracken, and seemed to consider herself of more worth than the others. She wore a red cloak, and a green tunic laced loosely over her plump bosom. A girdle of leather covered with gold filigree work ran about her hips, with a poniard buckled to it in a silver sheath. She was a Norman, Arletta, a smith's daughter, and had run away from Ancenis when the French army had passed through it seven years before on the march for Nantes.

Some twenty paces ahead of this company of vagabonds rode their captain, a man with immense shoulders, long arms, and an ugly and dogged face. His bassinet hung at his saddle-bow, his spear was slung behind him, and the shabbiness of his blue surcoat and the rust on his armor suggested that personal vanity had no great hold on him. He had a hunch of brown bread in his hand, and was munching it solemnly as he rode along, keeping an alert watch upon the darkening moor. He had thrust the last corner of the loaf into his mouth, when an outrider came cantering back towards the troop, bawling a tavern song, as though to keep himself in humor on such a raw and hungry evening. He drew near over the heather, and, saluting the man in the blue surcoat, broke

at once into petulant cursing.

"Pest on it, captain, I can see no stick of a house and not the trail of a chimney; nothing but the moor and thickets of Broceliande."

The man in the rusty harness received the news sullenly.

"Ives swore he knew these parts," he said.

"He knows them, Messire Bertrand, about as well as he knows the inside of a missal."

"Then have him hided for being a liar."

"With a good grace, captain."

And, cantering off, he joined the main company, their spears black against the evening sky; and, pouncing upon one of the wretched peasants, drubbed him mercilessly till the fellow lay flat and would not move.

Bertrand gave no heed to the serf's cries, but rode on alone under the flaming sky towards the thickets of Broceliande, flashing with misty and autumnal gold. He felt miserable that night, savage and sour, disgusted with his lot. Seven years he had been serving in the wars, and here he trotted at the head of thirty thieves, called by pure courtesy free riders for the rights of Charles of Blois. He had done no great deed since the siege of Vannes, and it was bitterness to Bertrand to be reminded of that day. He had hoped much from that exploit at the siege of Vannes. It had lifted him up in the sight of all men, for, like a young falcon, he had flown his first flight into the welkin of war.

Then, what had followed? Had Bertrand been questioned he would have pointed to his rusty harness and the plundering vagabonds who rode at his heels over the moor. He would have smiled grimly and very bitterly, spoken of the ingratitude of princes and the jealousy of men better born and more richly circumstanced than a round legged-fellow who trusted only to the strength of his own right arm. He had fought at Vannes, at Nantes, at Hennebon, a hundred and one places, but no great captain had ever cared to mark his deeds. Young squires had been honored before him, mere boys whom Bertrand could have killed with a single blow. Fortune and the favor of the great ones had been against him. He would cringe to no seigneur, say soft things to no man, or lure fame to him with a courteous lie.

Then had come the last trying of Bertrand's temper, for it is a rare prince who can take the truth from an inferior and not feel the twinge of malice in return. It had happened at the siege of Guy la Foret, a strong castle towards Nantes. Bertrand had been set to lead a storming party that was to assault at the breach while the main strength of the leaguers skirmished at the gate. A hundred men had been given him, a mere handful, insufficient for the forcing of the broken wall. Bertrand had stood forward and spoken the truth to Lord Luis of Spain, who commanded the besiegers.

“Sire,” he had said, “fivescore men cannot make good their footing in the breach. If I am to lead—then I must lead at my own price.”

Luis of Spain, sensitive as to the dignity of his own discretion, had rallied Bertrand upon his courage.

“God see to it, sire,” the Breton had answered him, “I am no coward, but I tell you the assault will fail.”

And fail it did with the loss of thirty of Lord Luis’s best men. Bertrand had been taken up for dead out of the ditch and dragged back to the camp, under the very spears of the English when they made their sally. As for the Spaniard, he had been the more savage at the repulse, since he himself had staked his three best horses in a wager on the success thereof. And, like many a captain, he had taken to abusing those who served him, and in shaming the men who had risked their lives at his command.

“Messire Bertrand du Guesclin, the fault was yours—”

Bertrand, with his head in bandages and his face white as a sick girl’s, had tottered into Lord Luis’s tent to hear the whole blame laid to his lack of spirit.

“Sire,” he had said, “did I not warn you?”

“Too well, messire. I think my own thoughts and hold to my own reasons. When the hawk flies ill the quarry need not take the air.”

Bertrand had sworn a great oath, red with shame at such curt handling.

“Before God, sire, do you accuse me of cowardice?”

Lord Luis had shrugged his shoulders.

“I will not twist your words, messire, into their true meaning. You may know that I shall place my commands elsewhere in the future. It has been said that the hands of half our captains smell of English gold.”

What more could Bertrand have done than march grimly out of Lord Luis’s tent, cursing his own luck and the malice of the man whose meanness had dishonored him. His good name had seemed torn from him, and, like a rough and angry boy, he had been ready to take Fortune at her word. Why should he strive after an empty shadow when there was work enough for the free lance and the adventurer? Had not Croquart the Fleming made the land murmur at the audacity of his forays and the daring of his captures? Half the castles in the dukedom had paid ransom to the Flemish freebooter. He fought for De Montfort and the English, but he fought for his own hand and plundered all.

They were sad days for Brittany, with her seigneurs and gentlemen divided among themselves, some standing for Montfort, others for Charles of Blois. The English and the French burned and plundered against each other. The peasants fled to the woods, leaving their crops to the foragers, their poor hamlets to the fire. The burghers kept close within their walls and barriers, ready to surrender and resurrender to the party whose banners blew more bravely for the moment. No strong place was safe from surprise and treachery.

The whole land shuddered, from the granite west to marshy Dol, from the White Wood by Dinan even to the Loire. It was a war of sieges and of counter-sieges, plunderings, fierce tussles on the bleeding moors, ruin and misery untold. No man could rest even in the deeps of dark Broceliande or in the islands set in the foam of the sea.

Bertrand, bitter and savage at heart, had ridden from Guy la Foret, knowing not whither fate might lead him. When some such temper as this had been upon him, he had fallen in near Josslin with a company of mercenaries who had lost their captain in a skirmish. Bertrand had met the chief among them in a roadside tavern, taken them as his men, and promised them three-quarters of all the plunder that they gathered. To prove his spirit, wounded as he was, he had fought the best fellow at his weapons among them, and thrashed him soundly, to the delight of his brother thieves. Bertrand had been their cock and captain from that moment, and thus it was that he rode that autumn evening over the moors with thirty free companions and three harlots at his back.

Bertrand drew in his horse suddenly, and, standing in the stirrups, looked under his hand towards the woods rising in the east to touch the coming night. Yonder, amid the outstanding thickets of Broceliande, he saw a light gleam out, a faint spark in the black unknown. Bertrand and his men were tired and hungry, and for three nights they had slept under the open sky.

The "free companions" had seen it also, and were shouting and calling to one another. The three women on the hacks had mingled with the main troop, their tired faces lighting up at the thought of a fire and supper. The one with the bracken in her hair was pulling her nag through the press towards Bertrand, when the man with the pig slung across his saddle-bow reached out and caught her bridle.

"Come, sirs, Letta laid me a fair wager."

The girl tugged at her bridle, and cast a fierce look into the fellow's grinning face.

"Let me be, you fool!"

"There—she disowns it! I call Lame Jean to witness—"

"Yes, yes, three kisses—I'll swear she promised them."

There was much loud laughter from the rest. The woman Arletta had plucked out her knife and made a stab at the man's wrist. He let go the bridle to avoid the blow, cursing her for a spitfire as she drew clear.

"Keep your pig," she said, viciously.

"Gaston can kiss the pig," shouted a facetious comrade, and they all laughed and twitted the pig-bearer till he lost his temper and threatened to let blood.

Arletta, smoothing out the petulance from her face, heeled her hackney forward and approached Bertrand, who had halted his horse on the brow of a

slope. He was staring morosely at the light shining amid the thickets, but turned his head as Arletta joined him.

"The saints send us a good lodging to-night, lording," she said, with a giggle and a toss of the head.

Bertrand looked at her, but did not smile.

"We must beat the bushes first," he answered, sullenly.

Arletta, shirking his surliness, threw him a bold look out of her black eyes and touched her bosom with her hand.

"Ah, lording, I am tired," she said; "I should like to sleep in a bed once more. As for that pig Gaston, I'll give him the knife if he makes a mock of me."

She was watching Bertrand, her sharp lips parted over her teeth.

"Am I not your servant, lording?" she asked.

"Confound you, then, be quiet!"

"Messire is tired and out of temper."

"You should know—" and he rode on down the slope with the rest following him.

Bertrand sent some of his light-riding gentlemen in advance to reconnoitre, for it was the duty of a captain of free lances to treat every strange place as the harbor of an enemy. He and his men were ready to plunder even their own friends, but they took shrewd care not to be caught and fleeced by rivals in the grim maze of war. Bertrand's riders went trotting cautiously over the moor, avoiding the sky-line and heading for the scattered thickets that fringed the forest.

The woman Arletta still kept close to Bertrand, throwing sharp glances from time to time into his face. It was as though she watched to read his humor, even as a dog watches the face of her master, and fawns for a caress or cringes from a blow. Bertrand seemed surly and reticent that night. He rode along with his chin on his chest, wrapped in his own thoughts, forgetful of the woman at his side.

"Messire is troubled?"

She spoke almost humbly, insinuatingly, yet with a glint in her black eyes and a jealous alertness sharpening her face. Bertrand growled. Her persistence only annoyed him.

"Well, what now? Haven't I given you enough spoil of late? You would not be content with all the crown jewels in your lap!"

Arletta's mouth hardened viciously for the moment, but the expression passed and her face softened.

"Lording, am I not your servant?"

"Ten thousand devils, what is it now?"

"Gaston—"

“Well, what of Gaston? Must I cut the fellow’s throat for your sake?”

Arletta’s eyes glittered; she breathed rapidly and hung her head.

“Lording, am I not your servant?”

“Well, child, well?”

“Gaston—”

“Curse the fool! What are you at, Arletta?”

Suddenly and without reasonable warning she broke into passionate weeping, clinching her fingers over her face and bending her head down over her breast. Bertrand stared at her in honest wonder. The ways of women were beyond his ken.

“Come, come, child, what is it?” he asked, more gently.

Arletta rocked to and fro in the saddle.

“I am nothing—I am a mere drab. Men may mock at me; I am nothing—I have no honor.”

Bertrand grimaced.

“Am I not your servant, lording? Yet, but who cares what Gaston says to me?”

“Letta—”

“No, no; you only laugh at me, you do not care. I am a drab, a tavern woman.”

Bertrand looked at her and stroked his chin. Women were strange creatures, and their whims puzzled him, but he caught a glimpse of Arletta’s meaning. How much was artifice he could not tell. She wished to see him jealous; he was quick enough to gather that.

“Gaston shall have his tongue clipped,” he said at last.

“Ah, lording, you do not care!”

“Curses, wench, will you drive me silly!”

They had ridden down from the moorland and were nearing the beech thickets, the bluff headlands of Broceliande, old Merlin’s forest. The light was twinkling brightly through the trees, and the outline of a window stood black and clear about the glow. Bertrand’s scouts had reached the place. He heard them shouting and laughing, and saw several dark figures move across the lighted window. Then a shrill squeal rose, a frightened squeaking like that of a rat caught in a dog’s mouth. Bertrand frowned and clapped his heels into his horse’s flanks. He cantered forward towards the thickets, and saw a low, pitched roof and a ruined tower rising from a dark cleft in the woods. It looked like a manor, with the walls and out-houses in ruins, nothing but the hall and the low tower left.

The voice was still pleading, rising now and again into a trembling screech. Bertrand guessed what was happening within. He tumbled out of the saddle and, crossing the grass-grown court, made his entry into the hall.

The place was in an evil plight—plaster falling from the walls, the windows broken and shutterless, holes in the roof where the tiles had tumbled through. In one corner towards the screens an old sow was penned behind wood-work that had once wainscoted the walls. The floor was littered with rubbish, and in more than one spot a puddle testified to the leakiness of the roof, while there were green patches of damp upon the walls. A wood fire burned on the great hearth-stone in the centre of the hall, and round it Bertrand's "free companions" were gathered, two of them holding up an old man by the arms, while another prodded him in the legs with a glowing fagot from the fire. A stench of singed wool arose from the old fellow's stockings, and he was squirming to and fro, hopping and squealing, a look of grotesque terror upon his face.

"What devil's game are you at now, you rogues? Guicheaux, drop that stick or I'll break your head for you."

The men gave back before Bertrand's roar, and grinned sheepishly at one another.

"The old fool has money hidden somewhere, I'll wager," said Guicheaux, who had handled the fagot.

"That's as it may be. I tell you I'll have no torturing. Grandfather, hither. I'll keep the dogs from biting you."

And a poor, weak-eyed, wet-nosed thing it was that came cringing forward, pulling its gray forelock and looking up piteously into Bertrand's face.

"What manor is this?"

The ragged creature cocked an ear and fingered a lower lip that was blue and drooping with age.

"If you please, lording, it is no man's manor."

"Nonsense; speak up; they shall not touch you."

Arletta, the two women, and the rest of the troop came streaming in at the moment. Bertrand waved them back and kept his eyes on the old man's veined and weathered face.

"If you please, lording, this was Yvon de Beaulieu's house. But he is dead, messire, and all his people."

"Well, and you?"

The grotesque head shook on its skinny neck.

"I was his pantler, lording, but they were all killed. Sir Yvon and his son, Jehan the falconer, and ten more. It was Croquart the Fleming who did it. Madame Gwen he took away with him, because she still had her looks, or might fetch a ransom. Ah, lording, they took everything, even the fowls out of the yard."

Bertrand stroked his chin, looked steadfastly at the old man, turning over in his heart the brutalities of war.

"Give him a stool," he said, suddenly. "Now, grandfather, sit you down; we'll not disturb you. A lodging for the night—that is our need. And, men, mark me, Croquart has swept the place clean; we have food of our own; let no one thief a crust or I'll have my word with him. A bundle of sticks; grandfather, I'll pay you for them out of my own purse."

Soon the dusk had deepened into night, and men had thrown aside their arms and harness, picketed their horses, and piled up a large fire in the centre of the hall. They crowded round it, squatting on the floor and frizzling pieces of meat on their sword-points, the light playing upon their hard and weather-worn faces, the smoke curling upward to escape by the louvre in the roof. The man Gaston had brought in his pig with him, and was skinning it in a corner, with the help of two of his companions. They thrust a spear through the carcass for a spit, and, carrying it to the fire, set it upon two pronged stakes that they had driven into the floor. Their bloody hands did not prevent them from handling the stone flasks of wine that were passing from man to man. A devil-may-care spirit possessed them all. With war and the Black Death stalking the land, none knew when the end might come and when the worms and the earth would be taking dust from dust.

Bertrand, in no mood for their rough pleasantries, had drawn apart towards what had been the dais. The hall was full of smoke and the stench of cooking, while through the shutterless windows the bats flew squeaking in and out. He sat on a worm-eaten bench, bread and dried meat from a wallet on his knees, a pilgrim's bottle, with a strap through the handles, hanging from a peg in the wall. He had his sword lying naked on the bench beside him, for he was ever forearmed against the fellows who followed him. Any one of them when drunk would have used his poniard against the pope.

Bertrand was under a cloud that night. He looked grim and heavy about the eyes as he watched the fellows at their food, tearing the meat with their knives and stuffing their fingers into their mouths. What rough beasts they were! Bertrand was no courtier, but even he discovered some disgust at the men who called him "brother." Arletta sat alone against the wall, crumbling a piece of bread and watching Bertrand with her restless eyes. The other two women were of the same temper as the men. They chattered, gobbled, wiped their mouths on the backs of their hands, hiccoughed, drank, and swore. Presently one of them stood up to sing. She was hot in the head, and her gown had been slit from the neck by the hand of one of the rough fellows who had been romping with her by the fire. She stood up, giggling and leering, a streak of grease upon one cheek. It was a low and bawdry ballad that she sang, one of the loose catches popular with the begging musicians who bawled in the common taverns. She felt no shame in the singing of it, and the men applauded her, hardly ceasing masticating to shout for more.

Bertrand grew weary of the scene—this poor drab with a dirty kirtle showing under her red gown, her face flushed and coarsened, her cheap trinkets shining in the light of the fire. He picked himself up from the bench, took his sword with him, and went out into the darkness of the yard. The men would probably be drunk before midnight; it was useless to meddle with them, and some one must needs keep guard.

A young moon was sinking in the west, and all about the ruined house rose the outstanding beech-trees of Broceliande. Their autumn panoply of gold was masked under the thousand stars, and even, the black slopes of the moor spread like a strange and night-wrapped sea. No wind was moving. In the manor court grass was growing ankle deep, and weeds and brambles flourished everywhere. The night air was sweet and pure after the sweat and beat of the crowded hall.

Bertrand stood leaning on his sword, his eyes fixed on the dim outline of the moor. A savage discontent was at work in him that night, a fierce melancholy that lay heavy upon his shoulders. The past rose up and spoke to him, spoke to him like some fair girl who had known neither sin nor shame. Purity and honor, what was he that he should think of such things? Had he not lost all the pride of life, that emulative madness that turns men into heroes? He was a thief, a bully, the lover of loose women, and for months he had been content to be nothing more. And yet the old youth cried in him at times, and a child's face haunted him, half lost in a mist of shimmering gold. He remembered the pride he had taken in his armor, the nobleness he had striven for, the brave creed he had cherished. Great God, how he had changed since he had plucked Tiphaine a white May-bough in the meadows at Motte Broon! She would be a woman now, and a great lady, and no doubt she had forgotten him, even as he had almost forgotten her.

There was a rustling of feet in the rank grass growing about the door. A hand touched Bertrand on the shoulder. He started, glanced round, and saw the girl Arletta standing by him.

"Lording," she said, still touching him with her hands, "I am tired, and the beasts are drunk; they frighten me."

Bertrand frowned and put away her hands.

"Let me be, Letta," he said.

The girl was peering at him, her eyes dark and questioning; but there was no smell of wine upon her breath.

"See, lording, I have not touched the bottle. There is a room above; I have been there; there is dry bracken to make a bed."

She tried to lay one hand upon his shoulder and to lean against him, but Bertrand shook her off and would not look into her face.

"I must keep watch," he said. "Go up, child, and sleep."

“You are wrath with me?”

“No, no; let me be, Arletta. I tell you I have the black-dog on my shoulders.”

She drew away from him, half fierce, half humbled, and, sitting down on the threshold, drew her skirts about her and curled herself against the door-post. Bertrand still leaned upon his sword. He paid no heed to the girl as she lay and watched him, jealously, yet with some of the homage of a dog within her eyes.

Bertrand turned on her at last, almost with an oath.

“Go up and sleep.”

She shivered, but did not stir.

“Lording, what is good enough for you is good enough for your servant.”

Bertrand tore his cloak from his shoulders and threw it to her, peevishly.

“Take it; cover yourself up.”

“But, lording—”

“Cover yourself up, I say! Am I to let you catch your death cold because you are a little fool?”

Arletta took the cloak and wrapped it about her body. Bertrand began to pace the court, his steel clogs ringing on the stones, his sword slanting over his shoulder. And thus they passed the night together, Bertrand on guard, the girl sleeping upon the threshold.

VII

IN the deeps of the forest of Broceliande stood a castle known in those parts as the Aspen Tower, from the trees that grew about the moat. The Lord of Tinteniach, who had held it long in fee, had surrendered it to the Sieur de Rohan in exchange for a manor near the western sea. The Sieur de Rohan had used the castle as a hunting-tower till some grim thing had happened in the place and a woman's blood had dyed the flagstones of the chapel. The chattering aspens, the black moat, the rolling leagues of dark Broceliande had worked upon De Rohan's conscience and smitten him with a dread of the lonely place. He had offered it to Stephen Raguenel, to whom he owed a certain favor. The Vicomte had taken it gladly, and garrisoned and regarnished the Aspen Tower when the Blois and Montfort wars began.

The aspen leaves were turning to gold, and their melancholy whisperings seemed to fill the valley, as though all the ghosts within Broceliande were flitting and shivering about the tower. The broad moat lay black and stagnant, reflecting the tall trees, streaked here and there with sunlight and dappled with showers of falling leaves. Though the sun was at noon, mists were hanging about the forest, a haze of faint gold dimming the red splendor of the beeches and the tawny magnificence of the oaks. A damp and melancholy stillness weighed upon the valley; even the trees seemed cold, as their gorgeous samites fluttered to decay.

There was something that suggested tragedy in the loneliness of the castle with its walls reflected in the black water and the woods rising like flame beyond its battlements. The spirit of autumn seemed to breathe in it, the spirit of sadness and of death, of mystery and of shadow. The gate was closed, the bridge up, the great grid, with its iron teeth, resting on the stones. No life stirred in the place. Nothing told that there were folk within save one thin plume of smoke that climbed feebly into the air.

Sadness and the sighing of the aspen-trees! Black water, mist-drenched grass, towering woodlands desolate under the blue! A melancholy that might have seemed beautiful had not the place been cursed with something more than sorrow! Such silence, such emptiness! The Black Death had supped in the Aspen Tower. That was why the place seemed terrible.

Many years had passed since the tournament at Rennes, and as for Tiphaine of the May-bough—well, Bertrand would hardly have remembered her as she bent over the fire in the lord's solar and stirred some concoction of herbs and wine that was steaming in a brazen pot. Tall, slim, yet broad across the bosom, her body seemed to take the wine-red tunic that she wore and

mould it into curves that were rich in their simplicity. As for her face, it was not beautiful in the easy meaning, save for the blush of rose through the olive skin and the earnestness of the liquid eyes. The mouth was too large, the chin too prominent, the bones too massive. In repose, there was a sternness about it, a maturity of strength strange in one so young. It was as though the spirit had triumphed over matter, and that mere sensuousness could not flood forth the glow of the soul within.

A restless spirit possessed her as she bent over the wood fire, with no living thing save a wolf-hound to keep her company. With a deep intake of her breath she thrust her hands above her head and leaned against the stone hood that projected over the hearth. It was not the hysterical weakness of a girl that spoke in that one gesture, but the restrained anguish of a woman, a woman who felt the terror of the unseen strong about her in that lonely tower.

The dog whimpered and thrust his nose against Tiphaine's knee. She bent suddenly, with a melting of her whole figure into tenderness, the hard, staring misery gone from her face.

"Ah, ah, Brunet, how will it end? how will it end?"

The beast licked her hands and put up a huge paw.

"How you would bark, Brunet, if your master came! Yes. I would give my all to see his banner at the gate. They do not know how the Black Death serves us."

She leaned again against the hood, staring into the fire, her hand still fondling the dog's ears. It seemed to comfort her to touch something that was warm and real, something in which the blood flowed. She had seen man after man sicken and surrender to the pestilence. She still heard their delirious cries, the chattering terror of the women who had crowded round her clamoring to be let loose to starve in the woods. Was it all a dream? Were the graves in the garden real, the smell of death in the place nothing but a grim illusion? She remembered the swollen and disfigured faces, the cries for water, the sordid horror of each hour of the day. Yet it was all true, so true that she wondered why the pest had spared her.

Rousing herself at last, as though casting cowardice fiercely out of her heart, she set her teeth and took up a cup that stood on a stool before the fire.

"There are Jehanot and Guy," she said, talking to the dog as though he understood her; "they are at work; we must remember them, Brunet; and poor Enid, who used to give you sops."

She was ladling the posset from the brass pot into the cup, the dog watching her with his ears cocked, his tail beating the floor. When she had filled the cup she threw a gray cloak over her shoulders and passed out from the solar to the stairs that led into the hall. The great room was deserted, and had a cold, damp look. There were ashes and charred sticks upon the hearth, a

pile of straw against one wall, and from one corner of the heap protruded a human foot. Tiphaine saw it and gave a shudder. Loose straw littered the hall, and even in the court, where the sun streamed down as though something had been dragged out through the door.

From the court an open wicket led through a wall into the garden bounded on the far side by the palisades above the moat. Tiphaine went in under the autumn trees, fruit and leaves rotting together on the grass, a few ghost flowers still blooming in the beds. Two men were at work in the far corner, flinging up earth out of a hole. Ten paces away a row of newly turfed mounds showed where Death had his autumn store.

Near the grave the men were digging lay a figure covered with a sheet. The two diggers had strips of cloth tied over their mouths and nostrils. They stood up and ceased work as Tiphaine approached, carrying the silver cup, the dog following at her heels.

“Who is that, Jehanot?”

She was pointing to the sheet. Jehanot, an old cripple with a round back, wiped his forehead with his hand.

“That is Le Petit de Fougères,” he said.

“Ah, ah; and he is dead?”

“This morning,” and the man sniffed. “There are Richard and the lad Berart in the hall. We have covered them up with straw.”

Tiphaine called sharply to Brunet, who was snuffing at the sheet, and stood looking at the grave and the two diggers. They were all that the Black Death had left to her in the Aspen Tower out of a garrison of twenty men. She had had four women to serve her when the Vicomte had ridden out two months ago. Now but one was left, and she sick to death in the room above the gate.

“How are you, Jehanot, and you, Guy?” she asked.

The two men looked at each other as though to detect the first flush of fever on the other’s face. They smiled grimly. The intense silence of the castle, the mist lying stagnant over the valley, seemed to accord with the invisible horror that lurked in the air.

“I am sound, madame.”

“And I—as yet.”

They crossed themselves and muttered a prayer and the names of several saints. Tiphaine held out the cup to them, her eyes wandering to the figure under the sheet.

“I have brought you a hot posset,” she said; “it will keep out the damp.”

Jehanot drank first, and then passed the cup to his comrade. The man drained it, and then gave it back to Tiphaine with a crook of the knee.

“I am going to sit with Enid,” she said.

Jehanot, the cripple, looked at her through half-closed lids, for the misty

sunlight was in his eyes.

"Leave her to me, madame?" he asked.

"No, no."

"I have taken my chance; nothing more can matter."

Her face lighted up of a sudden, and became beautiful as she gave the old man one of her smiles.

"The Holy Mother remember you, Jehanot," she said; "you are a good fellow, and I have prayed for you, but Enid is in my hands."

She turned and walked slowly back towards the court, holding the cup pressed against her bosom, the men looking after her in silence. Her gray cloak vanished under the brown domes of the fruit trees. Jehanot plunged his spade into the ground with an oath.

"The saints defend her!" he said, "How she drives the devil out of one with a look!"

His companion grunted and went on with his work.

"I would run for it, but—"

Jehanot glanced at him quickly over his shoulder.

"But for madame?"

"Yes."

"That would be a coward's trick. We should be shamed, even by her dog. God send the Vicomte back, I say, and keep all plundering devils from breaking down the gate."

Tiphaine crossed the court, shuddering inwardly as she thought of the dead men lying bloated and stiff under the straw in the hall. It was with an effort that she went in out of the sunlight and climbed the stairway to the lord's solar. There was still the woman Enid to be looked to; and, refilling the cup from the brass pot on the hook, and ordering Brunet to lie down before the fire, she unlatched a small door in the wall that opened on a short gallery leading to the tower. At the back of the portcullis cell was a room known as the lesser solar, hung with red cloth, its windows opening upon the court. Books were ranged on a shelf beside the chimney and bundles of herbs dangled from the beams of the ceiling. In one corner stood a bed, with a water-pot and a crucifix on a stool beside it.

Tiphaine set the cup down on the table, and, stealing across the room, drew the hangings back along the bed-rail. On the bed, under a coarse green quilt, lay the woman Enid, her sweet name belying her as she moaned and panted and plucked with her fingers at the clothes. Her face was as hideous as the face of a leper, blotched and swollen, the lips covered with brown scabs. Tiphaine looked at her and shivered, remembering how she had kissed her as a child. The woman was wandering, thrusting out her dry tongue, blood on the quilt, her black hair in a noisome tangle.

"She will die to-night," thought Tiphaine, trying not to shrink from the bed and the tainted air of the room.

She took up the cup from the table, and, holding her breath, she bent over the bed, while the thing on it coughed and whimpered. She tried to pour some of the posset between the cracked lips, but the woman only choked, and the red wine dribbled down her chin. Tiphaine put the cup back upon the table, and turned to the window-seat as though to wait and watch.

"What is the use," she said to herself, fingering the rosary that hung about her neck. "I can do nothing, and I have prayed."

Moved by some such simple thought as this, she left the woman to her moanings, hoping for pity's sake that she might make a speedy end. It was more terrible to look on life than death, when life boasted so much horror. Lonely, very miserable, and sick at heart, she went to the little chapel beyond the solar and knelt down at the altar steps. Prayer was inarticulate in her, a blind up-rushing of the soul, a passionate desire for deliverance from the end. The sunlight had left the painted window, and everything was dim and indistinct and cold; the breath of the unseen seemed to fill the place and to chill her as she knelt before the cross.

"Ah, I cannot pray."

She started up, half in petulance, half in despair, and went to her own bower that lay beyond the chapel. A hawk moped on the perch by the window, and even the bright colors on the walls seemed cold. Tiphaine stood before the window and tried to remember how many days had passed since her father and Robin had ridden out. She strove to count them, taking her rosary and dropping a carved bead for each day. When would they return? And when they came they might find the Aspen Tower filled with the dead. Geoffrey the castellan and fifteen of the garrison lay buried with the three women under the apple-trees in the garden. Who would go next? Only crippled Jehanot, the man Guy, and the dog were left.

Mad with the silence of the place, she picked up a lute from the bed and tried to sing. Anything, even mockery, was better than this accursed stillness—

"When the thorns are white, and the larks sing
High in the blue sky over the fields."

Heavens! how cracked and shrill her voice sounded! She stopped as though the sound of it frightened her, and threw the lute aside in mute disgust. Ah, that something would happen, that a storm would come, anything but this autumn mist, this silence, these dripping trees! Why should she not take Fate by the throat and go forth into the darkness of Broceliande? There were wolves in the forest, but were they more horrible than the Black Death? There were thieves

—and footpads. Yes, but even a knife would be better than the pest's slow torture.

She turned suddenly to a table of carved oak that bore a small basin of black marble. The bowl was half filled with water, water that reflected the colored hangings and the beams and plaster-work of the ceiling. Tiphaine bent over the bowl and looked into the spirit mirror. She knew something of magic, and had dabbled her white hands in the mysteries of the age. Muttering certain words that had some deep meaning according to the strange old book the girl kept locked in the chest at the bottom of her bed, and shading the water with her hands, she looked into it till the pupils of her eyes were wide as in the dark. For a long time she stood there gazing into the bowl, while it remained pictureless, showing nothing but her white face and her weary eyes. At last she seemed to be blessed with a vision, for her features sharpened and she breathed more rapidly, like one troubled by some sudden warning. In the bowl Tiphaine could see the image of men riding, the glimmer of their armor like moonlight upon the sea.

VIII

“GUICHEAUX, you have ridden Broceliande before; is not that a tower yonder, rising above the trees?”

Guicheaux, a lean fellow with a face like a hatchet, heeled his horse forward and followed the pointing of Bertrand's spear.

“It looks like stone, lording,” he said.

“Well, and what then?”

“Why, lording, it will be something to crack a nut upon,” and Guicheaux chuckled, unconverted ribald that he was and the quipster of the party.

Bertrand frowned at him.

“Come, leave your fooling. What place is it? Do you know this valley?”

“Pardon, lording,” and Guicheaux grinned till his creased face looked longer than ever; “I left a wife here once. I should know it.”

“Get on, get on.”

“It was the Sieur de Rohan's hunting-tower, and many a good stag has he pulled down in these thickets. He loved the place, lording, and the ladies in it. I was a beater, and yet beaten in those days, for of all the washerwomen who ever handled a mop-stick my wife was the strongest in the arm.”

The men laughed; Guicheaux had flown his jest, and smirked as he gathered up the applause.

“Your servant, sires; and, seigneurs, you will not betray me if the woman is still alive?”

“No, no, Guicheaux; she has consoled herself, or swallowed her own stick.”

Bertrand had halted his company on the edge of the wood, the great trees towering above them in their amber and green. Before them grass-land sloped, even to the thousand aspens that stood crowded about the tower. It was a desolate scene, even for Broceliande. Three days had Bertrand and his men been wandering in the forest, till they chanced upon the path that led to the Valley of Aspens.

Bertrand was smiling and stroking his chin, as though tickled by some thought that had occurred to him. He half wheeled his horse and looked keenly at the brown and wind-tanned faces drawn up before him under the trees.

“Listen.”

Every eye was on him.

“Do you remember how the Sieur de Rohan cheated us out of our spoil at Guingamp?”

“Curse him, captain! Are we likely to forget it?”

Their vindictiveness was full of mischief. They guessed what Bertrand had to say to them.

“Well, gentlemen and free companions, why should we not have our share of the bargain? It is possible that we can plunder the place, and make a bonfire of it for the sake of the seigneur’s soul.”

The suggestion had been seized even before it had passed Bertrand’s lips, and the men caught their leader’s spirit. Bertrand was in one of his reckless moods, when he was ready to lead his fellows into any mischief under the sun. They cheered him, and began tightening up their harness and looking to their arms. Bertrand was as grim and strenuous as any. The game pleased him that day, and Arletta had his smiles as he came to her to lace his bassinet.

“Give me a kiss, wench,” he said.

She gave him three, and a brave hug, laughing wickedly as he chucked her chin.

“The black dog has a holiday, lording,” she said.

“Little mistress, your eyes have scared him. Wait till we have our hands in some of De Rohan’s coffers! You shall have the baubles in your pretty lap to play with. Guicheaux, remember the axes. Some of you cut a young tree down; we may need it to break the gate.”

They set to work, and had a young oak down in a twinkling, and cleared the branches from the bole. The two women who were standing by straddled the trunk and made the men carry them, laughing, chattering, and making fun, till Bertrand, turning martinet, ordered them down to mind their business. The shorter of the two caught her skirts on a lopped bough, and had to be rescued amid roars of laughter.

“How you alarmed me!” quoth Guicheaux, as he helped her up. “I feared your linen had not been washed for a month!”

Tiphaine was brooding before the fire in the solar the day after Le Petit de Fougères had been buried, when she heard a voice calling to her from the hall.

“Madame Tiphaine! Madame Tiphaine!”

Rising, with a rush of hope from her heart, she slipped back the panel in the wall above the dais, through which the lord could look down on his people from the solar, and found Jehanot peering up at her with a cross-bow in his hand. She could see that the man was trembling, whether with joy or fear she could not tell.

“Madame, there are riders in the valley; I have seen them from the tower.”

Tiphaine remembered the mystic pageant that had been shown her in the basin of black marble.

“Well, Jehanot, well?”

"I could see no banner or pennon. Maybe—"

He hesitated, thumbing the string of his cross-bow and looking up into the corners of the roof. Tiphaine guessed what was passing in his mind. She shot the panel back and went down from the solar into the hall.

"Jehanot," she said, very earnestly.

The man waited.

"It is not the Vicomte—no—I can read that on your face. There is no banner or pennon; and that means a 'free company.' "

She was standing with one fist to her chin, looking vacantly at the pile of straw that covered the dead bodies, for Richard and the lad Berart had not yet been buried.

"Jehanot, go up into the portcullis-room and watch."

The cripple nodded.

"They will summon us. If they are strangers, learn from them who they are. If friends, say that I will come out to them."

"Yes, madame."

"You understand, Jehanot? We are of the Blois party. Be careful; look for enemies—"

"If they are a rough crew," the old man answered, "I will preach the Black Death's sermon to them."

"Yes, yes."

"And lie if needs be."

"Should they be Croquant's ruffians—"

Jehanot grimaced as he limped away.

"God give us better luck!" he said; and then, turning at the door: "Stay in the chapel, madame. If they are for plunder, they may grant you sanctuary."

Jehanot climbed up to the portcullis-cell and looked out through one of the squints across the moat. A faint breeze stirred in the aspen boughs, and the trees were muttering as though feeling the presence of some peril in their midst. Leaves were falling in golden showers, and through the crowded alley-ways of the wood the wet grass glistened in the sunlight. What was that? Jehanot's head was straining forward on its skinny neck, his eyes fixed in a hard stare. He had seen a dim figure flit across the main path to the moat and take cover behind a tree. Another and yet another followed it. Still all was silent save for the chattering of the aspen leaves. They were reconnoitring the place, and their stealth did not comfort Jehanot's fears.

Then he heard a deep voice sounding over the water.

"Forward, sirs—forward!"

Instantly the aspen wood seemed alive with steel, and Jehanot saw men swarming down towards the moat. Several of them carried the trunk of a tree, and at the sight of it Jehanot sucked in his breath expressively and whistled.

There was no doubt as to their purpose as they headed for the causeway with a man in full armor on a black horse leading them. Jehanot saw Bertrand dismount, fling his bridle to a follower, and come clanging along the causeway till he reached the gap left by the raised drawbridge.

“Sound your horn, Hopart; we will challenge them to surrender.”

The horn’s scream echoed through the valley, while the men crowded the causeway at Bertrand’s back. The fierce, wolfish faces were turned this way and that as they scanned every wall and window. A sudden thought seized Jehanot as he crouched behind his squint. He put his hands to his mouth and broke out into a wailing cry.

“’Ware the Black Death! ’ware the Black Death!”

He waited, watching the men crowding the causeway from the darkness of the cell. They were looking at one another, gesticulating and pointing towards the squints of the portcullis-room.

“’Ware the Black Death! The plague is heavy on us!”

Jehanot could see that they wavered and were wrangling together. Bertrand, who was watching the windows, caught sight of Jehanot and shook his sword.

“It is a trick, sirs!” he shouted. “Back! back! they are cheating us to gain time. How could the pest reach such a place as this?”

“True, captain, true,” came the response.

Jehanot, white and terrified, put his face close to the squint and shouted to Bertrand:

“It is no trick, messire; it is no trick.”

Bertrand swore at him.

“Silence, you old liar. We want the Sieur de Rohan’s treasure-chest. Back, lads! back! We must cut down more trees to bridge the gap. Guicheaux, take five men and cover the squints; they will be playing on us with their cross-bows in the winking of an eye.”

The cripple shouted to them again, but his cries were unheeded in the bustle and uproar. The men had herded back over the causeway, leaving Bertrand leaning on his sword, confident in his armor to defy both bolt and arrow. Axes were soon swinging and the white chips flying from the trunks of several young trees. Guicheaux and three others had wound their cross-bows and posted themselves along the moat, and were waiting for archers to show themselves at the squints or on the battlements.

Jehanot was still squealing, repeating the same words in his unreasoning fear.

“Keep back!—the Black Death is with us! Keep back, for the mercy of God!”

Bertrand waved to Guicheaux with his sword.

"Silence the old fool!" he shouted.

The soldier trained his cross-bow on the squint where he could see Jehanot moving to and fro, waving his hands to them and shouting, like one gone mad. The string twanged, and the quarrel, glancing from the stone jamb, struck the old man in the face.

He fell back, squeaking like a mouse, his hand over his mouth, for the bolt had knocked his teeth away and broken his lower jaw. Trembling and panic-stricken, he stumbled back into the lesser solar, where Enid lay dead upon the bed. A woman's figure stood outlined against the window; it was Tiphaine's.

"Jehanot! Jehanot!"

The old man mumbled through his bloody fingers:

"To the chapel, for God's sake, madame; have a care, they are shooting at the windows."

Tiphaine held Jehanot by the shoulder.

"Ah—ah, the cowards! they have hurt you, my poor Jehanot. Come, come with me; we will go to the chapel, and I will hide you behind the hangings. Where is Guy?"

The old man was sick and faint with pain. Tiphaine dragged him along the gallery to the lord's solar, gave him wine, and bound up his bleeding mouth. The man Guy had jumped into the moat an hour ago, swum across, and fled into the woods. Jehanot confessed as much, moaning, and holding his broken jaw between his hands.

"Whose company is it—not Croquart's?"

Jehanot shook his head, turning his whole body with it.

"They seem bad enough," he said, "whoever they may be."

Brunet was following them, growling and ruffling up his collar as the sound of the men battering at the gate echoed through every gallery and room. Tiphaine half dragged Jehanot to the chapel, and hid him behind the hangings beside the altar. Then she ran back into the solar, took a burning brand from the fire with the iron tongs, and, returning, lit the candles on the altar and threw the flaming wood upon the floor. Beside the chalice, on the white altar cloth, stood the silver swan that Bertrand had given her at Rennes.

The great gate was down, and half a dozen sweating fellows were prising up the portcullis with spear-staves and the trunks of young trees. Inch by inch the great grid went up till Bertrand and two others had their shoulders under the teeth and held it till the rest wedged it up with timber. Shouting and swearing, they crowded pellmell like a drove of swine through the tower arch. Some turned into the guard-room, to find it empty. Others made for the hall across the court, expecting resistance and finding none.

The man Guicheaux was at the head of those who made for the hall. With them were the two women, as wild and keen as any of the men. They found the

hall empty, but spread this way and that, some towards the screens, others towards the high table and the place where the buffet stood.

A brisk shout startled the whole rabble. Guicheaux, who had been turning over the straw with the truncheon of a spear he had broken under the grid, had started back and stood pointing at the straw, white and abashed, like a man who has found a snake curled in the grass.

The rest crowded round him, querulous and wondering. Then a blank silence fell. They stood staring at one another and at the blackened body Guicheaux had uncovered with his spear. One of the women, who had been peering over a man's shoulder, clapped her hands over her face and broke into hysterical screaming.

"The murrain, the black murrain! We shall all die of it!"

Guicheaux cursed her, tossed the straw back over the body, and looked at his companions. They were huddling away from the spot like a pack of sheep, the lust of plunder out of them for the moment.

"Let us be off!" quoth a young Poitevin, holding a hand over his nose and mouth.

"Quiet, you fool!" and the big fellow Hopart, with the red beard and angry eyes, cuffed the lad with his gadded glove. "Out with you, milksop! We have taken our chance, and the devil's with us. Let us have our spoil. Who's afraid of a dirty corpse?"

He strode up, kicked the body under the straw, and turned a bloated face to Guicheaux and the rest.

"To the chambers first, sirs, and then for the wine."

Hopart's recklessness persuaded them in a moment. They broke away, all the fiercer for the fright, and raced for the stairway leading to the solar and the chapel. Bertrand joined them as they reached the dais, Arletta hanging on his arm, her face flushed, her eyes shining.

The men were jostling and crowding on the stairs, pulling one another back in the scramble, cursing and shouting—a mad crew. Guicheaux was the first to reach the solar. He ran to the hutch at the bottom of the Vicomte's bed, beat his spear-staff through the lid, and wrenched up the splintered panels. They were all scrambling over the hutch like pigs over a trough. One man pulled out a silver mug, another a bag of money, a third an ivory crucifix set with stones.

"To the chapel!"

It was the big fellow, Hopart, who had kicked the dead body in the hall who gave the cry. A dozen men followed him, leaving Guicheaux and the rest to plunder the ambreys on either side of the fireplace, while Arletta unlaced Bertrand's bassinet, laughing all the while at the way the men showed their greed.

They had forced the doorway of the chapel, when there was a sudden

scuffle, a swaying back of the press, the loud bay of a dog. Hopart was rolling on the floor, stabbing at Brunet, who had him by the throat. The men who had fallen back rushed in and slashed at the dog with their swords and poniards. Hopart freed himself, hurled the hound aside, and began to kick the beast as it lay dying upon the floor.

“Cowards!”

Hopart and his comrades were crowding together and staring at the lady in the red tunic who stood upon the altar steps. The candles flickered above her, their light glimmering on the silver upon the altar and on the golden sheen in Tiphaine’s hair. She was white and furious, moved to the depths by Brunet’s death.

“Cowards!”

It would have been difficult to compress more scorn in one single word. The rough thieves held back before her, even the great blackguard of a Hopart looking clumsy and abashed. It needed another woman, and one of a coarser type, to break the spell this white-faced madame had cast upon the men.

“Ho, ho! the fine she-leopard. See—she has jewels on her! What, sirs, are you afraid of a fine lady? Let me pass; I’ll show ye how to pull out hair.”

It was Gwen, the broad-hipped wench who had caught her clothes on the stump of the tree. She was shaking her fists and urging on the men with the instinctive hatred of a veritable drab for a sister whose face was as clean as her clothes. The men swayed forward towards the altar. Hopart, his throat bloody from Brunet’s fangs, had his eyes on the jewelled girdle that Tiphaine wore. He shouldered the rest aside only to be plucked back by a strong hand from the altar steps and sent staggering against the wall.

“Back! back!”

Bertrand was before them, his sword out, his hair bristling, a look on his face that the men had learned to fear. They gave ground as the white blade whistled to and fro, huddling together, each man trying to get behind his neighbor.

Bertrand drove them back towards the door, and then turned to the altar, where Tiphaine still stood. His bassinet was off, for Arletta had unlaced it in the solar, and the light from the candles fell full upon his face.

“Messire Bertrand du Guesclin!”

Tiphaine’s hands were at her bosom. She was staring at the man before her, incredulous scorn blazing in her eyes. Bertrand went back three full paces and stood looking at Tiphaine with his mouth agape.

“Messire Bertrand du Guesclin!”

“Madame, who are you?”

For answer she took up the silver swan and held it in her hands before them all.

“Who was it who gave me this, messire, at the tournament at Rennes?”

IX

THE one pure thing in that little chapel, Tiphaine, stood there on the altar steps, looking down on Bertrand, the swan of silver in her hands. Behind her burned the candles, above rose the eastern window with its painted glass: azure, purple, and green. She seemed strangely high above them all, a being apart, one in whom no selfish cowardice dimmed the glow of her woman's scorn. For the common herd, the mere pawns in the game of plunder and of war, she had no remembrance for the moment. It was at Bertrand that she looked, sternly, wonderingly, yet with a sadness that shadowed her whole face.

As for Bertrand, he stood with his sword held crosswise in his hands, his head bowed down a little, his brows contracted like a man facing a cloud of dust. He looked at Tiphaine as though confident that he had no cause for shame, but failed in the deceit, as a man who was not utterly a blackguard should. The girl's eyes made him feel hot from head to heel. She was so calm, so proud, so uncompromising, so pure. To Bertrand she was as a being who had stepped by magic out of a golden past. He found himself shuddering at the thought of what might have befallen her had Hopart and the rest laid their rough hands upon her body.

"Messire Bertrand du Guesclin, have you nothing to say to me?"

Bertrand was squaring his shoulders and trying to look her frankly in the face.

"We took this for the Sieur de Rohan's place," he said.

Tiphaine's eyes held his.

"How much honor is there in the excuse, messire?"

"Honor?"

"To take the castles of one's friends, castles that have no garrisons, where the Black Death conquered before you came?"

The men and women were crowding the far end of the chapel, grinning and giggling, and not a little astonished at the way that Bertrand had his tail between his legs. It was a new thing for them to see their captain bearded, and bearded successfully, by a mere woman.

The truth was plain to Tiphaine as she looked at the man's sullen and silent face, and at the rough plunderers who called him leader. She had no fear either of Bertrand or his men. The plague had taught her to look on death without a tremor.

"Then you are no longer of the Blois party, Messire Bertrand du Guesclin."

"I—madame?"

"Yes."

He gnawed his lip, with the air of a man wishing himself saved from some merciless scourging.

“The Sieur de Rohan is for the Count of Blois.”

“It is so.”

“Therefore, messire”—and she looked down at him from her full height—“therefore—I do not understand.”

The woman Gwen, who had torn her skirts on the trunk of the tree, began to laugh and declaim:

“Lord help us, what has come to the captain? Did ye ever see such a meek gentleman?”

The men chuckled. Bertrand whipped round with a devil’s look in his eyes, and made at them, making mighty sweeps with his sword.

“Out! out!”

His wrath sobered them. There was something terrible in it, something so grim that they quailed and went back before him, pushing one against another. Few of the men were cowards, but none wished to tempt the whistling fierceness of Bertrand’s sword.

“Out! out!”

They crowded through the doorway, flinching, and covering their faces with their arms. In a minute the chapel was empty, but Bertrand still followed them. He drove them through the solar and down the stairway into the hall, thrusting Arletta out last, and barring the door. Huddling together like a flock of silly sheep, they stood gaping at the blank wall and the closed door.

Bertrand lingered a moment in the solar, listening, one hand gripping the handle of his sword, the other stroking his strong chin. It was even as though this great, grim-faced fellow, who had driven twenty men before him by sheer strength of will, shrank from facing the woman waiting for him in the chapel. After pacing the solar, he shook himself and recrossed the threshold. Tiphaine was standing where he had left her. Her eyes looked straight at Bertrand as he moved towards her, trying not to slouch or shirk her gaze.

“Well, messire?”

She challenged him curtly with those two words. It was no mere question, but the call to an ordeal that he could not shirk.

“I am sorry—” he began.

“Sorry! That is generous—indeed! See, there lies my best friend, my dog Brunet, slashed to death by the swords of your men. My castle gate has been broken by you, my father’s house pillaged!”

Her words came quickly, yet with the clear ring of an armorer’s hammer upon steel. She was still wroth with him, and, with good reason, grieved also by the falling of his manhood into such a life.

Bertrand could not meet her eyes.

"What can I say to you, madame?"

She dropped her arm and looked at him in silence, her face aglow, her breath drawn deeply.

"Messire Bertrand! Messire Bertrand!"

The change of tone was wonderful, piercing through to the man's heart. He hung his head, knowing too well what was passing in her mind.

"I am what I am," he said, sullenly.

"Yet—you remember Rennes?"

"What good is it, madame, to remember what one cannot keep."

"What good, messire! Have you, then, fallen so much from your own heart?"

He flung back his head suddenly and looked her in the face.

"Why should I shirk it?" he said. "I am what I am—a captain of free companions, a beast, a ruffian—God knows what! Where is my honor? Ask those great lords who made me what I am."

He seemed to recover his dignity of a sudden, a dignity that, though bitter and rebellious, boasted sincerity and truth. He rested his sword-point on the floor, crossed his two hands on the pommel, and waited like a man who has thrown down the gage.

Tiphaine stood above him on the altar steps.

"Then you have forgotten Rennes?" she said.

"I—madame?"

"How, then, should Bertrand du Guesclin have fallen to leading these poor fools to the plunder of Breton homes? I should not have dreamed it when—I was a child—at Rennes."

Her words moved him, and he bent his head.

"Men fail—sometimes," he said, sullenly.

"Sometimes; but you—"

"I?"

"You—who were so strong, messire; you—who feared nothing!"

He stretched out his arms before her, the sword sweeping the air.

"Before God—the whole fault was not mine!"

"And why not yours, Bertrand du Guesclin?"

"They were against me—those great captains; what was I to them?—a dog to be kicked when the meat scorched on the spit."

"And then?"

"They took my honor from me. Was not that enough?"

"No man need lose his honor, even though the whole world calls him liar."

He looked at her steadfastly a moment, noting her queenliness and the sadness of her eyes.

"I am what I am; the how, or why, neither mends—nor matters. Give me

your commands.”

She turned to the altar, and, lifting the silver swan, held it out to him with both her hands.

“Take it, messire.”

He glanced up at her and frowned.

“Not that!”

