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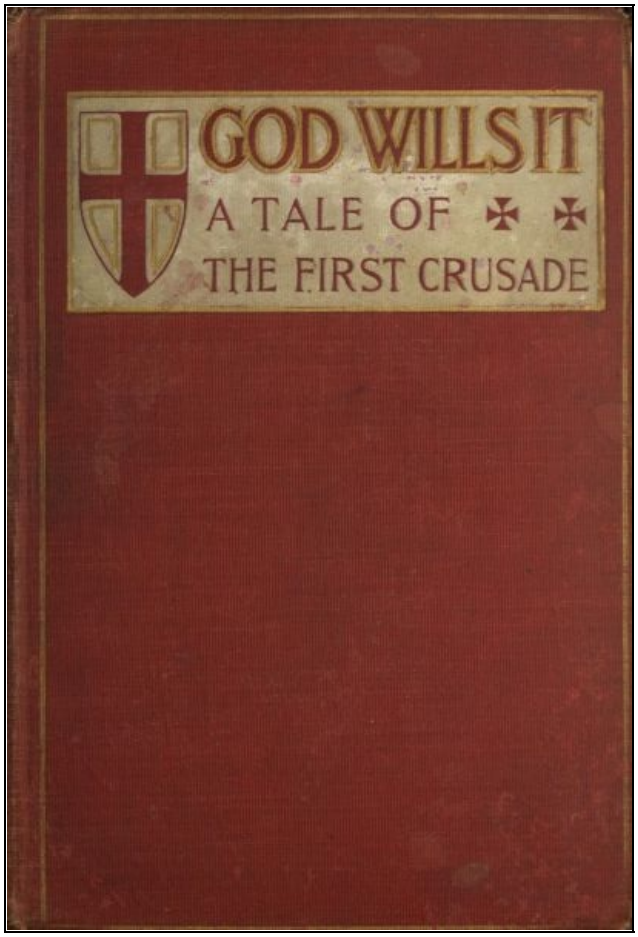


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"GOD WILLS IT"

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**"IN A TWINKLING RICHARD WAS AT THE HEAD OF THE RAGING BRUTE"**

# "GOD WILLS IT!"

*A Tale of the First Crusade*

BY


## WILLIAM STEARNS DAVIS

AUTHOR OF "A FRIEND OF CÆSAR"


WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY LOUIS BETTS

*"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."*

—Hebrews xi. 33, 34.


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To my long-time Friend

ARTHUR WASHBURN

I DEDICATE THIS TALE

OF THE DAYS OF FAITH

# PREFACE

The First Crusade was the sacrifice of France for the sins of the Dark Ages. Alone of all the Crusades it succeeded, despite its surrender of countless lives. No Richard of England, no St. Louis led; its heroes were the nobles and peasants of France and Norman Italy, who endured a thousand perils and hewed their victorious way to Jerusalem. In this Crusade united Feudalism and Papacy won their greatest triumph. Notwithstanding the self-seeking of a few, the mass of the Crusaders were true to their profession,—they sought no worldly gain, but to wash out their sins in infidel blood. In this Crusade also the alien civilizations of Christendom and Islam were brought into a dramatic collision which has few historic counterparts.

Except in Scott's "Count Robert of Paris," which deals wholly with the Constantinople episode, I believe the First Crusade has not been interpreted in fiction. Possibly, therefore, the present book may have a slight value, as seeking to tell the story of the greatest event of a great age.

I have sometimes used modern spellings instead of unfamiliar eleventh-century names. The Crusade chronicles often contradict one another, and once or twice I have taken trifling liberties. To Mr. S. S. Drury and Mr. Charles Hill, University friends who have rendered kind aid on several historical details, I owe many thanks.

W. S. D.

Harvard University.

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# GOD WILLS IT!

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# PROLOGUE

## HOW HILDEBRAND GAVE A BATTLE CRY

High noon in Italy. Without, a hot sun, a blue bay, a slow sea-breeze; within, a vaulted chamber, bare stone walls, a few blazoned pennons upon the pillars, here and there pictured tapestries, where one might see many a merry tourney and passage-at-arms. Very gentle were the footfalls, though the room was not empty: the whispers were so low that the droning buzz of a bee, which had stolen in at the narrow window, sounded loud as a mill wheel. There were a score of persons

in the chamber: tonsured priests in white stoles, and monks in black cassocks; knights in silvered hauberks; a white-robed Moor with the eyes of a falcon and the teeth of a cat; and a young lad, Richard, son of Sir William the castellan, a shy boy of twelve, who sat upon the stone window seat, blinking his great eyes and wondering what it all might mean. No eye rested on the lad: the company had thought only for one object,—a figure that turned wearily on the velvet pillows, half raised itself, sank once more. Then came a thin voice, gentle as a woman's:—

"Abd Rahman, come: feel my wrist, and do not fear to speak the truth."

The Moor at the foot of the bed rose from the rushes whereon he had been squatting; stole noiselessly to the sick man's side. From the arch of the vault above dangled a silver ball. The Moor smote the ball, and with his eye counted the slow vibrations while his hand held the wrist. Even the vagrant bee stopped humming while the sphere swung to and fro for a long minute. Then without a word Abd Rahman crept to a low table where a lamp was heating a silver vial, and on which other vials and spoons were lying. He turned the warm red elixir into a spoon, and brought it to the dying man. There was a rush of color to the pallid cheeks, with a striving to rise from the pillow; but the Moor again held his wrist. Another long silence,—then the question from the bed:—

"Do not hesitate. Is it near the end?"

Abd Rahman salaamed until his turban touched the rushes.

"Sheik Gregorius, all life save Allah's is mortal," said he in mongrel Latin.

At the words, there ran a shiver and sobbing through all the company; the priests were kissing their crucifixes; the monks were on their knees,—and had begun to mutter *Agnus Dei, qui tolles peccata mundi, miserere nobis!* The sufferer's voice checked them.

"Sweet children, what is this? Sorrow? Tears? Rather should you not rejoice that God has remembered my long travail, and opens wide the doorway to the dwellings of His rest?" But the answer was renewed sobbing. Only Abd Rahman crouched impassive. To him death was death, for Nubian slave or lordly Kalif.

"Draw nearer, dear brothers, my children in Christ," came the voice from the bed. "Let me see your faces; my sight grows dim. The end is not far."

So they stood close by, those prelates and knights of the stout Norman fortress city of Salerno, on that five-and-twentieth of May, in the year of grace one thousand and eighty-five. None spoke. Each muttered his own prayer, and looked upon the face of the dying. As they stood, the sun dropped a beam athwart the pillows, and lit up the sick man's face. It was a pale, thin, wasted face, the eyelids half drooping, the eyes now lack-lustre, now touched by fretful and feverish fire; the scanty gray hair tonsured, the shaven lips drawn tensely, so wan that the blue veins showed, as they did through the delicate hands at rest on the coverings. Yet the onlookers saw a majesty more than royal in that wan face; for before them lay the "Servant of the Servants of God." They looked upon Gregory VII, christened Hildebrand, heir of St. Peter, Vicar of Christ, before whom the imperial successor of Charlemagne and Cæsar had knelt as suppliant and vassal. The silence was again waxing long.

"Dear children," said the dying Pope, "have you no word for me before I go?" Whereupon the lordliest prelate of them all, the Archbishop of Salerno, fell on his knees, and cried aloud:—

"Oh, *Sanctissime*! how can we endure when you are reft from us? Shall we not be unshepherded sheep amongst ravening wolves; forsaken to the devices of Satan! Oh, Father, if indeed you are the Vicar of Our Lord, beg that He will spare us this loss; and even now He will lengthen out your days, as God rewarded the good Hezekiah, and you will be restored to us and to Holy Church!" But there was a weary smile upon Gregory's pale face.

"No, my brother, be not afraid. I go to the visible presence of Our Lord: before His very throne I will commend you all to His mercy." Then the dim eyes wandered round the room. "Where is Odon? Where is Odon, Bishop of Ostia? Not here?—"

"*Beatissime*" said old Desidarius, Abbot of Monte Casino, "we have sent urgent messages to Capua, bidding him come with speed."

A wistful shadow passed across the face of Gregory.

"I pray God I may give him my blessing before I die."

He coughed violently; another vial of Abd Rahman's elixir quieted him, but even the imperturbable face of the Moor told that the medicine could profit little.

"Let us partake of the body and blood of Our Lord," said Gregory; and the priests brought in a golden chalice and gilded pyx, containing the holy mysteries. They chanted the *Gloria Patri* with trembling voices; the archbishop knelt at the bedside, proffering the pyx. But at that instant the lad, Richard, as he sat and wondered, saw the Pope's waxen face flush dark; he saw the thin hands crush the coverings into folds, and put by the elements.

"I forget; I am first the Vicar of Christ; second, Hildebrand, the sinner. I have yet one duty before I can stand at God's judgment seat." The archbishop rose to his feet, and the holy vessel quaked in his hand; for he saw on the brow of Gregory the black clouds, foretelling the stroke of the

lightning.

"What is your command, *Sanctissime*?" he faltered.

And the Pope answered, lifting himself unaided:—

"Speak! how has God dealt with the foes of Holy Church and His Vicegerent? Has He abased Guibert of Ravenna, the Antipope, very Antichrist? Has he humbled Henry, the German, Antichrist's friend?" The voice was strong now; it thrilled through the vaulted chamber like the roar of the wind that runs herald to the thunders.

And Desidarius answered feebly: "Holy Father, it is written, 'He that is unjust let him be unjust still.' Guibert the Antipope, who blasphemes, calling himself Clement the Third, still lords it in the city of Peter; in Germany Henry the accursed is suffered to prosper for yet a little season."

Whereupon Richard saw a terrible thing. The face of the Pope flushed with an awful fury; he sat upright in the bed, his eyes darting fire, and night on his forehead. Abd Rahman rose to quiet him —one glance thrust the Moor back. None seconded. The Pope was still Pope; his were the keys of heaven and hell,—perdition to deny! And now he spoke in harsh command, as if handing down the doom of kingdoms, as indeed he did.

"Hearken, bishops and prelates! I, Gregory, standing at the judgment seat of God, am yet the Vicar of Christ. Of me it is said, 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven;' and let my last act on this sinful earth be this—to devote to the devil and his angels the souls of Henry, king of the Germans, who vaunts the name of emperor, and Guibert, whose sin shall be forgiven never, for he is Antichrist."

The pontiff gasped for breath; his voice sounded again.

"Take vellum, and write the formula of the greater excommunication against the two accursed. Make haste: for all the rest of the world I will forgive, but they shall be parched forever. Then let me, like Pope Zacharias, sign the anathema with the very blood of Our Lord. Haste; for the time grows short."

They obeyed like mute slaves. Richard saw a priest's pen racing over the parchment, and shivered to his young self; for two of the world's highest were being handed over to eternal torment. The Pope still sat. In his eye flashed a fire born of passion passing reason.

"Yes," he ran on. "I am the son of the carpenter of Saona, the poor monk at St. Mary of the Aventine. Yet I have been set above kings. At Canossa the prince of this world has knelt at my feet, confessing his imperial majesty lesser than mine. I have made and unmade kings; I have raised up and pulled down; and the holy bride of Christ shall come unblemished to her marriage. The Church—the Church—shall wax forever; and this has been the work of my hands!" The Pope raved,—all knew it,—but who should say him nay? Still he stormed on in his passion: "They have driven me to exile, but mine is the victory. I die, but the Church advances to triumph! Kingdoms fall,—the Church is established. The earth passes away,—the Church sits down to the marriage supper with the Lamb: for the gates of hell shall not prevail against her!"

Gregory saw the priest lift his eyes from the writing-desk.

"Is it written?"

"It is written, Holy Father."

"Bring it to me, and bring the chalice and the pen; for I will sign."

The archbishop brought the vellum and the holy cup, and knelt at the bedside; and others had brought lighted candles, twelve in number, each held by a prelate or priest who stood in semicircle about the bed. Then while they chanted the great psalm of wrath, they heard the bell of the castle tolling,—tolling,—not for the death of the body, but for the more grievous death of the soul. "*In consummatione, in ira consummationis*"—"Consume them, in wrath consume them," swelled the terrible chant.

"Give me the crucifix," commanded Gregory. Desidarius placed one of silver in his hand. A priest at either side bore him up from the bed. Softly, but solemnly as the Judge of the last Great Day, Gregory read the major anathema:—

"I, Gregory, Servant of the Servants of God, to whom is given all power in heaven, on earth, and in hell, do pronounce you, Henry, false Emperor, and you, Guibert, false Pope, anathematized, excommunicate, damned! Accursed in heaven and on earth,—may the pains of hell follow you forever! Cursed be you in your food and your possessions, from the dog that barks for you to the cock that crows for you! May you wax blind; may your hands wither; like Dathan and Abiram, may hell swallow you up quick; like Ananias and Sapphira, may you receive an ass's burial! May your lot be that of Judas in the land of shades! May these maledictions echo about you through the ages of ages!"

And at these words the priests cast down their candles, treading them out, all crying: "Amen and amen! So let God quench all who contemn the Vicar of Christ."

Then in a silence so tense that Richard felt his very eyeballs beating, Gregory dipped in the chalice, and bent over the roll. The lad heard the tip of the pen touch the vellum,—but the words were never written....

Darkening the doorway was a figure, leaning upon a crooked staff; in the right hand a withered palm branch,—the gaze fixed straight upon the Vicegerent of God. And Gregory, as he glanced upward, saw,—gave a cry and sigh in one breath; then every eye fastened upon the newcomer, who without a word advanced with soft gliding step to the foot of the bed, and looked upon the Pope.

None addressed him, for he was as it were a prophet, a Samuel called up from his long rest to disclose the mysteries hid to human ken. The strange visitor was of no great height; fasting and hardship had worn him almost to a skeleton. From under his dust-soiled pilgrim's coat could be seen the long arms, with the skin sun-dried, shrivelled. Over his breast and broad shoulders streamed the snow-white hair and beard. Beneath the shaggy brows, within deep sockets, were eyes, large, dark, fiery, that held the onlooker captive against his will. The pilgrim's nose seemed like the beak of a hawk, his fingers like dry talons. And all looked and grew afraid, for he was as one who had wrestled with the glamour and sin of the world for long, and had been more than victor.

Pope and pilgrim gazed upon each other: first spoke Hildebrand:—

"Sebastian, my brother-monk!"

"Hildebrand, my fellow at St. Mary's!"

Then the apparition fell on his knees, saying humbly:—

"And will not the Pope bless Sebastian the palmer from Jerusalem?"

What the pontiff replied was lost to all about; then louder he spoke:—

"And has Sebastian the palmer forgotten his love for Hildebrand the monk, when he reverences the Vicar of Christ?"

But the stranger arose.

"I kneel, adoring Gregory, Vicegerent of God: I stand to lay bare to Hildebrand, the man, his mortal sin."

A thrill of horror ran through all the churchmen, and the archbishop whispered darkly to Desidarius, but the Pope reproved:—

"And I implore the prayers of Sebastian, a more righteous man than I; let him speak, and all Christians honor him."

So they stood. The palmer drew close to the bedside, pointing into the pontiff's face a finger bare as that of one long in the grave.

"Listen, Hildebrand of Saona! I am come from my pilgrimage to the tomb of our dear Lord. I have come hither to fall at your feet, to bid you remember the captivity of the city of Christ, and His sorrow at the wrong done Him through His little ones. I come to find the Vicar of Christ like the meanest of humankind, nigh to death, and preparing to stand naked at God's tribunal. I find him not forgiving his enemies, but devoting to hell. I find him going before God, his last breath a curse—"

But the Pope was writhing in agony.

"Not this, my brother, my brother," rang his plea. "O Sebastian, holier man than I," and he strove to turn from the palmer's terrible gaze, but could not. "Not in my own wrath and hatred do I this. Henry and Guibert blaspheme Christ and His church, not me. Did I not freely forgive Censius the brigand, who sought my life? Have I ever been a worldly prelate, whose cellars are full of wines, whose castles abound with plate and falcons and chargers? Has simony or uncleanness ever justly been laid at my door? Not so, not so,—I am innocent."

But Sebastian never wavered. "You and I were fellow-monks at St. Mary's, friends, as one soul dwelling in two bodies. But the pleasure of God led us wide apart; you became maker of popes, very Pope—I remained a simple monk; for our Lord spared me the burdens of greatness. Now for the third time I have been to the tomb of Christ, to plead pardon for my many sins and I bring from Palestine treasures more precious than gold."

The whole company was about the palmer when he drew forth a little packet. "See—the finger-bone of the blessed St. Jerome; this flask is filled with water of Jordan; this dust my poor hands gathered at the Holy Sepulchre." And now all bowed very low. "This splinter is of that wood whereon the price of all our sins was paid."

Hildebrand took the last relic, kissed it, placed it in his bosom lovingly. Then came the slow question. "And are the Eastern Christians still persecuted, the pilgrims outraged, the sacred places polluted?"

"Look, *Sanctissime*" was the answer, tinged half with bitterness and scorn; and Sebastian bared his arm, showing upon it a ring of scarce healed scars. "These are tokens of the tortures I endured by command of the Emir of Jerusalem, when I rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ's dear sake."

"Wounds of Our Lord!" cried the archbishop on his knees, "we are unworthy to wash the feet of

such as you!"

"No," replied the palmer. "It was but merciful chastening. Yet my heart burns when I behold Christians cursing and slaying one another, while so many infidels rage unslain and the Holy City mourns their captive. Therefore I stand here, *Sanctissime*, to reproach you for your sin."

Again Gregory broke forth: "Unjust Sebastian, eleven years since I pleaded with King Henry, setting forth the miseries of Jerusalem; ever has my soul been torn for her captivity. Did I not profess myself ready to lead over land and sea to the Holy Sepulchre? Then the devil stirred Henry to his onslaught on the Church, and God has opened no door for this righteous warfare."

Sebastian leaned over, speaking into the Pope's face.

"You have put your hand to the plough and looked back. You promised Michael Ducas the Greek aid against the Turks. You anathematized him for heresy. You wrote of holy war. War blazed forth in Saxony, where your underling, Rudolf of Swabia, slew his fellow-Christians with your blessing, while Christ's children in the East were perishing. You called to Rome Robert Guiscard, that man of sin, whose half-paynim army spared neither nun nor matron in its violence when it sacked, and led thousands of Roman captives to endless bondage in Calabria. Where then your anathemas? You cared more for humiliating Cæsar than for removing the humiliation of Christ. Therefore I reproach."

There were great beads of sweat on the Pope's forehead; he was panting in agony; again and again the splinter of the cross was pressed to his breast, as if the very touch would quench the raging flame within. "*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!*" he was repeating. Next he spoke aloud: "Sweet friends, bear witness,—all my life I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore, in exile, here at Salerno, I die. Yet our old enemy, Satan, has been too strong. I am a very sinful man, thinking too much of the glory of Peter, too little of the sorrow of Christ. Pray for me,—for Hildebrand, chief of sinners; for Gregory the Pope is nigh his end."

When the pontiff's breath failed, there were again shadows in the doorway, and two figures entered treading softly; the one a tall and handsome churchman, in a high prelate's dress, the second a cavalier, not tall, but mighty of limb and shoulder, the jewels flashing on his baldric, the gold spurs at his heels. The warrior threw back his helm, and all saw the long, fair beard, the steel-blue eyes, the mien of high command.

"Odon, Cardinal of Ostia, my dear son!" cried the fainting Pope, as the prelate knelt at the bedside, beseeching the blessing. "But—you?" and he wondered, looking upon the knight. The other bowed his head.

"Holy Father," said he, in the tongue of northern France, "do you not know me? I have greatly sinned: I have fought with Henry against Holy Church. I repent; assign any penance—for from Rome I have come, seeking absolution at the hands of the true Vicar of Christ."

"And you are—?" came from Hildebrand's thin lips.

"Godfrey of Bouillon." And the knight knelt beside the cardinal.

The light was again in the Pope's eye. "Fear not," came his words. "As you have been the foe of Holy Church, so now you shall become her champion. Your sins are forgiven; what you shall do, learn hereafter." Another spasm of coughing; Abd Rahman administered his last elixir. All knew the end was very near. But again the pontiff spoke. "I must say farewell, sweet children. Make Desidarius my successor, for he has served Holy Church full long. But he is old, and after him"—his eyes went over to Odon—"you shall sit upon the throne of Peter." The prelate was in tears.

"Say it not," he cried. "Unworthy!—Anselm of Lucca, Hugh of Lyons, they are better men than I."

"No," said Gregory, gently, "you will succeed in due time, and do not refuse the service of the Lord." Then he turned to Sebastian. "Dear brother, O for ten years of life, five, one! I have been an unfaithful shepherd of my sheep! But God is all wise. Never in this body shall I call the soldiers of the West to arm against the enemies of Christ! Yet—yet—" the voice faltered, steadied again—"the time cometh when God wills it, and you, Odon, shall call forth the warriors of the Cross; and you, O Godfrey,—be this your penance,—you shall lead the host to Jerusalem. And the host shall move victoriously, Frank, German, Italian! The Holy City shall be rescued from her spoilers! And this be your battle cry, against which paynim or devil may not prevail, '*God wills it!*' For what God wills, may no man or archfiend stay!"

His voice pealed like a trumpet, like the shout of a dauntless captain leading through the deathly press. All looked on him. When his hands stretched on high, every other hand was outstretched. Nearer they crowded, and the swords of the Norman knights leaped from their scabbards,—there was the clang of mail, the flash of light on bare steel,—highest of all the sword of Godfrey. Hildebrand struggled to rise; Sebastian upbore at one side, Odon at the other. The Pope gazed upward toward the vaulting—seemingly through it—beyond—

"I see the heavens opened," was his cry. "I see horses and chariots; a mighty host; and Michael and all his angels with swords of fire. I see the earth covered with armies innumerable, and red with the carnage of countless battles. I see the great host of those who have shed their blood for Christ, ascending into heaven, with psalms of praise, clothed in white robes, while their comrades below march on to victory." A pause,—a final burst of ecstasy,—"I see the Cross triumphant on the walls of Jerusalem! And all this shall be not now, yet speedily; for so God wills

it!"

The Pope reeled; Sebastian caught him; they laid him on the bed. Abd Rahman was beside—no need of his skill—a great rush of blood surged from Gregory's lips, one brief spasm—he was dead.

"Christians," spoke Sebastian the palmer, "think not the Vicar of Christ has left us unaided in this sacred task. At the throne of God he will pray that our fingers be taught the sword, that we be girded with strength for the battle. And now while his spirit is borne on high by angels, let us take on ourselves the vow of holy war."

The lad Richard, whose young wits had been sadly perplexed by all he had seen since at early morn he had been sent to watch in the sick-room, that his weary father the castellan might rest, made as if to glide from the chamber; but Sebastian by a glance recalled. They stood around the bed, looking upon the dead man's face, their arms stretched on high.

"We swear it! That soon as the path is plain, we will free Jerusalem. So God wills it!"

Thus cried Odon, thus all; but loudest of all Godfrey of Bouillon. Then Sebastian, turning to Richard, said:—

"And you, fair young sir, whom the saints make the sprout of a mighty warrior for Christ—will you vow also?"

Whereupon Richard, holding himself very lordly, as became his noble Norman blood, replied with outstretched hand, in right manly fashion:—

"Yes, with St. Maurice's help, I will slay my share of the infidels!"

"Amen," quoth Abbot Desidarius, solemnly, "Gregory the Pope is dead in the body, but in the spirit he shall win new victories for Holy Church and for God."

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# CHAPTER I

## HOW BARON WILLIAM SALLIED FORTH

It was early dawn in May, 1094. The glowing sun had just touched the eastern mountains with living fire; the green brakes and long stretches of half-tropical woodland were springing out of the shadow; a thin mist was drifting from the cool valleys; to the north the sea's wide reach was dancing and darkling. Upon a little height overlooking the Sicilian town of Cefalu three men were standing, very unlike in age and dress, yet each with attention fixed on one object,—a white falcon which the youngest of the party had perched on his fist. Two of the men were past the prime of life. Of one, the swarthy countenance, sharp features, bright Oriental dress, ponderous blue turban, and crooked cimeter proclaimed him at once a Moor, undoubtedly a Moslem; the other, taller, thinner than his comrade, wore a coarse, dark mantle; his hood was thrust back, displaying a head crowned with a tight-fitting steel cap, a face stern and tough, as if it were of oxhide, marked almost to deformity by plentiful sword scars. He wore a grizzled gray beard; at his side jangled a heavy sword in battered sheath; and in his hands, which lacked more than one finger, he held a crossbow, the bolts for which swung in a leathern case at his thigh. The two stood by their third companion, who was holding up the falcon on a gold-embroidered glove, while the other hand readjusted the feather-tufted hood over the bird's eyes.

"By St. Michael," the young man was declaring, "say to me, Herbert, and you also, Nasr, there was never such a falcon; no, not in all Count Roger's mews."

The speaker stood at least a head taller than the others, and they were not short men. He was a strong-limbed fellow of perhaps two-and-twenty; with a face not regular and handsome certainly; the cheek-bones were too high, the features too rugged, the mouth too large for that. But it was an honest, ingenuous face; the brown eyes snapped with lively spirits, and, if need be, with no trifling passion; the mouth was affable; the little brown mustache twisted at a determined curve; and the short dark hair—he was bare-headed—was just curly enough to be unruly. He wore a bleaunt, an undercloak of fine gray cloth, and over this was caught a loose mantle of scarlet woollen,—a bright dress that marked out his figure from afar.

The young man had been speaking in Norman French, and his comrade in the steel cap, who answered to the name of Herbert, broke out loudly:—

"Aye, my Lord Richard, there is not such a falcon in all Sicily from Syracuse to Trapani; not such a bird as will strike so huge a crane or heron from so far, and go at the quarry so fearless." And the old man held up a dead crane, as if in proof of his assertion.

"I am glad to think it," replied the other, "for I have no small hope that when next I go to Palermo, I may show that haughty Louis De Valmont I know somewhat of hawking, and can breed a bird to outmatch his best."

"Allah!" grunted Nasr, the Moor, "the young *Cid* is right. Never have I seen a better falcon. And

he does well to harbor the old grudge against the boisterous De Valmont, who will get his dues if the Most High will! Ha, ha!" And the old rascal began croaking in his throat, thinking he was laughing.

Nasr had spoken in Arabic, but his companions understood him well enough; for what tongue was not current in Sicily? The young man's face was clouded, however, as if by no very pleasant recollection; then he burst out:—

"By the Mass, but I will not forget the high words that pompous knight spoke to me. If it be a sin to harbor an enmity, as Sebastian the chaplain says, why then"—and he crossed himself—"I will do penance in due time. But the quarrel must be wiped out first." And he clapped his hand on his sword-hilt to confirm his word.

"*Ai!*" muttered Herbert, "the churchmen talk of the days when spears shall be beaten into pruning-hooks—so they say it; but I say, let old Herbert be dead before that time dawns. What is life without its grudges? A good horse, a good sword, a good wife, and a good grudge—what more can an honest man want, be he knight or 'villain'?"

Richard yawned and commenced to scratch his head.

"Ah!" he commented, "it was very early we rose! I have not yet rubbed the vapors out of my crown. Sir Gerald, the knight travelling from Palermo who lodged with us, was given hospitality in my bed, and we talked of his horses and sweethearts till past midnight. Then Brochart, my best dog, was not content to sleep under the bed, as is his wont, but must needs climb up and lie upon me, and I was too slumberous to roll him off; so I have dreamt of imps and devils all night long."

He drew the strap tight that held the falcon to his glove, and led the way down the slope, remarking that since he had tested the new bird thus early, he would not hesitate to display her keenness to his father the Baron, who proposed to ride hawking that day. So they passed down the hill towards Cefalu with its white houses and squat-domed churches spreading out below them, a fair picture to the eye; for the summer sea, flecked by a few fishers' sails, stretched beyond, and the green hills far to either hand. Before them on a sheer eminence rose the battlemented keep of the castle, an ancient Saracenic fortress lately remodelled by the new Norman lords, the dawn falling bright and free on its amber-gray walls, and lending a rich blush to the stately crimson banner that from topmost rampart was trailing to the southern wind.

As the three went down the slope they struck the highroad just beyond a little clump of palm trees, and at the turn they ran on a travelling party that was evidently just setting forth from Cefalu. There were several women and priests on palfreys and mules, one or two mounted men-at-arms, and several pack animals; but the centre of the whole party was found in an enormous black horse, who at that instant had flung off his rider, and was tossing his forefeet in the air and raging and stamping as if by a demon possessed. Two stout Lombard serving-men were tugging at his bits, but he was kicking at them viciously, and almost worrying out of their grasp at every plunge. The women were giving little shrieks each time the great horse reared; the priests were crossing themselves and mumbling in Latin; and all their beasts were growing restive.

In a twinkling Richard was at the head of the raging brute, and with a mighty grip close to the jaw taught the foaming monster that he felt a master hand. A moment more and the horse was standing quiet and submissive. Richard resigned his hold to a servant, and turned to the strange travellers. A fat man in a prelate's dress, with a frosty red face, was pushing his white mule forward; Richard fell at once on his knees, for he recognized in the churchman My Lord Prelate Robert of Evroult, the Bishop of Messina. The good father was all thanks.

"*Dominus vobiscum*, my son; you have subdued a savage beast, to which I, a man of peace and not of war, should never have given harborage in my stables. And who may you be, for I have seen your face before, yet forget the name?"

"*Beatissime*, I am Richard Longsword, son of William Longsword, seigneur of this Barony of Cefalu."

"A right noble knight you will prove yourself, no doubt," commented the bishop; "when at Palermo do not fail to wait on me." And then, when he had given his blessing, he signed for the cavalcade to proceed.

"I thank your episcopal grace," quoth Richard, still very dutifully; and then his eye lit on another of the travellers,—one much more to his liking than the reverend prelate; for a lady sitting on a second white mule had thrust back the yellow veil from before her face, and the Norman caught a glimpse of cheeks red as a rose and white as milk, and two very bright eyes. Only a glimpse; for the lady, the instant he raised his gaze, dropped the veil; but she could not cover up those dark, gleaming eyes. Richly dressed was she, after the fashion of the Greeks, with red ribbons on her neck and a blue silk mantle and riding-hood. Her mule had a saddle of fine, embossed leather, and silver bits. At her side rode an old man in a horse-litter led by foot-boys; he also daintily dressed, and with the handsome, clear-cut features and venerable white beard of a Greek gentleman. The lady had dropped her veil at his warning nod, but now she bent over the mule and half motioned to Richard.

"You understand Greek, Sir Frank?" was her question; not in the mongrel Sicilian dialect, but in the stately tongue of Constantinople. In her voice was a little tremor and melody sweet as a springtime brook. The Norman bowed low.

"I understand and speak, fair lady," replied he, in her own tongue.

"How brave you have been!" cried the Greek, ingenuously; "I feared the raging horse would kill you."

Richard shrugged his shoulders and laughed:—

"It is nothing; I know horses as my second self."

But the lady shook her head, and made all the red ribbons and bright veil flutter. "I am not wont to be contradicted," said she; "a brave deed, I say. I did not think you Franks so modest."

The old man was leaning from the litter. "Let us ride, my daughter," he was commanding. The lady tapped her mule on the neck with the ivory butt of her whip. "Farewell, Sir Frank; St. Theodore keep you, if you make so light of peril!"

Richard bowed again in silence. He would not forget those eyes in a day, though he had seen many bright eyes at Count Roger's court. "*Ai*," cried he to his companions, "to the castle, or the hawking begins without us."

So they struck a brisk pace, whilst Herbert related how he had heard that the Greek gentleman, though a cripple, had stood high at the court of Constantinople, and that he had come to Cefalu on a Pisan ship a few days before. It was declared he was in exile, having fallen out of the Emperor's favor, and had been waiting at Cefalu until the bishop came up, giving them escort for the land journey to Palermo.

"As for the daughter, ah! she is what you have just seen,—more precious than all the relics under a church altar; but her father watches her as if she were made of gold!"

"I am vexed," replied the young man. "I did not know this before; it was uncourtly that persons of their rank should lodge in Cefalu, and no one of the castle wait on them." Then because one thought had led to another: "Tell me, Nasr, have you learned anything of that Spanish knight whom they say keeps himself at the country house of Hajib the Kadi? Assuredly he is no true cavalier, or he would not thus churlishly withdraw himself. There are none too many men of spirit here at Cefalu, for me to stick at making acquaintance."

Nasr showed his sharp, white teeth.

"Yes, I have gained sight of the Spaniard. From the brother-in-law of the cousin of the wife of the steward of the Kadi, I learn that he is called Musa, and is of a great family among the Andalusian Moslems."

Richard chuckled at the circuit this bit of news had taken; then pressed:—

"But you have seen him? What is he like?"

"If my lord's slave"—Nasr was always respectful—"may speak,—the Spanish knight is a very noble cavalier. I saw him only once, yet my eye tells if a man has the port of a good swordsman and rider. Assuredly this one has, and his eyes are as keen and quick as a shooting star."

"Yet he keeps himself very retired about the country house?"

"True, *Cid*, yet this, they say, is because he is an exile in Sicily, and even here has fears for his life; so he remains quiet."

"Foh!" grunted Richard, "I am weary of quiet men and a quiet life. I will go back to Palermo, and leave my father to eat his dinners and doze over his barony. I have the old grudge with De Valmont to settle, and some high words with Iftikhar, captain of the Saracen guards, will breed into a very pretty quarrel if I am bent on using them. Better ten broils than this sleepy hawking and feasting!"

So they crossed the drawbridge, entered the outer walls of the bailey, with its squalid outbuildings, weather-beaten stables, the gray, bare donjon looming up above; and entering a tiny chapel, Richard and Herbert fell on their knees, while a priest—none other than Sebastian, who had stood at Hildebrand's side—chanted through the "*Gloria*" and "*Preface*" But when it came time for the sermon, the baron's two bears, caged in the bailey, drowned the pious prosings with an unholy roar as they fell on one another; and the good cleric cried, "Amen!" that all might run and drag them asunder.

There by the cage Richard greeted his father,—a mighty man even in his old age, though his face was hacked and scarred, and showed little of the handsome young cavalier who had stolen the heart of every maid in Rouen. But in his blue Norman eyes still burned the genial fire; his tread was heavy as a charger's, his great frame straight as a plummet; a stroke of his fist could fell a horse, and his flail-like sword was a rush in his fingers. He was smooth-shaven; round his neck strayed a few white locks, all his crown worn bare by the long rubbing of his helmet. One could have learned his rank by the ermine lining on his under-mantle, by the gold plates on his sword belt and samite scabbard; but in a "villain's" dress he would have been known as one of those lordly cavaliers who had carried the Norman name and fame from the Scottish Marches to Thessaly.

Father and son embraced almost in bear-fashion, each with a crushing hug. Then Richard must needs kiss his mother, the fair Lady Margaret of Auvergne, sweet and stately in her embroidered

bleaunt, with golden circlet on her thick gray-gold hair; after her, Eleanor, a small maiden of sixteen, prim, demure, and very like her mother, with two golden braids that fell before her shoulders almost to her knees; and lastly, Stephen, a slight, dark lad, with a dreamy, contemplative face and an eye for books in place of arrow-heads, whom the family placed great hopes on: should he not be bishop, nay Pope, some bright day, if the saints favored?

"Hola, Richard!" cried the Baron, with a spade-like paw on his son's shoulder. "So you made test of the white falcon; does she take quarry?"

"A crane large enough to hold a dog at bay!"

"Praised be St. Maurice! Come, let us eat, and then to horse and away!"

So they feasted in the great hall, the plates and trenchers clattering, enough spiced wine to crack the heads of drinkers less hardened, the busy Norman varlets and Greek serving-maids buzzing to and fro like bees; for who could hawk with hunger under the girdle? A brief feast; and all had scattered right and left to make ready; but not for long.

Soon they were again in the court, the Baron, his sons, and Herbert, with Aimeri, the falconer, who had brought out his pride, as fine a half-dozen of goshawks and gerfalcons as might be found in all Sicily. The birds were being strapped fast to each glove, the grooms were leading out the tall palfreys, and the Baron stood with one hand on the pommel of his saddle, ready to dig his spurs and be away, when a mighty clangor arose from the bronze slab hanging by the gate.

"By St. Ouen," cried he, in a hot Norman oath, pausing in his spring, "what din is that? I have no mind to put off the hawking to bandy words with some wandering priest who would stop to swill my wine!"

But Herbert, the seneschal, had gone to the gate, and came back with his wicked eyes dancing in his head.

"Ho! My lord, there will be no hawking to-day!" he was bawling with all his lungs.

"Why not, rascal?" growled the Baron; yet he, too, began to sniff an adventure, like a practised war-horse.

"These people will make it clear to my lord."

And after the seneschal trooped three very dissimilar persons, who all broke out in a breath into howls and cries.

The first was a well-fed priest, but with a tattered cassock and a great red welt swelling upon his bare poll; the second, a dark-eyed Greek peasant of the country in a dress also much the worse for wear; and the third, a tall, gaunt old Moor, whose one-time spotless white kaftan and turban were dust-sprinkled and torn. They all cried and bellowed at once, but the priest got out the first coherent word.

"Rescue, noble Baron, rescue, for the love of Christ! My master, the Bishop of Messina, is fallen into the hands of the men of Belial, and I, even I, of all his following, am escaped to tell the tale. Rescue—"

And here the Greek broke in:—

"Oh! most august Frank, by St. Basil and St. Demetrius, I adjure you, save my sister, whom the pirates have carried away."

But the old Moor, with tears in his eyes, knelt and kissed the Baron's very feet.

"Oh! fountain of generosity, save my master, for the Berber raiders seek not his ransom, but his life. Rescue, O champion of the innocent!"

"By the splendor of God!" roared the Baron, with a great oath, "I make nothing of all this wind. What mean they, Herbert?" And the seneschal, who stood by all alert, replied curtly: "I gather, Moorish pirates have landed below the town toward Lascari to kill or kidnap the Spanish knight who dwells with Hajib the Kadi; and doubtless the Bishop of Messina and his company have fallen into their hands while passing along the road. It may be, my lord,"—and the sly fellow winked, as if the hint would be needed,—"that if we ride forth, we may nip them before they regain the ship. The Kadi's villa is far inland."

Baron William was no man of words when deeds were needed. In a trice he had clapped to his mouth the great olifant—the ivory horn that dangled at his baldric, and its notes rang out sharp and clear. Twice he wound a mighty blast; and almost before the last peal died away the castle was transformed. The Norman men-at-arms, dozing and dicing in the great hall, were tearing their shields from the wall, their lances from the cupboards and presses. Forth sounded that merriest of jingling, the clinking of good ring-steel hauberks as they dragged them on. In the stables feverish grooms girt fast the saddles on the stamping *destrers*—the huge war-horses. And up from other parts of the castle rose the boom of kettledrums, the clash and brattle of cymbals, as the Baron's Saracens, nigh half of his garrison, came racing into the bailey, clattering their brass-studded targets with their bow staves, and tossing their crooked cimeters. Richard and his father had rushed into the donjon, but were back quick as thought with their mail shirts jangling about them, and stout steel caps hiding all the face save the eyes. The good Baron was snorting and dancing for the fray as if it had been his first battle; or as if he were what the *jongleurs* said

of Charlemagne, "two hundred years old, scarred by a hundred fields, yet the last to weary of the mêlée."

Good Lady Margaret stood by the gate as the troops rode out, after her son and husband had kissed her. Dear woman! it was not the first time she had seen them ride forth perchance to deadlier fields, but she had not yet learned to love the blasts of the war-horn. Until they returned she would spend the time in the chapel, betwixt hope and fear, telling it all to "Our Lady of Succors."

"Will you not come with us?" cried Richard, gayly, to Sebastian, the old priest, who stood at his mother's side. "Play Roland's Bishop Turpin, who slew so many infidels."

The good man shrugged his shoulders, and said with a sigh: "Not slaying infidels, but slaying for slaying's sake you lust after, my son. When you ride for Christ's love only, then perhaps I ride with you; but St. George shield you—if not for your sake, at least for ours."

The troops cantered forth, twenty good Norman men-at-arms; as many light-mailed Saracen riders,—the Baron and his son in full armor. At the turn in the road below the castle Richard waved his kite-shaped shield, as last salute to the little group by the drawbridge.

"Let us go to the chapel, my children," said Lady Margaret to her younger son and her daughter. "We can do nothing here."

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# CHAPTER II

## HOW RICHARD WON THREE FRIENDS

Little heeded Richard Longsword the warnings of priest or mother, as with a good horse between his knees, a stout shield tossed over his back, and the white hawk blinking under her hood and perched upon his shoulder, he spurred ahead of his troop, leading their mad gallop. One thought, be it confessed, was uppermost in his mind,—the Greek lady with the yellow veil and red ribbons, —she the booty of Berber raiders, while he was near by with a keen sword in his scabbard! St. Maurice forbid! So furious was his riding that the Baron, who was foaming behind, must needs shout to him not to outpace the company. The ground sped fast under the flying hoofs. A fair and fruitful country it was, had he given it heed: fields of cotton, orchards of orange and lemon, flower masses scattered here and there bright as the rainbow, and the great mountains swelling up above all, with Pizzo Antenna and San Salvadore in the background, their mighty summits standing forth as brown and green crystal against the azure.

There was a kind, sweet wind creeping in from the sea, bearing a breath of the pure brine; and to the sea were threading the silver rivulets from the meadows, the racing brooks from the mountain sides. Small place had all this in the young Norman's mind. Already as they cantered westward toward the foothills, his keen eye had lit on a sluggish column of smoke, at sight whereof he gave his flying steed another thrust with the rowels; and all the riders at his back, when they saw, set up one gleeful yell,—they were on track of the raiders. Now frightened Moslem or Greek peasants scampered past them, too scared to whimper out more than a word as to where the foe awaited. Then as they swung round a turn in the road, and cleared a clump of manna trees, a woman came flying to meet them,—old, but decently dressed, and throwing up her hands she gave one mighty howl to Richard.

"Oh! Sir Frank; rescue, rescue for my dear mistress! Save her from the Hagarenes!" For so the Greeks called all the race of Ishmael.

Richard bent low in his saddle. "Never fear, good woman; where are the raiders? I will rescue your lady!"

"There!" cried the old woman, screaming again. "Oh! they will kill us all! St. Irene, St. John, St. Basil—"

But Longsword did not wait for her to finish her adjuration. Right at the turn in the road were advancing a knot of men in bright barbaric dresses with tossing spears and brandished cimeters. When they caught sight of their galloping pursuers, they set up a hideous din from horns and cymbals and tabors; and the shout of the Baron's party was met by a louder from fourfold as many throats.

The Baron had pricked up abreast of his son, and one sweeping glance over the freebooters' array told the story.

"Nigh two hundred," he muttered under his helmet, "and think themselves too strong to be molested. We have met them as they return to their ship. Berbers mostly, but I see the fair skins of some Christian renegadoes. They have captured some horses, and their prisoners are strapped to them, in the centre of the band. By the peacock! it will be a pretty fight ere we get at them! But we have our mounts, and one rider matches ten on the ground."

The pirates stood on a little clearing flanked by vineyard hedges; and a low stone wall lay betwixt them and their assailants. The horde were drawing up in close mass: the best-armored men without, bowmen within, prisoners and booty in the centre. A tall mounted African in a splendid suit of silvered armor and in gilded casque was wheeling about, ordering, brandishing his long cimeter,—evidently the chief. Just before the pirates lay the wall, which a mounted enemy must clear at a bound to strike them. Baron William turned to Herbert.

"Ready, my men?"

"Ready, lord."

Then again the Baron wound the horn, and the restless horses felt no spur when the whole band as one swept forward. Right as they came to the leap of the wall a deadly arrow fire smote them. Three steeds went down: four riders reeled; but the others took the bound and crashed upon the Berbers. Four and five to one were the odds, but not a rider that had not slain his tens and scattered his hundreds; and the weight of the Norman sword and axe the luckless raiders felt with cost. Like a sledge shattering the wood the impact smote them: there was one struggle, one wild push and rally to maintain the spear hedge. It was broken, and the Baron's men were cutting hand to hand, and hewing down the Berbers. Loud ran out the Norman war-cry, "*Nostre Dame, Dieu ay nous ade*," and the very shout struck terror to the hearts of the quaking pirates. An instant of deadly fencing man to man, and they were scattered. Like rats they were breaking through the thickets and dashing down the hillside; close on their heels flew Nasr and his Saracens, shooting and hewing with might and main.

But Richard had higher foes in view. The instant the pirates scattered, their six riders had struck out boldly, pushing their beasts over the walls and through the groves and hedges, all flying northward toward their only safety,—the ships. Now behind each of four riders was strapped a prisoner, and it was on these last that Richard cast chiefest eye; especially on one, for from the prisoner's throat he could see trailing red ribbons. Leaving the men to hunt down the fugitives on foot, he thrust his steed by a long leap over a hedge and was away after the mounted raiders, little recking whether he had a follower.

The wind whistled in his teeth as his good horse sped across ploughed lands, and took ditch or garden wall with noble bounds. Now he was gaining on the rearmost fugitive, a lean, black African on a stolen steed, who was weighted in his race by no less a prisoner than the reverend bishop. Richard laughed behind his helm, as he saw the holy man writhing and twisting on his uneasy pillion, and coughing forth maledictions at every jolt in the mad chase. The Norman swung up abreast the Moor, and struck out with his sword. The raider made shift to wield his cimeter, but one stroke cleft him down, and as he fell he dragged the bishop with him, who landed on the crupper with a mighty thud that made him howl to all the saints.

Richard glanced back; two or three of the Baron's men were in the far distance, the rest scattered; only Herbert on a well-tried horse flew close at hand.

"Help, fair son! *Maledicte*, I perish—I die a martyr, butchered by paynims!" groaned the bishop. But Richard left him to salve his own bruises, and pricked the faster. Be the foe two or twenty, he would follow the lady of the red ribbons. Swift as a dream he flew on. Before him on the greensward lay the old Greek, thrust from the pillion to lighten the load of his captor. Feebly he struggled to rise as Richard swept past. "Ah, young Frank, for Christ's dear sake save my daughter!" was his cry and groan.

"That will I!" snorted the Norman, and he smote his steed's neck with the flat of his great sword. The bishop, the Greek had vanished; hedge, ravine, brooklet, he swept through them, over them; nor knew how often St. George saved him from headlong fall. The Berbers were lashing and prodding with their cimeter points; but Richard was well mounted, only the great black horse bearing the captive lady sped ahead despite all Richard's speed.

A stone wall,—all the fugitives cleared it saving the last, behind whom was strapped a young man, fast prisoner. As Longsword flew, he saw this rider miss the leap, crash downward. In a twinkling all the pursued, save the guard of the lady, wheeled, charged back. But Richard had reached the wall, passed with a bound, and for a long instant it was foil and fence, his life dancing on three cimeter points at his breast. Then, sudden as a thunderclap, there was a new blade opposed to the Berbers,—the erstwhile captive had burst his bands, leaped from under the kicking charger, disarmed his guard, and was in the midst of the fray, giving blow for blow. But at sight of him, all three pirates forsook the Norman, and rained their blows upon the prisoner.

"*Allah!* Hew him down, though we die for it!" was the shout of their chief. The captive parried all three as one; ere the second stroke, Richard had sped the first raider past sword-play. His new ally beat down a second with a sweeping blow. The third cried "Mercy!"—but neither gave him heed. The released prisoner, a light-skinned young Moslem of Spain, wiry as a hound, nimble as a cat, had caught the rein of a fallen Berber, and swung himself into the dead man's saddle, touching no stirrup, almost ere Richard could admire.

"As the Most High lives," cried the Spaniard, as if rescue were mere incident, "after the lady! The ship is near!" And ride they did, though the black horse was far ahead now, despite his burden.

"Ride, Frank, ride!" shouted the other, leaning over his steed's neck, and seeming to lend speed by very touch and voice. "Allah smite us, if she is taken!"

Over the foothills, across the rolling country, the feet of their horses springing like on-rushing winds, raced the twain. They saw blue water before an orange grove, and not far away the pirate's refuge,—the ship. And still the black horse held them in chase, though losing slowly. Richard flung the target from his back, to make greater speed. He could see the lady struggling on her uneasy pillion. Her captor with one hand gripped her fast; with the other, smote and prodded with his cimeter. The flecks of blood were on the black steed's flanks. The lady plucked at the Berber's throat with strength born of despair.

"Rescue, rescue, for the love of Christ!" rang her cry; and as if in answer, the great charger began to plunge in his gallop, nigh casting his double mount. The Berber wrestled him down, with a mighty strain on the reins; but in the instant Richard had gained apace. "Ai! St. Michael!" he thundered, his good sword swung almost in stroke. But at the shout there was a wild yell from beyond the orange trees, and as he swept on he saw a score or more pirates rushing with drawn swords to greet them,—and through the grove the tacklings of the ship. Straight toward the midst of the Berbers sped the black horse: a moment,—the lady would be lost indeed!

"Rescue for the love of Christ!" again her wail in reply to the triumphant howl of her captor. The Norman's hand was on his shoulder; down he plucked the white falcon, unhooded, tossed in air,—one circle she cut, then sped straight in the flying raider's eyes.

Vainly he strove to buffet away with a fist; the instant the grip on the reins relaxed, the black horse was plunging, rearing, and Longsword was abreast. With one long stroke he smote the Berber from the saddle; the lady reeled also, strapped fast. But the Norman, proud in his might, calmed the black horse with one hand on the bits; drew his blade once across the thong, releasing the captive. The pirate tumbled to earth with never a groan.

Barely in time—the twenty were all about them now; but Richard Longsword fought as twenty, the Spaniard as twenty more. "A houri! A great prize! A great ransom!" howled the raiders, seeking their prey; but they ran on doom. For the Norman mounted, and in his armor dashed them down with his heavy sword; and those whom the Spaniard's cimeter bit never cried more. Yet with all the death twinkling about, Richard held his steed and mailed breast betwixt the foe and the lady. Even while he fought, her clear Greek voice encouraged. "Holy Mother, that was a well-struck blow! Oh, were I but a man with a sword!"

How long the mounted two could have beat back the unmounted twenty only the wise saints know; for just as Richard's hauberk had turned the third javelin, and his eyes danced with stars when his helmet dinted, a new cry rang from behind.

"Forward, brothers! Slay! death!" And a bolt from Herbert's crossbow crashed through a pirate's target,—herald of the advent of the man-at-arms and fifteen riders more; at sight whereof the pirates—guessing at last that it was all over with their comrades who had gone inland—fled like partridges through the grove, over the white sands; and before Herbert could rein in his steaming beast, they heard the blocks creaking, as feverish hands made sail and warped the ship to sea. Not all thus to escape; for the Normans nipped several, whom they tugged away, strapped to the saddle-bows, after having searched them for jewels down to their shoes.

Richard looked about him. The lady, agile as a *fée*, had alighted, and was standing, clinging with both hands to an orange tree, panting for breath,—as did all. The Spaniard had dismounted also, and stood leaning against the saddle.

While waiting breath for speech, Longsword surveyed the rescued, finding in both need of more than one glance. The costume of the Moor had been sadly dealt with, but his silken vest and the shawl at his girdle were of the finest silk, and set off a most shapely frame. He was tall, wiry, supple as a blooded charger; and no dress would have concealed a face so intelligent, ingenuous, winsome, that, as Richard looked thereon, he had but a single thought,—"I would know more of this man." The countenance was a fine oval, the forehead not high but prominent; the eye, brilliant, deep, and dark; the small mouth, shaded by a black curly beard; the skin not swarthy, yet tinged with pale brown, a gentle bronzing of the sun-loved vegas. But these are parts only, and the whole—how much fairer was it than any part! For the face thrilled with eager, active intelligence, and the eyes seemed but open windows to a soul,—a soul perchance to admire, to reverence, to love. And as Richard beheld him, he felt a magic current of fellow-feeling drawing him to the Spaniard, ere they had spoken ten syllables.

Yet not all the Norman's gaze was for the Moslem—far from it. The lady no longer wore her yellow veil: the red ribbons were in tatters round her throat; her blue mantle had many a rent; but of these, who would think? She stood with her brown hair all dishevelled to the winds, and underneath the flying tresses one could see those bright eyes—dark, bright, and very merry; a high, white forehead, small red lips, and features that seemed smoothed and rounded like some marble image of the old pagans, which Sebastian had called "a snare of Satan." But this was no snare; for these cheeks were moulded with a soft texture and bloom like a pale rose; not quite fair, like Norman maidens, but just tinted enough to show the breath of the sun. All this Richard saw, and was not awestruck nor abashed, as in the presence of many handsome dames; but simply delighted, and, as chance would have it, the lady herself broke silence.

"By St. Theodore, Sir Frank," quoth she, holding out both hands to Richard, "will you say again to my face that you can do nothing brave?" And here she laughed so merrily, that the Norman was laughing too when he replied, having taken the hands:—

"Ah! dear lady, it is the white falcon you should thank, if any praise be due."

"And no praise for the falcon's trainer?" quoth she, still laughing; then with a sudden turn, while the tears almost stood in her eyes, "*Eu!* Brave, noble sir, what may I do to repay! Kneel, fall at your feet, kiss them?"—and half she made to do so, but Richard shrank back, as if horrified.

"St. Michael forbid!" cried he; "rather this, let me kneel and kiss your hand, blessing Our Lady she has suffered me to save you!"

"But the peril was very great!" protested the lady, while Richard did as he wished, and kissed a hand very small and white.

"But the joy of peril is greater in such a cause!" he flashed back, rising. There was a shadow flitting across that bright face.

"My father?" the question came slowly. "He is—safe?"

"I saw him released; have no fear. I swore to him I would save you." And the flush of pleasure was Richard's tenfold payment.

"Let us go to him," said the Norman, as he bade one of the men-at-arms arrange a pillion and ride back with the Greek toward the scene of the first battle.

"Ah! may all the dear saints bless you and your good men—I would give my life for my father!" said she.

So while the lady rode ahead, Richard galloped stirrup to stirrup with the Spaniard. He had needed no words to tell him that the Moslem was a notable cavalier, and the Spaniard had dispelled all doubts by a frank declaration of his name and position.

"Know, O Frank, that you have this day won the eternal gratitude of Musa, son of Abdallah, the late Vizier of Al'mu'tamed, King of Cordova, though I am better known as 'the Sword of Granada,' for in that city have I spent much of my life."

And the Christian bowed his casqued head in humblest reverence, asking:—

"Then truly have I saved that famous knight, who, they say, held the lists at Toledo, during the truce, against the Cid Campeador and all his cavaliers?"

"I had that fortune," said the Spaniard, smiling, and returning the bow; "but," and he spoke lightly, "I would not have you, Sir Frank, regard me in an awesome fashion; for, believe me, after striking the blows I saw you give to-day, you may, I think, break lances with the best, and owe deference to none."

"Ah, my lord," cried Richard, "it has been a great privilege for a simple 'bachelor' like myself to be of service to so great a warrior."

The Moslem laughed, and made reply: "No, I will not be 'lorded' by you. I think I know an equal and a friend when I set eyes on him. To you my name is Musa; and yours—?"

"Richard Longsword," was the answer.

"Then, O Richard, we know one another and are brothers."

Then and there, while the horses were at a merry pace, the two young men leaned over their saddles and caught one another's hands. And at that moment was stricken a friendship that was destined to bind with hooks of steel through more than one fateful year. As if to cement the tie, Longsword passed the flask at his belt to the Spaniard.

"Drink, friend, for you have seen enough this day to chill your veins, even if your prophet forbids wine."

"I am but a lax Moslem," replied Musa, with another of his soft smiles. And taking the flask, he clapped it to his lips. "'Wine of Paradise'!" cried he, when he took it away. "Ah, an hour since I expected that I would be soon drinking from the cups of the houris in the real Paradise, or more likely"—with a sly wag of the head—"scorching in no gentle fire!"

"Then the raiders sought your life, not your ransom?" asked the Norman.

"Assuredly; do not think I have lain so hidden here at Cefalu because, like a dervish or one of your monks, I enjoy solitude. I fled Spain because my blood is too princely to make my presence safe to Yusuf, the Almoravide, who has come from Africa to save us Spanish Moslems from conquest by the Christians, and who has conquered us himself. When Granada fell and its treasures were scattered as booty to his rude Berber officers, and when Seville and all Andalusia were in his hands, imprudently I spoke of the days of our great Kalifs. The words were remembered by enemies and duly reported. Presently I heard that Yusuf suspected me of leading a revolt in Cordova against his rule, and that he keenly desired my head. I will not tell how I escaped to my Cid Campeador at Valencia, and thence to King Alfonso of Castile. But the Almoravide's arms are long. Nowhere in Spain would I be safe. So I came to Sicily, where I have relatives, hoping by lying close to elude his agents; but in vain, as has just been proved!"

"So," asked Richard, "this raid was on your account?"

"Of course," replied Musa; "I was surprised at the country house of Hajib this morning, and taken before I could kill more than two of the pirates. In their chief I recognized a corsair long in the

service of Yusuf. They aimed to bear me in chains to Cordova, that the Almoravide might gloat over me alive, ere calling the headsman. You saw how they rained their blows at me, when they saw rescue at hand."

"The saints be praised, I saved you!" exclaimed the Norman. "You were indeed in the very jaws of death."

"Aye," was the careless answer, "and I owe you all thanks; yet this is not the first time I have imagined I would see no more mornings."

"Ah, my lord, you are a great cavalier!" cried Richard, enthusiastically.

The Spaniard shook his hand in warning.

"I am not 'lord' to you, brother! If Allah favors our friendship, what brave adventures shall we not have together!"

Longsword made no reply. The Moor had captivated him: he felt that he could ride through a thousand men-at-arms with such a friend at his side. Presently they drew rein under a wide-spreading, venerable chestnut tree that bowed over the highway. Here were gathered the Baron and most of his men: here was my lord bishop sitting on the ground upon a saddle, still groaning and rubbing his bruised shins, while two scared priests were shivering beside him, and muttering a *gratias Deo* for their deliverance from the infidel. The old Greek was also there, resting on a saddle-bag; but when the young Norman galloped up he made shift to rise; and his daughter, who had already left her pillion, hastened to say:—

"This, my father, is that brave Frankish nobleman to whom we owe so much," and then to Longsword: "And this is my father, the Cæsar Manuel Kurkuas, late of Constantinople, but who now is exile, and travelling to Palermo."

The old Kurkuas, despite his lameness, bowed in the stately fashion of that ceremonious courtesy which was his inheritance.

"Lord Richard," said he, in his sonorous native tongue, for he already knew the Norman's name, "the blessings of a father be yours; and if at any time, by word or deed, I may repay you, your wish shall be my highest law."

But the daughter broke out, a little hotly:—

"Oh! father, not in so solemn and courtly a manner thank him! We are not in 'His Divine Majesty's' palace, by the Golden Horn. Take him by the hand as I have done; tell him that we are his friends forever, and that if we go back to Constantinople, we will take him with us, and share with him all the riches and honor that would belong to a real Kurkuas."

The old man listened to her flow of eager words, half pleased, half alarmed; then, with a deprecatory shrug, exclaimed:—

"Pardon a thousand times, my lord, if I am too old to speak all that lies at heart, save in a cold and formal way. Yet pardon, also, my daughter; for she has so unbridled a tongue that if you come to know her, strong must your friendship be, or she will drive you from her by sheer witless chatter."

Whereupon, before Richard could reply, the lady returned to the charge. "Yes, truly, I am half of Frankish blood myself. And I think it better to speak from my heart and declare 'I love you' and 'I hate you,' than to move my lips softly and politely and say things that mean nothing."

The Greek shrugged again, as if accustomed to such outbursts. "You have lost your veil," he said gently, raising his eyes.

"Assuredly," was the answer; "nor do Frankish ladies wear them." Then, turning to Richard, "Tell me, Sir Norman, do you see anything about me to be ashamed of, that I must veil my face?"

The remark was advanced so naturally, in such perfectly good faith, that Longsword, without the least premeditation, answered as readily as if to his sister:—

"I see no reason why you should veil, my lady."

"Then do not speak of it again, dear father," said she.

The mules of the bishop's party, which had been taken when the pirates fell upon them, had been recovered, and the bishop began to stop groaning over his bruises. The Baron remarked that, although the baggage had been retaken, it was too late to repack and make the journey that day. One and all, they must go back to Cefalu and enjoy the hospitality of the castle. The bishop demurred, when he saw that the Moslem Musa was bidden to share the feast; but he was very hungry, and reflected that Christ and Mohammed were impiously good comrades in Sicily. He and the priests with the Greek and his daughter mounted the mules and started away, just as Herbert rode up with the tidings that the Berbers' ship had long since put to sea. As for the great black horse that had nigh carried Mary away from her rescuers, the grateful prelate bestowed him upon Richard. "He was an unruly beast," declared the bishop, "*furiosus, impetuosus, perditus equus*, in whom a devil beyond all doubt had entered; and if the Baron's son desired him, he was welcome, though he feared, instead of a gift, he was bestowing a cursing." But Richard beheld the huge crupper and chest of the great beast, watched his mighty stride, and reflected that such

a *destrer* would bear quite as safely in battle as one with the prized white coat and greyhound feet. Therefore he thanked the bishop and led the horse away.

So they fared back to the castle, while the Cefalu people gave them cheers and flowers as they passed along the way; but the fairest welcome was on Lady Margaret's face when they all pounded over the drawbridge.

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# CHAPTER III

## HOW RICHARD WON A BROTHER

A notable feast it was the good Lady Margaret set before her unexpected guests; for if the warning was short, the eager hands were many, and the day before there had been rare hunting. The worthy Baron, her lord, took pride in the goodly Norman habit of sitting long at table, and would have found eight hours none too many for meat and drink, had there been another to keep him company. And if this feast ended sooner, there was no lack of good food and better cheer. Hincmar, the stately chamberlain, marshalled his guests up to the fountain at the door of the great hall, where they washed their hands in punctilious order of precedence. The hall itself was hung with rare tapestries, the floor was strewn with fresh mint and cornflags; over the diners' benches were cast rich carpets of the East, and for the host and his immediate relatives and guests were gilt chairs of embossed leather. Then the serving-lads went in and out, bringing wine-soup in three kinds in remembrance of the Trinity, and flesh and fowl, from a stuffed cormorant to a haunch of bear's flesh. Last of all the great drinking-horns began to pass to and fro, and the skins of Cyprian wine from the cellars, to empty.

The Baron had placed the bishop at his right hand at the head of the long table, on his left the Greek Cæsar. But a little lower sat Richard, and beside him Musa and Mary Kurkuas; and while they were busy over the trenchers talk flew fast, and these in brief were the stories they told one another.

William Longsword, the present Baron of Cefalu, had been a Norman seigneur of noble lineage and slender estates near the ducal capital of Rouen. The Longswords were an ancient house. They boasted their descent from that notable William Longsword who had succeeded to the sovereignty of Rollo the Norman; yet, as too often, a great name did not mean great fiefs, and young William's best fortune was the weight of his battle-axe. But that battle-axe was very heavy. At Val-es-Dunes, when William the Bastard crushed his rebellious barons, Longsword had won the great Duke's highest favor. At Hastings none had struck doughtier blows than he. For a moment he had dreamt of a broad English barony and a Saxon heiress. But when the new king was at York there rose ill-blood and a hint to the monarch that the mutiny of certain Anjou mercenaries was due to his vassal.

One morning Longsword finding that fetters, not fiefs, waited him in England, fled just in time to Flanders, and went south to *gaaignant*, "to go a gaining," as the Normans put it, seeking fortune wherever the saints favored. In Auvergne he had married the daughter of a mountain baron, but had drifted on to Italy, had served with Counts Robert Guiscard and Roger, his brother, in Calabria, Epirus, and Sicily; and at last when Noto, the last Saracen stronghold in Sicily, fell, and Count Roger rewarded his faithful cavaliers, William Longsword had found himself Lord of Cefalu, with a stout castle and a barony of peaceful and industrious Moslems and Greeks for vassals; now for four years past he had ceased roving, and dreamed of handing down a goodly seigneury to his firstborn.

Thus Richard told his father's story, and Mary related more briefly how her father—and she proudly recounted his titles—was the "preëminently august" Cæsar Manuel Kurkuas; whose family was of the most noble and wealthy of the whole imperial city. He had been a great warrior in his day, until a crippling wound in the Patzinak war had forced the one-time "commander of the guards" to accept the peaceful office of "first prefect" of the capital. And in this position he might have died in honor and prosperity, had it not come to Emperor Alexius's ears that he had intrigued in favor of Constantine, the son of the dead sovereign Romanus, who was just raising the rebel standard. "And so," explained his daughter, quite simply, for she was bred at the Grecian court, "the Princess Anna Comnena, who is my kind friend, gave me to understand that all was not well with my father, and the Grand Chamberlain let fall that 'his eyes were in danger.' Therefore, with the aid of St. Basil and our cousin, the High Admiral, we made escape on a Venetian ship, and it was well we did; for Constantine, I hear, has been captured and blinded, and if we had been taken, the like would have befallen my father, and I would have been cast into the convent of Antiochus 'to live with the angels,' as they call taking the veil, at Constantinople."

"Allah forbid!" cried Musa, who had been following all her story, and Richard winced when he thought of those brown locks falling under the shears.

The Greek gave a little shrug and shiver. "Ah!" said she, "let us not speak of it. Yet I do not blame the Emperor. He has many enemies to guard against." And she paused.

"But you said you were half a Frank," said Richard, wishing to turn the conversation.

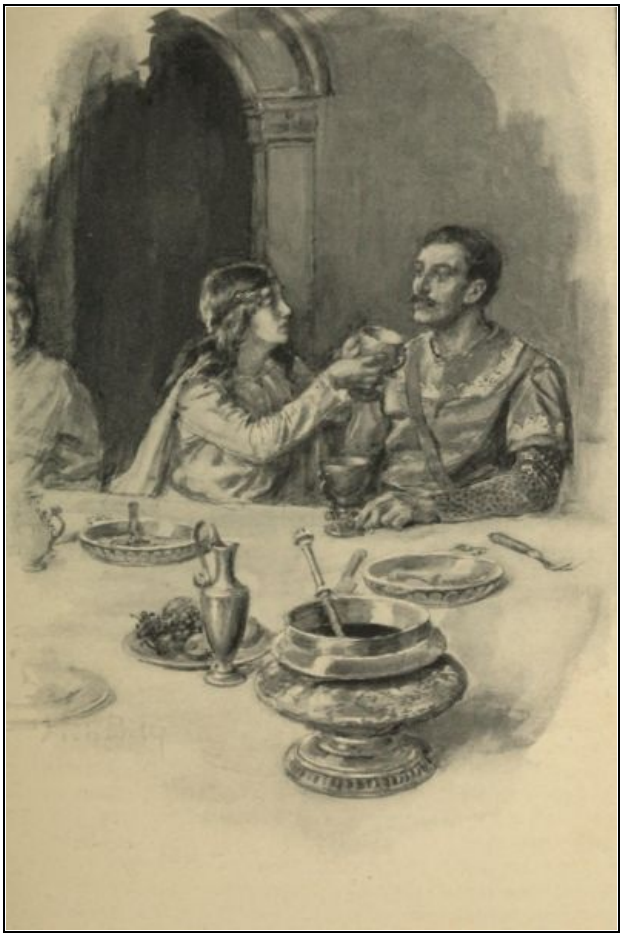
"Yes, truly, my father was envoy to the Duke of Aquitaine. In Provence he met my mother, daughter of the Baron of La Haye. She must have been a beautiful woman. They say all Constantinople was at her feet, when my father brought her there—his bride. But she died when I was a very little girl. I can only remember her bright eyes and sweet face." Another pause; and Richard did not try to break it. Was he not conscious in his innermost soul, that there were bright eyes and a sweet face very close to his own? That for an hour past, as the fashion was, he had been dipping his hand in the same bowl where also dipped another hand, soft, and white, and delicate? The evening was stealing on. Now the ruddy torches were sputtering in their cressets along the wall; and the glow fell softly over the feasters, seeming to hide witchery and sweet madness in every flickering shadow. For the first time in his life Richard Longsword felt a strange intoxication stealing over him. Not the wine—he had not drained a beaker. Up at the head of the table the Baron and the bishop were matching bumpers, and the former, between his draughts, was trying to tell Cæsar Manuel some tale of the Durazzo campaign in which they had both fought, though on opposing sides. At the foot of the table the Norman men-at-arms were splashing their liquor, and roaring broad jests at the Greek serving-maids. Musa, having satisfied hunger, sat with his long eyelashes cast down in dreamy Oriental revery. Only for one face and for one voice did Richard have sight or hearing. The princess held the Majolica cup to her lips, tasted, held it toward the Norman.

"See," said she, softly, "you have saved my father's liberty—perhaps his life—and me"—the color half left the wonderful face while she spoke—"from death or worse." The cup trembled as she shuddered at the thought. "When the Berbers seized me, I pleaded with all the saints to let me die,—better a thousand deaths than to breathe out one's life captive in an African harem!"

"By Our Lady, speak not of it," came from Richard,—he, too, trembling. But the brightness had darted again into the Greek's eyes while she continued: "And now attend—the reward! Know, brave Frank, that three months since a 'supremely august' prince, close to Alexius's self, would have given half his inheritance for gift like this!"

And with her own hands she held the cup to his lips. Richard drank. What else possible? He felt himself caught in a tide irresistible, too delicious in its caress to escape from if he might. Was the wine fire, that it burned through every vein? Yet the very flame bore a sweetness, a delight beyond all thought; the hot pain drowned in the ecstasy. He did not know what he replied, but the lady was answering.

"*Eu!* What joy I take in you Franks, whom I have never seen before to-day. When first did we meet? This morning beside the raging horse? I think I have known and admired you these score of years!"



**"THE CUP TREMBLED AS AT THE VERY THOUGHT SHE SHUDDERED"**

"I?" quoth Richard, wool-gathering.

The lady laughed at her indiscretion.

"You do well to ask. At times my father rails at me; 'Daughter, you open your mind to strangers like a casket.' Again I am silent, hidden, locked fast, as my mood alters. Be it so, I am the open casket to-night. I will speak it all forth. The saints grant I may dwell amongst you Franks; how much better to crush down a raging horse with one touch, than to know all the wisdom of Plato!"

"Why better?" asked the Norman, never taking his gaze from that face all rosy in the flickering light.

"Why?" her voice rose a little, and the brightness of the torches was in her eyes. "Let others con the musty parchments,—a thousand times better are the men who *do*, as you of the West,—than the weaklings who only *know*. Plato babbled foolishness describing his 'perfect nation,' for when he strove to realize it—failure!"

"These are riddles, sweet lady!" cried Richard; "who was this Plato—some pagan long since in hell?"

Whereat the princess began to laugh afresh; not offensively, but sweetly as a running brook; so that the other would have said a hundred witless things to make her continue. Then she answered, her eyes dancing, and Richard thought he saw the lips of the dreamy Spaniard twitch: "Yes, for all his mist-hung cobwebs, he must have broiled in no common fire. But I love better to talk of coursing and falconry; that science better befits a Christian!"

"St. Stephen!" blurted out the Norman, pricking his ears, "can you ride and hawk?"

"Do you think I sat smelling inkhorns and tangling silk yarn all day in our palace by the Golden Gate? I had my own Arabian palfrey, my own dear goshawks: not four months have flown since I hunted with the Princess Anna over the lovely hills of the Emperor's preserves beyond the Sweet Waters of Europe. O"—and Richard almost thought her about to weep—"St. Irene, pity my horse and the birds, their mistress so far away!"

"By the Mass," began Richard, more flighty than ever, "you shall find our Sicilian birds put the best of Constantinople to shame. But the saints are very kind not to let you grow more sad over your loss; next to losing one's kinsfolk, what worse than to lose horse or falcon!" The lady had kissed a second cup, and pressed it to his lips. "Drink, then, in token of the merry rides we shall have side by side, if you come to wait on us at Palermo!"

And Richard drank, while all the time he felt the tide of intoxication sweeping him onward. Glancing into the Greek's eyes, he knew in a half-conscious way that a like spirit possessed her too. Had they been alone, only the saints know what might have befallen. Richard's voice was very loud when he answered, "No, by the Splendor of God, you must stay at Cefalu,—you shall ride my best palfrey; fly the white falcon!" The lady cut him short with another laugh, her face still very merry: "St. Basil, make them deaf; they all look at us! What have we been doing!"

Richard started, as from a dream: father, mother, bishop, the Cæsar, were all looking upon them. The Lady Margaret was turning a warning face upon Richard, but the Cæsar addressed his daughter austerely. "My child, these noble Franks and your valiant rescuer will take away strange tales of your conduct at this feast. Believe me, kind lords, my daughter is commonly less bold and unmaidenly than to-night. This has been a strange day for us, and we must pardon her much."

"You forget the princess is not your sister," added Lady Margaret, severely, her eyes on Richard; and the Baron was ready with his own word, but the younger Greek cut all short.

"Yes, by St. Theodore," was her saucy cry, "this has been a strange day for us all. And if you, my father, think my saving is over-dear at two cups of wine, let the Berbers snatch me off again! But give no blame to my Lord Richard, for it was I that began, led on, and made the fire tenfold hotter."

