THE SEVEN STREAMS

WARWICK DEEPING

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THE
Seven Streams

BY

WARWICK DEEPING

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TO

MY DEAR SISTER

KATHLEEN

THIS DREAM ROMANCE IS DEDICATED

“Sleep after toyle, port after stormie seas,
Ease after warre, death after life, does greatly please.”

SPENSER, *The Faerie Queen*.

“Dreams;
Which are the children of an idle brain
Begot of nothing but vain phantasy.”

SHAKESPEARE, *Romeo and Juliet*.

THE SEVEN STREAMS

CHAPTER I

For a night and a day Tristan le Sauvage had watched his arms before the high altar of the chapel of Purple Isle. For a night and a day he had seen the long tapers glimmering towards their silver sockets, under the painted roof. Dawn light and evening glow had shone through the latticed casements east and west, dusting the stones with colour, carving deep shadows from sculptured pillar and from moulded arch. Not a sound had broken the silence of the tombs. Alone before the Great Cross, Tristan had kept vigil, chastening his manhood for quest beyond the sea. Two months had passed since a great ship with gleaming sails had swooped like a falcon upon Purple Isle, and carried thence that white dove, Columbe the Fair.

The sun had descended in a whorl of crimson flame when Tristan rose up from before the altar, and passed out to his kinsfolk who had gathered at sunset in the chapel court. The moon had climbed the starry port of heaven. In the court lamps flickered, and white faces peered at him like pale flowers out of the gloom. The delicate finials of many cypresses were smitten with the moonlight; a thin perfume of spring quivered in the air.

Before the chapel gate stood Father Madan of the Isle, clad in his Mass robes, his white beard silvered by the light of the moon. Four acolytes stood round him with bell and aspergil, ewer and book. Maidens in white bore garlands of primrose and of violet on crosses of white wood. There was a deep silence through all the court, as Tristan came out from the inmost shadow, his head bowed over his broad chest.

Tristan le Sauvage was no lover of priests. Frocks and stoles were women’s gear. It was with no great grace that he went on his knees on the bare stones at Madan’s, feet, while the old man stretched out his thin white hands over him like a snowy Druid uttering incantations under the stars.

“Son Tristan,” quoth the priest, with that innocent unction beloved of women, “hath the good God chastened thee for this thy quest?”

Tristan hated parade with the great sinews of his heart. He was a surly soul,

a bad courtier at the crook of the knee.

"Son Tristan," said the priest again, "the buckler of Faith awaits your arm."

"I have sharpened my sword, O Father," said the man on the stones.

Madan knew well this unpolished rock, the granite that loved the billow's blow better than the honeyed voice of a lute. He forgave the untamed temper of youth, and blessed him as he knelt at his feet.

His kinsfolk gathered under the long shadows of the cypresses. Dame Joan, his mother, drew near, and kissed his lips. Her hands lay heavy upon his shoulders; her face shone white under her pure grey hair.

"Tristan," said she, "the good saints strengthen you. Thrice blessed am I in the manhood of my son."

"Mother," he answered her simply enough, overshadowing her with his great strength, "God by your love has given me a good schooling. Therefore be comforted. Columbe, my sister, shall return to you again."

When she had hung upon his bosom, Dame Joan kissed him, as did his sire and Lavaine, his brother. They were brave folk, simple of heart, open-souled towards Heaven. Love with them was as an eternal prayer winging at dawn and eve to the throne of God. Girded from the great world by the waste of waters, they lived their lives in the strong purity of virgin faith.

The full moon gazed on them as they passed down from the chapel towards the sea. A thousand pines thrust up their midnight spears towards the stars. Deep to the confines of the dusky sky the far sea glimmered, washing the island with a sheet of foam. Madan the monk led on the company, acolytes, maidens, and young men chanting together under the moon. Tristan walked at his mother's side. With solemn song and the faint pulsing of the chapel bell, they brought him slowly towards the strand.

In a black inlet, bulwarked from the broad vigour of the sea, a galley lay moored beside a rude stone quay. The water was scolloped all with silver round the sable rocks. A great glistening highway stretched over the ocean towards the east.

By the galley's bulwarks Tristan took leave of his mother and his sire. He sprang down behind the thwarts and took the tiller in his hand. The black sail climbed the mast; the long sweeps smote silver from the swirling pool. Madan stood forward and blessed him as the prow rose to the waves. Thus Tristan le Sauvage put out from Purple Isle, and followed the moon's highway over the sea.

CHAPTER II

The tall hills of a strange land rose athwart the deepening azure of the second dawn. Spears of light fell streaming towards the sea, glittering upon the ever-tumbling waves that hurried onwards towards the west. The stars sped back behind the veil. The faint moon grew frail as a great silver net burdened with transient dew.

Tristan le Sauvage, steering the boat, sat with his eyes fixed upon the misty heights touched with the golden glories of the dawn. Before him the multitudinous waves leapt and tumbled, washing the bulwarks, plashing against the prow with a moist unrest. A light breeze bellied the black sail, set the cordage creaking and humming about the mast. The world seemed full of the awakening day and the sinuous and solemn splendour of the sea. The waves were troughed with opalescent light as they swept and heaved about the boat. There was a salt zest in the ocean's breathing, a deep intake of strength into its panting heart.

The men at the benches watched Tristan le Sauvage as they dipped their sweeps. The dawn light shone upon his rugged face and the links of his hauberk. There was no uglier man in Purple Isle than Tristan le Sauvage. Nature had juggled with him from his earliest years. Of no great stature, he was like a tough oak, cumbrous, huge of trunk, and gnarled of limb. The long arms showed their great muscles even under the sleeves of his hauberk. His chest was as the front of some great rock; his heavy head seemed sunk betwixt his shoulders; his legs bowed as by the massive strength above. A pair of dusky eyes peered out with honest faith from a craggy, hairless countenance. The broad mouth was pursed up half morosely over the strong white teeth.

Such was the pilgrim who plied the tiller, helming the boat towards the broadening day. Tristan spoke seldom, crying now and again to Rolf the pilot, as the boat heaved and rolled over the waves. His eyes were fixed on the hills that rose above the waste of waters. Black cliffs, craggy and solemn, began to frown upon the sea. The far heights bristled with woodland, shimmering with magic mystery under the rising sun. The moist surge of the sea cheered on the galley towards the shore.

Tristan stood to the tiller, and scanned the strange coast under his hand. The wind freshened, the sail bellied from the mast, the toilers drew in their oars, and watched the coast-line rising from the foam. Like battlements of black marble, the cliffs towered above the blue shallows, with rocky pinnacle

and forest spire smitten from the east with a glamour of gold. Precipice and wooded height were solitary as the sea itself. No tower crowned the headlands, no town lurked in the green shadows of the placid bays.

Rolf, old senator of the seas, stood forward in the prow, gazing at the line of heights. Straight to the east a narrow valley thrust upwards from the sea, walled on either hand with cliff and forest slope. Rolf hailed Tristan to the prow, and pointed with knotted finger to the shore.

“The Land of the Seven Streams, sir,” he said to him. “I know these cliffs of old. See yonder valley; the Silver Snake runs therein, a great river and a strong. The stars have steered us well. Hold for the opening in the cliffs; we can ride in over the bar.”

Running fast on the backs of the billows, they came to where a counter current beat upon the prow, fretting the sea into contending streams. It was where the river charged the tide. The galley swerved and faltered; the sail flapped against the mast.

“Out sweeps,” came Rolf’s hail from the prow. “Pull, lads; ware rocks to the north. The passage lies ahead.”

With the sail lowered and much straining of oars, they swung in past the rocky barriers where the waves chafed and broke in foam. The great cliffs towered upon either hand, solemn and stupendous, tufted with dwarf oaks, topped with pines. Once within the inlet, the galley ran smoothly on the broad bosom of the river, whose curves smote landwards into forest gloom.

The men rested on their oars while Tristan climbed into the prow and stood beside Rolf the seaman, looking forth over crag and forest. No plume of smoke ascended to the sky, no roofs shone out amid the green. The place was steeped in the grandeur of solitude, and there was no sound to break the silence save the perpetual plaining of the sea.

Tristan questioned the old man at his side; he had grown grey under many winter skies over stormy seas; his beard was as the foam below the bluff beak of a ship.

“Whence comes this river?” he asked him.

“Sir,” he answered, “this great river feeds upon the Seven Streams, and like a vast snake, takes them all into its belly. We have entered in at the sea gate of the land.”

“Who are its rulers?”

“Sir, there are many lords in the land, holding their fiefs direct from the King. Southwards lies the duchy of La Marche Montagne, northwards the duchy of Blanche the Bold.”

Tristan pondered his words, as the river sped past them to the sea.

"Hold on," he said, "and bear me higher into the heart of the land. What better path for us than this broad stream?"

As they passed on that day the heights descended, spreading eastwards into wooded hills. The land grew milder and more green of face. Ancient trees sentinelled the river; broad valleys swept from it under the sapphire sky. Hills grey with olives, dusky with cypresses and firs, rose from green meadows, sleek and brilliant under the sun.

About noon, they rounded a rocky point, where myrtles clambered up the bluff brow of the hill. In the northern shallows they saw a boat moored and a peasant fishing. As the galley drew near with a steady pulse of oars, Tristan stood in the prow and hailed the man over the water. The fisherman fingered his line, and sat staring none too trustfully at the galley sliding towards him with ripples prattling at its prow. Strange ships sailed seldom into those quiet waters; the bloody deeds of Norse pirates still lived in the heart of the peasantry.

Tristan, seeing the man's distrust, tossed him a piece of silver from the leather purse at his girdle. The fisher groped for it amid the cordage at the bottom of the boat. Questioned, he told them of the knights and barons of those parts, of the castles and hamlets therein, of the roads and forest ways. His lord was a certain Sir Parsival, who held a tower perched upon a neighbouring hill. Lastly, he described the region known as La Vallée Joyeuse, a rich and pleasant pasture land, where vineyards purpled the hills, and Sir Ronan the Peaceful had his home.

Tristan, leaning on his sword, bade his men pole in towards the northern bank, where a stretch of meadowland swept to the myrtle thickets that hid the rocks. The water lay still as glass in the shallows. The woods cast purple shadows athwart the stream, and the meads stood thick with many flowers. The galley ran aground in a little inlet where reeds and rushes bearded the bank. Tristan leapt from the prow, found sure footing, and turned with a smile to face his men.

"Good voyage and a clean sea to you," he said.

They crowded to the bulwarks with many rough and rugged prayers, holding up their caps to him, proffering their service. Grizzled sea-dogs that they were, they loved, him, even because he was strong and generous, and a giant in arms. Like Homeric mariners gathering round Ulysses at the entry to Hades, they prayed him to share with them the perils of the unknown. Tristan put them off with bluff but unbending gratitude. They would have hindered him, sea-dragons that they were. Such a pilgrimage as his required but a single

sword.

"Good men that you are," he said, buckling his shield over his shoulders, "you ride the waves better than the back of a horse. When I have need of brown sails and a strong keel, I will send to Purple Isle and call you over. To my sire and to Dame Joan, my mother, commend me."

They tossed their rough blessings on him as he climbed the bank, rattled the sweeps in the rowlocks, waved their fur-lined caps. Tristan saluted them with his drawn sword, a warm colour on his ugly face. They were still watching him and waving their brown fists when he disappeared from their sight into the woods.

There was a strenuous tone in the man's stout heart that day. The world lay open at his feet, like a broad and glorious plain, unfolding its many phases to his ken. Tristan, great boyish Titan, with a heart of gold, welcomed the sun as it smote through branches upon his face. He was glad of the woods and of their solemn liberty, glad of the hills, and the broad, beaming valleys. Purple Isle had held him overlong in its girdle of foam. The wide world smiled on him; the beacon of romance burnt red upon the hills.

He followed the path that morning that the peasant had described to him, a path that wound over uplands under the shadows of ancient trees. The woods were virgin to Tristan's heart. There were no such broad-shouldered giants in Purple Isle with its waving pines and stunted myrtles. The great oaks stood to him for sinew and strength. Their gnarled loins spoke of the sap of centuries, their limbs of a hundred battles with the wind. Youth ran riot in him that April day. He was as a Bacchanal intoxicated with the wine of being. He smote the great trees as he passed, bluff, open-handed buffets that would have shaken a Hercules. Once, in the joy of strength, he grappled an oak sapling as he would have grappled a python, wrestled with it, bent it beneath the might of his broad back till the stem splintered and surrendered to his grip. He tossed the broken tree aside with the smile of a conqueror, strode on through the woods, singing as he went.

He had come to the brim of a valley, and had halted to gaze over the meadows with their dark knolls of trees, when a shrill cry stirred him like a wail of a hostile trumpet. Wild and inarticulate, it eddied through the woods, terror breathing in the cry, as of life struggling in the toils of death. The voice grew and gathered, died again into an eerie whimper. Tristan, stiff as a wooden image, heard it with quickened pulses and a sudden solemnity that overspread his countenance like a cloud.

Pushing through a thicket of hollies, he came to a great break in the woods, where the forest gloom gave place to an open valley, a golden bowl brimming

with sunlight. In green meadows a castle stood amid the windings of a stream. Peace seemed throned above the olive thickets, the shimmering water, and the gilded meadows. Yet from a stone bridge that linked the sandy highway where it crossed the stream, there rose other voices to denounce the dream.

Tristan, standing under the woodshawe, beheld a knot of figures swaying to and fro over the keystone of the bridge. Swords were tossing, men struggling together betwixt the parapets. The few seemed caught and trampled by the many. Even as he watched, a horseman broke from the pool of grappling, foining figures, and galloped northwards up the sandy road. An archer, standing on the parapet of the bridge, loosed a shaft at the fugitive, a shaft that found its billet in the rider's back. Tristan saw him thrust his arms to the sky, twist in the saddle, and fall heavily to earth. His horse, whinnying with fear, left the high road, and cantered over the fields towards the thicket where Tristan stood.

Tristan was not a youth given to the subtle balancing of thought. Being barren of all fear, save the fear of God, he obeyed without debate the prick of impulse. Leaving the thicket, he hallooed to the riderless brute trotting towards him over the meadows. The horse halted, tossed up his head with ears agog, pawed the earth as he cast about from side to side. It was a superb beast, black as a raven, with a single white star on the forehead. Tristan called to him, advancing step by step. There was a magic in the man that made all wild things trust him and obey. The great beast suffered him to approach over the grass. Tristan's hand touched the sleek, foam-flecked muzzle. He caressed the brute's ears, took firm hold of the bridle, mounted at one spring, knew himself the master.

"God helps him who helps himself," he said, with a certain quaint sententiousness, running his fingers through the long black mane.

Being imbued, despite his strenuous vigour, with some hard-headedness of discretion, he ignored the blood-spilling in the valley, content to shepherd the prize to his own good cause. Turning back into the woods, he rode southwards from the place, keeping diligent watch, however, lest any hot-handed gentleman should be following on his heels. Seemingly they were busied with the purging of their own pastures, for Tristan saw no more of them that day.

CHAPTER III

Tristan le Sauvage slept that night in the woods. He had discovered a flask of wine and a well-stocked wallet slung to the horse's saddle, an added boon to the day's capture. The air lay mild that night as a June kiss on the earth's round cheek. Tristan, with his saddle propped against a tree, and the stars glittering above the forest, fell asleep thinking of Purple Isle and the far faces of his kinsfolk.

With the first pulse of dawn in the east, he was up and astir with the zest of the hour. The woods were full of golden vapour, of dew and the chanting of birds. A stream sang under the boughs, purling and foaming over a broad ledge of stone into a misty pool. A blue sky glimmered above the glistening tree-tops; the dwindling woodways quivered with the multitudinous madrigals of the dawn.

Tristan went down and sprang into the pool. He tossed and turned, smote wheels of spray with his great arms, ploughed and furrowed the quaking water. The blood leapt in him at the cold kisses of the pool. Ruddy and buoyant, he clambered out into the sunlight, his naked strength glistening with the clean dew gotten of his swim. The muscles rippled under the gleaming skin. Tossing his great arms, expanding his deep chest, he ran barefooted over the mossy grass. A drooping bough swept low to tempt his fingers. He twisted the limb from the trunk, tossed it like a lance from hand to hand, leaping and glorying in the splendour of his strength.

Anon, he armed himself, knelt down beside his horse to pray. A quaint calm fell instant upon his shoulders; the boisterous temper of his mood sank like a sea beneath the benediction of a god. It was in solitude, by sea or forest, that such a man as Tristan opened his heart to Heaven. His was not a soul that bartered through carved screens for penitence and peace. His face caught a radiance from the vaultings of the trees. St. Cyprienne, with her dusky eyes and martyr's crown, received the woman's portion of his prayer.

When he had broken fast and watered his horse at the pool, he sallied from the thickets with the breath of the dawn beating upon his mouth. Around him ran wooded hills, streams, and pastures dusted thick with flowers. The odours of spring burdened the breeze. In the distance the purple of the heights that circled La Vallée Joyeuse clove the azure of the sky.

As Tristan rode through the wilds that day, following a grass-grown track

that marked the grave of a Roman road, he came to a little stone shrine, standing by the wayside under the arms of a granite cross. A larch thicket hedged the place with a thin gloom. A fountain bubbled near, oozing away amid green rushes and mossy grass.

At the foot of the stone cross squatted a man in a grey cloak, with a bell at his girdle and a bag of undressed ox hide in his lap. Tristan stared with unstinted but momentary disrelish at the figure beside the shrine. The man was a leper, and hideous even in the grip of a more than hideous disease. His swollen and distorted face was grotesque as some evil head carved by a mason's chisel. The brows were swollen over the watery eyes, the mouth disfigured, the skin, mined by many sores. Even the hands were cankered and deformed; the man was as grim an image as misfortune could display.

Tristan, out of sheer pity of heart, drew rein to gaze at this outcast with furrowed brows. Though the tide of youth ran strong in his body, he was not the slave of that selfish health that ignores despair and comprehends not pain. The man by the cross held up his bag with a mute gesture of appeal. Tristan, fumbling in the depths of his purse, drew forth alms with a flash of pity.

The leper, keen to scent honour upon the thorny track of life, gathered the tokens of charity from the grass with hideous hands. He lifted up a cracked and husky voice, blessed Tristan, and wished him God-speed.

"The holy saints defend you, messire," he said. "It is long since a Christian took pity on my soul."

Tristan, ignorant of all leprous lore, and the unsavoury nature of such a wanderer, questioned him concerning La Vallée Joyeuse, and the length of the road that led that way. This Lazarus was very human under his thickened skin. Alms alone did not dazzle his vision. The sick are ever hungry for sympathy, the instinctive pity that shines from the soul. The leper had as long a tongue as most men, though the weapon had grown rusty for lack of use.

"I tread the road towards La Vallée Joyeuse," he said, rising from before the cross; "if a friend will suffer my infirmities, I can play the guide for a league or more."

Tristan climbed from the horse with a smile on his face. There was no reflective pride within his heart.

"Mount up, friend," he said; "my legs are lustier than yours, I wager."

Scorning debate in his masterful way, he held the stirrup and heeled the man up. The black horse snorted and tossed his mane, as though despising so ragged a burden. Tristan ruled him with hand and voice. If the master chose chivalry, the beast could obey.

In this fashion they set out together, the leper straddling the soldier's horse,

Tristan walking like a groom at his side. They were soon accorded in spirit and speech, for a smile on the lips makes the whole world kin. The leper had lived as a merchant in his day, till disease had beggared him and left him an outcast. He had turned pilgrim, so he said, to visit a certain holy well, whose waters were magical to recover the sick. The shrine lay by the northern seas. Many great miracles had been wrought at this well, and pious folk cleansed of many a malady. Of the Land of the Seven Streams the leper had much to tell; he had gathered shrewd gossip, as he travelled north.

"Good friend," he said, when Tristan questioned him, "I know neither the temper nor the colour of your sword. If you carry a white heart and travel for peace, I would pray you to beware of La Vallée Joyeuse."

Tristan, frank soul, unfolded without fear the purpose of his quest. He told the man of Columbe his sister, and of the vow he had sworn to recover her body.

"Where the waves run white," he said, "there may the voyager find the wrecked ones who have fallen in stormy waters. If this same valley is a perilous region, who knows but that I may win some news of my quest."

"Friend," said the leper, with his hand on his bell, "you misread the riddle. Listen, and I will explain."

With honest despatch he uncovered to Tristan the tone and temper of the Seven Streams. As he told his tale that green spring day, his hoarse raven's croak made the theme more sombre, prophetic of the clouds that shadowed the land.

"You have given me courtesy, messire," he said; "I return you good counsel, a rare commodity when properly handled. The lords and peasant folk of this same land have denied their faith to our Great Father the Pope. They have taken heresy into their hearts; have denied in the Sacrameant the flesh and blood of our Lord. Even in his wrath, the Pope was merciful, deeming them ignorant and seduced by pride. He sent out his legate and his missionaries into the land, but the rude folk here would have none of their preaching. So a crusade has been called against the province, and swords are shining in the Southern Marches."

Tristan, rebel at heart, questioned the justice of such a crusade.

"By God's light," he said, "these priests are over meddlesome with the souls of others. Tell it not in Gath, my friend, but I have no great love for men in petticoats."

The leper grimaced at him with his misshapen mouth.

"Heresy or no heresy, messire," he said, "they have spilt holy blood here. I had the news on this road this morning. The deed was done but yesterday."

"Ha!" quoth Tristan, staring in the man's face.

"They have slain the Pope's legate. God have mercy on them, for the Church knows little of that virtue."

Tristan remembered the wild cry in the woods, the fight by the bridge, the slain man whose horse he had taken. There was new significance in the scene to him. He questioned the leper as to the churchman's end.

"The old tale," he said. "The priest trifled with a certain knight's daughter, whose tower stands westwards towards the sea. There was quick vengeance afoot. The knight and his men followed fast after the legate's company, ambuscaded them, and put the whole rout to the sword."

"By God," said Tristan, smiling in his eyes, "they were well served for the deed. I would have slain the Pope for a less dishonour."

They had passed a league or more in company, and were crossing a heath open and bleak to wind and sky. The leper reined in the horse on a sudden, climbed from the saddle, gave the bridle into Tristan's hand. He drew his cowl down over his distorted face, and trudged on wearily, like one whose feet were weighted with despair.

"Therefore, messire," he said, "you may gather that there is like to be fire and sword in La Vallée Joyeuse. As for me, my lamp burns dim; I must cherish it that the good God may trim the flame at St. Ursuline's Well. Pray for one, messire, who is often sad and heavy of heart."

"Friend," said Tristan, "my prayers are yours for what they are worth. Doubt not that if strength could cleanse you, you should be fresh and clean as a new-budded rose."

They had come to the rim of the sandy heath, where the ground broke abruptly into rocky slopes, plunging downwards under thickets of arbutus and of pine. Four roads crossed at a spot where a great wooden crucifix stretched out its painted arms athwart the sky. The leper climbed a little knoll rising from a pool of golden broom, and pointed Tristan southwards over the scene.

At their feet lay a great valley, a broad bowl brimming with golden light. Its depths were chequered with woods and meadows, pools set like lapis lazuli in an emerald throne. A lake lay under the shadow of the hills. Heights girded the valley on every hand, save where a river like a giant's sword clove a deep defile through the hills.

Tristan stood silent in the sun, and gazed at the valley under his hand. It was as a new world to him; this rich cup of the earth, brimming with the wine of beauty, sparkled with many colours in the hand of Romance. The tall heights, the blown cloud banners overhead, the dusky woods smiling and

frowning alternate under the sun, these were as strange music to him, melting with many tones into the purple distance of the south.

The leper stood at his side in silence. He had been watching Tristan's face, with the bloom of youth thereon, pondering the while on the misery of his own hard lot. The world and the splendour thereof mocked his shrivelled and repulsive skin. As for Tristan, he seemed like a young god destined to trample down fate with the serene calm of a fearless fortune. The leper turned from the warm south with the bitterness of a man who beholds life's pathway curling towards the grave.

"Yonder, messire, is La Vallée Joyeuse," he said. "The saints defend you. As for me, I wander on towards death."

They took leave of each other there; the leper hobbling away with eyes down-turned, his bell jangling at his thigh. Tristan, full of a great-hearted pity, watched him with a smile upon his mouth. He felt his own hale body warm to the wind, his face fresh as dew-washed grass. The man with his sores and his lonely despair loomed like a dark cloud over the sun.

Tristan cast a last glance at him over his shoulder as he descended the road. The leper had drawn to the great cross where it towered solitary under the open sky. He had fallen on his knees at the foot thereof, and clasped the beam with his arms. He was kneeling thus when Tristan left him, clinging like a wrecked voyager to the feet of the Christ.

CHAPTER IV

Tristan rode on down the sandy road, pondering what the leper had told him that morning concerning Joyous Vale, how the valley lay in peril of the sword. These priests, he vowed in his own heart, were too given to meddling with the souls of others. For a few subtilties twisted from a theologian's tongue, they would let war loose upon an innocent province, and teach with violence what they could not teach with truth. Tristan was not a man who needed the superfluous unction of a priest's pardon.

Rounding a great rock that overhung the road, he saw Sir Ronan's hold smile up at him from beside the lake. About the walls and terraces rose many roofs, the ruddy hoods of many houses gathered about their giant sire. The place looked peaceful as a child asleep, bowered round with green, touched by the waters of the lake. Pastures pillared with poplars and aspens stretched towards the darker confines of the woods.

Tristan, glad in his heart of the beauty of it all, followed the road where it plunged abruptly into a thicket of pines. There was a patient gloom under the sweeper boughs. Squirrels ran ruddy-coated up the trees, peering black-eyed at him as he passed, and gorse ringed the dark aisles with gold.

As Tristan rode through the pine wood that day, he heard the sound of singing coming down to him upon the breeze. It was a woman's voice that sounded through the woods, so richly that the tall trees listened and smiled under the noon sun. Tristan drew rein on the grass by the road. He had never heard such a voice before, a voice that set the welkin quivering as with vibrations of tremulous light.

Riding on again with a smile on his face, he saw the woodland break away before the meadows of the town. The sky grew broad above the trees, and still the rich voice sounded through, now hushed, now rising like a lark towards the clouds. Tristan could catch the words of the song as he walked his horse over the spongy turf.

Rounding a bank of furze in bloom, he saw under the shade of a cedar tree a ruined shrine grown round with thorns. Many flowers were a-bloom in the grass, and a rivulet went splashing down towards the great lake in the valley. A gradual slope heaved away from the wood, and by the shrine in the long grass a woman sat on a fallen stone, with her face turned towards the town.

Tristan dismounted, and, having tethered his horse, he stood under cover of

the bank of furze and watched the woman by the shrine. She had ceased her singing, like one whose thoughts were too deep and solemn for further song. She was sitting with her chin upon her palms, staring into the distant south. Tristan saw the curve of her neck, white and clear as the moon's rim, the amber of her netted hair, the rich folds of her green gown.

Now Tristan was not a woman's man, and in Purple Isle his ugly face had won him little favour among the girls. He remembered how Grizzel, the fishwife's child, black of eye and red of face, had mocked and taunted him on the moors, with her bare-legged wenches at her back. He remembered how he had wished them men for the sake of the clods they had thrown at his head. Yet though the woman by the shrine was as none of these, he wavered a moment behind the bank, as though half in awe of her because she was fair.

Hearing his footsteps in the grass, she turned—and saw him, and rose up from the stone. She was as tall as Tristan, and older than he was both in face and years and in knowledge of life. Her golden hair was knotted up in a caul, her green gown dusted with violets and bordered with blue.

She seemed to shake the thoughts out of her heart as she rose up and looked Tristan over. Yet there was no aloofness in her eyes, nay, her very soul seemed to shine therein as she stood considering his face. She smiled a little as she saw the bronzed, uncomely countenance somewhat abashed and sullen before her.

"Would you speak with me?" she asked.

Tristan was mute for the moment, like one whose words stumbled one against each other.

"We are strangers," she added, still smiling at him out of her great eyes; "is my speech foreign to your ears?"

Perhaps it was her complete fearlessness of manner that smote Tristan from the first moment that she spoke to him. An atmosphere of stateliness seemed to surround her, an intangible magic that held him despite his strength. Though he could crush the brow of an ox with his fist, he seemed half in awe of the woman whose face, with all its fairness, showed no fear.

"Madame," he said, squaring his shoulders, "though a stranger here, your words are my words. Tristan le Sauvage is my name, and I have come from Purple Isle, over the sea. For the rest, I have a quest upon me, and I carry a sword."

There was a species of defiance in his voice, as though he viewed the subtler sex with a boy's suspicions. Nor was the meaning of his mood lost upon the woman.

Matching frankness with simplicity, she gave him welcome to the Land of

the Seven Streams.

“Friend,” she said, very openly, “welcome to Joyous Vale, you and your sword. I, Rosamunde, am the lady of this valley; you may see my husband’s tower yonder, amid the trees. Our guest table waits for strangers—who would tarry for a season.”

Tristan thanked her, and turned towards his horse.

“I am beholden to you,” he said, with that rough shyness which gave to his face a certain charm, “for in the Seven Streams I know no man and am known of none.”

So, when he had taken his horse, and joined her by the ruined shrine, they passed down together over the meadows towards the town.

CHAPTER V

Tristan grew the more bewitched by the woman's face as they passed on towards the lake together. The lips were thin, tinged slightly with scorn, yet very tender when she smiled. The eyes were large and of a greenish blue. There was a rich, round beauty, upon the face, the rose tint of the skin warm and sensuous as the bloom upon fruit. She was very slim where the girdle ran, but big of bosom and long of limb.

Nor was it the beauty alone that made Tristan marvel. A sadness hovered there, a hidden meaning, that his unlettered senses failed to fathom. Mystery! Such the impress she gave to his mind, like the tragic tone of some antique woe. She seemed a woman to whom life should prove sweet. Yet she had tasted of bitterness, so Tristan thought.

The meadows rippled like golden cloth spread under the trees for a queen to tread. A thousand aspens shivered in the sunlight, their fluttering melancholy chilling the air as with the sound of rain. Poplars towered towards the blue. By the lake stood a thicket of gnarled figs, their broad leaves dappled over with gold.

Rosamunde, Lady of La Vallée Joyeuse, drew Tristan's tale from him as they walked the meadows. Her swift simplicity was as a magic mirror, wherein all creatures showed her their thoughts. Tristan could but confess to her straight from his soul as he looked into the unwavering depths of her eyes. Not being burdened with the reflective sense, he flung his words in the welkin's face, with the candour of one who had no shame to fear.

"We are but woodlanders here," she said at the end. "As for the wide world, we are walled from its ken. This quest of yours troubles my knowledge. To me, it is like seeking a solitary flower in a trackless wild."

"The darker the way, madame," he answered her, "the more splendid the quest."

She smiled suddenly, and her fine mouth softened.

"You have the heart of youth in you," she said, "the heart that never tires on the road."

"I am strong, madame," he said, very simply.

"We women love strength."

"And youth?"

“To me, youth is strength,” she answered, “age—weakness. Only those are strong who keep their hearts young. As for rusty age, it is the season of discretion, of puling sapience, and unkindling courage.”

She seemed to talk beyond the present, as though her thoughts were high in the heavens. Tristan could not tell what was in her heart, save that she seemed sad, full of unrest. It was as though her words were not for him, but for some other soul in a far-off land.

“My life is my sister’s,” he said, with an air of strength. “Though my hair grows grey, madame, I shall seek her out.”

“Happy sister,” she said, with a smile.

“Happy brother,” he retorted, running his hand over the horse’s black mane.

“Ah, Tristan,” she said, with strange motherliness in voice and mood, “there will come a day when some woman will be happy with a heart such as yours. If for a sister you will dare so much, what will your faith be to one dearer than all the sisters who tread the world?”

They had come to the town, sunk deep in gardens beside the lake. Its roofs were ruddy as an autumn orchard, its highways paved with white stones; peace seemed to cover it, and great content. No battlements frowned black-browed over the meadows. Beauty and simple truth sat throned in its calm heart.

As for Rosamunde, she was queen therein; Tristan gathered as much before they had gone fifty paces of the grey, white stones. Her empire lay with the people’s hearts. She was mother, lady, friend to all. Children ran to her when they saw her face. She had a kiss, a smile, an outstretched hand for each. Some brought her flowers, posies of red and white, which Tristan, taking, laid within his shield. The women beamed from doorways as she passed. The peasants louted to her, warm homage on their sun-tanned faces. She had a word, a smile of sympathy for all. That they loved her, Tristan could reason well.

“To-day, Samson comes to us,” she said to those she passed, “to-night, friends, gather to the castle. Samson will speak to us there. Bring with you your children. They must share the truth.”

Tristan, forgetful of the mild eyes that stared at him, a stranger in Joyous Vale, wondered in his heart who Samson was. Perhaps a priest, a minstrel, an arch-heretic. If these good folk were apostates, he could praise their heresy. Sin, poverty, and shame had little heritage in Joyous Vale. He saw no beggars in the streets, no rags, no misery, no unclean thing. The faces round him were as fresh as May, serene and simple, harbingers of good. If this same Samson had wrought all this, surely of all men he could be counted happy.

In this wise, leading his black horse by the bridle, Tristan came with

Rosamunde to her husband’s home. Tristan was not unloth to see this Ronan, whose wife she was. One truth he had gathered well: Columbe, his sister, was not in Joyous Vale.

CHAPTER VI

Many a year had passed since the rough folk of the Seven Streams had first murmured against the sleek and masterful priests whose god seemed the god of wine-bibbing and of greed. Arrogance and luxury and all manner of uncleanness had spread through the abbeys of the land, staining the robes of the Church with scarlet, tainting every holy place. Charity had become as naught; lust and avarice had walked hand in hand; tyranny and violence had reigned together.

Thus through many long years there had been a great sundering of the sympathies of the people from the tall towers and gorgeous palaces of the Church. Not openly had the slow change come, but with stealth, even as the earth's crust is mined by the tunnelling of subterranean streams. Celibacy, that perilous plant, had cast its unclean tendrils over the land, bearing dark fruit in many a solemn haunt, making vain show, hiding the bane beneath. Slowly all reverence had elapsed, and fear had been swallowed up in hate. From the broad lands and the dark forests teeming with wild beasts, murmurings, like the moanings of the wind, had spread and gathered through the Seven Streams.

Then Samson had come, like some tall demigod out of the dark unknown. Was it not told that all the wisdom of the East had been hoarded and stored within his brain? The philosophic lore of Greece was his. The sages of Egypt and the grey fathers of the Church had poured their mystic learning into his soul. Plotinus and Augustine, philosopher and Christian patriarch, had mingled in him their spiritual zeal. Half priest, half poet, half soldier, and half seer, he had lifted his voice in the Seven Streams, preaching Christ crucified, even as the Galileans had preached of old.

To him the rude instincts of the peasantry had risen, eager and passionate, hungering for the truth. Serf and lord had mingled in one cause. Many a good married priest, condemned because his heart was a father's heart, had come to Samson, zealous for the faith. Then the deep thunder of the Great Pontificate had echoed over the streams and mountains. Synod and council had dared the strife; church and grave had been sealed up fast; anathema and interdict had followed on. The dead had been buried in unhallowed ground; the bread and wine had been denied the land. Still Samson had preached, so that the province followed him, even till the great abbeys were empty and in ruins, the shrines and churches given to the dust. So fierce and turbulent had waxed the storm that monk and priest had fled to the far south, fearing the people and the

people’s enmity.

That same evening when Tristan came to Joyous Vale there was a gathering of the peasantry on the castle terrace to hear Samson the Heretic hold forth. He had ridden in towards vespers, a big man, cowled and cloaked, on a gaunt grey mare. By custom, a room had been set apart for him in Ronan’s tower, to serve as an oratory and cell. Here he could retreat like a hermit to his cave, and refresh in solitude both the flesh and the spirit, like the reasonable Christian that he was.

Above the terrace, the grey walls of the tower, crusted with lichen, rose towards the azure of the evening sky. A great silence covered the valley, save for the bleating of sheep in the meadows, the cry of the lapwing from the marshes. Distance purpled the far horizon; the woods stood wondrous green and fair. Peace prevailed over garden and garth; as yet there was no muttering of war beyond the hills.

Rosamunde sat in a great carved chair, draped at the back with scarlet cloth. Ronan her husband stood at her side. He was a lean man, with prominent shoulders, shallow eyes, and a cold mouth. The peasant folk sat on the benches before them. Rosamunde’s women were at her feet.

Tristan had throned himself on the wall where cactuses grew in urns of stone and gillyflowers flourished, yellow and red. He was watching Rosamunde and Ronan her lord. The man by the chair pleased Tristan little. The hollow chest, the sullen eye promised nothing virile in the matter of arms. It puzzled Tristan how he had won such a wife, for they were as a rose and a mandrake bound up together.

His cogitations were ended by the opening of a door. Samson in his black robe came out on the terrace. A wooden cross hung at his girdle; he wore leather sandals and an iron chain round his neck. Waving the peasant folk back as they thronged him, he took a stool of cedar wood that stood by the wall. Putting back the cowl from off his face, he gazed round on those who awaited his words.

Though a seeming monk, he wore no tonsure; the black hair was cropped close to the massive head. Seated there in the western glow, he looked like a Homeric hero with the face of a Jove. The eyes were black, bright as polished stone. The long jaw curved prominently under the thin, straight mouth. The brows met in a black line over the nose. A mass of passion and virile power, he faced the peasantry like a prophet of God.

As Tristan watched him, he began to speak, moving his hands to time his words. His voice bewitched from the first sound, and the simple folk before him were as still as stones. Even Tristan forgot Dame Rosamunde’s face.

Samson's theme was simple and strong, yet grand in its bold simplicity. He expounded the pure spirit of the Christian creed, brushed aside dogmas, denounced outward forms. His convictions were great, his scorn as powerful. Greed in high places, luxury and lust, pride and simony, these were his victims. Casting Christ's ideals against the pomp of the Church, he mined the rotten fabric with his tongue.

"People of La Vallée Joyeuse," he said, "clean hearts avail with Heaven, clean souls, clean lives. Labour in the fields is a prayer to God. Live that you may not fear death; live that your lives may demand entry into Heaven. Actions build the stairway up to God, good deeds, pure thoughts. Believe not those who promise you salvation with hired prayers and the melting of much wax. Gold cannot bribe God. The Church's wings cannot waft you into paradise if you are weighted with the iron girdle of your sins. Pardons, penitences, the ringing of bells, these are but mummeries to deceive your souls. Serve God in your hearts, and you will have no need of a Pope."

Tristan's eyes had wandered from the preacher to Rosamunde's face. Its expression stirred him, even as a falling star smites the vision of one watching the night sky. The woman's eyes were fixed on Samson's face, with a certain passionate intentness that made Tristan wonder. The half-petulant curve had vanished from her mouth. A warm radiance seemed to burn upon her cheeks; her eyes were more bright than the stones at her throat.

By sudden instinct Tristan glanced at Ronan, who stood beside Rosamunde, leaning on her chair. The man's narrow face was half in shadow. He was watching his wife with a curious stare, fingering his chin, his thin lips working. He appeared to be studying the play of thought on her face, shifting restlessly from foot to foot. More than once he cast a rapid glance at the preacher, like the glance a jealous hound casts at a rival.

To Tristan there was a strange underchant to the song, a secret movement he could not catch. Samson's eyes were on the people before him, Rosamunde's eyes on Samson's face, Lord Ronan's on the face of his wife. Tristan watched the three with his instincts groping in the dusk. He listened no more to the preacher's words, but watched in silence the play before him.

The sun had ridden low upon the hills. In the gardens and thickets beneath the terrace a hundred birds made their vesper song. Shadows, purple and gold, increased on the lake. In the west, the moon was heaving up a broad shoulder above the world. A great silence descended like dew out of the heavens. Odours of rose and myrtle flooded the air.

From his vigil, Tristan woke to find the peasantry moving, Samson standing alone by the wall. The man had drawn down his cowl and re-knotted

his girdle. He passed back slowly towards the door, walking gravely with his chin on his chest. Tristan was watching Rosamunde's face. He saw her take a deep breath under her robe, her hands hanging limp over the carved rails of her chair. Her head seemed to droop on the scarlet cushion, as she watched Samson under half-closed lids. The town showed dim in the green gloom beneath, like white coral glimmering under the sea. An hour passed, and found Tristan on the terrace. Far beneath the lake shimmered, touched by the rising light of the moon. The cry of wild duck came from the shallows. In the thickets a choir of nightingales had broken the silence together.

On the terrace, Tristan had drawn beneath the shade of a cypress, that rose like a spire from the garden beneath. He was leaning his chin on his crossed forearms, staring out over the scene. The valley was as a battleground betwixt moonlight and gloom. The hill-tops led the silver host on, the water gleamed with the beat of their feet. In the deeps of the woods and the hollows of the hills the gloom kept the banners of the night unfurled.

There was a rough melancholy in Tristan's mood. Samson's words were as the noise of swords dinning perpetually within his brain. A vigorous zest breathed in the creed, a flash of the green woods, a scent of the sea. The bold truths of the man's harangue were woven in his thought like a crown round Rosamunde's brow. Her large eyes haunted him, wistful and brave. He remembered also her husband's face, with its lack-lustre malice, its cold distrust. There was some romance in this heretical crown with the great stones set in its band, the treacherous opal scowling yellow and green, the sapphire blue and bold in the sun, the ruby red with its passionate fire.

Two voices came to Tristan out of the gloom, as he loitered on the terrace under the stars. Hunching his shoulders, he drew towards the tree. The voices came from the garden below, where there was a yew walk by the wall.

The first voice was Rosamunde's; Tristan caught the mellow tones out of the dark. Anger flooded it, to judge by its temper. A second voice echoed the woman's, a cold drawl, vain yet bitter. It was the Lord of Vallée Joyeuse who walked with her under the yews.

"Madame, I may claim some reverence from you," came the taunt. "God knows, I am only your husband; a poor reason, it seems. This braggart preacher bulks too large in our house."

"He is a man, messire. You are jealous, eh?"

"You suggest, madame wife, that there is cause for the passion."

Silence held a moment, a pause as for breath. Tristan's mouth hardened. It was the woman's voice that sounded next, a ringing scorn in it that made Tristan's eyes glitter.

“Is marriage a surety for insolence?” it said.

“Insolence! Is the truth insolent?”

“Shall I suffer this, though I am your wife?”

“Husbands, madame, suffer no tricking of their honour, save when they are blind bats and fools.”

There was again a pause. Rosamunde’s words came clear and passionate as the notes of a well-tuned harp.

“Man, you have said enough to me, though you are my mate.”

“Regret it, madame, as much as you will.”

“Ha!”

“But beware of trickery.”

“These lies, I’ll not brook them——”

“Cultivate discretion.”

“Silence! I am no puppet, though you have wedded me.”

The voices passed westwards under the yews, growing faint as the angle of the terrace came between. Tristan stood up, and spread his broad shoulders. There was an ugly look in his eyes, a firm closing of his iron mouth. He tightened his sword belt, passed from under the stars to the hall, spoke little as he sat at supper with Ronan’s men.

CHAPTER VII

Seven days had passed, and Tristan was still lodged under Rosamunde's roof. Of his sister Columbe he had won no word, yet he tarried in Joyous Vale in Rosamunde's service. The woman had need of a loyal sword. Tristan had learnt to serve her there with the quick instinct of a great-hearted dog. There was much of the mother in her mood towards the man; nor did she dower his face with any deeper passion.

Shadows had deepened round Joyous Vale, and vague rumours had come from the south, whisperings of sword and torch and the march of armed men. A shepherd had seen dim sails upon the sea. As to what summer would bring to them, prophecy stood silent. Rosamunde's state was no easy one, as Tristan had gathered, for she was watched and spied upon by her husband's men. Ronan's jealousy was as a snake coiled in the grass, ready to dart and flesh its fangs. She could no more trust him than she could trust a priest. Moreover, his malice hindered her cause, barred her from plotting to save her people. Samson alone could help her in this, and Ronan's jealousy kept the two apart.

It was the morning of Tristan's second Sabbath there. He was on the terrace burnishing his arms, when Isabel, Rosamunde's woman, crept out to him from the tower. He was to take horse and follow her lady that morning. She had need of him, and trusted his honour.

Tristan, having saddled and bridled his horse, rode out and met Rosamunde at the gate. She was mounted on a white palfrey, her woman Isabel beside her on a mule. Tristan saluted them, a silent discretion in his deep-set eyes. To him Rosamunde's beauty was as the breath of June.

They rode out down the slope of the hill, where the gardens amid the thickets were ablaze under the noon sun. Rosamunde was clad in a green robe, with a girdle of red leather shaped to her figure. She rode on before Tristan and the woman Isabel, as though not sorry of solitude and freedom from stone walls. There was a calm unapproachableness about her, which, when she so willed it, became as a wall of glimmering ice. Her words, often imperious and curt, would have suggested insolence on the lips of one less fair. Tristan had seen her angered but once. There had been something of the splendour of a stormy sunset about the mood, a red rush of passion that had bewitched him more than smiles.

As they left the town behind a screen of poplars, Rosamunde called Tristan

to her, but gestured Isabel to remain behind. Her lips had much scorn on them that day, scorn for her husband, jejune and jealous pedant that he was. Of the red wine of her love Lord Ronan had tasted little. She was unsmirched as a rose, pure as an ivory palace conceived in some deep dream.

Tristan eyed her over his massive shoulder, wondering much what was in her heart. A mask of thought covered her face, as she gazed ahead into the deeps of the woods. True, there was much in her heart to breed unrest, yet Tristan was as a child in a temple, ignorant of the many and manifold visions stirring within her brain. La Vallée Joyeuse stretched out before her, like a calm sea untouched by the wind. Yet beyond the mountains the black banners of war gathered. Fanaticism was streaming like fire to purge and to destroy. Had not the Pope armed the southern nobles against the land? Had not Sir Parsival put his legate to the sword?

Rosamunde, great lady that she was, feared not for herself the peril of a zealot's war. The people of La Vallée Joyeuse were to her as children. She was their lady, and they loved her, even because she was gracious and merciful, a friend set above them like an altared saint. It was her spirit that had opened their rude hearts to Samson's heresy. She, the first convert in mind and soul, had drawn them after her, as a shepherdess draws her sheep.

As for the lords and barons of the Seven Streams, they were scattered wide amid their woods and hills. Samson had preached and they had listened. Mewed in their mountains and their forest gloom, they were deaf to the thunder of ecclesiastic wrath. Ronan of Joyous Vale, first lord of the province, was mere selfish clay, careless of his people, jealous of his wife. His very malice made her mute to him. On Samson, rugged Titan piling mountains against the Papal Jove, rested the one ambition of the land.

Drawing Tristan to her that day, Rosamunde unbosomed something of her care to him. There was a serene stateliness in all her words, a tender dignity as of one who stoops, from love, not pride. The man seemed nothing but a casual friend, cast in her path by the hand of circumstance. She trusted him, had trusted from the first, because his face was ugly and his words came slow.

Tristan gathered the truth from her as they rode through the meadows. There was much shrewdness in his turbulent brain. Moreover, Rosamunde had taken hold upon his heart. Sympathies are warm where love treads fast; comprehension kindles when the torch burns bright.

"Lady," he said to her, in his curt, calm way, "of the burden you bear—I am wise—in measure. Our cross bulks the heavier when the shoulder is chafed."

"Ah," she said, with a flash of the eye, "these valley folk are as children to

me. I have no babe of my own, so the burden is honest."

Tristan recalled such war lore as he had learnt from the rough mariners of Purple Isle. He would have served her more gladly with his sword than with his tongue. She had tempted his counsel; he bent his brows and played the philosopher.

"Madame," he said, "I have heard men say that our fears are like hillocks seen through mist, bulking like mountains through the fog. I have found billows less big when I have breasted them. As for this land of yours, it is a maze of mountains and of woods. You can baulk your enemies, as King David baulked Saul."

She plucked the strategy from the speech like a gem out of a casket, and played with it to her own good comfort.

"To leave our homes," she said, "and take to the wilds. There is wisdom in the plan, and yet——"

Tristan attempted more stoical counsel.

"Better let your homes burn than your bodies," he said. "Scattered and in hiding, you will provide no martyrs for these holy ravagers. They will return empty by their own tracks. Ten men are worth a hundred in the mountains."

"Ah," she said, with sudden passionate scorn, "if I could but trust my husband!"

"Trust yourself, madame," quoth the man on the black horse.

"One staunch friend perhaps. What then?"

Tristan, full of the ready zeal of youth, set forth his faith to her with a gesture of the hand. He went red under his black brows, as though half ashamed of such an outburst of passion.

"Madame," he said to her, "here is one sword more. I am young—you smile, by God—I have the strength of three. No man in Joyous Vale shall laugh twice in my face."

"Ah, Tristan," she said with deepened colour, "I trust you well. Why should I burden you with another's yoke? What is Joyous Vale to you?"

"Madame," he said very simply, "my shoulders are broad; try them."

"To-day, I trust you," she retorted slowly. "We meet Samson in yonder wood."

Lines ran across Tristan's broad forehead; his mouth hardened. He was as a man who felt himself outfaced, disarmed. There was no guile towards him in the woman's heart, and yet his youth recoiled from her with jealous spleen.

"Madame," he said half sullenly, looking no longer on her face, "I have

promised faith to you. It is enough."

Before them rose a great barrier of trees, a larch wood set upon the green bosom of a hill, whose slopes fell away towards a vague wilderness of pines. Many flowers and herbs were in bloom upon the hillside. Tristan, sullen of face, drew apart from Rosamunde as they mounted the slope and entered the alleys of the deepening wood. The sun poured through, streaking and ribbing the gloom with gold. Rosamunde's green gown gleamed richly above her palfrey's white flanks.