“And yet you remember Rennes?”

He caught her meaning, and understood—to his own cost—the significance of the thing she wished.

“You strike hard, but the blows are true,” he said. “I have lost what once was mine; I acknowledge it; a man can do no more.”

He sheathed his sword and took the swan from Tiphaine, looking at her hands and nothing else. For Bertrand there was a bitter symbolism in the scene. The few pure memories he had given to the past were flung back to him like the dry petals of a cherished flower.

He thrust the silver swan under his surcoat, so that it was held there by his belt.

“And now?”

She stood silent a moment, as though considering.

“Am I to be obeyed?”

He crossed himself.

“Before God, yes.”

He looked up at her and waited.

“These are my commands,” she said: “return your plunder; bury the two dead men—in the hall. Mend the gate that you have broken; then leave us to our liberty.”

“Here—alone?”

“I have said it.”

“But—madame!”

“Madness—you would say?”

“Only command me, and I will see you safe to Rennes, or Josselin, or Dinan.”

She was calm and determined, for she had made her plans.

“Messire, I have said it. I am not alone,” and she drew back the hangings and showed him Jehanot, cowering against the wall.

Bertrand looked at her, baffled, yet realizing that she wished to be obeyed.

“I would have had it otherwise, madame.”

“And I—had it been different.”

He turned and pointed towards Brunet’s body.

“And the hound?”

“Ah, poor Brunet, leave him; Jehanot and I will bury him. But for the rest

—”

“You shall be obeyed.”

She turned suddenly, as though she had ended her meeting with him, and knelt down before the altar, her hands folded over her bosom. Jehanot was kneeling also, while from poor Brunet’s body the blood still curled across the stones. Bertrand stood motionless for a moment at the chapel door, looking at Tiphaine as though he were being banished from light and warmth into the night. Perhaps she did not trust him. Why should she? Had he not broken the child’s faith she had kept for him from the past?

He went out into the solar and closed the chapel door. A fierce gloom had fallen on him, the gloom of a proud man who has had the cold truth flung in his face. Great God, was he so vile a fellow that Tiphaine held the Black Death’s terror to be more merciful than his kindness? Yes, he was a beast, a bully, a common thief. Bertrand humbled himself with all the passionate thoroughness of his nature.

Tiphaine had given him her commands. Good! He would at least show her that he could obey. Striding through the solar and down the stairs, he found his fellows still loitering in the hall. They were whispering together with the restless air of men vaguely afraid of the days before them. Some were counting money on one of the long tables, others gloating over the spoil they had taken, and making coarse jests at Bertrand’s lingering in the chapel.

Bertrand came down into the hall, his naked sword over one shoulder, his mouth set. He looked the men over with that searching stare that seemed to fix itself on every one in turn. Bertrand was in one of his silent, tight-lipped moods. The men waited, watching him and wondering what was to follow.

“Guicheaux, hither!”

The words were sharp and vicious. Guicheaux started, colored, and came forward nimbly.

“You have a silver mug under your surcoat.”

The quipster would have lied had he dared, but Bertrand’s eyes were on him.

“Come, do you hear me? Disgorge, all of you. Guicheaux, put your mug down on the floor at my feet.”

They began to murmur, to grumble, to nudge one another. Guicheaux hesitated. Bertrand’s lion’s roar set the rafters ringing.

“Come, all of you; let me have no grumbling! Hopart, you have money on you. Bring it here, I say, or, by God, I will break your neck!”

The men had seen him fierce, but never in such a mood as this before. They obeyed, grudgingly, sullenly, each man knowing Bertrand for his master, and fearing to be the first to feel his wrath. Cups, money, ewers, a silver “ship,” a rich girdle or two were lying in a heap at Bertrand’s feet. His face

softened as he took the swan of silver from under his surcoat and added it to the pile of spoil.

“Men,” he said, with a keen look.

They stood watching him; no grumbling was to be heard.

“I have sought a favor from you, and you have obeyed me. I give you thanks.”

Guicheaux grinned at the coolness of the speech. He had an inveterate love of insolent address, and he could have licked Bertrand’s shoes for homage at that moment.

“Men, I have some share of plunder on the pack-horses. Divide it among yourselves. I make a gift of it.”

The change that swept over the rough faces was significant. Satisfaction succeeded surliness, and they cheered him as though he had won some great fight and driven the English into the sea.

Bertrand, who knew their hearts, held up his sword for silence. How different the applause of the fellows seemed to him from what it would have seemed an hour ago.

“Guicheaux, take ten men, find tools and timber, and repair the gate.”

Guicheaux grimaced, but prepared to see the whim obeyed.

“The rest of you go out over the moat and pile your arms in the aspen wood. We shall march as soon as the gate is mended.”

Never had Bertrand’s free companions met with such strange strategy before. To take plunder—only to return it; to break down a gate—only to rear it up again! They could make nothing of the riddle, save that the lady in the chapel had bearded Bertrand as though she had been a queen of France. They poured out from the hall, leaving Bertrand standing before the pile of metal, the silver swan glistening in the sunlight that slanted from one of the narrow windows. He stood there a long while, leaning on his sword, his face dark and expressionless, his eyes sad. At last he turned to the penance he had taken upon himself, the burying of the bodies that lay stiff under the straw.

Alone he buried them, digging a shallow grave in the orchard, while Guicheaux and his comrades hammered at the gate. There was heroism in the deed, but Bertrand hardly felt it at the moment. The responsibility was his, and he took it, lest his men should suffer.

The gate was patched and firm upon its hinges, Richard and the lad Berart stretched in their last resting-place under the apple-trees. The “free companions” had built a fire in the aspen wood, and were cooking meat and making a meal. They had joined their sagacities in unravelling the mystery of their captain’s orders, but none save the women came near discovering the truth.

“I will tell ye how it is,” and fat Gwen wiped her mouth and looked at

Arletta, of whom she was jealous: “madame, yonder, was once the captain’s lady love; that is why the brave fellow looked so meek.”

Meanwhile Bertrand had passed once more into the empty hall, and was standing staring at the swan of silver crowning the untaken spoil. No sound came from the chapel, where Tiphaine and old Jehanot kept sanctuary till the troop had gone. Bertrand was smiling sorrowfully and fingering his chin. Suddenly he took his poniard from its sheath and went to the high table on the dais. Bending over it, he carved a rude cross thereon, and, taking the swan of silver, set it on the board beside the cross.

Then he saluted the closed door of the solar and went out of the Aspen Tower to join his men.

X

A WIND had risen when Bertrand and his men rode forward into the woodways of Broceliande. Falling leaves were flickering everywhere, drifting in showers, dyeing the green grass bronze and gold. The forest was full of the murmuring of the crisp foliage of autumn. Deep in the inner gloom the rust-red masses of the dead beech leaves glowed like metal at dull heat. The western sky had taken its winter tones, that flush of orange and of maroon that backs the purple of the misty hills.

Bertrand loitered behind his men, slouching in the saddle and looking straight before him into the forest. The emotions in him were complex for the moment, so much so that they might have taken their temper from Broceliande itself. The rustling of leaves, for falling memories; the shrill piping of the wind, all human in its infinite anxiousness and dread. Humiliation and gloom were heavy on Bertrand's soul. He had been shown his own likeness in the mirror of Tiphaine's honor, and the ugliness thereof had made him consider what manner of man he was.

He awoke at last to find Arletta watching him as she trotted beside him on her half-starved nag. There was a jealous look in the girl's black eyes, a sharp petulance about her face. Bertrand's quixotry had puzzled her not a little, and Gwen's words were still sounding in her ears.

"Lording," she said, "is the black dog back upon your shoulders?"

Bertrand frowned, and swore at his horse as the beast stumbled over a piece of dead-wood. He was in no mood for Arletta's questions.

"Mind your business, wench," he said, "and I will mind my own."

Arletta's curiosity was aroused; moreover, it was not in her woman's nature to be driven from the truth with a snub.

"You have had these moods and whimsies of late, lording."

"Ah, have I?"

"Yes, often and often, and to-night you look blacker than a Moor. Who is the lady who scolded you in the chapel?"

She affected innocence, but the pretence could not hide the hardness of her voice.

"What is that to you?" quoth Bertrand, digging his knees into his horse's flanks.

"Nothing, lording, nothing."

"Nothing, eh? Then leave well alone."

"Ah—ah—"

"What ails you now?"

"To-day you kissed me and were gay. What has happened?—what have I done? Dear Heaven, I am always vexing you!"

Bertrand lost patience, and was turning on her with a snarl and a curse, when something seemed to stay his temper. Tiphaine's face had risen before him. She had told him the truth? Yes, he was a rough beast and a bully.

"Let me be, child," he said, even gently.

Arletta's lips quivered, but she took his kindness into her heart and looked less peevish and jealous about the eyes.

"Lording, maybe you are tired and hungry."

She rummaged in the bag that hung on her saddle, and brought out a piece of bread and a few olives.

"Take them, lording," she said, holding out her hands.

Bertrand was touched. He took the food and ate it.

"Thanks, child," he said, "you must put up with my rough temper, and close your ears when I take to growling."

In the Aspen Tower, Tiphaine had come from the chapel, after covering Brunet's body with the cloth from the altar. She had made Jehanot sit by the solar fire, for the pain of his broken jaw and the terror he had borne had brought the old man near to a collapse. The pillaged chest, the rifled ambreys, the scanty furniture, tossed pellmell into the corners, made Tiphaine wonder whether Bertrand had kept his vow.

She left Jehanot in the solar, and, going down into the hall, found the pelf piled on the floor, even as Bertrand had promised. The straw had been thrown aside, and the bodies of Richard and the lad Berart were no longer there. Then Tiphaine's eyes fell upon the swan of silver, swimming beside the rough cross cut by Bertrand on the high table.

However proud a woman may be, she can rarely cast past kindness wholly from her heart. Her sweetness, if she be a good woman, persists in trying to sanctify a friendship threatened by all the influences of fate. Tiphaine had tried her power on Bertrand that day. Her courage, like a bold haggard, had flown at the man's rough pride and brought it tumbling out of the blue. Bertrand had obeyed her, save in one respect. He had left the prize he had won for her at Rennes, and had cut a cross beside it, to symbolize some thought that had been working in his heart.

Tiphaine's face softened as she stood looking at the swan. She was not without vanity, the true vanity of the soul that cries out with joy when some great deed has been inspired; some evil pass prevented. Bertrand had disobeyed her in one thing, and she grasped the thought that had made him carve the cross upon the table. Her words had gone home to the man's heart;

he was not dead to scorn; he could react still to the cry of his own conscience.

Would the mood last? Tiphaine hung her head and wondered. There were so many powers behind the man, dragging him back from the prouder life. He had been wronged, perhaps treated unjustly, driven to recklessness by some undeserved disgrace. She remembered Bertrand's passionate nature as a child. He was quickly wounded, and stubborn over the smart thereof.

"Ah, Bertrand du Guesclin," she thought, "how long will my words ring within your ears? Will you hate me when your humbleness has gone? Will you hold to the old life, or break from it like a brave man, turning shame to good account? Who knows?—who knows? Yet I will keep this gift of yours, to prove or condemn you as the days may show. Will it be the smelting-pot for the silver swan, messire, or God's altar again, towards which the hearts of true men turn?"

Bertrand was fighting out the same question in his heart as he rode with Arletta through the darkening woodways of Broceliande. Dusk was falling, and the heavy silence of the forest was broken only by the trampling of hoofs and the voices of his men. Mist and gloom were everywhere. The falling of the leaves was very ghostly in the twilight, and the piping of the wind grew more plaintive as the red flush dwindled in the west.

A sense of loneliness and of nothingness had fallen on Bertrand, a savage spirit of self-abasement that took him by the shoulders and thrust him down into the deeps. Of what use were Tiphaine's words to him? Defeat was heavy on him, fate against him, and wherefore should he swim against the tide? How could a mere freebooter, a beggarly captain among thieves, hope to retrieve the failures of the past? He had chosen his part in life, and he must abide by it, without clutching at the golden fruit that hung above his reach. The past was beyond him, with its memories. Nothing could flush his soul once more with the boyish ardor he had felt at Rennes.

It is strange to what poltroonery even a brave man will fall, and how the stoutest heart can flag, the most strenuous spirit fall into the mopes. Men are not demi-gods, and their very fibres are fashioned out of clay. Physical starvation can bring the strutting hero low, while soul hunger is the most paralytic misery of all. The truest courage is that which meets fate in the mists of twilight, and passes the valley of shadows with set mouth and dogged will. It is easy to be brave when trumpets scream and the flush of fame burns upon the clouds. To defeat defeat, alone, and with the bitterness of failure in the heart—then is it that the iron in the man must prove its temper. As yet Bertrand had not learned the highest courage. He was as a petulant boy who cries "Shame! Shame!" when the world baffles his first venture.

The man Guicheaux came cantering back from the main company, for it was growing dark, and they would have to lodge as best they might under the autumn shelter of Broceliande.

“Shall I call a halt, captain?”

Bertrand glanced at him like a man waking unwillingly from sleep, and nodded.

“Make me a fire apart, Guicheaux,” he said.

The quipster grinned, and glanced at Arletta.

“There are some big beeches yonder, lording,” he said, flourishing his hand as a signal to the men to halt.

“The leaves are dry as shavings, and there is bracken waiting to be cut. We shall find plenty of dead wood about, and a good beech-tree will make Dame Arletta a fine bower.”

Guicheaux trotted away, and the men were seen off-saddling under the trees—huge spreading beeches that stood on a low ridge between two valleys. The free companions piled their arms about the tree-trunks, and used the boughs as pegs to hang their harness on. Some of them picketed the horses, after watering them at a stagnant pool, some fifty yards down the slope. Others cut down bracken with their swords, and gathered dead-wood to make a fire. The two women, Gwen and Barbe, chattered and bandied their coarse jests with the men as they looked to the serving of the evening meal.

Bertrand had unsaddled his horse, tethered the beast, and sat himself down at the foot of one of the trees with his shoulders resting against the trunk. He let Arletta look to her own nag, and did not rouse himself to give her a helping hand. His morose mood was selfish in its obstinate self-pity. He hardly heeded the girl as she came and knelt beside him on the beech leaves and began to search her wallet for food.

Presently Guicheaux approached with an armful of sticks. He kicked the dry leaves together and began to build a fire, looking curiously at Bertrand from time to time, and smiling mischievously at Arletta. Crouching, he struck sparks with his flint and steel, and blew on the tinder till it flared up and set the dry leaves blazing. Guicheaux rubbed his hands before the flames with comfortable unction, and looked at the two women who were slinging a cooking-pot over the other fire. The men were trooping in with bundles of bracken, which they began to spread as bedding for the night.

Guicheaux glanced round at Bertrand moping against the tree. “Some of Gaston’s pig is to fatten us, lording,” he said.

Bertrand did not seem to hear him.

“Bread, boiled pork, and a mug of cider. Consult your stomach, messire, whether it be not hungry.”

Arletta darted an impatient look at the quipster, and ordered him away with

a wave of the hand. The captain had the black-dog on his shoulders, and it was better for all that he should be left alone.

Presently she crept close to Bertrand and offered to unlace his bassinet. Her brown hands were quickly at their work, Bertrand letting her disarm him, piece by piece, staring sullenly into the fire, and not guessing how much he resembled a sour and surly child. Arletta gave him all her patience, keeping her lips shut and pestering him with no more questions. She took the rusty bassinet and laid it amid the beech leaves, and soon shoulder-plates, demi-brassarts, and greaves were lying beside it.

Arletta's fingers were on the buckle of his sword-belt.

"Ha! what are you at? Let it be!"

He pushed her hands away, looking at her searchingly.

"Lording!"

"I trust no one with my sword; no one shall play tricks with it. Are you for treachery?"

The taunt was a mean one, and Arletta winced.

"Your sword is a true sword," she said, "and do you not trust me also?"

She put her hands out to him as she knelt with a pleading tenderness on her face. Bertrand looked in her eyes, and hated his own soul. Poor, honorless wench that she was, she shamed him, and gave him a loyalty that he did not deserve.

"I trust you, Letta," he said, touching her cheek.

Her sharp face mellowed, and seemed to catch warmth and color from the fire. Her black eyes glistened, and she looked handsome and desirable, with her nut-brown skin and raven hair, red lips pouting over her small teeth.

"Lording, I am only a woman."

Guicheaux approached them again, carrying a slice of steaming pork on his poniard, a loaf of bread, and a stone flask of cider. Arletta took the food from him and nodded him back towards the fire, where the free companions were making a brave battle over their meal. She knelt down again beside Bertrand, and pressed him to eat, coaxing him half-playfully, half-wistfully, till she won her way. Food, drink, and the cheerfulness of the fire worked their spell on Bertrand's spirits. He began to feel comforted in the inner man, warmer about the body, less befogged about the brain. Life had its satisfactions, after all, and what were glory and the frail fancies of chivalry compared with good food and a hale hunger? He began to smile at Arletta as she lay curled in the beech leaves, her green tunic tight about her figure, and held the stone bottle in her brown and rough-skinned hands.

"Drink deep, lording," and she laughed; "it will keep the damp out. See how bravely the fire burns."

She began to eat in turn, now that Bertrand had taken his fill, cutting the

meat and bread with the knife she carried at her girdle. Her eyes caught the light from the fire, and her black hair enhanced the pale charm of her peevish face. Bertrand slouched lazily against the tree. He was content for the moment with Arletta's comeliness.

Night had settled over Broceliande; leagues of darkness and of mystery wrapped them round, while the flames tongued the gloom and Guicheaux and his gossips drank and laughed about their fire.

Bertrand stretched his arms and yawned.

"Food puts new courage into a man."

She bent towards him with a sinuous gliding of the body, pouted out her lips, and put her face close to his.

"You are yourself again, lording."

Bertrand kissed her, thinking of Tiphaine, and swearing stoutly in his heart that he was beyond her scorn and pity. Arletta, red and happy, started up, and began to pile leaves and bracken into a bed beneath the tree. She made a pillow by rolling leaves up in an old tunic, and threw more wood upon the fire.

"There, lording, I have made a bed."

She took him by the hands and dragged him playfully from the tree.

The free companions were rolling themselves in their cloaks about their fire and half burying their bodies in the litter of bracken. Only one man stood to his arms, to take his watch while the others slept. One by one the voices died down and surrendered to the silence of the forest. The clouds had broken overhead, and a young moon was shining through and through, a patch of celestial silver above the black and half-leafless branches of the trees. The sentinel, after yawning for an hour, and rubbing his heavy eyes with his knuckles, looked cautiously at Bertrand, and slunk from his post to crawl into the bracken about the fire. Under the beech-trees there was naught but a tangle of bodies, arms, legs, and snoring faces crowded close about the flames. Broceliande's stillness was supreme. Like some forest of dreams, she seemed to hold these sleepers in her magic power.

Three hours or more had passed when Arletta started awake with a low cry and sat up in terror, her hands on Bertrand's chest. She had been dreaming, and had thought that in her sleep strange shapes had been crowding round her in the dark. She shivered, and crouched rigid and motionless, staring as though bewitched into the depths of the gloom about the fire.

"Bertrand, lording, wake—wake!"

She tugged in terror at Bertrand's arms as he lay beside her on the leaves and bracken. The horses were whinnying, stamping, and snorting under the trees where the men had tethered them. Arletta's eyes were fixed on two dots of light that stared eerily at her out of the dark.

Bertrand awoke, grumbling and yawning, and clutching at Arletta with his

arms.

“What, the dawn already?”

“No, no! Look yonder; see—in the dark—there!”

Bertrand heard the horses screaming, started up, and found Arletta quivering beside him, her face white as linen, her eyes great with fear. The moon was behind a cloud, and as Bertrand followed the pointing of Arletta’s hand he understood in an instant the meaning of her terror. Out of the blackness of the forest circles of red crystal were shining on them, two by two. There was a padding and rustling of feet in the dead leaves, the vague flitting of dark figures to and fro, a forward movement of the blood-red eyes.

“Wolves, by God!”

There was a great plunging and screaming amid the horses as Bertrand sprang up, kicked the fire into a blaze, and, snatching a burning branch from it, made at the circle of eyes, roaring like a roused lion. The dark shapes swerved and scampered over the leaves, snarling and snapping their jaws, but flinching from Bertrand and his burning brand. The free companions were scrambling up from the litter of bracken. They saw Bertrand beating the darkness with his fiery flail, vague shadows flying before him like the evil spirits of the forest.

The moon came from behind the cloud at the same instant, showing the struggling, sweating horses, squealing and kicking, and ready to break loose.

“Wolves! wolves!”

They picked up brands from the fire, and charged this way and that, the beasts scattering before them and slinking away into the darkness. Hopart, Guicheaux, and several others ran to quiet the horses and to prevent them from breaking loose. The tumult ceased in due course, and the men came crowding back about the fire.

Bertrand strode towards them, carrying his burning branch.

“Guicheaux, Hopart, Simon, whose watch was it? Who the devil let these brutes up so near the fires?”

The free companions were jostling one another, trying to discover in the dusk the fellow who had stood on guard when they had lain down to sleep. It was the Poitevin lad who had shown such terror when the Black Death had startled them in the hall of the Aspen Tower. He was skulking behind a tree, ready to take to his heels had he not feared the wolves and the darkness. Hopart discovered him, and dragged him towards Bertrand before the fire.

“Pierre, is it? So, lad, you fell asleep. We’ll read thee a lesson.”

The Poitevin, scared to death, cringed as his comrades hustled and cuffed him. They were furious with the lad for having deserted his post and left them unguarded against the perils of the night.

“Mercy! Mercy! Messire Bertrand, Messire Bertrand, they are tearing my arms off!”

Hopart smote Pierre on the mouth with the back of his hand.

“Scullion! Crybaby! Jackass!”

“Let him be, men.”

They left him grudgingly, as though they had caught some of the savagery of Broceliande’s wolves. Pierre stood shaking before Bertrand. Then he dropped on his knees and began to snivel, his poltrooning drawing laughter and taunts from Hopart and the rest.

“Get up, man, get up!”

By way of being wisely foolish, the Poitevin grovelled the more, and tried to take Bertrand by the knees.

“Mercy, lording, mercy! I was tired, devilish tired—”

Bertrand looked at him, and then rolled the fellow backward with a thrust of the foot.

“Stand up, fool!” he said, sharply. “Stand up—like a man! Guicheaux, give him twenty cuts with your belt. We will let him off easily. Next time it shall be the rope.”

They took Pierre, stripped his back, and trounced him till the blood flowed. It was Arletta who pleaded with Bertrand for the lad, and saved him ten strokes out of the twenty, for Guicheaux would have beaten him till he fainted. They piled wood on the fires and retethered the horses, for there would be no more sleep for the free companions that night. Squatting round the fire, they talked and gossiped together, and shouted songs to frighten the wolves.

As for Bertrand, he lay his head on Arletta’s knees, staring at the flames, and listening to the howling of the beasts as they still padded round them in the darkness. He was thinking again of Tiphaine, of the counsel she had given him, and of the cross he had cut on the high table with his poniard. What would she make of his remorse if she could see him lying with his head in Arletta’s lap? And yet the girl was as loyal as a dog, patient and gentle when her jealousy had no prick of passion.

Bertrand, as he lay, felt her hands upon his forehead.

“Sleep, lording,” she said, as she bent over him. “Nothing can harm you while I am watching.”

XI

THEY had been on the march an hour next morning, following the winding forest ways under Guicheaux's guidance, when Hopart and several others who held the van came plump upon a couple of peasants squatting beside a miserable fire. In the centre of a clearing stood a rude hut built of logs and thatched with whin and heather. The grass was all trampled and muddy about the place, as though a number of horses had been tethered for the night.

At the first glimpse of the free lances and Hopart's red face under its iron war-hat, the men by the fire skipped up like rabbits and bolted for the woods. The free companions gave chase, hallooing to the peasants to stop, and spattering them with maledictions as they still continued to run. The slimmer of the two gained the undergrowth and dived into it like a bird into a bush. Hopart, however, came thundering down on the other, who was lumbering along on a lame leg, toppled him over by thrusting his spear between his knees, and, rolling from the saddle, had the gentleman in hand. He was a stupid, hairy-faced clod, with a pendulous lower lip and a scar across one cheek. They brought him to Bertrand, who had ridden in with Arletta, and set him in the midst before the captain's horse.

Bertrand, who had been struggling with his conscience since the rising of the sun, looked round the clearing, noticed the trampled grass, and promptly fell to questioning the lame boor Hopart had brought to earth.

"Hallo, Jacques Bonhomme, whose hut is that?"

The peasant indicated his own person with his thumb.

"Yours, eh? And who have you been lodging? A large party by the look of the grass. Speak up! We are Breton men, and we are not here to steal."

The man's face brightened a little as he scratched his chin and looked cunning.

"Maybe you are of the Montfort party, lording?"

"Maybe we are, maybe we are not. Who have you had camped here for the night?"

"Monk Hanotin, Croquart's bully."

"Who? Say that again."

"Monk Hanotin, lording, and twenty men. They've thove my old sow, bad blood to them, burned my sticks of furniture, and taken all the meal I had in the tub."

Bertrand was frowning at the man, while Hopart and the rest listened in silence.

"Thank the saints, Jacques, that they took nothing else. Croquart's men!

The devil! And how long have they been gone?"

The man pulled the hairs in his shaggy beard.

"Maybe an hour, maybe less."

"We saw nothing of them. They are ahead of us, eh?"

"No, lording, they went west."

"And we rode east. Well, what do you know, anything?"

There was more hair-pulling, more screwing up of the peasant's sleepy but cunning eyes, as though he were trying to tune his wits to Bertrand's temper.

"I heard something, lording, of the business they have in hand."

"You did! Tell us."

"When they were kicking me and making me burn my own stools and table I heard Monk Hanotin talking. They are for the Vicomte de Bellière's tower, the Aspen Tower we call it in these parts. I reckon they mean to pluck it as they plucked my poor hens."

Bertrand straightened in the saddle, a flash of fierceness crossing his face, as though one of his men had called him a coward. Bending forward, he held his poniard at the peasant's throat, while Hopart and another gripped him by the arms and shoulders.

"Swear, Jacques Bonhomme! Swear, swear!"

The man looked stupidly into Bertrand's eyes as though fascinated.

"Swear, lording?"

"That you have spoken the truth."

The fellow shook off Hopart's grip and crossed himself.

"By Holy Jesu, Our Lady, and St. Ives," he said, "I swear!"

Bertrand clapped his poniard back into its sheath.

"Good," he said. "God see to it, for your throat's sake, that you are not a liar. How many men had Hanotin with him?"

"Twenty, I should say, lording—English, Flemings, Gascons—cut-purses enough."

Bertrand's upper lip tightened. He was alive again to the last sinew.

"Jacques, you know the forest ways?"

"Yes, lording."

"Bring us to the Vicomte de Bellière's tower before Hanotin and his rogues break in."

"Lording, I will do my best if you will bring back my old sow."

Bertrand stood in the stirrups and called his men round him.

"Come, who is for robbing a brother thief? Shout, all of you, for Bertrand du Guesclin and Brittany!"

And shout they did, ready as Bertrand to strike a blow at Hanotin, Croquart the Fleming's man. Guicheaux gave tongue to the common will.

"Lead on, lording, we will follow."

"Well said, comrade," quoth Hopart, "I'd give a knight's ransom to stick my poniard in Hanotin's belly."

There was stir and ardor everywhere. The men were down tightening up girths and looking to each other's armor. Guicheaux and Hopart were unlading one of the pack-horses and hoisting up the peasant onto the beast's back. Bertrand had drawn his sword and was feeling the edge thereof. Of a truth, God had given him his opportunity. He would save Tiphaine—yes, or lose his life in the adventure.

A hand touched his bridle. It was Arletta's. She was looking up wistfully, jealously, into Bertrand's face.

"Take me with you, lording."

"No, no, Letta, this is no woman's business."

"I can ride with the best—"

"Yes, you have spirit, child; but we shall have our stomachs full of fighting before night. Stay with Gwen and Barbe. You will be safe here."

Arletta went white under her black hair, and then red as fire. Her eyes flashed, her bosom heaved.

"Lording, I will go with you—yes, yes, though you ride to save madame. I know your heart, I know your heart!"

A wave of color swept over Bertrand's face. He looked hard at Arletta, who was clinging to his bridle with both hands.

"What! Jealous, Letta? For shame, for shame!"

She burst out weeping of a sudden, all her woman's nature rushing out in tears.

"Take me, lording, I am your servant. No, I'll not stay while you are fighting. Lording, lording!"

She leaned against his horse's shoulder, and tried to clasp him with her arms. Bertrand was frowning and gnawing at his lip. His mood had changed; the sullen repinings of the night were past. He felt his sword sharp, his arm mighty.

"Well, you shall come," he said.

"Lording, I am your servant."

She kissed his hands and sprang away, smiling dimly through her tears. Yet her heart was not quiet despite her victory. Why was Bertrand so fierce and eager to fly at Hanotin's throat? Was it because he was of the English party, or because—And Arletta clinched her fists and shivered.

So Bertrand and his men turned back towards the Aspen Tower, leaving the two women in the hut, with Simon and the Poitevin to guard them and the baggage-cattle. Bertrand took the lead once more, and loitered no longer like a sick stag behind the herd. Guicheaux had Jacques Bonhomme on a horse beside him, keeping a fast hold on the bridle, and improving the fellow's

loyalty by grimly reminding him that some one's back would be the worse for their stirrup-straps if the Aspen Tower were not reached before night. The men were blithe and full of fettle. Monk Hanotin and his free lances were gentlemen of parts—brilliant rogues, so far as devilry could carry them. They did not ride with empty saddles. The peasant swore that they had the spoil of half a dozen castles and manors on their pack-horses.

As for Bertrand, the whole tone of life was changed in him since he had turned back from that patch of open land in Broceliande's heart. The mopes had fallen away; he had a deed in view; the day was justified by its endeavor. Some strange stroke of chance had beaten him back towards the woman who had shown him his own soul. He was riding to save Tiphaine—Tiphaine, the child who had made a man of him at Rennes. He recalled her as he had known her then—sweet, winsome, passionate, generous in her championing of his ugliness. He saw her as she had stood but yesterday on the altar steps, brave, scornful, haloed round with a lustre of gold. All the deep pathos of the scene smote home to him—dead Brunet's body, the pest-stricken home, old Jehanot shivering behind the hangings. Why, he had been no better then than this bully of Croquart's, this Hanotin whom he was thirsting to slay! Great God, how a man might discover his true self in the likeness of another!

Bertrand awoke over the peril of the child he had loved of old. He was as hot to save her as though he were still her champion at Rennes. Tiphaine in Hanotin's ruffian hands! Bertrand set his teeth and raged at the thought of it. He must reach the Aspen Tower before the patched gate fell.

Arletta rode at Bertrand's side that morning, biting her red lips, and tasting the bitterness of her own reflections. A woman is quick in the telling of a man's moods, and his actions speak for him in lieu of words. With Arletta jealousy was an ever-smouldering passion. It lurked at all times behind her pale and sinful face, and in the restless deeps of her troubled eyes. She had been known to stab fat Gwen in the arm because the woman had dared to laugh at Bertrand before his men. Arletta could brook no rivalry in this poor, honorless conceit of hers. She loved Bertrand, loved him like a mother, a mistress, and a slave—was proud of his great strength and of the truth that he belonged to her.

Yet Arletta had kept a vision of madame of the Aspen Tower, concerning whom her lord had been so glum and silent. She hated Tiphaine with her whole soul. A woman soon grasps the character of a sister woman, and to Arletta Tiphaine stood for every contrast that could make Bertrand see her as she was. Untarnished pride and haughty purity! The thin, white-faced light of love, with her jet-black hair and sinuous ways, knew how steep was the slope between Tiphaine and herself. She had seen her but for a moment, but that moment was sufficient. Bertrand, her master, had humbled himself before this lady of the

tower, and to Arletta there had been a reflected bitterness in Bertrand's homage. She was but a poor sparrow-hawk compared to this gerfalcon, whose splendid pinions had never been impeded by the hand of man.

About noon they halted by a stream to water the horses and make a meal. Arletta could see how Bertrand chafed and fretted at the delay, how hot and fierce he was to come up with Hanotin and his free lances, whose tracks showed in the wet grass. Arletta would have rejoiced if half the horses had fallen lame; but no, there was to be no slackening of the chase that day. Bertrand was in the saddle, inexorably eager, and shouting to his men:

"Forward! forward!"

The brown thickets swam by them as they cantered on through shadow and through sunlight. The sun sank low, hurling his slanting showers of gold over the bosom of Broceliande. Every forest monarch seemed afire, touched with a glory that was not of earth. The pungent scent of the rotting leaves rose up like invisible incense before the reddening altar of the west. Another league and they would be on the brink of the valley, and near the tower that Arletta hated.

Bertrand called a halt. He was a man who never racked his wits for strategy or battle craft. Like a good hawk, he "waited on" till the quarry rose in view; courage and strength of pinion did the rest. The horses steamed in the frosty air. The men sat silent, images in steel, listening for any sound that might break the silence. They were close on the valley, close on Monk Hanotin and his scum of Gascons, English, and Flemings.

From afar came the faint crying of a horn, wild and wailing, like the voice of the dying day.

"Hear them, hear them, brave dogs!"

Hopart was biting at his beard and setting back his shoulders, as though to feel their weight.

"Blow, brother Hanotin!" he growled. "We will be with thee before dark."

They drew together under the trees, their eyes on Bertrand, who was holding his breath and listening. The rough fellows had confidence in him. There would be no bungling where Bertrand led.

"Ready, sirs?"

A growl and a loosening of swords came in response.

"Good. Keep your tongues quiet. We must hold to the trees till we have the tower in sight."

He was spurring on his horse when he remembered Arletta, and drew rein again with an impatient frown.

"Here, one of you look after the girl. Keep her safe in the woods till we have finished."

Arletta, jealous and very miserable, held out her hands to him with a sharp cry.

“Lording, I am not afraid—”

“What devil’s nonsense now! Back, I say! Am I to be obeyed?”

Arletta looked at Bertrand’s face, and slunk away as though he had smitten her. Tiphaine of the tower had all his tenderness. She only cumbered him, and his passionate impatience hurt her heart.

“Off! I can look to myself,” she said, as one of the men came to take her bridle. “Go forward and fight; I’ll be a clog on none of you.”

Another furlong and they neared the valley, pushing on cautiously under the trees. Bertrand and Guicheaux rode ahead, speaking not a word, but keeping their eyes fixed on the woodways before them. Soon the sky broadened into a pillared arch of gold. The great trees gave back, showing the valley and the aspens glimmering about the tower.

“Yonder are their horses.”

Guicheaux was pointing with his spear, his thin face working with excitement.

“We have them, lording! We have them on the hip!”

Bertrand peered down the valley under his hand. He saw some thirty horses picketed on the edge of the aspen wood. Only two men were guarding them. Where were the rest?

He gave a shout, and drew his sword.

“Listen, they are breaking in!”

From the valley came the confused cries of men hurrying to the assault, and Bertrand could hear the dull crash of blows given upon the gate. A confused shimmer of steel showed under the black bulk of the tower as Hanotin’s men thronged across the causeway.

“On—on!”

Bertrand was already galloping down the slope into the gold mist that drowned the meadows.

XII

HANOTIN'S men had already broken down the gate when Bertrand came galloping through the aspen wood. He had halted but a moment to cut down the two fellows who had been left to guard the horses, and who had drawn their swords on him and tried to give the alarm to their comrades on the causeway. Thanks to the din his own men were making, Hanotin had no warning of the rescue that was at hand.

Tiphaine, who had climbed the tower with Jehanot when Hanotin's horn had blown the first challenge, stood looking down in a species of stupor through the machicolations of the battlements at the mob of men struggling through the wreck of the twice-broken gate. They had forced up the portcullis, and were shouting with savage triumph, their shouts coming up to Tiphaine like the snarling of wild beasts. She could see their bassinets and shoulder-plates and their thrust-out heels as they struggled to be first in through the entry.

The last men were still in view when she saw one of them clap his hand to the back of his neck, turn, and stare in astonishment across the moat. Tiphaine, vividly receptive of all details in her dull terror, noticed a red patch of blood between the rim of the man's steel cap and the edge of his gorget. He had been hit in the neck by a cross-bow bolt, and was shouting and gesticulating, calling back his comrades, who were crowding through the gate.

Tiphaine was startled by a cry from old Jehanot. He was hopping from foot to foot, brandishing his cross-bow, his eyes shining out curiously above the bandage over his mouth and chin.

"Look! look!"

Tiphaine followed the pointing of his hand, and understood whence the cross-bow bolt had flown. Through the aspen wood, with its last yellow leaves flickering in the sunlight, came Bertrand's men, pressing forward on foot behind their captain, whose sword flashed as he cantered down on his great black horse. They came on in good order with their shields up, spears bristling, steady and silent.

Tiphaine recognized the blue surcoat.

"It is Bertrand!" she said—"Bertrand du Guesclin!"

Jehanot was waving his cross-bow above his head.

"A rescue! a rescue! To the chapel, madame. There will be bloody work. Shut yourself in. I'll bide here and watch."

Hanotin's men were crowding back under the arch of the gate, jostling each other, taken by surprise. Some were for meeting Bertrand upon the

causeway, others for holding the tower and letting the portcullis fall. Hanotin, a giant with a face like raw meat, came pushing through the press, cursing his men, and shouldering them aside as a ship shoulders the waves.

“Out of the way! Out of the way! Let me get a glimpse at these gentlemen.”

He pushed through and had his desire—a vision of a wedge of shields and spears thrusting forward across the causeway.

Hanotin sprang back, brandishing his mace.

“Down with the grid! Curse these foul trees, the bridge is jammed.”

He swept his men back, and stood alone to hold the entry till they should have time to lower the portcullis. Bertrand saw that the need was imminent.

“St. Ives!—Du Guesclin!”

Hanotin snarled and swung his mace.

“Out, fools, out!”

There was a squeal of delight from the battlements above. Old Jehanot had toppled a loose stone over. It brushed Hanotin’s body, made him stagger, and broke in fragments at his feet. Before the free lance could recover Bertrand rushed on him, and knocked him over with a blow of the fist. Shouting, cursing, heaving, the whole rout went in over Hanotin as he struggled to rise. They drove the Monk’s men through the tower arch by sheer weight of numbers, burst into the court, and stood shouting and cheering as though gone mad.

Hanotin had picked himself up and was rallying his men. Furious at the way he had been wrested and trampled under foot, he stormed at his fellows, taunting them with having given way before a mob of footpads and boys. Bertrand’s free companions in their rush had carried the court-yard, but they had left the tower gate and guard-room in Hanotin’s hands.

The Monk, who was an inspired bully, and knew how to make the most of a situation, ordered the portcullis to be lowered—a piece of ostentatious bravado that he was soon to regret. The great grid came jerking down; they were to fight it out like cats in a cage. Hanotin bluffed beyond his powers when he thought to frighten Bertrand into a surrender.

“Steady, steady. Keep close together, and follow when I give the word. Let them drop the grid. They are stopping their own bolting-hole.”

Bertrand’s coolness heartened his men on the instant. They could see that he was smiling—smiling one of those grim and quiet smiles they had learned to treasure. Messire Bertrand knew his business. Guicheaux and Hopart watched him in silence, ready for the spring they knew was coming.

“Good-evening, brother. How is it to be—your mace against my sword?”

Hanotin ran his eyes over Bertrand’s figure, and shirked the challenge.

“Not so fast, sir,” he said; “I am too big for thee, and the game is ours.

Throw down your arms, or—" And he drew the edge of his hand across his throat.

Bertrand laughed. His men were grinning and nudging one another, gloating at the way the free lance had shirked the challenge. Bertrand spoke a few words to them over his shoulder.

"As you will, brother," he said, setting his sword swinging. "In, sirs, in! Notre Dame du Guesclin! Follow me!"

Hanotin's men were the better armed, but Bertrand, who had the advantage of numbers, kept his fellows together, and broke Hanotin's ranks at the first charge. It was rough-and-ready scrimmaging enough in the gathering darkness of the narrow court. Men shortened their swords, used poniards and gadded fists, grappling together, squirming and wriggling on the stones. Bertrand hunted out Hanotin, and hammered him while the sparks flew. The bully labored with his mace, puffing and grunting as he gave each blow. Twice wounded, he closed with Bertrand and tried to bear him down beneath his weight. Hanotin would have been wiser had he shirked the bear's grip that had given Bertrand many a victory over the Breton wrestlers as a lad. The Monk went down with a crash that startled even the men who were struggling in the death grips round him. He lay still a moment, and then, heaving himself upon his hands and knees, wriggled away like a huge lizard into the thick of the press.

Bertrand sprang after him, but a sudden rush of his own men and a weakening of the Montfort party threw him sideways against the wall. Hopart, who was close at hand, helped Bertrand to his feet.

"Hurt, lording?"

"Hurt? Not a bit of it! On; they are losing heart!"

They were losing ground also, and had been driven back under the tower gateway. With the grid down there was no escape save into the guard-room, or up the newel stairway leading to the lesser solar, and by the gallery to the lord's solar and the chapel. Hanotin, who had recovered his feet and picked up a fallen sword, shouted to his men to take to the stairway. There was a rush for the narrow entry, Hanotin and three others holding their ground while the rest tumbled pellmell up the stairs.

This was the very move Bertrand had dreaded, for he knew that Tiphaine must be hidden somewhere in the rooms above. He had seen her head on the tower for an instant when he and his men had first charged for the gate. Hanotin's free lances would be like wild beasts brought to bay in the place. They might kill the girl, or harm might come to her with men hunting one another through the darkening rooms. Calling off ten of his own fellows, he left Hopart and the rest to force the stairs, and doubled across the court-yard for the hall.

It had grown so dark that the great room was like a cavern. Bertrand groped through it, and climbed the stairs towards the solar. The door was slammed against him from within, and his shout of "Tiphaine!" answered with curses. Setting his teeth, he threw his weight against the door, broke it, and went sprawling, with rattling harness, into the blackness of the room.

In an instant two of Hanotin's men were on him, trying to stab him in the dark. Bertrand kicked out right and left, caught one gentleman by the ankle and brought him down backward with a crash. There was a rush and a great shouting of "Lights!—lights!" The room seemed full of tumbling, struggling shapes. Furniture was overturned, whirled away, and broken. Men were grappling and stabbing haphazard in the gloom, cursing the darkness and calling to one another.

Light streamed in suddenly. The chapel door had been burst open by two men who had fallen against it, and were now wrestling together on the floor. Bertrand, scrambling up, with a poniard wound in his forearm, stood back against the wall and looked round him. Three men were struggling on the bed, a confused tangle of arms and legs, while at the far end of the solar Guicheaux and several more were holding back the fellows whom they had driven into the gallery leading to the tower. Bertrand could hear Hopart and the rest fighting their way up the stairway to the lesser solar above the gate.

A den of horror, brute force, and death the place seemed as Bertrand leaned against the wall and recovered his breath. He turned and saw the two men struggling by the chapel door. The bigger of the pair had the other under him, and was driving his dagger into the agonized wretch's throat. The victor scrambled up from the body, shook himself, and looked round with his teeth a-gleam like a dog at bay. Bertrand recognized Hanotin by the beard.

"Hallo, brother—you are there! Good!"

Hanotin snarled and darted through the chapel doorway, swinging the door to after him. Bertrand dashed it open, and stepped over the body of the man the Monk had stabbed. A woman's cry rang out through the chapel. Before the altar stood Hanotin, holding Tiphaine by the bosom with one great paw, and brandishing his poniard with the other.

"Off, dog, off!"

Hanotin spat like a cat, and forced Tiphaine down across his thigh.

"A truce, or the knife goes home."

Bertrand faltered in his fury and stood looking at Tiphaine, Hanotin's hand gripping her bosom, her hair falling down in disorder as he held her across his knee. Bertrand could not see her face. She was struggling a little, her bosom heaving under the man's paw, her hands stretched out to catch the blow.

"Loose your hold!"

Hanotin showed his teeth and grinned. The ruse was a desperate one, but

he had Bertrand baffled for the moment.

“No, no, messire. You see my terms. Curse you!—she-dog—”

Tiphaine had seized her chance and twisted herself free from Hanotin’s grip. She slipped and fell upon the altar steps, and rolled down them to the floor. Hanotin sprang forward, but Bertrand was too quick for him. There was the whistling of a sword, the clang of a helmet, and the Monk’s bassinet ran blood. He staggered and fell, with Tiphaine beneath him, and in his blind death agony tried to stab her as he lay. Bertrand, throwing down his sword, seized Hanotin by the sword-belt. He lifted him from Tiphaine and swung him away upon the floor, and in the fury of his vengeance dashed his mailed heel again and again into the man’s face. Life was over for Hanotin. He had given his last blow.

Bertrand turned towards Tiphaine, who was half lying below the steps, supporting herself upon her hands. She was dazed, shocked out of her senses for the moment, with the Monk’s blood dyeing her hair and clothes. She looked at Bertrand and gave a little gasp of pain.

He was bending over her on the instant, the distorting anger gone from his face. He took her in his arms and felt the quivering of her body. She clung to him for a moment like a frightened child, staring in his face, her eyes full of the horror of Hanotin’s death.

“Bertrand, my God! oh—let me breathe—air, air—”

He let her lean against the altar, all the savagery gone out of him, his face twitching.

“Are you hurt? Tiphaine—”

She shook her head, and then pressed her hands over her ears as though to shut out the brutal babel that came from the dark rooms and passage-ways. Bertrand could hear Hopart shouting in the solar, “Kill! Kill!”

“Bertrand, Bertrand, for God’s sake, tell them to spare the wretches!”

She sank to her knees and laid her head against the cold stone-work of the altar, pressing her hands in horror over her ears.

Bertrand lifted a strand of her hair, kissed it, and then turned to end the slaughter.

XIII

A SUNNY morning, with white clouds banding the blue of the autumn sky, Broceliande, a sea of gold, glimmering over the silent hills. A sparkle of frost in the air, rime on the grass, brown leaves falling everywhere, the aspen leaves murmuring feebly about the black waters of the moat.

Grimness and horror still lingered about the place, despite the blue sky and the golden woods. Even the water in the moat seemed to hide within its depths dim visions of death that would make the eyes that gazed thereon dilate and harden. Memories haunted the Aspen Tower—memories of men hunting one another through dark passage-ways and chambers. Every black squint and window seemed to gape and whisper as though trying to tell of what had passed within.

Fires were burning in the aspen wood, horses cropping the grass, men building rude huts with boughs cut from the forest. Southward of the moat, in a hollow, where thorn-trees grew, three fellows, stripped half naked, were shovelling earth back into a long and shallow trench. Ever and again there was a splashing of something into the moat and a rush of water from the stone shoots draining the hall and tower. The guard-room door was barred, and two men with grounded spears were standing on duty under the arch of the gate. In the court lay piles of broken or blood-stained furniture, scraps of armor, trampled rushes. Men were going to and fro, carrying buckets which they filled at the moat.

Water in a miniature cascade was running down the stairway leading to the lord's solar, to be sluiced about the hall with mops and brooms and swept out again into the court. In the solar itself, Bertrand, barelegged, his tunic turned up over his belt, was throwing water against the walls and swilling the floor. The whole place had a damp and sodden smell, like a house that has lain empty long after the masons and plasterers have done their work. From the gallery and the lesser solar above the gate came the sound of voices, the plash of water, the swishing of brooms.

Perched on the bed, that had been dragged into the middle of the room and stripped of coverlet and sheets, sat Arletta watching Bertrand with her restless eyes. She had her cloak over her shoulders, because of the cold, and her fingers were picking at the gaudy embroidery on her gown, as though she were brooding over some hidden grievance. There was something forlorn and pathetic in the bright colors of her clothes, the reds and greens, their superficial brilliancy. She was very miserable, was Arletta. Her heart ached as dully as her head, and her hands were blue and numb with cold. Bertrand paid no heed to

her presence as he used his broom, strange weapon for his hands, and took the buckets Guicheaux and Hopart brought him.

He sluiced the last ripple of water down the stairs, stood up and stretched himself, as though cramped in the back. A strip of blood-stained linen was wrapped round his left forearm. Beside Arletta, on the bed, lay piled his armor, his shield, sword, and surcoat hanging from a peg near to the window.

Arletta opened her mouth and yawned.

“Lording,” she said.

She spoke almost in a whisper, her face pinched, her teeth ready to chatter.

“Lording!”

The appeal was a little louder, bringing Bertrand round upon his heel, to stare at her vacantly, as though his thoughts were far away.

“Yes, child, yes.”

“May I make a fire?”

Bertrand glanced at the wet hearth and the gloom of the great chimney.

“It would be as well,” he said; “the place is damp as a cellar. It is not fit—” and he halted, stroking his chin.

Arletta gave a little shiver, and a twinge of pain swept across her face. She shook her black hair, climbed down from the bed, and went and stood close by Bertrand.

“Lording, you are tired.”

She touched his arm and tried to slip her hand in his. Almost imperceptibly Bertrand shrank from her, yet with an instinctiveness she could not miss. He was listening, and glancing restlessly towards the chapel door.

“You will find wood in the shed by the kitchen.”

“Yes, lording.”

“Hopart will light a fire in the room over the gate. Gwen and Barbe can share it with you when they return. This is madame’s chamber—”

“Yes, lording,” she said, sullenly, ready to weep.

“And, Letta”—he looked guiltily shy of her, despite his courage—“madame is much troubled; she would see no one—as yet. The men will camp in the aspen wood, because of the Black Death. If you are afraid—”

“Afraid, lording?”

“Yes, of the plague.”

She flashed an indescribable look at him, her mouth quivering.

“No, lording, I am not afraid.”

Bertrand frowned, but said no more to her. The girl’s strained face troubled him. Everything was coming to Arletta, slowly, and by degrees. Bertrand was beginning to be ashamed of her; he would have her away while Tiphaine was near.

She went out from the solar and stood shivering on the stairs, leaning her

weight against the wall. Her knees felt weak under her, dread heavy on her shoulders, dread of this great lady and of the slipping away of her one poor pride. She beat her hand across her mouth, and went slowly and unsteadily down the stairway into the hall. Pools of water still covered the floor, and the damp emptiness of the place seemed to echo the beatings of her heart. Crossing the court in the quivering sunlight, and threading her way between dead men's armor and broken wood, she came to the kitchen, where Hopart had already built a fire. He looked at Arletta and grinned, gave her the stuff she asked for, but held his banter, for the girl's face sobered him. Returning, she climbed slowly to the solar and found it empty, Bertrand gone.

Throwing the wood down petulantly upon the hearth, she looked round the room, pressing her face between her hands. Bertrand's surcoat had been taken from the peg beside his shield and sword. She guessed what drew him, and why he had wished to be rid of her for a while. Sullenly and with effort she knelt down and began to build a fire. There would be no warmth for her in its red, prophetic blaze. Her heart was cold—cold as the stone hearth she knelt upon.