Cæsar Manuel hobbled to his feet.

"I do not blame my Lord Richard," said he, curtly; "I only fear lest closer knowledge make him repent your friendship. Most gallant Baron, and you, noble lady," continued he, bowing in courtly fashion to both, "I am feeble, and my daughter has diverted you enough. With your pardon, let us go to our chambers."

The Baron muttered something to the effect that there was still much wine—a pity to miss it. Mary rose and deliberately allowed Richard to bend and kiss her hand, courtesied before the Baron and his lady, knelt while the half-tipsy bishop hiccoughed out a benediction. Stately as a queen, she drew herself up, but her last shaft was darted at the Cæsar. "Dear father, are you not sorry I am so little contrite?" then to Richard, "And you, my lord, do not forget we go to Palermo!" There was a rustle of her dress; Manuel limped after; three serving-varlets brought up the Greeks' rear. They were gone. Richard started again—looked about. His mother and sister had risen also. The Baron and the bishop had reached that stage of joviality where the holy man was commencing to sing and brandish his flagon. Richard tasted the wine—insipid; how unlike the sweet fire of the cups proffered by the lady! Musa had glided from his revery,—was casting about sharply.

"My head throbs, though I have drunk little," professed the Norman. "Do you wish more?" Musa shook his head. "Then come upon the battlements; the bishop's bellowing makes one mad."

They mounted through darkened chambers, up dizzy ladders, to the summit of the donjon. It was a murky, cloudy night that greeted them as they emerged from the trap-door and stood alone on the stone-girt platform, with the land and the sea one vague black haze below. No moon, no stars; only a red flash on the ground where the light streamed from a loophole in the great hall. No sound save the faint shouts of the drinkers, echoing from far below, and their own measured footfalls. They paced the platform for a few moments in silence. Then the Norman broke forth in Arabic:—

"Musa, son of Abdallah, we have sworn brotherhood. Our friendship is young: may I put it to a test?"

"My hands, my wits, my head if need be, all yours, my brother," replied the Spaniard, never hesitating.

"Help me to gain the hand of this lady!"

Their hands rested on one another's shoulders. Richard felt—but perchance he was wrong—a quiver run through the Moslem; only for an instant, if at all. Very naturally Musa replied:—

"Had you said, 'Kill me this enemy,' how easy to aid you! But to win the lady, what may I do? I am no magician to mix you philters. In her eyes I am only Moslem, and Infidel. She has not learned, as have you Sicilian Normans, that Christian and Moslem may be friends. I would be a sorry pursuivant in your behalf."

Richard was silent; then cried out:—

"*Ai*, it is all madness! I have no need to be told. I set eyes on her first this morning. Holy Mother, what sin is mine that I should be afflicted thus! Never before have I loved a maid so much as my white falcon. Yet were I longing for a drop of water in Purgatory, I could not have greater desire. It is sin; it is madness; I must never see her again, or great sorrow will come of it!"

But Musa pressed his arm closer, and more kindly.

"No," said he, softly, in his rich Spanish accent; "if it is mere fleeting passion, it will end; and the upright man is none the worse. Is it a sin to take delight, when Allah reveals to us what seems a glimmer of Paradise? And as for the future, that lies in the hands of the Most High. Whatever is written in the books of our dooms—what power may withstand? To-day, call it madness, and speak not of it. To-morrow, if it live, call it passion—speak in whispers. A month, a year; call it love—it will speak for itself. It is a fire—all men see it. And who would then hide its brightness?"

"Ah," answered the Norman, "what day is this! How dare I stand and speak thus to you of what I ought to hide even from myself? How long have I known you?"

"How long?" replied the other, dreamily. "Friendships are made in the heart of Allah. Before the earliest star was created, before He said to the earth, 'Be,' it was destined that friend should be joined to friend, and when two such souls in the body meet face to face, they are not strangers. In each other they see a fellow that they have loved, while they dwelt as thoughts in the bosom of the Eternal."

"Yes," said Richard, caught in the pensive mood of the other, "we are friends. Why? We know not. To what end? A mystery! It is well we both believe God is good."

"He is good," said Musa, reverently, and they descended.

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# CHAPTER IV

## HOW RICHARD WENT TO PALERMO

The yawning servants had carried the bishop from under the table, long before Baron William that night found the bottom of his last flagon. Yet early the next morning, none was more nimble and jovial than he. The Greeks did not come down to the great hall; they were fatigued, said Sylvana the old servant who had adjured Richard to rescue them during the fight. The Cæsar's wound was paining him, and he required the care of his daughter. So it was noon before Richard set eyes again on the princess, as she came into the bailey with her father on her arm, to help him into his litter. The bishop was impatient to be away. What with the clamor of the foot-boys and grooms, and the neighing of impatient steeds, there was little chance for ceremonious leave-taking. The bishop had thanks and blessings for his rescuers and hosts. The Cæsar gave a few courtly phrases of gratitude; his daughter bestowed on Lady Margaret and Eleanor each a hearty kiss, and for Richard, one smile from her bright eyes, and the words, "Fail not to wait on us, if you come to Palermo." So the troop started, leaving Richard to stare after them until the cavalcade was a speck on the roadway, and for the rest of the day to resolve many times that to Palermo he would go ere many months be sped.

But in the days that followed he was not idle. First of all the bishop's gift, the great black horse, had to be wrestled into submission; no light task, for the mighty beast would rage like a bull; but

in the end the brute was conquered, and "Rollo"—such was his christening—became Richard's boon comrade and second self; dear as those horses whereof the *jongleurs* sang, that would snatch their masters from the midst of a host of foes, or recognize them returning home after seven years, when the riders' own wives had forgotten them. But this was the least the raid of the Berbers had brought to Richard, for he and Musa became grappled to each other by bonds of friendship that tightened each day. The Spaniard had sealed his gratitude by the gift of a Valencia hauberk, inwrought with gold wire, light almost as velvet, on whose links once the sword of Cid Campeador had turned. And Musa brought also a wonderful chessboard of rock crystal with men of silver, over whose magic squares the Norman was to puzzle many an hour; but beyond all else, Musa brought himself—more a marvel every hour to Richard Longsword. What had he not learned and done! A swordsman whose prowess in the fence tested Richard's utmost skill; a poet whose musical Arabic must have charmed many a fair brunette by the darkling Guadalquiver. He could talk of elixirs, alembics, and horoscopes. The learning of the University of Cordova was his; he could read Greek and Latin, and had a smattering of the Languedoc. Only a consistent Moslem he was not,—neither going to the mosque on Fridays, nor abstaining from wine nor remembering the fasts; and when Richard asked, "Will you turn Christian?" Musa had replied, laughing, "I am of the rationalist school of the Kalif Mamun,—reason alone is the father of religion; even the commands of Al-Koran are not fetters to bind, when reason directs otherwise."

Richard could only shake his head. Moslems, he was very sure, were likely to scorch in eternal fire, but at least he conceived they ought to be consistent in supporting their superstition, if they held to it at all. As for himself, when he compared his life and acquirements to Musa's, he grew exceeding humble; born in a camp in Campania, his boyhood spent now in this, now in another Italian or Sicilian castle, from a lad he had learned to wield a sword as became the son of a doughty sire. But he had neither the gentle troubadour's art, as the knights of Provence, nor the deeper lore of the Spaniard. Reading, thanks to Sebastian's patience, he might make shift with; he could barely scrawl an awkward fist. One accomplishment his south-Italian life gave him: he could speak Greek, Arabic, Latin, the Languedoc, and the Languedoil; but with these and some skill in hawking and jousting his learning ended, and it was small enough.

As day sped into day, Musa was ever at the castle of Cefalu. He had relatives in Palermo who desired him there, and declared the city safe against kidnapper or assassin; but he was not tempted to leave the country house of Hajib. The Baron smiled on the friendship; he had long since learned to love infidels, if they were only brave knights; Sebastian alone was all fears and frowns, and had many a wordy tilt with the Spaniard.

"Ah, Richard," cried the chaplain once, when the two friends sat at chess in the great hall, "know you not Holy Church condemns chess as no less perilous to the soul than very dicing?"

And when Richard, despite prickings of conscience, would not leave the game, Sebastian admonished in private:—

"Remember the words of the Apostle: 'Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what concord hath Christ with Belial?' Be warned; bitter sorrow or perdition will come of this friendship; have you forgotten your vow to slay the unbelievers and free Jerusalem?"

"But we await the will of God, father," answered Richard, carelessly.

"And the will of God is that you first cast off these ties of Satan, and make ready for holy warfare, or assuredly God will remember your sin and punish you." But Richard would not hear. Ever he drew closer to Musa; the reckless paladin Roland and his "sage" friend Oliver were no nearer comrades, and in the after days Longsword likened their love to nothing less than the bonds betwixt David and Jonathan.

Yet Sebastian never forbore his warnings. "Dear son," he said, when Musa was telling his wondering friend of the marvellous mountain of Kaf, which encircles the earth, and whither the Almighty had banished the rebellious genii, "be not seduced by the wisdom which cometh from the Father of Lies. Though Musa called himself Christian (and were not damned already), yet his soul would be lost because of his sinful learning. It was so with Gerbert, whom the Devil even aided to become Pope, yet in the end snatched away his soul; in testimony whereof his bones rattle in their tomb, every time a pope lies nigh to death."

"*Wallah!*" cried the Spaniard, gently, "your mind, friend, is as wide as the bridge Es-Sirat, which bridges Hell on the road to Heaven,—finer than a hair, sharper than a sword-edge."

"Mock me not, Child of the Devil," retorted the unappeased churchman.

"Nay," was the mild answer, "I am not obstinate. Convince me, satisfy my reason; I will then turn Christian."

"Ah," replied Sebastian, sadly, "have you never heard the words of the holy Anselm of Canterbury, 'Let the intellect submit to authority, when it can no longer agree therewith'?"

Musa shook his head.

"Let us not wrangle to no purpose," said he, extending a frank hand; "our own Prophet commands us, 'Dispute not with those who have received the scriptures'—the Christians and Jews—'save in the mildest manner.' Think not we blaspheme the Son of Mary. No good Moslem speaks His name without adding 'on whom be peace.' We too hold He was born of a pure virgin, by a miracle of

God, and Al-Koran says 'He is the word of God, and a spirit proceeding out of Him.'"

"Aye," made answer the priest, stripping his arm, and smiling grimly as he pointed to his scars, "and is this not a token of your tolerance and reverence?"

Musa shrugged his shoulders.

"*Mâshallah!* Those Seljouks at Jerusalem are but barbarians. We Arabs love them a little less than we do most Christians!"

"One fire awaits you all," muttered the obdurate priest, withdrawing.

So days sped, and a letter came to Musa from Palermo, from his uncle the great merchant Al-Bukri, the "general syndic" of the capital. There was promise of patronage and high office with the Fatimite court at Cairo. Would the Spanish knight come down to Palermo for consultation? And Richard vowed loudly he would travel to the city too, only his heart grew sad when Musa spoke of parting and a career in Egypt. "Be not troubled, brother mine," quoth Musa, lightly; "what is fated, is fated; as for my fortune, so far as man may dispose, I say as did once an Egyptian kalif, 'I carry my kingdom here!'" and he slapped the hilt of his cimeter. And Richard, when he thought of what awaited in Palermo, went about with his head in the air. Night and day had the vision of the Greek been before his face. Would he not hew through hosts to possess her? Had he not already won a name and a fame—as a true sprig of the Longswords? Was not the lady in his debt, had she not shown all favor? What hindered him to recount his father's fiefs to Manuel, and say, "Sir, give me your daughter!"

"But the lady may be dowerless," objected old Herbert, who had been Richard's confidant since earliest boyhood; "I have little liking for cat-hearted Greeks who spit, not bite. And I fear the Emperor has snapped up all the exiled Cæsar's estates."

"No," was his answer; "I hear that through Venetian merchants, Cæsar Manuel saved much ready money. But"—and Richard's voice rose high—"were she mine with only our old Norman dower,—a chaplet of roses and a mother's kiss,—by St. Michael, I swear I would take her; for the tips of her fingers are dearer than red gold!"

"*Ai*," cried the old daredevil, "you have indeed a merry passion. Well, go your way, and the Holy Mother favor you!"

The Baron consented half reluctantly to his son's desires. He did not love most Greeks; but Cæsar Manuel had been a brave cavalier, and had saved the wreck of his great fortune; and the Baron was too fond of his eldest to refuse him anything in reason. Only, before starting, he gave Richard this advice:—

"Be not over-anxious to brew up more quarrel with that Louis de Valmont. I know he comes from your mother's country of Auvergne, and his family and hers have been long at feud. But he is a knight of great renown, and till you have won your spurs, do not bear yourself loftily. He is a haughty man, high in favor with Count Roger, and a broil with him may breed you little glory."

So Richard vowed discretion after his careless way. The two friends were to sail from Cefalu upon a Tunisian corn-ship, that made Palermo on her homeward voyage. Herbert was to follow by land, bringing down the retinue and horses; and his young master went on board, laughing and promising himself that when next Cefalu lay under his eyes, at his side should be another.

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Brief voyaging and a kind west wind brought the Tunisian soon in sight of the red crags of Monte Pellegrino, which dominated the "City of the threefold Tongue," where dwelt Greek and Latin and Arab in peace, brotherhood, and prosperity. Before Longsword and his friend stretched Palermo, its white palaces, its domes and minarets bright as snow under the morning's azure sky; around them lay the fair wide crescent of the harbor running away to the wooded headland of Capo Zafferana; and on the emerald waves loitered the rich argosies of Pisa, Amalfi, Venice, and Andalusia, beating out against the laggard wind. Behind the long reach of the city stretched the "Golden Shell," one long green vega, thick with orchards of olive and orange; broken with feathery palm groves, tinted with flowering thickets bright as the sunset; threaded by the circling Preto, and many another silver rivulet hurrying to the sea.

A fair picture, thought Musa; while Richard repeated the proud boast of its citizens, that Palermo was indeed *prima sedes, corona regis, et regni caput*. Then their ship made anchor off the old Saracen castle of Castellamare, where now lay the Norman garrison. Busy boatmen set them down on the quay in the harbor of Khalessa, where were the warehouses of the great Arab merchants, and where all around brawled the crowd and clamor of a half-Eastern traffic. And even Musa's eyes were amazed at the wealth and splendor of this busy city, which had hardly yet realized that her masters now went to church and no more to the great mosque. At the stately house of Al-Bakri courtly hospitality awaited them. The grave syndic was all smiles and flowery compliments to his nephew's preserver, and cried out when Richard made to go to the castle. On the next day a messenger came for the Norman, with words that made his sun shine very bright and the sea-breeze sweet as nard of Araby—Cæsar Manuel Kurkuas begged Richard to wait on him at the "Palace of the Diadem," which lay without the city by Monreale.

# CHAPTER V

## HOW RICHARD WON TWO FOES

The "Palace of the Diadem" had been the pride of some haughty Kelbite emir in the days when Palermo was a prime jewel in the Arabian crown; but the glory of its builder's family had long since been laid low. Moslem had slaughtered Moslem in the feuds that racked Sicily. Byzantines and Pisans had menaced the capital and ravaged its emerald vega. Now at last the Norman had come to conquer, and remained as lord; so that the owners of the palace had long sought purchaser. Then the Greek Cæsar came, an exile, but with a good store of bezants held in trust by Venetian merchants, and the palace had passed into his hands. It lay on the first slopes of the hills rising back of Monreale, close by the Norman count's hunting lodge; the steep mountain sides crowding down upon it from above; before it, to the north, the broad sweeps of the Golden Shell; and around, dense groves of locust and almond, palm trees and judas trees, with thickets in perennial bloom. Here, all the year long, little brooks kept the greensward moist and sweet; and in springtime the orange blossoms glistered whiter than clouds against rare green foliage. At evening, from behind clustered thickets would drift the notes of the nightingale, while the still, shy moon crept upwards in the sky. Such the gardens about the palace. And the palace itself? It was a lyric in stone. One could wander through long halls and wide courts in a soft half-light, with no rude sun venturing to touch a vulgar ray upon the stalactite vaults, the mazy colonnades, the red granite and jasper shafts, the tile work and moulding of red and blue and gold. Buried in the midst of these halls, where the air ever breathed of musk, and rose-water, and frankincense, what effort to lie through the round year, and hear the fountains plash their music, and dream of love, joy, and the kiss of the houris?

Here dwelt the Cæsar and his daughter. Not alone; thither came all Palermo, from Count Roger downward. True, Manuel was in exile, but there were many roads back to Alexius's favor, and once regained, the Cæsar's friendship was worth the winning. And as for the princess, all the young knights quarrelled in secret for the chance to offer her holy water at church, or to ride in Countess Adelaide's train when she took the fair Greek hawking. Much ill-blood was brewed, and some little shed; for the Norman and Saracen knights alike would almost have given their heads for one smile from her. Yet the hottest rivals were the one-time friends, the great knight, Louis de Valmont of Auvergne, far-famed as a jouster, and Iftikhar Eddauleh, commander of Count Roger's Saracen guards, reputed the stoutest lance in Sicily.

Thus it befell that Louis and Iftikhar (who, despite his creed and dark skin, was all gallantry to the Christian ladies) had ridden to Monreale to pay their *devoirs* to the princess on the selfsame day Richard and his friend rode thither also. The Cæsar affected something of his native state at Monreale; he met his guests in a marble court, where a gilded swan was pouring tinkling water from its curving throat; and scattered about the alabaster basin, in the mild half-light, lay rug-covered divans, gay carpets, and a great cushioned armchair for the aged Greek. The Cæsar wore the insignia of his rank,—buskins of green leather, and a gem-set, open cap, whence dangled a long lappet of pearls over either cheek. And his daughter, too, was another and far statelier lady than she whom Richard Longsword had plucked from the Berbers. She stood to greet her guests, all radiant in purple tunic, a silken cape about her shoulders which shone with gems worth a baron's ransom; and when she spoke, it was with the nod and mien of one whose life it had been to command.

Yet they were very merry. De Valmont had equal fame as troubadour and as cavalier. He had brought the princess an "improvised" *canso*, wherein he protested his abject wretchedness when the light of her face was hid from him, professed himself her slave, and conjured heaven, since she still remained so cold, to take away his life, that he might no more suffer. At this poem Mary professed herself delighted; for she was long past blushing at lip service. Then Iftikhar, swelling with jealousy, matched the Provençal with his Arabic, which Mary, like any cosmopolitan Byzantine, understood well; he sang how all the black-eyed maids of Paradise burned in jealousy of the Greek, how before her beauty each nightingale forgot his song, and a hundred genii flitted about her, feasting their ravished eyes. Whereat Louis, in rivalry, would have capped his song with another, when a serving-lad announced Richard Longsword and Musa of Granada.

Longsword knew Iftikhar and De Valmont well, yet in years to come he dated their contact from this hour. Splendid was the emir in form and face, with broad shoulders and lordly height and poise. His swarthy Egyptian skin became him as a bay coat a charger; his ponderous hands, full black beard, red morocco-shod feet, the huge cimeter at his side, all spoke one word—"power"; a prince in very deed, from his jewelled black turban downward. And beside him stood Louis,—short, but great of limb, fair-haired, handsome, save for a certain smile more arrogant than affable. His beard was trimmed to a little beak, his hair carefully shaven across his forehead, as the fashion was; and he wore his native high black boots, the bane of all Provençal-hating Normans. On the gold plates of his sword-belt were jewel-set rosettes, and despite the heat of the day he did not disdain to show a mantle lined with rare sable,—no poor cavalier's dress.

Mary greeted the newcomers warmly; warmly—yet to Richard how different was she from that merry girl who had pressed the cup to his lips that fateful evening at Cefalu! He had come expecting to demand, and to carry away; and behold! the laughing maid was a stately princess;

her suitor was one of a score of young men who loved without hope; his rivals were the most valorous cavaliers in all the broad island. He had but set eyes on De Valmont and the emir, when he saw his day-dreams vanish in thin air. What had he, unknighted, comparatively unrenowned, to proffer, when such champions sought her grace?

Still, for a while the talk ran gayly. Mary told of her rescue, and praised Longsword's valor; but his joy was tempered as he saw the patronizing smile that sat on De Valmont's face, when the recital finished.

"Our young friend comes of my own Auvergne stock," said the knight, with venomous urbanity; "when he reaches due years he will break lances with the best."

The Norman's cheek flushed, but he mastered his temper. "You say well, fair sir; I am indeed a very young cavalier. Yet I hope I am not unworthy of my mother's family of St. Julien, which has won some small credit in its feuds with its neighbors."

There was an arrow in this reply; for the houses of St. Julien and Valmont were at bitter strife, and thus far the saints had given glory to the former. So the knight frowned in his turn, and shot back:—

"Yet, I think, good squire, that you are Norman rather than Provençal. No gentleman of the South Country preserves that worthy old custom, whereby the father hands down his festival clothes to the son through three, and here, I imagine, four generations."

The insult was palpable enough, but Longsword reined in his anger.

"You are wrong, Sir Louis," quoth he, very softly; "my bleaunt is new, though I have no Provençal tailor; for I remembered the saying of certain holy churchmen: 'He who dresses after the godless fashion of the men of the Languedoc, puts in peril his soul.'"

The parry and thrust had gone on long enough to promise little honor to De Valmont, and the knight ended by saying blandly: "It grieves me, dear friend, that you listen to such slanders. Be assured there are no Christians better than those of Provence."

Richard affected to be appeased. Yet every moment his soul was crying out against this rival, who disdained and mocked him as a mere boy. And bitterer grew his wrath, when Louis continued:—

"Come, heir of Cefalu; can you not match with me in singing the praise of the adorable mistress of our hearts, the ever incomparable Princess Mary Kurkuas,—flower of the Greeks, star of the Moslems, sun of all Christian cavaliers! Let us hold our *tenso*; and contend,—not with sword,—but with verses, singing the matchless worth of our lady."

Richard felt the anger swelling within him. He had prudence in dealing with Louis, but not to bear tamely a thrust of sheer malice, likely to permit a display of his rival's superior accomplishments before the princess. Well enough De Valmont had known that the Norman was no troubadour.

"Louis de Valmont," answered Longsword, haughtily, "I am no clerk in your 'courts of love,' whereof you Provençals boast so often. When I will praise man or maid, I find blunt speech good enough, if they have wit to hear. When I have difference with any gentleman, I have a good horse and a good sword—and let St. Maurice judge between us."

"By St. Martin," cried the Provençal, bursting into a laugh, "hear you this, my Lord Iftikhar! Our excellent Norman, when I speak of a contest of *cansos*, at once talks of hauberks and lances."

The emir cast a disdainful eye upon Longsword.

"*Allah akhbar!*" he commenced, then more mildly: "yet how can we say aught against so excellent a young man, as he who plucked our princess from the pirates?"

Richard's gorge was rising; but before his hot words broke forth, Musa, who had bided his time, interposed:—

"Tell me, Cid Louis," said he, in his broken Languedoc, "men say you have served in Spain; is that not so?"

"I saw service there with Raymond of St. Gilles," was the answer, "and with King Alfonso, and Cid Campeador."

"And brave cavaliers they are," continued the Andalusian. "None better, Christian or Moslem, so far as knightly courtesy is known."

"You say well," asserted the Provençal; "they are splendid knights. By the Cross," he added deprecatingly, "I count myself no poor lance, with St. Martin's help; but in Spain every cavalier was nigh my peer."

"I rejoice you found such noble comrades; but, by Allah, know this, O Frank: I have ridden against all the good lances of Spain, and Richard Longsword of Cefalu is as firm a saddle as the best!"

The Spaniard had drawn himself up haughtily; there was fire in his eye, half a threat in his voice. Neither De Valmont nor Iftikhar cared to contradict him. And when Louis, vainly endeavoring to turn the tide that was setting against him in the princess's presence, again proposed a *tenso*, Richard was again able to answer in tones of lofty scorn.

"Have you no shame, fair sir, to rehearse here the frivolous songs you doubtless learned at the court of William of Aquitaine, whose *cansos* and *tornadas* are all in praise of his paramours—a new love and a new song each day?"

"Have a care, young sir, have a care!" quoth the southern knight, angrily.

"I seek no quarrel," was the reply;—"nor shun one." This last, under the breath.

Louis stepped before the Norman with his hands on his hips.

"Heir of Cefalu," said he, in undertone, "if it is true you are a good lance—well. But remember this, that is told in Auvergne. On the mountains near the castle of Valmont lies a chapel, whither often I went to pray, waiting some champion to come and test my valor; but none has ever dared, nor have I ever ridden against my match, save against my own brother Raoul, the Seigneur of Valmont."

"Do not threaten," said Richard, still in undertone.

"Threaten? I?" replied the knight. "I speak of the past, not of the present. Yet those are sorry who cross my path."

They said no more. The emir and De Valmont were the first to take leave. Mary gave Louis her hand to kiss, and Iftikhar salaamed very low. When the two were gone, all who remained were happier; and the princess, who had been silent long, found her tongue.

"You are not a friend of Sir Louis, or the emir?" said she.

"I would not be their foes," replied Longsword, looking into the bubbling fountain; "yet it is true Sir Louis is very willing to think himself above an unknighted cavalier. And the emir and I know each other little."

"Ah," said the lady, her eyes also resting on the water, "it is sad it is thus. Believe me, Lord Richard, you and De Valmont should be friends. He is a gallant cavalier. I have heard much of his valor. He is a poet also. What lady would not lose her heart at his compliments?"

Now all this was gall and wormwood to Richard, but he made shift to reply.

"Yes, doubtless he is a splendid knight."

"But you are not his friend? Why?"

"Lady," replied the Norman, a little sourly, "if to be the cavalier is only to wear the wreath in the tourney, and sing *cansos* in the 'courts of love'—behold Louis de Valmont; from the Scottish Marches to our Sicily none knightlier. But," and his eye kindled, "with God's help, when in my turn I win stroke of the accolade, they shall say of Richard Longsword that he was more than mere jouster or troubadour; for I am no soft Provençal like De Valmont. My ancestors snuffed the bleak north wind, and laughed at the cold and storm. I hold that the belted knight is consecrated priest: standing in the world, should behold its sin and violence, and keep his own heart pure, should lay low the wicked, and lift up the weak; for God has set him apart to pray, not with his lips, but with his good sword; and he should ride to each *mêlée* as to a sacrament."

"Verily," cried she, smiling; "it is you that are now the poet!"

"Not so," was the half-gloomy answer; "I repeat the words of Sebastian, our chaplain, who is one of the saints of God."

"You will be a noble cavalier," said Mary, when the two friends arose to leave her. "Yet," she added, "I will not have you a foe to Louis de Valmont. That my friends should be enemies among themselves, would be a heavy grief."

Richard kissed Mary's hand, and rode away. He and Musa had been bidden to come again and often to Monreale; but he had no great joy in the prospect. Rather his thoughts were darksome as the night.

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The shadows were falling when the Norman and his friend left the Palace of the Diadem. The half-light of the marble arcade was fading into a soft haze, wherein the gauzy tracery that pierced the pillared stone work was barely visible. Manuel Kurkuas lay on his cushions, sunk in silent reveries; his daughter had stolen to his side, cast one arm about his neck, and with her other hand softly, slowly, stroked his long white beard. Neither spoke for a long time. Presently in came an Arab serving-man with noiseless step: tiny lamps began to twinkle red and green up against the vaulting, throwing the mazy mosaic work into flickering shadow. The tinkle, tinkle of the fountain never ceased. They could hear the note of the nightingales from the grove, sweet, tremulous, melancholy. The servants set a tray before the Cæsar with silver cups, and fruit, and cakes, salaamed and retired. Then the fountain and the *bulbuls* alone broke the evening calm. Presently the old Greek raised his head.

"They have brought the tray?" he asked, still dreamily.

"Yes, there is a sleeping powder in your wine. Will you drink?"

"Not yet," said the Cæsar, still musing; then half stirring: "Ah! my daughter, do you remember where we were one year ago this night?"

"We were at our summer house by Chalcedon, and doubtless had just returned from a sail to the Isles of the Princes on the Emperor's own galley."

"It is beautiful, that Bosphorus; and our noble capital," ran on Manuel, dreamily. "No church in the world like to our Hagia Sophia! No dwelling like the 'Sacred Palace' of our Emperor! No river fairer than the blue Bosphorus! Ours are all the trophies of the art of Greece at her prime; ours the books preserving the ancient learning; the speech of Plato, of Demosthenes, so unlike this Frankish magpies' chatter! Do you not long to be back? I shall be recalled. You will be again a great lady at Constantinople; marry some '*pan-sebastos*,' or perhaps the heir of the purple buskins himself." Mary was silent; the old man continued: "No reply? I know your thoughts. You are half a Frank and love them better: better to watch these mad knights at tourney than read Polybius with the Princess Anna?"

"Yes, my father," was the simple reply; "we have glory, art, learning, a name never to die. But the future is with these Franks—so boisterous, so brutish! For high resolve and higher action make people great, not gazing at statues, and reading of brave deeds done of old."

More silence save for the bulbuls and the fountain.

"Daughter mine," replied the Cæsar, "you say well. We have fought a good fight,—we of the Rome by the Bosphorus: we have flung back Avar and Arab. The Turks press hard, yet we may hold them at bay a little longer; but our race is indeed grown old, and our glory, too. And you love the West? What wonder! your mother spoke this Languedoc in which this De Valmont sings. And doubtless you will give your hand to him; men say he is a mighty cavalier; as his wife you will be a great lady among these Franks."

"Father!" cried out Mary, in protest.

"No," said the Greek, still smiling, "I will not give you away against your will. If not he, whom? Does the Moslem Iftikhar find favor? Religion sits light in this strange Sicily."

But Mary shook her head angrily.

"Ah, then you perhaps were glad when young Richard of Cefalu came to-day. But he is no poet like De Valmont. His manners may prove as rough as his blows."

"I will not give myself to a chamberlain or a troubadour. Shall I receive *cansos* when my hair is gray, or my face wrinkled? If I wish soft manners, let it be one of the eunuch-courtiers about the Emperor's palace."

The Cæsar laughed softly. "You have seen this Richard but little; he saved us both; we owe him all gratitude. He shall come often. I am a shrewd judge of men, and read their faces. His I like well. Just now he thinks De Valmont has you snared, and is very sorrowful. But no trial harms the lover. To-day he worships your face, as do all. Later let us see if he looks deeper, and loves you with all your faults!"

"My faults?"

"Yes," with another soft laugh, "you are over-fond of the applause, and glitter, and whir of admiration. You know your face is very fair to see, and love to let men see it. And though in action you are often prudent and demure, yet—as on that night at Cefalu—you are like a coiled spring,—such as moves the singing bird of the Emperor: one touch will make you flash forth in some madness. But beneath all I know you are pure and strong, and will make a noble woman."

"You temper praise with blame, my father," was her answer.

"Now let me sup and go to rest; and while I drink, take your lute and sing. Not from the choruses of Æschylus; nor Pindar nor Anacreon: sing me Proclus's hymn to the Muses, the last pagan poem in our Greek, which is worthy to stand beside our best; and the burden of the hymn, too, fits with my mood to-night."

So Mary took up the lute, let her fingers wander over the strings, and then, while the fountain babbled accompaniment, sang sweet as a silver bell:—

"Glory and praise to those sweet lamps of Earth,
  The nine fair daughters of Almighty Jove:
Who all the passage dark to death from birth
  Lead wandering souls with their bright beams of love.

"Through cares of mortal life, through pain and woe,
  The tender solace of their counsel saves:
The healing secrets of their songs forego
  Despair: and when we tremble at the waves

"Of life's wild sea of murk incertitude,
  Their gentle touch upon the helm is pressed,

Their hand points out the beacon star of good,
  Where we shall make our harbor and have rest:—

"Hear, heavenly Sisters, hear! O ye who know
  The winds of wisdom's sea, the course to steer;
Who light the flame that lightens all below,
  And bring the spirits of the perfect there,

"Where the immortals are, when this life's fever
  Is left behind as a dread gulf o'erpassed,
And souls, like mariners, escaped forever,
  Throng on the happy foreland, saved at last!"

The lute was still. Naught but the plash, plash of the fountain, the distant call of the birds. In through the marble tracery stole the silent panels of moonlight. Manuel Kurkuas sat long in deeper revery:—

"'Throng on the happy foreland, saved at last!'" he murmured; "ah! daughter mine, it is late: we must seek rest."

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# CHAPTER VI

## HOW ROLLO MET INSULT

On the next day Richard rode again to Monreale, this time without Musa. But on the way, just as his horse brought him clear of the city, and he was speeding past the straggling Saracen village that stretched far up the hills to Baidha, the canter of two riders going at a mad pace thundered behind him, and he saw Louis de Valmont with Iftikhar Eddauleh close at his heels. The Provençal knight was bravely accoutred with silk mantle and boots of the latest fashion, and was bestriding a splendid white palfrey that made Richard shiver the tenth commandment then and there. The emir was no less gay in flaming scarlet vest, and trailing to the wind a red and yellow kaftan; while on his head tossed a great blue turban, whereon the gems were sparkling. Clearly the two had set forth independently, and had no mind for comradeship; for Richard soon learned that Iftikhar had put his horse to his speed to outstrip De Valmont, and the latter had ridden away from him. When the Provençal drew close upon Richard, however, the Norman, nowise anxious to be the last, spurred on also, and soon all three were in the race; which ended by De Valmont shooting ahead, and leaving the others side by side. As the knight vanished in a cloud of dust, Iftikhar reined in his good bay, and turned to Longsword.

"He passes us both, Cid Richard," quoth the emir, showing his white teeth, while he laughed.

"Truly, emir," was the answer, "they say there is no rider like him in all the South Country."

The Egyptian grinned again, a little angrily.

"*Wallah!* Let him go. I will reach Monreale soon enough. Not even Louis de Valmont shall cross my path save when I choose; neither he nor any other."

"You wax bold, my lord. And may I ask why you speak thus? Surely, it is no wound to your honor or mine that he chances to-day to outride us both."

Iftikhar laughed aloud, was silent a moment, then broke forth.

"Verily, Cid Richard, why ride we all, you, I, De Valmont, to Monreale! *Ya!* do you still ask why I say I 'let none cross me'?"

Richard's hand started towards his hilt.

"My Lord Iftikhar, we all seek the good favor of that incomparable lady, Mary Kurkuas."

The Egyptian's hand was on his cimeter also. "You speak well," came back his haughty answer; "but I speak to a young cavalier like yourself this word of warning—do not carry your passion too far. As for De Valmont, let him know this, good lance that he is: I am as sure a saddle as he, and I am more." Iftikhar leaned, as he rode, and half whispered to Richard, "Do you know the brotherhood of the Ismaelians?"

"The secret confederacy among Moslems, whose god is the dagger?"

Iftikhar spoke very low: "Know, O Norman, that I am a grand prior amongst the Ismaelians. Soon as Allah wills, I return to Syria. At my nod will be countless devotees, who rush on death as to a feast. Therefore I am not lightly to be thwarted by De Valmont even. *Ya!*"

And the emir laughed grimly. Richard kept silence, but swore in his heart that laugh should be like Roland's laugh at Ganelon,—a laugh that cost Roland his life.

When they came to the Palace of the Diadem, De Valmont was there before them, and had the

lady's ear. He was telling of a marvellous hunting party that was on foot for the morrow, and how Count Roger's daughter, the young Countess Blanche, had especially bidden him to ride with the princess to the chase. And Richard, and Iftikhar also, had perforce to stand by, while Mary gave the Provençal her sweetest thanks, and promised him her glove to wear at the next jousting.

Sorry comfort it was to Longsword, especially as the princess gave him and the emir only enough of the talk to let them know she remembered they were there. As for Iftikhar, black jealousy drove him forth quickly. He salaamed himself away, and went tearing down the road to Palermo, uttering invocations to all the evil jinns, to blast Louis de Valmont's happiness for many a long year. But Richard would not own to such defeat; while Louis and Mary bartered merry small talk, he sat beside the old Cæsar, and found in the noble Greek, after the crust of dignity was broken, a man of the world who could tell his story.

And Richard found that Manuel had been a mighty warrior in his youth, though not after the Norman fashion. Richard learned with wonder how armies were marshalled according to careful rules in the military books of Nicephorus Phocus and Leo the Wise; how campaigns could be worked out, and armies shuffled about dexterously as chessmen, instead of depending on chance *mêlées* and bull valor. The Cæsar had stirring tales to tell of wars and paladins Richard had never before heard of,—Zimiskes and his terrible fight with Swiatoslaf the Russian, when St. Theodore himself, men said, led the charge through the pagan spear-hedge; of Basil, the terrible "Bulgarian slayer"; of the redoubtable champion, Diginis Akritas, grim lord of the Cilician Marches, the terror of the border Arabs; only Manuel's face clouded when he spoke of the present darkened fame of his people.

"I was with Romanus Diogenes," said he, bitterly, "at Manzikert, that fatal day when by the treachery of Andronicus, general of the reserve, our Emperor and all Asia Minor were betrayed to Alp-Arslan the Seljouk. Oh! Sir Frank—" and his dim eyes lighted, "never saw I harder fight than that: all that mortal men might, did we, riding down the Turkish hordes with sword and lance all day. But at nightfall we were surrounded, and the hosts rolled in around us. Treason had cut off our succor. Our divisions perished; our emperor was a prisoner; and the force that Alexius Comnenus led against you Normans at Durazzo was a shadow, a mockery, of what had been our army in the days when the Kalif of Bagdad trembled at the advance of the terrible Romans!"

When Richard left the palace it was in company with Louis de Valmont. Mary had been very gracious to the Norman in parting, and Manuel had urged him to come again. He was an old man, time was heavy on his hands; he was rejoiced to tell his tales to whoever would listen. But it was Louis who had the last word with the princess, Louis who whispered at the farewell some soft pleasantry that had a deeper ring than the common troubadour's praise and compliment. Longsword and the Provençal rode back towards Palermo side by side. De Valmont was in a happy enough mood to be very gracious.

"Heir, of Cefalu," said he, while they cantered stirrup to stirrup, "I did wrong yesterday. I thought you sought to cross me in a quest—what shame for me to avow it—after the hand of this lady. But to-day by your discreet carriage I see you have no such rashness. Who can but fall at the princess's feet, and sigh with passion! And her father, though a Greek, must have been a fine man once in the saddle."

The Provençal's words were like flint striking steel; Richard replied very slowly, sure warning that fire was near at hand.

"Sir Louis de Valmont, with our eyes on the lady, no marvel we possess only one thought. Yet not I only, but Iftikhar Eddauleh may cry 'Hold!' ere you carry this fair game to an end. The emir this day boasted to me he was become grand prior of the Ismaelians, the devotees of the dagger, and that not even so good a lance as you might cross his road when he minded otherwise."

The knight frowned blackly.

"The emir and I are friends no longer. The princess may love the gems in his turban, his Arabic verses; but not even here in Sicily will she wed an infidel. He has more than one woman in his harem in the city. Over his devotees and his own lance I lose little slumber."

"You say well, fair sir," said Richard; "yet honor forbids me to conceal it. I think you will not take Mary Kurkuas to the priest before you have tried the temper of my sword, though Iftikhar do what he lists."

"Take care, my brave lad!" cried the Provençal, dropping his jaw in a sneer. "I wish to splinter no lances against such as you."

"By St. Michael, I swear it; aye, and will make it good on my body!" And Richard raised his hand in an oath.

"Fie!" cried the other, pricking ahead. "In the morning you will repent of this folly. I can win no glory in a broil with you; which, if I follow up, will end with your funeral mass."

And before Richard could make reply De Valmont's white palfrey had swept far in advance, leaving the Norman with only his raging thoughts for company. In this state he rode into the town, seeking the house of Al-Bakri. But close by the door a noisy crowd was swelling: Pisan sailors, Greek peasants come to market, Moslem serving-lads, and chief of all several men-at-arms in leather jerkins and steel caps, all howling and shouting in half a dozen tongues, and making the narrow street and bare gray house-walls ring with their clamors.

"A hair, a hair of the wonderful horse of Cefalu!" was braying one of the men-at-arms in the very centre of the throng. "Pull out his tail; let him drag a cart! What knight ever rode such a *destrer*? And this is the best-loved steed of my Lord Richard! Like master, like horse!" While others shouted: "Give up the fellow! He is ours! We claim him for our master, Louis de Valmont. What need has your Lord Richard of a *jongleur*—mountebank himself?"

And then in the midst of the press, Longsword saw his old retainer Herbert, sitting upon Rollo; perched behind on the great steed a small, scared-looking man, with the little bright eyes and peaked nose of a mouse; with a strange dress of blue and red stripes, and hugging a great viol under his arm. So far the crowd had confined itself to noise; but it was pressing so madly around the entrance to the court, that the porter had hesitated to throw open the gate lest the mob press in with the rider. There was an angry glint in Herbert's eyes; and the veteran had his fingers round his hilt with the blade half drawn, while Rollo had tossed up his great black head, and was snuffing and pawing as if his hoofs were ready to fly out on his besetters.

"A thousand fiends!" cried Richard, pushing into the throng, "what have we here! Dogs, devils, back all of you!" And he struck right and left with his riding whip, making a red scar on more than one swarthy cheek. "Out of the way, rascals, or your heads pay for it!"

There was no resisting this menace. Rollo himself had struck out with his mighty hoofs, and a sailor went down upon the pavement with a groan. The crowd slunk back, cursing and threatening under breath; but no man wished to come to an issue with his betters.

"Now, Herbert," cried the Norman, "what means this? Has Satan uncovered the Pit, and his imps flown out? Who is this man with you?"

"May all the saints blast them!" and here the veteran doomed all his assailants to pitiless and eternal torment. "To be brief, good lord, this man is by name Theroulde, a right good fellow; as you see by his viol, a *jongleur*. Before your father fled England, I knew him well, when we both were younger. I found him as I rode by the quay, landed from a Pisan merchantman, and seeking to escape the men-at-arms of Louis de Valmont, who, seeing him a stranger and likely to prove a merry fellow, wished to carry him to the castle, willy-nilly, to give them sport over their cups; and this sailor gang fell in with them. Then when I saw that he did not like their greeting, and that he recognized me as an old comrade, I took him up behind me, and rode away; but this pack," with a contemptuous snap of the finger, "travelled behind us like the curs they are; and I think they would have learned how my sword could bite, had you not come up."

"Theroulde? Theroulde?" repeated Richard to the *jongleur*, who had leaped to the ground and stood bowing and scraping, but still hugging his beloved viol; "are you not son of that Taillefer, the brave minstrel to whom Duke William granted that he should ride first at Senlac, singing of Roland and Roncesvalles, and who died a cavalier's death that day?"

"I am his son, gracious lord," said the man, with another bow and wide grimace. "I am Theroulde of Mount St. Michael, and well I loved and served your father in the brave days of the English war."

"By the peacock," cried Longsword, "and what lucky saint sends you to Sicily, to enter my father's service once more, if you will?"

"Ah! lord," was the doleful answer, "glad I am to see Sicily; but no merry thing brings me hither. I was in the service of my dear Lord Henry, son of William the Bastard, and dwelt in his court at Mount St. Michael, with a warm nook by the fire and a flagon of good drink always mine for the wishing. But three years since I was driven out an exile, when William, the wicked 'Red King,' and Duke Robert besieged Henry their brother, and took the stronghold. So ever since I have wandered over Champagne and Burgundy and the Ile de France; and then I went down to Aquitaine and thence to Dauphiny. But I did not learn to love the chattering Provençals, who think songs of mawkish love better than our northern *chansons* of valorous knights. Then I heard that your noble father had been blessed with a fair barony here in Sicily; and hither I came to seek his bounty, though I did not expect to find in his son so grand a cavalier."

Richard laughed a little sourly. Now he had a new grudge against Louis de Valmont; to the sins of the master had been added those of the men. A knight did not always as yet keep squires of as gentle blood as himself. De Valmont's crew of attendants were but little better than "villains." The insults to Herbert and Rollo were not to be forgiven in a moment. And in this new fury Richard rode into the courtyard; while Theroulde, delighted to be under friendly patronage, rattled on, rehearsing his wares.

"Know, most valiant sir, that I boast myself versed in all the noble histories of that wise Trojan priest, Dares, and of the rich Greek cavalier, Dictys of Crete; I can tell you all their tales of Sir Hector and of Sir Ulysses and of the fair and never too much praised Countess Medea. I have set in new verse the whole tale of Roland and Oliver, and how Count Ganelon betrayed them; and I can tell you the story of Oberon, king of faery, who was begotten by Julius Cæsar at the isle of Cephallenia, while he was at war with King Pompey."

So he would have run on forever had not Richard thrust him away and gone in to Musa, with a face dark as a thundercloud. The *jongleur* was left to the hospitality of the Moslem servants of Al-Bakri, who treated him kindly though he eyed them askance; for to his mind they all were servants of Apollin, the pagan demon of the sun. Presently a messenger went from Richard to the castle, where De Valmont lay, bearing a letter,—a letter which demanded of the Provençal that he

either inflict summary chastisement on his men who had insulted Richard through his favorite horse, or make good the affront by a meeting face to face.

Richard spent the next two hours in the little court of the syndic, pacing moodily under the orange trees that stood around the fountain basin; while Musa lolled on the rugs upon the divan under the arcade, and tried to persuade his friend to sit down with him at chess.

"By the Mass, Musa," cried the Norman, twisting his mustache with nervous energy, while his eyes studied the black and white tiled pavement, "Moslem that you are, I had rather see Mary Kurkuas yours than De Valmont's. What with all the brave tales you tell of your sweethearts in Cordova and Granada, you must know the way to a woman's heart."

"*Allah!*" exclaimed the Spaniard, taking a cushion from the divan and flinging it merrily at his friend. "Do you not know, I am like the Arab youth who died fighting at Emesa?" said he. "I see the black-eyed girls, the houris looking at me; and one for love of whom all the world would die, beckons me, saying, 'Come hither quickly, for I love thee.' Not that I would slander the beauty of your Greek; but," with half a sigh, "he who has seen the maidens of Andalusia can long only for the houris of Paradise."

"You speak folly," cried the Norman, pettishly. "Where are your eyes?" But at this moment Hugh, the serving-lad who had gone to the castle with the cartel, returned.

"A letter from Sir Louis de Valmont," he announced.

It was a roll of parchment, written by some priest or monk, with only a rude mark over the signature, in another hand; for Louis with all his "gay" science was no clerk. It ran thus:—

"Louis de Valmont, Knight of Auvergne, to Richard Longsword, greeting: I am astounded that an unknighted 'bachelor' like yourself, who has won neither spurs, nor vassals, nor fame in arms, should venture to address me with such insolence. As for my men they had their frolic, and only a fool will quarrel about it. As for your defiance, I will win small honor by slaying a boy like yourself in the lists, as I could well do, and my honor is in no wise hurt when I say I will not meet you. Farewell."

Richard tore the parchment into shreds and strode to and fro in bootless fury.

"By the splendor of God!" cried he, stretching his arms aloft, "the day shall come when this Louis and all the spawn of his sinful house shall curse the hour he sent me this. So may Our Lady help!"

Musa could do nothing to comfort. Richard told his trials to Sebastian, just come down from Cefalu. And in Sebastian he found a counsellor very like to those of long-tormented Job.

"Ah! dear son, this is because all love is sorrow except it be the love of heaven. Says not the Apostle, 'Love not the world, neither the things in the world,'—"

"Not so," broke in Richard; "in loving Mary Kurkuas I love an angel of light."

Sebastian shook his head solemnly. "Dear son, this is a chastisement sent on you from heaven for forgetting your vow, now that you are come to man's estate. Often have I invoked my patron saint, Sebastian, by the arrows that pierced his side, that you would put by all these carnal lusts, this friendship for Musa, the paynim, and dedicate life and might to the freeing of the Holy City."

But Richard was in an impious mood that day. "I was a child when I took the vow. Let the saints smite me, if they will, only first let me humble De Valmont!"

"Alas!" came the answer, "they will indeed smite you, until in very agony for your sin you will plead to go to Jerusalem."

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# CHAPTER VII

## HOW DE VALMONT SENT HIS GAGE

Richard's fury lasted more than one angry day, Musa's comforting counting for nothing. Sebastian's warnings—twanging the same old string—only made his rage the hotter. He wrote to Cefalu, saying it was all over with his suit, and received a letter dictated by his father (who wrote only with his battle-axe) that it was as well; he could marry a daughter of the Baron's old friend, the Count of Foix. William had not seen her, but she would bring a large dowry, and a messenger could sail with proposals for Toulouse at once. Richard returned answer that he could not marry the lady—she came within the forbidden degrees through some ancient alliance of his mother's house with that of Foix. But his heart burned more than ever. Then respite came: Count Roger was summoned to Campania by his nephew and suzerain Duke Roger Bursa, to help crush certain malcontent barons, and away he sailed, taking Iftikhar and his much-prized Saracen guard. With him also went Musa and Richard Longsword, who was finding Palermo a dreary place, and gladly bartered gloomy thoughts for hard campaigning.

Louis de Valmont remained. Every morn he fared to Monreale to bask under the smiles of Mary.

Very pleasant these days to her. As Manuel had said, she was more than fond of the praise of men; knew her eyes darted madness, and was not ashamed to show them. Palermo was not Constantinople; no polished Greek as spoken in the circle of Psellus, the philosopher, and of Anna Comnena; no splendid state ceremonies. But life was free; men spoke of their loves and hates plainly; did not prattle friendship and misty compliment and stab in the dark. Yet in the end Louis's homage began to pall on her. She heard unpleasant stories touching him through Sylvana, her nurse, an indefatigable gossip-monger. The Provençal, she learned, was accounted a hard master to his men; his peers praised his courage, but not his courtesy; he had fought a duel in Catalonia with a baron, in a broil concerning the latter's lady; he had two Moslem sweethearts in Palermo; some said three. All these tales did not go to prosper Louis's suit, and he began to find the morning chatter growing dull and the princess meeting his *cansos* with sober and troublesome questions.

Manuel Kurkuas said little; he was a shrewd man, and knew it was easier to lead than to drive. What with De Valmont's hollow gallantry and boasting of his own great deeds, he fell daily in the daughter's eyes. Then one day two carrier pigeons fluttered to the casements of the Palermo castle, and Sylvana came to Mary itching with a tale. The princess had just bidden Louis farewell. His importunity was great, her perplexity greater; for she did not love the man, yet things had gone too far for her to dismiss him without bitterness and gossip all over the city.

"*Hei, despoina!*" quoth the old woman; "Bardas, the groom, is come from Palermo—a terrible story. Richard Longsword in deathly peril!" And Sylvana, sly sinner, who knew Mary better than Mary knew herself, had expected the start, and flush, and little cry. "No, by St. Basil, he is safe enough," protested she, consequentially. "He was with Count Roger in Italy in the war against William of Grantmesnil, who has turned rebel. Let him tell the whole tale himself. But the chief part is this: There was a castle which my Lord Count and his kinsman, Duke Roger Bursa, swore they would take, but it was defended as though held by very devils. The engines beat a breach in the walls, and the next thing was the storming. But to make the breach and to go through it are not the same thing, as Nicetas, who was my uncle's son, and fought in Syria, once told."

"I have heard that story," cried the lady, impatiently; "go on."

"Well, as I said, the breach was stoutly defended. My Lord Count orders up his boasted Saracen guard, and bids my Lord Iftikhar lead the storm: once, twice, they charge—are beaten back—the third time when ordered, say they are not fond of dying—too many comrades are fallen already. Then while the emir hung back, forward comes my Lord Richard and Musa, his friend; they will lead the storm. A few mad Franks follow them. They win the breach and the castle. St. Theodore must have aided. They say my Lord Richard had as many wounds as you have fingers, when they took him up. No, do not stare about thus: Bardas said he only lost a little blood. But they have made him a knight after the fashion of these Franks, by Duke Roger's own hand; and to Musa they gave I know not what presents. And now seeing that the rebels have sued for mercy, the Count is coming back with all his men, and sent off pigeons from Stromboli saying that he will arrive to-morrow."

To-morrow came and went, and De Valmont held aloof, half to Mary's satisfaction, half to her vexation. Nor did several succeeding days see him. But finally it fell out that he and his rival sallied forth from Palermo by different roads, and both came to Monreale and into the Princess's presence at about the same time. And now it was Louis's turn to let his sharp little beard curl up in impotent anger. For Mary gave never a glance to his high-peaked Anjou boots with which he swelled in pride, but only had eyes for the golden spurs that were twinkling significantly upon Longsword's heels, and the broad white belt that girt him.

"Ah! Sir Richard," cried she, with a pretty stress on the "sir," "now at last you will not deny that you can do a brave deed or two!"

The Norman blushed manfully; for praise from her lips was dearer than from Pope or Emperor.

"Dear lady," said he, humbly, "thanks to the valor of my good comrades, and the help of the blessed angel Michael, men are pleased to speak well of me."

"And the sword you wear," continued she, "it is not the one I saw glance so bright at Cefalu. Who gave it?" And she added, while Richard drew forth the weapon: "How long! How heavy! What magic letters are these upon the blade?"

Richard had bared a mighty weapon, which he held outstretched while the sun glinted on the long, polished steel, and the gold chased work on the guard shone bright.

"Know," he said proudly, "that from this weapon we Longswords take our name. This is 'Trenchefer,' passed from father to son, so far as memory may reach to the days when our house came down from the Northland with Duke Rollo, and hewed away our duchy from the weakling Emperor. Never has a Longsword carried this blade and endured captivity. Never has a hostile hand gripped its hilt; never has a first-born of my race"—Richard held his head still higher—"lacked a first-born who could not toss it like a twig." And he brandished the great gleaming blade on high. "As for these strange characters, they say they are an incantation, pagan no doubt, but it still holds good: a rune-song, they call it, which makes Trenchefer cut iron like wool and steel like fagots. Here in the hilt is the reliquary, set there by my pious grandfather to destroy the sin of the spell, and make it stronger; here is a tooth of St. Matthias, and a clot of the blood of St. Gereon the Martyr. All his life my father has borne this, and never yet has Trenchefer failed in the sorest need. Now that my father is old, and I a belted knight, I have taken Trenchefer to bear

until my own first-born can wield it worthily."

Mary stepped beside him, took the hilt in both her little hands, and made shift to raise the great sword. It was very heavy. The blood mounted to her cheeks; she smiled, but bit her lips, and made a mighty effort. Once she raised the blade, then dropped it with a clang, and laughed merrily.

"*Eu!* Sir Richard," she cried in Greek, "what a pretty toy for a maid like myself! I will let you always swing it for me."

"It is not heavy," quoth the Norman, his iron wrist tossing it lightly.

"Not heavy!" was the reply. "You Franks are born, I half think, in armor; slaying is to you a pleasant art."

"And why not, sweet lady?" answered the other, seriously. "Is there anything better befitting a brave gentleman, after a noble life, than to be rocked to sleep in a fair battle with the swords clinking merry music above, and angels to convoy his soul?"

But at this moment De Valmont, who had stood by gnawing his mustachios all this while, stepped up and took the sword out of Richard's hand.

"Assuredly, Sir Richard," said he, holding up the sword, though truth to tell he found it nothing easy, "you have here a mighty weapon. You will be the thirteenth of Charlemagne's twelve peers, and contest the captaincy with Roland's self." He sheathed the sword, and laughed dryly.

There was no need for any special wits to see that Louis was seeking a quarrel at last.

"I trust it will be found keen enough to satisfy any who question *now* my knighthood," came back the hot retort. But Mary intervened with haughty mandate:—

"Sir Louis! Sir Richard! what is this in my presence? How often have I bidden you be friends, if you would keep my favor! Must you brawl under my very eyes?"

"I cry pardon of Sir Richard," began the Provençal, feeling he had made a misstep; but Longsword cut him short.

"And I grant none; but this is no place. Let us begone!"

"I warn you!" cried De Valmont, in black fury, "if we meet, but one shall ride away. Hitherto you have crossed swords with weaklings, and I give you a proverb, 'Amongst the blind, the one-eyed man is king.'"

"And I return proverb for proverb," blazed back the Norman: "'It is well to let the sleeping dog lie.' Let God judge if I have sought this quarrel!"

"Sirs," commanded Mary Kurkuas, with her haughtiest gesture, "get you gone both, nor return till this strife be ended!" And she pointed towards the door.

Richard collected himself with a mighty effort.

"I obey, lady," was all he said; while he bowed, kissed the hem of her mantle, and stalked out of the palace. De Valmont did not follow him, but stood staring darkly about, as though wanting half his wits.

"Sir Louis," repeated the princess, still at her lordly poise, "did you not hear what I said?"

"Ah! *Dona!* beautiful mistress!" cried the Provençal, half threatening, half entreating; "what words are these? Depart? Will you dismiss me? By St. Martin, I swear life will be all night without you! Oh, pity, favor me; have mercy on my distress!"

Mary looked upon him, and saw that half his profession sprang from his troubadour gallantry; but the rest—the mad light in his eyes proved how genuine!

"Give me your hand!" raged on De Valmont, half beside himself. Then with a step nearer—"No, not your hand, your lips!"

Mary flushed in turn with her anger; quail she did not.

"Sir Louis, recollect yourself," she commanded sternly; "let what has slipped you be forgotten. I repeat—depart, or I call my father's servants; and come not again, until your quarrel with Richard Longsword be ended."

"Then, by Christ's wounds, I will have his life!" roared the Provençal with a great oath, and tore out of the room, leaving Mary quaking amid hysteric laughter.

When Manuel Kurkuas heard what had passed, he grew very grave.

"Enemies they have been since first they met here at Monreale," was his comment, "and now I fear they will strike friendship only in heaven, unless," he added dryly, "their sins be such—and they are many—they will perchance meet elsewhere."

So his daughter spent the remainder of the day in no little trepidation and sorrow; for it was no pleasant thing to feel that two gallant gentlemen, for whom she had cared much, were to risk immortal souls, perhaps on her account. About noon the next day, Sylvana came to her gleefully

with the whole story.

"*Ei*, my lady," chattered she, "all Palermo is talking of it, and Bardas has brought me all they say. It is told that this morning Sir Richard went to the Cathedral, and confessed to a priest and received the host; then he set hand on a box of holy relics and swore something secret, but doubtless terrible. A little later, lo! in comes Sir Louis and does the very same. Then right in the porch of the church they came face to face, and Sir Louis broke out with revilings terrible to hear, and finally cried, 'You are not an equal fit to kiss my cheek; "villain" you are, or little better, who should kiss my spurs!' Whereupon Sir Richard gave him a great box on the ear, which nearly knocked him down, crying, 'This is the kiss I give you!' And then and there they would have drawn, but other gentlemen dragged them asunder by main force, and took them to Count Roger, who, when he found he could not compose their quarrel, demanded of each his knightly word that they would remain apart until the great tourney, which will be when the envoys from the Egyptian emperor come. Then the two will meet, and Our Lady guard their lives!"

Mary Kurkuas did not sleep soundly that night. Often as the dreams came to her, they took form of champions in armor, charging, charging, ever charging! And when she awoke, it was with the last words of De Valmont ringing in her ears, "By Christ's wounds, I will have his life!" A long time after all the palace was still, she arose, lit a taper, and knelt before a stiff little Byzantine painting of the Holy Mother that was by her bedside.

"O pure and blessed Lady," she prayed, "have mercy on me! Have mercy on them both! I have sinned in leading them on so madly; they have sinned in loving me so madly! Oh, pity, mercy; have compassion on us all!"

So ran her prayer. After a while she was a little comforted, and fell into troubled sleep.

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# CHAPTER VIII

## HOW IFTIKHAR SPED A VAIN ARROW

News from over the sea,—from Italy! News that set old Sebastian declaiming, and wandering about all day with a mad fire in his eyes and a verse from Isaiah the prophet on his lips. For it was bruited abroad that a wonderful pilgrim had come from the East, Peter of Amiens, once a noble and a warrior, but one who had forsworn the world and gone to the Holy City to expiate his sins. Now he had returned, and stood before Pope Urban with messages from the down-trodden Patriarch of Jerusalem; also with a marvellous tale,—that Christ had appeared in vision to him, and bidden him summon the soldiers of the West to the deliverance of the City of God. And the Holy Father had believed, and given him letters bidding all men hear him and obey. Nor was that all. There was a great council of the Church soon to convene at Plaisance to move all Italy to go against the infidel; and if Italy were too sunken in her civil strifes and unknightly commerce, the Pope had sworn he would appeal to his own people, the French—"bold cavaliers so dear to God."

When Sebastian heard this tale, brought by a Genoese, he was all eagerness to take the next ship for Marseilles with Richard. "It was the acceptable day of the Lord; who was not for Him was against Him: beware lest the laggards endure the reproach of Deborah upon Reuben, that abode by his sheepfold, and Dan, who remained in his ships." But Richard only swelled with desire to see De Valmont prone upon the sands; and Musa smiled in his soft manner, saying, "Have not you Franks broils enough among yourselves, that you must seek Jerusalem?" Whereupon Sebastian had cried, "Ah! Child of the Devil, you seek to pluck away Richard's soul; but every night I wrestle with God in prayer, beseeching God He will sever this unholy friendship. And my faith does not fail!"

Musa gave no answer; silence was the stoutest armor against the churchman.

Presently all thoughts of Italy and France were chased from mind by the coming of the long-awaited embassy from the Egyptian kalif to Palermo. A great and splendid embassy it was, headed by no less a person than Hisham, son of Afdhal, vizier to the kalif Abul Kasim. There were long trains of stately Abyssinian eunuchs and negro guardsmen in gay liveries; a mighty glitter of scarlet and purple caftans, jewel-decked turbans, gold-sheathed cimeters, a present of dazzling gems for the Count and the Countess. The echo of the earthquake in France and Italy had been heard in Africa, and the kalif had been anxious to forestall the joining of the redoubtable Sicilian Count to the Crusade by early display of friendship. Then, too, it was told that the kalif had especial love for Count Roger, because in crushing the Sicilian emirs he had only chastised rebels, who had a little earlier cast off their fealty to the Cairo Emperor.

And Count Roger, bound to do his guests full honor, sent out his heralds over the length and breadth of Sicily, proclaiming a grand tournament. Forth went the messengers "crying the tourney," till their mules were dust-covered and their voices cracked. To the remotest Norman castle and Saracen village in the mountains they went, and man and maid made ready their best, and counted the days; for the Count had ordered there should be games and combats for Christian and Moslem alike.

The days sped slowly for Mary Kurkuas. De Valmont and Longsword were bound by pledge to Count Roger not to wait on her till after the tourney. Bitterly Mary reproached herself for her folly. Did not all Palermo know how she had given her glove to De Valmont? And Richard? Why had she held that cup to his lips that night at Cefalu? Mere gratitude? Was not that repaying her preserver with more than friendship? And was she not willing to pay? Such her questions—never answered. Poor little Countess Blanche, Count Roger's daughter, soon to be exiled as given in marriage to the king of Hungary, would have laughed with glee to have two such gallant cavaliers joust with her name on their lips. But Mary's heart told her that it was very wrong. Her father's health failed fast; she was filled with foreboding. Musa and Iftikhar were the only visitors at Monreale now. Musa was ever the same,—gentle, sweet-voiced, courtly, never unduly familiar. Iftikhar at times swelled with a passion that nearly betrayed him; but Mary was too accustomed to ardent lovers to take alarm. Yet at times, to her dismay, she saw he really held that their religion was no barrier between them, and that he would gladly have stood on equality with Richard and De Valmont. One day it befell that the fire in the emir nearly flashed out. He had paid a more than commonly florid compliment, and Mary twitted him.

"But you Moslems in truth cannot care much for women, for all your verses and praise; we are not even granted immortal souls by your law!"

"Oh, believe it not," cried the emir, hotly; "for in Paradise the true believer will rejoice in the company of all the wives of his mortal state!"

"Yes," interposed Musa, with a soft laugh. "He will if he desire them, otherwise not; and there are many husbands and many wives!"

The princess saw the frown that swept over the brow of the emir at this interference.

"Come, my lord," commanded she, pointing to the lute, "you shall sing to me! Sing of love, and mirth, and laughter, for I am in a doleful mood to-day."

But Iftikhar only frowned the more.

"O Brightness of the Heart!" he replied gloomily, "I too am not merry. Were I to sing, it would be Kalif Rahdi's poem, of which the burden runs, 'Man is but the child of woe!' You would not care for such melancholy?"

"Assuredly not," laughed the lady. "Then you shall play the minstrel, Sir Musa. First you shall tell us of those wonderful poets' gardens in your Spain; then you shall sing one of the songs that win the sighs and blushes in the harems of Seville or Granada." And she held out the lute.

Musa obeyed, tightened the strings, tinkled a few notes, and said in his musical, liquid Arabic:—

"Know, O lady, that we Spaniards are not like the Moslems of the East; we do not hide our wives and daughters in prison houses. To us marriage is born of true love, and he who would win love must be a poet; therefore all Andalusians are poets. Would you hear of the wooing of my mother? She was the daughter of the emir of Malaga, and on the day my father came to her father's court, he saw her in the gardens, dancing with her women; and his heart was as fire. Sleep left him. Three days he spent in sighs and sorrow, and on the fourth he stole under the garden wall and sang his passion: how she was lovelier than the Ez-Zahra, 'City of the Fairest'; her voice was sweeter than the murmur of the Guadalquiver glancing in the sun; her eyes more beautiful than the stars when they twinkle in the lake, and a smile from her lips surpassed all wine. Then, on the next night as he sang, she answered him in like manner in verse; how her love was strong as the Berber lion; his white teeth more precious than pearls; his head more beautiful than garlands of roses; and his words cut her heart more keenly than cimeters of Murcia. So my father rejoiced, for he knew he had won; and went boldly to the emir and demanded his daughter in marriage."

"And what are the songs which your poets sing by the Guadalquiver and the Darro?" asked the princess.

"Ah, lady," answered Musa, dreamily, "no true poet can sing his love-song twice. See; I will wish myself back at Cordova, in the orange groves I love so well, and will sing as move the genii of song." And the Spaniard ran his hands over the echoing strings, and sang in low, weird melody:—

"Sweet as the wind when it kisses the rose
Is thy breath!
Blest, if thy lips had but once on me smiled,
Would be death!
Give me the throat of the bulbul to sing
Forth thy praise:
Then wouldst thou drink the clear notes as they spring
All thy days!
Nard of far Oman's too mean for thy sweetness,
Eagle wings lag at thy glancing eyes' fleetness;
By thy pure beauty, bright gems lack completeness;
Lady, ah, fairest!

Were I a genie, with rapture I'd seize thee;
I'd haste away
To magic-wrought cavern, all jewelled and golden;

There I'd stay
While the long glad years with printless feet wheeling
Leave no trace,
Save only new beauty and soft love revealing
In thy face.
The speeding of ages would breed us no sorrow;
I'd shrink from no past, and dread naught of the morrow;
The laugh in thine eyes, that alone I would borrow,
Lady, ah, rarest!"

"*Ai*, Sir Musa," cried Mary, when the strings were still, "were you Louis de Valmont or even my Lord Iftikhar, I should say in my heart, 'How much you are my slave!' But to a Spaniard like yourself the making of such a song—it means nothing?"

"Nothing," answered the Andalusian, his dreamy eye wandering over the marble tracery on the wall above.

The emir broke forth hotly:—

"*Wallah*, you Spaniard, what mean then your pretty songs, your chatter of praise and compliment, if they are words, words, and nothing more? In the East, whence I come, we thrill, we feel, we make no shame to flame with a mighty passion. Aye, and make our deeds match our fine words."

Musa laid down the lute, and stared at the emir unconcernedly.

"My good lord," answered he, "do you not know that when I sing love, I sing not the love of any one lady? And think not I despise our princess—she is peerless among women. Rather I praise that divine essence which reveals itself in every bright eye and velvet cheek from east to west,—this pure beauty sent down from Paradise by the favor of Allah, I adore; and whenever I behold it, its praise I must sing."

"You are trained in the heathen philosophy of your schools of Cordova," retorted the emir; "I cannot follow your thought. To me it is better to have the taste of one cup of wine than be told of the sweetness of ten thousand. Enough; the Count requires me." And he arose to bow himself out.

Musa had arisen also, and courteously thrust his right hand in his breast, where he murmured the farewell, "Peace be on you."

Iftikhar's answer hung for a moment on his lips, then he gave the customary reply among Moslem friends, "And on you be peace, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings!"

Mary sighed when the emir was gone.

"You are not gay, dear lady," said the Spaniard; "if I can do aught to aid, command me."

Half petulantly the princess caught a sugared cake from the tray by the divan and threw it into the fountain, where the greedy fish in the basin waited.

"I should be very happy, should I not?" exclaimed she, with a laugh not very merry. "See, since I have come to Palermo, here are Richard Longsword and De Valmont with blades drawn on my account; the emir sighs like the west wind, and is all gloom and restlessness; and you, Sir Musa," she went on boldly, "were you to speak out your own heart, are wishing them all three dead, that you might have no rival. Holy Mother," added she, with half a sob, half a laugh, "I am too much loved! What am I, silly girl, that so many brave cavaliers should pawn their souls for my poor sake!"

"Sweet mistress," replied the Spaniard, very slowly, flinging a second cake into the fountain, "you are wrong. Your friend, your admirer, I will ever be. Were we both Christian or Moslem, had I no memories of moon-lit nights and sun-lit orchards in Spain—but enough of that! Know that I am the sworn brother of Richard Longsword; that he loves you purely and honorably; that after the manner of his people he will become a great man, whom any lady, be she however high, might love to call her lord. And that you may smile on him, is my first and only prayer."

Mary's whole face crimsoned at this, for Musa was not now playing the poet. There was a ring of command in her voice when she made answer:—

"Sir Musa, I cannot have another say for them what Richard and Louis de Valmont may not say to my face. Let us await the tourney. Who knows lest your friend will woo no more after that day? I hear—God spare them both—that Louis is a terrible knight; he will ride against Longsword as though all the fiends were in him."

"They are in the hands of the Most High," said the Andalusian, still very gently; "yet, believe me, the Provençal may have ridden down many stout knights, and yet not the peer of Longsword. But —" and he in turn salaamed, "I have also to hasten. And perhaps even my presence is burdensome."

"No," cried the Greek, extending her hands, "come, come often; I have too many lovers, too few friends. My father sinks day by day; Christ pity me! I am alone in a strange land; I have borne myself foolishly. The beauty you sing of is half a curse. If truly you would be my friend, and nothing more, do not desert me. I am very wretched."

There were tears in her eyes; her voice choked a little, but she stood proud and steady, the great princess still.

Very low was the reverence paid by the Spaniard. He kissed the bright rug at her feet; then rising, answered:—

"Star of the Greeks, not you, but Allah who has put enchantment in your eyes, has bred this trouble, if trouble it be. But as for me, I swear it, by Allah the Great, you shall never call on me in vain!"

"You are a noble cavalier, Sir Musa," said the lady, now all dignity; "I thank you."

So the days went by, and it was the evening before the tourney. All around Palermo spread the tents, bright pavilions of silk with broad pennons above, whipping the slow south wind. The gardens of the Golden Shell buzzed with the clatter and hum of a thousand busy squires. In the city, every house—Christian, Moslem, or Jewish—was thrown open to guests. There were flags at every door and window; and within pealed the laughter of feasters, the note of viol and psaltery and tabor at the dance. All the house walls without and within were decked in tapestries, cloth of gold, and priceless *paile* and *cendal* silk, some from the looms of Thebes or Corinth, some from the farthest Ind. Mixed with these Orient stuffs, the storied Poitou tapestry shook to the breeze in long folds, displaying kings and emperors and the legion of the saints. Much wagering there was with knight and villain on the issues of the day. Many cavaliers of the baser sort had entered, merely in hopes to fill their purses by the ransom of defeated combatants; most of all, men chaffered over the coming duel between Richard and Louis. "Longsword would never stand one round," ran the vulgar tongue; "De Valmont had no peer unless it were Iftikhar. The saints have mercy on the younger knight in Purgatory!"

As for Mary, she had spent the afternoon in no common vexation. Her father was worse, and could not go to the tourney. Countess Adelaide had bidden the princess sit with her, but Mary had little joy in the prospect.

That evening as she sat with a taper at her reading-desk, the purple vellum leaves of George of Pisidia's learned epic brought little forgetfulness. While she was staring at the words, Bardas, the serving-man, startled her: "The emir Iftikhar to see the gracious princess." And without awaiting permission the Egyptian entered. He was in his splendid panoply,—gold on the rings of his cuirass, two broad eagle wings on his helmet, between them burned a great ruby. Under the mail-shirt hung the green silk trousers with their pearl embroidery, gems again on the buckles of the high shoes, more gems on the gilded sword hilt.

"You are come in state, my lord," said the Greek, while he made profound obeisance. "What may I do for you?"

"O lady of excellent beauty," he began abruptly, "will you indeed give your hand to him who conquers to-morrow?"

The wandering eye, the flushed cheek, the mad fire of his words—all these were a warning. Mary drew herself up.

"You ask what you have no right, my lord," answered she; "I am in no way pledged."

Unlucky admission: in a twinkling the emir had moved a step toward her and stretched out his arms.