Deeper and deeper they threaded the shade, the grass track growing less green, dusted with cones and the fallen wind wrack of the trees. Whortleberry and heather grew there, with great pools of gorse. The silence increased, hanging like a purple pall, the sunlight plashing fitfully over the multitudinous boughs.

Deep in a dwindling aisle, they saw a man in a black robe seated upon a fallen tree. He rose, came towards them, when he marked the white brow of Rosamunde's horse. Tristan, watching the woman's face, a half-jealous gleam deep in his eyes, saw the colour increase the rose-white richness of her skin. She breathed more rapidly, held her head higher, watched Samson keenly as he came towards her under the trees.

Drawing near, he put his cowl back from his face, kissed the hand she stretched to him, held her stirrup while she dismounted. She cast her bridle over Tristan's wrist, threw a rapid glance at him as he sat hunched and sullen upon his horse.

"Wait," she said with an imperious tone tinging her voice, "watch, keep guard."

Tristan, turning with a word, took the white palfrey and his own black horse, tethered them to a tree on the eastern side of the ride. Isabel had joined him on her mule, a smile on her broad mouth as she noted the man's sour face. Samson and Rosamunde were pacing the grass together, looking in each other's eyes as they talked. There was much on either tongue, question and counter-question, words as to the war and the gathering in the south.

The woman Isabel had slipped lightly from her mule. She was a plump, yellow-skinned wench, with roguish eyes and a red patch of colour over either cheek-bone. Her tongue was equal to her temper. Tristan, leaning against the trunk of a tree, paid no heed to her as he stared at Samson and the lady. The man's stride spoke of his power; he gesticulated as he talked, and his words flowed fast. Rosamunde's green gown swept the grass in stately fashion. She walked with arched neck and supple waist, her hair glimmering under its golden net, her red-slippered feet gliding glibly over the turf. Tristan gazed at

her and marvelled. For the moment he half hated her for her loveliness and for the calm pride that kept him chained.

He awoke to find the woman Isabel at his elbow, peering with parted lips into his face. She smiled in her eyes as they met his, touched her mouth with a fat white hand, moved nearer to him with a little rustle of a sigh like a summer breeze through orange bloom.

"Coz, we are well sorted," she said with a titter. "A silver cross for your thoughts, boy. Why so sour of face?"

Tristan scowled at her betwixt the brows, and unbent nothing to her coquetry.

"Ha, cousin," he said, "men find the moon dull when the sun is away."

"Sun!" she retorted, "you ugly stump! Keep your eyes wide. I am too bright for such as you."

"Shine hard," he said to her with a smile. "I shall have no need of a shield."

She tightened her girdle, smoothed her gown, and eyed Tristan under drooping lids.

"Samson is a handsome fellow," she said.

Tristan pursed up his mouth and answered her nothing. Rosamunde and the preacher had passed deeper into the wood, and were out of sight and hearing. Tristan would have given much to have known what passed between them under the trees.

"Samson," said the girl at his elbow, "Samson, sirrah, has the wit to be courteous to a lady. He has no tongue like a tag of undressed leather, nor a face like a dinted buckler red with rust."

Tristan played with the buckle of his sword belt and wished the woman Isabel a man.

"Ha, cousin," she ran on, "I have heard of a horse-boy stealing a pair of red shoes, because they had covered a lady's toes. As for her heart, it was a pearl, a great white pearl, sirrah, not to be breathed upon and handled by grooms. Hark! holy saints, what's amiss in the wood?"

Isabel had started from her malice like a woman who sees a snake twisting at her feet. She stood rigid, with eyes dilating, her lips apart, the colour gone from her face. Through the alleys of the wood had come a sudden outcry, the loud voice of a man challenging a foe, the passionate declaiming of an angry woman. Tristan, with his back taut as the straining mast of a ship, stood snuffing the air, his muscles quivering, his broad chest spread. In the flash of a second he had plunged down the grass ride at a run, unbuckling his sword as he ran, flinging aside belt and scabbard. Voices, passionate and clamorous,

were playing through the trees. They winged on Tristan's heels, as he sped with tight mouth and kindling eyes under sun and shadow.

Coming upon a narrow glade in the wood, he saw the scene spread out before him. With her back to a tree stood Rosamunde, her eyes ablaze, her head held high. Before her, with uplifted knife, his robe gathered as a buckler in his left hand, stood Samson the Heretic, fronting four armed men who crouched round him like hounds about a boar. Even as Tristan came, they sprang together upon the monk, dragging him down in a moiling heap upon the grass. The fourth snatched out at Rosamunde, caught the neckband of her gown, rent it to the girdle as she strained from him with both hands set upon his face.

Tristan leapt in as though his blood had changed to fire. The man who had seized on Rosamunde sprang away with a red throat and an empty doom. Turning, Tristan plunged upon the three, who struggled and writhed over the powerful figure of the priest. Plucking the uppermost by the girdle, even as he would have plucked a beetle from a stone, Tristan threw him full against the stem of a tree. The man's breath groaned out of him; he twitched and lay still. Samson, bleeding in the brow, had risen upon the others with a hand on either throat. Tristan, dodging round, ran his sword through the body of the taller man. Samson, bleeding and breathless, rose from the carcass of the other, and made way for Tristan's blow.

Sudden silence fell upon the pool of death. Rosamunde stood with Tristan and the monk, staring at the brief havoc their hands had wrought. The grass was stained with red. Samson, shaking the blood out of his eyes, turned to Tristan with outstretched hand. Their manhood seemed to meet in that one strong grip. Rosamunde, tearing cloth from the border of her gown, came forward and caught Samson by the sleeve.

The monk knelt to her while she bound the green cloth about his forehead. Tristan stood apart from them, his eyes still ablaze, his great chest rising and falling beneath his hauberk. Jealousy, quenched for the moment, rose again in the hot blood that played about his brain. Turning upon his heel with a last glance at the man lying against the tree, he strode away towards the horses, where the woman Isabel stood with a face white as swan's-down. To her querulous terror he gave no heed, for there was still bitterness gnawing at his heart. If he had been the wounded one, would Rosamunde have rent her gown?

Some minutes passed before she came towards them under the trees. She came alone, pale and distraught, yet cold outwardly as stone. Samson had parted from her in the woods; their words had been brief, significant as silence. She said nothing to the two who waited; pointed them to their saddles, and neither dared to question her, so imperious and clouded was her face. Then

they mounted, rode out, and headed homewards over the fields.

CHAPTER VIII

Rosamunde, pale and silent, rode through the thickets that clothed the castle hill. Not a word had she spoken either to Tristan or to Isabel since she had parted with Samson in the wood. Her face seemed frozen into an unnatural calm, as though she strove to mask the passions that worked within. There was a deeper significance in the adventure than either Isabel or Tristan had imagined.

They wound through the gardens where the sunlight slept upon the lawns, and came through a myrtle thicket to the great gate. The place was deserted, steeped in the noon silence. Tristan, clattering in at a word from Rosamunde, woke a groom sleeping on a bench in the stable court, and sent the man out to take the horses. Rosamunde stood under the shadow of the gate. There was an angry calm upon her face, a statuesque scorn that seemed to prophesy of what should follow.

“Come with me—be silent, both.”

These were her only words to them as she turned towards the terrace, white above the green gardens spread below. At the entry of the passage leading to the great hall and the tower she turned on Tristan and Isabel with a rapid stare from her unwavering eyes. There was deep meaning in that glance of hers. Tristan felt it, even as a bolt piercing his hauberk. With it she challenged his faith, his loyalty towards her as a woman. Laying a finger on her lip, she beckoned them to follow.

Following in silence, they passed the gallery, climbed a short stair, found themselves in a dark entry set back in the thickness of the wall. A streak of light showed where a door stood. Rosamunde, lifting the latch, peered in and entered. Tristan and the woman followed her. They could hear nothing else save each other’s breathing.

A long room stretched with lessening shadow towards a tall window opening on the south, and hangings, green and gold, covered the walls. Eight carved pillars ascended towards the dark vault above. At a table near the window sat a man with his back turned towards the door; the table was littered with fragments of glass, colours, brushes, and illumined scrolls. The man by the window was bending over a glass panel, enamelling a red rose thereon with unsteady hand. He seemed oblivious of the three who watched him from the doorway.

Rosamunde, with her torn robe gathered in her hand, moved into the room, with a glance thrown at Tristan over her shoulder. Following, he stood behind her in the shadow, watching her every movement. She gestured to him to strike one of the pillars with the scabbard of his sword. As the clangour sounded through the room, the man by the table twisted on his chair, sprang up and stared at them, dropping his brush on the stone paving at his feet.

There was a significance in the scene, tinged as it was with the love feud of these two. Rosamunde, tall as a white lily, stared the man down with an imperious scorn that betrayed the truth. Tristan, watching the Lord of Joyous Vale as he would have watched a wolf, saw him pale under his brown hair before the damning figure of his wife. His eyes wavered, his jaw fell. He seemed to stoop, to contract, as a tree shrivels before the breath of a forest fire.

Rosamunde, still gazing on his face, advanced towards him across the room. The man would have fallen back before her had not the table barred his way. Her splendid height, her towering courage, seemed to cast into contrast his cringing guilt.

“Sir, thanks to Heaven, we have returned.”

There was so suggestive a scorn in her voice that the high roof seemed to quiver at the sound. Ronan, moistening his dry lips, frowned and found no answer. The poor smile that he conjured up was as a moonbeam flitting over ice. His blood ran cold; he was afraid, and showed his fear.

“Sir, we have returned,” she said with the slow torture of an unpitying tongue. “For your good welcome, husband, we give you thanks.”

The man bowed to her stiffly, clumsily, like a wooden doll jointed at the hips.

“Madame is ever welcome,” he said; “her prerogative demands it. Need I emphasise the truth?”

She laughed at his words, a laugh that seemed as foreign to her beauty as the cracked cackle of some shrivelled hag.

“Sir, your courtesy bribes me to silence. I see we but hinder you; trifle with such lordly cares as befit your temper. Pick up your brush, sir. Playing with crafty colours upon brittle glass, the pastime pleases you. I would commend it to a man of courage.”

His eyes flashed for the moment, grew dull again like treacherous water. He reached for the brush, to hide his face from her. Rosamunde, gathering her green gown, swept by him with scorn. At the door she turned and cast a last taunt at him over her shoulder.

“Samson the Heretic is well,” she said. “He sends you, sir, his great good

will."

All that noontide Tristan stood on guard at the door of Dame Rosamunde's room. She was as a white bird in the nest of a snake, and for all his jealousy Tristan's blood ran loyal in her service. They were Ronan's men who had fallen upon Samson and Rosamunde in the wood that day. The Lord of Joyous Vale was no open and courageous smiter, for poison suited his senses better than an honest blow. That Rosamunde was in great peril Tristan le Sauvage knew right well. It seemed that his one buckler covered her from the world, nor was he sorry to sustain the feud.

Tristan, keeping guard before the door, watched the sun sinking towards the western hills. The light smote through the narrow casement in the rough stone wall, played and gleamed upon the laced rings of his hauberk. There were warring instincts in the man's heart. Jealousy still stirred in him. Yet over his finer self there shone that luminous reverence for a woman's name. Tristan, half savage, half Christian in his untempered youth, strove with his deepening manhood towards the finer faith.

As the gold mellowed in the west, the woman Isabel came out to him from her lady's room. The morning's adventure had sobered the wench's mood; she had dropped her coquetry at her mistress's feet. Drawing Tristan in, she barred the door, stood by it listening, pointed the man into an inner room. He noted the great bed with its rich hangings, the carved panels, the coloured cloths about the walls. There was a rich and mysterious savour in the air; even the flowers upon the casement ledge seemed brighter than their fellows in the fields below. To Tristan the place was as some rare shrine, whose odours and gleaming dyes breathed about the face of Love.

Rosamunde sat at the open window looking towards the lake. A bank of gillyflowers bloomed upon the sill. There was still the same proud pallor upon the woman's face; solitude had not bribed her to salve her care with tears. Hers were not eyes that wept at the first kiss of anger or of pain.

Turning, she looked long at Tristan, like one who would be sure of the faith she needed. The man's shoulders were broad; they might bear her honour. Woman that she was, she was the more eager for his comradeship, since jealousy had snatched at the red jewel over her heart. No doubt she thought it easy for the man to serve her, seeing that she imagined no bitterness upon his ugly face.

"Tristan," she said, looking deep into his eyes.

He met the glance squarely, like one sure of his own honour.

"Tristan, to-day I have trusted you," she said; "this morning you promised faith to me. I would try you further. Am I wise in this?"

“Madame,” he said with blunt simplicity, “you are apt at making servants. I obey you still.”

She rose, stood at the window, pointed him to the lake. Tristan drew to her side, gazed out as she told him of her charge.

“See, there is an island yonder, covered with trees.”

Tristan bent his head.

“There are boats on the strand below the town; go alone and ferry over. On the island there is a ruined chapel. By the altar, under the ambry in the right-hand wall, you will see a stone marked with a trefoil in the floor. Under the stone there lies a casket of black oak. Take the casket; sink it in the deeps of the lake.”

They gazed into each other’s eyes questioningly, like two mutes over a grave. Rosamunde was the first to break the silence.

“Tristan, you will take oath to me?” she said.

“By my sword, madame.”

“The casket goes unopened to the deeps?”

“I swear that.”

“Then, I am content.”

She stood forward suddenly, and stooping a little, kissed him upon the brow. It was done in a moment, but the shaft had sped. Tristan, red to the lips, went back from her with a strange light in his eyes. He was hers from that moment, body and soul.

The sinking sun had built a golden highway over the water when Tristan came to the lake’s rim. The woods stood wondrous green against the sombre purple of the hills, and the reeds and rushes glittered like silver wire. Water-fowl winged from out the shallows as he unmoored a boat that lay half grounded by a stone stage. Thrusting out and setting the water spinning at the prow, he was soon deep in the golden pathway towards the west. Two furlongs away the island cast its gloom upon the lake. The water lay black and deep about its rocks; the stunted trees were bannered with crimson and gold. Tristan was soon under their shadows, where he ran the boat aground in a small inlet, clambered out, and sought the chapel.

The place stood ruinous, plunged deep in weeds, festooned with ivy and many lusty plants, choked thick with brambles. A fallen pine tree lay across the roofless porch. Briers and nettles cumbered the floor. Tristan, struggling through in the half gloom, had to draw his sword where the chancel began. A great thorn tree flourished betwixt the roofless walls. Tristan clove a pathway through the prickly mass, trampled the nettles, climbed the low steps towards

the altar. Crouching, he sought for Rosamunde's stone. It was some while before he tore the rank herbage aside, and found the trefoil carved beneath. The slab had been glued by damp and moss. It was smooth and heavy, giving no vantage to his fingers. Working with the sword point, he prised up the stone, thrust in his hand, and drew the casket out.

Night had fallen and the west drew dim. Hardly had he huddled the casket into his bosom, turned back the stone over the hole, when an uprush of gruff voices rose as from the dark thickets of the place. Tristan, starting up with twitching sword, fell back against the altar, alert and grim. The plash of churned water broke on the evening silence, the creaking of sweeps in the rowlocks. Scrambling out towards the gate, Tristan saw the tall mast of a ship stride black across the sky. It skirted the island, towering over the trees, a scarlet streamer afloat from its gilded vane. Like a great finger it seemed to stretch towards the sky, held aloft as in silent warning.

Threading the thickets with the oaken casket under his arm, Tristan came to the island's rim. He looked over the water towards the west, and saw that the lake seemed peopled with shadowy ships, striding solemn and silent out of the night. A thousand oars seemed to churn the water. Bulwarks glimmered, armour shone. Like giant ghosts the ships crept on, sable and strange against the fading west.

Sudden out of the gloom leapt the cry of a horn, its voice echoing from the hills. A vague clamour came from the shore. In the town, torches were gleaming like red moths in a garden. From the castle the alarm bell boomed and clashed, for the Papal fleet had descended on Joyous Vale.

CHAPTER IX

Tristan, made his way back to the boat, poled out from the island, keeping its black shadows betwixt him and the nearest galley. He rowed eastwards into the open cavern of the night, his eyes roving from the distant town to the great ships stealing over the water. Their tall masts rose against the last gleaming cranny in the west. Beyond them the mountains towered solemn and stupendous, fringed with aureoles of transient fire. Even in the half gloom Tristan could see a vague glittering movement on the slopes behind the castle, a glitter that told of armed men marching from the hills. It grew plain to Tristan, as his broad back swung with the oars, that the Pope's men had come by sea from the Southern Marches, sailed up the great river, landed troops in the woods, struck a sudden blow at the chief lord of the province of the Seven Streams. While Ronan had grown drunk with the strong wine of jealousy, Death had descended upon Joyous Vale, and sprinkled the Cross with the blood of sacrifice.

There was a swirl of thought in Tristan's brain. Rosamunde of Joyous Vale had his mind in thrall, and his first duty to her was easy in its consummation. Leaning his chest upon his oars, he reached for the casket where it lay on the plankings at his feet. The thing was bound with iron, its wood black and ponderous with age. Tristan balanced it in the hollow of his hand, wondering whether it would sink or swim. The feminine temptation to force the lid never thrust a suggestion into his brain. Tossing the casket over the gunwale, he saw it sink in a wavering circle of light. For fully a minute he watched the place, that he might be assured of the casket's burial. With the vow to Rosamunde fulfilled, he turned both his thoughts and his boat towards the shore.

The ships had lighted flares upon their prows, a crescent of fire that deepened towards the town. Many of the galleys had touched the shore; Tristan could hear the crews shouting and plashing in the shallows, as they disembarked to attack the town. Behind the poops of the ships deep gloom prevailed, while a cresset glared on the castle tower, a red tuft of flame gemming the night. The bell still tolled. It ceased of a sudden; the silence was more sinister than its clangour.

Tristan pulled for the bank where a thicket of larches rose near the water. Climbing out, he splashed through the shallows, moored the boat to the stump of a tree. Strenuous stanzas were astir in his brain. What of Rosamunde in her husband's tower? Swords were yelping about the place, torches tossing, spears

aslant. Could Samson the Heretic save her now? It was the sword's turn, and Tristan rejoiced.

Leaving the wood, he crossed the meadows that ran to the dark roofs of the town. There was no wall or ditch about the place; the streets could be swept by a charge of horse. A whimpering uproar rose towards the stars; there was fighting afoot. Tristan soon gathered as much. Going at a trot over the meadows, he blundered suddenly on a knot of armed men, a Papal picket guarding the road. So intent were they on watching the town that Tristan fell flat, and escaped unseen. The men wore white crosses over their hauberks, a blazoning adopted to distinguish their cause. Tristan, plunging on into the gloom, won a stretch of garden ground that dipped towards the meadows. Flowers bloomed pale-faced in the dusk. The scent of thyme and roses burdened the air.

The Papal levies had ended the tussle as Tristan gained the fringe of the streets. Houses were ablaze in the western quarter, flinging a red canopy over the town. Swords and pikestaffs swirled in the streets. Bronzed, sweaty bravos were looting the houses, letting lust loose in attic and cellar. Now and again a quick scream wavered from some darkened house, a scream followed by oaths and unclean laughter. Women and children in their nightgear ran headlong into the streets, to be hounded down and taken, or driven away into the woods. Now and again there was a scuffle, as men met and fought out the death feud in doorway and in garden.

Tristan, passing up an alley under the deep shadow of a wall, ran full face into the arms of a soldier who came stumbling out of a hovel with a wine skin under his arm. Seeing the white cross on the man's chest, Tristan seized so kindly a chance. His great arms went round the man like the coils of a python. The wine skin burst under their feet as they struggled by the wall. Tristan lifted the soldier shoulder high, dashed him down on the cobbled path, where the man rolled on his side, lay still in the shadow. Tristan, kneeling down, unlaced his surcoat, stripped it off, and tumbled it over his own head. The white cross would serve him as well as his sword.

The road towards the castle teemed with steel, and torches flared through the thickets. The castle walls started pale and fitful out of the gloom, their battlements gleaming above the gardens dark under the stars. A hot burst of cheering came down into the town. The troops thronging the road shouted in answer, as they pressed on to share in the sacking of the place. Clarions blew a triumphant fanfare. The strident chant of a company of white monks rose from the market square. They were singing a "Gloria" as they wound in procession through the town, a great cross and a silver reliquary borne in state before them.

Tristan had joined himself to a company of archers who followed a knight in a green surcoat, bearing a scarlet leopard on his shield. They came by the black thickets and the silvery lawns to the broad entry of Sir Ronan's hold. A bunch of pikemen held the gate, where broken beams told of the late assault. Three dead men lay by the guard-room door, slain there when the gate had crashed down. Tristan shouldered in with the rest, unquestioned since he wore the white cross on his breast.

The great court was packed from wall to wall. The Papists had dragged a horse-block into the midst, and were beheading such of the garrison as had escaped unscathed in the fight. Tristan saw a mere boy dragged forward by the wrists, forced down on the block despite his screaming. The fair hair was soon dabbled in blood. Near by stood a tall ruffian with a severed head on his spear. Even in the torchlight Tristan knew the face, for it was Ronan's head on the soldier's lance.

Shuddering still at the thought of the lad's screams, he pushed on towards the terrace with the green knight's men. His massive shoulders gave him the van. There was a great press in the gallery to the hall, as those on the terrace jostled in towards the door. Cries of "Back, sirs, back! reverence for the Lord Bishop," echoed under the low-pitched roof. Tristan, putting brute force to good use, thrust his neighbours to the wall, the men's oaths falling like water from his broad back.

Within, the hall was lit by flambeaux, borne by the guards about the wall. Grim, iron-shirted men packed the place, their surcoats turned up over their girdles, their swords bare to the red flare of the torches. In the waist of the hall a grove of spears tapered towards the smoke-wrapped rafters, their points like dim stars seen through clouds. Before the daïs had gathered a great company of knights and captains, ranged in long ranks against the walls. The many painted shields, azure, green, and red, shone in a rich array under the gloom-filled roof.

On the daïs in dead Ronan's chair sat a man in a robe of black velvet, a gold cross hanging by a chain about his neck. He wore a cap of purple silk over his tonsured scalp. There were jewelled rings upon his plump white fingers; he had a belaced and perfumed diaper in his lap. At his right hand sat a burly lord with a black beard and a face of iron, Benedict, Warden of the Southern Marches, debauchée and despot, whose very winepresses ran blood. Christopher, Canon of Agravale, the episcopal secretary, was pointing his quill on the Bishop's left.

Tristan, leaning against a stone pillar by the door, stared hard at the man seated in dead Ronan's chair. The Lord Bishop of Agravale was a comely cleric, black of chin and bright of eye. A broad beak of a nose overhung a pair

of full red lips. There was a sensual and feline smirk upon the face, an opulent and unctuous pride that shone from curved nostril and twitching mouth. His face was the face of a man who lived rather for his loins than for his soul. An affected dignity served to impress the mob with the ascetic sanctity of the episcopal honour.

Bishop Jocelyn and Benedict of the Marches sat cheek by jowl, debating together over a state letter to the Pope. At intervals the Bishop cast a rapid sentence into the ear of the Canon at his elbow, a pearl of sapience that the discreet cleric hoarded on the parchment under his hand. A silver bell tinkled from the Bishop's table. Silence descended on those assembled. The throng of armed men parted, giving way before two guards who brought forward a man with his hands bound behind his back.

Tristan knew the fellow for a smith and armourer in the town, a rugged, cross-grained ranter, a stout follower of Samson in the path of heresy. The man had a bloody cloth bound about his head and his yellow beard bristled under his sullen face.

Bishop Jocelyn, lolling in his chair, considered the prisoner at his leisure, under drooping lids. He tilted his carnivorous nose with the air of a vulture, sniffed, and spoke with a high-pitched and priestly drawl, throating forth his words as though they came from his Mass Book. Tristan mistrusted the voice as a watch-dog mistrusts the persuasive cajolings of a thief.

"Friend," said the Bishop, moistening his lips, "God prevent you from being damned to eternal torment. The Mother Church is merciful even to those who rebel against her care. Tell us, good son, why the people of Joyous Vale have rebelled against our Father the Pope."

The man before the daïs was no panderer to the power of prosperity. He was as stubborn rock, quarried out of the very mountains that circled Joyous Vale. Moreover, he was sustained by pride in the primitive faith for which he was ready to stake all the tangible benefits of existence. From sheer native obstinacy of soul he was ordained a martyr.

"Priest," he said, with blunt disrespect, "put off your gold chain and the rings from your fingers. Wash the hypocrisy from your face. Then I will speak with you as man to man."

The churchman flushed a little under his smooth skin, pursed up his mouth, made a sign of the cross before him in the air.

"My son," he said, with superb pity, "we are not here for obscenity and abuse, but for the controverting and purging of error. God pardon me if I am as iron with a froward flock. I will put such questions to you as will prove your heart."

“Prove what you will,” said the smith with a frown; “you would damn the Christ, were He set here in my place.”

Certain of the rough men about the walls laughed at the retort. They loved courage and an insolent spirit even though their swords were to quench the same. The Bishop heightened his beneficent pity, towering from his pedestal of piety with the superb and unconscious egotism of the cleric.

“My son,” he said, “will you obey our Father the Pope?”

“I obey no Pope,” came the echo.

“Will you revere the Sacraments?”

“I claim the wine for all.”

“Blasphemy, my son. Should the Holy Blood touch your tainted lips? I trow not. As for confession and the remittance of sins——”

“God defend us from such lying ordinances.”

“Man——”

“None can remit sins save God.”

Bishop Jocelyn smiled like a Stephen, lifted up his face to the reeking roof, laid his hand on the silver bell.

“Hence,” he said, “we must purge this acre. God have pity on these fools; they know not what they do.”

Strong hands swept the man away; he disappeared into the press like a fallen tree dragged down by the eddies of a stream in flood. A knot of armed men charged out by the door, bearing an honest martyr in their midst. The floor before the Bishop’s chair was empty. A hush fell upon the hall. Tristan, keen as a hawk, waited for what should follow.

An odour of violets breathed sudden upon his face. The perfume recalled to him a woman’s room, burdened with odours, smothered with colours and fair flowers. The scent seemed to fall as from the richly embroidered bosom of a woman’s gown. Turning, he saw, with a leap of the heart, Rosamunde standing under the arch of the doorway, the woman Isabel shivering at her heels. The men gave back from her as from before a queen. The Lady of La Vallée Joyeuse carried her pride like an ivory coronet upon her brow. Tristan saw no fear upon her face, no tremor upon her lips. She moved towards the daïs, her green gown sweeping the stones, her long hair streaking her shoulders. She looked neither to the right hand nor the left. Her eyes were fixed upon the red banner blazoned with a yellow cross that hung above dead Ronan’s chair.

A great silence held the hall. The rough men of the sword stared mutely at the woman’s face, as she stood, a living emblem of tragedy, pale yet unfrightened, strong in her own strength. A slight colour played upon her face

as she sustained the insolent gapings of those around her. Man muttered to man. Some jeered and grinned, elbowed each other, croaked like birds of prey. As for Tristan, the hot blood rose to his brain; he set his teeth, took a deep breath, bided his time.

Bishop Jocelyn was staring Rosamunde over with an appreciative loosening of the mouth that was in no way platonic. His eyes had a glassy brilliance under the finely arched brows. He played with the silver clapper of the bell, rose to his feet with an exaggerated display of courtesy, spoke to Rosamunde as she stood before the daïs.

"Madame," he said, letting his glances rove over her full bosom and splendid throat, "we of the Church hold you accused of treachery and treason to our Holy Father the Pope. You and your people have set his ordinances at defiance. For this reason were we bidden to gather the armed sons of the Church, and make war upon such heretics as blasphemed the Creed. Yet, madame, it is given us to promise mercy to those whose hearts remain not froward towards the truth. God has dealt hardly with you and your home to-night. There is yet time for Mother Church to receive you once more into her bosom."

Tristan, rugged rebel, would have laughed at the priest's words had the chance been less momentous. God's justice, forsooth! Mercy from the intolerable tyranny of the Church! The stout sense in him jeered and mocked at the pharisaical verbiage. Straining from the pillar, peering over the shoulder of the man in front of him, he waited with a frown for Rosamunde's answer. He was forewarned in his heart what her words would be. Her back was towards him, yet there shone clear defiance from every line of her tall frame.

"Priest," she said at last, casting out her words so that they seemed to smite the wall, "do you blaspheme God by working iniquities in His name? Is it Christ's ordinance to spill blood—to dishonour women? Out upon you, mummers and jugglers that you are! Burn me to-night if the deed suits your religion."

Her words rang like the blows of a sword in Tristan's brain. Heavens! she had courage! The man exulted even in the temerity of her scorn. He mouthed her words over to himself with a grim and strenuous relish. Here were home-thrusts for the gamblers with God. Bishop Jocelyn still stood behind the table, a sleek worldliness warming his shaven face.

"Madame," he said slowly, "your tongue out-runs your reason."

"And your charity perhaps," she answered him.

Jocelyn spoke on.

"You have been unstrung by the terrors of the night," he said. "Calm

yourself, return to your room, wait for the day. Commune with faith; pray, pray that the Holy Virgin may cleanse the heresy from your heart. On the morrow, madame, you shall speak with me again."

"Bishop," she said, with face upturned, "words will not serve you to change my heart."

"Let the future prove," he answered, "your blood runs hot to-night. Let me counsel you to ponder your peril in solitude."

"I have considered all," she said.

"According to the poverty of your faith," he retorted; "on the morrow, madame, we will sift your doubts together."

He rang the bell, while his eyes remained fixed on Rosamunde's face. The guards came forward to take her from the hall. Setting herself between them without a word, she turned and walked steady and erect towards the door. The tongues of those assembled seemed loosed on the instant. A babel of laughter echoed under the roof amid the swirling smoke of the flambeaux; a wave of colour swept along the painted shields. Above the uproar came the insistent tinkling of the Bishop's bell.

Before the doorway, Rosamunde came to a sudden halt, like one smitten on the face. She had seen Tristan standing by the wall, and their eyes had met, flashed, held in one swift stare. Scorn was on the woman's lips, a sudden pallor upon her forehead. Tristan read "traitor" in that glance of hers. The white cross seemed to burn his bosom, for even as he stood speechless she passed out and was gone.

CHAPTER X

Tristan, strong man that he was, blundered out from the hall much as Peter fled from before the face of Christ. The thrust was perhaps the more bitter seeing that he was innocent, nay, brimming with ardent faith. The night breeze played upon his face as he reached the terrace; the stars were bright in the heavens, the moon streaming up through mountainous clouds. Pools of gloom lay between the fields of silvery vapour. Houses were burning in the town below, a red haze of smoke and light pouring from the place as from a pit.

Tristan, stung with shame, hurried out through the bloodstained court to the gardens fathoms deep in gloom. A sudden frost seemed to have fallen upon his heart, though his face still burnt with the blaze of Rosamunde's scorn. The last look from her eyes seemed colder to him than the glances of the stars. Great passionate boy that he was, the wrong stung him like the hatred of a lost friend. Had not Rosamunde kissed him on the forehead that very day? He threw himself down on a grass bank and wept, and the damp grass licked his face as he rolled restlessly from side to side.

The newly inspired chivalry sank before the spear of rebellious pride. As for Rosamunde, had he not served her well? Martyrs and saints! was he deserving of such infidelity at her hands? The woman was a fool, had no wit in her to read the true cunning of a man's endeavours. She was fickle as moonlight, quick to mistrust at the first mutterings of doubt. Moreover, he had wept over the injustice, he, Tristan the iron-faced, who had never puled since he left the cradle. Ha! if this was gratitude and faith, he would think no more of Joyous Vale, and this proud-lipped dame who conceived all men to have been born her lackeys.

Full of such callow spite as this, Tristan floundered up, tightened his sword belt, brushed the moisture from his face, passed on towards the town. Soldiers were returning from the castle, cursing and shouting under the trees. Rough horseplay ruled the road. Men were riding on each other's shoulders, singing, scuffling, quarrelling as they went. Tristan, shy of such company for the moment, kept to the dark and the paths through the thickets. He strode on morosely, eating his own heart, letting his temper rage with the uncontrolled sincerity of youth.

Entering the town by a narrow by-lane, he bore for the market-place, where the waves of riot ran high. The Papal troops were as wild beasts let loose in an arena, and mere human flesh seemed an insignificant sacrifice for their savage

zeal. Men were even hewing down the houses with axe and hammer, as though to leave no stone or beam unbroken in the place. Children were tossed from the attic windows on the bristling spears beneath. The wild pirates from the old pagan north had never worked more savagely than these children of the Cross.

Tristan's anger began to cool apace before he had gone far through the streets of the town. No such tortures had been known in Purple Isle as were perpetrated here under the benediction of the Church. Men put indiscriminately to the sword, women dishonoured, children thrown from the flaming houses. The streets were full of death and despair; the very town was a great slaughter-house. Horror descended like a cloud on Tristan's brain. He was weak as a frightened child for the moment amid the devastation of the night. The anger oozed from him like wine from a cracked jar. Only a great and empty pity remained in its stead.

Coming to the market square, he stood as one dazed by the terrific action of a dream. The place was packed with drunken men, wearing indeed the livery of the Church, yet appearing with their flaming torches more as the acolytes of hell. Great stakes had been set in the midst of the square, faggots and the timbering of ravaged houses piled around. Even as Tristan watched from under the low eaves of a house, a knot of soldiers passed him, bearing on their shoulders the figure of a man. He was so swathed in cordage as to look like an encased mummy. Setting the victim against a stake, they chained him there, buffeting and spitting in his face, as he had been the Christ. Torches licked at the faggots, and deep ululations ran through the square with the strident psalming of the monks for an underchant. The flames writhed like golden snakes; smoke blackened out the faces of the stars. Tristan saw the figure chained to the post jerk and strain from the rising flames. The man's hands came free. He clutched the beam above his head, strove with great throes of agony to climb above the fire. Soon the smoke throttled him; the flames played the part of a shroud.

Tristan, sick with the sight, turned back down the street with his brain a-swimming. Would they set Dame Rosamunde in the market square and burn her there as they had burnt the smith? A great faintness gathered round; the reek of charred wood was in his nostrils. The flare of the flames died over the houses and the din and clamour grew less and less. Stumbling on, he reached the outskirts of the town, where the meadows ran white under the moon. The clean breath of the night beat on his face, and the scent of the pine woods rolled down from the hills.

A limb of the lake gleamed in the meadows. Tristan went down to the water's brim, knelt in the weeds, and drank from his palms. He dashed up water in his face, let it run down his chest, cold and clean, rose up again with

his heart more steady. The town still flickered and yelped under the stars. He turned his back on it and made towards the woods.

The scenes in Ronan's town still played on his thoughts. Had he been zealous in the pay of the Church, his faith would have quailed before the deeds done that night. Moloch could have hungered for no bloodier work than this. Tristan remembered Ronan's town as he had first seen it from the hills, glimmering peacefully in silver and green. He remembered the children playing in its streets, the red, comely women drawing water at its wells, the sturdy peasants labouring in the fields. If such a brutal doom as this had fallen upon Purple Isle? His sire slain, his mother—God forbid the thought. He grew grim and savage as his courage kindled; the petulant weakness of an hour had passed.

As for Rosamunde, her proud face was above him once again, clear as the moon, overtopping his manhood. The passionate spite had melted away, for he comprehended now the scorn in her heart. She was wiser, older, less selfish than he. Rosamunde had forecasted the savage zeal that had scorched the valley and those whom she loved, while his imagined falseness had embittered the truth. Tristan cursed his own hot wrath. What was he that he should resent her doubts! How else could she have read the cross on his breast?

The woods descended upon the meadows and the hills seemed to stretch their great arms to him out of the night. Tristan, full of a simple devotion, a sudden strong passion of chivalrous pity, knelt down under a tree and tore the white cross from his breast. The moonlight played upon his face as he knelt with arms folded, and made his short prayer openly in the eyes of Heaven.

"Great God and Father," ran the words, "Thou who avengest all things, strengthen Thou my heart. Let honour prevail against those who blaspheme Thy mercy. Thou who didst gird King David against the pagans, give to Thy servant a strong arm and an unblunted sword. Here—now—I pledge my faith to these two women, even to Rosamunde and to Columbe my sister. Holy Jesu, shine Thou upon my shield."

Even as Tristan prayed the stars seemed to brighten in the heavens, as at the touch of some high seraph's hand. The man knelt a long while in the grass, thinking of Rosamunde, how she believed him a traitor. His heart was strengthened against her fate. He swore that night that he would prove his faith to her, even though it brought him to the gate of death.

CHAPTER XI

Rosamunde, standing at her window high in the tower of Joyous Vale, watched the dawn cleanse the sombre east. Over the hills the golden chariots flew. In the valleys, the shadows, like giant snakes, writhed and darted from the rush of the dawn. The heavens had taken the colour of June. Gold, azure, and rose were woven together as by the might of invisible hands.

Rosamunde, with dark shadows under her eyes, watched the burnt town rise out of the gloom. No glimmering casements flashed up to the dawn, no spirelets glittered, no red roofs shone. Smoke veiled the air beyond the gardens and the sleek green meadows, where tottering walls shook like palsied patriarchs, shaking their heads over this deed of shame. Charred beams stood black beneath the sky. The reeking ruin of the place rose up to Rosamunde from the dewy love-lap of the dawn.

On the lake the great ships lay at anchor, their white wings folded, standards and streamers afloat from their masts. Their prows were blazoned with many shields. The water, a silver sheet, lay spread about them, calm and clear. In the meadows the host had pitched camp for the night, and there were many pavilions ranged over the grass, red and purple, white and blue. A grove of spears stood round Benedict's tent, with many shields swinging to the breeze. Horses were picketed on the outskirts of the woods. A company of men-at-arms stood to their lances without the great gate of the castle.

Rosamunde, leaning on the sill, put back her hair from off her forehead, and met the truth with a bitter calm. The burnt town betrayed the terrors of the night. A great silence covered the ruins; only the meadows spoke of life. From the tower she could look into the market square, where the charred posts still stood amid the steaming ashes.

Her loneliness grew the more apparent as Rosamunde looked out over the lake and the hills rising purple against the blue. Yesterday, necessity had stirred her courage and peopled a province with her cares. Her quick sympathies had created comrades. To-day all was changed. Death had claimed the allegiance of her people. Outlanders held her home, fed within her hall, lounged and jested in her courts. They had even taken the woman Isabel from her for the night, for the Bishop had ordained that she should be left alone with her own soul.

As she stood at the window, she thought of Tristan, traitor, as she believed.

If she had ever trusted a man, she had trusted him, with his blunt tongue and his ugly face. None the less, his eyes must have lied to her again and again. Truly, he had played his part with a cunning mask of ingenuous passion. He had let the Pope's men in. Spy and hireling that he was, he had blinded her well as to what should follow.

She hated Tristan with an immoderate hate as she stood at her window that golden day in June, for the burnt town seemed to stand as a grim witness to his dishonour. Why had he saved Samson from the sword? That he might blind her the more with professions of faith. She had trusted her heart in his great hands, and he had stood to mock her before them all.

The bar was withdrawn suddenly from her door, and the woman Isabel thrust into the room by those without. There was a clanging to and fro of harness in the galleries. Isabel had orders to prepare her lady for a second meeting with the Bishop. Rosamunde suffered the woman's prattle with the listless silence of one whose thoughts flow deep. The army was to march southwards along the lake, so ran the report. Holy Chrysostom! the night had been red with blood! Would madame wear her grey gown with the blue sleeves? Yes. 'Twas very comely. And the girdle of beaten steel, with the poniard fastened thereto? Ah, yes, they had searched the place, and taken away the knife. Bishop Jocelyn was a courtly prelate, so men said. One of his servants was bringing up wine and meat on a silver tray. What? Madame had no taste for food? One must live, though men made war.

Rosamunde broke in upon her patter, desirous of hearing other news.

"Have they taken Samson?" she asked.

Isabel shook her head.

"Thank the Lord, no."

"What of Tristan?"

"Madame, I have not seen the man."

Rosamunde kept her countenance under the woman's stare, and though her face felt hot she did not colour.

"The fellow had a hot heart and too ready a hand. He is slain, perhaps. God rest his soul."

Rosamunde told nothing of the imagined truth, and of the beginning of her hate. Isabel had not seen Tristan in the hall.

Anon, robed, and fed by the Bishop's clemency, she was taken by Christopher the Canon past the iron-coated sentry at the door. As a prisoner she passed through her own home, where the galleries were empty, the chambers void. The Bishop's men had looted the place; they were carrying the

plunder to the ships. The champion of the Church was worthy of his hire; many a cherished relic saluted Rosamunde's eyes no more. The hall itself seemed grey and empty despite the streaming sunlight through the narrow windows set high up in the wall.

Bishop Jocelyn awaited her, sleek, polished, buxom of face, a most creditable sympathy pervading his mood. The heretic pleased, if the heresy offended. He bade Canon Christopher set Rosamunde a stool, thrust a silver mug aside with his hand, spread his tablets, crossed himself, and began.

"Madame," he said, "I have given you audience alone, that we may talk the better. Mark you—how the sun shines, and that June is with us. The blood of the earth runs brisk and warm. It is my purpose here to persuade you to live."

There was a suggestive comfort on the complacent face. The man's philosophy smacked of compromise. That he was not unloth to pardon her, Rosamunde could see full well, yet she mistrusted his voice, strident with sanctimony, his soft, mobile mouth, his glittering eyes.

"Whether it is better to lie than to die," she answered him, "out of the abundance of your righteousness, you can tell me, Lord Bishop."

"Daughter," he said, mouthing his words with an air of relish, "surely it is better to procrastinate for a month, than to be damned instantly and for ever."

"Your charity foredooms me—thus."

"Madame, St. Peter has the keys of heaven, and we are St. Peter's ministers."

The retort was such a one as Samson the Heretic would have rent with the splendid sincerity of his scorn. To Rosamunde, numb and lonely as she was, there yet appeared a grim pharisaical humour in the perfumed piety of this complacent prelate, decreeing the eternal fate of God-given souls. Could this lapwing, this piping swan, so far deceive himself and others as to claim the power of final pardon or of endless punishment? Rosamunde awoke at the thought with an echo of Samson's strenuous eloquence in her memory.

"Priest," she said very calmly, "we of La Vallée Joyeuse have been taught that a man's soul speaks face to face with the Living God. Here we have hired no spiritual chapmen to trade and barter with our prayers. I claim my daughtership before Christ our Lord. Sure am I, that even as Mary of Bethany sat before God's face, so may I serve Him without bribing the hirelings of a degenerate Church."

Bishop Jocelyn set his finger tips together, elevated his eyebrows, suffered a slight smile to play upon his lips.

"Madame," he said to her, "it is easy for me to know that you have been

deceived by plausible and disastrous doctrines. It is easy to impose on women, seeing that they catch the reflection of any bold man's mind. They answer men, as tides the moon."

"There you are in error," she retorted. "My conscience stands upon the mountain-top, and shuns not the light. I believe what I believe. I know my own heart."

"Ah," he said, with something of a sigh, "you are obdurate, my daughter, obdurate to the point of death. I fear there is but little hope for you. Well, well, I have played my part."

He rang his silver hand bell, and a captain in full chain harness came in through a side door with a company of archers at his back. The men stood to their arms. Such were the justiciaries employed by the Church.

"Madame," said Jocelyn with vigour, changing instantly his persuasive pose, "recant your heresy, or the stake awaits you. Come. Are you prepared to burn?"

She looked at him mutely, doubtingly, pale to the lips. The heavy breathing of the guards fanned the stagnant air. Above her hung the churchman's face, contending passions playing thereon, like a red sunset through a cloud. The loneliness and despair cried out in her; the flesh rose up against the spirit.

"Is this your mercy?" she asked him, breathing fast.

"Madame, I am sent to prevent blasphemy, to restore the truth."

"Ha! can you convert us by burning our bodies?"

"If you burn not now, woman, you will burn in hell hereafter."

She stood back two steps from him, staring at the floor. In imagination, she heard the hiss of the green faggots, the grim purr of the gathering flames, felt their scorching breath upon her face. Was there no salvation save in this stark death? Was a heart full of convictions worth such torture? Great helplessness fell like a fog about her brain. Life, ruddy and eager, cried out for pity; the lust to live grew quick and violent in her blood.

"You tempt me to the death," she said, with head thrown back.

"Not so, my sister."

"To the death."

"Nay, nay, to life. Lift up your face to the Church's bosom. It is warm and fragrant to the faithful. Come, sister, come."

She swayed forward like one about to faint, clutched at the table, steadied herself upon her straining arms.

"I surrender," she said hoarsely. "What else is there for me to do?"

The man leant forward, touched her forehead, marked with his finger an invisible cross thereon. He smiled and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

“Trust in the Church, my sister,” he said; “it is enough. By God’s grace we shall cure you of the canker of heresy.”

CHAPTER XII

The Bishop's men had plucked up their tents from about the blackened ruins of Ronan's town, and marched southwards from La Vallée Joyeuse, burning and plundering as they went. They found few to poise the spear and trim the shield against them in those green wilds. The folk of the Seven Streams were scattered amid their moors and forests, nor had they banded together any great company of men-at-arms. Sometimes a lonely tower stood forth upon the hills, to start into scarlet flower when menaced by the Holy Truncheon of the Church. The peasant folk had fled to the mountains and the deep gloom of the woods, for these crusaders marched to purge the land, and torch and sword claimed an eloquent apostleship in that rough age.

The southern fleet had set its sails, and sailed out by the river towards the sea. The waters of Joyous Vale were left to the grebe and the heron, to the wild duck's cry and the dull note of the bittern. Ronan's tower stood a haunt for owls to perch in; bats played under the rafters in the twilight; spiders webbed the walls. Soon there would be grass and shaggy weeds in court and terrace. Briers would ravish the shrubs in the garden, docks and nettles destroy the flowers. The vines would fall from their rotting poles, the olives ripen and receive no care.

Rosamunde, Dame of Joyous Vale, had been set within a horse litter, a litter with painted panels and a canopy of purple cloth. The litter was Bishop Jocelyn's, but he had surrendered it to her service, and mounted his white mule instead. A guard of twenty men marched about Rosamunde on the road, ten on foot and ten on horse. They were bearing her southwards towards the mountainous marches, over hills and through valleys foreign to her ken. All day she heard the trumpets whimper, saw pennons float and flicker through the woods. At night she would mark a glare in the dark sky, the glare of watchfires, or the flaming crown of a martyred town. At times they would let her walk beside the litter. No one spoke with her save Bishop Jocelyn, for her woman Isabel had turned wanton, and trudged the road with the servants of Christopher, Canon of Agravale.

As for Jocelyn, proud patron of the Faith, his theology had taken the wings of Mercury, and flown fast for temporal favours. He appeared zealous to convince Dame Rosamunde of the infallible nature of his doctrine. For the time being, there was no hinting at faggots and the ordeal of fire. He rode often beside the litter on his white mule, casting his subtleties at the woman lying

within. He called her daughter, sister, child, as the unction stirred in him, while sanctity bubbled on his lips like wine out of a leaking cask. It had a more classic odour than Heaven might have desired. Since Bishop Jocelyn could conjure with Peter's keys, he did not hesitate to tamper with the lock of honour.

As for Tristan le Sauvage, the burning of Ronan's town had set him full face before his own strong manhood. The mere boisterous days of youth were behind him as a sunny sea, for he had seen death and had met distrust. Sterner, bolder blood played through the red cavities of his heart. To rebel against arrogance and tyranny was to live. To shatter injustice, to overthrow hypocrites, in such effort lay a strong man's paradise.

Hidden in a thicket, he had seen Rosamunde set forth from Ronan's tower in Bishop Jocelyn's litter, the churchman riding beside her on his white mule. They had not burnt the woman yet, the fairest heretic in the land of the Seven Streams. Whether she had recanted or no, he could not tell, but Tristan, remembering the Bishop's face, prophesied no such fate for her from so sensuous a source.

He had found food the first morning in a deserted cottage, yet his great need was a horse, for the beast he had taken in the valley by the sea had been converted once again to the service of the Church. Following the Papists through the woods on foot, he bided his time till night should fall. The Bishop's men camped under the shadow of a hill, and Tristan, crawling down in the dark through the grass, found the place where the horses were tethered. His temerity prospered as it deserved. He escaped untouched from the Bishop's ground, with a horse and food to reward the venture.

Next day he followed the army through the wild, waiting his chance for a swoop from the woods. What though twenty men marched round Rosamunde's litter? With her eyes to watch him, he would break the steel wall, pluck the white rose out of the midst. That would be man's work, worthy of a sword. He would set her behind him on the saddle, ride for the woods, escape. What then? First he would say to her with a noble air, "Madame, declare, am I a traitor or no?" Perhaps she would kiss him, even as she had kissed him in Ronan's tower.

The chance came to Tristan one still evening when the mists were rising in the valleys and the sky was veiled with gold. The mounted men of Rosamunde's guard had lagged behind to water their horses at a spring. They had loitered there, jesting and swearing as a stone bottle passed from hand to hand. Benedict's men-at-arms were a good five furlongs to the south, while the rear guard marched by a track that ran westwards on the far flank of a low hill.

Tristan closed in, keeping cover behind the trees. The horses bearing the litter were plodding slowly, with heads hanging, ears adroop. The purple curtains were open towards the east, and Tristan could catch the white glimmer of a face within. All around them were tall hills deluged with green woods. A stream glittered through the flats under elms and drooping willows.

