

WEIRD TALES



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"A troop of phantoms
in knightly armour,
skull faces grinning
from their helmets."

The Gentle Werewolf

By SEABURY QUINN

*A remarkably gentle creature—that werewolf. But she was a lady
And the lady was in love.*

SPRING had come to Galilee and summer was not far behind. Already the plain of Jordan was showing brown and bare, a desert of dun sand and dust with here and there a patch of wiry goat-grass, but in the foothills of the Lebanons the fresh soft verdure washed

the slopes with a green tide that broke into a froth of blossoms on the flat crests of the knolls. Southward, in Cairo the Magnificent, the Sultan Baibas plotted war, but the citizens of Acre paid small heed to warnings brought by spies and friendly Arabs. Since Saint Louis and his hard-fight-

ing blades sailed for France in 1245 they had lived in constant peril of the Paynim; yet their basalt walls had broken wave on wave of Moslem soldiery—and it was spring. Why worry over rumored wars when the soft breeze played among the branches of the orchards, the soil smelt sweet and warm and the larks and linnets piped their minstrelsy in every coppice?

The men-at-arms on watch at the Gate of Saint George waved friendly greetings to the little company of youths and maidens who clattered through the tunneled entrance and out into the sunlight burnishing the high road to Tiberius. Six of them there were, two noble squires and the young knight Gaussin de Solliès, and with them three maids of the highest blood of Outremer.*

They rode without attendants, for the Peace of Jerusalem still held and they had no fear of Paynim raiders, and this was Beyond-the-Sea, not France, and chaperonage was an institution strange to them. Like their cousins overseas they were, yet strangely unlike, for while in France and

England maids toiled at the broidering-frame and youths rode forth on raids or hunted in the forests where the sun was cold, and few of them could form the letters of his name, these children weaned in Palestine were born to luxury and reared in ease. Their Western manners warmed and softened by long contact with the East, they had escaped the thrall of crudity, abysmal ignorance and uncleanness of Europe's mediæval thousand years without a bath. Unguents spiced with scents from Cathay and Persia were theirs; the Arabs' vapor bath was part of their routine; once a week at least skilled masseurs came to tend them; not less than once a month a eunuch barber or deft woman shaved their

All night he lay sleepless.

* Lands held by the Crusaders.

And inside his broken, empty heart,
echoed a cry: "Sylvanette."



bodies till they were as free of surplus hair as those of newborn infants.

A dozen peoples served them: merchants from Damascus and Baghdad brought them cloths the like of which were seldom seen in Europe; scores of dark-eyed Syrians were at their instant call; courteous Arabs and sleek Greeks had taught them prosody, philosophy and rhetoric. They spoke—and read and wrote—French, Arabic, Latin and Greek with easy interchangeability.

As they mounted the first range of foothills young Gaussin touched the gold-bossed bridle of his saddlemate. "Wilt tarry beneath the trees with me a while, Sylv'ette?" he asked. "There is somewhat I would say to thee."

The girl looked at him, smiling, and drew her Arab pacer's rein. A moment later, as their friends rode down into the farther valley, they walked their horses to the grove of flowering almond trees and Gaussin leaped down from his saddle to take the girl's slim foot in his hand and assist her to dismount.

Since Adam first looked into Eve's eyes there has been no woman in creation who could not tell when she was about to receive the offer of a man's devotion, and the telegraph of Eros warned Sylvanette de Gavaret. A flush as delicate as the almond blossoms overhead spread up her throat, across her cheeks and on her high, white brow. She looked at him, eyes wide, lips parted; she was breathing faster as he took her hand, slipped off the pearl-sewn gauntlet, and kissed her fingers.

No chevalier's kiss this, no mere salute of gallantry, but homage, worship utter and complete as that of worshipper before a shrine.

"*Sylv'ette ma drue!*" he paraphrased the Arthurian romance, "*Sylv'ette ma mie, en vous ma mort, en vous ma vie!* (Sylvette my little bird, Sylvette my dear, in you my death, in you my life)."

Her eyes were soft with love and trust as she laid her other hand upon his crisply curling auburn hair and capped the verse in a voice scarcely louder than a fluttering breath:

*"Bel ami, ainsi, va de nous!
Ne vous sans moi, ni moi sans vous!
Fair love, let us together be,
Not thou sans me, nor I sans thee!"*

He looked up, wondering incredulity in his eyes. "Lovest thou me, then, Sylv'ette?"
"With all the heart of me, my Gaussin."

Time and life are one, eternity is different, immeasurable; and eternity, though but an instant clipped from time's relentless dial, was theirs as they exchanged their first kiss. He drew her to him slowly, unbelievably, and the utterness of her sweet self-surrender was almost terrifying as she leant against him, lips apart, and offered him a kiss that shook him to the final cell and fiber of his being. She groaned softly, as in pain, went flaccid in his arms, then tightened her arms round his shoulders, pulling his face down to hers, pressing against him until he felt the flutter of her heart as it beat echoes to the pounding of his pulses.

AFTERWHILES they sat beneath the almond trees on a net of spangled shade, the coiling fronds of the new grasses cool against their hands. The delicate odor of the almond blossoms came to them, and the warm scent of fern-grass. Beneath its overtone of pink, with the verdure of the sward below, and the bright blue of anemones to punctuate it, the orchard might have been a fragment of the Magic Carpet of the Arab story-tellers, torn off and drifted here to light among the foothills of the Lebanons.

At noon they rose to their knees and, hands joined piously, recited the sweet salutation of the angel to the Blessed Mother while the bells of half a hundred

churches, and the chapels of the Templars and the Hospitalers and the covents of the nuns and friars rang the angelus. Afterward they broke their fast with pasties of spiced meat and comfits washed down with Cyprian wine, and washed their hands in a small brook that clattered over pebbles round and smooth as doves' eggs. Then she must lave her white feet in the brooklet, and he must be her tiring-woman and her body-servant and dry them on the linen of his mantle, and claim a kiss from both her insteps for the service, and a mailed and bearded knight from the Hospital, as he rode by on his high black charger, smiled at them as he heard their laughter, then wiped a tear-drop from his eye. But he could not tell if he wept for them because they were so young and inexperienced, or for himself, because he had neither youth nor illusions left.

At last the soft blue dusk of early evening settled in the valleys. They rose, and while he put the harness on the horses she watched him with love-brightened eyes. A lovely creature, this Sylvanette de Gavaret. Just turned sixteen, and lissome as a willow withe, she made each movement with a sort of lilting, questing eagerness. There was lyric loveliness in every motion of her long and supple body, in the undulation of her narrow hips, the rondure of her high firm breasts. An Arab ancestress had willed her the black hair that in some lights seemed to have an iridescence like a blackbird's throat and the great dark eyes, soft and appealing as a gazelle's, with something hesitant in their velvet depths. But the long, slim lines of her, the fair white skin through which a delicate tracery of blue veins showed and to which no sun, however ardent, could bring a touch of tan, were heritages of pure Norman blood. Brought up in Outremer, child of the mingled customs of the East and West, she dyed the almond-shaped nails of her hands and feet bright red with henna and em-

phasized the depth and power of her great dark eyes by shadowing their lace-veined lids with kohl.

