

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



H. P. Lovecraft—Fiswoode Tarleton—Seabury Quinn
Edmond Hamilton—Bertram Russell—Everil Worrell

Weird Tales

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The Devil's Martyr

BY · SIGNE
TOKSVIG



"Sathanas, I adjure thee to speak!"

IN THE garden of the episcopal palace only the dragon-flies were stirring. They gleamed and darted over a little fountain pool, iridescent, energetic, careless of the summer heat that weighted the still leaves and the drooping flowers. They skimmed close to the thin silver line spouting from the statue, a small dilapidated faun; they circled in patterns of light around his weather-beaten head, making a vivid but hardly appropriate halo for it.

A boy lay close by the fountain, watching them. He was fifteen, tall for his age, and too slim for the black clothes he was wearing. Except for their color they were those of any noble youth of his time: a doublet,

close-fitting hose, a short surcoat, a fall of white lace around the throat. His brown wavy hair had a glint of gold in it, and framed a handsome face with definite features, black brows, dark blue eyes and curving red lips, contrasting oddly with his air of shy sensitiveness, his white thin cheeks, his pallid hands.

At the moment he was smiling as he watched the dance of the dragon-flies. He loved this spot; it was the only brightness in the great stiff garden where even in summer the cathedral aisles of elm and beech were dim and gloomy. His uncle the Bishop, whose ward he had been since his parents died, disliked the frivolity of flowers and advised the solemn ave-

nues for ambulatory meditation. Young Erik of Visby had been sent out for that very purpose; a book of prayers lay forgotten on the moss beside him, but now if he noticed it at all it was only to see that the coruscating wings were more like jewels than the precious stones with which the missal was encrusted.

But a prayer-book will not be forgotten with impunity. Erik had no sooner discovered the living halo around the head of the queer little statue than a tall, thin cleric in a dark cowl appeared at the end of the avenue and looked about. He soon saw the boy and came noiselessly toward him.

"Do you call this devotion?"

At the sound of the metallic voice the boy jumped up and swung around, his hand flying nervously through his hair.

"Father Sebastian—I——" He choked with apprehension.

The monk lifted a long, slender hand and his large, light gray eyes widened.

"What were you sent out for?"

The boy hung his head, saw the missal and hastily picked it up.

"Not to lie here, gaping at a heathen stone! What made you do it?"

The boy rubbed the book with his sleeve but was silent.

"You don't know? Didn't something seem to pluck at you; didn't something draw you away from the avenue where prayers are easy to this place where you forget them?" Father Sebastian's face blazed into sudden anger and he shouted: "That was the Devil!"

Erik cast a terrified glance at the little gray faun, and his bewilderment was so evident that the tense, meager face of the monk relaxed. He laid a pitying hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You didn't mean to let him. You forgot. But *he* is always watching; he took the shape of one of those

gaudy flies to lure you away. My fault, too; I should not have left you so long."

Erik, looking down, could not see the watchful tenderness trembling in the thin lips; he only shivered to hear the words, "Come, we must do penance in the chapel, for the Lord is angry with us," and the monk walked toward the trees, bidding the wilting boy precede him, as if unwilling to leave him out of his sight again.

Erik went in a daze. When he passed from the hot, golden sunshine into the chill dark green of the avenue, he felt buried; it was like an endless tomb. It ran straight for nearly half a mile, walled in by ancient elms that branched sideways until they arched impenetrably into each other, high overhead. There was dead silence here, and awe. Had he been alone he would have run breathlessly to the far end where the sun shone. The anger of the Lord was ready to overwhelm him anywhere, but most terribly here and in the chapel. He shed a few unmanly tears. He would never have done that in his father's castle, five long years ago. But he was tired now, and weak with fasting and vigils, and his back still hurt from the last time he had done penance with the whip. It was no consolation that Father Sebastian, too, flagellated himself.

THEY were half-way up the avenue. Drops of light dappled it here and there. He could see two human specks moving about at the end of it. One had a reddish look, an unfamiliar color. The other was wide and black; that was likely to be Father Laurence, the bishop's thrifty almoner, who had no taste for the whip.

It was Father Laurence. But to whom was he bowing?

Erik was dazzled. Dominant against the green leaves stood a

big, broad-shouldered, dark-bearded knight, clad entirely in shimmering vermilion. Soft white plumes drooped from his hat, and a heavy gold chain about his neck glistened fiercely. As Erik approached, staring childishly, the stranger watched him smiling; then as the two came into the sun he turned to Father Laurence:

"Is this the Count of Visby?"