"Oh, happy mortal that I am! O lady with the wisdom of Sukman, nephew of Job, the beauty of Jacob, the sweet voice of David, the purity of Mary the Virgin! Listen! Favor me!"

"Sir!" cried the Greek, recoiling as he advanced, "what is this speech? No more of it. I am Christian, you a Moslem. Friends we have been, perhaps to our cost. More than that, never; we part, if you think to make otherwise!"

Iftikhar fell on his knees. All the flame of a terrible passion was kindling his eyes. Even as she trembled, Mary could admire his Oriental splendor. But she did not forget herself.

"I must bid you leave me!" with a commanding gesture. "If our friendship leads to this—it is well to make an end!"

"Not so," burst from the Egyptian, still supplicating; "none worship you as do I! To me you are fair as the moon in its fourteenth night, when the clouds withdraw. For your sake I will turn Christian. To win you—" But Mary was in no gracious mood that night.

"Madman," she tossed back, all her anger rising at his importunity, "do you think you will buy me with such a bribe? Forswear Mohammed for your soul's sake, not for mine! I do not love you. Were I to look on any Moslem, why not Musa? he is a noble cavalier."

Iftikhar was not kneeling now. His eyes still flashed. His voice was husky; but he mastered it.

"Lady," he said a little thickly, "think well before you say me nay. Listen—I am a man of great power among both Franks and Moslem. Were I to go to Syria, even higher things await me,—commands, cities, principalities," his voice rose higher, "kingdoms even; for you should know that I am a chieftain of the Ismaelians, one of the highest *dais* of that dread brotherhood, whose daggers strike down the mightiest, and at whose warning kalifs tremble—"

Mary cut him short; her poise grew more haughty. "I do not love you. Were you kalif or emperor, I would not favor you. Depart."

"Hearken!" cried the Egyptian, with a last effort; "my breast bursts for the love of you; the light of your eyes is my sun; a kiss from you—my arms about you—"

But here the Greek, whose face had crimsoned, snatched a tiny baton beside a bronze gong.

"Away from me!" she commanded fiercely, as he took an uneasy step toward her. "Away! or I sound the gong and call the grooms."

"Woman!" came from his lips hotly, "what is such a threat to me? I would have you with your love if I might. But, by the Glory of Allah, you I will have, though your every breath were a curse. Your grooms!" with a proud toss of his splendid head; "were they ten, what have I to fear? I, the best sword in all Sicily, in all Syria, Egypt, and Iran, perchance." And he came a step still nearer; and now at last Mary began to dread, but still she did not quail.

"I doubt not your valor, my lord," she said very coldly. "But my heart and hand are not to be won with a cimeter, as was won that castle breach which Musa and Richard Longsword, not you, entered first."

Scarce were the words out of her mouth before terror seized her. For in a twinkling Iftikhar had snatched the gong from her reach, and caught her wrist in a grasp of iron. She could feel the hot breath from his nostrils in her face, see the mad blood swelling the veins of his forehead. In her panic she screamed once, and instantly Iftikhar was pressing her very throat. In his mighty hands she was dumb and helpless as a child.

"Hear me," came from his lips in a hoarse whisper. "I have not come hither alone. I had come to bear away the pledge of your love. You spurn me. All is provided. My slave Zeyneb is without, and with him fifteen men, all armed, hidden in the gardens. What resistance could your servants make, were you to cry ever so loudly? My men are devotees of our order—would kill themselves at my bidding. A ship lies in the harbor at my command. It is night. You are helpless. I will carry you aboard. Before morning we are beyond sight of Sicily, beyond pursuit. And you are mine, be it in love or hate, forever—forever!"

Iftikhar pressed his face nearer. Mary thrilled with horror beyond words. She had one thought,—her father, her father.

"To Egypt," Iftikhar was repeating, "to Syria. There is a palace of mine at Aleppo, beside which this is a cottage. And it shall be yours and you mine. *Allah akhbah!* How beautiful you are; your lips, a kiss—"

But even as Mary's senses reeled, she heard a step, a familiar step, and Iftikhar had let her drop from his hands as though her form were flame. She caught at a column, steadied herself, and looked upon the face of Musa.

The Spaniard was standing in the dim light of the hall, dressed in sombre black armor; but the red plumes danced on his helmet. His shield was on his arm, naked cimeter outstretched.

"The peace of Allah be with you, fair lady, and noble lord," said Musa, bowing in most stately fashion, first to the shivering Greek, then to Iftikhar. The Egyptian already had his weapon drawn, but the Andalusian did not fall on guard.

"Most excellent emir," continued he, very gently, "Count Roger bids me say, if you will go at once to the castle, it will please him well. And your men in the gardens shall be no care to you. I have ridden from Palermo with forty lancers, who will give them all good company on return."

Night was never blacker than the frown of the Egyptian, when he replied huskily: "And, Sir Spaniard, why does Count Roger favor *you* with bearing me his orders? And why come you here unbidden, with cimeter and target?"

"Because," answered Musa, his brow too darkening, "I know too well why the Commander of the Guard is here." Then, more sternly, "And that I have come barely in time—praise be to Allah—to save him from a deed at which the very jinns of hell would cry out!"

He took a step closer to Iftikhar, and the two blades went up together. But Mary sprang forward, with the cry:—

"Not as you live! You shall not. Would you kill my father by fighting here, and for me?"

Musa let his point fall, and bowed with courtly ease.

"You say well, Star of the Greeks. The emir will speak with me elsewhere."

Iftikhar made no attempt to conceal his rage.

"Cursed be you and all your race! What enchanter has told you this—has humiliated me thus?"

"You ask what I may not tell," and Musa smiled in his gentle way. "Enough, I was told all that was in your heart, about an hour since,—the ship, the men, the design. Count Roger also knows; and, my lord, he has been none too well pleased with your faithfulness of late. I have come with forty given me by the Count. They do not know their errand; they are to move at my nod. Ride back with me to Palermo, my lord, and pledge me your word, by Allah the Great, said thrice, that you

will not molest Mary Kurkuas so long as you remain in Sicily, or—"

"And if I will not—" broke from the raging emir.

"Then, my lord, I shall carry you to the castle in fetters. My men are also without—" Iftikhar had half started upon the Spaniard, swinging his cimeter. "Never!" came between his teeth. Musa beckoned away Mary with his own weapon. "To your father!" he commanded. But the Egyptian let his point sink. "Allah make you feel the fire of Gehennah!" was his curse. "I am trapped, I will swear."

"Then, my lord, saving Count Roger, and the lady, and myself, none shall ever know of this," said Musa softly, and he pointed with his cimeter to the doorway. Iftikhar repeated the great oath—the most terrible among Moslems—thrice; bowed to the Spaniard; made a profound salaam to Mary; the samite curtains in the passage closed behind him; his footfalls died away; he was gone. Musa bowed in turn:—

"Allah is merciful, dear lady. Do I prove a faithful cavalier?"

"Ah, Sir Musa!" cried Mary, still faint and weak, "God requite you. I offer you all I have, except love—and could I give that, it were mean repayment."

Musa's plumes almost brushed the pavement as he again saluted.

"I may not tell how I learned of this plot. I was warned secretly by a strange Arabian woman, who required of me solemn oath not to reveal her. To her, owe the thanks! But my mistress's words are more precious than as if each syllable were treasures of gold; the praise, flashed from her eyes, beyond gems; her voice sweeter than all the nightingales of Khorassan. I am well repaid."

He, too, departed. Mary stood long clinging to the pillar, now shivering, now laughing. What had she not escaped? When might she forget the unholy desire on the emir's face when he departed? Had he indeed forsaken his passion for her forever?

"St. Theodore," she cried with a sad, wild laugh, "I am cursed with too much love!"

Then she went to her father.

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# CHAPTER IX

## HOW TRENCHEFER DROVE HOME

November sixth; feast of St. Leonard, the warrior hermit; third hour of the morning. In the monastery church the monks were chanting "terce" to an empty nave. When the muezzins climbed their minarets to bid all Moslems "come to prayer," few heard. Mary Kurkuas sat in the pavilion of Countess Adelaide, viewing the lists and wondering if even the vision of the Golden Horn and Constantinople might be more fair. The lists were set in the broad plain betwixt the city and Monte Pellegrino, the loftier western height of Castellaccio and Monte Cuccio. All about lay the matchless country—Palermo, its masses of white buildings crowned with gilded minarets; the blooming "Golden Shell" a sea of olive trees, palm, fig, orange, running down to that other sea of emerald; and in the background rocks of saffron topped by the broken peaks beyond.

Against the stout wooden barriers with pointed palings, pressed and jostled a vast swarm of city folk,—Greek, Frank, Arab, Jew,—their busy tongues making babel. Within the barriers, but behind the low inner fence, loitered the impatient squires, splendid in bright mantles and silvered casques, ready, the instant conflict joined, to rush to the *mêlée*, and drag dismounted combatants from under the horses. But for the ladies—"the stars of the tourney"—were set shady pavilions,—wooden lodges, brightly painted, flag-covered. Now their rising tiers of seats were filled by a buzzing throng, rustling their silken mantles and satin bleaunts. And the sun was glancing on many a gemmed fillet and many a ribbon-decked, blond tress that fell nigh to its proud owner's knees. These on the western side. On the eastern fluttered gauzy veils, feathery fans, blazing brocade of Mosul, and kerchiefs of Kufa. Dark eyes flashed from beneath the veiling. But Moslem watched Christian in peace. A clang of trumpets was drifting down the wind—the tourneyers were coming from Palermo.

Fifty viols braying in the hands of marching Frankish *jongleurs*; fifty Egyptian timbrels clattering; kettledrums, northern horns; heralds in blue mantles, Christian and Moslem side by side—the combatants two abreast—Norman, Provençal, Sicilian, Arab, Egyptians of the embassy,—a goodly company; gold on every Toledo hauberk, silver on each bit and bridle; a trailing pennon on every lance, save when a prouder banner streamed—the silken stocking of some fair dame, gift of love to her chosen cavalier. So the procession entered. Behind them trailed a new horde of common folk who had come from watching two blindfolded varlets chase a pig in a ring; these, too, now pressed against the palings, peering and edging for a glimpse within. Then, while the actual combatants rode to the tents at either end of the lists, two cavaliers—Count Roger de Hauteville and Prince Tancred, his nephew—came to take seats in the Countess's lodge; for they were judges of the games.

A lordly cavalier was the Sicilian count despite threescore years and more; fire still in his blue eyes, command and power in his voice; worthy suzerain of so fair an isle. At his side stood his nephew,—stranger as yet to Mary Kurkuas; but at once she noted his flaxen hair and crafty "sea-green" eye, and stature above that of common men. She was told he had fame as the most headlong cavalier in all south Italy; but she little dreamed what deeds God destined him to dare. Very ceremonious was the Prince, when he saluted the Greek lady. He spoke her own tongue fluently, and never in Constantinople had she met a gentleman more at his ease in courtly company. Their talk ran soon to the tourney and the combatants.

"I wish you joy, fair princess," protested Tancred; "not often may any lady see two stouter champions ride with her name on the lips of both!"

Mary shook her head.

"Would God they might do anything else! They tell me Sir Louis has sworn to have Sir Richard's life; and the Auvergner is a terrible cavalier."

Tancred shot a glance keen as an arrow. Did he know that Mary's heart would ride with one of the train and not with the other?

"Spare him your tears," was the answer. "Louis de Valmont is a famous knight; but I do not think he will down Richard Longsword in one joust,—or in seven."

"St. Basil spare both—and forgive both!" was the unuttered reply. But she asked, "Yet I saw neither among the combatants?"

"True; both protested they could not meet in the regular tourney and take the required oath to fight solely to gain skill. Fight on the same side they will not; therefore they will come forward when the general games end." Tancred was cut short by a word from the Count.

"See, my princess—a cavalier asks your favor."

None other than Musa had reined before the pavilion on a prancing white Berber. His plain black mail fitted his fine form like a doublet. His mettled horse caracoled under his touch with a grace that made a long "Ah!" come from betwixt more than one pair of red lips. His glance sought the Greek.

Mary rose deliberately; long since had she learned not to dread the public eye.

"See, Sir Musa," cried she, loosing the red ribbon from her neck. "Wear this in the games and do me honor!" More than two heads had come together.

"Has De Valmont a new rival?" ran the whisper. But Mary knew her ground.

"Your reward for service untold," she tossed forth; and only the Count and two more knew what her words implied. Musa caught the ribbon with a flourish of his lance; pressed it to his lips, then wound it deftly around the green, peaked cap which he wore Andalusian fashion in lieu of turban.

"You honor a gallant cavalier," said the Count, applauding. "I offered him much to join my service; but he listens to the proffers of the Egyptian envoys."

"Look!" came Tancred's voice; and Mary saw Iftikhar Eddauleh, on a dappled Arabian and in his panoply of the night before, come plunging down the lists. Abreast of Musa he drew rein in a twinkling, and the two riders came together so close that no other might hear the words which flew between them. But ten thousand saw Musa's hand clap to hilt, and Iftikhar's lance half fall to rest.

"Holy Mother—keep them asunder!" was Mary's whispered prayer.

Count Roger had risen.

"Sirs—what is this? Brew quarrels under your lady's very eyes? Go apart, or I forbid you to ride in the games." Iftikhar bowed his head,—in no very good grace, it seemed,—and cantered sulkily to the upper end of the lists.

"I fear Iftikhar Eddauleh and I must soon seek other masters," remarked the Count to Tancred, in Mary's hearing. "Rumor has it, he has dealings with the Ismaelians. He grows haughty and insubordinate. A good captain and a matchless cavalier; yet I shall not grieve to see him return to the East."

But now the Christian heralds were calling on the Normans and Provençals to range themselves in two companies and do battle, after the rule of that knightly paragon, Geoffrey de Preully,—"for the love of Christ, St. George, and all fair ladies." Of the passage at arms that followed, needless here to tell. Many a stout blow was struck despite blunted weapons; ten good knights fell senseless from their horses; the squires took up two dead; sent for a priest to anoint a third. Before the fray ended, little Countess Blanche and her ladies had fluttered and shrieked till wild and hoarse. They had torn off ribbons, necklaces, lockets, bracelets, and tossed forth madly "gauntlets of love" to favorite cavaliers, until they sat—or stood rather—dressed only in their robes and their long, bright hair.

Then came respite, while the lists were cleared for the Saracens' games,—for the wise Count suffered no ill-blood to breed by letting Christian ride against Moslem. The Egyptian cavaliers

took part—stately men, in red, silver-embroidered tunics, with blue, gem-set aigrettes flashing in their turbans. No less gallant were the Sicilian Saracens, and Iftikhar most brilliant of them all. A small palm tree was set in the midst of the arena,—the trunk bronze, the leaves one sheen of gold-foil. A silver dove dangled from a bough, in the bill a golden ring. Then the Arab heralds proclaimed that each horseman should ride in turn, catching the ring upon his lance; and he who once failed should not try again.

So they rode, twenty or more. The first round none missed; three in the second; and so till the ninth, when there were but two,—and these Iftikhar and Musa the Andalusian.

"Beard of the Prophet!" cried Hasham, the Egyptian envoy, who sat at the Count's side, "the two are as enchanted. Not in all Egypt—in all Syria and Khorassan,—such horsemen!"

"And the All-wise alone knows," responded the Count, "which of the two be the better! Yet I wish any save these two were contending. See! Again!"

And the twain rode many times; till Mary, whose cheeks were very hot and eyes very bright, forgot to count the rounds. At last a shout:—

"Iftikhar fails!" The ring was still in the dove's mouth. Musa swung lightly his horse; dropped lance-point, dashed at the tree at a gallop, fleet as the north wind, amid a cloud of dust; but as he flew down the lists a mightier shout was rising. The ring glittered on his spear. The Count placed the prize in Mary's hand, when the heralds led the victor to the judges' lodge.

"Sir Musa," said she clearly, while he knelt and she fixed the diamond-studded aigrette upon his cap, "you have so ridden that all your friends grow proud. May it be ever thus!"

"Could each gem be a thousand," answered the Spaniard, in his musical accent, "they were less precious than your words to-day."

"There spoke the true cavalier of Spain!" cried Count Roger, who loved Moslems so that priests grumbled he dissuaded them from Christianity. And Hasham added, "Verily, the efreets bewitched the Almoravide when he exiled such a horseman!"

"By the brightness of Allah!" replied Musa, with a sweeping bow to the ladies, "who could not ride through a thousand blades with such gaze upon him!"

The Andalusian started to ride slowly back to his station, when the Count summoned him again.

"Sir Musa, all is not smooth between you and Iftikhar Eddauleh. In the game to follow I desire that you ride on the same side. I will not have you meet. What were those words between you?"

The Spaniard's teeth shone white when he answered:—

"Bountiful lord, the emir deigned to tell me that if ever we met face to face and naught hindered, I would do well to commend my soul to Allah."

"And you?"

"Made answer that the secrets of Allah were hid, and no man knows whether the Book of Doom assigns death to Iftikhar or to Musa when they meet; as Musa for his part prays they may."

"Mad spirits!" laughed Roger; "but I cannot have more than De Valmont and Longsword sacrifice themselves to-day. Your word that you will not seek Iftikhar's mischief in the games!"

"Given, my lord."

"Good!"—then to an attendant knight, "Send the emir to the pavilion."

But the emir had withdrawn himself, and was not to be found, until amid the clash of Eastern music the arena was cleared and the Moslem game of the wands began. The ten riders who had contended best for the rings were drawn up, five against five. Light round targets were brought them, and in the place of pointed lances, long brittle reeds. He who failed to break his reed on an opponent's target, when they charged at gallop, fell out of the game, unless his rival fared no better. Iftikhar Eddauleh and Musa were arrayed on the same side, with three combatants between. The Count had seen the shadow flit across Mary's face, and reassured: "They will not meet unless the other eight are worsted before either of them—and that can scarcely be; for all are great cavaliers."

Then the kettledrums boomed, while the ten dashed together. A fair sight, without the bloodshed of the Christians' tourney. As each rider swept forward after breaking his reed, he dashed on past attendants standing with a sheaf of unbroken lances, dropped his shivered butt, snatched another, and spurred back to the contest. The horses caught their masters' spirit, and threw up their heels merrily as they flew on charge after charge. Well matched were all; only on the seventh round did an agile Sicilian, by a quick crouch in the saddle, elude an Egyptian's reed while fairly breaking his own. The dust rose high. The horses panted. One by one the combatants dropped out. At last, after the multitude had howled and cheered till weary, the dust cloud settled, and revealed that of one party of five not one remained contesting; of the other, side by side sat Musa and Iftikhar Eddauleh.

The great Count shook his head, and Mary had little joy. They at least knew what fires would spur on the emir, when he rode; but to deny the crowd their sport would have meant riot,—nay,

bloodshed,—what with their thousands standing on the benches, pressing the palings, shaking earth and air with tumult. The two contestants mounted new horses and sat face to face; behind each stood an attendant with the sheaf of reed lances. Count Roger swept his eye over the lists.

"Ha! who is that dwarfish fellow behind the emir?" demanded he; and a knight beside answered:—

"Zeyneb, Iftikhar's body-servant and shadow."

Roger did not need to see the cloud that spread on Mary's face. "Holla!" cried the Count, "*he* is not admitted to the lists! A venomous cat, I hear." A new roar from the benches drowned his voice. The two had charged amid deafening din. Three times past, and the reeds fairly broken; four times,—never drawing rein,—the emir broke only by a great shift; five times, both shivered fairly; sixth time, the Egyptian shattered only his tip, which still dangled from the butt.

"The Spaniard wins!" cried a thousand throats. But the emir had spurred by, dashed up to his attendant, snatched lance, wheeled instantly, and thundered back, Musa flying to meet him.

"Ho!" trumpeted the Count, leaping up, "Iftikhar's lance! See!" In a twinkling the lists rang as never before. The Spaniard reeled in his saddle; his target flew in twain; he clapped his right hand to his shoulder and drew it away—blood!

Prince Tancred had bounded into the arena.

"Felony!" his shout; "the emir had a pointed weapon. Sir Musa is run through. Physicians—aid!"

A dozen squires and grooms buzzed around the Spaniard, making to lift him from his horse. He sat erect—dispersed them with an angry gesture.

"Nothing—*Bismillah!* The lance turned as it split the target. My side was grazed, and a little blood drawn—it is nothing!"

"Lead Iftikhar Eddauleh this way," raged Tancred, his green eyes fired with his wrath. The emir had deliberately ridden back unbidden. From the benches came countless curses and jeers—Frankish and Arabic; he heeded none.

"What is this doing of yours?" demanded Tancred, very grave. "You rode with a pointed lance—no reed."

The Egyptian drew himself up very proudly.

"By the soul of my father!" swore he, outstretching his hand to Musa, "all men saw we were riding madly, and paying little heed to what was thrust in our hands. Just as we struck, I saw the steel—too late. A pointed lance must have been hidden in the reeds. Allah be praised, you are not slain!"

"This is not easy to believe," began Tancred. Musa cut him short:—

"I accept his oath—I am not disabled. Ride again!"

He cantered to his stand at the head of the lists. Tancred returned to the Count.

"Where is Zeyneb, the emir's dwarf?" demanded Roger.

"By Our Lady," cried the Prince, with a glance—"gone!"

"After him!" thundered Roger. "His was felony or foolishness, best paid by hanging. Lay him by the heels!"

Men-at-arms rushed away; but in neither the multitude nor the city found they Zeyneb.

The two rode once more—met; broke fairly. Men heard their voices for an instant raised high—curse and defiance, doubtless. Who might say? A second time—all eyes following. Mary saw the Spaniard swing nimbly in his saddle. The emir's lance overshot harmlessly; his own snapped fairly on the target. Another mighty shout—Musa had won!

"Again I wish you glory!" said Mary, as she fixed a second diamond aigrette on the cap of the kneeling Spaniard. "May God ever guard you as now, and let you shed glory on your friends!" But this last was in a tone few around might hear.

"And I protest," replied Musa, no louder, "I crave no honor greater than that of serving you."

Mary blushed. She knew the Andalusian meant all he said; yet she was not afraid, as she had been if Iftikhar or De Valmont had so spoken. A page served Musa courteously, bringing him a basin of perfumed water, towels of sweet white linen, and a goblet of cool Aquillan wine. Then he sat with the Count and his party during the noon interval, protesting that Iftikhar had given him but a slight bruise which needed no stanching, though Mary feared otherwise. Very tolerantly he listened to the tale of Gerland, militant Bishop of Girgenti, how in his diocese he had turned his cathedral into a castle—the unbelievers being so many. The squires brought fruit and cakes and wine. The Greek monks—Cosman and Eugenius—whom Count Roger patronized for their poesy, sang a new hymn in honor of the Blessed Trinity; an Arab rival presented a tale in verse of the Count's late raid to Malta, and so the hour passed. The multitude scattered a little, but did not disperse. The best wine had been kept till the last. What were blunted swords or riding with reed

lances, beside a duel betwixt gallant knights under their lady's very eye; swords whetted, and life —perchance soul—at stake!

Mary found her heart beating fast. The moments crept slowly. People, she knew, were staring at her,—pointing, whispering her name. Sweet no doubt to feel that scarce a young knight but would nigh give his right hand for a gracious speech from her, hardly a woman but would almost pawn hope of heaven to sit in her place! But when the pure heart of the Greek turned to her dying father and the gallant gentlemen who were hazarding body and soul on her account,—even the bright sun shone darkly.

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Richard Longsword had watched the tourney from a lodge at the northern end of the lists beside his fidgeting father and grave-faced mother, trying to enjoy the contests and to forget himself in the tale Theroulde told, while they waited, of the redoubtable paynim knight Chernubles, who could toss four mules' loads like a truss of straw. Herbert growled advice in his ear. Sebastian said never a word, but Richard knew he had lain all that night before the altar, outstretched like a cross while invoking heavenly legions to speed his "spiritual son." Only when Musa and Iftikhar contended, Longsword forgot himself; thrilled at his friend's peril, rejoiced at his victory, and swore a deep, if silent, oath that the emir should not go scatheless on so poor excusings.

The interval ended at last—praised be all saints! The heedless chatter of the ladies, the braying laughs of the men-at-arms, were a little chilled. Slowly a great hush spread across the lists. Richard kissed father and mother, wrung Herbert's great scarred paw, and vanished in a tent at the northern end of the close. Here waited Sebastian and friendly Bishop Robert of Evroult, who brought the Host and heard Longsword's confession and shrived him. Richard vowed two tall candlesticks of good red gold to Our Lady of the Victory, if all went well; made testaments, if the day went ill. "*Dominus absolvat*," the Bishop had said ere the young man rose from his knees. But Sebastian was murmuring in his heart, "Oh, if he were but to ride for the love of Christ and His Holy City, and not for unchristian hate and love of the eyes of a sinful maid!"

Then Musa came to the tent, thrusting all the Cefalu squires aside, and himself put on the Norman's hauberk, drew the chainwork coif over the head for shield of throat and cheeks, clapped on the silvered helm, and made fast the leather laces, till Richard was hid save for the flashing of his eyes.

When all was ready they led him out, and Theroulde strode before, proud to play the knight's pursuivant. From the end of the lists the *jongleur* sounded his challenge:—

"Ho, Louis de Valmont! Ho, Louis de Valmont! My master awaits you! Here stands the good knight, Sir Richard of Cefalu, armed for fair battle, ready to make good on his body against cavalier or villain who denies that Louis de Valmont is base-born, unknightly, unworthy to wear his spurs of gold!"

Whereupon, from the other end of the arena, advanced a second pursuivant, Bernier by name, a dapper Provençal in a fantastic blue cloak, answering shrilly:—

"Ho, bold man! Who are you that mock Sir Louis de Valmont? He has no lance save for his peers."

Then Theroulde threw back, still advancing:—

"So tell your master to be well shriven, for my Lord Richard of Cefalu swears he will number him among the saints ere sunset!"

And Bernier paid in return:—

"Foolish crow cawing folly, you are! Not the saints, but the very devil, shall be Richard Longsword's company this night!"

But Theroulde was undaunted, and boasted haughtily:—

"My master's sword is trenchant as Roland's 'Durindana'; his strength that of all the paladins in one. He is terrible as King Oberon with all his magic host!"

So they bandied their vauntings, and the crowd roared in mirth at each sally, until two trumpets pealed forth, one from either end of the lists, and out from the tents came the combatants in full armor, a herald at each bridle. Louis de Valmont was a notable figure, mailed. He bestrode a high-stepping white *destrer*, with huge crupper, hair like silk, eyes like fire, ears carefully cropped away after the French fashion. The high saddle glittered with gilding and chased work; the brass knob of the kite-shaped shield on the left arm shone, and the steel covering flashed as though of flame. Louis wore a hauberk enamelled red, with black wire embroidered into the sleeves; but the red crest of his tall helm was brighter than all the rest.

No less bravely panoplied in his white hauberk sat Longsword, but no skill of his could give grace to the awkward gait and uncouth form of Rollo. A great wave of jeering laughter swept down the benches as the black monster passed.

"Ho, steed of Cefalu! Are you an unhorned ox?"

"Defend us, saints! This horse is sired by Satan!"

"His limbs are iron, they drag so heavily!"

These and a hundred more shouts flew out. Men did not see Richard's muscles grow hard as steel, and his face set like rock, when he caught their mockery; for every insult to the horse was the like to the master. But the vows that rose then from his heart boded little good to Louis de Valmont; for they were sparks from the anvil of a mighty spirit. Neither did he know—as Mary Kurkuas knew—that the most battle-scarred knights in the Count's pavilion jeered not, but muttered darkly; and Prince Tancred whispered to Roger: "They are wrong when they say De Valmont has the better chance. I know a horse and a man at sight,—and here are both."

They brought the two knights to the barrier opposite the Count's pavilion. Very lightly, though armed, the twain dismounted, and stood side by side before their suzerain.

"Sir knights," quoth Roger, soberly, "I like this combat little. You do ill, Sir Richard, to seek quarrel with a cavalier of long renown; you too, Sir Louis, to press a contest that will breed small glory if won, much sorrow if lost."

Before either could reply, Mary Kurkuas arose and spoke also. "Since on my account you are at strife, as you love me, I command, even at this late hour, put wrath by. Be reconciled, or perchance whoever wins, I will forbid you both my face forever."

And Richard, as he looked on those red cheeks, the brown hair blown out from the purple fillet and waving in little tresses to the wind, nigh felt a spell spread over him,—was half-ready to bow obedient and forget all hatred, not to displeasure so fair a vision. But Satan had entered into Louis de Valmont's heart, prompting him to answer, hollow and fierce, from the depths of his helmet.

"Sweet lady, gracious lord, I am touched in honor. Gladly will I put all by with Sir Richard, if only he will confess freely that he spoke presumptuously for one of his few years, and was indiscreet in affecting to cross a cavalier of my fame in quest of gallantry."

If Louis had been bent on dashing the last bridge of retreat, he had succeeded.

"After Sir Louis's words," came the reply from Richard's casque at its haughty poise, "I see I need make no answer. Let us ride, my lord, and St. Michael speed us!"

The Count frowned upon the Auvergner:—

"Except you call back your words, Sir Louis, I must perforce order the combat. Yet you may well seek honorable reconciliation."

"I have offered my terms, my lord," returned Louis; and deliberately mounting, he rode to his end of the lists.

Tancred had stepped beside Richard.

"Fair sir," said he, softly, "you are a young cavalier, but a right knightly one. Trust in St. Michael and your own stout heart. De Valmont seeks your life, but do not fear. And know this: I pass for a keen judge of man and maid,—if it is you that conquer, the Princess Mary will not greatly grieve."

"Holy Mother, how know you this?" and Richard's hands dropped from the bridle. But Tancred only smiled.

"Does a woman speak only with her lips? I saw your sword-play in Italy, and learned to love you. And now I tell you this, thinking it may make your blade dance swifter. Go, then,—and all the saints go with you!"

"Let God judge betwixt them; and let them do their battle!" announced Count Roger, gravely, while the combatants were led to their places. Before each horse attendants stretched a cord, made fast to posts. Others measured two lances of equal length,—lances not blunted, but with bright steel heads and little pennons, Louis's with golden border; Longsword's, green blazoned with a silver lion. Then a herald made sure that neither knight had fastened himself to his saddle.

The attendants scattered from the lists. De Valmont's horse was pawing and sniffing uneasily, but Rollo stood firm as a rock. The champions sat face to face, featureless, silent as of granite. No chatter now in the pavilions. Theroulde broke the stillness with his cry, "Go forward, brave son of a valiant father!" And Bernier forced a broad jest as he glanced at the ladies, "Joy here to pick out one's wife!"

Richard was very calm. The moment had come. He and Louis de Valmont were face to face, under the eyes of Mary Kurkuas. Betwixt his helmet bars he could see that wonderful face, the head bent forward, the eyes brighter by day than ever stars by night,—at least to him. Holy saints! what deed could he not do with that gaze upon him, with the love of the Greek staked upon his strong arm and ready eye! "For Mary Kurkuas!" That was his battle-cry, though sounded only in his soul. It became stiller—he could hear Rollo's deep breathing. Count Roger had turned to Bishop Gerland. The prelate rose, held on high a brazen crucifix, at which both champions made the sign of the cross with their lance points. Four men with hatchets approached the cords before the chargers.

"*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen*," came the words slowly; and at the last,

Roger signed to the four. "Cut!" his command. The axes fell as one. Their sound was hid by the bursting tumult. Quick as light the horses caught the greensward with mighty strides. Behind, the dust spumed thick. As they flew, each rider swung lightly forward, lance level with thigh, shield over the crouching chest.

Crash! Both steeds were hurled on haunches, and struggled, tearing the ground. The riders reeled, staggered in the saddle. Then with a mighty tug at the reins, brought their beasts standing, and rode apart,—in the hands of each a broken butt, on the ground the flinders of stout hornbeam lances.

Din unspeakable rang along the lists, as the two swung back to their stations. No more banter and jeers at Rollo. Old Herbert, whose eyes had danced with every gallop, muttered in the ear of poor Lady Margaret:—

"Good cheer, sweet lady! The lad is a good lad. Did you see? The Auvergner was half slung from the saddle, but Richard met his lance like a rock."

They brought new lances to the knights, and, while both waited for breath, Bernier came down the lists with his master's message.

"My lord bids me say, fair knight," declared he to Longsword, "that he loves good jousting and did not expect so smart a tilt. Yet he warns Sir Richard, in fair courtesy and no jesting, he will make this next bout Sir Richard's last—therefore, if there be any parting message or token—"

Sebastian, who stood by, cut him short.

"Bear this back to Louis de Valmont, the murderous man of sin: It is written, 'Let not him that putteth on his armor, boast like him that taketh it off.'" And while Bernier was returning, half crestfallen, the good cleric was muttering: "Ah, blessed Mother of Pity, spare Richard, thy poor child. Make him conscious of his sin—his unholy passion, and presumption. Yet—it will be a rare thing to see De Valmont on his back. Holy saints—what do I say!"

Again they rode; again the last vision before Richard's eyes, ere Rollo shot on the course, was that figure,—white face and brown hair, and those eyes upon him. All men knew Louis spurred with Satan behind him on the charger. Another shivering crash—more lances broken. When they parted, both shields were dinted by the shock. Many heard knights cry that the two were riding more madly than ever. A third time—behold! Louis de Valmont had been half lifted from his saddle; one foot had lost its stirrup; but Longsword sat as a tower. Those at the southern end heard the Auvergner cursing his squires and grooms, calling for a new horse, and invoking aid of all powers in heaven and hell when next he rode.

A great hush again down all the lists. The pursuivants had no heart to cry. For a fourth time Richard Longsword and Louis de Valmont sat face to face,—and rode. The horses shot like bolts of lightning. The crash sounded from barrier to barrier. In the whirling murk of dust one could see naught; but out of it all sounded a shout of triumph,—Richard's voice: "St. Michael and Mary Kurkuas!" Then while men blinked, the dust was settled, and Louis de Valmont was rising from the sand, smitten clean from his horse. None beheld his face; but his mad cry of rage they heard, as his great sword flashed forth, when on foot he ran toward his foe. But lightly as a cat, Longsword had bounded from the saddle, faced the Auvergner, whom the tall Norman towered high above; and for the first time the multitude saw the sun glint on the long blade of Trenchefer. Right before Roger's pavilion, under Mary's eye, they fought, leaping in armor as though in silken vest, making their huge swords dance in their hands like willow wands. The blade of De Valmont rained down blows as of hail upon the bowing sedges. Fury and wounded pride sped might through his arm. For a twinkling Longsword gave way before his furious onset; as quickly stood firm, paying blow for blow. Not for life the Auvergner battled,—for dearer than life,—his knightly name. The best lance in the South Country dismounted, then mastered by a boy scarce knighted? A thousand deaths better! Thrice, all his strength flew with a downright stroke,—a smithy's sledge less crushing. But when he smote on Trenchefer the steels rang sharp; the blow was turned. From under their helms each beheld madness in his foeman's eyes, and flashed back equal madness. Richard fought the more slowly, his casque dented and his shield; but the Valencia mail was proof. After the first, he yielded not a step; and at each blow parried, at each stout stroke paid, the saints, if none other, heard him mutter across his teeth: "This, to win Mary Kurkuas! This, for the love of the Greek!"

But still the Provençal pressed, and still the Norman held him. Mary saw De Valmont's blade shun Trenchefer. His sword half turned as Richard attempted parry,—but smote the Norman's helm-crest. Mary almost thought she could see the fire-spark leap in bright day. But ere she could thrill with dread, Longsword had staggered, recovered, returned the stroke. Quick, deep as from huge bellows, heard she their breaths. Each moment her heart cried, "All is over!" as some doughty blow fell. But it would be parried, or turned on the good mail. On they fought,—fought till mild women rose from the benches and shouted as not before in that day's mad games; and old cavaliers, who set a battle before a feast, stood also with a terrible light in their eyes, blessing the saints for showing them such sword-play! As Mary watched, her thoughts raced thick and fast: now she longed to laugh, now to weep; now only to hear no more of the click and clash of those long swords. Would it never end?

But now Prince Tancred was again with his head beside Count Roger. "The Auvergner fails!" Men began to cry out that De Valmont no longer gave back the Norman's blows; only parried. And, of a sudden, Mary saw the iron tower of Richard Longsword, that had stood firm so long, leap as

with new life. Twice Trenchefer sprang high, and crashed upon De Valmont. Twice the Auvergner tottered. Thrice—De Valmont's guard shivered as a rush—through shield, hauberk, gorget cleft the Vikings' blade. The shield flew in twain. The Provençal fell with a clash of mail, and, as he reeled, Mary could see the spout of blood where the sword had bitten the shoulder.

The Count was standing. He beckoned to Longsword—tried to speak. One mighty shout from Frank and Moslem drowned all else.

"Richard Longsword! Richard of Cefalu!"

All the lists were calling it. The bright mantles and gauzy veils were all a-flutter. Richard stood over his adversary, Trenchefer swinging in his hand. Again the Count beckoned—still uproar. Roger flung his white judge's wand into the arena.

"*Ho! Ho!*" thundered he,—and there was hush at last.

"Sir Richard Longsword," spoke the Count, "you have won after such sword-play as I have never seen before. De Valmont's life is yours, if still he lives. Yet if you will, kill not—though he promised you small mercy. For he is a gallant Cavalier, and proved to-day a mighty knight, though no victor."

"And I," returned Longsword, under his helm, "give him his life. Let him live—live to remember how Richard of Cefalu humbled him before the eyes of Mary Kurkuas!"

So he turned to walk to the end of the lists, but others swarmed about him; Musa foremost, who unlaced his casque in a trice, and kissed him heartily on one cheek, while Herbert croaked and shed great bull tears on the other. Prince Tancred ran down to him, and many nobles more, while Baron William and his dame sat very stately in their lodge, their hearts full, but saying nothing—a thousand eyes upon them. Count Roger had turned to Mary:—

"My princess, I too must speak with this new paladin; and you need have no shame to go with me."

The Greek's forehead was very red; but while her words were hanging on her tongue, a serving-lad from Monreale touched her mantle:—

"Gracious mistress—my lord, the Cæsar Manuel, is newly stricken, and lies very low. He sends for you."

Mary bowed to the Count:—

"My lord, you see it is impossible for me to go to Sir Richard. Yet tell him I have prayed long he might have no hurt. And now I must go to my father."

So Roger went down alone, and led the great throng that swept around the victor as amid the din of harps, viols, and kettledrums uncounted they bore him to his tent. Few saw the squires that carried Louis de Valmont away. He still breathed. A Saracen physician said he was fearfully smitten, but that life was strong within him, and he would live. But who then cared for the fate of the vanquished?

They bore Richard back to Palermo in high procession. All the knights swore that he had outdone all the cavaliers of the tourney, and must receive the chief prize. A great banquet and dance was held at the castle; the halls rang with music and the clink of wine-cups; the floors shook beneath a thousand twinkling feet. The young knights to prove their hardihood danced in the armor worn all day,—chain mail jingling in time to the castanets. The *jongleurs* sang new *chansons*; the ladies blazed in brighter silks and velvet; a myriad flambeaux flickered over all. Only Mary Kurkuas was not there, nor was Emir Iftikhar, delight of the ladies. To Richard and to Musa there were homage and flattery enough to addle wiser wits than theirs. Richard danced till the morn was paling, despite two great welts on his forehead. Two young ladies—"flowers of beauty," the *jongleurs* cried—brought to him the prize of honor, a shield set with jewels and blazoned with four stripes of gold. Each added to her pleasant words a kiss. In truth, not a cavalier's daughter there that night would have said nay to Richard Longsword, had he prayed for anything. When at full dawn he fell asleep, it was to dream of gallant sword-play, throbbing music, and bright eyes, but the eyes were always those of Mary Kurkuas.

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# CHAPTER X

## HOW IFTIKHAR SAID FAREWELL TO SICILY

Richard Longsword spent the winter in Palermo. There had come a letter oversea from his grandfather, old Baron Gaston of St. Julien in Auvergne, beseeching his daughter to send to France her son, who, fame had it, was a mighty cavalier. He was needed to set right his barony, for he himself grew weak and his vassals quarrelsome. But though Richard's eyes danced when he thought of France, and he won from Musa a pledge to postpone any Egyptian service till the new adventure was well over, he lingered in Sicily. For the life of Cæsar Manuel that winter

ebbed fast. In early spring came a stately dromon streaming with purple flags, to bear him back to Constantinople, and a great letter in vermilion ink sealed with gold, pledging the favor of Alexius to his "dear cousin," and entreating his return to the palace by the Golden Gate. But on the day the imperial messenger landed, they were bearing Manuel Kurkuas to his last rest. The Greek Bishop of Palermo was there, also Count Roger, Tancred, and many seigneurs. Then when it was over, and Mary had seen all and done all, with the white face and dry eyes of those true women who can weep for little things but not for great, she found herself alone in the world and utterly desolate. The house of Kurkuas had been a decaying stock. Even at Constantinople her relatives were distant. Only in Provence, at La Haye, dwelt her uncle, whom she had never seen,—brother of her long-dead mother. Either she must go to him or return to Constantinople, where were many ministers and admirers, but only the Princess Anna to be her true friend. Yet Mary would not leave Monreale. The Palace of the Diadem was hers. All day long she would sit in its twilight courts beside the fountain, reading or trying to read, with only Sylvana for companion. When Richard or Musa went each day to ask for her, she would send kind greetings; but said she could not see them. Sylvana, however, was a wise woman as became her years; and one day, behold! Musa was led into the court of the fountain unheralded, and the princess must needs speak with him.

"Ah! Sir Spaniard," said she, with a wan smile, "for my father's memory I would have bidden you stay away. I am in no mood for your songs of the orange groves by the Darro. Yet"—and here flashed forth her old arch brightness—"now that Sylvana has circumvented me, I am very glad you are here!"

Musa smiled sweetly and gravely.

"Dear lady, would that all your sorrows were but monsters, that I might slay them. What may I proffer you,—music? But your heart is too heavy. Words? The lips are but unskilful revealers of the soul. And mine,"—he added with a sincere glance, "is very full for you."

"Do as you will!" cried the lady, suddenly; "say as you will. Look! My father is dead; at Constantinople I have few that love me. What matters it what befall me? I am alone—alone; and to whom am I a care?"

"Brightness of the Greeks," replied the Andalusian, "say not, you are alone; say not, you are a care to none. To me you are a friend, and"—he went on quite steadily—"much more than a friend to another."

And Mary looked at him very steadily also, when she replied: "It is true. When Richard Longsword comes to me, I will have something to say."

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Musa rode from Monreale at a racing gallop that afternoon. All the staid Moslem burghers stared at him as he pounded up the city streets; and just as the sun was sinking Richard Longsword was leaping from the steaming Rollo without the gate at the Palace of the Diadem. When Bardas led him within, he heard the princess's little wind-organ throbbing and quavering. He stood in the court, and saw her bending over the keys, while all the silver pipes were ringing. The notes, marked red and green on the parchment, were spread before her. Sylvana had her hand on the bellows, as her mistress sang the mad old pagan chorus of Euripides:—

"O Eros, O Eros, how melts love's yearning
  From thine eyes when the sweet spell witcheth the heart
  Of them against whom thou hast marched in thy might!
  Not me, not me, for mine hurt do thou smite,
My life's heart-music to discord turning.
  For never so hotly the flame-spears dart,
  Nor so fleet are the star-shot arrows of light,
  As the shaft from thy fingers that speedeth its flight,
As the flame of the Love-queen's bolts fierce burning,
  O Eros, the child of Zeus who art!"

Richard stepped softly across the rugs. The bell-like voice died away, the organ notes wandered, were still. Mary rose from the music. Flushed indeed was her face, but her voice was steady.

"I have sent for you, Sir Richard!" she said. "I am glad you have come."

But Richard, foolish fellow, had run to her, and crushed her to his breast in his giant arms, and was trying to say something with his lips very near to hers. And Mary felt his touch and kiss as blest as a heaven-sent fire.

"O sweetest of the sweet!" he was crying, "what have I done that I should have such joy? For one such touch from you, I would have beaten down a thousand De Valmonts."

"And do you think, Richard," said she, piteously, "that all I love in you is this?"—and she pressed her hand around the knotted muscles of his arm. Then she began to weep and laugh at once, and they both wept and laughed, like the children that they were; and Sylvana smiled softly to her sly old self, and bore away the organ.

"And what was in your heart, Mary," cried the Norman, when he found a steady tongue, "that night when you held the goblet to my lips at Cefalu?"

"And what was in yours when you drank? Oh, I was all madness that night. I said to myself, 'Here is the kind of man I would fain be born,—with a twinkling eye and an arm like iron.' Had not my father's gaze been on me, St. Theodore knows what I would have done! What with your head so close to mine, and the wild deeds of the day making us as friends for a thousand years! But now," and she began to laugh again softly, "you will have to tame me a great deal. I may look a wood-dove, but I have the heart of a hawk. It will be a long time before I can be content to obey any one;" then with a naughty toss of her pretty head,—"even you."

"Ah!" exclaimed Richard, "it is I that need the taming; I, whose wits are in my hands, who love the ring of good steel better than all Musa's roundelays."

"Let us not settle too much of the future," answered she, pertly; "we shall perhaps know each other better as time speeds." So they twittered and laughed, till long after the last bird-song had died into silence, the last bulbul had folded his weary head under a wing. A full moon was overhead when Richard swung onto the back of Rollo. His lips were still sweet with the nectar of a warm kiss; the wind was just creeping over the orange grove, which was whispering softly. Here and there the fireflies flashed out tiny beacons. Rollo threw up his great muzzle, and shook his raven mane, as if he knew, rascal that he was, of the joy in his master's heart. Then, swift as the north wind he flew toward Palermo, and for Richard, as he rode, the night shone as a summer's morn.

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The gossips at Palermo bandied the tale about, almost before those concerned in it knew it themselves. No one marvelled; all said that Richard Longsword had fairly won his prize, and Mary Kurkuas would never have shame for her lord. Only the Emir Iftikhar communed darkly with his own heart, and with certain sworn followers of his in the Saracen guard. The good syndic Al-Bakri was a mighty newsmonger. A certain neighbor brought him a story; he in turn dealt it out to Musa; and the Spaniard gave Richard Longsword strong reasons for wearing his Valencia mail shirt under his bleaunt. Baron William had returned to Cefalu. But when a letter came from his son, the seigneur sent straightway, bidding Richard come home, and bring with him Mary Kurkuas, who it was not meet should remain alone, with only Sylvana and the serving-men and maids at Monreale. Richard, hasty mortal, would have had her to church before setting out. But Mary shook her head. The turf was not yet green over the grave of the Cæsar, and she owed a duty to her mother's kinsfolk in Provence. If Richard was to go to Auvergne, she would go with him to La Haye, the barony of her uncle, and there might be the wedding. So with Sylvana as duenna, away they went to Cefalu. There dear Lady Margaret opened her heart wide to the motherless Greek; and they spent many a merry day, with guests and good company coming from far and near to drink at the Baron's board, and to pledge the health of "the peerless lady, Mary Kurkuas, the fairest of her age in all Sicily and France." Day after day Richard and Mary rode forth together; for the Greek was as mad a rider as though born on the saddle. The white falcon was on her wrist; they chased the luckless quarry over thicket and brake, while Longsword laughed as he saw how Mary dashed beside him. And there were long evenings, when in the soft gloaming, and no other was near, they could sit in Lady Margaret's bower outside the castle walls, with the sleeping flowers clinging all about, and a little stream tumbling gently in the ravine below. Here every breath was eloquence, every word a poem, and the voice of Mary sweeter than Musa's lute. Only Mary,—for Richard was all blind these days,—noticed that Musa and Herbert were ever watchful; that Musa always insisted that his friend wear the Valencia shirt; that even when the lovers rode off seemingly alone, there would be Musa or Herbert or Nasr riding within bowshot.

All the castle had opened its heart to Mary,—even Sebastian; though the churchman did not capitulate without a struggle.

"Lady," said he once to her, "you Greeks are in peril of your souls. You communicate with leavened, not unleavened, bread, for which you may all go to perdition; and in your creed you do omit *Filioque*, in speaking of the Holy Ghost, which I do conceive is the sin whereof Our Lord speaks, saying, 'He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.' And for this sin Pope Leo Third had your patriarch excommunicated, and delivered over to be buffeted by Satan."

But Mary only answered very gravely:—

"Are not men created in God's image?"

"Certainly, daughter," replied Sebastian, soberly.

"And is Nasr, the abominable devil-visaged Saracen here, a man?"

"A man," began poor Sebastian, wavering, "yet created for—"

"Surely," cried Mary, cutting him short, "God has a strange image, if it is like Nasr. Unless, indeed, he be of the race Vergilius the heretical philosopher describes: born in the Antipodes, not descended from Adam, and for whom no Redeemer died."

"Daughter, daughter," protested Sebastian.

"Do not be angry," came the reply, "only I will answer for my heresy when you explain concerning Nasr." And with this Sebastian was content to drop the encounter.

Then of a sudden came a day when the even flow of life at Cefalu was rudely shaken. Richard and Mary had ridden with some retinue to games which Baron William's neighbor, the Lord of Pollina, had been holding. The jousts had been hot, though not so fierce as to be bloody. Richard had refused to ride, for all the country-side stood in some awe of him. Musa had won the hearts of all the ladies, as he ever did, by his dashing horsemanship and grace. Evening was beginning to fall. They were still two miles from Cefalu, and before them opened a long, shaded avenue of holm-oak and cypress, through which shimmered the failing light. Mary touched whip to her fleet palfrey. The good horse shot forward, and beside her raced Richard, leaving the rest behind. They had swung into the avenue, the steeds were just stretching their necks for a headlong pace, when lo, as by magic, behind a thicket rose three men, and in a twinkling three arrows sped into Longsword's breast! The clang of the bow and Mary's cry were as one. But even as Richard reeled in the saddle, Musa and Nasr were beside him, at a raging gallop. The Norman shivered, sat erect. One arrow was quivering in his saddle leather, two hung by the barbs from his mantle.

"You are wounded!" was the cry of the Greek. But Richard put her by with a sweep of the hand.

"For me as for you, Musa, this Spanish mail is a guardian saint. The arrows were turned. I am unhurt."

"Mother of God!" Mary was crying, all unstrung, "what has befallen us!"

But Nasr and Herbert had shot ahead. They could hear horses crashing through the thickets; other men plunged in after them on foot. Then a great shout, and forth they came, haling two very quaking and blackguardly-looking Egyptians, in the hands of one a strong bow.

"By the glory of Allah!" Nasr was swearing, "these men are of the Emir Iftikhar's guard. We shall have a tale to tell when next we fare to Palermo."

They dragged the wretches into the light. Nasr's identification and their guilt were beyond dispute. Their comrade had made his escape. But when Musa began to question them as to who prompted their deed, they had never a word, only cried out, "Have pity on us, O Sword of Grenada; like you, we are Moslems, and we sought an infidel's life!"

"By the beard of the Prophet!" protested the Spaniard, "good Moslems you are in truth. Well do you remember Al Koran, which saith, 'He that slayeth one soul shall be as if the blood of all mankind were upon him;'" and he added cynically, "Console yourselves, perchance you will be martyrs, and enter the crops of the green birds in Paradise."

"Mercy, mercy, gracious Cid!" howled the Egyptians.

"Away with them!" cried Richard, who saw that Mary was very pale and trembled on her horse. "At Cefalu we have for them a snug dungeon, thirty feet underground, with straw beds floating in water. There they can recollect, if Iftikhar Eddauleh put this archery in their heads!"

So Herbert and Nasr trotted the prisoners away, strapped to the saddles. That night, after Sebastian had said mass in memory of the merciful preservation of his "dear son," Baron William and Herbert taught the Egyptians how Normans were accustomed to eke out meagre memories. They began by sprinkling salt water on the prisoners' feet, and letting goats lick it; and then, as Sebastian aptly expressed in his Latin, *sic per gradus ad ima tenditur*, they at last called for red-hot irons. In this way, though the Egyptians were stupid and forgetful at first, in time they remembered how Iftikhar had sent them to Cefalu, to do what, except for the Valencia mail, they nearly accomplished. They had acted in a spirit of blind obedience, fully expecting to be captured and to suffer; and when they heard Baron William ordering the gallows, they only blinked with stolid Oriental eyes, for they saw that groanings availed nothing.

Very early the next day a messenger flew post haste to Palermo, with a formal demand from Baron William that the High Mufti, who judged all the Saracens of Sicily, should hear charges against the Emir Iftikhar. But the messenger was late. The third assassin had secured a fast horse, and outstripped him by half a day. Iftikhar was already out to sea, bound, it was said, for Damietta.

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# CHAPTER XI

## HOW RICHARD FARED TO AUVERGNE

Now when the south wind blew gently with the advancing spring, Richard set forth for Auvergne. With him went Sebastian, rejoiced to see "that very Christian country of France," and Herbert his arch-counsellor, and Nasr with a score of tough Saracens, very fiends as they looked, Baron William's old retainers, who would have followed the devil with a stout heart so long as he led to

hard blows and good plunder. Just before he started, Richard was admonished by his father not to rush into quarrel with Raoul, the brother of Louis, whose lands of Valmont lay close by St. Julien. "A rough, bearish fellow," William called him, who had won the name of the "Bull of Valmont" by his headlong courage. He had broiled with Louis, chased him from the fief, and now lived alone with his mother, the Lady Ide, and young brother Gilbert. Just now, report had it, he was at sword's points with the abbot of Our Lady of St. Julien, who claimed freedom from tolls upon the Valmont lands, and William warned his son against being used by the monk to fight his unchurchly quarrel. So Richard promised discretion, kissed his mother for the last time; and away he went on a stanch galleon of Amalfi headed for Marseilles, and making Palermo on her voyage from Alexandria.

A short voyage, too short almost for Richard and Mary, who found even the evenings grow enchanted, while they sat on the gilded poop watching the sun creep down into the deep; or listened to the tales of Theroulde, who set Mary a-laughing when he told of King Julius Cæsar, and how he built the walls of Constantinople, and wooed the "very discreet Fée," Morgue, who became his wife. But the joy was rarest to be alone upon the poop, with the soft breeze crooning in the rigging, the foam dancing from the beak and trailing behind its snowy pathway where trod the dying light.

"Ah," said Mary one evening, as the first star twinkled in the deep violet, "one year it is since I set eyes on you, my Richard; since you plucked me from the Berbers. In this year I have lost my father, and gained—you!" And there were both sadness and joy upon her face.

"A year!" quoth Richard, his eyes not upon the stars, but upon a coronal of brown hair. "How could I ever have lived without you? Since you have entered into me, my strength waxes twenty-fold. By St. Michael, I will seek a great adventure to prove it!"

"Do you think to give me joy by risking life at every cross-road to prove your love? Does a true lover think so meanly of his love, that he is willing to tear her heart by thrusting his precious self in peril?"

"No," protested he, taking her right hand in his own, then the other; and holding both captive in his right, while she laughed and struggled vainly to get free. "But what do you love in me? The only thing I have;—an arm that is very heavy. And shall I not use that gift of the saints? Are there not haughty tyrants with no fear of God in their hearts, who must be overthrown by a Christian cavalier? Is the world so good, so free from violence, and wickedness, and strife, that he who can wield a sword for Christ should let it rust in the scabbard? You would not have me always in your bower, listening to those Greek books which I called Churchmen's frippery, until you made them all music. Only yesterday I heard Sebastian grumble, 'St. Martin forbid that the princess play the Philistine woman to our Samson, and shear his locks; so that Holy Church fail of a noble champion!'"

"I will never play the Philistine woman to you, my Richard," answered Mary, lightly. Then as a sweet and sober light came into her eyes: "Oh, dear heart, I know well what you must be! It is true the world is very evil. We are young, and the light shines fair; but there is a day to dance, and a day, not to mourn, but to put by idle things. You will be a great man, Richard," with a proud, bright glance into his face; "men will dread you and your righteous anger against their wickedness; God will give you mighty deeds to do, great battles to win, great wrongs to right, and perhaps"—here with another glance—"they will think you grow hard and sombre, when it is only because you dare not turn back from your task, but must think of duty, not of childish things. But I will still be with you; and when you go away to the wars, as go you must, I will never weep till your banner is out of sight; and if I do weep, I will still say, as you said, 'It is no dreadful thing for a brave gentleman to die, if he dies with his face toward the foe, and his conscience clear.'"

"You will make me a very saint," said Richard, still holding fast her hands; "but it is by your prayers alone, dear saint, that I may dare have hope of heaven."

"No," replied the Greek, smiling, "you are not a saint. Oh, you will do very wrong, I know! But God and Our Lady understand that your heart is true and pure. It is our souls that go to heaven, not our tongues with their harsh words, nor our hands with their cruel blows. And when you are fiercest, and the tempting fiends tear you, and the sky seems very black, then I will kiss you—so—and you will recollect yourself, and be my own true cavalier, who wields his sword because the love of Christ is in his heart."

"But you will not always be with me," protested Richard. "When I am alone and sorely tempted—what then?"

"Then you must love me so much that my face will be ever before your eyes; and by this you will know when you strike for Christ, and when for worldly passion or glory."

"Ah!" cried Richard, "what have I done that God should send down one of His saints to sit by me, and speak to me, and dwell forever with me?"

"Forever!" said Mary, lugubriously; "we shall all be in heaven in a hundred years. How well that there is no marriage nor giving in marriage there, or some of those lovely saintesses might make eyes at so fine a warrior-angel as you; then I would wax jealous, and St. Peter, if he is the peacemaker, might have his wits sore puzzled." But here soberness left them both, and they laughed and laughed once more; till Musa and Theroulde, who had discreetly withdrawn to the cabin, came forth, and the *jongleur*, looking up at the now gleaming planets, told how wise

beldames said, those lights sang a wondrous melody all night long, and a new-born child heard their music.

Richard was still holding Mary's hands, and she saucily told Musa that she had begun early those lessons of obedience which her lord would surely teach her.

"Flower of Greece," laughed the Spaniard, "in Andalusia the women are our rulers; at their beck palaces rise, wars are declared, peace is stricken. The king of Seville for his favorite wife once flooded his palace court with rose water, to satisfy her whim. Come with me to Spain, not Auvergne."

"No," answered Mary, tugging free her hands and shaking a dainty sleeve of Cyprian gauze, "we will never turn infidel and peril our souls—not even to please *you*, Sir Musa."

She saw a dark shadow flit over Musa's face: was it as the ship's lantern swayed in the slow swell of the sea? But he replied quickly:—

"Alas! I am not such a friend to the lord of Andalusia to-day that I can proffer there princely hospitality."

Then their talk ran fast on a thousand nothings; but the shadow on Musa's face haunted Mary. She resolved in her heart, she would never again remind him that their faith lay as a gulf between them.

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The stout ship reached Marseilles, where she was to barter her Eastern wares for Frankish iron, oil, and wax. Her passengers sped joyously to La Haye, a rich and stately castle in the pleasant South Country, where Baron Hardouin, Mary's uncle, received his niece and future nephew with courtly hospitality, as became a great seigneur of Provence. And when Richard rode again northward with a lock of brown hair in his bosom, he had a promise that, when he returned in autumn, there should be a wedding such as became the heiress of a Greek Cæsar and a great Baroness of the Languedoc.

Never again was Longsword to ride with fairer visions and a merrier heart. He was in France, the home of knightly chivalry, of Christian faith. As they passed through Aix and Avignon and Orange, and all along the stately Rhone, the wealthy lords and ladies entertained him in their castles, Theroulde paying by his stories for all the feastings and wassail. And Richard carried his head high, for the fame of his deeds in Sicily had run overseas; and men honored him, and the great countesses gave soft looks and words,—with more perchance, had he only suffered. "Verily," thought Richard in his heart, "the *jongleurs* did well to sing that when King Alexander the Great lay a-dying, he had only one sorrow,—that he had not conquered France, head of the whole world." But for the ladies, their troops of troubadours and their "courts of love," Richard had only pleasant words, no more. For Longsword had a vision before his eyes that two years before he had never dreamed. Fairer than all knightly glory, the sweet delirium of battle, the cry of a thousand heralds proclaiming him victor, rose the dream of a strong and beautiful woman ever beside him; her voice ever in his ears, her touch upon his arm, her breath upon his cheek; and from year unto year his soul drawing to itself joy and power merely by looking upon her—this was the dream. And Richard marvelled that once his life had found rest in hawking and sword-play. So as he rode northward, all the little birds upon the arching trees sang that one name "Mary"; and the great Rhone, hastening seaward, murmured it from each eddy and foaming boulder; and the kind west wind whispered it, as it blew over the pleasant corn-lands of Toulouse and Aquitaine.

Thus ever toward the north; at last they touched the domain of the Count of Vaudan close to Auvergne, and near St. Flour they entered Auvergne itself. Then around them rose the mountains like frozen billows of the angry North Sea, their jagged summits crowned with cinder-filled craters; upon their bold flanks patches of basalt, where clinging pines shook down their needles. On nigh each cliff perched a castle, black as the rock and as steep; and amid the clefts of the mountains were little valleys where browsed sure-footed kine; where the people were rude, rough men, with great beards, leather dresses, surly speech, and hands that went often to their sword-hilts.

"Sure, it is a wild land I have come to set right!" cried Richard, gazing at the fire-scarped ranges of *puys*; and he rejoiced at thought of ordering his grandsire's barony with a strong hand. But Sebastian again was only gloom and warnings.

"Ah, dear son, how much better to leave your grandfather's petty seigneury to its fate, and heed the word of holy Peter the Hermit, who is preaching the war against the infidels."

"Not while Mary Kurkuas lives will I quit her to go to Jerusalem," proclaimed Richard, boldly, and Sebastian shook his head, as was his wont. "'The woman tempted me, and I did eat,'" was his bitter answer; "God is not mocked; your pride shall yet be dashed utterly."

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# CHAPTER XII

## HOW RICHARD CAME TO ST. JULIEN

Now at last they were drawing near to St. Julien, whither Richard sent advance messengers. And as he saw how, despite the rocks and the ragged landscape, fair meadow valleys began to spread out, and wide fields bursting with their summer fatness, he grew still more elated and arrogant in soul. How many gallant adventures awaited beyond those hills! How he would rule with a strong hand his grandsire's seigneury! Nay more, he would do better: he would some day ride over this road with Mary Kurkuas at his side, and hear knight and villain hail him, "Richard, by the Grace of God, Count and Suzerain of all Auvergne." With only five horsemen had Robert Guiscard left Normandy, and when he died, half Italy and nigh all Sicily were at his feet; and should not Richard of Cefalu do better, with a fair, rich barony to build upon?

Presently, after a long day's ride, the young knight's company came forth from the last pass amongst the hilltops, and before them—St. Julien. Richard could see the tall square towers of the distant castle shining yellow gray in the dying sun; he could see the long reaches of ploughed land, the glebe of the Abbey of Our Lady of St. Julien, to whose abbot the local baron paid each year six bunches of wild flowers, token of nominal fealty. Far away were the dun masses of the monastery's many roofs and walls; about the castle nestled the thatches of a little town, a fair stream ran through the valley, and all around the beetling mountains kept watch.

"A goodly land," cried Sebastian, shading his eyes with a gaunt hand; "a goodly land; ah, dear Christ, grant that the hearts of the men within it be as pure as thine own heavens above!"

"And have I done wrong," declared Richard, pointing from corn-land to castle, and thence to river, "to come so far to possess it? Does not God will rather that I should play my part here, than throw away life and love in a mad wandering to Jerusalem?"

But Sebastian shook his head.

"They say the devil can appear as an angel of light; God forfend that the earthly beauty of this country breed perdition for your soul."

So they went down the hillside, laughing and singing, and pricking on their flagging steeds, though Richard saw that Musa was only half merry.

"Tell me, brother mine," said he, "why are you not gay? Do you envy me my first inheritance?"

The Spaniard threw up his hands in inimitable gesture.

"*Wallah*; is not your joy my joy, soul of my soul!" cried he, earnestly. "Not gay? Allah forbid that there be truth in portents. As at noon we rested, and I slept under the trees, I dreamt that I was grievously plucked by the hair."

"And that forbodes—?"

"That some calamity or ill news comes either to me or to some dear to me. So our Arabian diviners interpret dreams, and so some years since Al-Aāzid, my master at Cordova, instructed me."

"Christ defend us!" quoth Richard, crossing himself. He was not imagining ill for himself nor for Musa, but for Mary Kurkuas.

"Be not troubled," continued the Spaniard; "the surest presages often fail." Richard rode on in silence. The melancholy of his friend was contagious. A cloud drifted over the sun; the bright landscape darkened. As they passed by a wayside cross on the hillside, a skeleton swung from an oak in the hot wind—some brigand or villain, who had enraged the seigneur. A wretched beggar met them, just as they plunged into the trees to enter the valley.

"Alms! alms! kind lord," he croaked, his face red with bloody patches; and as he spoke he lay on the ground, and foamed as if grievously ill.

"Away with you!" growled Sebastian, angrily; "you have smeared blood on your face, and there is a bit of soap in your cheeks."

So they left, and heard his shrill curse, when he saw Richard tossed forth never a *denier*.

"No good omens," muttered Herbert, in his beard.

"Ride faster," commanded Richard, touching spur to Rollo.

So they hastened, while above them the canopy of leaves grew denser, and more clouds piled across the dimming sun. Then as they swung round a turn, they came upon a man with a great load of fagots on his back,—a tall, coarse-faced fellow, with a shock head and unkempt beard, hatless, dressed in a dirt-dyed blouse held by a leathern belt, woollen trousers, and high, rude boots.

Herbert rode up to him, as he stood staring with dazed, lack-lustre eyes at the company.

"Ho, sirrah; and are we on the Baron of St. Julien's land?" No answer; then again, "Are we on the Baron of St. Julien's land?" Still no answer, while the scoundrel gazed about like a cornered cat,

looking for chance to escape. Herbert grasped his ear in no gentle pinch.

"I work miracles," bellowed he. "I make the dumb speak!" Then as he twisted the ear, the man howled out:—

"Yes, this is his land."

"And why not all this before?" roared Herbert.

"I love my lord," growled the fellow; "how do I know but that you seek his ill? Sorrow enough he has, without need of more."

"Ha!" exclaimed Richard, "what is this? Speak out, my man. I am his friend and yours!"

But before he could get answer, the pound, pound, of several horsemen was heard ahead. And they saw in the road four riders, two accoutred men-at-arms, two others, by their dress and steeds evidently gentlemen of the lesser sort. One of these, a tall young man of about Richard's age, spurred ahead; and as he drew near, he dropped his lance-head in salute.

"Noble lord," said he, "do I speak with Richard Longsword of Cefalu, grandson of the Baron of St. Julien?"

"I am he, fair sir," replied Richard, with like salute.

"I am rejoiced to see your safety. Your messengers have arrived. We expected your coming. Know that I am Bertrand, squire of the Baron, your grandfather; and this is his good vassal the castellan, Sir Oliver de Carnac; in our Lord's name we greet you well and all your company."

So Richard thanked them for their courtesy, and then questioned:—

"And is my lord the Baron well?"

But at his words a great cloud lowered on the face of the squire, and he turned to De Carnac; and that stern-faced knight began to look very blank, though saying nothing. Then Bertrand began hesitatingly:—

"It grieves me, fair lord; but the Baron is very ill just now; the skill of the monks of St. Julien does nothing for him."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Norman. "I give him joy; I have here a famous Spanish knight, who, besides being a mighty cavalier, knows all the wisdom of the paynim schools, which, if very bad for the soul, is sovereign for the body."

"No skill avails, lord," said Bertrand, looking down. "He is blind."

"Blind!" came from Longsword. "When? how? he did not write."

"No, fair sir; three days since it happed; and I have a sorry tale to tell."

"Briefly then." Musa saw the Norman's face very calm and grave, and he shuddered, knowing a mighty storm was gathering.

"Lord," said Bertrand, "over yonder mountain lies the castle of Valmont: its seigneur, Raoul, has for years been at feud with your grandfather, my lord. Much blood has flowed to neither's advantage. When Louis went away, the two barons made a manner of peace; but of late they quarrelled, touching the rights to certain hunting-land. The suzerain, Count Robert of Auvergne, is old; he gave judgment against Raoul, but had no power to enforce. Four days since Baron Gaston went upon the debatable land to lay a hound; with him only Gaspar, the huntsman. Raoul and many men meet them; high words, drawn swords; and after our Baron had slain three men with his own hands, the 'Bull of Valmont' takes him. Raoul is in a black rage, and his enemy in his power."

Richard's face was black also, but he was not raging.

"Go on," said he, very calmly.

"Raoul says to my lord, 'It is a grievous thing to take the life of a cavalier, who cannot defend himself. I will not do it, yet you shall never see that pleasant hunting-land more.' Then he calls John of the Iron Arm, a man-at-arms and chief devil at Valmont, who is after his own heart, and bids him bring the 'hot-bowl.'"

"The 'hot-bowl'?"

"Yes, lord; a red-hot brazier, which they passed before our Baron's eyeballs, until the sight was scorched out forever."

Richard was turning very pale. "Mother of God!" muttered he, crossing himself; but Bertrand went on:—

"Then Raoul struck off Gaspar's right hand, and bade him lead his seigneur home with the other, and let them remember there was brave hunting on the Valmont lands."

"And what has been done against Raoul?" asked Richard.

"Nothing, lord. De Carnac is our chief; but when we knew you were coming, and heard how you

had laid the Bull's brother, Louis de Valmont, on his back, great knight that he was, we waited; for, we said, 'When Sir Richard comes, we shall be led by one of St. Julien's own stock, and we shall see if he loves Raoul more than do we.'"

"You have done well, dear friend," said Richard, still very quietly. "Now tell me, how is my grandfather; well, save for his eyes?"

"Alas! he was nigh dead when he came back, and to-day the monks declared he would slip away; only desire for revenge keeps his soul in him."

"I must see him," said Longsword, simply; then to Musa, "Ha! my brother, will you be at my side in this adventure?"

"*Allah akhbar*," cried the Spaniard, his eyes on fire, "that Raoul shall feel my cimeter!"

"Softly, softly, dear son," quoth Sebastian, who had heard all, "*Omnia licent, sed omnia non expediunt!*"

"No Latin now, good father," was the Norman's prompt retort, and he turned to Bertrand: "To the castle with speed!"

Forward they rode through the squalid little village, where ragged peasants and slatternly women opened their eyes wide, and crossed themselves as their eyes lit on the "Saracen devils"; then they clattered onto the stone bridge, and past the toll-keeper's booth at the drawbridge in the middle span. Before them across a stretch of cleared land rose the castle: not a curiously planned system of outworks, barbicans, baileys, and keeps, as Richard saw in his older days, but a single massive tower, square, built from ponderous blocks of black basalt that could mock at battering-ram. It perched upon a rocky rising, at the foot a moat, deep, flooded by the stream, where even now the fish were leaping; outside the moat, a high wooden stockade; within this, the stables. From the crest far above, the eye could sweep to the farthest glens of the valley. Ten men could make good the hold against an army; for where was the hero that could mount to the only entrance—that door in the sheer wall thirty feet above the moat, and only a wooden drawbridge to reach it, which pulleys could lift in a twinkling?

Richard looked at the castle and shrugged his shoulders. "Is the hold of Raoul de Valmont like to this?" he asked.

"As you say, lord; only the outer wall is higher," replied Bertrand, while they left their steeds at the foot of the dizzy bridge. Richard blew through his teeth. "St. Michael," cried he, "there will be a tale to tell ere we get inside!"

When they came within the great hall, dark and sombre, with slits for the archers its only windows, there were all the castle servants waiting to do Richard honor, from the gray old chamberlain and the consequential cellarer to the "sergeants" that kept the guard. But Longsword would have none of their scrapes and bows.

"Take me to my grandfather," he commanded, after turning down a horn of mead. So they led him up blind ladders to a room above. Here the windows were scarce larger; there was a great canopied bed, a *prie-dieu* chair, two or three clothes-presses; on the floor new, sweet rushes. The day was sultry, but there was a hot fire roaring in the cavernous chimney-place. The glowing logs sent a red glare over all the room; in every corner lurked black shadows. Before the fire stretched two enormous wolf-hounds, meet hunters for the fiercest bear. There was a huge armchair deeply cushioned before the fire, the back toward the doorway. As Richard entered, the hounds sprang up, growling, with grinning teeth, and a sharp brattling voice broke out:—

"Out of the room, pestilent monk. Away to perdition with your cordials, or I set the dogs on you. Give me the head of Raoul de Valmont, then stab me if you will!"

"Grandsire, it is I!" cried Richard, and ran beside the chair, and fell on his knees. A great hairy hand reached out for him, and he saw a face, hard as a knotted old oak, beaten by storm, scorched by lightning. Strength was there, brute courage, bitter hate, and an iron will. Only the lips now were crisped, the white beard was singed to the very jowl, and across the eyes was drawn a white bandage, stained with blood.

"Mother of God!" moaned the old man, groping piteously. "Is this the welcome that I give you, sweet grandson?"

But Richard, who thought it no shame to weep, held the mighty hand to his lips and sobbed loudly, while "the water of his heart" ran down his cheeks.

"*Ai*, dear grandsire," said he, when he had his voice, "it is well I have come. I too bear no love for the race of Valmont."