Tristan, with nostrils wide and every sinew taut as steel, trotted on through a grove of birches whose filmy foliage arabesqued the heavens. A glade opened to the road below, the purple litter shining like an amethyst set in green grass. The guards were slouching in twos and threes about the horses, their pikes and axes at the trail. Even as Tristan watched, a white hand drew the curtain, a mimic night drowning the day.

Tristan, twisting tight the strapping of his shield, whipped out his sword, pushed his horse to a gathering gallop down the glade. He shot like a hurled spear out of the gloom. Hurtling fast from the trees, he was on the men before they knew him for a foe. “Holy Cross, Holy Cross!” was his cry, as they scattered from him like pence from an almoner’s palm. Swerving right and left, his sword played grimly on their pates. Pike, staff, helmet, buckler, he hewed through all, as a woodman lops hazels with his bill. Five out of the half score were down in the dust; the rest scurried like winged partridges over the grass.

He was out of the saddle and beside the litter, bridle in hand. Rosamunde had jerked the curtains open at the first sound of the scuffle. It was no moment for vapourings. Tristan, hot with his sword work, played the master for once with a rough chivalry that suited his fibre.

“Come, madame, out with you. I keep faith to you, though you doubted me in Ronan’s hall. Fast! We must make for the woods.”

“Tristan!” was all she said.

He seized her suddenly in his eagerness, set her upon the horse, climbed up before her. Her arms girdled his body. She was silent and half ashamed, as though shaken out of the injustice of her hate.

“The casket?” she asked him, as they made towards the woods.

“Lies fathoms deep in the lake,” he said.

“Ah, Tristan, you have served me well.”

“I should have served you better, madame,” he said simply, “if I had been in Ronan’s tower before the Bishop.”

She mouthed a sudden “hist” into his ear, her arms tightening so that he could feel the rising and falling of her bosom. The warm perfume of her breath rose about his face. Half a score of mounted men had rounded the angle of the road. They sighted Tristan and Rosamunde on the rim of the wood, saw the

deserted litter, the dead men in the road. They were at full gallop instanter over the grass, swords agleam, lances pricking the blue, while the hot babel of their tongueing echoed through the valley. Tristan, with a grim twist of the mouth, heeled on his horse and took to the woods.

The great trees overarched the pair, and beams of gold came slanting through. The grass was a deep green under the purple shadows. Through the silence came the dull thunder of hoofs, as the men racketed on, swerving and blundering through the trees. They rode faster than Tristan with his delectable burden, and the distance dwindled betwixt the pack and the chase.

Rosamunde was looking back over her shoulder, her hair shimmering and leaping with the breeze. The black boughs hurried over her head; the trunks seemed to gallop in the gloom. She could see steel flashing through the wood, like meteorites plunging through a cloud. Her fear was for Tristan as they threaded on, and she tightened her arms round him, spoke in his ear.

“Tristan,” she said, with her chin on his shoulder.

He hardly so much as turned his head, for his eyes were piercing the shadows before him.

“Tristan, set me down,” she said. “They will take us both; better one than two.”

“Hold fast, or you will fall,” was all he retorted.

“Leave me, Tristan,” she said again. “You can outpace them alone; I am their prize. They are ten to one; what can you do against ten men?”

“We shall see,” he said through his set teeth.

She surrendered for the moment, and clung to his shoulders. An open glade broadened sudden towards the east, a great star shining splendid in the eastern sky. Rosamunde, clinging fast to Tristan as they swayed along, heard a great trampling of hoofs in the wood. The nearest galloper swung out from the gloom. He was leaning over the neck of his horse, his lips parted over his teeth, his sword poised from his outstretched arm.

“Halt!”

Tristan glanced at him as they rode cheek by jowl, their horses plunging down the glade.

“Hold off!” he shouted.

“Halt, or I strike the woman first!”

“Be damned for a dastard, if you dare!”

The sword circled above Rosamunde’s head, its whistling breath fanning her hair. She cowered a little and loosened her hold. Tristan swerved of a

sudden, drew up his horse on sluthering hoofs.

"Off—off!" he roared.

Rosamunde broke away and left him free. He charged on, caught the man cross-counter as he reined round to front him. The knight toppled down beneath the great swoop of the sword. Tristan clutched at the swinging bridle, gestured to Rosamunde with his shield.

"Mount, mount! By God! we will fool them yet."

The wood grew alive with shouting and the noise of hoofs. Rosamunde's guards had heard the clangour of Tristan's blow as he smote the first man from the saddle. A second rider plunged from the trees, where Tristan met him, horse to horse. Their swords whimpered, screamed, and clashed. Tristan's blade struck the man's throat through.

Rosamunde had not mounted her horse, for the brute had grown restive and broken away. She stood by a tree and watched the fight.

"Guard, Tristan, guard——"

He caught a third sword on his upreared shield, smote out from under it, maimed his man. Two more blundered out of the gloom, while Rosamunde's voice rang out under the trees:

"Guard, Tristan, guard! They are at your back."

The cry came too late to the struggling knot of steel, for two more riders had come from the wood. One set his lance for the thrust, and smote Tristan between the shoulders. The man gave a roar like a wounded leopard, fought on awhile, meeting their swords like a sea-girt rock. A second lance-thrust pierced his side. His horse, overweighted, stumbled and rolled down. Tristan fell free, but did not move. The men trampled him underfoot, and turned on Rosamunde, who stood by a tree.

In an hour she was lying in the litter again, with the faint moon peering in through the hangings. Her eyes were dusky as the heavens above, her face pale, her lips adroop. She was thinking of Tristan slain in the woods, for he had proved his faith to her even in death.

CHAPTER XIII

Under the shade of a beech tree on the slope of a hill a man sat with a bare sword laid across his knees. On the hill-top above, half-hidden by pines, the walls of a ruined house rose against the unclouded sky. A deep valley dwindled beneath, choked with woodland and cleft in twain by a white band where a torrent thundered. Far to the south mountains towered against the gold of the evening sky.

It was Tristan le Sauvage who sat with his sword laid across his knees, watching the valley and the darkening hillside. Near by, an iron pot steamed over a wood fire, the smoke thereof ascending straight into the heavens. By the gate of the ruin a cistus was in bloom, its petals falling upon the long grass and the broken stones.

Tristan had been busy burnishing his sword, handling it lovingly, even as a miser fingers gold. Shield, helmet, and hauberk lay in the grass at his feet. His face was less boyish than of old, though but a month had passed since he had been left stricken and bleeding in the woods. He had been near death, and the staunch struggle to escape the grave had set a maturer forethought on his face. Moreover, he had suffered in heart as well as body, and the brisk youth in him moved to a sadder tune.

As he sat there under the shadow of the beech tree, burnishing his sword and parleying with the thoughts within his heart, a horn called to him from out the woods. The shrill echoes clamoured amid the hills.

“Tristan, Tristan,” they seemed to cry, like ghost voices stealing out of the night.

The man rose up from under the shade of the tree, and looked out down the hillside under his hand. Betimes, a figure mounted on a shaggy horse drew from the woods, and climbed the slope towards the ruin. The man was clad in chain mail that rippled in the sunlight, and he carried neither shield nor spear. At his back he bore a stout yew bow, and the body of a deer was slung before him on the saddle.

Tristan went out from under the tree, his bronzed face beaming in the sun. It was Samson the Heretic, returned from hunting in the woods, Samson, who had taken Tristan for dead where the Bishop’s men had left him, and recalled him to life amid the grey walls of the old ruin. The Heretic had followed Rosamunde from Joyous Vale, and lurked in the woods to cheat the Papists of

their prey. Skulking with a few followers in the thickets, he had seen Tristan swoop from out the woods and seize on Rosamunde from the litter. Thus it had fallen out that Samson had found Tristan bleeding under the trees where he had been outmatched by Jocelyn's men. Samson had taken him upon his horse, abandoning Rosamunde for Tristan's sake, and in this old sanctuary had wrought his cure.

The men met with that heartiness of hand and voice that bespeaks brotherhood, that linking up of faith with straight looks and fearless words. Tristan, still smiling, took the body of the deer from the Heretic's saddle bow. The shaft had flown straight to the poor beast's heart. Tristan marked it, as he slung the deer to a bough of the beech tree, building analogies in his brain.

"Were this Jocelyn," he said, "I should envy you, brother, to the point of death."

"That murderous hand of yours——"

"Ha, Samson, shall I not pluck out the heart of that man, even as he plucked the Lady Rosamunde out of Ronan's tower? What is youth but battle? and I am young, methinks, young enough to fly for the Southern Marches."

Samson was unsaddling his horse. He stayed with his fingers on the buckle, and half stooping, looked somewhat sadly into Tristan's face.

"Beware," he said, "lest you open the old wounds again."

Tristan spread his arms.

"I have bled," he said, "and shall bleed again, methinks, or be called coward by every pledge of my good youth."

Samson lifted the saddle to the grass, and stood up, fingering his beard and looking Tristan over.

"The men murmur for the sword," he said. "I met Malan in the woods to-day, after I had slain this beast with a long flight. They clamour to be led against those who have harried and sacked the Seven Streams."

"Let them murmur; I echo them."

"Your wounds?"

"Are tough as leather. Shall we not take the sword?"

"It is God's will."

"Never had men better cause than we."

The Heretic had not been idle while he played the Samaritan to Tristan in the ruin amid the woods. Even as in the wake of a great ship the waters seethe and foam, so the rude peasant folk of the Seven Streams had risen in the track of the Bishop's host. Burnt hamlets and ruined towers, these were their

witnesses, their solemn oracles. They had flocked to Samson, these homeless men whose kinsfolk had fallen to Jocelyn's swords. Samson had preached to them more fiercely than of old. They were as tinder to a torch, these woodlanders; they were ready to burn for him in the quitting of revenge.

That evening Tristan and the Heretic watched the sun go down behind the hills, and spoke together of what might chance to them in the unknown. Far to the south towered the great mountains, like sable pyramids fringed with fire. The stream clamoured in the woods beneath, as though it voiced the turbulence of the age. They spoke together, these two men, of Rosamunde, of Joyous Vale, and the Bishop's war.

Tristan, lifting his sword, pointed it to a star that shone solitary in the southern sky.

"Let us remember Ronan's town," he said.

There was a strange smile on Samson's face as he laid his hand on Tristan's shoulder.

"Whatever life may give," he said, "some joy, much pain, travail, and discontent, I trow there is no better quest in life than such a one as hangs upon your sword."

"You speak in riddles," quoth the younger.

"This star, what a riddle lives therein."

"Your tongue plays with me."

"Not so, brother; have I not said enough?"

The two men looked into each other's eyes. On Samson's face there was that goodly light that streams up from a generous heart, brave and bounteous, man's love for man. In the Heretic there were no ignoble moods, and, like Paul of old, he esteemed himself little.

"Brother," he said, "the fight for the truth gives its own guerdon. That you are with us, I know full well; moreover, I mind me that a man's heart reaches through human love into heaven. A fair face, two trustful eyes, the waving of a woman's hair. How many a pure spell is wrought with these!"

Tristan stood leaning on his sword, looking not at Samson, but towards the south.

"Are you so old?" he asked him suddenly.

"I—brother?"

"You followed also through the woods. And had the eyes no spell for you?"

Samson leant his arm over Tristan's shoulders, even like an elder brother,

who banishes self.

“For me,” he said, “are no such songs as men make at sunset when the heavens are red.”

“And Rosamunde?”

“Can one bound to God, even as I am bound, turn to look on a woman’s face? Nay, Tristan, my brother, the dream is thine, a dream to set thy young blood stirring.”

Tristan looked long into the Heretic’s eyes.

“You love her?” he said.

“I have loved her,” Samson made answer, “even as others have loved her, because one cannot look on her unmoved. It is her privilege to be loved, yet may not my eyes confess the truth. Yours is the hand that must seize the torch, yours the sword that shall cleave the spell.”

“And you——”

“I am Christ’s man, brother. What I do, I do with my whole heart.”

CHAPTER XIV

Tristan and the Heretic rode south-west towards the sea with their hundred lances aslant under the summer sky. They were as men challenging a kingdom with their swords, and they tossed their shields in the face of fate. The fine audacity of such a venture set the hot blood spinning in their hearts. To raise the banner of liberty aloft against Pomp and Power! To hurl damnation in the mouth of the Church!

The Papists had left garrisons in many of the strong places of the Seven Streams. The main host had recrossed the river known in those parts as the Lorient, and had camped about Agravale, ducal city of the Southern Marches. They had raided the province of the Seven Streams into a desert, so far that life seemed absent. A great silence had descended over the land. Hamlets were in ashes; towers stood mere blackened shells upon the hills. As to the lords and gentry of the province, they had either fallen or taken like outlaws to the woods. It was such desperate men as these that Samson coveted to swell his company.

They pushed on warily, avoiding such places as were garrisoned by the Bishop's men. Samson was as a merchant who possessed one ship; he would not imperil her as yet in troublous waters. Men gathered slowly to him as he made his march, grim, stony-faced men whose silence seemed fiercer than their words. Blood was thicker than dogmas and decretals; they had one common bond, these children of heresy, one common vengeance. They had suffered, all of them, in home and heart. In three days Samson's company had increased to the number of two hundred spears.

As for Tristan, he was as a hound in leash; his sword thirsted in its scabbard; he had tasted blood, and was hot for a tussle. His sinews were taut despite the southron's spear, and his strength seemed greater than of yore, perhaps because his heart bulked bigger. Nightly when they camped in the woods he would wrestle with any man whose ribs could bear his hug. He could take Samson by the hips, burly man that he was, and hold him high above his head. The fellows would gather round and gape at the giant. Tristan began to know his power the more as he found strong men mere pygmies in his grip.

They held westwards towards the sea, through grassy plains where streams went winding ever through the green, and poplars threw their towering shadows on the sward. Samson had trudged the land through in the days of his preaching. He knew each hamlet, each road, each ford. The Papists had padded

through this same region like a pack of wolves, and Tristan and the Heretic found no life therein.

On the fourth day they came upon the ruins of a small town set upon a hill in a wooded valley. Vultures flapped heavenwards as they rode into the gate; lean, red-eyed curs snarled and slinked about the streets. Tristan smote one brute through with his spear that was feeding in the gutter on the carcass of a child. In the market square the Papists had made such another massacre as they had perpetrated in Ronan's town. The horrible obscenity of the scene struck Samson's men dumb as the dead. The townsfolk had been stripped, bound face to face, left slain in many a hideous and ribald pose. The vultures' beaks had emulated the swords. The stench from the place was as the breath of a charnel house, and Samson and his men turned back with grim faces from the brutal silence of that ghastly town.

Near one of the gates a wild, tattered figure darted out from a half-wrecked house, stood blinking at them in the sun, a filthy tangle of hair over his dirty face. The creature gestured and gibbered like any ape. He fled away when Samson approached, screaming and whimpering as though possessed with a devil. The man was mad, had lost his reason in the slaughter of children and kinsfolk. Save the dogs and the vultures, he was the one live thing they found in the town.

When they were beyond the walls and under the clean shadows of the trees, Samson lifted up his hand to the heavens like one who called on God for help.

"Brother, shall such deeds pass?" he said. "Before God, I trow not. Heaven temper our swords in the day of vengeance."

Tristan's thoughts were beyond the mountains, hovering about a golden head and the ruffian priests who ruled the south. What might her fate be at the hands of the Church? His manhood rose in him like a sea thundering up in the throat of a cavern.

"Samson," he said, with iron mouth, "God be thanked for the strength of my body."

"Brother, thank God for it," said the Heretic, grimly enough. "Would I had the power of a hundred men. My strength should be a hammer to pulverise these dogs."

"Ha, Heaven see to it, when I have Jocelyn by the throat, I will break his back as I would break a distaff."

Hard by the sea there was a certain strong place set upon a rock, Tor's Tower by name. It was a wild pile of masonry clinging to naked stone, wind-beaten and boisterous. The place had fallen by treachery into Papist hands, so

Samson gathered from men who joined him on the march. A Papal garrison had been established there, some of the bloodiest ruffians in the south.

Tor's Tower stood a mile from a great arm of the sea. Between the rock and the shore were treacherous marshes, while on the landward side wild heathland dipped to a waste of woods. Dull skies hurried over the place; the wind piped keen from over the sea. A narrow causeway led to the tower, winding round the flank of the rock. It was the very aerie Samson coveted till he had hatched a flight of goodly eagles.

Tristan rode through the woods and reconnoitred the tower, saw that weeks would be needed to starve such a place. Even as he lay hid in the woods, some two-score spears rode home from a foray, passing close by Tristan's lair. They had wine skins and spoil laid over their shoulders, also two young peasant girls bound back to back, and tied together on a horse. The men's rough jesting reached Tristan's ears, he heard their oaths and their unclean talk. His fingers itched for the pommel of his sword; he kept cover, however, and bided his time.

Tristan and Samson were soon agreed in the matter. When dark had fallen, they marched over the moor, left twenty men to guard the causeway, climbed up with the rough ladders they had hewn in the woods. The sky was of ebony, sealed up against the stars. Half the Papists were drunk in the place when Samson's men planted their ladders against the wall. Tristan was the first to leap down into the court. He slew two guards who kept the gate, hurled down the bar, shot back the bolts. Samson's men came in like a mill-race, and there was bloody work in court and hall. When they had made an end of the vermin, they cast their bodies down the cliff, remembering Joyous Vale and the town in the valley.

Tristan and Samson watched the dawn streak the eastern sky with gold above the woods. They were masters of Tor's Tower and the wild wastes that glimmered towards the sea, while fifty dead men were wallowing in the marshes at the foot of the rock. The tower was well victualled, could be held for months by loyal and wary men. Samson was for making it a rocky refuge to the scattered companies of the Seven Streams.

"Give me but one sure pinnacle," he said, striking the battlements with the scabbard of his sword, "one high place where we may rear up our flag, and the sheep will take courage, gather, turn to a pack of wolves. Tor's Tower shall be our beacon height. Give me till the spring, and the southrons shall find no feeble rabble for their swords."

Tristan had a more passionate quest within his heart, and his thoughts, like swift swallows, pinioned south. He had sworn solemnly to his own honour that

he would follow Rosamunde and set her free.

“Brother,” he said, “hold Tor’s Tower till I come again; send out your riders through the countryside. Men will gather when a flag’s unfurled.”

“Go where you will,” said Samson, grasping his shoulder; “the star leads towards the south. Ha, good rogue, have I not hit you fair? God keep you on such an errand.”

“I ride south,” said Tristan, with a smile.

“Take ten men with you. I can spare no more.”

“Brother,” said Tristan, “I am content with my own carcass.”

“What devil’s scheme has caught your heart?”

Tristan laughed, spread his great chest.

“Samson,” he said, “believe me no traitor when I go to take service in the Bishop’s guard. I shall prove a good smiter, doubt it not. Master Jocelyn shall not complain of my sword.”

CHAPTER XV

The ducal city of Agravale queened it in the south amid the gloom of her ilex woods and the perfumes of her pines. The city stood on the verge of a great precipice that plunged to the sweeping waters of the river Gloire. Southwards from this line of precipices, crowned in the centre by the towers of Agravale, stretched a broad valley spreading many leagues to the great mountains that closed the Marches from the nether south. The plain was a vine-clad Arcady, rich in olives, painted thick with flowers. Purple and green and gold, it swept to the sombre bosoms of the mountains, whose snowy peaks smote like moonlight through the clouds.

On the north a wilderness of woods covered the plateau that ended in the great precipice above the river. Black was the tincture of this wild, a gloomy green like the sullen depths of some unsailed sea. Here the ilex made midnight in the valleys, and the stone pine lifted its beseeching palms towards the sky. Holly and cedar, cypress, oak, and yew, a torrential wilderness of trees choked up the valleys and concealed the hills. Here the wolf hunted and the wild boar rooted in the glades. Only the wind made music, while the shadows danced and quivered on the grass.

Agravale, proud city of the south, lay pale and luxurious under the southern sky. Its white walls stretched like marble veins into the sombre green-stone of the woods. It was an opulent city, sleek, sinful, and magnificent. Colour enriched its many gardens, where vines clustered and roses revelled. The pomegranate thrust up its ruddy blooms, and glowed with the gilded roundness of its fruit. The orange burdened its green canopies with gold. The arbutus bled; the oleander blushed against the blue. Like wine poured from heaven were the sunsets upon the white pinnacles of the mountains. Northwards flowed the woods, beating with leafy billows on the walls.

Agravale, rich city, possessed a duke in those times, Raymond the Simple, a puppet prince whose instincts were monastic, save in his obedience to his wife. The Duchess Lilias kept her husband like a half-tamed ape, mewed up in the palace with baubles to trick his temper. He was as weak of wit as he was feeble of limb, while Lilias, proud Semiramis that she was, queened it through all the Southern Marches. She was a greedy dame, loose of mouth and loose of life. Bishop Jocelyn was her confessor and her confidant. The pair pandered to the passionate temper of the city of Agravale, and were very obedient to their Father the Pope.

The Bishop and his companies had marched back from the Seven Streams with much plunder and honour, and the holy praise of Mother Church. They had martyred and massacred, laid waste the province, dangled their dogmas on the points of their lances. There had been much rejoicing at Agravale, much opening of wine casks. Triumphant Masses had been sung in the great cathedral of St. Pelinore. A tourney had been held without the walls, for there was good cause for pride and pleasure in Agravale. The children of the south had upheld the Roman Faith; their swords had shone in the cause of truth.

The great inspiration of the city was a certain passionate rivalry that existed between Bishop Jocelyn and Lilias the Duchess. The pair diced with gold, gambled with extravagance, for the edification of the saints and the good people of Agravale. When Dame Lilias laid out new gardens with marble fountains and towers therein, the Bishop out-gardened her by the magnificence of three acres. When Jocelyn feasted all the beggars of the city, the Duchess out-charitied him with much silver and good cloth taken from her coffers and her presses. The pair kept Agravale a-bubble with their vanities. The Bishop would have hired the angels out of heaven to out-dance the wantons who tripped at the bidding of Lilias the Duchess.

The rivalry between the pair had been exaggerated the more by the swaggering quarrels of their knights and mercenaries. Like hired gladiators, they were ever ready to rend each other's throats in the cause of chivalry. It had so happened that the Bishop's champions had been worsted by Lilias's men in a late passage of arms without the walls. Percival, captain of the ducal guards, had unhorsed some dozen of the Bishop's paladins with his single spear. There had been great wrath thereat in the episcopal palace.

One August morning, a bronzed, iron-faced man entered the forecourt of the Bishop's palace, threaded his way through the loungers by the stair leading to the inner gate. A guard met him with crossed pike on the top step, bearing the episcopal badge on the breast of his tunic, a golden key in a mailed hand. Tristan, turning a deaf ear to sundry witty gentlemen who were sitting on the benches in the sun, told the guard his business.

"Friend, I would see your captain of the horse. Tell him a stranger has tramped leagues to serve under him. Tristan le Sauvage is my name."

The guard grounded his pike and stared Tristan over.

"Sir Ogier is at dinner," quoth he.

"He can listen the better, being so wholesomely occupied. Come, friend, lead on."

The man took Tristan to a small room that was joined to the guards' hall by a winding stair. At a table, with a page boy at his elbow, sat a giant with a

great hairy jowl, gigantic hands, and a heavy paunch. He was gnawing a mutton bone like a huge ogre, and had a tankard of ale at his right hand. He stared Tristan over with his small, close-set eyes, showed his teeth when he heard his business. Ogier had been born a butcher's son in the distant north, and had carved out his fortune by the sheer weight of his arm.

"So, lad," he said, smacking his lips and tossing the bare bone upon the table, "you would serve the Bishop and drink his beer? Good, very good. Can you pay for your stomach?"

Tristan showed the girth of his arm, the knotted muscles swelling under the sleeve. Ogier rose up, towering like a poplar over Tristan's head; his belt would have girded two common men's loins.

"My child," he said, setting a hairy hand on Tristan's shoulder, and leaning his great weight thereon, "stand fast now; let me feel my prop."

Tristan never budged; he was like a stone buttress against the flank of a tower, yet he rocked a little as the giant bore on him. Ogier grinned, puffed out his lips.

"Short men stand stiff," he said. "Come, my troll, we will try you further."

"What you will," was Tristan's retort.

Ogier thudded down by the winding stair, his broad body shutting out the light. There was a tilting yard joining the Bishop's stables, and in the yard stood a horse-block of solid stone.

"Lift it," was all the giant said.

Tristan unstrapped his shield from betwixt his shoulders, ungirded his sword, gave them Ogier to hold. He spread his feet, tilted the stone, got his fingers under the edge, held his breath, heaved the mass over his head. The block splintered a flagstone at Ogier's feet. The giant blundered back against the wall with an oath.

"God's truth, man!" he said. "Have a care of my toes."

"What now?" said Tristan, breathing hard.

Ogier grinned and gripped his hand.

"You are the man," he laughed, cracking Tristan's bones in his paw. "We will set you on Percival, the Duchess's lion. By my bones, you will break the man over your knee."

Tristan, lodged within the gates of the Bishop's palace, used eye and ear to gain some glint of Rosamunde's fair head, some breathing of her name. Like a mirror he had to receive what passed before him, silent and unstirred. Caution bridled him, and he played his part like the dogged adventurer that he was; had an open hand for every man, scullion or squire, a smile for the womenfolk who

came out into the stable court to giggle and gossip with the grooms and men-at-arms. Ogier had taken him with some pride to Bishop Jocelyn in his state closet. The churchman had felt Tristan's limbs with his soft, womanly hands, and smiled over a strength that was as prodigious as his own conceit. He was a champion who should give Dame Lilias's men the lie.

Of that proud woman, Rosamunde of Joyous Vale, whom the Papists had snatched from him in the gloom of the woods, Tristan won no word or whisper. The men-at-arms of the palace spoke often of their march through the province of the Seven Streams. Many of the ruffians had carried torches in the sacking of Ronan's tower, yet of Rosamunde and her fate the world seemed to have no care. Tristan, with his ugly face inscrutable as the face of a sphinx, watched and listened, bided his time. If Rosamunde was in Agravale, he would carry the gates of her prison off their hinges, and set her free. Once again he would look into those deep, wistful eyes, upon that face whose petulant splendour haunted him night and noon.

There was great love in his heart for Rosamunde. It had grown and fed upon the stoutest fibres of his heart. Her very name had taken root about him, even as a red rose clambers about a grave. Tristan was no visionary, no melancholy worshipper of the stars. Life to him was action, a bluff buffeting of waves, a gallop with the wind. He was alive and lusty from the iron sinews of his ankles to the corded muscles of his throat. Superbly young, yet older in passion than of yore, he took life cheerfully, knew no defeat.

As for Rosamunde, he loved her, and was not ashamed of this same love. It was no enigma to him, no subtle riddle begotten of a poet's brain, for to Tristan this love was as natural as life itself. He loved the woods with their mysterious shadows, the sea for its hoarse splendour, the flowers—even because they were fair of face. In the same spontaneous fashion he loved this woman, whose face was beauty and whose lips were life. Above and beyond this impulse towards joy, the deeper truths were mellowing Tristan's soul. He began to find new glories in his strength, to cherish his manhood, to build fast his honour. Since Rosamunde was Rosamunde, should he not consecrate his manhood to her?

The moon had not changed her scimitar for a silver shield before Tristan was proven both in arms and faith. The women of Agravale were bounteous beings, buxom and boisterous, red fruit to be plucked from the tree of virtue. A red gown trailed more than once round Tristan's feet, and youth had tempted him to merge youth in youth. Yet he had shut his mouth, stiffened his head on his massive neck, for Rosamunde's face shone high in the heavens.

As for his courage, that was another matter. Tristan could thrash a man, if he would not kiss a woman, and Ogier took him often through Agravale with

half a score bravos at their back. They swaggered through the streets, loitered in the taverns, ogled such women as came their way. More than once they met the Duchess's men, and shouldered them roughly to the wall. Ogier, the butcher's son, had a tussle in view, and Percival of the Red Beard was to be brought to his knees.

From the square before the ducal palace, with its pomegranates studded with golden fruit, its rose trees and its acacias, ran a narrow passage-way leading to the gardens of the abbey of St. Pelinore. It was a shadowy place, flanked by high walls of stone, arched above by the dense foliage of chestnuts and great cedars. The path gave the shortest track to such of the Duchess's men who returned from the lower city to the palace. Ogier had watched this "run" of late, eager to catch Knight Percival in a lane where there was no turning.

It was near the vesper hour one evening, when Ogier and Tristan turned from the palace square into this stone-walled walk. A knot of the Bishop's men-at-arms had passed in before them; their voices and footsteps echoed with a metallic resonance betwixt the walls. Of a sudden there was a clangour of arms at the far end of the passage. Hoods and helmets hid the entry; a pike or two bobbed and shimmered under the trees. Ogier loosened his sword in its scabbard, warned Tristan with a wink of the eye.

Ogier's men had met the ducal company in the midst of the passage. There was a tossing up of challenges that reverberated in the narrow throat of the place.

"Out, dogs, make way for the Duchess."

"Hold, sirs, you shall take the wall of us."

"Be damned, then, stand aside."

There was a brief scrimmage, a swaying to and fro from wall to wall. A sword shone out in the gleam from the west. A tall man in a trellised hauberk, with a red tunic showing beneath, broke through the press, and came striding on with his chin in the air, his red moustachios curling up like the tusks of a boar. He twirled his sword, while his tawny eyes flashed rapid glances over Ogier's face.

Ogier spread his great arms from wall to wall, thrust one foot forward, and barred the way. Percival of the Red Beard made a sweeping gesture with his sword.

"Out of the path, wine skin," he said, "or I will set you leaking over the stones."

"Church before State, my friend," said the giant, standing firm.

"Out, dogs, the Duchess is at hand."

“Devil take her,” was Ogier’s retort.

There was a blow from sword, a blow that Ogier caught upon his shield. Tristan, stooping, dodged under the giant’s arm, sprang at Knight Percival before he could gain his guard. He had his bear’s grip on the man’s body. A heave of the chest, and the Knight of the Red Beard was off his feet. An impotent waving of a sword, a dropped shield, a straining of sinews, and Percival crashed over Tristan’s head. His face struck the stones; he squirmed over and lay still.

Ogier brandished the rest of them back.

“Room for the Duchess,” he roared. “Come, madame, we are the Bishop’s men; though we fight your fellows, we serve the Duke.”

Tristan, standing over Percival’s body, saw a short, plump woman move through the lane of armed men. Two young girls carried the train of her purple gown. She had a round, pallid face, eyes of greyish green, somewhat protuberant, but very liquid. The eyebrows sloped outwards over the eyes. The nose was broad, with nostrils wide apart; the mouth large, with lustful lips. Her neck had a peculiar silken brilliancy; her bust was full, her hips very broad. It was Lilias herself, Duchess of Agravale.

Ogier saluted her, and lowered his point. Two of the men-at-arms had raised Percival up; he was bleeding about the face, for the fall had stunned him. Lilias’s eyes were on Tristan’s face.

“Ogier,” she said, speaking very rapidly, as was her wont, with much working of the lips, “you of the Bishop’s household are for ever picking quarrels with my gentlemen. See to it, Sir Butcher; you shall hear more of this.”

Ogier, ignoring her taunt against his origin, covered his heart with his hairy paw, turned back her wrath with a suave and ponderous unction.

“Ah, madame,” he said, “your men persecute us, have beaten us often, methinks, because your gracious self lives in the heart of each of your knights. If I served such a lady as the Duchess Lilias, by God and the prophets, I could thrash the world.”

The woman smiled a little, the smile of one to whom flattery was never gross. Even a great dolt such as Ogier could fool her with a few honeyed antics of the tongue.

“What of my poor Percival?” she said, stooping and looking in the fallen man’s face. “Pah, how a red nose spoils a man!”

“He would have split my poor carcass,” said Ogier, standing at her side, “had not my new Hercules pitched him like a sack of flour over his head.”

Lilias turned, stood at her full height, and looked Tristan over. She was a woman who loved muscle and strength in a man, and that flippant insolence that makes for pleasure. Tristan's ugly face had a peculiar charm, a virile fascination in its uncomely vigour. Lilias smiled at him with her glassy eyes, gathered her gown close about her hips. She expected homage, but found not a flash of it. Tristan met her look for look, a frown on his face, his arms folded firmly over his chest.

CHAPTER XVI

It was but two days after his breaking of Sir Percival, that Tristan, idling through Agravale, saw before him the open door of the great church St. Pelinore. From the gloom within came the scent of incense and the sound of the chanting of the Mass. Tristan could see tapers shining on the high altar in the choir. Women were passing in and out, and two blind beggars sat at the gate.

Tristan, moved more by curiosity than by the desire for worship, entered in and uncovered his head. The rounded vault was painted vermilion and gold; the huge pillars of white stone were banded with silver and inlaid with stones. The basins for holy water were of black marble, their dark pools gleaming with the colours of the roof. Many chapels opened on either hand, dim sanctuaries steeped in vapour of gold and of rose.

Tristan, rugged islander, had never looked upon the like before. The place was full of that subtle beauty conceived and wrought by the mind of man. A strange idealism had sanctified the saints and dowered each relic with a magic mystery. The splendour of the place touched Tristan's soul. Nothing in Joyous Vale had equalled this in pomp and magnificence, in form and colour. And yet the afterthought dethroned the spell. Was not Rosamunde's gracious body fairer far than this great church?

Tristan took his stand by one of the great pillars, and setting his back to it, looked round the place. In the nave there was a stone pattern wrought in the floor, known in Agravale as the Penitent's Rosary. There were some ten women moving round and round, halting over each great bead to breathe a prayer through silent lips. Tristan watched them as they circled round with bowed heads and folded hands, moving where the sunlight streamed from the tall windows overhead.

He was conscious suddenly that one of these dames was not wholly absorbed in prayer under her hood. A round white chin was tilted significantly under a pouting mouth, and two watchful eyes considered him with a suggestiveness that no man could mistake. As the woman circled over the stones, walking slowly in her grey mantle that but half hid the richer stuffs beneath, Tristan felt that her eyes held his, and that her thoughts were very far from heaven. The truth came to him as he watched her glide over the stones of the great rosary. It was Lilias herself who did penance there, penance with her feet, but not with her heart.

In due season the Duchess had ended her pilgrimage, and stood with her hood turned back, looking at Tristan across the church. Her women had gathered about her, and outside the gates Tristan saw the spear points of her guard. Turning, with a glance cast at him over her shoulder, she swept in state out of St. Pelinore's, her women following her, save one young girl who loitered at the door.

Tristan, with his broad back resting against the pillar, stood thinking of the woman's face tinted by the light reflected from the crimson lining of her hood. Her eyes had challenged him even as they had done in that narrow passage when Percival lay senseless in the dust. They puzzled Tristan—these same eyes; for they had no depth to harbour pity, and their shallow glances spoke of no high mood. Different was Rosamunde from this pale, sensuous dame whose scented garments perfumed the very church.

Tristan was roused out of his reverie by a small hand plucking at his sleeve. By the pillar stood a dark-eyed girl, half child, half woman, thin, and a little sad. There was a timid smirk on her childish face as she looked at Tristan and gave her message.

"Follow my mistress," were her words.

Tristan stared down at her, his ugly face bathed in the sunlight that streamed from above.

"Whom do you serve, child?" he said slowly.

"Lilias the Duchess," came the answer.

"What would your lady ask of me?"

The girl tittered and coloured before him, shamed, as it were, by the man's straight stare.

"You are Tristan of the Bishop's guard?"

"I am Tristan," he answered her simply.

"You are to come with me," she persisted, touching his arm.

The man's mouth hardened as he considered her message, still leaning his weight against the pillar. What was Tristan to Lilias, or Lilias to Tristan? She was a woman, and a bad one, so he had gathered since he had sojourned in the city. Yet she ruled Agravale, and in her ruling was wise in the secrets of the south. In some vague way he even imagined that he might win news of her whom he sought.

Thus Tristan followed the girl from the church, and crossing the great court that lay without, entered the gardens of St. Pelinore. Mulberry trees towered above the lawns, studded thick with ripening fruit. Weeping ashes glittered there, and figs and cedars cast their shade over broad beds of mint and thyme.

The girl watched Tristan as she walked beside him, holding a little apart, with one hand to her cheek. She was a sharp wench enough, and Agravale had taught her to take the measure of a man. Therefore she studied Tristan's face, that she might read his strength or weakness therein by the dogged set of the strong jaw, the keen eyes, the firm, clean mouth. She began to speak to him as they crossed the gardens with a coy simplicity that was well assumed.

"You are strange to Agravale?" she said.

Tristan looked at her slantwise over his shoulder, for she seemed but a child untouched by guile. Her glances wandered over the great trees, and the flowers that grew in the short grass.

"You would prosper?" she asked him tentatively, casting about in her mind how she might win his trust.

"I have begun passably," said Tristan, with a smile.

"For you humbled Percival. Ah, how strong you must be! I am almost afraid, sir, when I look at your great arms."

Her mild eyes trembled up innocently to Tristan's. The flattery seemed so spontaneous in her words that it would have puzzled a young man to have uncovered her cunning. Nor was Tristan unwilling to seem strong to her, for youth takes pride in its great strength. For the moment he was half tempted to question her concerning Rosamunde of the Seven Streams.

"You may be a great knight in Agravale," the girl said to him, with a shy smile.

"How so, sister?"

"Ah, sir, are you blind? Know you not that a woman loves not a beaten man?"

"So."

"You trampled down Percival. The Duchess would have you serve her in his stead."

"That is not possible."

The girl stared at him, and for the moment lost her mask of innocence.

"Are you not ambitious?" she asked.

"I am young, good sister."

"And a mighty man, though young."

"You seem zealous for me."

"I serve my lady. Why, it will be all plain for you. Is it so strange a thing to serve a woman?"

They had left the gardens and come to a high stone wall that skirted the

precincts of Lilias's palace. Cypresses and bays showed above the stone, while a great cedar cast a broad shadow there. In the wall there was a little door studded over with iron nails. The girl took a key that hung at her girdle, unlocked the door, and pointed Tristan in.

"Enter, sir," she said, with a glib smile and a slight bending of her body.

Tristan stood and looked through under the lintel. He could see a garden spread within, the grass sleek under the noonday sun, beds of flowers, purple and red. At the end of a lawn stood an orange thicket, and under the trees a woman walked, clad in crimson, with her white arms bare. She wore sandals of gold stuff on her naked feet and her hair hung loose about her neck.

But Tristan turned back from the door and looked full into the girl's dark eyes. She coloured a little under his gaze, as though half guessing what was in his heart, and that he knew the part she played. Nor was he slow to read the truth that shone for him on her thin, pale face.

"You will speak to my lady for me," he said to her, casting a swift glance into the garden.

The girl looked at him, but did not stir.

"What, sir, shall I say?" she asked.

"That I will not enter yonder place."

"Not."

"No, for the youth in me will not serve."

Her face changed suddenly like a fickle sky, and she began to mock him as he stood before her, thrusting her tongue out and beating her hands. To Tristan she seemed like some sly elf changed from a child to an evil imp, as he turned and left her by the wall with a grim frown on his ugly face.

CHAPTER XVII

When Tristan returned to the Bishop's palace, he found two horses standing saddled and bridled in the inner court. One of them was Tristan's, a raw-boned roan with one white foot and a white muzzle. A man-at-arms, half asleep on a bench at the bottom of the guard-room stair, scrambled up when he saw Tristan, and opened a great mouth with the gusto of a news-teller.

"Hallo, laggard! Ogier has been calling for you this hour or more, blaspheming you till the stones blushed. Above with you, if you would hear good downright cursing."

Tristan passed through the guard-room, found Ogier striding to and fro in his closet, armed for riding, the froth from a tankard still on his beard. He unbosomed himself when Tristan entered, like a volcano to whom periodic outbursts were the natural vent of much accumulated spleen. Tristan let the giant's cursing pass over him like water. He gained time by sitting down before Ogier's table and finishing the remnants of that gentleman's dinner.

"Feed away, my son," said the giant, with his hand on the tankard; "you can keep your mouth shut, I guess, when it is a matter of discretion. You and I ride out with Jocelyn."

"Am I not an image that beholds and sees not?" said Tristan from the table.

"Ha, lad, you will stand in need of blindness to-night. The Bishop will amuse himself. And to be honest, he can out-devil all the Gadarene swine when the fit is on him."

"The good saint."

Ogier laughed.

"My son," he said, "I am getting grey, and I have seen many strange sights in my time. It has always puzzled me to discover where the devil all that virtue hides itself which the priests prate of, mostly to the women. Silence. Behold the virtue, my son, necessary to the honest fellow who would fill his pockets from the coffers of the Church. Come, now, I hear the trumpet in the court."

Jocelyn, Bishop of Agravale, had possessed himself of some persuasions of piety in the hearts of the innocents to whom he ministered. He was a man who believed at least in cleansing the outside of the pot. To rule by means of the prerogative of righteousness, a man needs some little reputation for that virtue. And since the robes and insignia of office were scrupulously cleansed and

burnished, Jocelyn found opportunities to pander in secret to the inner man. There was a subtle conviction in him that to be able to resist the devil, one must bow down and propitiate him at stated intervals. The occasional lapse made the intervening virtue the more easy. Priest that he was, he could not pose eternally, even to himself, as a species of waxen image in which the virile blood had been turned to milk.

It was publicly acknowledged in Agravale that the good Bishop rode regularly into the wilderness to eat grass like Nebuchadnezzar in order to purge the brain of the vain follies of human pride. He held long vigils in the woods, so his people believed; played the hermit under the winking stars. It was whispered that celestial visions had been spread before his eyes, that St. Pelinore had come down and walked the earth with him to his great comfort. Like Elijah in the wilderness, he was sustained by the grace of heaven, and by the dew of sanctity that descended upon his soul.

Thus Ogier and Tristan followed him that day from Agravale, two stalwart exemplars of the Church Militant. The Bishop rode a mouse-coloured mare, trapped with red harness and a saddle of carved ivory. He wore a plain black robe with a sable hood and a black mask over his face. Ogier rode a great white stallion, a huge beast, the only horse in Agravale who could bear his bulk. Tristan, with his red shield strapped between his shoulders and the episcopal white surcoat over his hauberk, rode beside Ogier on this saintly pilgrimage.

The three sallied from Agravale, leaving its white walls that climbed to the very verge of the great southern precipice. Its towers and turrets ascended towards the blue. Northwards the woods bristled under the sun, a glitter like blackened steel under the summer sky. The road wound under ancient trees. Many a huge ilex cast its gloom over the grass. The stone pine towered on the hills above the dense woods of beech and chestnut, and the valleys were full of primeval oaks, whose sinewy limbs stretched far over the sun-streaked sward.

As for Tristan, his mood partook of the silence of the woods. He was thinking of the Duchess Lilias, that she was not a dame to be flouted with impunity, nor one who could forgive the starving of her desire. Though the summer was flying he had no news of Rosamunde. So utterly had she vanished from the ken of the world, that some Old Man of the Sea might have mured her in a cave under amber-bosomed waves. That she was dead Tristan would not believe. There was an instinctive faith within his heart that Rosamunde lived, perhaps to her greater misery. Ogier himself might have the secret locked in his ungainly carcass, yet Tristan had no desire to betray his quest before he could mend matters to his credit.

Jocelyn had little to say to the pair as they rode through the wilds together.

Once free of Agravale, he had put the mask from off his face, and rode with his cowl turned back, his sleek and sensuous face white in the sun. Tristan saw him smile often in a prophetic way, as though the pilgrimage were much to his liking. In a wallet at his saddle bow he had a flask of red wine, and the churchman's lips were often puckered round the mouth of the flask.

As the day declined, they came to a wilder region, where pines grew thick and cranberries tufted half-hidden rocks. The track was a mere grass ride, two cubits broad, where Ogier and Tristan followed Jocelyn in single file. A desolate valley opened gradually before them, steeped on every side with the black umbrage of the woods. To the west a craggy peak smote the setting sun. In the lap of the valley lay a mere, an island rising black and dim above the silvered surface. Grassland gilded with asphodel dipped towards the water. Yellow flags grew in the shallows; there were lilies floating beyond the rushes.

The sun sank down behind the crag as the three crossed the grassland towards the water. Blood-red streamers streaked the sky; a golden mist ascended towards the woods. The island in the mere grew black as ebony, overarched by a canopy of scarlet clouds. Tristan could see a stone building rising from the island's thickets, and the place breathed forth mystery towards the hastening night.

Ogier took a bugle horn that hung round his neck, and blew three blasts that set the wild woods ringing. At the sound a boat put out from the island and moved over the smooth water towards the bank. A strange babel of wild voices seemed to fall as from the sky. Cries came as from lost souls tortured in a burning pit. While Tristan listened with a frown on his face, the cries died down into the woodland silence.

The barge was rowed by an old man, with a beak of a nose, fierce, restless eyes, and a mouth like a flint. As the barge ran to the stage, the old man let a horse-board down. The barge could bear but one of them at a time. Tristan and the giant waited at the water's edge while the boat bore Jocelyn over the water, to where the island rose sable as the night.

Tristan's brows were knotted above his eyes. The mystery of the place had set him musing, casting about for Jocelyn's reason in riding into such a wilderness. He questioned Ogier as they watched the barge.

"Where have we come?" he asked, with a keen stare into the giant's face.

Ogier grinned and licked his lips.

"Men call it the Mad Mere," he said. "Yonder house is a hospital for such as froth at the mouth when the moon is full."

"And that clamour when you blew your horn?"

"The mad folk squealing. Old Nicholas chastens them often with his

whip."

Tristan still gazed at the island under his heavy brows.

"And my lord the Bishop?" he asked.

"My son," quoth Ogier, with one of his grins, "if you are ambitious, keep your tongue from stealing the truth."

"Have done with your damned riddles."

"My son, Master Jocelyn refreshes himself after the dull services of sanctity. Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. You shall behold how frail are the feet of the holy."

"I grow wise—in time."

"Ten thousand devils, man, you shall see such sights as shall make you grow green as an unripe fig. Keep your mouth shut in Agravale, and you will prosper."

The barge drifted back to them, and Tristan took the next passage, waited by the landing stage while this grey Charon ferried Ogier and his white horse over. Tristan had cast rapid glances round him as he waited. The place was built of rough-hewn stone, walled in on every side, with narrow squints for windows. Cypresses and yews grew close about the walls. The gate was flanked by a stone tower, standing black and sullen against the sky. Ever and again an eerie whimper came from the place, or a wild medley of voices, more like the chattering of a band of apes. There were three more horses tethered in a roughly thatched hovel under a walnut tree. A man was asleep there on a pile of hay.

Ogier landed, dragged the white stallion from the barge by the bridle. The ferryman took the horses, when he had made the boat fast to a great stake by the stage. Ogier knew the ways of the madhouse well enough; Tristan gathered as much as they passed in together under the low arch of the gate. A narrow courtyard held the centre of the building, with barred windows opening upon it on every side. In the centre of the court stood a great whipping-post with iron wristlets dangling from a rusty chain. Tristan saw all these things as his eyes darted rapid glances hither and thither in the half gloom.

As they passed through the court, a sudden clamour arose at the narrow windows overhead, where white faces were pressed against the bars. The grated windows seemed filled with mad eyes and dishevelled hair. The beings mured there were as wild beasts starving in a cage. Their cries reverberated through the well of the court, dinning their frenzy into Tristan's ears.

Ogier passed into a room opening by a short passage from the court. It looked like a species of guard-room or antechamber, leading by a flight of low

steps to a larger room above. A door fitted with an iron grille closed the stairway at the top. In the lower room a fire burned upon the hearth; a meal had been spread on a rough table, and the place was lit by a single iron lamp hanging from the ceiling.

Ogier unbuckled his sword and flung it with a crash upon a wooden settle. He was hot and out of temper. Drawing a stool to the table, he began to eat like a hungry wolf.

“Fall to, my son,” he said, flourishing a pot in his right hand; “we shall be on guard all night. Come, keep up your courage.”

Tristan joined him. They ate in silence, listening to the vague and unhallowed sounds that echoed now and again through this habitation of the mad. Tristan was debating with himself as to what had become of Jocelyn the Bishop.

As they sat at meat, the sound of a melody played by a rebec and flute quivered down from the upper room. A thrill of laughter stirred in the air; streaks of yellow light poured betwixt the hinges and under the planking of the door. The music increased, as though some blithe company descended to a feast; while within, a man’s gruff voice broke forth into a song. The crabbed and grizzled ferryman came in from the court, and sat down on a stool before the fire.

Tristan leant over the table, laid a hand upon Ogier’s wrist.

“Are yonder folk mad—also?”

The giant grinned and held up a pot.

“Mad, my son, most mad,” he said; “when the wine flows, you will hear them cackling.”

A woman’s voice rose in discord to the music, a wild and abandoned scream of inarticulate laughter. Half a dozen tongues seemed to gather in a chorus. The laughter died down, rose again into a squeal of mirth.

“The Bishop and Black Benedict enjoy themselves,” said Ogier, licking his lips.

Tristan rose up, thrusting aside his stool.

“By God,” he said, “I will look through yonder grille.”

Ogier plunged forward and barred his way.

“Wait, my son,” he said, with a bending of the brows, “wait till they are drunk enough. Then, by my soul, you shall look at your leisure.”

CHAPTER XVIII

Tristan faced Ogier for the moment as though more than tempted to hold him in defiance. He remembered, however, that the giant was worth more to him as a friend than as an enemy; and making a laugh of the matter, he picked up the stool and returned to his supper. Old Nicholas by the fire had watched them with a dull grin on his ferocious and toad-like face. He poked the embers with a charred stake, winked at Ogier, and waxed witty over the strenuousness of youth.