Father Sebastian pressed forward and said sharply, "This is a boy entrusted to our care."

"True," the stranger deferred with a slight bow, "but is he not also Count of Visby?"

The almoner waved Father Sebastian aside. "You are quite right, my Lord, of course! What our brother means is simply, as you know, that Count Erik is the ward of his uncle the Bishop until he comes of age."

But the ascetic would not be denied. "This boy was vowed to us by his dying mother, and he should not be reminded of the empty title which he is about to forsake."

"As well as the domain of Visby which so conveniently adjoins the estate of the Order," the knight said, flicking his boot with his riding-crop.

Father Sebastian was about to answer hotly, but folded his arms, bent his head, and said with dignity, "Come with me, Erik, to the chapel."

"Not so fast, not so fast," the knight laughed, stretching out a long arm and gathering the boy to his side; "the reverend Father Laurence here will tell you that I have just come from the Bishop, who has given me permission to take away Count Erik for a month to my castle of Lynas."

The almoner nodded deferentially and drew his colleague aside, hissing at him, "Let him go! It is the Bishop's orders." Father Laurence was plump, but he had a firm jaw and small, practical eyes. Every

gooseberry in the kitchen garden was known to him.

Erik stood quiescent within the arm of the red knight, not daring to take his eyes off Father Sebastian's white, pained face, and more than a little afraid of this man who had said he was going to take him away. But when the monks turned their dark backs to them and walked down the corridor of trees, he felt a strong hand press his shoulder.

"They're gone now, Erik. Would you like to come with me? I am Michael of Lynas. I knew your father."

A vague memory stirred in the boy and he looked up, shyly. The bronzed, bearded face was smiling, and the narrow dark eyes were full of kindness. In a rush of confidence he begged, "Let us go now, before flagellation in the chapel!"

"By a thousand devils we will go!" swore the knight, shaking his gauntlet at the retreating monks. "My horse will carry us both."

They hurried away, the boy half hidden in the swirl of the vermilion mantle, and the clerics, turning back, saw them disappear around a corner.

Father Sebastian doubled his stride and began to mutter rapid prayers.

"What demon are you exorcising now?" sneered Father Laurence. "Surely the fasting and whipping you do is affecting your mind!"

"I see the Prince of the Air, robed in the red of eternal fire, carrying off a soul that was entrusted to me," cried the monk, beginning to run, "and he shall not!"

The other pursued him, clutching his cowl.

"You'll stay here or the Bishop will deal with you! I told you the Earl of Lynas is not known to you because he has been away in the East for ten years or more."

"Is that why you would trust him with a boy whom I have been preparing for the novitiate?"

Father Sebastian was icily scornful, Father Laurence endlessly sweet:

"Because you've prepared him so well he's certain to choose us when the time comes, and besides—but you wouldn't understand—for one month of his young kinsman's company the Earl is willing to drop the lawsuit about the western meadows."

"Sell all thou hast——" murmured the other, then asked bitterly, "Was Lynas right? Does the domain of Visby go to the order if Erik enters it?"

"Or if he dies. It does," said Father Laurence casually and bent down to uproot a presumptuous dandelion. "And what other heir is there, or who will administer it better?"

Father Sebastian stared into the sky, his face contracting. "I shall spend the month in prayer for him."

"If you want work," his colleague smiled, "I hear that witchcraft has broken out in the town again—healing with magic herbs and so on. They say that Dame Agnes and her pretty little daughter Karin——"

But Father Sebastian was walking rapidly away in the direction of the chapel. The almoner smoothed out the hole where the dandelion had been.

TWILIGHT arose from under the trees and veiled the garden. The dragon-flies of the fountain folded their wings, and a serf came out to turn off the tinkling water. The world was still as the hovering moths.

There was quiet, too, between the blossoming hedges where Erik was riding. In the courtyard four men-at-arms had been waiting for them, and Earl Michael had caught him up in front of himself on a black stallion. Through the town it had pirouetted a little, but now it was trotting ahead peacefully enough. The rhythm almost put the boy to sleep, tired and weak with hunger as

he was, and he soon found himself gently drawn back against the broad chest of the Earl. There he rested. A soothing warmth came from the firm strong body, and he marveled dreamily at the even, magnificent thud of the heart. Now he remembered this man. Long ago, in the castle of Visby—he must have been very young—he had been brought into the great hall by his father, who had laughed and flung him into the arms of his friend, where he had lain still and heard the same reverberant heart-beat. He wondered would he ever see Visby again. He had given up asking Father Sebastian to let him.