When Arletta had left him, Bertrand had taken down his blue surcoat from the peg where his sword and shield were hanging, the blue surcoat that had once been blazoned over with eagles of gold, but was now wofully dim and threadbare. He had slipped into it, pulled on his hose and shoes, and felt the stubble on his chin, that had not been barbered for two days. Opening the chapel door, he found the place empty and the sun making a glorious mosaic of light of the eastern window above the altar. The Virgin's robes gleamed like amber wine; the greens and purples were richer than the colors of the sea. Bertrand closed the chapel door, and, leaning against it, stood looking towards the altar and at the steps where Hanotin had fallen the night before.

It was here that Tiphaine prayed, and yonder stood her prie-dieu, with a missal on the book-ledge. How quiet the chapel seemed, how full of sunlight and of peace after the brutal violence of yesterday! Bertrand went and stood by the prayer-desk, and, looking like a boy half fearful of being caught in mischief, opened the missal and turned over the pages. The book was beautifully illuminated, the vermilions, golds, and greens glowing with the freshness of young flowers, the quaint pictures and grotesque letters making the book a thing of beauty and of strangeness. Bertrand knew naught of Latin, save the few prayers he had been taught by Father Isidore at Motte Broon. In truth, he hardly knew his letters, and it was curious to see him running his finger under a word and trying to come to grips with the profundities of a pronoun.

But if Bertrand could not read its Latin, the missal itself spoke to him in a language of the heart that he could understand. How often had Tiphaine's

hands turned these pages! How pure she was, how utterly unlike the poor drabs upon whom he had wasted his manhood! Bertrand stood fingering his unshaven chin and staring at the missal, with his brows wrinkled up in thought. He had come face to face with one of those barriers in life that mark off beauty from ugliness and deformity. Was character worth the building, worth every careful chisel-mark on the stone? Bertrand looked round the chapel; it was oracular to him that morning, eloquent of those higher truths he had lost in the rough petulance of his distemper. He felt himself a prodigal, an interloper, a foolish boy who had thrown away his birthright in a moment of peevish irritation.

There was much boyish simplicity in Bertrand still. He touched Tiphaine's missal with his great hands, and then knelt at the prie-dieu as though trying to experience some new sensation. He crossed himself, fixed his eyes on the book, and, great, broad-backed sworder that he was, tried to imagine how Tiphaine felt when she knelt to pray before the Virgin. It seemed quite natural to Bertrand that Tiphaine should pray. He would like to watch her fair, strong face turned up in adoration to the cross. It would do him good to look at her, drive the evil out of his heart, and perhaps teach him to pray in turn. What, Bertrand du Guesclin praying! He stumbled up with a rough and ingenuous burst of self-contempt. He was a fool to be kneeling at Tiphaine's prie-dieu. He had forgotten how to pray, and his one religious inspiration was the dread of ever playing the hypocrite.

"Bertrand!"

He started as though one of his own rough fellows had caught him on his knees. The door of Tiphaine's bedchamber had opened while Bertrand was kneeling before the missal. She was standing on the threshold, wearing her wine-red gown.

Bertrand faced her sheepishly.

"I was only looking at the missal," he explained, bent on thoroughness and sincerity.

They stood considering each other, with something of the cautious coyness of a couple of strange children brought suddenly face to face. Both were embarrassed, both conscious of a sense of antagonism and discomfort, as though troubled by the thoughts imagined in the heart of the other.

"Bertrand, I have not thanked you—yet."

He glanced at her keenly a moment, and rested one hand on the prie-dieu.

"It is nothing. We crossed Hanotin's tracks, that was all. Besides, we owed them a grudge."

Tiphaine was struck by his dogged air of self-restraint, and yet there was something in his voice that touched her. The long, wakeful hours of the night had changed her mood towards him. She seemed to have been given sudden

insight into the heart of this strong and rebellious man, whose arm had saved her from a thing that she dared not picture.

"We each have something to forgive," she said.

"I disobeyed you in that one thing."

"Yes."

"I did it that I might still have the memory of Rennes."

She was gazing at the altar steps, as though recalling how Hanotin had held her across his knee. She shuddered a little. It was something, after all, for a man to be grim and mighty in battle.

Bertrand stood by the prie-dieu, watching her.

"Do you remember, Tiphaine, that night when you came to us at Motte Broon?"

She looked up at him and smiled.

"I was just such a rough dog then; it was sympathy I wanted, and the sympathy you gave me won me the prize at Rennes."

If he had read her thoughts his words could not have touched the woman in her more.

"You are right in reproaching me," she said.

"I? What reproach have I to make? You showed me my true self two days ago. I have learned to take hard blows—when they are given honestly."

Their eyes met.

"Yet—there is the other self."

He steadied himself against the prie-dieu.

"Let me tell you the whole truth, as I blurted it out to you at Motte Broon. I'll not spare myself; it would do me good."

She met him bravely with her eyes.

"Tell me everything," she said.

And she knelt at the prayer-desk, her chin upon her hands, while Bertrand, leaning against the wall, told her the whole tale—all that had befallen him since the siege of Vannes.

There was silence between them when he had finished. Tiphaine's eyes were turned towards the altar, with no self-righteous pride upon her face.

"I can understand, Bertrand," she said.

"Be rough with me."

"Rough!"

He flushed and spread his arms.

"I am what I am; but, before God, I believe that there is something in me—yet. Do not flatter me; flattery did no man any good."

She set herself to match his sincerity with equal truth.

"What right have I to preach to you? And yet—"

"Say what you will."

“There is a courage above the mere courage of a man swinging a sword—the courage to suffer, to be patient, and to bide by one’s true self.”

He looked at her steadfastly, and bent his head.

“That is where I failed,” he said, slowly; “I see it now as plainly as I see your face.”

At the chapel door Arletta stood listening, her mouth twisted with jealousy and hate. She had heard all that had passed between the two. The great lady was taking away her one poor pride, her love. And Arletta shivered, gripping her bosom till her nails bruised the skin.

XIV

JEALOUSY is as the dark under world to the warm day of a woman's love. It is peopled with phantoms and with shadows—a land of credulity, of whisperings, and of gloom.

Arletta, poor wench, was dwelling on this black sphere of her troubled life. A child of the soil, quick in her passions, hot of blood, she had had no schooling in the higher patience, or learned that world-wise nonchalance that shrugs its bland shoulders at despair. Impulse was law to her, the blind instincts of her body her counsellors, her hands her ministers of justice. She loved Bertrand—loved him with the zeal of a wild thing for its mate. She loved him because he was stronger than other men, because his strength had made him her master. Many a night she had lain awake, smiling over some bold trick of his, the plunder he had taken, the devil-may-care courage dear to the heart of such a woman as Arletta. She had never thought that she was holding him back from nobler things, and that her hands were strangling the ambitions of his manhood. Arletta would have been content to have him the most feared and fearless swashbuckler in all the Breton lands, and she would have taken pride in the rough triumphs of such a life.

Little wonder that she awakened with a start of dread when this white-faced madame with the calm and quiet eyes came sweeping royally across her path. It was as though some saint had stepped down out of a painted window, touched Bertrand on the breast, and disenchanted him with the light of love who had ridden over the moors and through the woodlands at his side. Arletta understood all that Tiphaine's influence portended. Her woman's instinct tore out the truth of her own dethronement. Bertrand would be the gentleman once more, ashamed of a bed of bracken and of a poor quean who had no honor.

Hate found the door of the girl's heart open, with jealousy beckoning from within. She hated Tiphaine—hated her with a reasonableness that had its justification in the truth. Who had the silkier skin, the finer clothes, the more sweeping grace, the longer hair? Even in the mere physical rivalry the lady outshone the poor woman of the smithy and the moors. But it was for her birth that Arletta hated Tiphaine most of all, and for the superiorities that went therewith—the grace, the presence, the clear, quiet voice, the beauty of completeness, the habit of command. Even hatred fed on its own humiliation, and jealousy confessed with bitterness the justice of its cause.

Arletta's dreads were quickly justified. The "free companions" were to camp in the aspen wood, for madame was to be guarded till her father's banner should come dancing through the woods. Arletta herself was sent to the

kitchen to cook and scour with Barbe and Gwen. The women began to jeer at her before her face, seeing how the wind blew, and that Messire Bertrand du Guesclin had changed his coat. He served and carved at madame's table, acted as seneschal, took her commands, and saw them followed.

As for the Black Death, it seemed to have spent its fury in the place, for it laid no hands on Bertrand's men. Perhaps their wild life saved them, the sun and storm that had tanned and hardened them against disease. There was work and enough for them in regarnishing the Aspen Tower under Bertrand's orders. He sent them hunting in Broceliande to bring back food for Tiphaine's larder. To keep the rest busy he ordered the building of a new gate from timber stored in one of the out-houses, and the strengthening of the palisades closing the garden from the moat. The men worked willingly, for Bertrand had given them all the plunder they had taken from Hanotin. Not a sou would he touch; the days of his thieving were at an end. Then there were the prisoners to be looked to in the guard-room, wounded men to be cared for, bread to be baked, strayed cattle to be sought out in the woods. A lord's house in those days was a little town within itself, fitted for every common craft, supplying its own needs by the labor of its inmates' hands.

Bertrand went about his duties with a shut mouth and a purposeful reserve. Even his rough fellows felt that he had changed, for he no longer laughed with them and joined in their jesting. Like a masker he had thrown off his buffoon's dress and taken to the habit that was his by right. The men whispered together over Bertrand's transfiguration, but took no liberties in his presence. Messire Bertrand was still their hero; his slaying of Hanotin was like to become an epic deed among them; moreover, the generous squandering of his share of the plunder had made his whims and moods respected.

As for Arletta, she went sullenly about her work, wincing at the sneers she had from Gwen and Barbe, and hating to be stared at by the men. Often she would creep away into some quiet corner and brood bitterly over her lost power. Bertrand but rarely spoke to her, and then the careful kindness of his words stung her more sharply than a whip. He was no longer rough and tender by turns, and Arletta would have welcomed blows only to feel his strong arms once more about her body. Bertrand avoided her, kept his distance when there was no escape, and even spoke to her of Ancenis, where her father was growing prosperous on forging armor for the wars. How easy it all seemed to Messire Bertrand! It was a man's way, she imagined, to be able to forget everything in three days, and to turn his back upon the past.

Tiphaine and Bertrand seemed often together. They walked in the garden, rode hunting in the woods or in the fields to give Tiphaine's hawks a flutter. Bertrand served madame at her table in the hall, and slept across the chapel door at night. Arletta exaggerated all these happenings in her heart.

The fourth morning after the saving of the tower she saw Bertrand cross the court as she stood in the kitchen entry half hidden by the door. Bertrand was alone, and, slipping out, she followed him, driven to dare his displeasure by the bitterness of neglect. Bertrand's foot was on the first step of the solar stairway when he heard the rustle of a woman's skirt.

"Lording, lording."

He turned, half angry, half ashamed, and stood looking down into her white and passionate face.

"Why, Letta"—and he tried to smile—"what is it, wench?"

His coolness stung her. Why, Bertrand had loved her once—had told her so with his own lips! Desperate in her dread, she flung out her arms and clung about his neck.

"Lording, lording, why do you turn from me? Dear God, what have I done?"

She was panting, quivering, looking up into his face. Bertrand, conscious of the straining arms about his neck and of the questioning wildness of her eyes, stood helpless for a moment, betrayed by his own conscience.

"Gently, child, gently," he said, trying to unfasten her hands, and dreading lest Tiphaine should hear them—"gently. What ails you? Come, come, be a good wench!"

Arletta clung to him the more, quivering, and pleading with him in passionate whispers. Bertrand began to lose patience.

"Letta, Letta!"

He spoke hoarsely, forcing down her hands.

"Listen, Letta, I have words to speak to you."

Repulsed, she sprang away, thrusting him back with her hands, her eyes miserable yet full of fury.

"Yes, yes, I know—I'll not bear it. You are ashamed of me; you hate me; I see it clear enough."

Bertrand tried to soothe her, holding out his hands.

"Letta!"

"No, no," and she thrust him off, "I am nothing—a mere drab. You hate me; you would like to see me dead. Ah, yes, messire, I am no fool. Madame is not as I am. She is a great lady. Ah—ah—how can she take you from me!"

She burst out weeping, covering her face with her arms, her passion sinking into despair. Bertrand looked at her. What could he say? He felt tongue-tied, helpless, and ashamed.

"Letta!"

She stood sobbing, her arms before her face.

"Letta!" And he went near to her.

"No, don't touch me, messire."

“Come, be sensible—”

She flashed up again, her passion working through her misery like flames through wet wood.

“No, no! Hold off, messire! I am a woman; I have my pride; I can give as well as take.”

Bertrand said nothing.

“Yes, you would be rid of me, you would throw me away like an old shoe!”

She turned suddenly, threw up her arms, and ran unsteadily towards the door. Bertrand sprang after her, and then halted. What was the use of it? The wrench must come, the reckoning be paid. Perhaps the girl was only trying her woman’s tricks on him. He strove to comfort himself with the suspicion, and let her go, weak and wounded, like a winged bird.

Tiphaïne supped in the solar that night, Bertrand serving her, and old Jehanot carrying the dishes from the kitchen. Two torches were burning, one on either side of the great hooded chimney, and freshly cut rushes were strewn upon the floor.

Tiphaïne was in a silent mood, engrossed in her own thoughts. By chance she had overheard Arletta’s pleadings with Bertrand in the hall. Her heart was sad in her for the girl’s sake, though she was but learning the rough methods of the world.

Old Jehanot had gone to the kitchen with the empty dishes, and Bertrand stood filling Tiphaïne’s glass with ypocrasse.

“Enough,” and she raised her hand.

He let the lid of the beaker fall, and moved towards the door, for Jehanot had left it ajar, and the draught from the hall came in like a winter wind. Bertrand’s hand was on the latch when he heard the rattling of the curtain-rings along the bed-rails, as though some one had stood hidden and bided their time to sweep the curtains back. Tiphaïne’s chair was drawn up before the fire, and Bertrand, turning on his heel, saw Arletta swoop towards her with one arm raised.

It was all done in the taking of a breath. Arletta had struck her blow, and in her flurry snapped the knife-blade on the oak head-rail of the chair. Bertrand, forgetting the past utterly in the moment’s wrath, took Arletta by the throat and hurled her back against the bed.

“Mad beast!—murderess!”

She cowered before him, choking from the grip he had given her throat, and hiding her face behind her arm. Bertrand stood over her, as though tempted to strike again.

“No, not that!”

Tiphaïne, unhurt, her face pale, her eyes full of pity, came between

Bertrand and the girl.

“Be careful, the cat is mad!”

“You are too rough—and blind.”

Arletta still cowered against the bed, as though Bertrand’s hands had throttled her last hope. The lust for revenge had flowed from her like wine from a broken jar.

Tiphaïne bent over Arletta, waving Bertrand aside when he sought to interfere. The significance of the scene had flashed suddenly before her eyes, moving her not to anger but to a spasm of pity.

There was no need for her to question Arletta. The flare of passion had died out of her, and she looked like a frightened child, ashamed and humbled.

“Come!”

Arletta writhed from her touch and hid her face.

“Come; the blow’s forgiven; you did not think. The wine-cup, Bertrand.”

He brought it her, a man whose conscience was crying within his heart.

“Drink some of the wine, child.”

But the girl only broke into bitter weeping and hid her face in the coverlet of the bed. Tiphaïne stood looking at her, her lips quivering, her eyes compassionate.

She turned to Bertrand, and gave the cup back into his hands.

“She is better alone, perhaps. Take one of the torches and light me to the chapel.”

Bertrand obeyed her without a word. The whole scene had been a revelation to him, as though the last glimpse of Arletta crouching by the bed had been a vision betraying his own shame. Carrying the torch, he went before Tiphaïne into the chapel, feeling himself guilty of the blow that had been aimed by Arletta at her heart.

Bertrand set the torch in one of the iron brackets on the wall. Tiphaïne went to kneel at her prie-dieu, her chin upon her hands, her face lifted towards the altar. She knelt there awhile, silent, motionless, while Bertrand watched her, wondering what her woman’s mind would weave out of the tangle.

She spoke at last.

“How long has the child been with you?”

“Two years; perhaps less. Her father was an armorer at Ancenis; she left him when the French marched through. I did not take her from her home. Besides, she is no longer a child.”

Bertrand’s face seemed furrowed with recollections, or as though he were asking himself some question that he could not answer. Tiphaïne did not move.

“How a man stores judgments for himself! The girl cannot be left to a life like this. I feel I have some duty by her. And yet I could swear she would be ready to throw herself into the moat if I told her I would send her home.”

"There is one other way, Bertrand."

"How?" And his face appealed to her.

"She is a woman; she could be your wife."

Bertrand's jaw dropped.

"Marry her!"

"So you are too proud for that?"

He remained silent, staring at Tiphaine, his hands opening and shutting, his forehead a knot of wrinkles.

"It is not pride in me," he said, at last.

"Not pride?"

"No. What could we hope for, she—and I? Would she be happy with me? No, by Heaven, for we should hate each other in a week! What good could there be in such a life, for us?—one long tavern brawl till we grew more brutal and besotted, each dragging each deeper into the mire. How could Letta, poor wench, help me to gain what I have sworn in my heart to win? How could I give her all my homage in return? No, we should both sink; perhaps—in the end—she would stab me—or I—her."

He had spoken rapidly, almost with fierceness, feeling the inevitable destiny beating within his heart. At the end he drew breath and leaned against the wall, still watching Tiphaine at the prie-dieu.

"Yes, you are right," she said; "one cannot mend life with a make-believe. And then—"

"There is her home at Ancenis."

Tiphaine thought a moment.

"Let me talk to her—alone. Perhaps she may listen."

XV

A FAINT cry came stealing through the silence of the place, like the wail of a bird that passes on the night wind and is gone.

Tiphaine heard it and stood listening, her eyes changing their intensity of purpose for a shadowy and vague unrest. Bertrand was still standing by the torch he had thrust into the iron bracket clamped to the wall. The flare flung darkness and light alternate upon his face.

Tiphaine started up from the prie-dieu, and, opening the chapel door, called:

“Arletta, Arletta!”

No sounds came to them save the crackling and hissing of the wood upon the fire. Tiphaine passed in, looking into the dark corners of the solar for a crouching figure or the white glimmer of a human face. The room was empty; Arletta had disappeared.

Tiphaine stood for a moment like one taken with a sudden spasm of the heart. The broken knife-blade shone symbolically at her feet.

“Bertrand!”

The cry came sharply from her, as though inspired by fear.

“Bertrand!”

He followed her and looked round the room, not grasping the prophetic instinct of her dread.

“Hist!”

She stood silent again, her eyes fixed on Bertrand’s face.

“Quick! Search the tower! I am afraid for Arletta!”

Bertrand gave her one look, pushed past her without a word, took down the torch, and went out into the gallery leading to the tower. Tiphaine’s foreboding had taken hold of his man’s heart. As he passed down the gallery with the torch flaring above his head he looked out from the narrow windows, and saw the moon rising huge and tawny over the forest. The night had built an eerie background before Bertrand’s eyes. He felt suddenly afraid, strong man that he was—afraid of what the dark tower might hide within its walls.

Coming to the newel stairway, black as a well, he stood listening, holding his breath. Before him was the door of the lesser solar. The darkness and silence seemed to come close about his heart. He opened his lips, and was startled by the harshness of his own voice.

“Letta, Letta!”

Still no sound.

“Letta, Letta, where are you? Come, you are forgiven.”

He stood listening till the echoes had died down the gallery where the moonlight streaked the floor. What was that! A sound as of weeping, a number of sharp-drawn breaths, and then a short cry, given as in pain. Bertrand started like a horse touched with the spur. He stumbled up the stairway, for the sounds came from above, the torchlight reddening the walls, the smoke driven down by the draught into his face.

A door barred his progress. He tore at the latch savagely, and felt something heavy against the door as he forced it back and slipped into the room. His foot touched a hand; the hand moved. A whispering moan came up to him out of the dark.

Bertrand was down on his knees with the torch flaring on the floor beside him. Behind the door, and half crushed between it and the wall, lay Arletta, her head sunk upon one shoulder. There was blood on her limp hands, blood soaking her bosom, the whiteness of death upon her face.

Bertrand, shocked to his heart's depths, thrust his arms about her, and drew her to him out of the dark. He was babbling foolishly, calling her by name, bidding her take courage and forget his roughness. Arletta's head lay heavy on his shoulder. She stirred a little, sighed, and lifted her hands. For a moment her lips moved, and her eyes looked into Bertrand's face.

"Lording—"

"Letta, what have you done? My God—"

"Lording, I am dying."

Bertrand burst out weeping, his man's tears falling down upon her face. Arletta shuddered. Her mouth was close to Bertrand's cheek, and he felt her warm blood soaking his surcoat.

"Lording, kiss me, forgive—"

He kissed her, his arms tightening about her body. She lifted her hand jerkily, unsteadily, and felt his hair. Then with a long sigh her head sank down, her mouth opened, and she was dead.

Bertrand knelt there holding her in his arms, stunned, incredulous, his hot tears falling down upon her lifeless face. He spoke to her, touched her lips, but she did not answer. It was thus that Tiphaine found them, death and life together, with the torch setting fire to the wood-work of the floor.

Tiphaine trod out the flame, and, standing with the candle in her hands she had taken from the chapel, looked down at Bertrand with Arletta lying in his arms. Her pity and her awe were too deep for tears. She turned to leave them, but paused before the door.

"Bertrand," she said.

He groaned, kissed the dead face, and then laid Arletta gently upon the floor. Still kneeling, he watched her, the truth—and the irrevocable bitterness thereof—coming home to him slowly with a great sense of shame.

“Bertrand.”

“Don’t speak to me”—and he buried his face deep in his hands—“let me bear it out alone.”

Tiphaine passed out, leaving the candle burning in a sconce upon the wall. She groped her way down to the moonlit gallery, and so to the chapel, where she knelt before the altar, her face turned to the figure upon the cross. But Bertrand watched all night beside Arletta’s body, holding the hands that were cold in death.

XVI

THE dawn was streaming up when Bertrand came down the stairway from the upper room in the tower and paused in the gallery leading to the solar. A bitter watch had it been for Bertrand, a long vigil with the relentless past condemning him with the thoughts of his own heart. He had knelt there, stunned and awed, with Arletta's blood dyeing the floor and her white face shining on him from amid the dark wreathings of her hair. There had been no horror in her death for him, only a great revulsion of remorse, a moving of all his manhood. He had looked on the dead face hating himself, haunted by memories—memories poignant as a mother's tears. How good the girl had been to him, even when he had been rough and petulant! She had often gone hungry that he might eat. And now he had killed her—killed her with his great blundering penitence that had trampled on her love in its struggles to be free. He had blood on his hands—the blood of the woman whose bosom had pillowed his head in sleep.

Bertrand stood in the gallery, miserable and cold, watching the dawn come up over the thickets of Broceliande. There was no joy for him in that splendor of gold, for the eyes of Arletta would open with the dawn no more. Ah, God, what a brute he had been, what a self-righteous coward! He had taken this woman's heart, broken it, and thrown it back to her in this awakening of his, of which he had been so proud. Bertrand gripped the window-rail and stared at the moat. A glory of gold was streaming over the forest, and the black water beneath him caught the splendor and seemed glad.

The two women, Gwen and Barbe, were washing themselves in the water-butt before the kitchen entry when Bertrand went down into the court. They pulled their clothes up over their breasts on catching sight of him, and stood giggling and looking at each other.

"Good-morrow, lording."

"Your servant, Messire Bertrand. Letta's a proud woman again, I'm thinking—"

They burst out laughing, cawing like a couple of crows.

"S-s-h, Gwen, be decent!"

"Why shouldn't I have my jest with the captain—"

She stopped, open-mouthed, for Bertrand's white face shocked the insolence out of her. There was something more than fury on it, something more terrible than pain. There was blood, too, on his surcoat. The women shrank from him, holding their loose clothes, awed by the look in Bertrand's eyes.

“Out, you fools!”

He pointed to the tower gate, and followed them like some inexorable spirit as they went before him like a couple of sheep. Guicheaux was sleeping on a pile of straw outside the guard-room door. Bertrand shook him, and pointed to Gwen and Barbe as the quipster sat up, rubbing his eyes.

“Turn them out!”

The women were ready enough to be deprived of Bertrand’s presence, and they scampered across the bridge when Guicheaux swung the gate open. The man watched them, then turned, and, looking curiously at Bertrand, put his lips together as though tempted to whistle.

“Shut the gate.”

Guicheaux obeyed him, wondering what was to follow.

“Arletta is dead.”

“Dead, captain!”

“She stabbed herself. I am going to bury her. Keep the men out of the place.”

He spoke curtly, fiercely, forcing out the words as though each one gave him pain. Guicheaux’s face was a white patch in the shadow—the mouth a black circle, the eyes two dots of light.

“Dead, captain!”

Bertrand looked as though he would have struck the man.

“Yes. The fault was mine. Arletta was jealous; she tried to stab madame, and, when balked, stabbed herself instead.”

Guicheaux said nothing. He stood pulling his peaked beard and frowning at the stones. The thing had shocked him, lewd-mouthed ruffian that he was. Bertrand watched him a moment, and then, turning on his heel, went to one of the out-houses where tools were kept.

The grass in the garden was crisped with fallen leaves and dusted with dew that twinkled, thousand-eyed, under the sheen of the dawn. All the pungent freshness of autumn was in the air. Bertrand chose his ground—a clean stretch of turf close to the stem of a great apple-tree, and far from the mounds the Black Death had built. He set to work with the look of a man who feels his heart helped by physical effort. Sweat ran from his forehead and his breath steamed up into the air, but he never paused till the grave lay finished.

Thrusting the spade into the pile of earth, he went into the court and climbed the tower stair to the room where Arletta lay dead. Bertrand stood and looked at her awhile, dry eyed, moved to the depths, his mouth twitching. Then he lifted her in his arms, feeling the solemn coldness of her body striking to his heart, and carried her down the stair and across the court into the garden. Very tenderly he laid her in the grave, and, kneeling, set her hair in a circle about her face and crossed her hands upon her bosom. Then he stood up and looked at

her, the sunlight touching her face, as she lay in her last resting-place, her hands in the shadow that hid the blood-stains on her dress.

A foot-fall in the grass and a shadow stealing athwart the band of sunlight brought Bertrand round upon his heel. Tiphaine had crossed the garden, her red gown sweeping the fallen leaves, her crucifix in her hands, and a few half-faded flowers. Her eyes were full of the sadness of deep thought.

"You have laid her there?"

He nodded, and stood twisting his hands together.

Tiphaine went close to the grave and looked down at Arletta sleeping her last sleep, with her black hair about her face. How quiet and unhurt she looked, her jealousy dead with her, her hands folded upon her bosom! Tiphaine knelt down and began to pray, holding her crucifix over the grave. The act brought Bertrand also to his knees by the pile of brown earth he had thrown up out of the trench. He looked at dead Arletta and then at Tiphaine, whose hair shone like amber in the sun. He saw her lips move, saw her take her breath in deeply, her eyes fixed on Arletta's face. Bertrand tried to pray also with the groping yet passionate instincts of a soul still half in the dark. He strove after the words that would not come, knowing full well what his heart desired.

"Bertrand."

Tiphaine was looking at him across the grave. Her mouth was soft and lovable, her eyes tremulous with pity. It was to be peace between them. Bertrand's remorse pleaded for mercy.

"Bertrand, the child is asleep; she will know no more pain."

Bertrand hung his head and stared into the grave.

"I have killed her," he said; "yes, there is no escaping it. She was very good to me, poor wench, and I—I was often rough and selfish."

He knelt there, gnawing his lip, twisting his hands into his surcoat, and trying to keep the tears from coming to his eyes. Tiphaine watched him with a strange, sad smile. She was wondering whether Bertrand would forget.

"One cannot change the past," she said.

He flung up his head and looked her in the face.

"I have done with the old life. This child's blood shall make a new man of me."

"Well spoken."

"I mean it. Help me with your prayers."

She held out her hands to him across the grave.

"There are brave men needed—yes, and you are brave enough. Take arms for our Breton homes, Bertrand, and help to drive the English into the sea."

They knelt, looking steadfastly into each other's eyes, no pride between them for the moment. It was then that a sudden thought came to Bertrand. He drew his poniard, and, bending over the grave, cut off a lock of Arletta's hair.

Reddening a little, he held it out to Tiphaine, his eyes pleading with her like the eyes of a dog.

“Here is the poor child’s token. Give me a strand of your hair to bind with it. It is all I ask, and it will help me.”

She stood up without a word, let her hair fall from the net that held it, a cloud of gold and bronze about her pale face and over her wine-red dress. Taking Bertrand’s poniard, she cut off a lock and gave it him, content that the threads of gold should be twined with dead Arletta’s tresses.

“Take it, Bertrand, and I will pray for you.”

Bertrand was binding the black and bronze together, smiling to himself sadly, and thinking of Tiphaine when she was a child.

“I shall not forget,” he said, simply.

“Nor I,” she answered, throwing the flowers and crucifix she had brought into Arletta’s grave.

And so Tiphaine left him, and Bertrand turned to end his work. He covered Arletta with dead leaves, and threw in the few flowers he could find in the garden. Then he thrust back the earth very gently into the grave, growing ever sadder as the brown soil hid Arletta’s face from him forever.

And that same noontide young Robin Raguenel came riding in with twenty spears bristling at his back and English plunder on his pack-horses. Broceliande had given back Tiphaine her own at last, after weeks of peril and despair. As for Bertrand, he took young Robin’s thanks in silence, and told the truth rather than play the hypocrite. The lad’s pleading could not hold him. Bertrand saw Tiphaine alone no more, and, marching his men out, plunged into the deeps of Broceliande.

BOOK III

“THE OAK OF MIVOIE”

XVII

ONE March day a man wrapped in a heavy riding-cloak with the hood turned back over his shoulders sat looking out over the sea from the cliffs of Cancale. Behind him a shaggy pony was cropping the grass, lifting its head to gaze ever and again at its master, motionless against the gray March sky. A northeast wind blustered over the cliffs, the sea, sullen and venomous, running high about the islands off Cancale. The great waves came swinging in to fly in white clouds of spray over the glistening black rocks that came and went like huge sea-monsters spouting in the water. Across the bay St. Michael's glimmered beneath a chance storm-beam of the sun, while the shores of Normandy were dim and gray between sea and sky.

It was Bertrand, throned like some old Breton saint, with the waves thundering on the rocks beneath him and the gulls wailing about the cliffs. He sat there motionless, fronting the wind, his sword across his knees, as though watching and waiting for some sail he knew would come. The strong and ugly face might have caught the spirit of the granite land. Rock, sea spume, and the storm wind everywhere; a few twisted trees struggling in the grip of the wind. Bertrand, solemn, gray-eyed, motionless, akin to the rocks that lay around.

Two months had passed since Bertrand had come to Gleaquim by the northern sea, where his kinsfolk had kept Christmas in the old house where the Du Guesclins had had their rise. He had disbanded his free companions at Rennes, maugre their dismay and their unwillingness to leave him. The men's rough loyalty had touched Bertrand, and taught him that even the saddest dogs could love their master. Guicheaux had even cast himself at Bertrand's feet, swearing that he would go with him to the ends of the earth. It was with a husky voice that Bertrand had answered them, bade them choose a new captain and fight for Blois. He had left them bemoaning the obstinacy of his will, to discover, some twenty miles from Rennes, that Guicheaux and Hopart were following on his heels. Moved by their homage, he had taken them with him to Plessis-Bertrand, in Hakims valley by the sea.

There had been no great joy in Bertrand's home-coming. His father, failing in years and health, had grown querulous and miserly, while Dame Jeanne adored Olivier as foolishly as ever. Julianne and the other girls were at a convent in Rennes. Two of the boys were lodged with their aunt in the same town, and Gaheris had gone as a page into the Sieur de Rohan's household. There had been but a poor welcome for the prodigal, who brought no spoil or honor with him—nothing but a solemn face and two hungry followers. Sieur Robert had received him with no outburst of pride. His mother pursed up her

lips, and questioned him as to what he had done with the money he had had to start him in the wars. Olivier strutted and swaggered in his finer clothes, made love to his mother's serving-women, and sneered openly at his brother, asking him how many ale-houses he had captured and how many millers' ransoms he had won. Even in the kitchen there were brawlings and discord, for Hopart and Guicheaux drubbed Olivier's men for lauding up their master and belittling Bertrand's courage.

As for the Champion of Rennes, he kept a tight mouth and a flinty face, took all the trivial taunts without a word, feeling it good that life should run roughly with him for a season. Vain, vapping Olivier and proud, cold-eyed Jeanne knew nothing of the deep workings of that quiet man's heart. He never spoke to them of the near past, and told them nothing of what he had learned and suffered. They thought him sour, surly, dull in the head. Thus, even in a home, kinsfolk are as strangers and outlanders together, and the mother knows not the heart of the son.

A great change was working in Bertrand—one of those uprisings that occur, perhaps, but once in the course of a strong man's life. The recklessness, the passionate abandonment of youth were past—likewise the first peevish curses of disappointed manhood. Bertrand had learned to humble himself, to look round him, and to think. He had grappled with the truths and falsities of life, and searched out the flaws in his own heart with that dogged devotedness that was part of his nature. No easy and emotional religiosity inspired him, but rather the grim spirit of an old Stoic, striving after the best for the nobleness thereof. Yet the change was not without its tender tones. Almost unconsciously Bertrand had set up Tiphaine in his heart, while beside her, yet more in the shadow, Arletta's white and wistful face seemed to plead with him out of the past. Those who had known him of old, saving Olivier and his mother, wondered at the new gentleness, the air of patience, that had mellowed the rough and violent boy whom they remembered.

Bertrand was much alone that winter. It was a season of rest for him, a girding up of the loins, a tightening of the muscles of the heart. Nearly every day, in rain and sunshine, he would ride down to the sea, and sit there on the cliffs, with the ever-changing sky above him and the ever-restless waters at his feet. To Bertrand there was something bracing in this solitude and in the unbelittled magnificence of sea and shore. It was in those lonely days that he learned to know the true courage, that nobler quietude that smiles at defeat. And with the humility that had come upon him a deep and solemn peace seemed poured like divine wine into his mouth. The conviction grew in him that the higher life was yet before his face. Even as the grand old Hebrews trusted in the Eternal One with a faith that made them terrible, so Bertrand believed, with all the simple instinctiveness of his soul, that the powers above

had work for him to do. The day would come for him, when or how he knew not yet. He was content to rest and tarry for a season, perfecting the self-mastery that was to make of him a man.

Bertrand mounted his rough pony and rode homeward that March day with the sun going down amid a mass of burning clouds. His heart was tranquil in him despite the wailing of the wind, the moaning of the trees, and the bleak stretch of moorland and of waste. He saw the peasants returning from their labor, and smiled at the sight. The patience of these lowly tillers of the fields seemed to comfort him. He had begun to think more of them of late than the mere pomp of chivalry and the glamour of arms. They suffered, these brown-faced, round-backed peasants, and Bertrand's heart went out to them as he thought of their hard lives and the heaviness they bore.

The servants were trooping into supper when Bertrand rode into the old court-yard and saw the hall windows warm with torch-light. He stabled his pony, fed the beast with his own hands, and washed at the laver in the screens before going in to supper. Sieur Robert and his wife were already at the high table, with Olivier, the young fop, lolling against the wall. His lips curled as he saw Bertrand enter, for he hated his brother, and feared him in his heart.

Bertrand went to serve and carve at the high table. He had taken the task on him of late with that quiet thoroughness that made him what he was. It was proper, he thought, for him to serve before those who had begotten him, even though he had known no great kindness at their hands. Olivier would sneer and smile at Bertrand's newly inspired filial courtesy. He was a selfish fool himself, and loathed stirring himself, even for the mother who would have given him her head.

"Hallo there! those roast partridges look fat. Bring the dish, brother; this north wind blows hunger into a man."

Bertrand brought the dish without a word, and Olivier helped himself, pleased with the honor of being waited on by his brother.

"Give us some Grenarde, Bertrand. Thanks. And the spice-plate. Ah, madame, you keep to ypocrasse. Bertrand, my mother would drink ypocrasse."

Olivier had long lorded it over both his parents with the easy insolence of a favored son. Bertrand poured out a cup of ypocrasse for Dame Jeanne, and, having carved for his father, and given him a tankard of cider, sat down to eat in turn. Olivier, who was greedy despite his daintiness, left Bertrand in peace awhile, only deigning to talk when he had ended his hunger.

"Well, Brother Bertrand, how are the pigs to-day?"

This question had become a nightly witticism with Olivier since a certain morning two weeks ago, when he had found his brother helping the swineherd to drive his hogs.

Bertrand kept silence and went on with his supper. Olivier, after staring at

him, took a draught of wine, wiped his mouth, and called for water and a napkin that he might wash. Bertrand rose and brought them from the buffet below the great window.

"Thanks, good brother."

The patronage would have set Bertrand's face aflame not many months ago. He left Olivier waving his white hands in the air, and carried the bowl and napkin to his father, and then to Dame Jeanne, who thanked him with a slight nod of the head.

"Mother, I am thinking of joining the Countess at Rennes this year."

Olivier was forever on the point of sallying on imaginary quests, and thrilling his mother's heart with the threat of daring untold perils. He had been to the wars but once in his life, when an English spear-thrust had excused many months of unheroic idleness.

"They must miss you," said Jeanne, with a jealous look.

Olivier spread his shoulders but did not see that Bertrand smiled.

"True," he confessed, with divine self-unction; "I am a good man at my arms. This cursed spear-wound still smarts a little and chafes under the harness. How many men, mother, can you spare me in the spring?"

Jeanne du Guesclin considered the demand with the fondness of an unwilling fool. Olivier's vaporings never rang false in her maternal ears. Like many a shrewd, cold-hearted woman, she was deceived pitifully by the one thing that she loved.

"Wait till the summer, child," she said.

"Child!" And Olivier stood upon his dignity and showed temper. "You are blind, madame; you never see that I am a man. You women are made of butter. We men are of sterner stuff."

His mother's meekness was wonderful in one so proud.

"Ah, Olivier, you have the soldier's spirit! I must not try to curb your courage."

The hero smoothed his diminutive peak of a beard, and deigned to suffer her carefulness, like the inimitable peacock that he was.

"Honor is honor, madame. We men cannot sit at embroidery frames and make simples. It is the nature of man that he should thirst for war."

A sudden stir among the servants at the lower end of the hall drew Bertrand's attention from his brother's boasting. His ear had caught the sound of hoofs and the pealing of a trumpet before the court-yard gate. The clattering of dishes and the babbling of tongues ceased in the great hall, for Plessis-Bertrand was a lonely house and travellers rarely came that way. Hopart and Guicheaux, taught caution by long, experienced exposure to all manner of hazards, took down their swords from the wall and went out into the court-yard, followed by some of Olivier's men with torches. Olivier scoffed at the

free companions' carefulness.

"Some dirty beggar," he said, "or a couple of strolling friars. Hi, Jacques, if they are players—and there be any wenches—show them in."

Bertrand, who was wiser, and had no vanity to consider, saw that his sword was loose in its sheath.

They could hear Guicheaux shouting and a voice answering him. Then came the unbarring of the gate and the ring of hoofs upon the court-yard stones. The men were shouting and cheering in the court. Hopart's hairy face appeared at the doorway of the hall. He so far forgot his manners for the moment as to bawl at his master on the dais.

"Beaumanoir's herald, Messire Jean de Xaintré. They are going to maul the English at Mivoie's Oak. The eagle must look to his claws!"

In came the servants, shouting and elbowing beneath a flare of torches, old Jean, the butler, flourishing his staff and trying to keep order and clear a passage. Hopart and Guicheaux were treading on the toes of Olivier's men, spreading their fingers and grinning from ear to ear. Bertrand saw the flashing of a bassinet, the gay colors of a herald's jupon, the Sieur de Beaumanoir's arms quartered with those of Brittany. Some dozen men-at-arms followed in full harness, shouldering back the cook-boys and scullions.

The herald, an esquire of the Marshal's, Jean de Xaintré by name, marched up the hall and saluted those at the high table.

"Greeting, madame and messires all; God's grace be with you. I come from the Sieur de Beaumanoir, Marshal of Brittany. Thirty champions are to fight thirty English at the Oak of Mivoie on Passion Sunday. We need the Sieur de Guesclin's son with us."

Dame Jeanne looked at Olivier and beckoned him forward.

"Here is your champion, herald," she said. "Olivier, the Sieur de Beaumanoir needs your sword."

Jean de Xaintré stared at the lady and glanced, with a grim twinkle, at Olivier, who looked as though he were not so ready to deserve his mother's pride.

"Your pardon, madame"—and Xaintré laughed—"Bertrand du Guesclin is our man. Greeting, old friend; you have not forgotten Jean de Xaintré."

Jeanne du Guesclin bit her lips.

"What—Bertrand!"

"Madame, who but Bertrand, the best son you ever bore!"

Bertrand had risen and was standing with one hand on his father's shoulder, knowing that his chance had come at last. The hall, with its crowd of faces, seemed blurred to him for the moment. Yet he saw Hopart and Guicheaux squealing and flapping their caps in the faces of Olivier's men.

"I am here, old comrade. Give me the Marshal's orders."

Jeanne, white and angry, glared at him, and put her arm about Olivier.

"To choose the clumsy fool!" she said.

Jean de Xaintr  had drawn his sword, and was holding the hilt crosswise before him.

"Swear, brother in arms, swear on the cross."

"Ay, Jean, give me the oath."

"Swear by Christ's cross. The Oak of Mivoie on Josselin Moors, to fight Bamborough and his English on Passion Sunday."

Bertrand lifted his hand, crossed himself, and took the oath.

"Before God—and our Lord—I swear," he said.

Xaintr  thrust his sword back into its sheath.

"Bertrand du Guesclin will not fail."

Sieur Robert, sleepy and querulous, sat staring about him, and looking weakly at his wife. Jeanne du Guesclin had sunk back heavily in her chair, and was still biting her lips, and looking bitterly at Bertrand. Olivier had tossed down a cup of wine, and was braving it out as though the whole matter were the choicest farce. Guicheaux and Hopart were still stamping and shouting till Dame Jeanne started up in a blaze of fury, and shouted to her men, who crowded by the door:

"Take the fools out and have them whipped!"

But Bertrand cowed his mother for the once, and swore that no one should lay hands upon his men.

"Quiet, dogs," he said, shaking his fist at them, "you have barked enough; let us have peace."

He sprang down from the dais and gripped Jean de Xaintr 's hands.

"Old friend, you have not forgotten me?"

"No, no. Come, give me wine. Here's to you with all my heart."

XVIII

IT was seven in the morning on the day of his riding to join the Marshal of Brittany at the Oak of Mivoie, and Bertrand stood warming himself before the great hall fire. He was in full harness—harness that he had burnished lovingly with his own hands, and the raised vizor of his bassinet showed a calm face and the eyes of a man who listened. Bertrand had broken fast alone in the hall, after keeping a vigil in the chapel with his sword and shield before him on the altar steps. He was to ride towards Dinan that day, for Xaintré had told him that Robin Raguene! had been chosen among the thirty, and Bertrand rode to seek him at La Bellière, and perhaps win a glimpse of Tiphaine herself. His heart felt full of joy that morning, the joy of a man to whom life offers stirring days again.

Jean, the old butler, appeared at the door that closed the stairway leading to the private rooms. He looked half timidly at Bertrand, a tower of steel before the fire, and came forward slowly, coughing behind his hand.

"Well, Jean, how long will they keep me waiting? The days are short in March."

"Your servant, messire—"

"Well?"

"My master has bidden me carry you his good grace—and blessing—"

"What! My father is not out of bed?"

"He prays you to pardon him, messire. He feels the cold, and these raw mornings—"

Bertrand silenced him with a gesture of the hand. His face had lost its brightness for the moment, and there was a frown as of pain upon his forehead.

"Ah, of course, Jean, say no more. And madame?"

"Madame, messire, is at her devotions; she would not be disturbed. In an hour—"

Bertrand turned with a shrug of impatience, picked up his sword, and buckled it on.

"My time is God's time, Jean," he said; "carry my respects to my father and my mother—"

He winced over the words, frowning, and looking sorrowful about the eyes.

"Tell them I could not tarry. And my brother Olivier? Curling his pretty beard?"

"I will go and see, messire."

"No, no; never trouble the sweet lad. It is a mere nothing, man, to the

parting of his hair. Good-bye, Jean; forget the mad tricks I played you as a boy."

He turned, took up his shield, and strode out from the hall, a sense of forlornness chilling his ardor for the moment. Hopart and Guicheaux were waiting for him in the court-yard, holding his horse and spear. Bertrand had refused to take the men with him, preferring solitude, content with his own thoughts. Guicheaux and Hopart ran up to him, still hoping that he would change his purpose.

"Ah, lording, you will crack the English bassinets!"

"Good luck, good luck!"

"Take us, too, messire. We can live on rust and leather."

Bertrand was glad even of their rude affection. He took out an old brooch and a ring of silver from his shrunken purse, and thrust the largesse into their hands.

"No, no, sirs, I ride alone. Keep these things, and think of Bertrand du Guesclin if he comes not back again."

They hung round him like a couple of great children, eager and devoted.

"Messire, courage, you are too tough for the English dogs."

"Keep up your heart, captain, and give them the clean edge."

They ran for a mile along the road beside him, holding his stirrup-straps and looking up into his face. And theirs was the only heartening Bertrand had when he rode out to fight for the Breton poor at the Oak of Mivoie on Josselin Moors.

Bertrand's courage warmed again as he mounted the moors and felt the blue sky over him and the broad Breton lands before his face. He forgot Olivier's sneers and his mother's coldness, and the way they had let him go uncheered. The truth remained that Beaumanoir had chosen him, and that the chance had come for which he had waited. That day, also, he might see Tiphaine again, give her the good news, and tell her of the change that had been working in his manhood.

Bertrand was in fine fettle by the time he struck the windings of the Rance, and saw the river flashing below the cliffs and glimmering amid the green. He tossed his spear and sang as the towers of Dinan came in view, the gray walls girding the little town, with the Rance running in the narrow meads below. All the thickets were purpling with the spring. The bare aspens glittered, the clouds sailed white over the wind-swept Breton town.

But Dinan had no call for Bertrand that March day. He rode on, still singing, happy at heart, watching for the tall chimneys of the Vicomte's house, finding a quick, strange joy at the thought of seeing Tiphaine again. Bertrand was not a Provençal rhapsodist. He could not write love songs to a woman's lips, but look bravely into her face he could, and crown her with the homage

that only great hearts know.

Soon the turrets and carved chimneys rose up amid the trees, smoke floating with the wind, the Vicomte's banner slanting from its staff. Bertrand rode up amid a swirl of March-blown leaves and blew his horn before the gate. The servants who came out to him knew the eagle on his shield, and Robin himself met Bertrand in the court.

"Messire du Guesclin, welcome indeed!" and he held out his hands to take Bertrand's spear and shield, his beaming face a greeting in itself.

"Xaintr  told me you were chosen."

"To be sure, he passed this way on the road to Concale. Mother of God, but I am glad you are come! Tiphaine is above, playing chess with my father."

Robin gave the spear and shield to one of the servants and embraced Bertrand when he dismounted. There was something comforting to the lad in having this strong man to bear him company.

"It will be a grim business, Bertrand. Croquart is to fight on Bamborough's side, and Knowles and Calverly. Pssh! but who is afraid of the Flemish butcher? Come to my room; I will help you to disarm."

He led Bertrand through the garden to his bedchamber joining the chapel, chattering all the way, with a restless smile on his boyish face. There was an exaggerated fervor in the lad's gayety, and his eyes looked tired as though he had not slept. Bertrand saw that his hands trembled as he helped to unbuckle the harness, and that his mouth drooped when he was not talking.

"What a day for us, brother in arms!" he babbled, drawing out Bertrand's sword and feeling the edge thereof with his thumb. "Croquart is a terrible fellow. But then Beaumanoir is as brave as a lion, and Tinteni  a powerful smiter, and you, Bertrand, are as good a man at your weapons as any."

Bertrand looked hard at Robin, and forced a smile.

"We shall hold our own," he said.

"You think so?" and the lad's face brightened. "I have been running two miles each morning to better my wind. Look at my new armor, yonder. It is the cleverest German work. See the kneecaps, and the pallets to guard the armpits. It will take a good sword, Bertrand, to pierce it, eh?"

He seemed so eager to be cheered, despite his vivacity, that Bertrand felt troubled for the lad, and pitied him in his heart. He was wondering why Beaumanoir had chosen young Ragu nel. He was tall and strong enough, but he had not the dogged look of a born fighter.

"You will do bravely enough, Robin," he said. "Why, I have seen these English beaten many a day. We Bretons are the better men."

"Good, good indeed! Why, man, you are thirsting for Passion Sunday to come round."

"Because we shall win," said Bertrand, quietly, smiling at the lad and eager

to hearten him.

Bertrand had finished his disarming, and, having washed his face and hands in Robin's laver, stood for him to lead on to the Vicomte's room. He was troubled now that he was to meet Tiphaine again, wondering how she would greet him, and whether her father knew what had passed within the Aspen Tower. He followed Robin through the oriel, stroking his chin and bracing his manhood for the meeting.

Tiphaine was seated before the solar window, with the chess-board between her and the Vicomte. She rose up at once when Bertrand entered, and held out her hands to him with a readiness that made him color.

"Messire, we meet again."

To Bertrand her voice brought back a hundred memories that gave him pain. He winced a little as he took her hand and felt her clear eyes searching his face. It meant more to Bertrand to meet those eyes than an enemy's sword would cost him at Mivoie.

"God grant madame is well," and he bowed to her clumsily and turned to Stephen Raguenel, who had pushed back the chess-table and was rising from his chair.

"Well met at last, Messire du Guesclin. I can thank you with my own lips for the great debt we owe your sword."

Bertrand guessed that Tiphaine had saved his honor. He flashed a look at her, and saw by the smile and the shake of the head she gave him that the Vicomte knew nothing of the first spoiling of the Aspen Tower. Bertrand blessed her, yet felt a hypocrite.

"If I have served you, sire, say no more of it."

The Vicomte de Bellière, stately seigneur that he was, kissed Bertrand's cheek after the quaint fashion of those days.

"My house is your house, lad," he said, "my servants your servants. I hold myself your debtor."

For Bertrand, La Bellière had a strange and saddened sense of peace that night as he sat before the log fire and talked to the Vicomte of the combat at the Oak of Mivoie. La Bellière contrasted with the memories of his own home, for here they loved one another and knew no discords. The solar, warm with the firelight, had something sacred and beautiful within its walls. Bertrand felt the quiet dignity of the Raguenels' life, the charm, the mellowness that made home home.

Tiphaine sat opposite to him, her embroidery in her lap—a mass of green and gold—her eyes shining in the firelight, her hair coiled above the curve of her shapely neck. Her father's chair was turned towards the fire, and he could see both his children, for Robin stood leaning against the chimney-hood, his face drawn and pinched when in repose.