"Young blood runs hot, sirs," he said, "and prithee, what is this chivalry men prate about but youth gone mad."

"Ha, old raven, we are all mad to you, since you are scourging lunatic folk all the days of your life. All creation's moonstruck to an owl hooting in a chimney."

" 'Tis only like drink," said the ferryman. "Some are quickly overset; others swim in wine—'tis their natural element. All men are mad in measure. These mad folk have more spirit than body; you, Messire Ogier, have more body than spirit. The flesh overbalanceth the spirit, and your fat paunch keeps out the vapours. It is good in season to make of one's soul a toad under a stone."

The old man sniggered, stretched himself, took a knotted whip from the wall, and passed out by a narrow door set back in the thickness of the wall. There was something so evil and repulsive about the creature that the room felt warmer to Tristan when he had gone. Ogier had stretched himself on a settle before the fire, for though it was summer, a cold mist rose from off the mere. Ogier, with his carcass propped before the glow, blinked and dozed after his superhuman meal.

Tristan, sitting by the table with his chin upon his fists, kept wide awake and listened. The fire flung huge shadows about the walls; the smoke-grimed roof was steeped in gloom. From the room beyond the closed and gridded door the mirth grew more boisterous as the night wore on. Music and mad laughter mingled in a riotous flux of sound, while ever and again a woman's squeal would top the din. In that dark, firelit room Tristan's manhood gathered fanaticism for the future, and he began to understand the more why Samson had blasphemed against the Church.

Ogier had fallen asleep upon the settle. Tristan saw the man's stout chest

heaving to and fro like a smith's bellows. The sound of his snoring seemed to shake the room, as the breath rattled and bubbled in his throat. Ogier's huge mouth was open, his fangs gleaming above his uncleanly beard.

Tristan rose from the table with his eyes on the sleeping man. Holding the scabbard of his sword, he climbed the stairway, pushed back the grille, looked through into the inner room. A stream of light gushed through the grating upon his face, with odours of wine and cooked meats and of scented garments. The scene within was more like some classic orgy than the breaking of bread by a Christian Bishop. Couches were spread upon the floor about a low table covered with flowers. Lamps hung from the roof, hooded with crimson cloth. Goblets and silver chargers bearing fruit and rich food stuff gleamed in the light of the lamps.

At the end of the room, half lying in a woman's lap, was Jocelyn of Agravale with a garland of vine leaves about his forehead. His face was suffused, his eyes bright with the fumes of wine. The woman beside him was robed in scarlet, arms and shoulders bare and white, a wreath of roses over her raven hair. To the right of the Bishop sprawled Benedict of the Marches, a brown-eyed wench leaning on his shoulder and pouring wine over his head. There were three more women about the table, whose charms were sacred to Benedict's two esquires.

Tristan, very grim about the mouth, closed the grille, and sprang down the stairs. He had seen enough to disgust his manhood, for, bred in the strong, clean lap of the sea, he had little understanding of such sins as these. Perhaps in his heart he had feared to find Rosamunde in that company of the saints. Not that he doubted her, for his faith was not feeble in the matter of her honour. Yet, with such holy rogues as Jocelyn ruling the land, some hideous tyranny might have brought her low.

Ogier was still snoring on the settle before the fire, and Tristan strode up and down with the ruddy glow playing and sparkling upon his hauberk. The laughter and bursts of music came more crazed and disjointed to his ears. His cheeks tingled, his hands quivered for the sword. What if Jocelyn, hypocritical sensualist that he was, had Rosamunde imprisoned and in his power? Perhaps she was under this very roof, mewed amid madmen and beings bereft of all cleanly and regenerating reason. Tristan could not suffer such thoughts as these. He glared at Ogier sleeping by the fire, as though ready to throttle him as he slept.

A distant clamour in the house stayed him in his stride for the moment, and Tristan heard blows given, a rough voice cursing as in furious wrath. Screams came ebbing from some cell or passage overhead. There was the rush of feet down stone stairs, a panting outcry, a scraping of fingers along the walls of a

dark gallery. The door jerked open. A young girl with her hair tangled over her face ran into the room, stared round her like a hunted thing hounded into a trap. Her ragged gown reached only to her knees, and she pressed the rotten cloth over her bosom with both hands. Bloody weals showed on her bare shoulders; her eyes were wide and piteous with fear. Even as she stood there shivering like a reed, Nicholas the warden came in, his teeth agleam, his whip swinging in his hand. Breathing hard, he made at the girl, smote at her, once, twice, while she cowered beneath the lash, holding up her hands to break the blows. Tristan's blood was up on the instant. He sprang on Nicholas, took him by the waist, hurled him heavily along the floor. The girl, with but half a glance at Tristan, turned and fled back through the door, while Ogier, waking with the din, scrambled up, rubbing his eyes with his hairy paws.

"A thousand curses! What are you at, lad?"

"Breaking that old wolf's head."

"Pah, he has no muscle for such as you. You're drunk, I say."

"Not I. The old cur was scourging a woman with a whip. That is not my fashion. I pitched him over into yonder corner."

Ogier bent over Nicholas, raised his shoulders from the floor. The old man groaned a little, bled at the mouth, still held the whip clutched in his right hand. Ogier called for wine. Tristan, very grim, brought him the flask, but would not minister to Nicholas with his own hands.

"By Peter, my son," said Ogier, from the floor, "you have come nigh breaking our grandfather's neck. Hold up, gaffer; swallow some of this strong stuff. Take his heels, you dolt; we'll lay him on the settle by the fire."

Between them they carried Nicholas to the settle, dribbled wine between his teeth, saw his lids quiver as he began to recover from the throw. Tristan had taken the old man's whip. He broke it like a reed, and threw the fragments into the fire. Ogier, rising from his knees beside the settle, scowled at him with his small flesh-hidden eyes.

"Go and cool your blood in the court, my son," he said; "you are too ready with those hands of yours. Discipline is my creed. Mad folk must be kept in order."

"With the whip?"

"How else, you soft pate? Old Nicholas must drive the devil out of them with whipcord, or they would tear him limb from limb. The man cannot tongue-tag with idiots. You will have to tan your heart leather better, friend Tristan, if you are to serve Jocelyn of Agravale."

Tristan turned away with a great effort, and began to pace up and down the

room. He could not trust himself to look at Ogier for the moment. The giant's arrogance of bulk made Tristan's arms tingle to come to a grip with him. Presently he passed out into the court, felt the cool breath of the night playing upon his face. The stars were shining overhead; only an occasional whimper came from the barred windows in the wall.

The whole sky rocked above his head, and he was as a man struggling in a whirlpool of opposing impulses. He was half moved to charge in, slay Ogier and Nicholas, put Jocelyn and Benedict to the sword. Yet even if he purged the place, what then? Would he be nearer Rosamunde or Columbe, his lost sister? As for these mad folk, they would be as ready to rend him in all likelihood as old Nicholas who handled the whip. Reasonless miserables that they were, they would but starve and turn upon each other like wolves loosed suddenly from a cage. And the women, these flowers of passion? They were Jocelyn's creatures, content to work his will, and what was barren liberty to them? They would have mocked him as men mocked Noah.

Tristan's brain cooled in the night air. There were the constant stars above him, the dim clouds sweeping pure athwart the sky. He would gain yet more by silence than by some outburst of physical protestation. What if he slew Ogier and Jocelyn also, would he be the wiser as to Rosamunde's fate? The time of his patient apprenticeship had not yet elapsed, and the surest fortitude still lay in silence.

A shadow filled the doorway leading to the guard-room. Ogier stood there, stretching his arms heavenwards, yawning like a volcano. He saw Tristan, and called to him out of the gloom.

"Ha, my son, have you cooled your flesh by now? Your fingers itch too incontinently for other people's weasands. Old Nicholas is himself again, save for a bruised face."

Tristan conjured up a laugh and fell in with Ogier's humour.

"It goes against the grain with me," he said, "to see a girl flogged. God knows, she is mad, and the rod is the only argument."

"Women, my son," said Ogier, striding up like a great galleon, and buffeting Tristan's shoulder, "women are like dogs, the better for a beating. They make fools of us, the wantons, but, by Jeremy, we have the heavier hand of them. Consider Master Jocelyn. Ha, I was forgetting. Did you look through that grille?"

Tristan, quick to comprehend his part, nudged Ogier significantly with his elbow. The giant broke into a chuckle, a sound that echoed through the court.

"See how our saints have feet of clay," he said. "My faith, comrade, but the Bishop is a bigger fool than any of us. He would out-Solomon Solomon for a

black eye and a red mouth. Tristan, my son, if you love peace, keep clear of petticoats."

"Truth, truth," said the disciple, with a laugh.

Ogier stretched himself again and yawned.

"Ah, my son, we are the ministers of love. To horse, and away at dawn. Such are our orders."

"Jocelyn returns to Agravale?"

"Not so fast, sir. Do pigs eschew a clover rick? No, no; 'tis we who ride, and not the Bishop."

"To Agravale?"

"To the devil, sir, with Agravale. There might be some sly wench there, by the way you seem to dote on the city. No, my son, we ride yet deeper into the woods."

Tristan turned suddenly upon his heel, and stared Ogier full between the brows.

"More madhouses?" he asked.

Ogier chuckled, and smote him with his fist upon the chest.

"Remember, good lad," he said, "that the dear Bishop rideth on a pastoral pilgrimage for the redemption of the afflicted. There is a certain comely heretic who needs his holy ministrations. Of her, more anon. We, sir, are good Jocelyn's forerunners to prepare him a welcome. Come, I see a grin on the sky's face. The dawn is rushing up. Let us go and eat, lad, before we sally."

CHAPTER XIX

Tristan and Ogier sallied at dawn, old Nicholas ferrying them over the mere one by one. The man had recovered his wits, if not his good will, and his small eyes darted furtive gleams at Tristan, as though he were ready to knife him if the chance had offered.

A wind had risen in the night, brisk and eager as a blithe breath from the sea. The clouds raced athwart the blue; shadows scampered over the grass; the trees shook their heads and laughed. The water was smitten into a thousand golden wrinkles by the wind. The lilies danced in the shallows; the rushes shivered as the ripples plashed amid the sedge.

As Ogier and Tristan got to horse, a last shrill clamour reached them from the madhouse in the mere. A swift swirl of sound, wild and wordless; it was the wailing of the wretches mocked in their dark dens by the ever-returning dawn. To Tristan the air seemed cleaner since he had crossed the water; the dawn had a deeper gold, the sky a richer colour. The trees cheered him, waved their dark green shields. “Rosamunde, Rosamunde, Rosamunde!” cried the wind. All the alleys and wells of that deep wild seemed to breathe adventure and to mouth romance.

The valley, with its dark pines and stunted olives, sank back under the dawn, while the madhouse stood like black marble in a sheet of gold. Rabbits scurried into the thickets. A herd of swine ran from them, squealing and grunting into the gloom. Wild life was with Tristan, the solitary piping of the birds. The wilderness seemed part of his own soul, where strength and grim nature flourished in the good prime of youth.

Ogier was in a coarse, boastful mood that morning. What little spirit he had seemed to smack of the wine-cask and the brothel. He twitted Tristan, jested against the Bishop, let his loose tongue revel over unclean food. The man was a mere mountain of flesh, corrupt and noisome, and Tristan glanced over his carcass with the grim glee of a smiter. He marked the man’s fat and ungainly girth, smiled when he pictured his good sword falling across the giant’s throat.

“Come, lad,” said Ogier, in his ranting mood, “what though I am a butcher’s son, I am not ashamed of the shambles. I have eaten good meat in my time, and drunk such wine as warms the belly. This great carcass of mine has served me well.”

“A stout arm, comrade, and a stout sword.”

“Man, there is not a fellow in the south who can match me in arms. Goliath, why, I would have cloven that Philistine to the chin. As for you, my little one, I could break your back as I could wring the neck of a pigeon.”

“Doubtless, doubtless,” said Tristan, with a smile.

He was content to listen to the man’s vapourings, for if Ogier waxed garrulous, so much the better. He might betray himself and Jocelyn also.

“To serve the Church, sir,” Ogier ran on, “you must play the pander and keep your mouth shut like an alms coffer. I have been purveyor to the Bishop. Wine, meat, gold, glory, love, and the like—why, sir, I have played with them all, and to my credit.”

“You have the needful wit in you,” said Tristan, with something of a smile.

“Youngling, well said; you could do worse than follow my lead. A heavy hand and an iron heart; these things serve. Nor have I stinted myself in obeying the Bishop.”

“You farm his taxes, eh?”

“And take my own toll, man. Jocelyn’s none the wiser. I play the Bishop before him, and he pays the cost.”

The land dropped before them to a wooded plain, grassland and thickets interspersed together. Great cedars grew there, and huge primeval oaks. Tristan printed the map upon his mind, as he rode on Ogier’s flank, keeping his bearing by the sun. To the north a line of hills towered up, wooded below, bare-fanged above. All about was the blue gloom of the far unknown, and the wilderness smiled under the hurrying sky.

“This second hermitage,” said Tristan, playing with his bridle.

Ogier licked his lips with his great red tongue, smoothed his coarse beard.

“Therein, sir,” he answered, “Jocelyn has caged his latest captive. Mark the quip, my friend. She is a white heretic from the Seven Streams. Scold that she is, I have great hopes of her.”

He laughed and grimaced in Tristan’s face.

“Another damsel queened it there before, brother,” he continued. “Of her, I guess, there was some tragic end.”

“How so?” asked Tristan, growing the keener as he listened.

Ogier edged his horse round a fallen tree.

“Before Lententide,” he said, slouching lazily in the saddle, “I was sent by ship with certain priests to a northern province to treat with Blanche the Bold, who is a duchess there. Ha, but she would have none of our treaties. Sailing home with a good west wind, we ran by an island—Purple Isle, as my sea-dogs

said, far out to sea. Our casks were low, so we landed to win water. By a spring near the shore my fellows caught a chit of a girl with as pert a face and as trim a body as I ever saw in Agravale. ‘So ho,’ thought I, ‘here is good merchandise to please the Bishop.’ Ha, brother, but I sold her to Jocelyn for two hundred silver crowns.”

Tristan, with a sudden grimness in his eyes, twitched at his bridle and drew a yard nearer to the man on the white stallion. So tightly were Tristan’s lips pressed together that they formed a pouting line above his chin. The muscles were knotted about the angle of his jaw. He would not trust his tongue for the moment, lest the truth should out.

“A good bargain, comrade,” he said, grinding his teeth, every sinew of him taut as the fibres of a wind-rocked tree, “a good bargain. And the girl, what of her?”

Ogier laughed. His great red mouth gaped above his beard, and there was an unclean glint in his wolfish eyes.

“She was good food,” he said. “I had my fill before she came to the Bishop’s table. Bah! we soldiers have our turn.”

Tristan’s hand was on his sword. The muscles of his arm tightened, then relaxed. He shut his eyes for the moment, saw blood against the sun. Yet, from mere molten wrath, his vengeance hardened to metal at white heat.

“What of the girl?” he asked again.

Ogier puffed out a deep breath, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

“The devil knows,” he said, jerking his thumb over his right shoulder. “For a month she was in the madhouse yonder; the girl was too much a lamb for the she-wolves there. Jocelyn had her sent to the haunt we ride to. She was no longer flaunting it when the White Heretic took her place.”

“Dead?” said Tristan, with a great gulp of fury.

“Ask Jocelyn, my son,” quoth Ogier, with a callous sniff.

They had come to a great wood that climbed into the blue distance, clouding the bosoms of the hills. From the dense and mysterious umbrage of the trees a broad stream glittered, winding southwards into the green. A narrow grass ride delved beside the water into the woods. Ogier plunged in, with Tristan at his heels.

“My son,” said the giant, over his shoulder, oblivious of the sword that tingled in its scabbard, “if the Bishop’s business takes you this way once more, follow the river; it will guide you straight.”

“Thanks, comrade,” said Tristan.

“We shall have fun anon.”

“With the White Heretic, eh!”

“By my bones, lad, she is as cold as a block of marble.”

A broad glade opened sudden before them, its grassy slopes shelving on the east towards the river. Great oaks canopied it on every hand, the sunlight sifting through in a thousand streams. The mossy trunks stood hord on hord, while the plash of the water played through the stagnant air.

There was the upflashing of a sword, and a hoarse challenge startled the trees.

“Guard, devil, guard!”

Ogier, his great mouth wide, twisted round, saw a furious face glaring dead white front under the shadow of a shield. A sword streaked the sunlight. Ogier blinked at Tristan as at one gone mad.

“Damnation! What’s amiss, my son?”

“By the love of God, I have you now!”

“Fool, are you mad?”

The hoarse voice echoed him; the eyes flashed fire.

“Guard, ravisher, guard!”

“Ten thousand devils! What have we here?”

“Tristan of Purple Isle, avenger of Columbe; Tristan the Heretic, Tristan of the Seven Streams.”

Ogier growled like a trapped bear. He whipped his sword out, put forward his shield.

“On with you, traitor!” he roared. “Join your sister under the sods.”

“Ha, say you so?” said Tristan, closing in.

There was a brief blundering tussle on horseback under the trees. Ogier’s stallion seemed overweighted by his bulk, and was slow to answer the bridle as a waterlogged ship the helm. Tristan caught Ogier on the flank, so that the giant could not use his shield. Their swords flashed, yelped, twisted in the air. A down cut hewed the dexter cantel from Ogier’s shield. The giant’s face, with a gashed cheek, glared at Tristan from under his upreared arm. So close were they that blood spattered Tristan’s face, as Ogier blew the red stream from his mouth and beard.

Tristan broke away, wheeled, and came again with a cry of “Rosamunde!” He lashed home, split Ogier’s collar bone even through the rings of his hauberk. The giant yelped like a gored hound, dropped his shield, parried a second cut, smote Tristan’s horse above the ears. Tossing and rearing under the trees, the brute was unmanageable for the moment, and Tristan slipped

from the saddle, sprang back against a tree as Ogier charged at him. The sword point whistled a hand's breadth from his face. Before Ogier could wheel, Tristan was on him like a leopard. The giant, gripped by the girdle, toppled back and came down with a crash, his sword flashing from his hand in the fall.

The pair were at grips upon the grass, where Tristan, quick as a cat, came up on Ogier and straddled his chest. The giant heaved at him, gripped him by the knees. For one moment Tristan fell aside, but he was up and above again, with one hand on the other's throat. Ogier, straining, panting with his burden of flesh, went down again under Tristan's weight. He fought with his feet, rolled to and fro like a rudderless ship. Tristan, shortening his sword, ran the point into Ogier's throat. The giant's hands clutched and gripped the blade. There was a spasmodic heave of the great body, a tense quivering of the limbs, as the sword ran through, smote a cubit or more into the grass beneath.

Tristan, breathing hard, with his mouth wide open, rose up slowly from the giant's body. Ogier had his death stroke; the red stream told as much as he twitched awhile and then lay still. Tristan, wiping the sweat from his forehead, plucked his sword out by the hilt. Columbe of Purple Isle was avenged of one foe.

CHAPTER XX

The first thing Tristan did after he had wiped his sword on a grass tussock and set it in his sheath was to look to the wound Ogier had dealt his horse. The animal was standing under a tree, tossing its head, rubbing its muzzle against the trunk. Tristan had great tenderness for any dumb thing in pain; moreover, he and the horse had come south from Tor's Tower together; they were good comrades in the way of adventure. Tristan's voice, familiar and trusted, calmed the beast, so that he suffered Tristan to gauge the wound. There had been no great evil in the blow, for Ogier's sword, turned by the bone, had left a slight gash and nothing more. Tristan comforted the beast, fondling the muzzle, stroking the sleek neck. He knotted the bridle over a bough, caught Ogier's white stallion, and tethered him also.

Next he took dead Ogier by the heels, dragged him out of the pool of sunlight where he lay into the shade of the solemn trees. For Ogier he felt no pang of pity; the man was a mere mountain of flesh, fit food for worms and ravens. Nevertheless, he covered the face with the broken shield, unbuckled Ogier's girdle, and picked up his sword. So much done, he went down to the river, and washed the blood from his hands and face.

Mounting Ogier's stallion, Tristan took his own horse by the bridle, and followed the ride beside the stream. His heart was great in him that day, for the slaying of Ogier had warmed his blood and the lust of battle still stirred within him. His thoughts fled towards Columbe his sister, and he prayed that her golden head might gleam out before him from the greenwood shade. If she lived, what great joy for a brother's heart. To feel her warm arms round his neck, to see her child's eyes flash to his. Columbe, the maid with the smiling eyes, who had been his heart's ease in the days of old.

Of Rosamunde he thought but little for the moment, for he had not slain Ogier for her sake. It was as though she had stepped aside out of his heart when he remembered Columbe and his mother's blessing. Yet like some fair queen she should crown his honour and share with Columbe the blessings of the sword.

Tristan came to a narrow valley, its grassland golden with asphodel dipping down towards the stream. Around, above, towered the ancient trees. In the midst of the stream stood a goodly island, bosomed in foam, hid by the woods.

Tristan, halting under an oak, scanned the valley under his hand. Gazing over the grassland, his eyes discovered a grey wall linking the scattered rocks, girding the island under the shadows of its trees. He saw the glint of a red roof under the green. Though there was no bridge to span the water Tristan doubted not that this was the Bishop's hermitage, "Jocelyn's dovecot," as dead Ogier had said. He tethered his two horses under the trees where they would not be seen by folk on the island.

Leaving the shade, he went full length and crawled through the tall rank grass like a leopard stalking its prey. Soon he heard the gush and thunder of the stream, as it raced and foamed over rock and boulder. Lifting his head slowly from the grass, he scanned the island under his hand. So snugly was the house hid amid the rocks and trees that Tristan had to delve for it even as a hawk searches the long grass for crouching prey. The stone wall was so cunningly ranged above the rocks that it seemed part and parcel of the isle itself.

Tristan scrambled down the bank and plunged into the torrent. It was shallow yet treacherous. The water foamed about his knees; pebbles and boulders rolled under his feet. Reaching the farther bank, he found the rocky wall rising fifteen feet above his head. He swung himself up by the roots of a stunted fir that clung to the bank by gnarled and contorted talons, and swarmed up the trunk till he reached the boughs. Below, the torrent foamed in the sun, burdening the air with a hoarse swirl of sound. Tristan's head came level with the summit of the wall. Craning his neck and keeping well within the bosom of the tree, he peered over into the space beyond.

Without lay the wild woods, the torrent, and the unknown; within all the sumptuous colour of the south seemed engirdled by that circle of grey stone. Smooth lawns, emerald bright, gleamed betwixt massed banks of flowers. Fragrant herbs perfumed the air. Pomegranates grew there hung thick with fruit, oleanders with red coronets burned beside the slim and dusky cypresses. Apricots gleamed from lush eaves of green, and vines with their purple clusters were growing about the house.

Even as Tristan watched he saw colour moving within a tunnel of close-clipped box, the gleam of a blue kirtle, the glimmer of golden hair. He hung in the tree and waited, for there was no sound in his ears save the roaring of the stream. Anon, the figure came out from the box thicket into the sun, where a bed of balsams coloured the grass. Tristan well-nigh lost his hold of the tree, for it was Rosamunde herself who walked in the garden.

Tristan coloured like a great boy at the very sight of her face. It was months since he had looked on it, and his stout heart hurried. How fair she was, how tall and slender! The very flowers seemed graceless at her feet!

Tristan felt the old strange awe of her rise up within his heart. With the stars and the moon she was throned above the world, and as she walked the lawns with her stately air he had more fear of her than of twenty Ogiers.

Tristan watched her, wondered what thoughts were in her heart. There was a slight drooping of the queenly head, a limpness of the hands as they shone white against her blue kirtle. Would she be glad of the liberty he brought to her, to lay with his sword and shield before her feet? Cared she for Jocelyn, with his sleek, shaven face? God, no; such fawning apes were fit but for Lilias and Agravale, that city of sin.

Rosamunde, turning suddenly from the sunlit lawn before him, passed down a terrace-way built above an offshoot of the stream, where oleanders grew in great stone jars. Water plashed beneath on ferns and moss-green stones. Tristan, while her back was turned, swung along a bough and straddled the wall. It was smooth on the inner face, giving no foothold, no vantage to the fingers. Tristan jumped for it, landed in a bed of pinks, rolled over, and scrambled up with earthy hands. The soft loam and the plants had deadened his fall. He crossed a stretch of grass, rounded a clump of bays, found Rosamunde leaning on the balustrade of a little bridge.

"Tristan!"

The name was mouthed in a half-credulous whisper, as she turned on him, sudden colour surging to her cheeks. She grew pale again, yet her eyes were full of a strange brightness, her face turned slightly heavenwards, with the red lips parted above the strong white chin.

"Tristan!"

The man was redder than Rosamunde. Her beauty silenced him, and he could gaze, nothing more.

"Tristan, I thought you dead."

"Dead, God be thanked, no," he said, going on his knees as one who remembered tales of courtesy. "Ah, Madame Rosamunde, I have kept my faith. I have searched and found you. Behold, I bring liberty."

She stood back as the man did her homage stiffly, yet with a rugged dignity that showed his temper. There was vast earnestness upon Rosamunde's face. The baser passions of the world had hemmed her in these many months, and dread of their animal strength had made her eye all men askance. Even Tristan was not trusted yet. A woman jealous of her womanhood, she conned his face as though to read his humour.

"Tristan, I thought you dead."

It was as though she parleyed with him that she might judge him the more.

“See, am I dust, madame?” he answered her.

“How came you here?”

Tristan felt some cloud between him and her eyes. Her grave and watchful temper puzzled him, nor had he foreshadowed such cold gratitude as this.

“Madame Rosamunde,” he said, “Samson the Heretic saved me from death; you shall hear the tale anon, if you should wish for it. My life was yours, and Columbe my sister’s. I had vowed faith to you both, and so came to Agravale. The Bishop’s captain hired my sword. Yet though I served him with a traitorous heart, I won no word of you till yesterday.”

She went nearer to him again, still gazing on his face, and her eyes were on Tristan’s, nor did he waver. So cold did she seem that he felt great shame growing within his heart, for it flashed on him in a moment that she despised this faith of his.

“Tristan,” she said, very solemnly, as though plotting to challenge his honour.

He rose up and faced her with folded arms.

“Tristan,” and there was more passion in her voice, “I have borne much, suffered many things from the evil men have conceived against my soul. Ah, God! I have lived in hell these many weeks. I am a woman, and I am alone. By your manhood, swear to me you will not trick my trust.”

He frowned a little and his mouth hardened.

“Have I not proved my faith?” he said.

“Not yet, not yet.”

“I have dared much. Tell me, have I failed you ever?”

“No, Tristan, no.”

“If you mistrust me, I can return.”

There was so deep a bitterness in his strong voice that she read his honour, and went near to him with her face upturned.

“Tristan, I am half ashamed,” she said.

“Ah, madame, I shall never shame you.”

“No, no.”

“Try me,” he said.

The man was breathing deeply, and she stooped of a sudden and kissed him on the lips. A red wave rushed over Tristan’s face. He stood stiff as a rock, with her hands upon his shoulders, looked in her eyes, and moved not a muscle.

“Madame, I take your gratitude and ask no more.”

“No more?”

“As there is honour in me, I will serve you, and ask no return.”

“Tristan,” she said, with an uprushing of faith, “I can trust at last.”

“God guard us both, madame,” he said very simply. “For your sake, I have been tempted, yet my heart is clean.”

She stood back from him, and covered her eyes for a moment with her arm. At the very gesture a silver circlet upon her wrist caught Tristan’s eye, a coiled snake of tarnished silver, curiously wrought, with emeralds for eyes. Tristan thrust out a hand towards Rosamunde with a strange cry.

“That bracelet!”

She stared in his face, and twisted the thing from off her wrist. Tristan snatched at the circlet of silver, handled it almost with the greed of a miser gloating over some splendid gem.

“Whence had you this?”

His words came sharp and savage as the blows of an armourer’s hammer upon steel.

“Speak,” he said, with a strong gesture of the hand.

“The bracelet I found in a room they gave me here,” she said, “hid in a chest with other stuffs. What is it to you, Tristan, that you pull so wry a face?”

“Madame,” he said, with great passion in his eyes, “I saw this last upon my sister’s arm.”

“Tristan——”

“My God, then, Ogier spoke the truth.”

Rosamunde’s expression changed, like one who hears the stealthy step of an enemy on the grass. Her eyes dilated, her face paled. She thrust out a hand and pointed Tristan to a thicket.

“Pandart comes. Quick, hide.”

“Who is Pandart?”

“My jailer.”

“Then God deliver him,” said Tristan, with his mouth like iron.

CHAPTER XXI

A stout and ungainly being appeared round a thicket of bay trees, like some stout god Pan footing it in Arcady. It was the figure of a little man with a toad-like face, protruding blue eyes, and a great slit of a mouth. A double chin flapped to and fro under his ugly but good-tempered countenance, and his legs were bowed like the staves of a cask.

Pandart, good soul, was a mild man, a man of milk, who feared the Bishop and Ogier his knight. Slow of wit, he took life calmly, and was amazed at nothing so long as he had food. He stopped short when he saw Tristan standing by the White Heretic of the Seven Streams, and blinked his eyes under their penthouses of fat.

The salutation that was accorded him hardly tallied with the good man's temper. Waddling over the grass like a fat and amiable dog, he was taken of a sudden by the throat and hurled flat upon his back. A whirlwind seemed to fill the place. Above him lowered a pale, set face, while a sword's point rested over his heart.

Pandart, shrewdly scared and beaten for breath, lay and blinked at the man who held the sword. His shoulder had been disjointed in the fall, his arm lying twisted under his body; yet, despite the pain of it, he dared not stir, seeing that the bare steel weighed on his ribs. The silver circlet was thrust into his face. Pandart's eyes seemed bewitched by the thing, while Tristan watched him as a dog watches a dog.

Slowly he forced the truth from the man concerning Columbe, whom he had sought from over the sea. Under the point of Tristan's sword, Pandart told what had passed in the hermitage, Columbe's coming and her shaming there, and, last, how she had died by Ogier's hand, to make way for Rosamunde of the Seven Streams. It was a grim tale for a brother's ears, but Tristan heard it to the end.

Then it was that Rosamunde, who watched him, saw his face become as the face of a devil. He reared up his sword over Pandart's carcass, heeding not his whimpering nor his outstretched hand. Rosamunde, waking as from a dream, sprang forward and seized on Tristan's arm.

"Slay him not," she said. "Shall the man suffer for the master's sin?"

Tristan flashed round on her.

"Betwixt them they have slain my sister," he cried. "Am I a woman to

snivel and forgive?”

Without flinching, she met the anger in his eyes, keeping her hold upon his powerful arm.

“Has not Ogier perished at your hand?”

“God did deliver him——”

“Not against this old man can you lift your sword.”

Pandart had slipped aside from under Tristan’s feet. He struggled to his knees and knelt there in the grass, his right arm hanging helpless from the shoulder. Tristan, looking at the grey head and the wrinkled face, relented somewhat, remembering his own sire.

“You shall judge,” he said to Rosamunde, giving her the sword.

She took it and set the point upon the grass.

“Speak with him yet further,” she said. “Have pity on his grey hairs, for the old man has been kind to me.”

She left them there together, while Pandart rose up from the grass and stood before Tristan, holding his maimed arm at the elbow. The anger was melting out of Tristan’s heart, and grief gathered in him as he thought of Columbe’s golden head lying tarnished under the sods.

“Show me the grave,” was all he said.

Pandart, wincing as he walked, led Tristan amid the flowers and fruit trees to where a great cedar stood, and a low green mound received the sunlight streaming through the boughs. Tall cypresses were crowded near, like mutes standing about a grave, while the great cedar’s vaulted gloom made the place solemn as a shrine.

When Tristan had looked long on the green mound in silence, he questioned Pandart further, and received the truth. Ogier had slain Columbe at the Bishop’s bidding, even to make room for Rosamunde, whom they had brought from Agravale. They had buried Columbe there under the light of the moon, with the red rose of death over her heart. Tristan said hardly a word, but suffered Pandart to pass back to the house, where his dame, a thin woman with a querulous face, cringed and waited for him behind the door. Pandart went in and bade her swathe his arm.

Meanwhile Rosamunde walked alone on the terrace-way where the oleanders bloomed in their stone jars. She was a strange woman, this Lady of the Seven Streams, devout yet passionate, gracious yet ever too enamoured of her pride. Perverse and incomprehensible, half shrew, half saint, beautiful even in her perversity, she was destined to pain those who gave her love. Jealous of her liberty, she would go shackled by a whim, provided the whim was of her

own forging. Tristan she had believed dead these many months, and Tristan loved her. As a woman, she knew that well. Yet she had ordained it in her heart that Tristan's love was mere summer madness, a boy's love, beneath her pride.

Columbe his sister, then, was dead. Of the white-faced child from Purple Isle Rosamunde had had no knowledge. She had often gazed at the fresh-tufted mound under the cedar, but Pandart had kept silence and betrayed nothing. She felt a woman's pity for this blue-eyed child reft from her home, bruised by the passions of a ruffian crew, done to death in this wild hermitage. The truth revealed to her her own real peril and the grim depths of Jocelyn's perfidy.

Anon, she left the terrace and passed towards the cedar. Infinite thought dwelt in her large eyes, a beautiful wistfulness upon her mouth. Coming to the cypresses, she stood to listen. A sound, deep and significant, quickened the look of pity on her face. She stood open-mouthed, listening to the sound of a strong man weeping. There was an almost godly pathos in those tears. The truth thrilled Rosamunde to the core of her red heart, made her lips quiver, her eyes grow hot.

Tristan weeping! This great warm-hearted creature broken down by the touch of death! She listened with tingling ears, half ashamed of prying upon such sorrow, for the sound awed her utterly, dethroned the pride from out her soul. All the deep instincts of her womanhood awoke, tremulous and tender, poignant with another's pain.

By sudden impulse she pushed past the cypresses, stood under the huge shadows of the cedar. Tristan was lying full length upon the grave, his face hidden within his arms. She saw his shoulders rise and fall, and he still had the silver circlet gripped in his right hand. Rosamunde stood impotent, hesitating to violate such grief as this.

Presently the man grew calmer, and the passion seemed to pass like a storm over the sea. Perhaps some spirit voice stilled the deep waters, the cry of the Christ to foaming Galilee. Rosamunde, moving over the grass, stooped, touched Tristan's shoulder with her hand.

He twisted round like one smitten with a hot iron, and there was a shadow as of anger on his face. It was shame to a strong man such as Tristan to be caught with tears upon his cheeks. He rose up and knelt beside the grave, propping himself upon one arm. Rosamunde's hand was still upon his shoulder; his other arm he held before his eyes.

"Madame," he said sullenly, "must you stare upon my weakness thus?"

"Tristan——"

"Leave me."

“Ah, may I not share your sorrow?”

She knelt down suddenly at his side, even like a mother, and drew the arm from before his face. He did not resist her, though he frowned a little.

“Tristan, you have been noble towards me in your faith,” she said; “may I not show a woman’s gratitude? Is there shame in receiving this?”

He looked in her eyes, but did not look for long, for there was still some bitterness within his heart. Was it not for Rosamunde that Columbe his sister had been done to death?

“Rosamunde,” he said, speaking slowly her name, “the wounded bear must lick his wounds and growl out his fury in some lonely den.”

“Ah,” she pleaded, “you grudge my gratitude to you for all.”

“Madame, I cannot parcel out my grief.”

“What of your vengeance—can I not share in that?”

It was a lash of the tongue suited to rouse such a man as Tristan. The speech was quick and swiftly sped. Tristan sprang from the grass like one who heard a faint voice calling from the grave.

“Vengeance—God hear me—yes!” he cried.

He stood there above Rosamunde and the grave, breathing heavily, the muscles showing in his powerful neck, his face transfigured for the moment. Taking the snake of silver, he wound it about his wrist, made a great vow with his hands uplifted to high Heaven.

“Never shall this poor relic leave this arm,” he said, “till it has hurled down Agravale into the dust.”

CHAPTER XXII

Evening descended, and the green valley was full of golden light. Afar on the hills the great trees dreamed, dome on dome, touching the transient scarlet of the west. Ilex and cedar stood like sombre giants in a shimmering sea. The eastern slopes gleamed in the sun, a cataract of leaves plunging into gloom. The forest was full of shadows and mysterious streams of gold, and a great silence shrouded the wilderness save for the restless thunder of the stream.

Tristan had gone to bring the horses to a thicket on the western bank near the island. Moreover, he had played the Samaritan to Pandart, had twisted the disjointed head of the bone back into the socket, even as he had learnt the trick from a smith in Purple Isle. With the calm of the declining day, some measure of peace had fallen upon Tristan's soul. He was a sanguine being, brave in a rallying, quick to recover heart. Columbe was dead, and he had wept for her. Vengeance was to be thenceforth his life's purpose.

And Rosamunde? Tristan had discovered comfort in her presence there, for love takes beauty as a balm into its breast. He had great hopes and passionate prophecies in his heart. Rosamunde had knelt by him; her hand had touched his hand. God, how his lips still thrilled to the magic of her kiss! And those eyes, were they not wonderful, passing the burnished stars in the dark firmament? There was great awe of her in Tristan's heart, great joy in her rich beauty, faith to defend her against man and beast.

As he came from watering his horses at the stream, he heard the sound of a woman singing, for Rosamunde walked in the garden amid the vines and pomegranates, chanting some sorrowful legend of lost love. Pandart had shown Tristan a rough bridge across the stream, where giant boulders had been set as stepping-stones betwixt the western grassland and the island. There was a narrow postern giving entry through the wall. Tristan stood at the gate and listened. Above the thunder of the foaming stream the rich voice clambered, strong and clear. Even the great golden vault of heaven seemed full of the echoes of that passionate song.

He found Rosamunde seated on the terrace-way where the oleanders bloomed. Under the stone bridge the water foamed and bubbled, the ferns and moss green and brilliant above the foam. About her rose the knolls of the gold-fruited trees. Farther, the forests climbed into the glory of the heavens.

She ceased singing as Tristan came to her, put the lute aside, made room

for him on the long bench of stone. There was a tinge of petulance on her red mouth, the pathetic perverseness of a heart that loved not by the will of circumstance. Rosamunde was as a woman deceived by dreams. She desired the moon in the person of a man, and since fate bowed not to her desire, she turned her back in anger upon the world.

For Tristan she felt great pity, honest gratitude, but the memory of Samson blinded her to deeper imaginings. That Tristan loved her, being a woman, she knew full well. And yet she feared him for this very love, stiffened her perverseness against his strength.

Tristan sat on the stone seat and looked at her with his honest eyes. To Rosamunde there was a love therein, a love that she could not fathom. The look troubled her, seeing that she had no echo in her heart.

"Tristan, I have words for you," she said.

"Say on," he answered her, his eyes fixed solemnly upon her face.

Tristan had served her well, better than man had ever served before. Yet he had raised no such image in her heart as Samson the Heretic had built therein. To Rosamunde, Tristan was still but a generous boy; for she had not comprehended the godlier manhood enshrined behind his youth. He was silent, slow of speech, ignorant in the subtler sense; and feeling herself the wiser of the twain, she did not hesitate to air her wisdom.

"You will sail for Purple Isle?" she said.

He flashed a keen look at her, and his face fell.

"Purple Isle is far from me as yet," he answered.

"What would you, then?" she asked. "Believe me, Tristan, I will not hinder you. We must part, both of us. There are other claims upon my soul."

"Madame, Jocelyn still lives."

"And you will deal with him—what then?"

He did not answer Rosamunde for a moment. His eyes were troubled, and he looked like one whose thoughts were buffeted by a strong wind. Above them the zenith mellowed to a deeper gold, and they had the noise of waters in their ears.

"Rosamunde," he said at last, "what would you with me? Am I not pledged to guard your honour?"

"Ah," she said, drooping her lashes, "I will give you your liberty, Tristan, soon enough. I shall not clog your years."

"Madame, what purpose have you in your heart?"

There was almost a strain of fierceness in his voice, the tone of a man

tortured by suspense. Rosamunde looked at him, saw love upon his face, like a sunset streaming through a cloud. She pitied him for a moment, but hardened her heart the more.

“Tristan, I am weary of the world,” she said.

“Weary, madame, when you are free?”

“Who is free in life? I am fearful of the ruffian passions of the world, of lusts and terrors, ay, even of love itself. Life seethes with turbulence and the great throes of wrath. I would be at peace. I would give myself to God.”

Tristan rose up suddenly, and began to stride to and fro before her. He loved Rosamunde, knew it in that moment with all the strongest fibres of his heart. He had hoped too much, trusted too much to the power of his own faith. He turned and faced her there, calm outwardly, miserable within.

“Must this thing be?” he asked her.

There was such deep wistfulness in those words of his that she bent her head and would not look into his face.

“Tristan,” she said, “I pray you plead no further with my heart. I shall turn nun; there is the truth.”

“As you will, madame,” he answered; “ ’tis not for me to parley with your soul.”

He stood motionless with head thrown back, his eyes gazing upon the darkening windows of the east. The sound of the running waters surged in his ears; the colours and odours of the place seemed to faint into the night. As for Rosamunde, she moved never a muscle. The man’s great faith seemed to fill her with a gradual shame.

“Tristan,” she said at last, “have I not said that I am weary of the world, its passions and its inconstant smiles? Guard me for one short week, and I will ask no more.”

There was that inexplicable perversity in her heart that at certain moments makes a woman traitorous to her own desires. Rosamunde, passionate pessimist, beckoned her own fate on with a bitterness that Tristan could not fathom.

“Listen,” she said. “In the province of the Seven Streams there stands the great convent of Holy Guard, set on a headland above the sea. ’Tis many leagues south of Joyous Vale, by the great river that parts our province from Duchess Lilias’s lands. The Papists have spared the place, since Samson was never there. Thither, Tristan, shall you take me. I will turn nun, and take the veil.”

Tristan watched her, listening like a man to the reading of his own doom.

Rosamunde did not look at him. Her fair head was bowed down over her knees.

“Since this is your desire,” he said to her, “I am content to see you bulwarked from the world.”

“Tristan, you will take me to Holy Guard?”

“Madame, have I not promised?”

CHAPTER XXIII

Tristan was astir early with the coming of the day. He passed over the stream, saddled and bridled the horses for the morning's sally. The grass was drenched with dew; the woods towered heavenwards with a thousand golden peaks, while in the valley the river echoed back the light, chanting sonorously as it slid under the trees.

Tristan was very solemn about the eyes that morning. He looked like a man who took little joy in life, but worked that he might ease his heart. He watched the sun climb over the leafy hills, saw the clouds tread the heavens, heard the thunder of the stream. There was life in the day and wild love in the woods. Yet from this world of passion and delight he was an exile; nay, rather, a pilgrim therein fettered by a heavy vow. Strong man, he was to bear the Grail of Love through all these wilds, yet might never look thereon, nor quench his thirst.

He passed back into the garden with dead Ogier's sword under his arm. Columbe's grave lay steeped in sunlight, a-glitter with the dew upon the grass. Tristan took Ogier's sword, set it upright in the midst of the grave, knelt down and prayed there, his face bowed within his folded arms. He swore that Ogier's sword should rust in the grass till Jocelyn should rest in his spilt blood.

As Tristan knelt there, Rosamunde came out to him from Pandart's house. She was cloaked in green for riding, the crimson-lined hood turned back upon her shoulders. Her golden head gleamed bright as yellow gillyflower in the sun, yet her looks were distraught and somewhat sullen. Tristan rose to meet her. They kept their distance, seemed fearful of looking in each other's eyes.

"Tristan, you are ready?"

"I have saddled the horses," he said.

She read the heroism in his heart, the bitterness of the faith she compelled from him. The truth troubled her, since it shamed her also; for Tristan had grief enough, as she knew well.

"Pandart has prepared us food," she said.

"Pandart must speak with me. See yonder sword, Rosamunde; the blade must bide there till I come again."

"Whose is the sword?" she asked.

"Dead Ogier's," he answered her, frowning and clenching his teeth.

Pandart came out to them from the house, and cringed to Tristan like a beaten hound. He had a leather wallet under his arm, a water-flask in his hand. Tristan took him by the shoulder, thrust him towards the grave.

"See yonder sword?" he said.

"Ay, sir, I see it."

" 'Tis dead Ogier's sword. Pluck it thence, and the dead shall rise. Mark me, I return again to take that blood relic from my sister's grave. Touch yonder sword, and by heaven and hell, you shall pay the price."

"I'll not meddle," said Pandart, with his mouth agape.

Tristan and Rosamunde made no more tarrying. They crossed the stream, Pandart following with their meagre baggage. Tristan strapped the wallet and water-flask to his saddle, and lifted Rosamunde to Ogier's horse. Then they took leave of Pandart and the island in the stream, and riding northwards, plunged into the woods.

All that day Tristan strove and struggled with his youth, his great heart beating fast and loud under his steel hauberk. Love was at his side, robed in crimson and green; her hair blinded him more than the noon brightness of the sun. As for her eyes, he dared not look therein, lest they should tempt him to deceive his honour. Silence bewitched the pair as though they were half fearful of each other's thoughts.

Tristan spoke little, keeping his distance, as though mistrusting his own tongue. As for Rosamunde, the same passionate perversity possessed her heart, and though she pitied Tristan, she pitied him silently and from afar.

The first night they lodged them in a beech wood where dead leaves spread a dry carpet under the boughs. Tristan made a bed of leaves at the foot of a great tree. He spread a cloak and saddle-cloth for Rosamunde's comfort, made as though to leave her alone in the wood.

"Tristan," she said suddenly, looking slantwise at his face.

He turned and stood waiting.

"You have given me your cloak."

"A mere rag, Rosamunde; 'twill keep the cold from you."

"What of yourself?"

"I shall not need it," he said to her, "for I shall not sleep to-night. I keep watch and guard you. Have no fear."

She sighed, hung her head, sat down at the foot of the tree. The man's unselfish faith shamed her more and more. Perhaps, in her perversity, she strove to love him the less for the rough simplicity of his good faith. His very

patience hardened her discontent.

Tristan, with a last look, left her there, and wandered away into the woods. A full moon climbed in the east, and the wide land was smitten with her mystery. The valleys were as lakes of glimmering mist, the hills like icy pinnacles gleaming towards the stars. The forest glades were white under the moon; the trees, tall, sculptured pyramids, their trunks as of ebony inlaid with pearl wherever the moonlight splashed the bark. The silence of the wilderness was as the silence of a windless sea.

Tristan wandered in the woods, his heart full of the strange, sad beauty of that summer night. The stars spoke of Rosamunde; the trees had her name unuttered on their lips. What was this woman that she should bring such bitterness into his life? Were there not others in the world as fair as she, with lips as red and eyes as magical? Strangeness; mystery. She was one with the moon, a goddess shrined in the gloom of forests dim. White and immaculate, beautifully strange, she was as an elf-child fated to doom men to despair.

Tristan passed back, found her asleep under the tree. He stood beside her, gazed on the sleeping face. There was silent faith in that slumber; trust in the man who guarded her honour. The moonlight streamed on the upturned face, shining like ivory amid the gleam of her hair. How white her throat was, how her bosom rose and fell with the long pale hands folded thereon.

A sudden warmth flooded Tristan’s heart, and youth cried in him like a desirous wind. Should this beauty be mured in stone, this red rose be hid by convent trees? Was she not flesh and blood, born to love and to be loved in turn—and what was life but love and desire?

He crept near on his knees, hung over her breathlessly, gazing on her face. God, but to wake her with one long kiss, to feel those white arms steal round his neck! They were alone, the two of them, under the stars. For many minutes Tristan hung there like a man tottering on a crag betwixt sea and sky. Passion whimpered in him; his heart smote fast. Yet even as he crouched over Rosamunde asleep, some dream or vision seemed to trouble her soul. Her hands stirred, her lids quivered, her breath came fast betwixt her lips. A shadow as of pain passed over the moonlit face. Tristan, motionless, heard her utter a low cry, saw tears gleaming upon her cheeks.

Pity, the strong tenderness of his nobler self, rushed back into the deeps as a wave from a cliff. The black thoughts flew from his heart like bats frightened by the light of the sun. Great shame seized on Tristan; he fell down at the foot of a tree and prayed.

CHAPTER XXIV

The fifth day towards evening Tristan and Rosamunde saw the sea, a wild streak of troubled gold under the kindling cressets of the west. Beneath them lay a valley full of tangled scrub and wind-worn trees. Westwards rose a great rock thrusting its huge black bastions out into the sea. Upon this rock rose the towers and pinnacles of Holy Guard, smitten with gold, wrapped in mysterious vapour. Into the east stretched a wilderness of woods, dim and desolate, welcoming the night.

Tristan and Rosamunde rode out from the woods towards the sea, while in the west the sun sank into a bank of burning clouds. The trees were wondrous green in the slant light; the whole world seemed bathed in strange ethereal glory. Holy Guard upon its headland stood like black marble above the far glimmerings of the sea.

Tristan le Sauvage rode with his eyes fixed on the burning clouds. Rosamunde was watching him with strange unrest. Since that first night in the woods he had held aloof from her, had spoken little, had harnessed himself with an iron pride. Yet at times, when his eyes had unwillingly met hers, she had seen the sudden gleam therein of a strong desire. She had watched the dusky colour rise on Tristan's sunburnt face, the deep-drawn breaths that ebbed and flowed under the man's hauberk. Though his mouth was as granite, though he hid his heart from her, she knew full well that he loved her to the death. The fine temper of his faith had humiliated and even angered her. Though his despair deified her vanity with heroic silence, the man's courage made her miserable from sheer sympathy and shame.