The Earl reined in the horse violently. Erik nearly slid down but he was held in a steady grip. In the diaphanous northern evening, he could see that a body was lying across the road, the slight body of a girl, her kirtle torn and her long light hair tossed about her.

One of the men dismounted and brought her to his master. Thick amber hair fell away from a face as white as the hawthorn flowers. The Earl looked at her. "She's not badly hurt," he said. "Take her to the last house of the town."

Erik's heart sank. Often indeed had he been told that women were the favorite aids of Lucifer, but now he was only hoping that this poor hurt pretty thing would be helped by the powerful arm sustaining himself.

"Wait!" the Earl commanded, and Erik, following his gaze, saw a bundle of plants by the roadside. They were brought to the master, who examined them carefully. The boy waited breathlessly. Never had he seen anything so pitiful as the round white shoulder cut by a red gash.

At last the Earl said something in a foreign tongue; one of the men lifted the inert body in front of him; and the little cavalcade continued in the darkening shadows.

After a while the Earl remarked, as if he had been put in mind of it by the feel of Erik's ribs under the thin clothes, "Your Father Sebastian, what does he do besides starving you? I mean, what is he famous for; does he illuminate beautiful books of hours?"

"Oh, no," Erik answered with some pride, "before he came here he was a great exorcist of devils—four thousand and five hundred and forty-seven he drove out of one person's body once, he told me. And he has got sixty-nine witches burned—but only when they wouldn't renounce the Evil One; he says he doesn't hold with burning them if they confess and repent."

"Was that in the Bishop's town?" The Earl's voice was steely.

"I don't know, I think not; there's been none there for some years. No, now he practises austerities. He can fast longer and sleep less and pull the girdle of spikes tighter than anybody I know, and he hardly feels flagellation," Erik trailed off disconsolately.

"A proud martyr."

"He often tells me about the martyrs and how he envies them that they were let suffer for the love of the Lord—I can't understand——" he broke off, terrified at himself.

"The word 'love' seems strange to you?" the man asked tentatively, at the same time drawing the mantle closer. But Erik only shook his head, not wishing to risk injudicious confessions.

They rode more slowly now. The hoofs were sinking in a sandy road, and Erik could smell the salt tang of the sea and the spicy little shrubs and flowers that crouched near it. The strong air made him drowsy; he wanted to rest and ride forever. But the road turned, and soon there was the sound of sliding summer waves on a long beach. He started up.

"The sea?"

"The sound you'll hear day and night at Lynas. The place where I'll teach you to swim. Look!"

There was a wide bay in front of them, and into the bay a high tongue of land, and on that, dark and formidable against a pale green sky, rose a tall, square, turreted castle. One of the men sounded a horn, and lights gleamed in the deep slits of masonry, and the smoky red of torches flared below. With a grating whine the drawbridge was lowered, and hoofs clattered hollowly over it. Inside the gloomy courtyard forbidding grooms were waiting, men as tanned with another sun as their master himself.

Earl Michael dismounted. Losing his support, overwhelmed by weariness and the sharp air, Erik saw everything whirl about him. He was caught then, in the same strong arms, and carried into the castle like a child.

Darkness slid over his mind in long purling waves like the sea. When he began to rise out of it he heard low voices speaking a foreign language. He was conscious of hands running smoothly along his limbs, rubbing his feet, restoring heat to his body. If it were a dream, he would not wake up. He clenched his eyelids, he would force himself back to sleep, but soon he feared the cold gray matins bell would ring!

They were lifting him now; what a pity! they would see how hideous his back was with the scars from the whip. And then he heard a full round oath in a ringing voice that he knew—Earl Michael's. He was not dreaming! They were caressing his back with velvety oils; something silky descended over him; something pungent was held to his nose. He opened his eyes.

He was in a small but high-vaulted room suffused with marigold light and hung with verdant tapestries. Two women were leaning

over him, but he saw only the anxious face of Earl Michael. He smiled to banish the concern, and the man touched his cheek gently.