It was pathetic the way the old man gloried in his son. He did not grudge him to the Breton cause, but let his pride soar over the lad's honor. He told Bertrand the deeds of his own youth, beneficently garrulous, and swore that Robin would outshine his father. His handsome face mellowed as he sipped his wine and looked from one child to the other. Bertrand, silent, yet very reverent, watched Tiphaine's hands, too conscious all the while of Robin's strained and jerky gayety. The lad's heart was not happy in him, of that Bertrand felt assured.

"Come, messire, you have not seen Robin fight as yet."

Bertrand smiled, a little sadly, and shook his head.

"He had his christening when our Countess retook the castle of Roche-D'Errien. You were one of the first in the breach, Robin, eh? Yes, yes, and Beaumanoir heard of the spirit you showed in that tussle down in the south, Ancenis—was it? What a head I have for names!"

Tiphaine looked up from her work and gave her father the word.

"Aurai, to be sure, where that rogue Dagworth had his quittance from Raoul de Cahours. Robin won his spurs there. You shall see how the lad can fight, messire, at the Oak of Mivoie."

Robin laughed, blushed, and frowned at the fire. Tiphaine was looking at him with almost a mother's love in her eyes. Her brother's restless gayety had no sinister significance for her sister's pride in him. It was a solemn evening; Robin might be unnerved by the pathos of it, but nothing more.

"Robin will play his part," she said, quietly.

"God's grace, of course, he shall! More wine, messire; let us drink to brave Beaumanoir and to Brittany."

Before the hour for sleep came round, Tiphaine drew Bertrand aside towards the window, and stood looking keenly in his face. His eyes were happier than of old, and the sullen discontent had left him since Arletta's burying in the garden of the Aspen Tower.

"Bertrand."

"Yes, Tiphaine?"

"How is it with you?"

He looked at her frankly, yet with a saddened smile.

"I am learning my lesson—letter by letter," he answered.

"I am glad of it. We are the firmer friends, and—"

She hesitated, with a troubled light shining in her eyes. Bertrand saw her glance wistfully at Robin and her father.

"Bertrand."

"I stand to serve you."

"Take care of Robin for us, Bertrand; it would kill my father to lose the lad. And he is so young, though brave and strong enough. If—"

Bertrand reached for her hand and held it, his face transfigured as he looked into her eyes.

“Trust me,” he said.

“Ah!—”

“I will stand by the lad, and take the blows from him even with my own body. Tiphaine, I have not forgotten.”

And Bertrand did not sleep that night with thinking of Tiphaine and the Oak of Mivoie.

XIX

BERTRAND and Robin Raguene! rode southwest from Dinan, holding towards Montcontour, so that they should come on Josselin from the west. All about Ploermel, and even to the walls of Rennes, Bamborough's English and Croquart's ruffians were still burning and plundering, and driving the wretched peasantry like sheep before them. Montfort's English had been very bitter against the Bretons since Dagworth's death, vowing that he had fallen through treachery, and that Brittany should pay the price in blood.

The sun was setting on the Friday before Passion Sunday, when Bertrand and Robin came to the little town of Loudéac and sought out a lodging for the night. They were guided to an inn on the north of the market square, and given a private chamber, as befitted young Raguene!'s rank. The lad had shown a strange temper all the way from Dinan, his face like an April sky, now all sunshine, now all gloom. Moments of gusty gayety alternated with morose and restless silence. Bertrand had done what he could to humor the lad, without letting him suspect that he was troubled for the part he would play at the Oak of Mivoie.

Robin drifted into a reckless mood that night at Loudéac. He called for much wine and showed the innkeeper an open purse. The servants stirred themselves to honor "my lord," who was to fight for Brittany on Josselin Moors. The innkeeper, a shrewd old pimp, who wished his guests to be amused, sent up a couple of dancing-girls to the chamber after supper. Bertrand looked black when the girls came in to them, giggling and twitching their bright-colored skirts. It was customary at many inns to keep such ladies, and young Robin laughed at them, his head half turned with wine.

"Hallo, wicked ones! Come and sit by me. You can dance and sing for a gentleman, eh? To be sure, Mistress Red-stockings, you have a pretty pair of ankles. Who calls for muscatel and good Bordeaux? Bertrand, fill up your cup."

The women were ready enough to make play for Robin, seeing that he was a handsome fellow and two parts drunk. Bertrand, however, had no desire to see the lad preyed upon by such a pair of harpies. Ignoring their oglings and their tittering, he went to the door and shouted for the innkeeper, and gave the man a look that did not miscarry.

"None of your tricks, my friend; we have no purses to be picked. What we have ordered we have ordered, but these delicacies are not to our taste."

The man looked at Robin, who had taken the girl with the red stockings on his knee.

"But, my lord yonder—seems satisfied."

"Robin, let the girl go."

The lad quailed before Bertrand's eyes, and surrendered to him sheepishly, yet not without some show of spite.

"Now, Sir Shepherd, out with your sheep."

The innkeeper saw that Bertrand was in no mood to be trifled with, and that he was the master of the situation so far as Robin was concerned. He beckoned the women out, pulling a wry face, yet outwardly obsequious as any son of Mammon. The women followed him, tossing their ribbons and looking saucily at Bertrand, whose ugly face was like a block of stone. Their insolence was nothing to him, for he had drunk the dregs of recklessness and thrown the cup away.

Robin was sitting sulkily before the fire, biting his nails and glancing at Bertrand out of the corners of his eyes. He knew that the elder man was in the right, and yet Bertrand's mastery chafed his pride.

"You meddle rather much, messire," he said.

Bertrand went up to him with the air of a brother, a good-humored smile softening his face.

"Nonsense, Robin; you are a little hot in the head. No more wine, lad; I ask it as a favor. Who kissed you last—was it not your sister?"

Robin shuddered, and sat staring at the fire.

"You are right, Bertrand," he said. "By God, I was going to Mivoie with a harlot's kisses on my mouth!"

"No, no, lad, you have the true stuff in you. Come to bed; we must not waste our sleep."

It was some time after midnight when Bertrand woke with a start and lay listening in the darkness of the room. A voice was babbling in the silence of the night, making a hoarse whispering like dead leaves shivering in a frosty wind. Bertrand's eyes grew accustomed to the dark, and he could see Robin half kneeling, half lying upon the bed. The lad was praying like a man in the extremity of terror.

"Oh, Lady of Heaven, pardon all my sins. I am young, and I have erred often, and often I have prayed with a cold heart. Mea culpa! mea culpa! Lord Jesu watch over me at the Oak of Mivoie. It is terrible, very terrible, to be afraid, but I have taken the oath, and all men will mock me if I fail. St. Malo, hear me; I will build a chapel to thee if I come back safe from Mivoie."

To such whimperings Bertrand listened as he lay motionless in bed. Robin's whispering terror troubled him; he grieved for the lad, yet knew not what to do. If Robin had his sister's heart, there would be no quailings, no shivering prayers at midnight, no grovelling on the floor. Bertrand lay listening, half tempted to speak to the lad. He held his words, however, and

watched till Robin climbed back with chattering teeth to bed. Bertrand betrayed nothing of what he had seen or heard when they rose to dress and arm that morning, though his heart misgave him when he saw the lad's red eyes and drooping mouth. He began to be keenly afraid for the lad's courage, lest it should fail utterly and bring shame on Robin and on those who loved him.

They rode out through Loudeac after paying the reckoning at the inn. Robin's spirits revived somewhat as they went through the narrow streets and the townsfolk cheered them and waved their caps.

"Grace to the Breton gentlemen!"

"God bless ye, sirs, at the Oak of Mivoie!"

The glory of it all brought a flush to Robin's cheeks. He looked handsome enough in his new armor, his horse going proudly, with trappings of green and gold. His manhood stiffened; his blood came more blithely from his heart. Had he not a part to play, a cause to champion? Men looked for great things from him, trusted to his word. Robin's pride kindled as he rode through the streets of Loudeac, and Bertrand, watching him, felt glad.

It was when they were free of the town and plunged into the woodlands that Robin's courage began to wane once more. Loudeac had been full of life and the stir thereof, but here in the deeps of the mysterious woods there was nothing but silence and loneliness about him. The wind sighed in the beech-trees; the firs waved their solemn boughs. The damp grass and the sodden leaves were as yet unbrightened by many flowers. The pitiful thinness of the lad's courage grew more plain as the hours went by.

Bertrand talked hard, and tried to make young Raguenel more ready for the morrow. He told him of the tussles he had come through unharmed and of the many times that he had seen the English beaten. And Croquart—what was Croquart the Fleming that they should talk so much of him? The fellow was only a butcher's brat; he had learned to use the knife and the cleaver, and boasted the insolence of a scullion. Brittany had as good men as Croquart, Calverly, and all the gang of them. Bertrand took no heed of Robin's frailty, but held forth strenuously, as though fired by his own convictions. Yet the more he talked the deeper grew the lad's depression.

About noon they halted beside a stream where moor and woodland met, watered their horses, and made a meal. Robin ate but little, and seemed to have no heart to talk. Bertrand ignored his restless manner and the weak twitching of his lower lip. He gave the lad little time for reflection, feeling that Robin's courage leaked like wine out of a cracked jar.

"Come, we must make Josselin before dark."

Robin dragged himself up from the foot of a tree. He went slowly towards his horse, walking with no spring at the knees, his chin down upon his chest. Bertrand's back was turned for the moment, for he was tightening his saddle-

girths, that had worked slack since the morning. Robin glanced at him, with the look of a hunted thing in his eyes. He stooped, lifted up his horse's left fore foot, and plunged the point of his poniard into the frog.

Bertrand turned to find Robin's horse plunging and rearing, with his master hanging to the bridle.

"Hallo, lad, what's amiss?"

Robin, fearful lest Bertrand should guess his treachery, patted the beast's neck and coaxed him back into control.

"By the saints, Hoel is dead lame!"

He tugged at the bridle and walked the horse to and fro, gloating inwardly at the way the poor brute hobbled.

"What's to be done?"

Bertrand marched up without a word, lifted the beast's fore foot, and saw the bleeding hoof. His mouth hardened as he turned on Robin, grim but very quiet.

"Show me your poniard."

The lad stared at him, his lower lip a-droop.

"My poniard?"

"Yes."

"Upon my soul, messire—"

He had flushed crimson, and was shaking at the knees, nor did Bertrand need to press his guilt. He stood looking at Robin, contemptuous, yet moved to pity, debating inwardly what he should do.

"Well, messire, a nice trick this, laming your own horse! I will get you to Josselin to-night, even if I have to carry you."

"Bertrand, I—My God, I cannot go, I am not fit!"

He broke down utterly of a sudden, and threw himself upon the grass, burying his face in his arms, and sobbing like a girl. Bertrand had never seen such cowardice before; it was new and strange to him, and the very pitiableness of it shocked his manhood.

"Come, lad, come," and he bent down and tried to turn him over.

Robin squirmed away like a frightened cur.

"I can't, I can't! Don't jeer at me; let me be!"

"What! You will break your oath?"

The lad's shoulders only twitched the more, and he buried his face yet deeper in his arms.

"For God's sake, lad, stand up and play the man. What will they say of you at Dinan?"

It was all useless, useless as trying to turn milk into wine. Robin lay snivelling on the grass, all the manhood gone from him, his fine armor a veritable mockery, his whole body palsied by abject fear. Even Bertrand's

taunts could sting no courage into him. Robin Raguenel was a coward; Bertrand knew the truth.

He stood looking at the lad, disgust and pity warring together on his face. Was this the brother Tiphaine loved, and for whom he had promised to risk his life! Once more in despair he tried to rouse the lad, yet doubting in his heart that any good would come of it.

“So, Robin”—and he spoke gently—“you will let your father know that you are a coward?”

Robin groaned, but did not stir.

“Well—and your sister, she is proud of you?”

“Mercy, have mercy!” And the taunts only brought forth more snivellings and tears.

“Then you will break your oath to Beaumanoir, messire?”

“Yes, curse him, why did the fool choose me?”

Bertrand turned from Robin with a half-uttered oath, picked up his spear, and moved towards his horse. There was no help for it; he must leave the coward to his shame. They needed men, not girls, at Mivoie.

XX

BERTRAND faltered as he was about to mount his horse and stood irresolute, like a man who repents of parting in anger from a friend. He thrust his spear into the grass, buckled the bridle round it, and went back towards Robin with a frown of thought upon his face. His promise to Tiphaine had dared him to desert the lad, however much he might despise him for a weakling and a coward.

“Stand up, messire, I have some last words to say to you.”

Robin turned on his side, his green surcoat dew-drenched and muddy, and, propping himself upon one elbow, plucked at the grass.

“Ride on,” he growled; “let me be.”

“For the last time, Robin, will you go with me to Mivoie?”

“What! to have my brains beaten out by that brute Croquart? He has a grudge against me. Xaintré warned me to beware of the fellow.”

“A cool confession, messire.”

“Cool! Why should I be butchered for the sake of a crowd of wretched serfs?”

Bertrand looked at him as though half minded to pick the lad up and shake the terror out of him by sheer strength. But even Bertrand saw how useless it was to argue with such a quivering and sulky tangle of nerves. Young Raguene! was too soft and sensitive a creature to bear the rubs of the age he lived in. The stark fear of death was on him, and he was worse than an hysterical woman for the moment. Even if he were dragged to Josselin that night he would only disgrace himself at Mivoie on the morrow.

Bertrand turned on his heel, and began to march to and fro under the trees. Now and again he looked grimly, yet sorrowfully, at Robin, his eyes full of reproachfulness as he began to realize what the lad’s cowardice might mean. The words that he had spoken to Tiphaine were sounding in his ears: “Trust me, and I will shield the lad even with my own body.” There was no shirking such a promise, and argue as he would the rough candor of his own conscience had him baffled at every point. What would Tiphaine think of him if he left this loved but weak-willed brother to be shamed and dishonored in the knowledge of all Brittany? And Stephen Raguene!, that generous old man? The blow would kill him, and bring his white head down into the grave. Bertrand ground his teeth as he realized the bitterness of it all, and felt his own honor tangled in the fatal web of Robin’s fear.

Bertrand trampled the sodden grass till he had worn a muddy track under the beech-trees between Robin and the place where his horse was tethered.

Never did Bertrand fight a tougher fight than he fought with himself that day on the road to Josselin. Renunciation, the higher courage, triumphed. Bertrand dashed his hand across his eyes, looked bitterly at the sword he had sharpened so lovingly and at the shield with the Du Guesclin blazonings thereon. Well, there was no help for it; he would sacrifice himself for this miserable boy; he had given Tiphaine his promise. And as for his oath to Beaumanoir, he would both keep it and break it, and God would know the truth.

With the tussle ended, doubt and indecision had no more power over Bertrand's will. He made no boast of the deed he was about to do, but marched to it boldly with a set mouth and an unflinching face.

"Off with your armor, lad; there is no time to lose."

Robin stared as though Bertrand had commanded him to crawl out of his skin.

"Up with you!" and there was a ring of fierceness in the voice. "Strip off your armor; we must change our coats."

Robin leaned upon one hand, eying Bertrand furtively, and not grasping his meaning for the moment.

"What will you do, messire?" he asked.

"Do!" and Bertrand's lips curled as he unbuckled his girdles and cuishes; "save you from shaming the folk who love you by taking your place at the Oak of Mivoie."

Had the veriest spark of nobleness been left alive in him that moment, Robin would have risen up with generous shame, compelled towards courage by Bertrand's chivalry. But the meaner powers were in the ascendant, and the dread of death made him blind to his own littleness. Even Bertrand saw the look of relief upon his face as he scrambled up, evading Du Guesclin's eyes.

"Messire Bertrand, this is too good of you—"

A contortion of contempt swept over Bertrand's face. The lad was pleased to approve the sacrifice and mildly call it "good."

"Don't thank me, messire. Take off your armor. We are much of a size. The fesse of silver shall make a show at Mivoie."

Robin obeyed him, secret exultation stifling shame.

"I shall not forget this, Bertrand."

"Nor shall I!"

"Beaumanoir will think that something has hindered you."

"Ah, no doubt."

Bertrand's brows contracted as he gave the lad a look that should have let light into his soul. Robin seemed glib enough with his excuses.

"Do not think that I am doing this for your sake, Messire Robin Ragueneel."

"No?" and the coward looked astonished at the words.

"I am thinking of your father and your sister at La Bellière. They love you,

Robin, and God knows I am loved by no one. Therefore, I remember the love they have for you, for no one will grieve if Bertrand du Guesclin gathers shame."

Robin looked at him vacantly. So wrapped up was he in his own troubles that he did not realize the greatness of Bertrand's sacrifice.

"Oh, it will work very well," he stammered.

"You think so? Thanks."

"We can say that your horse fell lame. And if you keep your visor down no one will know you. Besides, you are strong enough to fight any man who gives you the lie."

Bertrand ground his teeth over the ease with which the lad contrived it all. By the blood of God! did the fool think that it was easy for a strong man to throw away the chance he had longed and prayed for? Bertrand knew what men would say of him, and that the public tongue is as uncharitable as it is false.

"Unbuckle my arm pieces."

He rapped the words out as though the uttering of them gave him relief. Robin skipped forward to complete the sacrifice. He was still possessed by a blind and selfish joy.

"I will help to make the tale sound honest for you," he said.

Bertrand's shoulders heaved.

"You are quick enough with your wits," he answered. "Come, listen to me. I know this road; there is a low inn not five miles from here, set back in an empty quarry. Hide there till we have fought at Mivoie."

Bertrand was curt and peremptory enough; Robin understood him, and looked sullenly at the grass.

"What if you are killed?" he asked.

The utter coolness of the question staggered Bertrand, despite the revelations of the last hour.

"Who thinks of being killed!"

"Croquart will strike at you."

"And am I afraid of Croquart? If I were to fall the trick would be discovered. You have scented that out, eh, you little fox! No, lie quiet in your hole till I ride back."

"And then?"

Bertrand bit his lips.

"God knows, so far as I am concerned!" he said.

In half an hour the transformation was complete. He took Robin's shield upon his arm (the fesse argent on an azure ground), but kept his own horse and his heavy axe that hung at the saddle-bow. Robin melted somewhat when the time for parting came. He tried to embrace Du Guesclin, but Bertrand would

have none of the lad's gratitude.

"Off, sir, you owe me nothing; it is your father's honor that I cherish, and the vow I made your sister. Keep up the mockery, messire: you are Bertrand du Guesclin, skulking in the woods of Loudeac."

And with a grim face he climbed into the saddle and, pricking in the spurs, went off at a canter.

When he had gone Robin sat down sullenly under a tree and watched Bertrand disappear over the open moor. He was beginning to hate himself, yet his gross cowardice still held him firmly by the throat. Rising at last, he took his lame horse and began to lead the beast wearily along the road, for Bertrand's armor was heavy on him, and his heart sick over the whole coil. But Bertrand rode eastward over the moors, bearing Robin's shield, and thinking of Tiphaine and the shame she would hear of him.

XXI

THE Josselin Moors were golden with gorse and broom when Beaumanoir's banner, with its eleven argent billets on an azure ground, was unfurled beneath the Oak of Mivoie. He had ridden out from Josselin with the seigneurs and mesne lords who had gathered to the place, the champions of Mivoie being marked out from the rest by wearing broom flower in their helmets. With the Marshal rode the Sieur de Tinteniach, as noble a gentleman as ever feutred a spear; Geoffroi Dubois, called by some "The Wolf"; Sir Yves de Charrual, Carro de Bodegat, and many more. A great rabble of peasantry followed them over the moors, beating up the dust from the highway with the tramp of their many feet. Along the road they were joined by knots of people—village flocks, each following its parish priest. The heart of all Brittany was in the combat, and the faint pealing of the bells of Josselin borne on the western wind seemed to speak forth the passion of the poor.

Beaumanoir's trumpets were screaming when Bertrand came trotting over the moors towards the oak. He had tarried late in Josselin for the safeguarding of his deceit, meaning to take his place in the ranks at the last hour. Twice that morning he had nearly been discovered—once by a Breton captain who had recognized his voice, and again by one of his old free companions loitering outside an inn. Bertrand had taken to the open moors, passing the groups of hurrying peasant folk on his way, and waving his shield to them as they cheered Sir Robin of Dinan riding to keep troth with the Sieur de Beaumanoir.

There was much bracing of armor and handling of weapons when Bertrand pushed through the press towards the oak. He had left his horse close by with some peasants on the moor, and a herald was calling the roll of those chosen. Robin Raguenel's name was shouted out as Bertrand came up with his visor down. He waved Robin's shield above his head, so that the fesse of silver should speak for itself.

Bertrand drew back under the boughs of the oak, and pretended to be busy bracing up his armor. Over the moors he could see the English spears glinting in the sunlight along the road from Ploermel. They came on gallantly, these dreaded English, with Bamborough's banner blowing in the van. Bertrand's eyes wandered towards the silent peasant folk gathered like sheep upon the moors. He took heart as he thought how these men of the soil had suffered, and that he was not fighting for mere selfish fame. The broader issue quenched for the moment the smart and bitterness of his own self-sacrifice.

"Messire Bertrand du Guesclin."

It was the herald's voice calling his name, and Bertrand had been waiting

for that cry for hours. He stood up and looked round calmly at the burnished bassinets and painted shields, feeling like a man who watches his own burial in a dream. A second time he heard the herald call his name, and saw the knights and squires look questioningly from man to man. Silence had fallen under the great oak. The Sieur de Beaumanoir was speaking to the gentlemen about him, and in the lull Bertrand could hear their words.

"I am loath to mistrust the man, yet he has failed us and sent no warning."

"A mere spoil-hunting vagabond," said Yves de Charrual. "I know the fellow."

"The oath was given him by Xaintré."

"True; then this is treachery."

"The dog shall have the truth from me," quoth Carro de Bodegat, a flamboyant gentleman whom Bertrand had once wounded in a duel.

Bertrand stood by in Robin's armor, grinding his teeth as he listened to all they said. How ready they were to damn him as a traitor, these proud ones who had never known how long he had waited for such a chance as this! Even his doggedness could hardly take their taunts in silence; he longed to throw his visor up and give Charrual and Bodegat the lie. Only one lord spoke up for him before the rest, the Sieur de Tinteniach, asking why a brave man should be slandered without full knowledge of the truth. Bertrand loved Tinteniach for these words, and vowed in his heart that they should be repaid.

Meanwhile Beaumanoir had called an esquire forward, Guillaume de Montauban by name, and given him the honor that Du Guesclin had forfeited. Bertrand stood listening to the casual ignominy that was being flung by those about him at his courage. Even when challenged as Robin Ragueneel, and asked for a judgment concerning his own honor, he grimaced behind his visor, and answered gruffly that he would not condemn a Breton man unheard.

The sacrament of the mass came to silence all these cavilling tongues. Bertrand knelt with the rest, grim and silent, wondering whether Robin guessed how much this ordeal meant to him. He covered the mezail of his bassinet with his hand when he lifted the visor and took the bread. His one prayer was that this dallying should not be long, for he was fierce and ready for the English swords. Soon the Gloria had been sung, and the priest, facing eastward under the oak, had offered the *Gratio ad Complendum*.

"*Ite, missa est!*" came the cry. And a hundred strong voices shouted, "*Deo Gratias!*"

The English were drawn up where the highway to Ploermel broadened into a smooth stretch of grass and sand. Croquart and five Netherlanders were to fight for Bamborough, also four Bretons, for the true-born English mustered but twenty. Bamborough, who had stood laughing and jesting while the Bretons were hearing mass, turned to his "thirty," and gave them his last

words.

“Sirs,” he said, “I have read in Merlin’s books that we shall have the victory. Let us kill or take Beaumanoir and his men and carry them prisoners to Edward our king.”

Beaumanoir, more devout and less boastful, kissed the cross of his sword, and held it high above his head.

“Friends, may God make us increase in virtue. Keep a good countenance, and hold fast together.”

The sun streamed out from behind a cloud when the two bristling banks of steel surged towards each other over the heather. St. George and St. Ives, good saints, were hailed perforce into the struggle. The dust smoked up into the sunlight so that those who watched the fight could see but vaguely how matters sped. Sword and axe, mace and bill, clashed and tossed like the play of counter-currents in some narrow strait. Shields were cloven, plumes shorn away, men thrown down and trampled underfoot. Through the drifting dust the armed figures flashed like flames struggling through a pall of smoke.

From the first rush the English party had the upper hand, being bigger men and more hardened to the trade of arms. Croquart the Fleming broke to and fro, charging like a boar, hurling men aside, and making the shields and steel plates ring with the thunder of his heavy mace. He hunted out Bertrand in the press, and beat him down with a side blow on the bassinet. It was the Sieur de Tinteniach who sprang forward over Bertrand’s body, and held Croquart back till the fesse of silver shone out again.

“Grace to you, sire!” And Bertrand flew at the Fleming with his axe, but lost his man in the shifting of the fight.

For two full hours the moil went on till sheer exhaustion forced the wolves of war apart. They drew back to gain breath, some dazed like men half drunk, leaning on each other, grasping and staggering over the heath. Two Bretons were dead, many wounded, and three prisoners under Bamborough’s banner. The honor as yet was with the English; even Bertrand confessed it grudgingly as he leaned upon his axe.

The Sieur de Tinteniach came stumbling up to him, his visor up, his face gray, his eyes glazed.

“Give me a prop, Robin,” he said; “I have no breath in me. Curse these English, they have the devil in their bodies.”

Bertrand put his arm about Tinteniach’s body, his heart warm towards the man who had spoken for him before the rest.

“Wait, sire,” he said, grinding his teeth, “we have not finished with Bamborough yet.”

Tinteniach leaned on him, looking curiously at the eyes that showed through the visor.

"You sound hoarse as an old hound, Robin," he said.

"My throat is dry," and Bertrand turned away his head.

On came the English, massed in a solid wedge of steel. Tinteniak roused himself, their shouts stirring him like the scream of a trumpet. Bertrand kept close to him, knowing that the strong man was weak and wounded, and that he could cover him with Robin's shield.

In the thick of the fight Bamborough of Ploermel had grappled the Sieur de Beaumanoir, and was dragging him by sheer strength from the mêlée.

"Surrender, Beaumanoir! I'll send you a prisoner to my lady love!"

Bertrand and Tinteniak sprang forward for a rescue, Du Guesclin bringing the governor of Ploermel to earth with a down stroke of his axe. Tinteniak's sword ended the argument; Bamborough's head fell away from the hacked and bleeding neck.

Beaumanoir had freed himself, and was up, shaking his sword.

"St. Ives," he cried, "Bamborough is dead! Courage, Bretons, and the day is ours!"

Croquart the Fleming seized on Bamborough's authority, and, closing up his men, charged the Bretons and bore them slowly back. Strive as they would, Bertrand and the stoutest of them were driven to the very shadow of the great oak. The crowd of watchers went swaying and scrambling back from the eddying ripples of that pool of death. The sweat and clangor awed the peasantry, though a hoarse shout of despair went up when the Sieur de Beaumanoir's banner lurched down into the dust.

Then came a second pause for breath, the English waiting like dogs to make their last dash at the wounded stag. Beaumanoir, drenched with blood, his strength failing because of the fast he had kept before mass, leaned upon Bodegat and called for wine.

"Drink your own blood, Beaumanoir!" cried Dubois, half mad with his wounds. "Courage, sirs, there is hope in us yet!"

It was then that young Guillaume de Montauban, whom Beaumanoir had chosen, ran away towards his horse, his comrades cursing him for a coward as he stumbled over the moor.

"Take care of your own work," shouted the youngster, as he scrambled into the saddle, "and I, before God, will take care of mine!"

He swung round and, thrusting in the spurs, rode for the English at a gallop. His heavy horse broke through with a crash, scattering the war dogs, and leaving many floundering, cumbered and weighed down by their heavy harness. Geoffroi Dubois sprang forward as he grasped the ruse. The Bretons, rallying together, charged down upon the English before they could recover. The wedge of steel was rent asunder, the men whom Montauban had overthrown made easy prisoners as they struggled to rise.

Croquart and a few fought on until the end, but, hemmed in and outnumbered, they surrendered sullenly to Beaumanoir.

“Well, sirs, you have won by treachery,” said Calverly, throwing down his sword. And though the Bretons shouted him into silence, there was the sting of truth in the “free companion’s” words.

Bertrand, bleeding from a sword-cut in the thigh, forced his way through the peasant folk who came crowding over the moors. Some of them clung round him, and kissed his shield and harness, even the bloody axe he carried in his hand. Bertrand forced them aside as gently as he could, and marched on towards the heather-clad knoll where two country fellows were holding his horse. He heard a voice calling him as he climbed into the saddle, and, turning, saw the Sieur de Tinteniach staggering over the heath. Bertrand had saved Tinteniach’s life more than once in the last struggle, and the brave fellow was eager to take the supposed Robin by the hand.

Bertrand wavered a moment as he remembered how Tinteniach had spoken up for him before them all. Then, waving his hand, he clapped in the spurs, and went at a canter over the moors to Josselin.

Hungry and weary as he was, he rode into the town to get food and wine at an inn. Men, women, and children, who had been watching on the walls, came crowding round him at the gate. A man-at-arms had read Bertrand’s shield, and it was noised from mouth to mouth that Sir Robin of Dinan had ridden back from Mivoie.

“News, messire! What news?”

Bertrand looked down at the eager, crowding faces, and saw the ripple of exultation that spread about him as he threw them the good news like a stone into a pool. Some went down on their knees and prayed; others jigged to and fro like roisterers at a fair; even the children shouted and clapped their hands.

Freeing himself with difficulty from the people, Bertrand broke away down a side street and drew up before a common tavern. The place was empty save for one old woman, who served Bertrand as he sat in the dirty room, pondering on the irony of it all—that he should be the man to bring the good news to Josselin. Begging linen from the old woman, he unbuckled the cuishe from his right thigh, poured in wine, and bound up the wound. Then he gave the dame some money, mounted his horse, and rode for the western gate.

All Josselin was in an uproar as Bertrand trotted through the streets. Mounted men had come in from Mivoie, cheering and waving branches of broom. Bells were pealing, townsfolk and peasantry shouting and crowding in the narrow streets. They thronged round Bertrand and nearly dragged him from his horse, striving to touch even his surcoat and armor, and shouting their blessings on Sir Robin of Dinan. Bertrand, facing the mockery of it all, won through them patiently, and came to the gate that led towards Loudeac.

“Du Guesclin played the coward” were the last words he heard as he rode from Josselin towards the west.

XXII

EVENING had come when Bertrand neared the quarry on the road to Loudeac, where Robin Raguene! lay hid. A path ran from the main track and wound through the woods, leaving the open moorland sweeping—a wave of gold into the west. It was one of those rare passings of the day in spring when strangeness and mystery were everywhere, brooding on the dream hills against the splendid sky, watching for the night in the windless woodways of the forest. The song of the birds went up towards the sunset, tumultuous, and borne upon the wings of joy. Yet to Bertrand the beauty of it all was but a mockery, even as the dawn mocks the eyes of a man dying in his youth.

The inn, a mere hovel with rotting thatch and sagging beams, stood at the mouth of the quarry with a dirty stable yard behind it. The greater part of the quarry was tangled with brushwood, a few patches of coarse grass closing in a strip of shallow soil where the inn folk grew their vegetables. A Breton lass, brown-legged and bare-armed, was hoeing in the garden when Bertrand rode up towards the inn. Robin, sitting on a block of stone, was talking to the girl, making love to her for lack of else to do. The girl's black eyes and insolent mouth were charms that might make a man forget for the moment thoughts that were troubling to his conscience. She returned Robin as good as he gave, laughing, and tossing back her hair as she plied her hoe, her bare feet sinking into the soil.

Bertrand, riding into the dirty yard behind the inn, broke like an unwelcome elder brother upon Robin philandering with this Breton Hebe. A few ragged chickens scurried away from Bertrand's horse. An ass brayed at him over the door of a byre, and a couple of pigs rooting in the offal went grunting surlily towards a dung heap.

Bertrand looked round him, saw the girl leaning on her hoe, one hand stretched out to slap the boyish face that had ventured near in quest of favors. She dropped her hoe on catching sight of the strange knight in the yard, and came forward to take his horse. An old woman appeared at the back door of the inn, and screamed peevishly at her daughter. Bertrand dismounted and let the girl tether his horse to a post in the yard.

Robin Raguene! had recognized his own shield with a start and a flush, the amorous glint gone from his eyes in a moment. His sulky face betrayed the meaner thoughts that had been working in his heart, and that he had dreaded the hour of Du Guesclin's return. He had begun to hate Bertrand because Bertrand had been a witness of his shame. He hated him for the very sacrifice he had made, his ungenerous and thin-blooded nature revolting at the thought

that Bertrand held him in his power. The debt had transformed Robin into a mean and grudging enemy. Self-pity and disgust at his own impotence had destroyed any feeling such as gratitude, and he was ready to quarrel with the man who had renounced so much to save him.

Bertrand left his horse with the girl and went towards Robin, who was digging his heels into the turf and looking as though he would have given much to escape the meeting. He made no pretence of welcome, but stood sulky and ill at ease, all the rebellious littleness of his soul puffing itself out against the man who had made him such a debtor.

Bertrand, puzzled, and suspecting nothing in the breadth and simplicity of his heart, scanned Robin's face, finding no gladness thereon, no gratitude in the eyes.

"So you have come back?"

The antagonism was instinctive in those few curt words. Bertrand's outstretched hand dropped. He looked hard at Robin, as though baffled by the lad's manner.

"We have beaten the English," he said, quietly.

"Have you?"

"Yes; not a man discovered the trick. The honor of the De Bellières stands as it stood before."

Probably it was the ring of reproach in Bertrand's voice that stung the lad through his sullen reserve. He took five sharp paces forward, and stood grimacing, and beating one foot upon the grass.

"So, Messire Bertrand du Guesclin, you flatter yourself that you have done a brave thing!"

Bertrand stared at him.

"I have saved your honor," he said, bluntly.

"Of course! of course!"

"And heard myself cursed for a coward and a traitor."

Robin swung round, and began to pad to and fro, his face dead white, his teeth working against his lips. He was mad with Bertrand, mad with himself, mad with fate for having twisted him into such a corner. It never entered his head for the moment that Bertrand had suffered, and would suffer yet more.

"You expect me to grovel at your feet, messire," he blurted.

Bertrand flushed under his bassinet.

"I have not asked for your thanks, Robin."

"No, and I tell you that I have cursed myself because, like a fool, I let you have my arms."

Bertrand's face went hard as stone. He looked at Robin, and understood of a sudden that the lad loathed him now that his honor had been saved at Mivoie. He felt himself in Bertrand's power, and had not the magnanimity to confess

that the whole tangled coil was of his own weaving. Bertrand gulped down his scorn as he realized the truth.

“Your courage comes two days late,” said Bertrand, holding his anger back.

Robin whipped round on him like a wild-cat at bay.

“Curse you! Why did you meddle with me? Curse Beaumanoir, curse Bamborough and his English! I should have fought at Mivoie if my damned horse had not fallen lame.”

Bertrand’s lips curled.

“Don’t blame the poor beast, Robin,” he said.

“Ha, you call me a liar! I tell you, messire, I never lamed my horse. It was your doubting me that cut me to the quick. And then when you had wounded me in the heart you scoffed and sneered. I tell you it was your taunts that took my strength away at Loudeac.”

He jiggled to and fro in his hysterical fury, spluttering, snapping his teeth, jerking his arms about. It was plain enough to Bertrand whence all this froth and ferment came. The lad was mad with him for what he had done and also for what he knew.

“Come,” he said, quietly, bolting up his scorn. “Come, Robin, I never thought to hear you speak like this.”

Robin still chattered like an angry ape.

“No, no; you thought I should grovel and fall at your knees, eh! Yes, you are a fine fellow, Bertrand du Guesclin, but, by God, I am not going to wallow at your feet! Give me back my armor; give me back my armor, and be damned to you! Go and tell all the duchy that Robin Raguenel played the coward.”

Bertrand looked at him as Christ might have looked at Judas. The lad’s squealing passion filled him with bitterness and disgust. It was difficult to believe that this was Tiphaine’s brother.

“Fool,” he said, speaking with a self-control that was fiercer than any clamor, “it is for those who love you that I have done this thing! What shame I bear, I bear it for their sakes, not for yours. Take back your arms. I shall suffer for them long enough.”

He took Robin’s shield, scarred and dented by the English swords at Mivoie, and threw it on its face at Robin’s feet. Then, without a word, he began to unbuckle the borrowed harness, piling it on the grass beside the shield. Robin watched him, biting his nails, the futile fury dying down in him like a fire built of straw. The scorn of Bertrand’s silence sobered him as he idled to and fro not daring to offer to help Bertrand to disarm.

The girl looked out at them inquisitively from the back door of the inn. Robin shouted to her, bidding her bring the armor that lay in his room. She drew her white face in, and returned anon with Bertrand’s shield slung about

her neck, her arms and bosom full of steel. Bertrand glanced up at her, and at the sight of his ugly face, made more grim and terrible by its pent-up passion, she dropped the armor with a clatter on the grass and, throwing down the shield, skipped away, after darting out her tongue at Robin. Bertrand had put off the last piece of young Raguene's harness. He stood up and stretched himself, and tightened the bandage about his thigh.

Robin's face had grown weak and irresolute once more. His blood had cooled, and he remembered how much he lay at Bertrand's mercy.

"You are wounded," he blurted, seizing the chance of breaking the reserve of this grim and silent man.

Bertrand picked up his hauberk, but did not look at Robin.

"Take my wallet," he said, curtly.

The lad gave him a vacant stare.

"There, on the saddle. Get the folk within to fill it."

Robin loitered a moment, but, finding that Bertrand paid no heed to him, he slunk away across the yard towards the place where Bertrand's horse was tethered. When he returned, after having the wallet filled at the inn, Bertrand stood again in his own armor, with the eagle of the Du Guesclins on his arm. He pointed Robin back towards the horse.

"Strap the bag on; get water, and a feed of corn."

"Messire Bertrand, I am not your groom."

A look persuaded him. Robin parleyed no further, but turned to feed and water Du Guesclin's horse. Bertrand came and watched him at the work, silent and unapproachable, ignoring Robin's restless glances and his jerky and almost cringing manner.

"What am I to say to them at La Bellière?"

"What you will."

Robin lifted up the bucket for the horse to drink. His eyes were half dim with tears, his mouth weak and petulant.

"Won't you help me, Messire Bertrand?"

"To keep up the lie, eh?"

Robin hung his head.

"You must know how we won the day at Mivoie, and how Sir Robin Raguene saved the honor of Brittany."

Robin winced, flushed like a girl, but stood listening while Bertrand told him all that had passed at Mivoie: who were slain, who were wounded and taken prisoners, how Tinteniac and Beaumanoir fought, and how Montauban broke the English ranks. Robin heard all without one flash of pride or gladness. Humiliation was heavy on him, and he had no joy in this Breton victory. When Bertrand had made an end, he stood with the empty bucket dangling in his hand, listless, and without will.

“Bertrand”—Du Guesclin’s foot was in the stirrup—“where—where are you going?”

The strong man drew a deep breath, but mastered himself in an instant.

“Where God wills,” he said.

He lifted himself into the saddle, setting his teeth as his wound twinged, and, turning his horse, rode out from the yard. Robin stood like one in a stupor. It was only when the eagle of the Du Guesclins flashed out to meet the sunset that he gave a shrill cry and sprang after Bertrand, holding out his hands.

“Bertrand! Bertrand!”

Du Guesclin did not turn his head. Robin ran on and caught him by the stirrup.

“Bertrand, forgive me; I will tell the truth—”

“Back, lad, back.”

“Bertrand!”

Du Guesclin clapped in the spurs, and, bending down, tore Robin’s hand from the stirrup.

“We have thrown the dice,” he said, “and the throw must count. Go back to La Bellière; the truth is safe with me.”

He cantered off, leaving Robin alone before the inn, mute and miserable as he thought of the lies he had made for his own mouth.

XXIII

AT La Bellière the Vicomte's trumpeters stood in the great court betwixt the hall and the gate-house, and set the walls and turrets ringing.

"Mivoie! Mivoie! Mivoie!" the echoes wailed. "Mivoie! Mivoie!" croaked the jackdaws that roosted in the great octagonal chimneys. "Mivoie!" cried the serving-men, as they carried the lavers and napkins into the hall. La Bellière kept festival in Robin's honor, and every scullion in the kitchen had pieces of silver in his pocket.

The Vicomte's neighbors, unlike the folk in Biblical history, had ridden in to give the old man joy of his son. There was much washing of hands in the great hall, where the basins were being carried round before the meal by the Vicomte's servants. The tables were covered with white napery, the walls hung with rich cloth and embroidered hangings, the floor strewn with fresh rushes, primroses, wind flowers, and wild violets. Robin, dressed in a surcoat of green stuff threaded through with gold and with a posy of bay leaves tucked into his girdle, sat in the place of honor at the high table. Tiphaine, in white samite worked with gold, had come down the stairway from the solar, looking joyous and splendid, with the dames and maidens following in their silks and sarcenets. There were lute-players and men with viols and citherns in the gallery. The trumpets rang out as the servants came in from the screens, bearing the dishes garnished with bays and herbs to the tables.

The Breton gentry had pressed about Robin and his father, pleasing old Stephen in the praising of his son. Robin, feeling like a thief, had made light of the whole matter, meeting almost with impatience the flattery they gave him. He was glad when Father Guillaume stood up to say grace, pattering out his Latin to the edification of few. Stephen Ragueneel stood with his hand upon Robin's shoulder. When Father Guillaume had blessed the puddings—and craved a lively appetite from heaven—the Vicomte lifted his son's shield, and showed the battered fesse of silver with all the pride of a paternal Jove.

"The grace of our Lady and the blessings of the saints be with you, kinsmen and friends," he said. "Look at this shield, and you may see how God has blessed me in sending my lad safe through such a shower of blows."

Robin, fidgeting from foot to foot, felt the eyes of all fixed upon his face. What a terror it was to fear the glances of his fellows and to imagine doubt in every heart! He passed for a modest fellow by reason of his blushes, the men liking him no less because he seemed not to relish the way the Vicomte trumpeted his valor. Robin frowned when his father called for the mazer bowl, enamelled with the arms of the De Bellières and banded with silver. Stephen

Raguenel held it in both hands and pledged Robin, and sent the mazer round the tables that the guests might drink good luck to his son. On the silver band of the mazer were engraved the words, "Keep troth," and Robin remembered them, to his cost.

The devil mocked Robin Raguenel that day, taunting him even from his father's happy face, and turning to scorn the pride in Tiphaine's eyes. "Mivoie! Mivoie! Mivoie!" screamed the trumpets in the court, till Robin sent a servant to tell the men to cease their din. Wine came to him, and he drank it, feverishly, fiercely, yet feeling his tongue dry with the lies he had poured into his father's ears. Behind him, held by a man-at-arms, shone the shield that Bertrand du Guesclin had carried.

Yeolande of Lehon, Robin's betrothed, sat next him at the high table and ate from the same plate. The girl was very proud of her man before them all, and took no pains to disguise her pride. Her very enthusiasm refined Robin's torture, for she could not hear enough of the fight at Mivoie, and pestered the lad till he could have cursed her to her face. "How many men had he killed?" "Who were the bravest among the Bretons?" "Who were knighted?" "Would the Sieur de Beaumanoir die of his wounds?" Robin, half mad with inward terror and vexation, described twenty things he had never seen, and tangled his wits in a veritable web of fiction.

The great "ship" was rolling along the table on its gilt wheels, laden with sweetmeats and spices, when Sir Raoul de Resay, a kinsman of Robin's, leaned forward across Yeolande's bosom, and touched Robin's arm with the silver handle of his knife.

"Messire, a word with you," he said.

Robin turned to him, ready to be accused at any moment of being a liar and a coward.

"Is it true what they are saying of Bertrand du Guesclin?"

"True! What are they saying, messire?"

Robin was as red as the wine in his cup.

"Why, that Bertrand played the coward and never came to Mivoie."

Raoul de Resay's eyes marked Robin's flushed cheeks and the tremulous movement of his lips. He misread the meaning of the lad's hot color, thinking that it was the badge royal of a generous heart.

"No, by God, Raoul, Bertrand du Guesclin did not play the coward! His horse fell lame near Loudeac. I left him in the woods there, and have not seen him since."

Yeolande of Lehon touched Robin's arms.

"I like to see you flush up like that," she said, "when a brother in arms is slandered."

"Slandered! Who spoke of slander, madame?" And Raoul de Resay took

the taunt to heart. "I have known cowards, but Bertrand du Guesclin is not one of them."

For three long hours Robin suffered from the good-will of his friends, and even when La Bellière was free of them, the lad still had his father to torment him with affection. Stephen Ragueneau had the ways and whims of an old man. Like a child, he was never tired of hearing the same tale retold. Robin was dragged into the solar, held at bay in the broad window-seat, and catechised tenderly till the truth itself was torn to tatters. The lad writhed inwardly under the ordeal, finding each lie the more bitter to his lips. He escaped from the old man at last, and went out into the orchard, letting his hot face cool in the wind.

It was under the apple-trees that Tiphaine found him, tossing twigs into the pool that reflected the budding bloom above. Robin had said no word to her of Bertrand's breaking of his oath. She had heard it spoken of for the first time at the high table by Raoul de Resay and others. Hot and angry, she had given the lie to young Prosper of Dinan, who had called Bertrand a coward, and had silenced those who cavilled thoughtlessly at Du Guesclin's honor.

Robin saw her through the trees and cursed her to himself, guessing that his hypocrisy was to be tested once more. Tiphaine did not see the spasm of pain that passed across her brother's face. She was troubled for Bertrand, and angry when she remembered how the spruce young squires had sat in lordly and complacent judgment on a man whom not one of them would have dared to face in arms.

"Robin, they tell me Bertrand did not fight at Mivoie."

Robin groaned in spirit, and marched out the weary troop of lies once more, watching his sister's face as she stood leaning against the trunk of an apple-tree. He saw that she was troubled, and, like the guilty coward that he was, began to wonder whether she suspected him.

"Robin, this is bad news to me."

The lad was breaking twigs from a bough above his head.

"You do not know how much this meant to Bertrand! He had prayed for such honor—prayed for it night and day."

So absorbed was she for the moment that the rush of shame into her brother's eyes passed unnoticed. Tiphaine had turned and stood looking at the pool, whose still waters reflected the apple-boughs and the burning clouds above.

Robin recovered himself and began to whistle.

"A man cannot help a lame horse," he said.

"A lame horse would not keep Bertrand from Mivoie."

Robin stopped his whistling, and appeared absorbed in watching the hovering of a hawk above the fields. The bird's wings were palpitating in the light of the setting sun. She swooped suddenly and dropped from sight below

the trees.

“Something has happened to Bertrand.”

Robin started, and pretended not to have understood her.

“Happened!”

“Yes. Bertrand would rather have died than break troth at such an hour.”

The tortures of the day seemed to culminate for Robin at that moment. He had always feared his sister in a measure, and stood half in awe of her stronger will and the unflinching candor of her eyes. Her words were innocent enough, and yet they seemed like knots of steel that wring the truth from some wretch judged to the torture.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

“Perhaps. How should I know? I have had no news of Bertrand since I left him in the woods by Loudeac.”

For the first time Tiphaine noticed the curious restlessness of her brother’s eyes.

“Robin, you are not yourself.”

He laughed and swept his hand through his hair.

“I spent too much of myself at Mivoie. I am dead tired. What can you expect?”

She looked at him keenly, knitting her brows a little, as though she had caught a falseness in his words.

“Robin, are you hiding anything from me?”

“Hiding! What should I hide?” and his eyes flashed out at her.

“How did Bertrand’s horse fall lame?”

“Stabbed in the foot by a stake.”

“And then?”

“I had to leave him. On my soul, Tiphaine, I am not a prophet. I cannot tell you what I do not know.”

They heard the Vicomte’s voice calling them from the house, and Robin, trembling like a man saved from death, clutched at the reprieve, and walked back through the orchard. Tiphaine followed him, slowly, thoughtfully, playing with her silver-sheathed poniard, her eyes fixed upon the ground. Some instinct warned her that Robin had not given her the truth, and she was troubled for Bertrand, wondering what had hindered him from keeping troth with Beaumanoir.

It was the third night after he had left Robin that Bertrand, who had eaten nothing all day, saw the flicker of a fire shining through the trees before him. The cloud of fatalism had thickened about him as the night came down over the tangled woodways of the forest. All the past had risen up before him: the

savage sorrows of his boyhood, the coming of Tiphaine the child, the tournament at Rennes. The years of rough adventure he had spent had seemed only to taunt him with failure and with bitterness. He had thought also of dead Arletta, and how the poor child had died in the autumn deeps of dark Broceliande. Brooding on the past, he had come to think that God's wrath was heavy on him, and that he was cursed, like Cain, because of his stubborn heart. He had ridden on and on, letting his horse bear him where it would, feeling neither thirst nor hunger nor the weight of his heavy harness. He had drawn out his poniard and felt the point thereof calmly, sullenly, with a balancing of the evils of life and death. He still held the knife in his hand when he sighted the fire, the flames upcurled like the petals of a great flower.

Bertrand reined in and sat motionless in the saddle, his eyes fixed upon the fire. Possibly there was something elemental in the red and restless play thereof, something that flashed comfort into Bertrand's heart. He clapped his poniard back into its sheath and rode on slowly, his jaded horse pricking up his ears and tugging at the bridle as though scenting water.

Three figures started up from about the fire as Bertrand rode out from under the shadows of the trees. He could see that they were peasants, two men and a girl, and that they were as shy and timid as hunted deer. The younger of the two men brandished a short cudgel, but there was no fight in the poor devils; the English wars had broken the spirit of the Breton poor.

Bertrand shouted to them and waved his hand, wondering at the hoarseness of his own voice.

"A friend! a friend!"

He rode up towards the fire, the light flashing on his armor and weaving giant shadows about his horse. The peasants kept their distance, dread of the mailed fist inbred in their hearts.

Bertrand showed them the eagle on his shield.

"Come, I am a Breton man; you need not run from me. I want food and a place by your fire."

They came forward grudgingly, one to hold his horse, the other to help him from the saddle. So stiff and faint was he that Bertrand staggered when he touched the earth, and sank down with a groan beside the fire.

The two men stood staring at him stupidly, and it was the girl whose instinct answered to the appeal. She knelt down by Bertrand, to find that he had fainted, his face showing gray and haggard through the mezail of his bassinet. She called to the two men, and they brought her a stone flask full of cider, and helped her to unfasten the laces of Bertrand's helmet. The girl sat down and lifted Bertrand's head into her lap. She poured some of the cider between his lips, the woman in her pitying him and taking charge of his wounded manhood. She was still bending over him when Bertrand recovered

consciousness, and he felt her hands smoothing back his hair. Rough and toil-lined as her face was, there was something soft and gentle in the eyes. Above him hung this peasant woman's face—one warm touch against the stolid darkness of the forest. And what did Bertrand do but break down and weep.

The girl held his head in her lap awhile, wonderingly and in silence, till he struggled up, and, looking round him shamefacedly, asked surlily for food. They gave him coarse bread, swine's flesh, and more cider. He ate ravenously, saying nothing, the peasants watching him, awed by a something they did not understand. Presently Bertrand pointed to his horse; the men caught his meaning, and went to unsaddle the beast and give him water. The girl had turned away, and was throwing sticks upon the fire.