They crossed a small stream and came to a sandy region where stunted myrtles clambered over the rocks, and tamarisk, tipped as with flame, waved in the wind. Storm-buffeted and dishevelled pines stood thicketed upon the hillocks. The place was sombre and very desolate, silent save for the low piping of the wind.

Neither Rosamunde nor Tristan had spoken since they left the woods and sighted Holy Guard. The man pointed suddenly with his hand towards the cliffs, the light of the setting sun streaming upon his white and solemn face.

"Yonder is Holy Guard," he said to her.

There was a species of defiance in the cry, as though the man's soul challenged fate. His heart's cords were wrung in the cause of honour.

Rosamunde quailed inwardly like one ashamed, her lips quivered, her eyes for the moment were in peril of tears.

"Yonder is Holy Guard," she echoed in an undertone. "There I may escape the world and be at peace. Tristan, you have served me well."

"Ah, madame," he said, with increasing bitterness, "I have done my duty. Remember me, I pray you, in your prayers."

"I shall not forget," she answered him.

"Nor I," he said, with some grim emphasis.

A narrow causeway curled upwards towards the towers upon the rock. The sea had sunk behind the cliffs; the sky faded to a less passionate colour. Rosamunde's eyes were on the walls of Holy Guard, and she seemed lost in musings as they rode side by side.

"Tristan," she said suddenly, as they neared the sea, "think not hardly of me; rather pity me in your heart. Strife and unrest are everywhere. It is better to escape the world."

"Better, perhaps," he said, with his eyes upon the clouds.

"Forget that there is such a woman as Rosamunde," she said. "In Holy Guard I shall strive to forget the past."

"Who can forget?" he muttered. "While life lasts, memories live on."

They had come to the causeway where the track wound like a black snake towards the golden heights. Not a sound was there save the distant surging of the sea. The distorted trees thrust out their hands, and seemed to cry *Vale* to the two upon the road. At the foot of the causeway, Tristan turned his horse. He took one long look at Rosamunde, then gazed beyond her into the hurrying night.

"God give you peace, madame," he said, with deep vibrations in his powerful voice.

She stretched out a hand.

"Tristan, you will not leave me yet?"

"Ah," he cried, with sudden great bitterness, "is it so easy to say farewell?"

The man's strong despair swept over her like a wind. She sat mute and motionless upon her horse, gazing at him helplessly like one half dazed. On the cliff Holy Guard beckoned with the great cross above its topmost pinnacle. Rosamunde shivered, strove with herself, was perverse as of yore.

"What am I that you should crave for me?" she said. "I have but little beauty, and am growing old. Leave me, Tristan; forget and forgive. I have no heart to surrender to the world."

Tristan was white to the lips as he stiffened his manhood to meet the wrench.

“Rosamunde, I would have loved you well,” he said. “No matter. God cherish you, and give you peace.”

“Tristan,” she said, leaning towards him from the saddle.

He gave a hoarse cry, covered his face with his hand, would not look at her despite her pity.

“My God!” he said, “say no more to me. It is enough.”

He smote his horse with the spurs, wheeled from her, passed by without a look. His face was as the face of a man who rode to meet his death.

“Tristan!” she cried to him, but he would not hear her. She saw him plunge to a gallop, saw the shield betwixt his shoulders dwindle into the night.

“Tristan!” she cried again, with sudden loneliness seizing on her heart. “Tristan, come back to me! Tristan, Tristan!”

The cry was vain, for he would not hear her, deeming her pity more grievous than her scorn. Despair spurred him on; the black night called. Rosamunde watched him vanish into the increasing gloom, while on the cliffs Holy Guard stood like the great gate of death.

CHAPTER XXV

Tristan rode through the woods from Holy Guard that autumntide fierce of heart and grim of face. He held northwards for Tor's Tower by the rugged coast that closed the western sea, glad of his own savage strength and the rude wilderness that suited his temper. The elemental fiercenesses of life had waxed within him, and action came as a balm to his raw and rebellious spirit. With Rosamunde gone from the heavens like the chastening moon, primitive darkness had fallen around. The glimmering stars of chivalry were faint above. The wild beasts seemed akin to Tristan; he fought and slew, was even as they.

In this wise, gaunt and wind-tanned, with rusty hauberk and unshaven chin, he came after many days to Tor's Tower, where Samson had gathered the folk of the Seven Streams. It was a wintry evening, grey and desolate, with clouds racing in the heavens and the sea rushing towards the shore. In the woods a shower of leaves were falling, dancing and flickering to the piping of the wind.

At Tor's Tower the cry went up from the rude camp in the meadows to the grey walls upon the cliff: "Tristan has come, Tristan le Sauvage!"

Savage indeed seemed the wanderer who met the greetings of these iron men, took their rough hand-grips and the waving of their steel. Unshaven, sullen, and fierce of eye, with his black hair tangled by the wind and rain, he was no gay pilgrim on his great raw-boned horse. Tristan climbed the causeway with his face towards the sea, and dismounted before the castle gate.

Samson stood there to greet him with his hands outstretched, a warm light on his powerful face.

"Welcome, brother, out of the south."

They stood and looked into each other's eyes like men to whom silence meant more than words. Tristan's mood could be deciphered from his face, with its pursed up mouth and sullen eyes. Samson read the truth thereon, how much Tristan had left in the Southern Marches.

They passed together into the tower, and climbing the stairs, looked out over the battlements towards the sea. Below them stretched the marshes and the sandy shore, and in the east the woods waved their reddened banners against the night. Samson leant against the parapet and watched Tristan as he stood beside him.

"You have failed, brother?" he said at last.

The younger man's face seemed to grow the more sullen. Though he had lost the buoyant zest of youth, he had gained more of the grim purpose of manhood. It was the face of a fanatic that Samson watched.

"I have failed," he said, simply enough, "failed and yet won, as fate did order it. The Lady Rosamunde I rescued out of Jocelyn's hands, and set her in Holy Guard by the sea, whither I rode with her at her command."

"Holy Guard, brother?"

"Rosamunde's heart was towards the place. What could my ugly face make of love?"

On that wind-swept tower Tristan told Samson of his wanderings in the south. He recounted how he had joined the Bishop's men and sojourned in Agravale two months or more. He told how he had ridden with Jocelyn and Ogier to the madhouse in the mere, how he had slain Ogier, and found Rosamunde and his sister's grave. Lastly, he confessed to Rosamunde's weariness of the world, and told how he had left her in Holy Guard by the sea.

When he had ended, Samson spoke to him, looking tenderly on his face.

"You are with us yet, brother, despite the past?"

"My sword is yours——"

"Till we have slain Jocelyn."

"And hurled down Agravale into the dust."

They passed down from the tower, for the wind was keen and the night was gathering in the east. Samson had news upon his tongue, and as they paced the court together, he told Tristan of all that had passed since he had wandered in the south. A champion had risen up to preserve the province of the Seven Streams and to fling a broad shield over the broken land.

Blanche, Duchess of the Northern Wilds, had fallen in the past under the spell of Samson's preaching, and with her nobles she had received the heresy. That same summer the noise of the dark deeds done in the province of the Seven Streams had come to her over the southern borders. Being a woman of heroic temper, she had risen in wrath over the burning of Ronan's town and the slaughter Jocelyn's men had made in the land. She had summoned her liegemen to her in her city by the northern sea, and had put before them the wrongs of the Seven Streams.

"For," quoth she to her knights and freemen, "Pope or no Pope, let us end this butchery. Since our lord the King cannot keep peace in his provinces, by our Lord Christ in heaven, I, Blanche the Duchess, will stay the strong from murdering the weak."

Now the King who ruled those lands was but the creature of a lawless

court, the tool of fair women, the puppet of the priests. His great vassals flouted him when they would, and made war on each other like petty kings, filling the land with war and turmoil. Hence Blanche that autumntide had crossed her borders, and daring her suzerain to hinder her, had marched with her men for the Seven Streams. Of all this Samson told Tristan as they paced the court under the darkening sky.

Thus early that winter, at Samson's desire, Tristan rode out with a hundred spears to bring the Duchess Blanche to Tor's Tower by the sea. It was gusty weather, with the grey sky smitten through with stormy light and the woods scattering their last largesse of gold to the wind. Tristan rode over the moors with his hundred men, and about noon on the second day saw the lances of the Duchess's men pricking along a sandy track that wound amid knolls of heather towards the sea.

Tristan, having sent forward a herald, watched their oncoming from the crest of a low hill. A woman rode in the near van, mounted on a great white horse, its harness of scarlet leather bossed with gold. She was clad in green, and carried a light spear with a silver pennon tongueing from its throat. Tristan doubted not that she was the Duchess, the most splendid woman of her age, who had saved her duchy by her own good courage from the greedy onslaughts of many neighbouring lords. She had built up a strong power in the north, and her people worshipped her almost as a saint.

Tristan rode down and met the Duchess at the head of her men. She was a big woman, whose jet black hair was thickly streaked with silvery strands. Her face was as fresh as a young girl's, with but few wrinkles about the eyes that beamed and flashed over the world. From her stately throat to her large white hands, she was full of rich and vigorous life. No longer young, she had kept her beauty, even as good fruit mellows under the autumn sun.

Tristan bent the knee to her without constraint, for from the first glance he had taken her measure, and marked the queenliness that all true men honoured. She sat on her white horse and looked him over as he stood in the road with his drawn sword set point downwards in the sand. As for Tristan, he felt that the woman's eyes searched and considered his whole heart, and that honour stood for fame before her face.

"So, sir, you are from Tor's Tower?" she said to him, smiling down. "My war-wolves follow me to give Samson succour. Think you we can make the place by night?"

"It is some ten leagues to Tor's Tower," Tristan answered her, "and too much marching will tire your men."

"Let it be on the morrow, then," she said; "he is in no need of us for a day,

I trow."

She bade Tristan mount and ride at her side, while the long spears bristled over the sandy heath, and the banner of the Bleeding Cross flapped in the wind. Behind them over the dusky slopes came the rough warriors of the north, bronzed, bearded men, big of bone and burly of limb. Their axes hung at their saddle bows, their long shields blinked towards the sea.

The Duchess questioned Tristan as he rode at her side concerning Samson's power and the state of the Seven Streams. There were many strong places that had been garrisoned by the Bishop's men, such as Sanguelac and Merdin and Marvail by the fords of the Lorient. Tristan told her all he knew as to Jocelyn's garrisons and Samson's fortune. He discovered that the Duchess was well versed in war, that she had a stout heart and a generous instinct. She recalled to him Rosamunde whom he had left in Holy Guard, save that she was older by some fifteen years, and had more strength and sureness of courage.

All that day Tristan rode at her side, under the ken of her fearless eyes. She was not a woman a true man could dissemble with, for she possessed that strange charm that forbade reserve, that natural sincerity that commanded trust. Before many hours had passed Tristan's tongue was running briskly as for some friend. His strong face and his grim manner pleased the woman, for she was one who hated a perfumed sprig, and could not suffer a honeyed tongue.

Thus, gracious lady that she was, she soon had Tristan at her service. The man told her much of his life, how he had sailed in search of his sister, and fallen in with the heretics of the Seven Streams. He told her also of his sojourn in the south, how he had found his sister's grave and had sworn vengeance over it against Jocelyn of Agravale. But of Rosamunde of Ronan's town he said but little, for he would not speak of that which concerned his heart.

They came that night to a lonely tower on the hills, and lodged there until the morning. Blanche had gathered that Tristan was no knight, but a mere soldier of circumstance, whose honest sword was of more worth than an ancient title. Therefore she called him before her that same evening and gave him knighthood at her hands. On the morrow they marched on towards the sea, and saw Tor's Tower rise on its rocky height.

CHAPTER XXVI

In Agravale there was much blowing of trumpets, much burnishing of arms. The women of the city had drawn forth all their gay stuffs, their gold tissues and fripperies, and much scarlet cloth. The streets teemed with soldiery gathered from all the southern baronies, and there were many knights and nobles in Agravale, the city was full of the clangour of war. The hostels were full to over-flowing; each house was a tavern where the wine ran red.

The dragon of Heresy had lifted its head once more out of the dust, and the Papal spies had come in from the Seven Streams, telling how Samson was gathering men at Tor's Tower by the sea. The tidings had gone out through the Southern Marches that a second crusade had been ordained by Heaven against these whelps who blasphemed the Church. The Pope had despatched his legates through the duchy, threatening the half-hearted, blessing the zealous. The Great Father had sent a sacred banner to Agravale, consecrated to the cause of the soldiers of God. The Golden Keys of Heaven flew thereon. Jocelyn, who had been ordained Bishop of the Crusade, had set the banner in St. Pelinore's great church, where the people might gaze on it and bless God and the Pope.

One winter noon Jocelyn walked in the cloisters of the abbey of St. Pelinore, with Christopher the Canon at his side. For an hour they had been stalking to and fro on the sunny side, with the carved heads on the corbels grinning one against another. Jocelyn and the Canon were alone in the cloisters; more than once a deep chuckle had seemed to answer the grinning faces above.

"Brother, we must prevent the ignorant from blaspheming," said the Bishop, with a mobile smile upon his mouth.

Christopher sniggered.

"Ah, my lord, I have had such troubles myself. The man must be muzzled, in the cause of the Church."

"Drink the wine and break the pitcher, eh?—such is the fable. This watch-dog of mine has come crawling to my feet. I can spurn him anon, when the truth is out."

Christopher comforted his superior with the ready glibness of an underling. He was a man of the world in the broader sense, had the wit to ignore unflattering veracity.

“David, my lord,” he said, “I regard as one of the most comforting figures in all history. As for St. Augustine, he enjoyed his youth. ’Tis the main purpose of a man’s life that tells. Many a river errs right and left before it finds the sea.”

“A beneficent doctrine,” quoth the other, with a glint of the eye.

Pandart had come through the wilds to Agravale, and had claimed private audience of the Bishop that day. The man had waited these three months in the island hermitage for Jocelyn and his men—who never came. The Bishop had sojourned over long in the madhouse in the mere, and had returned to Agravale without riding to speak with Rosamunde of the Seven Streams. He had sent a servant to warn Ogier and Tristan of his return, but the man had lost himself in the woods, and had trudged back to Agravale, weary and half-starved. Each day Jocelyn had thought to hear Ogier’s deep voice thundering through the court. Later he had scented treason, and had sent a company of “spears” to seek out the river hermitage and to bring Pandart to Agravale.

That same noon, Jocelyn, returning from the cloisters of St. Pelinore, found Pandart awaiting him in the private oratory of the palace. Sable curtains shut out the daylight. The coloured mosaics on floor and wall glimmered in the light of a brazen lamp. Jocelyn barred the door so that he should be alone with his minion before the little altar. He seated himself in a carved chair, so that his face was in the shadow.

“Come, whelp, what have you to tell?”

Pandart prostrated himself, kissed the Bishop’s shoe, remained kneeling with his clumsy head bowed down between his shoulders. He dreaded the truths that were upon his tongue, and it was only when Jocelyn spurned him that he began to speak.

“Ogier is dead, my lord,” he said.

Jocelyn started in his chair, held out a quivering arm, half in wrath, half in dismay.

“Ogier dead!”

“Sire, I found his carcass in the woods; wolves had mangled it, but I knew the face.”

“Whose hand did this?”

“Tristan his comrade, who served in the guard.”

Jocelyn fingered his smooth round chin. The natural cunning had crept into his face; he hid his wrath and dissembled fear, and for the moment his voice lost its priestly drawl.

“What of the woman Rosamunde?” he asked.

Pandart grovelled on the stones.

“This same Tristan took her from us.”

“Ye gods, man, did you not fight?”

“My lord, this Tristan slew Ogier; he was too great for me. He would have slain me also had not the Lady Rosamunde held his hand.”

Jocelyn remained silent, staring down at Pandart’s face with its heavy servility and gaping fear. The man’s words had an import he could not ignore. Ogier, venal champion of the Church, was dead, and Rosamunde had escaped with Tristan into the woods.

“What more?” he asked anon, his black eyes gleaming in the light of the lamp, as he saw that Pandart had not ended his confession.

“My lord, concerning Columbe, whom Ogier slew——”

Jocelyn twisted in his chair, for the theme was bitter, and beyond his dignity. The realisation of Pandart’s knowledge was no pleasant draught to the episcopal palate.

“Whelp, what of Columbe?”

“This same Tristan was the girl’s brother.”

“Her brother?”

“He had tricked you in Agravale that he might learn the truth.”

Jocelyn started up and began to stride to and fro within the narrow compass of the walls. His hands played with the gold cross at his breast, and he frowned often, worked his white teeth upon his full red lip. Pandart knelt before the empty chair, watching his master with furtive awe. He had dreaded this truth-telling for many weeks.

“Well, fool, what else?”

Jocelyn stood and scowled at Pandart, evil prophet that he was. It was in his mood to vent his viciousness upon the man, since he was impotent to harm those who had baulked his passions.

“What more would my lord know?”

“Ape, what followed? Where is this Rosamunde?”

“The man Tristan rode with her into the woods.”

“Whither?”

Pandart spread his hands; his broad mouth twitched.

“My lord, I overheard certain words of theirs,” he said, “while I played eavesdropper in the garden. The woman spoke of the abbey of Holy Guard by the sea. She would turn nun. The man Tristan vowed to guard her thither.”

“To Holy Guard, eh?”

“Sire, so they said.”

Jocelyn stood awhile in thought, biting his nails, staring at the wall. He dismissed Pandart with certain grim words of warning, scanning his face narrowly for signs of treachery. When the man had gone to the scullion quarters, Jocelyn sent for Nicolon his chamberlain. He told him that Pandart was a spy and a traitor, sent to search out Agravale by the heretics of the Seven Streams. Nicolon understood from the Bishop that he was to poison Pandart that same night.

It was the day of the gathering of the nobles of the Southern Marches at the Duchess’s house, to hear the reading of the Pope’s letter concerning the conduct of the crusade. Jocelyn went thither in his robes of state, his pastoral staff borne before him as he was carried through Agravale on an open litter with a canopy of purple cloth above. The canons and priests of Agravale followed in his train. Behind the clerics came the knights and retainers of the episcopal palace, with the Pope’s sacred banner blowing in their midst. The townsfolk crowded the streets, as the nobles marched through with full panoply of arms, trumpets blowing, spears agleam. The women knelt as Jocelyn was carried by; the men crossed themselves and bared their heads.

“God save the Scourge of the heretics,” ran the cry.

“God save Bishop Jocelyn.”

“God help the south.”

With unctuous sanctity upon his face, Jocelyn was borne through the streets of Agravale. Pomp and colour played around; the iron men of war followed hard on his heels. Yet Jocelyn was deaf to the shouts of the mob, and their superstitious homage failed for the nonce to fire his vanity. A woman’s face shone before the churchman’s eyes, splendid with scorn and unconquerable beauty, and he licked his lips over his unclean thinking.

In the great hall of Dame Lilias’s palace Jocelyn took his episcopal chair beside the Duchess on the dais. His clerks and canons thronged the table below. The benches were crowded with knights and captains, iron men in hauberk and helm. As for Lilias, her vanity had climbed to the occasion, and she had clad herself in a silver hauberk, with a coronet of steel cushioned on her fair hair. A dwarf sword was laid across her lap, as she sat under her canopy, with green lilies blazoned on the scarlet drapings of her chair.

Jocelyn, by sudden inspiration, had moulded the future to his schemes. The plan had come to him as he was carried through the streets of Agravale. Had not the Pope made him the Priest of the Crusade, upon whose prophetic guidance the barons should rest? While his priests sang a psalm, their deep

voices pealing to the roof, Jocelyn sat in his splendid robes, facing the nobles. His countenance was as serene as a little child's.

At the end of the blessing Jocelyn kissed his cross, and began to speak to those assembled of the righteousness of the cause. The Pope's letter was read aloud by one of the clerks, wherein the Pontiff blessed the sons of the Church. Jocelyn spoke eloquently, with burning words. A full pardon for all sins would be given to those who fought in the war. Those who died would be translated to heaven. The province of the Seven Streams was to be divided as spoil, and each common soldier was to have his share.

When this holy bribery had been made plain, Jocelyn diverged to schemes of his own. His tongue was clever enough to sustain the test, for it was the very boldness of his hypocrisy that had ensured men's trust. He told the knights and nobles assembled before him how he had been blessed with a vision concerning the Crusade against the Seven Streams. The men listened with superstitious faith, for it was an age when Christendom had pledged its reason to the Church.

"My brothers," he said, speaking with a loftiness that seemed to scorn deceit, "unworthy though I am of Heaven's favour, I have been counselled strangely in a dream. St. Pelinore stood by me in the midst of the night, even as he has stood by me in the woods and the mountains. 'Son,' he said, 'the Good God shines on the Golden Keys. He shall deliver the heretics into thy hands. First, thou shalt purge me an evil place, even Holy Guard set above the western sea. With shame I speak it—the nuns are wantons, its Abbess a witch. First destroy Holy Guard, then shall God deliver unto you the province of the Seven Streams.' "

The man's hypocrisy kept pace with his theme, and none would have suspected the baser passions that worked beneath. Jocelyn's eyes flashed as he spoke, his face was transfigured as by some heavenly purpose. The vision served him that night with the assembled barons, for who so impious that he should deny the saint who had pointed out Holy Guard as doomed to ruin? It was agreed among them before they dispersed that they should march on Holy Guard as St. Pelinore had said.

CHAPTER XXVII

Holy Guard towered on its great headland as on an island, fronting the surges of the sea. The abbey held the last outjutting of the coast on the side of the province of the Seven Streams. To the south, washing the inner surface of the cliff, the great Gloire came flowing fast, filling the deep craggy valley from shore to shore, swirling under the thousand shadows of its ancient trees.

Holy Guard, piled height on height on its lofty rock, looked over the river mouth where it met the sea. At low tide the headland was surrounded with sands, great golden lawns where purple cloud-shadows raced and played. Beyond were the white-edged breakers and the silvery azure of the sea. Myrtles mantled the rock even to where the spray might fall. From the cliffs and the wild marshes east of Holy Guard the hills rose up, sombre with black oak, pine, and yew. Southwards in clean weather could be seen the peaks of the great White Mountains that parted the Crescent from the Christian Cross.

Holy Guard—black, desolate, and mysterious—had received Rosamunde within its walls. The place was as rugged as the rocks beneath, swept by the sea wind, bleached by the spray. Its gold cross on the chapel spire seemed to glitter over a savage void poised betwixt the clouds and the wild depths beneath. Chasm and valley plunged to the waters. The great forests rolled to mimic the sea.

The Abbess Joan was an austere woman and pitiless, hard of feature as a granite image. She had suffered much in her early youth, had grown the more bitter amid cloistered gloom. The nuns of Holy Guard were grey and rough, shackled by a discipline that coarsened the soul. For them no orchards bloomed, no broad valleys were gilded with easy corn. No music, rich and deep, wreathed round pillar and under painted vault garlands of song and of sacred sound. Holy Guard was dumb, solemn, and saturnine. Its life was as death, its joy worse than sorrow.

As for Rosamunde, full of a passionate misery, she had entered its gate dreaming of chants and the throbbing of bells. She had pictured cloisters full of golden light, gardens where angels might have tended the flowers. Her heart was heavy, yearning for peace, and that infinite calm the world had not given.

Holy Guard might have served a demon, by the fierce and pitiless humour of its heart. Its nuns were as mutes, rough, raw-boned, and sullen. Rosamunde, with her rich soul, was as a queen in a charnel house, mocked by mere

skeletons. The Abbess had received her, portioned her a cell, given her a black gown in place of the blue. She had solemnised her novitiate in the cold grey chapel, whose walls seemed to shut out the warmth of heaven. Toil and travail became her lot. She laboured with the rest in the sour, stony garden, washed the linen, drew water at the well. Her white hands grew rough and red apace; her cheeks became hollow, her bright eyes dim. There were fasts and vigils, penitences galore. The nuns' tongues were bridled save for one hour in the day, and no laughter or joy ever echoed through Holy Guard.

Rosamunde had sought peace there; she discovered shame and bitterness of spirit. Her ways were not the ways of those about her, for these ashy people had forgotten the world with its throes of passion, its pathos, its tears. There were no humble poor to need their alms, no sick and palsied to be cheered and fed. Their creed was narrow and selfish as their lives. The sea and the wilderness hemmed them in; they had grown hard and savage, coarse beyond belief.

A great change came over Rosamunde's heart those months. She began to think much of Tristan and the love he had shown her, how she had tried him and found him a man. These new thoughts solaced her those winter months as she toiled at the well-winch or dug in the garden. Hallowed by memory, Tristan's face had lost its ugliness, gained even a rough beauty as the past sped back. She recalled his great strength, his manliness and honour. Even in the incredulous deeps of her heart, she began to believe that she would have found a finer haven within Tristan's arms than in the wind-swept towers and courts of Holy Guard.

The change was very subtle that worked in her that winter. She disbelieved her own heart at times, scoffed at her imaginings, yet found that they remained. Her mood towards Samson had altered also. It was as the melting of a dream for the passionate reality of life, a fancy that seemed as frail as a spider's gossamer hung with dew. She had worshipped Samson in her impulsive way, even because he had bulked a god among men, a martyr and a prophet.

Moreover, she had been lonely, lonely to death those years in Joyous Vale, and had yearned for the love that had never come. Ronan, her husband, had sickened her soul with his feeble body, his pusillanimous mind. Out of the bitterness of solitude she had conceived romance, and cheated her heart with vain imaginings. Now in Holy Guard she had come by the truth, that a woman's brain was but the vassal of her heart.

Before long she began to curse the day when she had abandoned Tristan for the cloisters of Holy Guard. She had found no comfort within its walls, and though her heart cried out there was no one to comfort her, no one to speak with concerning the past. The place seemed full of desolation and death and

the voice of the wind. She yearned for liberty, even for the troublous and sinful lap of the world. Life, desperate and bitter though it might prove, was fairer far than a living grave.

One evening she stood and watched the sun sinking over the sea as she leant against the parapet of the topmost platform of the place, with the chapel behind her, dark and dim, the cliffs plunging sheer to the sands beneath. Holy Guard was built wall on wall upon the rock, its towers and roofs climbing the rugged slopes. Thus from its heights Rosamunde watched the fires dwindle, the red glow elapse. Blue gloom descended and overarched the sea. The wind gathered and moaned as the stars began to shine in the darkening sky.

An eternal melancholy seemed to cover the world. The clouds lost their crimson shrouds, grew grey and colourless, hurried fast before the wind. There were tears in Rosamunde's eyes as she gazed towards the sea, for she was growing old and her youth was flying; soon she would be as these nuns, haggard, hard-featured, cold of eye. Her heart cried out for some great love. Lacking such love, what was life worth that she should strive to husband it? Even God seemed far from her on that lonely crag, and Christ's face was dark within the walls of Holy Guard.

As she stood brooding, gazing out towards the sea, where the breakers foamed dimly under the deepening night, Julia, Mistress of the Novices, passed by from the chapel with a chain lamp swinging in her hand. It was contrary to the rules for nuns to loiter; when not at work or in chapel or refectory, they were packed in their cells to pray and meditate. Sister Julia was a woman of obscure birth, a coarse, brown-faced scold with the tongue of a Xanthippe. She took much pride in her post as Mistress of the Novices, since she could often hector women of nobler birth. Feminine malice was alive in Holy Guard. Rosamunde had been subjected to a goodly share thereof by reason of her estate and the mere insolence of beauty.

Thus the sister accosted her with no great kindness, glad of an excuse to use her tongue.

"Laggard, to your cell. Draw water for penance on the morrow. You are too often idle for so young a wench."

Rosamunde turned to her with a look of appeal. There were still tears upon her cheeks, and even for the sympathy of this round-backed scold she would have given much, so lonely was she.

"I go, sister," she said. "I was but watching the sun go down, thinking of the years that have gone over my head."

Julia sneered, and tilted her nose. It was well known in Holy Guard that Rosamunde had been of noble birth. The woman, grained with the hypocritic

egotism of that narrow life, had created Rosamunde's downfall with sisterly relish.

"Leave the past alone, girl," she said, with a tightening of her mouth; "it was none too clean and godly, I warrant. I saw court life in Agravale before I found Our Lady here."

"Who would doubt it?" said Rosamunde, with a tinge of scorn.

"Mortify your pride, my wench; we suffer no fire-flies in Holy Guard."

"Nor any charity," said Rosamunde, turning on her heel.

Drawing her gown about her—for the wind was keen—she passed from the terrace down the broad stairway to the lower platform of the abbey. Seeking her cell down gloomy passage-ways and galleries, she sat down on the wood, straw-palleted bed, miserable at heart, cold in body. The blue gloom of the night showed through a chink in the wall, a single star glimmering through with silver irony. The wind whistled into the cell as into the narrow throat of an empty tomb.

Yet while Rosamunde was moping in Holy Guard, grieving for liberty and that love she had lost to the world, Tristan won fame in the Seven Streams as a bold smiter and a hardy knight.

The fierce tune in the man's brain had grown more strident in the winter weather. "Columbe and vengeance," cried a voice, grim and relentless, deep and unceasing. He lived, prayed, dreamt for revenge. Strong and terrible in the fanaticism of his strength, he galloped like a madman over hill and dale. Nothing was too hard for him, nothing impossible. His sword played like lightning through the wilds, for battle and action seemed to ease his soul. He was a man whose heart was filled with fire, before whose eyes swept a mist of blood. Night and noon, Columbe his dead sister seemed to stand and gaze upon his face, and ever he would fancy that he heard her voice amid the rain pelt and the howling wind.

Samson had marched out to drive the scattered garrisons Jocelyn had left from the strong places of the Seven Streams. Tristan was Samson's Talus, his man of iron with the iron flail. Taking Tor's Tower as their fountain-head, they had pushed their forays south and east, smiting sudden blows out of the dark. It was a war of outposts, of scattered sieges, of ambushes in the woods. Honour fell to the swift and the desperate; strength and subtlety went hand in hand.

In such a war as this Tristan grew terrible, a man without pity, one who never tired. Samson had given him two hundred spears, and many of Blanche's best knights were content to serve him. The man with the red shield and the sable pennon became the scourge and terror of Jocelyn's men. Tristan struck mightily and with furious swiftness. One night he fell upon Sanguelac, a strong

place towards the border, scaled the wall alone, for the ladder broke behind him. He sprang down into the court, slew with his axe six men who held the gate, let his own knights in. The place expiated Ronan's town with death and fire.

The following night he fell upon Merdin, a hill tower some seven leagues away. Though an outpost from Sanguelac, its garrison knew nothing of their fellows' fate. They were drinking and dicing when Tristan's men broke in. Such deeds as these spread terror and panic through the breadth of the land, for Tristan came like a storm-wind through the wilds or like an eagle out of the blue.

As for Blanche the Duchess, proud lady that she was, her eyes kindled at the noise of Tristan's deeds. Often she rode with him on raid and foray, content to share the grim chaos of such a war. Was he not a man after her own heart, knighted by the stroke of her own sword? Her face would flush when she heard the sound of Tristan's trumpet over the moors.

Her men whispered together over their camp fires; they loved their Duchess, were fierce and jealous for her honour. Yet there was not a man in their iron ranks who loved not Tristan and swore by his sword. He was a soldiers' man, fearless and hardy, one who could sleep in mud and scale a tower. "Sanguelac," "Merdin," these were his watchwords. The black eagle should lead them towards the south.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The night before the southern troops marched for the north, Agravale gave herself up to riot and revelry. Though it was winter, the days were warm, the townsfolk held a carnival in the gardens of St. Pelinore. The houses were decked with rich cloths and banners, the churches with boughs of cypress and yew and garlands of purple amaranth. Companies of monks passed through the streets with crosses and reliquaries, chanting under the stars.

Such was the prologue in Agravale to the storm-cry of war over the Seven Streams. There was a veneer of sanctity over the venture, a professed piety more sonorous than real. Though the priests paraded the crowded streets, held crosses and relics to the lips of the people, the taverns teemed, as did the houses of infamy. The southern folk were prepared to make war in velvet, and prayed more for plunder than the good of the Church.

The dawn of that winter day came crisp and clear, with a sky like crystal, hills and woods sharply carved against the cloudless blue. The clangour of trumpets woke the town, with its vanes and casements mimicking the dawn. Jocelyn had ordered his Bishop's chair to be set on a mound in the meadows without the western gate. Soon after sunrise he rose and celebrated Mass in the cathedral church of St. Pelinore. Thence from the crowded aisles, with their mail-clad worshippers, he passed in state to his throne in the meadows, a great following of priests chanting at his heels. All Agravale had hurried to the walls and meadows to watch the host march out for the north.

Certain of the southern companies were already under arms in the meadows, their lances rising towards the blue, their shields aflicker in the sun. The black masses were dusted over with colour, while many a banner waved in the wind. Behind the Bishop's chair was planted the Sacred Standard of the Golden Keys, destined to flash benedictions over the soldiers of the Church. A crowd of monks surrounded the knoll where Jocelyn sat, with the precentor of St. Pelinore's to lead the chanting. The walls and housetops, the glistening fields were crowded by the townsfolk in holiday dress.

From the western gate the pomp and panoply of the south poured forth with a sounding of trumpets, a sparkling of pennons. First came Count Reynaud with the knights and spears of Vanclure, some five hundred men in red and green surcoats. Benedict of the Mountains followed hard on their heels, with three hundred spears and a company of archers. The monks about the Bishop's chair raised a wild chant that came as a counterblast to the

clangour of the trumpets. The mailed masses gathered about the Sacred Banner with the Golden Keys. The whole host shouted, tossed up shield and lance, while horns and clarions pierced the din. On the walls the women waved scarves and kerchiefs, their shrill cries mingling with the clamour of war.

Jocelyn, wearing his mitre and bearing his cross, stood before the chair to give the sons of the Church his blessing. He made a noble figure enough in his splendid robes, jewels and rich cloth agleam in the sun. There was a complacent pride on his handsome face; his eyes flashed as he gazed round on these henchmen in steel.

"Sons of the Church," he cried, with cross upraised, "the Holy Father has blessed you—behold here his banner. We march to uphold the decrees of the Church, to hurl down heresy, to destroy the wicked. See to it, sirs, that your swords shine bright. The saints in paradise shall watch over your souls."

The men cheered him lustily enough.

"God for His Church!" they cried.

"St. Pelinore for Agravale."

With a pealing of trumpets, the whole host was soon in motion on the great white road, pennon and casque pouring into the solemn shade of the woods. Horn answered horn, bugle cried to bugle; the trampling of the horses thrilled the bright air. Shields and surcoats shone and shimmered under the dark pines and ilexes. Thus the Sacred Banner went out from Agravale to march on Holy Guard and the Seven Streams.

As for Jocelyn, his mood changed with the moods of men. He passed back to his palace to doff his pontificals for more worldly gear. Since he was to play the shepherd to this warlike horde, he would act in keeping with the enterprise before him. The cross and mitre were well enough in Agravale; Jocelyn had determined to discard them for attributes more temporal. He donned a trellised coat and a steel casque, girded on a long sword, took an embossed shield. He would lead his own household knights against the heretics, strike a blow for the Banner with the Golden Keys.

Three days' hard marching brought Benedict, who held the van, within three leagues of the River Lorient, where it parted the Southern Marches from the province of the Seven Streams. It was here that certain grey-faced, mud-bespattered riders fell in with the vanguard as they came riding south. They were the remnant of a garrison that had been driven out of Marvail by Samson the Heretic, a town beyond the fords of the River Lorient. The men told how Tristan le Sauvage stormed hither and thither through the Seven Streams, falling on outposts, putting garrisons to the sword. They told also how Samson and his heretics had been reinforced from the north, though they were ignorant

that Blanche the Duchess had herself taken the field.

With such news to set him cogitating, Jocelyn halted his banners south of the Lorient, and took counsel with his captains as to what their schemes should be. To strike at Holy Guard, they had to cross the river and march along the northern bank through the enemy's country. Now Samson the Heretic was at Marvail with three hundred men, ignorant, perhaps, that the southern barons had drawn so near. Samson was the one man in all Christendom whom the Holy Father desired to see in chains, and the chance was too flattering for Jocelyn to eschew it.

The Bishop's tent was pitched in the woods south of the river, with the crusaders camped around under cover of the trees. Jocelyn had called Count Reynaud, Benedict, and several other barons to him in council. He had determined to set the necessity of Samson's capture before his confederates that night. They were gathered under the shade of a huge ilex tree, with the great banner adroop over the embroidered canopy of the tent. Through the opening they could see the woods billowing below them to the river valley, the dark domes of the trees clear cut under the sky.

Jocelyn was very suave, yet mightily in earnest. He gestured with his hands, used the subtlest modulations of his voice, lifted his eyes to the darkening heavens as though ever ready to behold visions, stars portending the triumph of the truth.

"Remember, sirs," he said, "that our faith constrains us to save the ignorant from the powers of those who trade upon their folly. If we could bind the arch-fiend, how many souls we should preserve from hell! Even so is it in this war of ours. This Samson, foul-mouthed blasphemer, perverter of the Scriptures, has bewitched with his tongue the province of the Seven Streams. To slay the heresy, we must slay the arch-heretic. Heaven seems eager to deliver him even now into our hands. You, sirs, as men of the sword, are able to deal with the elements of war."

Benedict of the Mountains was quick to understand the churchman's argument. He and Jocelyn were cronies of a common cult, and the soldier would have been more outspoken in the vulgar sense had not the occasion constrained him to dignity. Count Reynaud of Vanclure was a good Catholic and an honest knight, one who hated coarseness and would not suffer a lie. And since he was a powerful noble and necessary to the cause, Jocelyn pandered to his respect with a display of exaggerated zeal. His great power over the Count was by the power of fanaticism; even such a Christian as Reynaud could wax brutal in the battle for a faith.

"So, my lord, you would have us strike at this Samson, speedily?"

Jocelyn spread his hands, made a pretence of leaving all technical machinations to their military intelligence.

“An ambuscade, a false message, a night attack,” he said; “these, sirs, are ruses I may abandon to your strategy. All I desire is that you shall deliver this blasphemer into my hands, and I vouch that the Holy Father will bless your children.”

“The man is a lying whelp,” said Benedict, with a pious leer. “What say you, Sir Reynaud and gentlemen, to a night attack?”

The Lord of Vanclure bent his brows.

“Samson is at Marvail,” he argued, “with three hundred men. It will be well for us to send out riders over the river, that we may know whether the heretics hold the fords, also as to whether Samson has moved his banner or no.”

“True enough,” quoth Benedict. “Scent out the bear before you set the dogs on. My light riders know the ways.”

“Then, sirs,” said Jocelyn, “we are agreed on this point—if Samson is at Marvail, and the fords are not held, we will swoop at night and seize the town.”

“Plain as your Mass Book, Bishop,” said he of the Mountains.

Jocelyn made the sign of the cross in the air.

“God bless ye, good sons of the Church,” he said. “The saints are with us. And assuredly ye shall prosper.”

CHAPTER XXIX

It is the common fate of reformers that they inspire the enmity both of the ignorant and the self-seeking, and hence the larger portion of humanity is arrayed against them. Ruffian and blinded saint meet and kiss over the corpse of an innovator. Many a Prometheus is torn and rent by the insensate malice of the age. The fate of fools is to live; that of great spirits that they should be immolated by the savage present for the blessing of a fairer future. Each martyr lights a beacon fire that hurls light and splendour within the portals of the coming century.

Thus when Reynaud of Vanclure fell at midnight with five hundred men upon the heretics of Marvail, he butchered them with a good conscience, in the full belief of the efficacy of the deed. Samson's men were caught asleep, snugly housed in the town. Half armed and dazed, they were hunted out and slaughtered in the streets. Samson himself was taken alive while fighting with his back against a wall; bound and pinioned, tied upon a horse, led from the town under the escort of a strong body of men-at-arms.

When the news was brought to Jocelyn at the fords of the Lorient, he gave the messenger a hundred silver pieces out of his own strong box, licked his lips, and ordered a triumphal service to be sung. In the woods under the great ilex trees and pines the soldiers mustered, while the hoarse chanting of the monks rose on the silent air. Through the ranks were carried the Sacred Banner and the Cross Processional, knights and warriors kneeling, kissing their naked swords. Samson the arch-heretic had fallen into their hands; God had greatly blessed the cause of Holy Church.

The day after the night attack, on Marvail, Count Reynaud marched south again to the Lorient, leaving two hundred men to garrison the town. He was eager to bear so precious and notorious a burden beyond the river, to deliver Samson to the mercies of the Church. The Heretic was brought bound upon a horse, Reynaud's men massed round him, tauntingly exultant, flinging mud and mockery at his head.

The strong soul in Samson rose that day to meet the doom he knew must follow. There was no hope for him save in a rescue, and though a few scattered followers were dogging Count Reynaud's march through the woods, they dared not ambuscade so powerful a force. Samson was in the hands of fanatics, nay, in the hands of usurers who extracted bribes from the souls of men. He had dealt too mightily with these hypocrites with his tongue to expect much

mercy at their hands. He knew full well that the priests were as vultures, ready to rend and to destroy.

They forded the Lorient well before noon, their horses trampling the water, the men smiting spray at Samson with the shafts of their lances.

"Leper, be cleansed," they cried, laughing and mocking him.

"Behold, here is Jordan; cleave a path for us, O saint."

Samson took the taunts in silence, girding his spirit for this great trial of the flesh. He gazed at the river, believed that he would be dead before the water that they forded reached the sea. All hope lapsed as the Lorient rolled behind and as he neared the southern bank. The wooded slopes glittered with steel, for the soldiers of the Church had thronged down to see the Heretic brought back in bonds from Marvail. A fierce, mocking outcry rose from the thickets, a clamour as of wild beasts tongueing to the slaughter. The road to the ford seethed with men, a mass of squealing, frenzied beings, more like the brown savages of primitive ages than cleansed and baptised Christians. Even Samson on his death march pitied them with some measure of pure scorn. He rode unmoved through the mocking mob, with pale, calm face and steadfast eyes.

He knew this to be the end of all his struggles, of his strenuous preaching, his Heaven-inspired zeal. He had sought to seize the people from the grip of the priests, men who had traded and fattened on the frailties of mankind. Had he not pointed them heavenwards to the great All-Father, and to the Son who had redeemed the world with the passion of self-sacrifice? He had preached against those who had usurped the portals of heaven, who had blasphemed the Great Spirit by claiming their own bodies to be the sole channels of grace. He had cried that man stood face to face with his Maker, that the Holy of Holies was in the heart.

As Samson rode amid the railing mob that played around him on the road, his thoughts sped to Calvary and the crosses there. Should he flinch from what the Christ had suffered, and from what the martyrs had rejoiced to bear? The strain of heroism deepened in his soul, and a divine patience purged out wrath. It was the fate of prophets to seal with their blood the truths they expounded to mankind.

Had he laboured for nothing? No, the seed had been sown, and, like a good husbandman, he could go to his rest. There were strong men who would take up the challenge, and seize the torch from his dying hand. He remembered Tristan, that youthful Titan, who would preach with the sword what he had preached with the tongue. The Duchess Blanche had breathed the true spirit, and there were scores of heralds in the Seven Streams. Samson was strengthened by such thoughts as these. He feared not death, since death was

not the end; they could slay the body, but not the soul.

Samson was brought before Jocelyn's tent, torn from his horse, dragged before the chair where the Bishop sat. Helmets, wave on wave, swayed on the hillside; a thousand faces dwindled into the gloom of the woods. One heavy hand had buffeted the Heretic's mouth, yet he stood before Jocelyn with pale, firm face, blood on his lips, his eyes unwavering.

There was a peculiar lustre in Jocelyn's eyes. His face was suffused; his hands quivered as they gripped the carved rails of the chair.

"So, blasphemer, you have fallen to us at last."

A divine patience showed on Samson's face, also the melancholy of a man who grieved but did not fear. Now and again his dark eyes kindled; he stood unmoved by the menacing faces that hemmed him round.

"Bishop," he said, "boast not thyself blessed because thou hast conquered dullards with a lie."

"Infidel, what hast thou to plead?"

"That I have spoken the truth and served God. That I have not pandered to a greedy Church, nor cheated men by forged doctrines and by false decrees."

A soldier sprang forward and spat in Samson's face.

"Kneel, dog, to the Bishop."

The Heretic turned to him with a smile.

"Friend, your taunts are brave enough since I am bound. I kneel to no man, only to God in Heaven."

A mocking wave of laughter spread from rank to rank, for the jest sped home. The rough faces craning towards the Bishop's tent were suffused and contorted with a savage zest.

"Make him kneel, by God!" cried a black-bearded Hercules with a flash of the sword.

The words echoed the will of the mob. Four men seized on Samson, bore him to his knees, threw him prostrate, so that his face was bathed in the trampled mire before the tent. Still his patience and his dignity withstood them. He knelt in silence, knowing that mere words were vain.

Jocelyn rose in his pontificals, stretched out a scornful hand towards the Heretic.

"Tell me, sirs, what shall be done with this poor anti-Christ?"

The men seemed to catch a wild and savage echo from the past.

"Crucify him! crucify him!" was the cry.

Jocelyn stood motionless a moment with folded hands, his eyes turned

heavenwards as though in prayer. The crowd watched him, their glances wavering betwixt Samson and the Bishop's face. It was a full minute before the churchman spoke again. Then the words fell like a sad condemnation wrung by duty from a merciful heart.

"God, Mother Virgin, and ye holy saints," he said, "have pity, we beseech thee, on this sinner's soul. In death and after death let him know well the God whom his proud lips have so blasphemed. Sons of the Church, I surrender this heretic into your hands."

A great shout rolled up, billowing from the soldiery crowding from under the trees. The ranks swayed, broke, stood still a moment. Samson, with flashing eyes, and face with the calm of death thereon, had risen from his knees. He stood at his full height, as Paul before Festus, noble and undismayed. For one brief instant his voice rang through the woods.

"Ye men," he cried, "if I have sinned, God see to it, and save my soul. I die in the strength of a holy life, fearing neither death nor the powers of hell. As for ye priests, never have I lusted after women nor grovelled after gold. God see to it, sirs, when the judgment comes, Samson the Heretic will meet Pope and Bishop undismayed."

Jocelyn's cross went up; there was hot anger on his face, and a dozen monks pushed forward through the crowd, calling on the soldiery to work their will. Samson was seized, thrown down, trampled upon, drawn savagely by the heels. Shouting and cursing, the pack drew him into the wood, while the monks, gathered in a company, raised a deep chant of thanksgiving over the slaying of such a sinner. Thus they crucified Samson on the hills above the Lorient, nailing him to a tree, naked and covered with wounds.

Yet the Heretic's patience was as triumphant as their wrath, nor did his courage fail him in that hour, and his cry was the cry of a great spirit:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Meanwhile, the tidings had passed to the heretics lurking in the woods, and one of their number had watched the martyrdom from the bosom of a great ilex tree. Fierce in their sorrow, they gathered and swam the river as the night came down, vowing vengeance for Samson's death. Ten men took horse that same night, and rode north together into the province of the Seven Streams. They headed for Merdin, where Tristan and the Duchess were said to be.

It was in a valley wild with trees, dark as some valley of death, that the first of these ten riders found Tristan marching towards the south. Black crags towered above; a dark smoke of rain was rushing before the wind under a granite sky. The horseman, worn and mud-stained, drenched to the skin, met Tristan riding at the head of his men, grim with the weather and the working of

his own heart.

“They have crucified Samson,” was the man’s cry, before he fell fainting with hunger and weariness from off his horse.

“Samson crucified!”

The cry rang through the rain-drenched ranks. As for Tristan, he said nothing, but frowned at the winter sky.

CHAPTER XXX

Sea spray was blown upon the rocks of Holy Guard, the grey sky raved, the trees rocked and moaned upon the hills. Rain whirled with the wind. The towers and walls shook; doors chattered; gallery and court were full of the storm.

At midnight there came the cry of a trumpet from the troubled darkness of the night. Armed men were climbing the causeway with rain beating upon their faces, moisture clinging to their beards. There came the rattle of a spear staff on the great gate of the abbey, and again the trumpet challenged the dark walls, like the cry of a sea-bird driven by the storm.

Twelve nuns and novices were in the chapel keeping a vigil with the Abbess Joan. For the rest, Holy Guard and all its sisterhood were plunged in darkness and in sleep. The porteress at the gate, nodding over her prayers in the guard cell, started at the trumpet cry, drew her gown round her, crept shivering to the grille.

“Who knocks?” she cried.

“Open in God’s name!”

The woman drew back the bolts, opened the wicket, peered out into the gloom. Men, rain-drenched and cloaked, scrambled in, black shadows pouring out of the night. Two soldiers seized on the porteress. A wet, hairy hand was over her mouth, stifling her cries; she was huddled into her cell, where a lamp flared with the draught through the gate.

Armed men still poured in, a tide that swirled from wall to wall. Rough voices rose amid the racket of the storm.

“Lights there; fire the torches.”

“Keep together.”

“The chapel, sirs. Follow me. Ten of you hold the gate.”

A tall figure led the way like an old grey wolf heading the hunt, while the pack poured up the passage-way betwixt the towering walls, finding no swords to stem their progress. They climbed the fifty steps that wound in the rock to the main mass above, scrambling, shouting, plucking at each other’s belts. Soon they were under the second arch and within the heart of Holy Guard.