The old Baron felt for the Norman's arm; caught it; ran his hands from wrist to shoulder; gripped tight on the iron muscles.

"It is true, it is true!" he half laughed; "you are of my stock, and your father was a mighty cavalier. You will be worthy to have the barony."

"Say it not, sweet sir," cried Richard; "please God, you will yet live many a year!"

"Ho!" roared the Baron, in anger, "would you have me live as a blind cow! What is life without

hawks or hounds or tourneys or war! God willing, I shall die soon. Hell were nothing worse than this. I do not fear it!"

"Christ forbid you should speak sincerely!" protested Richard, crossing himself.

"No; it is true," raged the old man; "there is good company down below. Do not say Bernard the Devil is not there, these seven years, and he was my good friend. I am as bad as he. Fire can't hurt a man, if he can only *see*. What have I to do with your saints and prayers and priests' prattle! Heaven for them; and for men who love good sword-play and a merry lass—"

But Richard cut him short.

"Don't blaspheme! How know you that this is not a reward for all your sins?"

"Raoul used by the saints to reward me? Ha, ha—" and the Baron this time bellowed a wild laugh in earnest.

"Grandfather," said Richard, very gently, "you are in no mood for further talk. I will leave you, and come again."

"Come, and say that Raoul has gone to the imps!" raged the Baron; then, as Richard's steps sounded departing, "and if you take John of the Iron Arm, Raoul's chief under-devil, alive, give him a bath in boiling lard to remind him of what awaits him yonder!"

Barely had Richard reached the great hall when Bertrand was at him again:—

"Their reverences, the abbot of Our Lady of St. Julien, the prior, and the sub-prior, come to see your lordship."

So the three monks in their black Benedictine habits came in before Richard, who bowed very low, remembering the wise maxim: "Honor all churchmen, but look well to your money." The abbot was short and fat, the prior short but less fat, the sub-prior leaner still. Otherwise they seemed children of one mother, with their pale, flabby faces, their long gray beards, and black cowls and cassocks.

"*Benedicte*, fair son," began the abbot; "we trust the true love of God and Holy Church is in your heart."

"Of God and Holy Church," repeated the prior.

"Of God and Holy Church," chanted the sub-prior.

"I am a great sinner, holy father," quoth Richard, dutifully, "yet I hope for forgiveness. What may I do for you?"

Then the abbot ran off into a long, winding discourse as to how the barons of St. Julien had ever been the protectors and "advocates" of the abbey, and how of late "that man of Belial, Raoul de Valmont," had oppressed the monks in many ways. "And even now God has mysteriously deigned," continued the prelate, "that he should commit a sin, the like whereof have been few since the days of Judas called Iscariot."

"And what may this be?" asked Richard, soberly.

"When our *refectarius*," solemnly went on the abbot, "passed over the Valmont lands, driving three black pigs, and with twelve fair round Auvergne cheeses amongst other gifts of the pious in his cart, this man of blood cruelly possessed himself of the pigs and cheeses, saying, 'The holy brethren will find prayers rise strongest when they have pulse in their bellies'—blasphemous sinner!"

"Accursed robber!" cried the prior.

"Friend of the fiends!" echoed the sub-prior.

"And therefore," wound up the abbot, "we do warn you, on the peril of your soul, to cut off this child of perdition root and branch; to call forth to arms the *ban* and the *arrière-ban*; to make his castle a dunghill and his name a byword and a hissing!"

Richard was smiling. When the abbot finished, he gave the holy fathers a merry laugh that made them half feel their weighty mission a failure. But Musa, as he looked upon his friend, trembled, for he did not like that kind of smile or laugh. Richard flashed forth Trenchefer, and laid his hand on the knob that contained such holy relics.

"See you, holy fathers, gentlemen and vassals all. I, Richard Longsword, setting my hand on the holy relics of the blessed Matthias and the blessed Gereon, do swear before God Most High, that I will have the life of Raoul de Valmont, and of every man or lad of his sinful race; and God and these holy saints do so to me, if I show mercy!"

And all the men-at-arms, and Bertrand and De Carnac, saw that they had to do with a born leader of warriors, and cried out "Amen!" with a mighty shout, so that the solid rafters quaked and reëchoed. But Sebastian as well as Musa shuddered when he beheld Longsword; for the Norman's words rang hard and sharp as whetted steel, and the good churchman's heart was heavy with new foreboding.

"This is a cruel vow, my son," he broke in. "Raoul de Valmont must suffer for his sin; but Louis,—he whom you spared when at your feet,—will you seek his life also, and that of the lad Gilbert, the younger brother?"

But Richard flung out hotly:—

"Silence, Sebastian; cursed am I for sparing Louis de Valmont. Cursed for sparing an accursed race! I will have the lives of all—all; and will right my grandsire and myself also. So help me God!"

Sebastian had one last appeal.

"For the sake of Mary Kurkuas, do not rush into this blood-feud. God will not bless you if you go beyond Raoul!"

Longsword threw back his head.

"I were unworthy of Mary Kurkuas if I yielded a hair! No power shall shake me! Let Christ pity them; I will not!"

Sebastian turned away.

"Dear Lord," he prayed, "Thou seest how my sweet son is torn by the fiends who seek his soul; first he forgets Jerusalem, now will dip his hands wantonly in Christian blood. Spare him; pity him; restore him to himself."

That night Richard sat at chess with Musa; played skilfully, laughed loud. His talk was merry, but his face was very hard.

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# CHAPTER XIII

## HOW RICHARD SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN

Night was falling. There was a gray mist creeping over the mountain; the ash trees and beeches loomed to spectral size; the sky was thick with dun cloud-banks. But De Carnac, as he looked upward, muttered to Longsword in a bated whisper, "The clouds are less heavy; wait two hours—they will break and give us the moon."

"Hist, men!" Richard cautioned the band about him; "not yet; we must wait for darkness."

Long had they already waited,—those score of Saracens and fifty or more St. Julien men, lying in ambush behind the trees, north of the crag whereon perched the Valmont castle, the only side where an easy road led up to the outer rampart, within which still lowered the great keep. They had seen men go in and out, but none molested them in the safe shadow of the trees. Their hearts had leaped at the chirp of each cricket, the call of each wood-bird. The sounds died away; naught followed; each man listened to the beating in his own breast.

It grew darker. Now the last light shimmered between the leaf-laden branches; a murky haze overspread tree and shrub and moss-covered ground until all objects were lost in the black night. The castle was a good three hundred paces away, but it was so still that they heard the rattle of the porter's keys when he made fast the great outer gate. The chains of the drawbridge rattled; they could see a lantern flash on a steel cap as its owner made the parapet rounds; a few glints of light from the narrow windows in the keep faded one by one; then—silence.

Richard felt for his sheath and loosened Trenchefer; then whispered to a shock-pated "villain," whose wrists were bound, and the cord in Herbert's keeping:—

"Now, Giles of the Mill, serve us true in this; for as I hope in heaven, your hands shall be stricken off, and the stumps plunged in hot sulphur, if you play false!"

"Never fear, lord," answered the fellow. "Raoul hung my eldest son for fishing in his stream after mid-Lent; never fear his brother will fail to let down the ladder."

Richard rose to his feet very slowly. It was so dark under the trees that the keenest eye saw only blackness. On the western hill-crest, where the clouds gave way, the last bars of pale light still hung, but dimming each moment.

"*Nox ruit interea, et montes umbrantur*," repeated Sebastian, softly, at Longsword's elbow.

"*Ai*, father," muttered the Norman, turning, "why did you not remain in the glen by the horses? We will call you, if any need shriving."

"And shall not the shepherd go with the sheep?" said Sebastian, solemnly. "Ah! dear son, if God bless you this night, slay the guilty, but spare the innocent!"

"Time enough," protested Richard, "to consider, when we see the inside of that keep. By St. Michael, it will be no jaunty hawking!"

Sebastian laid his great, iron-capped mace upon his shoulder. "This weapon I bear," said he, "that I may not live by the sword, and so by the sword perish."

"Now, my men!" commanded Richard, his voice still very low; and silently the long line of dark figures rose from the fern brake. As they rose, a distant bell pealed out many miles away, the notes stealing in among the trees like echoes from an untrodden world.

"They toll some one who has died in Bredon," whispered Bertrand, the squire. "Let us pray," said Richard. And all the Christians knelt. The Saracens stood dumbly, but perhaps said their word to "Allah,"—for who among them was fated to see another morning?

So Richard prayed—a wild, unholy prayer, as became his unholy frame of mind; and he ended, "Thus I confide myself to the stout heart Thou hast given me, and to my good sword, and my good right arm; but last of all to Thee!" And one may hope the Most High rejoiced that He was not utterly forgotten.

"Come!" commanded Longsword, rising. "Keep your shields from banging, all the crossbows ready, and the swords loose. De Carnac, you have torches; we shall need them; and you, Herbert —the great axe."

Softly as birds upon the wing, those seventy mad spirits stole across the band of open ground betwixt forest and castle. Then they halted before the looming outworks. They heard the sentinel above tramp along the platform. A stray gleam of light touched his lance-head. He might have tossed a pebble down upon Longsword's helm. Herbert laid down his great axe, set his crossbow, laid a quarrel and levelled into the dark.

"Not as you love me!" growled Richard, clapping a hand on the reckless veteran; "will you blast all now?"

Tramp, tramp; the sentry was gone round behind the other side of the keep. Richard crept up to the wall, and at his side Musa. It was so dark here, they only knew the barrier by their hands.

"Now, Giles, your signal!" Longsword passed the word. And then sounded a low bird-call, a second, a third; then silence again. More steps on the parapet above; and a voice very far away, and mysterious in the dark.

"Below there?"

"Yes," answered Richard.

"Here; the ladder; I have fastened it." And something whirred down into the gloom, and struck the ground lightly. It was the end of a rope ladder. Richard groped for it, caught, and gave command.

"Stand by, men; I will go first; who second?"

"Who but I, brother?" protested Musa, in his ear.

"Good; let us gain the parapet, if we may, in silence; then storm the drawbridge and the keep-gate before the alarm. And now"—and he gripped Trenchefer in his teeth and began to climb.

Two rounds he had mounted, when there was a second step above; then a shout, cry, scuffle:—

"Devil! Traitor! Help!" and in an eye-twinkle there was a torch flaming on the parapet. Richard paused a moment. Right at the crown of the battlement stood a figure in armor, and behind the bulwark was the noise of struggle. Louder the shout:—

"Treachery! attack! to arms!"

Twenty voices had it now. A mighty horn was blaring; a great bell was tossing up its brazen throat in ringing clangor.

"Down, lord, down!" it was Herbert who called.

"Follow me, all who love God!" flung back Richard; and he sped up the ladder, and Musa after him. Twenty rounds there were to clear; and at the top, one who was swinging his sword to cut the cords. But in the torchlight Herbert again levelled, and whing!—his quarrel had sped clean through the man-at-arms. A second was there, a third, but a flight of Saracen arrows smote them. Richard never knew how he climbed those rounds. He was grasping the battlement—a long leap cleared it. He had won the platform; beside him was Musa; and beside Musa stood Herbert. The parapet was theirs—and what a sight!

Upon the summit of the great keep a huge bonfire had sprung up, and the tall flames leaped toward the inky heavens. Down the long bridge from the keep-door were running men in armor,—ten, twenty, twoscore,—and their swords were flashing. And two mighty shouts came swelling from within and without:—

"God and De Valmont!"

"Our Lady of St. Julien!"

Richard saw a man in a silvered casque running down the drawbridge—a dwarfish man with the shoulders of a bull; over his head danced the spiked ball of an armed whip.

"Ah! St. Julien dogs!" was his shout. "To the fiends with them all!"

"Up, men!" roared Richard, his voice swelling above battle-shout, bell, and fire. But a great curse came from Herbert. "God spare our souls! One rope of the ladder is snapped!"

"Make it fast," flew back the answer. "Musa and I will cover you. Ha, my brother?"

And while Herbert tugged at the cords, the Spaniard's cimeter swung side by side with Trenchefer. A great rush: the Valmont men, tall mountain giants, were at the two and about them in a twinkling. One sweep should have flung the twain to the court below; fools!—they knew not that all the South Country had no better swordsmen. Richard struck right, Musa left; and their blades grew red. The attackers recoiled as from live fire. A second rush—a second repulse; once more—the parapet was narrow; the Valmont men reeled back, and some cried out in terror.

"Out of the way, dogs!" Raoul was bawling. "I will beat them down!"

But as he rushed, Herbert rose from his task. The great axe was swinging over his head; and as it poised, first De Carnac, then Nasr, then the rest by tens cleared the wall.

"God is with us!" burst from Richard, and he leaped from the parapet into the court below. Right amongst the swarming Valmonters he plunged, and Trenchefer cleared the path. At his right pressed Musa, at his left Herbert, and with such guardian saints all hell might rage in vain against him.

Man to man they fought and right valiantly; but our Lady of St. Julien smiled on her votaries that sinful night. They flung wide the door to the court; the Saracens swarmed in, biting like cats with their crooked cimeters.

"Devils! Paynim devils!" howled the Valmonters, as they still more gave way. "Christ save! We are lost!"

"Back to the keep!" thundered Raoul, who had laid more than one foeman low. "Back, and I will guard the bridge!"

The Valmonters surged back. They swarmed upon the drawbridge. The wood creaked with their rush, the stout chains tightened. Raoul, whose flail had made even De Carnac give way, turned to follow, but Richard was on him.

"Now, torturer of old men!" the Norman hissed it through his teeth while he felt Trenchefer leaping on high, as though it were a breathing thing.

"Now, St. Julien hound!" and Raoul ran down the bridge to meet him. They were above the moat—a misstep, death. Richard knew it all, yet in strange way knew nothing. Fear—what was it? He saw Raoul's great spike dash down upon him; his head rang, strange lights glared in his eyes; but all his strength sped into the hilt of Trenchefer. The good sword caught the tough oak of the flail, cleft it as a reed, and Raoul de Valmont gave one great cry, and showed a face all gnarled with deathly hate as he reeled into the darkling moat.

"God is with us!" again Richard cried, and he leaped upon the drawbridge. The great door slammed fast in his face; he could hear the bolts rattle; feverish hands strained on the levers to the bridge-ropes. But just as the planking sprang up, the axe of Herbert drove through the ropes like pack thread, and Richard rushed onward to the door.

"Quarter, kind lord, quarter!" voices were crying from within. "Mercy! our lives! as you love Christ!"

"Down with the door!" raged Longsword, whose head seemed one ball of fire.

Herbert poised the great axe, and the solid wood sprang in with the blow, but the bolts were strong.

"Give it me!" and Richard snatched the axe like a toy. Three times the door gave back under the shattering shock; and with the fourth it reeled inward. From the battlement above, beams and stones snowed down upon him. What recked Longsword? He knew they would not hurt, and cared not if they should. Where in his mind was Mary Kurkuas when he felt the hot blood streaming on his torn forehead, and the fury of demons in his heart!

"God is with us!" a third time he called it. Before, opened the dark, narrow, vaulted way to the great hall. There were flashing eyes and tossing blades in the passage. What were these at such an hour! The Valmonters had lived as devils, as devils they fought; but what could they do, save die? Three minutes of hard cutting hand to hand, and the way was cleared. Longsword and his men—that were left—stood in the great hall. The cups still lay on the long tables, scraps of food on the trenchers; for the evening's carousal had not been cleared away. For a moment there was darkness, then a cresset on the wall flashed up, another and another, and all was light.

"Fire! Death! Sack!" the St. Julien men were shouting, and who should say them nay?

There were women and little children cowering on the settles, young girls ran screaming up the swaying ladders to the lofts above, and after them the raging victors. Richard's voice was a trumpet calling above the stormy chaos.

"Up to the parapet, Nasr! Let not a man escape! Search the dungeons, Herbert, lest any hide!"

"Kill! kill!" threescore throats were echoing.

But Richard had caught an old woman by the arm, and dragged her from her knees.

"They say Raoul had a young brother. Where is he? Speak, if you wish to live." His sword was swinging, very red.

"Pity, lord," moaned the shivering creature. "Spare Gilbert. He is harmless as a dove!"

"Where is the boy, woman?" belched the Norman, and struck at her with his knotted fists.

"Oh, mercy!" screamed she; "his mother, Lady Ide, took him to the chapel."

"After me, men!" blazed Richard; and he ran towards a rude stairway leading to a chamber below.

Musa caught his arm. "My brother!" he cried in his ear, "you are beside yourself! This is no work for a cavalier. Your grandfather is avenged. Call off the men!"

"By the Splendor of God!" flashed forth Longsword, "not even *you* shall stop me now!" He thrust back Musa with one sweep of his arm, and flew down the stairway, twenty blades at his heels.

Above, raged the roar of conflict: the moans, cries, agony, battle-shouts, all blending in one hideous, echoing storm. For a moment after the red glare of the hall, Richard blinked in the dark; then in the lower chamber he saw an altar, and four tall candles burning upon it; and around the altar clung white-clad figures, moaning and praying in one breath.

Straight across the little chapel sped Richard; and as he did so he saw amongst the women two men, one tall and in armor, with a sword at his side; the other a youth, with a fair girl's face and curling golden hair. As he strode, one of the women rose and stood before him; very queenly she was in her flowing gray hair, and her brave sweet face; for she was Ide of the Swan's Neck, once the fairest lady in all Auvergne.

"As you hope in God—" began she. But as she spoke the man in armor sprang from the altar, sword in hand.

"Ha! John of the Iron Arm!" laughed De Carnac at Richard's side.

"By the Cross!" cried the Valmonter, "you shall not take me here like a cornered rat!"

And before he could raise to parry, Richard saw the other's blade swing straight upon him. One flash—one thought of Mary Kurkuas—crash! The great mace of Sebastian had dashed the sword aside, and De Carnac smote the man-at-arms so that he toppled with a dull cry. Richard saw John of the Iron Arm at his feet.

"Seize! Bind!" he shouted; "let him be as Baron Gaston said." And he strode straight on toward the altar. Lady Ide caught at his hands.

"As you hope in God," she pleaded, "do not harm my son! Revere the altar!"

And Richard, with all the fiends in his heart, smote her so that she fell without a moan. He saw the boy clinging to a box on the altar—sacred relics doubtless. In one hand the lad held up a brazen crucifix, and stretched it forth—defence against the slayer.

"Pity, pity, for the love of Christ!" he was pleading. He was only a young lad.

Sebastian tore at Richard's arm.

"As you love Our Lord!" cried the churchman, "spare him!" Richard glared round the room.

"Some of you strike down this boy!" was his command to all about. De Carnac, mad sinner, started forward, gave a glance at the relic box and crucifix, recoiled, crossing himself. "Deliver us from evil!" he was muttering.

"You, Abul Kadir," cried Richard to a grinning Saracen. "Pluck the boy away! Hew him down!"

But the Moslem, though his fingers twitched round his hilt, did not stir. "Away, away!" pleaded Sebastian, dragging at the Norman's arm. "Our Lady spare this wickedness!"

"Pity, sweet lord!" moaned the lad, his fair head bowed beneath the crucifix. Richard shook himself from Sebastian's hand. Trenchefer had sprung on high; at his shout the vaulting rang.

"I have sworn it! Christ died not for the spawn of Valmont!" The great sword dashed down the crucifix, shattered the sacred box; the lad lay with his bright locks in a crimson pool.

Then silence more horrible than any noise. In the rooms above they were still chasing, plundering, slaughtering; it sounded very far away. All the tapers save one had been dashed out by the stroke; in the pale flicker Richard could see strong men with their heads bowed, and their lips moving in prayer. Musa leaned against a stone pillar, his cimeter dropped, his face buried in his hands. Only Sebastian was raising his hand in adjuration.

"Come out of him, thou unclean demon," he was saying slowly and solemnly.

Richard looked left, looked right. Why did men stare at him, and shrink away from his glance? Why did his head throb as if the veins were bursting? He held up Trenchefer—how red the blade

was! What had he been doing? Lady Ide on the hard flags was beginning to quiver and moan—how came she there? The other women had fled the chapel. The gray shadowy walls seemed turning round and round; Richard caught the altar-rail to stand steady.

**"THE LAD LAY WITH HIS BRIGHT LOCKS IN A CRIMSON POOL"**

Now a mightier shout in the halls above.

"Out! Out! The castle burns!" And with the shout a rising roar and crackle, and the sniff of creeping smoke.

Still Richard stood; almost he felt as a man waking from a dream. Would it not all flee away and leave him at Cefalu in his mother's bower? or at Palermo in the genii palace with Mary Kurkuas beside the plashing fountain?

Musa had stepped to him and touched his arm gently. "Dear brother, the castle burns quickly. We must haste, if all would get out!"

Richard shook himself; his head steadied.

"Come, my men!" He led them up from the chapel. Already the flames were mastering the upper lofts. The parapet was a pyramid of glowing fire. The victors rushed down the drawbridge with their spoil; a great copper dresser, plate, gold cups, tapestry—the plunder of Raoul de Valmont for many a long year. Only Musa stayed long enough in the chapel to bear the Lady Ide outside the bailey, where some of the castle women were not too terrified to care for her, and take her to the cottage of a peasant not far away.

Richard stood outside the gate. The fire was climbing downward and mounting upward. Now from every loophole spouted a blazing jet. The sky had cleared, but the eddying smoke veiled stars and moon. The great keep was a flaming beacon against the dark; ten leagues away lord and vassal would see it, and say that Raoul the Bull of Valmont had met his deserts at last. The St. Julien men crowded around their chief, gave him cheer on cheer, and cried out that with him to lead no emperor might withstand them. Richard stretched up his hands toward the glowing fire-mount.

"Let God Himself undo my deed this night!" he cried. Then they walked to the glen, took horse and were away, and saw St. Julien before dawn. All the ride Richard was laughing and boasting, and saying that he wished a Raoul every month that he might have such rare sport; but Sebastian and Musa said little, and their thoughts were none the most gay.

# CHAPTER XIV

## HOW RICHARD'S SIN WAS REWARDED

There was mirth and dancing in the St. Julien castle when Longsword and his band returned. Seventy and more had they gone away, scarce fifty came back, some of the women howled long for the husband or brother whom they brought home on the shields; but save for these, who was there but had a laugh and a cheer for Richard, who had borne himself a very paladin in the fight? When the knight dismounted at the castle gate, forth came the gray-haired steward with the great horn goblet of the urus-ox,—a mighty cup centuries old, ornamented with strangely wrought silver bands, and brimming with home-brewed mead.

"Drink, fair lord," he commanded, "for you have proved a right noble seigneur of St. Julien. None but a cavalier of wondrous valor is suffered to drink from this."

So Richard drained the great horn. "To the perdition of every Valmonter, and to the bright eyes of Mary Kurkuas!"

Then he went to the chamber of his grandfather, who had sat all that night, gnawing his nails, crying to the varlets to run to the parapet to see if the sky was aglow toward Valmont. As Richard came in the old man staggered up to him, caught him by the arm, and sniffled piteously when Richard told how they won the outwork and the bridge and the keep.

"By the Cross!" swore the Baron, half laughing, half moaning, "I would have given half my life to be there,—there and strike one good blow, and feel the steel eat through Raoul de Valmont."

"Raoul de Valmont will never feel another sword," said Richard, softly; "he is gone to his account."

"Aye," cried the Baron; "gone, so the varlets who ran here told me; gone, and a long time St. Peter will have of it reading off the list of his sins. By Our Lady, they were not a few; and perhaps mine are as many, ha! Well, even the devil will not frighten me much, after what I have lived through!"

"You must live and undo your misdeeds if you can, dear grandfather," said Richard, whose own conscience was as yet very easy.

"Yes, I must have a talk with the abbot. Live like a demon, then square at the end with the priests! Two or three fields added to the glebe, a few *sols* ready money, and the saints forget all about you, and let you crawl under the gate of heaven—that is the way a man of spirit should live and die! But the Valmonters—the boy Gilbert?"

"I killed him," said Richard, deliberately.

"Good; he had never done any harm; neither have wolf whelps; but we kill them just the same. And John of the Iron Arm?"

"He is here. De Carnac struck him down, but he is alive; they have him in the dungeon now."

"Good again; I can hear him whistle his tune before we let him die. *Ai*, lad, you will be a right good seigneur for this old castle. I shall sleep in the ground more snugly because I know you possess all. I have fought, scraped, and lied to make the barony larger. No man shall ever say Gaston forgave a foe, or failed to square off a grudge, and now Raoul has been paid—ha!"

So Richard left the old man to chuckle in his darkness. The next day the abbot came over with congratulations, blessings, and a request for the great altar cross of Valmont,—which was due, because the "*aggrave* and *reaggrave*," double and triple anathema, he had thundered against the Valmonters, doubtless went far to blast their prowess; and Longsword all piously gave the cross. The monks chanted *Te Deums* and enough masses to lift every fallen St. Juliener promptly out of purgatory. Richard went about with merry face and loud laugh. "After the feast comes the dance!" he would cry, when all marvelled at his nimbleness after so hard a *mêlée*.

At the great feast in honor of the victory, Richard sat at the head of the long horseshoe table, drank with the deepest, and never blushed when Theroulde likened him in valor to Huon of Bordeaux or even to Roland.

"You seem very joyous to-night, dear son," said Sebastian, who appeared gloomier than ever.

"And why should I not?" quoth Richard, stretching forth for more wine. "Have I not blotted out my grandfather's enemy; have I not a noble barony; have I not the love of the best of friends," with a glance at Musa, "and of the fairest woman in the world?"

"Ah! sweet son," replied Sebastian, sighing, "all these shall pass away! The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; there will come a time when you will cry, 'Would God I had been mindful of my vow and gone to Jerusalem.' Even now it is not too late; let us go and hear the holy Peter of Amiens, called Peter the Hermit."

Richard cut him short with a direful oath. "Speak not again of Jerusalem. I care more for Mary Kurkuas and for Musa than for ten thousand Jerusalems! Let others who have more sin on their souls, and are more frighted by priests' patter, go if they list. For me I give you the good Arab

saying:—

"'Begone all eating cares this night!
Who recks to see the morning light?'"

Then, to a serving-varlet: "Here, fellow, another horn." And Richard stood up with all eyes upon him. "To Mary Kurkuas," he drank, "and long may she be the liege lady of St. Julien."

Every man present, except Sebastian, roared out the pledge; but Sebastian only sat still, and prayed to the saints.

Thus sped some weeks, and old Baron Gaston breathed his last. Before he died John of the Iron Arm had gone before him, in a manner better surmised than said. The Baron had felt his sins coming home upon him as his time drew nigh. The abbot went to see him very often. Gaston wished to die as a monk. The brethren put on him the monk's robe and scapulary, the sub-prior pronounced over him some words of consecration, and the dying sinner muttered some half-articulate vows. Yet he seemed more concerned as to what would befall his good horse Fleuri when he was gone, than about the welfare of his soul. Around his bed night and day sat his petty nobles and neighbors watching in solemn silence, except to cross themselves when a magpie croaked, or when it was said that a vulture hovered over the castle—sure sign of the death-angel's approach. The moment the Baron was dead, the serving-boys ran through the castle, emptying every vessel of water, lest in one the straying soul should drown itself. The monks gave him a funeral as became one of their own order, and one who had made over to them so wide a stretch of farm-land. Ten days after Gaston was buried, they proclaimed Richard Baron of St. Julien. Lady Margaret was her father's only heir; but she was far away, and a man with a strong arm was needed in that troubled seigneury. So Richard Longsword sat down in the Baron's high seat at the end of the great hall, and all the lesser nobles came before him, knelt, placed their hands in his, and swore themselves "his men." And Richard raised each up, kissed him on the mouth, and promised love and protection so long as he observed fealty. Fealty, Richard himself owed in name to the Count of Auvergne, with the young William of Aquitaine as overlord of all. But times were turbulent, Aquitaine and Toulouse at bitter feud. Richard looked upon the castle, the stout men, the broad lands, and the blue sky: "No power can say me nay," was his laugh, "saving God and Mary Kurkuas." And one fears he did not greatly dread the former. But the barony he ruled with a strong hand, and ended the petty tyrannies of the lesser nobles upon their serfs; while Sebastian as chancellor chased from office the chaplain of St. Julien, a rollicking, hard-swearing sinner, with a consort, six children, and wide fame as a toper. In his stead reigned Sebastian himself, who soon crossed swords even with the abbot: first, because there were fowls in the abbey kettles Fridays; second, because the brethren bartered smacks with the bouncing village maids. "*Peccatum venale!*" cried the abbot to the last charge, and defended the former by saying that fowls were created along with fish on Friday, and who that day refused fish? So both good men complained to Richard, but he merrily said that Nasr, as an impartial infidel, should compose their quarrel. And ignoring their war, Longsword rode up and down the barony, setting the crooked straight, making the "villains" worship him for his ready laugh, his great storehouse of humor, his willingness to stand with the weak against the strong. Only men who had followed him at Valmont whispered about him. One day Richard heard two men-at-arms with their heads together, while he sat at chess with Musa.

"Our seigneur is a terrible man. You should have seen him in the chapel."

"From what I was told, he smote the very relic box. He must shudder lest the hand of God be laid on him."

"He shudder? Lord Richard would not shrink, if he saw a thousand fiends. His heart is made of iron, like his hands, if only you could see it. Yet sometimes I tremble lest we all be smitten a deadly blow for his deed. We all stood by consenting, though the stroke was his."

Richard heard, and the whispers so shook his mind that he made a false move, lost a piece, lost the game. Musa saw that he was silent for once that evening. A messenger had come the day before from La Haye: Mary was well and joyous; they would have a bridal that would be a tale through all the South Country. Yet Richard was no longer merry. Musa confided his anxiety to Herbert, who had become his firm friend.

"The Cid my brother is not well. He talks in his sleep; he boasts before men, but fears to be left alone. Last night he cried out on his bed to take away Gilbert de Valmont and his fair, blood-stained hairs."

Herbert shook his head. "The 'little lord'"—for so he fondly called his mighty nursling—"has done a deed, even I," he laughed grimly, "who have a few things to tell the priests, would not like to dip hands in. Slaying the lad was no wrong, mind you. But the altar! the altar! Better kill fifty in cold blood than shatter a relic box!"

"No, I think he fears lest Allah requires the boy's blood at his hands."

Herbert brayed out a great laugh. "God will never wink twice, caring for those Valmonters. They say Louis is coming north with a band to take vengeance. Pretty fighting—no music sweeter than that of sword-blades."

"I would that the princess were here," said Musa, "to lift Richard from his black mood." But when the news came that Louis was trying to induce the Counts of Aquitaine and Toulouse to make

peace and march against St. Julien, Richard only laughed loudly as Herbert.

"By St. Maurice, let all come; and bring the king of France and Duke of Lorraine. Valmont was too easy a task; let me match my strength against great lords now!"

Musa only shook his head.

"Allah grant," was his prayer, "that naught befall unhappily, until we go back to La Haye for the wedding. Mary Kurkuas's bright eyes will scatter all this darkness."

But day after day went on, and no bolt fell. Richard continued to ride hard, hunt hard, drink hard. Musa began to feel, however, that the shadow was beginning to lift. Louis had been unable to induce Toulouse and Aquitaine to compose their feud; there was little to fear from his quarter. Then one afternoon came the stroke from heaven.

A fair sunny afternoon it was, in the late summer. Richard had been up with the dawn, following a great boar over the mountains. The dogs had brought the beast to bay, and his white tusks had killed three hounds, before Longsword had ended all with a stroke of his Danish hunting-axe. The boar was a giant of his kind. They brought him on a packhorse, that staggered beneath the weight. The carcass was laid out before the huge fireplace of the hall, and all the castle girls and women stood round pinching his shaggy sides, feeling of his white teeth, laughing, chattering, and screaming. Richard, having put off his hunting-boots, was calling to a serving-boy for water, when the bronze slab at the gate began to clang, proclaiming a stranger.

"*Héh*, porter, open to me!" was the cry without, and there was a scurry of many feet on stairways, for few visitors made their way to St. Julien.

Presently they led into the hall a wandering pedler. He had a weighty pack of Paris pins, of ribbons, of Eastern silks, and fifty kinds of petty gewgaws that set the women oh-ing and ah-ing. But when he undid his bundles, he dragged forth a letter, a roll of parchment, carefully sealed.

"This, fair lord," said he to Richard, "I was bidden to bring you from Marseilles, where a shipmaster put it in my hands."

"From Sicily—from Cefalu, then." Richard had not expected a letter so early, but so much the merrier. Only he was puzzled when he saw that the superscription was not in the hand of his brother Stephen, the usual scribe for his father. Richard broke the seal, which he did not recognize, unrolled, and read; while the girls swarmed round the pedler, ransacked his wares, and pleaded with the men to be generous with the spoils of Valmont, and buy.

But Musa, as he looked at Richard reading, saw sudden sweat-beads standing on his forehead. The letter ran thus:

> "Robert of Evroult, Bishop of Messina, to his very dear spiritual son, the valiant and most Christian knight, Sir Richard Longsword, sends his greeting and episcopal blessing.
>
> "May the grace of our Lord, the pity of our Blessed Lady, ever Virgin, the sweet savor of the Holy Ghost, be upon you. May Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel, the great and all-adorable archangels, spread their shields about you, to deliver you. May all the company of the saints on high intercede for you at the throne of the Father of all mercies, and bless you; and may God Himself grant unto you strength and peace.
>
> "Fair son, it has pleased the Most High to lay upon me a burden which makes my bones to cry out, and my nights to be spent in tears and in roarings. Yet who better than I may write you? Bow to the will of God, and listen. Ten days since it befell that Moslem corsairs landed by night at Cefalu, and stormed your father's castle. The tales we have heard are scanty, for few who saw what befell are here to tell. From a man-at-arms who escaped, it would seem that the castle was surprised about midnight. The garrison was small; for my lord, your father, had sent many of his men into the mountains to chastise some robbers. They say your father laid about him as became a Christian and a cavalier, and slew many; yet at the end, seeing there was no hope, stabbed your mother with his own hands to spare her captivity amongst the infidels. They say, too, that your brother Stephen died fighting with a valor worthy of his father and brother. As for your sister Eleanor, I hear nothing. Therefore, we dare hope, if indeed it is a thing to hope, that she is not dead, but carried away captive by the unbelievers. Soon as the alarm was spread, Prince Tancred, who was near Cefalu, took ships and followed after the pirate's two vessels. One outsailed him; he captured the other after much struggle. The prisoners confessed their chief was the Emir Iftikhar, one time in Count Roger's service. The emir was on the vessel which escaped with your sister, so said the captives. The prince put to death his prisoners in a manner meet to remind them of the greater torments waiting their unbelieving souls. Rumor has it, Iftikhar has sent a creature of his, one Zeyneb, to France to seek your hurt. This is incredible, yet be guarded. I have had masses said for the souls of your kinsfolk; and consider, sweet son, even in your grief, how now they are removed far from this evil world, and have their dwelling with the saints in light. May the tender pity of Christ comfort you, and give you peace. Farewell."

A great cry, inarticulate, terrible, burst from Richard's lips. He staggered as he stood. Herbert

grasped him round, to steady. The parchment fell heavily from his hand. Musa caught it, read a few lines.

"My brother! Allah have compassion—" he sobbed, his own heart melting fast.

"Where is Sebastian?" came the choking whisper from Longsword.

"Gone to the village, lord," hesitated Bertrand, "to confess two thieves. He is staying to the feast for the executioner and priest after the hanging!"

"My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?" Richard was moaning. His face was ashen. They looked on him, some about to stop their ears at his blasphemy; but one glance told it was no blasphemy, but bitter truth. He was putting by Herbert lightly as a child, and springing toward the door that led down to the drawbridge. At the sight of his face the women began to weep.

"My brother! my brother! stay!" Musa was calling. He might better have cried to the whirlwind.

"Halt him, men!" shouted Herbert, leaping after. "He is mad; he will slay himself!"

Two or three men-at-arms leaped out, as if to stop him. At one flash from his eyes they fell back, crossing themselves. Richard ran out upon the drawbridge. They could see his feet totter; all held breath—the moat was very deep; he recovered, ran on.

Herbert made a trumpet of his hands and shouted to the porter at the outwork:—

"Stop him! Close the gate!"

But Richard ran right past the gazing fellow, and reached the open. Musa had sped after him.

"Richard, you are mad! Where are you going?" was his despairing call. Longsword only ran the faster. They saw him leave the beaten road, and fly along over garden walls, ditches, hedges, with great bounds worthy of a courser.

Musa pressed behind, but soon found himself completely outdistanced. Richard was heading straight for the lowering mountain. The Arab turned back, panting for breath. Already the Norman was out of sight, lost in the forest. Musa hastened to the castle.

"Call out all the men, send word to the village," was his command to De Carnac; "beat up the mountain with dogs, or you will never see your baron again!"

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# CHAPTER XV

## HOW RICHARD FOUND THE CRUCIFIX

As Richard Longsword ran across field and fallow that bright afternoon, had the warm sun turned to ink, he would scarce have known it. Sight he had not, nor hearing. He did not feel the bushes that whipped smartly in his face as he dashed through them; he did not see the wide ravine of the brook brawling at his feet. Only by some mad instinct he leaped and cleared it, and ran on and on; fleeing—from what? His head was throbbing, though he had touched no wine; there was a great weight in his breast, numbing, crushing. He even tried to stop himself, to look about, to call back sense and reason. Useless; the passion mastered him, and still he ran on.

As he ran, he prayed; prayed aloud, and knew not what he prayed. "Holy Mary, pray for me! Holy Mother of God, pray for me! Holy Virgin of Virgins, pray for me! Mother of divine grace, pray for me!"

And still on! Would the fire in his brain never quench? He stumbled over a fallen tree, and knew he was in the forest. He rose, glanced back; he could see at last,—the tower of St. Julien was still in sight. And in the tower were men and maids who could laugh, and chatter, and love the sunshine. Away from them! Richard broke in among the crowding trees, and ran yet faster. Presently, though his pain grew not the less, it ceased to be one aching blur of feelings. Forms, faces, were darting before his eyes; now among the trees; now peering from the thickets; now flitting along some grassy mead on the mountain side. They were not real. He knew it well. When he fastened his gaze on them, they were nowhere. But still he ran. His feet flew like those of the hunted roe. And was he not hunted? Was he not fleeing? From what?

Richard had known his Latin, cavalier that he was. The words of the service were ringing in his ears—who uttered them? "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there." The words sounded and sounded again. Richard clapped his fingers to his ears. Still he heard them. And he must run, run as never before, if he would escape from his pursuer.

Presently he stumbled over a second log; fell headlong beneath a pine tree upon a slipping carpet of dead needles. The fall was heavy; he felt his head thrill with a new pain. For a moment he lay still; and a cool fern pressed comfortingly against his cheek. It was good to rest quietly and look upward into the dark tracery far overhead. He could just see a little patch of the blue shimmering

through the pine boughs, a very blue bit of sky. If heaven lay beyond that azure, how fair a land it must be! Richard pressed his hands to his brow, and held them there for long. The throbbing had a little abated. He sat up; looked around. Not a sound except the drone of a mountain honey-bee hanging over some blossom. Trees, trees, before, behind. His eye lost itself in the ranges and mazes of gray-black trunks. There was no path; he had no recollection of the way. He called aloud—only echoes from far-off glens.

Richard rose and sat upon the log; and his fingers tore at the wood's soft mould. Would God his mind had been in His hands! The Cefalu folk—they were all before him—father, mother, sister, brother. He should never see them more in this world—and in the next? Oh, horror! what part could his sainted mother have with her unholy, murderous son! His father had sinned after his kind, yet to him little had been given of holy teaching, and little would be required. But he, Richard Longsword, had he not been brought up gently by his mother, as became a high-born Christian cavalier? Were not her prayers still in his ears? Had there not been at his side for guide and counsellor Sebastian, who was one of the elect of God? Had he not given his mother a pious and holy kiss when he fared away to Auvergne? and did she not send him forth with his virgin knightly honor, to do great deeds for the love of Christ? and how had he kept that honor? He had slain Raoul, and there was never a stain upon his conscience; but Gilbert the lad, the innocent boy who had poured out his blood at the very altar—was it for the love of Christ that he had slain *him*? And that vaunt he had flung to heaven when the keep of Valmont burned: "Let God Himself undo the deed!" Lo, it was made good—not even God, were Gilbert de Valmont to stand forth with breath, could take back that sinful stroke of Trenchefer!

Richard cried aloud in his agony; and the black woods rang, and birds flew screaming from their haunts, as though the hawk were on them; echo and reëcho, then the woods were still. Richard roused himself by a painful effort. The tree trunks were darkening; the patch of blue above waxed dim; night was approaching.

"St. Michael!" he muttered, "I must get away quickly, or sleep under the trees."

But a native of the region might well have wandered in that dusky maze, and where were Richard's wits for woodcraft? He plunged heedlessly onward, forcing aside saplings by brute strength, his mind on anything but his path. One thing alone he knew and cared for,—never on earth, never in heaven, would he see his mother again, or his father, or Stephen, the brother at whose learning he had mocked, but in secret revered. And his sister? Well for Iftikhar Eddauleh five hundred leagues lay betwixt him and Richard Longsword, or the emir might have found his proof-panoply become his shroud!

Still Richard wandered. It darkened fast. He began to find himself peering askance into every shadow. He lengthened his stride, for the forest was proving too dense for running. His speed led nowhere—trees, and ever trees, and still the light was failing. Richard raised his voice for a great halloo. Echoes again, but out of the gloom came more,—a low, deep growl; and the Norman knew its meaning well. There was a little break in the forest; the gloaming was a trifle stronger. Richard saw before him two eyes, bright in the twilight as coals of fire, and the vague outlines of a huge, dark form. All the battle instinct of the Norman leaped into life.

"Good," cried he to the woods, "a bear!"

He snatched at his side, no sword—unbuckled at the castle, just before he read the letter. But he laughed in very delight at what might master his chief enemy—conscience. "Good!" cried he again, and he plucked up a great stone. At the moment he felt as if he could grapple the brute in bare hands and come off victor; and if otherwise—what matter?

With all his might he dashed the stone between those gleaming eyes. A mighty snarl. Richard tore the bough from a tree with giant grip, and sprang to the battle. Another snarl and growl, and behold! the brute instead of rearing and showing teeth, shambled away, and was lost in the shadows of the forest. Doubtless it had just been feeding, and would not fight unless at bay. But Richard cried out, cut by his pain:—

"Dear God, even the beasts turn from me, I am so accursed!"

He sat again upon a log; it was very dark. He could just see the tall columns of the trees. The patches of sky were a violet-black now. He stared and stared; he could go no farther; to wander on were madness. There were deep ravines on the mountain side. Richard remained still a long time. As the darkness grew, his sight of things past increased. His boyhood; his life in South Italy and Sicily; his first meeting with Mary; his duel with Louis; his parting with Mary; the storming of Valmont; his mother, ever his mother. She had nursed him herself—rare mark of devotion for a seigneur's lady. She had been proudest of the proud, when he had won his honors. She had whispered to him an hundred sweet admonitions that dear, bright night he was last at Cefalu. Did he love her more than Mary? Praises be to God, there are loves that never war; and such were these! Oh, had he but been at Cefalu, with his good right arm, and Musa, and Herbert, and Nasr—how different, how much better! And now all were dead save Eleanor, his bright-haired sister, and she—the captive of Iftikhar. Why, if God had been so wroth with him, had He not stricken him, and let the innocent go free? He was strong; his will was adamant as the blade of Trenchefer; to save those dear ones a single pang—what would he not suffer! Were they not—all save his sister—happy now? Surely the saints had taken joy to welcome his mother and brother; and within, his father's soul was white, if some little seared without.

"Ah!" cried Richard, "if my own heart were clean, I would not grieve. I would pray for their souls,

and love Mary Kurkuas, and know that pure angels intercede for me at God's throne; but now—what with the blood of Gilbert de Valmont, the shattering of the altar—what is mine but torment eternal!"

And Richard saw, he was quite sure, as he strained his eyes in the dark, a fair green country strewn with flowers, and in the midst a battlemented city, and within that a glittering throne with myriad bright angels, playing lute and harp unceasing. Upon the throne sat an old man, with a white beard falling to his girdle, crowned with gold, and holding an orb and sceptre; and Richard knew this was God the Father. Then he saw angels bringing up men before the throne: Raoul de Valmont, John of the Iron Arm, and all their sinful crew. And God said to them: "Why have you come here, your sins unrepented, unshriven, all unprepared to die?" And they answered: "Richard Longsword has sent us; he was wiser than Thou, Lord, and could not bear with us as Thou hadst done so long." Then God said: "Your sins are very great. Depart to the lake of fire!" Then they brought a fair-haired, girlish boy, and God said: "Why hast thou come, dear child, when thou hadst not done on earth that which I designed for thee?" And the boy answered: "Richard Longsword is wiser than Thou; he did not wish me to be on earth." So the angels gave the lad white wings like their own, and a great viol like a *jongleur's*. But God said: "Concerning Richard Longsword it is written, 'Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.'" Then some angels, very terrible, approached Richard as he gazed, to lead him to the throne; and lo! he was stripped naked as an infant at the font, and all the strength had sped out of him!...

A mighty peal of thunder! the jagged lightnings springing above the trees; now all the woods were lit by the white bolts, now all was black; and on high, giants were dragging down pinnacles of a mighty fortress. Richard cowered on his seat. The raindrops smote him, but could not cool his glowing temples. The tale of the great storm that presaged Roland's death came to him—how from Mount St. Michael to Cologne there was pitch darkness at noonday. Would God this were omen of his death only—not of his perdition! Betwixt the lightnings could he not see children running about with two heads, and all the boughs swelling out with heads of serpents—sure sign of the presence of the devil? And, in the darkness, what was that flickering will-o'-the-wisp form, unless it was Herodias's daughter dancing, dancing with glee, as they said she ever did when she saw a soul devoted, like herself, to Satan? Would the night ever pass? Richard cowered on his seat. At last—and who might say how long it was in coming?—there was a faint tinge among the tree tops, a low flutter of wings on the branches. One shy bird commenced his morning call; another, another. The blank maze of tree trunks began to unravel into moss-strewn avenues. The dawning was at hand, and the sky fast coming blue. The only traces of the rain were the diamond drops hanging on twig and flower. A warm, moist odor was rising in the wood; the day would be very hot. Richard roused himself. His clothes were wet; he flung away his fur-lined "pelisson"; the heat of the heavy coat was intolerable. His head swam, as he stood up; but he summoned his strong will. His brain steadied. He looked about.

"I am lost," reasoned he; "there is only one way to find the path to St. Julien; I must go above the trees. From the mountain crest I can see which side to go down." So he climbed, though now his steps were no longer strong, and his feet ached wearily. At last—the saints above knew after how long—he saw the pines thinning, then the rocks shone black and bare in the sun. One last effort—and he was out of the forest; the jagged summit still towered above him, but he could look forth—on what a view! Far and wide stretched the pleasant Auvergne country; corn-land and orchard, green but browning with the dying summer. The mountains pressed in on every side, north and west the great volcanic *puys* tossed their bleak crests far into the blue, as if piers to upbear the heavens. Away to the east were more hills—the Cevennes; and beyond, very near the sky line, what was that whiteness through the scattering haze—the Alps? As he looked up, an eagle rose with hoarse scream from a crag above, and flew into the sky straight in the face of the sun, until his broad pinions were only a speck against the glowing blue. Richard looked downward. To his right and far away lay a village, monastery buildings, a tall bare tower—St. Julien—very small; he must have travelled far. But below him, at his feet, so that he felt he could cast a stone upon it, was another tower—black, smoke-stained; its bare parapet open to heaven, a great charred mass around—Valmont! Richard gazed and shuddered. "Dear God," he cried softly, "why hast Thou led me here, to show me the place of my sin? Am I not enough punished?"

The scream of the eagle had died away. Higher and higher climbed the sun. All the valleys were springing out of the receding shadow. There was a soft, kind wind upon the mountain. Its kiss was sweet and comforting; but Richard needed more than the wind. It was not all pain of the heart that tore him now. His head was very heavy; he felt his knees beating together; at times his sight grew dim.

"I am ill, in fever," he muttered to himself; "I must hasten to some house, or I shall die, and then —" But he never completed. He could see peasants' cottages beyond the Valmont tower; perhaps the dwellers had been wronged by his men the night of the sack, and would make him scantly welcome; but it was better to risk that, than lie down on the naked crest of the *puy*. He staggered downward, ever downward. Thrice he fell; thrice rose by a mighty effort. At last he dimly realized that the ground before him no longer sloped; he was clear of rock and trees, and before him, seared and bare, was the keep of Valmont. Richard fell again, this time on soft grass, and lay long. His head had ceased to pain him, but he felt weak as a little child. "I shall die! Christ pity me!" was all his thought. But again he rose, rose and staggered onward. The ruin drew him towards it, as by an enchanter's spell. He found his way past the outer wall, through the open

gate where the weeds were already twining. One side of the tower had fallen, filling the moat; within, the other three walls rose, bare, fire-scarped, cavernous. Still Richard dragged forward. He was upon the cinders now; charred beams, benches. Here was a shivered target, there a shattered lance. As he advanced, three crows flew, coming from some carrion spoil they had found within. He was inside the enclosure of the keep; the sun no longer beat on him. It was cool and still. His strength was at an end. On a pile of dust and ashes were little green weeds springing. It was soft. He lay down, and tried to close his eyes and call back some prayers. "Here it is I shall die!" his wan lips muttered. But as he rested, something hard pressed his head. He took it, dragged it from the dust. Behold! a brass crucifix, and right across the body of Our Lord a deep, rude dint! "The crucifix held by the boy when I slew him!" moaned Richard. Then he looked on the face of the Christ. The lips moved not, the eyes gave no sign; but as Richard kept gazing, he felt the brass turning to fire in his hands,—pain, but pain infused with a wondrous gladness. "Christ died not for the spawn of Valmont!" had been his blasphemy; had Christ died for *him*? "Ah! Sweet Son of God," cried Richard from his soul, "Thou didst not come to earth and suffer for the pure and righteous, but Thou didst come for such as I. Thou didst pardon the thief on the cross; canst Thou pardon even me? I have committed foul murder, and insulted holy relics, and made the heavens ring with my blasphemies. I have no merit; I were justly sent to perdition for my sins; I lie here, perhaps dying. Have mercy, Lord, have mercy!" Did a voice speak from the blue above? Was it only some forest bird that croaked in Richard's disordered ear? "Lord," cried Richard, half rising, "if Thou canst forgive, do not let me die; let me live, and, by Thy holy agony, I swear I will remember the vow of my youth; I will remember the sorrows of Thy Holy City; and I will rest not day nor night, I will spare not wealth nor love nor blood, till I see the Cross triumphant upon the walls of Jerusalem, or until I die—if so God wills it!" And he knew nothing more until some one was dashing water in his face, and above him he saw the villain, "Giles of the Mill," who had been the betrayer of Valmont.

"Ah, lord," he was saying, "well it was that Americ, the leper, wandering here in search for red adders, found you and told me!"

"Americ, the leper?" asked Richard, his wits wandering.

"Yes, lord; we keep him shut in a little hut outside the hamlet. But early in the mornings we let him go out hunting for red adders with white bellies; for if he eats enough of them with leeks, he is cured. But you, fair sir, are grievously ill. I must take you to my cottage."

Then Richard lapsed again into a stupor; and when next he saw the world, he was in the miller's house. The good-wife was making a great fire with vine branches, and hanging a huge iron pot to heat water. They had laid Richard on the bed, the only one in the whole house, broad enough for both parents and the half-dozen dirty, shock-headed brats, that were squalling round the single room, and chasing the little pigs who belonged there as much as themselves. The children would steal up to the bed softly on tiptoe, and make curious glances at the "great seigneur," who had avenged their elder brother by slaying the terrible Bull of Valmont. Then their mother would cry out to them to keep their distance: "Who were they to set eyes on the mighty lord, who could send them all to the gallows if he listed?" But Richard, as he gazed on the unkempt, freckled faces, said in his heart, "Ah, if I could give all the St. Julien lands for the one white conscience of that little girl!"

Giles of the Mill presently had out his plodding horse, and pounded away on the road to St. Julien, while his wife called in two wrinkled old crones, who looked at Richard, and shook their heads, then whispered almost loud enough to let him understand. The women put strange things into the pot: the feet of a toad, many weeds and flowers, the tail of a kitten, and a great spider. Then when the water was very hot, they brought some to him in a huge wooden spoon. Richard, though he knew what Arabian physicians could do, was too weak to resist them. Presently there was a clatter of hoofs without, and Herbert, Musa, and Sebastian were coming into the cottage. The face of Musa was very grave when he touched Richard's wrist; his next act was to empty the kettle on the earthen floor. The Norman's last strength was gone: he had tried to rise to greet his friends, sank back; his words were but whispers. Sebastian bent over him.

"Dear father," the priest barely heard, "pray for me, pray for me; I have sworn to go to Jerusalem."

But Richard's eyes were too dim to see the light breaking on Sebastian's face. Herbert and Musa devised a litter, and they bore the knight back to St. Julien.

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# CHAPTER XVI

## HOW LADY IDE FORGAVE RICHARD

Richard Longsword lay betwixt death and life for many a long day. Sebastian hardly left him for an hour, nor did Herbert; but it was Musa that saved him. Sebastian had a plainly expressed dislike for the Spaniard's ministrations.

"It is suffering Satan to cast out Satan," said he, to the Andalusian's face, "to suffer an infidel,

such as you, to try to heal Richard."

"Verily, learned sheik," answered Musa, with one of his grave smiles, "if it is better that Richard should die and dwell with your saints, I will not use my art."

"No," sighed Sebastian, who had not lived in Sicily with eyes quite closed, "the lad is reserved for great things, for God and Holy Church. He must not die; use your arts, and I will pray Our Lady that she will defeat the evil in your science, and retain the good."

So Richard was medicined according to the teachings of the world-famed Abul Kasim, and Sebastian went so far as to side with Musa, when the Arab forbade the officious sub-prior—who boasted himself a leech—to speak again of poulticing the Baron's head with sheep's lungs. A wandering Jewish doctor from the school of Montpellier gave more efficient aid. The abbot brought over a finger bone of St. Matthew to put under Richard's pillow,—sure talisman against madness. And it was sorely needed. Many a time those about the bed would shiver when they heard Longsword scream aloud that Gilbert was standing beside him, his face red with blood.

"Remember Mary's tale," Richard would cry, "of the evil Emperor Constans, who slew his brother, and how the dead man stood before him in sleep, holding forth a cup of blood, saying, 'Drink, my brother, drink!' So with me, Gilbert de Valmont holds the cup, I cannot drink it! Holy Saints, I cannot! Away, away with him!"

And in half-lucid moments, Richard would hear Sebastian pray, "Dear Lord, if by penance and sacrifice of mine I gain merit in Thy sight, lay it not up for me, but for Richard, my dear son. For I love him, Lord, more than any other, saving Thee; and he has sinned grievously, and Thy hand is heavy upon him. But pity him; he repents, he will go to deliver Thy tomb and Holy City."

After this, when Richard lapsed again into his mad spells, he would howl that he was being cast into the burning abyss of Baratron with the devils Berzebu and Nero. But at last the fever left him wan and weak, with a face grown ten years older in two months. The castle folk rejoiced. The abbot came with congratulations and a tale how Brother Matthias, admittedly a little near-sighted, had seen in broad day St. Julien himself, accompanied by his stag, who had signified that the Baron should recover, and give five hundred "white deniers" to the abbey as thank-offering. Sebastian firmly forbade any generosity.

"Do you doubt the vision?" asked Richard.

Sebastian smiled grimly. "I do not doubt. But St. Julien asked for money for himself; and your all is dedicated to a higher than St. Julien—Christ. Our Lord did not bid us bestow riches on the rich. Need there will be of all money and good swords and strong right arms, before our sinful eyes see the deliverance of the Holy City. Let not even pious gratitude turn your thoughts aside." So the monks growled helplessly, for Sebastian had the Baron's ear now, and all the people venerated him as being one who seldom touched fish or flesh, slept little, prayed long, and always cast down his eyes when he passed a pretty maid.

Then came another letter, from La Haye, in Mary Kurkuas's neat Greek hand.

> "Mary Kurkuas to her dearest heart, Richard Longsword, sends tears and many kisses. Life of my life, I have heard the news from Sicily, and my heart is torn. It was for my sake that you earned the wrath of Iftikhar, because I said 'I love you' to you, not to him. Each morning and sunset I kneel before my picture of the Blessed 'God-bearer,' praying her to have pity on you, to make you strong, to stanch your heart. From my wise Plato and Plutarch, I draw no healing; but when I look on the face of the Mother of God I know all is well, though human eye may not see. There has come a travelling *jongleur* from Auvergne, who tells a wonderful tale of your deed at Valmont. In the midst of my sorrow I yet rejoice and thank the saints, that my own true cavalier was spared, and was suffered to slay that horrible Raoul. Yet I am glad it was all hid from me till safely over. I know you have a great work to do in Auvergne, and would not call you hence. Yet remember now that the summer is just sped, that I am waiting for you at La Haye. Then when you come, I can touch your face, and smooth away all the pain, and we will look no longer back but forward. And so with a thousand kisses more, farewell."

This letter made the gloom on Richard Longsword's brow settle more darkly than ever. She knew of his sorrow, of his storming of Valmont—of the death of Gilbert, not a word! Here was fresh sorrow; to his own mortal pain must be added that of giving anguish to one dearer than self. Who was he, with innocent blood almost reddening his hands, with blasphemies nigh upon his lips, to take in his arms a beautiful woman, pure as an angel of light? Richard ground his teeth in his pain.

"Dear Sebastian," cried he once, despairing, "can even the great pilgrimage wipe out my sin? Did not Foulques of Anjou go thrice to Jerusalem before earning peace for his soul?"

"My son," was the answer, "fear not; your sin is great, yet not as Foulques's, for he tortured his brother to death in a dungeon. No other pilgrimage—to St. James of Compostella, to St. Martin of Tours—is like to that to Jerusalem. And now you are to go, not with staff and scrip, but with a good sword, and to win great battles for God and His Christ!"

So for a moment Richard brightened; then, lapsing in gloom, he groaned: "Unworthy, all unworthy am I so much as to look upon the City of God! Let me turn monk, and seek peace in toil

and fast and vigil."

But Sebastian shook his head: "Well I know that too often the very seat of Satan is within the cloister—spiritual arrogance, worldly lust, even in the great abbey of Clugny itself. And did God give you a grip of steel and an arm of iron to let them grow weak in some monkish cell? You have a great work before you, sweet son. Fear not, be patient. God will bring it to pass!"

There was a strength, a simple majesty, about Sebastian, when he spoke, that made all doubts for the moment flee away. So Richard continued to possess himself in such peace as he might. Day by day he grew stronger; and at last, just as October began with its cool evenings and crystal mornings, he was again riding about upon Rollo. All the St. Julien vassals fell on their knees when their dread lord passed their hamlets, and they put up a prayer of thanksgiving; for they said, "The seigneur is a kind and just man, with the love of God in his heart, despite his fury at Valmont."

But now came messengers out of the south. Louis de Valmont had raised a great force; all the roving bandits of the woods had gathered around him; the war between Aquitaine and Toulouse lagged, and many landless cavaliers had come under his banner. When Herbert heard the news he began to talk of victualling St. Julien for a long siege, and sending to Burgundy and Languedoc for help. But Richard would hear none of it.

"The saints know there has been enough Christian blood spilled, since I came to Auvergne. There shall be no more in my quarrel," declared he; and he sent back a messenger to Louis, saying that he prayed him to enter on no new feud, but to grant a meeting where they might compose their quarrels without arms. Three days sped, and back came the envoy with a letter, which three months earlier would have made Richard swear great oaths and draw out Trenchefer. "Louis de Valmont," ran the reply, "will come to St. Julien and there meet Richard Longsword, and five hundred lances will come with him. As for composition, let Richard make what terms he could with the saints, for on earth he need beg for no quarter."

"By the Glory of Allah!" declared Musa, when the letter was read, "we will make them cry 'Hold!' before many arrows fly!" And Herbert began to call to arms the vassals of the barony, and chuckled when he thought of the brave times ahead. But Richard, when he had slept on the letter, called for Sebastian, and was with him long alone. Then he unbuckled Trenchefer, put on a soiled, brown bleaunt, and bade them bring a common palfrey for himself and a mule for Sebastian. He commanded Herbert to keep strict guard of the castle, to yield to none, to attack none. Even to Musa he would not tell the object of his journey. With the priest at his side he rode out of the village, and turned his face toward the south, where the road climbed over the mountains.

They journeyed on till the sun lacked a bare hour of setting. Then before them, on a smooth meadow where ran a little river, they saw many rude tents, horses picketed to lances thrust in the ground, the smoke of camp-fires; and heard the hum of a hundred voices. Presently into the road sprang half a dozen surly, hard-visaged men with tossing pole-axes and spiked clubs. They demanded of knight and priest their business, in no gentle tone.

"Tell your master, Louis de Valmont," said Sebastian, mildly, "that a cavalier and a servant of Holy Church would speak with him."

"A servant of Holy Church, ho!" cried one of the men-at-arms, with a covetous glance at the mule; but Sebastian fastened his firelike eyes upon the fellow, who dropped his gaze and began to mutter something about the evil eye.

They led the two into the midst of the camp, where a great press of disorderly varlets and petty nobles swarmed around, pointing, laughing, whispering loudly. Only the largest tent was carefully closed, and about it stood sentries in armor. A man-at-arms went to this, thrust in his head, and was back with the message:—

"Sir Louis de Valmont and his mother, the noble Lady Ide, have no time to waste words with every wandering knight and priest that come this way. They bid you state your errand to me and begone, or we strip you of steeds and purses."

"Tell Louis de Valmont," said Richard, in a voice that many might hear, "that the Baron of St. Julien and his chaplain desire speech with him, and that speedily!"

There was half a hum, half a growl, in the crowd about. Swords waved on high; lances tossed; voices began to shout, "Seize! Strike!" Sebastian swept round upon the soldiery with his terrible gaze, and all recoiled. Richard stood stern and motionless as a rock. Then the flap of the tent dashed aside, and forth strode a figure in silvered casque and hauberk.

"Sir Louis de Valmont," said Richard, very gravely, advancing with outstretched hand, "I greet you well. Let us meet in peace in Christ's name!"

A dark scowl knotted the brow of De Valmont.

"By all the fiends, what devil persuaded you to come into my presence? As God lives, you shall die this night, though you kiss my feet and beg for life."

But Sebastian answered for Richard.

"It shall be as you say, Louis de Valmont; but first you shall look into your own soul, and see if

you be a meet instrument to execute God's will. We cannot speak here. Let us enter the tent."

Louis stood obdurate; but with a single sweep of his hand and a second lightning glance, Sebastian scattered the men-at-arms, and he and Richard strode right past De Valmont into the tent.

Dimly within they saw the rude camp furniture, bedding and rugs on the ground, where were laid out some silver dishes and flagons, and two serving-maids were making ready a meal; but as they stepped in, before them rose a figure, a woman with gray hair and a face ashen with a great sorrow, who sprang forth to Richard with a bitter cry.

"Away, away, wretch, murderer! Hew him to death, Louis! Ah! my boy! my boy!"

It was the Lady Ide. And at her cry Richard's face also grew ashen, but he did not quail.

"Dear lady," answered he, "I am all you say. Yet let me speak. Your son's men are all around; my life is in Louis's keeping."

"Away! away!" moaned the mother, "and as they kill you, let my curse still be in your ears! Each night I cry to God to remember the blood of Gilbert. Oh, may God's wrath be heavy upon you!"

"Lady," replied Richard, turning even paler, "God's wrath has indeed been heavy upon me! Let them seize and torture me, I do not fear."

And here Louis broke in, raging:—

"Enough of this! In Satan's name, will you add to your infamy by reviling my mother to her face? Ho, Robert, Aimeon,—this way!—drag him forth!"

But Sebastian looked straight into De Valmont's eyes.

"Peace, man of sin! Know that if Richard Longsword be indeed so accursed as you deem him, yet he is as Cain; for God has set a mark upon him, lest any finding him should slay him!"

And under the priest's terrible gaze the Provençal's hand left his sword-hilt, and he held down his head. Then to Lady Ide, Sebastian spoke:—

"Daughter, your sorrow is great. Nevertheless, I warn you. As you would stand at the judgment seat on the great Day, listen to the words of this knight."

And Lady Ide also bowed her head. Then Richard began: "Noble lady, the first cause of your sorrows lies not in me. My grandfather and your son Raoul quarrelled; on what account I know not. But as God is my just judge, the thing Raoul did to Baron Gaston, when he held him prisoner, cried to heaven. I slew Raoul in fair battle after he had tortured my grandfather, fettered in a dungeon."

And at this the mother burst forth:—

"Oh, holy St. Martin, but Raoul was a terrible man! Yes, I confess it, though it was I that bore him. Did I not plead with him not to torture Baron Gaston, and tell him the saints would requite tenfold?"

"Amen, daughter!" commented Sebastian, sternly.

"But Gilbert, my youngest, innocent as song-thrush! gentle as a little girl!" the lady wailed.

"And I will speak of him also," continued Richard. "Before I came to St. Julien, I had had quarrel with Sir Louis. Yet we warred in knightly fashion. Sir Louis lost the day, but there was no stain upon his honor. Still there was little love betwixt me and any of the De Valmont name when I went to Auvergne. Then I came to St. Julien, and saw my grandfather. Holy Cross! dear lady—could you have seen him, you would have melted with pity—all seared by fire, those sightless eyeballs!"

"No more! by every saint, no more!" moaned Lady Ide.

"When I saw him, and heard of Raoul, and heard that he had a younger brother Gilbert, I swore a great oath to Heaven that the Valmonts were a godless brood, and I would slay them all—all. For in my eyes Gilbert was but as his brother." Lady Ide groaned, but Richard went on: "Then when I stormed Valmont, I fought Raoul face to face and man to man, and he perished as befits a valiant cavalier. Whether my own sins are not now as great as his, let God judge; but if he died, he died—I dare to say it—not without cause."

"It is true! Dear Christ, it is true! And I was his mother." Lady Ide had her face bowed on her hands, and shook with her sobs. Richard drove straight on:—

"Then the devil entered into me. I was mad with lust of slaying and the heat of battle. My veins seemed turned to fire. I knew all that I did, yet in a strange way knew not—only beheld myself striking, shouting, running, as if I stood a great way off. I struck you down foully. I slew Gilbert at the altar, and all the time that I raged, I felt deep within—that what I did, was a sin against God. I shattered the holy relics; I blasphemed heaven. There are those who have sinned more than I, but they are not many."

The lady was not weeping now. She was staring at Richard with hard, tearless eyes,—all the

picture of that fearful night standing, as in a vision, before them.

"But I have been punished,—punished, perhaps, after my sins,—yet scarce has God given me grace to bear. I had a mother who held me dear—dearer, if I may say it, than you held Gilbert."

"It cannot be!" cried Ide, starting up, but Sebastian frowned and she was quiet.

"I had a mother, a father who also loved me, a brother gentle as Gilbert, and a sister," and when Richard spoke the word even Louis turned away his gaze, there was such agony on Longsword's face. "And now tidings have come from Sicily that father, mother, and brother are dead, slain wantonly by Iftikhar Eddauleh, whom Louis knows well; and my sister! holy Mother of God, drive the thought from my heart! is the captive of that paynim. So think you not the sin I committed against you and yours has not met its reward? Think you I shall greatly fear, if Sir Louis calls in his men and bids them slay me? What is death beside the pains that I bear here!" And Richard smote his breast. Then Louis burst forth:—

"But why, by the Holy Cross, did you venture hither? You know I have sworn to have your life."

"Right well," answered the Norman, dropping his gaze; "and doubtless you expected to find me holding St. Julien with all my vassals, and much blood ready to be spilled. But I again have sworn an oath,—and the oath is this: 'For my sins, and for the souls of my parents and brother, I will go to free the Holy City from the unbeliever. And I will shed no more Christian blood until I see the Cross triumphant on the walls of Jerusalem, or until I die.' Therefore I stand before you, asking to be forgiven; and if you will not, I do not fear death."

A long silence; then the woman broke it:—

"My boy! my boy! You have killed him! You must suffer!"

"I am willing, lady," said Richard, never stirring.

But Sebastian now had his word:—

"Take care, daughter, lest you too sin in the sight of God! What said Our Lord upon the cross? 'Father, forgive them!' And has not this Richard Longsword been chastened? been brought very low? You lost your two sons; but one of these, by your own lips, is confessed worthy of death, and for the slaying of the other this man has been repaid. He slew one innocent: he has lost three—and one worse than dead. And he is a chosen vessel of the Lord. For God has cut him short in his sins, even as He cut short Paul when breathing forth threatenings and slaughter. For I say unto you: I had granted unto me a vision,"—and Sebastian's voice rose to a swelling height,—"no flitting dream of the night, but clear as the noonday; I saw Richard Longsword standing on the walls of Jerusalem, and above his head the cross. And he shall fight great battles for Christ, and endure great tribulation more; but shall see the desires of God upon the wicked. Therefore, you and you, deal pitifully with him. For he has sinned, but has repented, and now is one of God's elect."

And as Sebastian spoke, lo! Lady Ide's eyes were bright with tears, and her frame shook with a mighty sobbing; for, as she looked on Richard Longsword's face, she saw it aged with an agony beyond any curse of human thought.

"Ah, dear God!" she cried, lifting up her hands, still very soft and white, "Thou knowest it is hard, yet I—I forgive him!"

Richard knelt and kissed the hem of her robe.

"Sweet lady," said he, "you have given water to one who seemed parched in nigh quenchless fire. For when such as you may forgive, I may look to heaven, and say, 'Christ is not less merciful.'"

Lady Ide only pressed her hands to her face. Richard turned to Louis. "And am I forgiven by you also?" was his prayer. But Louis answered:—

"My mother forgives you. That is enough. I am not made like the angels, as is she. I will do you no harm. Since I cannot take my men to St. Julien, we will go to Clermont, where the Pope will hold the council, and brave adventures will be set afoot. Between us there is a truce. Let forgiveness and friendship wait."

So Richard bowed his head and went out of the tent.

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# CHAPTER XVII

## HOW RICHARD SAW PETER THE HERMIT

Thus Richard returned to St. Julien, to the great joy and wonderment of Musa and Herbert, who had never expected to see him again after learning his quest. As the days of autumn advanced, Richard began to make ready for his progress to Clermont. For hither, report had it, all France was flocking, small and great. In July Urban II, who, as Cardinal of Ostia, had once knelt at the

bed of the dying Gregory, had crossed the Alps to see once more his native land,—for he was a Frenchman, born near Chatillon-sur-Marne,—and now that he had become the Vicar of Christ he did not forget that the best servants of Our Lord prayed to Him in the Languedoc or the Languedoil. And so, leaving behind Italy, with its wrangling prelates, its sordid city-folk, its Antipope, and half-phantom emperor, he returned to his own people. And lo! all France felt a thrill at the pontiff's coming—for who did not know that wonders past thinking were at hand! The sense of sin hung heavy on each man's soul: fast, penance, alms, gifts to abbeys, gifts to rear cathedral walls, the vows of the monks—all these too feeble to lift the pall of guilt! Richard was not the only despairing baron who cried after this fashion,—"Miserable man that I am—who shall save me from the body of this death!" Sin there was in France, lust, violence; but also a spark of "the fire not of this world." Let the breath of the spirit blow; let the prophet's voice cry to the four winds; and the spark would spring to a flame, the flame to a roaring, the roaring would echo to the ends of the earth. The sky was bright over beloved France; day by day new castles were rising, cities also, and cathedrals mounting up to heaven. All without grew more joyous every day; but men, looking within, saw their sins beyond reckoning. With France so fair, and "heaven so like thee, dear France," who would not give all to possess so lovely a country forever!—yet their sins—they were so many!

Urban had crossed the Alps in July; in August he was at Nimes; in September he crossed the Rhone, thence to Clugny, "Queen of Abbeys," where he had been a humble monk years before. As November advanced, he set his face toward Clermont, in Auvergne; and when St. Julien's folk made preparation to journey thither, Sebastian could scarce restrain his own impatience. All day he roamed about, his eyes bright but vacant. Richard did not share his joy; for he thought not of the pilgrimage only, but of Musa, and his mind grew darker. How he loved the Arab! And yet was not this bond betwixt Christian and Moslem a sin not lightly to be punished?

"*Ai*, my brother!" Richard would cry in despair; "turn Christian; go with me to Jerusalem; when we return, take half of the St. Julien lands!" Whereupon Musa laughed in his melancholy way, replying:—

"And why may not I bid you become Moslem and speed to Egypt?"

"Well that my faith is strong!" returned the Norman, bitterly. "But we must part—must part! Yet God has made you flesh of my flesh. We see love in each other's eyes. We hear each other's voices, and hear joy! Were we both of one faith, where we two were, there would be heaven! Yet, O Musa, we are sundered by a gulf wider than the sea!"

