

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume
34

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OCTOBER, 1939

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Published monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter September 24, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. Single copies, 15 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$1.50; Canada, \$1.75; elsewhere, \$2.00. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand, London W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Lady of the Bells

By SEABURY QUINN

A romantic weird tale that spans the shadowy years between our own time and the cruel Thirteenth Century when Simon de Montfort was ravaging the fair land of Provence with fire and sword

ELLIS paused upon the threshold as his key clicked in the lock. The entranceway to the studio was dark and enigmatic as a tunnel; beyond, the lesser gloom of the workroom was gray with early-twilight monotonous; save for the dripping of a leaky spigot in the bathroom the place was quiet as a mausoleum, yet he had a feeling he was not alone.

"Hullo?" he challenged, snapping on the wall switch.

His voice came echoing back at him; the sparsely furnished studio had the resonance of an empty auditorium. Stepping softly, and with stick in readiness, he went completely through the place, snapping on the lights before him, searching every room with a sharp glance before he entered. Everything was empty and in order: entrance foyer, workroom, bedroom, bath. The light, thin film of dust that gathered where the sloping skylight joined the wall was intact; the ash-crowned pile of cigarette butts in the brass bowl by his working-stool jarred from a cone to a low mound as he walked by. There was proof. If anyone had been there the impact of his feet surely would have disturbed those butts as he went by. Sense and reason told him he was the sole occupant of the place, yet the feeling of another presence persisted. Not sinister. Quite the contrary. But he didn't relish company. He had a job to do, and art was long and time increasingly fleeting.

The times, as a Frenchman would have put it, did not "make fair" for Clairbourn

Ellis. Small things annoyed him, put him off his stride, made good work difficult. And for a long time he had been the victim of a string of persecutions.

First, about the regiment. Like his father and grandfather, he'd held a commission in the 369th, one of the last remaining cavalry outfits in the Guard. An outfit with traditions, that. Historic names streamed from its colors: Monterey, Buena Vista, Chapultepec, Chancellorsville, Antietam, Gettysburg, the Argonne. Now it had been mechanized, made into a squad of motorcycle cops and taxi-drivers. His resignation had been in the mail the same day that the last review with horses had been held.

Then, there was Irene Chandler. He hadn't been in love with her—not too much, anyway. But he'd known her all his life, and gone to school and played and danced with her. Life seemed less complete since she had married Eddie Applegate.

"I don't love him as I could have loved you, Clairbourn," she'd told him frankly, "but he's—safe. He'll buy me a nice house in Larchmont or Montclair, give me a new car each year——"

"And fall asleep in his chair half an hour after dinner every night," Ellis broke in. "Look at him, Irene. Only thirty-two, and getting bald and paunchy already. He thinks he's exercising when he walks from Broad and Wall to Broadway; he doesn't know a Corot from a Rembrandt, and what he doesn't know about books——"



"From it, like a giant pendulum, swayed the figure of a man."

"He knows bank-books, Clair," she shut him off a little acidly. "That's more than you do. You were born about five hundred years too late, darling. If we were in the fourteen-thirties instead of today you'd be the perfect answer to a maiden's prayer, or a matron's, for that matter. Traipsing over Europe with your paints and brushes in a wallet at your back and your long sword belted to your waist; painting, drinking, brawling, rescuing beauty in distress and playing hell with every woman's heart from Florence to Sienna. Cellini might not be so well known

today if you'd lived in his time. But you don't. We're in the Twentieth Century, and America. They say that you're the best man with a saber in the regiment. So what? That's like being able to wiggle your ears. Everyone can't do it, but what use is it? The fellow who can write a nice, fat check can do a better job of rescuing damsels in distress than the most accomplished swordsman in the world. There ain't no dragons left to kill these days, young feller.

"You're lots of fun, my dear, and summer skies and stars make a fine canopy

to play under, but I shan't always be a girl. There'll come a time when I'm too old to play, and then I'll want a roof above my head, and some assurance of three meals a day——"

"Right-o," he agreed with enthusiasm. "And a pew in church, and half a dozen kids, and flowers on the table when you entertain the dominie at dinner twice a month. Go to it, gal; high destiny is calling."

Then he kissed her three times, once for her, once for himself, once for the happy times they'd had together.

He spent much more than he could afford for a silver service for her, and donned a cutaway and stiff shirt—both of which he cordially detested—to act as usher at the wedding. Then, when the last handful of rice was thrown, he went out and got beautifully, completely and incomparably drunk.

During the sad, remorseful period of sobering up came the greatest blow of all. Old Sam Gulden—"Gulden's Greetings, Inc., A Card for Every Celebration"—turned his sketches for an Easter greeting down uncompromisingly.

"It ain't that I don't like your work, y'understand, my boy," he explained, "but them pitchers ain't th' kind I want that we should have this year. Crosses an' lilies an' little chicks an' ducks is all right, but not for Gulden's, Inc. We gotta have more class about our line, like them pitchers like you see up at the Met, or Anderson's—tall, slinky-lookin' dames dressed in red or blue or sumpin' leanin' over balconies, wid men in long hair and striped tights down on th' ground wid gee-tars in their hands, or mebbe flingin' roses up to 'em. I seen a pitcher once called Lay Belly Dame Sands Mercy. It wuz a pip. That's th' general idea, if you know wot I mean. Them chickie-wickie, duckie-wuckie cards is all right for a second line, but I can buy all them I want for ten-fifteen dollars.

I'm payin' you foldin' money, boy. You should ought to paint me sumpin' wid real class."

"Umph?" Clairbourn answered. "I could do you a scene in the Pre-Raphaelite style, but it'll take at least a month. Can't let you have it for a cent under five hundred."

Mr. Gulden waved a pudgy hand and called on heaven to witness his disinclination to discuss finances. "Did I ask you the price?" he demanded in an injured voice. "You do th' work real classy, Ellis boy, an' me an' you won't have no law-suits about money."

PPROMISING a picture in Burne-Jones' or Rosetti's style was one thing, completing it before the year-end something else; and the deadline was December 31. After two weeks' preparation, visiting art galleries, making sketches, throwing them away, then beginning at the start once more, Clairbourn was prepared to tear his hair, throw his best hat down on the floor, and jump on it. Inspiration would not come, and time was ticking off remorselessly. At last in desperation he had crossed the River, rented a small studio in Poplar Street, and shut himself in with his work. But inspiration lagged in Brooklyn, even as it mocked him in Manhattan and Westchester. After three weeks of immurement he had turned out one fair imitation of the Pot of Basil, something reminiscent of Beata Beatrix, and what might have been a smudgy carbon copy of Cophetua and the Beggar Maid. Into the incinerator they had gone, and Ellis faced a virgin canvas as the ides of December approached.

Then inspiration came like Promethean fire. Walking home from dinner at Joe's, Ellis passed a brightly lighted bar, and had to dodge to keep from collision with a convivial customer who came reeling from the tavern with a love of all mankind in

his heart and a snatch of nursery rime upon his lips:

Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross
To see a fine lady upon a white horse.
Rings on her fingers, and bells on her toes . . .

Ellis almost hugged the fellow. There she was—his model! His mind reeled back, like a motion-picture film run through the projector in reverse. Once more he was a little fellow, three, perhaps four years old, almost petrified with terror from a dreadful dream, lying in the darkened nursery, fighting with the fright that still oppressed him for courage to call Mother. Dreadful shapes were lurking in the darkness. Behind the dresser crouched an ogre, bloody-toothed and ravenous for little boys; the chiffrobe gave ambush, but did not conceal, a green-eyed witch with long, sharp talons on her claw-like hands and hideously dank and stringy hair about her bony face; beneath the chair there crouched a yellow dwarf with a great sack upon his twisted back—even Teddy Bear's glass eyes shone with a cold malevolence. Then, faint as sleighbells heard from the highway down by the river, came the clinking jingle-jangle of small silver chimes. In a moment she was there, the lovely little lady from the Mother Goose Book; her white horse with his silver-embroidered saddle-cloth and gold-bossed bridle stamped and pawed the frozen ground outside the window, and, accompanied by the music of the little bells that jingled on her feet, the lovely little lady stepped across the sill and came to him across the dark and fright-filled nursery.

She was very little, scarcely larger than himself, but she was very lovely. Her soft, close-fitting gown clung to her like a molded sheath of moonlight, and in the pale beam that shone on her she herself seemed a creature of the moonglow. Her silken hair, which hung in two long braids

each side her face and down her shoulders, had a sheen of lunar silver; the rose-like mouth and violet eyes alone gave color to the misty oval of her face. She bent above him, smiling, and put soft hands on his face. Their touch was wonderfully comforting; he could feel the panic beating of his heart subside as the faintly spicy scent of clove and orange blossoms came to him from her hair and gown and body. Presently he slept, and when he wakened sunlight flooded through the nursery, the furniture was just furniture, Teddy Bear was just a thing of cloth and glass and sawdust. There were no dwarfs nor ogres nor witches anywhere about, and hardly any memory of them.

But memory of the lovely little lady stayed. Mother laughed and Nurse was cross when he talked about her; so by and by he ceased to speak of her, but every night he lay awake and watched for her, and more than once he cried himself to sleep because she did not come.

He hadn't thought about her for ten years and more that night he sneaked away from the Tau Delta Theta dance to sit in the parked car with Edith Marlow. Edith was a pretty thing, with bright brown eyes and bright brown hair and bright, keen, sometimes mordant wit. All the boys were wild about her, and tradition had it that the word "No" had no place in her vocabulary. She snuggled down beside him in the front seat, and the pliancy of her surrender had more of practised skill than artlessness about it. Moonlight filtered through the swaying, blossom-burdened boughs, the road was barred with bands of ebony and silver; from the clubhouse came the chiming of a staff of little bells as the orchestra played a swing version of *Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix*. The music was a parody, but the bells . . . the riming, chiming tinkle of small silver bells . . . the white horse stamping just outside the nursery window, the little pretty lady bend-

ing over him and smiling half tenderly, half longingly . . . all at once the girl who pressed against him seemed a form of common clay, the hands that clasped his cheeks seemed coarse and harsh, compared in memory with the hands that soothed him in the moonlit darkness of the nursery.