"I was afraid they had left only your bones!"

He was given something strong and delicious to drink, and the light feeling in his head vanished. He looked around, first at the loose crimson silk mantle in which he was wrapped. The Earl was stately in a green, wide-sleeved, fur-brimmed tunic. The two women stood attentively in a corner. Their skin was brown; their eyes were black and humid. They were so dark to Erik's wondering glance that he involuntarily thought of a white fairness he had seen, and hair the color of yellow amber.

He tried to sit up. "What happened to her?"

The Earl was puzzled. "To whom? — Oh, the girl we found! I forgot. I must——" He rose. "You'll hear later. To sleep now."

He was gone. The boy sank back to rest.

IN ANOTHER room of the castle, simpler and barer, the young girl of the road sat in half-darkness by an open fire. Shadows flickered on the walls and she did not notice that a door opened. Like a sudden apparition a figure stood before her, a tall man hid in a curious cloak of vivid green, terminating in a hood that was crowned by two small, hornlike plumes and a great emerald shining between them. His face was muffled, showing only the steady, burning eyes. He did not speak nor make any gesture, but the girl had no sooner looked up than her pale passivity changed into joyful awe. She threw herself at his feet.

"Lord!" she sobbed. "You have come back at last!"

"Have you kept the laws?" he asked in a thick, unnatural voice.

"Always," she replied; "my mother taught me what you taught her and the others of our faith. We have helped the good and hurt the cruel. Today I was going home with a bundle of healing herbs when the boys stoned me and called me witch."

"You know that they will always call you 'witch' and the god 'devil'?"

"I ask only to suffer for the god!" There was rapture in her face.

"You must stay at Lynas for a month and serve the young Count Erik, who will be one of us."

She nodded and sank down to adore him again. When she rose he was gone. She showed no surprise,

ERIK woke with a start, his heart palpitating; had he overslept for matins? But slowly he worked forward to reality; thrilled with delight he looked out, not on imprisoning trees, but on an opal sea, calm and brightening into blue. A shining speck moved out beyond the far foamy line of the third reef. It came nearer; it was the Earl. Down on the strip of hard, white, sandy beach, sheltered by dunes that held the sun, Erik went to meet him. Laughing at the boy's fears, the man assured him that soon he, too, would be swimming, if not beyond the third, at least beyond the second reef; while Erik shivered, undressed against his will, pitifully thin and pale beside the other's brown muscularity. But after he had thrust himself into the clear, bracing saltiness, had come out alive, and lay baking in a fragrant nook of the dunes, he began to feel a new strength pulsating in his blood, and saw his skin turn pink in the sun.

There were meals with wines and savory meats, and in the evening they went to a curtained hall lit by many candles held in sparkling flowers of glass. Silk hangings glistened along the walls, and rugs of strange patterns silenced the floor. Other-

wise there was nothing except a divan wide and long, and soft as morning sleep. Here they lay, and musicians came with flutes and citherns while the two Eastern women danced for them. Erik felt he should hide his face, yet he did not, following with big eyes the whirling veils, the glittering bangles, the pliant movements. The Earl watched only him. They salaamed away, and in came the girl of the road with a guitar which she strummed while she sang plaintive songs of the people in a sweet, slender voice. Erik went to sleep.

THE days went by, long days full of satisfied curiosities, the vigor of sea and sun, food and wine, dance and music and sleep. Erik seemed to grow visibly taller, heavier, stronger, and the monkish pallor soon gave way to a hard, clear tan. In the evening now, one or other of the Eastern women remained frankly coiled up by the side of her master. Karin, the girl of the road, stayed, too. Erik was teaching her to read, proud of at least one of his former accomplishments.

One night, the next before last of the end of the month, the Earl saw their lips meet over the big, black-letter book, and he stroked his pointed beard with satisfaction. When they were alone he said, "Now will you forsake the world, the flesh and—the devil?"

The boy ran his fingers gayly over the guitar. "I have a few surprises for Father Sebastian." At the thought of his former preceptor he pulled his black brows together. "You worship another god?" he dared.

Earl Michael was startled out of his bronze calm.

"What do you know of that?" he asked sharply.

"Nothing—except that Karin has

told me that there is another—who loves love."

The Earl gazed at him, the long dark eyes narrowing intensely. Then he drew him down by his side, and while the yellow wax candles guttered in the glass candelabrum, and the night flitted in from the sea, he whispered to the boy.