The shimmer of her silken tunic was like the pale bloom of her skin, something that belonged to her, and no one else, and the dark amethysts of her ear-rings, like the amaranthine jewels of her necklace and the great carved amethystine signet on her forefinger, seemed to echo the soft somberness that hid the inward glow of her fringed, plumbless eyes.

She shuddered slightly, as if stricken with a sudden chill as he led up the bridled Arab barbs. "Art cold, my sweetling?" he asked with a lover's solicitude.

"Nay, love of mine," she answered with a smile that brought the hidden fires of her deep eyes to sudden glowing. "'Tis that I hate to say farewell to this dear spot. Would that we might be like this alway, have this one day frozen into an eternity."

He laughed and kissed her as he swung her to the saddle. "'Tis but the dawning of our day of love, *yah Shadjar ad Darr—O Pearl-Spray*"—he used the Arabic love-term as naturally as if he had been born beneath the shadow of the Crescent. "As good Queen Balkis said to Solomon the Great, 'The half hath not been told thee.'"

He broke into a snatch of song as they rode down the highway and dipped into the purple-shadowed valley: the romance of Bisclavret penned by Marie de France for the pleasuring of English Henry:

*"Bisclavret a nun en Bretan
Garulf Papelent li Norman . . ."*

"The Bretons call it Bisclavret,
In Normandy they say Garulf, in England
werewolf . . ."

"Ah, no, my love, sing not that frightening ditty, I entreat thee!" Sylvanette signed herself fearfully and looked about her with a shudder. "The werewolf is a devil-creature to affright the hardiest, and we are far from home—"

"O thou sweet small coward," he laughed teasingly, "art thou truly frightened of the werewolf while I ride thus beside thee?"

"Nay," she answered with an echoing smile, "not truly. But the *bisclavret* affrights me sore. In all the host of Pandemonium there is no monster like unto the werewolf, methinks. By'r Lakin, I chill from heart to skin at very mention of its name! I cannot bide a wolf-pelt nigh me, since it reminds me of the hateful *loup-garou*. [werewolf]."

THEY trotted through the vaulted portal of the tower-gate under echoing walls that picked up the sound of their horses' hooves and hurled them back with thunderous volume, and came into the street beyond. In the evening cool the city was astir. Beneath striped canopies of sail-cloth, Syrian merchants spread their stocks of rugs from Mosul, glass from Damascus, linen sewn with pearls from far Baghdad, jeweled saddle-cloths from Shamakha, carpets from Bokhara vivid as a hasheesh-eater's dream.

Upon the Square stood the Cathedral, first a church and then a mosque and now again a church, staunch with the trinity of its great oaken doors and Gothic strength, vivid with the glow of sanctus light and candle, calm now, and quiet, as if it dreamt of peace amid a world still echoing with the clash of arms and battle-cries and shuddering under rumors of new wars.

Here she bade him leave her, for he must report at the citadel before the evening angelus had rung, and afterward he must bespeak her father for her hand, while she would fain kneel at the altar of the good Saint Anne and ask her intervention when the landless knight besought the heiress of de Gavaret for wife.

He looked back with a wave as she went up the steps, and she turned to him, white hands held out in farewell, eyes upraised

and very wide. A sudden gust of evening breeze pressed her silk robe against her body, defining it as though it were a statue suddenly released from the rough marble, and she raised her hands and pressed them to her breast and leant herself toward him. With lips apart and eyes tight closed, she leaned toward him, then turned and made her way with slow steps through the shadowy ravine of the great door. At the threshold she stopped for a moment, wound her scarf of tabby silk turbanwise about her head, then tiptoed to the niche in the north transept where the altar of the blessed Anne of Bethlehem was set.

The evening shadows had grown deeper when she emerged from the great church. Little feathers of dusk were drifting through the streets; a sort of brassy, unreal twilight filled the air. She tossed a groat to the small half-caste boy who held her horse, swung the barb around so she might mount the saddle from the horse-block at the curb, but paused with foot upraised as a little scream of almost human agony came to her. She looked about. Nowhere, either in the Square or in the streets debouching on it was there any sign of life. Then the scream came again, and she looked into the shadow cast by a buttress of the cathedral wall and saw a filthy, ragged figure squatting.

Bridle looped in elbow, she approached the crouching form. It was a woman, brown of face and wrinkled as a frosted apple. Her cloak was patched and quilted with a dozen different-colored scraps of rag, and round her neck and on her filthy, scrawny hands were ornaments of tarnished metal. Between her knees she held a writhing, quivering jackdaw at which she mouthed with toothless gums.

"What saith my lord the Count, thou imp of Satan?" she demanded. "Did not I send thee to his tower to overhear his counsel with the Master of the Templars? Tell me that which passed between them,

or by Barran-Sathanas I'll pluck thee bare as any pigeon ready for the pastry-cook!"

"Let be!" Sylvanette commanded very sharply. "How darrest thou, in the very shadow of God's house—"

Her brave words slackened, faltered, for the old crone raised her wrinkle-puckered face and looked at her with fixed, set, staring eyes, void of expression as if they were set in a corpse's face. Yet in the dark they seemed somehow to glow with inward phosphorescence, like the pale light given off by long-dead things that rot in swamps and quagmires.

"And who are thou to give directions to thy betters, wench?" the crone demanded. "Pass on, or feel the vengeance of La Crainte—"

"Wench?" Fury drove all fear from Sylvanette. "Thou darrest call me wench, thou foul harpy?" She brought her riding-whip down on the rag-patched shoulders of the crouching hag. "That for thy insolence! Unloose yon poor bird instantly, or—"

Once more her voice failed, for the old woman was addressing her in a low, squeaky whisper: "How long wilt thou continue in the form of woman, wretched creature?" She rose, drew a flask from her girdle and from it poured a little liquor in the palm of her cupped hand. "Take the form I give thee"—she hurled the liquid into Sylvanette's face—"and retain it till"—she rose and brought her withered, wrinkled lips against Sylvanette's ear, whispered something in a tittering, malicious breath, then slapped the girl on both cheeks with her open hand.

THE liquor the old hag had thrown in her face stung like vitriol, scalding Sylvanette on brow and cheek and chin. The fire of it seemed spreading through her veins until she felt as if she were bound to the stake with blazing faggots heaped about her. The world was spin-

ning crazily on a loose axis; time stopped, and breathing with it. She was gasping, choking, dying. She dropped upon her knees, then to her hands. The scarf wound round her head fell uncoiled to the pavement; her gown and shoes and gauntlets hung and flapped about her. An itching, tingling and unendurable as nettle-stings, spread over her entire body. Her eyes stung so she could not wink without sharp, stabbing pains in them. She raised a hand to soothe her smarting lids. . . . O, mercy, heaven! No hand, this, but a broad furry paw, long-nailed and terrible—a wolf's foot!

She screamed in horror and dismay. "*Woo-hoo-oo-oo-hoo!*" Deep-throated, rising in a slow crescendo, then sinking from a howl to wail, and from a wail to a low moan, the ululation of a wolf's bay sounded eerily, and from every kennel in the city came an answering chorus, yelps, growls, barks of dogs which answered the long howl with fear or fury.

"Begone!" The witch spurned her. "Go seek thy kind, and"—a high, cruel, cackling laugh—"remember how thou mayest find release!"