The friends had been pacing along the clearing without the castle; and now Musa thrust his arm around the shoulder of the mighty Norman, and the two strode on a long time silent. Then Richard continued:—

"Tell me, Musa, if you go to Egypt, and we Franks to Jerusalem, and it befalls that you have chance to fight in defence of the Holy City, will you embrace it? You are not a strait Moslem."

The Spaniard answered very slowly, his eyes on the ground:—

"What is written in the book of our dooms, that may no kalif shun. Says Al-Koran, 'The fate of every man, we have bound about his neck.' And again it says, 'No soul can die unless by the will of Allah, according to that which is written in the book containing the destinies of all things.' Therefore why ask me? The Most High knows what will befall, whether you Christians will have your will, and see your cross above the Holy City, or whether you will all be lying with the dead."

"Amen!" answered Richard, solemnly. "Only to the Christian there can be no doubt as to the will of God, unless, by the unworthiness of our sinful hearts, we are denied the boon of setting free the tomb of Our Lord. But, my kind brother, it is not of this that I would speak. I dread this parting from you. Think! here stand I, with many vassals to fear me, a few, like Herbert, to worship me; but—" and the strong voice was broken—"on all the wide earth there are but three that love me,—Sebastian, Mary Kurkuas, and you. And how may I lift eyes to Mary now? And you—you are to be taken away."

Musa only looked on the grass at his feet. Then he said sweetly:—

"Ah, my brother, though now we part, I do not think our friendship will have brought bitterness only. So long as we live we shall think each of the other as the half of one's own soul that has traversed away, but will in some bright future return. And who knows that your churchmen, and even our prophet (on whom be peace), are wrong alike? That every man and maid who has walked humbly in the sight of the Most High, and striven to do His will, will not be denied the joy hereafter? Do you think Allah is less compassionate than we, who have dwelt together these many days, and to whom our faith has been no barrier to pure love?"

Richard shook his head.

"God knows," said he, half piteously; "Sebastian says to me each day: 'The Spaniard is of the devil. Take heed! He stands on the brink of the lake of quenchless fire; send him away, if you are truly devoted to the service of Our Lord.'"

"And he is right," answered Musa, bending down and plucking a late floweret; "our paths lie far asunder. You will go to Jerusalem, and if you fare prosperously, you will return with the great load lifted from your soul, and rule here as a mighty baron with Mary Kurkuas at your side. And I—doubtless I shall gain favor at Cairo. They will give me work to do. I shall become a great emir,

—vizier perhaps—no—I will better that; what may not a good sword hope with favoring start? May I not be hailed in twenty years 'Commander of the Faithful'?"

And Richard, catching the lighter mood, answered: "And will you go forever mateless? At Palermo how many bright eyes smiled on you! As kalif the fifty houris of your harem will chase from mind the memory of Richard the Frank." Musa tore in pieces the floweret, and blew away the petals.

"A harem? Allah forefend! My father had three wives, and was the slave of each at once. Never wittingly will I yield myself to love, save of one who shall be the fairest of the daughters of Allah and gifted with His own wisdom!"

"You speak of Mary Kurkuas!" cried the Norman, starting.

"*Wallah*, to every lover his mistress is the only fair one!"

So Musa made merry. A few days afterward he rode away with the Saracens to La Haye, to tell Mary that for the sin of her betrothed, Richard dared not hail her his bride. A sorry story! but only Musa could make the best of it. Nasr and his Saracens were to be shipped back to Sicily. As for Longsword, he set forth with a few men-at-arms westward for Clermont.

As they travelled, more and more people met them, and all were going the selfsame way. At Chanterelle the lord of the castle had to send to Richard begging pardon, but there were already so many cavaliers with their retainers halting with him for the night, that he could offer no hospitality. At Valbelaix, lo! a great crowd of peasants, men with long hair and shaggy beards, foot-sore women and little children, were on the road; and when Richard asked them how they durst leave their seigneur's lands and brave his wrath, an old man fell on his knees and answered:—

"Ah, gentle knight, our seigneur may be angry, but God is still more angry. For we have all many sins, and they say that at Clermont the Holy Father will tell us how we may be loosed from them."

Then Richard bowed his head very humbly and bade Herbert cast a whole bag of silver obols amongst the good people, and was very glad when the children cried out in their sweet, clear voices: "God bless you, good lord," and "Our Lady remember your kindness."

As the company rode toward Courgoul, they came on another knight with his train. The cavalier was a thick-pated, one-eyed old warrior, who had a life of hard fighting and foul living written all over his face. But when Richard inquired whither he journeyed, the old sinner made reply:—

"To Clermont, brave sir."

"And why to Clermont?"

"Ah! you have two eyes. You can see; my sins are more than the leaves on the trees. I could never remember them all at confession. But even I," and he crossed himself, "am a Christian; and if by riding a few jousts with the infidels the saints will think more kindly of me, St. Anastaise, it would be no irksome penance!"

So they travelled, and Richard began to see that he was not the only one who felt the hand of God very heavy upon him. When the troop came to Courgoul, a great band of country folk, farmers, petty nobles, and two or three greater lords were overtaken, all hurrying and shouting, so that for a long time Longsword could learn nothing from them. Then, at last, men began to cry, "He is here! he is here!" just as they turned in before the little village church.

"Who is this 'he'?" pressed Richard. And twenty tongues tossed back: "Are you a stranger? Peter of Amiens! Peter the Hermit, the apostle of God!"

So the whole band swarmed to the church door, but could not enter, for within there was no room to stand. And an old priest came forth, and scarce obtained silence:—

"Back, back, good Christians, the saintly Peter will come and speak to you under the great tree."

Then all surged again to a wide-spreading oak before the church, and the building emptied like bees pouring from a hive; but last of all, with a sacristan guarding at either side to keep off the people, came a little man, almost a dwarf in stature. He had his eyes on the ground; his carriage was ungainly; head and feet were bare. His hair was unshorn, his brown beard fell upon his breast. One could see that his cheeks were wan with fasting. He wore a gray hermit's cloak, and beneath that a rude, dirty cassock, girt With a cord. And this was the man who was setting France aflame, and doing that which King Philip or his greatest vassal could not with all their lieges! "Your blessing, father, your blessing!" voices began to cry. And now a woman, who had tried to kiss his cloak's hem, but had been thrust back by a sacristan, fell on her knees, and was kissing the sod where the hermit's foot had pressed. More voices: "Your blessing, father! Our sins are great! Pray to God for us—He will hear you!" And the baron whom Richard had met was on his knees before the anchorite, bowing his wicked old head, and moaning and sobbing and gasping out all sorts of petitions. Peter had reached the foot of the great tree. It stood on a slight rising, and the crowd all gave back a little. Peter fell on his knees, beat his breast, and prayed silently. And with him all knelt a long while, each repeating his *mea culpa*. Then the hermit rose. At the flash of his eyes, bright as carbuncles, a fire seemed to burn to each hearer's deepest soul.

"Listen, Christians of Auvergne!" One could hear a leaf rustle, it was so still. "You say your sins are many?" "Yes, yes!" came from a thousand voices, all moaning at once. A slight gesture; they

were silent. "And you say well. God is very angry with you. He sent His dear son, Our Lord, to this world more than a thousand years ago. How wicked it still is! Who of you is guiltless? Let such go hence. I have no word for him. But you," with a lightning gaze about, "have given way to lustful passion; and you—have blasphemed the name of God; and you—have shed innocent blood. It is so. I see it in all your eyes." And now a terrible commotion was shaking the crowd. Strong men were crying out in agony; women wailed; there were tears on the most iron cheek. Peter went on: "I am not the Holy Father. Come to Clermont, if you wish to learn how to be loosed from your sins. But hear my tale and consider if the acceptable day of the Lord be not at hand,—the day when your sins which are as scarlet shall be washed white as wool. Know, good people, that not long since I was in Palestine, in the dear home land of our Blessed Lord. Ah, it would tear your hearts too much, were I to tell you all that I there saw: how the unbelievers pollute churches and holy altars with vile orgies; how the blood of the oppressed Christians has run in the streets of Jerusalem, like brooks in the springtime; how even the Rock of Calvary and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre have been defiled—by deeds which the tongue may not utter!" A pause. The crowd was swaying in emotion beyond control. Peter held on high a large crucifix, and pointed to the Christ thereon: "Look at the body of Our Lord. His wounds bleed afresh; they bleed for His children who have forgotten Him, and turned away to paths of wickedness, and left His sacred city to unbelievers. O generation of vipers, who shall save you from eternal wrath?" The cord was strained nigh to breaking. The people were moaning and tossing their arms. A great outburst seemed impending. "Come to Clermont. For I say unto you that God has not turned away His face utterly. There the Holy Father will tell you what you shall do to be saved. Thus long has God seen your wickedness and been angry with you. But He has not kept His anger forever. Be sober and of good courage, for a great day is at hand. When I was in Jerusalem, I communed with the saintly Simeon, the patriarch, and wept bitterly over the griefs of the Christians there and the arrogancy of the unbelievers. And I declare to you that when I knelt one day at the Holy Sepulchre, I heard a voice: 'Peter of Amiens, arise! Hasten to proclaim the tribulations of My people; the time cometh for My servants to receive help and My holy tomb to be delivered!' And I knew it was Our Lord Himself that spoke. Therefore I rested not day nor night until I had bidden the Christians of the West put forth their might in God's most holy war!"

For a moment stillness; then Peter broke forth again: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake as in the ancient time, in the generations of old! Then shall the redeemed of the Lord return, and come singing into Zion; and they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away!"

Then there was a strange thing. The people did not cry out, the moaning was hushed, all kept motionless; and the hermit stood holding up the crucifix, with his hand outstretched in benediction!—

"To Clermont!" was his command; "to Clermont, men of Auvergne! There you shall have rest for your souls!"

He went down from the little rising, and the people again began to flock about him. But he called for his mule, and when he mounted it, made away, though the crowd pressed close, and found holy relics in the beast's very hairs. Richard had been stirred as never before in his whole life. Was it true that all the world was guilty and sinful even as he? He felt himself caught in a mighty eddy, bearing he knew not whither; he, one wavelet amid the sea's myriads. Yes, to Clermont he would go,—Musa, Mary Kurkuas, honor, life,—he would give them all if need be, only to have his part in the war ordained by God.

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# CHAPTER XVIII

## HOW RICHARD MET GODFREY OF BOUILLON

Under the dead craters of the Monts Dôme in the teeming Limagne basin lay Clermont, a sombre, lava-built town, with muddy lanes; and all around, the bright, cold, autumn-touched country. Far beyond the walls stretched a new city,—tents spread over the meadows even; for no hospitable burghers could house the hundreds of prelates and abbots come to the council; much less the host of lay nobles and "villains." Daily into the Cathedral went the great bishops in blazing copes, and the lordly abbots beneath gold-fringed mitres, to the Council where presided the Holy Father,—where the truce of God was being proclaimed between all Christians from each Wednesday set-of-sun till Monday cockcrow, and where Philip of France and his paramour Queen Bertrade were laid under the great anathema. But no man gave these decrees much heed; for when Richard Longsword rode into Clermont on a November day, and pitched his tents far out upon the meadows,—all near space being taken,—he wondered at the flash in every eye at that one magic word, "Jerusalem!" All had heard Peter; all burned for the miseries of the City of Our Lord; knew that their own sins were very great. From Pérignat to Clermont, Richard accompanied a great multitude, growing as it went. After he had encamped, the roads were still black with those coming from the north, from Berri; from the west, from Aquitaine; from the east, from Forez. One could hear the chatter of the Languedoil, of the Ile de France, and of Champagne—all France was coming to Clermont!

Beside Richard encamped an embassy from the Count Raymond of Toulouse, headed by a certain Raymond of Agiles, a fat, consequential, good-natured priest, his lord's chaplain; a very hard drinker who soon struck hands with Longsword,—much to the scandal of Sebastian, who did not love tales of lasses and wine-cups. With him was a half-witted clerk, one Peter Barthelmy, of whom more hereafter. But Richard cared little for their jests. Could even the Holy Father give rest to his soul? Could a journey to Jerusalem write again his name in the Book of Life?

Richard went to the church of Our Lady of the Gate. Kneeling by the transept portal, with strangely carved cherubim above him, he looked into the long nave, where only dimly he could see the massy piers and arches for the blaze of light from two high windows bright with pictured saints. As he entered, a great hush and peace seemed to come over him. He turned toward the high altar; the gleaming window above seemed a doorway into heaven. He knelt at a little shrine by the aisle. He would pray. Lo, of a sudden the choir broke forth from the lower gloom:—

"That great Day of wrath and terror!
That last Day of woe and doom,
Like a thief that comes at midnight
On the sons of men shall come;
When the pride and pomp of ages
All shall utterly have passed,
And they stand in anguish owning
That the end is here at last!"

Richard heard, and his heart grew chill. Still the clear voices sang on, till the words smote him:—

"Then to those upon the left hand
That most righteous Judge shall say:
'Go, you cursèd, to Gehenna
And the fire that is for aye.'"

Richard bowed his head and rocked with grief. But when he looked again up toward the storied windows and saw the Virgin standing bathed in light, her eyes seemed soft and pitiful. Still he listened as the music swelled on:—

"But the righteous, upward soaring,
To the heavenly land shall go
'Midst the cohorts of the angels
Where is joy forevermo':
To Jerusalem, exulting,
They with shouts shall enter in:
That true 'sight of peace' and glory
That sets free from grief and sin,
Christ, they shall behold forever,
Seated at the Father's hand
As in Beatific Vision
His elect before Him stand."

Richard sprang to his feet. "*Ai!*" were his words, half aloud; "if hewing my way to the earthly Jerusalem I may gain sight of the heavenly, what joy! what joy!"

A hand touched him gently on the shoulder. He looked about, half expecting to see a priest; his eye lit on a cavalier, soberly dressed, with his hood pulled over his head. In the gloom of the church Richard could only see that he was a man of powerful frame and wore a long blond beard.

"Fair knight," said the stranger, in the Languedoil, in a voice low, but ringing and penetrating, "you seem mightily moved by the singing; do you also wish to win the fairer Holy City by seeking that below? I heard your words." There was something in the tone and touch that won confidence without asking. And Richard answered:—

"Gallant sir, if God is willing that I should be forgiven by going ten score times to Jerusalem, and braving twelve myriad paynims, I would gladly venture."

The strange knight smote his breast and cast down his eyes. "We are all offenders in the sight of God, and I not the least. Ah! sweet friend, I know not how you have sinned. At least, I trust you have not done as I, borne arms against Holy Church. What grosser guilt than that?"

The two knelt side by side at the little shrine for a long time, saying nothing; then both left the church, and together threaded the dirty lanes of the town, going southward to the meadows where was Richard's encampment. As they stepped into the bright light of day, Longsword saw that the stranger was an exceeding handsome man, with flashing gray eyes, long fair hair, and, though his limbs were slender and delicate, his muscles and frame seemed knit from iron. When they passed the city gate, Richard asked the other to come to his tent. "You are my elder, my lord; do not think my request presumption."

"And why do you say 'my lord'?" asked the stranger, smiling.

"Can I not see that your bleaunt, though sombre, is of costliest *cendal* silk? that your 'pelisson' is lined with rare marten? that the chain at your neck is too heavy for any mean cavalier? And—I cry pardon—I see that in your eye which makes me say, 'Here is a mighty lord!'"

The knight laughed again, and stroked his beard thoughtfully.

"Good sir," said he, at length, "I see you are a 'sage' man. You desire to go to Jerusalem?"

"Yes, by Our Lady!"

"So do I; and I have come no small journey to hear the Holy Father. Let us seal friendship. Your name?"

"Richard Longsword, Baron of St. Julien," answered the Norman, promptly, thrusting out his hand.

"And mine," replied the other, looking fairly into Longsword's face, with a half-curious expression, "is Godfrey of Bouillon."

But Richard had dropped the proffered hand, and bowed very low. "Godfrey of Bouillon? Godfrey of Lorraine? O my Lord Duke, what folly is mine in thrusting myself upon you—" But Godfrey cut him short.

"Fair sir, do not be dismayed; your surmise is true! God willing, we shall ride side by side in more than one brave battle for the Cross; and I count every Christian cavalier who will fight with the love of Our Lord in his heart to be my good comrade and brother."

"O my lord," began Richard again; and again the elder man stayed him with, "And why not? Will God give a higher place in heaven to the sinful duke than to the righteous peasant? Are we not told 'he that exalteth himself shall be abased'? And why have I, man of sin from my birth, cause to walk proudly?"

The last words came so naturally that Richard could only cry out in despair: "*Ai*, Lord Duke, and if that be so, and you, who all men say are more monk than cavalier, are so evil, what hope then for such as I, who have sinned nigh past forgiveness?"

"And what was your sin, fair knight?"

"I slew an innocent boy with his hands upon the altar."

Godfrey crossed himself, but answered very mildly: "You have greatly offended, yet not as I. For when you slew only a mortal boy, I crucified My Lord afresh by bearing arms against His Holy Church. Eleven years since with the Emperor Henry, in an evil hour, I aided him to take Rome from the saintly Pope Gregory. For this God let me be stricken by a great sickness. I was at death's door. Then His mercy spared me. And when I recovered, I swore that I would ride forth to the deliverance of the Holy City; in the meantime, under my silken robe I wear this," and he showed a coarse haircloth shirt, "as a remembrance of my sin and of my vow."

"But you are without state?" asked Richard, wondering; "no vassals—no great company?"

Godfrey smiled. "What are the pomps of this world?" said he, crossing himself again; "yet in the eyes of men I must maintain them; such is the bondage of the ruler. Just now my affairs are such in Lorraine and Brabant that were it to be noised abroad that the Duke were gone to Clermont, there would be no small stir, and then, perhaps, many would conspire to resist me. But now they think me hunting, to return any day, and they dare not move in their plots. Yet my heart has burned to see the Lord Pope, and hear the word that he must speak. Therefore I have come hither, in the guise of a simple knight, riding with all my speed, and only one faithful lord with me, who passes for my man-at-arms. And I must get the blessing and mandate of the Holy Father, and be back to Maestricht ere too many tongues begin wagging over my stay." And then with a flash of his keen eyes he turned on Richard: "And you, my Lord de St. Julien,—are you not the son of that great Baron, William the Norman, who rode the length of Palermo in the face of all the Moslems during the siege, and were you not also victor in the famous tourney held last year by Count Roger?"

"I am, my Lord Duke; yet how could you know me?"

Godfrey laughed lightly. "I make no boast, fair sir," he answered, "but there are very few cavaliers in all Christendom of whom I do not know something. For this war for the Cross is no new thing in my heart; and I strive to learn all I may of each good knight who may ride at my side, when we battle with the paynim; and I rejoice that your dwelling in half-Moslem Sicily has not made your hate for the unbeliever less strong."

"Ah!" cried Richard, "only lately have I resolved to go to Jerusalem; I have fought against it long. To go I must put by the wedding of the fairest, purest woman in all the world,—perhaps forever. Yet my sin is great; and the blood of my parents and brother, slain by the infidels, will not let me rest. But it is very hard."

"Therefore," said Godfrey, solemnly, with the fervor of an enthusiast kindling his eyes, "in the sight of God, your deed will have the more merit. Be brave, sweet brother. Put by every worldly desire and lust. I also have sworn to live as brother to mine own dear wife, till the paynims defile the city of the Lord no more. Our Lady grant us both the purer, uncarnal love, the glory passing thought, the seats at God's right hand!" And the great Duke strode on, his head bowed in deep revery, while Richard drew new strength and peace from his mere presence. Richard brought Godfrey to his own tent, letting De Carnac and the others know little of the story of his guest; and with the Duke came Count Renard of Toul, his comrade, a splendid and handsome cavalier, who

seemed singularly ill-matched with his man-at-arms jerkin and plain steel cap. Longsword called Theroulde, and the *jongleur* was at his best that night as he sang the direful battle of Roncesvalles, the valor of Roland and Oliver, and the gallant Bishop Turpin; and of Ganelon and his foul treason, King Marsillius and his impious attack on the armies of Christ; the death of the dreadful paynim Valdobrun, profaner of Jerusalem, and a hundred heroes more. As the tale ran on, it was a thing to see how the Duke swelled with holy rage against the infidel. As Theroulde sang, sitting by the camp-fire, the Duke would forget himself, spring from the rugs, and dash his scabbard upon the ground, until at last when the *jongleur* told how Roland wound his great horn thrice in anguish, after it was all too late and the Frankish army far away, Godfrey could rein himself no more: "By the Splendor of God!" was his shout, "would that I had been there and my Lorrainers!" Then Theroulde was fain to keep silence till the terrible lord (for so he guessed him) could be at peace. Late that night they parted. On the morrow, report had it, the Pope would address all the Christians at Clermont from a pulpit in the great square.

"And then,—and then,"—repeated the Duke; but he said no more, for they all knew their own hearts. Richard lay down with a heart lighter than it had been for many a dreary day. "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" The name was talisman for every mortal woe.

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Long after Richard had fallen asleep, Herbert sat with Theroulde, matching good stories before the camp-fire. The man-at-arms lolled back at full length by the blaze, his spade-like hands clasped under his head, his sides shaking with horse-laughs at Theroulde's jests. Suddenly the *jongleur* cut his merry tale short.

"St. Michael! There is a man lurking in the gloom behind the Baron's tent. Hist!"—and Theroulde pointed into the dark. Herbert was on his feet, and a javelin in his hand, in a twinkling.

"Where?" he whispered, poising to take aim.

"He is gone," replied the *jongleur*; "the night has eaten him up."

"You are believing your own idle tales," growled the man-at-arms.

"Not so; I swear I saw him, and the light as on a drawn dagger. He was a misshaped, dwarfish creature."

Herbert sped the javelin at random into the dark. It crashed on a tent-pole. He ran and recovered it.

"No one is there," he muttered; "you dream with open eyes, Theroulde. Tell no tale of this to Lord Richard. He has troubles enough."

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# CHAPTER XIX

## HOW RICHARD TOOK THE CROSS

With the dawn that twenty-sixth day of November a great multitude was pouring through the gates of Clermont. A bleak wind was whistling from the north, mist banks hung heavy on the eastern hills, veiling the sun; but no one had turned back. A silent crowd, speaking in whispers; but all manner of persons were in it—seigneur and peasant, monk and bishop, graybeard and child, lord's lady and serf's wife,—all headed for the great square. Richard, with Duke Godfrey and Renard of Toul, fought their way through the throng; for what counted feudal rank that day! They came on a richly dressed lady, who struggled onward, dragging a bright-eyed little boy of four.

"Help, kind cavaliers!" came her appeal. "In the press my husband has been swept from me."

The three sprang to aid. She was a sweet-faced lady, reminding Richard of Mary Kurkuas. "And who may your husband be?" he asked, setting the lad on his own firm shoulder.

"He is Sir Tescelinde de Fontaines of Burgundy," answered she, "and I am the Lady Alethe. We wished our little Bernard here should say when he grew old, 'I heard the Holy Father when he sent the knights to Jerusalem.'"

"And he shall see and hear him, by St. Michael!" cried Richard, little knowing that his stout shoulder bore him whom the world in threescore years would hail as the sainted Bernard of Clairvaux. The boy stared around with great sober eyes, looking wisely forth after the manner of children.

"Yes," repeated Richard, while Godfrey and Renard cleared a way to the very centre of the square, right under the rude pulpit set for the occasion. There was a high stone cross standing in

front of the platform, and Richard seated his burden on one of its long arms. "Now, my little lord," cried he, "you shall be under the Pope's own eye, and your mother shall sit on the coping below and watch you."

"You are a good man!" declared the child, impulsively, stretching out his little fat arms.

"Ah!" replied Richard, half wistfully, as his glance lit on Louis, who had struggled to the front, "would that all might say likewise!"

Richard looked about. The ground rose a little around the pulpit; he could see a great way,—faces as far as the eye could reach, velvet caps and bare heads, women's bright veils and monkish cowls, silver-plated helmets of great lords, iron casques of men-at-arms,—who might number them? Pennoned lances tossed above the multitude, banners from every roof and dark street whipped the keen wind. Each window opening on the wide square was crowded with faces.

The Norman did not see a certain, dark-visaged hunchback, who strove to thrust himself through the throng to a station beside him. For when Godfrey's sharp eyes and frown fell on the rascal, he vanished instantly in the press. But Longsword waited, while men climbed the trees about and perched like birds on the branches, and still the multitude pressed thicker and thicker; more helmets, more lances, more bright veils and brilliant scarfs. Would the people come forever? Yet all was wondrously silent; no clamor, no rude pressure; each took post and waited, and listened to the beating of his own heart.

"The Pope is in the cathedral. He is praying for the special presence of the Holy Ghost," went the low whisper from lip to lip. And the multitude stood thus a long time, many with heads bowed in prayer. The chill wind began to die away as the sun mounted. Richard could see rifts in the heavy cloud banks. The shadow over the arena lifted little by little. Why was it that every breath seemed alive with spirits unseen? that the sigh of the flagging wind seemed the rustle of angels' wings? that he, and all others, half expected to see bright-robed hosts and a snow-white dove descending from the dark cathedral tower? More waiting; little Bernard began to stir on his hard seat. He was weary looking at the crowd. His mother touched him. "Be quiet, dear child, bow your head, and say your 'Our Father'; the Holy Spirit is very near to us just now."

At last—slowly the great central portal of the cathedral opened. They could hear the low, sweet strains of the processional streaming out from the long nave; the doors swung wider; and forth in slow procession came priests and prelates in snow-white linen, two by two, the bishops crowned with white mitres, and around them floated a pale haze as the faint breeze bore onward the smoke from a score of censers swinging in the acolytes' hands, as they marched beside. But before all, in a cope where princely gems were blazing, marched the grave and stately Adhemar of Monteil, Lord Bishop of Puy, and in his hands, held on high, a great crucifix of gold and ivory. And as the white-robed company advanced the multitude could hear them singing the noble sequence of St. Notker:—

"The grace of the Holy Ghost be present with us,
And make our hearts a dwelling-place to itself;
And expel from them all spiritual wickedness!"

While the procession advanced, the people gave way to right and left before it; and a great swaying and murmur began to run through them, waxing more and more when, at the end, the clear voices sang:—

"Thyself, by bestowing on the apostles of Christ a gift immortal and unheard of from all ages,
Hast made this day glorious."

"Verily the Holy Spirit is not far from us," said Duke Godfrey, softly, as the last strains rang out. Still more prelates, more priests; forth came Dalmace, archbishop of Narbonne, William, bishop of Orange, Matfred of Beziers, Peter, abbot of Aniane, and a hundred great churchmen more. Then, last of all, with his cardinals all about him, and a heavy cross of crystal carried aloft, came the Vicar of God on earth. Richard beheld the glowing whiteness of the bands of his pallium, whereon black crosses were embroidered; the jewels flashing on the cope and its golden clasp; the gold on his mitre higher than all the rest. He could see the face of the pontiff, pale, wrapt, spiritual, looking not at the mighty crowd about, that was beginning to sink to its knees, but up into the heavens, as though beyond the dun clouds he had vision of fairer heavens and fairer earth. Then the chanting clerics sang again, and advanced more boldly. And as they moved, two knights striding at either side of the Pope raised lances, and shook out long banners of white silk, upon each a blood-red cross. Loud and joyful now was the singing:—

"The Royal Banners forward go;
The Cross shines forth with mystic glow;
Where He in flesh, our flesh who made,
Our sentence bore, our ransom paid.

"O Tree of beauty! Tree of light!
O Tree with royal purple dight!
Elect on whose triumphal breast,
Those holy limbs should find their rest!"

Louder the singing. As the people gave way, the prelates and priests stood at either side, while the Pope ascended the pulpit, at his side Peter the Hermit. First spoke Peter. The little monk was eloquent as never before. He told the familiar tale of the woes of the Jerusalem Christians, so that not a soul was untouched by mortal pang. At times it seemed the multitude must break forth; but no sound came: only a swaying and sobbing as from ten thousand hearts. Then a long silence, when he ceased. It was so still, all could hear the gentle wind crooning over the tree-tops, and when a little child began to wail, its cry was hushed—affrighted at its own clamor.

Then stood forth the Pope. And if it had been silent before, there was deeper silence now. The very wind grew still, and every breath was bated. Far and wide over that mighty throng the pontiff threw his voice, clear as a trumpet, yet musical and soulful. His words were not in the stately Latin, but in the sweet familiar Languedoc, and entered men's hearts like live coals from off the altar.

"Nation of France: nation whose boast it is you are the elect of God, glorious in your faith and love of Holy Church, you I address. For you have heard and your souls are torn with the sorrows wrought at Jerusalem by that race so hateful to God. You have heard, and I know well what moves within your hearts. Shall I repeat the words of this holy hermit? Shall I tell how churches are beaten down, or—Christ forbid—become temples of the accursed worship? Shall I tell how Christians have bathed the very altars in their blood; how your brethren have chosen martyrdom, rather than deny Christ's name? O Holy Cross of Christ, verily thy dumb wood must cry out, nay, the stones break silence if the Christians of the West harden their hearts and will not hear; if no sword flashes forth in vengeance, no army hastes to succor the Sacred City."

And Urban had gone no further when there was again a swaying, throbbing, sobbing in the crowd. For an instant the Pope's voice was drowned, not by outcry, but by one vast murmur. He beckoned; there was silence, then higher rose his voice.

"O saintly spirits of Charlemagne, and of Louis his pious son, scourges of Saracens, why do ye sleep? Awake; awake; tell your children of France that holy war is theirs! O souls of the martyrs, long at rest, awake, awake; stir the cold hearts of these Christians that I may not speak in vain! O Holy Tomb of Our Lord, and thou Calvary, where the price for all our sins was paid, speak forth the sorrows of Christ's servants to these hard Western hearts. Kindle our hearts, O Lord, and grant Thine own spirit, that I may speak as becometh Thee and Thy Holy City—Jerusalem!

"Sweet children in Christ, hear the cry of that city; hear the cry of those holy fields where trod the Son of God; hear the moan of the Christian virgins torn to captivity by paynim hands; hear the cry to God of ten thousand souls whose blood smokes to heaven! How long! O Lord, how long! When will come vengeance on the oppressor!"—Again the multitude were quaking,—a deep roar springing from a myriad throats, and hands were on hilts, and pennons shook madly. But Urban dropped his voice, and again commanded silence.

"Wherefore has God suffered this? Does He take pleasure in the woes of His children? Is He glad when unbelievers pollute His altars, hew in pieces His holy bishops, and cry, 'See how helpless is your crucified Lord!' Ah, sweet children, look into your own hearts, and search if you are meet instruments to do His pleasure. Let us weep, let us weep over Jerusalem! Let us weep, let us weep over our own sins, for each one of us has more than the hairs of his head; and in the sight of God none is worthy even to behold the Holy City from afar; and if not worthy of the earthly city, how much less of the heavenly! All, all have sinned in God's pure sight. I see cavaliers, sworn defenders of Holy Church; your hands are red with Christian blood wantonly shed. I see great prelates, touched with the sacred chrism,—unworthy shepherds of Christ's sheep; you are stained with pride, hypocrisy, lust of power. I see men and women of mean estate; selfishness, lust, unholy hate, are strong within you. All, all have sinned!"

And now strong men were kneeling and groaning, "No more!"—were stretching out their arms to heaven, and moaning, "Mercy! mercy!" and here one man and there another was crying out that he had committed some direful deed, calling on all around to pray God with him for pardon. But Urban kept on.

"Be of good cheer, sweet children; your sins are great, but greater is the mercy of God. For I stand before you clothed with power from on high. Mine are the keys of heaven and earth and hell. And I say to you, despite your sins, you are forgiven. Shed no bootless tears; for deeds, not tears, to-day avail. The heritage of the Lord is wasted; the Queen of cities groans in chains—who, who will spring to her release?

"Warriors who own the name of Christ, you I address,—you, who have slain wickedly in unholy war, rejoice! A holy war awaits! You who have sped fellow-Christians to death, rejoice! God will give you to trample down the alien! Draw forth the sword of the Maccabees, and go forward. To him who lives, God will give the spoils of the heathen for an inheritance; him who dies, Christ Jesus will confess before his Father. Draw forth the sword, Christians of France! Draw forth, and let it flush red in the unbelievers' blood! For this is the Lord's doing, and he who enters upon it, casting out all hate for his brother from his heart, and with the love of Christ strong within, is purged of all sin, be it however great, and his name is written in the book of life!"—A mighty din was rising, but Urban's voice swelled above it all. "*Soldiers of Hell, become soldiers of the living God!*" was his cry, facing straight upon Richard; "lands, fame, home, friends, love,—put them all by; remember the wounds of Christ, the moans of Jerusalem; for now again Christ says to you, 'He who loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me; if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me—" No more; for there rose a

thunder as when storm-driven billows break upon the beach.

"God wills it!" From Richard's lips it had sprung, all unbidden. Godfrey had caught it—Hildebrand's battle-cry. And as if the shout had reached high heaven, that instant the dun clouds parted. The sun streamed on naked swords and tossing lances innumerable; the flashing of the brightness was terrible as celestial light.

"God wills it!"

Every tongue had caught the cry. It swelled forth, unbidden, the voicings of the passion in ten thousand breasts. The sun glanced on the crystal cross in the Pope's hand: those who saw were dazzled, and looked away.

"Yes," cried Urban, across the sea of quivering steel, "God sends His own sign from on high. Truly, thus 'God wills it!' To-day is fulfilled the Saviour's promise, that where His faithful are He will be. He it is that has put these words in your hearts; choose them as battle-cry; for on your side will be the God of battles, and at His will you shall trample down the unbeliever."

Then Urban raised on high the fire-bathed cross. "See," cried he once more, his voice rising above the swelling din, "Christ Himself issues from the tomb, and gives to you this cross. It shall be the sign lifted among the nations which is to gather together the outcasts of Israel. Wear it upon your shoulders, upon your breasts; let it shine upon your arms, surety of victory or palm of martyrdom; unceasing reminder that as Christ died for you, so ought you to die for Him and His glory!"

Again rose the clamor, and until they chanted his death-mass Richard forgot not that hour. One wild cry went up, the scope of heaven shook, the earth quaked; and now the shout was, "The Cross! the Cross! to Jerusalem!" The swords danced more madly, and little Bernard rose from his seat, tossed his tiny fists in the air, and joined the mighty cry. Louis de Valmont, who had stood opposite Richard all the time, and drunk in each word, ran out before all men, flung his mailed arms round Longsword's neck and kissed him, while tears streamed down his face.

"O sweet brother," cried the Auvergner, all melted, "I too have sinned greatly in God's sight. I cannot go to Jerusalem with hate upon my soul. I forgive the death of Gilbert; pray that Our Lord may forgive me!"

The other men who had nursed unholy wrath one to the other began to embrace, and to beg for pardon; and many more kneeling stretched up their arms, calling heaven to witness they would shed no more Christian blood till the Holy City was redeemed. Urban stood upon the platform, silent, and looking out upon the throng with a smile that the beholders thought was not of this world. But when the surgings of the multitude were a little stayed, the Pope again beckoned, and there was great silence. Then Cardinal Gregory came forward, and all knelt and beat their breasts, repeating the *Confiteor*.

"I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault," repeated the thousands; "therefore I beseech the blessed Mary, ever Virgin, the blessed Michael, the archangel, the blessed John the Baptist, the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, and all the saints to pray to the Lord Our God for me."

Then when every casqued head was bowed low, the Cardinal proclaimed in a voice which the most distant might hear, "To as many as shall from pure love of Christ take the cross to go for the deliverance of Jerusalem, the same I do absolve from all their sins, and declare them spotless and perfect, in sight of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen!" And the words fell on Richard's soul like water on fevered lips. Another great cry, "The Cross! the Cross!" and the thousands surged with one impulse toward the pulpit, demanding the sacred token at the pontiff's own hands. And nigh foremost was Richard; not first, for Bishop Adhemar of Puy, his heart burning with holy fire, was already kneeling before the Pope, and Urban was pinning a red-cloth cross upon his shoulder. But Richard had sprung upon the platform and was next.

The Pope smiled when he saw his mighty frame and sinews of iron—a direful foe of the infidels!

"Father, Holy Father, do you not know me?" cried Richard.

"I do not, sweet son," said Urban, pinning fast the cross.

"I am that lad Richard who stood by Pope Gregory's bedside; but I have greatly sinned."

"Be of good cheer!" said the pontiff, gently; "you have remembered your vow. Your sin, however great, is forgotten of God."

So Richard stood back, while Godfrey of Bouillon knelt to receive the cross. At sight of him Urban smiled again, and would have spoken; for he recognized the great Duke. But Godfrey whispered, "Not here, Holy Father, not here; but soon from Metz to Antwerp I will be calling out my vassals to go to Jerusalem." Then Godfrey stepped back, with the red badge upon his breast; after him came Renard of Toul; after him Louis de Valmont; and then the merry priest Raymond of Agiles, merry no longer, but with a grave and consequential cast upon his face. As he knelt before the Holy Father, he said he took the cross both in his own name and in that of his lord and patron Raymond, sovereign Count of St. Gilles and Toulouse, who pledged himself to the war with all his southern chivalry. Then there was more shouting and rejoicing, and it seemed as if the clamor would never end, nor the train of knights and barons cease advancing to kneel before the Pope

and receive the cross.

Hour after hour sped by, still Urban stood and gave his blessing, and a brave and pious word to each stout cavalier who came. The priests brought red cloth from the presses in the bishop's palace, and more and more. Still not enough; and gayly dressed knights gave up their scarlet bleaunts for the Holy Father to tear into the sacred emblem. Then at last, when the sun was near its setting and men finally felt a bleak wind biting, the Pope spoke again.

"Dear children," said he in closing, "you have done a great thing this day. What you have promised may cost you dear in blood and worldly estate; yet, remember the warning to him who putteth the hand to the plough and looketh back. I bid any who would withdraw, to do it now; and he commits no sin." Again the cry, "To Jerusalem! God wills it!" and no man stirred. "Then," continued Urban, "let him who hereafter shall turn back, be excommunicate and anathema. Anathema upon him who shall hinder the soldiers of the Cross! Anathema upon him who shall harm their family or estate, while they fight the Lord's battles. Gladly would I go with you to win the crown of martyrdom or of victory, but the Antipope is still in Italy; the Emperor and the king of France still defy Holy Church. Adhemar of Puy I appoint my legate, and under his guidance you shall go forth. And now my blessing and absolution upon you all. Amen."

So the great multitude scattered far and wide; upon the breast of every man a red cross, and in his heart a joy as of another world; for it was as if a voice had spoken to each and all out of a cloud, "Thy sins which are many are forgiven." Richard strode back to his tent with Louis de Valmont beside him; and all the air seemed sweet, and their words came fast, as between two long-time friends, while above in the crisp night the stars burned like cressets lit by the angels.

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# CHAPTER XX

## HOW RICHARD RECEIVED GREAT MERCY

In later days wise monks wrote that at the moment the great cry went up at Clermont, all the Christians of the world from cold Hibernia to parching Africa thrilled with joy ineffable, and on all the paynims there fell fear and trembling. Be this true or false, from the Pyrenees to the Rhine over wide France ran a fire; from Auvergne to Aquitaine, to Anjou, to the Ile de France, to Normandy.

There were signs and wonders in the heavens—stars fell from the firmament; the clouds pictured armies and knights who wore the red cross on their breasts. The shade of mighty Charlemagne was seen coming forth in his hoary majesty, with sword pointing toward Jerusalem. Not knights only, but women and little children ran after those who preached the gospel of steel and fire. Quiet monks forgot their abbey kitchens; hermits forsook their solitudes on the hills—greater merit to win the pilgrim's absolution! The peasants wandered from their fields in masterless companies, roving on aimlessly, conscious only that Jerusalem lay toward the sun-rising. And bandits left their lairs, confessing their crimes, eager to take the cross. Up and down France went Urban and Peter; at Rouen, at Tours, at Nimes, there were other Clermonts: each bishop called forth his flock. Too often the tales of Eastern gold and of paynim beauties were more enticing to the roistering knights, than summons to holy warfare. But the sense of sin hung heavy on the land. No avarice drove Stephen of Chartres to take the cross, great count that he was with more castles than days in the year; nor did Robert of Flanders pour out his father's princely treasure in hopes of pelf; nor Robert of Normandy pawn his duchy. In the south, Raymond of Toulouse, haughtiest lord in France, whom more lances followed than followed even the king, set forth for Palestine, determined there to leave his bones. With him went his wife, the Princess Elvira of Spain, and at Raymond's back were all the chivalry of the south country, of Gascony, Languedoc, Limousin, and Auvergne, along with Bishop Adhemar, and the great prelates of Apt, Lodève, and Orange. So from the least to the greatest all were stirred; and if King Philip, and William the Red, and Emperor Henry moved not—what matter? For the might of Christendom lay not in its phantom kings, but in its great barons and knights whose good swords would hew the way to Jerusalem. Thus the winter sped, and with the coming of spring France was ready to pour forth her flood of life!

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So with France. And how with Richard? He had returned to his tent after the great day at Clermont with a light heart and a merry laugh. Duke Godfrey was with him, and Renard of Toul and Louis de Valmont. They had left little Bernard with his father, and Richard saw the lad no more, until after many years he heard him preaching as never Peter the Hermit preached, and calling on men not to go to Jerusalem, but to cast from their hearts their own dark sins. The night was cold, a keen wind was again whistling from the western *puys*, and Richard brought all his friends with him to his tent, to cement friendship by passing the night in his company. Before the roaring camp-fire they sat a long time, talking of the brave days in store. Godfrey gulped down

eagerly all that Louis and Richard had gathered in Sicily of the country and manners of warfare of the infidels, and they knew in turn that a great captain and master-at-arms was speaking with them. Already Godfrey was ordering his campaign.

"And the number of the unbelievers?" he would ask.

"More than the sea-sands," Longsword replied, "and they say they are all light cavalry and archers."

"By Our Lady of Antwerp!" cried the Duke, "we must pray then for a close country and a hand to hand *mêlée*!"

"Ah!" declared Renard of Toul, "what matter how we fight! Is not the Lord on our side, and St. Michael and St. George!"

The Duke laughed merrily.

"You are the same mad Renard as ever," said he. "Is it not written, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God?' But," continued he, gayly, "in good time let me see the Holy City on high; yet not until I have had a good joust, chasing the paynims from that on earth!"

Thus ran the talk, but presently Louis said:—

"And did you, De St. Julien, see in the multitude a certain dwarfish, dark-skinned fellow, who stood right back of you all the time the Holy Father was speaking, his eyes fastened not on the Lord Pope, but on you?"

"I did not; why did you ask?"

"Because, though I was some little way off, I could have sworn that he was Zeyneb, the body-servant of Iftikhar Eddauleh, and he seemed as if devouring you with his eyes."

"Zeyneb? He who gave his master the iron lance instead of the reed, when Iftikhar rode against Musa the Spaniard?"

Louis nodded.

"You are bewitched, fair sir," laughed Richard, gayly; "the rascal was long since in Syria or Egypt." And here his face grew dark, as he thought of the sack of Cefalu, and that Eleanor might be in the clutches of Zeyneb himself that moment. It was well to forgive Christian enemies, but to hate infidel foes took on new merit by wearing the cross, and Richard was not minded to forget Iftikhar Eddauleh.

"On the relics I could swear I saw him!" protested Louis.

"It is true," added Godfrey; "I set eyes on such a knave. Not that I set him down as infidel. But I had little liking to have such a fellow within arm's length; my ribs nigh itched with a dagger at merely seeing him. When he sidled up to us, I gave him a frown that made him hide his black head in the crowd."

"Well, fair Duke," said Richard, "rest assured, he has not come to hear the Holy Father, if this is Zeyneb, the slave of Iftikhar. Bishop Robert wrote something of his coming to France, but entirely doubted the tale."

"By St. Michael of Antwerp," declared Godfrey, "what do infidels at Clermont?"

Richard shook his head, but Herbert, who heard all, came to him only a moment afterwards and led him aside.

"Little lord,—you must wear the ring-shirt."

The Baron resisted. "You grow fearful as an old woman, Herbert. Godfrey and Louis dream, when they say a creature of Iftikhar is in Clermont."

But Sebastian urged as well.

"Theroulde and Herbert have seen him also. As you love our Lord, do not peril your life. Why has Zeyneb come to Clermont, save to do what failed at Cefalu?"

"Faugh!" growled Richard, "will not God despise me, if I shiver at every gust of danger?"

"As you love my Lady Mary, do this!" pressed Herbert shrewdly, and at Mary's name Richard submitted meekly as a lamb. Thus all that evening Longsword grumbled at the precaution, and swore he would wear no more mail till he came face to face with the unbelievers. But he grumbled no longer, for just as the stars told it was past midnight, he was waked from sound sleep by a blow that sent him to his feet blinking and staggering. And lo, the wall of the tent against which he lay was pierced clean through by a dagger that had broken against the Valencia shirt; for a bit of the blade lay on the canvas. Herbert and De Carnac were swearing loudly that they had not closed an eye all night, but it was Louis who darted into the darkness, and came back with a strange fellow held in no gentle grip. He dragged the prisoner to the dying firelight; they saw his coarse villain's blouse, a spine so bent that he was nigh hunchback, a poll of coarse black hair that scarcely came up to Richard's elbow, a face not unhandsome, but with black eyes very small and teeth sharp and white. One shout greeted him, as he was held before the fire.

"Zeyneb! Zeyneb, the slave of Iftikhar Eddauleh!"

The fellow held down his head, and twisted his face as if to defy recognition.

"Ha!" cried Renard of Toul, "he has a dagger-sheath in his belt! Empty? Ah, the crows will love his bones!"

Richard had found his tongue.

"And does my Lord Iftikhar," asked he in Arabic, "think it cavalier-wise to send out assassins like your worthy self, when he cannot reach his foe with his own arm? This and the deeds at Cefalu put me greatly in his debt—let him be well paid!"

"The arm and eye of the grand prior of the Ismaelians reach to farthest Frankland, my Cid," quoth Zeyneb, standing very limp in Louis's clutch.

"And the arm shall be soon lopped off," retorted the Auvergner. But at that instant his firm hold weakened. Untimely slackening! with a lightning twist and turn Zeyneb had slid from De Valmont's clutches, as if of oil; gone in the dark before the knights could cry out. The night swallowed him as if he were a spectre.

"After! after!" thundered Godfrey. "Fifty Tours deniers to him that seizes!"

There was a mighty shout. All the neighboring tents were in uproar. A friendly baron loaned bloodhounds; but which of the many trails was Zeyneb's who might say? All night they beat the camp; a hundred idle knaves were haled before Richard, each one of whom doubtless would have been the better for being knocked on the head; but none was the dwarf. At dawn Richard went wearily to rest, but criers scoured the country, calling on all good Christians to begin the Crusade by catching this infidel assassin. Several townspeople told how the fugitive had come to Clermont a few days since, pretending he was an Eastern Christian exiled by Moslem persecutors. They had given him great compassion, and answered his questions as to the whereabouts of Richard de St. Julien, whom he said he was seeking. But all the search brought nothing.

"Strange," commented Richard, "Iftikhar should use him as agent; his crooked back stops all disguise."

"You do not know him, little lord," answered Herbert. "Satan has given him a heart as darkly crafty as his black eyes. I have heard his fame at Palermo. Undisguised, he is a rat sly enough to creep through a hole too small for a beetle."

And Sebastian piously admonished:—

"Dear son, now that you have taken the cross and your sins are forgiven, great mercy is shown you. Be very humble, for God has some wondrous service in store!"

The admonition Richard treasured in his heart; but he did not so far tempt Providence as to put by the Valencia hauberk, and Herbert kept guard over him night and day. Also a courier speeded to La Haye with a letter bidding Baron Hardouin have a care that Iftikhar did not try to repeat his Cefalu raid, and to leave no Syrian dwarf unhanged in his barony.

A few days thereafter the great gathering at Clermont scattered; and Heaven knew there was much to be done, if the hosts of the Lord were not to set forth with scrip and staff merely! The Duke of Bouillon parted with Richard and Louis as became Christian brothers-in-arms, and went homeward to rouse his vassals. As for De Valmont, he had need to go to Champagne; but Longsword rode straight for St. Julien. Every peasant he met on the road, when they saw he was a gallant knight, begged him to be their leader to Jerusalem. Almost every breast wore the red cross; women bore it, and little children. "God wills it! To Jerusalem!" That was the one cry. Yet Richard was sad at times; for he saw that men acted in ignorance, and that their very zeal would destroy them.

As for Sebastian, he had a word of the prophets at all moments in his mouth, and saw in everything a manifest sign that the days foretold in the Apocalypse were at hand, when "the Beast" and all that served him were nigh their end, and the righteous should rule forever.

"Now is fulfilled the word of the Lord!" was his cry. "Fear not, for I am with thee. I will bring thy seed from the East and gather thee from the West; I will say unto the North, 'Give up,' and to the South, 'Keep not back; bring my sons from far and my daughters from the ends of the earth.'"

Only Richard saw that the shrewd cleric was not lacking in worldly wisdom. When they passed two shouting monks, who were showing their naked breasts on which they had branded the Cross, and whom many were declaring to be saints indeed, Sebastian had only the shake of the head.

"They are blind leaders of the blind," was his comment; "they will suffer pains enough before they see the Holy City to forget all their fiery zeal. The kingdom of heaven is not to be won by tortures inflicted for the praise of men."

When they reached St. Julien, there was work for Richard all that winter. The Baron convoked his "*Ost*," the fighting-men of the seigneury, and, standing upon the great stone before the castle, told how for his own sins and the souls of his kinsfolk he had taken the cross—"and who would go with him?" Whereupon, as Sebastian declared, "A new pentecostal fire spread among the St. Julieners;" and so many cried they would make the crusade, that Richard had trouble to make it

plain, enough must stay behind to care for the aged, the harvests, and the castle, and that no family be left to charity. Up and down the barony went Sebastian, showing his scars inflicted by paynims, drawing all after him. Even the lord abbot was stricken in conscience, confessed his lax rule, and wished to go to Jerusalem. But Sebastian told him God were better pleased to have him remain and teach the brethren fasts and vigils. Yet to the fighting-men the priest had but one message, "that now was come the time for the righteous to wash their hands in the blood of the ungodly." And Richard was busy on his part arranging the seigneury, raising money by sale of rights to pig pasture held on certain lands, and more money by allowing a rich Jew, who dwelt in the barony and now wished to go to Spain, to buy his right of departure; for a rich Jew was a very precious possession to a seigneur, who never let him withdraw, with his wealth—for a trifle.

Richard was happier in this work than he had been for many a long day. The blood of Gilbert de Valmont no longer hung heavy on his soul. Louis de Valmont was his friend. He could look up into heaven and see there only peace and mercy. But he was sad when his thoughts ran to Mary Kurkuas and the many years that might speed before he could call her his bride; for this was no time to think of home and marriage. Even a greater sadness came over him, when he thought of Musa. All his faith, all the teachings of Holy Church and her ministers, left him only the assurance that the Spaniard's soul was doomed to the fire unquenchable. This life so short, the after-life so long, and Musa thus doomed! Why did God create amongst the unbelievers such high manhood, such knightly prowess, and then consign it all to the same torments reserved for the utterly wicked? Yet could he doubt his own religion—he, the ardent champion of the Cross, whose new-found happiness depended on this very belief, that the death of infidels was most pleasing in God's sight?

At times Sebastian could see that his mind was still clouded, and would say:—

"Dear son, do not hide what makes your face so sad."

"*Ai*, father, I am thinking of Musa, and how I love him, and how terrible is the state of his soul."

"Love him not," Sebastian would cry sternly; "as for his soul, it is given to be buffeted of Satan, at which all good Christians should rejoice."

"But we are bidden to 'love our enemies,' and Musa is no enemy; I count him as my brother."

Then Sebastian would frown more fiercely than ever.

"Yes, love 'our' enemies, not those of Holy Church. Give heed lest to your former sins you add not a greater—that of sinful pity toward the hated of God!"

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# CHAPTER XXI

## HOW RICHARD RETURNED TO LA HAYE

Long before Assumption Day, the appointed time for setting forth, soon as the balmy spring winds blew, all France was marching. Not the great lords first,—for worldly wisdom was plentiest under gilded helmets,—but the peasants took the road by thousands on thousands. Day after day the long procession by St. Julien, serpent-like, trailed on,—priests and bandits, petty nobles, old crones on crutches, little children on lumbering wagons; for weapons, often only boar spears and wood axes. "And is this fortress not Jerusalem?" the children would often cry when they saw the castle; and their fathers and mothers hardly knew if they ought to tell them nay. Hoary sires crept along on their staffs, followed by sons and sons' sons and daughters also. To each stranger they would cry: "Come! God wills it! Let us die at Jerusalem!" And Richard's heart grew sad, knowing they would indeed die, but far from the Holy City. At first he bade the butler and cellarer open the castle vats, and supply food and drink to all; but those worthies protested that three days of such charity would ruin the fief, and Richard was forced to let the pilgrim hordes roll by, subsisting on what they carried with them. Full soon their means would be at an end; then they must plunder or starve. But Longsword's bounty would have been only a drop in their bucket.

Sometimes, however, there came sturdy bands that clamored at the castle gate, demanding food.

"Food?" roared old Herbert, one such day; "and have you taken nothing in your wallets?"

"No," quoth a hulking peasant, showing an empty pouch; "the priests say, 'God who nourishes the sparrows will not let His dear children suffer;' so we have gone forth trusting in His bounty to feed us."

"Begone!" cried Sebastian, from behind the portcullis; for the pilgrims had begun to threaten. "I also am a priest, and say to you, as says the Apostle, 'If any would not work, neither should he eat.' God has given you better wits than have sparrows. Sin not by misusing them!"

But too often the rascals fell to plunder, and reluctantly Richard sallied forth; slew some, and hanged others for a warning. Very grave grew Longsword when he heard of the outrages

wrought through the bands led by Volkmar the priest and Count Emicio in the Rhine cities, for he knew this was no way to win Heaven's blessing. "Their sins are great," commented Sebastian. "God is pleased to lead them to destruction." And of Peter the Hermit, who headed a like band, as not a few had desired Sebastian himself to do, he only prophesied, "He listens to the praise of men; God will abase him!" As indeed came true.

So with the peasants. But at last the seigneurs were moving. Richard rode from St. Julien with five-and-twenty petty nobles, thrice as many full-armored men-at-arms, four hundred stout "villains" on foot; and above his head the great banner of his house, St. Julien's white stag blazoned on a red field. The baron's heart was gay when he saw the long line of casques and lances. But beside them trailed a weeping company; old men and women, who went a little way, making a long farewell.

"Ah, sweet lord," the pretty maids would cry, "how long will it be, ere you ride back with Peter and Anselm and Hugo?" and so with fifty more, wailing out the name of husband, brother, or sweetheart. Then Richard would bang Trenchefer in a way to hearten the most timorous, and swear, "In two years you shall see them all again, and I will make every good man-at-arms a knight!" So when the women saw his bold, brave face, they took courage. But there were tears and to spare, when they came to the last wayside cross, and Herbert went down the line, calling gruffly to every man and maid not bound for Jerusalem to drop from the ranks. So the lines were closed, and the long files of helmets and hauberks went over the mountain side. Many an eye went back to the groups of red, blue, and yellow clustered round the cross; and many an eye was wet that had been seldom wet before, as they saw tottering old Bosso, Sebastian's vicar in the parish, hold up the crucifix, and all the bright gowns bend in prayer. But none fell from the ranks, no step lagged.

Richard nodded to Theroulde, whose mule was plodding beside Rollo. The *jongleur* clapped his viol to his shoulder; the trumpets blew; the kettledrums boomed until the crags echoed; and then once more the shout went down the lines as so many times before: "God wills it! To Jerusalem!" Whereupon the drums thundered faster, the feet twinkled more nimbly. When they came to the pass of the mountains, Richard ordered no halt; but he drew rein on Rollo, and let the column swing past. Each man cast one glance over his shoulder; louder the viols, the trumpets, the drums; again the cry: "God wills it! To Jerusalem!" Richard saw the backs of the last rank and turned his gaze toward the valley. There it lay—fair as when, nigh a year before, he had seen it from that same hillside, crowned with the bursting summer. He could see the tower of the great keep, the abbey, the village—all. And in that year what had not befallen! His grandfather dead; Raoul de Valmont dead; Gilbert de Valmont dead; ah! pity, his father, mother, brother—all dead; and his sister worse than dead! And yet the sky could be blue, and God sit calm above it, despite the wickedness of His children! Richard's shield-strap had slipped; in readjusting it he saw his face in the bright steel, clear as a mirror, and he knew lines of pain and grim resolve and deathly battle were marked thereon that would never in this world be smoothed away. Yet he was the same: the same debonair young knight who had laughed when he looked upon this valley, and vowed it should all be one love-bower for Mary Kurkuas. And now he was the stern Baron of St. Julien, at whose nod five hundred fighting-men trembled; who had blood on his hands, and, merciful saints, more blood on his soul, even if the sin were absolved! Mary, the soft, sweet life in Cefalu, the sunlit dreams of one short year ago, of love, of bright tourneys, of victories won without a pang—where were they now?

As he turned, he saw Sebastian riding his palfrey beside Rollo. "Ah, dear father," said the Norman, half sadly, "this is a pleasant country to leave behind. Is Palestine, even with Jerusalem, more fair than Auvergne? When we have taken the Holy City, we will return, and I will pray the Lord Pope to make St. Julien a bishopric, and you shall be the *sanctissimus* of the country-side!"

Sebastian smiled at this forced banter.

"Dear son," said he, "this is indeed a fair country, as I said when a year ago we first saw it from this height. But something in my heart says to me: 'Sebastian, God is hearkening to your prayers. Your journey in this evil world will some day end. After you have seen the Cross victorious on the walls of the earthly Zion, then you shall straightway behold the heavenly.' Therefore I shall never see St. Julien again."

"These are fancies, father," said the knight, laying his heavy hand affectionately on the priest's tonsured head; "you shall live to a yet riper age. You shall see the Holy City purged of infidels. Then at last it will be no sin to fulfil my dream. Here in St. Julien Mary Kurkuas and I will dwell, and you beside us; and if God bless us with children, what greater joy for you than to teach them all things, as you have taught me, and make them tenfold better (Christ pity me!) than their father."

"Yes, sweet lad," replied Sebastian, gently, "that would indeed be joy; but the will of Our Lord be done. And now let us be about His business." Whereupon he turned his palfrey. Richard cast one glance over mountain, valley, tower, and farm-land—a vision never to fade; then:—

"Come, Rollo!" he urged, and flew after the column. The music crashed ever faster; the marching men raised a mad war-song; Richard's voice rose above them all. As they sang, they struck the downward slope, and the crags hid St. Julien.

Southward they marched; for the Auvergners went in company with Raymond of Toulouse, by the southern route across Italy, though Richard would have desired the German route with Godfrey. At Orange the Norman met the great Count of Toulouse and St. Gilles,—a tall, haughty man, with flowing silver hair and beard; brusque to strangers, but underneath the sternness a high-minded Christian soul. With him was his handsome and valiant friend, Viscount Gaston of Béarn, a winsome cavalier who became Longsword's close friend. At Orange Richard rejoined the band with Raymond of Agiles, Toulouse's chaplain, and found Louis de Valmont. On that spot was cemented a long-time friendship, to be ended only after they had all seen deeds, knight or cleric had never dreamt before.

But while the host lay at Orange, Richard's heart was elsewhere; presently there came a letter that set him to mount and ride right quickly.

"Mary Kurkuas, to her sweet lord Richard: kisses and greetings more than words may tell.

"Dear Heart: I have heard all from Musa, and I may not write how my heart is torn for you. The fiends have been many in your soul, have tempted you grievously, and you have fallen. Do you think I shrink from you, that I bless the saints I am not yet your wife and can escape a hateful bond? Sweet life,—love is not made of such feeble stuff! You do well to go to Jerusalem, but will you go without one word, one look? I have somewhat to say to you, which can only pass when face to face. Come to La Haye. Musa tells me I am still as beautiful as at Palermo, and I hope in your eyes also this will prove true. I think my words, songs, and love will not make you a meaner soldier for Christ. To Him you belong first, but after Him to me. Ride swiftly, for I sit watching to see Rollo coming down the castle road bearing my own true love. So come. Farewell."

Whereupon, when Richard read, all his resolution to go through Provence, turning to neither right hand nor left, sped from him as dust before the south wind. To his surprise Sebastian did not oppose.

"Dear son," said the churchman, "love is of God. There is a love of man to woman; a love of man to the Most High; happy are they to whom the higher and lesser are at one."

"But in former days you did not smile on my suit to Mary."

"Verily," said Sebastian, while Herbert made the horses ready, "I saw in it the hand of Satan to prevent you from going to the Holy City. But now that you have taken the great vow, and I see in your face that you are strong, I have no fear. Yet remember, your duty is to God, and not to women; when you ride toward Palestine, do not leave your soul snared in a silken net in Provence."

"Ah," cried Richard, "you know not what you say. Did you ever have love for a pure and beautiful maid?"

Sebastian's face was very grave.

"Many things have befallen in my life, God is lengthening my days. In the years of my youth—what may not have happened? But she died—she was very young; so was I. I have mastered all earthly lusts, praise be to God!"

And this was the only word Richard had ever heard Sebastian speak, of what befell him before he entered the monastery, and the long shadows of his life's renunciation fell over him. But of more moment was the speech Richard had with Herbert, as they rode along.

"I marvel that no mention was made in the letter of the messages I sent to La Haye, to warn against that dark-faced devil, Zeyneb."

Herbert fell into a long study, his eyes fixed on the way that was gliding by under their merry canter.

"The roads were safe. All the brigands have left their lairs to go to Jerusalem—ha!"—this, with a sly grunt and chuckle. "However, if my lady writes thus three days since, nothing has befallen."

"True," replied the Baron, spurring Rollo more hotly, "yet as I think of it, I begin to misdoubt. Iftikhar Eddauleh is of that accursed brotherhood amongst the infidels—the Ismaelians. Their guile reaches to the ends of the earth. Twice he has sought my life, and only St. Michael saved me. I would I could see that Zeyneb dancing at a rope's end."

"The rope or the axe will be his confessor at last!" muttered Herbert; then they all rode harder.

When Richard came within sight of the towers of the castle of La Haye, not even Rollo's mighty stride made the ground speed swift enough. All around stretched the vineyards and orchard bowers of the pleasant South Country; the wind blew softly over great fields of blossoms; the peasant and wayfarer trudged on peacefully with no sword at his side, and feared not raid nor robbers, for safety and ease reigned everywhere in fair Provence. When they drew near to the castle, they could see a score of bright banners tossing on the rampart, while a great crash of music greeted them; for the Baron of La Haye was a valiant troubadour, and kept as many *jongleurs* as grooms. But what cared Richard? As he thundered up the way to the drawbridge, he reined in Rollo short, was out of the saddle, and his arms were about some one in white that had run from the orchard to greet him. And he felt a soft breath on his cheeks, soft hands in his hands, soft words in his ear; and his own words came so fast, they would scarce come at all. Then he knew that all the castle folk were standing by, smiling and laughing in friendly manner. Soon

Baron Hardouin came down and gave him a stately speech, after the best courtesy of the South Country; and Richard, holding Mary's hand in his own, looked upon all about, and spoke out boldly: "Fair lord and good people, I have no skill in speech, but this I say: the Princess Mary Kurkuas is the fairest and noblest maiden in all the earth, and to him who says me nay, I will make it good upon my body." Whereupon he half drew Trenchefer, but all cried out, "Long life to the valiant Baron de St. Julien! long life to our fairest princess!" And Richard went into the castle with his head in the air, seeing only one face out of the many, and that very close to his own.

Only when Hardouin had feasted his guest, and had made him listen to a dozen *jongleurs* and their minstrelsy, Richard found himself alone with Mary in the castle orchard, just as the long afternoon was spreading out the shadows. They sat on the turf, with a gnarled old apple tree rustling above them. All around the bees were humming over the roses; the birds were just beginning to carol the evening. Then the question was, "And where is Musa?"

Whereupon Mary answered: "He is gone forth hawking; for, said he, 'I think Richard will come to-day; and though I am his brother, there are hours when even brothers are better loved afar off.'"

"What a noble soul he is," said Richard, his eyes wandering dreamily up into the waving canopy of green; "how often I wonder that he has never courted you, nor you given him favor. Almost I love him too well for jealousy."

"But not I!" cried the Greek, firing; then with a laugh: "See, your eyes are open wide, for you are fearful lest I take your words in earnest. Ah, dear life, I can love but one; and with you my heart is a full cup. Yet to Musa I would give aught else—all but love. Yet fear him not. He is the most generous of men. Often as we have been together, his talk has been of you,—praising you after his Arab fashion, till even I cry out at him, 'Richard Longsword is a wondrous knight, yet not so wondrous as you make him!' Then he will laugh and say, 'In my eyes there was never Moslem or Christian a greater cavalier than my brother.'"

"So he has been at La Haye all the winter?"

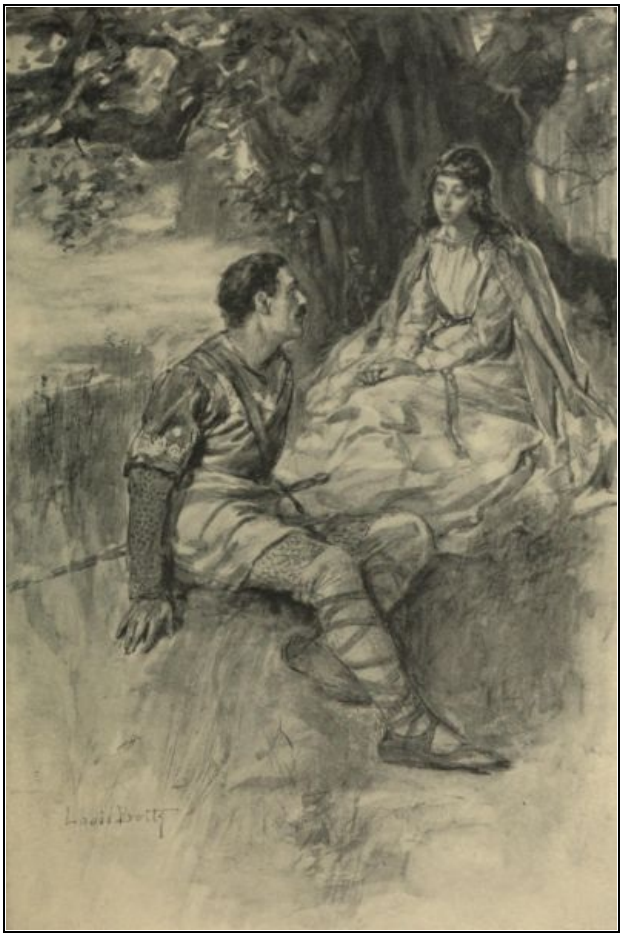
"Yes; he sent away your Saracens to Sicily; and I need not tell the shifts he had to save their skins, such was the cry against infidels in all the country. But here in Provence, where there are so many Jews and unbelievers, not to speak of the Cathari and other heretics that are so strong, a Moslem knight may dwell without annoy; for I fear my uncle—" and she fetched a sigh—"likes his troubadours and courts of love too well to leave them for the war of the Holy City."

But at the mention of Jerusalem Richard's brow grew dark.

"Dear heart," said he, "what madness to come to La Haye! How may I lift eyes to you, when I belong to the cause of Christ; and what time is this for marriage and giving in marriage! And if God grants that I return alive from Palestine,—and well I know the dangers, if some do not,—how many years for you must it be of weary waiting—years plucked out of the joyousness of your own dear life! Ah, sweetest of the sweet, I hold your hand now, and see heaven in your eyes. But I know you would not have me always thus; we cannot sit beneath the trees forever."

"No, my beloved," said the Greek, very softly, "this is no time for marriage or giving in marriage; yet—" and she spoke still more softly—"shall I not go with you, to nurse the wounded, and give cold water to the sick; to lay a cool hand on you—thus—if you are very weary or tempted? Are there no noble ladies who go with the army,—the Countess of Toulouse, the wife of Baldwin, brother of great Duke Godfrey, and many more? And shall I not be one? Listen: my sins too are very great; yes,"—for Richard was raising a hand in protest; "I am too fond of the pomps and praise of this world, and my heart too often will not bow to the will of God. For my own sins and for the sins of him I love better than self, I would pray at the tomb of Our Lord. Yet I cannot fly out alone—a poor defenceless song-bird, amongst all the crows and hawks. Therefore I have sent to you, that you might hear me say this, 'Let us be wedded by the priest full soon, for the Holy Father has forbidden unprotected maids to go to Jerusalem; but let us not be to each other truly as husband or wife until the Sacred City is taken, and we can kneel side by side at the Holy Sepulchre."

Richard had risen, and as he stood he held Mary's hands in his own, and looked straight into her eyes.



**"'HOW MAY I LIFT EYES TO YOU WHEN I BELONG TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST?'"**

"Dear life," cried he, "do you know what you say? Peril, toil, hardships,—yes, death even, and worse than death,—captivity—all these may await! And is your little body strong enough for the long, long way to Jerusalem?"

"It is, Richard," said she, looking back into his face with a sweet, grave smile; "how I wish I could do something very great, only to show my love for you!"

He was bending over to snatch her in his arms; her hair was touching his cheek; when Mary shrank back with a frightened scream:—

"Richard!"

And before the other word could pass her lips, a strange misshapen form had darted from under the tree. A flash on bright steel, a cry, a stroke—but at that stroke Mary snatched at the wrist, caught, held an instant.

"The jinns curse you!" the hiss, and Mary felt the wrist whisk like air from her hands. Another stroke, Richard half reeled. There was the click of steel on steel. A second curse, and the assailant ghost-like was gliding amongst the orchard trees. Longsword was still staring, trembling, reaching for Trenchefer; but Mary gave a loud cry. And at that cry, lo! Musa was swinging from his saddle, and grasping in no gentle grip the cloak of the dwarf Zeyneb.

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# CHAPTER XXII

## HOW RICHARD PARTED WITH HIS BROTHER

The dwarf was writhing, twisting, biting with long, venomous teeth, but the grasp of the Spaniard was as steel. His eye was not on his captive, but on Richard.

"*Wallah!*" was his greeting, "are you wounded?"

Richard stood erect, his hand at his side.

"Again you have saved me. The Valencia shirt was proof once more." Musa was advancing, dragging Zeyneb, who still struggled, but helpless as a mouse in a cat's mouth.

The Spaniard picked up the dagger that lay on the grass, and frowned darkly when his eye fell on the edge.

"Poison," was his biting comment. "I did indeed suppose Iftikhar Eddauleh could at least trust to clean steel, even if he must place it in the claws of such vermin as this!"

And he shook the dwarf till the latter howled with mortal fright. Mary, now that the shock was past and the danger sped, was calling out to all the saints amid hysteric laughter and crying, and Richard, too, felt very strangely—thrice now his life had thus been sought.

Musa's fingers knit round the dwarf's wretched neck, and he seemed to find joy in watching the latter's agony.

"Beard of the Prophet!" he repeated, "Iftikhar shall wait long before he find another such servant!"

"Guard, hold fast!" admonished Richard. "Surely the fiends aid him; he escaped Louis de Valmont's grasp as by magic."

"He will need a stouter spell to-day, by the glory of Allah!" retorted Musa. The dwarf at last found tongue.

"Laugh now, my masters, and you, my lady; but you shall all whistle otherwise ere you hear the last of poor Zeyneb."

The Spaniard laughed scornfully.

"Aye, truly," declared he, "you are like to live many days, my merry sir, after your feat just now."

The dwarf only hung down his head, while all around them swarmed the castle folk talking each at once, and making a mighty din. Baron Hardouin sent his niece away with her maids, to have her temples bathed in strong waters, for snow was no whiter than her cheeks. But four sturdy men-at-arms haled Zeyneb within the castle, and then the Baron blew out on him his fury. He should be torn by wild horses, fed to the bloodhounds, grilled over hot coals; and any other device for leaving this world in an agony was told over to him. Zeyneb did not stir. After his first howl and rage, he only blinked sharply out of his little black eyes and twisted his lips. But when Richard asked the Baron if he had received no letter concerning the attempt at Clermont, the dwarf broke forth in French.

"He has not, Cid Richard, and with good reason. I met your messenger and killed him."

"Killed him!" the word went round the circle with a shiver, through braver hearts than those of the maids; for there was an uncanny light in the hunchback's eye, that made the boldest chary.

"Assuredly," continued Zeyneb, holding up his hands. "I met him on the road, a simple fellow; it was dark; he could not recognize; the dagger passed under the fifth rib; he gave one cry."

"*Maledicte!*" exclaimed Sebastian, crossing himself. "Have we here the very devil in human guise?"

"Be he man or devil," protested Hardouin, with a great oath, "he shall find the pit more joysome than the dungeons of La Haye."

"Pardon," replied Zeyneb, looking about unflinchingly, and speaking very good Languedoc. "You will find you have no power at all. You cannot slay me—"

"Cannot?" flew from Hardouin.

"Truly," was the calm answer. "All things are in the hand of God. Without His will you can do nothing."

"Silence, blasphemer!" thundered Sebastian, smiting the dwarf on the mouth. "Who are you to utter God's name?"