Gently—a fellow can't be rough about such things—he disengaged himself. "Let's dance," he whispered, almost sobbed.

"Dance?" Edith echoed, gathering her aplomb with an air of injured dignity such as a cat displays when dropped unceremoniously from an erstwhile friendly lap. "What d'ye mean, dance? D'ye think I came 'way out here just to dance?"

Phil Tracy passed him as he made his way unsteadily back to the clubhouse. "Okay if I take over, Clair?" he called.

"Sure, the keys are in it," Ellis answered. "Try to get back by two, though, Phil." He saw the white of Edith's arms make a bar dexter across Phil's black dinner coat as he glanced back.

The car was wrecked, Phil Tracy killed and Edith hopelessly crippled when they collided with a truck at Dead Man's Curve. One-handed driving, swigs from a hip-flask and frequent long embraces create hazards when the car is doing sixty and the highway set with curves and filled with lumbering trucks.

Naturally, he went to Phil's funeral. An eery ripple traced his spine as the flower-decorated casket wheeled past him down the church aisle. "There go I, but for the grace of—the lovely little lady," he told himself in an awed whisper.

"**T**HANKS, feller, and happy landings," he called to the lurching drunk as he avoided his embrace. "I'll remember that."

"Huh?" the other asked. "Wash 'at? Whash y'gonna remember? Shay, you wanna fight?"

"Not with you, old top, you've given me

an inspiration," Ellis grinned, and hurried down Hicks Street to his studio. Five minutes after he had let himself in he was working on a picture with the lovely little lady's memory as a model.

At first the work had been no task at all. In less than half an hour he had sketched the figure in, and while the graphite was still new upon the canvas he knew how he would paint her. Instead of the moon-whited gown she wore when she came to him in the nursery he would show her in a green robe with faint purple sleeves, sheath-tight about the bust and waist and hips, falling to a rippling fullness at the bottom. It was to be an Easter motif; she should show mixed joy and devotion. He joined her long, slim, pearl-pale hands with pearls upon the fingers palm to palm before her breast, drew her kneeling with one slim red velvet-shod foot peeping from the hem of her green gown, and—"bells on her toes so she shall have music"—tipped the bottine's pointed end with a small silver hawk-bell.

The face had given him some trouble. He intended to portray her with the long-remembered, somewhat wistful, wholly tender smile, but it seemed his brush had a volition of its own. When he tried to force it, it resisted, like a gyroscope when an attempt is made to change its axis. "All right," he muttered when the almost animate perversion of the brush continued for ten minutes, "have it your way. Let's see what you can do." He shut his eyes and grinned, resting his brush tip against the canvas.

For thirty seconds, possibly a minute, nothing happened; then, at first slowly, but with gathering speed, like the table of a ouija board as it begins moving, the brush acquired motion. He could feel it twitching in his fingers, almost like a living thing—or something controlled by an outside force. A minute, two, five, ten, he sat with closed eyes, making random dabs

against the canvas. Then: "Let's see what sort of mess I've made," he muttered as he opened his eyes.

He almost fell off of the stool in his astonishment. A face had taken form above the low-cut, purple-sleeved green gown, and it was the face of his remembrance, but not as he remembered it. The head was held a little back; fringed lids were drooped on plumbless violet eyes, almost concealing them; the full red lips were slightly parted in beatitude; the whole face in its frame of gilded hair was entranced, longing. "Like a nun, breathless with adoration," he thought; then: "No, not quite." Rather, it was yearning, pleading, entreating; rapt in a perfect ecstasy of petition. Every pulse and nerve and cell and fiber of her being seemed called upon to give force to the prayer; it seemed as if the very substance of her soul were poured out in the appeal she made. The fervor of it almost terrified him.

Only once before had he seen such a look of utter self-surrender to entreaty on a human face. That was at a spiritualistic séance when the medium's control delayed his coming, and the distraught woman poured her spiritual energies out in a petition to her spirit guide. He hadn't any faith in ghosts or spirits, but the happenings of that night were like a nightmare when he thought of them—the mocking voices issuing from the trumpet, solid objects seemingly deprived of weight and floating bubble-light about the room; finally the whitely-luminous face, strained with malevolence, that took form in the darkness and leered and grimaced at the company. Then the choking, rasping cry of the medium, the confusion when the lights were turned up and they found her sitting in her chair, stiff with a paralytic stroke.

He'd thought of putting in a chapel background, possibly a painted window picking up and echoing the muted greens

and reds and purples of her costume, with the nimbus of a saint to repeat the bright glory of her rose-gold hair, but here again he found his touch a fumbling one until he ceased to make a conscious effort at depiction. After that the pigments seemed to find their places of their own volition. Six hours' work completed the setting, a garden traced with sanded paths, with here and there a deep, still pool where golden carp played roguishly among the roots of star-shaped water lilies. Against a wall of weathered brick old rose trees shook their blossoms out like banners in the still, calm air of gathering evening, and trailing jessamine climbed across the coping. Beyond, at the sides, showed the deep-green foliage of olive trees set in rank on marching rank until they faded in the misty purple of the horizon. In the far background was a white-walled house with red-tiled roof and a wide entranceway barred by a grille of fancifully wrought iron. To the right, upon a pedestal, was the painted figure of a plaster saint, red-cloaked and red-haired, gowned in white and holding in her hand what seemed to be an embrocation-jar of alabaster.

HE DROPPED into a chair to contemplate the picture. "Devilish good, if I do say so as shouldn't," he told himself, then stopped with a grin. "Maybe I ought, at that," he added. "If I told a spiritualist how that daub came into being he'd swear that Osceola or Little-Moose-Face-in-the-Wilderness got hold of me and acted as my spirit guide to paint the thing while I was in a trance.

"All right, spirits, s'pose we have a little séance, just you and me," he suggested as he rose.

There was a bottle of Scotch in the bathroom and a siphon of seltzer chilling by the bedroom window. The picture was completed—old Sam would do a buck and wing when he saw it—"real class"—and

he was two full weeks ahead of schedule. The circumstances warranted a drink or two—or three.

He poured a tot of whisky in the glass and shot the soda hissing into it.

"Here's to you, little lovely lady," he proposed and held the tumbler toward the picture. "You came to me so long ago when I was frightened witless, the memory of you saved my life once, now you're going to bring me a fat fee."

He tossed the whisky-soda off and refilled the glass.

"Wish I could do something for you in return," he told the kneeling figure between sips. "Wonder who you were, and when and where you lived, or if you ever lived at all? Most old nursery rimes have some fact-foundation. *London Bridge Is Falling Down* commemorates the inhumation of a girl in the foundations to insure their permanency, Jack Horner was the Abbot of Glastonbury's steward, and a thieving rascal in the bargain; but who the deuce were you? Anyway, I wish I'd known you in the flesh."

The potent liquor was beginning to take hold. Clairbourn was growing slightly maudlin; on the point of sympathizing tearfully with himself.

"So bein' the best swordsman in the regiment's like wigglin' your ears?" he murmured as he splashed a fresh supply of whisky into the glass without diluting soda. "Just a trick, she called it—a devilish, useless trick. Man with the fat bank account's the one to rescue damsels in distress these days. No need for strong right arms and skill in swordsmanship. I bet you wouldn't have said that. Bet you'd have put some value on a man's skill with the saber."

He drew a deep draft from the tumbler and bent forward in his chair, eyes narrowed.

The unshaded hundred-watt lamps hanging from the ceiling glared down on

the painting, giving it a garish look, bringing out its highlights, emphasizing its shadows. An odd optical illusion: The scene seemed three-dimensional, like one of those old double photographs folks used to look at through twin lenses of a stereoscope in the days when *Mr. Dooley* and *The Shade of the Old Apple Tree* were musical hits of the season. The white-walled, red-tiled house seemed half a mile away, the olive trees stretched almost to infinity, the kneeling girl before the painted saint was almost beyond shouting-call.

Staggering slightly, he crossed the studio and snapped the ceiling fixture off. That was better; in the subdued light of the wall sconces the picture took on twilight aspects, its bright colors were muted, its shadows dimmed until they were mere patches of darkness.

He dropped into his chair again and resumed contemplation of his work. It was a clever bit of composition, no doubt of it. The realism of the scene was almost photographic. There was depth and color there, almost a suggestion of motion. . . . Almost? By the Lord Harry, there was motion! It was like a view glimpsed in a camera's finder. The branches of the olive trees were swaying lightly in the evening breeze, a rose-tree dropped a shower of petals, the trailing jessamine was waving in the wind.

"Boy," he assured himself, "you're inebriated. You're spifflicated; you're pie-eyed. Drunk as a hard-boiled owl. What you need is one more little drink."

The bottle-throat made little clattering noises on the tumbler-rim as he spattered whisky into the glass. Some of it spilled against his hand and soaked his cuff. Carefully, steadying one hand with the other, he raised the drink to his lips, eyes glued to the picture. "Ride a cock horse," he hummed between hiccups. "See a fine lady with rings on her fingers an' bells on her

toes . . . ride a cock horse to—only wish I could . . ." And, suddenly, then. . .

HIS steed was a big mettlesome animal, too large for pure Arab, too finely made to have much Flemish in him, and black as moonless midnight. The saddle was the easiest he had ever ridden, extremely high at pommel and cantle, with a deeply curving seat. It was made without skirts, but the long blue saddle-cloth of quilted silk fended his legs from the horse's sides. The stirrups were of hammered silver, wider in the tread than he was used to, but very comfortable. The feet pressed in the stirrups were cased in boots of well oiled russet leather. Soldier's boots they were—trust a cavalryman to recognize them—soft, pliable, well cut, and, apparently, well worn, too. The hands upon the brass-bossed bridle were gloved in leather similar to the boots, good, serviceable cavalry gauntlets, and above their cuffs showed fustian sleeves of Lincoln green.

Glancing quickly down he saw his body was encased in a cuirass of brass inlaid with silver in the design of a lion's face surrounded by a bristling mane.

The road was well made, tiled with plinths of stone laid end to end with nice precision, but the scenery each side was gloomy and forbidding. Through the gathering dusk which blurred all outlines the dark green foliage of the olive trees made clouds of tossing shadow. There was no chirp of bird or cheep of insect, only the persistent rustle of a small breeze in the branches and the rhythmic clatter of his horse's hooves against the paving-stones broke silence. He might have been in a ghost-world, a world which once had lived and smiled back at a smiling sun, but now lived only in the melancholy memory of its former life.