Panic seized her. Home! She must get home, see the good Père Botron, have this foul witchery taken off with bell and book and holy water. With long, swift, silent leaps she raced along the darkling street, but somehow the quick summer darkness which had settled on the city seemed less dense. The horologe had struck the sunset hour long since, lights were glowing in the windows of the houses, here and there a cresset burned against a wall; but the darkness seemed no more than a deep twilight as she loped with long, swift, space-devouring leaps toward the Château Gavaret.

She was almost at the portal now. At the gate stood Guilhen, sergeant of the watch, leaning on his partizan, gazing with indifferent eyes at a cat that stalked imag-

inary mice in the shadows. She made toward him as to a shelter in a tempest. "Guilhen, old fellow, it is I!" she attempted to cry, but:

"*Woo-hoo-oo-oo-hoo!*" a wolf's howl split the gathering darkness.

"Saint Mary's mercy on all sinners!" Guilhen almost let fall his partizan at sight of the great beast that rushed toward him. Almost, but not quite. In a moment he had gathered back his wits and aimed a devastating blow at the brute. "Wolf or demon, natural creature or *bisclavret*, have at thee!" he shouted. Then, to the guard within the château: "Ho, there, a wolf runs in the streets! Bring bows to shoot it down!"

"Guilhen, Guilhen, 'tis I, the Lady Sylvanette ensorcelled by foul witchcraft!" the wretched girl screamed, but only horrid growls and marrow-chilling howls came from her mouth.

Now a twanging like a plucked harp-string sounded, and an arrow clipped against the pavement by her feet, and a quarrel from a crossbow struck fire from the paving-stones behind her.

She turned and ran for dear life, for the guard was turning out, and the arrows screamed and whistled past her ears like hornets when their nest is disturbed.

Through the streets she ran, the clicking of her nails against the paving-flints in time with the wild beating of her heart. Now she was at the gate of Saint George. The great valves had been closed but the postern still swung open to admit late travelers.

"Ho, there!" a porter cried. "A wolf comes; close the gate, 'twill yield a noble pelt!"

He seized the chain to draw the postern shut, but like a driven arrow she sped past him, out upon the moon-washed highway toward the foothills of the Lebanons whence two hours earlier she and Gaussin had ridden.

Panic raced beside her and fear ran at her heels as she swept along the road until she reached the orchard-plot where she and Gaussin had exchanged their vows. There she sank whimpering on the grass, her sides expanding and contracting with her tortured breathing. Her throat was burning, parched and dry with dust. She rose wearily and went to the brook where she had waded after noonday meat. The moon shone on a little pool of still water as she bent thirstily above it, and she shrank back, sick with fright and horror. In the mirror of the brooklet she had seen herself—her broad face gray-furred, eyes green and glowing in the moonlight, white fangs agleam, long pink tongue lolling from a black-lipped mouth.

In bitterness and agony of spirit she wept, and the long-drawn, eery belling of a wolf's howl sounded through the night: "*Woo-hoo-oo-oo-hoo!*"

GAUSSIN DE SOLLIES was making a meticulously careful toilet. In almost feverish haste he replaced the woolen hose and doublet with silk garments, and in place of the white linen surtout drew a mantle of fine damask brocade over his small-clothes.

He buckled a gold-studded belt about his waist and lashed a light curved cimeter to it with a gold chain. Finally he dashed rose water upon his hair and beard and clapped a velvet cap upon his curling red-gold hair.

He was asking much when he demanded Sylvanette de Gavaret for wife, he realized, but as he looked into the Byzantine mirror of polished silver he knew that he had much to offer.

Not in lands and gear—the good Lord knew otherwise!—but in person, and certainly in prospects. He had traveled far and fast. While most youths of his age were still serving as squires, he had worn the golden spurs of knighthood almost

four years, and yet he had just passed his twenty-second birthday.

Godson—some said love-child—of the Bishop Gilles de Saucier, he had been reared in the episcopal palace at Tyre, learning all one destined for the church should know, and many things a cleric had no right to think of. In his fourteenth year his patron died, but he had made good friends who saw him placed in service with the Warden of Antioch, where he straightway left all thoughts of robe and tonsure and addressed himself so aptly to the arts of war that before he reached his sixteenth year he had been made a captain, and in his eighteenth summer had won knighthood for bravery in the field. Two years' captivity in Cairo had made him well-nigh as familiar with the Paynim soldiery as his own, and despite his youth he was as welcome at the council table as he was at the head of his troop of mounted men-at-arms. Red-haired, blue-eyed and ruddy-faced, he was pure Norman to his fingertips, but Norman overlaid with Eastern culture, and with his forthright Frankish nature tempered and diluted with a subtlety that came from long association with the Greek and Arab. A man who had come far in a short time and would go farther, this; no maiden's father need reproach him for his lack of lands, those would surely come with ripening age, and meantime he could offer youth and strength and ardent love.

He went forth seeking no one-sided bargain, he assured himself as he mounted and rode leisurely toward the Château Gavaret and his interview with his beloved's sire.

HILAIRE DE GAVARET, Lord Constable of Acre, sat at late meat upon the terrace outside the square keep of his walled house. The Galilean moon-encrusted rooftops of the lower houses and the spires and turrets of the greater build-

ings with a coat of silver; a slim, soft-footed page renewed the red Greek wine in his cup; impassive Syrians held their torches high and washed the terrace with a flow of orange light that veiled the stars. Hilaire drank deeply, but not thirstily. Rather, his drafts were like those of a man who seeks to drown his apprehension. At dining-time he had been startled by the howling of a wolf outside the house, and wolves in a walled city were as rare as monks who liked not victuals or soldiers who cared naught for loot. At first he had been sure his ears deceived him, but when the sergeant of the watch assured him that he saw the beast and that it tried to force an entrance to the house he felt a chill of apprehension.

When Sylvanette was but a babe in arms an Arab sand-diviner had foretold that ere she reached the full bloom of her womanhood some great misfortune would befall her, and the wolf's cry at his door seemed like an omen. Thrice he had sent a messenger to his daughter's bower. Three times the word brought back had been the same.

She had ridden to the foothills of the Lebanons with a company of young companions, and had not yet returned. Who had been her saddlemates? Her tiring-women could not say, but they believed young Gaussin de Solliès was one. Small wonder if he was. The lad was like Sylvanette's shadow. Presently he would come suing for her hand, belike, and Sire Hilaire would inquire what he had to feed a wife withal, how he proposed to equip a house and provide bread and meat for retainers. Then with a show of great reluctance he would yield, and give them his blessing, for Sylvanette's dowry was enough for two, and he was widowed and without another heir. By the blood and bones of good Messire Saint James, he liked the lad, and—

"My Lord," a Syrian servant bowed

with deference at his elbow, "young Captain de Solliès begs for admission—"

"Bid him come, and quickly," interrupted Sire Hilaire. "By sainted Denis' sainted head, 'tis time he brought my daughter home!

"*Holà*, good Messer Jackanapes," he greeted Gaussin as the young knight stepped out on the terrace, "what ill wind blows thee hither? Or belike it is a good breeze wafts thee here, and thou art come to tell me that thou leavest for Antioch or Tyre or Constantinople. The blessed saints in Paradise grant that it be a right good distance—" While he was speaking he looked toward the doorway to the house, made sure he saw the flutter of a gown, and smiled more broadly.