"I?" retorted Zeyneb, a little proudly, holding up his head. "I? Know, Christian, that we Ismaelians are chosen by God Himself to execute His will. Our sovereign here below says to us, 'Do this,' and we do it, knowing that no harm can befall, save as it is foreordained by the Most High."

"Away! Away to the dungeon!" raged Hardouin; "to-morrow you shall have cause to remember your sins!"

Strong hands were on Zeyneb's shoulders, but he almost writhed out of them, and stood before Richard.

"*Ya!* Cid Richard; thrice now have I sought your ending. Well—Allah preserves you! Sometimes death is sweeter than life. Would you have me tell of what befell at Cefalu? I saw your mother die, your brother, your father, your sister—"

"Away!" roared Longsword, "or I shall kill him, and he will escape too mercifully."

The men-at-arms tugged Zeyneb down the dark stairs. Herbert had him very tightly by the scruff.

"*Ai*, my dear fellow," the veteran was croaking, "tell me why you were at La Haye after your adventure at Clermont."

"Because I knew your master would come hither as sure as a dog sniffs out a bone. My lord Iftikhar had said to me, 'See that Richard Longsword troubles no longer,' and I had bowed and

answered, 'Yes, master, on my head.' Therefore I came to Auvergne, and when Allah did not favor, to Provence."

"Where Allah has mightily favored!" chuckled the man-at-arms.

"*Héh*, fellow," grunted a second guard, "I have seen you before lurking about. By the Mass, I wish then I had slit your weasand." And the grasp on Zeyneb tightened.

"I owe you no grudge, gentle Franks," quoth the dwarf, as they pushed back the door of a cell that was all dust and murk. "Allah requite you! Greet Richard Longsword and the right noble Mary Kurkuas; I shall meet both, I trust, in Palestine, whither they wish to go."

"Ha!" growled Herbert, driving him in with a mighty kick. "To-morrow, to-morrow!—Double fetter! Remember your good deeds, if you have any."

And so they left him; yet Herbert, for all his jests, could not shake off the strange horror that smote him when he recalled the dwarf's gleaming black eyes, and that direful laugh.

Richard had gone to Mary, who was lying in the ladies' bower, a long, brightly tapestried chamber, with here and there a tier of saints or knights in stiff, shadeless fresco. The couch lay by the grated window that commanded a broad sweep of the fair land. As he entered, one of the maids rose from beside her mistress, bearing away the silver bowl of lavender water. Mary's long brown hair lay scattered over the silken pillows, the sun making dark gold of every tress. She was pale; but smiling, and very happy.

Richard knelt and spoke not a word, while he put the soft hair to his lips and kissed it. Then he said gently:—

"Ah! sweet life, I feel all unworthy of so great a mercy. And it was you that saved me!"

"I!" cried Mary, starting.

"By St. Michael, yes. For the dagger was aimed at my throat, where the mail did not guard. Had you not seized, I should long since have needed no physician. But it is not this which now gives me fear. Zeyneb is a terrible dwarf. To-morrow he shall have cause to mourn his sins. But if you go with me to Palestine, you go to certain danger. Iftikhar Eddauleh, I learn, is a great man in Syria. Of this Ismaelian brotherhood I know very little; but if their daggers can reach even to France, what is not their might in the East? I may see a day when no ring-shirt may save me. Yet their power I do not fear; for it is no great thing to die, were it I only, and absolved of soul. But think, if in the chance of war or of plotting, you should fall into the hands of Iftikhar! Death once past would be joy for a dear saint like you, whom Our Lord would stand ready to welcome; but a living death—captivity, life-long, to the emir—dear God, forbid the thought! Yet there is danger."

Mary had risen from the couch. She was still very pale; what with her flowing hair, and her bare white neck, Richard had never seen her more beautiful.

"Richard Longsword," said she, slowly, "I have said I wish to do something very great to show how much I love you. Well,—I am a soldier's daughter. Manuel Kurkuas was no mean cavalier in his day, though you frown on us Greeks. My fathers and fathers' fathers have fought back Moslem, and Bulgar, and Persian, and Sclave. I am of their blood. And will you fright me with a 'perhaps'? Let Iftikhar Eddauleh lay his snares, and whisper to his dagger-men; I think Trenchefer"—with a proud glance at the iron figure before her, and the great sword—"and he who wields it a sure bulwark."

"Sweetest of the sweet," said Richard, laying his great hands on her smooth shoulders, "something tells me there may be great sorrow in store. I know not why. God knows I have had grief and chastening enough. Yet I still have dread."

"And I," said Mary, gently, lifting her eyes, "know that so long as Richard Longsword keeps the pure and spotless knight of Holy Church, whatever may befall, I can have no great woe!"

"Ah!" cried the Norman, his eyes meeting hers, "you speak well, pure saint. For without you, the fiends will tear me unceasing, and with you beside I may indeed look to heaven. You shall go; without you I am very full of sin!"

He bent and kissed her. It was the pledge of love, more pure, more deep, than ever had thrilled in him before.

"*Ai*, dear heart," he said, holding her from him that he might see the evening light on her face, "in Sicily I loved you for your bright eyes; but now—I love that in you which is within,—so far within that no *jongleur* may see, to sing its praise."

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That night Baron Hardouin and Herbert slept on the gentle pleasures they had prepared for Zeyneb, the dwarf; but in the morning Aimer the seneschal came to his lord with a face long as a sculptured saint.

"The paynim dwarf!" was his trembling whisper; "he is gone!"

"Gone!" cried Hardouin, dropping the hawk's hood in his hand.

"Truly, my Baron," continued the worthy, "this morning, as we went to the dungeon, behold! Girart, the guard, was stretched on the floor dead, as I am a sinful man!"

"Fellow—fellow—" broke out the nobleman, beginning to quake.

"Art-magic, and direct presence of Satan, it must have been," moaned the seneschal, wringing his hands. "Girart was ever a sleepy knave; yet the infidel had slipped off his fetters. The lock was all pried asunder, and Girart's head beaten in, as though by a bit of iron, while he snored."

"Mary, ever Virgin!" swore the Baron, crossing himself. "Shall the devil go up and down in my own castle? Out, men, boys, varlets, all! scour the country! send riders to all the seigneurs about!"

And so they did, more thoroughly than ever in the camp at Clermont; but again the dwarf had melted out of human ken. True, when the messengers went as far as Marseilles, they heard a vague story that a dark-skinned hunchback had embarked on a merchantman of Cyprus; but even this tale lacked verification, and the simplest and most satisfactory account was that of old Nicole, the gate-keeper's wife, who protested by St. Jude that she had seen two horrible red dogs creeping around the barriers just as she went to bed,—sure sign of the presence of the dreadful devil Cahu, who was on hand to rescue his votary.

Only some days after, a groom found scratched on the stones of the castle's outer wall this inscription in Arabic: "To Cid Richard: three times are not four. There is a dagger that may pierce armor of Andalus. Remember." And below this, the rude sign of a poignard encircled by a noose.

"The token of the Ismaelians," commented Musa, when he read it. "Allah grant that the boast prove as vain as his earlier strokes! Yet I would you were going anywhere but to Syria."

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Day sped into day. The great host of Raymond of Toulouse was preparing to set forth for Italy. The hours of dreaming in the orchard under the ivy-hung castle wall at last saw an end. Musa had received by the latest ship to Marseilles from the East, a long and flattering letter from Afdhal, the vizier of the Fatimite kalif himself. The offer was a notable one, a high emirate in the Egyptian service. There would be fighting in plenty in Tripoli and Ethiopia, not to mention Syria and beyond; for the Cairo government had on foot a great project to break the power of the Abbaside rivals at Bagdad and their Seljouk masters and guardians. Musa brought the letter to Richard and Mary, as the two sat beneath the great trees, each hearing no music save the other's voice. And when he had finished, Richard said calmly: "Yes, brother mine, now at last you must leave us. Yet, please God, you shall see no service in Syria till we have sped our arrow at Jerusalem, for good or ill. Our hopes and hearts go with you; but you must go."

Musa bowed his head; then to Mary: "And you, Brightness of the Greeks, are you bound irrevocably to go to Palestine?"

"I go with my husband," said Mary, simply, looking straight upon him with her frank, dark eyes.

"Then remember this," replied the Spaniard, very gravely, "if at any time—and so Allah wills—I can serve you with wit, or sword, or life, remember I am Richard Longsword's brother, and, therefore, your own. What I said at Palermo, I say once more. And who is so wise that he will say: 'Musa the Moslem shall never again give succor to Mary, the Star of the Christians'?"

"*Hei*," cried Mary, trying to laugh, a little tearfully, "your face is sad as though you saw me in the clutch—" she was about to say, "of Iftikhar," but the shadow of the memory of that scene at Palermo, when the emir's mad breath smote her cheek, passed before her mind, and she was silent.

"Sweet lady," answered the Spaniard, smiling, yet after his melancholy way, "I have scant belief in omens. Men say I am reckless in danger, as though tempting Allah to write my name in the book of doom. Listen: when I was young my father had the astrologers of the king of Seville's court cast my horoscope. And they came to him, saying: 'Lord, your son will be a great cavalier; he shall escape a thousand perils; a thousand enemies shall seek his life; he shall mock them all. Nevertheless he shall perish, and that because of the passion for a maid, whose beauty shall outrun praise by the poet Nawas, whose loveliness shall surpass the houris of Paradise; yet even she in her guilelessness shall undo him.'"

"But you distrust prophecies!" exclaimed the Greek, blushing.

"Even so," continued the Andalusian, stroking his beard; "yet see. If it be true as the astrologers say, I may run to myriad dangers and stand scatheless; for where is the maid who shall put madness in me saving you," with a soft smile; "and are you not my sister, in whose love for my brother I joy?"

"You speak riddles," said Mary, this time casting down her eyes.

"Riddles? There is little profit in the unweaving. Perhaps in Egypt, in that warm, enchanted Nile

country, in some genii-haunted island of the great river where the cataract foams, and the sun makes rainbow ever on the mist,—who knows but that I may find my temptress—my destruction!"

"Ah!" cried Richard, laughing now, "she must indeed be more than human fair, for I think no mortal maid will stir the heart of Musa, son of Abdallah, if—" But he paused, and his eyes were on Mary, who clapped her hand upon his lips. Musa was humming gently a weird Spanish song, then laughed in turn in pure merriment. "See, we almost draw swords, because I will not confess myself covetous of Richard's bride!"

"Silence, or I wed neither!" came from Mary; and perforce the two made her blush no more.

Then before the sober days that awaited them came, there was the wedding. Musa was soon to take ship to Palermo, thence to Egypt; so they hastened the bridal, and Baron Hardouin gave them one which was long the talk of the country-side. Never before was the sky more blue, the air more sweet, the village church bells' pealing merrier. A hundred guests from far and near; amongst them Counts Raymond and Gaston, ridden over from Orange. A noble procession it was to the church, the *jongleurs* leading in their brightest motley; the bride all in violet silk, gold lace and ermine at her fair throat; on her hair a great crown of roses red as her own red lips; behind pranced Rollo, bearing his lord on an ivory saddle; then all the guests, the great ladies crowned with gold; and flowers upon every neck, upon the beasts, upon the roadway; till the throng came to the church porch, where Sebastian stood to greet them.

In his hands was a book, and on it a little silver ring. Mary stood before the priest, and Richard Longsword at her side. Her eyes were cast down—"She has neither father nor mother to give her away, ah! dear lady," all the women were lamenting. But Baron Hardouin advanced to her, took her hand in his, laid it in the hand of the Norman; and the latter—the words coming from his very soul—repeated the great vow: "Forever I swear it, by God's strength and my strength; in health or in sickness, I promise to guard her." Then Sebastian took the ring: he said a little prayer over it, and gave to Richard; and Richard placed it on three fingers in succession of the little hand that lay in his. "In the name of the Father!"—then, "of the Son!"—then, "of the Holy Ghost!" And on that third finger the ring should abide till life was sped. As it slipped to its place, the women gave a little laugh and cry, "Good omen! it glides easily! She will be a peaceful bride!" For when the ring stuck fast, there was foreboding of shrewings and sorrow.

Then into the church—dim, awesome; two candles on the altar; a cloud of incense; a vast company still pressing about with curious whisperings. In the gray nave they knelt for the benediction; distant, mysterious as from another world, "May God bless you, and show Himself favorable unto you, your bodies and your souls." Then they received the host at the altar; and Richard, as was appointed, in the sight of a thousand, with a great crucifix above and Christ Himself in the golden dove beneath the altar, took Mary in his arms, and gave her the kiss of peace—the peace of the love that may not die in earth or in heaven.

This over, back to the castle, the trumpets making the azure quake; banners on every house; flowers rained upon the bride; her black mule treading a scarlet carpet. All shouted, "Joy, joy and long life to the noble Lady of St. Julien! Joy to the valiant Baron! Joy to both!" So there were fêtes and tournaments eight days long, as the custom was. Mary and Richard went to their wedding mass, and during the service the bride, as did all good brides, they told her, made vows to obey her lord, to call him "Monsire," or, better, the good Latin "*Domine*." But she straightway disproved this promise, and mocked the great De St. Julien to his face.

On the ninth day Musa said farewell. Richard and Mary rode forth with him for a long way, to see him well towards Marseilles. Neither he nor Richard spoke the word nearest their hearts,—"What will befall the soul of my brother?" But they had many things to say, of when the Crusade should be over, and Moslem and Christian might be friends at least in this world. But that hour seemed very far away.

At last they came to the fork, and the two could go no farther. Musa turned to bid farewell. "Remember," said he, in his musical Spanish Arabic, "remember the mercy of Allah surpasses all human mercy. We are all in the hollow of His hand; Christian and Moslem alike in His keeping. By His will we shall meet, and naught shall sever."

"Amen!" said Richard, looking down. They had all dismounted. Without speaking, he cast his arms about Musa, and gave him a close embrace. And when the two stood apart, the Spaniard's eyes rested on Mary, then on Longsword. The Norman smiled and nodded. "Are you not my sister?" said Musa, simply. And he laid his hands upon her arms, and kissed her forehead, while she resisted not, nor even blushed. Only her long lashes were bright, when she answered:—

"Yes, my brother, my heart is very full. I cannot speak all the things I feel."

Musa swung into his saddle; the men-at-arms of Hardouin who were to escort him to Marseilles cantered after. They saw the Spaniard climb a hillock; just at the curve he gave one sweep of the hand—was gone. Mary laid her head on Richard's shoulder, and spoke nothing for a long time. Then they rode to La Haye together, and neither had heart for idle speech.

At the castle gate Sebastian met them, his face—so far as he ever suffered it—twisted with a smile.

"Glory to St. Raphael! The unbeliever is departed!"

"Musa is gone," answered Richard, soberly.

"Praises to God! the devil hath reclaimed his own! the lake of unquenchable fire—"

But he spoke no more. Richard had knotted his fist and with one buffet felled the priest, so that he did not speak for a good while; and when he did, Mary observed that never by word or deed did he recall the Spaniard.

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# CHAPTER XXIII

## HOW IFTIKHAR'S MESSENGER RETURNED

It was the twelfth day of the sacred month Ramadan, in the year of the flight of the Prophet four hundred and ninety,—according to the Christian reckoning in the month of August, one thousand and ninety-six,—that Iftikhar Eddauleh sat over his sherbet in the palace El Halebah, which is by the Syrian city of Aleppo. Now good Moslems were not presumed to enjoy food or drink from rise to set of sun during the sacred month, therefore the grand prior of the Ismaelians sat shaded on the *liwan*, a raised hall opening off the great court of the palace. Here, with the door covered by Indian tapestries, and with silken carpets of Kerman deadening the footfalls of each soft-stepping Persian slave, the great man could lie upon his purple couch, and let his eye rove from the bright, inlaid stones of the alabaster walls to the ceiling beams of gilded teak. Without the sun beat hot, the parching south wind from the desert swept sand-dust in the eyes of man and beast; but within all was cool, darkened, fragrant with frankincense from the smouldering brazier.

Iftikhar was in that mood of sleepy indolence to which men wonted to a life of restless action are often prone. He was clad only in a loose under-mantle of green cotton; and while he dozed a dark-eyed maid of Dekkan was bathing his feet with perfumed water from a porcelain basin. A second maid stood by the couch, and often, as the master languidly held out his cup, refilled it with the sweet rose sherbet from a brass cooler of snow. Iftikhar drank again, and again, speaking not a word; till at last the first Hindoo, having borne away the bowl, stood at his head with a great fan of bright feathers. So far as speech or expression was in question, his ministers might have been moving statues, so noiseless, so mechanical, was every action.

Presently Iftikhar began communing with himself, as was his wont, half aloud. "One year in Syria; *Wallah!* truly if prosperity is not my destiny, all the jinns deceive. I have been to Alamont, the 'Vulture's Nest,' have seen Hassan ben-Sabah, Lord of the Ismaelians, and all the 'devoted' have been bidden to obey my word as they would the 'Cid of the Mountain.' At my nod ten thousand daggers flash, ten thousand riders go forth. Let emir or sultan offend:—he lies down on his bed, his memlouks about; he awakes—in paradise; for in all Islam who may escape our daggers? *Mashallah!*—let others boast; what may not I, Iftikhar, accomplish? I, who was left a foundling in the great Cairo mosque El-Azhar, and was reared by the compassionate Imam Abdul Aziz? Power, riches, glory—there shall be no bound to my fortune!"

The Egyptian leaped up and began to pace the floor.

"Much yet to do," ran he on; "I have Hassan Sabah's pledge that I shall be his successor. Every barrier must be plucked down betwixt the Ismaelians and empire over all Islam, such as Harun or Mansur never held. 'All is permitted, naught feared,'—such is our watchword, taught the initiated at the grand lodge in Cairo. Let him who stands in our way be snuffed out like a rushlight,—Barkyarok the arch-sultan, the Bagdad kalif, who is Barkyarok's puppet—all—all!"

As the Egyptian spoke, a huge negro, shining with great earrings, and, save for a red cincture, clothed only in his ebony, glided from behind the curtained door. In his hand was a naked cimeter of startling length. Never a word he said, but only pointed with his weapon to the passage, then salaamed.

"The dervish Kerbogha?" asked Iftikhar, stopping his pacings.

The negro, who was a mute, only bowed almost to the floor.

"Bid him enter." The giant salaamed a third time, and was gone. An instant later a stranger entered. His robe was spotless white, but the shoes and belt were red. He was a man just in the turn of life, with a powerful military frame, the nose of a hawk, and a hawk's keen eye; a grizzled beard, very thick, that swept his breast; his head crowned with a peaked felt hat, also white. The sun had long since tanned his skin to a rich bronze; there were scars on cheeks, forehead, hands. He strode with the springing step of one who loved hardship for hardship's sake; and no second glance was needed to tell that power and command were second nature.

Iftikhar bowed very ceremoniously, thrusting one hand in his bosom, and the stranger doing the like, while the formula was exchanged: "Peace be on you." "On you be peace, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings."

Then the Egyptian bade the Hindoos bring new water and sherbet. The stranger flung himself upon the divan, and words flew fast.

"You have been to Antioch?" asked Iftikhar.

"I have," replied Kerbogha,—for such was the new comer's name. "Yaghi-Sian is willing to link hands with us. His pride has been humbled mightily since he attacked your friend Redouan, lord of Aleppo, and was defeated. Now he sees that only by joining the Ismaelians can he hope for success."

"And you promised—?"

"That if the plans of Hassan Sabah fail not, we shall have the puppet kalif, Mustazhir, and his master, the arch-sultan Barkyarok, at our mercy in two years. Then each prince who is of our party shall divide the spoils, and rule every one in his own land, sending some tribute to Alamont in sign of fealty to the order. I have engaged, you will warn Redouan, that Yaghi-Sian is not to be attacked; and if he refuse, let him remember how our daggers found Nizam ul-Mulk, the great vizier. To-day I am at Aleppo, to-morrow I go to Mosul, thence to Alamont to tell my tale to Hassan Sabah."

Whereupon Iftikhar replied, while the slaves bathed Kerbogha's feet:—

"I see all goes well. The Seljouk power declines since the death of Malek Shah. Yet Barkyarok is not to be despised; he can still summon the Turkish hordes. The 'devoted' cannot do all. The dagger throws down many thrones, raises none. To strike kalif and sultan we need more—an army—myriads; how gather it? A whisper at Ispahan, 'Kerbogha is of the Ismaelians; he moves disguised as a dervish to seduce the emirs.' How long then does the arch-sultan delay to send the bowstring?"

Kerbogha set down his sherbet cup and laughed dryly.

"*Wallah*, can one always play at backgammon,[1] and win? So in life; fortune and skill must go together. Let us play our game, and take what Allah sends without a quiver."

"An army, an army; where an army, to break the arch-sultan's might?" Iftikhar was repeating, when the curtain was thrust away. The giant negro was salaaming again.

"Another stranger?"

The mute nodded.

"Can he be trusted?" the second question from Kerbogha.

A second nod. "Let him come in."

And the curtains gave way for none other than the dwarf Zeyneb, travel-stained, with a ragged beard and a very tattered costume. At sight of his master and Kerbogha, the dwarf bowed to the rugs, then laid his hand on lips and forehead. At last Iftikhar spoke:—

"You come from Frankland?"

"I have been amongst the Franks, lord, as you deigned to command."

"And Richard Longsword, whom my soul hates?" came eagerly.

The dwarf looked his master full in the eye.

"He still lives, and to my knowledge prospers."

"Child of Eblees the Devil, have you failed yet again? at Palermo, at Cefalu, and now in France?" And Iftikhar put forth his hand for the ivory staff that lay by the divan. "Sluggard, an hundred strokes on your bare heels for this!"

The dwarf still did not flinch.

"Master, once at Clermont where the Frankish lords were all gathered to prepare for taking Jerusalem, I stabbed at him through the walls of his tent; some jinn prompted him to wear a Valencia hauberk. Barely I made away. Again in Provence, when he stood by the Star of the Greeks, I would have stricken him in her arms; but that chain shirt, enchanted doubtless, turned the blow. I was cast into a dungeon, and only because Allah granted that I should know how to pick loose fetters, and because He shed sleep upon my guard, did I escape being food for dogs. Therefore, if I deserve stripes, lay on; yet my small wit could do no more. The hand of Allah protects Richard Longsword."

Iftikhar controlled himself by no common effort.

"You have ever been a trusty slave, Zeyneb; no man may contend against the Most High. I do wrong to be angry. Depart, and when refreshed, return and tell all; of the Star of the Greeks and of the commotions amongst the Franks; for of these last the Lord Kerbogha will be glad to hear."

But as Zeyneb was bowing himself out of the *liwan*, a low, weird song stole from the chambers within; now softly rising as the breeze, now mounting shriller, shriller, till the gilded stalactites trembled, and the whole hall throbbed with the wailing melody, then fainter, dying like the retreating wind. Again and again the three heard the wild song rise, throb, fall, and a strange awe spread over them, as if more than mortal accents drifted with the note.

"The song of Morgiana," said Iftikhar, dropping his eyes; "she is fallen in her trance. My Lord Kerbogha, let us go to her. For her eyes now see things hid to all save Allah!"

The three tiptoed down a long, dark way, Zeyneb following as a matter of course. At the end was a door where stood a second eunuch, a tall, beardless, ebony skeleton, with naked sabre held before him. The black knelt while his master passed. Iftikhar knocked thrice at the door; it turned on its pivots slowly, noiselessly, by some unseen power. As the three stepped within, they were nigh dazzled by the intense white light. They were in a court surrounded by a two-storied arcade, the delicate columns, the fantastic capitals, fretwork, and panelling, all in alabaster and marble. Below, the eye wandered over gilt mosaics, winding scroll into scroll, till sight grew mazed and weary. In the centre of the court sprang a tall silver pipe, embossed with strange figures, discharging itself aloft in a fine cool spray that drifted downward on all beneath. Perfume mingled with the spray, and what with the blinding light, shot through the mist, and the wandering song which ever grew nearer, sense lost itself as amid an enchanter's spell. Iftikhar led past the fountain, into the arcade; and in the shadows apart from the misty outer air a brazier was smouldering, and a heavy fragrance rose with the gray smoke. Still the song, very loud now, but no word heard clearly. Iftikhar spoke.

"Morgiana!" And Kerbogha saw sitting in the dark niche, behind the brazier, a woman, her head thrown back, drinking in the rising vapor. She was dressed only in a violet robe that fell from throat to feet. There was a girdle of silver chain-work; no sleeves; arms, neck, face, all bare; the skin, not so dark as of most Eastern women, rather a fine olive. Black and slightly waving was the long hair that tossed heedlessly over the shoulders. In the shadow Kerbogha could only see that the face presented a profile of marvellous symmetry, and the eyes—wonder of wonders,—now flashing with a half-drunken fire—were steel-blue. As Iftikhar spoke, the woman tossed her head, but continued the song. They heard her words:—

"Armies advancing; the vultures appearing,
Wheel for their prey.
Now the hosts mingle, a thousand blades flashing;
Hid is the day
By the twittering arrows; as, quaking like aspen,
The warring hosts sway!"

"Morgiana!" again Iftikhar commanded. The song sank into wild moanings, dimmer, dimmer,—was gone. The strange singer now spoke, yet still in wild rhythm:—

"Wherefore, man, do you come to me, the blue-eyed maid of Yemen! See, the smoke-drug is strong; let me drink, drink, drink, and tread beyond the stars."

"Moon of the Arabs," spoke Iftikhar, softly, as though stepping delicately, "I heard your song; the power of the drug is upon you. I would have you speak before me and the Lord Kerbogha. Make known to us the way of the jinns. Reveal—is it written in the smoke that Barkyarok perish? that the Master of the Devoted be hailed Commander of the Faithful in Bagdad?"

The eye of the maiden was wandering, now on Zeyneb, now on Kerbogha—a long silence, then of a sudden:—

"My sight is dim; I see nothing; the smoke weaves no picture; I cannot see the sultan; my ears hear the question, my eyes are blind."

"Wait," whispered Iftikhar to Kerbogha, who, man of war that he was, felt the very air awe-laden.

Morgiana bent over the brazier, blew the smouldering leaves; again the smoke rose thickly. Twice she breathed it deep; when she raised her head, the fire glittered once more in her eyes.

"Behold! behold!" and she half started from the niche.

Iftikhar hung on each word. She continued, first slowly, then faster, faster, finally running in half song, half chant; arising the meantime with outstretched arms, shaking the flowing tresses as she swayed:—

"Again armies; tens of thousands, horseman and footman, in the armor of the Franks, the red cross of Issa upon their breasts; another host; Arab, Seljouk; tens of thousands; battle. Allah can number the slain, not man; death, death upon every wind!" She swayed still more wildly, as if mastered by the vapor.

"One face I see, the Greek, the Greek, Mary Kurkuas. She is struggling—in vain; a mighty arm holds her; a great warrior bears her. Allah! I know him; I would not tell his name!" But Iftikhar had broken forth almost sternly:—

"Speak, speak, woman! Who is the warrior you see against the smoke?" The words turned the trend of the spell. Morgiana moved more gently as she repeated in quick rhythm:—

"Now the smoke weaveth in mystical figure;
I see the hosts marching,
I see the hosts warring,
I see the strife swaying
Like wrestling swift winds!

"'Twixt Frankland and Eastland the conflict sore wageth;
I see the Greek flower transported beside thee,
Thine eyes,—they behold her;

Thy arms,—they enfold her;
Thy heart is as flame!—"

"*Allah akhbar!*" burst from Iftikhar, starting. And at the cry, Morgiana had given another, and fell so suddenly that only a quick snatch by Zeyneb saved her from striking the brazier. She was speechless, pallid, when they lifted her; Kerbogha would have declared her dead. But Iftikhar drew from his bosom a crystal vial, in which glowed a liquor red as vermilion. Three drops he laid upon her lips; and lo, there was a flush of color, and in a moment the woman was sitting upon the rugs and glancing at them with shy, scared eyes. Iftikhar beckoned to Kerbogha, who bowed and withdrew; but Zeyneb remained. All the glitter and madness had passed from Morgiana's face. Zeyneb knelt and kissed her hand, which lay limp within his own.

"You see I have returned safe from my long journey, Moon of Yemen; can you wish me no joy?"

The languid eyes lighted a little.

"Allah is merciful; I am very weary." This last to Iftikhar.

"Verily," cried the Egyptian, "you should not make the magic smoke; see, you are frail as a lily of Damascus; a sigh of the south wind would destroy you. Have I not forbidden it?"

"Lord," replied the lady, raising her eyes, now touched with a soft, sweet fire, "the hour came to me to-day. As the bird must fly north in springtime, so must I drink the hemp smoke, when the genii bid, or die. Ah, lord—I saw in the smoke shapes—terrible shapes—they are gone; the shadow still hangs over me; yet I know this—woe, woe, woe, awaits,—for you, for Zeyneb, for me. I am sad; my heart is torn."

Iftikhar knelt beside the divan, and looked into her face.

"Life of my own!" said he, half passionately, "why sad? What is the desire? A palace—can any be more fair than El Halebah? Jewels, robes?—the riches of Aleppo are yours. Servants?—a hundred maids of Khorassan and Fars and Ind are your ministers, most beautiful of the daughters of men, save as you outshine. The pang? The wish? Your will is law to me, and to all the 'devoted' of Syria."

But Morgiana turned away her head.

"Lord," said she, half bitterly, "will palace, and riches, and slaves bind up a bruised heart? Is gold a cordial for the soul? Does the dagger say, 'I am sovereign physician'?"

"Riddles—" commented Iftikhar, still kneeling.

Morgiana flushed; there was a flash in her eyes now, but not of softness or delirium. "It is past," cried she, bending her henna-dyed hand across her brow, as if to drive away a vapor. "The vision is gone. But I see—O Iftikhar, whom I have loved,—soul of my soul,—what do I not see! I see your love for me, true, and pure, and strong, when you bought me and Zeyneb, my brother, at the slave market in Damascus. And when we were with you in Sicily, and you served amongst the Christians, what nest of the wood-thrush more joyous than our home at Palermo? As you won honor after honor, and Christian and Moslem lauded you, was your gladness greater than mine? Then came the day when you listened to the cursed envoys of Hassan Sabah, and sold yourself to this fiend's brotherhood, who live by the dagger of stealth, and not by the sword of manhood,—that was the first sorrow. And then—" she hesitated, but drove on, and her eyes flamed yet fiercer—"came that hour when the old Kurkuas and his daughter came to Palermo,—and you set eyes on her Greek beauty. I have seen her; she is fair, I own it—and your heart grew chill toward me. Me you left in the harem, with a few fawning, glozing words, and went about sighing, dreaming of the Greek; and my joy was at end. Almost, even then, you would have possessed her; but I was crafty beyond you and Zeyneb. Remember the hour in the Palace of the Diadem, when Musa the Spaniard saw you with your arms—"

"As Allah lives!" thundered Iftikhar, leaping up, "how knew you this? No more—witch, sorceress!"

"Rage as you will!" tossed forth Morgiana, throwing back her head; "it was I that warned Musa. Ah! you both are weak—weak, though you vaunt yourself so strong."

Iftikhar was foaming; his fury was terrible. But Morgiana never quivered. "So you fled Sicily after devising murder in vain. Then the deed at Cefalu—and that accursed child Eleanor still remains to drive me wild with her moans and her sorrow. Again this Zeyneb, worthy brother, returns from Frankland. He has failed. I saw Richard Longsword's form in the smoke, and the smoke shows only the living. But he and Mary Kurkuas will come,—come with the Frankish hordes,—and then! Woe to you and woe to me, if your heart remember her beauty!"

"And the smoke mist says true, fair sister," quoth Zeyneb, naught abashed. "Richard Longsword goes to Jerusalem, and with him Mary Kurkuas, wedded, though not yet truly his wife; so I heard from her own lips." And he darted a swift glance at his master.

"Lord, lord!" cried Morgiana, suddenly falling on the pavement. "Do not listen! forget! forget! Put her from your heart! See! I embrace your knees, I kiss your feet. By Allah the Great and His prophet, I conjure you. She loves you not. I would die for you with a laugh on my lips. Oh, the heart of Zeyneb my brother is black, as his body misshapen! Death is woven for us all, if you continue this quest. Remember our love, our joy,—the little babe that died in Palermo. Have I ever deceived? If you remember Mary the Greek, I say it, 'Woe, woe for us all!'"

But the jinns of a headlong passion had mastery of Iftikhar that day. He saw Morgiana of Yemen at his feet; but he saw another—that had been before his eyes day and night since that hour in Palermo when Mary Kurkuas's lips had been so near his own.

"Eblees seize you, woman!" came from his throat; and he spurned her. Morgiana said not a word; without a groan she arose, and sat on the divan, looking upon him tearlessly. Iftikhar brattled forth a forced laugh. "*Ya*, Zeyneb, let us go back to Kerbogha. Your sister is all tears and foreboding to-day. We must not let her sit over the hemp again." And with that the two left the white court and returned to the *liwan*, where the Prince of Mosul awaited them. The two chiefs of the Ismaelians listened long to the tales Zeyneb had to tell of the assembling of the Franks. Then Iftikhar cried:—

"Glory to Allah! The fish drift into the net!"

"I do not understand, my lord," said the dwarf.

"I know these Christians," the chief replied. "Lions in battle, but beast-strength will not win Jerusalem. Under cover of destroying them, we can gather a mighty host, unsuspected by Barkyarok. When they are blotted out, we take the sultan and kalif unawares! The Most High delivers the empire into the hands of the Ismaelians. Is it not so, Kerbogha?"

And the prince called Allah to witness that their troubles were at an end; that three years should see them masters of all Islam. Only the dwarf shook his head, and when questioned, replied, "Lords, you are mighty men-of-war; yet this I say, 'You will fail.'"

"And wherefore?" came from Kerbogha.

"Because I have been among the Franks, and there is a fire burning in their hearts that a thousand leagues of deserts cannot blast, nor ten myriad sword-hands quench, nor all your Ismaelians' daggers."

"You, too, prate evil, like your cursed sister!" cried Iftikhar. Then he asked Zeyneb very carefully as to the route likely to be taken by the Crusaders, the time of their arrival in Asia, and the like. After that he sent for a certain Eybek, one of the trustiest and most skilful of the "devoted," and dismissed him with this last command:—

"But Richard Longsword slay not. In my own time will I deal with him, man to man. Rather let him live, and eat his pangs as I have eaten mine, and know that I have borne away his prize."

FOOTNOTE:

[1] Arab name: Tāwulah.

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# CHAPTER XXIV

## HOW THEY SLEW THE FIRST INFIDEL

Richard and Mary made the toilsome journey across Lombardy and Dalmatia with trials enough to expiate many sins, before Count Raymond's host reached Constantinople. There also Emperor Alexius gave the Crusaders chill greeting, and earned many curses. Yet when Richard saw the riches of the "City guarded of God," and heard how the first hordes, led by Peter the Hermit and Walter Lackpenny, had lighted like locusts on its suburbs, and had sacked palace and church as though despoiling very infidels, Longsword did not marvel that Alexius thought needful to deal warily with later comers. Here for the first time he learned the fate of the first peasant hordes,—how, to save his city from ruin, Alexius had ferried them across the Bosphorus. Left then to the Turks' tender mercies, the Sultan of Nicæa had pounced upon them with his light cavalry and cut them short in their sins. Peter the Hermit had escaped to Constantinople; his followers had perished almost to a man; and so began the great outpouring of life-blood in the long agony of the Crusade.

Small wonder Alexius Comnenus saw in his later guests doubtful friends or worse! Or that with all his matchless guile he sought pledges from them, that their coming might bring blessing rather than destruction to his empire; for the blunt Franks openly swore that the schismatic Greeks were but one degree better than Moslems. So day followed day of intrigue and lie-giving; the Augustus bickering and haggling with Raymond, Godfrey, and the other Latin chiefs. In the meantime Richard had time to learn the marvels of this great city of the Cæsars. What city like it! Palermo had not one tithe its wealth. Its walls might mock all the chivalry of France. Where in the West was one building so notable as were a score along the Mesa, the great street from the "Golden Gate" to the "Sacred Palace"? Everywhere Corinthian columns, veined marbles, bronzes that nigh seemed breathing, palaces, churches a hundred and more; great *fora* where swelled a mighty traffic; merchants whose shops boasted the luxurious wares of Persia, China, Ind; and multitudes on every street—Greek, Bulgar, Russian, Armenian, Jew. To Richard the scene was for long an enchanted confusion; and he marvelled to see how to Mary the pomp and bustle alike came as the common course of life. When he rode at her side through the humming city, or felt

the light bark spring under the oar, as they shot up the Golden Horn or toward Chrysopolis, he was fain to question how any one here born and bred could find joy in coarser, wilder Frankland.

Together the two had been in St. Sophia, monarch of churches, had seen the great dome swimming on its sea of light above its forty windows; had heard the choir sing as angels the praise of "Mary, God-bearer, Giver of Victory." And Richard's soul had been almost carried aloft by the throb of the stately service. Again in the street, he said: "Dear life, I feel as if I were but just plucked down from heaven. What have I done that you love me so; that you can so cheerfully leave all this, and dwell with me in our rude, bare West?" And Mary, as she rode beside him, answered, smiling: "Why? And can one live forever in the great church, and eat and drink music? Is all life a rowing from Chalcedon to Prinkipo? Ah, Richard, could I be happy to spend my days after the manner of these ladies of Constantinople,—watched like cats by sleek eunuchs, and kept close that our masters may stroke us? Is it better to listen to the music of St. Sophia and to read Sophocles and Herodotus; or to ride, hawk on fist, over the merry country with you at my side, to feel the wild wind tossing my hair, to sniff the breeze in the free woods, and think how sweet a thing is life?"

"Then you are true Frank at heart!" laughed her husband, "despite your Greek name and learning."

"I am the wife of Richard de St. Julien," answered she, very seriously; "and he is a mighty baron of France."

So they viewed the great city through each other's eyes, and Richard grew humble as he saw how much wit heaven had granted those Greeks he once despised. At last the negotiating ended; the Emperor came down from his dignity; the princes swore him a loose manner of fealty; Bohemond of Tarentum, the most covetous of the chiefs, abated his demands. On a day never to be forgotten, the imperial galleys bore the host across the narrow strait. "Asia!" the cry of each knight as he kissed the very soil; at last they were fairly set to go to Jerusalem!

And now the all-reigning desire was to slay infidels. Not many leagues away lay a great paynim stronghold, Nicæa, capital of Kilidge Arslan, sultan of Roum,—with fighting promised of a right knightly kind. Merry the music, and merrier the hearts of the hundred thousands, that May season, as the host swept in flashing steel and unsoiled bleaunts past old Nicomedia under the blue Bithynian sky, the hills all bright and green in springtime glory.

"Sure, Our Lord is with us!" cried Richard. "I feel a giant's strength!" But Sebastian plodded on with bowed head. "Boast not," was the reply; "for our sins we all may yet be sorely chastened."

"But is not God on our side, father?"

"Yes, truly; but it shall be even as with the band of Gideon. Of thirty and two thousand there were left to fall on the Midianites three hundred; and to be among these, may we be worthy!"

At this Richard laughed, looking off to the long lines of bright hauberks and forests of lances, far as the eye could reach; yet he had not laughed, had he known that of the six hundred thousand of fighting-men that crossed into Asia, scarce fifty thousand were to see with mortal eye the Holy City. But for the moment the skies seemed very bright, and the shadows commenced creeping only when forth from the forest stole ragged wretches, nigh starving, refugees from Peter the Hermit's rout. These told how Kilidge Arslan had slaughtered man, woman, and child, when he stormed the camp of Walter Lackpenny. Then, when the host advanced a little farther, they came to a wide heap of bones, more than could be counted, bleaching in the sun, and the crows still a black cloud above; for here had been the first battle and the first defeat. Loud rose the oaths and threats of vengeance from peasant and baron; the lines advanced in closer array, the music lessened, every lance was ready; for now at last they were treading on the soil of the infidel.

Richard Longsword rode with the three thousand pioneers that Duke Godfrey sent ahead to plant crosses by the wayside as guides to the hosts who came after. Thus it befell, the saints granted that he should be among the first knights to set eyes on the unbelievers. With Prince Tancred, Bohemond's valiant nephew,—who had not forgotten the lists at Palermo,—Richard saw a band of horsemen whizzing ahead, and, lo, as the Christian riders drew near, the Turks' little crooked bows began spitting out barbed arrows, which glanced harmlessly on the chain mail, but now and then wounded a horse. "Rash infidels,—singled out doubtless by Satan for destruction,"—so Prince Tancred cried when he couched his lance; and away went the whole squadron of knights. The Seljouks wheeled like lightning, and were off; their bony Tartar horses flew madly under the spur, while the men, bending dexterously in their saddles, launched their shafts. But destruction was upon them; the Christians rode them down one after another; some were lanced, some taken; a few escaped, howling in a truly devilish fashion, to tell the tale to their fellow-unbelievers. It had been so easy for the cavaliers, that they rallied one another on the prowess of the day.

"Ha! De St. Julien," Tancred would cry,—"how many paladins have you slain?" And Richard would answer, "As many as you, fair lord; but who is this grand soldan you have strapped to your stirrup? Will he fetch a thousand byzants' ransom?"

They brought the luckless prisoners into camp, and scarce knew what to do with them. Shock-headed, small-eyed fellows they were,—all bones, teeth, and sinew. None could speak their language. Raymond of Agiles, worthy chaplain, stood before them with a crucifix, and discoursed an hour long in Latin on the perilous state of their souls, hoping that some word of the truth

might lodge in their hearts through a miracle of grace. But the wretches only blinked out of their little eyes, and never moved a muscle nor gave a sign on their stolid faces. Theroulde advised that, following Charlemagne's precept, they should be put to death.

> "None of the Moslems did remain
> But had turned Christian, or else was slain!"

prattled he, jauntily; but Sebastian counselled that due time for repentance should not be denied them. "Let them be as the men of Gibeon," he recommended, "hewers of wood and drawers of water." So the poor Turks were suffered to live, and Mary Kurkuas sent one of her maids to the tent where they lay bound, with cordials for such as were wounded. Many good Christians frowned at this, and Count Pons of Balazan hinted to Richard he would do well to rebuke his wife; "it was not seemly to have pity on God's enemies." But Richard belched out a great oath. "By St. Michael, who saveth from peril, he who bids me rebuke the Baroness de St. Julien shall walk up the length of Trenchefer!" and Count Pons, who was a discreet man, had to plead no desire for a quarrel, remembering the fate of the Valmonts.

Thus tamely the Holy War began; but on the sixth of May the army found itself under the walls of Nicæa—an infidel city now, but forever sacred to Christians, since here had been framed the great Creed. The knights laughed at sight of its lofty battlements, as promising doughty fighting, and sat down for the siege, awaiting the coming of Raymond from Constantinople. While the siege-engines made the firm rock quake with the attack, Richard and the other barons rode forth into the country seeking adventure; for Kilidge Arslan was sending down his light riders from the hills, and there was steady skirmishing. Each morning as Richard went abroad he looked back at the face of Mary—the lips smiling, but not the eyes; and each evening when Rollo lumbered wearily homeward—perhaps with his lord's target battered deeply—there would be laughter, kisses, and merry talk, as they sat before the camp-fire, saw the red flames weaving pictures, and Longsword told of the brave deeds of the day.

So sped two weeks around Nicæa, and on a Friday Richard sallied forth in company with Bohemond and Tancred, who led the scouting party. As their troops climbed the foothills that lay south of the city, the eagle eyes of Tancred lit upon three men who were stealing from grove to grove, as if wishing anything rather than to be seen. Then there was a headlong race among the knights to see which would strike first, and Rollo tossed out his great hoofs and led them all. Thus Richard caught the three just as they were plunging in a thicket, and bade them stand and yield. One indeed made a bold break for freedom, but just as he dashed among the trees, Tancred's javelin smote him, and his fellows held up their hands and howled for quarter. When the two were fairly on the way back to camp Richard observed that one was a Seljouk, but the other—a brown, black-eyed, wiry-limbed fellow—cried out in Arabic when addressed: "Ah, Christ be praised! I am amongst Christians; mercy, kind lord, on a fellow-believer,—release these bands!" "Christian?" protested Richard, still holding the cord knotted round the prisoner's hands.

"I call Our Lord to witness," exclaimed the captive, "I am a baptized Christian of Syria, and have endured captivity and persecution for the sake of the Gospel;" and at this he cast down his eyes and began to sigh.

"Our Lady pity you!" cried all the knights, touched to the quick instantly; "and how came you with these two infidels?"

"Ah! noble lords," declared the Arab, a great tear on each cheek, "I have been long captive among the unbelievers, the slave of Kilidge Arslan. Know that on Sunday the Sultan will fall upon you with all his host, and we three are messengers sent to bear the tidings into the city through your lines."

"Fellow! fellow!" began Tancred, pricking up his ears, "a Christian, and yet the private messenger of the infidels?"

"Yes, Cid," was the ready answer, "I have, alas!"—another great sigh—"been false to my faith and apostatized; yet I said in my heart, 'Let me go with these messengers, and by betraying them to the Franks, undo my own sin and gain liberty among Christian people.'"

"By St. Theodore," swore Tancred, "you speak smoothly; if it is as you say, you shall not go unrewarded, and Bishop Adhemar shall give you full absolution."

"Even so, Cid," replied the Arab, whose hands Richard had set at liberty, but who made no effort to fly. "Put to torture this Turk, my companion; he will confess all that I have told."

"You are a stout-limbed varlet," commented Bohemond, the sly-eyed Prince of Tarentum; "you shall serve with me in my suite as guide and interpreter, for language and country you must know well." But the Arab only bowed, and answered:—

"My lord is a fountain of generosity, yet it is my desire to seek service with the husband of that very noble lady the Princess Mary Kurkuas, who it is told is the great emir, Richard Longsword."

"St. Michael," burst out Richard, "I am he! Yet why do you call my wife by name?"

The stranger salaamed almost to the dust.

"God is gracious beyond my sins in granting so noble a lord as husband of the daughter of my dear master. Know that fifteen years past, before the Moslems took Antioch, I was house-servant

to Manuel Kurkuas, 'domestic' of Syria. Oftentimes have I held the very august princess on my knee, and even in her childhood all declared she was of beauty passing St. Thecla."

Richard had only to hear one praise Mary Kurkuas to become that man's friend straightway. And he put his hand on the hilt of Trenchefer, taking oath upon the relics that if the stranger, who called himself Hossein, told an honest tale, he should never lack a patron. Only Tancred, viewing the Arab with his sea-green eyes, was heard to remark, "This fellow invokes the saints glibly, but his faith has more profession in it than is to my liking."

However, when they brought the two before Duke Godfrey and threatened the Turk with torture, he broke down and told the interpreter a tale exactly like Hossein's—that Kilidge Arslan waited in the mountains with a great host and would fall on the besiegers the next day. So the Arab's credit was high when Richard brought him to the tent of his wife. Hossein cast one glance upon her, and fell upon his knees, kissing her robe and crying:—

"Praises, praises to St. John of Damascus! I behold the daughter of my beloved lord Manuel, and God has verily clothed her as an angel of light!"

"Good man," said the Greek, a little confused, "I know you not. When have you served my father?"

"O preëminently august lady!" broke forth the Arab again. "Do you not remember Hossein, who was in the Cæsar Manuel's palace at Antioch? How he told you the tales of his people and sang you the wondrous song of Antar, and the stories of the jinns and the spirits of the air?"

"I was indeed in Antioch when my father ruled the city, but I was very young. I recall nothing," replied Mary.

"Alas! I had hopes your memory had not failed," declared Hossein, still kneeling; "yet it is true, O noblest of the Greeks, you were very young. Enough; my devotion can repay the daughter what I owe to the father. For the most excellent Cæsar saved me from cruel death at the hands of the infidels, my fellow-countrymen."

"You are an honorable man," said the lady, touched at his demonstration, "to discharge a debt incurred so long ago. Perhaps"—and she ran over all her early girlhood in her memory—"I recall something of you, yet my father had many servants. I crave pardon if I forget. And how have you fared all this while among the Turks?"

Whereupon Hossein flew into the most pitiful tale as to his life of captivity and persecution, so that the lady's eyes grew wet, and her heart right sore.

"Good Christian," said she, at last, "surely you have endured much for your faith. God grant that under like persecution I do not apostatize more deeply. And what may I do for you? Have you home, friends, kin?"

"Alas! most august princess, Heaven has taken all away. Let me be your slave, your bodyguard, and sleep without your tent by night with a naked sword. Perilous times await, and"—here he choked in his speech—"the foe shall only touch you by stepping across my poor body!"

"You are a noble and pious man," said Mary, smiling. "It shall be as you say. I will ask the Baron to make you my guardsman." Whereupon Hossein invoked all the saints of the calendar to witness his delight; and the princess had her varlets and maids clothe and feed him. When Herbert and Theroulde came to look at him, however, they wagged their heads; and Sylvana, the nurse, who went wherever her mistress went, came boldly to Mary, saying:—

"Save for his pious talk, we all swear this man is infidel. I knew all your father's servants at Antioch, and he was not of them."

But Mary answered her sharply:—

"Must one have a white skin to love Our Lord? No man could come before me with such a lie. Your memory fails you. The Cæsar had a great household. Besides, this Hossein has just revealed all the plots of Kilidge Arslan, and my husband says he is to be trusted." The word of Richard Longsword was not to be contradicted before his wife, as Sylvana knew well; so she held her peace. Only Theroulde arranged with Herbert that one of them should always watch their lady's tent along with the suspected Hossein.

But the Arab's revelations proved true to the letter. On the next day, while Raymond of Toulouse with the rear of the Provençals was making his way to camp, three huge bands of Seljouk cavalry swooped down on them and on the forces of Duke Godfrey. Then followed a battle of the true knightly sort, the Turks trying what they became too wise to attempt again,—to ride down the Franks in fair onset, with sheer weight of numbers. Long and fierce the struggle; every Christian chief proved a paladin. Generalship there was not; every baron and his knights fought his own little battle with the hordesmen confronting. Then in the end the surviving Seljouks were driven from the field like smoke; the heads of their fallen comrades slung into Nicæa by the engines, forewarning of what awaited the garrison. There were masses for the Christian dead, the first martyrs; *Te Deums* for the victory. Richard Longsword, men cried, had slain as many infidels as Duke Godfrey's self. When he stood in his bloody hauberk before Mary that night, she cast her arms about him and kissed him, saying: "O sweet lord, how beautiful you must be in battle! How God must rejoice in your holy service!"

"Dear life," answered Longsword, pressing her to his mailed breast, "it is when I think of the pure

saint on earth who is praying for me that my arm grows strong."

"Then it must be very strong, Richard," said she, with half a laugh, half a sob, "for I love you more than words may tell; and my prayers are many and all for you."

So they were glad that evening,—at least all who had not lost a friend. But when Mary had gone to rest, Herbert talked gravely with Richard.

"Little lord," said he, affectionately, "put no trust in this Hossein. The saints are on his tongue, yet he stumbled when Sebastian tried to make him say the Creed, even in his own Arabic; and Theroulde swears that to-night when he thought none watched, he knelt toward Mecca in Moslem fashion, as if to pray, and muttered the incantations of their Al-Koran."

Richard laughed. "Theroulde smells danger at all times; and Sebastian thinks, to speak Arabic is to squint toward perdition. Hossein has revealed a secret which has given the infidels the mightiest stroke that was theirs since Charlemagne marched to Spain. And yet you accuse him of being one of them? Have shame for your suspicions on a persecuted fellow-Christian! Treat him as a brother, and pray that your own souls be in no greater peril than his."

"Nevertheless—" began Herbert.

"I hear no more," replied his master, abruptly; "I must go to rest. A cursed story told by Count Renard's *jongleur* runs in my head;—how Robert the Norman and his father, King William, once fought hand to hand, helmets closed, and Robert nigh killed his father ere they knew one another. St. Michael, what if Musa and I should meet thus! But I must sleep."

Herbert grumbled long to himself, and Theroulde and he renewed their vow never to leave Hossein a moment alone to work his own devices.

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# CHAPTER XXV

## HOW DUKE GODFREY SAVED THE DAY

The host lay before Nicæa many a weary day before the starved and despairing garrison declared for Emperor Alexius and the Franks saw the Greek standards floating from the battlements. Loud was the rage against this trick that robbed them of the plunder of so fair a city. "Back to Constantinople!" howled the men-at-arms and petty nobles. "The Greeks are schismatics and scarce better than Moslem!" But the judicious presents of Alexius silenced the cries of the chiefs, and they in turn controlled their people, though from that hour little love was wasted on the Emperor. On the twenty-fifth day of June the Army of the Cross struck its tents about Nicæa, and set out for the march across Phrygia, through the heart of the dominions of Kilidge Arslan.

Soon after starting the host divided; for water and forage would be none too plentiful, the guides said, in the plains and mountains before, and to keep together might mean ruin. So Duke Godfrey led away the larger half of the army with Raymond, Adhemar, and Hugh the Great; while the second corps followed Bohemond, Tancred, and Robert of Normandy. Being himself Norman, Longsword went with this last division, although he would gladly have kept company with the Duke of Bouillon. He was ill pleased to see with how little order each host marched, and how scant was the effort to keep close enough each to the other for help in case of need. Still, for a day or two, all went well. They passed through a pleasant rolling country, with abundant grass and water. All the villages, to be sure, had been burned by the Turks, and scarce a peasant met them. But around them like an invisible net the Sultan's light-horsemen hovered, and now and then the long line of baggage mules and plodding infantry would be attacked, a few beasts hamstrung, a few footmen wounded, before the knights could charge out and chase the Seljouks over the hills. On the third day, however, the attacks grew more violent. Longsword had been sent back by Bohemond to cover the trailing rear-guard, where were the staggering sick, the defenceless *jongleurs*, and the women in heavy carriages. As the afternoon advanced, he sent a message to the Count of Chartres that unless he had speedy succor his St. Julien men could not hold back the thickening squadrons; and quick as the reënforcements came, there was a sturdy *mêlée*—lance to lance, sword to cimeter—before the Turks broke. When at last they were flying, Richard pushed the sure-footed Rollo up a hill where any horse saving he would have stumbled; and behold, from the hilltop Longsword could see a score of heavy dust clouds rising, north, south, east, west,—cavalry galloping. When he rode down he met Tancred himself.

"Fair lord," was his report, "the infidels surely plan to attack us in force to-morrow. If my eyes are good, there are thousands of Turkish horse around us. Kilidge Arslan must have called round him all his easternmost hordes, and intends battle. I advise that before nightfall a strong escort be sent to Duke Godfrey, bidding him hasten to our relief."

"By the Mass!" swore Tancred, his knightly honor touched. "Of all men, you, De St. Julien, should be the last to cry 'Rescue!' We are well able to scatter Kilidge Arslan's thousands, and Godfrey shall rob us of no glory."

So Richard held his peace, though for some strange reason his heart was not as gay as it should

have been when about to engage in glorious battle with the infidel. He accompanied the rear as it toiled into the encampment, already plotted by the van. Longsword saw with anxiety that, though the camp was protected in the rear by a reedy marsh, and on one side by a shallow stream, no palisades were being raised, nor any other defences. The weary men set their tents as they might, lighted fires, feasted, and were asleep, heavy with the toilsome march. Mary Kurkuas stood at the tent door as was her wont, and greeted her husband.

"You ran more than your share of peril to-day. The fighting was hard. Ah! I was frightened."

"*Ai!*" cried Richard, taking off his heavy helm, "if I never come nearer death than to-day, like a stork I shall live to be a thousand. But there is a bandage on your wrist—what? blood?" and his face grew troubled.

"Yes," answered Mary, smiling now, and holding up the wrist. "While you were so valiantly guarding the rear, a squadron of Turks flew out of a defile just before us, and ere Prince Bohemond could ride up with his knights, had charged very close, shooting arrows."

"Mother of Mercies, you were in danger! But were you frightened?"

"Not till it was all past. For Hossein sprang in front of me, at his own peril, and covered me with his target, catching three shafts upon it otherwise meant for me. Then the Prince flew up with his band and chased the Turks away; and I found that my wrist was bleeding where a barb had scratched."

"Ha, Herbert!" cried his master, "will not my lady make a noble cavalier? She wins honorable wounds; she shall have lance and hauberk, and ride beside me. As for Hossein, what do you say? Be he Moslem or Christian, he has shielded your mistress at risk of life." The man-at-arms scratched the thin hairs on his crown.

"True; perchance I have wronged him. Yet yesterday we could not persuade him to taste a bit of pork, and he has that cast of eye which 'wise women' call malignant."

"You are all suspicions and jealousy," declared Mary, pouting. "Did I let you, I believe you would clap Hossein in fetters."

"I would I saw them on his wrists!" muttered the veteran, as he went away to his supper. But Richard and Mary sat a long time before their tent, sipping the spiced wine of Lesbos they had brought from Constantinople, and watching the stars peep out one by one from the deepening sky. The camp buzzed all about, yet dimly, as if each man was in love with quiet. It was very warm, and the soft wind bore the scent of drying wild-flowers and parching heather, as it crept down from the sun-loved uplands. It was a sweet and peaceful hour, one which stayed as a pure and holy vision in both their minds for many a long, sad day.

"Sweetheart," said Richard, when they grew tired of counting the budding stars, "though Prince Tancred and the rest will not hear it, there will be a mighty battle to-morrow. I have seen Kilidge Arslan's hosts all around us. We shall fight in the morning as never at Nicæa."

"Ah! Richard," answered Mary, still in laughing mood, "you must let me ride with you. See!"—and she caught the dagger from his belt—"can I not strike as manfully as any dapper little squire, and make the infidels flee before me, as ever did your Frank hero, great Roland?"

"Verily," cried her husband, his eyes on her face, "I think if the Moslems saw you coming, they would drop every man his sword,—your darts would pierce them."

"My darts?" asked she.

"Yes, truly,—these," and he laid his fingers on her eyes.

"No," was the answer, and she shook him off. "Listen: my eyes are my sorrow,—first, because they captured the Baron de St. Julien, who deserves no such bondage;" then, more gravely, "next, because they nigh undid Louis de Valmont; and last—O Richard! still I have mighty fear of Iftikhar Eddauleh; he is seeking your life, and God knows whether his unholy passion for me is still in his heart! Swear, swear to me, Richard, that rather with your own hands you will take my life than suffer me to fall into *that* man's power. He is Moslem, but on that account I do not hate him; yet death were better than to be his bride!"

Richard was accustomed to these changing flashes of gay and grave; but he knew there was no common ring of entreaty in Mary's last words, and he answered very soberly:—

"Heart of my heart, I am here in all my strength, with Trenchefer at my side, and around are thousands of good Christian knights. When they are all slain, and I also, then you may fear Iftikhar Eddauleh. Till then, think of likelier things to dread."

Mary was silent, watching the stars for a moment, then replied:—

"You say well, Richard, you are very strong. I am proud of you. Yet I have a strange fear that all your strength cannot shield me from Iftikhar. But no more of my folly,—perchance I am moonstruck. Let me go to the tent, to say one prayer to the Holy Mother to keep you safe to-morrow, and then to sleep, to dream how happy we shall be when we go back to France."

So he kissed her; and when the flaps of the tent had closed behind her and her maids, he called Hossein.

"Good fellow, to-morrow we expect battle. To-day you have been a gallant guard of the princess. Remain by her to-morrow; defend her with your life. As I live, if you do your duty, reward shall not fail."

"Cid," answered the Arab, kissing the Baron's feet, "I hear and obey. I swear, on my head, no unfriendly hand shall touch your very noble wife."

As Richard looked about, he saw Theroulde standing in the firelight. "And you, too, Sir Minstrel," said he, "shall stand guard with Hossein over your lady." As he spoke, he thought he heard a low curse, "Eblees confound him!" burst from under Hossein's breath. "Ha! What said you, Arab?" asked Longsword.

"I was but sighing as I thought of my many sins, Cid," answered the fellow, very dutifully.

Richard did not reply, but repeated to himself ere he fell asleep: "It is as well Theroulde will be with Mary. Despite everything, I mislike this Hossein, for some reason."

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Richard slept heavily, and was awakened by a hand on the shoulder. It was the St. Julien knight, De Carnac, who commanded the watch of his baron's command.

"Up, fair lord!" the warrior was urging, "the Seljouks are closing round. Our sentinels are being driven in. I am bidden summon you to council with the Prince of Tarentum." And with this Richard staggered to his feet and stared around. It was very dark in the tent as he put on hauberk and helmet. Without there was hum of many voices, distant shouting, baggage cattle chafing and clinking their chains, and presently a clear French war-cry, doubly piercing in the night, "*Montjoye Saint Denis!*" A moment later a trumpet blared out, then another and another.

Richard stepped from the tent; the sky was graying in the east; encampment—men, horses, all—were vague black shadows just visible. He was buckling fast Trenchefer when the flaps of the next tent parted, and forth came a figure—his wife. In the dim twilight he could only see the whiteness of her bare throat and the soft, unbound hair, waving on forehead and shoulders. She came to him, and embraced him without a word. Then at last she said, "Now, dear life, you must ride out and fight God's battle, and if I cannot gallop at your side, you shall know that my heart and my prayers ride with you; and you must be very brave and very strong, and I will wait here and be brave also."

"Ah! beautiful," answered he, before he swung into the saddle of the waiting Rollo, "God will have pity on me for your dear sake. You know no words can tell you all I feel."

"Our Lord be with you!" and with that word upon her lips she kissed him; and he mounted, took lance, and rode away, with all the St. Julien men saving a few grooms, also Theroulde and Hossein, who were to remain by the tents.

With the breath of the last kiss on his lips, and his head held very high, Richard Longsword led his troop out of the gray maze of the encampment. Battle was before him—a great battle against countless infidels, such as he and his peers had often made merry to think of; yet Longsword felt no joy that morning. Fear for himself he had none; the battle might sweep over him, the war-horns blow his funeral mass—what matter? Yet in a way his heart was sad. It would have been better had Mary remained at La Haye; better were he to fight for himself and the cause of Christ alone. But he knew not why he should grieve. That the Seljouks should so prevail over the soldiers of the Cross as to menace the encampment, scarce entered his head. Only he had been happier, could he have recalled his command to Hossein, taken the Arab in his troops, left another to guard the lady. But the fellow had twice proved his devotion. Why mistrust? And all such thoughts sped from his mind when he saw, dimly ahead, armed cavaliers sitting on their tall *destrers*, and Prince Bohemond's voice called:—

"Who rides? De St. Julien?"

"The same, my lord prince; what news?"

"Praise St. Michael, you are here! We need all our wits. The infidels are closing round, and dark as it is we can hear the hoof-beats of tens of thousands. We must prepare for battle with the dawn."

"And have you taken my advice, my Lord Tancred," asked Richard, "and sent messengers to the Duke?"

"Two knights and ten men-at-arms have ridden an hour since," replied Tancred, for he was among the horsemen. "Yet I would vow Our Lady two gold candlesticks, were I sure they could get through the hordes. You may mock me, De St. Julien, if you will, for not heeding your warning last evening."

"Mockery is of little profit this morning, my lord," said Richard, soberly; "how may I serve you?"

But at this moment came another cavalier, in armor that gleamed in the wan light, and behind him a great train.

"Hail, fair Duke Robert!" cried Bohemond; "what news do your outposts bring you?"

The son of William the Conqueror swore a deep Norman oath, and replied: "In my quarter arrows pelt like hailstones; all the fiends are broke loose. They only wait the light to strike us. God grant we are all well shriven, for we may sleep with the saints ere another morning!"

"Fair lords," said Tancred, "we must go to our posts and array the battle. De St. Julien, bid the varlets and footmen place the baggage wagons round the camp, to make what barricade they may. After that, put your men at my right, for by the Virgin, we shall see stout fighting!"

So the council broke up, there being nothing to advise save to fight heartily. Richard sent the heralds through the camp and, with cry and trumpet, roused the sleeping host, though the alarms of the night already had waked many. A great confusion there was: a thousand voices shouting at once, women wailing, war-horns blaring, wheels creaking, all trebly loud in the murk of the breaking day. Long before the wagon barrier, also, was as it should be, a great cry began to swell: "The foe! the foe!" and the infantry commenced to bang their shields and clatter their pike-staffs, for discipline was none the best. Richard rode away with his hundred St. Julien troopers,—men that he could trust to the last pinch,—and drew them up beside the personal command of Prince Tancred. Prince Bohemond and the Norman Duke had arrayed their mailed cavalry in a solid rank, the line stretching far down the plain, every man in complete armor, with a good horse between his knees. As the light strengthened, Richard could see the long files of lances, ten thousand bright pennons whipping the wind, and the new sun shone on as many burnished casques and flashing targets—noble sight; yet not so strange as that which he beheld when he looked northward just east of the little town called Dorylæum. The hills, so far as eye could reach, were covered with an innumerable host, thousands on thousands, and all on horseback. He could see the gay red and green turbans, the bright scarfs and mantles, pennons, banners—past counting; and even as the sun lifted above the hills, and sent its weird red light over the valley, a mighty roar of tambour, kettledrum, and cymbal came rolling from the foe, and a shout from myriad throats, wild, beastlike, shrill as the winter wind. With the shout, as if at magician's wand, all the hills seemed moving; and the Seljouk hordes charged straight upon the Christian lines.

It was a wondrous spectacle; far as the eye might pierce, only horsemen, and more horsemen, speeding at headlong gallop. "Christ pity us!" more than one bronze-faced cavalier muttered in his beard. And some cried, "Charge!" But Tancred held them steady. The hordes swept on as one man, nearer, so near that the dust-cloud blew in the Christians' faces; and all braced themselves for the shock. But just as the crash was about to tremble on the air, lo! the foremost Turks had wheeled like lightning, and arrows flew out that darkened the sky by their number. And as the first horde rolled off to one flank, still shooting, the next, the next, and yet another whirled past, pouring forth their volleys.

"Stand fast, Christians!" was Tancred's shout, as the first shafts dashed harmlessly on the good mail; and for a moment the Franks sat, their steeds immovable, and let the blast of steel beat on them. Yet only for a moment; though but one arrow in a hundred struck home, here and there men were bleeding, wounded horses plunging. Each instant Crusaders were falling; should they sit forever and be shot to death? Duke Robert was the first to charge. "*Dex aiè!*" cried his Norman knights, and lance in rest they spurred straight in the face of the wheeling myriads. Vain courage! A few Seljouks they struck and rode over in a twinkling; but the vast horde parted before them like water, and rained in arrows and ever more arrows from safe distance. The Duke regained his lines, but one-fourth of his men had been stricken, and the terrible horse-archers were shooting a more deadly shower than ever.

"The foot! the crossbowmen!" was the cry of the raging knights. And their archers and arbalisters, coming to the front, tried to return the fire as best they could. Many a Seljouk rode no more after their volley, but their shafts were as a bucket on a holocaust. Horsemen, and yet more horsemen, were rolling in. More and more rapid the arrow fire, the sky was dark with flying dust, the ear deafened with the thunders of hoofs uncounted, the clash of the kettledrums, the yell and howl of the Seljouks. Flesh and blood could stand the strain no more. Either the Turks must be routed, or the Franks would perish to a man.

"Charge! Charge!" this time the cry went down the line on every lip. Two arrows had grazed Rollo, despite his leathern armor. Thrice had Richard felt the sting on his ribs, where the mail had turned the shaft. Only one desire had he now,—to ride through or over his tormenters.

"God wills it! Normandy! Normandy!" came from Duke Robert's cavaliers. "*Montjoye Saint Denis!*" rang from the Count of Chartres. "*Biez!*" thundered the Auvergners; and the whole steel-mailed line swept upon the Seljouks, like an avalanche. And now a crash! They smote the Turks with might irresistible; the *destrers* trampled down the frail Tartar horses by thousands. What guard were light targets and cotton turbans to the swords of the men of France? For a moment, when Richard reined in Rollo, he believed the foe annihilated.

"God wills it!" myriad voices were calling. Yet even as the dust hung in the air, the arrows began to beat down again. Like flies the Turks had scattered; like flies they returned, new hordes making good all loss. And now the Christians were in deadly peril, for their ranks were all broken into little handfuls, and the Seljouks swarmed round each, trying to trample it down by weight of numbers. Richard led his men back from the charge. Trenchefer was very red. How many Turks opposed the St. Julieners he could not tell, but by the grace of the saints the line was re-formed at last. Prince Bohemond, crafty of heart, but a very lion in battle, flew down the line to steady it.

"We have slain a thousand infidels!" the Count of Chartres was crying. "One more charge and we have victory!"

"One more such victory and we are crowned martyrs!" Prince Tancred made answer. "Robert of Paris is slain, and William, my brother, and a hundred good knights more; and we are being shot down like sparrows."

Another onrush of the Seljouks, this time nearer. Richard felt the moments creeping by with leaden feet. The possibility of a disaster beyond thought stared him in the face. It was one thing to go to death in a fair fight with the sword hot in one's hand—another to sit passive and feel destruction beating down. Yet he was thinking, not of himself, but of another. Prince Tancred, burning to avenge his brother's loss, charged out with his own troop. The Seljouks closed around him like the sea. Bohemond flew to aid, and rescued his nephew. Richard saw Tancred riding back within the lines bareheaded and bloody, his lance broken. "Christ keep our souls, the Seljouks have our bodies," murmured the Breton Count Rothold, "I will not die here!" and he also charged out with his shrill native war-cry, "*Malo! Malo!*" In a twinkling the hordes rolled round him; Richard and the St. Julieners saved him. But now Robert, the Norman, spurred up to Longsword. The Duke's casque was beaten and gory, his long white pennon red-dyed, his horse wounded.

"De St. Julien, we are lost unless Godfrey and the rest rescue. The first messengers are surely slain. Are your troop still left, and your horses unwounded?" The noise of the Turks made his voice nigh inaudible, but Richard bowed his head.

"Then for the love of Our Saviour, ride, and bring succor. On you hang all our lives!"

"Men of St. Julien," cried Richard, "will you follow me?"

"Through ten thousand devils!" roared back De Carnac and the rest. Richard clapped spurs to Rollo.

"Christ guard us!" was his cry; but his glance was toward the encampment. He led the Auvergners to the left of the battle, where the Seljouk horde seemed thinnest.

And what followed was ever to Richard Longsword as one long wild dream whereof the memory lingered; the reality was blotted out. He knew that he charged his men against the horde, and, as ever, the Turks gave way before them—more victims to be swallowed in their quick-sands. But these Franks, having made their charge, did not turn back. The arrow fire smote them; yet on and on they spurred, still chasing back the foe. And then, when the tribesmen saw that these mad Franks would not wheel back to the encampment, from the fatal line around the Turks closed in, shield to shield, lance to lance. Richard never knew what saint gave strength to his arm that day, and made Trenchefer terrible to the unbelievers. Only after a long delirium of hewing and riding, he saw the open country before. A look backward—behold, he was upon a hill. The Turkish lines stretched away to his left; he had cleared their flank, and the battle raged in its mad carnival behind him. He looked for his men—how few! They had ridden from camp a hundred; scarce fifty were at his back. But the deed was done. They had cleared the Seljouks, and now to Duke Godfrey!

"Lord, I am a very sinful man," prayed Richard, as they pushed their wounded steeds down the hill southward; "unworthy of this mercy. Surely it was through the prayers of a dear saint whose peril is still great."

"Ride, men, ride!" he commanded, and gave head to Rollo, whose tough hide had turned more than one barb. The great black horse tossed out his hoofs and was away. No other St. Julien steed could pace him. He left the band behind, and Richard flew toward the long line of tents he saw nestling under a distant hill. The mighty steed ran like a beast of steel, unwearying, unslacking; hillocks he raced over, gullies he cleared with unfailing leap. The wind whistled in Longsword's hair—his helmet had gone, the saints knew whither; he felt the horse speeding too fast for thought. A few roving stragglers from the Seljouk host pricked after him, two or three arrows twittered overhead. Rollo dropped them all, their small steeds blown and weary, while on the Northern monster ran.

And now he drew near the camp. Men were shouting to him, a great crowd of varlets staring. Rollo ran down the streets of tents, a thousand eyes upon the thundering black horse and his blood-stained rider.

"The Duke! the Duke!" Richard was shouting, as he drew rein before the wide, silken pavilion. A score of knights and squires swarmed around. A strong hand was needed to stay Rollo. Richard sprang breathless to the ground, and stood face to face with Godfrey, just emerging from the tent. "Lord de St. Julien," cried Bouillon, "alone? Covered with blood?" But Richard cut him short.

"Rescue, rescue, as you love Christ! Our host is surrounded, and nigh perishing; Robert of Paris and Prince William are slain. The Seljouk arrows are hail. Rescue, or all is lost."

"By Our Lady of Antwerp!" thundered Godfrey, all action, "blow horns, sound trumpets! Horses; arm; mount!"

No need of more! The word flew through the encampment swifter than light. Now the Duke's war-horns sounded, now Count Hugh's, now Count Raymond's. But Godfrey was foremost. Scarce had Richard quaffed a helmet of water, before the Duke stood before him in his silvered hauberk,

and the fifty picked knights of his bodyguard were in saddle. "Give me a horse!" cried Richard. "A horse, my lord duke! for mine has ridden hard, and is wounded."