By the roadside something white glowed ghastlily against the gnarled bole of an

olive tree. A scarecrow? Dear heaven, no! He recognized it as he drew rein. The body of a man, stripped staring-nude, and nailed by hands and feet against the tree, the arms outstretched against two diverse branches as if upon the transverse beam of a cross, the body bowed back on a bend in the trunk. The head had fallen on the breast, long black hair trailing dankly round the ears and down across the sweat-dewed brow; little rivulets of blood had trickled down the palms and wrists and insteps, and dribbled into little puddles on the mold-strewn earth. A poniard had been thrust into the bare breast, and from it hung a slab of wood hacked from the tree with a legend burned into it:

Pour décourager les hérétiques

"Good heavens!" Ellis viewed the grisly relic with a shudder. "You have 'em, boy, no doubt of it. You've got the D.T.'s, no mistake. Take it easy, now; you'll soon be out of it. Don't let it get you down—"

Self-admonition ended on a startled "Hey!" Pounding hooves beat on the flint-paved roadway, shouts of rage rang in his ears as three men dashed out from the shelter of the olive grove, riding at him furiously, swords flashing in their hands.

They seemed very young and undersized, scarcely more than boys, but what they lacked in stature they made up in fury. And they were three to one. Instinctively he reached toward his pommel for his saber. There was nothing there, and, panic-stricken, he wheeled to flee when the banging of a weight against his left leg halted his maneuver. Next instant he had whipped a length of steel from the scabbard belted to his waist, and, head bent, charged against his adversaries.

Had they held together they could have overmastered him, for though one of them might have gone down before his charge the other two could have closed on him like a vise. But the suddenness of his at-

tack seemed to unnerve them, and they drew apart, slashing at him as he thundered past. He felt a dull blow on his head—like a saber stroke against a fencing-cage—and realized he must be wearing some sort of a helmet. As yet he'd had no chance to make an inventory of his costume.

A point jabbed at his breast, but turned off harmlessly from his cuirass, while a third blade struck him on the shoulder, glancing from the passegarde of his breast-plate and shocking his left arm to momentary numbness. Then they were on him once more, and he was fighting for his life.

Without much method, but in white-hot rage, they rode at him, driving their horses against his, cutting, slashing, hacking, stabbing with their long straight swords. He parried their blows easily, beating down one blade to engage with another, then turning that aside to hack a third out of his way.

And as he fought his anger grew. What the devil did these kids mean, ganging up on him this way? He might be dreaming, or in an alcoholic fantasy; somehow, even, he might be translated to another time and place; but he'd done no harm to anyone. Why did they set on him? Maybe they were brigands, highwaymen. "Yea bo, treat 'em rough!" he yelled the slogan of the Three-Six-Ninth, and closed with one of his opponents, slashing at his shoulder.

The boy—he was no man—was dressed in a buff jerkin of some untanned quilted leather, and at its top, about his throat, he wore an iron gorget, but both the armor and the garment were too big for him, and between them gaped an unprotected space an inch or more in width. It was at this that Clairbourn's saber chopped, hewing through the shoulder muscles and the tendons of the neck as though they had been tallow.

He saw the youngster's face contort with sudden agony, heard the scream of torment shrilling from his twisted lips, and turned to ward a sword-point from his face as a second lad lunged at him. Shortening his blade he flung himself back and thrust defensively. His adversary dashed at him with a shrieked imprecation, running full upon his point. It ran directly in his opened mouth, and with a cry of deafening shrillness he half turned in the saddle, clawed at the blade with blindly groping hands, and toppled sidewise from his horse, his dying scream stifled to a sickening gurgle as his throat filled up with blood.

Now they were man to man, and Ellis would have temporized with the remaining youth, but the lad was lacking in discretion as he was in fear. Twice he had stabbed at Ellis from behind, both blows turned by the cuirass; now he charged straight at him with upraised blade, and as Clairbourn caught the downstroke on his edge he felt the shock upon his shoulder muscles. This one was stronger than his comrades, though slower and less skilled. He had the advantage of a mail shirt and steel sallet, however, and though Ellis struck him several times his blows seemed harmless.

At last: "All right, feller, if you want to trade slugs, I'm your man!" Clairbourn exclaimed, and swinging in his seat to dodge a devastating slash, chopped at the other's head with all his might. His broad blade caught the lad's helmet between the ridge and rim, ringing like a clapper on a bell, and he felt the tingle in his hand and forearm as steel shattered against steel. His adversary toppled like a tree uprooted by the wind, and a spate of blood gushed down his face. The blade of Ellis' sword had sheared clear through the steel cap, cleaving through the wearer's leathern coif and scalp and skull, and breaking with the force of its own blow.

Ellis threw the useless shattered sword away, and looked down at his fallen foes. Now that the excitement of the fight was done he felt suddenly exhausted, tired almost to swooning, and a little sick. It was one thing to be a good swordsman, skilled in fencing and in practise with the Turk's-head and quintain, quite another to engage in combat to the death. In all his ten years' service with the Guard he'd never seen a blow struck or shot fired in anger, never seen a man die or, indeed, viewed a dead body, save those which had been ministered to by skilled morticians. Now within a quarter-hour he'd seen the raw products of homicide, the dead man nailed against the tree and the three corpses in the road. These lads had been instinct with life a little while ago, now—he retched at sight of them.

"Still," he rationalized, "it was they or me. I didn't attack and I'd have called it off if they would."

But the stiffening corpses seemed to look at him accusingly. He turned away and set spurs to his mount, steadfastly resisting inclination to look back. Where he was going he had no idea. Only one thing he knew: this dream—perhaps this alcoholic hallucination—had dumped him in a wild, fierce, hostile world, sometime in the middle of the Thirteenth Century, judging by his outfit and the costumes of his fallen adversaries. Anywhere he went would be a better place than where he was, for he was alone and without a weapon.

"Come on, big feller, step on it!" He shook the bridle gently, lifting his mount from a trot to a gallop, and from a gallop to a pounding run.

A LONG and gently sloping hill stretched before him, and as he reached its brow he paused to take some sort of bearing. Cutting perpendicularly across the tiled road was an earthen trail, deeply rutted with the tracks of ox-carts.

At the intersection of the ways was a stone cross upon a battered pillar; a little to the right, perhaps a hundred yards away, was a cleared space, and in its center loomed a gibbet. From the gallows beam a length of rope depended, and from it, like a giant pendulum, swayed the body of a man, chains clanking on its wrists and ankles. Perched on the crosstree was a pair of ravens, and as Ellis took the eldritch scene in one of them spread its wings and fluttered toward the swaying corpse. But before the obscene fowl had a chance to flesh its beak in the poor bloated face a cry came from the olive trees and a young girl ran forward, waving her arms wildly as she ran. She stopped halfway to the gibbet, reached down and took up a stone which she flung with more than usual feminine accuracy at the raven. The pebble missed its mark but struck the gallows with a sharp crack, and in a moment both the birds of prey had taken awkward flight, croaking raucously at her.

"Good work, sister!" Ellis called as he turned his horse toward her.

She started at his hail, lips parted, eyes dilated, bosom heaving. She was a pretty thing, with dark, unkempt hair falling to her shoulders, large black eyes and red, ripe, rather bulbous lips. Her costume consisted of two garments, a white chemise which hung unfastened to the waist and showed the swelling rondure of her breasts, and a short, wide petticoat of bright red, reaching halfway to her ankles. For a moment she looked at him with fear-widened eyes, then crossed herself and shrank away.

"Hold on," he ordered. "Don't be afraid; I wouldn't hurt——"

"*Croisé!*" she spat the word at him as if it were the vilest of vile epithets, and put her thumb into her mouth, biting it savagely before she snapped her hand at him. "*Croisé détestable!*"

Next instant she turned on her slim bare

feet and darted for the shelter of the olive grove as if she were a rabbit coursed by hounds.

"H'm, I seem about as popular as a skunk at a lawn party," Ellis muttered, bewildered. "Those fellows tried to kill me and the girl bites her thumb at me." He bent his head in thought a moment. "*Croisé*," she had called him, "*croisé détestable*—detestable crusader?" Why? He'd always thought crusaders were swell guys, oath-bound to succor the distressed, rescuing Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Turks, doing good to everybody except—"Hey, wait a minute," he broke in on his estimate of the days of chivalry. "Wasn't there a crusade once that didn't fight the Turks—sometime in the Thirteenth Century, when Simon de Montfort sacked the Languedoc? Good Lord! Suppose . . ."

Was that the explanation of the man nailed to the olive tree, the way the youngsters set on him when he stopped by the body, the young girl's fright and hatred? He remembered, now. For seven bloody years de Montfort and his cohorts ravaged Provence and the Languedoc, plundering and murdering at will, crucifying captured knights on their own olive trees, choking wells with corpses, devastating everything with fire and sword, and rooting out the troubadours as if they had been vermin. In a situation such as that of course all strangers were suspect. Those not for the Provençals were against them, and no stranger would be for them. The three lads who had attacked him were part of Ramon of Toulouse's scattered guerrillas—poor little devils, why hadn't they challenged him and given him a chance to explain? And the poor girl was some homeless country lass hiding in the olive grove and driving off the ravens from the body of her executed brother or father, possibly her husband.

He felt about for some weapon. In his

girdle was a dagger, hardly larger than a hunting-knife, but it would do. Riding to the corpse, he cut the rope that held it to the gibbet, lowered it to the grass and arranged its hands and feet, drawing up the dead man's shirt to hide his swollen features and protruding eyes. It was impossible to dig a grave with nothing but the dagger, but he cut some turf and laid it on the body, then, this symbolic burial accomplished, rode slowly toward the highway. All the time he worked he had a feeling eyes were on him, hostile eyes, eyes filled with hatred so hot that it burned the tears away. As he regained the road he thought he saw the flash of a white chemise and red petticoat among the olive trees ahead. "Probably running to give warning of my coming," he reflected grimly. He weighed the little dagger in his palm. Not much of a weapon, but maybe he could bring one of 'em down before they finished him.