So that way lay the wind, eh? The wench was hovering in the offing while her lover made his request for her hand? Now for the aspect of a stern, uncompromising sire! He choked a chuckle rising from his belly and put on a fierce look. "What would'st with me, sirrah?"

"It is about thy daughter, Messire," Gaussin replied nervously. "I am come to—"

"My daughter, quotha? And where is she? Report has come that thou rode off with her this morning while the dew still sparkled on the grass. Say, hast thou brought her back unharmed?"

The blank expression on the young man's face brought his mock-bluster to a halt.

Gaussin was looking at him open-mouthed, something like dawning terror in his eyes. The muscles tightened at the angles of his jaw, his fingers clenched the carved arms of his chair as if they clung in desperation to a tower parapet. "She—she is not here?" Fear, consternation—utter panic—forced the question from him.

For a moment they stared at each other, young knight and old campaigner. Their eyes met and nothing moved in their faces.

It was as if each looked at a graven image incapable of looking back.

At length Sire Hilaire licked his lips and spoke in a voice hard and raucous as the sound of ripping parchment. "Say'st thou that she rode out with thee and thou hast dared return without her?"

Gaussin looked at him helplessly. He had left her at the cathedral before the sun went down. The streets were well patrolled by men from his own provost guard; besides, who would dare offer affront to the daughter of the Lord Constable? But he had left her—alone—to make her way unguarded and without escort through the darkling evening. True, she had wished it so, but he was a knight, sworn by oath unbreakable to guard all gentlewomen placed in his care until the sword fell from his unnerved hand.

"Messire," he began, but the Lord Constable's bellow drowned his faltering explanation.

"By holy Michael his most puissant lance, thou callest thyself knight, thou cur, thou scurvy knave, thou false poltroon!" His ruddiness gave way to a gray pallor as he leveled a taut forefinger at Gaussin. "Report thyself in close arrest to the Lord Provost, sirrah. Tomorrow I lodge my complaint before the Court of Chivalry—the good God grant me life until I see thy name struck from the roll of true sir knights!"

ALL night Gaussin paced his quarters. Hour after hour he walked a frustrated diamond-shaped pattern on the black and white marble tiles. Inside his ears, as if it echoed from his broken, empty heart a cry reverberated: "Sylvanette!"

Only this morning—or had it been a thousand years ago?—they were so happy in their new-found love. Now . . . "Sylvanette—Sylvanette!" the syllables of her name reproached him, mocked him. Once, exhausted past endurance, he threw him-

self upon his couch, but scarcely had he closed his eyes when he rose with a dreadful cry. For at the moment sleep came, there came a troop of phantoms, men bedight in knightly armor, but with crests reversed upon their shields, and when they put their vizors up skull-faces grinned at him from their helmets. "Rise, Gaussin de Solliès," they bid him in deep, hollow voices, "rise and join our company, for we, like thee, were recreant to our chivalry, and now thou art become as one of us."

Then from a cave of blazing pitch and brimstone, demons brought a helmet glowing fiery red, a lance of poison thorn-wood and a shield of rag stretched on a frame of willow. "Dress thyself in the armor of thy infamy, O forsworn knight!" cried the capering host of fiends. "Put on the panoply of degradation; ride the lists of infamy!"

"Mercy!" he screamed as they made to put the glowing helmet on his head. "Is there no hope, no relief?"

"Aye, brother of the damned," a skeleton in armor answered, "that there is. When thou hast fought thy way across this fiery plain and conquered every foe sent out against thee, then climbed the wall of smooth and slippery ice that hems the field of the lost spirits, thou shalt find surcease from thy sufferings, not before. And mark thee, recreant knight, each time a foeman overthrows thee in the lists another thousand years is added to thy period of torment."

He wakened bathed in sweat and gazed about him with eyes glazed with horror. Then, as he realized he had dreamed, the furious beating of his heart subsided, and once more he began his pacing back and forth across the floor.

Dawn came seeping into the gray murk of the sky like blood welling through a soiled bandage. From cathedral, church and chapel came the chiming matins of the bells:

"Hail, Mary, full of grace,
Blessèd art thou among women . . ."

HE WAS weak with weakness greater than mere bodily fatigue when they brought him forth to stand before the Masters in Chivalry and hear the charge Sir Hilaire lodged against him. His companions of the day before were summoned to bear witness, and one and all they testified, all to the same effect: That he had ridden forth with them and with the damoselle Sylvanette de Gavaret; that he and she had dropped behind when they were scarce an hour's ride beyond the city; that none of them from that moment had seen or heard of Sylvanette de Gavaret, and might the Lord do so to them, and more, if they spoke aught but the truth, and the whole truth.

Defense? What defense could he offer? That he had let the wilful maid have her way, permitted her to tarry at the cathedral while he rode off to leave her to her own devices, and make her way unguarded through the night-bound streets? A half-wit three-year child would not believe a story such as that.

The judge advocate advised him. He could not be degraded without a trial if he chose to stand upon his rights. He might have trial by ordeal, swear to his innocence and take the exorcized bread in his mouth. If he could swallow it his guiltlessness would be assumed. Or he might have recourse to compurgation, bring twelve good men and true to swear that they believed him innocent. He might have ordeal by combat, and battle with de Gavaret's champion to the death. Which would he choose?

He looked about the circling lines of knights and ladies. No eye in all the throng looked at him with aught but scorn. No hope of compurgation there. He was already condemned by the audience.

Wager of battle? He could scarcely

keep upon his feet, and the cold he had caught as he stood bathed in sweat while he looked from his window yesternight had sent an enervating fever racing through his blood. In combat he would be no match for Beppo, the Lord Provost's dwarf, much less a champion armed cap-a-pie and lusting to write *Guilty* on him with the sword.

"I choose the ordeal by the corsned," he replied. Heaven knew that he was innocent of wilful wrong, he would have given his blood drop by tortured drop for Sylvanette. Let heaven witness to his innocence.

The corsned, a small loaf of leavened bread about the size of a man's fist, was brought, and while a kitchen villein kneaded and compressed it till it bulked but half its former size the bishop's chaplain exorcized it by the ancient rite: "I exorcize thee, creature of wheat, may no evil spirit lurk in thee to aid the guilty with his wiles . . . may the power of the adversary, all the host of Satan, all evil attack, every spirit and glamour of the Devil be utterly put to flight, and driven far away. . . ."

Wine was poured upon the compressed, unpalatable bolus, and Gaussin raised his hand. "Heaven witness I am guiltless of this charge against me. If it be not so may this bread lodge in my throat and strangle me, but if I be unjustly accused may I swallow it as featly as it were a sup of wine, and may it nourish both my corse and my spirit."

The chaplain thrust the kneaded dough into his opened mouth, and he strained at it, for to bite or chew it was forbidden. For purposes of swallowing it might almost as well have been a stone, but even so he might have forced it down had it not been for the cold caught the night before. With his throat stopped by the compact mass of bread he felt the sudden tightening of the pectoral muscles which precedes a cough, strove desperately to swallow, and bent

forward suddenly, face suffused and shoulders heaving. Next instant he shook with the torsion of a cough, threw back his head in effort to get breath, and shot the wad of compressed bread from his mouth like a quarrel from a crossbow. Heaven had given judgment. He was guilty.