Bertrand called to her when he had finished the last crust that they had given him.

"Child, come hither."

She turned and stood silent before him, while Bertrand fumbled for the purse he carried at his belt.

"Your name; tell it me."

"Marie, lording—Marie of the Marshes."

Bertrand threw her money, with a twist of the hand.

"Take it for the food; God's blessing go with it. You have done me good, child; now let me sleep."

And sleep he did, like one of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

The dawn was breaking when Bertrand woke beside the peasant's fire and heard the birds singing in the thickets. A soft haze of light filled the east, and there were mottlings of crimson above the trees. Bertrand lay still awhile, watching the gold glint of the sunrise through the crowded trunks, while the dew glittered on the green turf and the birds sang lustily. He found that the peasant folk had covered him with an old cloak, and that simple touch of sympathy went to Bertrand's heart.

The girl Marie came out of the woods singing a Breton song and carrying a bundle of sticks in her bosom. She threw them on the fire, and looked at Bertrand as he sat up and felt his wounded thigh. The night's rest had put new strength and courage into him. He was no longer the fatalist drugged with the opiate of despair. The golden splendor of the woods, the blue sky, the glistening dew gave a sparkle to life and stirred the joy of being in him.

Scrambling up, he thanked the girl for the cloak, and, looking round him, asked for his horse. Marie of the Marshes pointed to where the beast was tethered, under the shadow of a great beech. Some fifty yards away Bertrand saw a stream flashing through clumps of rushes and tufts of waving sedge. He went down to it and dashed water over his face and neck, finding his wound less painful and the muscles less stiff and sore.

As he walked back to the fire the two peasants came out of the woods with a couple of rabbits they had snared. Bertrand turned to them like an old campaigner and helped the fellows to skin the rabbits and sling an iron pot over the fire. They lost their shyness as he worked with them, for there was a frankness in Bertrand's manner that appealed to these men of the soil.

They were in the middle of the meal, seated round the fire, with the girl Marie next to Bertrand, when they heard a shout from the woods and saw a bandy-legged old fellow, very ragged and dirty, running towards them over the grass. He had a holly-wood cudgel in his hand, and was followed by a dog that looked more like a wolf, with its long snout, lean build, and bristling coat. The girl started up and kissed the old man on the mouth, a duty that Bertrand did not envy her. After bobbing his head to Bertrand, he came and sat himself down by the fire, while Marie fished a rabbit's leg out of the pot for him.

When he had gnawed away the flesh in very primitive fashion, he threw the bone to the dog and wiped his greasy beard on the back of his hand. The dog, after crunching the bone, came snuffing round Bertrand, his ears back, his tawny eyes fixed suspiciously on Du Guesclin's face.

"Ban, you devil, down! down! Pardon, lording, the dog must have his smell at strangers."

Bertrand held out his hand to the beast, snapping his fingers and looking straight in the dog's eyes. His absolute fearlessness satisfied the animal, for he gave a wag of the tail, grinned, and wrinkled up his snout, and curled himself complacently against Bertrand's legs.

"He scents a true Breton," said Du Guesclin, with a laugh. "Any news on the road, friend?"

The old man was studying Bertrand.

"Well, lording, the broom flower is in bloom, and little Kate, the ermine, is skipping and chuckling over the fight at Mivoie."

Bertrand never flinched, but looked the peasant straight in the face.

"That is old news to me, friend," he said.

The man grinned, and nodded his head mysteriously, with quaint sententiousness.

"Maybe, lording, you have not heard that the devil is loose again."

"There are many devils in Brittany, father; we are possessed like the pigs in the Bible."

"Eh, yes, but none so bad as Croquart. He has broken out of Josselin, they tell me, and is at Pontivy, with his free lances, swearing blood and burnings for Bamborough's death."

Bertrand straightened up, and took the news for its solid worth.

"I thought the Sieur de Beaumanoir had the fellow safe for a while," he said.

“Ah, no doubt, lording, but Croquart is at Pontivy, and mad as an old wolf dam that has lost her cubs.”

The sun was well up when Bertrand took leave of the peasant folk, and, learning the way from them, mounted his horse and rode off into the woods. He had given the girl Marie a kiss before going, feeling grateful to her, even though she had seen him weep. New courage stirred in his heart, and his eyes were keen as he rode under the great trees, thinking of what the old man had told him concerning Croquart. A curious smile hovered about his mouth. Presently he dismounted, tethered his horse, knelt down on the grass, and prayed.

When he had ended his praying he took his shield upon his knees, and, drawing his poniard, began to batter at it with the hilt. The blows rang out through the silence of the woods till the eagle of the Du Guesclins was beaten from the shield.

XXIV

THE sun was setting at La Bellière when a couple of men-at-arms wearing the Sieur de Tinteniach's badge upon their sleeves came cantering along the road from Dinan. They wound through the poplar-trees and the beech thickets, flashing back the sunlight from their harness and raising a slight haze of dust that was turned to gold by the glow from the west. Riding up to the bridge, they hailed the porter who was closing the great gate and asked whether Sir Robin Ragueneel had returned from Mivoie.

"For," quoth the bulkier of the twain, "we are the Sieur de Tinteniach's men, who has sent us jogging all the way from Montcontour with the news that he will try your master's wine to-morrow."

And so the Vicomte's porter put back the gate for them, and Tinteniach's men smelt the savory scent of the La Bellière kitchens. Nor was the news long in reaching the great salon where Tiphaine and her father were playing chess, with Robin reading at the window. The lad went white when he heard the news and slunk out into the garden, sick at heart.

Heaven curse Tinteniach! What possessed him to come to La Bellière! Robin marched up and down under the apple-trees, biting his nails and smoothing his weak, round chin with the palm of his hand. The incubus of dread and remorse had grown heavier for him day by day he had lost both flesh and color, though a restless and feverish cheerfulness simulated the hectic confidence of a man who refuses to believe that death has him by the throat. And now the Sieur de Tinteniach was coming to La Bellière, and the lad's guilty conscience fluttered like a girl in terror of a ghost.

At supper Robin saw the two men-at-arms seated among his father's servants. They stared at him in all innocence, even as men stare at a fellow-mortal who has been blessed with the attributes of a hero. But to Robin, scared and suspicious, and ready to tread upon a snake in every corner, their interest in him suggested thoughts more sinister. Had Bertrand betrayed him, or had Beaumanoir and his lords discovered how the fesse of silver had played a double part? Robin sat in spiritual torment all through the meal, watching Tinteniach's men much as a rabbit in the grass watches a falcon hovering for a swoop. When it happened that the fellows whispered together, he created their words out of the terror of his heart, and figured them out into ignominy and shame. Stephen Ragueneel could make nothing of his son that night, and Tiphaine, who had watched Robin jealously for many days, set the news of Tinteniach's coming beside her brother's moody face. The lad's look troubled her, and she was filled with a vague dread of something she could not yet

foreshadow.

Robin went to his bed in the room beside the chapel, but not to sleep. The darkness and the silence of the night intensified the misery of his moral loneliness and held him yet more at the mercy of his conscience. Toss and turn as he would, he could not escape from the conviction that his cowardice had been discovered and that the *Sieur de Tinteniach* was coming, like some stern *St. Michael*, to smite and to condemn. Even as a man upon the mountains may see the image of his own body magnified and distorted by the mist, so the lad's conscious guilt took fright at its own fear. He sat shivering in bed, his teeth chattering, his face white with the moonlight that poured into the room. Alone, in the silence of the night, he was like a frightened child, who yearns for a mother's warm arms and words of comfort.

It was past midnight when *Tiphaine* was awakened by hearing some one knocking at her door. She sat up in bed and listened, the moonlight falling across the coverlet and touching her white arms and bosom.

Again she heard a hand knocking on the carved panels of the door.

"Who's there?"

Since no voice answered her, she slipped out of bed, and, throwing a long cloak about her, opened the door and looked out into the passage. Leaning against the wall, with its hands over its face, *Tiphaine* saw a dim and shrinking figure, the figure of her brother.

"Robin!"

She stood with one hand on the door, looking at Robin, a strained wonder on her face.

"Robin, what is it?—are you ill?"

She heard him groan as though in pain.

"*Tiphaine*, my God, what shall I do? It is all a lie—a miserable lie!"

She leaned forward, seized Robin's hands, drew them down, and looked into his face.

"You have lied to us?"

"Yes—"

"Of what?"

"I never fought at *Mivoie*; I was afraid; *Bertrand* took my arms."

Tiphaine dropped his hands and started back from him, a look—almost of fierceness—on her face.

"Robin, is this the truth?"

The misery of his silence answered her.

"What! You played the coward!—you let *Bertrand* make this sacrifice!"

Her clear voice rang along the gallery, calling echoes from the sleeping house. Robin, terrified, sprang forward and gripped her arm.

"*Tiphaine*, you will wake every one; listen to me—"

She shook him off, cold as the moonlight for the moment, the shock of her brother's shame making her hard and pitiless.

"You think that I shall help you to act this lie?"

His hands leaped out to her with futile pathos in the darkness.

"Tiphaine, I cannot bear it; Tinteniach comes to-morrow."

"Well, what then?"

"He may know everything. They will strike off my spurs, and I can never show my face in Brittany again. Tiphaine, for God's sake—help me!"

She unbent nothing to him, the pitifulness of his weakness filling her with a sense of overmastering scorn and anger.

"No, no."

"But my father!"

"And you will let Bertrand suffer?"

"He made me promise."

"Yes, and you kept the promise! My God, to think that you should be so mean!"

She leaned against the door-post, one hand at her throat, her eyes blazing even in the dim mingling of moonlight and of gloom. Robin was standing with his hands clasped about his head like a man frightened by the lightning in a storm.

"What can I do?—what can I do?"

He repeated the words again and again, hardly knowing what he said. The very reiteration of the cry seemed to anger his sister, as the prattling of a child may anger a woman who is in trouble.

"Fool, keep quiet; let me think."

Robin ceased his babbling and leaned against the wall, watching Tiphaine, his face vacuous and flaccid about the mouth. For some minutes there was silence between them, a silence that seemed spaced by the rapid beating of the man's heart.

Tiphaine stirred herself at last and stepped back over the threshold into her room.

"Go back to bed," she said, quietly.

Robin did not parley with her.

"You will help me?" he asked, with quivering mouth.

"To tell the truth, yes," and she closed the door on him and left him shivering in the dark.

It happened that morning soon after dawn that two of the brothers of the abbey of Lehon, who had gone out to work in the fields, saw a man running along the road that wound between poplar-trees towards the abbey. They stood and waited for the man to approach, struck by his strange look and the way he reeled from side to side. He came on like one half-dead with running, his

mouth open, his eyes glazed. Not at first did they recognize his face, so drawn and distorted was it with suffering and despair.

“The abbey?—the abbey?”

He stood panting, waving his hand vaguely down the road, his knees giving under him so that he rocked like a young tree in a wind.

“By the love of Our Lady, it is Messire Robin!”

They moved towards him, thinking him mad, but the man dodged them and ran on down the road. The two brothers stood looking after him, wondering what ill news was in the wind that the young lord of La Bellière ran half naked along the highway to Lehon.

Master Stephen, the abbot, knelt at his prayers in the parlor when the brother who served as porter came to him with a grave face and told how Messire Robin Ragueneil had run half naked into the abbey church and was lying like one dead before the altar. Master Stephen, who was a man of substance and circumspection, dismissed the brother and went alone into the church. On the altar steps he found Robin lying, weeping like a child, his face hidden in his arms.

“Messire Robin! Messire Robin!”

A pitiful face met the abbot’s astonished eyes. It was sharp and sallow, like the face of a man who had come through some great sickness. Before he could prevent him the lad had clasped Stephen by the knees.

“Father, take me in, I will take the vows, I—”

He sank down in a dead faint, his hands still clutching the hem of the old man’s robe. Some of the brothers who were in the cloisters came when the abbot called them. Together they lifted Robin up, and, wondering, carried him from the church.

XXV

AT Pontivy, Croquart the Fleming had established himself in the best hostel the town could boast, his free lances and adventurers swarming in the streets and quartering themselves at will on the townsfolk, who dared not grumble. Half the mercenaries in Brittany seemed to have poured into the place, drawn thither by the high pay Croquart offered. The Fleming had sworn to avenge the fight at Mivoie, boasting that he would wipe out Breton treachery with the spoil of Breton towns. He had offered a hundred gold-pieces to any man who would bring William de Montauban to him alive, threatening to strangle the esquire and set up his head over one of the gates of Pontivy.

To the townsfolk it might well appear that the Sieur de Beaumanoir had only wounded and not scotched the devil, and made him madder than of yore. Bamborough of Ploermel was dead, and the rabble of English, Gascons, and Flemings were not likely to abide by the shadowy oaths that Bamborough had sworn before the fight at Mivoie. All the sweat and strife of the struggle at the Oak had not bettered the prospects of the Breton poor. The Sieur de Beaumanoir was still at Josselin, wroth at the thought that Breton blood had been spilled for nothing, knowing too well that they of the Blois party were not strong enough to drive Montfort's English into the sea.

Pontivy was at Croquart's mercy, a truth that the townsfolk took bitterly to heart. The little place was like a sponge in the Fleming's hand; he could squeeze what he would from it, till every hole and purse were dry. And the mercy of a captain of free lances meant also the mercy of his men, and what such mercy meant a hundred towns in France learned to their cost through those grim English wars so full of "chivalry." After the Poitiers fight the Black Prince served King John as cupbearer at Bordeaux, yet for the picturesque princeliness of that single deed there were a thousand miseries hidden from the pages of romance. A king may pick up a lady's garter at a dance, and great fame come of it, and live in the pageant of the world. Yet behind the dawn-flash of some such splendid trifle a multitude of the dead lift their white hands in the night of the unknown. The blood of the common folk sinks down into the earth they tilled, but the froth from a prince's wine-cup clings to the lips of men.

It was late one April day when Bertrand rode towards Pontivy, meeting many who had turned their backs on the place rather than live at Croquart's mercy. The gates were well guarded, for the Fleming was no fool, and knew that he was as well hated as any man in Brittany. Bertrand, who rode as a common free-lance, and looked the part, with his rusty harness and battered

shield, was suffered to pass with a few questions, and directed to the hostel where Croquart's captains were enlisting men. Bertrand, knowing Pontivy well, made his way up a narrow street to the house of a merchant named Pierre Gomon, but found the gate barred and all the windows closely shuttered.

After thundering at the door awhile, he heard the sound of footsteps in the passage and the harsh grating of the rusty grill. A face showed behind the iron-work, peering at him suspiciously, for it was growing dark, and the narrow street caught but little light.

"Who's there? What may you want?"

Bertrand asked for Pierre Gomon, and discovered that it was Pierre Gomon himself who looked at him through the iron lattice.

"Hello, sir, have you a quiet attic for Bertrand du Guesclin?"

The voice was familiar to the merchant, but, like his neighbors, he lived in perpetual terror of Croquart's men. Anything that walked the streets with a clank of steel made the burghers of Pontivy shiver behind their bolted doors.

"I will wager, sir, that Messire Bertrand du Guesclin is not within ten miles of Pontivy."

"How, Pierre Gomon, will you tell me I am not myself? Come, I am here on my own errand, and heed a quiet hole to sleep in. Here is my hand, with the ring I had from you two years ago."

He put his hand close to the grill, but Master Pierre Gomon was not to be satisfied with any such cursory inspection. He left Bertrand standing outside the gate, and, bringing a lantern, flashed the light upon the ring Du Guesclin wore.

"Yes, it is the same. And your face, messire?"

Bertrand had put his visor up.

"Ugly enough to be remembered," he said, with a laugh. "Come, Pierre Gomon, we are both Breton men. Do you think I am here in Pontivy to screw money out of you with Croquart and his rabble?"

The merchant's face betrayed ineffable relief. He unbarred the gate and let Bertrand in, shooting back the bolts again with the feverish haste of a man shutting out some wild beast.

"Pardon, messire," he said, taking the bridle of Bertrand's horse; "we are being bled to death by these English barbers. Twice that devil Croquart has sent men to me for food and money. They broke open my strongbox and half emptied my cellars. God bless the day when we of Pontivy see the last of them!"

Bertrand could have laughed at Pierre Gomon's lugubrious face had he not known what war was and what manner of wolves herded round Croquart in the town.

"Lend me one of your attics, friend," he said, "and give my horse a stall in

your stable.”

“They’ll take the beast, messire, as sure as I’m a ruined man.”

“Let well alone,” said Bertrand, unbuckling his sword.

When night had fallen, Bertrand found himself in one of Pierre Gomon’s attics, with food and a flask of wine on a table near him. The moon’s light shone full upon the dormer-window, so that he had no need of the candle the merchant had brought him. Bertrand stripped off his harness and made a meal, and then, drawing the stool up to the window, sat leaning his arms on the low sill and looking out over the little town.

From amid the jumble of roofs, sharp-peaked, like waves in a choppy sea, Bertrand could hear the shouting of the soldiery who idled in the streets. In the east a full moon was rising, a huge buckler of burnished bronze, its light glimmering on the little river that wound about the town, and making the roofs and steeples white like glass. Between two houses Bertrand could get a glimpse of the market square and of the hostel where Croquart had his quarters. The fretted windows were red with torchlight, and Bertrand could see figures moving to and fro in the rooms within. Croquart and his comrades in arms were making merry, while in the market square a crowd of soldiery drank and warmed themselves about two great fires.

Bertrand’s thoughts went back from Pontivy, lighted by the moonlight, to his home and to La Bellière by the northern sea. He was wondering whether Jeanne, his mother, had heard the news of Mivoie. How Olivier would curl his dainty mustachios, shrug those padded shoulders of his, and dismiss his brother from all creditable remembrance with a sneer! Bertrand’s thoughts turned from his own home, where they loved him little, to La Bellière and to Robin. They would know now that he had failed to keep troth at Mivoie, and he would have given much to learn whether Tiphaine believed him worthless and without honor. Unconsciously Bertrand had come to set much store on the girl’s goodwill. He judged his thoughts by the fearless purity of her face, and kept her words locked in his heart.

Bertrand heard loud shouts and a burst of laughter as a knot of half-drunken English came staggering and shouldering along the street. They were shouting a catch-cry that Croquart had given them, and singing some doggerel that had the Sieur de Beaumanoir for its victim. Bertrand leaned out and watched them pass, lusting greatly to throw the stool down on their heads.

One fellow gave a loud screech, jumped on to a comrade’s back, and began to thump him with his heels.

“Whoa ho, Dobbin! to Josselin we go,
To hang the marshal and his Bretons in a row.”

The men took up the snatch and went bawling down the street, the mock horse prancing and curvetting with the rhymester on his back. Such peace-loving people as were abroad went scuttling down alleys, and into corners like mice running from a cat. Bertrand watched the gentry disappear down a passage that led into the market square. Their drunken shouting had given him a cud to chew, for, if Croquart struck a blow at Josselin, he—Bertrand du Guesclin—might yet have a part to play.

At La Bellière the Sieur de Tinteniach sat at the window of the great solar, looking out upon the orchard-trees, whose boughs were white against the blue. He had ridden in about noon from Dinan, to find an atmosphere of tragic awe filling the house, a sadness that seemed strange when the woods and meadows blazed with the spring. Dinner had been set for him at the high table, yet to his questions the old major-domo had given short and vague replies: "The Vicomte kept his bed, and Madame Tiphaine was anxious for her father. Craving the seigneur's patience, she would speak with him in the solar when he had dined. No, Messire Robin was not at home." Tinteniach had forborne to question the old man further, for there were tears in the man's eyes, and the very servants looked like mutes, going about their work as though death were in the place. Tinteniach had finished his meal in silence, feeling the shadow of some great sorrow over the house. Stephen of Lehon had been at La Bellière that morning, and had ridden back on his white mule to the abbey, shocked at heart by what he had seen and heard.

The curtain of green cloth, embroidered with gold martlets, that covered the door leading to the Vicomte's bedchamber was swept aside by the white curve of a woman's hand and wrist. Tinteniach, drumming on the window-ledge with his fingers, turned with a start and rose to make a very stately kissing of madame's hands. Tiphaine, upon whom the brunt of the day's bitterness had fallen, looked white of face and shadowy about the eyes.

"I am glad, Sieur de Tinteniach, that you have come, for you can help me more than any man on earth."

She was looking straight into Tinteniach's eyes, liking their quiet braveness and the almost ascetic refinement of his face. He was verging on middle age, and carried himself with that simple stateliness that comes to men who have moved in high places and taken the measure of the world.

"Madame, I have been reproaching myself for burdening you at such a time. Your father is ill; yet you say that I can help you; good. I had ordered my horses out for Dinan, but if you would have me stay—"

"Stay, sire," she said; "I have such a tangle to unravel that I shall need your wisdom to help me through."

Tinteniach, grave and restrained, put a chair for her before the window and turned the shutter so as to keep the sun from shining on her face.

"You do me honor," he said; "if I can help you, show me how."

He moved back to the cushioned seat in the broad window, the sunlight shining on the richness of his dress and showing the silver in his hair. He was a man who a woman would come to when in trouble, for, of all the knights of Brittany, Tinteniach held the noblest record.

"Sire, let me tell the truth to you: my father lies half dead in the room beyond us, and my brother Robin has hid himself in the cloisters of Lehon."

She was looking steadily at Tinteniach, trying to read how much he knew, but his face was a sympathetic blank to her, devoid of subtlety or pretended innocence.

"Pardon me, madame, you seem to think me wiser than I am."

"You fought, sir, at Mivoie."

"True, and your brother Robin saved my life."

"It was not my brother, sire."

Tinteniach started.

"No, but Bertrand du Guesclin, who fought in my brother's arms."

They looked at each other in silence for a moment, each trying to shadow forth the other's thoughts. To Tinteniach there was a magnetic strength shining in the eyes of the girl before him. He felt that each word meant a stab of the heart to her, and that she suffered, though pain was hidden by her pride.

"Madame, what are you telling me?"

"Telling you the truth of this great sorrow that has come upon us. My brother Robin played the coward, God help the lad! for the shame of it has driven him to take the vows. Bertrand du Guesclin had promised me to care for the lad. He took Robin's arms and fought at Mivoie in his stead, bearing the shame to save a coward."

She confessed the truth with a strength that mingled pride with pathos. Tinteniach had risen, and stood leaning against the window-jamb, conscious of the trust she was laying upon his manhood. Her words had astonished him, yet he showed no fluster over her confession, respecting her pride too much to wound her with useless questions.

"Madame," he said, gravely, "what can I say to you but that I am here to help you—if it is possible."

Her heart went out to him for the delicate courtesy of his restraint.

"Sire, the truth must be told."

Tinteniach turned away his head.

"We are too proud, pray God, to let a brave man suffer for one we love. Bertrand has done for us what few men would ever do. I know the bitterness of the sacrifice to him, and those who would slander him shall have the truth."

Tinteniach's eyes flashed as she spoke.

"Madame, I am glad," he said, "that I stood out for Du Guesclin at the Oak of Mivoie, and you are right in telling me the truth. Both men were friends to me, and I know not how to place my pity."

"Sire, Robin is dead to us, poor lad! God has taken him; he will not see the scorn that Bertrand might have borne."

Even her great strength failed her for the moment, and she rose, turning aside, with one hand covering her face. Tinteniach, touched to the heart, remained by the window, suffering her bitterness to pass in silence. The pathos of life seemed very keen to him, held as it was in the proud walls of this noble house. He thought of Robin as he had known the lad of old, and pictured him now, cowering in the cloisters of Lehon.

"Sire, I have one more thing to ask of you."

She had mastered her weakness, and her eyes shone out on him from the determined pallor of her face.

"Take me to Beaumanoir; let there be no delay. Bertrand du Guesclin shall be cleared from shame."

Tinteniach went to her and took her hands.

"Child," he said, "you have chosen the nobler part. Would to God that I could mend this sorrow."

He kissed her hands and stood back, looking sadly into her face.

"The marshal is at Josselin," he said.

"Then, sire, I shall ride to Josselin. I shall not rest until the truth is told."

The next dawn saw them on the road, while at La Bellière an old man sat before the fire, dazed and stricken, muttering the name of his only son. And amid the aspens on the Lehon lands young Yeolande wept at the window of her room, looking towards the tall towers of the abbey, and wondering why God had stricken Robin's heart and taken his love from her to make of him a priest.

XXVI

CROQUART the Fleming had marched from Pontivy to take Josselin by surprise at the breaking of a summer dawn. The little town, with its gate-houses and spires, its high roofs and timber-capped turrets, had stood black and silent against the gold of the east when Croquart's stormers crept up to set their ladders against the walls. Unluckily for the Fleming and his men, the Sieur de Beaumanoir had been forewarned as to their coming, and their welcome that May morning came in the shape of stones, molten lead, pitch, and a rain of quarrels from the walls. They had been beaten back, to flounder, many of them, like great black cockroaches in the mud of the town ditch. And, to complete the thoroughness of the repulse, the gates of Josselin had opened wide to pour columns of armed men into the town meadows.

The cocks of Josselin were still crowing when Geoffroi Dubois and his Breton gentlemen and men-at-arms rode through and through the disordered companies of the Fleming's "horse." Many debts were waiting for dismissal on the green slopes under the walls of Josselin town. Every man who could carry a sword or bill swarmed out by the gates to strike a blow against these plunderers of Breton towns. Butchers with their cleavers, smiths with their hammers, armorers' apprentices with arms fresh from the forge followed in the track of the Sieur de Beaumanoir's columns of steel. There was no taking of prisoners that morning in the Josselin meadows. The townsmen rushed in among the disordered free-lances, stabbing the horses and bringing the men-at-arms to earth. John Hamlin, an Englishman, and the Fleming's brother in arms, was battered to death by the hammers of two smiths as he lay helpless in his heavy harness. Before the sun had topped the steeples the broken companies were streaming for the open moors, with Geoffroi Dubois and his Bretons in pursuit.

It was past noon that same day when Croquart reined in his black horse on the last sweep of moorland beneath the crests of the Loudeac woods. The Fleming wore a red surcoat covered with gold diapering, carried a fox's brush in his gilded bassinet, and was armed in harness that any great lord might have coveted. The coxcombrity of the adventurer showed itself even in the trappings of his horse, for the butcher-boy of Flanders, gay as any popinjay, had the love of a risen man for jewels, color, and the pomp of life.

Croquart stood in the stirrups and scanned the moorland under his hand. Hard galloping alone had saved him from the glitter of Dubois's spears, and, as for his own mercenaries, he had left the fellows to look after their own souls. Three solitary riders were forcing their jaded horses up the slope towards him,

the last and best mounted of his free lances, who had been able to keep sight of the black stern of Croquart's horse.

Though still young, the Fleming had the coarse and florid features of a man whose appetites had been pampered by success. Vulgar, vain, supremely cunning, with a chest like a barrel, hands and throat like an Esau's, he looked a heavy man, even on the big horse he rode. His broad, flat face mingled a snub-nosed audacity with the cheerful arrogance of sensual strength. The cheek-bones were high, the eyes small, deep set, and quick with the glint of a bird of prey. Even in defeat the man's unbounded impudence had not deserted him, and his eyes twinkled as he watched the laboring approach of the survivors of his "free company," a company that had dwindled to the ludicrous muster-roll of three.

"Hallo, sirs!" and he laughed in their faces; "Beaumanoir has made us hurry a little. Why, Tête Bois, you have the lives of a cat. Pluck up heart, man; why so white about the mouth?"

He raised himself again in the stirrups and scanned the moors for any showing of pursuit. Save for a solitary figure on horseback that had appeared like a black speck on the brow of a low hill, the moorland appeared innocent of Dubois's pursuing spears.

Croquart sat back in the saddle with a grunt of relief, and turned his eyes to the faces of his men. He had had sufficient experience of such gentry to know that he could trust their loyalty just as long as he could rely upon his purse.

"Tête Bois, my sweet scoundrel, tell me how much Beaumanoir has promised to any man who shall bring him my head. You heard of it at Pontivy, eh?"

The man looked uneasily at the Fleming. There was an ironical glint in Croquart's eyes that was disconcerting to a fellow with so sensitive a conscience.

"I never heard of the money, captain."

Croquart's lids contracted a little.

"Well, how much was it?"

"Sang de Dieu, captain—"

The Fleming laughed.

"Speak up, dear comrade. I see by your snout that you know as much as I do. Was it not five thousand crowns?"

He watched the men narrowly, yet with the cool confidence of one sure of his own strength.

"Five thousand crowns, sirs, for the head of Croquart the Fleming! Come, friend Tête Bois, five thousand crown-pieces would give you many merry months in the taverns, eh?"

The tanned war-dog looked restless, as though Croquart's raillery was too

cunning to be pleasant.

“We are your men, captain.”

“Good fellows! good fellows! You love me about as well as a whore loves a gentleman with a pocketful of gold. I shall take care, sirs, not to sleep till we unsaddle in the west. Five hundred gold pieces are easily earned by a stab in the dark, Tête Bois, eh? And, then, I am such a gay devil—my rings are worth a duke’s ransom,” and he glanced at his huge hands and then at the faces of his men.

“By St. George, captain—”

“Hallo, you are wondering how much money I have in my coffers at Morlaix. Good lads! I will remember to be generous.”

He understood the men and they him. It was a matter of money between them, a bribe that should out-bribe Beaumanoir’s bounty. Given fair play, the Fleming was more than a match for the three of them, and they knew it.

“No rat’s tricks, captain; we’ll take our oath on it.”

Croquart laid a hand significantly on his sword.

“The woods will serve us best,” he said. “We will take the forest way towards Loudeac. Dubois will not press too far into the west. After Loudeac we can take our time, for young Bamborough is at Guingamp.”

Croquart turned his head with a last backward look over the moors. The solitary rider who had topped the hill had dropped again from sight. Probably, so thought the Fleming, it was only another of his men who had escaped from the bloody Josselin meadows.

“Forward!” and he gave the word with gusto, as though he still commanded five hundred spears.

His men waited for him to lead the way.

“No, by my blood, gentlemen!” and he laughed. “Go forward. I prefer to take care of my own back.”

The popinjay is known by his gay colors, and it was Croquart’s love of gaudy trappings that betrayed him to the Breton rider whom he had seen poised for a moment on the brow of the next hill. The man had reined in his horse, craned forward in the saddle, and scanned with the keenness of a hawk the four steel-clad figures covered by the shadows of the Loudeac woods. Messire Croquart’s red surcoat, with its gold diaperings, and his gilded bassinet showed clearly against the green. It was for such a chance as this that Bertrand had played the spy at Pontivy. And for such a boon he had loitered on the moors near Josselin, coveting Dubois his battle-cry, and yet believing in his heart that Croquart would break free. The thing had happened even as Bertrand had desired it should. He was on the track of the Fleming, the taking of whose head would bless Brittany more than the fight at Mivoie had ever done.

“Brother Croquart, Brother Croquart, you think too much of the women, my friend!” and yet Bertrand forgot the fact that he himself thought each hour of the day of a pair of brown eyes and hair that changed in the sunlight from bronze to ruddy gold.

The champion of the fox’s brush rode towards Loudeac, with Bertrand on his heels, and at Loudeac the Sieur de Tinteniach’s shield hung in the guest-hall of the little abbey of St. Paul. Tinteniach and Tiphaine had ridden by Montcontour, following the same road that Bertrand and her brother had taken not a month before. They had passed the first night at Montcontour, the second at Loudeac, and at Loudeac they had heard that Croquart had escaped from Josselin and was enlisting men on the banks of the Blavet. Refugees had fled to Loudeac from Pontivy, and the little town already trembled amid its woods, dreading to hear the Fleming’s trumpets sounding a challenge at the gates.

Tinteniach’s two esquires were making the final moves in a game of chess in the guest-hall oriel, while Tiphaine and her serving-woman were dressing in their bedchamber for the day’s journey. Horses and palfreys stood saddled in the court, Tinteniach’s men and the two La Bellière servants strapping such baggage as they had on the backs of a couple of bony and ill-tempered mules. It was not known at Loudeac that Croquart had made his dash on Josselin from Pontivy, and that he and his men were scattered in flight over the Breton moors.

In the abbey garden the Sieur de Tinteniach leaned over the rail of the abbot’s fish-pond and threw pieces of bread to the fat carp that teemed in the waters of the “stew.” His pose was one of reflection, of dignity upon the pedestal of thought, as he watched a dozen silvery snouts clash together for each white morsel of bread. The high forehead and the meditative eyes, the stateliness of many stately generations, made of Tinteniach a figure of mark among the Breton nobles who followed the banner of Charles of Blois. The very hands that fed the fish were typical of the seigneur’s nature, clean, refined, sinewy, virile. His manner had that simple graciousness that makes beauty in man admirable even to his uglier fellows.

The ladies of Jean de Penthièvre’s household had long despaired of making the Sieur de Tinteniach blush for them, yet a most palpable deepening of color overspread his face that morning as the mistress of La Bellière came towards him between the herb-beds of the abbot’s garden. Thyme, marjoram, lavender, basil, rosemary, and balm crowded about the lithe lightness of her figure. As she stood before Tinteniach in her gray riding-cloak, lined with crimson silk, her hair burning in the sunlight about her face, she seemed to recall to him the troubled tenderness of a green yet stormy June, long grass weary with the rain, pools brimming with the sunset, silent trees wrapped in a mysterious glory of gold. Beauty in woman should fire all the best beauty in the soul of man. And

to such as Tinteniach, whose natural impulses towards nobleness were above mere religious and chivalric ordinances, the girl's brave charm was a mystery and a romance.

"Are the horses ready?"

"Ready, if you are not afraid of being snapped up by some of Croquart's plunderers."

"No, I am not afraid," and her eyes showed Tinteniach that she spoke the truth; "but your wounds, sire? How one's own trouble makes one selfish towards others!"

Tinteniach looked at her as though he might imagine other woundings than those he had earned at the Oak of Mivoie.

"I am myself again, though I wear half-armor. We had better take the forest road."

"As you will; I trust to you."

She began to fasten her cloak with its loops of crimson cord, her hands moving slowly, her eyes looking past Tinteniach as though he were mere mist to her for the moment. She was thinking of Robin, her brother, buried in the abbey of Lehon, and of the old man, her father, sitting alone before the fire. From La Bellière her thoughts swept over Brittany with an impatient pity for the land that suffered.

"I had hoped that Mivoie would have ended all this misery," she said.

Tinteniach was watching her as though her beauty had more meaning for him than her words.

"Montfort and Blois have the poor duchy by the horns and tail, while such a fellow as Croquart steals the milk."

She looked at him with a slight frown and an impatient lifting of the head.

"Croquart, the butcher-boy from Flanders! And you nobles of Brittany, with all your chivalry, cannot match this fellow in the field."

Tinteniach shrugged and smiled at her.

"What would you?"

"Why, were I a man—"

"Well—"

"And a Breton man—"

"Yes."

"I should not rest till I had freed Brittany from such a brute."

The seigneur spread his hands.

"But when the brute has a few hundred men behind him!—"

"Well, and no matter; Croquart is vain enough to take a challenge from a Breton noble."

Tinteniach smiled, as though any mood of hers had magic for him.

"You trouble too much about this butcher-boy," he said; "he will feel the

rope like most of his brother thieves.”

“Ah, sire, I see, your hands are too white—”

“Too white?”

“To soil themselves with such as Croquart.”

Tinteniach’s stateliness appeared unruffled by the impatience in her voice. An aristocrat, he saw no great glory in hunting down this Flemish butcher-boy, who robbed towns and fed his men on the peasants’ corn, a fellow whose head was rancid with grease and whose breath stank of the nearest tavern. He would be taken and hanged in due season by the providence of God; but as for making an adventurous romance out of Croquart’s capture, Tinteniach, with his refined breeding, was not inspired to such a quest.

“The true chivalry”—and he spoke without haughtiness—“is of the heart, not of the arm.”

“They tell me Croquart has a giant’s arm.”

“Yes, from handling the butcher’s cleaver.”

“Then, sire, a gentleman would shame himself by taking blows from Croquart’s arm?”

Tinteniach’s eyes expressed amusement at the vehemence with which she spoke. It was good to see the child, so ran his stately reflection, flame up over the wrongs of the Breton poor.

“Madame, would you have me search from Dol to Nantes in order to break a butcher-boy’s skull?”

“Are you sure you would break it, sire?”

“No”—and he laughed with a generous frankness that could not be quarrelled with—“the butcher-boy might prove himself the better man. At Mivoie he was the best champion the English had.”

Tiphaine flashed a look straight into Tinteniach’s eyes.

“Well, sire, I should honor the man who put an end to Croquart’s savagery.”

Tinteniach colored and gave her one of his most stately bows.

“Your words set a new price upon the fellow’s head.”

XXVII

THE walls of Loudeac melted away amid the green as the *Sieur de Tinteni*ac's party turned eastward along the forest-way to *Josselin*. They had taken a *Loudeac* shepherd with them as a guide, for there were many branching ways amid the woods, and it was easy to go astray amid that wilderness of oaks and beeches. *Tinteni*ac sent his two esquires forward with the three men-at-arms, the two *La Bellière* servants coming next with the mules, and *Tiphaine's* woman upon her palfrey, while *Tinteni*ac, the tall carack of the fleet, sailed beside the *Vicomte's* daughter, his shield flashing gold and gules towards the morning sun.

No healthy male is without vanity, and *Tinteni*ac, despite the serenity of his pride, had taken some of *Tiphaine's* words to heart. It was peculiar to her, this power of hers of establishing her ideals in the minds of others—foreign gods in a foreign sanctuary. A gesture, an expression of the eyes, a few movements of the lips, and her own intensity of soul poured out its inspiration upon others. She had all the passionate enthusiasm of youth, that fine fire that will not be damped by the cynicism of experience. And yet when she spoke it was without any intrusion of prejudice or self-will. Her heart force, her peerless sincerity, gave her this influence over the world about her.

*Tinteni*ac was not a man to be dictated to by the tongue of a mere girl, and yet there was something so compelling in *Tiphaine's* nature that he discovered himself questioning the aristocratic niceness of his opinions. It was her courage, her great-heartedness, that had struck *Tinteni*ac from the hour he had first spoken with her in the solar at *La Bellière*. Few women would have chosen so straight a path as *Tiphaine*. Her courage appeared to brush formalities aside. When trouble came she might have sat dazed beside her father in the great house at *La Bellière*, or hurried to *Lehon* to reproach *Robin*, or taken to her room and made sorrow selfish by refusing to be comforted. One clear thought appeared to have dominated her mind, the thought that a brave man had sacrificed himself, perhaps because she was *Robin's* sister. *Tinteni*ac envied *Bertrand* the part he had played at *Mivoie*.

They spoke of *Robin* that morning as they rode towards *Josselin* through the dewy woods. The *Sieur de Tinteni*ac would have made an admirable confessor, for he had the sympathetic self-effacement of the ideal priest, with the strength and sincerity of the soldier. *Tiphaine* found him easy to trust. He helped her with his knowledge of the world without uncovering her sense of humiliation and regret.

"A lively imagination may be a treacherous blessing," he confessed to her.

"I remember being saved from playing—from forgetting my manhood—once."

"You, sire, a coward!" and she used the word that he had avoided.

"All men are human—nerve, muscle, and blood. We build up character as our monks build a church. One loose stone in the tower arch and half the place may be in ruins."

"How did it happen?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes."

And he gave her the tale without affectation and without reserve.

Tiphaine was silent when he had ended, watching the winding woodways of the forest. She was thinking of her brother Robin, and how Tinteniach's trial compared with his. The one man had failed in the ordeal, the other risen to greater strength above the sense of his own self-shame.

"It was, then, your mother, sire?" she said, at last.

"Yes, my mother who saved me—"

"I can understand."

"That a man would be a miserable rat who would play the coward under his mother's eyes."

Tiphaine's silence showed that she was thinking.

"And Robin had no mother, sire," she said; "if I had been wiser—"

"And the lad less reticent."

"My love would have sent him like a man to Mivoie."

Tinteniach looked ahead between the dark boles of the trees.

"It is the waiting for danger that tires the courage," he said. "Like the sounds of wolves following at night, when one can see nothing."

"And the wolves?"

"May be a man's own thoughts. Most of us are brave when we plunge into peril with no time given us to think."

Had Tinteniach been able to see five furlongs through the forest, he might have put his philosophy to the test by watching the champion of the fox's brush cantering on the same road towards Loudeac. About them were the quiet glades and woodways of the forest, green with the glamour and the mystery of spring. Wind flowers fluttering white as swan's-down; wild hyacinths like the dust of lapis lazuli scattered on emerald cloth; the cuckoo flower with its lilac crosslets; primroses brilliant in the green gloom of coppice and of dell. The winding glades were paved with color and arched with tremulous foliage bathed in the sunlight. Through many a green cleft could be seen the golden splendor of the gorse in bloom, the white clouds moving over the azure of the sky.

Tinteniach and Tiphaine had loitered as they talked, and the rest of the troop, with the two esquires leading, had disappeared round the shoulder of a

beech wood, the great trunks rising out of the bronze flooring of leaves to spread into a delicate shimmer of green above. In a thicket of birches to the south of the road a cuckoo was calling, while the sunlight played on the white stems of the trees.

Tiphaine was still thinking of all that Tinteniach had told her, her eyes looking into the distance, a sad smile hovering about her mouth. The wild woods and the brown birds darting and fluttering in the brakes made her pity the poor lad who was shutting himself in Lehon against such life as this. She was roused from her reverie by the sound of men shouting on the road beyond the beech wood. Tiphaine's horse pricked up its ears. The birds, those spirits of the solemn woods, came scudding fast over the tree-tops.

Tiphaine's eyes were turned to Tinteniach's face. His fine profile, with its alert lines, showed that he had spoken of panic with the quiet smile of a man remembering a weakness long since dead.

"Listen, they are at blows yonder. Let us push forward. Hallo, what have we here?"

Round the edge of the beech wood came the two La Bellière men, whipping up their horses, with Tiphaine's woman on her palfrey between them. Hard at their heels cantered the two baggage mules, with halters dangling, a fair omen of an unquestionable rout.

Tinteniach's sword was up. He put his horse across the road, a hint that the La Bellière men seemed too scared to accept.

"Steady! steady!!"

"Fly, sire, fly—"

They were up and past, maugre the seignorial sword, Tinteniach barely escaping the indignity of being rammed by the near man's horse. To shout at them was as useless as hallooing after a rabble of frightened sheep. Tiphaine had caught a glimpse of her serving-woman's scared face as she was whirled past, clinging to the saddle with both hands. The woman had opened her lips to call to her mistress, but an inarticulate cry alone came from them. The two mules went cantering past with their packs slipping down under their bellies. In the taking of ten breaths the woods had swallowed men, woman, and beasts.

Tinteniach gave a contemptuous laugh.

"It seems that I am something of a prophet. What are we to look for next?"

He was as cool as though exchanging courtesies with a guest in the great hall of his own castle. Tiphaine saw his lips grow thin, the pupils of his eyes contract like the eyes of a hawk on the hover for a stoop. He glanced this way and that into the woods, setting his shield forward and balancing his sword.

"What do you make of it, sire?" and she matched him for composure.

"Gilles and Gilbert are fighting. Listen! They are falling back towards us. Look, who goes there?"

There was a crackling of the underwood near them, and they had a glimpse of the white face of a man pushing through the brushwood into a little glade. He seemed to see neither Tiphaine nor the knight on the great horse. And with the flash of a helmet he was gone, the green boughs closing on him like water over a diver's body.

Tinteniak bit his lip.

"A bad omen"—and he reached for Tiphaine's bridle—"that fellow of mine has taken to his heels. Perhaps he is discreet. We, too, can take cover."

He had already dragged Tiphaine's palfrey half across the road, when a man in red, riding a black horse, swerved round the beech wood into the sunlight. Three others followed him at a canter, shields forward, swords out. Tinteniak saw himself caught in the open. He wheeled briskly, covering Tiphaine with his horse.

"Keep close to me, child."

"Thanks, sire; do not risk anything for my sake."

He answered her with a look that it was impossible for her to parry.

Croquart drew rein when he saw nothing more terrible on the forest road before him than a knight and a lady without escort and without servants. The Fleming had taken the two esquires and their men for the advance-guard of a company pushing forward to help in the defence of Josselin. He had not waited to ask questions, but had charged without a parley, and, since the two poor youngsters had made a gallant stand against him, the Fleming had used his tusks in his hurry to break through.

The first thing that Croquart noticed was the gold and gules upon Tinteniak's shield; the second, Tiphaine's figure with its gray cloak lined with crimson silk, and the glitter of her hair under the boughs of the trees. Now Croquart was one of those insufferable creatures whose vanity takes fire at the first flash of a woman's gown. Ugly and illiterate rascal that he was, he had conceived a fashionable fury for the French romances, and had even taken to modelling his behavior upon that of their aristocratic heroes. A renegade is always doubly bitter against the party he has deserted; so Croquart, hating the past, aspired to be the gay and flamboyant gentleman, tender and irresistible to women. Hard and grim in the business of life, the sex feeling made a fool of him, even so much as to make him one of those fulsome fops who cannot refrain from displaying their feathers to the poorest draggle-tail be she beneath the age of fifty. His gaudy clothes would have seemed wasted but for the women, and his successes among the bourgeoisie had made him ambitious of flying for nobler game.

When Croquart recognized the Sieur de Tinteniak by his shield, and also saw the lady beside him with hair that took a sheen from the sun, he dropped his ferocity as though it had been his butcher's cleaver and assumed an air

which he believed to possess all the aristocratic gentleness of those sentimental heroes who never existed.

“Halt, sirs!”

He waved his men back with his sword and rode on at a trot towards Tinteniach and the Vicomte’s daughter. The spirit of ostentation pervaded even the salute he gave them.

“God’s grace to you, madame, and to you—sire. Am I to be honored by taking you as my prisoners?”

Tinteniach was trying to fathom the new-comer’s identity, for Croquart carried no proper device upon his shield.

“There has been no word spoken of surrender,” he said.

The Fleming bowed in the saddle.

“Then the Sieur de Tinteniach will honor me by meeting me with his sword.”

Tinteniach’s handsome face betrayed no hesitation.

“I am known to you, messire?”

“I remember your shield, sire. I saw enough of it at Mivoie to make me respect its master.”

“At Mivoie?”

“Certainly, sire.”

“And you—your name?”

The Fleming threw up the visor of his bassinet with the unction of a hero discovering himself at the dramatic moment. He looked at Tiphaine as though to watch how she received the impression of his magnificence.

“Sire, I am Croquart the Fleming.”

“Croquart! So; this is fortunate.”

Tinteniach’s face could express haughtiness with the perfect calmness of the aristocrat. Croquart had more looks for the lady than for the man. He saw her color deepen a little and a peculiar shadowiness pass across her eyes.

“No doubt, sire, you have heard of me,” and the fat hand seemed to insinuate the glitter of its rings into Tiphaine’s notice.

“The Flemish butcher-boy.”

Tinteniach’s tone had the whistle of a whip.

“Sire, William the Norman’s mother was a tanner’s daughter, and yet he became a king.”

“I said, sir, the Flemish butcher-boy.”

Croquart’s eyes gleamed for the moment like a cat’s. Tinteniach’s face roused the plebeian passion in him.

“By your grace, sire, we will see whether the Sieur de Tinteniach or the Flemish butcher-boy is the better man.”

“That, perhaps, is too great an honor.”

“An honor, sire, that my sword will compel you to confer.”

Tiphaine looked anxiously at Tinteniach. He was but half armed, because the wounds he had won at Mivoie would not yet bear the weight of heavier harness, nor would his pride suffer him to confess the disadvantage. It was Tiphaine who read his thoughts and said what Tinteniach would not say.

“Sire, you are but half armed, and Messire Croquart is in his battle harness.”

She glanced at the Fleming, and he felt the fearless influence of her eyes.

“Messire Croquart is gentleman enough to respect fair play.”

“Madame, you have read me right,” and he fell to her flattery without a question. “Hi, Tête Bois”—and he climbed out of the saddle—“take off my breastplate and my cuishes. The butcher-boy of Flanders will take no man at a disadvantage. Madame, I most reverently kiss your hands.”

Tiphaine’s heart misgave her for Tinteniach, as she watched the man Tête Bois at work upon his master under the shadows of a great beech. The Fleming’s girth of chest and limb seemed almost monstrous when compared with Tinteniach’s Grecian stateliness. The one was like a Norman pillar, massive and ponderous, giving a sense of uncrushable strength; the other like a fluted shaft of a more decorative age, its lines the lines of well-balanced beauty, its power concealed by perfection of design. The faces of the men were as vividly in contrast as their bodies. The butcher had the face of a butcher, and, as Tiphaine watched him, the very insolent superfluity of his strength made him appear as the champion of the brute world against the nobler ideals of the soul.

“Sire, shall we fight mounted or on foot?”

Tinteniach, with the courtly composure of an aristocrat, stood leaning on his sword.

“As you please.”

“On foot, then.”

“I am ready.”

They engaged each other on a broad strip of grass clear of the roots and the sweeping branches of the trees. Croquart had lived by his sword; the noble had drawn his only when the serenity of the seignorial honor was embroiled. From the first the Fleming had the upper hand. Tiphaine could see his grinning mouth, the glint of his eyes as though insolently sure of his own strength. Tinteniach never flinched from him, despite his wounds, taking Croquart’s blows with shield forward and head thrown back.

In the first minute Tinteniach was wounded in the thigh; Tiphaine could see blood on his green surcoat, but to have meddled would have been an insult that no true man would have forgiven. His own blows seemed to lack power against the Fleming’s greater bulk. He felt the wounds crack that the English

had given him at Mivoie, and he was short in the wind, like a man who has been a week in bed.

Three minutes' fighting found Croquart playing with his man. Tinteniach had not so much as flustered him. Strength and condition were all to the Fleming's honor.

"Come, sire, surrender," and he gave Tinteniach time to breathe.

The noble had faltered, more from faintness than from any failing of his courage. He saw Tiphaine watching him and read the misgiving in her eyes. The pride of such a man was very sensitive. To be beaten, and to be beaten before her, by a butcher!

"Who asks for surrender?"

"In faith, sire, not I!"

"Come, then."

And they went at it again with exuberant good-will.

An unparried blow on the right shoulder brought Tinteniach to earth at last. He struggled to his knees and tried to rise, but Croquart rolled him backward with a mere touch of the sword-point on the breast.

"Surrender, sire; I am in luck to-day."

Tinteniach, with a last effort, turned sideways and broke his sword across his knee.

"You can take the pieces, Fleming," and he dropped on his elbow, his face but a hand's-breadth from the tangled grass.

A strong man's anguish of exhaustion and defeat has some of the agony of hell in its expression, and to Tiphaine the shock of Tinteniach's dramatic overthrow was as vital as though he had been her brother. It wounded her woman's pride to see this man of the finer fibre crushed at the feet of this brute mass of insolence and strength. She was out of the saddle and facing Croquart before that gentleman had had leisure to exult.

"Messire Croquart"—and her courtesy was sublime, the most perfect weapon she could have chosen—"a Tinteniach can never surrender, a woman can. We are your prisoners."