COPPERY clouds pressed low on the horizon and a rising wind pushed them closer. In the upper sky a brassy, unreal light shone dimly, overlaying everything with a faint yellow tinge, making the road glow with a metallic luster. The storm's shrill pursuivants were sounding in the trees, and the leaves were shuddering together. He shook his bridle once more, urging the horse down the long slope toward the shadow-shrouded valley.

Now here and there rocks thrust from the soil, occasionally gullies scored the banks which rose each side the road. Once or twice he passed a small cave, black and tomb-like, hollowed by rain-water between rising boulders.

Then, suddenly, the storm was on him. Like a curtain drawn across the sky the darkness came, and with it came the hissing, stinging rain, almost as cold as sleet and striking with a force like hail. In a minute he was wet through to the skin,

and shivering with the clamminess of his dank garments. The horse's guess was quite as good as his; neither of them knew the road, nor where it led. He loosed the rein and bent his head against the drenching downpour, wondering what was coming next. Twice his mount slipped upon the rain-slicked road; at the third stumble Ellis swung down from the saddle, looped the bridle in the crook of his elbow, and proceeded cautiously afoot. This was no time for taking chances; another slip might break the horse's leg, or his neck, possibly both.

Just how far he'd walked he had no accurate idea, but it was some thirty minutes since he had dismounted when he saw a feeble glow of light between two great rocks standing like twin doorposts at the entrance of a cave.

"Come on, boy, shelter," he said to the steed as he turned toward the little cavern.

Someone was inside, obviously; probably they would be hostile, but perhaps he could make friends with them before they attacked. At any rate it was worth trying.

"A friend," he called as he entered the cave, "I am a—how the devil did you say it?—*Je suis d'ami!*"

Two forms were silhouetted by the fire-light, one a man's and one a woman's. The man was clothed in a long gown of brownish stuff, shaven-headed and barefooted, with a corded girdle round his waist. A friar, Ellis decided; though he could not place his order accurately.

Before the friar knelt a woman, hands clasped and head bowed as in prayer, but at the sound of Clairbourn's hail she raised her face and he started in surprise. Those wide-set violet eyes, that small red mouth, that mane of copper-alloyed golden hair . . . he recognized her instantly, but before he could do more than exclaim in astonishment he was fighting for his breath, for the friar had hurled himself on him, grap-

pling at his throat with unskilled but strong hands.

"Hey, take it easy, Father—Brother—whatever you are!" Ellis gasped as he broke the other's hold and pushed him back with a strong open-handed shove. "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm just a storm-bound traveler, looking for a shelter from the rain——"

Astonished, he ceased speaking. It had suddenly come to him that the words he used were not English, not French, not in any language that he knew; but he used them fluently, never hesitating for a syllable, as though they were his mother-tongue. Moreover, the others understood him perfectly, and when they spoke in the strange tongue he understood them.

"But you spoke the cursed language of the North — the tongue of Montfort's men!" the friar panted. "Art not one of the thrice-accursed raiders——"

"I'll say I'm not—nay, good father, thou'rt mistaken," Ellis answered. "I am but newly come here, and the sights I see do grieve me sore. It is that I would help thee if I could, but what can one man, lone and weaponless, do against a host?"

"Every strong arm helps," the friar replied. "If thou art swordless, a blade can be procured for thee. Meanwhile, I must ask thee to retire to the cavern's mouth. The Lady Dezirada would complete her confession——"

"Why, certainly," agreed Clairbourn, "but why not do it in church, or at her house? A roadside cave seems a queer place——"

"Ha, now I know thou art a stranger, truly," interrupted the young monk. "Knowst not this whole unhappy land lies under interdict, and none may make confession, be baptized or wed or buried in the bosom of the Church until the Albigensian heresy has been uprooted, and the Languedoc despoiled and laid waste? What we do we must needs do in secret,

for to give a grant of absolution is forbidden. Nathless, there are those of us who were Provençals before they were churchmen; we know our own and minister to them despite the orders of the Lord Bishop and de Montfort's murderers."

"I see," responded Clairbourn, though actually he did not.

He walked to the cave entrance and stood looking at the rain until a hail came to him from the rear of the cavern.

"Wilt thou come and break bread with us, son?" the friar called.

A hanniper of woven rushes had been opened and from it the girl took a loaf of wheaten bread, two stone bottles of wine and a square of damasked linen which she spread upon the cave floor like a picnic cloth upon the grass. Kneeling, they waited for the brief grace which the monk pronounced, then set to with a will. The bread was coarse but light and very palatable, the wine more sour than dry, but full-bodied and blood-warming, and they all three ate with ravenous appetite.

As he followed his companions' lead and sopped his bread crusts in the wine Clairbourn studied the girl sitting on the ground across the cloth from him. She was very young, he thought, not more than seventeen or eighteen; with the pale, white, almost transparent skin which accompanies red-gold hair and purple eyes. Her head was small and proudly held, as if in consciousness of noble blood, her lips were very red and full; sad lips, sweet lips, ripely soft and made for kissing. Hers was a face of delicate and piquant loveliness, ivory-toned beneath the aureate brightness of her firelit hair, and there was lyric grace in every movement of her long, lithe body.

Her gown of sober dark green had the stark simplicity of a single garment, clinging softly at the bosom and shoulders, rounded at the neck, long-sleeved, with loose-cut cuffs that showed the lovely turn-

ing of her slender wrists, and flowing with a rippling fullness to her feet. A girdle of red silken tape was crossed about her waist, brought down to cross again above her hips, and tied in a loose knot with long ends at the front. Her hair was smoothly parted in the middle and bound with green silk ribbons in two braids as long and full as twin umbrella cases. Had she loosed it, Ellis thought, it would have fallen well below her knees and been thick enough to hide her like a veil. On her feet were shoes of red cloth, cut low as modern evening pumps, but with the ends turned up, and to each tip was fixed a little silver bell.

No doubt of it, she was the lovely little lady who had lived in his memory since childhood, the girl whom he had painted yesterday—or was it years ago, or centuries in the future? She flushed a little under his long scrutiny, and when she lowered lids demurely over violet eyes he saw her lashes were a startling black, and very long, and curled at the ends.

"Lord, what a rave she'd be on Broadway!" Ellis thought. "If I could only get her there——"

"*Hérétiques — conspirateurs!* Yield thee!" The shout reverberated in the small cave like a thunder-clap among the mountain peaks. "In the name of the Lord Bishop and of Simon Montfort I require your submission!"

At the entrance, almost blocking it with his tremendous bulk, stood a huge man, chain-mail glinting on his arms and legs, a knob-bossed breastplate on his body and a steel *salade* with raised vizor on his head. In one hand he held a long bare sword.

"We be no heretics, *beau sire*," the monk declared. "We be good and loyal children of the Church and loyal subjects of our lord——"

"Ha, quotha?" cried the other. "Good Christians and no traitors, be ye? And

hiding like a nest of coneys in a burrow? *Pardi*’, we’ll make ye taller by a stretched neck, and as for yonder wench——”

THE friar leaped past Clairbourn, planting himself in the roaring bully’s path. “Begone!” he ordered sharply. “I am a priest of Holy Church, and speak with her authority. Thou darest not lay finger on this woman under penalty of excommunication. In the name of our Lord——”

“Go make thy plaint to Him in person. I weary of thy mouthings,” interrupted the big man, and ran his sword through the young priest’s frail body.

Ellis stared in unbelieving horror. To attack an unarmed man, and that a priest, to kill him in cold blood. . . . He cleared the little distance separating him from the murderer, and before the other could withdraw his sword struck him in the face.

Taken by surprise, the big man staggered back, his sword released, blood streaming from his wounded mouth and such a look of stark astonishment upon his face as would have been comic in any other circumstances.

Scabbards rattled on mailed legs as two men-at-arms rushed into the cave with drawn swords. “Shall we cut him down, *Messire*?” one asked, swinging back his blade to slash at Clairbourn’s undefended head.

“Nay, by God His holy angels, I’ll tear his eyes out with my two hands!” bellowed the leader, and charged at Ellis with great hands extended.

This was easier than he had hoped. Half a dozen loving-cups in the adjutant’s office bore the name of Clairbourn Ellis as defender of the regiment’s prowess in the inter-regimental boxing matches. He was one of the best welterweights in the whole Guard—and this big ox charged at him with his head down.

“Easy on, son,” he told himself as he

squared away; “he’s big, two hundred at the very least; straight up for the jaw, and keep clear of his arms; you’re sunk if he grapples with you!”

The uppercut which he swung was a pure work of art, but he miscalculated slightly, and instead of crashing on the condyle of the jaw it caught his adversary on the nose. The blood flowed freely, but the big man only shook his head and charged again.

This time Ellis crashed a left hook to the chin, and his opponent seemed to stumble in his rush, as though his feet were tangled in an unseen net, but in a moment he regained his balance and pressed on with a bellowing roar.

“This guy’s tough,” Clairbourn muttered. And, indeed, he was. To giant’s strength he added giant’s stature, and ability to absorb shocks second only to a sand-bag. There was just one thing to do, and Ellis set about it systematically.

Dancing round the cave he kept himself clear of the reaching hands, feinting, dodging, retreating constantly, and waiting watchfully for every opening. Steel protected most of his antagonist, a blow to the solar plexus would result in nothing but a broken hand; he could not numb his enemy by hammering his biceps, for the interlinked chain-mail upon the other’s arms made him immune to any blow he could deliver. Only the big, broad, bestial face was vulnerable, and to this Clairbourn gave his whole attention. In succession he struck at the great oaf’s eyes, missing them occasionally, but more often landing squarely on them; then, as the eyes began to puff and swell, and finally bleed, he gave attention to the lips and cheeks, pounding them with practised sureness till the flesh was purpled and the skin reduced to bleeding shreds.

At last the opportunity he sought arrived, and with a quick shove he pushed the Titan’s helmet off, kicked it as it fell,

then danced away and picked it up. It was a shallow piece of headgear, shaped something like a sugar-scoop, worn with the rounded end forward, and fitted with a vizor-cage on pinions at the front. Hammered from a single sheet of steel, it weighed perhaps eight pounds and made an ideal instrument for his purpose. As his adversary staggered past, almost blinded and mad with pain and fury, Clairbourn swung the helmet like a club and brought it down with all his might straight on the shock of matted hair that crowned the bullet head.