Sentence was pronounced immediately: That his name and arms be erased from the roll of knighthood; that his golden spurs be hacked off with a scullion's cleaver; that his armor be stripped from him and beaten to a shapeless mass with sledges in the hands of villeins; that his sword and lance be broken into pieces and with his knightly harness tossed upon a dung heap, and the shield that bore his crest be dragged through the muck of a pig-sty at an ass's tail; that the embrocation of knighthood be washed from his head with lye and scalding water, after which he should be stretched upon a bier and carried to the chapel as one dead. If upon the morrow he were found within the city walls he should be pelted with manure from the stables by villeins.

As he heard the dreadful sentence of his degradation Gaussin trembled like a man with ague; then, eyes ablaze with fever and indignation, "Messires, it was no will of heaven, but my cough that made me fail the ordeal, as you know full well," he told them. "Nevertheless, when a man is foredoomed he can look for little justice from his judges. My arms and gear are in my quarters. Do with them as thou wilt, but by'r Lakin, the first man to lay hand on me, be he of noble blood or villein base, goes straightway down to hell to tell the Devil of my coming!" he roared, and leaping tiger-like snatched a sword from a sergeant and swung it naked in their faces.

None hindered him as he walked from the council chamber, none sought to stop him as he marched with flaming cheeks and blazing eyes across the parade ground

and to the city gate. The guardsmen at the portal forbore to salute him, for the rumor of his degradation had preceded him, but neither did they move to bar his way. And so, unlet, he came once more upon the highway to Tiberius where yestereve he and his dear, dear love had ridden with hearts overfilled with happiness.

Once only he looked back, and saw the grinning lackeys of the guard regarding him. Ceremoniously he raised first one foot, then the other, shaking from them the dust of the city.

FOR thirty days Gaussin held to the highway, going ever northward, past Tyre and Beirut, Antioch and Tarsus, keeping from the walled towns, sleeping in the little villages along the way, or at the farmsteads bordering the road. Fortunately for him there had been some silver and a few gold pieces in the pocket hanging at his belt; so he lacked for nothing in the way of food or shelter, and once or twice he was enabled to increase his rate of travel by hiring transportation with a wagon train or caravan which headed toward Taurus and the Armenian states.

He had started without destination or purpose other than to put as much distance as possible between him and the city of his humiliation. Of those who travel thus, without intention, the Moslems say they journey toward God's gate, and so it proved for Gaussin. A month had passed, and he was in the country of the *atabegs*, the petty war lords of Edessa whose castles looked down on the red wheat fields and who sallied out to take their toll of passing merchant trains. The night he had spent in a cedar copse, for the caravansaries of the few wretched villages which grew like fungi on the ruinous remains of the old Roman road swarmed with vermin of prodigious appetite and thieves and cut-purses no less predatory. The changing light before the dawn was brightening

nearby trees and rocks and distant crenelated hills into sharp definition as Gaussin sat up with a great yawn, stretched his arms and dropped back on his couch of leaves. Then, all the luxury of languor gone from him, he crouched on one knee, sword in readiness, eyes narrowed warily. The crash of steel on steel, the hoarse shouts of contending men and the thudding of mailed feet came to him from the road.

Cautiously parting the branches he saw the combatants, one in lacquered armor who stood almost two ells tall and grasped a great sword in his hand and hewed a circle round him as if he were a scytheman standing in a field of growing grain; three men accoutered similarly lay face downward in the road, while round them surged a horde of Terkaris, lean, rapacious riders of the uplands, link-mailed and cimetered, retainers of some neighboring *atabeg* who had attacked these outlanders for loot, but now fought savagely for revenge for their losses. Across the stony field a herd of horses galloped riderless. Apparently the attackers had dismounted to creep upon their prey in silence, but had been discovered before they could strike.

Gaussin shrugged his shoulders. Let them fight it to the death. It was the Devil's business, not his. What had he to do with chivalry, or helping those beset by robbers? But the logic of his Gallic mind proved stronger than his bitterness. The robbers still were six to one, and though the giant fended them off mightily the result of the fight was forecast. If he were found by the victorious Terkaris while their blood-lust still ran at flood-tide . . . he was unmounted and without armor, and while he had no reason to love life there was no call to woo death needlessly. Besides, perhaps they would not kill him, but take him to the castle to be made a slave . . . to draw water and hew wood for some barbarous *atabeg*.

"God wills it!" he raised the Crusaders' battle-cry and dashed from his ambush with sword in one hand, dagger in the other.

Gaussin had had the best instruction in weaponry procurable, and it was well for him he had, for two of the robbers turned on him, and as he looked into their faces he knew them for *hasheesh*-eaters rendered fearless by the drug, and fierce as hungry tigers. No followers of some small *atabeg* these, but *fedawi* of the *Shaikh al Jebal*, half-crazed followers of the Old Man of the Mountain. Broided on their white surtouts he saw the crimson dagger of their lord and master, and with a quickly indrawn breath he realized that the fight he undertook was to the death, both now and afterward; for if he prevailed now he was a marked man, and the daggers of the secret killers would be whetted for his heart wherever he might go.

This thought flashed through his mind like a reflex, and then there was no time for thought, for swords were flashing in his eyes and he must kill or be killed. With a tremendous down-stroke he hewed the sword-hand off the nearest foeman, and as the fellow staggered back drove his dagger beneath his pointed beard, so that the fellow dropped with a startled sheep-like bleat while his companion leaped at Gaussin.

With a backstroke of his two-edged sword the young knight slashed across his adversary's eyes, hewing through the flesh and skull and into the brain, and wheeling drove his dagger straight into the teeth of a third hemp-chewer who had tripped upon the body of his comrade and so missed the stroke which he had aimed at Gaussin's heart.

Meantime the beset giant swung his flailing bloody blade, chopped an arm from one attacker, lopped the head off of another neatly as a scullion beheads a fowl, and dropping his brand leaped upon the

one remaining Assassin, raised him high above his head and hurled him to the roadway with such force that his bones cracked like breaking pots.

Now they looked at each other, Gaussin and the sole survivor of the beset party, and Gaussin drew his breath in as he recognized the other. He had seen such men as this—though not of such great stature—during his captivity in Cairo. For all the butter-color of his skin the giant was of ruddy countenance, his eyes were sharply slanted toward the outer corners, and his mustache drooped in two long plaited braids. He was dressed in armor of black lacquer ornamented with designs in golden damascene. The leather helmet on his head was pot-shaped and from its top a horse-tail trailed. Upon his feet were felt boots with soles at least two inches thick, the sword he held was long as a Crusader's blade but curved and double-edged, and fitted with a cross-guard almost a foot long. A Mongol, one of those fierce riders from High Tartary who periodically swept from their deserts to overrun the lowlands, take whatever might be new and precious, then drift back to their northern steppes, leaving desolation in their wake. What was he doing here?

THE giant addressed him in fair Arabic. "My thanks to thee, most noble Frank, for that thou camest when thou did. What art thou called, and where is thy retinue? If thou wilt call them to thee I shall be glad to take thee to the tent of my commander, who will requite thee for thy courtesy."