"By the splendor of God," cried Godfrey, "you will have your fill of fighting! Bring the best spare *destrer* and a new helm!"

So Richard was again on horseback; and if he was wounded and weary, he did not know it till later on that fateful day. Rollo he left in safe hands, and followed the Duke.

"To the east, my lord. Their flank is unguarded," he urged. "You may have them all."

And Godfrey rode madly ahead with his bodyguard. After him streamed the Christian heavy cavalry, they too thousands upon thousands—the finest squadrons ever arrayed in sinful war. Then again for Richard the mad delight of the ride! But this time with countless comrades about him; and as the host swept up over the eastern hills, the sun hung in mid-heaven, and made the arms and shields one tossing sea of light. Before and below lay the Seljouk horde and the thin lines of the Christians—very close now; for Kilidge Arslan was pressing in to pluck his prey. But at the sight one mighty cry rolled from fifty thousand throats, "God wills it!" For God had delivered the infidels into Duke Godfrey's hands.

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# CHAPTER XXVI

## HOW RICHARD WAS AGAIN CHASTENED

Forward the great host swept. And if the sight of the onrushing Turks had borne terror to the Christians that morning, what terror must have sped among the hordesmen that noon. For the whole army of Kilidge Arslan was caught in a fatal triangle,—the hills where no cavalry might wheel, the lines of Bohemond and Tancred, and the squadrons of Godfrey. "God wills it!" again the cry; and every knight in the onrushing squadrons was holding his lance steady—no sitting in rank now and feeling the beat, beat of the arrows. The Seljouks might not scatter, if they would.

A howl of mortal fear was rising from the unbelievers. The tale later spread that they saw two Christian knights in armor fiery-bright, who rode before the advancing squadrons, whose mail was unpierced by the stoutest lance-thrust, who slew with lightnings flashed from their flaming swords. The cry grew louder and louder. The Christians knew the Turks were calling on Allah and their Prophet to save them,—vain hope! for all the host of Michael and his angels were fighting for the Cross that day.

As he swept on, Richard saw the hordesmen dash their thousands upon Bohemond's thin line,—no arrows now, but striving to crush by mere weight of numbers. He saw the wearied Normans and Bretons spur out to the charge. And then indeed there was fair battle,—the Christian host nigh swallowed in the infidel myriads; but still over all tossed Tancred's white silk banner blazoned with its blood-red cross; and above the howl of the Seljouks rang the cry which the unbelievers that day so learned to dread:—

"God wills it!"

At this moment Godfrey and Raymond, with their fifty thousand mailed cavalry, struck the Turkish hordes, and swept them toward the hills like dust that scurries before the west wind. "God wills it!" The Seljouks were riding for life, the Christian knights trampling them down with their huge *destrers*; and sword and battle-axe reaping their bloody harvest. "God wills it!" Richard heard the horns of the Sultan's picked guard sounding the retreat; and the last resistance melted away as the Seljouks fled to a man toward the hills.

As Godfrey and his thousands came on, Bohemond, Tancred, and Robert of Normandy charged forth with their wearied knights—not wearied now—catching the hordesmen on flank and rear, trampling, slaying, pursuing. And when the rescued cavaliers saw Longsword flying at Bouillon's side, another great shout went down the line, "Richard Longsword! Richard de St. Julien!" Then the Norman held his head very proudly, for he thought, "What joy will this be to Mary!"

"On! on!" urged Duke Godfrey, never drawing rein, while the rout and chase swept forward. "To the hills after them! Let none escape! God and Our Lady are with us!"

"*Dex aiè*," thundered the rescued Normans, and the whole host flew faster. Swift were the Seljouk horses; but the shivered hordes, crowding together in the narrow valley, were mown as grass before the Christian onset. Up among the rocks the pursuit was driven; steeds fell, their riders trampled down instantly. The Seljouks gained the crags where lay their camp, dismounted, stood at bay. But the Franks had dismounted also, and spread around the hills a forest of lances. On the front attacked Raymond; on the flanks Robert of Flanders, Duke Robert, Godfrey, Hugh, and Tancred; while brave Bishop Adhemar led the attack from the rear. Then came the final stand. The Turks fought as beasts at bay. But the Christians were raging lions; they stormed the camp, broke the spear wall, scattered the bodyguard of Kilidge Arslan himself. The Seljouks, like frighted partridges, scampered over rocks and craggy peaks, where their heavy-armed foe might not follow. So some escaped, but a score of thousands then and there perished; for quarter none

asked or gave. Foremost in the press had been Richard. He long since had cast away his shattered shield; but the hauberk of Valencia was bulwark against a dozen deaths. Every time his good arm brought low an infidel he was glad; was he not performing to God a holy service? When the Seljouks broke once more after the storming of the camp, Longsword regained his horse to chase down those who hazarded flight in the plain country. The sun was hanging low in the heavens now. Old knights were praying Charlemagne's prayer at Roncesvalles—that the day might lengthen while they hunted the Moslem.

Richard rode with Gaston of Béarn, who had been not the least valiant of the many brave that day; and as he rode, again and again he came across fugitives, not in the fantastic colors of the Seljouk, but in a dress all white with red girdles and sandals. Often as they came on such, the pursued would turn and charge Gaston's whole troop with a mad fury that Frankish valor could scarce master. Presently, just as the shadows began to spread on the hills, Longsword saw before him a band of horsemen, clothed in white, in their midst the figure of a mighty warrior in gilded mail, upon a tall bay charger, and across that rider's saddle it seemed a prisoner in pale dress with fluttering red ribbons,—to Richard's mind, a woman. "After! After! A prisoner!" cried Gaston, putting his horse at a last burst of speed,—a good steed, but he had been ridden hard; and the fugitives still drew ahead. Richard clapped spurs to his mount; the beast, one of the best of Duke Godfrey, shot past Gaston, and the distance betwixt Richard and the strange rider lessened.

Richard could see now that the captive was indeed a woman, that she was struggling in the arms of her captor. Once he thought he caught her cry, despite the yells of the flying Moslems, who were invoking all the jinns to give them speed. He rode past the rearmost fugitive, who turned for fight, saw before him a brown-faced Arab, saw the cimeter dancing in his face; felt the steel edge glance on his helmet—a great rush of blood nigh blinding; a stroke of Trenchefer cleaving something—the Arab was gone. Richard dashed away the blood with his fist, pressed the spurs harder. The prisoner leaned out and shook forth her ribbons—Mother of Mercies! how like the ribbons of Mary! And had he never seen that splendid rider before? Again he spurred, and slapped his steed with the flat of his sword. Faster and faster; the blood once more blinded; once he brushed it away; long since his lance had been shattered in pieces, but Trenchefer was brazed to his arm. A last burst of speed; he could see the Arab warrior struggling with his arms about the captive; one instant more and he would breast the strange champion. But even as he pressed the spur, the good horse stumbled, plunged, was down, and Richard dashed upon the ground. An instant only. He was bruised; but he staggered to his feet, Trenchefer still in hand. "*Allah akhbar!*" rang the shout of the Arab, a voice he knew full well, yet had heard—where? Longsword dragged the kicking *destrer* from the ground. The good horse stood, made a step—he was lamed; walking were pain. And as Richard looked, his quarry sped over a hillock, was gone; while he stood staring after, scarce knowing that from head to heels he was bruised, and that the warm blood was streaming over his face. Only the darkening landscape seemed circling round and round, and his ears were ringing, yet not with the shout of receding battle. Gaston of Béarn had ridden up with his men. "Holy St. Barbara," the viscount was crying, "you are sorely hurt, fair friend. Your horse is lamed. Ho! Peter, dismount and put my Lord de St. Julien in your saddle. We must ride for the camp. Already it is darkening."

"No!" exhorted Richard, "continue the chase. Do not let those Arab fiends escape. They have a Christian prisoner, a lady, I swear by the four Gospels!"

"A lady!" exclaimed Gaston. "No prisoner! doubtless she is one of their tent women, whom the riders are trying to save. How could any Christian maid fall into their hands? Fighting we have had to a fill to-day, and none more than you, fair knight."

They put Richard upon the man-at-arms's horse. He was so weak now that Gaston rode at one side, and a squire at the other, to guard against a fall. As they rode back toward the encampment the stars were peeping out, and the moon had begun to climb above the hills. There was a thin gray haze spreading from the shallow river and marsh. Men talked in whispers, save as here and there they passed one lying wounded and moaning. All over the plain torches were moving about, priests and women seeking the Christian wounded, giving water to the dying, and with them camp varlets,—rabbits during the battle, but brave enough now,—plundering the fallen Turks, and slaying those who still breathed. Richard saw the great spoil of the Seljouk camp borne off in triumph: gold-threaded carpets, coin, horses,—many camels, that the marvelling victors, who had never seen such ill-shaped bulks before, thought the devil himself must have begotten.

Closer to the Christian camp the Frankish dead lay thickly on the ground. Raymond of Agiles was making the sign of the cross above each. "Blessed are these!" cried he; "already St. Michael leads them before Our Father; they have white robes and palms, and raise the anthem everlasting."

They rode on, and to them joined the Count of Chartres, shouting: "Praised be all angels, De St. Julien! You saved us all; the infidels were in the very camp!"

"The camp!" cried Richard, starting from his seat.

"Assuredly; Stephen of Blois and Bohemond strove to drive them out; there is a rumor certain women were carried captive. A scared horse-boy's tale, I trust! Holy Mother! You are wounded, my Baron! You nigh fall from the saddle!"

And Gaston of Béarn and Chartres caught Longsword, as he reeled.

"Unhand me, sirs!" shouted Richard, thrusting them both back roughly; "I am unhurt. I must go

to the camp!"

And he spurred away headlong, his bruise nowhere, one horrible thought mastering all.

Yet as he reached the camp, now very dim in the twilight, a deadly sense of weakness and weariness was stealing over him. Food? Save for a mouthful of bread while he buckled on his armor, he had tasted none that direful day. Water? He had not touched a drop since leaving Duke Godfrey's camp. Wounds? He was bleeding in a dozen places. He felt the firm earth spinning. Would there never be end to the frightful pound, pound of the horse under him? His sight was dimming, ears rang; but, summoning all his will, he controlled himself.

"Dear Christ," was his prayer, "do not let me faint until, until"—but he could go no farther. When, however, he passed more knights and men-at-arms bringing in the spoil, laughing and boasting over their valiant deeds, his breast grew lighter. When the infidels had been so utterly broken, what was there to fear? The rush of faintness passed, he again sat steady in the saddle. And as many as recognized him in the dusk raised the cry that swelled as the rest caught it: "Ho! De St. Julien! Hail! De St. Julien! Our Lady bless you, fair lord, you have saved us all this day!" But the shout that had been music in his ears two hours earlier he scarce heard. Prince Tancred passed him, called on him to stay; he spurred on, though the poor soldier's horse under him nigh dropped of weariness.

In the camp at last. The fires were being rekindled; around each little groups, over the loot of the Turkish camps. The wounded were groaning on the dry turf, men were bringing in the dead, and here and there women wailing. Richard knew the way to his own encampment, as if by instinct. And as he rode his blood chilled yet more when he saw here and there tents down, their walls torn, pegs wrenched, poles shattered, and contents scattered around. Then it was true the Seljouks had stormed the camp! Before him he saw the little group of pavilions over which the St. Julien banner had waved that morning—the banner was gone! His horse stumbled over a body. He dismounted. The moon was rising; in the pale light he saw the face of one of his own grooms—set in death. Men were standing before the tents, some tugging at the cords as if to retighten them, some kindling a fire, some in groups, talking in low, scared whispers. In the dimness they did not see Richard, as he came up on foot.

"Holy St. Maurice," one was muttering, "may I not be the first to tell the tale to my lord!"

"Fellow!" thundered Richard, bursting into the little group, and clapped a hand heavy as a millstone on the man-at-arms's shoulder. "Rascal! Speak! Speak! What is this? Dumb as a mute? Why no banner? The tents in disorder? Where is—" But the words came not, for his dry tongue clove fast in his mouth.

No answer. The retainer turned as pale and quaking as if the devil's self had accosted him.

"Speak! speak!" raged Richard, making his victim writhe under his iron grip. Still nothing. He looked at those around; silent all. He was too fearful to be angry.

"Mary! Mary de St. Julien!" cried he, finding the name at last; "if you are here,—one word,—or I am in perdition!" Still silence. He saw one of the men-at-arms crossing himself; he saw that the pavilion where he had left his wife was half overturned; he saw lying across the entrance a dead body, and the firelight showed the white dress and the red girdle and shoes.

"For the love of Christ!" was his plea, "will no one speak? or must I kill you all?" In his frenzy he half drew Trenchefer. And just as all gave way, when they saw the moonlight waver on the blade still red, there was a step, and a voice—Sebastian's voice—spoke:—

"Sweet son, bow to the will of God. Listen! I have just returned to the camp with Herbert and the rest. Mary Kurkuas is not here. Theroulde will tell all."

They heard a groan from Richard, that none forgot to his dying day. A javelin was lying against a tent-pole; as Theroulde stepped reluctantly out from the silent circle, the Baron sent the dart whistling past his head.

"Die!—coward! traitor!" then Longsword cursed terribly when the cast missed and flew into the dark.

Sebastian had him by the arm.

"Gilbert de Valmont!" whispered he, never trembling when Richard raised his fist to strike. "Remember him! Add not one sin to another! Listen to Theroulde!"

"Traitor!" stormed Richard, but the priest held him fast. "Why could you not die defending your mistress?"

"Hearken, my Lord de St. Julien, then call me traitor and coward if you will!" cried the minstrel, brave at last. "And see if there be no worse traitors than I? Would God you had listened to the warnings of us all against that smooth-tongued Hossein,—as if Christian faith could ever lurk beneath so swart a skin."

Richard had steadied himself.

"Go on, my man," he said, very quietly now, yet in a tone that set all a-quaking; for they could not comprehend. They only knew a strong spirit was in agony.

"Lord," said Theroulde, "if one jot of what I say be other than truth, so smite me dead, and let Satan own me forever. As we lay in the camp after you had led forth most of the fighting-men, soon we heard the rush and roar of battle, and presently some came flying, who said the cavaliers were hard pressed, and many slain. And all the time my lady sat before the tent upon the rugs we laid for her, resting her chin on her hands, and saying nothing. Yet she was not tearful nor pale, at which we marvelled, for we knew she thought that every roar and shout might betoken your fall, and her mind had only room for that. Then after the battle had raged long, and stragglers and wounded began coming in with tales that grew ever blacker, I said to Hossein, who sat by me, 'Brother, go to the edge of the camp, see if the St. Julien banner still towers high, and bring back word to my lady.' For I did not intend to quit her side, and was glad to have him gone. So he went without delay and was gone a long time, while the din of battle continually grew louder and nearer. Yet when he returned, he said, 'I went so close to the battle lines that—see! two arrows grazed me!' Then to your wife, 'Most august mistress, your lord's banner is not in sight; but fear nothing. He is not slain, they tell me, but has ridden to summon help from Duke Godfrey.' Then my lady's cheeks began to glow, and I imagine she was thinking of your return and the victory."

"For Our Lord's sake, no more of what you imagine!" came from Richard. "Tell only what you *know*!"

"Scarce had he returned"—went on Theroulde, his voice faltering—"when we heard a frightful clamor from the rear and flank of the camp by the river and marsh. Soon grooms and women ran by crying, 'The infidels are on us, slaying all!' And sooner than thought, we beheld the Seljouk horsemen, sword in hand, dashing among the tents, cutting down old man, priest, and woman, without quarter. Then I laid hands on a crossbow. 'Hossein,' cried I, 'if you are true Christian, die with me for our mistress!' But he only smiled, and drawing his cimeter, gave a mighty howl that rose above all other din. Ere I could look upon my lady, lo,—there were horsemen by our tents—Arabs—not Turks—in white, with red girdles; and Hossein shouted in their speech, 'This way, Cid Iftikhar; here is the Star of the Greeks!' And I saw Iftikhar Eddauleh himself upon a splendid horse, in flashing armor. Then I sped a crossbow bolt through one of his riders, cut down a second with my sword, and struck at Hossein, thinking to end his treachery. But Iftikhar swung once at me,—I knew no more. When I came to myself I found that I was under the wreck of the tent. Hours had sped; the battle had drifted away. The emir's sword had turned in his hand; the blunt edge smote me. I had a mighty blow, but will be none the worse—praise the saints! I looked for my lady—gone! All the grooms and varlets are slain, and old Sylvana the nurse. Hossein gone—and the devils ride with him! And for me, my Lord de St. Julien, if I have been coward or traitor, strike off my head. You are my judge."

Richard tore from his neck his heavy gold chain.

"You are a right valiant man, Theroulde, and no boaster. I believe your tale," said he, throwing him the gold links; "and now a horse—a fresh horse!"

Sebastian still held him.

"Madness!" cried the priest; "it is dark; you have been up since before dawn! For what is this horse?"

"To ride after Iftikhar Eddauleh," came from between Richard's teeth; "and if I find him not—to slay as many of his cursed race as I may; and then to curse God and die!"

While he spoke the moonbeams rested full on his face, and all beholding saw that it had aged in one hour; the lines wrought on it by the death of Gilbert were still there—and more. Had his hair shone white, none would have been amazed. "Christ pity him!" muttered old Herbert, the most fervent prayer of the veteran for many a wicked day.

But Sebastian would not let Richard go.

"As you fear God," commanded the priest, "be quiet; do not fling your life away!"

"I fear God no longer," was Richard's cry. "I only hate Him!"

Sebastian led him into the tent, with a touch soft and tender as a woman's. "Dear lad," he said gently, "God will not be angry unduly with you for what you have just said, though its sin is very great. You think, 'How can this thing be and God be still good?' Remember the words of holy Anselm of Canterbury, 'I ask not to understand that I may believe; but I believe that I may learn to understand.'"

"Father," said Richard, with a terrible calmness in his voice, "if for my own sins I had been doomed to some great woe, I could say '*mea culpa*,—merciful chastisement'; but since the chief suffering will be that of as pure a saint as ever breathed this air, I cannot endure without a groan. I only know that the hand of God is exceeding heavy upon me, and my burden is more than I can bear." Then, to the infinite relief of Sebastian and the rest, he let them take off his blood-soaked armor and shirt, and stanch the wounds, which were none very deep, but so many that he was weak from loss of blood. Presently Herbert came in and reported: "Little lord, our men took thirty Turks prisoners when the camp was stormed; shall we keep them to put to ransom?" Richard was not too feeble to leap from the rugs. "Kill! kill!" he foamed out; "if Satan wait long for their souls, let him have mine too!"

Herbert smiled grimly and went out of the tent.

"*Ai*," cried Longsword to Sebastian, when the priest forced him to lie down once more, "I do well to be cruel,—for there is no sweet angel now to teach me mercy. God reward me double beyond present griefs, if I slay not my share of the infidels! Therefore let me grow pitiless and terrible."

"You should hate and slay the Lord's enemies, dear son," said Sebastian, crossing himself; "yet beware lest you fight for your own revenge, and not for the glory of God."

"Enough if I slay them!" was the answer. Then Richard took food and drink, and toward morning slept.

So ended the day of Dorylæum, the battle where, as the pious chronicler puts it, "by the aid of St. James and St. Maurice the Christians had a great deliverance from their enemies, and twenty-three thousand infidels were sped to perdition; such being the singular favor of God."

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# CHAPTER XXVII

## HOW THE ARMY CAME TO ANTIOCH

To the surprise and joy of Sebastian and Herbert, Richard recovered from his wounds with miraculous rapidity. When the host marched again, many a voice cheered him. But those who loved him best saw the stony hardness of his face, beyond anything that came after the great stroke at St. Julien. No ragings and thunders now, but a calm and fearful laugh that made men shiver. He led a band of picked knights after the Seljouks, no more reckless cavalier in all the host than he. The Turks had been utterly routed. Two days' marches from the battle Richard found horses ridden dead by their panic-struck masters. Of all the prisoners taken Longsword had only one question, "Whither fled Iftikhar and his band?" But no prisoner could tell—they were only ignorant hordesmen. So Richard rode on, and only God knew what passed in his heart.

The army, now in one huge column, commenced the march across Phrygia, which journey, of all the unforgetable scenes of that Crusade, those who survived it were least likely to forget. Richard remembered the tales told by old Manuel Kurkuas, and laid in what provision he could for his men. Those of his friends who heeded him did likewise. But the multitude—noble and villain, creatures of a day—scarce stuffed their wallets, and went forward, little dreaming of the things in store. For the march was one long horror. Kilidge Arslan had ridden ahead with a band that still remained by him. If he could not stamp out the Christians with his hordes, at least he could make famine and thirst fight against them. He burned harvests; he devastated cities; the wretched inhabitants he hurried into exile,—with Phrygia, Pisidia, Cappadocia, to the gates in Mount Taurus, one desert for the bears and the wolves to hunger in. As the Crusaders advanced, they saw only fields seared and black, roofless houses, with swallows flitting above them; and forth from the caves in the hills crept gaunt, starved wretches, praying for a bit of bread in the name of Our Lord or Allah. The host climbed on the first day the crest of the "Black Mountains," fit presage for the blacker things before; so far as eye could stretch there was utter desolation. And on the next they entered the terrible valley called Malabyumas, and were there many days, hemmed in by precipices and beetling crags, while the great snake of the column dragged its slow length along. At first, while there was yet water on the hillsides and food in the wallets, the host toiled on with only the pitiless summer sun for foe; then, as the little streamlets grew rarer, the dry, dark crags pressed closer, and the food was failing, the misery began. Misery past imagining! for if it is terrible for one mortal to suffer and go out in agony, what is it when hundreds of thousands suffer? when horses and mules are falling like flies by the roadway; when men and women trudge onward like dogs, with their tongues hanging from their mouths; when the sun hangs, from morn till evening, a flaring, coppery ball, bright and merciless, drying up all the sap of life; while against the blue ether show the countless flocks of crows, that whir and caw as they pounce upon the dying ere the breath has sped or the living marched away?

The very hugeness of the host hindered its hasting through this land of torment. One Sunday five hundred persons fell down and perished with thirst, and those who toiled on called them happy; for in heaven one never dreams of cool fields and sweet, cold water, yet all the time is burned within by fire unquenchable. When a tiny stream was reached—what was it among so many? Women fell dying, with their babes sucking at their breasts; and the host pressed on, for help there was none from man!

The horses, poor brutes, died by scores; knights wept when they saw their *destrers*—often better loved than brothers—sink down; saw their dear falcons and hunting dogs perish. Yet who could think of beasts, where men were staggering with open mouths, gasping for each breath of wind to lighten their burning torments? Still the host pressed on, though, far back as eye might scan, the carcasses and the crows marked out the line of marching.

On and on! and in the midst of the torment there were strange hours of ecstasy, of rapture over visions passing human ken. Men raved of angels and a heavenly city, and streets of gold and living fountains; and the last word of the dying was "Jerusalem!" while the shout that went down the parching host when the sun beat fiercest and all the watercourses were dust, was, "God wills it! Jerusalem!" So the march kept on; and though thousands fell, none turned back, nor would

have, had the backward track been of less peril than that before.

Richard bore the privations with a steadiness which made good the opinion of his followers that his frame was built of iron—not of flesh and blood. Yet his heart was cut, as never in this way before, to see his men dying before his face, and he unable to aid. Many a poor Auvergner called to his lord, and bade him tell some mother or wife or sweetheart in far St. Julien that he had struggled hard to gain the Holy City, but God had willed otherwise; and the seigneur would bear witness that he had been a faithful vassal and true Christian.

Rollo, great steed, endured the thirst with a quiet fortitude that let him survive when half the cavaliers of the army were bestriding mules and oxen. Sebastian, too, bore up, shrewdly remarking, as was his way, that his life of fast and abstinence had advantages in this world as well as in the world to come. Herbert, too, seemed unconquerable; but what with the losses at Dorylæum and the thirst, Richard saw his company thinned in a way to make his heart sick, even had this been all.

Finally, one day, when the last watercourse was dried up and death stared all in the face, certain knights saw their dogs slinking into camp, and behold, sand on their coats and mud on paws! Keen eyes tracked them; and, hid behind the bleak mountains, the searchers found a river, broad, still, stately, sweeping through its narrow gorge. Hither rushed all the host, soldier and beast. Had the Seljouks been by then, they could have slain their foes to a man, for the Christians forgot all save water—water!—sweeter, more precious, than spiced wine. They drank till from very surfeit they fell down stricken; and three hundred died, slain by the element of life.

This was the end of the great horror. They found new streams; the parching valleys began to sprinkle with green; they saw once more fields and trees and vineyards. "I, the Lord, will open rivers in high places and fountains in the midst of valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water;" so repeated good Bishop Adhemar, the father of the army; and all who heard cried "Amen." And the cry was again, "God wills it! To Jerusalem!" not despairing now, but rejoicing, confident; for after so great a trial to their faith, need the Most High prove them more? Then the march quickened, the *jongleurs* played merrily, there were jests and tales around the camp-fires; and they began to hope for one more passage-at-arms with the infidel before taking the Holy City—as if Heaven had not saved them once already! Yet there was a tone of sadness in the host, for the line was much shorter now. Where was he who had left no friend on those burning sands or at Dorylæum? Troopers were trudging on foot; extra arms and baggage had been thrown to the wolves long ago; not a man in the army that had not grown a dusty beard. Once when Richard polished his shield so that it shone as a mirror, he saw his face upon it. He scarce knew himself, what with the stiff beard and the fresh scars of the battle, and those lines drawn above the eyes.

"*Héh*," cried he, forcing a jest to Theroulde, who sat by the tent mending a crossbow, "how would the fair ladies at Palermo who danced with me after the tourney regard me now?"

Theroulde tugged at the hairs on his own chin.

"If we see no razor ere long, fair lord, we may swear by our beards as did Charlemagne, were they but whiter, and, as the song has it, of two hundred years' growth."

"Verily," answered Richard, making shift to keep a merry face, "I think I have lived two hundred years in the past month; and if troubles make white hairs, the saints know I am like to become most venerable."

Theroulde said no more, and Richard, looking into the shield, thought in his heart, "Were Mary to see me now, would she still love me?"

But the answer came, "Though your face were changed black as an Ethiopian's, yet she would love you!" Then the further thought, at which Richard's soul grew black as night: "Should he never—never in this world—set eyes on Mary again? Why had God dealt with him thus? Why should she suffer for his sin,—even if it had not been purged at Clermont?" Each day Richard's face grew more terrible; men feared him and praised his holy zeal against the infidels.

Thus the host came to the pleasant city of Antiochetta. Time would fail to tell of all their later troubles: how Tancred and Baldwin, brother of Godfrey, took Tarsus and quarrelled over its mastery; how Baldwin seized Edessa and founded there a principality; how the great army trudged its weary way across Lycaonia and mounted the rugged steeps of the "Mountain of the Devil." Many a stout man-at-arms died by the way, of sheer weariness; but the host pressed on. "God wills it! To Jerusalem!" was still the cry, and the ranks closed up.

Then leaving Marash and descending Taurus, they met new foes: no more Turks, but bronzed Arabs on roe-limbed steeds, men armed with cimeters of Damascus, and bright with the silks and cottons of Ispahan and Bussorah. Richard was a busy scout-master now, for he and the few other Christians who came from Sicily alone could speak the Arabic, and need not trust to uncertain interpreters. So he rode before the host with his forty knights, no spirit madder than he,—a very St. George when he fell upon the Moslems.

When they were close to Artesia on their way to invest Antioch, several Arab riders fell into Richard's hands, and he put to them the inevitable question:—

"Dogs,—can you tell me if Iftikhar Eddauleh, one time emir in Sicily, is in Syria, and where did he part company with Kilidge Arslan?"

And the men answered, all trembling:—

"Mercy, O Cid! Your slaves only know that the Emir Iftikhar is great among the Ismaelians. Report has it that he has now gone to Alamont to see his lord Hassan-Sabah."

"And you know nothing—nothing—" words spoken with awful intensity—"of a certain Christian lady, his captive?"

The men saw he had gladly paid them their weight in gold, if they could have told aught; but they dared not lie.

"Nothing, lord;—we are of the following of Yaghi-Sian of Antioch, and know of the Emir Iftikhar only by name."

"*Fiat voluntas Tua*," muttered Richard, and he sent the prisoners to the rear to be further questioned by Duke Godfrey. But he was more reckless now in the forays and skirmishes than ever. All men said he was seeking death; and Sebastian gave him warning:—

"Son, you are a chosen warrior of Our Lord. His cause is not served by throwing your life away. Beware lest, in running into peril, you do great sin!"

"Ah, father!" was the response, "what have I left save to slay as many infidels as I can and die! Yet you are right; die I must not, until I have struck down Iftikhar Eddauleh and avenged—" but he did not speak the name.

The next day Richard led his men under the city of Aleppo, and scattered some of the best of the light horse of Redouan, the local emir. But the walls were high. Report had it there was plunder in the palaces without the walls; some of the knights wished to attack. "We fight for Christ, not for gold and jewels!" said Richard, sternly, and led away.

And now they were in Syria. Before them lay a rolling green country, fairer than Sicily even,—a deeper blue, a brighter sun, than in Provence. The warm wind bore to them the sniff of the sand-dunes, spiced groves, and genii's islands far to southward. They trod a strange soil, strange flowers underfoot, strange birds in the air, strange leaves on the trees. All the sunshine, however, did not brighten Richard Longsword. Gone! Parents, brother, sister,—ah, God! wife also, and only knightly honor and revenge left. Let him slay Iftikhar and see the cross above Jerusalem, and then! but he fought back the black thoughts, as he had many a time before. Day and night he rode at the head of his men, who whispered his bones were steel, he was so tireless.

Then the host drew close to the great city of Antioch, the first Moslem stronghold to resist since the fall of Nicæa. And noble adventure awaited when the Norman Duke led the van to force the "Iron Bridge" which spanned the Orontes, key to the northern approach of the city. Long and stoutly did Yaghi-Sian's horse-archers and infantry dispute the passage, but Robert's mad knights swept all before them.

"With an hundred and thirty knights Roger won all Sicily at Ceramis!" cried the valorous Duke. "Shall we fail now with St. Michael and Our Lady to aid?"

So forward it was; and the Saracens heard the great "*God wills it!*" rolling down the Christian line,—that battle-cry which made the fight blaze tenfold fiercer, and which infidels so learned to dread. A great victory, but something better for Richard. In the press he and De Valmont fought side by side; and when a sling-stone laid Louis prone, Longsword had stood above him, covering with his shield, and saved the Auvergner from the tramplings of friend or foe. Then when they cried "Victory!" and the scared infidels raced for their lives to get behind the walls, Richard bore Louis to his own tent; for the Auvergner's was far to the rear.

"Ah, Richard," said De Valmont, when they had pitched after the battle, "you would not have stood above me thus in Sicily."

"No, fair knight," answered Richard, frankly; "but God has seen the sins of us both, and we are rewarded."

"Come," cried the Provençal, firing, for he had a good heart under a haughty shell; "we swore forgiveness at Clermont; let us swear brotherhood, for we know each other now. We both are valiant men; we two fought with honor at least, though to my cost,—shall we not be as strong in friendship as in hate?"

So Richard took the Auvergner's hand, and gave him the kiss, not of peace, but of brotherhood. And when Sebastian, coming by, saw them, he smiled:—

"You do well, dear sons, for two friends have the strength of four apart, and true affection is of God!"

As soon as Louis was well enough to ride once more, the twain were ever together. And the companionship of Louis was an unspeakable boon; for to one whom he held his equal, De Valmont was a frank, open-hearted, merry-tongued fellow, the very comrade to chase off the imps of gloom that had of late encamped round Longsword's soul. But as they scoured the country, bringing in forage and seeking news of the enemy, Richard always had the same question for any prisoners:—

"Do you know aught of the Emir Iftikhar Eddauleh?" And when they told him no, he was most likely to give a nod to Herbert, which meant that the captives' heads were forfeit. Louis pitied

him from the bottom of his soul.

"Dear friend," said the Provençal once, when they waited without Duke Godfrey's tent to report a skirmish, "you let this loss of Mary Kurkuas eat your heart away. Believe me, I loved her once as much as you, and yet—" here he laughed at memory of his own discomfiture—"I am still a very merry man. Are you angry?" Richard shook his head. "Then hear me out. Your Greek beauty was a very *fée*, as Roland's Aude. But hers are not the only bright eyes and red cheeks in the world. Cannot the Lord of St. Julien have the best and the fairest?—in Sicily, in France, in Syria? Mark what I have done,—my heiress in Toulouse could hold her head beside the Greek, and no shame to either. Say to yourself, 'The saints are unkind; I will not let them make me pout forever. Another cast of the dice, and better fortune—'" But here he stopped, for on the face of Richard was, not indeed rage, but a darkening of passion that Louis knew he had scarce dreamed of. And Richard answered very gently:—

"Sweet knight, we have sworn brotherhood; I know you speak out of the goodness of your heart. When you say, 'Once I loved Mary Kurkuas as much as you,' and then boast your happiness, and add that she is not alone fair, you show but this,—you loved her eyes and her hair, but not her true self, as do I. As for what more you say, I only answer thus: I have sworn that henceforth I will look in love on no woman, if not on her, but will fight as best I can for God and Holy Church, and trust that after the sacred city is taken Our Lord will admit me into His peace. Till then let me be a good friend, and as merry as I may."

While he spoke, the tent doors flapped aside, and Duke Godfrey himself strode forth. There was strength and joy by merely glancing into the eyes of that noble man. He put his hand on the shoulder of Richard, and said as a father to his son: "Richard de St. Julien, fear not that God is unmindful of your sorrow and prayers. We all, who love and honor you, have shared your grief, and He who loves you more than we, must share the most. Be strong, and either He will give you the desire of your heart, or you shall enter into the peace no mortal man may know." There was a ring and sweetness in the words of the mighty Duke which no priest could fuse into his speech, for Richard knew that Godfrey himself had walked through the moil and toil of life, and was crowned already victor.

"I will trust in God!" he said, when he left the Duke.

At his tent he sat a long time with Louis over some rare wine they had taken that day; called for a backgammon board, and played against Louis, winning seven games running. Herbert, who was standing by, was glad when he heard his lord give a hearty, unforced laugh—not of the fearful kind which had been his custom before. When Richard prayed that night, he put forth a new petition: "Master, if I have been chastened sufficiently, and it is Thy will, grant that I may see Musa once more, for next to one whom clearly Thou willest I should not possess, I desire him beyond all the world."

And this prayer he repeated night after night. Louis de Valmont was grown a dear friend,—but the Spaniard! Richard never dreamed of making the Auvergner a rival. "Musa! Musa!" The longing to see him was too deep for words.

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# CHAPTER XXVIII

## HOW RICHARD REGAINED HIS BROTHER

When the Christians sat down before Antioch in the autumn time, the delights of the country—the abundance of provisions and drink, the dark eyes of the sinful Syrian maids who swarmed to the camp—made the Franks intent on everything save warfare. The massy walls mocked all storming; and though Bohemond blockaded from the east by the Gate of St. Paul, Count Hugh on the north, and Godfrey and Raymond on the northeast, the south was open to every wind, and provisions entered the city freely. Much ado had Richard to keep discipline amongst his own men. "My merry masters," said he once, when even De Carnac clamored for a carouse over some skins of heady Laodicean, "whether we see the heavenly or the earthly Jerusalem, let us see it with pure hearts and pure bodies." And with Trenchefer he slit all the wine-skins. So that night, at least, the St. Julieners kept sober.

But the tide soon turned. A miserable winter it was; chill rains; the ill-placed camps swimming in water. Swords rusted in a night. There was hardly an hour when the heavens did not pour down their floods, until scarce a dry back was in the army. And as the floods continued, the provisions, once squandered so recklessly, began to fail. Longsword rode forth with Bohemond and Robert the Norman to sweep the country, and too often met only roving Saracen horse, who gave them hard blows and little booty. Then at last came the inevitable pursuer,—pestilence! and men began to die by scores; their faith all gone, cursing God and the saints, and the folly that drove them from lovely France on a fool's own errand. Evil tidings came in daily. Sweno the Dane, it was told, who was leading fifteen hundred horsemen across Cappadocia, had been overwhelmed by the Seljouks. And other ill news flowed fast as the rain torrents. Even the stoutest began to think more for their own lives than for ever seeing the Holy City. Some fled to Baldwin at Edessa;

others to Cilicia. Duke Robert went to Laodicea, and only returned when admonished thrice in the name of Our Lord. William de Melun, the mightiest battle-axe in the whole army, fled away,—the infidels he did not fear, but who was proof against famine?

Yet many did not falter; Tancred did not, nor Count Raymond, nor Godfrey who, before all others, was the reproachless warrior of his Lord. Bishop Adhemar thundered against the vice in the camp, holding up the fate of Babylon and of pagan Rome, mother of harlots. Stern measures were taken against sins of the flesh. Blasphemers were branded with a hot iron. When some of Yaghi-Sian's spies were taken, Bohemond had them butchered and cooked, to spread the tale in Antioch that the Christians ate their captives, and that those who came after be discouraged.

But when Peter the Hermit took flight by stealth, the whole army raged in despair.

"If he flee, whom may we trust? Sooner expect a star fall from heaven!" was the cry. Tancred pursued after and brought him back. "Father," quoth the Prince, "do you well to lead Christians into a strait like this,—then valorously depart?"

"Alas!" moaned the one-time prophet, "the flesh is weak, though the spirit willing! Would I had never preached the Crusade! When I see the sins of the army, I fear lest I am 'that Egyptian,' as St. Paul was accused, 'who led forth into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers.'"

"Hark you, father," cried the Prince, with a bitter laugh. "I am a warrior and no churchman; but I think it shame for knight or villain to call the devil above ground, and then cry because he has a sting in his tail! Back you shall go, will you, nill you; and let us have no more long chatterings about the sinful sloth of the warriors of France until the praters themselves rule their lives by their own gospel."

So they fetched Peter again to Antioch. Before all the army he swore an oath on the Scriptures that he would never desert. And to his honor be it said, this lapse was his last. In the after days he won yet more glory and confidence, despite this showing of human frailty.

Thus the winter wasted. With the spring came better food and more fighting. Richard had kept his men in moderate health and spirits; first by his iron discipline, second because he remembered a hint given by Manuel Kurkuas on Eastern campaigning, and had pitched his tents on a plot that was sheltered by a hill from the malarial winds of the lowlands. Now rumors began to come into camp that great preparations were making among the Moslems for sending a huge host to the relief of Antioch. As the sun smiled warmer, the hearts of the Crusaders lightened. Their camp beside the green-bowered Orontes was a noble sight,—one sea of pennons and bright pavilions,—and all about a wide moat and a palisade. The knights rode in their tourneys, and tinkled their lutes in praise of some maiden in far and pleasant France. But still Yaghi-Sian made Antioch good, and Jerusalem seemed very far away.

Richard told himself that even Mary would not know him now,—what with the thinness of his cheeks and his beard that almost brushed his breast. The first bitterness of his loss was beginning to pass. Mary had doubtless become wise, and submitted to her lot. Iftikhar, he knew, would give her every sensuous delight. He prayed that she might learn to be reconciled. As for himself, there was much work to do. Men honored his great sword. Though his seigneury was small, the greater lords called him to their council, because he spoke the infidels' tongue, because his heart was in the Crusade and not in worldly advantage; above all, because in him they saw a born leader. He was still the reckless and headlong cavalier whose squadrons could scarce keep Rollo in sight when their chief was in the saddle.

"Beware, De St. Julien," said Godfrey, one day, while it was arranged that Richard should lead a picked band of forty down toward the port of St. Simeon to cut off some Arab skirmishers. "Life is not to be thrown down like a cast of dice. Remember Oliver's warning in the tale:—

> "'Valor and madness are scarce allied;
> Better discretion than daring pride.'"

"True," answered Richard, smiling, while his eye wandered vacantly over the fine-wrought "life of Moses" pictured on the tapestries lining the good Duke's tent. "But were I struck dead as I stand, who would feel a pang? My old watch-dogs, Herbert and Sebastian, Theroulde the minstrel, Rollo, my horse—who more, my Lord Duke?"

Godfrey touched the young knight's hair gently when he answered: "Fair son,—for so I will call you, if you take no offence,—all are put in this world for some great and glorious work,—and to us especially is granted the task of wresting Christ's own city from the unbelievers. You would not shun your task. Is it not as wrong to fling life away as to turn the back on the foe in fair battle? And if aught befell you, say not that none would mourn. Believe me, we all love and honor you; for we see that in your heart burns a rare and mighty love for Christ, and your fall were a grievous loss."

"You say well, my lord," said Richard, bowing; "and were I to fall, men would mourn 'another stout swordsman and good lance gone'; for I am honored for my strong arm. But that might be cut off, yet I were still Richard Longsword; then who would care if I died a thousand deaths!"

"As Our Lord lives, not so bitterly!" remonstrated the good Duke. But Richard only replied as he went out, "I thank your kindness; but if I meet the infidels to-day, let the saints judge between us, and we shall have a noble battle!"

"By Our Lady," swore Godfrey, when Richard departed, "I have great sorrow for that lad; for lad he is, yet with so old a face!"

And Bishop Adhemar, who had stood by after the council broke up, replied: "And I too am torn for him. For his sorrow is beyond human comfort. Alas! poor baroness! I met her often on the march. May she and he alike learn to bow to the will of God!" But Richard had flown back amongst his men, and called loudly, "To horse!"

"*Laus Deo! Gloria! Gloria!*" he shouted to Herbert; "as you love me, saddle with speed. Scouts bring in that a squad of the emir of Emessa's cavalry lurk around the port. I ride to cut them off."

"Horse and away, then!" bawled the man-at-arms. "Yet why so merry?" And Richard answered, laughing:—

"I know not, dear fellow; yet I feel as if some angel had said to me, 'Richard Longsword, some great joy to-day awaits!'"

"And what joy?"

"By St. Maurice, I know not, and care less; most likely I shall slay twenty infidels, and be slain by the twenty-first!"

"The saints forbid!"

"The saints forbid nothing. I have said in my heart, 'Ill-fortune, enough of you! Begone!'" And the others marvelled at Longsword's merry mood. "Forward, and St. Michael with us!" his command. "Forward! forward!" came from all the rest, for they sniffed adventure when Richard Longsword led.

Richard gave Rollo a little tap on the flank, that sent the huge brute racing better than any spur, and they plunged away at a brisk gallop.

Very fair that spring day. Underfoot the wild flowers were springing; the turf had a fresh green, and all the silver poplars and oaks were putting on young leaves. When the troop watered their steeds by a tinkling brook, they saw the water strewn with scattered apple blossoms. Everything was sweet, balmy, and kind. Who under such a sun could keep sad, and grimace at God and His world? Not Richard Longsword. He broke into a gay battle-song of Theroulde's; then the others took it up, and they made the myrtles and oleanders quiver with their chorus as they rode along.

"Surely the saints are with us this day!" cried Richard, when the last catch died on the air. They were skirting the Orontes, now hidden by the trees, now riding by its bright current, and watching the swans spread their white sails to the soft east wind. But Longsword had not forgotten the more serious duty that called him afield.

"You, De Carnac, and two more, dismount. Walk to the crest of this hillock, and get a long sweep of the valley," was his order.

Presently the three came back with tidings that there was a company of horsemen, Saracens presumably, camped in the meadow just beyond a little terebinth grove.

Richard drew up his men with the promptness born of a score of like encounters.

"God wills it! At them!" such his shout. And the forty, all as one, swept from their covert over the grassy savannah—were round the grove and upon the infidels before one could count an hundred. Easy victory; for the Moslems, perhaps three score, had many of their horses picketed, and were preparing a meal. The false Prophet had beguiled them into setting no sentry.

"Strike! Strike!" the Christians were riding them down in a twinkling; a dozen were crushed before they could rise from the ground; others drew, and made some slight defence; more stood dazed, and while calling on Allah were made prisoners. Richard was reining in Rollo, and growling that he had not struck a single fair blow, when a cry from Herbert startled him.

"By the Mass! Look! Hossein, as I am a sinner!"

And Richard saw before his eyes a white-robed, catlike Arab, swinging upon a picketed chestnut charger. No need to glance twice to know the traitor—Longsword could have singled his face from ten thousand. But as he gazed a flash of the Arab's dagger had cut the lariat;—a whistle to the high-bred desert steed, and the splendid creature shot away, fleet as a startled hart.

"For the love of God, shoot down the horse!" thundered Richard, making Rollo leap under the spur. Herbert levelled, and sent a crossbow bolt. Too hasty,—long range, and he missed. And every twinkling was making the distance grow long between the rider in the white dress and the Christians.

"Chase! Ride!" rang Longsword's command. "A hundred byzants to take him alive!" But Rollo himself was soon heading all the forty. Never had Richard ridden as now, never had Rollo felt the spur so deep; but the speed of Borak, steed of the lightning, was in the mount of Hossein. Seldom had Rollo so nearly met his match. Almost before one dreamt it, the forty were specks in the rear.

"Faster, faster, dear Rollo!" urged Richard, for his voice was ever the keenest spur to the great brute. And Rollo indeed ran faster, but the desert steed faster too; and for a long time the distance between neither waxed nor waned. Grove, thicket, gully, fallen log (for their way lay

along none the most beaten road), the kind Powers led them past, when a stumble would have dashed rider and steed to certain death. Richard pressed Rollo again, and the huge horse putting forth all his powers began slowly as a snail, yet steadily, to gain on the Arabian. For some moments they raced thus; then the road became clearer, shut in on either side by trees that arched down, and slapped their green banners in the riders' faces. Who recked? Already Richard could see Hossein swaying in the saddle, clearly deliberating whether he could slacken to dismount and speed up the hillside. But the Arabian was running for dear life now, and though his rider tugged at the bit, he hardly swerved. Rollo, black monster, was coming up bound upon bound. Richard dropped his lance into rest. He would have Hossein at mercy before one could say three *Credos*. Was his hand steady enough to pin the Arab through the thigh where flesh was thick, and so take him prisoner? For Hossein's life would be precious—for a while.

"Ah, traitor!" cried Longsword in Arabic, "call on Allah now!"

The only answer was a fresh bound from the chestnut charger, a final burst of speed that carried him ahead for a moment. Then the steady gallop of Rollo told once more—another furlong, and the Ismaelian would face his doom.

"*La ilaha ill' Allah!*" broke forth from the fugitive; and half involuntarily Richard drew rein, while the prey nigh in his hands flew onward. For lo! in the road directly ahead was a company—horse and foot, in Oriental dress,—advancing rapidly, not a bowshot away! Richard wavered for an instant. He saw a horseman in flashing armor and blood-red turban come pricking toward them. Almost ere the thought could speed through his mind, Hossein was among the newcomers, and a score more came dashing forward to confront the solitary Christian. A glance back—not one of his men in sight! Rollo blown and panting! Escape up the hillside—impossible!—he in armor, and the Moslems nimble as rats!

"God wills it!" Richard's soul cried. "This is the good fortune; to ride down the foe, fight valiantly, die gallantly, and then peace—rest—peace!" He threw down the lance, and drew forth Trenchefer. "The last time you will strike for a Longsword, good friend!" quoth he, with a loving eye on the keen blade, "and you shall not strike in vain!" Then he pressed Rollo once more, "On again, my horse!" And the huge brute caught the hard road under his hoofs and went forward at a headlong pace. Richard could see the leading warrior, a splendid figure on his steed, coming on with drawn cimeter—a noble comrade in death! He would strike him first. And Richard made Trenchefer dance high while he flew.

"God wills it! St. Julien and Mary Kurkuas!"

So the woods rang with his battle-shout. He could see the Moslems, staring half amazed, as he came on headlong, one against their scores; saw bows bend; heard the arrows scream past. The leader he had singled as his prey was dashing down the road to meet him. How fair a combat!

"God wills it! St. Julien and Mary Kurkuas!" Richard gave it as his last battle-cry, and swung Trenchefer to beat through the Moslem's guard; when lo! the strange warrior had dropped cimeter and shield—reined short—and from him, as if by echo, there came: "Mary Kurkuas! *Allah akhbar*, you are Richard Longsword!" And Richard let Trenchefer clatter in the dust. "Musa! my brother!"

Then, all in armor as they were, they flung their mailed arms about one another for very joy, and cried, shedding great tears, as do only strong men when moved too deep for speech. For a moment the other Moslems, as they swarmed about, were ready to run Richard through, thinking he had taken their chief captive by some magic art. But Musa motioned them aside. When the two again found words, the first question from the Spaniard was, "And how is it with the Star of the Greeks?" But at this, the face of Richard grew dark.

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# CHAPTER XXIX

## HOW IFTIKHAR BORE HOME HIS PRIZE

Iftikhar Eddauleh rode over the dusty road from Turmanin to Aleppo with only thirty about him of the hundred riders that had followed him to Dorylæum. But Zeyneb was at hand, and Eybek, who had gone on the secret mission months before; and beside the grand prior moved a horse-litter containing a treasure Iftikhar would not have parted with had the heads of all his men and his own been at stake. Mary Kurkuas was his. The scene when he took her in the Christian camp had been terrible; how beautiful she had been, standing at bay, dagger in hand—no lioness more dreadful! He had disarmed her without marring one spot on a skin that was soft as the rose-petals. How she had cried and pleaded! He had been cruel? Yes; the poets all sang love was either cruel or sweet; and Iftikhar would be all sweetness now.

As the troops rode past the khan which stands on the Aleppo road, about twelve furlongs' journey beyond the gates, Iftikhar drew up his horse beside the litter, which Zeyneb was carefully guarding. The curtains were closed, but he spoke in his soft, melodious Arabic: "Star of the Greeks, if you will,—look forth! For we are approaching Aleppo, and now you may set eyes on the

palace El Halebah, which, by the blessing of Allah, is mine, and therefore yours!"

Mary thrust back the curtains. Her face was very pale now; the red spots on either cheek seemed to glow with hidden fire. But her eyes were dry and bright—the hour of outward agony had been long since passed.

"A beautiful country!" were her words. And it was even so; for, bowered in gardens and framed by a sky of purest azure, lay Aleppo, whose white walls, white houses, gilded minarets seemed stencilled in silhouette against the blue. Crowning the city rose the citadel, high above the proudest domes with its sheer brown rock. On it, too, shone the gold work of its battlements, and its gaudy banners streaming. Iftikhar pointed out the lofty dome of the great mosque Jami-Zakarya, whose minaret seemed to climb to the very bow of the heavens; the stately Jewish synagogue, the domes of the Christian churches, the tall houses of the merchants clustered round the bazaar.

"Beautiful, truly!" said Iftikhar, his eyes not on the stately city, but on the face of the Greek; "fair as the two gardens by the river of milk prepared for the beloved of Allah! Yet you see but the outward husk, O Soul of my Soul! For yours is the palace which Seïf Eddauleh, one-time lord of Aleppo, prepared for a maiden like yourself of the blood of the Greeks; and what was her joy shall be yours as well. See—we are at the gates of El Halebah!"

Mary thrust back the curtains farther, leaned on the cushions of brocade of Tostar, and saw the troop swing down a stately avenue of poplars. Soon the glittering city and dusty highway were hid from view. Between green thickets and leafy arbors she could see the silver stream of the Kuweik creeping silently in its flower-banked bed. Soon the trees were so dense that the sunlight only filtered down a soft haze, and the ground under the horse-hoofs was cool, where the moist leaves had fallen. A strange hush seemed to pervade the wood, and Iftikhar himself, as if awed, rode on in silence. Several minutes thus; and Mary felt a strange thrill, as if a voice had spoken, "You enter now into a magic world!" The horses had fallen to a slow walk. They could hear bird calling bird far within, among the myrtles and laurel hedges. The soft rush of a hidden waterfall crept upon them; one could almost feel the fine spray, yet only heard the plashing music. Presently, as if by enchantment, four men in bright armor, with naked sabres, stood across their way, and a voice rang out, trebly loud in the hush of the wood: "Stand! Who dares set foot within the precincts of El Halebah?" But Iftikhar had ridden in advance of the troops. "By the dirk and the cord!" were his words, when he held up a finger where a gem-stone glittered.

"The grand prior! Hail, master!" And the white turbans of the four almost touched the turf while they saluted. An instant more, and they were gone.

"See!" said Iftikhar, when the seeming apparition had vanished among the trees. "Though El Halebah seem unguarded, save by the owls and bats, I say to you not a snake could wind under the dead leaves, but the eyes of my Ismaelians, keeping watch and ward, would find him. Fear nothing, O Rose of the Christians! About you this hour are three thousand blades, and over them all must a foe ride ere he lay hand on you! You are safe, as though in the bosom of Allah!"

Mary made no reply. The iron had long since entered her soul. Iftikhar was to have his day; the Holy Mother knew it was like to prove a long one. Yet even in her plight the magic wood had a strange charm for the Greek. And at last she asked, "How far about extends the grove of the palace?"

"How far?" answered Iftikhar. "One might wander a league and more to the north, and find naught save glen and fern-dell and fountains. Seïf built it for his fair ones and poets to roam, and think themselves in Allah's paradise. The singer Motenabbi found his words too faint to sing its praise. Now by the will of the Dispenser of All Things it has become the possession of the Ismaelians. Not Redouan, lord of Aleppo, himself dare set foot within the groves, save at nod of mine. Here we may dream we are upon the Fortunate Islands, a thousand leagues away in the Western Sea; and watch the stars go round the pole; and listen to the bulbuls and the brooks singing,—singing ever of revel, and laughter, and love, so long as mortal life may be."

Mary held her peace; Iftikhar, too, fell to day-dreaming. Of a sudden they passed from the wood, and saw before them a wide prairie of emerald grass. Beyond this rose a palace—one wide stretch of domes and pinnacles, and fantastic colonnades, and beyond the palace spread a blue lake, close girded by the forest. In the midst floated a green island covered with gay kiosks. A light skiff, blue as the waters, was shooting across the glassy surface under a steady oar. As Iftikhar's eyes lit upon the rowers in the skiff, he gave a cry:—

"Morgiana!"

"Did you speak to me?" asked Mary.

"No, Soul of my Soul," was the answer. "Yet see the boat; in it glides one whom, Allah granting, you shall love right well! At least"—and now he muttered under his breath—"either you shall love each other, or, as the Most High lives, I know whom I can part with best, and it will not be the Greek!"

And now they were at the portal. The brass-cased doors swung open without warning; a hundred gaudy flags tossed out upon pinnacles and domes; a great crash of music greeted them—trumpet, timbrel, hautboy, and cymbal,—and a line of twenty negro eunuchs, naked save for skirts of red silk whereon gold lace was flashing, each holding a ponderous cimeter. At sight of Iftikhar they

knelt and bowed their heads to the mosaic pavement. Then a single eunuch stepped forward, tall, spare, gorgeously dressed in Susangird damask, the jewels gleaming from ears, hands, and shoes; upon his beardless, ebony face a perpetual smile. He also knelt at his lord's feet. And Iftikhar questioned:—

"The messenger I sent ahead from Afrin came promptly?"

"He did, O Fountain of our Being; and all is prepared to receive and make joyous the Star of the Greeks!"

"You have done well, O Hakem!" replied the emir. Then when two of the negroes had lifted Mary from her litter, Iftikhar led her forward. "This, mine own, is my good slave, and yours too, by name Hakem, the chief of my eunuchs and ruler of my harem." Hakem had risen when his lord addressed him, but now at sight of Mary his smile became more blooming than ever, and his violet cap swept her feet as he bowed.

"Hakem," continued his master, "except I command otherwise, the tiniest word of the Star of the Greeks is your law. Deny her, and the stake is ready for your impaling!"

"I hear and obey!" replied Hakem, still smiling, and touching his head, to proclaim his willingness to lose it.

"Go before us to the harem!" Iftikhar went on, and with only the eunuch and Mary Kurkuas, the emir advanced within the palace. Mary saw, as they passed, court after court, fountains, domes, a wealth of jewel-mosaic on floor and wall, glass sconces of rainbow-tints hanging from golden chains. Then in a cool inner apartment where the sun stole dimly through marble tracery in the high ceiling, Iftikhar halted; and as he entered three women, dark-eyed, bronze-skinned, but beautiful as houris, stood—then knelt before Mary.

"Your slaves," said Iftikhar, pointing to them. "Command them; if they fail to please, a word to Hakem, and their lives are snuffed out."

"I thank your kindness, master," said Mary, very softly.

"Master?" exclaimed Iftikhar.

"Assuredly; am I not your slave as much as these women here? Is it not your pleasure, rather than my right, that keeps me from their servile tasks? Does not my very breath tremble on your nod?" And Mary stood before Iftikhar with folded hands, her eyes cast upon the silken rug of Kerman.

The emir broke forth with the heat of glowing fire.

"O Flower, whose beauty shames the rose of Khuzistan! Star, whose light I have followed these years, seeking, hoping, praying, striving! Who the slave, you or I? For your sake have I not sent to the ends of the earth? For you have I not prepared this palace, than which is not a fairer from Andalus to Turan? What is my life without you? What my power among the Ismaelians? My hopes of sovereignty, such as Zubaida, beloved of Harun, might have joy to share! For you,—it is all for you! Without you the palace is dungeon; the earth, wilderness; the fairest of Arabian maidens, jinns of black night."

And in the delirium of the moment he caught her, held her in his arms, kissed her once, twice. But her lips were icy. The touch of her form chilled him. He shrank away as from a statue of marble.

"Master," said Mary, never resisting, "I am your slave. You have the power. I cannot resist; I fear I cannot flee away. You may do with my poor body as you list; but me,—Mary the wife of Richard de St. Julien, the soul throbbing behind this flesh and blood,—*me* you can never hold in power. No! not, were your three thousand sword-hands myriads. For my true self is as far beyond your unholy touch as though I sat above the stars! Do with me as you will,—I laugh at you; I mock your impure wiles; for till you hold me, soul as well as body, I am free—free in the sight of God, though you pour all your passions on me! I love you not, and never shall, till the day breaks in the west, and the seasons cease to wheel."

As she spoke, her eyes glowed with a fire that lit another fire of mingled desire and rage in the eyes of Iftikhar.

"Hearken, Star of the Greeks!" and he again stepped toward her. Mary stood calm as a statue; only her eyes shone yet brighter.

"I have heard you often, master; but I will listen."

"I command you, style me no more 'master,'" raged Iftikhar, feeling he had conjured up a demon that greater power than his must chain.

"I can style you no otherwise," was the reply; "for so you are. Punish my disobedience. I can bear much."

There was a little table at hand; on it stood a rock-crystal goblet and a silver cooler filled with snow-water and rose sherbet.

"Mary Kurkuas," said Iftikhar, controlling himself by a great effort, and holding up the goblet,

"think not I seek the deeds of mad passion and violence. My power? The might that flashes in your eyes were a myriad times more! Love? Yes, truly; I would have your lips seek mine, as two doves flit to the same nest. See! A pledge!—by the great angel Israfil, at whose trumpet the dead shall spring for judgment, I swear: I will do you no hurt! nothing! I will teach you to love me, until Constantinople, and Sicily, and France shall be as a forgotten dream, and of your own free will you shall be mine own, till Allah cut us asunder."

He held high the goblet.

"To Mary Kurkuas, fairest of women!" he cried, drank, bowed low, and was gone, leaving Mary with Hakem the eunuch.

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The heavy tapestries in the doorway closed noiselessly. Mary stood gazing half stupidly at Hakem and the maids. Then at last the eunuch spoke, his imperturbable smile swelling to a fulsome grin.

"O my little birdling, what friends shall we not become! How sweetly shall we pass the days together!"

Had his words been hot irons, he could not have affected Mary more. In a trice she had sprung toward him, her eyes flashing flame. She was in poise and voice the great princess of the house of Kurkuas, born to rule. "Toad!" came across her teeth, "did I bid you speak? Out of my sight, you and these wenches, or as I live—"

"Mercy, gracious *Citt*, gracious mistress!" began Hakem, throwing up his hands and rolling his eyes, for he knew that he faced his match. "You are travel-worn; your dress—"

Mary took a step toward him, snatched him by the shoulder, whirled his face toward the door in an instant.

"Away!" was her command; "or if Iftikhar did not mock me, the next word I have for him is to ask your head!"

Hakem shuffled out of the room like a whipped hound. To the maids Mary gave not a word—simply pointed toward the passage. The flash in her eyes sufficed. They were gone; and the Greek found herself alone—oh, bliss!—alone!

The room was large, high-domed; the walls covered with gold and colored enamel in fantastic arabesques. Here and there an inscription from one of the poets in silver mosaic. On the silken carpet the feet moved noiselessly. The light trickled through the piercings in the dome, and spread a restful twilight around. There were divans of priceless Chinese silk, an ebony table whereon lay silver and crystal cups and coolers, fruit and honey cakes. Upon the divan lay ready a dress, silk also, plainly prepared for Iftikhar's new favorite, gold lace, jewel embroidery: in France worth a count's ransom; even in Constantinople worthy of the Empress herself. It was very still. Mary sat upon the divan beside the table and rested her face on her hands. She was more weary than one may tell. Despite the care of Iftikhar, the journey had been no easy one. And now this was the end! Here was the golden cage in which the bright bird was to be kept fast! Mary shed no tears now. Iftikhar had given her a pledge. She felt sure he would be patient within reason. But in time? Mary knew herself well enough and Iftikhar well enough to be sure that both were made of mortal stuff. After all, she was his slave—to be sold in the market if he chose. She had taken her vows touching Richard Longsword while life lasted. But was he not dead to her? Perhaps dead to all the world? Did men only die to one another when they stopped eating, talking, and sleeping? She could struggle, could put on her majesty, could say "No" a score of times; but in the end!—what end could there be saving one! So Mary sat in her revery, her thoughts as dark as the ebony table beneath her eyes.

Suddenly, as if awaking from a dream, she heard laughter,—laughter musical as a little stream, but with a mocking, angry tinge that left a sting. Mary lifted her eyes, raised her head. More laughter—louder, still musical. The Greek almost started. Could she not even have sorrow in peace?

"Have I not bidden you all begone?" was her cry, and at last the tears were not far from her eyes; for this defiance was the last drop to her cup of sorrow.

"No," came back a voice, clear and melodious as a zithern note; "no, you have commanded me nothing."

"Then now I say 'away'—leave me alone!"

"How sweet to see you angry! I will not leave you. See! I enter. I wish to look at you face to face."

The curtains at the farther end of the room opened. As they did so a score of little bells upon them tinkled, and Mary saw a woman standing in the mild half-light. Instantly the Greek rose, and the two looked into each other's eyes.

Morgiana was dressed in a manner only possible to one who felt the vulgar eye far removed. She wore loose green silk trousers that gathered a little below the knee; her feet were hid only by

white slippers, where the gem-stones were flashing, and white silken stockings; arms and neck were bare; a gauzy Indian shawl, white also, was wrapped about her; on her girdle shone the gold chain work, another gold chain around her neck; the abundant black hair streamed loosely over the shoulders from under a jewel-set fillet. The two women stood facing one another for a long moment. Then each broke forth in one breath, but the Arab first.

"How beautiful you are!—I hate you!"

"How beautiful!—I wish to love you!"

The two sentences blended into one; and instantly Morgiana burst again into laughter.

"So this is the Star of the Greeks! I give you joy; you are worthy of Iftikhar Eddauleh! *Ya*; were you a peri of the deep, you could not be fairer!"

Mary bowed her head. "Lady," was her answer, "who you are I know not; but this I know, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and if Iftikhar possesses you, God alone knows why he casts eyes on me!"

Yet again Morgiana laughed. "God alone knows?" was her cry; "verily, I doubt it. Were He knowing, and yet able to change the world, wicked He must be to suffer the deeds of men! You think me a stranger. Well, Morgiana the slave of Iftikhar greets Mary the slave of Iftikhar, and Morgiana adds that she will kill Mary, as surely as the evening follows the morn!"

"Pray God that you may have your wish full soon!" answered the Greek, looking down. Her words seemed to have touched a new spring in Morgiana. The Arab threw her hands on high.

"Cursed are you, O Greek! Cursed your beauty! Cursed all who look in love upon you! Let the jinns of the abyss swallow you! Let Eblees, Lord of Darkness, have mastery of you! May your bright eyes be turned to blindness, your white skin scorch, your smooth arms wither—" But here Mary interrupted, humble no longer now, her own proud fire flashing in turn.

"Silence—madwoman! It is you the evil powers will curse! Do I need maledictions from you to make my lot less darksome, my cup less bitter? Curse Iftikhar Eddauleh, if you will, whose sin and passion blast your joy and mine! Curse him, not me!" And at this Morgiana broke forth fiercely:—

"No, no, not Iftikhar Eddauleh! Were he tearing me with tortures, yet would I bless him. Were he foul as the rebel angels, his kiss were honey. Dwelt he in parching Gehennah, to be with him—paradise! No word against him, or here and now I slay you!"

Mary made no immediate answer. Morgiana's face was aflame with passion; as she spoke she swayed in half frenzy. Under her breath the Greek murmured, "She is mad!"

"As Allah lives!" cried Morgiana, her mood veering swift as the flight of birds, "I have frightened you! Unjust, cruel, my heart is half ice and half fire. I have given you arrows instead of tears. You are blameless, wretched, helpless,—what may I do for you?"

And she had caught Mary's hands within her own, and was drawing her close and kissing her forehead.

"They do well to call you star and flower of the Greeks! *Mashallah!* how could Iftikhar and all the world fail to give all to gain you! From Cairo to Samarkand there is none like you!"

Mary did not answer. To her Morgiana was fury, houri, and angel all in one moment. She knew not what to think, and so kept peace. But the Arab ran on: "I saw you at Palermo. It came to my ears that you were very beautiful. I saw you ride to church once with your father. I, of course, was veiled and guarded by Hakem; and when my eyes lit on you, I said, 'She is not over-praised.' Yet there was a throng, and you were not near. But now, face to face, I say, 'Not all the poets from Imr ul-Kais to An-Nami could paint in verse your beauty; no, nor all the angels who sing about the throne of Allah!'"

"Praise it not," cried Mary, finding her tongue; "it is, as you say, cursed,—cursed for me, at least; please God, not for those who have loved me! I say naught of Iftikhar; let God judge him, not I!" Morgiana bowed her head in turn.

"You say well. Let the Most High judge Iftikhar. And now"—raising her eyes—"tell me; shall we be friends?"

Then and there the two kissed one another, cried on each other's necks, and swore—so far as spirits like theirs may—to be friends and sisters. For the burden of each was great. When they had ceased crying and could talk once more, Morgiana led Mary to the divan, exclaiming:—

"*Wallah!* But you are all travel-stained and weary. Where are Hakem and the maids?"

"As you love me," protested the Greek, "do not call them. I will not see that sleek eunuch's face again. I sent them all away."

"Hakem!" repeated Morgiana, with a sniff; "he is a harmless lizard, after you grow accustomed to seeing him trail his nose around. His teeth look very sharp, but they must not frighten you. Nevertheless, if you will not—" Mary shook her head.

"Then I will play the tiring maid!" cried the Arab; and she laughed when she drew the pins from

Mary's hair, and let it fall over her shoulders, a shining, brown mass.

"*Wallah!* How beautiful you are!" Morgiana repeated again and again. She led Mary into a bath, where the air was heavy with perfumes of saffron and date-blossoms, then put on the Greek the Eastern dress which had been made ready. Mary's heart was very full when Morgiana laid aside the Frankish bleaunt; for in that mantle she had ridden beside Richard Longsword over the weary road to Constantinople; he had given it to her on their wedding day. But when the Arab wished to draw the little silver ring from her finger, the Greek shook her head.

"Silly!" commented Morgiana, "it is not worth a dirhem; I will bring you a casket of a hundred—ruby, onyx, beryl—"

"My husband set it there," replied Mary, thrusting back her hair and looking full into the Arab's face. "It was to remain there till I die." Morgiana tossed up her head. "Your husband? Richard Longsword, that boorish Frank, who has a bull's strength with a baboon's wits? How dare you love him, when you may have the love of Iftikhar Eddauleh!"

"Nevertheless," said Mary, very slowly, never moving her gaze, "Richard is my husband. I love him. Do not speak ill of him, or our friendship dies the day of birth."

"I have a very cruel heart!" cried Morgiana, kissing the Greek again; and the ring was left in its place.

They had completed the toilet. There was a long silvered mirror in the room, and Mary saw herself dressed after the fashion of the East, from the mother-of-pearl set upon her yellow shoes, to the gold-spangled muslin that wound above her flowing hair. "Holy Mother of Pity," she whispered, looking down at the little ring, "but for this, I were already become an infidel!"

The next moment the voice of Iftikhar demanded entrance, and the two women stood before him.

"*Bismillah!*" he exclaimed, smiling, and looking more handsome and lordly than ever, "I see two of the houris! You are friends?"

"We are sisters," replied Morgiana, a little defiantly. "I fled out upon the lake that I might not meet you when you returned,—but now!" and she took Mary by the hand.

"I will wait on you no more to-day," said Iftikhar, bowing in most stately fashion. But when he had gone, Morgiana gave a bitter cry:—

"Allah pity me; Allah pity you also! His words were for us both, but his eyes on you alone! I have lost him, lost him forever. The Most High keep me from some fearful deed!"

"I do not dread you," said Mary, gently.

"No," came the answer, "you need dread nothing. Christian you are, and Moslem I; but one God hears us both. Oh, let us pray,—pray for His mercy; for lesser help may not avail!"

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Mary slept that night in the same chamber as Morgiana, an airy, high-vaulted room, in an upper story of the palace. Through the tracery of the lattice came the warm breeze, bearing the narcotic scent of those tropic gardens. But Mary was long in falling asleep on her soft pallet. In the darkness she heard the trumpet-voiced muezzins in the distant Aleppo, calling the midnight *Oola: "Allahu akhbar! Allahu akhbar! Allahu akhbar!* I testify there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the prophet of Allah! Come to prayer! Come to prayer! Prayer is better than sleep!"

The words pealed out in the night like voices from another world. Mary stirred and kissed the silver ring. "Dear Mother of God! Dear Christ who suffered for us all, give me strength to bear all, to resist, to endure! Keep my own heart true to Richard Longsword and our love. Save me utterly, if that may be, and if not, be merciful and let me die; for the temptation will be very great!"

Morgiana started in her sleep; the curtain above her bed rustled. "Dear sister," she said softly, "go to sleep. The day has troubles enough, without letting them steal peace from the night."

So Mary kissed the ring, folded her hands, and at last was dreaming.

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# CHAPTER XXX

## HOW THERE WAS FESTIVAL AT ALEPPO

After the winter rains were past, and when all the birds were singing in the groves about El Halebah, Mary Kurkuas could see that Iftikhar Eddauleh was waxing restive in soul; both on her

account and on account of something which was stirring in that great world which lay beyond the palm trees, the lake, and the silver Kuweik. What those events without were Mary could scarce guess, for had she been transported into another planet, she could not have seen less of what passed in the realm of armies, and princes, and battles. The moment the enchanted groves of the palace closed about her, all beyond had been blotted out; she saw no men save Iftikhar, Zeyneb, and Hakem with his fellow-eunuchs, if these last were indeed men. Once she had asked Hakem whether the Crusaders had been driven back when they strove to cross Asia Minor, and whether the expedition to Jerusalem had been abandoned. The sleek creature had only salaamed, and smirked deprecatingly.

"O Rose of the Christians, my ears are deaf, my eyes blind to all beyond the precincts of El Halebah!" was his sole reply. Zeyneb she loathed from the depths of her soul. The dwarf saw her seldom, although he affected to seek the company of his foster-sister. Mary induced Morgiana to ask him to tell of the outside world, and was met by a blank refusal. "Let him twitter once, and Iftikhar would lift his head from his shoulders!" As for Iftikhar, when Mary demanded to know the success of the Crusade, he replied with one of his flashes of mingled authority and passion: "Soul of my Soul! ask me nothing. My lips are sealed, save when I speak of the love that burns me and of the brightness that blazes from your eyes!" And no appeal could draw from him more. Once during the autumn Mary thought she saw from the uppermost balcony a squadron of armed horsemen riding furiously from Aleppo. That day too she heard one negro eunuch say to a fellow, "Allah grant that they come no nearer!" and the other, "As you love life, breathe nothing to your own soul! If the *Citt*, Mary, should hear!" But this was all. Day sped into day. No change in the monotonous ease and routine of the harem. Mary had grown wonted to the unending round. She no longer lay awake to hear the muezzins. Sometimes she wondered if she would forget her Greek and her French, hearing only Arabic, save when she talked with Eleanor.

Eleanor had been held as captive by Iftikhar, not because he had any unwonted passion for her, or grudge against her; but she was beautiful, and he liked to feel that he held one of the Longswords in his harem. The young Norman had long since bowed her head to her fate. After a manner she had been kindly treated. Less full of energy and unquenchable vigor than the Greek, she had grown content to stay all day in the harem, bathing in the perfumed waters, embroidering, drinking sherbet. Morgiana, seeing she was not likely to become a rival, had patronized and protected her against the insolence of the eunuchs. Mary had been greeted by Eleanor rapturously, as if she were an angel. As for Morgiana, the "maid of Yemen" was alternately to her sister and fury. For days together she would have never a word for Mary save an occasional malediction or threat; then without warning she would repent in tears, implore forgiveness, become gentle, loving, clinging as Eleanor; and so until the next cloud of jealousy came over her.