The Fleming dropped his battle humor and made her a fat bow.

"I am at your service, madame."

"That is well spoken, sir. There are wounds to be looked to."

"Tête Bois, my saddle-bag."

The man brought it. Croquart, who, despite his undoubted courage, had a peculiar loathing for seeing his own blood flow, always carried wine, oil, and linen with him in the wars.

"Thanks, messire."

"Madame, it is a privilege to please."

Tiphaine understood the possible significance of the privilege, and hated

the fawning bully with all the energy of her distrust. He gave her the wine and linen with his own hands, making the exchange slowly, that he might touch her fingers and discover the color and temper of her eyes. The self-same eyes were brown and full of flashes of sunlight, flashes that made Croquart mutter "vixen" under his breath.

Tinteniach was still lying propped on one elbow and hanging his head like a man bleeding in pride as well as in body. That one of the first knights in Brittany should have been trampled under foot by a butcher-boy from Flanders was an indignity that needed superhuman courage to rescue it from contempt. And yet the fine fortitude of the man triumphed. He retrieved his respect by meeting Tiphaine with a smile.

"You see, child, the boaster has had his beating."

She knelt down by him, knowing how much that smile and those few words had cost him.

"It was your wounds from Mivoie."

"Perhaps," and he looked at his broken sword, "I am beaten for the moment. Wine and linen! My shoulder feels like a piece of red-hot iron. Child, listen," and he spoke in a whisper, "we are in this fellow's power."

Croquart had turned and moved away a few paces to shout orders to his men. Tiphaine was supporting Tinteniach's head and holding the wine-flask to his lips. As she bent over him he continued his whisperings in her ear, taking a drink from the wine-flask between each few words.

She colored and looked at him unwillingly, yet reading the honorable purpose in his eyes.

"I know this whelp's ways, child. You are Tiphaine de Tinteniach. Remember. It will make for your safety."

"But, sire—"

"Let Croquart think you are my wife."

"I have no ring."

"Take this."

And the exchange was made while the Fleming's back was turned, the circlet of gold slipping along the girl's finger.

Croquart had turned on them, and Tinteniach's discretion prompted him to show no temper to the Fleming. His natural serenity returned. He even smiled at Croquart as he knelt beside him.

"You have broken me, sir, and now you must help to mend me for madame, my wife—here. We had heard that you were at Pontivy."

Croquart was busy with Tiphaine uncovering Tinteniach's wounded shoulder. Gilded bassinet and golden head were nearly touching. At the word "wife," Tiphaine felt the Fleming's breath upon her cheek. She knew that he was looking at her, but she kept her eyes on Tinteniach's face.

"I was at Pontivy, sire."

"Grace de Dieu, you are everywhere. We thought the Josselin road safe to-day."

Croquart grinned, but said nothing of his defeat.

"And my two esquires, Messire Croquart?" and Tinteniach tried not to wince as the wound smarted.

"I have sent two of my men, sire, to bury them."

Tinteniach started, but restrained any show of feeling. He had caught the shocked pity in Tiphaine's eyes, and, though the poor lads were dead, he remembered for Tiphaine's sake the need for dissembling.

"Thanks, Messire Croquart," he said, vowing many solemn things in his heart.

"The lads fought well, sire. It was a pity."

"A pity, most certainly a pity. Poor Gilbert!—poor Gilles! We cannot have war, sir, without death. Madame—wife, you look troubled; leave us awhile. Messire Croquart will feel for you over these poor lads' death."

Tiphaine understood him, and, rising, moved away with her face between her hands. It was no mere piece of acting, for there were tears upon her cheeks—tears of pity and of passionate impatience that all this brutal work should be done under God's sun.

Croquart looked after her with a glint of the eyes. He noticed the fineness of her figure, despite her riding-cloak; the sweeping curves of bosom and of hips were not to be hid. He began binding up Tinteniach's wound, thinking the while that the aristocrat had excellent taste.

"Come, my friend, let us be frank. How much do you want from me?"

Their eyes met. Croquart laughed.

"Ten thousand crowns."

"What, sir?"

"For you, sire. Also ten thousand for madame."

"Twenty thousand crowns!"

The Fleming's eyes were full of cunning impudence.

"You are the Sieur de Tinteniach," he said.

"True."

"And courtesy would not permit you, sire, to value yourself more highly than madame—your wife."

Tinteniach looked at his broken sword.

"Well, friend, you will have to wait."

"Content, sire, content."

"What road do you take us?"

"The road to Morlaix, sire. I shall join young Bamborough there."

XXVIII

IN the underwood that topped a high bank overhanging the road where it swept round the beech wood a man in black harness crouched behind the twisting roots and stems of a clump of hazels. The black shell of steel was almost indistinguishable in the shadows. Snakelike it had crawled through a bank of gorse and reached the hazels overhanging the road.

Bertrand, with his sword naked at his side, had lifted his head cautiously and looked down into the road through a loop left by the twisting roots. The first glance had shown him Tiphaine seated on her palfrey under the trees, watching Tinteniach weakening before the Fleming's sword. Bertrand was not a man easily astonished, but his heart gave a great leap in him as he saw the Lady of the Aspen Tower with the sunlight shining through the branches on her face. Bertrand's thoughts were in a tangle for the moment. The Sieur de Tinteniach fighting with Croquart the Fleming, and the Vicomte de Belliere's daughter waiting to be claimed as the better man's prize! Bertrand felt dazed for the moment by the utter unexpectedness of the scene before him. The whole tone of the adventure had changed on the instant. Had a miracle been performed before him the man amid the grass and hazels, with bluebells nodding about his body, could not have been more struck than by this strange interweaving of the threads of fate.

When Tinteniach fell, Bertrand was on his knees, teeth set, sword ready, on the brink of a battle with the Fleming. The three men-at-arms watching the fight had not seen the black figure poised amid the hazel boughs. It hung there a moment as though hesitating, and then dropped back again into the grass and leaves.

Tiphaine was facing Croquart, while Tinteniach grovelled on his elbow, and this new grouping of the characters had sent Bertrand back to cover. He lay like a fallen bough, almost invisible, his body sunk in the dead leaves and the grass tussocks, hearing Tiphaine speak, yet unable to catch her words. Her face, clear before him in the sunlight, had that look that was peculiar to her when her courage was in arms. She was speaking for Tinteniach, and Bertrand watched her, noting the play of feeling on her face with the intentness of a man who watches the face of one he loves. It hurt him to see her speaking for Tinteniach, so sensitive is the strongest heart when a woman's eyes have power to wound or heal. The old blind feeling of bitterness that had been bred in him at Motte Broon rushed up to tantalize him with the imagined meaning his instinct set upon the scene.

Croquart gave her the wine-flask and the linen, and she knelt beside

Tinteniach, one arm about his shoulders, her face very close to his. Bertrand winced, drove one knee into the grass, and yet cursed himself for a credulous fool. Would any woman stand by and see a wounded man bleed to death, and would that woman be Tiphaine of La Bellière?

Croquant had moved away, and was shouting orders to his men. Bertrand heard them, though his eyes never left Tinteniach, with his head upon Tiphaine's knee. They seemed to be speaking together in low tones, and watching the broad back the Fleming had turned to them for the moment. Bertrand saw their hands touch, and looks that were alive with a subtle significance pass between them. Bertrand would have given all he had to have heard the words they had spoken.

The little picture was broken at last, though it seemed to the man among the hazels that Tinteniach had had hours at his disposal. They were binding up the wounded shoulder, and there was blood, Tinteniach's blood, on Tiphaine's hands. With some trick of the memory the sight of it brought back to Bertrand the vision of Arletta dying with red hands in that dark tower amid the beeches of Broceliande. It was as though God's voice had called to him—a still, small voice amid the silence of the mysterious woods. The perfervid selfishness went out of him like the lust out of the man who remembers the womanhood of his mother.

Bertrand's hands gripped the blade of his sword as he lay with it crosswise under his throat. He saw Tiphaine rise, draw aside, her face hidden by her hands. Bertrand felt numb at the sight of it, yet very humble. If she wept for Tinteniach, then Tinteniach was of all men the most to be honored. Honored? And Bertrand's face burned with the hot memories of many unclean years—years when he had bartered his manhood for harlots' kisses.

He drew back slowly from under the hazels, and, crawling through the gorse and underwood, reached the place where he had left his horse. A dead tree lay there that had fallen in a winter gale, and Bertrand sat down on the trunk with his drawn sword across his knees. He was humbled, but the struggle was not over with him yet. His heart was still full of the bitterness of the man who covets what he imagines another man to possess.

Bertrand sat on his tree-trunk with the sword across his knees and stared at his horse, that was trying to crop the grass, though the bridle was hitched over the bough of a tree. The oak bough would not bend, nor would the grass spring up to the hungry beast's muzzle. Bertrand, with a wry twist of the mouth, saw that he and his horse were the victims of a somewhat similar dilemma.

Jealousy is the great distorter of justice, and Bertrand had the devil at his elbow for fully ten minutes on the trunk of the dead tree. The imp shouted every imaginable grievance in his ear, exaggerating possibilities into facts and creating reality from conjecture. Had not he, Bertrand du Guesclin, sacrificed

himself for Robin Raguenel's sake, and accepted shame to save a coward? If Tiphaine was so tender for Tinteniach's sake, then, by God, let Tinteniach look to the guarding of his own petticoats!

But that great advocate whose irony slashes to shreds the special pleading of the meaner spirit, the sense of chivalry, that great chastener of manhood, took up the argument in Bertrand's cause. All ethical struggles are fierce in powerful natures, fierce in their climax, but sure in their decision. Bertrand's honesty was not to be cajoled. He sat in judgment on himself, the self-asking of a few pitiless questions baring that sincerity that makes true strength.

When he carried Robin's arms at Mivoie, had he not hoped that some day Tiphaine might know what he had done?

Had Tiphaine ever given him the promise of any deeper thing than friendship?

Whose past was the cleaner, the Sieur de Tinteniach's or his own?

Bertrand knotted his brows over these accusations, and confessed that the spirit of justice had him at its mercy.

He rose, stood irresolute a moment, and then moved towards his horse. The imp of jealousy made a last leap for his shoulders. Bertrand shook them, and was a free man, breathing in new inspiration for the days to come.

Now Croquart had ordered two men-at-arms to go and cover the bodies of Tinteniach's esquires, who lay dead together in the middle of the forest road. Bertrand was no hot-headed fool. He knew enough of the Fleming and his men to realize that a mere free lance such as he seemed would be treated to no such courtesy as had been given to Tinteniach. He was worth no ransom. If worsted, the point of a spear or the edge of a sword would give him his quittance in the Loudeac woods.

Bertrand knew, also, that he would have no chance with Croquart and his three men, one against four, and that Croquart would not trouble to engage him singly as he had engaged Tinteniach. For one moment Bertrand thought of returning towards Josselin, in the hope of meeting some of Dubois's men. But the plan did not please him. He had marked down Croquart as his own stag.

Unhitching his bridle from the bough of the tree, he took his spear, that rested against the trunk, and, making a *détour* through the woods, bore towards the place where the two esquires lay dead.

Croquart, meanwhile, was preparing to resume his march on Loudeac. He had dressed and bound Tinteniach's wounds, and lifted that gentleman back to the saddle.

"I take your word, sire, as a knight—and a Breton."

"Be easy, friend, I have not enough blood in me to give you trouble."

Croquart turned to hold Tiphaine's stirrup. She had ceased her anger of weeping, and her face had the white sternness of one whose courage has

cooled from the heat of passion. Croquart's smile was as powerless as a feeble sun upon the winter of her face. She mounted, took the bridle, and looked into the distance to avoid meeting the Fleming's eyes.

Croquart and Tête Bois got to horse. The two men who were covering the dead bodies with sods and leaves were to follow the Fleming as soon as their work was done. Croquart placed himself between Tiphaine and Tinteniach. He had rearmed himself in all his heavy harness. No more courtesies were to be expected from him that day.

They had hardly gone a hundred yards when a cry came stealing through the silence of the woods. It held a moment, quivered, to end in a last up-leap like the last flash of a gutted candle. Croquart reined in and set his hand upon his sword. His face, ugly in repose, grew doubly sinister as he glanced back under the boughs of the trees.

A single man-at-arms came cantering over the grass, crouching in the saddle and looking back nervously over his shoulder. Croquart swore at him as he pulled up his horse.

"Hallo, cur!—where is Guymon?"

The man straightened in the saddle and pointed towards Josselin.

"A fellow ran at us out of the woods, struck down Guymon with his spear —"

"And you used the spurs."

The man agreed, as though Croquart's anger was preferable to the stranger's spear.

"Well, what next?"

"The man turned back into the woods, captain."

"What! He did not follow you?"

"No."

"How was he armed?"

"Rusty harness that had been oiled and looked black."

"And both of you ran away—he from you, and you from him."

"Yes, captain."

Croquart laughed, and turned again towards Loudeac.

"You must have looked fiercer than you are, fool, or else your brother coward has stopped behind to take the dead men's rings."

The free lance accepted the explanation. As a matter of fact, he had taken the dead men's rings himself, but he did not trouble to tell Croquart so.

XXIX

THE thrushes were singing on the glimmering spires of the oaks as the crimson banner of the sunset waved to pale gold. In the deepening azure of the east the moon had lost the filmy thinness of a cloud and stood out in splendor over the black hills and the valleys faint with mist. Night came, and with it the bent figures of Croquart's men, gathering sticks and kicking leaves together to make a fire.

The very brilliance of the night made the woods cold, and Tinteniach, stiff with his wounds, sat propped against a tree, trying to pretend that he was neither in pain nor cold. Tiphaine stood near him, her eyes seeming to catch the melancholy of the dying afterglow.

Croquart turned his hands everywhere to help his men. Whistling, as he might have whistled as a boy when splitting carcasses in Flanders, he looked to the horses, cut down underwood, the fresh, green foam of the woods in spring, and built a screen between the trunks of two great oaks. A horse-cloth stretched across two poles gave some sort of shelter. Business was brisk and money forthcoming, despite the rout at Josselin and the loss of all his baggage. A ransom of twenty thousand crowns was not to be counted on every day of the week, and with the Sieur de Tinteniach as a hostage he could bargain with Beaumanoir should the marshal be discourteous enough to continue offering bribes for his head.

Croquart plunged down the slope of the hill where he had chosen ground for the night, to reappear with a bundle of freshly cut broom, which he tossed down under cover of the screen of boughs. His men's cloaks were purloined to cover the litter; the fellows could go damp when a Tinteniach was to be kept dry. Tête Bois had already persuaded the fire to blaze, and Croquart turned to his prisoners with a smile that suggested supper.

"A bed, sire, for you and for madame."

They saw, and avoided each other's eyes. Croquart, officious in his courtesies, picked up Tinteniach and laid him on the pile of broom, with a saddle on which he might rest his shoulders.

"Room for two, sire," and he looked at Tiphaine as though it would have pleased him to lift her as he had lifted Tinteniach. Her immobility discouraged him, and the dusk covered the color on her face. She was watching the flames leap up through the crackling wood, and thinking of poor Gilbert and poor Gilles, left to be spoiled of their rings in the lonely Loudeac woods. Only that morning she had seen their two heads, tawny and black, bowed over the chess-board as they made, little knowing it, the last moves in the game of life.

Croquart had killed them, yet stood there offering her the impertinences of his butcher's tongue. The two lads might have been two sparrows caught in a trap and left with their necks wrung, for all the reflection the deed caused the Fleming.

She went and sat with Tinteniach on the bed Croquart had made for them. Her mock husband felt the unwillingness of her nearness to him, an antagonism, that he would have found in few ladies of the court.

"I remember we have a part to play," she said, when the Fleming had moved away some paces.

"You trust me, child?"

"Yes, at all times. Yet to lie to this fellow makes me despise myself. I cannot forget the Breton blood he has upon his hands."

"We shall remember it," and his eyes grew alive with the firelight. "Mother of God, does a Tinteniach forget such things!"

Supper came, with Croquart ready to serve as their esquire. The man Tête Bois had been sent into a hamlet to the north of Loudeac, with orders to get food, wine, a horse-cloth, flint, steel and tinder, and an iron pot. A boiled chicken, eggs, brown bread, and a flask of cider had resulted from Tête Bois's marketing. Hunger is a great leveller of prides and prejudices, yet Croquart, ravenous as he was, set his reputation for gallantry before the cravings of his stomach, and carved the chicken and broke the bread.

On a square manchet the white slices of the bird's breast were proffered to the lady. Tiphaine saw the two great hands loaded with rings. She thought of the dead esquires, and the food disgusted her, given by those butcher's hands.

"Madame will eat?"

She took the bread and meat as though they smelled of blood. Tinteniach, less sensitive, and a veteran in the art of concealing his feelings, drew his knife and betrayed no disgust.

"Keep the fool in a good temper," ran his counsel to Tiphaine in a whisper.

"Must I eat this food?"

"Yes, though it choke you."

Croquart watched her, as though his cunning had uncovered her pride. He came to her with the wine-flask, saw her touch it with her lips and hardly taste the wine. Tinteniach was less scrupulous. Croquart's turn came next. He took a long pull, wiped the mouth on a corner of his surcoat, and smiled a smile that made his small eyes glitter.

"Madame, more wine?"

"Thanks to you, sir, no."

He saw the repugnance on her face, as though the slime of some unclean reptile could not have made the flask more nauseous to her lips.

"Madame will not drink after me?"

"I am not thirsty."

"And you do not eat? Well, as you will," and he treated her as though she were a sulky child. "Sire, I drink to you, the champion of Mivoie."

Tinteniach laughed.

"Women never know what is pleasant," he said.

Croquart sprawled beside the fire.

"The battle makes men friends," and he sucked at the flask till the wine dribbled down his chin.

"I remember, sire, when the Countess de Montfort gave me her own cup after the first taking of Roche d'Errien."

"Ah, yes."

"A great lady, sire, who can set courage before birth. I had this ring from her," and he held a hand up in the light of the fire.

Tinteniach humored him.

"Rubies! I have no such stones in my strong-box."

"Ah, sire, Jeanne de Montfort knows the value of a brave man when she is served by him. What say you, madame?"

Tiphaïne swept the crumbs from her lap with a quick gesture of the hand.

"No doubt the Countess had need of you," she said.

Croquart's watch-fire was the red eye of the night to Bertrand, the black shadow on the black horse stealing through the greenwood on the Fleming's heels. Bertrand saw the flames waving through the trees as he sat amid the crooked roots of a great oak, cutting slices from a loaf of bread he had bought on the road, his bassinet full of brackish water that he had drawn from a woodland pool. Bertrand was not a sentimentalist, and he broke his dry bread in the dusk as though hungry from a sense of duty, knowing that Croquart was not the man to starve on the march, and that a full stomach makes a better soldier than a head stuffed full of Southern songs. Bertrand carried an amusing matter-of-factness into the current of his adventures. It was not that he did not feel or suffer, but rather the obstinacy of his strength that insisted on coolness and lack of flurry. Thoroughness was a passion with him, even to the masticating of a loaf of bread.

When the dusk had deepened into the white mystery of a moonlit night, Bertrand braced on his bassinet, saw that his horse was securely tethered, and began his advance on Croquart's fire. Slipping from trunk to trunk and bush to bush, he made a mere moving shadow amid the trees. Croquart had chosen his ground on the slope of a low hill, a ridge of forest hiding the fire from the main track running to Loudeac town. Bertrand, by crawling along the farther slope of the knoll, got within twenty yards of the fire, and lay where a tree threw a black patch on the grass like a piece of ebony set in silver.

The figures were easily distinguishable to Bertrand. Tiphaïne, head held

high, lids drooping, the whiteness of her throat rising out of the crimson stuffs beneath. Tinteniach, propped against a saddle, his handsome face looking thin and tired, his eyes restless like the eyes of a man in pain. Croquart, a burly patch of angry red, bassinet off, tanned throat showing, a wine-flask in one hand, a charred stake in the other for stirring the fire. The two men-at-arms stretched half asleep on the far side of the flames.

The setting of the picture gave Bertrand the chance of testing the sincerity of his renunciation. He saw the rough bed, the canopy, the screen of boughs; Tiphaine close to Tinteniach, a space between them and the Fleming, as though the two were one by courtesy and by desire. Bertrand gnawed at his lips, despite the sternness of his self-repression. The group seemed typical of his own luck in life. Tiphaine and the Sieur de Tinteniach shared the fire, while he, as ever, lurked in the dark, alone.

"I would say, sire, without making a boast of it, that I have found none of your Breton men a match for me in arms."

Bertrand heard the words as a man who is half asleep hears a voice that wakes him in the morning. Croquart had been telling a few of his adventures, poking the fire with his stick and brandishing it like the baton of a master musician marshalling the lutanists and flute-players at a feast. The vanity of the Fleming was so inevitable a characteristic that one was no more surprised by it than by seeing a toad spit. Innocent egoism may be a delicate perfume, an essence that adds to the charm of the individual, admirably so in women when they are deserving of desire. But with Croquart his intemperate arrogance was a veritable stench, an effluvium of the flesh, a carrion conceit that nauseated and repelled.

To Bertrand, Tiphaine's face seemed tilted antagonistically towards the moon. Her throat lengthened, her lids drooped more over her eyes. She looked impatient over the bellows of this bull. Tinteniach leaned on his elbow and watched the fire. His contempt, deep as it was, found no expression on his face.

"You cut a notch on your spear," he said, "for every gentleman you have beaten in arms."

Croquart prodded the embers with his stick.

"I have cut twenty notches, sire, already."

"You will have no wood left to your spear soon, eh?"

"Room for more yet," and he laughed. "I will tell you the names: Sir John de Montigny, Sir Aymery de la Barre, Geoffroi Dubois, Sir Gringoir of Angers, Lord Thomas Allison, whom I challenged at Brest—" And he ran on, mouthing the syllables with the air of a gourmet recalling the dishes at some great feast.

Tiphaine drew her cloak about her as though she felt the cold.

“And to-day, sir, you have cut another notch,” she said.

“Ah, madame, it shall be one of the deepest, I assure you.”

Tinteniak was able to laugh.

“You flatter me, Fleming. We shared the fame at Mivoie.”

“Sire, madame your wife would break my spear at this last notch if she could.”

His eyes challenged Tiphaine, and she did not deny him.

To the man lying in the shadow of the tree these words came like the blows of a passing bell. It seemed to him that he had heard all now that he could ever know, and that the silver swan of Rennes would be but a memory and a lost desire. He lay very still in the wet grass, looking at Tiphaine with a dull aching of the heart, as a man might look at a lost love who has risen to trouble him beyond the waters of the river of death.

XXX

CROQUART yawned behind his arm. He rose, threw a bundle of sticks upon the fire, and called Tête Bois aside towards the horses. The free lance was a little bowlegged, brown-faced Gascon, very tough and wiry, with eyes like a hawk's and a sharp nose and beard.

"Hello! can you keep awake to-night?" and Croquart shook him by the shoulder. "We are in the way of earning a lapful of crowns. I will give you a thousand crowns if we bring the Sieur de Tinteniach to Morlaix."

Tête Bois's eyes lost their sleepiness and twinkled like the eyes of a rat.

"A thousand crowns, captain?"

"I say it again. Take this ring as a pledge. No tricks, or I shall pay you in other coin."

"Trust me," and he took the ring; "you can go to sleep in peace. Madame and her gentleman are safe by the fire. Go to sleep, captain," and he assumed the responsibility with an alert swagger.

"No tricks, little one."

"A thousand crowns, captain!" and his eyes twinkled. "Curse me, I love you."

Bertrand saw the Fleming turn back towards the fire, where Tiphaine was helping Tinteniach to wrap himself in his cloak for the night. Bertrand buried his face in the grass, as though unable to watch them at such an hour as this. Tiphaine, upon her bed of golden broom, had a sacredness for him, even though she slept at another man's side. She was pure, irreproachable, herself still, and no carnal thoughts made his happier memories bleed.

When Bertrand lifted his face again from the grass, Tinteniach, muffled in his cloak, lay full length upon the bed of broom; while Tiphaine, leaning against the screen of boughs, had unloosed her hair and was combing it with a little silver comb. Croquart, a mass of dusky red, sprawled by the fire, his naked sword under his arm and his shield propped against the saddle under his head. Tête Bois's short and bow-legged figure went to and fro with a shimmer of steel, his shadowy face and the polished back of his bassinet turned alternately towards Bertrand as he kept his guard.

Bertrand, forgetting Croquart and the sentinel, watched Tiphaine as she combed her hair. Her cloak, turned back a little, drew with its crimson lining rivers of color from the whiteness of her throat. Tossed by the comb, her hair glimmered in the firelight, rich whorls of mystery moving about her face. To Bertrand her eyes seemed to look far into the night, but what her thoughts were he could not tell.

He saw her put her comb away at last, turn and look at Tinteniach, who seemed ready to forget his wounds in sleep. She stretched a hand towards him, slowly, tentatively, but drew back sharply as Croquart found his bed uncharitable and shifted his body with much heaving of the shoulders. Tête Bois's keen profile showed against the firelight, mustachios upturned, nose beaking out from under the rim of his open bassinet.

"Madame had better sleep. We travel early."

The fellow had seen her stretch out her hand towards Tinteniach, and the words warned her that the Gascon was not to be cajoled. His strut was independent and alert as he turned his back on her abruptly and resumed his marching to and fro.

Tiphaine lay down on the bed, so that, though her face was hidden from Bertrand, he could see the glitter of her hair. There was the length of a sword between her and Tinteniach, three feet of flowering broom between the green cloak and the gray. Bertrand in his heart thanked God that he could see her so, separate, untouched under the moon. He could not have looked at Tiphaine if she had lain wrapped in Tinteniach's arms. Twice he saw her lift her head and look at Croquart and the rest. An hour passed before weariness seemed to overpower distrust, and her stillness showed him that she was asleep.

Tête Bois, tired of pacing to and fro, had come to a halt some ten paces from the fire, and now leaned heavily upon his spear. The Gascon was amusing himself by calculating how far a thousand crowns would go to making him the master of a troop of horse. The pieces kept up a fantastic dance before his eyes. He handled them lovingly in anticipation, letting them slip through his fingers in glittering showers, pouring them upon a table and listening to the joyous clangor of the metal. The moon was but a great crown-piece so far as Tête Bois was concerned. He took off the ring Croquart had given him as a pledge, and held it out towards the fire to watch the flashing of the stones.

Unfortunately for Tête Bois, greed dulled the keenness of his senses, and he neither saw nor heard the stealthy and sinuous moving of a black shape across the moonlit grass. The Gascon might have swallowed his thousand crowns for supper to judge by the nightmare that leaped on him out of the mists of the silent woods.

Dawn came, and Croquart the Fleming was the first to wake. He yawned, stretched himself, and sat up sleepily, his red face suffused, his surcoat wet with the heavy dew. Gray mist hung everywhere over the forest, though in the east there was a faint flush of rose and of gold. The birds were piping in the thickets. Tinteniach and the lady were still asleep.

Croquart smiled at them as a farmer might smile over the fatness of two prize beasts. He scrambled up and looked round him for Tête Bois, thinking

that the Gascon might have gone to cut fodder for the horses. The bow-legged paladin was nowhere to be seen. The watch-fire was out, though the embers still steamed in the cold air of the morning.

“Hallo, there, Tête Bois!”

The deep voice, resonant from the Fleming’s chest, woke echoes in the woods and silenced the birds singing in the thickets. Harduin, the second free lance, sat up and rubbed his eyes like a cat pawing its face. Tinteniach turned from sleep to find his wounds stiff and aching under the sodden bandages. Tiphaine, propped upon one elbow, her hair falling down to touch the flowering broom, saw Croquart striding to and fro, flourishing a stick, restless and impatient.

“Tête Bois, rascal, hallo!”

A few rabbits scurried down the misty glades, and a couple of partridges went “burring” into cover. The Fleming’s voice brought back nothing.

Croquart looked grim.

“The little Gascon devil!” he thought. “That ring was worth a hundred crowns, and a ring on the finger, Messire Tête Bois, is worth a thousand crowns in my strong-box, eh? If I ever catch you, my friend, I will break your back. Let us see whether you have taken your own horse.”

But Tête Bois’s horse was standing quietly with the rest, and the frown on the Fleming’s face showed that he was puzzled. What had happened to the fellow? And if he had deserted, why had he left his horse?

Tête Bois’s disappearance opened the day ill-humoredly for the Fleming. The natural roughness of his temper broke to the surface, and he was sullen and abrupt, his affectations of refinement damp as his own finery with the night’s dew. Tiphaine and her champion had never a smile from him as they made their morning meal and Croquart bustled them to horse, impatient as any merchant afraid of losing his silks and spices to footpads ambushed in the woods. Such baggage as they had was tied on the back of Tête Bois’s horse, and before the sun had been up an hour they were on the road towards Morlaix.

The mists rolled away, leaving a dappling of clouds over the blue of the May sky. The grass glittered with dew, and the scent of the woods was like the scent of some cedar chest filled with the perfumed robes of a queen. The beech-trees, with their splendor of misty green, towered up beside the embattled oaks, whose crockets and finials seemed of bronze and of gold. The grass was thick with many flowers, the robes of the earth wondrous with color.

Yet beauty cannot save a man from pain, and before they had gone two leagues that morning Tiphaine saw that Tinteniach suffered. From white his face had changed to gray, and his eyes had the wistful look that one sees in the eyes of a wounded dog. He had lost much blood and needed rest, for his harness and

each jolting of the saddle gave him pain. Pride kept Tinteniak silent—the pride of the man unwilling to ask favors in defeat. The cool air of the morning had its balm, but when the sun rose above the trees the heat of the day made his forehead burn.

Tiphaïne, looking up at him with pitying eyes, saw how he suffered, though he told her nothing. Croquart, sullen and out of temper, had forged on ahead, feeling the smart of the rout at Josselin. The man Harduin, leading Tête Bois's horse, followed leisurely in the rear.

"Your wounds are too much for you." And she drew her palfrey close to the great horse.

"No, child, no."

"Tell the Fleming you must rest."

Tinteniak straightened in the saddle with a slight shudder of pain.

"I can bear it longer," he said, quietly.

"Why, sire, why? Croquart must let you rest."

"Upon my soul, I will ask him no favor."

"And upon my soul, sire, in ten minutes you will fall from your horse."

She pushed past him without further parley and overtook the Fleming, who was biting his beard and looking as ill-tempered as it is possible for a man with an ugly jowl to look. Tiphaïne caught a glimpse of his solid and pugnacious profile before he turned to her with an impatient glint of the eyes.

"Well, madame, what now?"

"The Sieur de Tinteniak's wounds are still open; he cannot travel farther without a rest."

"Rest—a soldier asks for rest!"

Tiphaïne's color deepened. The very arrogance of the man's impatience fed her hate. She could have laid a whip across Croquart's face with immense comfort to her self-respect.

"You answer me—that?"

"I command here, madame."

"Then call a halt."

"The Sieur de Tinteniak must hold on to the saddle till we reach the hills."

"You have no pity!"

"I have no time to waste."

"And I—no words."

She reined in her palfrey, slipped from the saddle, and, leading the beast aside by the bridle, began to pick the flowers that grew in the long grass, as though she were at home in the La Bellière meadows. Croquart pulled up his horse, looking as black and threatening as a priest out-argued by a heretic. Tinteniak, guessing what had passed between them, reined up in turn and let his horse crop the grass.

Croquart's veneer of chivalry cracked under the heat of the sun. Tiphaine's eyes had flattered him too little to persuade him to be pleased with a woman's whims. He heeled his horse across the road, to see the Vicomte's daughter retreating from him at her leisure, singing to herself and stooping to pick flowers.

"Madame!"

Tiphaine went on with her singing.

"Devil take the woman!" And he pushed on after her, not knowing for the moment how to meet her tactics.

Tiphaine stood in a pool of waving grass, where bluebells touched the hem of her gray gown. Great oaks, with tops of burnished gold, swept up beyond to touch the clouds. She reached out a white arm for the flowers, seeing the shadow of Croquart's horse loom towards her over the grass. He was quite close before she turned and faced him, keeping her palfrey between her and the Fleming.

"Well, Messire Croquart," and she gave him the title with a curl of the lip, "am I to believe that you have no manners?"

"A truce to this foolery."

"I tell you, I am tired, sir, and I am going to rest."

Croquart bit his beard.

"I shall have to dismount to you, madame."

Her eyes blazed out at him, their splendor more visible now that she was angry.

"Dismount to me, you butcher boy from Flanders! No, that would be too gracious of you. Please continue to forget your manners."

"Madame, I shall lose my temper with you."

"It is lost already, Messire Croquart. Try the flat of your sword, or the edge thereof if it pleases you. I am not afraid."

"I shall have to put you up into the saddle."

"You cannot keep me from falling off."

"Hands and feet can be tied, eh?"

"Yes, and I have a knife."

"Pah, madame, am I a fool? I tell you I am in no temper to be bated."

"Get down, then, sir, and see if you can run in your heavy harness. Meanwhile the Sire de Tinteniach might have his rest."

Croquart opened his mouth to swear, but mastered himself with an effort, as though realizing that the species of dictatorship was not crowned with too much dignity.

"Come, madame, be reasonable."

"Is it unreasonable, Messire Croquart, for a wife to fear that her husband may die of his wounds?"

“Oh—you exaggerate.”

“The weight of your blows? They were not too feeble.”

“Grace de Dieu, madame, have your way, or we shall be quarrelling here till midnight!”

“Then we rest for an hour?”

“I grant it.”

And he capitulated sulkily, with the air of a man giving way to the foibles of a woman.

Of all this by-play Bertrand had a distant view as he followed Tiphaine through the green mystery of May. What were the golden meads to him, the winding woodways wonderful with spring, the dawn song of the birds, the scent of the wild flowers rising like incense out of the grass? To Bertrand that silent and unseen journey towards Morlaix seemed like a pilgrimage for the humbling of his heart. He followed, watched, planned, yet felt himself forgotten, reading into every incident that passed a woman's tenderness for a man whom he himself could easily have loved.

Through the long watches of the night and the shining of the east at dawn Bertrand had wrestled with his loneliness. It was not easy for him to renounce so much, to accept forgetfulness, to look upon the past as a mere memory. And yet the very obstinacy of his new self-discipline helped him to throw his jealousy aside. What kind of creature would he find himself if he deserted Tiphaine at such a pass, standing upon a mean punctilio, refusing to be generous save for his own ends? If he was to suffer, then let him serve and suffer like a man, remembering the old days when Tiphaine had saved him from his shame.

XXXI

A DESOLATED homestead in a valley among the northern hills gave Croquart and his prisoners shelter the same night. The house, built of unfaced stone and thatched with straw and heather, had been plundered by some of Bamborough's English, whose passion for thoroughness in their thieving moved them to burn what they could not carry.

Croquart rode into the grass-grown yard, where all the byres and out-houses had been destroyed by fire, nothing but a few charred posts rising above the weeds and nettles. The Fleming dismounted, after sounding his horn to see whether any of the farm folk still loitered about the place. They found the house itself to be full of filth, for the birds had roosted on the rafters, and the English used it as a stable, the droppings from their horses rotting upon the floor. It held nothing but the hall, a cellar, and the goodman's parlor under the western gable—the last room being a little more cleanly than the hall, its single window, with the shutter broken, looking down upon the orchard. Pears and apples piled up their bloom above the rank splendor of the grass—a sea of snow flecked and shaded with rose and green. To the east of the orchard a great pool shimmered in the sunlight, its waters dusted with blown petals from the trees.

Tinteniak was so stiff and sore with his wounds after the day's ride that Croquart had to help him from his horse. The Fleming, who had examined the house, took Tinteniak in his arms, and carried him to the upper room, where there was some mouldy straw piled in a corner. He laid Tinteniak on the straw, having made a show of his great strength by carrying a man taller than himself with the ease that he would have carried a child of five. Croquart had recovered his self-complacency since his skirmish with Tiphaine in the morning, and she had had nothing to charge him with save with his insufferable boasting.

Tinteniak was so utterly weary that he had not sufficient mind-force left in him to resent his being treated as a dead weight for the exhibition of the Fleming's strength. He drew a deep breath of relief when he felt his body sink into the straw—too faint to care whether the bed was one of swan's-down or of dung. In five minutes he was fast asleep.

Harduin had watered the horses and stabled them in the hall, lit a fire, and slung the cooking-pot over a couple of forked sticks. In a little hovel at the end of the orchard Croquart had found some clean straw, and carried a truss into the goodman's parlor to make Tiphaine a bed. She met him with a finger on her lip, and pointed to Tinteniak, whose tired body drank in sleep as a dry soil

drinks in rain. How much alone she was, how wholly at the Fleming's mercy, she only realized as she watched him spread the straw in a far corner of the room.

"You will sleep softly enough," he said, turning on his knees, and looking at her with an expression of the eyes she did not trust.

"It is not likely that I shall sleep," and she moved aside towards the window.

"No bedfellow, eh?" And he got up with a chuckle, leaving her alone with the wounded man upon the straw.

Presently he returned with a pitcher full of water, some brown bread, and a few olives. He set them down on a rough bench by the window, and loitered foolishly at the door.

"I trust madame has forgotten the quarrel we had this morning?"

"I am ready to forget it, Messire Croquart."

"Thanks," and he gave her an impudent bow, "we shall be better friends before we reach Morlaix."

When he had gone she closed the door on him, and found to her delight the wooden bar that was used in lieu of a latch. The staples were firm in the oak posts, yet not so firm that she could abandon her distrust. The rough bench at the window, a cup of water, olives, and bread; with such comforts she was content, so long as the door parted Croquart and herself. While Tinteniak slept she watched the sun sink low behind the woods that broke like green waves upon the bosoms of the hills. Below her lay the orchard trees, smothering the old house with beauty under the benisons of eve. Swallows were skimming over the still waters of the pond, and the mist in the meadows covered the sheeted gold of May.

In the dirty cobwebbed hall Croquart was making his plans for the coming night. The house door, studded with iron nails, lay wrenched from its hinges in the yard, and through the open windows the birds and bats could come and go. Croquart, sitting on a saddle by the fire, his sword across his thighs, called Harduin to him, and offered him the same bribe as he had given Tête Bois the night before.

"Well, my friend, are you in a hurry to desert?"

The fellow fidgeted under the Fleming's eyes.

"Come, let us understand each other; I have a mind to be generous. Will you stand by Croquart the Fleming or follow Tête Bois, who preferred a ring to a thousand crowns?"

Harduin, who had already stolen the rings from Tinteniak's dead esquires, appeared even more greedy than the Gascon.

"When shall I finger the money, captain?"

"At Morlaix."

“Call it a bargain.”

“And easily earned, eh? Keep guard in the orchard near the Sieur de Tinteniach’s window.”

Harduin nodded.

“The house shall be my affair. Whistle if you see anything strange.”

“Right, captain.”

And taking his spear and shield with him, he went out into the orchard to keep watch.

About midnight Tinteniach awoke, and turned on his straw with the confused thoughts of a man whose surroundings are strange to him. Tiphaine, seated by the window, where the moonlight streamed in upon the floor, went to him quietly, and knelt down by the bed.

“You have slept well,” and she felt his forehead; “there is food here if you are hungry.”

“Asleep! Selfish devil that I am! You must be tired to death.”

“No, I am not tired.”

He looked at her steadily, propping himself upon one arm. Sleep had cooled the fever in him, freshened his brain, and strengthened the beating of his heart. The room lit by the moonlight, the perfumed coolness of the night, the white face of the woman by the bed, filled him with a sense of strangeness and of mystery.

“It is my turn to watch.” And he touched her arm, thrilling, man of forty that he was, at Tiphaine’s nearness to him in the moonlight.

“There is no need for it; I have barred the door.”

“And Croquart?”

She did not tell him of her great distrust.

“Croquart has left us as man and wife. I have too much to think about to wish to sleep.”

Tinteniach sank back on his straw, watching her as she brought him the water-pot, bread, and olives.

“I am afraid I am a broken reed,” he said, with the smile of a man contented to be ministered to by a woman’s hands.

“You must gain strength, sire, for both our sakes.”

“Yes, true.”

“Therefore, you must sleep again.”

“I would rather talk.”

“We can talk to-morrow.”

“Have we not changed our parts? Well, I will obey your orders.”

And in half an hour his breathing showed that he had forgotten the world and such subtleties as the glimmer of moonlight on a woman’s hair.

Tiphaine had returned to her seat by the window, her sense of loneliness

increased now that Tinteniak was asleep. The night, with all its infinite uncertainty, its vague sounds and distorted shadows, filled her with restlessness and with those imaginings that people the world with half-seen shapes. The bravest of us are but great children when a wind blows the boughs against the window at midnight, and the moon, that magician of the skies, brings back the childhood of the race, when man trembled before Nature, filling the forest, the desert, and the marsh with goblin creatures born out of his own vivid brain.

Before Tiphaine at her window stood the orchard trees, pillars of ebony spreading into carved canopies of whitest marble, each chisel-mark perfect as from the touch of a god. The deep grass looked black as water in a well, the wooded slopes of the silent valley steeped with a thousand shimmering spires. Under an apple-tree stood Croquart's sentinel, leaning lazily against the trunk, the moonlight sifting through the apple bloom and dappling his harness with silver burrs. Tiphaine had discovered Harduin there, and knew that he had been set there to watch the window. Twice she saw Croquart enter the orchard to assure himself that Harduin was awake at his post.

An hour later she heard the Fleming mount the stairs, stealthily and with the deliberation of a man fearing to wake a household as he creeps to an intrigue. She could hear his breathing as he stood and listened, while the rats scuffled and squeaked under the wood-work of the floor. His hand tried the door, shaking it cautiously with tentative clickings of the wooden latch. Tiphaine thanked God for the good oak-bar that gave Messire Croquart the lie for once. He turned at last and went back to the hall, where she could hear him swearing and throwing wood upon the fire. There would be no thought of sleep for the mock wife that night.

Now whether Tiphaine was very quick of hearing, or whether the tension of her distrust had turned up the sensitiveness of her ears, she heard some sound in the moonlit orchard that seemed lost upon Harduin as he leaned against his tree. The noise resembled the faint "tuff—tuff" of a sheep cropping at short grass. Sometimes it ceased, only to commence again, nearer and more distinct to her than before. Tiphaine strained her ears and her conjectures to set a cause to the approaching sound. She wondered that Harduin had not heard it, and judged that his bassinet might make him harder of hearing than herself.

A suggestion of movement, a vague sheen in the grass showed in the moonlight under the apple-trees, as of something crawling towards the house. Slowly, noiselessly, a figure rose from the grass behind the trunk of the tree against which Croquart's sentinel was leaning. There was a sudden darting forward of the stooping figure, a flinging out of a pair of arms, a curious choking cry, a short struggle. Tiphaine saw Harduin drop his spear, writhe and twist like a man with a rope knotted about his neck. In the moonlight she could

see the violent contortions of his body, his hands tearing at something that seemed to grip his throat, his feet scraping and kicking at the soft turf. The man's struggle reminded her of a toy she had had as a child, a little wooden manikin, whose legs and arms flew into grotesque attitudes on the pulling of a string. Before she realized what had happened, Harduin's muscles relaxed, his hands dropped, and he hung against the trunk of the tree like a man nailed there through the throat. The body slid slowly to earth, doubled upon itself, was seized and heaved up over the shoulders of the other, and carried away into the deeps of the orchard.

A shudder of superstitious terror passed through Tiphaine. It had been done so swiftly, with such unhuman silence, that Harduin might have been pounced upon by some ogre out of the woods. The patch of grass under the apple-tree fascinated her; her eyes remained fixed on it, her heart going at a gallop, the blood drumming in her ears. With a sudden flash of intuition she remembered Tête Bois's disappearance the preceding night, and the way the man Guymon had been stricken down over the bodies of the dead esquires. Some grim and inexorable spirit seemed tracking Croquart through the woods, a fierce shadow that seized its prey under cover of the night.

She lifted her head suddenly with a quick-drawn breath of eagerness and fear. Something was moving in the orchard, for she heard the same peculiar sound that had heralded its first coming. A faint glimmer of harness under the white boughs, and a figure drew out of the mists of the night and halted under the tree where Harduin had stood a few minutes ago. A half-luminous band ran from the man's breast to the rank grass, the long blade of a sword like a beam of moonlight slanting through a chink in a shuttered window at night. The figure remained motionless, leaning upon the sword, as though it stood on guard in the orchard and waited for the dawn.

XXXII

BERTRAND kept watch in his black harness under the apple-tree, knowing that his time would come when Croquart should find him there, an enemy in Harduin's place. Whether it was the last night-watch he would ever keep, Bertrand du Guesclin could not tell. He knew Croquart's great strength and the little mercy he might expect from him; he knew that he was to match himself against a man who had never taken a beating in single combat. Bertrand put the chances of victory and defeat beyond the pale of thought. He was to fight Croquart for his head and for the two prisoners pent up in the ruined house. For his own life Bertrand had no particular greed. He would kill Croquart or be killed himself.

Cool, calm-eyed, firm at the mouth, he watched the night pass and the dawn come up out of the broadening east. He saw the color kindle on the apple-trees, the wet grass flash and glitter at his feet, the dim woods smoking with their silvery mists. He heard the birds begin in the great orchard, thrush and robin, blackbird and starling, piping and chattering as the sky grew bright.

"Bide by it! bide by it!" sang a thrush in the tree above his head.

"Thanks, my brown fellow," he said, with a grim smile; "wait and see whether Bertrand du Guesclin runs away."

He stretched his arms and the muscles of his chest and shoulders, tossing his sword from hand to hand. The flash of the steel seemed reflected to him for the moment from the narrow window of the solar in the western gable. Bertrand stood still. He had seen the white oval of a face framed by the inward darkness of the room, as though some one watched him without wishing to be seen. He knew that it was Tiphaine by the faint gleam of her coiled hair. How coldly she would be looking at him with those eyes of hers, taking him for Croquart's man, a shabby fellow who fought for hire. His carcass and his destiny could concern her little.

"Hallo, a whistle! Now, Brother Croquart, let us get to work."

He whipped round, closed his visor, and looked quickly to the buckles of his harness, and to see that his dagger was loose in its sheath. His shield, that he had hung on a bough of the apple-tree, dipped down and changed the fruit bough for his arm. The taut grip of the strap gave Bertrand a kind of comfort. He had two friends left him, his battered shield and his old sword.

Round the corner of the house came Croquart, his bassinet half laced, his scabbard bumping against his legs, the creases in his red surcoat showing that he had been asleep. He saw the man leaning lazily against the tree, and promptly cursed him for not answering his whistle.

“Harduin, blockhead, water the horses!”

The sentinel moved never an inch.

“Hallo, there, hallo, have you got maggots in your brain?”

Croquart’s hail might have cheered on a troop of horse in the thick of a charge home. He came striding through the grass, with his fingers twitching, a buffet tingling in the muscles of his arm.

“Hallo, you deaf fool—”

His mouth was open, the lips a red oval, empty for the instant of more words. It was not Harduin under the tree, but the man in the black harness who had stricken down Guymon in the woods. Croquart looked staggered, like some fat grandee charged in the pit of the stomach by a small boy’s head.

The repulse was but momentary. He leaped full six feet from where he stood, sweeping his gadded fist forward with good intent for the stranger’s head. Bertrand, every muscle on the alert, was quicker far than Croquart. The Fleming’s fist smashed the bark from the tree, leaving him bloody knuckles despite his glove.

“Good-day, Brother Croquart”—and a sword came to the salute—“they have offered five thousand crowns for your head at Josselin.”

The Fleming began tying the laces of his bassinet.

“And who are you, sir, that you are such a fool to think of earning the Sieur de Beaumanoir’s money?”

“I am a Breton, Brother Croquart, and that is the reason why I am going to have your head.”

XXXIII

TINTENIAC was still asleep upon his straw, nor did Tiphaine wake him, but stood at the window and watched the drama that was taking shape under the apple boughs. The man in the black harness was leaning on his sword, waiting for Croquart, whose fingers fumbled at the laces of his bassinet. There was something familiar to Tiphaine in this attitude of his, the attitude of a man whose heart beat steadily and whose eyes were quick and on the alert.

Croquart's sword was out. He looked at the window where Tiphaine stood, and guessed by her face that she did not wish him great success.

"Guard, Breton."

They sprang to it with great good-will, Bertrand keeping careful guard, and never shifting his eyes from the Fleming's face. He had learned his lesson off by heart, to let Croquart think that he had an easy bargain and that a few heavy blows would end the tussle. The butcher-boy of Flanders fell to the trick; he had met so few men who could match him in arms that he had grown rash in his methods, forgetting that guile is often more deadly than muscle and address. He had seen that Bertrand was a head shorter than himself; he soon suspected that he was clumsy, and not the master of his sword.

Bertrand gave ground, puffing and laboring like a man hard pressed. He let the Fleming's blows rattle about his body harness, half parrying them with a concealed adroitness, continually retreating, or dodging to right and left. He was playing for an opening in Croquart's attack, luring him into rashness, tempting him to hammer at him without thought of a dangerous counter in return. Croquart would soon stretch himself for the *coup de grâce*, thinking his man tired, and that he had trifled with him over-long.

Still Bertrand bided his time. He faltered suddenly, made a pretended stumble, tempted Croquart with an ungarded flank. Down came the Fleming's open blow, given with the rash vigor of a man imagining the victim at his mercy. Bertrand bent from it like a supple osier, rallied, and struck out with a swiftness that caught Messire Croquart off his balance and off his guard. Steel met steel on the vambrace of the Fleming's sword-arm. Tiphaine had a vision of a lopped limb swinging by its tendons, of a falling sword, of a second blow heaved home on the Fleming's thigh.

The loss of his right hand sent Croquart mad. He picked up the fallen sword, and flew at Bertrand like any Baersark, the one lust left in him to wound, to mutilate, and to kill.

The din of their fighting had wakened Tinteniach, and he had dragged himself from the straw to join Tiphaine at the window. They stood shoulder to

shoulder, silent, and half awed by the fury of these two men, who neither desired nor craved for mercy. Tinteniach had seen such battles before, but to the woman there was something horrible and repulsive in its animal frenzy, a reversion to the brutal past, when the lusts of man made him an ape or a bull. She shuddered at Croquart's dangling hand, and at the mad biting of his breath as he lashed at Bertrand with his sword. Shocked by the brute violence, the physical distortions of the scene, she turned back into the room, unwilling to watch the ordeal to the end.

Soon she heard a hoarse cry from Tinteniach. The men had closed and gone to earth, and were struggling together in the long grass. Croquart was losing blood and strength, and in such a death-grapple under the trees the cunning of the wrestler gave Bertrand the advantage. Though the lighter man, he was tougher and more sinewy than the Fleming, and fit in the matter of condition as a lean hound who has worked for his food.

"By God, he has the fellow down!"