There was indeed another god. He had many names, but the most unjust of them was the "devil." He was far older than that, and far different, but he had been branded with that name for so long that now even most of his worshipers knew him by no other. Among them there were both simple and gentle, and when they met together the priest of the god had to disguise himself even as a horned devil. He, Earl Michael himself, was now the priest here. Erik's father had been, and his mother must have suspected it. Later, when he was older, he too should be initiated into their community, and he should know the secret of the name of the god.

Suddenly Erik clung to him, half in feverish entreaty to know the god at once, half in panic fear, for a wind sprang up from the bay, puffing out the last of the candles, and they lay in a darkness that seemed to rustle and moan. But he was calmed by the strong steady presence so near him, and passionately he begged again to be let adore the god of the man whom he adored.

The Earl took his hand, and they went through the dark to a little door behind the hangings. Through it they stepped into absolute blackness. They stumbled along damp, dreadful passages where soft things flew past their heads and wet things hopped across their feet. At last a thin wand of light split the moist darkness, as an invisible door opened.

They were in a gleaming white colonnaded room that held, like the

inner calyx of a flower, a golden cell in its center.

Earl Michael clapped his hands, and the light vanished. Only one ray came like a shining path to them from this inner cell, and from there came also, faintly at first but approaching louder, a sobbing, thrilling music of flutes, strange, thin, reed-like flutes, evanescently and plaintively divine. The cell opened, and black polished stone glistened around them from circular walls. A black altar stood before a drawn curtain.

The boy knelt with bent head. The clear, frail music danced about him. Of a sudden it stopped. He looked up.

Doubly bright against the darkness of a deep niche stood a Greek marble statue—a naked god, a tall, young, beautiful, smiling god, with his head turned and his chin tilted a little, as if he were following the last echoes of the air he had been playing on the reed flute in his right hand. Two small, stubborn horns were half concealed by his curls, and his ears were mischievously pointed.

But awe veiled the neophyte's eyes, vivifying the antique god, making him seem to breathe, to be on the point of raising the reed flute to his lips again.

Sonorously the priest vowed a new worshiper to Pan.

"He swears to be thy servant forever, never to reveal thy pact with him, never to renounce thee."

"I swear." Erik bowed his head.

Again the aerial music floated about him, gayer, more lilting, more argent than before. The Earl touched his shoulder, and he rose. The curtain was drawn, the vision gone.

"How can I wait to begin the service of the god?"

"You have begun; in less than a year, when you come of age, you shall know everything."

"How can I go back to them, the torturers!"

"It will not be for long, and every night when you fall asleep you will be brought to me. Look at me! You will come to me!"

The dark eyes grew darker, more burning, boring into him; he felt drowsy. Every night he must come back to Lynas.

A HORN shrilled insistently. It pierced at last even into the semi-hypnotic sleep of the young Count of Visby, and he sat up. He was in his own room, and a moment later the Earl came in.

"The Bishop's men are here, a day too early. Father Sebastian has had evil dreams and must have you back at once."

The boy whipped up, slim, tanned, lithe, confident.

"Shall I go? And you will stay here, at Lynas?"

The dark face brightened. "Go! I will travel no farther than just beyond the third reef!"

ERIK rode under the Bishop's gate an image of radiant youth. The wind whirled out his short crimson cloak and the sun glittered in gold embroideries. Spurs jingled on the heels of his long, soft doeskin boots as he ran up the carved staircase of the palace, and louder even when he crossed the white oak floor of the Bishop's private room. He had seen his uncle rather seldom; this time he meant to make an impression on him.

The Bishop, a hawklike man, small and withered, sat in a high throne-chair, Father Sebastian on one side and the almoner on the other. They were ominously still, but the Bishop winced.

"You make a military noise, Brother Erik."

Erik scowled. He already felt himself Lord of Visby.

"My uncle," he began, and at the hardy sound of his voice the monks looked quickly at each other, "I will

tell you that if ever I thought I must carry out my mother's wish, I think so no longer. When I come of age I go to Visby Castle. I do not remain here."

Then he strode out, leaving anger and bewilderment behind, yet he was a little anxious at the thought of Father Sebastian's face. The large, light gray eyes had scrutinized him in a new way, not with zeal, not with wounded affection, but with an icy, dangerous sort of interest.