Gaussin laughed. A short, hard, cachinating laugh containing neither gayety nor humor. "One name will serve as well as any for such as I. As for my retinue, I stand surrounded by it. These be my followers, the winds, the rains, the tempests, the jackals and the carrion-crows that haunt deserted battlefields."

The giant Tartar looked at him inquiringly, and, glad at last to have an auditor, Gaussin poured out the story of his lost love, his trial and his degradation. If his tale affected the great Mongol he could not tell, for the yellow ruddy features were impassive, the eyes void of expression till he had finished. Then:

"A fool thou wert, but no knave," the giant decided. "Also I have seen thy swordplay, and it likes me. Dost know the country hereabout?"

"Like the lines of mine own hand."

"Good. Would'st take service with him who rules the earth?"

"Thou mean'st the Holy Father at Rome?"

"I mean the Kha Khan of the world, whose empire stretches from the Carpathians to Cathay. Captive princes bow their foreheads to the dust before him, ten times a hundred caravans bring him tribute every day, ten times a hundred thousand mighty men of war wait on his word."

"Why, then, this puissant lord of thine is just the master I would serve," replied Gaussin. If what the Mongol said were true, or even partly true, there would be fighting in this army, and loot, and glory, and a chance to make a new name for himself.

So to the north and east they rode upon two horses retrieved from the scattered herd, and when they came at last to the great Mongol camp Gaussin's eyes were like to pop from his head at the wonders they beheld.

The camp was circular in form with streets running in a series of concentric circles round a hub composed of a great hemispherical pavilion of black felt. It spread across a plain at least two miles square, yet it was closely crowded with men and horses and the gear of war. Besides the horses there were oxen, trains of camels, flocks of fat-tailed sheep. The soldiers of the Great Khan seemed as nu-

merous as sands upon the seashore, slim, high-shouldered men in armor of black lacquered leather or link-mail, with helmets shaped like pots, their long hair braided and their lips adorned with long, fierce, drooping mustaches. Each wore a long curved sword against his thigh, at every back there was a short horn bow with a quiverful of arrows. Most carried long light lances tipped with steel and targets of bullhide thickly studded with brass bosses. The officers sat on saddles rich with cloth of gold, their cloaks were sable or gray wolfskin, silver weighed their bridles, and the hilts of their swords flashed with precious stones. On ox-carts were the mighty siege engines, mangonels and trebuchets, battering-rams and scaling-towers made in sections ready to be put together at a moment's notice, and giant cranes from whose arms swung monstrous claws of iron capable of seizing stones in castle walls and plucking them away as a man might drag a weed up by the roots. There were even clumsy mortars to throw bombs of gunpowder, and a regiment of Chinese engineers to serve them.

Gaussin made quick calculation. The host could hardly number less than three-score thousand men, he figured, but when he spoke of it to his conductor the giant laughed. This was but an outpost of the vanguard. The main force was encamped at Gaghdad where the walls had been torn down stone by stone, the city sacked and the calif smothered under carpets. The young knight trembled as he listened. Baghdad the mighty had been overthrown, its calif killed. These were not men, but devils.

In the carpeted pavilion of the Tura [general] in command of the encampment Gaussin made supreme obeisance in the manner of the Tartars, dropping to his knees and bending till his forehead touched the rug of leopardskin spread before the general's divan: "My life between thy

hands, O mighty one." Then while he squatted cross-legged on a pillow his conductor told how he had fought the Assassins, praising his skill with the sword and his courage, and ending with the declaration that he begged leave to join the Great Khan's army.

So it was arranged. Gaussin was renamed Mangoli and put in command of a troop of Uigar—named Christian—horsemen. He was given boots of heavy felt, a shirt of Persian chain-mail with a cuirass of black lacquered leather damascened with gold. Double plates of leather reinforced with iron bands flared on his shoulders; in his waist-shawl he wore two swords, one a long curved battle blade, one a straight-edged Persian weapon. His helmet was a hemisphere of lacquered leather with a flaring lobster-tail to guard his neck, and on its top was set a horse's tail for crest. He shaved the short beard from his chin and let his mustache grow until it drooped in twin braids from the corners of his mouth. Gaussin de Solliès, godson of a bishop and degraded knight of Acre, was no more. In his place rode Mangoli, captain in the horde of the Kha Khan, lord of all the lands between the plains of Poland and Korea.

LIKE the mighty car of Juggernaut the Mongol horde proceeded, and the rumble of their hoofbeats was like earth-shaking thunder, the beating of their kettle-drums was maddening. There was magic and insistence and terror in the throbbing of the booming hollow tones of the taut skins. The peoples of the earth heard it and were afraid. The sultan of Mosul made his submission, Haython, king of Armenia, bowed the knee and offered tribute. Bohemund, the Christian prince of Antioch, sent ambassadors with gifts and assumed vassalage. Cairo heard the rumble of the distant battle-drums and trembled.

Gaussin acquired merit in the eyes of his commander. His knowledge of languages and the customs of the people made him valuable as an ambassador, his courage in the field won approbation. Within two months he had been given command of a regiment of hawk-nosed Turcomans who went to battle as to a feast, had his own standard of two horse-tails borne before him, and five kettle-drummers to announce his presence when he rode before his cavalry at parade. When the war council was called and the Tura and his colonels drank fermented mare's milk from the silver-plated skulls of dead enemies he was always among those present. Often he remained as guest of the general and played chess until the false dawn brightened in the sky.

One night the Tura paused as he advanced his queen's knight, looking at Gaussin with one of his rare smiles. "Methinks I have an embassy for thee, my Mangoli," he announced.

"Hearing and obeying, O Magnificence," responded Gaussin as military etiquette required. "Thy wishes are thy slave's desires. Where would'st that I should go?"

"To the castle of the Shaikh al Jebal at Alamut."

"The stronghold of the Old Man of the Mountain?" Gaussin almost gasped. Many had gone through the portal of that place of terror, but those who came back had been few as those who returned from the grave.

"In sooth. These thrice-accurst ones have seen fit to attempt to levy tribute on us. 'Tis time they learned the Kha Khan takes but does not give. You ride for Alamut with the dawn and bear our summons to surrender to the Master of the Assassins. Go boldly and fear not. The might of the Great Khan goes with thee."

Clad in his armor of black lacquer, Gaussin stood before the Shaikh al

Jebal, Grand Master of the Assassins. For ten days he had ridden with an escort of four Kirghiz horsemen, one of whom bore the Kha Khan's long blue banner that all might know he traveled on official business, and relays of fresh horses waited them at every stopping-place. At the foot of the tall peak on which the castle of the Shaikh stood, his escort was commanded to await his return, while he was led up a long spiral causeway to the very heart of the Assassins' spider-web.

Despite the realization that he had ambassadorial immunity, Gaussin shuddered as he gazed upon the Shaikh al Jebal, Lord of Death.

Surrounded by a group of giant guardsmen stood a dais of gilded sandalwood, and on it was a huge black cushion filled with some soft wadding. In this a man sank till he seemed almost enveloped in its sable folds. He was a little man, hardly more than a dwarf, but the head that topped his narrow shoulders was enormous, and its size was magnified by the huge turban that he wore. All black, the monstrous pillow, the robe of him who sat upon it, the turban wound about his head. But his face was pasty-pale, and from it looked a pair of hot, dry, glittering eyes unchanging in expression, unwinking in their fixed, set stare as those of some great snake.