Tinteniach was biting his lips in his excitement, and shivering like a dog on leash waiting to be let loose upon the quarry. Bertrand, with a twist of the leg and a hug of the Fleming's body, had turned Croquart under him and won the upper hand. The Breton's fist flew to his poniard. Croquart, who knew the meaning of the act, kicked like a mad horse, twisting and turning under Bertrand's body. With a heave of the arm he rolled half over, and, lifting Bertrand, struggled to his knees. Before he could shake the Breton off the misericord was splitting the plates of his gorget. Croquart, with a great cry, fell forward upon his face, dragging Bertrand with him into the grass, as a sinking ship drags down the enemy it has grappled hulk to hulk. Slowly the black figure disentangled itself from the red, rose up, and leaned for a moment against the trunk of a tree.

"An end to Croquart!"

The words came from Tinteniach in a half whisper, but Tiphaine heard them where she stood in the deep shadow against the wall.

Croquart dead! And she seemed to feel the great breath of gratitude the Breton folk would draw for such a death. Guymon, Tête Bois, Harduin, and the Fleming, all had fallen to the sword of this one man who had dogged them through the woods past Loudeac. Tinteniach had taken his shield, and was holding it from the window so that the hero of the orchard should see the blazonings. Tiphaine still leaned against the wall, watching Tinteniach and the blur of green woodland and blue sky above his head.

Bertrand was bending over Croquart and unlacing the bassinet that still bore the fox's brush. He saw Tiphaine's face beside Tinteniach at the window. Her presence did not hinder him, but rather urged him to despatch the work in hand.

“Sieur de Tinteniach,” he shouted, “make me one promise and I give you back your liberty.”

The aristocrat made the man in the black harness a very flattering bow.

“The conqueror of Croquart can ask what he pleases.”

Bertrand, with Tiphaine’s face looking down on him like lost love’s face out of heaven, broke the laces of Croquart’s bassinet.

“Sire”—and his voice needed no disguising—“I ask you and madame, your wife, not to leave that room till I have made an end.”

Tinteniach gave the promise, turning with a smile to Tiphaine, who promised nothing.

“Granted, sir. And in return, will you trust us with your name?”

Bertrand had turned his back on them and was bending over the body.

“Sire, you ask me what I cannot answer.”

“We will hold it sacred.”

Bertrand shook his head.

Tinteniach pressed him no further, and Bertrand, forcing off Croquart’s bassinet, broke away the plates of the gorget from the bleeding throat. Picking up his poniard he slit the Fleming’s surcoat from breast to knee, dragged it from the body, and spread the stuff upon the grass. Two sharp sweeps of the sword served to sever the neck. The dead thing was wrapped up in the red surcoat, and the ends of the cloth knotted together.

Tinteniach watched all this from the window, mystified in measure as to what the man in the black harness purposed next. He had not noticed that Tiphaine had left him, had lifted the bar from the staples, and was hurrying down the stone stairway into the hall.

Bertrand ran the blade of his sword under the knotted ends of the surcoat, slung it over his shoulder like a bundle, and picked up his shield. He gave a last look at the window, saluted Tinteniach, and marched off briskly into the orchard. His black harness had already disappeared beyond the apple-trees before Tiphaine’s gray gown swept the grass.

She looked round her with a slight knitting of the brows, seeing only Tinteniach at the window, the white domes of the trees, and the headless body in its gaudy harness lying prone in the long grass.

“Where?” and her eyes questioned Tinteniach, who stroked his chin and appeared puzzled.

“Our Breton champion has left us with our liberty.”

“Gone?”

“Like a beggar with a bundle. Let the man alone. He has his reasons and the advantage of us.”

“And yet—”

Tinteniach laughed.

“The woman in you is inquisitive,” he said.

Tiphaïne went a few steps nearer to Croquart’s body. It seemed difficult to believe that this lifeless, weltering thing had raised in her but an hour ago all the passionate hatred that great love of her home land could inspire. Now that it was mere carrion she conceived a scornful pity for the thing as she recalled the man’s arrogance, his bombast, his supreme and coarse self-adoration. Truly this was the proper rounding of such a life, to be bred a butcher, fattened with the blood of a noble province, and left a mere carcass for the crows and wolves. She turned from Croquart’s body with a sigh half of pity, half of disgust.

Tinteniach watched her from the window, his mind moved by the same reflections, the religious instinct in him pointing a moral. In the distance he had seen a figure on a horse pass through the morning mists in the meadows and vanish into the sun-touched woods.

“Our Breton has gone,” and he lifted up his shield, “I would have given half that ransom to have had a glimpse of his face.”

Tiphaïne looked at him with eyes that mused.

“Why should he have deserted us?”

“I am no reader of riddles. And our plans? What are they to be?”

“I am thinking of your wounds,” she answered.

“They are nothing. This fellow has given me new strength. Shall we still say, ‘to Josselin’?”

“Thanks, sire. I remember that I have the truth to tell.”

XXXIV

NOT a league from the Breton homestead, where Croquart the Fleming had made his end, the gyron of Geoffroi Dubois, vert, a bend between two buckles argent, came dancing along the road from Loudeac. With Dubois were Carro de Bodegat and some score more who had sworn on the crosses of their swords to overtake Croquart before he could find sanctuary with an English garrison in the west. By luck they had struck upon his trail near Loudeac where the fox's brush and the red surcoat had been seen, and recognized; and at Loudeac, also, Dubois had found Tinteniach's men-at-arms and the La Bellière servants, ready to affirm on oath that the Fleming could muster at least a hundred men. Dubois and his gentlemen had wasted no time scouring the country towards Morlaix, and doubtless they would have won the credit of taking the Fleming's head had not the man in the black harness been more forward in the adventure.

Geoffroi Dubois and Carro de Bodegat were pushing on with their troop at a brisk trot that morning, when the very fellow who had cheated them of the prize loomed up against the sky-line, on the crest of a moor. The morning sun shone in Bertrand's eyes, and he was seen by Dubois's men before he caught the flutter of their pennons down in the hollow where the moorland touched the woods. Half a dozen riders had broken away to right and left, and were cantering over the heather to make a capture certain.

Bertrand showed no concern at the measures taken to secure the pleasure of a parley with him. He reined in his horse to a walk, and approached Dubois's troop, reading their pennons and the devices upon their shields. If the green gyron of Dubois did not please him hugely, the tawny and blue of De Bodegat's pennon was even less welcome to Bertrand's eyes. These two Breton knights had been no friends to him in the Montfort wars. Dubois was a man jealous for his dignity, a good hater, and not over magnanimous or honest where his own interests were concerned. Carro de Bodegat had a grudge against Du Guesclin, an old wound, and an unpaid score. They would be ready to throw the troth-breaking at Mivoie in his face, the more so he thought now that he had forestalled them in the taking of Croquart's head.

Bertrand, on his raw-boned horse, looked for all the world like a needy free lance riding from town to town in search of hire. The green gyron came to a halt on a hillock, Dubois, gentleman of distinction that he was, refusing to drag his dignity aside to catechise a fellow who made so indifferent a show. The humble rush-light should approach the baronial torch, and Bertrand, knowing Dubois's nature, kept his visor down, and prepared to be hectored by the noble.

“Hallo, my man, you are on the road early.”

Bertrand saluted the Breton gentlemen as their tall spears gathered about him like the striding masts of as many ships. He had the red bundle before him on the saddle, and answered Dubois in broad Breton patois, posing as the common soldier in search of pay.

“God’s grace to you, sire, I ride towards Josselin; they tell me men are needed under the Marshal’s banner.”

Dubois studied him with the leisurely impertinence of a great lord criticising the patched clothes of a servant.

“So you go to Josselin, my little fellow, eh? Have you had news hereabouts of Croquart the Fleming?”

Bertrand looked stupidly at Dubois’s green plume.

“Croquart! To be sure, sire, Croquart is dead.”

“How! Croquart dead!”

There was a slight swaying of the spears like the swaying of tall ash-trees in a wind.

“Sire, if it please you I saw Croquart’s body lying unburied in the orchard of a farm-house not three miles farther west.”

Dubois was not pleased; nor were De Bodegat and the rest.

“Be careful, my friend, how you tamper with the truth. How did you know that it was Croquart you saw dead?”

Bertrand did not hesitate.

“Sire, by the fox’s brush.”

“Yes.”

“And the ugliness of the Fleming’s face.”

Carro de Bodegat, tempted to quarrel with the nature of the news, leaned towards Dubois, and pointed out the red bundle Bertrand carried on his saddle.

“I’ll swear the fellow is playing tricks with us.”

“Well, try him.”

“Let him open that bundle.”

Carro de Bodegat’s sharp eyes had picked out the gold thread-work on the scarlet cloth, and a patch of purplish ooze on the under side thereof.

“Friend, do you carry your food there?”

“Where, sir?”

“There, in that bundle.”

Bertrand held the thing up by its knotted ends.

“Devil take it, the cider bottle has had a knock!”

Bodegat pouted his lips, and sniffed.

“Do you carry your brown bread in ciclaton and your cider bottles in silk?” he asked.

“God’s mercy, sirs, what’s there to quarrel with in the stuff?”

Dubois exchanged a glance with Bodegat.

"Let us see what you have in that cloth."

Bertrand made a show of hesitation.

"Open it, I say."

"But, sirs—"

"Open it, or—" and at a sign from Dubois half a dozen spears were slanted at Bertrand's body.

Persuaded, he fumbled at the knots, flung out his arm suddenly, holding the surcoat by a corner.

"Have your way, Messire Geoffroi Dubois. Look and see whether this is Croquart's head."

That which but an hour ago had held the conscious soul of a man was tossed from the red surcoat at the feet of Dubois's horse. The beast reared and backed some paces. Twenty figures were craning forward in their saddles to get a glimpse of the thing that had half hidden itself in a clump of heather.

Carro de Bodegat was the first to earth. He threw his bridle to a trooper, and, picking up the Fleming's head by the hair, looked at the face, with its closed lids and gaping mouth, and, turning with a sharp, inarticulate cry, held up the head before Dubois.

"It is Croquart's."

"Should I not know it?"

"Who killed him?"

"Bertrand du Guesclin."

Bodegat turned sharply on the man in the black harness.

"And you?"

"I am Bertrand du Guesclin, Messire Carro de Bodegat. Has my face changed since I fought with you at Quimperlé?"

He put up his visor and let Dubois and the Bretons see his face. Many of them knew him; but there was no comradely cheering, no out-stretching of the hand.

Dubois had touched Bodegat on the shoulder with his spear, and they were speaking together in low tones, glancing from time to time at the man who had robbed them of Croquart's head. Bertrand liked neither their looks nor their whisperings; the hedge of spears about his horse raised his impatience and filled him with distrust.

"Messire Dubois, I am waiting for that head."

The pair ignored him, and still chattered together, their faces nearly touching, like a pair of lovers poking confidences into each other's ears. Bertrand was spreading the red surcoat for the return of Croquart the Fleming's head, watching the two whisperers with gathering impatience.

"We make a virtue of waiting," he said to the three Bretons nearest to him;

“these two gentlemen seem very enamoured of each other’s tongues.”

Dubois’s figure straightened suddenly in the saddle. Carro de Bodegat turned, with an unpleasant smirk hovering about his mouth.

“Messire Bertrand du Guesclin, we have not finished with you yet.”

“So!”

“There is a matter which concerns us all.”

“Messire, I ask you to give me back that head.”

“Gentlemen, close round; I order you to arrest a traitor.”

Bertrand’s hand went to his sword. Carro de Bodegat had already seized his bridle.

“Bertrand du Guesclin, surrender.”

“Surrender! In God’s name, no!” and he struck at Bodegat with his fist, broke loose, and made a plunge forward to be free. Half a dozen men closed round him like Saracen galleys about a sturdy ship. His sword was struck down, the shaft of a spear thrust between the hind legs of his horse, bringing the beast to earth, with Bertrand pinned by the right knee. Before he could break loose De Bodegat and four others heaped themselves on him and soon had him helpless and flat upon his back.

“Off, fools!—I surrender.”

“Let him up, sirs!” and Dubois bent forward in the saddle, still holding Croquart’s head by the hair.

The men rose from him, and Bertrand, sullen and angry, scrambled slowly to his feet.

“Which of you calls me a traitor?” and he swung round and looked from man to man. “Answer me; I am to be heard. You, De Bodegat? By Heaven, you have not the courage!”

Dubois’s mounted figure, haughty and splendid with its opulence of armor and sweeping plume, moved forward and overtopped Bertrand with an air of towering and seigniorial strength.

“Messire du Guesclin, what of the Oak of Mivoie?”

Dubois’s horse overshadowed him, but Bertrand held his ground.

“Well, what of Mivoie?”

“You broke troth, sir.”

“And if I did?”

“You stand to be judged by any two of those whom you deserted; so run the Marshal’s orders. As for this head—well, it is Croquart’s, and it has been noised abroad that you were Croquart’s man.”

“I Croquart’s man! By Heaven, a lie!”

His sturdy scorn flew full in the face of Geoffroi Dubois. It was then that Carro de Bodegat stood forward, precise, courteous, and insolently suave.

“By your leave, gentlemen, I will ask Messire Bertrand du Guesclin a few

questions.”

“Ask on.” And Bertrand held his head high and squared his shoulders.

“Come, sweet sir, why should we quarrel? You were not at Mivoie; good; and why?”

Bertrand looked Bodegat straight in the face.

“That is my affair.”

“You will not answer?”

“No.”

“Then we can conclude the reason—some slight sickness, a seductive soul in a tavern on the road. But wait, you have been at Pontivy, eh, with the Fleming’s men?”

Bertrand felt the coils of Bodegat’s cunning, but he was far too stubborn to slip through them with a lie.

“True; I was at Pontivy. Does that make me Croquart’s man?”

Bodegat smiled and gave a shrug of the shoulders.

“Oh, we had our spies there, messire; we are not fools. But bear with me; another question: Why have you beaten out the eagle from your shield?”

Bertrand’s sturdy figure quivered under the unruffled insolence of Bodegat’s pleased cleverness.

“That also is my affair.”

“Of course; these gentlemen will understand. You choose to ride abroad unrecognized. And, doubtless, messire, you were at the fight before Josselin town?”

Bertrand bent his head.

“You did not fight for us.”

“I fought for neither side.”

Bodegat and the listeners laughed aloud.

“Messire du Guesclin, you are a prudent soldier. And yet you had heard that Beaumanoir had offered five thousand crowns for the Fleming’s head.”

“I had heard it.”

“Five thousand crowns, good money, for striking off a Fleming’s head, perhaps while he was asleep.”

This last taunt brought Bertrand’s patience down. He sprang at Bodegat, only to be dragged back and to find a couple of spear-points at his throat.

“Messire Carro de Bodegat”—and he grappled with his wrath and conquered it—“these words of yours shall not be writ in sand. Ask the Sieur de Tinteniach whether Croquart the Fleming was murdered in his sleep.”

Bodegat bowed.

“The Sieur de Tinteniach and the Vicomte de Bellière’s daughter—the Lady Tiphaine—where are they?”

“Where Croquart’s body lies.”

“And they know that Bertrand du Guesclin killed him?”

“No, messire, they do not.”

Bodegat made a pitying gesture with his hands. There was a grim yet ironical exchange of confidences among the esquires and troopers. Carro de Bodegat had entangled Bertrand in what appeared to them a web of treachery, greed, and double-dealing. They showed no surprise when Dubois ordered Du Guesclin’s hands to be bound behind his back, that he should be set upon his horse, and his feet tied under the beast’s belly.

He suffered the shame of it without a murmur, ignoring the derision and looking steadily at Croquart’s head, that Dubois still carried.

“Forward, gentlemen!”

And, getting to horse, they pushed on for the homestead where Croquart and his prisoners had passed the night.

XXXV

BERTRAND, bound hand and foot, rode between Dubois and Carro de Bodegat, a figure of flint. His eyes seemed to see nothing but the monotonous banking of the clouds across the western sky. Dubois and Carro de Bodegat had never a word from him. They thought him savage and sulky, a rough fellow with a temper of the more sinister sort, who was furious at having been brought so suddenly to book.

Carro de Bodegat and Dubois knew nothing of the agony of loneliness that wounded Bertrand's heart, nor did they imagine that they were dragging him to a humiliation that he dreaded more than death. Bertrand had a foreshadowing of the ignominies that would soon ensue. In thought he saw himself standing before Tiphaine, a disgraced man, a traitor, a breaker of solemn promises. He felt death in his heart at the thought of meeting those eyes of hers. What a hypocrite he would appear, what a mean, dastardly fool, whose honor was a mere drab to be debauched shamelessly for the sake of gold! Bertrand du Guesclin, bribed by the English not to fight at Mivoie! Inferences and facts were against him on every side. Robin, poor coward, had confessed nothing; of that Bertrand felt assured.

And now Tiphaine was Tinteniac's wife. Had he not seen them whispering together, lying on one bed, passing before him as lover and beloved? The bitterness of his predicament gave jealousy a second opening into Bertrand's heart. Why should he bear all this for Tiphaine and for Robin Raguene, her brother, and what was Bertrand du Guesclin to the Sieur de Tinteniac's wife, that he should die dangling on a rope to save her and her kinsmen from the humiliation of the truth? Surely his passion for self-sacrifice had made him mad, and he was throwing life and honor away for the sake of an imaginary duty.

Yet of such stubborn stuff was Bertrand's soul that the fight was fought and won in him before his black horse had carried him a furlong. Like some old pagan martyr, he would rather drink the poison than confess himself a fool and recant from a philosophy that the world might class as madness. He had chosen his part, and it should serve him to the bitter end. Every child in Brittany might be taught to curse him as a traitor, but confess himself beaten—that, before God, he would not do.

Bertrand could meet death, but to meet Tiphaine—that was another matter. The infinite refinement of such a humiliation, the pitiful injustice of it, modified his pride in that respect alone. What need was there for Dubois and De Bodegat to make a mock of him before her face? If they had any pity, any

touch of chivalry nearer their knightliness than the tinctures on their shields, they would spare him this ordeal and let him make his end in peace. At least he could ask them this last favor. They could but refuse it, and then he would know the worst.

“Messire Dubois,” and he opened his lips for the first time since they had bound him upon his horse, “you have called me a traitor. Is my treachery so great that I cannot speak to you as man to man?”

The Breton lord regarded him with the serenity of conscious virtue.

“Courtesy is part of our religion, Messire du Guesclin,” and his sufferance made Bertrand long to smite him across the mouth.

“I ask no great favor.”

“Let us hear it, messire.”

“Quick judging, a long rope, and no witnesses.”

Dubois elevated his eyebrows and returned Carro de Bodegat’s significant smile.

“You do not appear to expect an acquittal from us,” he said.

“I expect nothing, messire, and ask for nothing, save this one thing.”

“Well, and that?”

“That the Sieur de Tinteniach and madame his wife may neither hear my name nor see my face.”

Dubois looked curiously at Bertrand, as though considering what his motives were.

“You have a reason for this.”

“Be easy,” and Bertrand grimaced like a man in pain; “they have had no wrong from me. I tell you, sir, that it is a mere whim of the heart. The Lady Tiphaine would not rejoice to see me as I am, and for myself I would rather shirk the meeting.”

Carro de Bodegat laughed maliciously.

“Messire du Guesclin, I feel for the lady.”

“Ascribe nothing to her, sir, but sorrow at seeing me condemned as a hypocrite.”

“True chivalry, messire; we can serve a petticoat when we cannot serve a country. What is your judgment, Brother Dubois?”

The elder man reflected before committing himself to an opinion.

“The thing seems reasonable, since it shows consideration for a lady. Then you ask this in all seriousness, Messire Bertrand du Guesclin?”

“Hang me as high as Haman, only grant this favor.”

Dubois smiled, like a man not sorry to avail himself of an advantage. Neither he nor De Bodegat had any love for Du Guesclin, and Tinteniach, more scrupulous, might seize the authority and spoil their retaliation.

“Well, sir, how would you contrive it?”

"Messire Dubois, here are plenty of trees."

"Trees! But we have to try you first."

"Try me!" and Bertrand gave a grim laugh; "please dispense with such a formality."

"We are honorable men, messire."

"I do not doubt it. Well, if you must drag me to this place you need not have me thrown like a bundle at Madame Tiphaine's feet."

Dubois watched him narrowly.

"In the orchard, hidden by the trees, there is a little hovel that the farm-folk use for tools and wood. Throw me in there, and say nothing. I assure you that for this consideration I will speak well of you in heaven."

Bertrand's grim quaintness had its effect upon Dubois.

"Let it be as you wish," he said; "the *Sieur de Tinteniach* and his wife need not be told that we have a prisoner."

"Nor who that prisoner is. My heart's thanks to you. One last word."

"Well?"

"I am not a kneeling creature. I shall be ready to be hanged at your earliest chance."

And Bertrand, having won his point, shut his mouth obdurately and said no more.

Before long they rode down into the valley and saw the apple-trees shining like spray blown from the green billowing hill-side. To Bertrand, who had ceased to look for good in life, those Breton apple-trees seemed to pile their blossoms as for a bridal about the place where Tiphaine had slept. Great deeps of thought were uncovered in him as he remembered her as a child, taking his part against Dame Jeanne and young Olivier. The sinuous glitter of her hair seemed to have flashed through the strange darkness of his life like some magic river casting a spell through the heart of some mysterious land. He recalled his old hopes and desires, the ambitions that he had thrown aside, his pride of strength and pride of sinew, the ill-luck that had dogged him even to the last. Well, he had kept troth and played the man, even though Tiphaine might never learn the truth and think of him as a worthless beast whom in her youth she had been foolish enough to pity.

Hardly two hours had passed since Croquart's death when Geoffroi Dubois crossed the meadows and saw the dark thatch of the homestead sweeping above the orchard trees. True to his promise, he sent Carro de Bodegat forward with the main troop, while he loitered to lodge Bertrand in the hovel that he had chosen for his prison. The rough door was closed on Du Guesclin, and three men-at-arms left on guard to prevent an escape. Bertrand, *sans* sword and dagger, with roped wrists and a heavy heart, sat down on some fagots in a dark corner and set himself to face the last renunciation he would make in dying to

complete a lie.

Up at the homestead Tiphaine was leading her palfrey to drink at the pool when the thudding of hoofs sounded over the meadows. Carro de Bodegat and his men came into view. Tinteniach, who was in the goodman's parlor, stripped to the waist and washing his wounds with water Tiphaine had brought him in a great earthen pitcher, had heard the sound of armed men riding, and, going to the window, recognized De Bodegat by his pennon.

Covering himself with his surcoat, he waved to Tiphaine, whom he could see standing beside the pool.

"Friends!" he shouted; "have no fear!"

Carro de Bodegat and his Bretons tossed their spears to her as they rounded the orchard at a trot. Two and two they streamed into the deserted yard, De Bodegat riding forward to where Tiphaine stood under the green boughs of a willow.

"Madame," and he bent his plume to her, "we had the good news on the road this morning."

"Croquart is dead, messire."

"Thank God for Brittany—we have seen his head."

XXXVI

WHILE Dubois, Bodegat, and the rest poured into the orchard to gaze at Croquart's headless body, Tiphaine led back her palfrey to the house, where the horses of the dead Fleming and his men still waited in the hall to be fed and watered. The beasts turned their heads to look at her, their eyes seeming to ask what had befallen their masters in the night. Croquart's own horse was strangely restless and uneasy, ears laid low, the whites of the eyes showing, and an inclination to kick very evident in his heels.

Leaving her palfrey stalled in the dirty hall, where the embers of the fire, harness, and baggage littered the floor, she mounted the stairs to the room in the gable, meeting Tinteniach at the open door. His wounded shoulder had given him a ludicrous but painful contest with his clothes, and he appealed to a woman's hands for the righting of his wrongs. There was a characteristic distinction in the way the pale and imperturbable patrician stood to be brooched and buckled without squandering a fragment of his dignity. Head held high, the sunlight touching the silver in his hair, a sensitive smile softening his mouth, he felt a youth's tremor at the nearness of her hands, and feared to look at her because she seemed so fair.

"The flies are buzzing about the dead dog," and he pointed to the Bretons who were crowding and elbowing about Croquart's body.

"How pitiful his boastings seem to me now!"

"Yes, mine was the last notch he cut upon his spear."

Tinteniach seemed the grand seigneur again—tall, gracious, a man whose face had the quality of command. Tiphaine felt that his manner had changed towards her, as though he were too honorable to prolong their supposed intimacy, however pleasant the playing of the part might seem. And yet she discovered more than mere gentleness in his eyes towards her, a posture of his manhood that betrayed homage and desire.

She fastened the brooch at his throat, and stood back from him, looking aside towards the window, where the iron men trampled the long grass under the orchard trees.

"Sire, I have much to thank you for."

"The thanks should come from the man whom you have trusted."

"Well, we will exchange our gratitude."

"And I can swear to being flattered by the bargain."

He bowed to her, and for the moment she felt herself a mere ignorant girl, uneasy and half abashed under the eyes of a courtier whose manners were too splendid. Tinteniach's stateliness made her sincerity seem incomplete. It was

difficult to repulse a man whose methods were without aggression.

"Sire, I had almost forgotten that I have your ring."

"My ring?"

"Yes," and she slipped it from her finger and let the circle of gold lie in her white palm.

Tinteniak looked at her, yet without a stare, and was slow in the stretching out of his hand.

"Can you not keep it?"

Their eyes met, but Tiphaine's were the first to fall.

"Sire, I cannot."

"As a remembrancer?"

"No, for it might be unjust."

A man of forty may be fired with all the inspired impulses of youth. We live in circumstances and are as old as the freshness of our sensibility to music. The fine candor of Tinteniak's face warmed to the feelings that his heart had cherished.

"I will not trade upon the trust that you have given me. Yet—these few days—"

"Sire," and he saw that she was troubled, "I have not the heart to hear this from you now."

"Then—I may wait?"

"I remember that my father waits for me. For his sake I promise nothing for myself."

She still held the ring out to him, looking bravely in his face, half hating the sincerity that made her hurt him for the sake of truth.

"Your pardon," and he took the ring.

"Sire, do not misjudge me."

"You are too honest, child, to be misjudged."

His fine spirit of chivalry and self-restraint rescued them both from the discomfort of the moment. He slipped the ring upon his finger, and seemed ready to forget what he had asked.

"There are other things to be remembered," and he looked thoughtfully at the orchard trees. "What are your wishes as to the secret you have given me to share?"

His self-repression pleased her, with its immediate turning to interests that were hers alone.

"You seem to think for me. I feel my lips close when I see these men."

"Such a truth is not easy in the telling."

"It is not that I am afraid. But there are memories—and thoughts."

"That the best of us hold sacred. Do I not understand? Let the truth wait till you meet Beaumanoir at Josselin."

Her eyes thanked him, for she was loath to expose her pride to these grim men who were sating their blood-lust with staring at a carcass.

“You do not think me a coward?”

“No, God forbid! Who are Dubois and Carro de Bodegat that you should show your heart to them?”

To Tinteniac her reluctance was natural enough, for when a man loves, his sympathies are quickened till he can behold beauty in the simplest workings of the soul. He left Tiphaine in the little solar, and went to greet Dubois and his brother Bretons, who were crowding from the orchard into the farm-house. So hot was the blood-hate in them that they had stripped Croquart’s body of its armor, hacked off his feet and hands, and driven a stake through the naked torso. The dead Fleming’s fingers were being treasured like ingots of gold, and some of the rougher spirits of the troop called for the slaughtering of Croquart’s horse.

“Down, you mad dogs!” and Dubois saved the animal from their swords, and had his arm badly bitten as he held the beast’s bridle.

The men laughed at their leader’s savage face, and at the way he abruptly reconsidered his opinion.

“The beast has the master’s devil in him,” and he suffered the rough troopers to have their way.

Tinteniac was seized on when he came down into the hall. The men kissed him like great children, for he had been the idol of the Breton soldiery since the combat at the Oak of Mivoie. He broke free from them at last and joined Dubois, who was sitting snarling on a saddle while one of his men rubbed ointment into the horse bite on his arm.

“The result of mistaken mercy, sire,” and he grimaced with the smart of it. “Steady, you fool, steady! you are not scrubbing the hall floor.”

Carro de Bodegat joined them, smiling ironically at Dubois’s oaths and distortions of the face.

“Courage, brother, courage; the son of a mare has as much gratitude as the son of a woman. Is it true, sire,” and he turned to Tinteniac, “that you do not know the name of the bully who pulled down the Fleming here in the orchard?”

Tinteniac confessed that he was as ignorant as the rest, nor did the two knights enlighten him, since the spirit of jealousy strengthened the promise they had made.

To Tinteniac the news of the rout at Josselin explained Croquart’s inordinate hurry to put twenty leagues between him and Pontivy. Dubois and De Bodegat were ready with many questions, and he in turn had much to hear from them. On neither side was Bertrand’s name mentioned; Tiphaine’s wishes were tending towards his doom.

In a few minutes they had made their plans, Dubois still swearing at the teeth-marks in his arm. Tinteniach, who felt his wounds, desired them to let him rest for a day, and neither Dubois nor Carro de Bodegat demurred at the suggestion. The delay would enable them, in the name of Justice, to vent their ill-humor upon the traitor who had cheated them of Croquart's head. Dubois had left the bloody trophy hidden in the hovel where Bertrand sat and brooded on the past. The three guards had been ordered to let no one pass, and the whole troop warned against divulging Bertrand's name.

Tinteniach, knowing nothing of the prisoner in the hovel, returned to the solar to rest on his bed of straw.

It was past noon, and Tinteniach lay asleep, when Tiphaine, weary of the four walls of the room, went out alone into the orchard. Geoffroi Dubois and Carro de Bodegat were sitting as judges over a wrestling-match that the Breton soldiery had started in the yard. She slipped out almost unnoticed, catching a glimpse of two sturdy troopers hugging each other in the middle of the ring. The white-topped trees and the deep aloneness of the rich green grass were very pleasant to her, for with Croquart's death and the return of freedom she had a great hunger for her home and for the face of her father, whom she had left in sorrow and unrest. The human consciousness, like the sky, is rarely untraversed by a cloud, the azure days serving only to part one gray noon from another. And to such a heart as Tiphaine's solitude called from the deeps of nature where the warm sap spread into the quiet faces of the flowers.

The Breton soldiers were shouting and exchanging wagers in the yard, their loud voices bringing discords where she sought for silence; nor was the orchard bereft of horror, seeing that Croquart's body, naked and mutilated, lay near the house, with a stake thrust through it. Tiphaine could see the glint of the golden meadows sweeping towards the arches of the trees. It would be good, she thought, to wander away into the fields, to let her gown sweep the waving grass, to watch the larks soar, and to hear them sing.

The desire led her towards the hovel where Bertrand waited for the end, the three guards gossiping together and leaning on their spears. A mere passing curiosity stirred in her like a thought suggested to a wayfarer by some grotesque tree beside the road. She had no vision of Bertrand sitting upon the pile of faggots, his head bowed over his roped hands.

The three men saluted her, and she turned aside to ask why Messire Geoffroi Dubois took such trouble to guard a mere stack of sticks.

"A prisoner, madame," said the tallest of the three.

"A prisoner?"

"A common thief we picked up on the road from Loudeac. Messire Dubois will give him the rope anon."

Tiphaine passed on, and yet the soldier's curt and casual words had robbed

the meadows of half their restfulness. She found herself repeating those same words: "A common thief. Messire Dubois will give him the rope anon." It was as though her sorrow had opened the heart of pity to all the world. Death and the pathos of it seemed everywhere—in the woods and fields, in the monk's cell, and in the castles of the great. Tiphaine's heart was full of that deep tenderness that dowers the meanest life with significance and the power of awaking pity. She seemed to hear the whimpering of this poor wretch, caged like an animal awaiting the butcher's knife. What though he was "a common thief," a rogue, an outcast, her soul had found something on which to pour the divine dew that God gives to those who suffer. The purpose came to her as she wandered slowly over the fields. One man's life should be spared that day; she would beg it of Dubois before the sword could spill more blood.

As for Bertrand, he had heard Tiphaine's voice, and sat shaking as with an ague, his eyes staring vacantly at the wattled wall of the hovel. It seemed to him of a sudden that he was less strong than he had believed, for the soul in him cried out for life and the joy of being. In a day he would have followed Croquart to the awe of the unknown, the woman for whom he had suffered knowing nothing of his end. The loneliness and the bitter smart of it made him for the moment like a forgotten child. Great tears were wet upon his cheeks, and for once no angry hand dashed them impatiently away.

XXXVII

IN a green corner of the orchard, shaded towards the west by a bank of brushwood, Bertrand stood for his last trial before those Bretons who had hunted Croquart from the walls of Josselin. Behind him the brown gold of the meadows rippled like water at sunset, to touch the gnarled trunks of the flowering apple-trees. A pile of faggots had been thrown down to give Messires Geoffroi Dubois and Carro de Bodegat a seat; their esquires were grouped behind them, bearing their masters' shields and spears.

Bertrand watched the faces of these two knights; Dubois, brawny, ponderous, black faced and round shouldered as a bear, less to be feared than his sleek and mercurial brother in arms. Carro de Bodegat's face, narrow and aggressive, with its sharp brown beard and rapid eyes, reminded Du Guesclin of the face of some velvet-capped merchant who had learned to deal with all the greedy littleness of the great. Bertrand hated the man for his high-nostrilled unction, for his insinuating smoothness that was most treacherous when most suave. He knew Carro de Bodegat's nature too well to hope much from him in the way of magnanimity. He was a creature of courtly astuteness and polished persiflage, who would use a dagger where an honest man would have used a sword.

Carro de Bodegat assumed the authority, Dubois lolling on the faggots, and nursing the arm that Croquart's horse had bitten.

"Messire Bertrand du Guesclin. Stand aside, gentlemen, and let our friend have room."

To Bertrand the circle of steel-clad figures seemed like as many pillars of gray granite set up by the folk of old upon the wind-swept Breton moors. The faces were as so many masks, curious and distrustful, crowding upon him like the threatening faces of a dream. He felt as though they kept the air from him, and confused his thoughts with the intentness of their many eyes.

From this mist of faces the countenance of Carro de Bodegat disentangled itself, keen and thin—an axe shining among so many billets of wood. It was with De Bodegat that the ordeal lay, and Bertrand braced himself for the touch of the glowing metal.

"Well, messire, what are we to say of the troth-breaking at Mivoie?"

"Why ask that question? It has been asked and answered."

The half smile in the man's eyes, the aggressive tilt of his peaked chin, made Bertrand hate him as he had never hated living thing before. The conviction weighed on him that he was like a sullen boy doomed to be outwitted by this shrewd and cold-brained man.

"Then Messire Bertrand du Guesclin will not accuse another gentleman of treachery?"

"I accuse no one, messire."

"Nine-and-twenty of us fought at Mivoie, and Guillaume de Montauban took the vacant place."

"You are well-informed, sir; you say I was not there. Why ask me all these questions?"

"Because," and De Bodegat hugged his knee, "you cannot answer me, messire, and you show these gentlemen how to escape a lie."

Bertrand angrily tightened one wrist against the other, so that the straining thongs twisted and bruised the sinews.

"Then, Messire Bertrand du Guesclin, we can color our own conclusions?"

"Well?"

"That you took bribes from Bamborough and the English not to fight at Mivoie."

Bertrand looked at the apple-boughs, and answered:

"That is a lie."

The merest child could have seen that he was suffering, yet for De Bodegat there was an ungenerous gratification of the ego in prolonging the humiliation of a man who once worsted him in a duel.

"And yet, sir, you were with Croquart at Pontivy?"

"I have already answered that."

"And you had battered the bearings from your shield."

"Well, you have seen it."

"So we may say that you loved the Fleming because of the blood-money that had been offered for his head."

A few short, sharp laughs, like the yapping of dogs, betrayed the temper of those to whom Carro de Bodegat appealed. Bertrand looked round him with a defiant lifting of the head. His eyes gleamed out at these countrymen of his who seemed so ready to condemn and to disgrace.

"Messires, I tell no lies, neither do I ask for mercy. If I am a traitor—and God himself cannot prove that true—give me my quittance and make an end."

Carro de Bodegat turned to Dubois, and made some pretence of deferring to his brother's judgment, feeling perfectly assured that justice would meet with no obstruction in that quarter. It was sufficient for Messire Geoffroi Dubois that his authority had been consulted. A straightforward and rather savage soldier, he had no manner of doubt as to Bertrand's guilt, and elected to have him hanged on the nearest tree.

Carro de Bodegat called one of his esquires forward.

"Gretry, where is this gentleman's sword?"

A man-at-arms had taken charge of it, and delivered the sword to Gretry,

who brought it to his master. Carro de Bodegat unsheathed the weapon, and held it before him, balanced by the blade across his palm.

“Here, gentlemen, you see the sword of a traitor—a sword that was to be bought and sold, and used for the winning of blood-money in these wars. Such swords must be broken with those who handle them. Come, Messire Bertrand du Guesclin, have you anything to say?”

“Nothing, messire.”

His eyes were fixed wistfully upon the sword that had served him for many years—one of the few friends he had ever owned. It had memories for him, had that same sword, and now—like its master—it was to be broken for a lie.

“Gretry!” and De Bodegat called the esquire forward.

“Yes, sire.”

“Take this traitor’s sword and break it across your knee.”

Gretry received it from Carro de Bodegat’s hands, set one foot upon the point, and bent the blade up over his knee. But being a mere youngster and of fragile build, the steel proved too tough for such strength as he possessed.

Carro de Bodegat started from the pile of fagots, and, taking the sword from Gretry, looked insolently into Bertrand’s face.

“It is a pity that such a sword should have been wasted, sir,” he said.

“God knows that it was not wasted, Messire Carro de Bodegat.”

“And God knows that Bertrand du Guesclin has told the truth!”

There was a sharp movement among the crowded figures, a sudden turning of all faces towards the shadows cast by the apple-trees. De Bodegat, with Bertrand’s sword held crosswise across his thigh, swung round on his heel like a man who has been called a liar by some stranger in a crowd.

The circle of armed men broke and parted before his eyes, giving a glimpse of the dark trunks of the apple-trees and the green depths of the orchard grass.

Bertrand, looking like a man in Hades who beholds the shining figure of the risen Christ, saw Tiphaine standing under the trees, where the sun poured through the white boughs, making her hair glow like a halo of gold.

XXXVIII

FOR the moment the figure in the black armor had ceased to be the centre about which the human interest of the scene revolved. All heads were turned towards that more imperious shape sweeping in its cloak of gray from the quiet shadows of the orchard trees.

Queenliness in a woman is the counterpart of courage in a man, and with Tiphaine the very carriage of her head conveyed more magnetism than the choicest smiles of a woman of meaner presence and address. She walked as though these gentlemen of the sword would fall back before her, and fall back they did, leaving her a pathway through the trampled grass. Dubois, standing beside the pile of fagots, had his expectancy ignored as though his knightliness had no standing in the lady's eyes. Tall as many of the men who watched her, fearless, and forgetful of all feebler issues, she swept on like one who walks towards God's altar amid the blurred figures of an unseen crowd.

The fifty odd bassinets turned with the unanimity of so many weather-cocks veering with the wind. Their incontinent curiosity trailed at her heels as though she were St. Ursula with eleven thousand virgins following in her wake. Carro de Bodegat alone had the presence to obstruct the path she chose to tread, and to attempt a parley with this imperious perfection of a queen.

"Madame—"

She looked straight into De Bodegat's sallow face like a red dawn refusing to be smothered by a cloud.

"Room, messire."

And Bertrand, into whose heart the blood of life seemed bubbling up, saw Carro de Bodegat step back, hunch up his bony shoulders, and venture a side-thrust as she passed.

"I would ask madame her authority—"

"Have patience, messire, and I promise you you shall hear it," and she left him grimacing in perplexity at Dubois.

To Bertrand the apple-boughs seemed more white against the blue, the grass more green, the gold of the meadows deeper than golden wine. She came near to him, halted, and looked into his face so steadily, and with such an outflashing of her woman's soul, that he felt like one dazed by some bright light.

"Messires, it has been spread abroad that Bertrand du Guesclin did not fight at Mivoie."

She spoke as though flinging a challenge at their feet, her voice slow but very quiet. The eyes of the whole company were fixed upon her face, for the

strange stateliness of her manner seemed to promise some great confession.

Dubois and his brother in arms bowed to her like men who were half in doubt as to what attitude to assume.

“Madame, we were with the Sire de Beaumanoir at Mivoie—”

“And you did not see the Du Guesclin eagle?”

They admitted the enigma, and were the more puzzled by the expression of consent upon her face.

“Perhaps, messires, you remember my brother’s arms—a silver fesse on a field of blue, the shield of Sir Robin Ragueneel, of La Bellière, near Dinan?”

“Assuredly.” And they waited to hear more.

“And yet, messires, my brother was not at Mivoie. His heart had failed him, and he had broken troth. You would have found him hiding in the woods near Loudeac.”

Her words won a murmur of astonishment from the listening men, her very calmness carrying conviction to the hearts of not a few.

“Impossible!”

Carro de Bodegat’s face was honestly impertinent in its unbelief.

“How impossible, messire? Should I confess this shame without a cause?”

“Madame, we saw your brother’s shield, and heard him answer to his name.”

“Then the deceit was the braver in its thoroughness. Know, gentlemen, and Bretons—all, that it was Bertrand du Guesclin who fought in my brother’s stead!”

Her words fell like stones into a pool, making the waters swing into merging circles that spread and melted into a vague suggestion of unrest.

“Messires,” and she looked round at the listening faces with a brave lifting of the head, “I loved my brother, and I was afraid, for he was young and not stiffened into manhood when the news came of the gathering at Mivoie. It was then that Bertrand lodged at La Bellière with us a night, and since he was my friend I gave my brother to him with these words: ‘Look to the lad, because I love him, and because he is our father’s only son.’ Little did I think that Bertrand du Guesclin would set so great a price upon my words, and bear the shame to save a coward.”

She ceased, and looked round her at the faces of those who listened. Only on Carro de Bodegat’s face did she find the unhallowed glimmer of a prurient sneer.

“If this is the truth—”

It was Dubois, the Breton bear, who came forward several paces from where he stood.

“It is the truth. Ask the Sire de Tinteniach, ask Robin Ragueneel, for you will find him among the monks of the abbey of Lehon. Shame drove my brother

there when he could no longer bear the burden of a lie.”

Not a man doubted her in the sincerity of his heart. Carro de Bodegat alone remained grudging and ungenerous to the end.

“Madame, we have yet to hear the meaning of this man’s hiding at Pontivy.”

“This man—indeed!” and she let her scorn flash out at him. “Come, Messire Carro de Bodegat, I will ask you a question in return. Who was it killed Croquart and his three men single-handed when you were hunting them with fifty Bretons at your back?”

The laugh was against De Bodegat. The rest had drawn aside from him. He stood alone, and would not suffer his jealousy to be convinced.

“Madame, you have not answered me.”

“I have no wish to answer you, messire. Bertrand, who is no traitor, will answer for himself.”

The Bretons cheered her. De Bodegat, remembering Croquart’s mangled neck, looked sullenly at Bertrand and said nothing.

The pent-up ardor of the men burst out at last. All hands were towards Bertrand, and they crowded about him, strenuous to make amends. It was Dubois who was the first to do a brave man’s penance for a savage wrong. And yet another was before him in the act, for Tinteniach, long a listener, had pushed through the crowd and rushed on Du Guesclin with a great hearted-shout of joy.

“Bertrand, Brother Bertrand, the prize at Mivoie should have been yours—not mine.”

“Sire,” and the strong man’s head was bowed at last so that it rested on Tinteniach’s shoulder—“sire, I am a great fool, but—God help me—I shall play the woman.”

XXXIX

THEY stood alone together on the edge of the orchard, nothing but deep grassland before them and the haze of heat that covered the woods. The men who had followed the green gyron from Josselin had slipped away by twos and threes—Tinteniach, with his hand on Dubois's shoulder; Carro de Bodegat, in sneering solitude and ready to snap at his best friend.

The bees were working in the apple-boughs, and the birds sang everywhere. The green lap of the world was filled with the precious stones from the treasure-chest of spring. Tiphaine was looking before her with a faint smile playing about her mouth, the sword that Carro de Bodegat had surrendered to her held like a crucifix in her hands.

"Bertrand."

Now that they were alone together he felt half afraid of her, and shy of the great gulf that her imagined marriage had set between them. Tiphaine, turning to him, wondered why his eyes looked sad. Her gratitude was more deep than gratitude towards him. Bertrand might have suspected it had he not been so resigned to believing her a wife.

"Do you remember the day when you plucked the white May-bough for me before the tournament at Rennes?"

Bertrand remembered it, and by his face the memory brought him more bitterness than joy.

"You were a child—then."

"A child, yes. I can see Robin now cantering his pony over the meadows. What a blessed boon it is that we mortals cannot foresee the future! The shame of this thing has broken my father's heart."

She began to speak of the past, that past that made the present seem more unlivable and real. She was grateful to him, Bertrand knew. But what was mere gratitude?—a cup of wine to a starving man.

"Tiphaine," and the low pitch of his voice startled her, "I am thinking of that poor child's grave among the beech-trees of Broceliande."

"Arletta?"

"Yes. You remember the words you gave me then?"

She looked at him steadily, with a transient quivering of her upper lip.

"I remember those words. And—I am thinking they may be forgotten."

"They can never be forgotten."

"No?"

"For they have made me something of which I am not ashamed."

His deep sadness puzzled her, for his eyes were like the eyes of a man who

strives to be patient when suffering inward pain. The tragedy of the Aspen Tower had left its shadow on him, and yet it could not explain to her the overmastering melancholy that seemed to humble his whole heart.

"I did my best to save the lad," he said.

"Can I doubt that? No, no, you kept your promises almost too well. If they had hanged you for a traitor I should not have had the heart to look the world in the face again."

"What would it have mattered?" and she saw that his bitterness was not assumed.

"Mattered? To lose the bravest man in Brittany, at the end of a rope!"

"Tiphaine!"

"Did I not dream as a child that Bertrand du Guesclin would do great things. And now this Bertrand du Guesclin is proving the wisdom of my dreams."

He looked at her so sadly, but with such an air of patient self-distrust, that it seemed that her praise was like wealth to a man dying of some inexorable disease.

"I am glad that I kept my promise," he began, "and that you can think well of a man who but a year ago was not worthy to touch your hands."

"But now?"

"Now—also"—and he spoke with a sense of effort—"I am glad—that you have chosen for yourself a man who in these rough times can give you honor and strength—things precious to a woman."

He made a brave uttering of these words, trying not to betray to her anything of the thoughts that were in his heart. There was a questioning wonder in Tiphaine's eyes. Only at that moment did she remember the part that the *Sieur de Tinteniach* had played.

"Bertrand!"

He looked at her sharply, for her voice had startled him.

"I had forgotten that you had followed us from Josselin. You often watched us with Croquart—was that not so?"

"Yes, I was always on the watch."

"And perhaps you were near enough to hear some chance words."

He flushed like an eavesdropper discovered in a seeming meanness.

"I was near you—" he began, "because—"

She broke in on him as though she had read his thoughts. "You believed that I was the *Sieur de Tinteniach's* wife?"

"I believed it."

"You believed that?"

"What else could I believe?"

"It was a mere pretence. *Tinteniach* knew too well what manner of man

Croquart was."

She told him the whole truth, and Bertrand watched her even as he had watched when she had swept past Carro de Bodegat to set him free. The bonds then had been bonds upon the flesh. Now she was breaking the spiritual fetters that had been riveted so fast about his soul.

"Tiphaine, it is enough."

The simplicity of those few words showed her how deep a loyalty had suffered here in silence. Woman that she was, she realized the completeness of his self-abnegation, and honored him the more because he had not grudged his faith to her when he had no hope of a reward.

"Bertrand, come near to me. Do you believe that I have told you the whole truth?"

He looked at her, silent yet very happy.

"I believe whatever you may say to me."

"Blindly?"

"No—not blindly."

"And why—not blindly?"

"Because"—and his strong face warmed to her—"because I can swear you are what you seem to be. Because I know what I myself have been. Because I have learned what honor is, and to know the face that cannot give a lie."

"Then I am the same Tiphaine who carried the white May-bough into Rennes?"

"Need you ask that?"

His faith was the more precious to her now that she knew what such a faith was worth. She turned aside, still holding the sword, and looked out over the meadows like one who wonders at the mystery of a moonlit sea. Some measure of awe had fallen on her in the presence of this silent and patient man who had learned to suffer—even to the death.

"Bertrand," she said, at last, "I have a great longing in me for La Bellière and for my home."

He bowed his head, watched her, and waited.

"The Sieur de Tinteniach and these men will carry the news to Beaumanoir at Josselin. Is it your wish that I should go to Josselin with them?"

"My wish?"

"Yes. For it is your right to ask."

He drew a deep breath and gave her all his homage.

"If I might take you to La Bellière—"

"Bertrand!"

"You can trust me?"

"I trust you utterly," she said.

XL

AT La Bellière an old man walked in the garden of the château, leaning on a servant's arm and taking short turns to and fro on the stretch of grass bordering the fish-pond, where the sedges rustled and the yellow flags were raising their yellow banners above each clump of spears. The bloom was falling from the fruit trees, and lay turning brown upon the grass. In the wilder corners of the orchard the weeds and wild flowers stood knee-deep, the sunlight shimmering into the waste of green, and making each wild flower seem like a living gem, red, white, and azure, purple and gold.

A dog wandered lazily at the old man's heels, snapping now and again at an over-zealous fly or watching the blackbirds and mistlethrushes that were foraging for nestfuls of querulous children. Swallows skimmed the surface of the fish-pond, twittering, and touching the still water with their wings between the great green leaves of the water-lilies.

It was Stephen Raguenel, who went slowly to and fro, leaning on the servant's arm, his steps weak and hesitating, an expression of profound and patient melancholy upon his face. He stooped so much that he seemed to have lost three inches of his stature in a week. His eyes had lost their pointedness and their sparkle; they were fixed and vacant, the eyes of a man who is living largely in the past. From time to time the Vicomte would lift his head and look round him with the half-wistful wonder of a child. The second simplicity of life seemed to be taking possession of him, and the pride of the great seigneur had mellowed into the quiet gentleness of the old man.

The servant, whose head was but a shade darker than his master's, kept step with him, and did not speak except when spoken to. Nor was his respect a thing of the surface only. He had felt much that the Vicomte himself had felt, and the shadow of humiliation fell also across his face.

"Girard, good fellow, what day of the week is it?"

"The third, sire."

"Ah, ah, and the swallows are here. It is hardly a year ago since we rode to join Madame the Countess in the south."

"Yes, sire, that is so." And the servant, with the discretion of a good listener, contented himself with following where his master led.

"How do the apricots look on the south wall, Girard—eh?"

"They have been full of bloom, sire."

"Madame Tiphaine is fond of the fruit. Let me see, Girard—how many leagues is it to Josselin from here?"

Girard pretended to consider, though he was asked the same question

twenty times a day.

"Some seventeen leagues, I should say, sire, by Montcontour and Loudeac."

"And it was Thursday?"

"A Thursday, sire, when madame set out."

The Vicomte had halted and appeared to be counting the ripples that a swallow's wings had raised on the quiet waters of the pool.

"Then I shall judge that they reached Josselin on the Sabbath, Girard—eh?"

"I should judge so, sire."

"And to-day is Tuesday."