Erik was no sooner back in his white-washed cell than there was a swift step in the corridor and a key turned in the lock. The jailers! He beat and kicked on the door, shouting imperiously that he, the Count of Visby, demanded to be let free. When he had exhausted himself, a chilly voice came from the other side. Father Sebastian bade him go to bed and substitute penitential prayers for supper; then he went away hurriedly lest he should betray the tears he was shedding, bitter tears over the long years of soul-saving whose work had been undone in a month.

To bed! Erik looked at the narrow window high up and tested his climbing skill. Yes, he could perch up there. It was on the third floor; a combination of ledges on the outside wall could support daring feet to the ground. But as he looked down he grew dizzy, nauseated. Impossible!

He threw himself on the pallet. If he could only go to sleep! There had been a promise. The long black lashes would not stay down. He turned and fretted. The bell tolled twelve before the warm weariness of approaching sleep flowed through his body.

Then he thought he was awakened by flutes, and that the little fountain-statue from the garden was alive and sitting near him, but golden, not gray, and with clear laughing features, short stubby horns half

hidden in curls, ears mischievously pointed. It beckoned to him, and he followed it without the slightest fear, through the narrow window and down the perilous ledges. Without exactly knowing how, he found himself at Lynas. As if in a lovely haze he saw Earl Michael, and there were dancing and music, food and wine, while Karin hovered over her guitar. Yet all was misty and brief and faded away in a troubled sleep.

He was still asleep when Father Sebastian came into the cell. The monk went whiter at the sight of him, and stepped back into the corridor.

"Is he there?" whispered Father Laurence.

"He is, but he was just as surely gone when I came in the night. He must be watched today. It is best to let him run free and see what the evil spirit will prompt him to do."

The almoner began to smile, then suddenly he looked shrewd.

"Do you suspect him of dealings with——?"

"With Satan! How else would his whole character have changed in a month? Is it natural? And who took him out of the cell to which I alone had the key?"

"Watch him," said Father Laurence eagerly, suppressing the theory that Erik with the sure step of a sleep-walker could easily have got down from the window. "The Bishop will bear no witchcraft, even in his kinsman. And the law will be with him."

"Tomorrow," sighed Father Sebastian, "I will examine and have put to the question this Dame Agnes and her daughter of whom you spoke. Rumor has it that she was at Lynas too, and you say that they are both suspected——?"

"They are!" the other encouraged him. "But remember it is more important to root out the black art in high places!"

ERIK awoke, his clothes soaked with dew, his body stiff, but with the glowing sense that the promise had been kept, and he would be prisoner only in the day. Karin had been there. He closed his eyes again and thought with leaping pulses of what she had told him of the joyous sabbaths. But could he not see her now? She, too, had left the castle.

Later in the day a servant came in with bread and water, and Erik, looking abstractedly at him, flamed with interest when the fellow made a little sign, a little secret sign which he had often seen Karin make. It flashed into his mind that the god had many worshipers, gentle and simple, and he waved the sign back. Instantly the man was changed from surly clay to humble alertness. Yes, he knew where Dame Agnes lived; he knew Karin. He would bring her that very day to a place near the garden, known, he felt sure, to him only. He scurried away.

The door was left open. Erik went out, cautious, watchful, but no one appeared to hinder him. A warm, bright day brooded quietly over the garden. He sauntered down to the fountain. Crimson-edged flowers grew by it, and he laid a few on the head of the chipped, unrecognizable statue. Then he flung himself on the soft moss, lulled by the crystal tinkle of water.

Someone was calling, "Master, master," in a low voice. It was the servant beckoning to him from the shrubbery. He ran after the man, who glided ahead of him along hidden paths that twisted in the thick underbrush surrounding the garden.

A monk, livid and haggard, attended by two big lay brothers, came out from the dark avenue, taking the same paths.

In a high outcropping of limestone, there were several hollows hidden by grass and creepers. Erik entered one to which the servant pointed, but

the sun through the foliage made a flickering tracery on the floor of the little cave, and he saw nothing for a few seconds. Then he felt two smooth arms about his neck and heard Karin whispering his name. He held her hard against his body; he kissed her throat, her mouth; he felt himself infinitely removed from boyhood.

Into their bliss a sharp dry voice cut suddenly: "Bind the young witch. Seize Count Erik."