In the chapel Joan the Abbess had been keeping the vigil of St. Margradel with six nuns and six novices. Two lamps hung from the wooden roof, flinging

vague streams of light into the gloom. The Abbess knelt on the stone steps before the altar, with the women crouching in cramped reverence at her feet. A single taper burnt before the rough wooden cross whose beams were linked by a crown of thorns.

Overhead the wind screamed, and the rain drove in through the crazy latticing upon the floor. The tide was full below, and they could hear the thunder of the waves upon the rock. Holy Guard was overarched by darkness and all the turbulent passion-throes of the world.

The trumpet's cry had passed unheard by those within the chapel: the rush of many feet had merged into the vaster clamour of the storm. A pikestaff smote the chapel door. The rusty latch clashed, the door swung in on its sea-rotted hinges, the arch of gloom was filled with hissing torches, smoke, and the gleaming bodies of armed men. Joan the Abbess started to her feet, stood with her back to the altar, her crucifix upraised. The nuns and novices, some standing, some crouching on their knees, huddled back towards her like fledgelings beneath a mother's wing.

Silence held for a moment, save for the blustering of the wind and the hiss of the rain on the burning torches. Joan the Abbess was no coward; her eyes were fixed questioningly upon the armed men at the door. Since they made no sign of entering the chapel, she still held her cross on high and challenged them from the altar.

"Who are ye who break the peace of Holy Guard?"

There was some stir in the crowd without the door, and the torches plunged forward, their smoke rolling to the roof. A tall man in a green cloak, with a sable hood shadowing his face, had pushed through the soldiery with drawn sword. His men stood with crossed spears before the door, while he faced the Abbess under the flaring lamps.

The woman still held her cross on high.

"Who are ye who trouble Holy Guard?"

The man in the green cloak answered her.

"Woman, the noise of your misdeeds has filled all Christendom. The Holy Father has decreed the breaking of the abbey of Holy Guard."

"These are false words."

The man ignored the Abbess's straining lips and upraised cross. His eyes were searching the faces of those who thronged the altar, white and mute, carven as out of stone.

"Rise, women, we command you."

Some obeyed him, others hesitated. Joan the Abbess still stood before the

altar with a few of the women huddling about her feet. The man in the green cloak pointed towards her with his sword.

“Take her hence, sirs,” he said. “Let her not cheat you with that cross of hers.”

There was some scuffling, some screaming, as in a dovecot where a hawk has entered. The Abbess calmed the scene by sudden surrender to the tyranny of the hour. She put the men from her, folded the crucifix over her breast, passed down from the altar towards the door. Her women gathered at her heels like sheep, thronging betwixt the line of torches and the glistening helms.

The man in the hood of sables suffered them to pass before him one by one, staring hard into each frightened face. At each motion of his sword the soldiers let a woman through, and they passed singly from the flare of the torches into the night.

The last woman had drawn her hood down over her face. She was taller than her fellows, and moved with more stateliness, a more youthful grace. At a sign one of the soldiers tossed back her hood and uncovered the face of Rosamunde of Joyous Vale, dead Ronan’s wife.

The man in the green cloak made a gesture with his sword. The soldiers herded to the entry, passed out from the chapel, and closed the creaking door. The torchlight flickered in through the lattices; vague cries pierced the clamour of the storm; the wind screamed, the sea surges thundered against the rock.

The man with the sword tossed back his hood. He and Rosamunde were alone together; the lamps flung their wavering light down upon his face. Rosamunde, knowing him in a moment, fell back and leant against a pillar. It was Jocelyn of Agravale, who had trapped her in Holy Guard.

CHAPTER XXXI

At Sanguelac the Tower of the Dead was lit with many cressets. Pierced with a hundred ruddy stars, it lifted its grey parapet to the sky, while the bells clashed in the belfry near. The men of the Seven Streams were mourning for Samson their leader; they wore black scarves over their hauberks, and had painted black bands athwart their shields. Tristan had set the bells of the town tolling, in memory of the great heart that beat no more. Samson's mantle had fallen on Tristan's shoulders; as for Blanche the Duchess, she was content to follow him.

It was night; and in the abbey in the town, whence such monks had long fled who had not turned heretics under Samson's preaching, the Duchess Blanche was housed with her knights and nobles. Tristan was with her in the abbot's parlour, also Lothaire, her chief captain, and the knights of her guard. They had framed their plans for the march on Marvail, where Jocelyn had left Count Reynaud encamped, while he, proud regenerator of the Seven Streams, had ridden towards Holy Guard to obey St. Pelinore. The Bishop had left Count Reynaud at Marvail, both to overawe the heretics and to preserve him in ignorance. So pious a knight might have used his honour to weigh the balance against Jocelyn's romancing.

With the conference ended, Lothaire and his knights went to their quarters, leaving Tristan and the Duchess alone together, save for two women who had attended her from the north. The night was clear, and through the open window the winter stars were shining; beneath the abbey a hundred roofs gleamed down to the midnight of the woods. Blanche had drawn to the open window, and Tristan stood by her leaning on his sword. The two women were stitching a black cross in the midst of the Duchess's banner, a cross that commemorated Samson's death.

Blanche, in the rich autumn of her woman's heart, had drawn nigh unto Tristan, even so as to renew the springtide of her youth. There was that fierce and uncompromising honour in him that made him doubly strong in a woman's eyes. Moreover, he went heavily through life that winter season, yet with the grim fatefulness of a man possessed. Blanche's heart had opened to his, half with a maiden's love, half with a mother's.

Tristan was morose that night as he stood beside her staring at the stars. On the morrow they were to march on Marvail, to smite those men who had crucified Samson beyond the river. Storm clouds were massing over the Seven

Streams, and many a fierce soldier had sworn dire things to his own heart.

The Duchess Blanche was troubled for Tristan as they gazed at the bare woods dark under the stars. There was that strange tenderness upon the woman's face that illumines the countenance of one who loves. Her eyes were kind under her silvery hair.

"Tristan," she said, "must a man live for vanished days alone?"

He turned his eyes from the heavens, leant more heavily upon his sword.

"The past is ever with us," he answered her; "the dead haunt me, stand round my bed at night. I see not flesh and blood alone, but the grey faces of those who cry to me for vengeance. They are not dead, these ghosts—Columbe, nor Samson, nor the martyrs of the Seven Streams."

The woman leant her head upon her hand, and gazed out into the night, so that Tristan saw but the curves of her proud face and bended neck. There was pathos in her attitude, the pose of one who yearned for that which life had never fully given.

"You live for the dead," she said again.

"Many whom I love are dead," he answered her.

She threw a glance at him, her eyes bright with the wistfulness that she could not hide. Tristan was blind to that which was in her eyes. For the moment he thought only of Rosamunde, walled from the world in Holy Guard.

"Tristan," she said.

"My lady."

"Are all the loved ones dead?"

He caught a deep breath, did not answer her speedily and frankly as was his wont.

"As the heart goes," he said; "the rest is nothingness."

"Nothingness; there you belie your soul."

His eyes gleamed suddenly, as though he heard some mocking trumpet cry and the trampling squadrons of his foes.

"Before God," he said to her, lifting the weight of his body from off his sword, "he who has lost friends to death, finds no soft resting-place to ease his soul. A little while—some months ago, not more—I leapt like a boy into the storm and strife of life. My youth is past, my manhood forged beneath the mighty hammer of God's fate. When dreams elapse, the strong man grips the sword."

"Strange words," she said, "for one who is not old."

He leant his hands again upon the pommel, sighed, and retorted to her with

the solemnity of one whose hopes were fierce, whose thoughts ran deep.

"There seems a season in man's life," he said, "when all is wrath, passion, and great pain. Youth passes in a year. The world grows full of storm winds, anguish, and huge travail. Battle breathes in the blood. A man must fight and labour, or grow mad."

"And yet——"

"And yet," he said, catching her very words, "my heart gives out at seasons, and I yearn, even I, to be once more a little child weeping my woes out on my mother's knees."

The Duchess turned to him from the mild stars, held out her hands, a woman whose heart was open as the sky.

"Ah, Tristan, is it a mother's heart you need?"

He looked at her sadly, knelt down and kissed her hands.

"Come, let me comfort you," she said.

Lifting his rough face to hers, he smiled, the smile of a man grateful yet not appeased.

"Winter is here," he said; "as yet there is no peace upon the woods, no singing of birds, no white clouds in the heavens. For me—battle and tempest. I shall not rest till many deeds are done."

On the morrow they marched from Sanguelac, with pennons tossing over hill and moor. Tristan bore a black dragon on a gilded shield, the device Dame Blanche had decreed to him after her sword had touched his shoulder. Three thousand spears, a strenuous van, pricked with him hotly through the winter wilds. Morose and fierce of face, Tristan held on towards the south, with Blanche the Duchess at his side. They were riding on Marvail to take it by surprise, fall suddenly upon Count Reynaud and his men.

It was well towards evening on the third day of Tristan's sallying from Sanguelac that the watchers on the walls of Marvail saw scattered knots of horsemen cantering towards the town. The gates were thrown open to take them in. Even in the farther meadows on the rim of the woods the townsfolk could see the flash and glimmer of pursuing spears. Mud-stained, sullen-faced men rode in to Marvail, confessing defeat in every desperate gesture, some with wounded comrades laid across their saddles, their shields splintered, their lances lost. That morning Count Reynaud had sallied out to give the heretics battle. His scouts had found them marching south, and had misjudged their numbers, since Tristan and the Duchess had masked half their companies in the woods. Count Reynaud had cantered out with horns blowing, shields aglimmer, spears aglint. The men of Marvail had watched them sally,

promising the Church more victims before the sun should set.

Two leagues from the town, on a hill amid the black billows of the woods, Tristan stood at the head of his main squadrons, gazing round over the place where their hot charge had left the wreckage of Reynaud's arms stranded on the hillside. The west was afire above the pines, crimson swords smiting through the clouds. It had been a battle of horse, grim, swift, and furious. Tristan had ambushed a thousand spears under Lothaire in the woods. They had charged home on the Papists' flank, crumpled their squadrons, hurled them back up the hill. Tristan and his men had come in like the sea. Sword and shield were witnesses to this.

Tristan stood amid the wreckage of the fight, with the Duchess beside him on her great white horse. The banner with the black cross drooped amid a grove of spears. Far to the south, through the dusky woods, Lothaire's spears still flashed and smote at the flying foe. On all sides were the dead and the dying, piled in sheaves, the grim harvest of battle.

At Tristan's feet lay the body of Count Reynaud thrust through with a spear. Before him among the slain stood some dozen monks guarded by men-at-arms. They had followed Count Reynaud from Marvail to bless his banner and to see the heretics put to the sword.

Tristan le Sauvage leant upon the long handle of his axe. A prisoner had been brought to him, an esquire of Reynaud's who had been taken in the fight. Tristan's eyes were fixed upon the man's slashed face as he questioned him concerning Jocelyn and the main body of the southern host.

"Come, sir, let us have the truth."

Several of the monks lifted up their hands, charging the man to seal his lips.

"Parley not with a heretic," said one.

"Receive martyrdom," cried another, "and be blessed in heaven."

Tristan turned on them with a grim scorn. He was in no mood for argument; that priests were mischievous rogues was his honest conviction.

"These are they who slew Samson," he said, pointing at them with his axe. "Guards, take and hang them in the woods. Every priest shall hang who falls to me in the Seven Streams."

The men obeyed him with no mean zest, fierce to be avenged on Samson's enemies. Twelve frocked figures were soon jerking and struggling under the trees. Tristan, stern about the eyes, turned once again to the man before him.

"Come, friend," he said, "this is the fortune of war. We are rid of these skirted fools; as soldier to soldier I offer fair terms. Tell me of Jocelyn and the

men of Agravale, or hang beside the monks on yonder trees."

Reynaud's squire was young and lusty, not ripe for death either in years or spirit, and Tristan's challenge worked his conversion. He began to confess such things as Tristan had desired.

"The Bishop has marched on the west," he said, "even, sir, because he was so guided by St. Pelinore in a vision at Agravale. He had some three thousand spears following the Sacred Banner of the Golden Keys."

Tristan nodded and smiled the man on.

"The vision, friend, tell us that."

Reynaud's esquire was white and faint from the blood lost to him by his wounds. Tristan cheered him on, bade the two guards support his shoulders.

"Ten more words, man, and we will see to your wounds," he said. "Whither has the Bishop marched with the spears of Agravale?"

"Sire, to the abbey of Holy Guard."

"By God, for what purpose?"

"To destroy it, as he was bidden in his vision by St. Pelinore."

The man fell forward fainting in the arms of his guards. They laid him down beside dead Reynaud, began to search his wounds and to pour wine between his lips. Blanche the Duchess was watching Tristan's face. She saw his eyes flash and kindle, his mouth harden into a grim line. It was as the face of a man who heard of the dishonouring of one he loved. Tristan stood motionless, leaning on his axe, gazing far into the burning west, and once his lips moved as though he uttered a woman's name.

CHAPTER XXXII

Samson the Heretic's death had cast Tristan into savage gloom. He had loved the man, and had learnt to lean on him as on a spiritual father, by whose warm eloquence the heavens were opened. Samson had been as a great beacon fire lighting a dark land, startling with his fierce beams the night-ridden gates of the Church. The light was quenched, the mighty spirit sped, and Tristan mourned for him as for a father.

Then had come the news of Holy Guard, and the breaking of Rosamunde's novitiate there. There was joy and sorrow commingled in the tale. In one great burst of bitterness, Tristan had opened his whole heart to the one soul on earth whose sympathy seemed as a silver cloud charged with kindly dew. Blanche had heard him to the end, wiped out the twisting pain from her own face, given him such comfort as a woman's heart could give. Her gracious queenliness stood her in good stead, and Tristan did not guess the inward sacrifice.

But the man was a man again before one night had passed. Holy Guard had fallen; Jocelyn and his war-wolves were by the sea. Tristan swore by God and high Heaven that he would ride and fall upon him before the news of Reynaud's slaying could reach the Bishop's ears. The Papists had fled out of Marvail like Gadarene swine, and retreated over the river for fear of Tristan's sword. As for the heretics, they sallied over, found Samson's body hanging naked on a tree. They took him down and buried him in the woods, swore over his grave to rid the Seven Streams of Jocelyn's power. Then they forded the Lorient once more, and leaving a strong garrison at Marvail, hastened by forced marches towards the sea.

"News, Sir Tristan, news, news."

So cried the rider who came in from the west, on a muddy horse under the winter sky. The dawn had streaked the east with faint gold, and transient sun shafts had touched the woods. In a glade amid pines Tristan's scout had found many horses cropping the coarse grass. Rough huts had been built of pine boughs piled against the trees, and many spears stood there with shields swinging in the wind.

Tristan heard the man's tidings as he stood before the doorway of his lodge of pine boughs and laced the steel hood to the rim of his helmet. His knights were gathering in on every side, some girding on their swords, others tightening their shield straps as they came.

“The Pope’s men are three leagues away,” so ran the morning’s greeting.

Tristan ordered a single horn to sound the sally, while he passed to the great red tent of Blanche the Duchess to greet her and to persuade her to keep from the fight. The glade was full of stir and action. Companies were forming up shoulder to shoulder; spears danced and swayed; horses steamed in the brisk morning air. The banner of the Duchess stood unfurled before her tent; she had heard the news and the whistling wings of the eagles of war.

Blanche came out to meet him in her burnished casque, her dark eyes afire with the zest of action. She would have none of Tristan’s caution, but ordered her white war-horse forward, mounted from Tristan’s knee, received the shouts of her eager soldiery. The red tent sank down; the followers were packing the baggage. As the sun cleared the trees, the northern van rolled out from the woods into a stretch of open land that sloped towards the bold curves of a river.

That morning Tristan was merry as he swung his axe and felt his horse rise under his weight. He was full of joy, this rugged smiter, who had sprung from an adventurous quest into the marshalling of armies. The great heart of the world seemed to beat with his. Blanche the Duchess read his humour, joined with him in the zest of the hour.

“Tristan, you are merry,” she said.

“Merry indeed, for we fight to-day.”

“You smile once more.”

“I shall smile in that hour when Jocelyn crawls at my feet. Ha, it is good to be strong!”

Tristan’s riders were scouring ahead, keeping cover, scanning the horizon for Jocelyn’s march. By noon they had left the open land, plunged up hills covered thick with woods. Tristan’s squadrons sifted through, and he halted them in the woods under the brow of the hill, went forward with his captains to reconnoitre.

Below lay a broad valley running north and south, chequered with pine thickets and patches of brushwood. On a hill in the centre stood a ruined tower. Towards the south a broad loop of the river closed the valley, while all around on the misty hills shimmered the giants of the forest, mysterious and silent. Tristan’s outriders had fallen back and taken cover in the thickets. Down the valley could be seen a line of spears, glittering snake-like towards the tower on the hill. Companies of horse were crossing the river, pushing up the slopes, mass on mass. In the midst of the flickering shields and spears blew a great white banner streaked with gold.

It was Jocelyn and the southern barons, who had been on the march since

dawn. They had thrown their advance guard across the river, and were straggling up the green slopes, while the main host crossed at the ford. On the instant Tristan did a cunning thing. He had brought from Marvail Count Reynaud's banner, also the pennons of many of his knights slain on the field. These he sent forward in the van of a strong company, bidding them close within a hundred paces and then charge at the gallop.

The Papists fell to the trick even as Tristan had trusted. They straggled up to meet the men riding under Reynaud's banner, only to discover spears rocking towards them at the cry of a trumpet, a line of plunging hoofs thundering down the slope. The woods belched steel. North, east, and west, company on company poured from the trees and raced full gallop for the disordered host. Jocelyn's men were caught like sheep on a hillside. The hurtling spears were on their shields, they were hurled back down the valley upon the disordered masses who had crossed at the ford.

The knights of the north and the heretics of the Seven Streams went in at the gallop, and gave the southerners no space to breathe. "Remember Samson!" was the cry. Down towards the river the whirlwind played, with dust and clangour and the shriek of steel. Spears went down like trampled corn. The battle streamed down the bloody slope, for nothing could stem that furious charge.

The river shut the broken host in, for the ford was narrow, not easy of passage. From the north came the thundering ranks of horse, on the south the waters were calm and clear. Jocelyn's squadrons, streaming like smoke blown from a fire by a boisterous wind, were hurled in rout upon the water. They were thrust down over the bank; slain in the shallows, drowned in struggling to cross at the ford. Some few hundreds reached the southern bank, and scattered fast for the sanctuary of the woods.

In less than half an hour from the first charge, Tristan's heretics had won the day. They gave no quarter, slew all who stood. Of Jocelyn's host some two thousand perished, many in the battle, many in the river. Tristan rode back up the hill, amid the cheers of his men. He had chosen three hundred spears to surround the Sacred Banner with the Golden Keys, trusting that the Bishop would be lodged near by. He had bidden his men take Jocelyn alive, and all such priests as had followed in his train. That Jocelyn had seized Rosamunde out of Holy Guard he guessed right well, and therefore he charged his men to deal gently with those about the Sacred Banner, to make prisoners, to slay but few.

Hence when Tristan rode up victorious from the ford, he saw the Pope's banner flying by the ruined tower, with dead Ronan's flag waving beside it. Tristan's three hundred had taken the Bishop, thrown him straightway into the

tower, and massed their ranks on the slopes of the hill. The prize was theirs, and they were eager to guard it. Some fifty priests had been taken also, but of Rosamunde of Holy Guard they had seen no sign.

Blanche herself rode down on her great white horse to greet Tristan and give him the victory. She had watched the battle from the cover of the woods, and had seen the Papists hurled into the river.

"Friend, God has blessed ye; the wolves have been hounded from the Seven Streams."

Such was her greeting as she met Tristan before the tower.

"Madame, the victory is yours," he said. "Without your aid we should have done but little."

"Nay, it is Samson's victory," she answered sadly. "Behold, the dead conquer after death."

Tristan dismounted and entered the ruined gateway of the tower. The men-at-arms, gathering round, shouted his name, "Tristan, Tristan!" The hoarse cheers echoed to the listening woods, waking the welkin, rolling towards the river.

Jocelyn, pacing to and fro within the round walls, heard these cries and bit his lip. He was at the mercy of the man who had slain Ogier, the man whose sister he had brought to the grave. The heretics had thrust the Bishop into the bottom-most chamber of the tower; the beams and roof above had rotted away, leaving the open sky racing above the battlements. Ferns, grasses, and gillyflowers grew upon the walls and in the crumbling recesses where the windows opened. The floor was strewn with rotting wood, overgrown with brambles and tall rank weeds. From this lower room three narrow windows looked out upon the woods, and ruin and decay seemed symbolised therein.

Soldier and churchman came face to face within the narrow compass of those walls. Tristan thrust back the rotting door, stood alone in the shadow, seeming the more grim and burly in the narrow space. The priest went to and fro like a caged cat, his eyes roving from Tristan's face to the door and the spear points that gleamed on the stair.

Without, the listening soldiery heard the fierce thunder of a strong man's voice, grim and terrible in the intensity of its wrath. Its echoes reverberated through the tower, pitiless and damning, cowing the thin tones that sounded in retort.

Tristan did not slay the man that day, for he had other tortures in his heart. With the cold steel before his eyes and a great hand upon his throat, Jocelyn jerked out the truth into Tristan's face. Rosamunde had been sent by river into the Southern Marches to be housed at the madhouse in the mere. Tristan beat

the pommel of his sword in Jocelyn's face, hurled him against the wall, left him huddled white and terrified amid the weeds and rotting wood.

"Lie there, Satan," he said. "Death can wait till I have worked my will."

CHAPTER XXXIII

Over the madhouse in the mere the noon sun had travelled, drawing the grey mists up from the meadows, glistening upon the pinnacles of the wooded hills. No wind was moving—the withered sedges were silent in the shallows, and no ripples barred the water with dim gold.

From the island came a solitary cry, the scream of a living thing in pain, shrill, piteous, and discordant. All the dismal babels of the place seemed to wake at the cry like the screaming of birds when some savage spoiler haunts the woods. The impassive trees moved never a finger, though echo veiled among the hills.

In the court, with the grey stone walls and the barred windows rising round, Nicholas the keeper had betaken him to his whip. A girl, naked to the loins, stood chained by her wrists to the wooden post in the centre of the court. She was a mad creature, given to wild outbursts of delirious violence. Old Nicholas had taken her when exhausted after some such fit, had chained her to the post for the chastening of her temper. Though the red weals showed in the white skin, her outcry and her writhings availed her nothing. The whip was the old man’s one appeal to those contumacious creatures who needed discipline.

In a long, low-ceilinged chamber under the tiles sat Rosamunde of Joyous Vale, listening to the cries that came from the distant court. The room was richly garnished in its way with hangings and carved furniture, and lamps of bronze. The three windows opened on the western sky, the wild crags above, the woods and the calm water spread below.

The Lady Rosamunde was seated on a carved bench, gazing out on the woods steeped in the double mysteries of sunshine and of mist. Her hands were in her lap, her undressed hair falling in gold upon her shoulders. The look upon her face spoke of deep misery, of passionate degradation, and shame of soul. Her proud neck was bent like the stem of a sun-parched flower. She sat motionless in the shadow, gazing solemn-eyed upon the empty world.

Near her, throned on a scarlet cushion upon the floor, a pale-faced girl peered at herself in a small hand-mirror, while she combed her black hair with a silver comb. She was studious and deliberate in her toilet, perfecting it with a flippant airiness of gesture that told of a sensuous and cheerful vanity. Ever and again she would cast quick, bird-like glances at Rosamunde before the window, smile to herself with a world-wise pity in her hazel eyes.

“Hey, sister Rose, be merry, be merry. If I were an escaped nun, I should be laughing till the sun looked big as a great shield.”

There was a certain hollowness in the girl’s merriment, as though her tongue were blither than her heart. Rosamunde half turned to her with the air of one burdened with utter weariness of soul and body. Life had seemed a black dream since that wild night in Holy Guard when Jocelyn and his men had hounded the nuns into the wind and rain. The memory of that violent midnight lived with a vivid horror that haunted her soul. At dawn she had been taken through the wilds, brought to the river, thrust into a galley, and rowed upstream into the depths of the woods. For two days and a night she had heard the plash of oars, watched the banks swimming by under a dreary canopy of mist. Then the men had landed her, set her upon a horse, brought her through leagues of woodland to the madhouse in the mere.

The girl Miriam who shared her chamber with her was a little Jewess, volatile, passionate, and warm of heart. A child of misfortune, cursed with the bane of beauty, she had suffered many things at the world’s mercy. Yet under the mask of vice and ignominy, the passion and fervour of her race still burnt unquenched. At Rosamunde’s first coming she had taunted and gibed at her. Later, the utter misery in the elder woman’s eyes had disarmed her vanity and touched her heart. Different as gold and wax, the pair had become friends by common necessity in their prison chamber under the tiles.

“Sister Rose,” said the girl again, “I have never yet won a smile from your lips.”

“Who can smile, child, when one hears the cries of those in pain?”

“Ah, the mad folk, they suffer always; it is their curse.”

“And we, Miriam?”

“We only suffer when our souls are sad.”

Rosamunde had heard from the Papists of Samson’s death; the tidings had shocked her, yet not with the profundity she would have dreamt of months ago. He had been her spiritual father and the great regenerator of the Seven Streams. To Rosamunde those later months he had been more of a god than a mortal; Tristan, outshone at the first, had brought back her heart from a garden of impossible dreams. From Jocelyn and his men she had won no other news save that their spears were set against Tristan and his heretics. They had taunted her with the promise to bring a sackful of ears taken from the detestable degenerates who had defied the Church.

“My soul, but you are as sorrowful as Rachel,” said the black-haired girl, twisting near on her cushion and half resting against Rosamunde.

“I have been a poor fool,” said she, with one hand on Miriam’s head.

“We women are all fools; the men cheat us into bondage. Once I was clean and pure. Well, well, what if I have an old heart in a young body?”

Rosamunde held her peace for the moment. The cries had ceased in the court below; the babel of mad voices had given place to silence.

“Have you thought of death, Miriam?”

The Jewess started, stared up into Rosamunde’s face. It was white and hard, the eyes full of a passionate pessimism.

“Death, sister!”

“As a Roman woman would have died. Ah, my God, is it then a sin to end such shame?”

Miriam struggled to her knees, her arms thrust over Rosamunde’s shoulders. The warm Jewish blood in her had taken fire of a sudden. Her pale face looked into Rosamunde’s, her dark eyes glittered with an earnestness that was almost super-natural.

“Sister, what words are these?”

“Shame or death—I halt between the two.”

“Death, but how?”

“A steel point, a mere bodkin prick, and then the end.”

The younger woman clasped her arms about Rosamunde’s neck, looked steadily into her face.

“Sister, you frighten me. Why then should we die? Is there no hope left, no gleam of a new dawn?”

“There is hope in prayer, perhaps.”

“Ah, my fathers have prayed of old and have been answered. The Great God reigneth, though I, His daughter, have erred in the tents of men.”

The misery melted out of Rosamunde’s eyes for the moment. She touched Miriam’s hair with her fingers, drew a deep breath, inspired new courage. Her mouth softened; she kissed Miriam upon the lips.

“Forget, child,” she said; “it was a moment’s weakness with me, and it has passed.”

The little Jewess took the kiss, broke forth into sudden weeping. Her heart was warm yet under her gay gown; the faith of her fathers was not dead within her breast. The spirits of Ruth and of Rachel might have wakened echoes in her soul.

“Ah, I have felt such fearful thoughts of old,” she said, “when I was drawn down into the dust and men trampled on my honour. Yet hope revived, and I lived on. Often I have thought that shame has broken all my heart, that I am

too sinful to look into the face of God."

Rosamunde kissed Miriam's lips a second time; it was her turn to comfort, and the instinct gave her courage. A long while she spoke to her, telling of the Christ, pleading as the saints had pleaded in the past. As for the girl, she threw her mirror and her silver comb away, plucked the bright brooch from off her breast, sat listening at Rosamunde's knees till evening fell.

That night the Lady of Joyous Vale lay long awake, thinking of Tristan and his great love. Her heart cried out for a strong man's chivalry, for the passionate tenderness of such a homage. Holy Guard and Jocelyn had broken her pride; she was as a child once more lifting her face to the lips of love. To be saved from shame, this was her prayer.

Lying awake in the moonless gloom, tossing under the coverlet with her hair spread around, she listened to Miriam's quiet breathing. The casements showed grey in the wall before her. Feverish, she rose up from her bed, drew a cloak round her, knelt by one of the open windows. The night air played upon her face. Overhead a thousand stars were shining, while the silent lake glimmered beneath.

Rosamunde bowed herself over the sill, leant her head upon her arms, and wept from sheer pain and weariness of heart. Life seemed sealed against all hope. Violence and infamy hemmed her in; she was mewed in this island amid mad folk and worse, the idle sport of a worthless priest. She had become again as a little child, hungry for love, afraid of the dark. Her heart cried out for Tristan there, that rough face lit by its honest eyes, that strength that no single arm could stay. He was the one man who could win her soul, guard her from all terror and the world's evil leer.

As she wept that night under the stars, she made a passionate prayer to Heaven.

"O God," cried her heart, "send Tristan hither. Grant that he may love me as he loved of old. Hear this my prayer, O Father of heaven. For lo, I have broken the pride in my heart, and lo, I love Tristan, and would be his wife. Hear me, God, and save me from shame."

She knelt a long while gazing up at the stars. The tears came no more to dim her eyes; a sudden wind stirred the trees in the garden. The sound seemed as a still voice answering her prayer, a voice that whispered—

"Peace, God has heard thee."

CHAPTER XXXIV

While Rosamunde was held a prisoner in the madhouse in the mere, Tristan and the Duchess had turned back from the west and marched again on Marvail and the fords of the Lorient. Having dealt with Jocelyn and dispersed his people, they were ready to revenge them for Samson's death, and for the ruin wrought in the Seven Streams. They had sworn together, they and their nobles, to humble Agravale and to end the crusades that the priests had preached in that same city.

At Marvail Tristan had set craftsmen at work upon two coffins of seasoned wood. The larger was framed for Jocelyn the Bishop; Tristan had him laid alive therein, and the lid fastened over him with thongs of leather. Two holes were left in the lid over Jocelyn's face, so that he might breathe and take his food. Imprisoned thus, he was carried on a litter pole on the march, while beside him was borne the empty coffin covered with the Sacred Banner blessed by the Pope.

Late that winter Tristan and the Duchess crossed the Lorient and encamped near to Samson's grave. They set their men to raise a great mound over the place, and having cut down the tree on which Samson had been crucified, they fashioned from it a great cross. This they set on the summit of the mound as a trophy to him who had conquered in death.

Between the fords of the Lorient and the city of Agravale lay some twenty leagues of forest land, more dark and rugged than the province of the Seven Streams. Here and there were villages hid in the deep gloom of the woods. A few abbeys and religious houses slept grey and solemn in the wilderness, their fish ponds glimmering amid the green. Many strange beasts lurked within its shadows and many barbarous folk but half claimed by the Church. From the fords of the Lorient even to the cliffs of Agravale a squirrel might have journeyed from tree to tree.

Into this wild region Benedict of the Mountains had plunged with the few hundred men who had escaped from the slaughter in the west. Hither also had gathered the remnant of those who had fled from Marvail after Count Reynaud's death. They had gathered their scattered companies on the way to Agravale, and were arming the rude peasantry to march once more on the Seven Streams.

By Samson's grave Tristan and the Duchess took counsel together with all

the nobles of the north. Samson's mantle had descended on Tristan, and though he had not the Heretic's tongue, he had sufficient ardour to serve the cause. Even the older men suffered his youth, for he had given proof of his great strength, and was honest enough to be advised when in need.

"To Agravale," he said, "that, sirs, I take it, is our common cry. Since we have Jocelyn in our hands, we cannot leave our work half done."

"Destroy the lair," quoth Lothaire of the Isles, "and the bear will rear no more cubs within. We men of the north are ready to follow."

So said they all about the board, for the Duchess had given Tristan her signet ring as a token that he had her will in the war. Some spoke of marching straight for the south, braving the forest and all its perils. Others were for bearing towards the sea, where they might reach Agravale by the banks of the Gloire. But Tristan had nurtured more in his heart than a mere march through the forest with skirmishes by the way if Benedict of the Mountains stood to oppose them. Rosamunde, he knew, was in the madhouse in the mere, and therefore safe for him, moated from the woods. The winter had been dry, with but little rain, and for days a strong wind had blown from the north-west, and the dead wood and leaves were brittle as tinder. It was Tristan's plan to fire the forest with a line of beacons carried south.

The nobles of the north were well content with some such strategy as this. They parted their host into three great companies, Lothaire taking one, Sir Didcart of the Hills another, Tristan and the Duchess keeping the third. After swearing troth over Samson's grave, they marched south from the fords of the Lorient, prepared to follow Tristan's plan.

As though to humour them, the wind freshened still further, and veered towards the north. Grey clouds raced in the sky overhead, and the tall trees moaned and swayed on the hills. Tristan saw that the hour had come. All day his men had laboured on the rim of the forest, hewing down trees, gathering brushwood and dead branches. They had built twelve great pyres each more than two furlongs apart, where the flames could strike at once into the forest. Lothaire and Sir Didcart were marching south, stacking up beacons as they went, ready for the signal from the north.

On the third night after the taking of the oath over Samson's grave Tristan gave the word for the firing of the forest. He was posted with Blanche on the crest of a hill where they could watch the lighting of the beacons. The wind moaned over the trees, and a myriad black spires waved in the wind like sharp billows on a heavy sea. Clouds were scudding fast in the heavens, with a new moon peeping through and through.

Red streaks played about the outermost thickets where men with torches

ran to and fro. Soon the red streaks lengthened into yellow spears while smoke billowed southwards with the wind. The flames smote upwards and licked at the trees, curling round trunk and waving top, spreading fans of flame from a thousand boughs. The pyres grew into pyramids of fire, great golden obelisks blazing to the sky. From the fords of the Lorient the message sped, leaping leagues into the night. Lothaire's men saw the beacons gleam, and kindling their torches, linked the chain up.

Tristan and Blanche kept watch upon the hill, their knights round them in silent awe. The tall trees were wrapped in shrouds of flame, and the smoke of their burning hung like a thunder-cloud overhead. Onwards with the wind the fire rolled, bringing the giants of the forest to earth, till glowing rivers streamed towards the south to meet and merge into a sea of fire. It was as some vast second chaos devouring the world, a burning judgment hurled down from heaven.

Tristan stood leaning on his sword with the joy of a fanatic on his face.

"See how the south burns!" he cried, stretching out his hand. "Martyrs and innocents, behold your vengeance!"

A sudden thought seized him as he watched the spreading fire. Calling to the men who were gathered round him, he pealed his deep voice into their ears, for the cry of the forest was as the roar of the sea. Figures struggled forward out of the gloom, bearing the coffin that held Jocelyn of Agravale. The bands were unfastened and the priest lifted out, for he could scarcely use his cramped limbs. Cowering before Tristan, he blinked at the scene as though called from the grave to face his doom. The forest lay a great sea of fire, and southwards the flames ravaged the night, till the distant hills awoke and grew grey.

Tristan stood beside the priest and pointed to the forest with his sword.

"Behold your bishopric," he said. "Here we may show ye the likeness of hell."

CHAPTER XXXV

Rosamunde, walking within the madhouse garden, where cypresses and dusky laurels hid the grey stone wall, saw a haze of gold steal into the sky towards the north. It was towards twilight and a strong wind blew, ridging the lake with foam, tossing the cypress boughs, moaning over the house. Rosamunde, puzzled by the glow towards the north, called to Miriam, who had been spinning in the room above.

Either the Jewess was asleep or the wind drowned the cry, for no face showed at the narrow window. From the garden an outer stair built on stone pillars led to a postern opening into the women's room. Rosamunde had been given the key of this door; for the garden had been surrendered to her by Jocelyn's orders. The mad folk were never loosed from their vaults; there were two soldiers besides old Nicholas and his wife to keep watch and ward over the place.

Rosamunde, climbing up the stone stair, found Miriam asleep on her bed in the corner. She did not trouble to wake the Jewess, but turned to the near window and looked out over the water. Twilight was descending, and the towering woods were steeped in the hoarse mystery of a winter's eve. The crags in the west were edged with gold, and a luminous mist poured up towards the clouds. Above the black spires of the waving trees the sky was lurid, yet not with the sunset. Purple masses of vapour played over the forest, and there was a hot, parched perfume on the wind.

Rosamunde, troubled by the strange face of the sky, turned and woke Miriam from her sleep. Together they stood on the landing at the top of the stone steps and watched the red glow increase in the heavens. There was some huge power striding over the woods; its sound swelled the piping of the wind, a far roar as of the voice of a rising sea.

Miriam clung to Rosamunde's shoulder.

"A wild sunset," she said, not guessing the truth. "Pah! what a strange scent on the wind. How black the woods seem. We shall have a storm in the night."

Rosamunde looked out on the scene in silence, with Miriam's breath upon her cheek.

"It is no sunset," she said at last; "it is not the full west, and there is no break in the clouds."

“What means, then, the light in the sky, sister?”

“A forest fire,” said Rosamunde slowly.

“My God, we shall burn.”

“The water is broad enough to hold us safe.”

A sudden cry pealed out over the mere, where old Nicholas was standing in his boat, poling back towards the island. He lifted a hand, pointed to the sky, bent to his work, and brought the boat over with foam at the prow. Voices answered him from the landing stage, where his old wife and two soldiers were watching the sky. They entered the court when Nicholas had moored his boat and clapped to the gate.

Rosamunde and Miriam leant against the stone balustrading of the stairway, watching the distant fire. The increasing grandeur of the scene reacted differently upon the two, inspiring fear in the Jewess and an unconscious calm in the Lady of Joyous Vale. A broad glare now hung as a curtain above the trees, and against it rose a thousand moving things. The sky grew full of screaming birds sweeping in terror from the breath of the fire, their wings whirring and panting towards the south. Some swooped for the island, settled on the roof and walls, or plunged, chattering, into the garden beneath. A great raven perched on the tiles overhead, and sat there croaking like a messenger of death.

Above the contrasted blackness of the forest foreground rose the aureole of the approaching fire. Pennons of flame tongued towards the heavens, while vast masses of smoke merged into the clouds. The glare began to play upon the surface of the mere, splashing the waves with ruddy gold, gleaming on the foam as it swept from the west. The distant peaks caught the earthly lightning from afar; the roar of the great furnace gathered and grew.

Even as the two women watched in silent awe, the meadow lands edging the lake seemed alive with hurrying shadows. The gloom teemed with desperate life. The wild beasts of the wood came panting out, herding and struggling towards the water. The wolf and the hare were flying together; the boar and the stag galloped side by side. Droves of wild pigs broke out in black masses, while above, with a perpetual whirr of wings, birds pinioned with the wind from the drifting smoke.

The live things were soon fighting in the shallows, trampling each other, bellowing and howling. The water grew alive with struggling beasts where a pack of wolves had taken to the mere and headed for the island. They crawled ashore by the stage, trotted hither and thither, their ululations making the night more terrible.

Ever the fire came nearer, beating up to heaven, rolling southwards with

palpitating splendour. A vast canopy of smoke had overspread the valley. Soon the deep gloom of the near thickets grew streaked with light as with the gleaming through of some rich sunset in scarlet and gold. Trees were falling in the forest, and the wind blew as from a furnace.

Rosamunde and Miriam stood still at the top of the stone stair. The terror of the night stupefied the senses, numbed even fear by the chaos of its splendour. It was as the end of all things upon earth, when the myriad wings of angels should dome the heavens, and the universe should elapse in fire.

A thousand demoniac voices seemed to answer the howling of the wolves. All about the island the beasts padded, casting up their snouts, giving tongue to swell the midnight chorus. The voices of the madhouse were as the voices of hell.

Rosamunde and the Jewess drew back from the stairway into the room, stood shivering at the door, listening to the uproar beneath. They heard a sound as of splintered wood, yells of exultation, old Nicholas's voice fierce yet faint, the terse cracking of his whip. Rosamunde, white and fearful, seized Miriam's arm, spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"The mad folk have broken loose."

"Loose!"

"Listen to their cries. They will slay old Nicholas. Quick, we must keep them out."

They clapped to the door, locked and bolted it, dragged up the beds and benches, piled them against it. As they laboured, panting with fear, a great bird flapped in by the open window, beat blindly about from wall to wall. Rosamunde ran and closed the casement frame, casting a rapid glance at the burning forest. Smoke and a myriad ruddy stars were flying athwart the heavens. The flames had rolled to the rim of the meadowland, and the valley seemed edged with a wall of fire.

In the court below a grim fight had begun. The madmen who had broken loose from their vaults had fallen upon old Nicholas and the two soldiers, penned them in a corner by the gate. The three were overpowered by the furious many, beaten down, trampled, torn limb from limb. Then, in the unreasoning madness of their triumph, the mob had broken down the great gate, and opened the house to the beasts of the forest.

In a moment the wolves, scenting blood, came padding in, leaping on each other in the narrow entry. A hundred red-eyed things surged into the court, foam dropping from their white-fanged snouts. The place became as a pagan amphitheatre, full of death and immeasurable horror. While the fire devoured the trees of the forest, the madman and the wolf rent and slew each other.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Through the black and ruined land came Tristan and his men, marching where the rivers ran, that they might not tread ankle deep in ashes, nor be choked and blinded by the dust and smoke. Ruin was everywhere, black, saturnine, and solemn. A strange silence hung upon the world, where the charred trees still stood with their hands outstretched to the rainless sky. Many lay fallen like the dead upon a battlefield. The wind had passed, the storm blasts moaned no more.

As Tristan rode through the desolate woods, he bowed down his head, and was heavy of heart. He had loved these children of the forest, these scorched martyrs stricken in the rising of the sap. No more would their banners blow with the march of spring. And yet the dead trees were but outlined against the deeper gold of memory, a melancholy afterglow, weird yet tender. The savage in him was inert awhile. Childhood and youth came back, his mother's face and Rosamunde's sad eyes, the golden glimmer of his sister's hair. Rosamunde, Rosamunde! What of the red rose plucked from the snowy towers of Joyous Vale? For the moment he forgot the grim, grinding present, the ten thousand iron men who drove clouds of dust from the ashes under their horses' feet.

Towards evening they saw a river gleaming below them in a valley, shining like silver set in ebony, as it coursed through the blackened country. Tristan, drawing rein with the Duchess upon the brow of a hill, hardly knew the valley, so great was the change the flames had worked. The river parted about an island, foaming over the rocks that thrust their black snouts above the surface. The island itself was green and untouched, girded by the water from the dead wild around.

Tristan pointed Blanche and his captains to it with his sword. There was a strange light upon his face, even as the light upon the face of a crusader who beheld the Holy City shining under the blue arch of heaven.

"Behold Jocelyn's hermitage," he said to them. "Columbe my sister lies buried under yonder cedar."

Blanche, weary despite the strength of her strenuous soul, strove to calm for the moment the passion of a man who had lived as in a furnace those many months.

"Tristan," she answered him, with a hand on his bridle, "is it not enough

that you have conquered? Shall not your sister rest in peace?”

The expression of the man’s face changed again as suddenly as the surface of a darkened mirror. The old fanatical and sullen gloom rushed back.

“What is victory,” he said, “but the power to punish, to crush the adder under the heel. My sister shall rest in no hidden grave. By my soul, I have sworn it; in Agravale I will build her tomb.”

There could be no debate with such a man as this, whose spirit flamed like a torch in a wind. Tristan dismounted on the brow of the hill, bade them bring forward the wooden coffin that had carried Jocelyn from the town of Marvail. The blazoned banner covered the shell. Tristan, with his own hands, flung the “Golden Keys” aside, ungirded the lid, bade his men lift the Bishop out.

Jocelyn stood there, a lean, cringing figure, with the pride gone from his hollow-cheeked face. His eyes roved over the blackened country, the sepulchral trees, the brown, scorched grass. He seemed dizzy in the sun, looking more like some starved ascetic than the plump prelate who had ruled Agravale. Tristan ordered wine to be brought, and Jocelyn drank greedily from the flask, his head shaking as with an old man’s palsy. The red wine ran down his chin, stained his tunic, soaked the dead grass at his feet.

Tristan stood above him with drawn sword.

“Seest thou yonder island?” he said.

Jocelyn followed with his eyes the pointing sword.

“Yonder,” said the knight, “yonder is your forest hermitage, Bishop, where Pandart kept house for those whom you cherished. Stir your wits, man; is your memory so slow?”

Jocelyn winced; his lip quivered; there was a moist mist over his eyes.

“God judge me, I know not the place,” he said. “Your words are meaningless, sinner that I am.”

Again Tristan’s sword touched the Bishop’s shoulder; the man squirmed under it like a frightened dog.

“Ogier is no name to you? Come, priest, look into my eyes.”

“Ogier, by God’s light, I know no such name.”

“Nor Rosamunde, Lady of Joyous Vale, nor even Columbe whom ye did to death? Lie not to me, Jocelyn of Agravale, for you know my face; I am that Tristan who served in your guard. It was I who slew Ogier in yonder woods, and set the Lady Rosamunde safe in Holy Guard. It is my sister who lies dead under yonder cedar. Tell me, by God, whether you deserve not death.”

Jocelyn bowed his shoulders beneath the words as a slave stoops from the

hissing lash. He clutched his bosom, choked, fell prone, grovelled at Tristan's feet. But in Tristan's heart there was no glimmer of pity.

"Strip him, sirs," were his words to his men. "When ye have scourged him down to the island, set him in his priest's robes by my sister's grave. Guard him there till I shall come."

Samson's old followers broke their ranks, stripped Jocelyn naked, unbuckled their belts, and drove him down towards the river. Whimpering, grovelling, he took his chastisement, spurned and scorned, the creature of Fate. They dragged him over the rocks in the bed of the river, robed him in the state robes they had taken from his tent, and bound him to the cedar tree in the garden. Such was the pilgrimage he made that day to the grave of Columbe, Tristan's sister.

Not till evening had come did Tristan enter upon the fulfilling of the vow that he had sworn before Rosamunde over Columbe's grave. His men were camped about the island and under the branches of the spectral trees. The west was an open gate of gold, the dead forest wreathed in rivers of mist. The island, with the dark foliage of its trees and shrubs, lay like some dusky emerald sewn on the bosom of a sable robe.

Blanche the Duchess's pavilion had been pitched on the stretch of grass before the house. Tristan had sought solitude in the room where Rosamunde had been lodged in the summer months that were gone. He passed an hour alone in that chamber, pacing from wall to wall, thinking of the task that lay before him. Never did his heart flinch more than from that ordeal of death, the opening of his sister's grave. He had searched the room, and had discovered in a cupboard an old robe of Rosamunde's, even the very one she had worn the night the Papists ravaged Ronan's town. Tristan took it, pressed the hem to his lips. The robe should cover Columbe's body, love's robe for a lost love.

Night came, and torches were kindled. Tristan, stern and white of face, knelt down and prayed, and passed out from the house. In her pavilion he found Blanche seated in state, her coronet circling her silvery hair, her knights round her as for some solemn council. The garden was thronged with armed men, their helmets gleaming in the light of the torches.

Tristan stood alone before the Duchess's tent, and bent the knee to her as one who serves.

"Madame," he said, in the hearing of all, "I go to uncover my sister's grave."

"Sir Tristan," she answered him with steady voice, "God comfort you in this your hour of trial. We would not gape nor gaze on your grief. Sirs, stand by me; let no man move save Sir Tristan gives him word."

The light in the west still wavered through the gloom. To the north rose the dome of the great cedar, its green boughs sweeping even to the ground. It stood like a green temple built by Nature for the kindly shading of a woodland grave. Tristan kissed the Duchess's hand, and chose ten of Samson's men who had served him of old in the Seven Streams.

Hid by the cypresses that closed the hollow, they passed with two torches under the cedar. By the dark trunk stood Jocelyn of Agravale, clad in his pontificals as Tristan had ordered. The men went to work on the grass mound. Near by lay the two coffins side by side, the Banner of the Golden Keys covering the larger. While five men opened Columbe's grave, the rest dug a fresh trench under the cedar.

Tristan stood by the mound and watched their labours, the torchlight playing upon his face, wreathing grim shadows about his figure. There was a terrible calm in the eyes that never wavered under the arch of the casque. Soon the soiled fold of a gown came to light, then a little hand, frail and wasted. Soon they had taken Columbe from the grave, after covering the face that Tristan might not see it. The man shaded his eyes with his great forearm as they laid the body in the coffin, and bade one of the soldiers cut from her head a long lock of her golden hair. Soiled with earth as it was, he laid the lock upon his lips, knotted it with hand and teeth about his arm. He had taken the silver snake from off his wrist and tossed the bracelet into the coffin, which he bade the men cover with Rosamunde's robe.

Not one of those who laboured had spoken. In silence the whole host stood to arms as the moon came up over the blackened hills. Yet when Columbe was borne from under the cedar, a hundred trumpets challenged the night, their wild clamour echoing amid the woods.

When the second grave lay deep under the tree, Tristan, striding to the trunk of the cedar, ordered the torches to be brought near.

"Bishop," he said, "chant your own death Mass, even a Mass for her whom Ogier slew."

No mercy did they show to Jocelyn that night. When they had made an end, they laid him in the coffin, covered it with the Sacred Banner, and lowered the whole into the open grave.

CHAPTER XXXVII

When Tristan had kept the vow he had sworn in the past over Columbe's grave, he was as a man who had battled at night through a stormy sea, to behold once more the calm and broadening splendour of the dawn. Jocelyn his arch-enemy was dead. The clouds had lightened about Tristan's soul; his heart hungered for Rosamunde, and for that golden head bowed down beneath the pathos of the past.