"To-day is Tuesday."

"Then on the morrow or the next day we should have good news?"

"To-morrow or the next day, sire, we should have good news."

Stephen Raguenel turned away from the fish-pond with a quiet sigh.

"That is well, that is well. I think I will rest, Girard, on the seat under the Pucelle de Saintongue. Thanks, my good fellow. There is no news to-day from the abbey of Lehon?"

"No news, sire," and Girard passed a nervous hand across his mouth.

"Abbot Stephen has a good name in Dinan, Girard—eh?"

"A very good name, sire. The country people call him their 'little father.' "

"Their 'little father'?" and the Vicomte folded his arms. "He will be a spiritual father to my son, my good Girard. Good luck to the lad. He was the only son I had."

It so happened that while Stephen Raguenel dozed in the sun on the bench under the pear-tree, Stephen, Abbot of Lehon, dealt with two shamefaced mortals who had begged an audience of him that very morning. They were none other than the two La Bellière men-servants who had shown such whole-hearted consideration for Croquart in refusing to hinder him in the capturing of the Sieur de Tinteniach and their lady. Honestly ashamed of the part they had played in the adventure, they had ridden back from Loudeac, only to find that they had not the courage to be the bearers of such news to their lord and master the Vicomte of La Bellière.

Being sensible fellows, they had conceived the plan of shifting the responsibility upon the fatherly shoulders of the Abbot of Lehon.

The Abbot did not thank them in the sincerity of his heart, but, being a conscientious priest, bemoaned the disaster and accepted the responsibility.

He ordered the two men to be locked up safely in two vacant cells.

The Vicomte had lost one child to the Church, and Abbot Stephen concluded that it would be courting a calamity to confess to him that his other child had been stolen by the "Flemish Devil." Madame Tiphaine and the Sieur

de Tinteniach might be rescued by the Bretons under Messire Geoffroi Dubois, and the Abbot deemed it wise to temporize, in the hope of receiving better news.

Unfortunately the good man's discretion was nullified by the tongue of an irresponsible woman, and that woman Lisette, Tiphaine's bower wench whom the two men had left at Loudeac. A meddling but warm-hearted creature, she had made her way to Dinan by begging a place on the back of a pack-horse belonging to a merchant who was returning to that town after disposing of his goods at Loudeac. From Dinan she trudged to La Bellière, carrying her news like a piece of hot pudding on her tongue. To such a woman it was easier to chatter than to think, and after such a journey it was imperative that she should create something of a sensation. She created it by falling in a faint at the Vicomte's feet as the old man crossed the court-yard from the garden, leaning on Girard's arm.

The woman was a fool, and Girard, shrewd in his generation, suspecting that she was ready to shriek the news of some calamity into his master's ears, promptly attempted to smother her indiscretion by whipping her gown up over her face.

"Ah, the little fox! Pierre, Gilbert, carry the baggage into the kitchen and give her a cup of wine."

He was bending over Lisette and stuffing her gown into her mouth to prolong her fainting fit. Several men ran forward, pounced on her, and prepared to bundle her unceremoniously out of the Vicomte's sight.

"Who is it, Girard?"

"No one, sire—only a silly chit who has walked too fast in the sun," and his knuckles showed no consideration for the softness of Lisette's lips.

The men were lifting her from the flag-stones when she recovered her senses with true hysterical inopportuneness and began to claw at the dress Girard had turned up over her head. The old man saw a scream gathering in the bower woman's bosom, and did his best to throttle it in her throat.

"Fool! idiot! hold your tongue—"

Lisette wriggled her hands free and clawed at Girard's face.

"Sire, sire—"

"Devil take the cat!"

The men showed her no great courtesy, but the gown fell away from her face in the scuffle.

"Let me be, fools!"

"Hold your tongue, you she-dog!"

"Sire, sire, they are hiding the truth from you. It is Lisette, madame's woman."

The Vicomte's shadow fell across the flag-stones close to her.

“Lisette!”

He had recognized the girl. Girard stood back and surrendered to the hysterical folly of a woman.

“Let her be, men. Come, what has happened?”

The dishevelled figure fell on its knees at the Vicomte’s feet.

“Sire, sire, a great misfortune.”

“Ah!”

“Madame has been taken by Croquart the Fleming. It was on the road to Josselin.” And she gabbled all she knew, and straightway began to weep.

Stephen Ragueneau looked down at her mutely, very gently, yet with a peculiar quivering of the lips. There was nothing foolish in Lisette’s grief to him. The truth was too poignant to suffer him to feel the thoughtless egotism of the woman’s tears.

“Girard.”

The old man was at his side, looking questioningly into his master’s face.

“Girard, help me to my room. I had rather have heard that she was dead.”

XLI

OVER golden moors and through winding woodways deep with the glamour of forests in green leaf, Bertrand and Tiphaine rode homeward towards Dinan.

Since there seemed something sacred in the days to them, they shunned the towns and villages, holding to the wilderness of the woods and moors, as though solitude and the silence thereof had a restfulness for either heart. For Bertrand that season of the world's awakening had been a season of storm, of weary nights and troubled dawns. He had slain his own self, to find his manhood reincarnated in the second life that had risen for him like a gold cloud out of the east. He was as a man who had much to remember, and much more to foreshadow. The woods and moors had a sudden awe for him, an awe that played like sacred fire upon the solemn summits of the hills.

As a man's life is, so are his desires. In the making or the marring it is the genius of effort that sets the furnace glowing and strikes with the hammer upon the malleable metal of the soul. No man ever drifted into strength or dreamed into nobleness by lying on a bed with a wine-cup at his elbow. We gather life or lose it. God strikes no balance for us. We may labor blindly, but we must labor—to be men.

As for Bertrand, he had grown young and old in the same breath—young in that he had won the brave ardor of his youth again; old, because he had taken the temper of the world, and learned to behold the conquering good even in the darkness of disloyalty and shame. He had come to true manhood by throwing that same manhood bound and broken at the feet of honor. He had won in thinking that he had lost, triumphed by believing that he could bear defeat.

Therefore he rode beside Tiphaine, the Child of the White May Bough, the Enchantress of the Aspen Tower, looking upon the beauty of her womanhood without fear, yet with awe. Her face seemed to open the gates of heaven before his eyes. He was content to follow her, hoping that in due season he might hold her hand in his.

The first night they lodged in a little inn upon the road. There was but one guest-chamber in the place, and Tiphaine slept there, while Bertrand lay awake before the door.

They passed the second night in an open wood, great pine-trees towering to the stars, Tiphaine asleep on a bed of heather that Bertrand's hands had gathered and spread. He stood on guard till the dawn came, feeling the dark, whispering wood like some solemn temple where he could keep vigil as a sacred right. Tiphaine slept, even like a trusting child. Her great faith in him

made Bertrand happy, happy as a man who has conquered fame.

He saw the dawn come up, a stealing into the sky of vapors of crimson and of gold. He knew that that evening they would reach La Bellière. It was to be the last day of their pilgrimage together.

The sunlight was slanting through the trees, warming the red trunks, when Tiphaine awoke and saw Bertrand, motionless, a pillar of patience, leaning upon his sword. There was a faint glimmering of sunlight in the eyes that looked at him. Her hair bathed Tiphaine's face like some soft autumn color bathing the white face of an autumn flower.

She left the bed of heather, and Bertrand heard the rustle of her footsteps in the grass. He turned, looking like one who has been watching the sunrise and finding the woods dark and mist-fogged after the brightness of the broadening east.

Tiphaine's eyes had the strangeness of eyes that are half happy and half sad.

"And I have let you watch all night!"

He looked at her and smiled.

"It has seemed short enough."

"Then Bertrand du Guesclin is never weary?"

"I had my own thoughts. With some thoughts—a man is never tired."

The secrets of the heart escape in the uttering of a few simple words. They stood looking at each other, each wishing to be compassionate yet honest. Tiphaine's eyes were the first to turn away.

"We shall reach La Bellière to-night," she said.

"Yes, to-night."

"And I shall see my father."

Perhaps there was the slightest tremor of regret quivering in her thankfulness. Bertrand was watching Tiphaine as a strong man watches the light or shadow in the eyes of one he loves.

"Shall I be welcome at La Bellière?"

"Welcome?"

"You see, some men are remembered—with bitterness."

"You misjudge my father."

"No, but I feel for him."

"I know it."

She lifted her face to his with a brave quickening of her womanhood. Instinct told her all that was in Bertrand's heart.

His hands were opening and shutting upon the hilt of his sword.

"A year ago you know what manner of man I was."

"I know what manner of man I honor now."

"You called me a worthless ruffian, and you were right."

"Forget the words."

"No, before God, no; they made me turn into a man."

"And you, Bertrand, have taught me many things in return."

It was as though she yielded, and yet did not yield.

"Tiphaine."

"We owe so much to you, we of La Bellière."

His hands swept out to her, letting the sword fall.

"No, no, do not say that. Am I a man to trade upon my deeds?"

"Bertrand!"

"Forget them, for I should hate myself if you were to look on me as one who had plotted for your gratitude. Tiphaine, I am just a man. I am thinking of you as the child who rescued me at Rennes."

His words moved her more deeply than he imagined. She looked into his swarthy and impassioned face, and felt his homage leap up about her like sacred fire.

"If I might speak it?"

She faltered, and her cheeks were red, her eyes mysterious.

"No, no, not now—"

He went near to her, holding out his great, strong hands.

"I am a rough, ignorant fool, but—before God—I know now how to give you homage."

"Bertrand, I know it—"

"Well—"

"Wait"—and she looked at him, and then at the hands he held to her—"I ask you to see the shadows that I see, the shadows that are darkening my own home."

"Shadows?"

"Yes"—and her courage came to her—"I am thinking Bertrand, of my father, and of Robin hiding in the cloisters of Lehon."

He dropped his hands and drew back a step, not harshly or selfishly, but with the reverence of a man who could behold the same vision as her tenderness beheld.

"Tiphaine, I never had a home."

"No."

"They always hated me. And yet—"

"And yet you feel what I feel, the sacredness that watches over home. Bertrand, there is my father; my heart goes out to him; I remember how he looked at me when I told him the truth of Robin's shame."

His face was more tender towards her than before.

"He loved the lad."

"And now he looks to me for all the love he lost at Mivoie. To-night he

will kiss me and think me all his own.”

There was no bitterness in Bertrand’s eyes.

“You have a great heart in you.”

“Bertrand, you understand?”

“God bless you, yes.”

She went to him suddenly and took his hands.

“Patience.”

And in her eyes he might have read the dawning truth.

XLII

IN the Abbot's parlor at Lehon there was a window that looked out upon the abbey garden, with its sunny stretch of turf, broad beds of herbs and vegetables, its barrier of aspen-trees about the orchard, an orchard rich in Pucelle de Flanders, St. Reols, and Caillon pears, cherries, and quinces, and pearmain apples. At this same window stood the Abbot Stephen, and behind him, half in the shadow, a girl in a gray hood and cloak and a man in black and rusty harness. The window was shaded, moreover, by a swinging lattice and by the red flowers and green leaves of a climbing rose, whose tendrils wavered athwart the blue of the summer sky.

Below, in the garden, between two broad bands of beans in flower, a young man in a russet-colored cassock was stooping over an onion-bed, holding a basket woven of osier twigs in one hand, while with the other he pulled up weeds. From time to time he stood up as though to stretch himself, or took to crawling between the rows, pushing the basket before him and throwing the weeds into it as he worked. The cowl of the cassock was turned back, leaving his head with its cropped hair bare to the sun.

The man weeding the onion-bed was Robin Raguenel; those who watched him, Bertrand du Guesclin and Robin's sister.

The crawling figure, in its brown cassock, hardly suggested the young Breton noble who had ridden out to fight at Mivoie in all the splendor and opulence of arms. Robin had changed the sword for the hoe, the helmet for a basket of osiers. In lieu of cantering to the cry of trumpets over the Breton moors, he crawled across the cabbage and onion beds of the abbey of Lehon, the sun scorching his rough cassock, his nails rimmed with dirt, his sandalled feet brown with the warm earth of the garden. Here was a transfiguration that challenged the pride of the worldly-hearted.

"Pax Dei."

Abbot Stephen crossed himself, beholding in Tiphaine's eyes a certain unpleased pity, as though the crawling figure of her brother had made her set the past beside the present.

Abbot Stephen looked at her steadily and smiled.

"You are offended for your brother's sake," he said.

Her eyes were on Robin, who had squatted on his heels to rest, and was staring vacantly into the basket half filled with weeds.

"Offended, father?"

"There is more wisdom, child, in this penance than the mere eye can see."

She still watched Robin, an expression of poignant pity upon her face.

"The change is so sudden to me," she said.

Stephen of Lehon spread his hands with a gesture of fatherly assent.

"And yet, my daughter, there is wisdom in this work of his. Your brother's pride is in the dust, and in the dust man's humbleness may find that subtle and mysterious seed that has its flowering when the heart is sad."

"It is difficult for me, father, not to grudge the past."

"Is there, then, no glory, child, save in the service of the sword?"

He looked at her with an amiable austerity whose humaneness had not hardened into the mere dogmatism of the priest. Abbot Stephen still boasted the instinctive sympathy of youth. As for Tiphaine, she glanced at Bertrand, who had drawn back into the room, arguing in her heart that it was better to fight God's battle in the world than to dream dreams in a religious house.

"Christ our Lord was but a carpenter." And the Abbot crossed himself.

"I remember it."

"In the simple things of life the heart finds comfort. A sinless working with the hands leads to a sinless working of the soul. It was the lad himself who prayed me to give him work to do."

She put her hands together as though in prayer.

"My brother must know his own needs," she said. "It is better to work than to sulk like a sick hawk upon a perch."

"Child, that is the right spirit."

And he stood to bless her, with no complacent unction, but with heart of grace.

For a while she looked at Robin kneeling on the naked earth, her silence seeming to confess that she was more content to leave him in the Church's keeping.

"I go now to La Bellière," she said, quietly.

"You have a double share, my child, to give and to receive."

"God grant that I may remember it," and she turned to Bertrand with a stately lifting of the head.

At La Bellière the sky was an open wealth of blue, the aspens all a-whisper. And yet, with summer reddening the lips of June, the sorrow of the place was still like the sighing of a wind through winter trees on a winter evening. Logs burned in the great fireplace of the solar. Stephen Ragueneau, looking like some December saint, craved from the flames that warmth that life and the noon sun could not give.

The turrets were casting long shadows towards the east when dust rose on the road from Dinan. A few peasants were running in advance of a knight and a lady who wound between the aspen-trees towards the towers and chimneys of La Bellière. Soon there came the sound of men shouting, the clatter of hoofs on the bridge before the gate. The starlings and jackdaws wheeled and

chattered about the chimneys. It was as though the château had slept under some wizard's spell, to awake suddenly at the sounding of a hero's horn.

Girard, discretion among the discreet, was craning out of a turret window, his face like a vociferous gargoyle spouting from a wall. He saw madame's palfrey, the cloak with its crimson lining, and understood that Croquart had been cheated of a ransom.

Girard ran down the tower stair two steps at a time, bruised his forehead—without swearing—against the cross-beam of a door, and reached the great court in time to see Tiphaine and the man in the black harness ride in through the gate.

"Assuredly this is God's doing." And Girard crossed himself before running forward to join his fellow-servants in frightening the starlings, who were unaccustomed to so much shouting.

"Madame, this is God's doing."

He kissed the hem of her cloak, and was asked but a single question in return:

"Girard, my father?"

"Now that madame has come back to us my lord the Vicomte will most surely live."

She left the saddle and bade Bertrand follow her. But the man in the black harness held back, feeling that he was a stranger amid the curious and many faces that filled the court-yard of La Bellière.

"Go," he said to her. "I will wait my time."

"Perhaps it is better."

"Yes, that you should go to him alone."

Girard, sparkling like a well-polished flagon, and brimful of exultation, presented his homage to the gentleman on the black horse. All the La Bellière servants had been told the truth. Messire Bertrand du Guesclin could have commanded more devotion at that moment than Charles of Blois himself.

"The grace of God to you, messire," and Girard's face carried more than a servile blessing.

The men made the turrets ring.

"God and St. Ives for the Eagle of Cancale!"

They crowded round, each trying to hold his stirrup or bridle or to take his spear. Their enthusiasm grew bolder as the contact became more intimate. Two of the tallest men soon had Bertrand upon their shoulders, and carried him in triumph to the dais in the great hall.

Girard's bald pate glistened with obeisances.

"Would my lord eat and drink?"

Bertrand accepted the suggestion. He felt it embarrassing, this setting-up of him like an idol to be stared at unwinkingly by so many pairs of eyes. If the

god ate, they would at least see that he was half-human like themselves.

“My good-fellow, honest men are always thirsty.”

And had it been possible they would have emptied a hogsheaf of Bordeaux down Bertrand’s throat by way of testifying their devotion.

Even the cook, gardeners, and dairy-women crowded “the screens” to catch a glimpse of Bertrand as he sat at the high table. They watched him eat and drink as though he were an ogre, whispering together, peeping over one another’s shoulders. Bertrand, who had none of the spirit of the mock hero, chafed under this flattering publicity, being in no humor to be gaped at like a black bear in a cage.

“My good-fellow, do people ever eat here?”

Girard flourished a napkin and looked puzzled.

“Ah, messire—”

“These friends of yours seem to grudge me my hunger by the way they push and stare.”

Girard took the hint and closed the doors on the array of inquisitive faces. He returned and made his bow.

“Messire du Guesclin must pardon the people. Messire du Guesclin is a great soldier and a hero.”

“Nonsense, sir,” and Bertrand laughed half foolishly at Girard’s magniloquent respect.

“Messire, you have a modest heart.”

“Modest heart!—to the devil with you!”

“And a courage that will not be flattered.”

Bertrand picked up his wine-cup and held it towards Girard.

“Enough, friend,” he said; “I am clumsy at catching compliments. Drink to all good Bretons. That will please me better.”

And Girard drank, his eyes looking at Bertrand over the rim of the cup.

It was then that the door leading to the stairway behind the dais opened, showing Tiphaine in a green gown, a red girdle about her waist.

“Bertrand.”

He saw at once that she had been weeping, though her eyes shone like a clear sky after rain.

“Come.”

Bertrand followed her without a word. She climbed the stairs and halted on the threshold of the solar, her hand on the latch of the closed door.

“My father has asked for you.”

The man before her appeared far more distrustful of himself than if he had been called to lead the forlornest of forlorn hopes.

“You will find him changed.”

“Am I to go alone?”

"If you wish it."

Bertrand's face betrayed his unwillingness.

"I would rather—"

"I came with you?"

And she took his hand.

Stephen Raguenel was sitting in his chair before the fire, with the look of a man exhausted by too sudden and great a joy. Tears were still shining on his cheeks. Bertrand felt more afraid of him than of a weeping girl.

"Father, I have brought Bertrand to you."

The old man would have risen; his hands were already on the arms of his chair. Bertrand, a great rush of pity sweeping away his awkwardness, went to him and knelt like a stripling beside the Vicomte's chair.

"Sire—"

Stephen Raguenel laid his hands upon Bertrand's shoulders. His eyes had a blind and vacant look. It was the wreck of a face that Bertrand saw gazing into his.

"It is you, Messire Bertrand du Guesclin?"

"It is I, sire."

"We owe you much, my Tiphaine and I."

"Sire, let us not speak of it," and his mouth quivered, for he saw in the old man's eyes the yearning of a father for his son.

"No, messire, our honor is with us yet. We give you that gratitude of which God alone can know the depth. Child, is not that so?"

Tiphaine had slipped behind him, and stood leaning upon the carved back of the chair. Her hands rested on her father's shoulders. He drew them down with his and looked up wistfully into her face.

"Bertrand braved more than death for us," she said.

"For the lad Robin's sake."

"Yes, for him."

He lay back in his chair with his eyes closed, his breathing slow and regular like the breathing of one who sleeps. Bertrand had risen, and was leaning against the carved hood of the chimney. He remembered vividly that night, not many weeks, ago when the old man had gloried in the promise of his son.

Tiphaine's hands were smoothing her father's hair. The touch of those hands brought a smile to the old man's face. He opened his eyes to look at her, and in that look the heart of the father seemed to drink in peace.

Bertrand turned, and went stealthily towards the door. He opened it gently, and left them alone together.

XLIII

BERTRAND rode out hawking early on the forenoon of the third day at La Bellière, leaving Tiphaine and her father seated together under the Vicomte's favorite pear-tree in the orchard. He had chosen a gerfalcon in the La Bellière mews, and taken the path towards a marsh where there was a heron passage some three miles from the château. He rode alone, with the bird belled and hooded on his wrist, more intent, perhaps, in gaining solitude than on seeing the falcon make a flight. For the heart of a man in love is a world within itself, where the green pastures and deep woods are tinged with a melancholy like the perfume of wild thyme in the green deeps of June.

But there was more than mere melancholy in Bertrand's heart that morning, for the truth was plain to him as the blue sweep of the summer sky that the old man at La Bellière lived in the spirit on the eyes and lips of Tiphaine, his child. The vision of yesterday shone ever before Bertrand's mind, the vision of Stephen Raguene's face glowing with a reflected light, a light falling from Tiphaine's face, with its great eyes and splendid sheen of hair. Nor would Bertrand have grudged the old man this, or have reproached Tiphaine for having a woman's heart. Men look for piety in priests, patience in a philosopher, tenderness and loyalty in a daughter towards her sire. The true man desires to find a beautiful completeness in the creature of his heart's creation. He would rather starve his own desires than see her fail in some sacred duty towards her soul.

But the Vicomte had given Bertrand food for reflection that same morning, nor had the food seemed particularly sweet.

"I am remembering, Messire Bertrand," he had said, "that there are other hearts in Brittany more near of sympathy to you than ours. We must not keep you at La Bellière."

A broad hint, forsooth, and Bertrand had read more in the old man's restless eyes than the Vicomte's tongue had suffered him to say. Half an hour's talk with Tiphaine at the open window! Stephen Raguene had even grudged him that, and betrayed by a flash of senile peevishness that the younger man's presence cast a shadow across the narrowing path of age.

Human, most human, and yet there was something pitiful to Bertrand in the old man's sensitiveness, his readiness to resent any sharing of Tiphaine's thoughts. No doubt she was all that was left to him, his pearl of great price, which he would suffer no other man to handle. In this life the services of a friend may be too soon forgotten when the clash of interests rouses the armed ego. Gratitude is the most volatile of all the sentiments. Return an old man his

lost purse, and it is but natural that he should knit his brows when the self-same purse is coveted by the very mortal who returned it.

Yet to one who has suffered in the cause of others a grudging and suspicious spirit is as a north wind in the midst of June. It was for this reason that Bertrand's heart was bitter in him that morning, not because Tiphaine loved her father, but because the old man grudged her even a friend. In the past the lord of La Bellière would have laughed at such a notion of tyranny. But sorrow and the slackening of the fibres of the heart can change the temper of the happiest mind.

The forenoon had gone when Bertrand turned homeward to La Bellière without having so much as slipped the hood or jesses. Yet even though he had won nothing by the falcon's talons, he had come by a decision to leave La Bellière on the morrow.

Not in the best of tempers, he came suddenly upon two shabby-looking devils squatting side by side under a wayside cross. They were sharing half a brown loaf and a bottle of cider, the jaws of both munching energetically with that stolid emphasis that betrays the philosophic and worldly mendicant. A couple of rusty swords and bucklers lay on the grass at the men's feet. One of the pair was leathery and tall; the other, buxom about the body, with a face that matched the frayed scarlet of his coat.

They sighted Bertrand, falcon on wrist, and stared at him casually as though considering whether he was a gentleman likely to disburse a coin. There was an abrupt slackening of the masticatory muscles. Two pairs of eyes were startled by the apparition. The lean man bolted a large mouthful of bread and started up with a shout that sent Bertrand's horse swerving across the road.

The loaf and the cider bottle were tossed upon the grass.

"Soul of my grandmother, bully Hopart, but it's the captain!"

"Lording! lording!"

"Devil's luck, and I'm no sinner!"

They made a rush across the grass, waving their caps and cutting grotesque capers.

"Hopart! Guicheaux!"

"The very dogs, messire."

"God save me, but this is gallant!"

Bertrand's face beamed like a great boy's as he rolled out of the saddle almost into Guicheaux's arms. Hopart and his brother bully sprang at him like a couple of barking and delirious dogs. So rough and strenuous were their methods of showing joy that a stranger might have taken them for a couple of footpads in the act of robbing a gentleman of his purse.

"Captain, captain, I could hug the heart out of you."

"Goodman, Guicheaux. Give me a grip."

"A crack of the knuckle-bones. Sir, but you are still strong in the fist."

In the midst of all this loving turbulence the gyrfalcon on Bertrand's wrist took to fluttering and screeching by way of protest, ruffled in feathers as well as temper. Bertrand disentangled himself, laughing and not a little out of breath.

"Captain, we have been beating all the country this side of Loudeac."

"Good-fellows!"

"And, lord, we have had our hands busy cramming lies back down these squeakers' throats. Faugh! how some of these fat folk stink of the pit!"

"So you have heard lies, eh?"

Hopart and Guicheaux exchanged glances.

"Well, captain, there's never a wind in seed-time but thistle-down's a blowing. Certain lewd rogues had been puffing a tale of the fight at Mivoie."

"To be sure."

"What is more, captain, a harping devil made so bold as to blab of it at Cancale."

"To Sieur Robert, eh?"

"Yes, and to madame."

"And it was believed?"

Guicheaux screwed his hatchet face into a kind of knot.

"Your pardon, captain, Madame Jeanne is a great lady."

"And has some spite against me. Well?"

Guicheaux looked at Hopart; his comrade returned an eloquent grin.

"Well, captain, we two took that harping devil and half drowned him in the ditch."

"You did?"

"But madame had her weapons ready. Brother Hopart, be so good as to scratch my back."

The fat man pulled up the thin man's shirt, and Guicheaux displayed a back still livid from the blows of a whip.

"Madame knows how to argue, captain," and he chuckled.

"What, they whipped you?"

"By the lord, they did that!" and Guicheaux proceeded to display in turn his comrade's honorable scars.

Bertrand looked at them, stubble-chinned rascals that they were, and felt a significant stiffening of the throat. It was no news to him that Dame Jeanne should have been ready to hear him slandered, but the loyalty of these rough dogs of war more than compensated for the smart.

"Hopart, Guicheaux, answer me. It was told then to madame my mother that Bertrand du Guesclin had played the traitor?"

They both stared at him and nodded.

“She believed it?”

Again the two heads bobbed acquiescence.

“And you?”

“We, captain?”

“Yes, you.”

“Well,” and Guicheaux looked embarrassed—“well, Brother Hopart, what did we do?”

“Kicked,” quoth the fat man, “and were royally toe-plugged for our pains.”

Bertrand slipped the jesses and shook the falcon from his wrist. He opened his arms to the two men, and Messire Bertrand du Guesclin might have been seen embracing the two vagabonds like brothers.

“Assuredly,” he said, “that harper friend of yours told lies.”

“Captain!”

“I fought at Mivoie, but not in my own arms.”

“Captain! captain!”

“All Brittany will soon know the truth.”

“St. Ives du Guesclin!” And Guicheaux threw his cap into the air, sprang at Hopart, and smote him an open-handed smack across the chest.

“Bully Hopart, bully Hopart, we must get drunk on this—or die!”

And they gripped hands and danced round Bertrand like a couple of clowns at a fair.

XLIV

WHILE Hopart and Guicheaux discovered themselves in such excellent fettle over the recovery of their idol, no less a person than Madame Jeanne du Guesclin presented her husband's pennon before the great gates of La Bellière.

The disgrace at the Oak of Mivoie had sent Madame Jeanne upon a pilgrimage among her friends, for the news of Bertrand's troth-breaking had challenged her pride, if it had not troubled her affection. Sieur Robert, a fat imbecile, had been left to gormandize at Cancale, while the wife, with sweet Olivier at her side, rode out to play the Roman mother. It was a necessary discretion that Bertrand should be sacrificed, nor did Madame Jeanne fail in the heroism of her indignation.

Sumptuous in red gown, with streamers of gold at the elbows, a short "spencer" of blue cloth open at the hips, a hood of some amber-colored stuff with liripipia of green silk, Madame Jeanne rode her roan horse into the La Bellière court. Olivier, as flushed and splendid as his mother, straight-waisted, full and jagged in the sleeves, smiled at the wide welkin as though his motto were, "By God's soul, I am the man." Ten armed servants in red and green, a falconer, two huntsmen with four hounds in leash, followed hard at madame's heels.

Some people seem designed by nature for the more spacious ways of life, for terraces that touch the sunset, marble stairways, and chairs of gold. This largeness of presence was part of Jeanne du Guesclin's birthright. Standing in the state solar of La Bellière, with one hand on Olivier's shoulder, she dwarfed her slim fop of a son, whose mawkish look betrayed the oppression of a youth tired by indiscriminate motherly conceit.

The window of the solar, with its scarlet cushions and carved pillars in the jambs, looked out upon the garden, where Madame Jeanne could see the Vicomte asleep on the bench under the Pucelle de Saintonge. Half an hour had passed since Girard had bowed them into the state solar, and Madame Jeanne was not a lady who could wait in patience. She watched Stephen Raguenel with a slight twitching of her nostrils and the air of a grand seigneuress much upon her dignity.

"It seems that they do things slowly at La Bellière."

Olivier yawned behind his hand.

"The roads are devilish dry," he remarked. "I should not quarrel with a cup of wine. The old gentleman there appears to have eaten a big dinner."

"The servants must be fools."

"Probably Madame Tiphaine is looking out her very best gown." And

Olivier began to flick the dust from the embroidery and the slashed splendor of his *côte hardie*.

Jeanne du Guesclin looked at him and smiled.

"If Robin Ragueneel is half as handsome—"

"Pooh, mother!"

"—as Messire Olivier."

"Confound my good looks," and he pretended to appear modestly impatient. "How often are you talking to me as though I were a fool of a peacock?"

"There, put your girdle straight, Olivier. If I have a handsome son, am I not allowed to use my eyes?"

"I may be straighter in the legs than Bertrand," and he gave a sharp and shallow laugh.

"Bertrand, indeed! We shall soon have done with the worthless fool. My friends cannot say that I am prejudiced in the man's favor, since I have been the first to tell many of them the truth."

"Poor fellow!"

It was curious to watch Jeanne du Guesclin's eyes change their expression—like water that seems hardened by the passing of a cloud.

"Remember, you have taken Bertrand's place," she said.

"Poor Bertrand!" and he showed his teeth; "if Beaumanoir catches him, he will most assuredly be hanged."

"Let them hang the traitor. I can have no pity for a turncoat and a coward."

Tiphaine was in her brother's room, looking through the hundred and one things that had belonged to Robin: his whips and hunting-spears; the jesses, hoods, and gloves he had used in hawking; a few books; a great press full of perfumed clothes. On a peg by the window hung the surcoat that Bertrand had worn at Mivoie. The room was much as the lad had left it on the night of his flight to the abbey of Lehon. None of the servants had dared to touch the room. The care of all these treasures of a young man's youth had been left to Tiphaine like some sacred trust.

It was in this room that Girard found her, kneeling before the great carved chest, her brother's helmet in her lap. She was burnishing the armor that Robin should have worn at Mivoie, and whose sheen displayed the scars gotten from the English swords. The light from the window fell across her figure as she knelt, her hair aglow, her eyes deep with the pathos of the past.

"Madame."

To Girard it seemed that she had been praying, and perhaps weeping, over her brother's arms. His voice startled her, for she had not heard the opening of the door.

"Girard?"

The old man bowed to her as she rose with Robin's helmet in her hands.

"Pardon, madame, there are guests in the great solar."

"I heard the sound of trumpets, Girard, and thought that Messire Bertrand had returned."

"It is his mother, madame."

"Jeanne du Guesclin?"

"And Messire Olivier with her."

Tiphaine laid Robin's helmet upon the bed, closed the great chest, and went to her own room, telling Girard not to wake the Vicomte. She changed her old gown for one of grass-green dusted with violets, fastened on a girdle of beaten silver and a brooch of lapis lazuli at her throat. Like Girard, she believed that Jeanne du Guesclin had ridden to La Bellière with the news of Bertrand's nobleness ringing like some old epic in her ears.

The windows of the gallery that led from Tiphaine's room towards the chapel and the great solar looked out westward over the main court. The sun beat full upon these windows, and Tiphaine, as she passed, had a blurred vision of Jeanne du Guesclin's men, in their red jupons slashed with green, crowding round some of the La Bellière servants. They appeared to be arguing and chaffering over some piece of news. In fact, Madame Jeanne's men were in the process of being enlightened as to that truth of which their mistress was most unmotherly in her ignorance. Tiphaine loitered a moment at one of the windows. She had an instinctive antipathy for the haughty-mouthed lady of Motte Broom. The two strong natures were in contrast, and Tiphaine was in no mood for uncovering her heart for the edification of this woman, whom she had distrusted ever since the days at Rennes.

To Girard, Tiphaine had given orders that the Vicomte was not to be disturbed, for she had taken the cares of the household on her own shoulders; nor was her father in a fit state to be afflicted with the irresponsible sympathy of inquisitive friends. The honor of the château was with Tiphaine, and it was this same honor that brought Girard to the door of the state solar ten minutes after his mistress had entered. Girard's fist was about to knock, when the pitch of the voices from within suggested suddenly that any intrusion would be indiscreet.

Girard stood there stroking his chin and knowing not for the moment whether to enter or to retire. Tiphaine was speaking, not loudly, but with that intensity of self-restraint that made each word ring like the clear stroke of a bell. Girard, who had known her since a child, and had grown familiar with every modulation of her voice, could see her, even though the door was shut. She would be standing at her full height, her head thrown back a little, her eyes looking straight at the face of the woman to whom she spoke.

Soon a harsher, sharper voice broke in at intervals, questioning, criticising,

snapping out short sentences with too evident a twinge of temper. Madame Jeanne had lost her haughty poise, and Girard, smiling a shrewd smile, thanked Heaven that he did not wear the Du Guesclin livery. From time to time a thinner and less aggressive voice would interpose, drawling out a few half-apologetic syllables—Messire Olivier trying to play the part of the wise and conciliating man of the world.

Girard was in the act of turning to retreat when he heard footsteps sweeping towards the door.

“Madame,” said Jeanne du Guesclin’s voice, harsh and metallic with inexpressible impatience, “you need not twit me with having blundered. What I heard I heard, and we credulous mortals are very human. Olivier, your arm.”

The door swung back, and Girard, caught before he could scramble round the corner, flattened himself against the wall. He had a glimpse of Jeanne du Guesclin’s face shining like a red sun through a thunder cloud, her lower lip pinched by her strong, white teeth. She came sweeping out on Olivier’s arm—Olivier, who looked like a wet chicken trying to appear worthy of an incensed and fluffed-up hen.

Jeanne du Guesclin saw Girard flattened like a pilaster against the wall, and recognized him as the man in office who had ordered the trumpets to blow a fanfan in her honor.

“Fellow, my horses!”

Girard contrived to bend at the hips.

“Order my men to be ready to return to Dinan in ten minutes.”

“It shall be done, madame.”

And Girard disappeared like a flitting shadow down the stairs.

Fate, however, reserved a more scathing ordeal for the chastening of Jeanne du Guesclin’s pride. Probably she never realized in life how insolent the truth could be till that moment when she came out from the doorway of the hall, and, standing at the top of a flight of steps, looked down upon the crowd of servants in the castle court.

The crowd was divided into two parties, distinguishable in the bulk by the contrasting colors of their liveries. Before the great gate the red and green of the Du Guesclins had huddled itself into a sullen and silent knot, while the blue and silver of La Bellière fluttered more cheerily across the court. But the dramatic energy of the scene seemed centred in two shabby, swaggering figures footing it to and fro under the noses of Jeanne du Guesclin’s men.

Messires Hopart and Guicheaux were taking their revenge, arm in arm, with a flourish of swords and the happy arrogance of a pair of heroes. The La Bellière servants appeared to be applauding their bombast and their swagger. Not so Jeanne du Guesclin’s men, whose toes were being trodden on and whose ribs had suffered from the ironical raillery of the mighty Hopart’s

elbows. Bertrand's rascals were top dogs for the moment.

"Hallo, sirs!"—and Guicheaux spread his fingers at one of Olivier's grooms who had taken part in the "scourging" at Cancale, "—who said Messire Bertrand did not fight at Mivoie? They swallow strange tales at Gleauim, eh?"

A figure in red and green growled out:

"God have pity on these two fools!"

"Fools?" and Hopart stopped dead in front of a little man who had ventured the insult. "So it is you, Jacques, my little pig, eh? I have always heard that swine are unclean brutes in the matter of food. Did you say 'fools'?"

Hopart, bulking big, with a face like a devouring fire, stared at the little man and shook a huge, brown fist.

"Did you say 'fool,' little pig?"

"Let Jacques be, bully Hopart."

"So!" and Hopart set his hoof on the great toe of the second man who had spoken, and emphasized the rebuke by a sounding smack across the mouth.

"Come out and fight," he said; "we are not in madame's piggery now."

The crowd roared. Hopart's swagger neared the sublime, his great, fiery face making the men in red and green blink like a brood of startled owls. Hopart was too big and threatening to be taken by the beard. No one answered his challenge, and the two heroes strutted to and fro again like a couple of prize cocks.

Jeanne du Guesclin, standing at the top of the stairway leading from the hall, saw all this in the compass of a moment. Nor had her coming been lost upon Hopart and Guicheaux. They doffed their caps to her with exaggerated gestures of respect, a display of mock homage that turned all eyes upon the proud figure of the lady.

Jeanne du Guesclin's face was white with anger.

"Olivier"—and she bit her words—"go down and give those swine a beating with your sword."

"Madame mother, leave the men to me."

It was not Olivier who had answered her, and Dame Jeanne started as though a snake had fallen at her feet. She turned and saw Bertrand standing on the threshold of the hall, his face impassive, his arms folded across his chest.

For the first time in her life Jeanne du Guesclin faltered before her son. There was a peculiar look in Bertrand's eyes, a look that shamed her, leaving her speechless and at his mercy.

"Guicheaux! Hopart!" And he went down the steps into the court.

The two worthies had discarded all swagger and were meek as lambs.

"Yes, captain?"

"We are here, captain."

Their innocence was sublime. No school-boy could have equalled it. Bertrand struggled hard to hide a smile.

"You are too noisy, you two. Stand back and remember your manners."

They stood back, yet ready to wink at the first chance.

"Certainly, captain. We were amusing ourselves a little."

"Cease to be amused."

And for the life of him Bertrand could not bully them further when they looked at him like a pair of rough and mischievous dogs ready to come and lick his hands.

Two men in red and green were leading Madame Jeanne's roan horse forward. She was still standing at the top of the steps, looking at Bertrand and biting her lower lip. All the prejudices of twenty years seemed shadowed forth upon her face. Even the cherished Olivier was afraid to meet her eyes.

Jeanne du Guesclin saw Bertrand take the roan's bridle from the hands of one of the grooms. To those who watched her closely it seemed that some great struggle was passing behind the proud and full-lipped face. Her eyes had the strained look of an imperious nature to whom the bitterest ordeal may be the forgiving of defeat.

"Madame."

Bertrand was before her, holding the bridle of her horse. His face appeared cold and impassive, and yet there was a slight softening of the stubborn mouth. Olivier, a mere pawn in this pageant of pride and passion, stood to one side, playing with his sword.

"Madame mother, may I help you to mount?"

Jeanne du Guesclin came down the steps like one under compulsion, and suffered Bertrand to take her hand. A strange thrill swept through her at the touch. It was as though she had realized with a flash of intuition that it was possible for a woman to be despised by her own son.

"Bertrand."

He saw her lips tremble, saw her color and then go pale.

"Mother."

It was as though the word struck her on the bosom—over her heart. She flashed an indescribable look at him, a look half of defiance, half of awe.

"Bertrand—"

He bent his head.

"You will come to us at Cancale?"

The words were half whispered, but Bertrand heard them, and felt all that was passing in Jeanne du Guesclin's heart.

"Mother, you can command."

He saw her draw a deep and hurried breath, and felt her grasp tighten upon his hand. Her eyes, full of the stormy instincts of a woman's soul, betrayed a

half-hunger for something that she could not name.

“Then—you will come? I ask it.”

“Yes.”

“Thanks. You are generous—more generous than I deserve.”

Thus far her pride would bend itself, and Bertrand, as he helped her to the saddle, felt her hand close again spasmodically on his. He knew the iron of his mother’s will, and understood how much those few words meant.

He walked beside her to the gate. And there, like a woman whose true instincts break through the ice of years, she looked long at him, and touched his forehead with her hand.

“Do not forget us at Cancale.”

“No, I shall not forget.”

“You have given us great honor.”

“Madame, remember, I am still Bertrand, your son.”

XLV

BERTRAND was astir next morning, with the reconciliation of yesterday still vividly before his mind. He began to dress and to arm himself, sitting on the edge of the bed in his room in one of the turrets, his hands dawdling at their work as though their master were too much enthralled by the importunity of his own thoughts. He had been moved by the sudden surrender of his mother's pride, and the element of shame in her recantation had roused in him a new instinct of tenderness, a tenderness that overflowed perhaps from a subtle and more human source. The indifference of years had been broken by a few halting, yet inevitable, words. Bertrand had given Jeanne du Guesclin no idle promise. He would turn his horse's head towards Cancale that very day.

Bertrand could hear Hopart and Guicheaux talking together in the little anteroom that opened from the turret stair. The fellows had lain like a couple of dogs outside his door, happy in the promise that he had given them that they should be his men from that day forth. The murmur of their voices came up to Bertrand as he armed, bringing back many a wild memory of wild nights spent on the moors and in the woods.

He buckled on his arm-pieces, using teeth and hands to clinch the straps, and, picking up his sword, went to the turret window and looked out. A thin mist hung over the meadows and the woods, a mist shot through like some silvery cloth with the gold threads of the morning sun. Above the haze the tops of the aspen-trees glimmered towards the deepening blue, and the jackdaws, whose nests were in the tall chimneys, were croaking and wheeling about the castle.

From the turret window Bertrand could see into the garden, where the mist clung about the orchard trees and dimmed the pool where the water-lilies spread their cups of ivory and of gold. Early though it was, Tiphaine walked in the garden, with the Vicomte's dog following at her heels. Bertrand had hoped for some such chance of speaking to her alone before he sallied to Cancale.

"Saddle the horses in an hour," he said, as he passed Hopart and Guicheaux on the stairs and went clashing down in his well-worn harness. The men watched him down the first gray curve of the winding stair, silent, whimsical, mysteriously wise. Hopart nodded; Guicheaux bobbed his hatchet face in turn. A long, red tongue darted out momentarily between a thin and humorous pair of lips.

"The captain has it, God bless him."

Hopart looked solemn.

"And something of a scold, too!"

Guicheaux's bright eyes were dull suddenly, as though he were thinking of the Aspen Tower in far Broceliande, and of the grim happenings there that had shocked even his war-hardened soul.

"The devil's in the women," he said, with reflection, "and yet—not the devil, brother Hopart, for the devil, I guess, would never have bearded the captain and made him humble, as she did, in Broceliande."

Hopart nodded.

"A brave lady."

"Our Lord keep them"—and the rascal crossed himself with the gravity of a fanatic—"she's just the captain's match, just as stout in the heart as he. I'll wager she's waiting for him in the garden."

The giant chuckled.

"If she's a lady of sense."

"Which she is. Come up; we'll peep."

And in they went to the window of the turret-room, and by the affectionate grin on Hopart's face it was plain that Guicheaux's prophecy had not flown wide.

Tiphaine and Bertrand were standing beside the pool, she in her green gown with the violets thereon, he in his harness, belted and spurred for the road to the sea. He had told her the preceding night of the last melting of his mother's pride. Tiphaine had known, when she rose with the dawn, that Bertrand was leaving La Bellière for Cancale that morning.

But it was not of his own home that Bertrand thought as he stood beside Tiphaine in the mist-wrapped garden. Life had taken for him a deeper tone. No more would he be the free lance, the man of the moors, who fought like an outcast for the law of his own hand.

"So you will go to Cancale?"

She spoke softly, like one who thinks. Bertrand was standing with his shoulders squared, looking at the water, his arms crossed upon his breast.

"To Cancale, my old home."

"And then—?"

"To the wars again."

"It is always war with us."

"It will always be war with us till the English are driven into the sea."

"You will share—in that."

"God helping me"—and he bowed his head—"and some day—"

He paused, a man weighing his words.

"Some day—I shall come to La Bellière again."

He turned and looked at her, as though wondering whether the woman in her understood.

"Bertrand."

She was gazing at the pool, with its floating lilies and the swallows skimming.

“Bertrand. My father is going towards the grave. He looks to me for a double love, now that Robin is no more his son. Can you blame me for remembering this?”

He looked at her honestly, and answered:

“No.”

They were standing close to each other, so close that Bertrand’s hand touched Tiphaine’s arm.

“It is not easy to give up—all.”

She felt that he was trembling.

“Bertrand, I have one word for you.”

“And that word?”

“Wait.”

Her hand touched his. He held it, and stood looking down into her face.

“To serve you, honor you, to bide my time,” he said.

It was not the half-shamed face of a girl that he gazed at, but the inspired face of a brave woman.

“Bertrand, take troth from me; are you content?”

He threw his head back with a great intake of his breath.

“Content,” was all he answered.

From the turret window overhead Hopart and Guicheaux had drawn back with curiously stolid and solemn faces. It was as though each of these ragged swordsmen were attempting to disavow any trace of feeling by assuming a staring obtuseness that scorned anything so mawkish as sympathy with Bertrand and the lady. Hopart yawned behind his hand, looking at his comrade the while out of the corners of his slits of eyes.

“Borrowed that grease-pot, brother?” he asked, abruptly, as though fixing on a sufficiently unemotional topic.

Guicheaux stared. He was not without sentiment.

“Grease-pot?”

“For the captain’s stirrup leathers; they’re stiff as boards. I told you to get it from the cook, eh?”

“Wipe them round your neck, brother,” said the thin man; “ ’twill serve.”

Hopart yawned again, and glanced reflectively towards his stomach.

“Honest service once more,” he said, with a fat and complacent sigh; “a roof over a man’s head, and clean straw to lie in; good food and plenty. Brother, I have pricked two holes to let out my belt.”

It was the distant braying of a trumpet and the floating-up of a haze of dust among the poplar-trees on the Dinan road where the mist had cleared that brought the alert, hawklike glint back into Guicheaux’s eyes. He rested his

elbows on the window-sill and craned his head forward, his mouth open as though it helped him to take in sound.

“Hst!”

Hopart leaned his hands on Guicheaux’s shoulders and flattened the thin man against the wall as he peered out in turn.

“Trumpets and banners, God a mercy!”

Guicheaux gave an expostulatory heave.

“Push me through the wall, hogshead! Eyes alive, but here’s a brave show—pennons by the score.”

Hopart’s heavy breathing grew yet heavier as he craned his head forward over Guicheaux’s shoulder.

“The Ermine, the Ermine, or I’m a bat!”

“Beaumanoir! Beaumanoir!”

“All for the love of the captain, I’ll swear. All the cats in Brittany coming to purr and rub against his legs.”

Guicheaux, in his excitement, continued to heave Hopart back a little, and to draw himself up so that he lay like a bolster doubled over the sill.

“Beaumanoir! Bully Beaumanoir, by God’s grace! Phew!”

He kicked out suddenly and began to writhe and wriggle under Hopart’s weight.

“Get back, great fool! Let me in.”

“What ails you, little one?”

“The captain!” And Guicheaux spluttered. “Get off my legs, oaf. He’ll break my head.”

Hopart’s obtuseness seemed as bulky as his body.

“What’s the captain doing, eh?”

Guicheaux cursed him, and contrived to squeeze back into the room.

“Was not madame there, fool?” he asked, looking hot and flattened.

“Madame?”

“Yes.”

And Guicheaux smacked his lips on the back of his hand.

XLVI

THE Breton chivalry flowed into La Bellière that day, a gaudy torrent that carried much pomp and panoply in the resonant splendor of its coming; trumpets blew, dogs barked, servants tumbled hither and thither, each man ordering and instructing his neighbor. Jehan, the porter, was fastening his best jerkin as pennons, two by two, came dipping under the arch of the gate. Heralds, trumpeters, lords, and knights poured in, till to the jackdaws on the chimneys the court-yard must have looked like a magician's pit crammed with all manner of strange beasts, glittering dragons, and grotesque centaurs.

Of the knighting of Messire Bertrand du Guesclin in the great hall of La Bellière that same morning, Hopart and Guicheaux had many things to tell in the years to come, when they were rusty, bent-backed figures declaiming to open-mouthed youth on the settles before the winter fires: How Bertrand was taken in the Sieur de Beaumanoir's arms; how the Breton lords crowded about him, offering him, one a horse, another a chain of gold, another a signet ring set with rubies; how Madame Tiphaine stood on the great dais, looking down upon her man's triumph with eyes that shone, even through brimming tears; how Beaumanoir's sword touched Bertrand's shoulder, and how the rafters rang with the shout that went up at his knighting; and how Messire Bertrand said little, and looked sly, as though ready to laugh over the time all these fine gentlemen had taken in discovering that he was not a fool.

But to leave Hopart and Guicheaux in their inglenooks with the firelight twinkling on their wrinkled old faces and their tongues wagging over the days that were no more.

For Bertrand's sake Tiphaine would have made a great feast that night for the Breton lords at La Bellière, but Bertrand, drawing the Sieur de Beaumanoir aside, told him the tale of Robin Raguenele. It was not in his heart to hear the trumpeting of his own triumph in the place while old Stephen Raguenele sat like a man stunned and thought of his son in the abbey of Lehon. There would have been mockery, gross mockery, in such a festival. And Beaumanoir, great lord and honest gentleman, gathered his pennons, his heralds, and his trumpeters, and returned by the road to Dinan that same day.

"I am for England, messire," he said to Bertrand before he sallied forth. "We go to bring Count Charles back to his own land again. Come with me and see the English court."

Bertrand flushed at the Marshal's words.

"I have a promise that must be kept," he answered.

"Here?" And Beaumanoir looked at him hard and smiled.

“No, to my mother—at Cancale.”

“Keep it, messire. It may be a month before we sail—if that is time enough.”

“Then, sire, I will come with you.”

“Brothers in arms—for the memory of Mivoie.”

Hopart and Guicheaux, trudging behind Bertrand’s horse as they followed him over the bleak lands towards the sea, glanced often at each other like two men most wise; for their lord rode as though he were alone with his own thoughts, a smile on his lips, and in his eyes the light of a brave desire.

For Tiphaine had given him one long kiss at parting, and a lock of her hair, that he should wear under his armor—over his heart.

“Wait,” her eyes had said.

And Bertrand had answered:

“Until death.”

THE END

Transcriber’s Notes:

Contents at the beginning of the book has been added for reader convenience. Archaic spellings and hyphenation have been retained. Obvious typesetting and punctuation errors have been corrected without note.

[The end of *Bertrand of Brittany* by Warwick Deeping]