The blow was devastating. With an exclamation which was half grunt, half startled yell, the big man stumbled, staggered to his knees, then sank slowly to the floor. Blood was welling from his ears; what seemed to be a bubble of gray-bloody stuff was oozing from his broken skull. Technically, he was dead before his bruised face struck the floor, but his great vitality persisted, like the muscular reflexes of a snake whose head has been crushed, and his arms and legs twitched with spasmodic tremors as he slumped to a position like one just about to turn a somersault, then slowly rolled upon his side and lay in an inert heap.

"*Domna Maria santissima!*" one of the men-at-arms exclaimed. "This is no man, but a devil! Who but a fiend with Satan's legions for his aids could overcome Dom Sebastian with his bare hands?"

Ellis swayed unsteadily. The fight had been a fierce one; he was all but exhausted. If they closed in on him now . . . he had no sword. . . . "Of course, I'm a devil!" he shouted, stepping toward them menacingly. "I'm a devil out of blazing hell with my shirt-tail all on fire!"

The foremost man-at-arms gave ground. If this fiend who beat the lustiest warrior in de Montfort's armies to death with his naked hands were to set on them . . .

"Man or devil, I'll have at thee, sirrah!"

cried the second soldier. "Stand, Hilarius; we be two to one, and our cause is blessed by the Lord Bishop's self——"

The slapping patter of rope sandals on the paved road outside drowned his words as half a score of peasants rushed into the cave. "Ramon de Toulouse; Ramon!" came the war-cry, and the men-at-arm went down beneath a storm of flails and forks and scythe-blade pikes.

"Art safe, *Madonna?*" cried a shrill voice, and a girl in white chemise and red petticoat circled round the knot of peasants and threw herself upon her knees before the Lady Dezirada. "I raised the countryside as quickly as I could, for erewhile came a stranger to the Gallows Hill and cut poor Pedro down—*ohé, Maria Madre*, they have killed poor Frey Andrés!" she broke off with a scream as she saw the friar lying on the cavern floor, his shaven head couched on the kneeling Lady Dezirada's lap, a little stream of blood trickling from the corners of his mouth.

"Take him—there he is, the outlander!" she pointed an accusing hand at Ellis. "I recognize him; 'twas he who slew the valiant brothers Nizana in the olive grove where yestereve they crucified the good Sire Marcos——"

"Stand!" It was the Lady Dezirada's voice, calm and low, but absolute in command. "I do not know who he may be, but I know him for a brave and knightly gentleman. With his bare hands he beat the villain Sebastian to death when he had struck the good Frey Andrés down defenseless, and all unarmed he faced that pair of scurvy knaves and would have done them battle to prevent their taking me. Do him honor, all of you, for he is a mighty man of valor and would serve with us against the ravagers of the Languedoc."

So in a circle round Clairbourn and Lady Dezirada knelt the peasants, pledging loyalty to both, and swearing to obey their orders without question to the death.

Presently they made a litter for the dying monk and would have set him on their shoulders, but the Lady Dezirada bade them lower him so she could walk beside him with his hand in hers.

The storm had blown itself away, and the setting moon left the night dim beneath the high stars as the little procession emerged from the cave. From another cavern someone brought the Lady Dezirada's horse, a beautiful white Arab with silver-spangled saddle-cloth and gold-bossed bridle.

Ellis took his horse's reins in hand and walked behind the litter. By his side the little peasant girl whom he had met beneath the gallows led the lady's palfrey. And so they marched into the shadowed valley between rows of gently whispering olive trees.

THE delirium that heralds death had laid its finger on the friar's lips.

"Dezirada," he murmured between deep, laboring gasps, "was it wrong to love thee, Lady Dezirada, even after I had taken holy orders? I swear I never had a carnal thought of thee. Thou wert like a sight of heaven vouchsafed in this world of woe and wickedness; like the sainted Barbara or Cecily, more to worship than to love. When I knew thou never could be mine I swore to put the world away, and with it every thought of thee, but ah! I saw thy face in every painted window, every beautiful illumination in the missal minded me of thee; when I watched before the altar thine eyes looked at me from beneath the crown and wimple of Our Lady. I fasted long and scourged myself until the flagellum fell from my hand, yet always thoughts of thee were with me. The red wine of the blessed sacrament put me in mind of thy red lips; in the glory of the golden sunset I saw thy bright hair; the pallor of the limewash on my cell wall was less white than the fair throat and

hands. God help me, I could not forget thee, or my love for thee, Dezirada!"

"Nay, Andrés," she replied softly—and Ellis noted that she did not say "Frey Andrés" — "soothly, God would not afflict His creatures willingly. If thou hadst thoughts of me it were no sin, for who but God implanted them in you—is not He called the God of love, albeit some who style themselves His ministers wreak hate in His name? If thou remembered me it was because the Lord desired it, that thou might'st minister to me and all our people when the cruel interdict was laid on us."

He scarcely seemed to hear. "Forgive me, Dezirada," he implored. "Have pity on the misery that tears my soul. Ten thousand times ten thousand years in Purgatory were a small price to pay if by my thoughts I've soiled thee. I was in friar's orders, and forbidden to hold converse or think of women, save as I thought of all God's creatures, yet constantly I thought on thee, not as the tenement of an immortal soul, but as a woman, one of those whom I was oath-bound to abjure. Ah, Dezirada, if my love has sullied thee——"

"No woman can be but the better for the pure love of a good man, my Andrés," she broke in gently. "Reproach thyself not, but think on heaven and its everlasting bliss——"

"Aye, heaven! 'Tis said that Doomsday comes apace, and ere another Easter morn the earth and skies shall have been rolled up like a parchment scroll. I go, Dezirada, joyfully I go to make a place for thee in heaven. Fear not to die when thy time comes, for I shall wait hard by the gate that leads from transitory life to immortality. My hand shall clasp thy hand to guide thee o'er the doorsill of the many mansions in Our Father's house. Thou shalt not feel the pangs of death, for I shall draw thee through the door to life eternal so quickly—like as a bridegroom carrieth his bride across the threshold of their

house . . . in heaven is neither marrying nor giving in marriage . . . the consecrated celibate is loosed from his vows . . . *Mater purissima* . . . Dezirada——” He struggled halfway to a sitting posture, raised his hand as if in benediction, and with her name upon his lips fell back upon the litter, his mouth a little opened, eyes fixed in the unseeing stare of the new-dead.

The Lady Dezirada halted the procession and fell upon her knees beside the stretcher, hands joined and head bowed in petition.

“Mother of Sorrows, hope of sinners, comes now a valiant soul to thee,” she exclaimed. “Have thou pity on him, and on all good Christians. Amen.”

“Shall we bear him to the convent, Lady?” asked a peasant. “It is not meet that one in holy orders should be buried elsewhere——”

The Lady Dezirada bowed her head in thought a moment; then: “Not so,” she decided. “He transgressed discipline by coming out among us to give absolution for our sins. They would deny him rest in consecrated ground and give him a beast’s burial. Let us take him to my pleasure where the wind chants benedictions in the jessamine and the rose-trees may drop benisons upon his tomb.”

THEY dug the shallow grave in her garden, and as the peasants plied their spades Ellis looked about. He had an oddly eery feeling: “I have been here before; I know this place!” Beneath the star-glow the pleasure was peaceful as a dream of Eden, a garden traced with sanded paths, with here and there a deep, still pool where golden carp played roguishly among the roots of star-shaped water lilies. Against a wall of weathered brick old rose-trees shook their blossoms out like banners, and trailing jessamine climbed across the coping. A hundred

yards or so away was a white-stuccoed house with red-tiled roof and a wide entranceway barred by a grille of fancifully wrought iron.

They joined Frey Andrés’ hands above his breast with the crucifix from his rosary clasped in them, and at the Lady Dezirada’s order crossed his feet as if he had made pilgrimage to holy places.

“Did not he die to bear the consolation of religion to the Church her suffering children?” she asked when they wondered at her command.

All knelt in silent prayer about the open grave, and as the first spadeful of earth dropped upon the body, Clairbourn rose and began singing softly. He had an excellent baritone, and more than once had eked out his allowance in his college days by singing in church choirs. Now, with all the art he possessed, he sang the *Ave* from Gounod’s *Messe Solennelle*:

*“Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum,
Benedicta tu in mulieribus,
Et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus . . .”*

As he finished the first phrase the company looked up with bated breath; by the final amen every face was touched with exaltation. Born to music and a love of the beautiful, but accustomed to the simplest compositions, the Provençals were almost stunned by the sheer glory of the Gounod masterpiece. “He has been permitted to glimpse heaven, that one,” whispered a peasant to him who knelt beside him. “Surely, no man wrote such music; it is the very song the blessed angels sing what time they bow in adoration at Our Lady’s throne!”

HE SLEPT in a high, gilded bed with silken sheets and coverlid of quilted satin. Dog-weary, he had tumbled down to sleep without a sidelong glance at his apartment, but when an aged servitor ap-

peared at his door with the coming of the first sunbeams, he sat up, stretched luxuriously, and looked about him. The room was all of twenty paces square, with white-washed plaster walls and ceiling and a stone floor warmed by woolen rugs barbarian in the brilliance of primary colors. There was a many-cushioned divan set against one wall; tall chairs of oak carved in the Spanish style and pillowed with red velvet stood about the others, and before an oratory was a priedieu with a leather kneeling-cushion. By the window stood a brazier of wrought iron; on a table was a copper bowl filled to overflowing with roses from the pleasance.

"Will my lord the tyrant-smiter deign to rise and follow me?" the old man asked. He made a quaint obeisance, more like a curtsy than a bow, bending both rheumatic knees at once and bobbing up and down.

"You're earlier than my valet generally comes," grinned Clairbourn, "but the customs of the house must be observed, I suppose. Lead on, MacDuff. Where to?"

The fellow put a copper bowl of steaming water on the table and laid a small dagger and a saucer filled with something which looked like thick, soured cream beside it. Then he unfolded a towel, draped it on his arm, and waited.

"My lord would shave before the bath?" he asked.