Lamed with surprize, he felt the girl torn from him. He tore out his little dagger, but it was sent spinning by one of the lay brothers and his arms were held behind him. Peering into his face were the terrible gray eyes of Father Sebastian, and the thin mouth was uttering strange words:

"Sathanas, I adjure thee to speak! Your name, tell me your name, and who sent thee into the body of this innocent lad?"

Erik gritted his teeth at him for an answer. The two were brought out. The lay brother with Karin went first, having bound her hand and foot and flung her over his shoulder as if she were dead. Her long, fair hair hung down, shining in the sun against the black cowl. Her eyes were closed, and no sound came from her. Soon she was out of sight.

Erik was locked into his cell, and his day went in wild apprehension for Karin and in vain attempts to dare an escape from the window. But dizziness overcame him whenever he climbed to the sill, and night found him sitting motionless. He did not even look up when the key grated in the lock and Father Sebastian entered.

The monk put a hand under his chin, forcing him to return his gaze.

"I have not lost hope for you. I will save you, the demon shall be cast

out; only confess your sin and then renounce Satan!"

Father Sebastian's emaciated body trembled with suspense, and all the emotion that had not been flagellated out of him welled into his eagerly supplicating eyes.

But Erik was silent, cold. Boy no longer, he knew it would be worse than useless to ask about Karin. He sighed with relief when the monk abruptly quit him and he was left alone to try to sleep, to try to reach Lynas again as he had the night before.

It happened again, the little guiding faun, the bright hall of Lynas, Earl Michael's thrilling voice adjuring him to be steadfast, the sweet embrace of the girl, but all as if in a mist, more dimly seen than the first time. Under his joy there was a heaviness in his mind, a foreboding not clear to him.

HE WAS dragged out of his sleep by Father Sebastian, who violently shook him.

"Unhappy, miserable boy! I came here in the night and found you gone. What choice had I but to tell the Bishop that you were off, unrepentant, with the Evil One? His Lordship's verdict is that even he can not save you from the death of a sorcerer. But confess, confess—renounce the Devil, and I will beseech the Bishop, your good uncle, to forgive you!"

He shook him again, in a passion to save him, but Erik remained silent. Father Sebastian knelt down to pray, and just then the door opened and Father Laurence came quietly in.

"Has he confessed?"

"He has not, but——"

"Then leave us. It is the Bishop's orders. He desires your presence. I have come from the witches."

The other left sorrowfully, reluctantly.

"Kind Father Laurence," Erik asked, "tell me about the—witches."

The almoner smiled calmly.

"They have confessed."

"Karin?" the boy shouted.

"No, not Karin, yet. But the mother has confessed that she knows you have sold yourself to the Devil. And now they are bringing the girl into the torture-chamber where she, too, will confess."

"Never!"

"Never?" Father Laurence brought his smooth face quite close to the boy's and almost purred, "Never? But you don't know what happens. First they will strip her quite naked. Then she can not conceal any devilish charm to keep her from speaking. One can never be sure about that. Such things can be kept even in the hair. So they will cut her hair off, and shave her. Everywhere, do you understand? The hangman and his helpers will touch her fair white skin everywhere."

Erik leaped up. "Where is my dagger? I'll kill you with my hands! Where is Earl Michael?"

The almoner chuckled, "His master the Devil drowned him the day you left when he was swimming out beyond the third reef in his foolhardy pride. But the girl is still alive and you can save her, if you will!"

"I will do anything!"

"Confess then," he suddenly thundered, "that you have made a pact with the Devil!"

Erik sank back on the pallet, exhausted, his head whirling with the half-understood words about Earl Michael, but his voice was firm: "I can not."

Father Laurence was suave again. "And then when the hangman has shaved her body, he will take a long sharp needle and puncture her with it. For where the Devil has put his

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The Devil's Martyr

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mark on a witch she has no feeling, at any rate Father Sebastian says so, and if she doesn't scream when the needle is pushed far into her flesh they know they have found the mark. Even so she may not confess. But there are ways—I think perhaps they will lock her legs between two iron plates and screw them together. They can break the bones and start the marrow from them——” He paused expectantly.

“I will confess. Only save her!” Erik moaned.

The monk called, and a clerk entered carrying a parchment.

“Write down,” the almoner commanded, “that Erik, Count of Visby, confesses of his own free will that he has entered into a compact with the Devil——”

Erik nodded. “Save her,” he whispered.