The creatures of his court fawned on the Master of the Assassins, but Gaussin neither bowed nor bent the knee. He was the emissary of the Kha Khan, ruler of the world from Krakow to Cathay.

"What petition dost thou make to Sinan, the Shaikh al Jebal, Lord of Death, O herald of the Barbarians?" asked a chamberlain.

Then Gaussin answered, keeping bold eyes leveled on the gnome-like creature squatting on the sable cushion: "Thus saith the Kha Khan, ruler of the earth—fling open wide thy gates and submit. If

thou dost, this peace shall be granted thee. If thou dost otherwise, that will happen which will happen, and what it is to be we know not. The Lord of Heaven only knows. I have spoken."

Silence utter and abysmal as the stillness in the craters of a long-dead world fell at his words. Then a titter ran about the ranks of white-robed retainers who waited on the Shaikh al Jebal.

"Say," came the reply from the Old Man of the Mountain, "that Sinan, Lord of Alamut and Lord of Life and Death, bids the gipsy Kha Khan get back to his pig-sty villages beyond the mountains while he has life to go. He who triumphed over Saladin the Victory-Bringer, and took tribute from the Lion-Hearted Malik Ric of England fears no outland horde. Get thee back to herding swine and driving sheep while yet I let thee live. I have spoken."

Gaussin turned upon his heel, two retainers put a bandage round his eyes and led him through the winding exits of the castle of the Assassins.

THE causeway leading from the castle wound in a steep spiral no wider than to let two horsemen ride abreast, and with a strong watch-tower at each turn. A handful of determined men could hold it against a host. Gaussin trod warily, for the slippery roadway had no parapet, and a false step meant a fall of half a thousand feet. At last he reached the gateway in the wall that circled round the mountain foot, passed through the guard of hot-eyed, lean-faced soldiers and paused upon the outer threshold to draw a breath of clean air. It was like coming from a charnel house, this exit from the Krak al Jebal.

"Ho, comrades," he called to his waiting escort, "I am come out again!"

No answer came. Could they be sleeping? "*Hai*," he shouted, "where be ye, sons of nearly noseless mothers, brothers

of indifferently moral sisters?" Only silence answered him, and he strode forward angrily.

The stamping of a horse attracted his attention, and as he turned toward it he caught the gleam of sheepskins in the darkness.

"Rouse ye, sons of calamity, uncles of ten thousand uncouth cockroaches!" he roared. "Stand on thy misshapen feet and tell me why ye dare sleep thus—"

His voice snapped like a frayed rope under sudden strain. The escort lay upon their backs, feet crossed, arms out as if they had been crucified against the ground, and from each breast there protruded the red handle of Assassins' murder-knives. Each body terminated in a bloody neck, and from four stakes four severed heads grinned at him. The Kha Khan's long blue banner lay upon the earth, tattered, trampled, smeared with mud and filth.

"By Allah and the good Saint John the Baptist, by the Lord Gotama Boodh, an hundred heads shall fall for each hair in thy beards, my comrades!" Gaussin swore. "And as for this insult to the Great Khan's standard—"

"Whatever falls or stands, 'twill make small difference to thee, O Tartar." Silent as shadows, four retainers of the Old Man of the Mountain had emerged from the darkness, and ranged themselves before him. The moonlight glittered on their slim curved cimeters and on the hard white teeth beneath their black mustaches.

"Thou camest bearing insults to the Lord of Death," their leader said. "Behold, we send the Kha Khan back his messengers, and though they may not speak, methinks the message they take back will be well understood. Bow thy neck to the sword, O Tartar upstart, thy day of doom has come."

Then they were on him like the wolf-pack on a stag, slashing at him with the

sickles of their cimeters, digging for the joints of his harness with their venomous daggers.

He drew his battle-sword and met their charge with a mad bellow of defiance. "God wills it!"

But at the first stroke he felt consternation surging through him like cold fever. He had been disarmed when he went through the gate of Alamut, and his weapon had been returned to him in its sheath. Not suspecting perfidy, he had made no test of it, but now, as he swung it, the blade snapped in his hand where it had been sawed almost through with files.

The Assassins screamed with glee as the sword parted in his grasp, but they reckoned without that far strain of Northern blood which had trickled into Gaussin's veins from some Norse berserker. If he was formidable when armed, he was terrible in his unarmed fury.

With a mighty shout he leaped upon the foremost Assassin, grasped him in his bare hands and raised him overhead, crashing him against two others with a force that sent them sprawling in a heap. Then, before they could rise from their stunned fall, he seized a rock as great as a man's girth and smashed it down on them so fiercely that the cracking of their bones was like the sound of snail-shells trodden underfoot.

But while he dealt thus with the three, the fourth Assassin had leaped on his back and slashed his knife across his brow. He felt the poisoned steel shear through his flesh and grate against the bone as if it had been iron reddened in the fire, felt the spate of hot blood rush into his eyes, heard a terrible, wild baying, as of a wolf that closes for the kill, heard the squeaking, screaming shriek of his assailant as he loosed the strangle-hold upon his neck and dropped off of his shoulder. Then, blood-blinded and in torment from the wound the venomous dagger made, he fell fainting

to the ground beside his headless comrades.

SYLVANETTE had worn her wolfish form like a hair-shirt for almost a year. When she first realized the dreadful change that had come on her she was so prostrated with horror that she could but lie upon the orchard grass and whimper like a beaten cur, but in a little while she rose and stretched her shaggy limbs, finding a kind of pleasure in their strength and suppleness. By morning she was ravenous and trotted out in search of food. A flock was grazing in a nearby meadow, and the shepherd ran screaming at her approach, but when she seized a little woolly lamb in her jaws and heard its piteous blasts for mercy she could not find the heart to kill it, but ran with it until she overtook its panic-stricken mother and dropped the trembling baby by the ewe's side. Then, hungrier than ever, she galloped through the wood until she came upon a cotter's croft and saw a joint of mutton hanging from a hook. Pursued by frenzied curses of the farmer, she made off with the haunch of meat, feasted at her leisure and slept until the sun went down and it was time to quest for food again.

Now and then she met with other wolves. As human maid she had been terrified at the mere mention of a wolf, but in her changed shape she not only had no fear of them, but, finding herself larger than the largest of them, swaggered through their midst, helped herself to their kills, and turned with savage snarls if they disputed their queenship. Once an old she-wolf would have stood against her, but Sylvanette charged at her, bore her down and shook her as a terrier shakes a rat. Only when the other's carcass dangled limply from her jaws did she relax her hold. After that the wolf-pack gave her room, and yielded up their kills without dispute.

Northward she traveled, sometimes fifty

or a hundred miles a day, seeking with her new-found beast's instinct for the solitudes of the Taurus. Presently she came upon the ashes of the circling watch-fires of a mighty Tartar camp. Food was there in abundance—knuckles of fat sheep, joints of beef scarce touched by carvers' knives, broken meats from goat stew, all that she could eat, and more. Why run the woods and fight with other wolves when here was provender in plenty, ready for the taking? So she followed the cold campfires from Armenia almost to the shores of the Sea of the Ravens.