Ellis noticed that he wore a metal disk swung by a cord about his neck, and as he reached the table the servant held this up before him. It was a slightly concave sheet of polished silver, and, deftly shifted by the servitor, who seemed instinctively to know his every move beforehand, it made an excellent mirror. The creamy substance in the saucer turned out to be a sort of soft soap, rather sticky to apply, but lathering to a fine fluffy foam when rubbed into the face with the fingers, and the dagger was as keen as any razor he had

ever used. In ten minutes he was shaved and ready for the next step in the toilet.

Wrapped in a cassock-like garment of white wool, his feet in rope-soled espadrilles, he followed his conductor through a corridor and down a flight of stairs until they came to a walled garden where stone lions' heads sprayed streams of water into a round marble pool. Ellis stood beneath the gushing runnels, turning around slowly, and finally dipped himself in the shallow basin of the fountain, emerging refreshed as from a shower. A pile of linen towels had been warming in the early morning sun, and the old man rubbed him vigorously, then spread sweet-smelling unguents on his hair and combed it deftly as a practised barber. This done, he led the way to a small wicket gate, bobbed his curtsy-bow, and asked, "My lord would break his fast?"

The gate led to the patio round which the house was built in Moorish fashion. A fountain played in the tiled center of the courtyard; round its edge, below the overhanging balcony, stood orange and lemon trees in tall tubs of painted wood. The Lady Dezirada waited for him in the shade of one of these.

Like Clairbourn she was dressed in a white woolen overall, full-fashioned as an Arab's burnoose and belted at the waist with a wide leathern girdle set with flat gold bosses. He had been right about her hair. It was unbraided and unbound, and the tips of it trailed on the marble pavement round her ivory-inlaid chair. She looked up at his coming and he heard the tinkle of small silver bells. Involuntarily he glanced down. Her child-small pink and white feet had been shod with rope-soled peasant sandals, and fastened to their cross-straps were the silver sleighbells to whose shrilling music she moved everywhere. Clairbourn's breath almost stopped at the sight of her. Sitting as she was, and costumed thus, she was the perfect

pattern of a mediæval saint. Thus, since Titian and da Vinci, had the greatest painters pictured saints and angels. Only wings, and possibly a halo, were lacking, and the sunlight on her bright gold hair supplied this, for it was like an aureole of flame around her pale and lovely face.

She laid her hand in his and met his eyes with a grave, almost wondering, look. Her touch was timid, she seemed almost frightened of him, yet at contact with her fingers he felt a sharp thrill, distinct as an electric shock. It seemed that he could feel his pulses quicken; there was a slight sensation of dizziness as he bent and raised her hand to his lips.

"Welcome to this house of mine, my lord," her voice was scarcely louder than a whisper. "It and all things in it are at thy command."

"Thank you," he returned inadequately as he dropped in the chair across the table from her. Then for a time they looked at each other in silence. It did not seem appropriate to ask how she had slept. To comment on the weather was too banal. For the first time since his fourteenth year Clairbourn Ellis was tongued-tied before a woman. And all the while she looked at him with grave and steady eyes, studying him, seeming to compare him with some preconceived design. At length she broke the pause:

"Art—art thou truly he?" There was something more than mere tentativeness in the query. It seemed as if her whole life hinged on his reply.

"I certainly am me," he evaded with no more tact than grammatical exactness, "but if you'll tell me who 'he' is perhaps I'll be able to tell you more."

"Dost thou by any chance remember me?" she asked him tremulously.

What could he say? Could he tell this girl who seemed no more than half his age that he remembered her from nursery days? Or that she was just a character

from Mother Goose? No chance! Yet if he told her "No" he knew the disappointment would be heart-breaking.

"Lady, in my own land I am a painter," he replied. "Sometimes I paint from living models, sometimes my fancies guide my brush. Meseems I have beheld thy face in visions, or dreamed it in a dream. I know that I have limned thy likeness in a picture celebrating Eastertide."

Relief dawned in her steadfast hyacinthine eyes. The latent fear and doubt that lurked in them seemed drained away, like a wave that slides off a bright beach and leaves it calm and shining in the sun.

"I too remember thee—but as an infant," she affirmed. "Whether it were dream or vision I know not, but methought I wakened in the night to hear the frightened wailing of a little child, and something in my heart entreated that I rise and dress and do the harness on my horse and go to bear him comfort. I rode great distances upon the quest; through far, dark skies I seemed to ride as though I mounted Pegasus and not mine own true palfrey; I heard the music of the spheres and saw strange, terrifying sights — of men who battled in the vaulted heavens as they had been eagles, or bored beneath the surface of the vasty deep like Leviathan — but finally I came unto a house, and there in darkness lay a little lad sore frightened by a host of evil shapes that ringed him round about. But I was not feared of them; so I went to him and soothed him till he slept, and then I came away to mine own place again. How comes it that I dreamt this dream? In sooth, I know not. Only this I know, for it was given to me to know it: Man-grown, the lad I comforted should bring help to fair Provence, and joy unspeakable to me; though through him I might also find my death."

"But I am twice thy age, milady," he protested. "How could it be thou sawest me as a lad?"

She raised her narrow shoulders in a graceful shrug. "With dreams as with the good God all is possible," she answered, smiling.

Then the serving-maids brought breakfast: white bread and fine, clear, amber-tinted wine with the smell of leaves and grape-flowers in it, and oranges and nectarines, apples and pomegranates, and soft, full-ripened, luscious figs.

HE FOUND a suit of fresh apparel in his room when he repaired there after breakfast: a shirt of fine white linen, hose of brown silk, leathern shoon, and a slashed doublet of brown satin laced with gold-tipped points; last of all a closely-fitting silk cap with a heron's quill thrust in its crown. When he descended to the patio, feeling as if he were going to a masquerade, he found the Lady Dezirada waiting.

She had changed her woolen bathrobe for a morning gown of white linen with full-hanging sleeves and short enough to show the tips of her kid bootees, fashioned with long, upturned tips to each of which was fixed a little bell. Her hair was gathered in a net of silver cord and covered with a veil of Roman-striped silk tissue. In her hand she held a sheathed sword.

"Thou art weaponless, my lord Clairbourn," she greeted, "and though thou workest mighty havoc with thy bare hands, meseemeth it were better if thou hadst a sword. Take it and wield it valiantly in Freedom's cause. It was my grandsire's, brought by him from Damasco in *outramer* when he came back from warring with the Paynim. See, it bears his shibboleth upon it." She bared the blade and pointed to a legend rather crudely scratched upon the metal: "*Non sibi, sed alteribus.*"

"Not for ourselves, but for others?" he translated tentatively as she put the gleaming weapon in his hand.

"Yea, it is the motto of our house.

There be those who love their fellow men through God, and those who love their God through fellow man. To me it always seemed that is the better way."

He swung the weapon tentatively, fell into a reprise and tried a practise lunge. Had the sword been weighed and measured for him it could not have been more perfect. The blade was a yard's span from tip to hilt, rather wider than a modern weapon, and prolonged to go clear through the ivory handle, which was bolted to it like the handles of old-fashioned kitchen knives. There were neither quillions, knuckle bows nor *pas-d'anes*, merely a hand-guard shaped like an inverted D, wrought brass wrapped with silver wire. Its double edge was razor-sharp, and it had a wonderfully balanced feel in his hand.

A LITTLE breathing-spell of peace came to the countryside with Clairbourn's advent. Sebastian de Longos had been de Montfort's chief lieutenant in the district, and with his death, raids became less frequent. There was no systematic pillaging, and such murders as there were were principally for private gain or private vengeance. Simon de Montfort stayed at Carcassonne, collecting the rich spoil of the crushed territory, assessing fines and levies, planning fresh forays.

Ellis rode out on patrol occasionally, and when he and his guerrillas met the enemy the fight was short and sharp, and ended with the hanging of survivors to the nearest tree bough. So frequent and successful were his counter-raids that presently the soldiers withdrew to Carcassonne. This was only April, by midsummer Count Simon would send out an army and grind these stiff-necked rebels' faces in the dust for once and all. Until then . . . there was plenitude of wine—and wenches—in the city; who but a fool would fight with foemen who struck and disappeared, then struck again when least expected, when he

might get comfortably drunk with safety in garrison?

So Ellis spent more and more time at the Lady Dezirada's villa, and their intimacy ripened with each sun-warmed day.

Early he asked her why she always went bell-footed.

"It is a vow," she told him. "Until fair Provence has been freed from the oppression of the North I've vowed to go belled like a jongleur or bouffon. For four years now I've heard the bells remind me of my country's travail every waking moment, but meseems the time draws nigh when I may lay my chimes aside and walk like other women."

One morning as they rose from breakfast he asked her to remain while he made a sketch of her. Next day he procured some brushes and pigments and began her portrait, using a slab of bleached olive wood in lieu of ivory or canvas. He painted her as she came from the bath, her white wool robe girt with the gold-bossed leathern belt, her bright hair swirling like a cataract of cloven flame across her brow and shoulders and rippling to the pavement round her chair, her little feet in rope-soled sandals with the small bells fastened to their straps. When he finished painting he inscribed the picture "*La Domna de las Campanas*—The Lady of the Bells."

"Nay, like Pilate, 'what I have written I have written'," he told her when she protested. "In years to come thy effigy shall hang above an altar-place, and generations of the sons and daughters of thy Provence shall make prayer and thanksgiving to her who helped to free their country from oppression."

Word came a raiding-party had been ravaging the countryside, and Clairbourn gathered his guerrillas and rode out to meet them. For three days they pursued the trail of burned farmsteads and cottages, mutilated corpses and dead animals; finally

they made contact with the ravagers. There was an even hundred of them, pikemen, bowmen, and arbalestiers. The guerrillas numbered almost twice as many, with reinforcements pouring in from every farm and hamlet, croft and grange, but, except for Clairbourn, none of them had armor, and their weapons were of rude and home-made kinds—axes, pitchforks, flails, scythe-blade pikes, butchering-knives, a few swords and some crudely-fashioned bows.

And slings! Rawhide for their making was available in any quantities, stones were to be had for stooping, and the peasants had been practised in their use since infancy.