Tristan rose at daybreak and took leave of Blanche, who walked early in the island garden. There was a sadness on the woman's face, the noble fortitude of one whose heart was hungry and whose dreams were dead. Yet she could play the mother to Tristan in his love, even as a good woman who imprisons herself seeks joy in the joy of others, contentment in their content. Her eyes grew full of light as Tristan came to her and commended Columbe's body to her care.

"God-speed ye, Tristan," she said, with her deep voice, "in the good quest that fires your heart to-day."

"Madame," he answered, ignorant of her full sacrifice, "the night that Samson's death was told us in the wilds, did I not show you all that my heart held sacred? We have avenged him and my sister here. By your good grace, and my great gratitude, we meet again before the walls of Agravale."

"Even so," she said, stretching out her hand, "may your quest prosper. As for a grandam like myself, I regain my youth in the youth of others. Your little ones shall clamber at my knees anon; her children, shall I not love them for their father's sake?"

Thus Tristan took his leave of her, and rode for the Mad Mere with a hundred men. Rosamunde, Rosamunde, Rosamunde! Spring was in the wind, though the blackened forest would spread no more its green canopies against the moonlight. All the old memories awoke in Tristan's heart with a great uprushing of tenderness. He remembered Rosamunde in a hundred scenes: moving through Ronan's town with the children at her heels, bending to kiss him in her castle bower, sleeping in the woods on the way to Holy Guard. Her deep eyes haunted him; her rich voice pealed through all the avenues of thought. Tristan's heart rejoiced in its passionate and rekindled youth. He prayed to God that he might look on Rosamunde's face again.

He rode at the head of his men that day with a fine light playing in his

deep-set eyes. His very soul seemed enhaloed about his face; his voice rang clear as a trumpet cry as he gave his orders and cheered on his men. As the reeking ashes smoked under their horses' hoofs, the bronzed veterans jested together, bartered their rough gibes, caught their captain's spirit. They loved Tristan for his fiery strength, his huge activity, his undaunted zeal. The story of the Lady of Joyous Vale had gone round the camp fires on many a night.

Tristan was guided by the distant hills, for he had noted their shape that summer day when he rode with Ogier to the Forest Hermitage. To the south, gaunt crags rose above the trees, three towering pinnacles, huge, natural obelisks cleaving the blue. Tristan kept to the higher ground. It was well past noon before he saw water glimmering in a blackened hollow, the island swimming fresh and green in the glassy waters of the mere.

A great silence wrapped the valley, and there was no smoke rising from the house, no boat moving over the lake. The ruinous woods were dark and still. Yet as they rode down through the trees, Tristan's man, a youth whose kinsfolk had been slain in the province of the Seven Streams, held up a hand, with a warning cry. A long, low howl came pealing over the water, a note in keeping with the desolation of the scene.

"Sire, a wolf's howl!"

Tristan drew rein, and scanned the island under his hand. A swift shadow had fallen upon his face, wiping out the radiance, dimming the light in the eyes. His men halted around him, their spears towards the sky, their shields shining in the sun.

"Sire, look yonder."

A brown thing trotted out from a small thicket on the island, stopped with nose in air with one paw up, and broke into a wild howling that woke the hills. Wolves, brown and grey, came hustling out from the yawn of the great gate. They cast about from side to side, snarling and snapping at each other, filling the valley with their uncouth clamour.

"Wolves, in truth," said Tristan, looking grim.

He shook his bridle and, shouting to his men, cantered off over the scorched meadowland towards the water. The brutes upon the island, catching sight of him, gave tongue more fiercely, and howled in chorus. Tristan's horse pricked up its ears, snorted, swerved, and would not go forward. He slipped out of the saddle, and, stopping his men with uplifted sword, bade them tether their horses.

They passed down to the mere on foot, and took counsel there, for old Nicholas's boat was moored fast by the wooden stage that ran out from the island into the water. Tristan's eyes searched the silent house. Of a sudden he

pointed with his sword to a window overlooking the garden, where a white cloth waved under the red tiles.

What boots it to tell how Tristan swam the mere, and brought back the boat over the water? It was sword and spear for the brown beasts of the forest. Only when Tristan's men entered the great gate did the unhallowed horror of the place give them the challenge. A few wolves still lurked amid the dead, the shredded relics of that night of slaughter. Tristan had the gates clapped to after they had put these last beasts to the sword, for fire alone could purge such a charnel house.

In the wall of the garden there was a little postern, its lock and bolts glued by the rust of years. Tristan broke the gate down with an axe, and, pushing in over the broken wood, found the garden within calm and green, unsullied by death or by the beasts of the forest.

His men had remained without the gate, prompted by a rough chivalry that gave Tristan honour. On the top step of the stair that led from the upper room stood a woman clad in a black robe, her hair loose upon her shoulders. There were deep shadows under her eyes, and her face was white as the face of the moon.

Tristan stood at the foot of the stairway with the axe still gripped in his great brown hands. It was not the Tristan who had served of old, but rather a man whose neck was stubborn, a man whose pride would suffer no yoke. The eyes that searched the woman's face were sterner than those she had known of yore.

"Madame," he said to her almost roughly, "you are free once more to go where you will. By God's good providence, I have cheated death for you."

She swayed a little where she stood as she looked down on him and watched his face.

"I am ever your debtor," she said slowly.

"I claim no usury," he answered her, with a queer smile; "what is duty to me comes as a mere command."

"Tristan——"

"Madame——"

"Have you no better words for me than these?"

She swayed forward suddenly, and Tristan saw that she was faint. He threw down the axe, sprang up the stairway, and stretched out his hands to her with sudden pity. Hunger and fear had done their work. He bore her back like a child into the room, and laid her on the bed where Miriam the Jewess knelt in prayer. Then, going out, he left the women alone together.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A strange yet beautiful timidity had fallen upon Rosamunde when Tristan next darkened the doorway of the room. He had left her to Miriam's care, and, after sending in wine and food from his sumpter mules, had contented himself with giving the hapless dead fit burial. With Telamon, his man, at his heels, he had passed through all the vaults, chambers, and galleries of the place, that he might rest assured that no starving wretches were left therein. In one damp cell he found an old man dead. Between them they carried him out into the sun, buried him apart from the grim gatherings of the court.

When the west grew red over the hills, Tristan passed alone into the garden and climbed the stairway to Rosamunde's room. The Lady of Joyous Vale was seated on a carved oak settle, her hair uncoifed, falling in rich folds upon her neck. The strange timidity upon her face was the more eloquent by reason of her old-time pride. Miriam crept out and left the two together; in the garden she found Telamon, and since the youth coloured when she spoke to him, she was not afraid of letting her eyes grow bright.

Tristan le Sauvage stood before Rosamunde, a great tenderness lighting his gaunt face so that it seemed transfigured in the woman's eyes. It was not the Tristan she had known of old, the sullen and over-strenuous boy, who blushed and stammered with his tongue. The man who stood before her was in his mighty prime, terrible in wrath, tender to weak things, fearless as a god. This Tristan had passed through deep waters, had faced death and defeated despair. The soul in him was greater than of yore, even because he had known sorrow and climbed to the summit of a more tragic strength.

Rosamunde, pale, penitent, discovered the great parable of life eloquent against herself. It was she who had ruled Tristan in the days that had passed away. Love and the deep passion-throes of life had changed the charm, strengthening the man, mellowing the woman. She conceived strange awe of Tristan as she gazed on his face that night, and saw the deep lines sorrow and pain had marked thereon.

Half timidly she beckoned him to the carved bench, even with the shyness of one who was half ashamed.

"Tristan," she said, "we are more silent than of old."

The man seemed sunk in thought for the moment as he gazed upon her face.

“We learn to be silent,” he answered her, “by reason of the rough realities of life. Am I the rude boy, Rosamunde, whom you pitied and helped of yore?”

She coloured, and her eyes grew deep with shadows. There was some bitterness in Tristan’s voice, even as though the memory of her own mere pity still weighed upon his soul. She grew meek before him with a simplicity that surprised even her own heart. In the old days her pride would have tinged her lips with scorn. Yet now that love had come and opened her whole heart, the petty prides of life had shrivelled and decayed.

“Tristan,” she said, “God knows, you are much changed to me. Sit here beside me. Must I then ask you twice?”

Tristan obeyed her in silence, resting one great arm on the carved back of the settle. The two were half turned towards each other, casting questioning glances into each other’s eyes; for as yet neither had fathomed the depths of the other’s heart.

It was Rosamunde who first set pride aside with much of the innocence of a little child.

“Tristan,” she said, with the look of one whose heart beat hurriedly, “am I to be forgiven?”

“Forgiven!” he echoed her.

“For the ingratitude I gave to you of old. I was a proud fool in those dead days. Tristan, I am wiser now.”

He caught a deep breath, bent slightly towards her, gazing in her face.

“I remember no ingratitude,” he said.

“You cannot cheat me into loving my old self.”

He still looked into her eyes, doubtingly, like a man half disbelieving a dawning truth.

“Rosamunde,” he said, “in those days I was but a rough and impetuous boy. God knows, I served you, even as a rude soldier would have served one throned above him in the hearts of many. What then was Tristan, that he should lift his eyes to yours?”

She coloured and bowed down her head. Her hands were folded upon her bosom; she swayed slightly, even as a woman needing the strength of a strong man’s arm.

“Nay, Tristan,” she said, stammering over the words, “the fault was mine, and I, proud fool, have learnt my lesson. All the horror and heaviness of life have made me wise. What was Rosamunde that she should refuse a heart of gold?”

Tristan stretched out a hand, stooped, and looked into her face.

"Rosamunde," he said.

"Have I not seen misery enough?"

"The truth, the truth!"

"Before God, Tristan, take and guard me from the world."

His hands held hers; she crept close to him, and hid her face upon his shoulder. Her bright hair bathed his face; his great arms compassed her, drew fast about her body. Presently she lifted up her face to his, a dim glory thereon, her eyes swimming with unshed tears.

"Kiss me, Tristan," she said to him.

He touched her lips with his.

"At last—peace," she said, with a great sigh.

"Peace," he answered her, as though his whole manhood stooped over her in prayer.

Thus did Tristan of Purple Isle win Rosamunde for his lady, after much pain and peril, travail and grim endeavour. A good sword and a stout heart had won him knighthood in strange lands, honour of all men, and the gold crown of love. To Tristan and Rosamunde their joy was full, tinged with the strangeness that breathes in all beauty, either in faith or desire, or in the mysterious deeps of Nature. Perhaps the woman was happier than the man, in that sorrow burdened him, and in the lightening of such sorrow lay a woman's gladness. That night in the madhouse they talked much of Columbe and of Samson the Heretic. The dear dead were with them in the full life of love.

On the morrow, a golden morrow, they took horse for Agravale, Rosamunde riding on a white mule that Tristan had taken at Marvail. Young Telamon bore Miriam behind him on his horse; the flaxen poll and the black curls were well accorded. Tristan and Rosamunde watched the by-play, riding close together and smiling into each other's eyes.

It was past noon before they saw the far towers of Agravale smite athwart the tranquil blue. Once more the woods were green and generous, for the fire had been stayed by the broad valleys that clove deep into the dusky woods. At a roadside cross Tristan fell in with a company of the Duchess's men who were on the watch for him at the edge of the forest. They had staunch news for Tristan, the last triumph-cry of the heretics' war, for but yesterday Lothaire had surprised Benedict of the Mountains in the open land to the west of Agravale.

Black Benedict and the southern barons, flying before the forest fire, had retreated on Agravale to throw themselves therein. Lothaire, coming up by

forced marches from the west, had thrust himself between the southrons and the city. There had been a fierce battle of horse on the outskirts of the forest. In the midst of the tussle Blanche and her columns had plunged upon the scene and turned the battle into a rout. Benedict and the great part of his ruffians had been hemmed in and slain fighting to a finish amid the glooms of the forest.

That evening Tristan and his company came from the woods, and saw before the walls of Agravale all the chivalry of the north and of the Seven Streams ranged under arms in the meadows about the banner of the Duchess. In the centre, raised upon a mound of earth, stood Columbe's coffin, covered with purple cloth. Beyond the thousand spears the towers and battlements of Agravale gleamed white above the woods. Far to the south the great mountains stood, purple and gold, coroneted with snow, crimsoned by the setting sun.

That evening before the walls of Agravale Blanche rode down alone on her great white horse to greet Tristan and Rosamunde the Lady of Joyous Vale. The Duchess had tuned her heart to a noble strain. Setting pride and passion behind her back, she rode down like the splendid woman that she was, to rejoice with those whose hearts were glad.

Tristan and Rosamunde dismounted before her, went to her like children, hand in hand, two pilgrims who had knelt at a common shrine. Blanche descended from off her horse, Tristan holding the stirrup, giving her his hand. He did not guess how heavy was her heart.

"Old friend," she said, smiling half sadly in his face, "is not your joy mine, though my hair is grey?"

She went to Rosamunde, held her hands, kissed her upon the forehead, as though she had been her daughter.

"Child," she said, "God has blessed thee in this. A good man's love is worth much travail. Has he not come through much peril towards your face? For when the heart is noble the truth comes first."

CHAPTER XXXIX

The Duchess Lilias, white sinner that she was, had fled from Agravale and taken horse for the East Lands with all her men. Great fear had seized upon those in the city when the northern sky had gleamed with the fringes of the fire. Under cover of night they had fled in a panic out of Agravale, men, women, and children, the monk and the merchant, the great lady and the hag. Unreasoning fear had seized on every heart, for they remembered the sacking of Ronan's town, and the foul deeds done by their soldiery in the province of the Seven Streams. Rumour had mouthed the report in Agravale that the heretics and the men of the north would sack the city in revenge for the harrying of the Seven Streams. When news was brought of Benedict's overthrow, there was much wailing through all the city. In their panic the whole population fled out of Agravale, after gathering such valuables as they could carry—gold cups, precious stones, money bags, bales of silk. Many of the aged and the sick were left within the walls, abandoned in the fierce terror of the moment. As for the priests, they were the first to be gone, having a jealous reverence for the ecclesiastical sanctity.

Thus when Blanche's trumpets rang out before the walls there came no shrill counterblast, no bristling up of spears. They seemed to challenge a city of the dead, white and voiceless, sunk in the mystery of the solemn woods. The gates were open, the streets silent, the towers and battlements devoid of life. There was no brave clamour to tell of courage, no clangour of bells, no blowing of trumpets.

Lothaire and his captains had suspected treachery at first, some subtle trap or priestly ambush.

"Tread warily, madame," he said to his lady. "Who knows what devilry lurks in such silence?"

Cautious even in victory, they sent advance guards into the city, not only to hold the gates, but to search places, churches and abbeys, where armed men might lie in hiding. Company after company had clattered in, with no sound to greet them save the clangour of their horses' hoofs. The streets were silent, the houses empty, the church gates open, the gardens deserted. In St. Pelinore's they had found a few infirm folk who had taken sanctuary before the altar, while the very dogs seemed to have fled the city.

Thus when Tristan and Rosamunde came from the Mad Mere with their

hundred men, Agravale of the south was in Blanche's hands. She had quartered her men within the walls, but had made no state entry into the city. Nor had she suffered Columbe's coffin to be taken in, remembering her promise to Tristan in this matter.

On the morrow after Tristan's joining the Duchess, they marched into Agravale with banners flying, trumpets pealing through the empty streets. Eight men of Samson's company carried Columbe's coffin upon their shoulders, Tristan walking bareheaded behind the body, with Blanche and Rosamunde following at his heels. After them came the Duchess's knights, their shields covered, their swords reversed. Yet Tristan had ordered the bells to be rung, the trumpets to be blown as though for a victory. Had he not taken Columbe from her grave of shame to tomb her royally within the walls of Agravale?

Thus with bell a-swing, arms clanging, trumpets screaming, they came through the wide and splendid streets to the great church of St. Pelinore. On either hand rose the rich houses of white stone, and the broad gardens brimming with early flowers. At the gate of the church Tristan stood aside with drawn sword, suffered Blanche and Rosamunde to pass in before him. Above shone the painted roof, on either side the tall bejewelled windows, panels of colour let into the grey wall. Columbe's coffin was carried up the aisle, into the choir, past the carved stalls to where the high altar shone with alabaster and gold. Tristan mounted the seven steps, turned and faced the knights and the rough soldiery.

"Sirs," he said, bending his head towards the Duchess, "by God's grace, and this good lady's nobleness, we are masters of Agravale and of the Southern Marches. Yonder lies Columbe of Purple Isle, even my sister, whom Jocelyn slew by Ogier's sword. By your good grace I will bury her here, even under the high altar of the southern saint, Pelinore."

The whole church cheered him, smote their shields, the thunder of the voices beating upon the roof. Many of the men who had followed Tristan and Samson ran to the outbuildings where tools were stored, came back bearing picks and bars of iron. Tristan pointed them to the altar.

"Break down this table for me," he cried, with upraised sword. "Carve me a grave that will hold my sister."

Silence fell upon the mass of steel-capped heads that filled the church from wall to wall. Desecration—but what of that? Was a broken grave worse than an outraged hearth, than homeless women or murdered men? Soon came the sharp clangour of pick and bar as Tristan's soldiers broke the altar. Alabaster and marble, gold work and precious stones came crumbling down the whitened

steps, till the altar became a ruinous heap, its pomp a pile of dust and rubble, glistening with gold work and gleaming gems. Beneath four great flagstones that the men had laid bare was tombed the body of St. Pelinore.

Under these stones they came upon a leaden coffin, with a cross of tarnished gold riveted thereon. In the grave were a staff, a pair of sandals, and a faded robe. For the moment the men recoiled from the coffin and the relics of a saint. Tristan, seeing their moral quandary, sprang over the pile of rubbish into the grave and touched the leaden coffin with his sword.

"What of Holy Guard, Sir Saint?" he said. "Thou who persecutest in visions, rise up and prove thy power."

No sound came from the silence save the heavy breathing of the men who had broken down the altar. Tristan stood back from the grave, smiled at the mute faces of his men, pointed them to the coffin with his sword.

"I have broken the spell, sirs," he said. "This good saint will not save his church."

They took heart and obeyed him, lifted the coffin out, laid it in the choir betwixt the stalls where Samson's heretics were gathered. Into the grave they lowered Columbe's body, replaced the stones, piled back at Tristan's bidding the broken fragments of the altar. Only Blanche and Rosamunde remained while Tristan knelt there awhile and prayed.

When he arose they both came to him, like Hope and Charity who had attended at the burial of Faith.

"God give you joy, Tristan," said the Duchess. "Columbe is avenged. Turn now, let all dark thoughts elapse."

He looked at them both and smiled.

"The night is past," he said.

Blanche had taken Rosamunde by the hand.

"And here, oh my brother, is your dawn."

They went out into the sunny forecourt where the men were burying the coffin of St. Pelinore under an orange tree. Once more the great church was steeped in solitude, the sunlight plashing through the coloured glass, the arches wreathed with shadowy gloom. Yet the rosary with its stones of white and green would be trodden no more by the penitents of Agravale. An Isaurian spirit had inspired Tristan towards the church, yet he was no mere image-breaker in his victory. The great church of St. Pelinore should cover with its ruins the grave of Columbe, his dead sister.

Thus the great work began. Knight and soldier seized an axe and pick, broke down the altars and images and the rich frescoes. They threw down the

buttresses, sapped the piers and pillars at their foundations, breached the walls and mined them in many places. By sunset the whole church tottered, the great tower trembled, the pillars fell. It was then that they fastened twenty stout ropes about the knees of the great central piers. Every man quitted the doomed church and ran out to watch its final overthrow.

At the flash of Tristan’s sword the men in the square set their hands to the ropes and drew together with a loud shout. The two southern piers, sapped at their foundations, tottered, broke, and came down like thunder. For a moment the tall tower quivered and stood. Then came the rending of the walls, the heavy downrush of the roof. Pillars crashed down like smitten Titans; a cloud of dust rushed to the heavens. Even as the temple of the Philistines fell beneath Samson’s strength, so the church of St. Pelinore sank in ruins over Columbe’s grave.

CHAPTER XL

About the White Palace far south of the Great Mountains were pitched a thousand tents, some under the shadows of the wooded heights, others on the banks of a broad river. The palace stood on a hill in the midst of a valley, like a white casket wonderfully carved set upon a pedestal of green marble. In its gardens fountains played amid groves of roses, myrtles, and orange trees. Huge cypresses rose against the gleaming walls, overshadowing beds of purple flowers, white marble stairways, tranquil pools. Towards the deep blue dome of the sky, tower, turret, and minaret mimicked the white peaks of the distant mountains.

About the White Palace on its hill were gathered the armies of Serjabil the Caliph. Pious Moslem that he was, a turbulent man with a heart of fire, he had sent a letter through all his caliphate to such as served Allah and loved the Crescent.

"In the name of the most merciful God, Serjabil to all true believers, joy and greatness be upon you. By the most high God and Mohammed his Prophet, this is to declare that I would send our arms against the infidels who have fallen upon each other beyond the mountains. For behold fighting for the truth is obedience to God. Therefore gather to me, children of the faith, with bow and spear, buckler and scimitar, that we may destroy the infidels, and beat down the Cross into the dust."

In the great Hall of the Ambassadors sat Serjabil in his ivory chair, a hundred carved pillars dwindling around into the golden gloom of the deepening eve. The ceiling of the hall was of cedar wood, inlaid with silver and lapis lazuli. The walls were covered with tiles of azure and green; the pillars and arches decorated with arabesques and letters of beaten gold. The floor was of white marble, the hangings of scarlet silk.

Serjabil wore a green turban enriched with rubies. His red robe was edged with rare fur over a tunic that was white as the marble floor. In his belt shone a jewelled scimitar, and before him on a desk of cedar wood was laid the Koran —the book of the Prophet.

Serjabil's black eyes gleamed and sparkled in his dusky face. It was the face of a man who was both a soldier and a sage, one who possessed the heart of a Kaled and the wisdom of an Ali knit together. About him were gathered the great ones of his land, emirs with snow-white beards, merchant princes,

soldiers, scribes. They were gathered there in Serjabil's palace to hear his commands concerning the war.

Before Serjabil's chair stood Hassan the poet, a thin-featured man, with a short black beard. The Caliph had called him forth from the throng to utter panegyrics in praise of war.

"Oh Hassan," were the Caliph's words, "to what would you liken the servant of God who destroyeth the heathen and obeyeth the Prophet?"

The poet salaamed, and touched with his lips a little charm that he wore at his neck on a silver chain.

"Oh Lion of God," quoth he, stretching out his hands, "who shall dare to praise the great? Behold, have I not seen the sun in his strength roll back the mists out of the valleys and launch his chariots over the hills? The hearts of the holy hunger for battle, for the sound of the sword and the cry of the trumpet. To the sun would I liken the Lion of God, who giveth life to the children of men, even life in death, and in death paradise."

Serjabil took a brooch from his red robe, a brooch set with precious stones, and cast it on the floor at Hassan's feet.

"Oh son of the golden mouth," he said, "God give ye joy of the true belief."

Hassan bowed low and took the brooch.

"Methinks," he cried, with his face afire, "that I see the black-eyed girls of heaven gazing upon us from their scented gardens."

At a sign from Serjabil two black slaves brought a man in shackles from a neighbouring alcove. It was Thibaut the Apostate, a renegade priest, who had fled from Agravale over the mountains. He had received many wrongs at Jocelyn's hands, and in his shame he had abjured the Cross, and turned Mohammedan to serve his ends.

Standing before Serjabil's chair, with the huge Æthiopians towering above him, Thibaut told of the state of the Christian provinces, and of the turbulence and vanity that reigned therein. He told how Samson had arisen in the Seven Streams, and had spread his heresy among the people till the Pope had decreed a crusade against him and the barons of the south had marched to war. Thibaut described the lands north of the mountains as empty and ruinous, rotten with decay. The Cross had been carried against the Cross, so that the Christians had sapped each other's strength. The Southern Marches, ay, and the Seven Streams, waited for the conqueror who should come with the sword.

When Thibaut had spoken, Serjabil arose and laid his hand on the open Koran.

“In the name of God,” he said, “and of Mohammed His Prophet, shall we not march against these fools? Behold, we are strong, we are not divided. While these Christians quarrel, let us cross the mountains.”

Many dark eyes kindled at the words; hands were stretched towards the Sacred Book, swords drawn and held towards the cedarn roof. The dusky faces shone with zeal, and white teeth gleamed behind coal-black beards. Serjabil drew his scimitar from its sheath, kissed the naked blade whereon were carved texts from the Koran and the names of his ancestors.

“La illah il Allah,” cried they all with the dim, strange ardour of the East, “let us march, oh Lion, against the Cross.”

Then through the shadowy galleries, under the dreamy arches, came the cry of a muezzin from the minaret in the great court—

“To prayer, to prayer.”

For it was the hour before sunset, when the hills were red above the cypress thickets and the golden meads. Silence had fallen in the hall where black slaves knelt with bowls full of water under the blue and silver roof. The solemn worshippers cleansed themselves, washing face, hands, and neck before falling to prayer. Every turbaned head was bowed towards the east, while the prayers went up through the many arches into the gold of the evening sky.

When Serjabil rose from off his knees, he closed the Koran upon its stand of cedar wood, and passed out to the stone-paved terrace that looked over the valley towards the woods. Beneath lay the palace garden, its dark thickets steeped in the odour of a myriad flowers. Soldiers and scribes followed the Caliph, their many-coloured turbans like a rich parterre against the whiteness of the palace walls.

Beneath in the valley stood the tents of Serjabil’s camp. The Saracens had risen from the grass where they had knelt in prayer, their faces towards the east. Seeing the Caliph upon the walls, they raised a loud shout, stretched up their hands to him.

“La illah il Allah,” came the cry, “oh Lion of Heaven, the Prophet preserve thee.”

Many ran to where their horses were tethered, loosed them, mounted, and took spear and shield. They galloped and circled over the meadows, tossing their lances high in the air, making mimic onslaughts, troop against troop. Their wild cries rang over rock and river as the sun went down into the west.

Serjabil stood close by the parapet with Thibaut the Apostate by his side.

“Behold,” he cried to those around him, “how the crescent moon climbs

into the sky. She shall shine full on us that night when we cross the mountains.”

CHAPTER XLI

Tristan was still at Agravale with some two hundred men, when a mob of peasant folk came into the city, bringing with them a lean, half-starved southron who had fled to Agravale over the mountains. The man had served as a slave in Serjabil's palace, and being wise as to the Caliph's schemes of conquest, he had dared martyrdom and fled for the north. Two other Christians who had shared his flight had been taken and beheaded on the road. The third had gained the mountains in safety, and having crossed by the pass known as St. Isidore's Gate, had descended into the lowlands with the cry of a prophet—

"Fly, for the Saracens are at my heels!"

It was but two days since Blanche's men had marched from Agravale, glad to return home through the Seven Streams after their campaigning in the south. The Duchess had tarried one day more, leaving Tristan and Rosamunde to guard the rear as they marched north towards the fords of the Lorient. At Agravale she had received an embassage from the King stating that he was coming south with his barons to restore peace to the Southern Marches. He besought her to meet him at a certain border town that they might discuss the state of the Seven Streams. And since Blanche had no great belief in the King's honour, nor in the sincerity of his faith, she had determined to meet him at the head of her men, the most powerful plea for peace and justice.

It was evening when the news came to Tristan as he was preparing to evacuate Agravale on the morrow and follow Blanche towards the north. He had but two hundred men left in the city, mostly Samson's veterans from the Seven Streams. The country folk crowded round him as he came out upon the steps of Lilias's palace, and besought him not to desert them in their extremity, and to leave their farms and hamlets at the mercy of the Saracens. Tristan pointed out to the chief pleader the smallness of his company, reminded them that they had little cause to claim protection at his hands. But when some of the rough men wept, and besought him the more to save their homes and families from the sword, pointing out that St. Isidore's Gate might be held by a hundred resolute men, he told them he would consider the matter, and give them an answer before dawn.

That night Tristan went alone into Lilias's garden and paced to and fro through the tangled grass. He was tempted greatly to abandon the south, for he had fought his fill since he had sailed from Purple Isle and landed in the heart of the Seven Streams. He had met grief and conquered it, and found love at last

after many days. He was as a man who had grown weary of the chaos of war and hungered for God's peace, and the clear calm of a woman's love.

It was about Rosamunde's face that Tristan's passions played as he walked in Lilias's garden under the moon. Should he gamble once more with fate, stake that which he had won with his own good sword, when the future stretched clear as a summer dawn?

Had not the lords of the Southern Marches harried the province of the Seven Streams and carried death and despair into a thousand homes? What claims had these people upon his pity? Could it be that God had decreed their destruction?

Great was the temptation that assailed Tristan that night to take Rosamunde his love and to ride from Agravale, leaving the Southern Marches to their fate. He could overtake the Duchess in a day, and leave the future to her and the King. If Serjabil and his Saracens crossed the mountains, the King could gather his great vassals and give them battle in due season. Had he not done enough with his single sword?

But as great hearts rise to great needs, so Tristan cast the tempter out of his soul, and grew strong in the strength of heroic manhood. The shade of Samson seemed to walk at his side, Samson who had been crucified for Christ and the Cross, and who had met death, a living sacrifice. Should he not save these helpless peasant folk from the Saracen scimitars and the false creed of their Prophet? He would stand shamed before God when the villages flamed and the smoke of their burning ascended to heaven.

Tristan knelt down in the grass and prayed, with the deserted city silent under the moon and the great stars shining overhead.

"Lord Jesus," he said, "I pray Thee pardon these weak thoughts that rose in my heart against my manhood and Thee. Grant me Thy grace to this good end that I may save these helpless ones who have sought my sword. Give me Thy strength against the heathen that I may quit myself as a Christian should."

At midnight he went out from Lilias's garden to the great hall where his men were gathered. Some were asleep on the rush-strewn floor, others were watching and talking together.

"Sirs," he said, "how many will stand with me for the Holy Cross, and hold the passes till the Duchess comes?"

Every hand was stretched towards him; nor did they fail him, these iron men, who had followed Samson through the Seven Streams.

"God bless you all!" he cried, with a smile on his face. "Percival, take horse and ride after the Duchess. Tell her the Saracens are marching for the mountains, that we go to hold St. Isidore's Gate. Ride, man, as though the

devil rode at your heels. The Duchess will turn and give us succour."

With the dawn came the great trial of Tristan's strength, for Rosamunde was ignorant of what had passed, and it lay with Tristan to tell her the truth. Moreover, she had lived amid dreams since she had been brought from the Mad Mere into Agravale. For her life's woes were at an end; she had forgotten that death still walked the earth.

She came to Tristan that morning in the garden, and found him pacing under the trees, fully harnessed, his sword at his side. There was that same grim earnestness upon his face that she had known of old when he had taken her to Holy Guard through the woods. As she came with her stately step over the grass betwixt the beds of balsams and the thickets of fruit trees her eyes grew dark under the sweep of her golden hair.

"Tristan," she said, "you seem grim to-day. Should we be sad at leaving the south?"

He winced a little and looked into her eyes, solemnly and sadly, like a man who suffered. His earnest face awoke vague fears in her, sudden dread of some fresh misfortune. She held out her hands to him with a questioning smile.

"Tristan," she said, "why are you silent?"

"I am thinking," he answered her, "of how our lives change even in one setting of the sun."

"Speak," she said, "for I am no child to be kept carefully in the dark."

"Rosamunde," he answered, squaring his shoulders and stiffening his great neck, "I thought the sea had grown calm at last, and that no more storms would come between us. Yet how frail are the hopes of men. Once more the sword must leave the sheath."

She reached out her arms to him with a sudden cry and the mute look of a frightened child. Tristan's hands were upon her shoulders. There was a divine tenderness upon his face as he looked in her eyes and told her the truth.

"Take courage," he said to her, "for if ever a man needed love, I, Tristan, am that man to-day. Serjabil and his Saracens are marching for the mountains, thinking to have an easy victory over Christians weakened by their feuds. It is God's will that we should take the sword and save the innocent from further shame."

She hung in his arms, looking up like one dazed into his face.

"Ah, Tristan, what must follow?"

His voice shook a little as he answered her words, holding her very close to him, like one who knew not what the days might bring.

"Rosamunde," he said, "I go to hold the mountain passes till Blanche and

her men can send me succour."

"But you have so few with you——"

"We are enough," he said; "and if not enough, where lies the shame?"

She turned her head upon his shoulder with a gesture of impatience, a pouting of the mouth that did not escape him.

"Tristan, you are mad," she pleaded, "to risk so much for those who have injured us."

"God knows, I fought not against the poor," he said, "but against the evil in high places. Now comes the hour when I may save the weak."

Rosamunde broke away from him suddenly and stood apart, like one whose pride takes umbrage at a threat. Her eyes grew bright with the impatience of the moment, for, believing all storm clouds to have passed from the sky, she had drifted dreamily towards a haven of rest. The sudden revulsion made her rebel against an enterprise that to her seemed mad.

"Tristan," she said, "you shall not go. Are my wishes nothing in this?"

The man's face appeared wreathed in shadows. He looked at her sadly out of his dark eyes, as though baffled by a mood that he had not foreseen.

"Would you love a man," he answered her, "who played the coward and fled from fighting for Christ and the Cross?"

"You are no coward," she retorted hotly. "I, Rosamunde of Joyous Vale, can swear to that. But as for this madness, I will not praise it; you can play the hero without being a fool."

"It is not folly," he said very patiently.

"But why tempt death," she cried again, "because your hot courage spurs you on? Wait till the King and the Duchess come, till the Southern Marches teem with steel and a thousand banners blow to the wind."

"By then," he said, shaking his head, "Serjabil and his men will have crossed the mountains and given the countryside over to rapine."

"What of the countryside?" she retorted, growing less generous as her impatience increased. "Who set the torch to the great forests, and burnt homes and hamlets in the cause of God?"

Tristan started and caught his breath, as though she had turned a sword against his heart.

"Why taunt me," he said, "because I fought for you and Samson and the Seven Streams? It was against the ruffians of the Church that I fired the forest. God judge me if I did ill. The greater be my duty now to guard the weak against the strong."

“Not so,” she said, with a flood of bitterness; “the sword is more to you than a woman’s heart. It is your glory that you love, your strength and your great fame. I, a mere woman, must give way to honour. For you are afraid, Tristan, lest men should jeer.”

Tristan clung by patience even though her taunts were the more bitter by reason of their ingratitude. Though he had imagined that Rosamunde would have sped him with brave words, even to death if God so willed it, he took her anger more as the anger of a child than the strong purpose of a grown woman. Therefore he stood out before her, convinced of honour, and sure in his own heart that she would turn to him when the impetuous mood had passed.

“Not for glory,” he said, “shall I leave you here. It is not easy to run from love.”

“Why go, then?” she cried, turning away her head, her hands playing with the rich girdle about her body. “Is duty the sorry nag that bears you hence? Before Heaven, Tristan, if you refuse me this, I will return to Holy Guard and live among ruins.”

His dark eyes followed her as she drifted to and fro in her blue gown over the brilliant grass. She was very lovely even in her anger, with her warm cheeks and her eager eyes. Yet Tristan, having a will more strong than her wrath, determined to take her at her word.

“So be it,” he said, solemnly enough; “I will send Telamon with you and twenty men. The Gloire will bear you straight to the sea; Lilias’s barge is moored in the shallows. Man can promise no safer place than Holy Guard; if the worst comes to the worst, you can sail for the north.”

Rosamunde looked at him, sudden wistfulness shining through the mask of wrath, as though she half doubted the truth of his words. There was no wavering of Tristan’s eyes, no loosening of the determined mouth. Her pride waxed in her as she gazed on his face, perhaps because she felt that she had earned his pity, in that she had failed him when he needed her love.

“So be it, then,” she said, turning away under the trees. “I shall be ready for Telamon before the sun is at noon.”

CHAPTER XLII

Like a proud star, Rosamunde of Joyous Vale had set in the far west, over the wilds and the deep woods that stretched towards the sea. Lilias's forsaken barge had borne her away down the silver curves of the mighty Gloire, with Telamon at the helm and ten men toiling at the oars. From a tower on the walls of Agravale Tristan had watched the gilded poop disappear into the gloom of the woods. In anger Rosamunde had parted from him, because he had set his duty before her love and had dared to deny her the tyranny of tears. Tristan wondered, as he watched from the tower, whether he would behold her face again.

"To horse, to horse!"

Such was the trumpet's cry that noon. Tristan and his men tightened up the girths, rode out from Agravale under the sun at its zenith, wound down the steep road towards the river, crossed the stone bridge, and held for the south. Their horses' hoofs rang on the old Roman road that stretched over the meadows like a great beam. They had taken certain of the peasant folk with them as guides, men who knew all the mountain passes and the narrow defiles of St. Isidore's Gate.

So the sun climbed, descended, and set in the west, beating on the distant peaks with vapours of crimson and gold. Knight Tristan rode at the head of his men, his eyes fixed on the far mountains, the purple slopes that rose from the plain, the icy glimmer of the snow-white heights. He rode as a man who considered death, to whom the unknown stretched out like an unsailed sea. There was great loneliness upon Tristan's soul that evening, for all the love seemed to have left his life, and all his battlings to have ended in bitterness. In the hour of trial Rosamunde had failed him, had hid her face from him behind the mask of pride. Nor cared he greatly what might befall from that hour, since death would honour him when hope stood apart.

Night came with a round moon swimming in a sky of dusky azure studded with the faces of many stars. Tristan halted his men to rest them and their horses on the march, for though the hours were precious, he would not deny them the sleep that they needed. They off-saddled at a little shrine by the roadside, a shrine dedicated to St. Geneviève by some good matron dead and gone. Roses clambered about the walls and slim cypresses streaked the misty grass where a little pool caught the light of the moon. A grove of poplars stood near in a broad meadow, the night breeze playing in their mighty tops.

As for Tristan, he had no hope of sleep, for there were thoughts moving in his brain, tramping like restless sentinels to and fro. The night seemed full of ghostly voices, crying to him out of the dark. He heard his mother's voice, even as he had heard it as a little child when his hands clung to the folds of her gown. Also he listened to Columbe weeping, as she had wept once in Purple Isle long ago. Yet Rosamunde's clear tones topped them all. He remembered the songs he had heard her sing in distant Joyous Vale to the women and children of Ronan's town. For him, perhaps, she would sing no more. Tristan found himself wondering in his heart whether she would weep if he died in the mountains. Perhaps her anger would melt away when she learnt that she had lost his love for ever.

Tristan passed the night alone under the stars, pacing to and fro on the white road, with the wind playing in the poplar tops. Often he stood leaning upon his spear, gazing towards the mountains whose snowy peaks gleamed like white marble in the distant south. Yonder in the yawning passes and under the huge and savage crags he would meet Serjabil and his men, rear up his shield against their lances. There was much of the soldier's joy in the thought that his sword would be measured against the scimitar.

Soon the dawn came, a golden haze rising in the east. The poplars caught the streaming light; in the meadows silvery mists smoked up; the far woods glistened, seemed to tongue forth flame.

From the gloom of the north a faint sound shivered on the wind. Tristan heard it and stood erect, peering along the empty road that ran so straight under the tall trees. The sound seemed to grow with the rising dawn, to swell into the thunder of many hoofs, the clash and clangour of hurrying steel. Vague lightnings came flashing from the gloom, shield and helmet mimicking the east. Huge mist-wrapped figures loomed out of the north, mailed phantoms pressing through the vapoury dawn along the white road betwixt the trees. A trumpet sounded beside the shrine. Tristan's men came crowding up through the long grass amid the burning cypresses.

A trumpet's scream answered Tristan's challenge. Along the road rolled a hundred spears behind Blanche the Duchess on her great white horse, the Banner of the Bleeding Heart blowing above. They came to a halt before the shrine amid an eddying cloud of dust. Tristan and his men ran to meet the Duchess, cheering her mightily with great good will.

Blanche, big-hearted woman that she was, had straightway turned when Percival had ridden in with Tristan's message concerning the Saracens. She had sent a rider to overtake Lothaire, bidding him march south again with all his men. Not waiting for him to join her, she had used whip and spur in her gallant haste to bring Tristan succour. Only her bodyguard, some hundred

spears, had followed her past Agravale towards the mountains.

Blanche climbed down from her jaded horse and met Tristan face to face on the dusty road. The soldiers on either side stood back out of rough respect to these two great ones whose hands were clasped in the cause of the Cross. Though Blanche was weary with hard riding, her splendid spirit seemed unquenched, her courage fresh as the broadening dawn. Her eyes were very bright as they gazed on Tristan's: she smiled at him dearly, held out her hands.

"Old friend," she said, "we meet again."

Tristan went down on one knee in the road and kissed the hands that were stretched towards him. Was she not a woman to serve and honour, a woman who could strengthen a soldier's heart and give him help in the hour of need? She had seen no madness in this ride of his, but rather the desire of an heroic heart to bear the brunt against heavy odds.

"Madame," he said to her, still kneeling in the dust, "Heaven wills it, it seems, that Tristan le Sauvage should be your debtor."

She drew her hands away from his, as though half unwilling to see him kneel to her.

"Rise up, Tristan," she said; "it is my good fortune that gives me the privilege. Where is Rosamunde? Will you not lead me to her?"

As for Tristan, when he heard her speak Rosamunde's name he went both red and white under his tanned skin. He was jealous for Rosamunde, yet half ashamed at having to justify her before the Duchess. He would not have confessed, even under torture, that Rosamunde had failed him in her love.

"Madame," he said, rising up from his knees and squaring his great shoulders against the truth, "Rosamunde have I sent to Holy Guard, that she might be safe there against all mischance."

Blanche had been watching Tristan's face, the shifting thought clouds that played over his eyes, nor had his answer wholly deceived her.

"How?" she said. "Rosamunde at Holy Guard? Was it her will that you should go alone to this great venture, whence none may return?"

Tristan was silent for one brief moment. Yet Blanche had discovered much of the truth in that short silence that held him mute.

"I planned for the best," he made haste to answer her. "Who knows what may happen to us in the mountains? Should I drag love into the van of battle, and cast such a pearl into Serjabil's treasury? Nay, Madame Blanche, give me but fifty of your men, and I will hold the passes till Lothaire comes south."

On Blanche's face there was a mysterious light, as though she rejoiced over some heaven-sent boon. Her dark eyes shone under her silvery hair; her

voice rang deep as she gave Tristan her answer.

“Not fifty, but a hundred shall you have,” she said, “and I, Blanche, will stand at your side.”

Tristan’s eyes met hers in one long look.

“Nay,” he said, “you are too noble a soul to be risked against Serjabil’s sword.”

“I am a woman,” she answered him very simply, “a woman who loves to stand by those who do not flinch when the wind blows keen. Am I better than my men, who give their blood for Christ and the Cross? No, I trow not. Who fears death when those most dear are on the brink of the grave?”

Tristan answered her not a word, for he was glad at heart of her great courage. He could have blessed God for such a woman. Did not a deep voice cry within him, “If only Rosamunde had spoken thus!”

CHAPTER XLIII

All that day and the next Tristan and the Duchess rode south from St. Geneviève's shrine, through the woods and meadows, rich with the magic of many flowers. The tall grass seemed as a rare robe shot through with threads of diverse colours. In the woods the ilex and the beech lifted their broad domes towards the blue, and in the pastures a myriad aspens shivered in the breeze.

Towards the noon of the second day the lowlands stretched back towards the north. Tristan and his men came to a wilder region, where the woods grew dark beneath the shadows of the mountains. Through a multitude of poplars whistling in the wind, amid fields spread with poppies, yellow and red, the road curled through dense thickets of chestnut and of beech. Higher still, under the deepening darkness of the trees, the road dwindled to a grass-grown track, so that the armed men rode in single file, a silvery snake that wavered through the green. Higher still, the spruce and larch fretted the blue dome of the sky, and heavenwards towered the silver firs and great pines, sombre and huge of girth.

Under the shade of a thicket of pines Tristan halted at noon to rest his men. A spring played by the roadside, where the thirsty riders drank from their palms, and led their horses to drink at the pool. Meanwhile, Tristan and the Duchess went forward with the guide to a great rock that was perched upon the hillside, and whence the man promised them full view of St. Isidore's Pass. Above the trees the mountains towered, crag on crag and cliff on cliff, till the mighty tops, aureoled with golden vapour, clove the canopy of the sky. Here and there a snow-capped peak gleamed and flashed against the cloudless blue. Black gulfs yawned everywhere, edged with a thousand glittering crags, hoarse with the thunder of a thousand streams.

Before them lay St. Isidore's Gate, a colossal rent betwixt two mountains, full of gloom even under the noon sun. Tristan and the Duchess scanned the pass, while the peasant told them how the road ran. At one point it dwindled to a narrow track, on the one hand a precipice plunging down, on the other the bluff shoulder of the mountain rising straight towards the sky. A great rock half closed the narrow track, and the gap was known as St. Isidore's Gate. It was a point that could be held, the peasant said, by twenty men against a thousand. Nor could they be outflanked save by one wild track that led over the mountains towards the east.

Blanche laid a hand on Tristan's shoulder.

“Let us give to Bertrand, my best knight, some eight score men to keep this path over the mountains. You and I, Tristan, can hold the pass together.”

The man looked into her fearless eyes, at the face so strong and yet so tender. Once more he besought her to consider her safety, and to remain with Bertrand on the slopes above.

“You are of greater worth,” he argued, “than we rough men, whose business it is to make play with the sword.”

But in Blanche’s soul deeper thoughts were moving towards the coming crisis. She loved Tristan, and in that hour when death was spreading forth his wings she took less pains to dissemble the truth. In the half-wistful sacrifice of herself she lost none of the dignity of her heart. Her rare womanliness seemed to stand the higher, even because her love was a noble thing.

“Tristan,” she said to him, “am I better than my men? Think you they will be the worse for having a woman in their ranks?”

“God knows,” he answered her, looking in her eyes, “we shall fight the better if you are with us in the pass.”

“Therefore,” she said, smiling a little, “you argue against your own plea. Is it not a woman’s joy to stand fast by those whom she has loved?”

“Madame,” he answered her, colouring to the lips, “would we were worthy of so great love.”

That night, when the round moon stood full upon the mountains, a line of spears glittered on the road that threaded the pass. On high the great peaks shone amid the stars, splashed with the moonlight, ribbed with deep shadows. A hundred torrents foamed in the ravines, their massed thunder rising like the hoarse cries of a multitude. Above, the peaks seemed monuments of silence, sublime and tranquil as they communed with the stars. Far below on the northern slopes the moonlit forests beat like a sea upon the bases of the mountains.

Tristan and Blanche rode side by side, the peasant trudging before their horses, an oaken staff over his shoulder. There were deep lines of thought on the woman’s face; it seemed wreathed in shadows, though the moonlight played upon her eyes and on the silver stephanos in her hair. The sublimity of the scene had constrained them to silence. Man and his machinations seemed infinitely small under the grand calm of the towering peaks.

Tristan’s thoughts had flown to Rosamunde and all the turbulence of those short months since he had sailed from Purple Isle to seek his sister over the sea. Glimmerings of death seemed to steal on him that night; vague voices called from the bleak cliffs above; mystery encompassed him and the strange twilight of the unknown.

“Lady,” he said suddenly, turning towards her in the moonlight, “how these torrents thunder. Methinks I hear the voices of the dead crying among the mountains. ‘Brother,’ they call me. Never have I known this mood before.”

Blanche’s eyes were fixed upon his face. She saw no fear there, only some sadness round the dogged mouth, a vague melancholy in the deep-set eyes.

“Who would not remember the dead,” she answered him, “amid these great mountains under the moon? Yonder white peak I would name the Christ. Does he not shine on us out of the night?”

“Even strong men die.”

“Not so,” she said; “the great ones never die. There is life in death for such as live like men. Can knightliness and honour end in dust? Nay, for they stand like these great mountains, rare spirits fronting the evil of the world, standing for God until the judgment come.”

“True, true,” he answered her; “and should a man grudge his poor dust to the All-Father who has made us men?”

“Never would I mourn for one,” she cried, “who died in some fair battle for the truth. They are not dead these great ones who have stood like mighty sentinels upon the towers of heaven. Joy is the incense we should give to such, not empty weeping and rebellious grief.”

They had left their horses on the lower slopes, and by midnight had reached the summit of the pass, where the road narrowed rapidly under the shadow of the cliff. A great rock hung like a bartizan over the precipice, narrowing the track still further so that a natural gate gave passage betwixt two walls of stone. A storm-twisted pine, clinging to the cliff, cast a broad shadow over the path, while over the thin grass the blue gentians grew even to the edge of the great ravine.

A sudden cry topped the far thunder of the torrents. Tristan’s guide stood beyond the rock, his tall figure outlined by the moon. He was pointing with his staff towards the south, beckoning them on with eager gestures.

“The Saracens, the Saracens!”

Tristan sprang up beside him, his melancholy gone in the flash of an eye. To the south a broad valley stretched up betwixt the spurs of the mountains, flooded by the tranquil light of the moon. Crag upon crag fell away to the distant scene where torrents ran like strands of flax into forests that stood like early bracken. From the dim depths where the pass began amid rolling woods there came a sense of movement under the moon. Columns of steel like shining beetles crawled up the rugged slopes from the edge of the forest. Nearer still under the bluff shoulder of a cliff the mountain road lay clear

before their eyes.