One day as she was foraging among the trenches where the oxen had been roasted whole, she heard the drum of hoof-beats, and, true to her instincts, sank down upon her belly until her gray-furred body seemed to melt and disappear against the gray wood-ashes of the pit. Then, suddenly, she smelled it. Not exactly a perfume, but sweeter to her twitching nostrils than the finest scent of Araby or far Cathay. Long since she'd noticed that each animal and man had a scent of his own, but this was like no other, it was . . . it was . . .

The troop of horsemen galloped by, a horse-tail standard at their head, the leader wrapped in furs of gray lynx, and at the sight of him she knew. Despite his Mongol armor and the way his long mustache drooped in twin braids, she knew him. Gaussin—her Gaussin! What he did so far from Acre, riding with the leather-armored horsemen of the Cham of Tartary, she knew not, nor did she care. He was here, she had his scent, she need only follow it to be near him.

After that she stayed as close to the great camp as possible, and whenever Gaussin rode out with his followers a great gray shaggy wolf loped through the broken land that paralleled his road. When he pitched camp she stayed near. When his tents were struck she took up the march with him.

She had followed him across the winter-blasted plains to Alamut, saw him leave his comrades in the valley while he climbed the causeway to the Krak al Jebal. When the Assassins leaped treacherously upon the Mongol soldiers she growled in fury, but she dared not risk a fight with them. Gaussein might return at any moment, and she must be strong and whole to help him if he needed her.

She saw them set upon him, and her woman-wolf's heart rejoiced at the fierceness of the battle she gave them, but when the fourth Assassin leaped on Gaussein's back and struck him with his dagger she knew the time for watching had gone by. With a fierce, belling bay she pounced upon the drug-crazed man and sank her great teeth in his neck.

It was astonishing how weak human flesh could be. The man fell easily before her charge; when she worried him he made but feeble efforts to defend himself—or so it seemed to her. His arms were puny, the dagger with which he had cut Gaussein had fallen at her attack, and unarmed he was no more a match for her than the little lamb she spared had been. Exultingly, she closed her jaws upon his gullet, felt the warm blood gush, looked with fierce, fiery eyes into his terrified fast-glazing orbs, heard the strangling, blood-choked cry he gave before she tore his throat away and mangled his face with her claws.

Then she turned to Gaussein. The dagger which had wounded him . . . she had heard of those Assassins' knives . . . 'twas said they were envenomed. Feverishly she licked the red wound that barred his brow. The blood began to flow less freely. Presently it almost ceased to trickle, but still she lapped at it, hoping madly against hope that she could draw the venom from the cut before it entered his blood stream.

Gaussein came slowly back to consciousness. The wound across his brow

burned like a brand and he was almost blinded with the blood that drenched his eyes, but dimly he realized a great wolf stood above him, licking the hot, bleeding cut with a pink tongue. The beast whined softly, as if to reassure him, and he sank back weakly. Presently, after the immemorial wont of wounded men, he moaned, "I thirst." The wolf left off her ministrations for a moment, then took his leather helmet in her teeth and trotted off. In a little while she came back with the headgear almost filled with water from the nearby brook. He drank greedily, and afterward he slept.

Something plucked him by the arm, softly, gently, but insistently. Presently he woke to find the she-wolf still beside him, urging him to rise. It was difficult to get upon his feet, but with his fingers laced in her thick fur he managed it, staggering drunkenly along the rough trail. His bestial guide seemed aware of his weakness, and every hundred steps or so she halted while he gathered back his strength. Also, he noted, she kept from the high-road, following the woodland paths, sometimes halting with a fierce low growl while she sniffed the air; once or twice she dragged him down, and shortly afterward a troop of Assassins rode past at a gallop.

HOW long he traveled thus he had no accurate idea. He knew only she guided and sustained him, licked his festering wound until it began to heal, lay close to him and warmed him with shaggy body when he slept, and ranged the woods to bring back hares or pheasants or suckling pigs for his fare.

At last there came a day when she appeared to think it safe to take the open road, and as they trudged along he heard a sound he had not thought to hear again, the rumble of Tartar kettle-drums. In a few minutes he saw them, a troop of leather-armored horsemen with horse-tails

trailing from their helmets, lance-tips glinting in the morning sun.

"Mangoli Khan!" the leader cried. "Praise be to such gods as perhaps there are! We had not thought to see thee. The Old Man of the Mountain sent thy four companions' heads to us; thee we thought he had surely slain, also."

The she-wolf turned under Gaussin's hand, freeing her shoulder from his clutch. She made a sound half whine, half moan, and would have turned into the brush, but Gaussin dropped upon his knees beside her.

"Nay, Lady Wolf, good, sweet wolfkin, I will not have it so!" he denied. "By all the blessed saints in Paradise, I swear I love thee, dearest beast!" And with his arms about her furry neck he kissed her full upon the hairy mouth.

He thought it was delusion, or return of his delirium, for instead of the rough, wiry pelt of the she-wolf he felt a mass of soft black tresses, perfumed with the spice of Araby, across his cheek; instead of the wolf's hairy muzzle a pair of lips as soft as rose leaves pressed against his mouth. She was clinging to him. He could feel her heart beat. Her hair was fragrant on his cheek. No she-wolf, this, but a sweet, softly-molded woman. His Sylvanette!

He said her name slowly, wonderingly. Then, as in the foothills of the Lebanons:

"Sylvette ma drue! Sylvette ma mie!
En vous ma mort, en vous ma mie!"

Came her answer, low and tender-sweet:

"*Bel ami, ainsi, va de nous!*
Ne vous sans moi, ni moi sans vous!"

The stolid Tartars of the guard showed small astonishment at seeing a woman where there had been a she-wolf. On the

steppes of Muscovy where they were weaned the *vrykolakas*—man-wolf—was almost as common as the house-dog, and those who chose to shift their shapes did so, nor was it any concern of their neighbors. Methodically they made two litters of sheepskin coats stretched over lances and bore the fainting Mangoli Khan and his wolf-lady back to camp.

HOW the armies of the Kha Khan laid siege to the fortress of the Old Man of the Mountain and plucked it apart stone by stone as children break a house of blocks; how the Grand Master of the Assassins went in chains to the blue-tiled court of the Great Khan at Karakorum and was never seen again is another story. Our concern is with Gaussin and Sylvanette.

Not until they had been wed did they hear each other's odysseys.

They lay upon their couch of skins with rugs of sables and lynx fur over them, and through the tent's thick walls of black felt came the muted thunder of the kettle-drums.

He stroked the hair that tangled round her neck, and at his touch the small pulse in her throat quickened. For a long time they lay thus; then she raised herself to draw the heavy coils of her hair from beneath her shoulders. Her lips touched his. Touched, and clung. "O my beloved," she murmured, "'twas thy kiss that set me free from wolf'shead."

"What say'st thou?" he answered sleepily.

"I said thou gavest me freedom from my wolfish shape with thy kiss. For this was the condition which La Crainte made when she ensorcelled me: 'Take and retain the form of a she-wolf until some noble lord shall kiss thy hairy beast's-lips and declare his love for thee'"