When de Montfort's soldiers saw the pitiful array of Clairbourn's force they laughed until the tears—which had not come at groans of men who died by torment or screams of frantic women as they saw their children's brains dashed out—ran down their grizzled cheeks and splashed upon the bosses of their breast-plates. Then they formed in phalanx to march through the rabble.

Ellis threw a skirmish line before the pike-edged, shield-protected square of marching men-at-arms. These retreated steadily, bawling execrations, brandishing their weapons and occasionally discharging ineffectual arrows at the soldiers. Now and then a Bowman or arbalestier answered with a cloth-yard shaft or crossbow bolt, and when he did a peasant fell to twitch and bleed his life away; for they were marksmen, these de Montfort veterans, and no better men of war were to be found in Europe or the Isles. But while the skirmishers drew arrows and attention from the phalanx, the remainder of Clairbourn's guerrillas circled through the olive groves and wheat fields till they encompassed the soldiers at rear and flank. Then Ellis blew his bugle-horn, and at the signal slingers loosed their missiles, raining

flints upon the close-packed men-at-arms like hailstones on a field of standing corn.

Most of the stones glanced harmlessly from iron cap and brazen gorget, or fell clanging from the metal bosses of the ox-hide targets, but now and then one found flesh, splitting nose or cheek, or striking blindness to an eye. On and on they rained, continuous and innumerable as drops in an autumnal tempest. Here and there a man-at-arms fell stumbling to his knees, or dropped to rise no more. The captain of the troop leapt half his height in air with upflung arms, then crashed face-forward on the stone tiles of the ancient Roman road with a sling-stone in his brain. Blinded by a sharp flint a sergeant tottered groping from the ranks, and the man who marched at his elbow staggered back into the arms of his companions, his face a bloody ruin where an eight-ounce stone had crushed his lips against his shattered teeth.

Two or three times the column was halted while the bowmen and the arbaljestiers sought to clear the way with shafts and quarrels, but the slingers fell upon their faces when the weapons were discharged, lying prone until the ranks were dressed again; then, when the march resumed, they rose and hurled a fresh downpour of missiles.

For five miles by the *miliaria* which still marked the old Roman road the running fight continued, and the men-at-arms no longer laughed in derision at Clairbourn's peasants. They had left a third of their companions writhing in the highway dust, almost all of them were wounded, and the galling rain of stones continued steadily, continuously, murderously. The sergeant in command ordered a halt, dressed his ranks and prepared for a charge. Where barbs and bolts could not reach, cold steel would. The pestilential peasants should be cut down in their tracks. The clarion sounded and the phalanx broke, sunlight glinting on the pikes and striking back

bright flashes from the flourished swords.

Now they were fighting man to man, and though the better arms and armor of the soldiers gave them an advantage, the preponderant numbers and the fury of the boors more than overbalanced it. Quarter was a word unknown to both sides. When a man struck down his adversary he dispatched him with as slight compunction as he would have had in crushing life out of a wounded snake. Kill or be killed was the order of the conflict. In half an hour it was over, and Clairbourn's men were busily engaged in stripping armor—and such valuables as they could find—from the corpses of their late antagonists.

Shallow graves were scooped out for the fallen peasants. The kites and ravens could be trusted to provide sepulcher for the dead soldiers—they had expected nothing more, and would have done the same to the peasants had they been victors. Then the guerrillas dispersed, each man going to his home, and Ellis turned his horse toward Dezirada's villa.

Half a league from the house he was hailed by Estefanette, the young girl he'd met on Gallows Hill the night he came to Provence.

"Dom Clairbourn, *beau sire*, haste thee to the rescue!" she cried wildly. "It is the Lady Dezirada—they have taken her!"

"Eh? Who has taken her, and where, Fanette?" he asked.

"To the citadel at Beziers, milord. She is arrested on a charge of witchcraft and sedition."

IN THE *majoria*—the great hall of justice—sat the judges temporal and spiritual; for the heinous crimes of which she stood accused concerned both crown and crozier.

A clerk read her indictment: That on divers times, at divers places, she had consorted with the contumacious rebels who defied both King and Bishop; that

she gave them shelter, fed them, clothed them, helped them to escape arrest.

So much for temporal offenses. Spiritually the list was longer and more formidable. She was a known associate of proscribed heretics; by her devilish arts she had seduced the friar Andrés from his vows of chastity, and induced him to confess and absolve persons under interdict. By the dying declaration of one Jacques Floquet, left for dead when he was set upon by rebel peasants, but happily found by a band of loyal troops whose officer had reduced his statement to writing, she had raised a demon from the depths of hell to beat the valiant Captain Sebastian to death with his bare hands, and ere he vanished in a cloud of sulfurous smoke this selfsame imp had vaunted his diablerie and called attention to the fire which blazed from his garments. Men—and women—had been burned on proof of far less serious charges. Would she confess her error, declare penitence, and trust herself to the court's mercy?

She denied the charges, stem and branch. Never had she raised her hand against the forces of the crown with knowledge. If men came pillaging and burning, slaying all who crossed their path, helpless babe and infirm grandsire no less than the stalwart men who stood against them, and showed no warrant for their violence, how could she know them for the soldiers of the King? They acted as if they had been common robbers. Could they blame her for assuming that they were?

As for the charge of sorcery, it was a lie from start to finish. Should she be convicted on the rantings of a man who raved in the delirium of coming death? She and all her house were known to be good Christians.

Turning from the churchmen to the lay judges she asked pointedly if they would let the vaporing of a madman, and a common man-at-arms at that, forfeit the life of

one in whose veins ran the noblest blood of France and Provence.

When she mentioned Frey Andrés tears coursed down her cheeks. He was a godly, pious man, who never by a thought or word or deed transgressed his vows. If he had given absolution to the interdicted Provençals it was because they were his people and he loved them, and his gentle heart was touched at their sad plight.

The Bishop's surrogate turned to the president of the court. "Need we go further with this phase of the examination, *Messire?*" he asked. "The prisoner is obdurate, but there is no question of the charge of witchcraft. The boot, the rack, perhaps the little horse——"

"Thou sayest, good Monsignor," interrupted the court president. "There is no question of the charge of witchcraft——"

"Good. Then thou wilt order the tormenters to begin——"

"Not so. The wench hath given proof past peradventure that she is no witch."

The surrogate drew a quick breath . . . these sharp-eyed laymen . . . "How meanest thou, *Messire?*"

"Why, by her tears. How else? Certes, one as learned as thy most reverend self knows that a witch hath not the power to weep, for she forfeits it when she accepts the Devil as her lord and signs her pact with Barran-Sathanas. But meseems we have not finished with this matter of disloyalty.

"Dost thou still deny the charges, Lady Dezirada?" he asked her sternly. "'Twere better to speak now, and plainly. Knowest not we can compel thy speech by torment if thou provest contumacious?"

Dezirada swept the courtroom with a quick glance. In the forefront of the audience she saw Clairbourn with his long sword girt against his thigh.

"Nay, marry, that thou canst not, *Messire,*" she denied. "I be of noble lineage, and my privileges are absolute. If

I deny thy accusations I may have recourse to heaven to prove mine innocence. I demand my right to have the cause adjudged by ordeal by battle."

"How now?" the president replied. "Thow knowest women and ecclesiastics may not wage combat——"

"But if I have a champion——"

"Why, soothly, in such a case the court can but assent, *Madonna*." He looked about the crowded courtroom. "Durst any man espouse this woman's cause?"

"Aye, by the rood, that do I!" Clairbourn advanced to the bancal and stood beside Dezirada, tugging at his gauntlet. "Hear ye, knights and gentles all," he shouted, "I do take on myself this lady's cause, and whoso dares dispute her innocence I'll write the judgment of high heaven on him with my sword. And thus I pledge my gage." He flung his gauntlet to the courtroom floor and bared his blade as he completed the formula: "Pick it up who lists!"

THEY lodged her in a little cell-like room adjoining a small chapel dedicated to the Magdalen, a darksome and forbidding little shrine with vaulted ceiling and a window scarce a hand-breadth wide, stained, rather than illumined, by the red glow of a vigil lamp. Here, while a sergeant paced before the iron-bound oak door, they let him see her for a moment.

She stood still and silent as the painted saint above the altar as he came to her, her fairness outlined by the dull glow of the sacral light. Her eyes were wide, moist, starry, and her lips were trembling like a little child's. Fear had laid its icy grip on her, but it was not fear of death. Then she held her long, pearl-pale hands out to him, and suddenly they were in each other's arms. It was not so much a passionate embrace as an instinctive act, so natural, so tender, so utterly inevitable that the

quiet ecstasy of it was almost terrifying. Then presently she found her voice and named him her true knight, her lord, her lover and the master of her heart. And he gave her such praise as lovers have paid to the mistresses of their hearts since Adam first beheld the bride the Lord God gave him in the garden He had digged and planted, calling her his dear, his darling, his beloved, fairest among women, delight of his eyes and the jewel of his heart.

Then the sergeant hammered on the door to tell them that their time of tryst was sped, and he took leave of her sweet mouth and turned to answer the summons. For a moment, as the door swung shut, he glanced back. She was kneeling on the bare stone of the altar steps, hands outstretched toward him; her violet eyes were bright with trust and worship.

THE ring of combat was marked out by stones laid in a circle in the castle's base court, and the president of the tribunal with his associates and attendants took their seats upon the raised dais.

"Who sustains the charge against the Lady Dezirada de la Soleza?" asked the president, and a herculean varlet swaggered forward, raised his hand in salute, and drew Clairbourn's glove from his belt, tossing it into the courtyard dust contemptuously.

"Who is he?" asked Ellis of a man-at-arms who leant upon his pike, bored by the whole proceeding, to judge by his attitude.

"Messer Miguel Torres, champion of the Convent of Saint Lazare, and sometime champion of the Lord Bishop," returned the soldier. "Knowest thou thy paternosters, little one?"

"How sayest thou?"

"If thou hast a prayer to say, thou hadst best be saying it; there'll be small time for making peace with heaven once thou'rt in the ring with that one. Ten years and

more he's held the list for the Lord Bishop and the convent, and never has he lost a battle-wager for them. *Mo' Dio*, I have seen him chop a sword in half as if it were a wooden billet!"