“Wait—the said Count Erik now renounces the Devil and all his works and is ready to expiate his sin in whatever way we decide to recommend to the secular arm.”

With shaking fingers Erik signed this, and Father Laurence started to leave when he was met by Father Sebastian, white and strained.

“Has he confessed?”

“He has.”

“Praise God!” the other declared ecstatically. “I have obtained grace for him from the Bishop, should he confess.”

Erik burst out, “Father Laurence just promised me that Karin would not be tortured.”

Father Sebastian looked blank. “The young witch? But she has been tortured already. As she would not confess she is to die by fire. Think about your own immortal soul, my poor boy!”

Crying out, “He tricked me, and

I recant my confession; I lied, I said what I did only to save her! I lied, I lied!” Erik fell unconscious to the floor, looking suddenly as pallid and thin as he had looked a month ago.

Father Sebastian bent over him tenderly, tears flowing.

“This is very terrible——”

“It is—I can not understand,” said the almoner, “why the Bishop should have changed. When I left him he understood he could not pardon even his own nephew if he confessed so abominable a crime. Especially as the accomplice must die——”

“She dies because she would *not* confess. Then there can be no mercy. That is the law. Who knows it better than I? Alas, if Erik persists in recanting his confession, he too must die for his soul's sake. But I may yet save him!” He buried his face in his hands.

The placid, practical face of the almoner twisted suddenly into fury. He thrust out an unyielding jaw and hurried off to hammer the Bishop again.

WHEN Erik recovered consciousness he found he was clothed in his former black garb. The two monks were both beside him, but as he looked from one to the other they seemed changed. They were mild and grave. He determined to test them.

“I do not confess,” he said defiantly.

Father Sebastian bent his head.

“I accept that,” he said.

“What will you do with me?”

The almoner said hastily, “You will soon be of age now, and the Bishop, although he is not well and

can not say good-bye to you, desires us to take you to Visby Castle."

Erik rose unsteadily. He could hardly walk, but they were ready to lead him. Father Sebastian supported him down the stairs. In the courtyard a carriage was waiting. They drove away in stony silence through the long tomb of sad dark trees, and he glanced at the little fountain where the sun was bright on the water and the statue sat gray and pensive. His thoughts hovered like the dragon-flies above the tragic contents of his mind without touching it, without remembering anything except when they rolled dumbly into the great park of Visby full of gracious open spaces and gay with flowers. It suddenly came to him that here he had been happy. He pointed out childishly that there he had learned to shoot arrows at a target, and there he had learned to ride. But his companions were grimly still.

As if wandering in a dream he walked between them into the castle, and then Father Laurence opened a door. Erik stepped back. The cry of a terrified animal broke from him.

The room was hung from ceiling to ground, from door to window, in long, dead, merciless folds of black, and it was empty—empty except for a low block in the center, and by this there stood immobile a masked man in black with a cold bright sword in his hand. His eyes rolled white through the mask and he took hold of the boy.

Father Laurence read in a voice of iron from a large parchment.

"Erik, Count of Visby, as you are a nobleman and a kinsman of his, the Bishop has recommended you to the favor of death by the sword, although the death for an unrepentant sorcerer is by fire. Executioner, do your duty."

Then he strode out, his sandals clattering on the stone.

Erik tore himself loose. The

ultimate fear crazed him. He shrieked: "Father Sebastian, I confess, I renounce! Let me live!"

The monk took him in his arms. "You shall live, by all the Martyrs!" he exclaimed, but even as he held the boy he felt him cease shaking. He saw him raise his head, saw the color come back into the pale handsome face, saw that Erik was listening intently to something. He too listened, but heard nothing, except a starling that fluted sweetly on a branch beside the open window. Erik stood straight now, with a radiant, exalted air.

"Forgive me," he said, as if to an invisible presence; and then to Father Sebastian, "I do not renounce the Devil. I *am* his. If I were not I would be. I love him. Make me his martyr."

With sure step he walked over, knelt and laid his head on the block. He smoothed the brown wavy hair with a glint of gold in it down over the dark-blue eyes.

Father Sebastian hid his face.

* * * * *

Afterward he wrote his side of this true story in the Latin chronicles of the Bishopric, and his last words were:

"And so, without a groan of pain or a word of piety, his head fell to the ground—God grant that his soul did not fall into eternal fire."