Tristan whistled and laid his hand on his sword, for there to the south in the pale moonlight came long lines of armed men toiling up the pass towards the Saint’s Gate. Buckler and lance caught the moonbeams from afar; white tunics splashed the sable rocks; glittering corselets were merged together till the long columns of moving men seemed like dragons of steel climbing the mountains. Above stood the calm and silent peaks steeped in the stillness of the heavens. Below, the many torrents muttered, as though they cheered on the advancing host.

CHAPTER XLIV

To the north of St. Isidore's Gate the road expanded into a broad platform, capable of holding some hundred men. Many boulders were strewn around, with squared stones fallen from the ruined parapet that had once edged the sharp precipice. Tristan and his men were quickly at work, carrying stones towards the Gate, and piling a rampart from the rock to the cliff. The peasant who had served them as guide had swarmed up the stem of the great fir and was perched amid the branches, watching the Saracens as they climbed the pass. Meanwhile, Tristan had sent a messenger to warn Sir Bertrand on the heights above that Serjabil was upon them with his host.

Soon a broad bulwark, a Cyclopean wall, closed the mouth of St. Isidore's Gate. Tristan stood under the shadow of the tree with Blanche the Bold at his side. The melancholy that had possessed the man but an hour before had passed with the stir of the coming battle. He was once more that Tristan of dogged will who had slain Ogier the giant in fair fight and trodden down Jocelyn into the dust.

He spread his shoulders and smiled at the moon as he stood with Blanche upon the rough stone wall. His nostrils dilated with his deep breathing as he watched the columns climb the pass.

"But a day and a night," he said, "and Lothaire should come. We could hold this wall for a week, I trow."

"Even so," she answered him; "yet before the moon climbs up again all my rough children from the north should tumble up to save their lady."

"If only Bertrand holds the mountain path."

"Bertrand will stand to the last sword."

"And, by Heaven, we shall not fail him. God willing, I would hold the pass alone."

The moon had passed behind one of the western peaks when Serjabil's men came climbing up to where the fir tree grew by the Gate. A broad shadow was thrown athwart the pass, so that the road was plunged in gloom. Tristan had ordered his force into five companies, each numbering some fifty men. They were to reinforce each other from hour to hour, so that all could rest in turn. They lay quiet behind the wall, waiting calmly for Tristan's orders.

Tristan crouched behind a boulder, his shield on his arm, his sword in his

hand. Around him were stretched the motionless figures of his men, like leopards crouching for the spring. The stars were very bright in the sky, since the moon had sunk behind the peak.

Then above the distant roar of the streams came the sound of voices, the jingling of steel, the dull padding of a thousand feet. Tristan, peering round a rock, saw a man on a white mule turn an angle of the cliff with a long line of lances at his back. White robes showed in shadows as the men marched up, recking nothing of what would follow. When they were within twenty yards of the Gate, the emir on the white mule drew rein in the road, and looked ahead into the darkness. Tristan could see a broad turban wreathing a dusky oval face. It was plain that the man had marked the barrier before him, and was debating its nature and what lay behind.

He spoke some words to his men, and pointed them towards the tree and the rock overhanging the precipice. Then figures sprang forward, came running up the road towards the wall across the Gate. Tristan heard them muttering one to another as they clambered up the rough pile of stones; a turbaned head showed above the summit; another followed it, and yet another.

Tristan sprang up with a great shout.

“God and the Cross!”

Fifty shields heaved up around him. There was the shrill whistle of whirling blades, the sound of strokes that went heavily home. Several white-robed bodies rolled back from the rampart, and the first blood had been shed for the Cross.

Down the pass under the moonlight the long columns could be seen to waver and halt as the trumpets screamed amid the mountains, the echoes tonguing from crag to crag. The emir on the white mule rode back among his men, pointing them towards the Gate with his naked scimitar. The advance guard raised a great shout, and came pouring up with bucklers forward, calling on Allah and Mohammed the Prophet. Lithe, dusky warriors in quilted tunics and shirts of mail came clambering up the rude stone rampart, to take the spear-thrusts in their faces and meet the swing of the pitiless swords. Not a single man of them could top the parapet. Soon white-clad figures lay piled against the wall, like snow driven there by the wind.

These light-armed folk gave back by their emir’s orders to make way for Serjabil’s guard, the choice troops of the Caliph’s provinces, harnessed in chain mail and finely armed. They came up the road in a long column, their bucklers blinking at the moon, to be eclipsed in the shadows athwart the Gate. Like foam they dashed against the wall, with its ranks of shields and spears above. Vain was their fatalistic valour, the courage that claimed an eastern

paradise. Time after time they clambered up to melt away before the wall. The dead were piled in the narrow road with cloven bucklers and broken spears. Many a man grudged not his blood that night for the languorous glances of the black-eyed girls.

When dawn came they rolled back baffled from St. Isidore's Gate. Serjabil himself rode forward on a mule; his keen black eyes took in the truth, the rugged hazards of that narrow way. It seemed to him that he had spent the night in throwing snow against a rock. With the dawn he embraced a subtler means, ordered his men to bend their bows and shoot their arrows high in the air. Moreover, he sent a thousand men to climb the path that wound over the mountain where Sir Bertrand lay.

So the fight went on that day, with the whistling of arrows over the wall, where Tristan and his men lay low. From the heavens the shafts came rattling down, dancing upon the upreared shields, taking a life from time to time. There were many skirmishes upon the wall, and single combats, wherein Tristan slew seven tall Saracens born of one mother. It was Serjabil's plan to wear the Christians out, to hold them in play while his thousand men forced the path that crossed the mountain.

Towards sunset Tristan stood under the shelter of the great rock, leaning upon his sword. He had come down from the wall to rest after the long day's fighting in the sun. The shield that hung about his neck had been battered deviceless by the Saracen spears. A scarf was knotted round his right thigh, where an arrow had gored him, but had not sped deep.

Blanche the Bold stood at Tristan's side. She had tended the wounded, and they had been many, under the shadow of the rock that day. Now her eyes searched Tristan's face for foreshadowings of defeat, or wounds within. She saw no weakening of the dogged mouth, no bowing down of the massive head.

"I judge," he said to her, leaning on his sword, "that we have lost this day some hundred men. These cursed archers have smitten us often."

Blanche stood silent, as though her thoughts sped to the hamlets of the north, where women and children would grieve for the dead.

"Whether we live or die," she said, "we stand here for a noble cause. Nor shall we flinch from the last blow."

"Amen," quoth Tristan, a smile on his mouth. "We can fight for another night and a day, if Bertrand can keep the path above."

"By then Lothaire and the host will be here."

"If Bertrand holds the path above."

There was a prophetic spirit in these words, for hardly had they passed

from Tristan's lips than there came sound as of thunder from the cliffs above. Tristan looked up, rapped out an oath, pressed Blanche back against the wall. A great rock came hurtling down, scattering stones from the rugged slope. It leapt out from the last ledge, flew spinning over the narrow road, to disappear into the depths beneath. Tristan's hand was on Blanche's wrist. Above the mutterings of the streams they heard the great rock crash below into the branches of the trees.

"By God," said Tristan, "they have forced the path!"

"On the mountain."

"Bertrand has been beaten back. They are rolling the rocks on us, curse their souls!"

He set his arm about Blanche's body and almost bore her to the foot of the cliff, where there was a shallow hollowing of the stone. They could hear the shouts of Serjabil's men, who cheered when they saw that the heights were won. Tristan's men were huddling up under the shelter of the cliff; they could face these Saracens on the wall, but not the rocks that smoked from the mountains.

Blanche lay back against the cliff and looked long into Tristan's face.

"There is yet time," she said to him suddenly.

"Ha?"

"To fly down the pass into the woods."

He darted a look at her and threw back his head, his mouth firm, his eyes fearless.

"As for me," he said, "I stay at the Gate. Take the rest with you and meet Lothaire on the road. Tell him and Didcart how I died."

She spread out her arms against the cliffs, as though crucified by her own courage.

"Not so," she said; "I will not go."

"But——"

"Make no pleading with me, Tristan," she said, "for my heart is fixed concerning this."

He laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"For my sake, go, madame," he said.

"For your sake," she answered, "I will not stir hence."

They stood looking for full half a minute into each other's eyes, as though Tristan sought to read the truth that was shining on him out of her soul. Unconscious of the gesture, he laid his right hand over his forehead, for he

understood of a sudden in that hour that Blanche loved him, even to the death.

"Madame," he cried hoarsely, "what can I say to you?"

"Nothing, Tristan," she said, with a strange smile.

Tristan was almost fearful of looking in her face. What were mere words to her but mocking symbols? Did she not know of his full love for Rosamunde? It was only at death's gate that she had betrayed the truth.

A shower of stones came rattling down the cliff, dancing like huge hailstones on the rugged road. A great rock crashed down upon the wall, slew five men there among those who held the Gate. The rest cowered back under the cliff, while the Saracen arrows sped from the pass, dealing out death in the crowded space.

Tristan saw that it would be but slow slaughter, and that twenty men were as good as a hundred, now that the platform was swept by the stones. He stood forward and shouted to the men.

"Brothers," he said, "I crave but a score of you to stand beside me, to hold the Gate to the bitter end. Let the rest make for the road to Agravale and tell Lothaire of how we stand."

The men crowding under the cliff heard him in silence, half ashamed of their own fears. First one stood out and then another, till twenty were mustered at Tristan's side. He bade the rest make haste to depart lest they should be caught in the pass and cut off from Agravale. Thus he was left with but twenty swords to hold the Saint's Gate against the Saracens.

Again the moon rose on the snowy peaks and on the solemn foreheads of the mountains. Clouds passed slowly over its surface, building caverns and deep forests of silver in the magic silence of the sky. Ever and anon the Saracen trumpets screamed exultantly on the heights above. The mountains awoke to the roar of the rocks forced from their sleep on the wind-swept slope to thunder down into the depths beneath.

Tristan kept his twenty men under the cliff, that they might escape these grinding, hurtling bolts that leapt out of the calm sky into the pass. He had climbed the wall, and lay prone in the angle under the trunk of the great tree. Thence he could watch the stormers on the road beneath and warn his men when the tide rolled up.

Nor was he left long in such a posture, with the flat of his sword under his chin. A clarion wailed in the darkness of the pass, warning those on the heights above to cease from hurling down the rocks. Spear and buckler flashed up once more as the moon's eye was uncovered by a cloud. With a great shout Tristan sprang up with sword aloft, his men thronging round him on the wall.

Again the moon sank into the west and huge shadows covered the cliffs. About St. Isidore's Gate the dead lay thick, where Serjabil's Saracens had recoiled once more. Yet empty of triumph was that desperate rally for those score heroes who held the wall. Tristan stood alone there on the bloody rampart, bleeding from a spear-thrust in his throat as he leant heavily upon his sword.

A voice called to him out of the gloom, and Blanche's hand was on his shoulder.

"God help you, Tristan," she said in his ear. "Is it death with you, soul of my soul?"

He staggered back against the cliff, while she held a wine-flask to his lips, then tore the scarf from off her bosom, and strove to staunch the blood from his throat. He leant heavily against the cliff, fighting for his breath, half dead with travail. Blanche's arms went about his body, and she half bore his weight as she watched him suffer.

"Tristan," she said, "Tristan, Tristan."

He turned his head wearily, so that it half rested upon her bosom.

"I am athirst," he said, "give me more wine."

She reached down and held the flask again to his lips, drawing his right arm over her shoulder so that he leant his weight upon her.

"Tristan, look up," she said at length. "Is it death with you? Great heart, take courage."

"I am very weary," he said, closing his eyes.

"Rest here, then," she answered; "I can bear your weight."

Slowly the dawn was streaming up, calm and clear after that night of travail. The peaks were glistening in the sky, the heavens mellowing from grey to blue. Under the white brows of the mountains, Tristan and Blanche were alone together, among the stricken and the dead. In death it seemed they would not be parted, though love and life had denied the dream.

Suddenly the woman's arm tightened about Tristan's body. The colour returned to her weary face; her eyes grew bright like the eyes of one who hears deliverance in the wind.

"Listen," she said, "listen, listen!"

From afar came the stirring cry of a horn, a wild blast echoing among the mountains. From afar seemed to rise the shouts of men, strong and vigorous, hurrying to battle. A faint clamour came from the heights whence Bertrand had been driven by Serjabil's Saracens.

“It is Lothaire,” Blanche said; “they are climbing the pass. Hear how the heathen give tongue above us.”

Tristan struggled up and gripped his sword. A second life seemed to breathe in his body; a second courage filled his heart.

“By God, they come at last!” he cried, with his eyes taking fire. “Give me a shield and I will hold the Gate.”

She hesitated a moment, then did his bidding, groping among the dead men by the wall. She thrust a shield on Tristan’s arm, her hands trembling, her eyes dim with tears. For the sake of his glory she was sending him forth to die in the pass for Christ and the Cross. Even as she armed him; she heard the sound of men storming towards the wall.

Tristan turned to her with the smile of a hero.

“One more fight,” he said, “and I shall have fought my fill.”

Tears were shining on Blanche’s cheeks.

“Go, Tristan,” she said, “and I will follow.”

He bent towards her and kissed her lips.

Therewith, he sprang up towards the parapet, and set his shield before his face. A hundred bucklers were surging up, with corselet and tunic playing beneath. Over the death wrack of the place the sons of the Crescent came streaming up. A single warrior held the wall as the dawn deepened and the night elapsed. Thus did Tristan take his stand with Blanche the Bold at St. Isidore’s Gate.

CHAPTER XLV

"Holy Cross, Holy Cross!"

Such were the shouts that set the wild cliffs echoing as hundreds of painted shields came up the pass to meet the dawn. Above, Sir Didcart with three thousand men had fallen upon those Saracens who had put Bertrand and his band to rout and had rolled down the rocks on Tristan at the Gate.

Up the road came Lothaire of the north, his men racing shoulder to shoulder behind him, panting open-mouthed towards St. Isidore's Gate. The great rock with its black pinnacles flashed into view, the platform strewn with the Christian dead, the narrow rampart piled with the slain. For one moment Lothaire stood still in the road. Then with a shout he broke away, waving his men on with his sword.

On the rampart, outlined against the sky, stood a single warrior with his shield reared up, while his sword flashed and swept from side to side. A mob of white-robed infidels topped the wall, thrusting at him with their lances, fearing to close. Near by stood a woman wielding a spear, with which she strove to beat down the lance points that were levelled at the man's body.

"Holy Cross, Holy Cross, God and the Duchess!"

Even as Lothaire's men charged up, Tristan gave ground, for an arrow had smitten through the rings of his hauberk, and wounded him sorely in the breast. A tall Saracen, seeing him stagger, sprang forward and smote at him with an axe, but fell in turn beneath Tristan's sword. Yet this was the last blow Tristan gave on the bloody rampart of St. Isidore's Gate.

Blanche's arms caught him as he fell; her body shielded him from the spears. Lothaire's men saw their Duchess stand like a noble mother guarding a son. One outstretched arm pressed the infidels back; the other was round the stricken man's shoulders.

Then came the roar of the rising tide as Lothaire and his avengers reached the Gate and poured up to save the Duchess there. The stalwart West rolled the Orient back, over the wall and down the road, with bustling shields and screaming steel. Buckler and lance went down in the dust, while the dragon of the North heaved on down the pass, its iron flanks hurling Serjabil's men over the precipice into the depths beneath.

Tristan lay under the shadow of the cliff with the Saracen's arrow betwixt his ribs. Beside him knelt Blanche, her noble hands dyed with the blood of the

man she loved. Many a rough soldier stood mutely by, gazing on their lady and the man at her knees.

"Wine," she called to them almost fiercely, "wine, ye fools, and linen, bring them. Ha, Walter, come hither, man, unfasten this hauberk. Thus—thus. Tristan, look up; is it death with you?"

Tristan stared in her face and smiled. They stripped off his hauberk, rent the clothes beneath till the flesh was bare about the barb. Blanche, with her teeth set, snapped off the shaft, but dared not do more, for the blood flowed fast. Her men brought her linen, strips that they had torn from the robes of the dead Saracens who lay around. Two soldiers supported Tristan's shoulders, while Blanche wound the bands about his body, padding the place where the barb remained, knotting the linen tight to staunch the flow.

Her men made a litter out of a dozen spears with shields and clothing laid thereon. Very tenderly they lifted Tristan up, and bore him slowly down the road from the Saint's Gate he had held so well. The great peaks glistened in the sun; the streams sang in the ravines beneath. Thus they bore Tristan from the mountains towards the woods that clothed the lower slopes, where they had left a horse litter that they had brought from Agravale for their lady's use on the homeward road. Reaching the shadows of the trees, they laid Tristan within the litter and took the road towards the north.

Many hours had passed, and the gates of the shrine of St. Geneviève were opened full towards the west. The evening sunlight streamed within, warming the white stones in the floor, gilding the carved panels of the tomb. The wooden roof received the glow reflected from the stones beneath, so that its colours seemed to breathe with deepening dyes over the dead saint's grave. Through the latticed windows roses climbed, dowering the air with a passionate incense that even in life suggested death. In the garden the cypresses, like black-robed Fates, spun the golden threads from the distaff of the west.

Tristan lay before the tomb with his great hands folded upon his breast. His eyes were turned towards the painted roof, where golden dragons seemed to move amid stars and moons, and meteor flame. Slowly his breath flowed in and ebbed under the crossed hands on his breast. Very silent was the shrine; the light seemed the more reverent for the saint's tomb there.

Tristan turned his face towards the door with the wistful look of a stricken child listening for the sound of a mother's voice. Little more than a year had passed away since he had knelt in the chapel of Purple Isle and watched his arms for Columbe's sake. Then his heart had echoed back the sounding surges of the sea. Then in the high tide of youth he had heard no requiems and no

ghastly cries stirring the pulses of the world. 'Twas different now; all changed the tones, the lights and shadows, the colours' scheme. While the sunbeams slept upon the floor death seemed nearer than life itself.

A figure darkened the gate of the shrine, the figure of a woman who stood looking towards the tomb. She drew near to the place where Tristan lay on the warm stones under the painted roof. Blanche's eyes were full of pity as she gazed on the strong man lying there, so weak and still was he, so changed in three days. Was this Tristan who had held the mountains, whose arm had been mighty in the van of battle? How white he was since the precious blood had ebbed hour by hour from the barb in his breast.

She sat herself down on the tomb's steps beside him and felt that his eyes were fixed on hers. There was an unuttered prayer upon his lips. He looked like a man who thirsted for water, but could not crave the cup from her hands.

"Tristan, what would you?" she asked, reading in his eyes that dim desire that appealed to the woman in her like the look of a dog.

He moved restlessly upon the bed, his fingers plucking at the hem of the coverlet.

"I have no heart in me," he said.

"No heart, Tristan?"

"To ask a boon of you at this last hour. For you have blessed me many times, nor have I aught but gratitude to give."

She stretched out a hand and touched his forehead, knelt close to him, looking sadly in his face.

"What would you have given me, Tristan," she asked, "other than the gratitude of a good heart? Am I one to crave weight for weight?"

As she knelt on the stones the sunlight gathered about Tristan's face, so that it seemed haloed round with gold.

"My soul wings towards Holy Guard," he said.

"Ah, Tristan——"

"I would that I might look on Rosamunde again and hear her speak to me before I die."

Blanche leant back against the tomb and stared out straight through the open door. For the moment she saw nothing but the arch of gold, and set therein a woman's face, fair with all fairness, rich with youth. In Blanche's heart there was sudden bitterness, since she knew that she was growing old, and that love flew forth to the face of youth. In life this Rosamunde had stood between, and even in death the man's last thoughts flew past her to Holy Guard by the sea.

And then she looked at Tristan’s face, with its wistful eyes and haggard mouth. How weak he was, how like a child’s this his last desire. Should she balk him when death stood by? No, by God, she was nobler than that.

“Tristan,” she said, “I will send to Holy Guard and fetch Rosamunde hither.”

His face brightened strangely at her words, but there was still a cloud before his eyes.

“Nay, send not to Holy Guard,” he said, “for days will elapse in the coming and going. And the lamp may be quenched before they return.”

“What would you, then?” she asked him again.

“Lo,” he said, “does not the great Gloire run from Agravale towards the sea? Set me, I pray thee, in a boat, and let them row me down to the sea.”

“What of your wound?” she asked once more.

“The blood,” he said, “flows from me still, though I lie here on the chapel floor. Therefore, I pray thee, bear me hence, that I may come to Holy Guard before I die.”

“So be it,” she said. “God grant thee life to behold thy love’s face.”

CHAPTER XLVI

They bore Tristan from the shrine of St. Geneviève northwards towards Agravale and the waters of the Gloire. All one day and a night they were on the road, riding slowly, since Tristan's wound would stand but little jolting of the litter. Ever beside him rode Blanche the Bold, sorrowful at heart for Tristan's sake, and for the last hours that she grudged to another. Had she not played the nobler part and contrasted her pity with Rosamunde's pride? Yet to Tristan the end would be bitter if he looked not again on Rosamunde's face, for the red stream never ceased to flow from where the barb was buried deep.

It was dawn when they came to the great Gloire and saw Agravale tower on the heights above, smitten with the sunlight from the east. Very peaceful seemed the green meadows where the tall poplars barred back the dawn. All the world seemed bathed in dew; the odours of flowers breathed in the air.

By the old stone bridge they found boats moored to the grey quays above the river. Blanche chose a black barge that lay in the shallows, and by Tristan's desire he was set in the prow with his face turned towards the west. Twenty of Blanche's men manned the barge, stout fellows who had held the thwarts in the north when the Duchess's galley put out to sea. She herself was in the prow, where Tristan had been laid on the narrow deck.

The barge foamed away on the bosom of the Gloire, gliding with the strong current as two men toiled at each great oar. Agravale and its white towers dwindled into the azure above the woods as the sun stood full in the eastern sky. Far to the south the white peaks gleamed, seeming to watch the barge pass down the broad river towards the sea.

Very solemn were the wilds that summer day, as the Gloire spread its curves under the towering hills. Gnarled trees drank like hoar warriors at the brink, and betwixt the sable deeps of the woods the grassland was broidered with many flowers. Sunlight and shadow were embattled there where the hills bristled against the dawn, and the river gleamed into rippling bays with a thousand lightnings threading the green. Deep were the mysteries of the woods and deep the chanting of the river as the sedges sang of the distant sea.

Tristan lay in the prow of the barge with his face turned towards the west. Like one in a dream he watched the woodland waving by, the great trees splashed with gold by the sun, the meadows ablaze with a myriad flowers. Sometimes he would gaze into the blue above and watch the white clouds

sailing by, or a hawk like a black speck poised in the heavens.

Thus the hours sped as in a dream while the barge swept on down the river, the oars swinging with the steady rhythm of a song. Sometimes Tristan counted the strokes till they seemed like the breathing of a mighty beast. Often he would fancy that Holy Guard towered up before him against the blue, or starting, he would seem to hear Rosamunde's voice calling his name as the water bubbled about the prow.

Blanche the Duchess watched beside him, wondering whether his life would ebb before they brought him to the sea. With her own hands she gave him food and wine for the staying of his strength. Her voice indeed was as the voice of a mother as she tended him there, forgetting self in the hope that his prayers should not prove in vain.

"Courage, Tristan," she would often say, with her mouth close to the wounded man's ear, "the stream runs fast, and there is blood in you yet."

So night came, and with it a summer storm of wind and rain sweeping up the valley from the sea. The men covered Tristan with a canopy of rough cloth, and propped their shields round him to shelter his bed. Gloom wrapped the woods where the tall trees battled with the wind. The Gloire's waves were capped with foam, yet the men at the oars rowed on and on. No sounds were there save the groaning of the looms, the heavy downrush of the storm, the plashing of the water at the prow. Truly did the Gloire seem a river of the dead as the black barge forged on against the wind and rain, with the hoarse moan of the forest filling the night.

Yet as the dawn came the clouds gave back and a clear sky waited in the west. Soon the sun rent the vapoury veil, flashing upon the distant mountains, while the wind sank to utter rest. The woods seemed wrapped in a shimmering mist and golden smoke wreathed all the hills. The huge shadows were startled from their sleep where every tree top pearled by the rain glimmered and flashed towards the dawn. The great Gloire laughed as the light came up and the drenched meadows smiled in the sun.

Tristan had slept that night through the rain and the wind, for sheer weariness had brought him dreams. In his sleep he had beheld Rosamunde walking the waters, treading the river to meet the barge. Her face had lit the waters like the moon, and crimson flames had wreathed her feet as they touched the waves that flowed betwixt the woods. Her gown was of a splendid green, so bright that it was as some rare emerald shot through with the sun. She had come to the barge and entered in, knelt down by Tristan and kissed his lips. And with that dream kiss Tristan awoke to find the dim woods dripping dew.

Whether it was this dream, or the clear morning air, or the long sleep that had held him through the hours, Tristan felt stronger with the dawn. Steadily the long oars still laboured on, for ten men rested while ten men rowed. There was to be no halting towards the sea, and with the swift stream the barge moved fast.

Blanche had been long awake at Tristan's side, watching the woods as they hurried by with the flower-filled valleys lying between. She had set her cloak to dry in the sun, and had spread her drenched hair over her shoulders. At the first lifting of Tristan's lids she was quick to greet him with a smile and a word.

"Dawn," he said; "how long have I slept? Are we nearer Holy Guard and the sea?"

"The men have rowed all night," she answered him. "You have slept, Tristan, while we have watched."

A strange smile played upon the man's lips, the smile of one who remembered a dream, some shining forth of a mystic face from the shifting vapours of the night.

"I have dreamed a dream," he said.

"Yes, Tristan," she echoed.

"Methinks that I shall reach the sea and live to be carried into Holy Guard. Hark, whose voice is that? The steersman calls to us from the poop."

One of Blanche's men who steered the barge was pointing to where the tall woods were broken by a valley. Under a thick mist they could see the shining through of a goodly river, streaked and silvered by the sun. Its waters came fretting round a rocky point to merge into the bosom of the Gloire.

"It is the Lorient," quoth Blanche, standing and looking under her hand.

Tristan half raised himself upon his elbow and gazed over the low bulwarks towards the woods. A tawny flood came flashing down to smite into the Gloire's more silver breadth.

"The Lorient," he said; "then we are but ten leagues from the sea."

"By nightfall we should come to Holy Guard."

He sank back again upon the bed with a spasmodic catching of the breath as the barb twinged in his wounded side. Fresh blood stained the linen bands. He coughed and winced as Blanche knelt by him and gave him wine out of an earthen flask.

"Courage, Tristan, courage," she said; "for by God's grace we shall bring you to Holy Guard before the night shall come again."

So the day passed, and the great Gloire coursed on with broadening grandeur towards the sea. The silent thickets clambered down to where the glittering inlets played on sandy banks and amid the sedges. Ever the meadows lay between, streaked with green rushes and with golden flags, while the sky seemed full of thunder clouds, of light and shadow, and of shimmering mists that wreathed the hills with golden smoke. Ever the great trees seemed to sing of death as the barge swept on towards the sea.

CHAPTER XLVII

It was sunset at Holy Guard, and a strong wind blew from over the sea, where the tide was low, and the sands were purpled with the shadows of the clouds. The breakers were white on the distant rocks and about the black islands scattered there upon the bosom of the sea.

Ruin possessed Holy Guard, for Jocelyn's men had laboured hard to fulfil the commands of the mighty Pelinore. Thus in the old days the Church knew well how to use the saints she herself had created. She could conjure with many a magic name and frighten the froward with the shades of the dead. Such prelates as Jocelyn could cheat their own creed with a cunning that claimed Heaven, though born of the Devil.

The chapel roof of Holy Guard had fallen in on the broken pillars and the grass-grown floor. The frescoes rotted on the walls, and through the empty casement frames shone vistas of sea and sky and wood. The wild voice of the wind played through the abbey, the red fires of the sunset glimmered in, and moonlight pierced the broken roof. Bats and sea-birds haunted the shadows 'mid the creaking and clashing of the doors and the hoarse roar of the waves beneath.

At a ruined window in the Abbess's room stood Rosamunde of Joyous Vale looking out towards the night. Telamon and his men were quartered below in the bare refectory and the empty cells. On a rough stool in the midst of the room sat the girl Miriam, whom Tristan had saved with Rosamunde from the madhouse in the mere.

The Lady of Joyous Vale leant against the stone sill with her face resting betwixt her hands. There was but little light in her shadowy eyes, and her shoulders drooped from the fair sweep of her neck, as though she were weary, and had known no sleep. She stood there motionless, like one whose thoughts sped far away over the dim horizon into the distant land of dreams.

The girl Miriam watched her lady, crooning to herself some ancient song with a faint smile on her full red lips. She was not unhappy, this Hebrew child, though she wondered, as she sat there, what had passed betwixt the woman who brooded by the window and Tristan who had gone to the mountainous south. That Rosamunde was sorrowful she knew full well, since her sorrow spoke on her wistful face.

From below came the sound of a man singing the staunch lines of some old

song forged in the smithies of the north. The girl Miriam smiled, and pressed one hand over the charm that hung over her heart. Rosamunde seemed to droop the more as she bowed down her head towards the night.

Miriam rose from her stool, went to Rosamunde, and touched her shoulder.

"What ails you?" she said. "May I not help?"

"It is nothing, child," came the dull response.

"Are you ill, lady, in body or in heart?"

"Why question me, girl, when I have no answer?"

Both Miriam's hands were on Rosamunde's arm, and her eyes were very gentle under her dusky hair.

"Am I but a child, then?" she asked.

"Well?"

"Have I not suffered, am I not wise in a woman's way? Ah, my lady, let me in. We have shared much together; trust me further."

Very slowly Rosamunde took her hands from her face, and turned and looked into Miriam's eyes. No vulgar curiosity did she find therein, no insolent challenging of the truth. The girl's face seemed softened by pity, yet not that pert patronage that affronts the soul.

"Child," she said sadly, turning again towards the east, "how easily are we women fooled by pride, driven to cheat our nobler self by the mad anguish of a passionate moment. Would to God I had had less pride!"

Miriam drew to her with her lithe, warm body, as though her very nearness should speak of sympathy.

"Lady," she said, "we women err according to the fierceness of our instincts. Love turns to lightning in a moment; or, like the moon, we frown at a cloud that dulls for an instant the distant stars."

"True, true," said Rosamunde, gazing towards the woods. "Words wound us too easily when we dote on words and behold not the truth that shines beneath. We cannot always bear the truth when that same truth wounds our desire. So we rebel, even as a good hound will turn when stung by the lash in a master's hand."

"And yet it is not love that turns."

"No, but the quick instinct of a passionate heart that snaps at destiny, to repent betimes. For when the pain is quick and keen, the finer reason slacks the lead, and the hot self leaps out on love, only to slink when the wrath is past."

She leant her chin once more upon her hands and watched the azure deepen in the east, with the vain anguish of her penitence. Was it but a week since she

had come from Agravale to the sea, stirred by the unreasoning fever of her wrath? Yet day by day her heart had cooled, till naught seemed left in it but slow despair. “Tristan, Tristan!” cried her soul. Often she would thrust her arms out in the night, and pray that Tristan might return once more.

Even as she stood there, gazing over the hills and woods where the river wound down towards the sea, she saw a black shape glide from the trees over the broadening bosom of the Gloire. She saw oars flash and glisten against the setting sun. Right in the golden path came a barge, bearing for Holy Guard across the river.

Rosamunde stood back and watched the boat with both hands folded over her heart. Then without a word she sprang away, sped down the galleries in the dusk, where many a shaft of gold smote through the narrow windows in the walls. Out through the ruined gate she sped, and down the rough path towards the river.

Nor was she so speedy that she reached the river before the barge had foamed up to the strand, where a narrow waterway wound to a wooden quay. Rosamunde, halting under a wind-twisted fir, saw four soldiers moving up the path, bearing upon a bed the figure of a man. Before them, some twenty paces, walked a woman whose face was turned towards the walls of Holy Guard. Rosamunde knew her as she climbed the path, Blanche of the North, even the Duchess.

The two women met on the narrow path that climbed the wild hillside from the waters of the Gloire. A great glory covered the sea, while the dark woods seemed steeped in shadow, as though the trees had drawn black cowls over their green polls. From the west came the hoarse murmur of the waves, as they foamed in over the yellow sand.

Blanche held out her hands to Rosamunde.

“Sister,” she said, “I bring you back Tristan from the mountains.”

As for Rosamunde, she was white as death, nor had she words wherewith to answer the Duchess. Going to the litter, she saw Tristan lying there with a grey face and great shadows under his sunken eyes. So weak was he that he could but stretch a hand to her as she drew near and touched his forehead with her lips.

“Rosamunde,” he said, with a great sigh.

Her hot tears fell upon his face, as she wept there, even before the men who bore him.

“Tristan, look not thus at me,” she said, “for I have been shamed out of all my pride.”

They passed on up the bare hillside with the moss-grown rocks lit by the setting sun. The perfume of the myrtle thickets scented the air, tossed abroad by the wild west wind. Over the sands rolled the rising tide, flowing fast under the flaming sky.

Thus they brought Tristan towards Holy Guard, its black walls haloed by the west. Rosamunde walked beside the bed with Tristan's hand clasped fast in hers. The Duchess Blanche had drawn apart, a deep calm on her stately face, an unfathomable sadness filling her eyes. She had surrendered love into Rosamunde's hands, and would fain be alone to hide the smart.

They carried Tristan through the gate, up the great stairway, and through the dim galleries into the chamber of the Abbess. There they left Rosamunde and the man alone, for Blanche would suffer none to meddle in the sacred meeting of the twain. She closed the door on them with her own hands, and passed out to the battlements to watch the sea drown the darkening sands.

In the twilight of the room Rosamunde knelt by Tristan's bed, and bowed down her face over him as one who mourned. Through many a window the west wind moaned, and death seemed to move through the ruined house. In Rosamunde's eyes there was a strange despair, for she had read the truth at the first glance, and her heart cried out in her as the night came down.

"Ah, Tristan," she said, with her pride in the dust, "I have sinned against you and your love. Ah, God, must I lose all at this hour!"

"Grieve not," he answered her, "for what is past. Fate has ever bruised our hearts; and though I die, I have love in death."

There was a great light within his eyes, but Rosamunde's face was hid in shadow. Not for her was the empty boast of love, the last triumph-cry of a wounded soul. She broke out suddenly into bitter weeping, and hung over Tristan as she wept.

"Love," she said, with her words half smothered and her hair falling upon his face, "how can I lose you out of my life? O God, have pity! Is it for this that I have passed through all? Tristan, Tristan, is it death?"

Very tenderly he held her hands, and strove to comfort her as the night increased.

"It is God's will," he said at last. "I have fought my fight, and the end is near. And yet I shall not win the spoil, for death steps in—thus ends the day."

"God is not merciful," she cried, "to those who grieve and sorrow here."

He drew her down to him, so that his face was wreathed in the glory of her hair.

"Let us not judge," he said, "those things which ever balk our ken. Are we

not children? Wife, take courage."

She clung to him, and kissed his lips, as though to shut the warm life in.

"Ah, Tristan, Tristan, that I also might die!"

CHAPTER XLVIII

A night and a day had passed, and Tristan lived on, though the blood still flowed from his wounded side. Blanche and Rosamunde had dressed the wound with oil and wine and diverse herbs, but the barb would suffer no healing there, and the red stream still ebbed slowly forth. They saw that Tristan weakened hour by hour, his great hands growing white as a young girl's, his eyes shining like crystal in a mask of wax.

Rosamunde watched at his side, counting the hours by the dial of her heart, neither sleeping nor leaving him long alone. As she saw him weakening with his wound, the fiercer mood returned to her heart as though to defy the power of death. It was not against Tristan that it arose, this passionate anger that strove with Fate. To the man she was mild and tender as moonlight, gentle towards him as the hours sped by. Against God it was that her heart cried out, against the God who would not hear her prayers.

When the second evening came, with the night's fatalism deepening in the east, she passed out from the room like one whose heart could bear up no longer against despair. It was not to weep that she sped away and climbed to the topmost wall of Holy Guard. Nor was it for prayer in the gentler sense, but rather to fling her burning wrongs full in the countenance of the heavens.

The sun was setting over the sea like some great slave of the Creator, doomed to tread an eternal track amid the planets of the sky. The clouds, like demons, scourged him on, breathing forth fire and purple smoke. Beneath on the rocks the sea complained, that mighty rhapsodist whose words declared the troubled destinies of all mankind. For as the wind is often hushed, luring the ocean into sleep, so doubt and anguish cease at times, only to mock mankind the more.

So it was with Rosamunde that summer night as she stood alone on the wind-swept walls and watched the sun go down in flame. All hope had ebbed from her, and her pure faith had, like an angel, spread its wings, and vanished into the distant gloom. The sky seemed but an iron dome, riveted above the helpless world. All eloquence had passed away with the unfathomable truths of life that sometimes vivify and sometimes kill.

What had life given her? Insult and pain, death, terror, and unanswered prayers! Had not her beauty been a curse? What single blessing had she won but the strong love of a strong man's heart, one fierce melody in the strifes of

sound! And now this one good gift seemed gone, snatched like a jewel from her breast by the lean hand of a mocking fate.

In great bitterness she thrust up her arms and cried aloud under the sky:

"God, if there be a God, hear my voice. Give me some sign that I may know that we are not brute beasts who live to beget life, then—to die. Give me some sign of immortality. Show me that wisdom rules the heavens, that we of earth are not dust and air."

And still the sun approached the sea, and still the hoarse waves laughed below as though there were no hope in heaven.

"Great God," she cried again, her hands outstretched towards the west, "give me but one word in my heart, that I may know there is a God, and that some kindness rules the world."

Yet there was no still small voice as that which spoke to the prophet in the cave when all the discords of the earth moved him to doubt in God's design. The sea and sky were full of life, the wild woods clamoured and the west wind blew. And yet there shone no light in heaven to comfort her whose faith was dim.

Slowly, with her head adroop, Rosamunde passed back to the Abbess's room, and stole in silently, to find Tristan asleep. A small lamp burnt on a sconce in the wall, shedding a vague light on the sleeping man's face. Rosamunde, with the look of one very weary, drew a great wooden chair that had been the Abbess's towards the bed, lay back therein, and rested her chin upon her hand.

The night had fallen about Holy Guard, filling its broken galleries with gloom. The stars were shining, and from below came the voices of those who sat at meat in the abbey refectory with Blanche the Duchess. It was Rosamunde's vigil, and no one disturbed her, for she had wine and bread with her in the room.

Once more the heat of her despair died down like a fire that lacks for fuel. Her very soul seemed weary to death, and very lonely in that silent room. A hundred dark thoughts coursed through her brain: the sure knowledge that Tristan would die, that God had deserted her, if there were a God. Apathy possessed her hour by hour; afar she heard the sound of the sea, and the wind in the windows overhead.

As the hours passed her eyes grew hot and heavy with sleep; the long night began to weigh her down, as Tristan slept on and took no heed. Soon her head sank upon her shoulder, the very gloom seemed to grow more dim, and the noise of the wind ebbed from her ears. She drooped down in the great chair, her hands lying open in her lap, her hair clouding over her face. Sleep wiped

the tired lines away from her mouth, and her large eyes strained towards the lamp no more.

That night Rosamunde dreamed a dream, a mystic vision, as though the God who watches over the ways of men had sent some seraph to His child. It seemed to her that she stood alone within the ruined chapel upon the rock. The chapel was full of golden vapour, a magic mist that seemed to move in luminous whorls towards the roof. The high altar was hid in gloom, as though a cloud enveloped it, like purple smoke over the moon. Even as she stood gazing in silent awe, a white arm was thrust from out the cloud, pointing its finger towards the floor that lay below the altar steps. A golden ray seemed to fall from the hand upon a stone a full cubit square. Letters of fire were traced on the flag. The purple vapour was rent aside, and in that dream shrine Rosamunde saw the White Christ bending from the Cross.

"Believe," the Christ's eyes seemed to say.

Then, with a sudden stream of light and a great sound as of a thunder-clap, the whole chapel rocked and sank into an abyss that had no ending.

With a cry Rosamunde awoke and stared around her in the room. Trembling, she sat up in the chair, awe and fear upon her face, as she remembered the vision she had seen. Tristan was still sleeping on the bed, and the great abbey was silent as death, save that she heard the sound of the sea.

Trembling and amazed, Rosamunde rose up like one whose soul groped in the dark towards the truth. She passed her hand over her heavy eyes, looked at Tristan as he slept close by the window where the night streamed in. Stung by sudden hope, she crossed the room, took the lamp from the sconce in the wall, passed out, and climbed towards the chapel. Up the great stair she made her way, the lamplight flashing on the walls and into her white palm as she shaded the flame. The wind played round her from above, moving her hair about her face. Her eyes were filled with hope and fear, like pools where darkness and moonlight mingle.

So through the gloomy galleries she came into the chapel of Holy Guard. Standing by the door with the lamp held high, she looked round under the ruined roof, as though half thinking to see her dream repeat its mysteries before her eyes. The lamplight quivered on the broken stones, the fallen rafters of the roof, and the snapped pillars that lay around. Above the altar the Cross still stood, but there was no purple mist about its limbs, no golden vapour filling the place.

Holding her lamp above her head, Rosamunde pressed forward over the ruinous floor towards the altar shrouded deep in gloom. Bending low, she gazed at the flagstones one by one as she passed up the aisle, lifting the broken

rafters aside and thrusting away the fallen tiles. Before the very altar steps she came to a stone covered with words which she could not read. Kneeling and setting the lamp on the floor, she drew a poniard out of her girdle and worked at the joints with the point thereof.

Soon the stone lurched up, showing a streak of darkness beneath, for there was a goodly cavity under the flag. Bending low, and turning the stone back on its face, she groped in the darkness till her fingers touched the smooth lid of a metal box. Very slowly she lifted it out, laid it in her lap as she half knelt on the floor, and turned the clasp that fastened the lid. Lying within was a glass phial filled with a fluid red as blood, also some yellow silken stuff that looked to her like an eastern veil.

Rosamunde set the phial on the floor and held up the veil before the lamp. Even as the light came streaming through, a golden halo glowed round a face calm and grand as the face of a god. Great awe came down on Rosamunde's soul, for she seemed to gaze on the face of the Christ.

CHAPTER XLIX

Bearing the casket with the veil and phial therein, Rosamunde passed out of the chapel of Holy Guard, down many a gallery and winding stair, to the room where Tristan slept. The look of awe still possessed her face, filling her eyes with solemn shadows, loosening the curves of her proud mouth. The lamp's light played upon her hair as the west wind swayed it to and fro like golden threads upon the cloak of night.

Coming once more to the Abbess's room, she found Tristan sleeping even as she had left him. A faint grey haze hung in the east, for the dawn was coming up over the woods and the waters of the Gloire. Rosamunde set the lamp on the sconce in the wall, and laid the casket on the great carved chair. With a rush of tenderness, she stooped and looked into Tristan's face, hung over him with arms outstretched, as though her whole soul gave him its blessing.

Then, with her face towards the east, she knelt down by the window, her hands folded upon her breast. Out of the night she had struggled to meet the broadening glory of the dawn. Never before had Rosamunde prayed as she prayed that hour in Holy Guard. Her soul seemed borne on wings of fire upwards, ever upwards, till the heavy world grew bright in the beams of the rising sun. Ever she seemed to strive with God, and in the strife her own weak faith caught a trebled courage from her prayers. Once more the welkin seemed to wake to the deep mysteries of life and love. The woods grew green, the waters shone, the clouds gleamed white against the blue. The voice of the dawn rang loud and clear, bidding the phantoms of the night depart.

A new light shone on Rosamunde's face, as though hope was reborn within her heart. She rose up from before the eastern window, took the casket in her hands, and knelt down at the side of Tristan's bed. She smiled as she turned the coverlet aside, and began to cut the linen bands stained with the blood that still ebbed through. So deep was the man's sleep that he slumbered on till she turned the last band from the clotted wound and saw the red stream oozing up.

Then Tristan awoke. His hands moved restlessly to and fro, and Rosamunde, bending over his body, caught them and held them fast in hers.

"Tristan," she said, with her splendid hair falling around his haggard face.

His eyes questioned hers with a strange wistfulness, and he breathed deeply, but did not speak.

“Tristan,” she said again, with her mouth close to him, as he lay and looked at her like a child, “I have dreamed a dream, and God has given me back your life. This I believe, for my faith has returned.”

“Rosamunde,” he said, with a great sigh.

“Lie still,” she whispered, “while I dress your wound with the gifts God has given me in the night.”

“God?” he asked her.

“Even so,” she answered, “for as I slept the Christ appeared and bade me believe, and in my dream he showed me the place in the chapel above us where relics were buried. Yet, if this dream fails me at this hour, I shall never believe in Heaven more.”

Therewith she kissed him on the lips, with tears brimming in her eyes. Tristan watched her silently as she took the phial and poured the red liquid into the wound. Mingling there with the living blood, it sent forth an odour through the room as though all the spices of the East, spikenard and myrrh and wondrous balms, had spent their perfumes on the air. Then Rosamunde took the mystic veil, and pressed it deep into the wound, where it grew red with Tristan’s blood.

Leaning back against the chair, she half sat, half knelt beside the bed, watching the man with all her soul. The streaming sunlight flooded in, playing upon Tristan’s face with its hollow cheeks and sunken eyes. In either heart was poised the chance of life and death that summer dawn.

Very slowly the minutes passed, as though Time halted in his stride. The lamp had burnt out on the wall, and birds were awake in the thickets beneath, their shrill orisons greeting the dawn. Rosamunde, filled with unrest, watched no longer beside the bed, but rose and paced from wall to wall, gazing out through the ruined window at the Gloire gleaming amid the woods. For the moment she dared not look at Tristan, lest the last hope should prove but a dream. A cold hand seemed on her bosom, pressing heavily on her heart, while the distant clamour of the sea came like a dirge into her ears.

Suddenly Tristan called to her, his voice strong and resonant as of old, not the half moan of a dying man.

“Hither, Rosamunde,” he said; “come to me. What miracle is this?”

She turned instantly and was at his side, bending over him with her eyes afire. And lo, the blood had ceased to flow, and the red veil seemed clotted fast over the place where the barb was buried. There was a faint colour on Tristan’s cheeks, and his eyes had the lustre they had lost of late. Rosamunde knelt and gazed at his face, as though half fearful of trusting the truth.

Then with a low cry she bowed her head, and laid her hands on the man's shoulders.

"Tristan, you will live," she said.

"There is strange strength in me."

"The dream, the dream!"

"No longer does the warm blood ebb."

She raised herself from Tristan's body and knelt with arms stretched towards the east, a great glory lighting her face.

CHAPTER L

It was evening, and Holy Guard was wrapped in silence, save that the sea laughed and clamoured on the rocks beneath.

Up the great stairway climbed Blanche the Duchess, with a purple cloak thrown over her shoulders and a small silver cross held in one hand. Solemnity dwelt on her face, as though joy and pain held converse there, while life and love were not accorded. Shadows there were beneath her eyes, and a sad smile playing about her mouth. Her hair seemed whiter than of yore, and age more manifest, as though her youth gave out at last, and bowed its head.

Very slowly she climbed the stair, as though her heart grew tired apace. The sun came through in golden beams from the thin squints that pierced the wall, smiting the silent shadows through, shadows that seemed to suffer pain.

Presently she came to the cloister court where seven tall windows broke the wall, giving view of the western sea, the great Gloire, and the thronging woods. About Holy Guard the world seemed to sweep like a rare tapestry, sea, forest, and stream, blending azure, silver, and green. The great abbey seemed arched with gold, an irrefragable peace begotten of heaven.

After standing awhile to look over the sea, Blanche passed down the long gallery that led towards the Abbess's room. She walked noiselessly. The door of the Abbess's room stood ajar, and from within came the sound of voices.

Blanche halted on the threshold, and gazed in with a smile hovering in her eyes. Tristan was lying on the bed half propped on pillows, with Rosamunde seated at his side. The woman's arm was about Tristan's shoulders, his head half resting on her breast, her hair falling down on either side, bathing his face as with golden light. Their eyes were turned away from Blanche towards the window in the wall.

They were talking together, these two who had come through storms to each other's arms. Calm joy seemed theirs and deep content, a golden mood in which their thoughts were oblivious of all things save their love. Blanche leant her shoulder against the wall and watched them in silence, with her face in shadow.

"Tristan," said the woman, "how dim seem the days when I played the great lady in Joyous Vale."

He half turned his head upon her breast, so that he could look into her eyes.

“I was but a great boy then,” he said.

“And I a wise fool,” she answered him. “Ah, Tristan, when shall we women learn that cleverness suffices not the heart? The great love in a strong man’s eyes, the trustful clinging of children’s hands, these are the things that make for heaven.”

“True,” he said to her, taking her hair and winding a bright tress round his wrist; “we are wise in small things, unwise in the great. God, love, and health —Heaven give me these, and I will not envy any man.”

But Blanche drew back from before the door with a shadow as of pain upon her face. Such then was life for those who loved, the godly light in a husband’s eyes, the trusting smile of an honoured wife. For her there could be no magic words, no clinging lips, no straining hands. In her deep loneliness she turned away, and passed back to gaze on the restless sea.

By the Same Author

THE LAME ENGLISHMAN
THE RUST OF ROME
THE RETURN OF THE PETTICOAT
THE RED SAINT
MAD BARBARA
BERTRAND OF BRITTANY
THE SLANDERERS
A WOMAN’S WAR
BESS OF THE WOODS
LOVE AMONG THE RUINS
UTHER AND IGRAINE

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Spelling and hyphenation have been left as in the original. A few obvious typesetting errors have been corrected without note.

[The end of *The Seven Streams* by Warwick Deeping]