Ellis noticed that the champion was unarmed and wondered at it, but explanation came when a man in the black robe of an exorcist appeared with two huge glaives in his arms and strode into the center of the ring. "Yonder is the armiger, little one," the pikeman told him. "Step forth and choose thy brand, and may good fortune attend thee. Thou'lt need it."

"Nay, I am already weaponed." Clairbourn protested, but the exorcist gave him a cold smile.

"'Twas thyself who threw the gage," he reminded. "He who takes it up may choose the arms. Lay by thy sword and make thy choice of one of these."

The weapons were of clumsy design, long-handled for two-handed grasping, cross-hilted, with blades at least two inches wide and all of forty inches long. They must have weighed twelve pounds apiece, and except for hacking would be almost useless, for their weight made using them with fencing-skill impossible. All advantage lay with the gigantic champion, Ellis realized at a glance. Armed with such a weapon and with a veritable ogre for an opponent, he would be virtually defenseless. "I have seen him chop a sword in two as it had been a wooden billet," the man-at-arms had said, and the words kept echoing in his ears.

"Eenie, meenie, minie, mo," he counted like a child, closing his eyes and touching the sword-hilts alternately. At the final count he put his hand upon the nearest hilt, but the exorcist deftly moved the blades so the other one came uppermost. So—they were forcing the choice on him, eh?

"Let me try its heft," he demanded, taking up the heavy weapon and swinging it

above his head, then whipping it as if it were a fishing-pole and he had just completed a long cast.

The iron snapped like shattering glass and more than half the blade fell clanking on the pavement at his feet. What remained in Ellis' hands bore eloquent testimony. The blade had been cut with a file till it was almost paper-thin; then the filings had been stuck back in the file-kerf with oil and gum.

Clairbourn held the mutilated weapon up for all to see. "Behold, my lords and captains," he shouted, "what depths of perfidy they sink to. In the name of chivalry and on behalf of every champion this dastard hath defeated in the lists I name him murderer and scoundrel, and unfit to meet in combat with a man of honor.

"What knowest thou of this, sir shave-pate?" he demanded of the exorcist.

The man returned his gaze with cold and sullen hatred, but answered nothing.

Not so the president of the court. White with rage, he rose from his seat, motioning to his heralds.

"Tie me that scurvy knave," he ordered, pointing to the exorcist, "and lead him haltered like an ass outside the castle doors; then beat him through the streets and from the city gate. As for thee, Dom Miguel, you have a single choice: Fight with such weapon as your adversary in his chivalry may choose to grant thee, though it be no more than a broomstick, or have your right hand cut off and hung round your neck while you stand in the marketplace for fools to gape at."

"Give him thy sword," Ellis bade a man-at-arms; then, as Miguel stepped into the ring, "*En garde*, thou caitiff knave, and if thou hast a hope of mercy put the hope aside, for blood of men perfidiously slain cries from these stones for vengeance!"

But, swaggering bully and unconscionable cheat though he might be, Miguel was a skilled hand with the sword. His straight

blade was longer by a hand than Clairbourn's curved saber, and to his sword's length he added full four inches of arm-reach. A dozen times he struck his point on Ellis' breastplate while all of Ellis' blows fell short. He had prodigious strength, too; so by sheer force he almost chopped the weapon out of Clairbourn's hand time after time.

There were no rounds. They were to fight till one or the other of them fell, and Clairbourn's breath was coming in short panting jerks and in his wrist there was the pain of coming weakness. A searing pain stung in his cheek as his adversary's point reached him, and he fell back a pace, another and another, seeking breathing-time.

Then Miguel overreached himself. His warped mind, seemingly unable to endure the thought of honorable victory, prodded him to needless treachery, and from his boot-top he drew a dirk, tossed it, caught it as it fell and hurled it full in Ellis' face.

Clairbourn dodged the missile, slipped upon the pavement and fell sprawling to his knees. And as he fell, his sword jerked up, and the razor-edge of his blade pierced the inner side of Miguel's leg, severing the femoral artery as a knife might slit a wine-skin.

"A chirurgéon—go, some of you, and fetch a chirurgéon, before he bleeds to death!" the Bishop's surrogate commanded.

"At his peril let the sawbones set foot in the ring!" Ellis warned with upraised sword. "Did chirurgéons attend the men this villain did to death by treachery and weakened weapons?"

The surrogate bowed frigidly. "Thou callest check, Sire Clairbourn," he answered, "but the game is never finished until checkmate is called. There be those who would inquire of thy origin and country, thy faithfulness to holy doctrine, and how it came thou wert at hand to lend

thy sword to one accused—and not acquitted—of the practise of witchcraft."

Ellis grinned at him. "I'll be ready any time you or your gangsters want to play," he replied, "and so will this."

The surrogate drew back in haste as Clairbourn's sword cut through the air six inches from his nose.

SHE was kneeling on the altar steps when he came to the little chapel. Her head was held a little back; fringed lids were drooped on plumbless violet eyes, almost concealing them; the full, red lips were slightly parted in beatitude; the whole face in its frame of gilded hair was entranced, longing. He heard her, though her prayer was but a whisper: "*O Magdalena santissima*, you too have suffered; you too knew what it was to give yourself in love. Hear my prayer, Maria Magdalena! Grant him victory, and bring him safely back to me. . . ."

The sound of her prayer faded like the music of a radio when the rheostat is turned off slowly. She was moving rapidly away, retreating and diminishing, as objects lose their size but not their clarity when looked at through reversed binoculars. Now, so far away she seemed to be beyond the reach of his voice, it was as if she wavered momentarily, like the image in a swinging mirror or the reflection in a still pool into which a stone is dropped. Only she and the saint seemed to hold their form and outline; the background was obscured and cloudy; then, suddenly, it was no longer the small, gloomy chapel, but a garden traced with sanded paths, with here and there a deep, still pool where golden carp played roguishly among the roots of star-shaped water lilies. Against a wall of weathered brick, old rose-trees shook their blossoms out like banners in the calm still air of gathering evening, and trailing jessamine climbed across the coping.

He was in the Poplar Street studio, sprawling in an armchair, looking at the picture he had painted. An echo seemed to hang in the still air like the faint hum that succeeds the striking of a sonorous gong. His own voice? Had he called her name as she retreated into . . . dear Heaven, into *what* had she retreated, time, space, or eternity? He propped his elbows on his knees and cupped his face in his hands.

Slowly, very slowly, reality replaced glamor. He looked down at the empty tumbler and the empty whisky bottle, saw the snow that piled like layers of cotton wool against the skylight, softening the cold, gray light of sunless dawn.

"Boy, what a dream that was!" he told himself. "I've seen the fine lady on the white horse with bells on her toes. . . ." But had it been a dream? Had Dezirada, whom he'd held against his heart and kissed, for whom he'd fought, whom he had loved, been nothing but a dream? A couplet from *The Tempest* echoed in his mind:

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

"**N**OW that's what I call class, boy," old Sam Gulden chuckled when Ellis brought his picture in. "I knew you'd ring th' bell for me. Sure, that there card'll be on every high-class stand from New York to Hollywood; and will it be a winner? Don't ask me, I wouldn't tell you! It's goin' to be th' hottest seller we've put out since th' dee-pression! Stop by Miss Simon's office on th' way out, Ellis boy; she's got a nize check for you."

Ellis cashed the check, paid a few bills, bought himself a man's-sized lunch at Longchamps, stopped by the Astor bar for a few drinks and some gossip, then took the B.M.T. to Brooklyn.

A bulky packet with a row of French stamps reaching almost clear across its up-

per margin had been stuffed into his mailbox; and as he took it out he recognized the writing on it as Dick Hope's. Dick was taking a sabbatical year from New York, poking through the less-known galleries in France with camera and sketchbook, preliminary work for the murals he was going to do for the Middleborough Public Library.

"Dear Clair" [he wrote]: "If you're still interested in mediæval art there's one that ought to interest you in the Musée des Antiques at Beziers. There's no doubt about its authenticity, but if it weren't so well vouched for I'd swear some modern slipped one over on the faculty of the gallery, for the treatment is as up to date as Whistler's or Sargent's. Actually, old-timer, it reminds me of your better work.

"They're rather vague about the gal who sat for it, but it seems she had a tragic history; got mixed up in the Albigensian persecutions on the wrong side of the fence, and was arrested on a charge of heresy and witchcraft. Instead of pleading guilty and saving her skin—at the expense of forfeiture of all her property, of course—she chose to face it out and demanded that her guilt or innocence be left to ordeal by battle. Everything went well for her at first, and her champion polished off the bruiser for the prosecution in fine style. Then he disappeared. Vanished into thin air, as the feller says.

"After that, of course, the fat was in the fire, and so was she. It seems the man who fought for her was previously unknown around these parts and when he won his scrap and did a disappearing act the natural verdict was that he was one of Old Nick's boys who'd gone AWOL from hell just long enough to slap the champion of right and justice down, then report back to the fireside at Gehenna before his absence could be noted. Anyway, they burned the lady to a fine crisp in the citadel courtyard, after several hours of the usual

unpleasant preliminaries with the rack and thumbscrews.

"Personally, I think her 'demon lover' was just an ordinary heel who saw the way the wind was blowing and took it on the lam before he got his whiskers singed, leaving her to hold the bag.

"Through the kindness of M. d'Hyères I was able to photograph the portrait. Look it over, son, and tell me if it doesn't look as if you might have done it some day when you were in 'specially fine form. One thing acquits you, though. You're versatile, but you couldn't possibly have been in southern France in the year of grace 1212."

Ellis drew the photograph from the letter with unsteady fingers. He hardly dared to look at it, yet he dared not throw it in the fire unseen.

The woman in the picture wore a long loose robe of white wool girt with a gold-bossed leathern belt. Her hair, unbound and unplaited, swirled like a cataract of cloven flame across her brow and down her shoulders, rippling to the pavement round her ivory-inlaid chair. Her child-small feet were shod with rope-soled sandals, with small bells fastened to their straps. And her eyes followed him with continuing insistence, accusingly, reproachfully.

He began to laugh, softly at first, then louder—higher. . . . "You're right, Dick; sure, you're right," he gasped between spasmodic bursts of irresistible cachinnation. "I certainly could not have been in southern France in the year of grace 1212!"