It was one day in the early springtime when the eunuchs spread canopies on the palace roof. Here, with the green groves stretching on every hand, the three women had idled out the warm, sweet afternoon. Mary was aiding Eleanor over her embroidery frame. And now it was that Morgiana told what she had never told before—the story of how she fell into the hands of Iftikhar. "Know, O sweet sister," said she, laying down the guitar on which her long, shapely fingers had been wandering, "that I am the daughter of Jaafar bin Shirzâd, who was the *Hajib*, that is, Lord Chamberlain, to the Commander of the Faithful, Al Muktadi the Abbasside, and that I was born in my father's palace which lay by the Tigris in Bagdad. My father had four wives and many fair female slaves, fair as moons; but most of all he loved my mother, Kharka, who was peerless among the women of Bagdad. She was the daughter of Abu Ahmed, emir of the free desert tribes of Yemen. From her I gain my name; from her my blue eyes, which are found sometimes among the Arabs of the great waste. My mother was brought up after the fashion of her people; not pent in harems, guarded by eunuchs, but free as youth—would to Allah this were the custom in all Islam! From her love of freedom comes my own proneness to rush to unwomanly things. At Bagdad my mother pined for her native sand plains, and died when I was young, leaving me to my nurse,—mother of my accursed foster-brother, Zeyneb. Then came the direful day when my father lost his head by demand of Melik Shah, the arch-sultan; and I and all his harem were plunged in slavery. I was sixteen when I and Zeyneb stood in the slave market at Damascus. At Iftikhar's first sight of me unveiled, the love sprang to his eyes as flame leaps on a torch. He bought us; and for years he and I were to each other as two souls in one body; the thought of him, joy! sight of him, joy! touch of him, joy! So he to me. And in love for me he cast all the other women from his harem. Then—luckless day!—he went to Sicily to find service among the Christians. There at Palermo I was mother of his child; merciful Allah! why couldst Thou not spare my little Ali? But he died—sorrow passing words! After that I saw that Iftikhar was drifting away from me. First he bought other slave women, though still he gave me chief place, and love of the lips. Then on a day"—and Morgiana's eyes seemed fiery daggers searching Mary's very soul—"I heard Hakem, chief eunuch, speak of the beauty of Mary the Greek; then I first heard your name, and learned to curse you! Aye, curse you, as I have a thousand times since. Since that hour, day by day, despite my wiles, and my beauty, and my sorrow, unceasingly he has drifted from me farther and farther; and now he has you—your body already, when he wills; your soul, too, full soon. And I have lost him; have lost him forever!"

Mary raised her head to reply; but Morgiana swept on: "Oh, it is not the pain of seeing another mistress of El Halebah; of knowing I am second when I should be first; of feeling, 'One whisper from the Greek, and at her wish Iftikhar would slay me.' But I love him. To possess him, though clothed in rags and loaded with fetters—enough! To hear him say, 'I love you,' as once he did, and know that it was not tongue but eyes also that spoke—that were my paradise!"

Morgiana bowed her head, and broke into wild sobbing. The Greek put her arm about her.

"Dear sister, I, like you, am the slave of Iftikhar Eddauleh—at his mercy, his toy, his sport for an idle hour—but never fear that I will love him. Till I know Richard Longsword sleeps with the dead —"

Morgiana lifted her face angrily. "Why speak of Richard Longsword? Who dares compare him to Iftikhar Eddauleh? Is he not a boorish Frank? And Iftikhar?—were it not there is but one Allah, would I not call Iftikhar a god!"

"You worship him; yet you are his slave?"

"Yes! what shame? Do I wish to be free? Are not all mortals slaves of Allah? And is not Iftikhar to me in the place of Allah? Let men bow down to a God; but what God may a woman own save a strong man, whose love is her all—her all!"

The words of Morgiana sank to a sob. She flung her face in Mary's lap and wept.

"Oh," she cried, "I see well enough how it is with you. I have eyes, and wits. On the first days you were here you loathed Iftikhar as if he were a snake. But he knows his game. He has drawn his net about you. Each day you note his dark Eastern splendor, so unlike the West; his speech like music, his professions of love; and each day you say, 'I hate him.' But you do not say it with the sting of months ago. Richard Longsword is becoming very dim before your eyes; Iftikhar Eddauleh, very real. The change is slow; yet I am not wrong. By Allah, I am not wrong! For I see two fires in your cheek, another on your forehead. You do not shudder, as you once did, at thinking, 'All my life I must spend in a golden prison like El Halebah.' It will be very pleasant. Iftikhar is to become the lord of all Islam, if naught fails. The Ismaelians will overthrow Sultan and Kalif, and Iftikhar is declared heir of Hassan-Sabah. So much I know, though we hear so little. And you will reign with him—Sultana! Empress!"

"As you love me, speak no more!" Mary found voice to beg.

"Love you!" cried Morgiana, in her mood; "do I not hate you with fury passing death? Last night, when Iftikhar spoke to you soft and low, I could see your eye following his as a weaver's the shuttle. You are yielding, yielding; soon—"

But Mary had clapped her hand upon the Arab's mouth. "Love me or hate me, do not torture! What can I do?" was her plea. "Day and night I call to Our Lady, 'Save me, or let me die.' And I am growing weak, weak! I cannot fight the will of Heaven much longer. How easy to defy Iftikhar the day he bore me hither! How easy to feel my will each day growing more helpless to resist! God is angry with me; some sin that I have forgotten, yet that must be very great. Oh, pity me, for I am only a weak girl!"

So they comforted one another, those two, whose hearts were too full for words. While they yet sat side by side, Iftikhar came upon the balcony. Splendid he was, in his jewelled turban, golden belt, and dress of *izar*—the gold-embroidered cloth of Mosul. He made a profound reverence to Mary, then spoke.

"O Star of the Greeks! I your slave have remembered that perchance even the charm of the halls of El Halebah may grow weary. Deign, I pray you, to be dressed this evening in such a dress as I have commanded Hakem to provide; for to-night all the daughters and maidens of Aleppo have been bidden to make free in these gardens, and there will be festival, such as Bagdad has seldom seen since the great feast of Moktader."

"I thank your lordship, I obey," said Mary, bowing. The emir's face lit with pleasure.

"And you, Morgiana," continued Iftikhar, more lightly, "you, with Eleanor, of course will not fail me. I would show these beauties of Aleppo that here hid in our groves are the fairest eyes in Syria."

"Cid," said Morgiana, haughtily, "if you command me, I will obey; otherwise, let me sleep and the rest dance."

"*Ya!*" cried Iftikhar, testily; "you are gloomy as Gann, lord of the evil jinns! No doing of mine can please you. *Wallah*, be it as you will! The Star of the Greeks is more kind. To-night! I swear the poets of Emir Redouan shall sing of the fête the whole year long!" So he was gone, and Morgiana turned fiercely on Mary. "Eblees and all his 'Sheytans' of the Pit pluck you away! What have you done? You said yes as though Iftikhar's words were sweet as honey of Lebanon. He will conquer you to-night! Are you blind? Not for the maidens of Aleppo, but for you, this fête is prepared. To-night he will be master of you, soul as well as body. Blind! blind!"

Mary looked into the Arab's face.

"O dear sister," came her words, "you say well. But I am not blind. What more can I do? Love him I do not, as you. But I am helpless; Iftikhar is lord. Better to have an end. Hate him I do not as I did once. Time is kind. I must bow my head, and pray God make me forget the past. There is no other way—none. I can fight the battle no more."

"Dearest heart," cried the Arab, "it is all true. You can do no more. If you were not so pure and lovely, I would have killed you long ago. Only do not triumph over me, when you have learned to love Iftikhar as do I."

"No, blessed soul," said the Greek, softly; "that may never be."

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That night all the heavens about El Halebah glowed with the light of myriad torches; lights on the domes and soaring towers; lights flitting among the palm trees; lights tossing behind every myrtle and laurel brake; lights twinkling from under the cool colonnades, and making the mist of the fountains a shimmering spray of diamonds. There were flowers scattered over every walk; flowers festooned about each column; the air made heavy with the breath of rose, pink, and violet. All about were set innumerable banners, streaming to every wind. Fires flashed from the islands upon the lake; and down the enchanted path that led through the woods to the Aleppo road there was a cordon of flambeaux, making the avenue light as day.

So much saw Mary Kurkuas, peering from her lattice, while the maids made her ready and clothed her in robes such as Iftikhar himself had never sent her before. At last the emir stood outside her door with the petition, "O flower more sweet than the rose, I, your slave, pray you, come forth—come forth; the fête is ready; the stars await the moon!"

Mary let them wrap round her face the veil of gauze of Baalbec, and went to meet Iftikhar. Never had the emir been more darkly handsome; his eye flashed with fire out-vying the blaze of the great gems at his girdle. He wore a tiara worth thrice the revenues of the king of France. The sheath of his long cimeter was of beaten gold. And when Mary looked upon him, a strange thrill passed over her—what a man this was, who had loved her even against her will!

"Come forth, O Fairest of the daughters of the Christians! And let the maidens of Syria blush beneath their darker skin: let them mourn, 'Our beauty cannot compare with the loveliness of the Greek who is beloved of Iftikhar Eddauleh!'"

So spoke the emir, and a mysterious spell seemed to fall on Mary. Under his word and nod she was passive as a little child. Once, once only—the vision of Richard Longsword—rough-featured, firm-lipped, framed of iron—passed before her eyes,—how dim it all was! How very far away! Iftikhar took her hand, and led her through the mazy colonnades. And women fair as the dawn brought her a great wreath of cool flowers that she hung about her neck; others threw upon the air a spray of perfumes of Mazendran, while as the two advanced, the lights and torches ever multiplied; they trod onward in a glow of brightness.

"See!" Iftikhar had led her to the balcony of the colonnade, where thronged the nobles of the court of Redouan, all in dresses bright as the sun, but Iftikhar's brightest. Before them and around stretched a wondrous vision. Mary saw the maids and young women of Aleppo, of Sultan Redouan's harem and of his grandees, dancing, as was their custom, in wide circles hand in hand; their white dresses flying, their brown arms twinkling, their violet-black hair streaming to the wind. First they danced yet veiled; then as the dances maddened, they one after another cast the veils aside, and their dark eyes flashed in the torchlight. Round the women in wider circles were others,—three thousand men,—also in white, but with each a glittering cuirass and cimeter. And as the maidens danced the men broke from their ranks, and danced after their kind; crying aloud, and beating their swords against their targets. But the crash of the cymbals, the boom of the copper kettledrums, the wild wail of the hautboys, the flutes, and the tinkling Persian harps, sounded above all. The dancers caught up torches, and made the ground spring with whirring light. As the music quickened, the dances wound their maze yet faster. And now the Ismaelians rushed among the women, mingling with them in the dance; plucking away the veils that were still clinging; catching the cymbals from the musicians' hands and crashing them yet louder. The whole scene seemed fast becoming pandemonium. Mary's eyes throbbed under the flashing of the torches; a desire seemed to spring through her to sway with the mad music—to join in the madder whirl. But as she gazed, Iftikhar lifted his hand, and one of the musicians upon the balcony, putting to his lips a tiny flute, blew across the raging sea of light one note, clear, piercing, tremulous as the bulbul's call. At that note men and maids were stilled, and stood gazing toward the colonnade where was Iftikhar Eddauleh with his captive at his side. Then Iftikhar stepped to the edge of the parapet, and stood in his blazing dress—a very genie in mien and glory. While he stood, lo! every knee was bowed. The women also with the Ismaelians swept their foreheads to the ground; and while they did obeisance, Iftikhar's voice rang out over lawn and grove: "Ye 'devoted' of the Ismaelians; and ye women of Aleppo; slaves of the lord of Alamont, of me his deputy, and his vassal Redouan—behold! Kneel, tremble, adore! For I will show to you the peerless creation of Allah; the Lady of Beauty, the Star of the Greeks, who by the grace of the Most High shall, ere two years speed, be hailed sovereign princess from the western sea to the river of India! Fall down before her! For I say to you: the man or maid who shall cross her will or refuse her adoration shall surely die! Since under Allah she shall hold the lives of you all in the hollow of her hand!"

At the word, the Ismaelians bowed again to the earth; then standing, three thousand voices cried, "We swear by Allah the Omnipotent, our lives and destinies shall hang upon her grace!"

But Iftikhar called, "Let Masudi of Bozra stand forth!"

A tall, handsome young Syrian stepped forward and stood before the balcony, his eyes cast on the ground.

"O man 'devoted' to Allah!" commanded the grand prior, "lay your cuirass upon the earth."

The mandate was implicitly obeyed.

"Take your cimeter! Fall upon it!"

Had the emir said, "Drink of this wine," there had not been less change in the Syrian's face. Not an eyelash quivered, nor did the lips twitch, when he held the keen blade at his breast and dashed himself upon the ground. A single spasm of the limbs, a red glow on the green sward,—that was all. Through all the great host standing under the torchlight there ran not so much as shiver or murmur.

"See, my children!" cried Iftikhar again, "this moment Masudi, your brother, sits down with the maids whose bodies are pure musk,—they who sit waiting by the stream of honey flowing from the root of the tree Tûba. Who else, at my summons, will take the journey thither?"

And the shout came back: "I!" and "I!" and "I!"; so all the three thousand cried it, and many sprang eagerly forward.

"No, my children," warned the emir, upraising his hand. "Allah and our lord on earth, the Cid Hassan Sabah, have need of you. Full soon shall you win all the glory and riches of this world, or the kiss of the houris! And now bear the poor dross of Masudi away, and think on his bliss."

As the eunuchs bore off the dead, Iftikhar spoke to Mary:—

"O Soul of my Soul, bethink you, here are three thousand of like mind to this man; and in the rest of Syria nine thousand more. With such a host we shall conquer the world—the world; and over it, you, my own, shall be sovereign sultana!"

"O Iftikhar," came from the Greek, "who am I to be thus worshipped!" The voice, the throb behind the voice,—the word "Iftikhar," not "master"—were they Mary's own? She felt herself snatched in a current she might not resist. Drifting, drifting, and she knew whither, yet in some strange way did not shrink. Why did the light flash still more brightly in Iftikhar's eyes? Why did his dark beauty become more splendid?

"Come!" was all he said. And in that word there rang a triumph, clearer than if sounded by trumpets. Her hand in his, he led her down the steps of the portico, all strewn with white bells of lilies, a carpet of blooming snow. At the foot of the stair a car which shone like a huge carbuncle; and harnessed to the car two lions, tame as oxen, yet tossing their shaggy manes, and their eyes twin coals of fire. Mary saw the beasts, but did not shrink. She looked upon the emir's face; in it confidence, pride,—and passion beyond words. How splendid he was! How one ought to worship this lord of men, to whom the lords of the beasts crouched submissive! How he had loved her with a love surpassing thought! She entered the car. They put in her hands reins of silken white ribbon. But Iftikhar himself stood at the heads of the lions, leading as if they were camels. Then he spoke: "Shine forth, O Moon, to the beautiful stars! Unveil!" And Mary, her hand answering his nod, swept the gauze from her face. In the same flash all the palace grounds shone with the red glare of Greek fire, so that the flambeaux made shadow; and Mary stood erect in the car, the light making her face bright and fair as the white cloud of summer. As she stood, she knew a tremor ran through the multitude and through the great lords on the portico; and a thousand voices were crying, not by forced acclaim, but out of their hearts: "Beauty of Allah! Fairest of the daughters of genii or men!" Such, and many more, the cries. Mary looked about; eyes past counting were on her. She held her head very proudly. Captive or queen, it was her triumph; and to Iftikhar she owed it all!

The emir led the lions down the long avenue opened for them by the ranks of the Ismaelians, amid the admiring women,—straight toward the lake; and as the car moved, the Greek fire sprang from the very water, red and blue, fantastic flame-columns, whose brightness blotted out the stars. As they advanced, the multitude closed after them; the torches on the palace doubled, trebled; every dome and minaret was traced in light; the music swayed and throbbed like the sighs of an ocean surf. They reached the shore; a second carpet of lilies; a boat, long, narrow, bowered in roses; a high canopy of flowers in the bow; a single negro eunuch standing like an ebon statue at the stern, poising his oar.

"Come!" so again Iftikhar spoke; Mary dismounted. He led her to the boat, seated her upon the roses. The multitude upon the shore stood in silence, all their praises in their eyes. The music was hushed for an instant. Iftikhar nodded to the rower. The oar dipped noiselessly. The boat glided from the shore gently as the tread of a spirit. Iftikhar sat upon the flower-strewn floor of the skiff, looking up into Mary's eyes. This was the end, praise God it was the end; she would do no more now! Iftikhar had conquered. Who of mortal stuff would fail to bend before such love as his; and he—was he not worth all loving?

Neither said a word for a long time. The distance betwixt quay and boat widened slowly. The lights from the gardens spread out shimmering paths of fire upon the black waters. The only sound was the distant music once more throbbing from the palace, the dim shouts of the revellers within the groves, and the drip of the water from the noiseless oar. On high above the feathery palms crept the round disk of the moon. At last Iftikhar, never taking away his gaze, said: "O Mary, my own,—at last, at last,—I have made all good. You are mine now—body, soul, forever; for even in Paradise those who love are not sundered. For you will I strive to win glory as never man strove; a year, two years, and I lead you into Bagdad, first princess of the world. Hassan Sabah

grows old; his glory passes to me, to you, whose slave I am,—and you shall be adored from the rising of the sun to its setting."

"Ah! Iftikhar—" but Mary said no more; the emir had interrupted her. "Mine are no vain dreams. Kerbogha, lord of Mosul, is gathering all the might of Mesopotamia for our service. Amaz, emir of Fars, is with us; and the exiled Vizier Muejjed. The Fatimite kalif of Cairo is our ally, if all else prosper. Soon—soon—Bakyarok, the arch-sultan, is fallen, the phantom kalif of Bagdad vanished away, and the hour for the Ismaelians is come."

Again Mary's lips opened; but the emir checked her.

**"IFTIKHAR TOOK FROM THE SEAT A LITTLE LUTE, TOUCHED THE STRINGS, AND SANG"**

"O my own! why speak of this to-night? Hark, let me sing if I may, as Antar the hero sang the praise of Abla, whose love he won by labors greater than mine; hearken."

And Iftikhar took from the seat a little lute, touched the strings, and sang, while his rich voice stole softly over the waters:—

"Moonlight and starlight clear gleaming,
Over the slow waters streaming,
  Glint on the lake's shining breast;
Fairer my love's eyes are beaming,
Where the dark wavelets lie dreaming,
  By the soft oar lightly pressed!

"Now while the shore lights are dying,
Now while with swifter stroke plying,
  Flit we across the dim deep;
Let us in rapt delight lying
Hear the mild wind gently hying
  Where th' sprites night watches keep!

"O that for aye I might, sweeping
Where the long willows hang weeping,
  Feel the musked breeze of the west
Over our blessèd bark creeping;
Then would I smile in my sleeping
  By my love's white arms caressed!"

When he raised his eyes to Mary, she could see they were touched by a gleam of awful fire; and her own breast and face grew warm, flushed with strange heat. The oar of the negro had stopped; the skiff drifted on slowly, slowly. Here toward the centre of the lake the water

stretched beneath the moon, a mirror of black glass.

"Mary, my beautiful!" cried Iftikhar, half rising, and he outstretched his arms. And Mary, as if his beck were a magician's, started toward him—the end! But as she stirred, her eye glanced downward; the moonbeams lit on something gleaming upon her hand—the silver ring of Richard Longsword: and a voice sounded, from the very heavens it seemed:—

"Mary de St. Julien, what price may a Christian wife give in exchange for her soul!"

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# CHAPTER XXXI

## HOW MARY REDEEMED HER SOUL

Near midnight—Morgiana had gone to her chamber early, but not to sleep. The throb of the music, the crash of the cymbals, the shoutings and laughter of the thousands,—all these nigh drove her mad. Twice had she tried to shut all out by a fierce resolve to hear no more, and sleep. Useless; sleep was a thousand leagues away. She had stood by her lattice and seen the multitudes swarming down to the illumined quay, had heard the praises of Mary Kurkuas ring up to heaven, had seen the boat glide into the darkness. And the Arab had cast herself on her cushions, and wept and wept, until her tears would no more flow. How long a time sped thus, she might not tell. When next she knew anything save her grief, she heard a light hand thrusting back the curtains from her bed.

"Morgiana." Mary stood holding a little silver lamp. The coronet was still flashing on her flowing hair, the dim light shining on her bare neck and swan-white shoulders. Never in the eyes of her rival had she seemed fairer. Morgiana stirred, stared into Mary's face.

"You have yielded! You are his—his forever! Oh, sorrow, sorrow!" So cried the Arab; but the Greek touched her cheek softly.

"Hush, dear sister! I have not yielded. I have defied him; and this time there is a gulf sprung between us that only death can close. It was an angel from heaven that spoke; I must, I will—escape him! I must fly, fly—or it is best to perish!"

"Fly!" cried Morgiana, startled now. "Allah the Compassionate! You are mad!" Mary checked her.

"No, not mad; only I know that I cannot sell my soul to Iftikhar Eddauleh, though he led me sultana through Bagdad. Listen: I had a terrible scene with him in the boat. God knows what I said or did; I recall nothing, save as out of a frightful dream. But one thing I know, I am the wife of Richard Longsword, and till I know he is numbered with the dead, I will lift eyes to no man, nor angel either; but to Iftikhar Eddauleh never—till the endless ages end! Dear God—I can endure no more. I must—I will—fly!"

"O dearest one," cried Morgiana, troubled greatly, "how may I comfort you? say what? do what? Allah pity us both!"

"He will have pity!" burst out the Greek. "Follow me. When Iftikhar rowed back to the shore he was in a black rage. I hoped he would strike me dead. He did not. The Sultan Redouan and his lords were feasting in the palace. Said Iftikhar to the eunuchs at the quay, 'I must join the revelling, but lead the accursed woman back to the harem; for seven days she shall not see my face, since she likes it so ill.' But the eunuchs were reeling with their wine. I wrapped a veil about me, and evaded them. Then I wandered through the palace, as did the other women come from Aleppo. No one knew me. And as I strayed by the great banqueting hall, I saw one whom they styled Aboun Nedjn, vizier of Redouan, rise and shout the pledge, 'To the confusion of the Christians, and may they soon fight their last before Antioch!' Then I turned to one of the women, and said, 'And are the Christians besieging Antioch?' and she replied: 'How ignorant! All Aleppo knows that they have lain about that city all winter; certain prisoners of theirs have been brought to Aleppo; and now the Lord Iftikhar makes ready to join the great host which Kerbogha, emir of Mosul, is gathering to deliver Antioch and its prince, Yaghi-Sian.' Then I listened no more, but fled straight to you. For I must fly this very night. Think, Morgiana: at Antioch are the Christians; at Antioch are Duke Godfrey, and Raymond, and Tancred; at Antioch, oh, joy! is Richard Longsword, whose soul is more dear than my own!"

"But, sweet sister," protested the Arab, "Antioch, I believe, is twenty of our Eastern leagues away, perhaps sixty of your Frankish miles. How can you make the journey? Alone?"

"To-night!" cried Mary, tearing the gold from her hair. "To-night! All the palace is drunken. Even the 'devoted' are in stupid sleep. No watch is kept, I saw that well. A late slave boy returning to his master in Aleppo—no questions."

"But the dangers of the way! Full of bandits, roving horsemen, the scum of both armies—for such must be afield. You on foot! The hardships; deathly peril!"

"Light of my heart," exclaimed the Greek, "let the jackals prey on me—beasts or more cruel men,

—if they be not Iftikhar Eddauleh!"

"Curse him not," blazed the other; "not even you shall speak him ill. Fool, that you do not love him!"

Mary was tearing off her silken dress.

"Morgiana," she said very quietly, "you know the presses where the eunuchs keep their clothes:—bring me a vest and mantle, and a turban,—the coarsest you can find; and heavy shoes, if any fit me. St. Theodore," she cried, looking down at the white thongs of her sandals, where the gems were shining, "how miserable to have such small feet!"

Morgiana obeyed without a word.

"Your skin! Your face white as milk!" she protested, when Mary stood in the costume of a serving-page.

The Greek laughed. "Have I not mocked you often for your Persian 'light of the cheeks' which you keep in that casket? Take your pencils and your *kohl*, and make me dark and tanned as a true Syrian! Haste; the night is flying!" As she spoke, an iron ball dropped from the water-clock in the corner upon a bell. "An hour after midnight. Quick, if you love me and love yourself!"

Morgiana did her task with all deftness.

"They will search for you. You will be pursued at dawn!"

"Say to Iftikhar," was the ready answer, "that I have wandered from the palace vowing to cast myself in the lake. Let him bid his 'devoted' seek me there."

"*Wallah!* You are a terrible maid!" cried the Arabian. "But how beautiful a serving-boy!"

"Now," continued Mary, desperately, "shears! my hair!"

"Never," protested the other; "not as I live, shall I touch it. See, I will bind it up beneath your turban. But oh, think better; do not go. The danger is terrible!"

"Morgiana," was the answer, "my husband is at Antioch. Naught can befall me worse than I suffer here. You have been a sweet sister to me; and I leave my kiss for Eleanor. May we never meet again! Farewell."

They kissed each other. Mary saw Morgiana standing in the dim lamplight, her head bowed upon her hands. Then the Greek stole through the dimly lighted halls. When she stepped past the nodding eunuchs who were standing guard at the harem entrance, she felt a little quiver. They gave her never a sign. She wandered across the great entrance hall; only two lamps twinkling high up from the stalactites by the dome,—weird, ghostly light. She stumbled on some form—a man sleeping in his drunkenness; for the law of the Prophet against wine, who had observed that night? She saw dimly low gilt and ebony tables beside the divans, the food still on them. She caught some cakes of bread and thrust them under her girdle, then tasted a cup that had not been drained. The wine was sweet, she did not like it. She wandered on. Here was the portico, where another guard stared at her stupidly. She passed outward, two others passed in; a dying flambeau showed the features of Iftikhar and Hakem. Mary trembled, but one of the pillars was good shelter. The emir had been over his cups, and his face was flushed, his speech thick, rapid. The eunuch as ever was smiling.

"By every evil efreet!" Iftikhar was swearing, "I will make her bend. In the boat I thought to win her kiss; she spat upon me! struggled so that scarce my strength could keep her from casting us into the lake! called the name of her accursed husband! See to her, Hakem. Bring her to more tractable state, and I give a thousand dinars; but let her spurn me again, and by the Brightness of Allah I will teach her she is slave indeed!"

"The Fountain of Omnipotence," replied the eunuch, smoothly, "is too kind. Let the Star of the Greeks be given into my full custody. Let her learn to bow her head to poor Hakem; and it will go hard, unless she is all smiles to Iftikhar Eddauleh."

"*Mashallah!*" cried the emir, "it shall be as you say. Well, I have sworn I will see her no more for seven days. Tame her, as you will. Sometimes I curse the hour when first I set eyes on her. Why shall I not deal with her as with any slave? Why speak of her love, her favor?—her body I own, assuredly. As for her soul,—*Wallah!* to us Ismaelians of the upper degree, if man or maid have a soul—it is of too strange stuff to be reckoned with. But come, good slave! I have drunk too deep to-night. Soon I expect word from Kerbogha that our host must move to Antioch; and then I shall have other things in mind than flambeaux and the eyes of a maid."

"My lord speaks with the wisdom of Allah!" fawned the eunuch. "I will go to our little bird to see that she sleeps secure, and in the morning she shall know your will."

They passed within the palace. Mary glided up to the great gate. The yawning porters were just closing.

"Eblees possess you!" cried one, holding up a lantern. "Back into the palace! Will you wander home to Aleppo at this hour? The city gates are barred long ago." But Mary's wits could work fast just now.

"Good brother," said she, jauntily, "I have stayed over-late, I know. But if I fail to return, my master makes my back pay with cold stripes. And I have a friend on the watch at the gate who will open when I call."

"*Mashallah!* you speak a strange Arabic!" protested the man. "Your hands are small as those of the Star of the Greeks that they say our lord loves better than El Halebah itself."

"And you too, friend," was her reply, "speak a tongue that makes me half believe you Christian! And no man living would liken your hands to any save ditcher's spades!"

"By Mohammed's beard!" exclaimed the fellow, good-naturedly, "you have a sharp tongue in your little body. Well, go; and let the kind jinns fly with you. Though almost I think you are girl, and would cry to you 'a kiss!'"

"Never to such as you!" the retort. The gate closed behind her. All was dark. The last lamps on the great domes were out. Mary stole on in silence. There was not the slightest sound of bird, beast, or stirring leaf; just light enough to see where amid the trees the avenue led away from El Halebah to the outer road. Along that roadway—sixty miles due east, so she had reckoned—lay the camp of the Christians—and Richard Longsword! She was alone, and free! For a while neither weariness nor fear smote her. The ground could not fly fast enough under her feet. Again and again she wandered against thicket or trunk in the dimness of the trees, but the way led on, and she did not lose it. There was a strange gladness in her heart. "To Richard! to Richard!" O had she but eagle's wings to lend speed to her going! Suddenly the trees stopped. She was at the edge of the palace groves. To one side under the starlight she could just see the untraced masses of something—Aleppo; to the other side, the east, the stars told her, the hill and plain country stretched out scarce discernible. Mary turned her face toward the east, and saw the grove sink out of sight in the darkness. Then she walked yet faster.

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It was noon, and the Syrian sun beat down pitilessly. The spring foliage and buds seemed wilting under the fiery eye. The little brooks on the hillside had already dried to a trickling thread. Everywhere the eye lit on reddish sand; red sand-hills and plain country with here and there a tree. The road had faded to the merest trail, where a few horses had trodden the thin weeds a day or two before. Mary rose from the stone by this roadway, where she had been sitting beneath a solitary sumac. She had eaten her bread, had lifted the water in her hands out of the tiny pool. She was weary—utterly weary. Had she been told she had traversed a thousand leagues since setting forth the night before, she could well have believed it. Yet reason bespoke that she had come less than a score of miles. She was footsore, hungry, frightened. The caw of the distant crow bore terror; the whir of the wind over the sunny plain half seemed the howl of desert wolves. Already her feet trudged on painfully, while her unaccustomed dress was dusty and torn. Each moment the utter folly of her flight grew upon her. She was alone, a helpless maid in the midst of that often harried country which lay between Antioch and Aleppo. Only once had she met human kind. During the morning two swarthy-skinned peasants, flogging an obstinate ass toward Aleppo, had stopped, and gazed curiously at this solitary youth in page's dress, but with the face of one of Sultan Redouan's harem beauties.

"Brother," one of the peasants had cried, "do you know that from Antioch to Aleppo scarce one house is inhabited? The Christians—may Allah bring them to perdition!—have sacked Dana and Sermada, and left only the dogs alive. All honest folk have fled nearer to Aleppo or southward."

"I thank you, kind sheik," came the answer in an Arabic that made the peasant marvel, "but I know my road. Yet are there any Christians now at Dana?"

"Praised be the Compassionate! Since the battle at Harenc they keep closer to their camps, though Allah that day vouchsafed them victory. It is told that Yaghi-Sian is making so many sallies, they are more than taxed to repel him, glory be to the Most High!"

"I thank you, good sheik; peace be with you!" And Mary had hastened on her way, leaving the peasants to wonder.

One said: "Let us go back. This youth is no common wayfarer. Let us question him further."

But the other wisely answered:—

"The day is hot. What is written in the book of doom is written. Leave the youth to God! Let us reach Aleppo and rest!"

So they fell again to beating the ass, while Mary dropped them out of view. She had been made less weary then, and the dialogue had lent wings to her feet. Presently she came to a wretched village: squalid, dark, rubble houses with thatched roofs; a few poor fields around, with the weeds growing higher than the sprouting corn. She hesitated to walk through the single street, but not a soul met her. The doors of the houses gaped open; within was scanty household stuff scattered over the earthen floors. Every house bore signs of hasty leaving. Two or three were mere charred shells, for the torch had been set to their thatches. Over in the field a flock of crows and kites were wheeling,—some carrion,—but Mary did not go near. Yet, as she walked this street, as it seemed of the dead, forth ran snapping and barking several gray, blear-eyed

dogs. For a moment she quaked lest they tear her in pieces. But at the sound of her voice they sank back whining, and followed on a long time, sniffing the bread under her girdle, and hoping to be fed.

She shook them off at last, half glad, half sorry, to have nothing living near her. And now she was sitting by the roadway, looking down into the tiny pool and thinking. She took off her shoes and let her little white feet trail in the water,—very little and very white, never fashioned by the Creator, so she told herself with a sobbing laugh, to be bruised by the hard road. Once Musa at Palermo had composed verses in praise of her feet; how they were shaped only to tread upon flowers, or to whisk in dances, or be bathed with perfumes worth an emir's ransom. Holy Mother! and what were they like to walk over now! She looked at her hands; as she dipped them in the brook nearly all the bronzing of Morgiana had washed away. They too had been praised, times past numbering. A learned poet at Constantinople had written some polished iambics, likening them to the hands of Artemis, virgin huntress on the Arcadian hills. How helpless and worthless they were! Mary saw her face in the pool also. Her beauty—despite the disguise—her curse; the bane of so many lovers! "Better, better," came the thought, "a thousand times I had been foul as an old hag, than to have my beauty lay snares for my soul!" And then the thought followed: "No, not better, whatever be my fate; for by my beauty I won the love of Richard, and the memory of his love cannot be taken from me in a thousand years!" Then, speaking to herself, she said resolutely: "Now, my foolish Mary de St. Julien, though your feet are so weary, they must prepare to be still more weary. For there is many a long league yet before you see the Christian camp at Antioch, and set eyes on your dread Frankish lord."

So, telling herself that she was a soldier's daughter and a soldier's wife, that the toils of travel would be as nothing to her father's campaign with the Patzinaks, she arose to continue the toilsome way. But as she stood over the little pool, the water looked more cool and tempting than ever. It was tedious to drink from the hands—a cup! Her hands went up to her hair, where was the blue muslin turban so carefully wound by Morgiana; and underneath it a silken skullcap. She unwound the turban, her hair fell in soft brown tresses all over her shoulders. As she bent to fill the cap, in the water she saw again her face, framed now in the shining hair.

"Allah!" she cried, after the manner of the Arabs, "how beautiful I am! how Richard will love me!" And she laughed at her own complacency. A sudden shout made her start like a fawn when the hounds are baying; then a rush of hoofs, an outcry.

"Iftikhar! He is pursuing!" her thought; and Mary sprang to run up the sandy hillside. Not Iftikhar; from behind the little sand-hill to the west six horsemen had appeared in a twinkling: all on long-limbed, sleek-coated desert steeds. Mary ran as for dear life, scarce knowing what she did.

"*Ya! Ya!*" came the shout, in a mongrel Arabic, "a maid; seize! capture! a prize!"

It was all over in less time than the telling. Mary never knew how it befell. She was standing once more by the roadway; two men, dismounted, were holding her. The other four still sat on their saddles. All six were devouring her with their eyes, and pelting her with questions she had no wits to answer. Her captors, she began to judge, were roving Syrian cavalrymen—half warriors, half bandits, tall, wiry-limbed, swarthy, sharp-featured. They and their steeds were gorgeously decked out with strings of bright silk tassels. They wore light steel caps polished bright; at their sides were short cimeters; over their shoulders were curved bows and round, brass-studded targets. When they opened their bearded lips to chatter, their teeth shone sharp and white as of hungry cats. At last Mary found words. The blood of the great house of Kurkuas was in her veins. Even in this dire strait she knew how to put on pride and high disdain.

"Slaves," was her command, "unhand me! Who are you, so much as to look upon my face! By what right will you treat me as is unfit to one of your own coarse brood?"

The curve of the lip and the lordly poise for an instant disconcerted even the Syrians. But soon one of them answered, with a soldier's banter:—

"By the soul of my father, pretty one, I half dream you a sultana. Does Allah rain houris in youths' clothes upon the waste land betwixt Sermada and Harenc? *Bismillah!* we do not light every day on a partridge plump as you!"

"Let me go, fools," cried the Greek, turning very pale, but more with wrath than fear, "or you will find my little finger large enough to undo you all."

But at this the six only roared their laughter, and for a moment ogled their captive with sinful eyes that made Mary's soul turn sick. She made one last appeal, and only her own heart knew what it cost her to say the word.

"Act not in folly. Carry me to Aleppo, and deliver me safely to the great emir, Iftikhar Eddauleh. He will give you for me my weight in gold."

Another laugh, but the six looked at one another.

"Tell me," quoth the earlier speaker, "O Star that falls in the Desert, how you come here, if you are possessed by Iftikhar Eddauleh?"

Mary only flushed with new anger.

"Beast, who are you that I should answer? Do as I bid you, or it will be to your hurt!"

"Truly, O Yezid," began a second Syrian, "it may be as she says. Let us ride to Aleppo."

But Yezid, who seemed the leader of the band, gave a deep curse.

"To Aleppo? We are too little loved by Redouan to risk our heads within bowshot of his executioner. Look upon the maid; she is one of the Franks, whoever she be. She will fetch a hundred purses in the market. Yet I am minded myself to possess her!"

Mary looked at the Syrian; noted his coarse, carnal eye, and the impure passion in it, and felt her heart turning to stone.

"Dear God," ran her prayer, "give me strength to bear all; for I am in the clutch of demons."

But the other five had raised a great outcry.

"Verily, O Yezid," shouted one, "you are a river of generosity. Six of us capture the maid, and you protest that she is yours alone. May Allah cut me off from Paradise if I part with my claim to her."

"And who are you, O Zubair," raged back Yezid, his teeth more catlike than ever, "to dispute my right? Am I not the chief? When we held the rich Jew without water four days since, did I not share the ransom equally? And now that we possess this maid, whose form and face fit my eye as my sword its sheath—" and as he spoke he laid his hand on Mary's bare neck, making the white flesh creep under his foul touch, and lifting the soft mass of her telltale hair. The five cut him short with one yell. "Never, insatiate one!" And Zubair added: "Let the maid be sold, and the money divided. If we may not take her to Aleppo, let us swing her across a saddle and spur away to Hamath, where there is a good market! As you have said,—a hundred purses for such an houri of the Franks. Better profit twenty fold than watching these roads, when the Christians have swept the country clean!"

Yezid grinned more savagely than ever; and Mary closed her eyes that she might not see his leer.

"I have sworn it," cried he. "This once must you sons of Eblees give way. I like the girl well. Not for an hundred purses would I part with her. Is she not my captive? shall I not bear her away to the mountains where is our camp, and the other women?"

Mary closed her eyes tighter. She knew *then*, if not before, that it had been a mad boast indeed when she said to Morgiana, "Naught can befall me worse than I suffer here at El Halebah." The evening before she had been hailed princess, sovereign of thousands—and now! Her eyes she could close; not her ears, and the foul speech of the angry Syrians smote them, though her sense grew numb by sheer agony. Louder and louder the quarrel. Presently she heard a great shout from Yezid.

"By the Beard of Mohammed! either you shall give the girl up to me, to work my will, or my cimeter is in her breast." His clutch tightened, and Mary saw through her eyelashes a bright blade held before her. "Death at last, the Blessed Mother be praised!" and she closed her eyes, and tried to murmur the words of "Our Father." But the voice of Zubair grew conciliatory. "Valiant captain, not so angry. You have the chief claim, but not the only one. Let us not broil, good comrades that we are. True the Prophet—on whom be peace—forbids dice; but Allah will be compassionate, and I have some about me. Let us cast for the maid. You win and possess her. We,—she goes to Hamath, and the sale's money is divided amongst us five!"

Yezid began to growl in his beard, but the shout of the rest silenced him. "Let it be as you said!" he muttered. And Mary, opening her eyes, now saw Zubair and the chief standing by the rock, and shaking the dice in the hollows of their hands. How strange it all looked! On the cast of four bits of ivory her own weal or woe was hanging! The fortune of her—a Grecian princess, a baroness of France, a Sultana of the Ismaelians! Was it not a dream? One cast,—a curse from Zubair. A second,—Yezid smiled and smirked toward her. Again Zubair cast,—again he cursed; and when Yezid lifted his hand he gave a loud, beastly laugh.

"Praises be to Allah! You have all lost. This houri, comes she here from the clouds or from Aleppo, is mine. *Ya!* I can wait no more to kiss her!" But just as Mary felt sight and sound reeling when he seized her, there was a great howl from the Syrians.

"Flight! To horse! O Allah, save!" And down the eastern road Mary saw, not six, but sixty, cavalrymen in headlong gallop; all with white robes and turbans, and at the head a rider whose armor was bright as the sun.

"Away, my peacock!" shouted Yezid, who, even in that moment, tried to swing Mary into his saddle before him. But as the words sped from his sinful throat, a shaft of Iftikhar went through his horse's flank, and the wounded beast was plunging.

"*Allah akhbar!*" the yell of the Ismaelians as they swept around Mary's captors, almost ere the luckless bandits could strike spur; and it was Iftikhar's own hand that plucked Mary from the clutch of Yezid.

"Bind fast!" his command. "*Bismillah!* what were they about to do?"

"This beast had won me at dice. He was to carry me to his den in the mountains, he boasted," Mary said, with twitching lips.

"Mercy, O Sea of Compassion!" Yezid was whining; "how should I know that I offended my lord?"

"*Ya*," hissed Iftikhar; "strike off the heads of these five here; let the jackals eat them. But their chief shall go to Aleppo, where we will plunge his head in a sack of quicklime."

Then, with not a word to Mary, he had his men devise a horse-litter, placed her in it, and the whole troop headed again for Aleppo.

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# CHAPTER XXXII

## HOW MORGIANA PROFFERED TWO CUPS

It was the next morning at El Halebah that Mary found Morgiana in her aviary. Here, in a broad chamber at the top of the palace, too high for any vulgar eye that chanced across the Kuweik to light on the dwellers of this wind-loved spot, the Arabian had her eyry. The high openings in the walls were overhung with fine, nigh invisible nettings, the floor strewn with white sand; and, despite the height, means had been found to keep a little fountain playing in a silver basin; and just now two finches were gayly splashing in its tiny pool. All around in deep tubs were growing oleanders, myrtle, laurel, although the birds made difficult the lives of the blossoms; there were hairy ferns, and the scent of sweet thyme was in the air; around the arabesqued columns roved dark, cool ivy; in and out through the meshes of the netting buzzed the adventurous honey-bee, flying thus high in hopes of spoil. Everywhere were the birds—finch, thrush, sparrow, ring-dove, and even a nightingale that, despite the drooping for his vanished freedom, Morgiana had by some magic art persuaded to sing evening after evening, and make the whole room one garden of music. As the young Arabian stood, upon her shoulder perched a consequential blackcap cocking his saucy head; and a wood-pigeon was hovering over her lips trying to carry away the grain there in his bill. Morgiana had named all the birds, and they learned to answer to their calls. As for fearing her, they would sooner have fluttered at their own shadows. Mary pushed back the door, stepped inside, and as she did so a whir of wings went through all the plants, for she was not so well known to the birds as was their mistress. But after the first flash and chirp there was silence once more, save as the doves in one corner kept up their coo, coo, around a cherished nest. Morgiana opened her lips; the pigeon swept away the grain, and lit upon a laurel spray, proud of his booty. Then the Arabian turned to her visitor. The Greek was very pale; under her eyes dark circles and red, as if she had slept little and cried much. For a moment she did not speak. Then Morgiana brushed the blackcap from her shoulder, and ran and put her arms about Mary.

"Ah! sweet sister,—so I have you back again! It was as I said, folly, impossible madness."

"Yes, madness!" answered the Greek, very bitterly. "I was indeed mad to forget that I am naught but a weak woman, made to be admired and toyed with, for strong men's holiday. But oh, it was passing sweet at first to think, 'I am free—I am going to Richard!'" And at the name of the Norman, her eyes again were bright with tears.

"O dearest and best!" cried Morgiana, clasping her closer, "what can I say to you, how comfort you? I heard the eunuchs tell of the plight in which Iftikhar found you. My blood runs chill as I speak. Allah! There are worse things than to be a captive of Iftikhar Eddauleh!"

"You say well, my sister; but how came Iftikhar to follow me? You did not betray? You told the tale I gave you?"

"Yes," protested the Arab, with half a laugh. "But in the morning, while Iftikhar foamed and the eunuchs dragged the pond, there came on me the desire to breathe the hemp smoke, and when the craving comes, not all the jinns of the abyss may stop me. And as I reeled over the smoke, I saw you in direful peril, clutched by wanton hands, facing a fate worse than death! Then I fought with myself. You were gone at last! And my evil nature said to me, 'Leave the Greek to her living death. Iftikhar is yours alone, you may win back his heart again, and be happy—happy!' But, O dearest, when I thought of your agony, I could not be silent. I told Iftikhar whither you had fled, and he spurred after and saved you."

"Yes," echoed Mary, "he has 'saved' me, as you well say. Not a word did he speak to me on the homeward journey. Last night I fell asleep the moment my head touched the pillow. Oh, bliss, how sweet that long sleep was! And in it I saw Richard Longsword, and he was holding my hand, and I could look up into his face. Then I awoke—Hakem, near me, saying that by the command of the emir hereafter he was to have my ordering! It was passing from heaven to nethermost hell. And here I am again! Helpless, passive, for others to work their will upon! while twenty leagues away lies Antioch and Richard and perfect joy. Yet I thank you, sister,—there is something worse than to be in the hands of Iftikhar, but God alone knows if there be anything I may pay you for the debt I owe."

"Do you believe in a good God?" said Morgiana, stepping backward and looking into the Greek's eyes.

"Do not Christians and Moslems alike believe in Him?" was the wondering answer.

"Then," persisted Morgiana, a fierce ring coming into her tone; "why does He suffer you to endure such sorrow?"

"He alone knows," was the reply. "It is as I said,—some fearful sin that I have committed and forgotten; or else"—and there was a new brightness in the eye of the Greek—"I am permitted to endure some pain that my husband had otherwise been made to bear."

"O foolish one!" came the retort of the Arabian. "You sin? The soul of Allah is not whiter than yours; no, not as white! Richard Longsword is strong enough to endure his own pains; yes, and has endured them if you are to him as he to you! I will curse God—you may not stay me. Unkind, cruel, He is! All-powerful indeed, yet using His power to plunge His creatures into misery!"

The Greek shuddered. "Beware! He will strike you dead!" her warning.

"Dead?" echoed Morgiana, lifting her dark bare arms high, as if calling down heavenly wrath, and bidding it welcome; "almost I think His power ends there! If He had mercy on me, I were dead long ago. But no—I go on, living, breathing, talking, laughing,"—and here she did indeed laugh, in a terrible manner that made Mary quake.

"Pity me. God is angry enough with us already. Anger Him no more!" cried the Greek.

Morgiana laughed again. "*Hei!*" she continued, "let us look at our case with both eyes. You are back again at El Halebah. By your flight Iftikhar assuredly considers his pledge to you at an end. What do you expect?"

"To be treated like any other captive of his 'bow and spear,' as you people say. To be at his will, sometimes to be caressed as these birds are by you, sometimes neglected; when I grow old or out of favor to see new women thrust before me, as, St. Theodore pity me, I have supplanted you. I shall in time grow sleepy, fat, and in a poor way contented; for such is the manner of the harem. Within four walls and a garden I shall live out my life. If God is still angry, I shall become very old. At last I shall die—when I shall have been among you Moslems so long that I can scarce remember 'Our Father.' Where my soul then will go, I know not; it will be worth little; sodden and dried by this cageling's life till an ox's were nobler."

"O dearest," cried the Arabian, laughing, but half in tears now, "your words are arrows to my soul. You must be free, free—either you or I. What would you give to be truly free? Give for rest, peace, joy, an end of sorrow, struggle, longing?"

"That waits only beyond the stars," answered the Greek. But she started when she saw the wandering glitter in Morgiana's eyes, and there was a wild half-rhythm in the Arabian's words when she replied: "Why not the stars and beyond? Why not seek out the pathways of the moon, the gates of the sun, the enchanted islands of the sweet West, and rest, rest, sleep, sleep—pangless, painless, passionless!"

"Morgiana!" exclaimed Mary. The other answered still in half-chant. "Yes, there is a way—a way. I will go, will return, and to one of us the door is opened,—opened wide!"

Then with a gliding, uneasy step she started away. "Back!" warned Morgiana to Mary, who attempted to follow. "I will do myself no harm. I return at once." Almost immediately she reëntered, in each hand a silver cup, the cups identical, each filled with violet sherbet. She set them upon the slab by the fountain. There was no madness in her glance now.

"I am thirsty," said the Greek, simply; "may I drink?"

"Drink?" repeated the Arabian, with a strange intonation. "Yes, in Allah's name, but first hearken! Many years ago, in Bagdad, a wise old woman taught me of an Indian drug, two pellets, small as shrivelled peas, in a little wine. Drink, and go to sleep—sleep so sound that you waken only when Moukir and Nakir, the death angels, sift soul from body. In Palermo, Iftikhar brought to his harem a Moorish girl. It was the hour of the beginning of my sorrow. A little made my breast fire, and my jealousy was swifter than the falling stars, which are Allah's bolts against the rebel efreets. One night when the Moor drank sherbet, she tasted nothing, she went to sleep; they found her body with a smile on the lips—her soul—? Ask the winds and the upper air."

Mary's eyes were fastened on the silver cups; were they brimmed with nectar of the old Greek gods that they should charm her so? She heard her heart-beats, and bated her breath while Morgiana continued: "You wish to be free. So do I. Life is terrible to you; only when you sleep is there peace, fair visions, joy. Do you know, I had resolved, when I learned Iftikhar was bringing you to Aleppo, that you should drink of sherbet from my hands the first night of all; and wake—where even Iftikhar's eagle eye could never follow you?"

"Holy Mother! why did you spare me?" came across Mary's teeth.

"Why? Because, when I saw you pure as a lily of the spring, and so fair that the rose blushed in redder shame before you, and knew that your sorrow passed mine,—I had no will to kill you. Yes, your very love for death disarmed my hate. And now?"—she pointed to the cups.

Mary felt herself held captive as her spellbound gaze followed Morgiana.

The Arabian knelt by the marble slab; took up the two cups; held them forth.

"Mary, Star of the Greeks," said Morgiana, looking straight into the Christian's eyes, "you believe in God; that He is good; that He orders all things well. Be it so. Then either He ordains that you spend your life the slave of Iftikhar, or that you be free. Either He ordains that I should possess Iftikhar, and he me—me only, or that I should flit far hence, where pang and remembrance of my loss can never follow. Therefore I say this. Here are two cups, alike as two drops of the spraying fountain. In one,—but I say not which,—I have placed the pellet of the Indian drug. The cups I cannot tell apart, save as I remember. You shall take the cups. I leave the room. You shall place them where you will, only so that I may forget which has received the magic pellet. I will then return. You shall drink of one, whichever you choose,—I the other. We shall kiss one another three times, lie down on the divan, and rest. Whom Allah wills, shall awake beyond the stars; whom Allah wills, shall awake in El Halebah! All is left to God. There is no taste, no pang; only sleep, sweet as a child on its mother's arm. For every day my love for you grows; but every day my heart says, 'Except Mary the Christian and Morgiana the Moslem be sundered by seven seas, woe—only woe—for both!'" Still the Greek did not reply. What were these visions flitting before her eyes? Not the birds; not the feathery palm groves waving beneath the palace walls. All her past life was there,—her father's stately house in Constantinople; the glory of the great city; the wild scenes of the escape to Sicily; Richard Longsword plucking her from the Berbers; the tourney—De Valmont in his blood; the hour when Richard touched her lips with the first kiss; the marriage; the last sight of her husband in the morning twilight at Dorylæum. Scene upon scene, a wild, moving pageant; yet behind all seemed to hover the shadow of Iftikhar—Iftikhar, the cause of sorrow and tears unnumbered. Still Morgiana held out the cups. "Taste!" she was saying. "You cannot tell. All is in the hands of God,—whether you bow your head to your fate, or to-night the moonbeams are your pillow; or whether I am escaped from all my heartache; can flit over your couch on unseen wing, and teach you to endure, as best you may, till the hour comes when hand in hand we can fly up the path of the sun and join in the dance of the winds."

As bidden, Mary touched her finger first in one cup then in the other, placing each drop in turn on her lips. The same—she might have drained both goblets and known no difference. Truly the issue was with God! And still Morgiana proffered.

"Take; we have been dear sisters together. How can I bless Allah when I desire to love you so, yet know that your life is misery to me, as misery to you? You have many times said you prayed for death."

And then Mary spoke, a wondrous spell binding her:—

"Not so, Morgiana,—unfair. Why should I live and you die? Let me drink alone of this blessed drug that makes the heart cease bleeding. And you may live—live and be glad with Iftikhar."

Morgiana shook her raven-black hair, and spoke with an awful smile.

"Always is death sweet—I will not shun it, if Allah so wills. All I know is, we twain cannot live together; not in this world. Perhaps it is the Most High's will that I should go out, and you remain to give joy to Iftikhar. We leave all to Him. Then let us drink; and each await the other. Therefore —take." Mary had received the cups. "Place them where and as you will; I return speedily." And Morgiana was gone. The Greek gazed on the magic liquor as though on her lover's face. Almost she seemed to feel herself transformed, transfigured; clothed with wings white as swans' sails, and soaring upward, upward into perfect freedom. She saw her father, her mother,—that fair angel face of childish years. She thought of Richard Longsword. There would be no time for her, while awaiting the golden morning when her husband could look upon her face with naught to dread. Did thus God will? She had set the cups on the railing by the windows. "Come back!" was her call to Morgiana. The Arab glided straight to the cups; took one; lifted to her lips. "Let Allah have pity on one of us!" her words. But as Mary's hand stretched out to do the like, she gave a mighty cry. Her goblet fell: the other was dashed from Morgiana's hand.

"Dear God! What do we?" cried the Greek. "Spare me this temptation! Nor do you commit this wickedness. Never shall we so tempt God. Though the grief be a thousand times more great, yet will I trust His mercy. I am a Christian, and Our Lord did not hang on the tree in vain to make us strong to bear. Death would be sweet. But had we God's wisdom, our present pangs would seem nothing, hid in the speeding ages of joy. Let us, each after our manner, call on God to show us pity. But never shall one of us stand before His face unsummoned, and cry, 'I am too weak to bear what Thou appointest!'"

Morgiana's face flushed livid; she staggered back.

"Then let Allah, if He may, have mercy; our need is great!"—such her cry from twitching lips. But as the words came, Mary saw the Arab's eyes set in a glassy stare; the lithe form fell heavily. Mary caught her round the waist, and laid her on the marble floor by the fountain; then dashed water in her face, and shouted for help.

Help came—the under-eunuchs, Hakem, Zeyneb; and finally Iftikhar, lordly and splendid, in a suit of perfectly plain black armor with two white hawks' wings nodding on his helmet, spurred and girded as for a foray. The eunuchs brought cordials, strong waters, and pungent perfumes. But Iftikhar first knelt by Morgiana's side, drew forth the little red vial, and laid the magic, fiery drops upon her tongue. The Arab shook herself; her form relaxed; the eyes opened. They bore her into a room leading from the aviary, and propped her on the divan cushions. Not till then did Iftikhar speak a word. Now one gesture sent all save the two women and Zeyneb from the chamber, when the emir broke forth:—

"In the name of Allah Omnipotent, what means this, Morgiana? I demand it; speak!"

And the Arab answered with her gaze full on Iftikhar.

"Cid, I asked Mary the Greek to drink out of one of two goblets, in one of which was a sleeping potion from which the sleeper awakens never. She refused, saying it were better to endure than to tempt the Most High. That is all."

A flash of terrible rage crossed the emir's face. "Witch! sorceress! Have you sought to make the Greek take her life? As the Most High lives, you shall be impaled!"

"Peace, master," said Mary, gently. "I have refused her proffer. Be assured I will find strength to bear until I see once more my true husband, or having endured your unholy will, in God's own time I die."

But at the word the face of Iftikhar was blackened with yet deeper fury. "Your husband!" came thickly. "Yes, master," answered the Greek; "for, living or dying, Richard de St. Julien is my true husband."

Iftikhar cut her short: "Dying? What if dead?"

A frightful suspicion crossed Mary's mind. It was her face that was pallid now. But Iftikhar reassured her with a forced laugh: "*Ya*, how easy to tell you, 'Richard, the Frankish barbarian, whose sport is slaying guileless boys, has gone to his long account in the fighting around Antioch.' But I say to you, he lives, and I go to Antioch to seek his life."

The Greek was herself once more. Very steadily she answered: "Master, let God judge Richard de St. Julien for slaying Gilbert de Valmont, since Zeyneb I see has learned and told the tale. But let God also judge Iftikhar Eddauleh, who is mightier with the dagger of his underlings than with his own sword, and who finds iron lances as light in his hand as those of reed."

The words of the Greek were slingstones whirled in the emir's face. In the blindness of his fury he sprang toward her, and struck. The woman tottered, recovered; then tore back the muslin from her neck and shoulders:—

"Strike!" cried she, "strike again! Are you not master? Are you not lord of this body of mine you so lust after? What is a little pain, a few blows, beside what I ever bear!"

Iftikhar's muscles grew tense as springing steel when he reined in his passion. When he spoke, his voice was low and husky: "Woman, you drive me to all bounds. You do well to call me 'master.' Truly I am, as you shall own with sorrow, if not with joy. But two evenings past you were queen, with the heir of Hassan Sabah your slave. But now—" he was silent, but broke forth again—"my pledge to you is at an end. You are mine. I will break your will, if I may not win it. You still hold the face of Richard Longsword dear?"

"Yes, by every saint!" flashed the defiant Greek.

"Hark, then," was the laugh of hate; "I go soon to Antioch in company with the great host Kerbogha of Mosul gathers to rescue Yaghi-Sian besieged by the Christians. I go second in command, with the twelve thousand 'devoted' of Syria, to whom death is less than sleep, who can stanch thirst with the vapor from the sunburned sand, whose steeds find food sniffing the desert blast. We will gird round the Franks tight as a ring girds the finger. I know the bull valor of your Christians. But they shall die as die the flies, or fall one and all our prey—prisoners. And Richard Longsword—"

"Look him fairly in the face—as at Dorylæum!" cried the Greek, in hot scorn. "As at Dorylæum!"

"And Richard Longsword," continued Iftikhar, still steadily, "as surely as the sun moves from east to west, I will slay in battle, or, taking alive, you shall see him my captive. Yes; by the brightness of Allah! When I go to Antioch, you go also; with your own eyes you shall see the fate of those Franks you love. You shall see Richard borne asunder on the cimeters of the 'devoted' or haled fettered before me."

He paused, expecting an outburst. None! The Greek was standing proudly, her head poised high, eyes very bright.

"And at the end you shall indeed touch the head of your Richard. The head,—for you shall hear the crier traverse the city, proclaiming, 'He who would amuse himself, come to the great square, —the body of Richard the Frank is exposed to the dogs!'"

Mary took two steps toward the Ismaelian; her voice was low; she was pale, but did not tremble.

"Lord Iftikhar, if God suffered and you placed even now the head of Richard Longsword in my arms, rest assured I would kiss it with never so much love. For I would know a brave and noble spirit waited on high till it were granted me to stand at his side, all his sins washed white by God's mercy. But, my Cid, better to think of bearding the lion than of celebrating the hunting. For, hear my word; go to Antioch, you, the 'devoted,' the hordes of Kerbogha,—go all, and meet there men with a love for God in their hearts, a heaven-sped strength in their good arms. Not with dagger and stealth shall you meet; but man to man, breast to breast, sword to sword,—and Christ shall conquer!"

"Silence!" tossed out the emir, losing self-control.

"Well you cry 'silence'! First silence your own dark soul—silence reproach for blood spilled wantonly, for tears your deeds have made to flow. At heart you Ismaelians believe in no God! Believe then in devils; tremble! For many await you! And this you shall find: men can die for Christ no less than for Allah! Aye, and can live for Christ; by His strength, make you Moslems die! As for me I shall not die; in some strange way, by some strange voice, I am warned God will save me utterly; and I shall see you blasted, stricken, accursed—and that were joy of joys!"

Mary's voice had risen higher, fiercer; her hands outstretched in imprecation. Before the wild gust of her passion Iftikhar had shrunk back like a timid beast. For a moment the Greek was master, queen as never before. Then sudden as the flame had flashed, it died. Mary stood with drooping head, silent, statue-like.

"Away! From my sight!" commanded Iftikhar. His captive did not move. Hakem had reëntered.

"Take her away," cried his master; "keep her close,—let her lack nothing; but as Allah lives, her will shall bow. Let her go to Antioch when I go; but I will not see her face again until I can show her Richard Longsword dead or my captive. And now—begone!"

Mary followed the eunuch with never a word. But Morgiana, silent long, broke forth:—

"Cid—seek no more blood in private quarrel. Keep the Greek. I do not pray for her or for me. But for your own sake—for you who are still the light of my soul, despite all the wrongs—do not go to Antioch. Ruin awaits you there. Even the 'devoted' shall fail. True is *Citt* Mary's warning. Allah will fight with the Christians. Leave Kerbogha to the decree of doom; leave to doom Richard Longsword. I have said it—ruin, woe awaits at Antioch. I have said it, and my warnings never fail!"

Iftikhar swore a great oath.

"Then by Allah that liveth and reigneth ever, they shall fail now! Let doom decree what it will, to Antioch I go, and to Gehenna speeds Richard Longsword!"

He turned on his heel, while she made no reply.

"Zeyneb," quoth he to the ever ready dwarf, "in your head are hid half my wits. You are a faithful servant. In my cause you would outwit Eblees' self. I declare, by the great name of Allah said thrice, when they proclaim Iftikhar the kalif, they shall proclaim Zeyneb the vizier."

The dwarf wagged his ears after his wont, to show how highly he prized such praise.

"In a few days," continued the grand prior, "I go to join Kerbogha. You know all my plans, my secrets. While at Antioch there may come to El Halebah from Alamont and our other strongholds messages needing instant despatch. You must answer. I give you this signet: seal them in Hassan Sabah's own name."

Iftikhar drew from his bosom a tiny silk bag, and took forth a ring set with a single emerald, worth an emir's treasure house.

"The ring of Hassan Sabah!" exclaimed the dwarf.

"*Mashallah!* is it not a talisman?" came the reply. "Graven with the sign of the 'dirk and the cord,' no Ismaelian dare refuse anything commanded by the bearer, whosoever he be, under pain of forfeit of the pearl-walled pavilion of Paradise. Even the bidding of a grand prior, except he be present in person to order otherwise, is over-ridden by a fisherman wearing this ring. Therefore guard as the apple of your eye. Place it in the strong box where I keep my gems; only wear the key about your neck."

The dwarf knelt and kissed his master's robe.

"Cid, you overwhelm me with your confidence! How may I requite?"

Iftikhar only laughed carelessly; the dwarf's eye roved round the room.

"Morgiana has seen and heard," suddenly he whispered.

The grand prior's answer was a second laugh. Then he added: "Morgiana? She would shed half her blood before twittering such a secret. Smell out greater dangers, my Zeyneb!"

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# CHAPTER XXXIII

## HOW EYBEK TURNED GRAY

"And how is it with the Star of the Greeks?" repeated Musa, while Richard Longsword's face grew gnarled as a mountain oak. At the Norman's silence, the Arab also became grave as death, and in a whisper that scarce left his throat, he asked:—

"As you are my friend, tell me, was it in the mountains where they say you suffered so from

thirst? or in the camp where was the plague and fever?"

Richard shook his head; then at last came the words:—

"She lives—at least I fear so!"

"Allah the Compassionate!" was the Spaniard's cry, "you 'fear' she lives?"

The Norman's casqued head was bent upon the shaggy mane of Rollo; he groaned in his agony:—

"Mother of Christ, pity me, if I be not beyond all pity! In the great battle at Dorylæum, of which you must have heard, our camp was stormed. I was away summoning help from Duke Godfrey. Before the Turks were driven out, they made prisoners."

"Prisoners! Allah pity us indeed!" Musa rocked in his saddle, and pressed his hands to his head. But Richard drove straight forward, having begun his tale. "I continued in the chase of the Seljouks. My horse ran ahead of the rest. I saw a squadron of riders clothed in white, not Turks, but Arabs. I saw that the leader of the band was holding a woman before him on his saddle. I was almost measuring swords with him, when my horse failed. I returned to camp torn with forebodings, and found—" But here he stopped, even he startled at the agony written on the Andalusian's face.

"Tell it all, dear brother," said Musa, raising his head by a mighty effort.

"I found that Iftikhar Eddauleh and a band of his infamous Ismaelians had led the storming of the camps. He had carried Mary away in his flight; and at this moment she is in his harem,—his slave, till God may have pity on her innocency and let her die." Then Richard told Musa why he had pursued Hossein, and the Spaniard called on his men to join in the chase of the fugitive, who had not taken refuge among them, but had flown on as swift as his steed could carry. But the Ismaelian seemed to have bidden the earth open, and it had swallowed him. So after futile search the whole party turned toward Antioch; and Musa explained that he came against the Christians with no hostile intent, but as commander of the armed escort of the embassy the Egyptian Kalif Mustaali was sending the Crusaders. For the Egyptians, as Musa explained, had little love for the Turks, since the Turks were the foes of Ali, successor of the Prophet, whom the Egyptians venerated. Moreover, twenty years before, the Seljouks had plundered to the very gates of Cairo. And now that Mustaali had conquered Jerusalem and Palestine from the Turks, he would be glad to strike hands with the Christians, and grant them free access to the Holy City, if only it could remain in his hands. Therefore he had sent a pompous embassy of fifteen deputies to proffer the Crusaders honorable peace or deadly war. "And do you imagine, O brother," said Richard, when he had heard this, and they were riding on together, "that we Franks will have anything less than the complete mastery of the Holy City, or be turned back by the threats of your kalif?"

"Allah is all-knowing," was the gloomy reply. "I forewarned the Vizier Afdhal that nothing would come of this; for have I not seen your France with my own eyes? But I can only obey. The smooth speeches I leave to the deputies." Then, with a quick turn: "As Allah lives, I can think of nothing but of what you have told me. Mary Kurkuas the slave of Iftikhar,—of Iftikhar! O Allah, if indeed Thou art omnipotent and merciful, why may such things be?"

"Peace, sweet brother," said the Christian, gently. "I am trying to learn to bow to the will of God. Do not make my task harder. Mary Kurkuas was my wife; but what was she to you?"

"What to me?" The words came across Musa's white teeth so quickly that he had spoken ere he could set bridle to his tongue. Then slowly, with a soft rhythm and melody attuned so well by his rich voice, he answered: "What to me? Shall I say it again; are you not my brother, is not Mary the Greek my sister? Are not your joys my joys; your sorrows—what sorrows are they not!—mine? Allah pity me; my heart is sad, sad. And what have you done to seek for her?" So Richard told as well as he might of his questionings of the prisoners, and of the report that Iftikhar had gone to Persia, to Alamont the trysting-place of the Ismaelians. But Musa shook his head at this.

"Either the man spoke false or was ignorant. I am close to the gossip of the court at Cairo. Iftikhar is in Syria. He keeps still, lest he rouse Barkyarok; but I think report had it he was dealing with Redouan of Aleppo."

"Aleppo?" repeated Richard. "I rode close to the city. But it is impossible to gain news. War blocks all roads. These Syrians will lie, though there be a dagger at their throats. Had we but captured Hossein—"

"Forgive that my coming made him escape you," broke in the Spaniard.

"Forgive?" continued the Norman; "what have I to forgive touching you, my brother? Perhaps even Hossein could have told nothing; but vengeance is sweet."

"*Wallah*, and it shall not be small!" swore Musa.

So the company rode back to the camp of the Christians; and Richard's men were astonished to meet their chief trotting side by side with an unbeliever. But he reassured them, and brought the embassy with all courtesy before Duke Godfrey, who entreated the Egyptians very honorably. Richard, however, took Musa to his own tent, and the two spent together an evening long and sweet. Richard told of the fighting around Nicæa, of Dorylæum, the desert march, the unfruitful siege; and Musa told a story of a campaign in Nubia against negro nomads, and showed the gem-hilted cimeter that the Fatimite kalif had himself bestowed when the Spaniard returned to Cairo

victorious. "And I had another reward offered me," continued Musa, smiling. "The kalif said to me: 'Cid Musa, you are a gallant emir. As Allah lives you shall be my son-in-law; you shall have the hand of Laila my daughter; whose beauty is as a fountain bursting under palms.'"

"So you are wedded at last," cried the Norman, and he held up his wine-cup. "To Laila, wife of the great Emir Musa, son of Abdallah!" was his cry. But the Spaniard checked him with a laugh. "No, I put the offer by, though it was not easy to refuse such a gift and yet save my head."

"St. Maurice, you refused!"

"I did; a sly eunuch let me see the princess unveiled. To some men she is beautiful: eyes that need no *kohl* to deepen, feet too small for silken slippers, her smile that of a lotus-bloom under the sun,—but she was not for me."

"Foolish!" cried the Christian, "you sing love ditties ever, but bear love for none."

"I am yet young. Wait,—in the book of doom what is written is written. Leave me in peace!" was the laughing answer. But neither Norman nor Spaniard laughed in heart when they lay down to sleep that night. Richard knew that Musa had made a great vow; he could nigh guess its tenor, though the Moslem kept his counsel well.

The Egyptian envoys came on a barren embassy; infidels were infidels to the Franks, came they from Bagdad or Cairo. When the ambassadors hinted that the Crusaders would be welcome at the Holy City if they would only enter unarmed, the answer was fiery: "Tell the kalif that we do not fear all the power of Asia or of Egypt. Christians alone shall guard Jerusalem." So the envoys prepared to journey homeward. The Franks were to send with them a counter-embassy, proposing peace if Jerusalem were surrendered; but few expected any good to come of the mission. Yet, despite the brave words, it was a gloomy council of the chiefs that met in Duke Godfrey's tent the night after they had rejected the Egyptian terms. Tancred was not there, nor Richard Longsword. Godfrey's face was careworn as he sat at the head of the table, on his left Raymond, on his right Bohemond.

"Dear brothers," he pleaded, after a long and bitter debate, "we do not fight, I remind you, for gold or glory. Therefore do you, my Lord Raymond, recall your bitter words against Bohemond—Christ is ill served by His servants' wranglings." But Raymond answered haughtily: "Fair Duke, I, too, love Our Lord. But now the Prince of Tarentum comes demanding that whosoever shall take Antioch shall be lord of the city. I sniff his meaning well. His intrigue with Phirous the Armenian who wishes to betray the city is well known. Would God we had Antioch! But I will not sit by and see one man gather all the fruits of our toil when we have labored together as brothers, and poured out blood and treasure; will not see the spoils all go to one who hopes to prosper by base artifice or womanish stratagem."

Bohemond had bounded to his feet.

"Yes, Count of Toulouse, you do well to say Phirous the Armenian will betray Antioch at my bidding, and at none other. Have I put nothing at risk in this Crusade? Have I not played my part at Nicæa, Dorylæum, the battles around the city? If you have a better device for reducing Yaghi-Sian, make use, and win Antioch yourself! They tell that the lord of Mosul, the great Kerbogha, is not many days' march away, with two hundred thousand men, swept from all Mesopotamia and Persia. Will his coming make our task easier? Time presses; to-morrow? Too late, perhaps. Promise me that if I win Antioch I shall become its lord, and Phirous is ready to yield three towers into our hands."

A deep growl was coming from the other chiefs.

"By Our Lady of Paris and St. Denis," swore Count Hugh of the French blood-royal, angrily, "this Prince of Tarentum shall not beard us thus. Let half the army watch Antioch, the rest go against Kerbogha. God willing, we can crush both."

But good Bishop Adhemar interposed.

"To do so were to betray the cause of God. The host is weakened by war and famine. One-half will never suffice to confront Kerbogha; only the saints will give the whole the victory. We cannot raise the siege, nor endure attack from Kerbogha in our camp. Let us not blame the Lord Bohemond. With God's will every prince and baron shall win a fair lordship in this Syria; there is room for all."

Silence lasted a moment; then in turn Robert the Norman cried, "By the splendor of God, my Lord Bohemond, think well if this Phirous has not deceived you!"

"He has not!" attested the southern Norman, hotly.

"Good!" retorted Robert, "he has taken your money and spoken you fair. So? You cannot deny. Nevertheless, fair princes, I have a man here with a tale to tell."

A dozen voices cried: "What man? What tale? Bring him in!"

Two squires of the Norman Duke led in an Arab, muscular, bright-eyed, decently habited. Robert explained that this man had come to him, professing to be a native Christian, well disposed to the Crusaders, and to have just escaped from the city. Through the interpreter he gave his name as Eybek, and answered all the questions flung at him with marvellous readiness and consistency.

"Yes, he had ready access to the circle of Yaghi-Sian, and knew that the city was capable of making a very long defence. The emir was looking for help in a very few days. If the Christians did not raise the siege at once and march away, it would need a miracle from St. George and St. Demetrius to save them from the myriads of Kerbogha." Only once, when the fellow raised his head—for he had a manner of holding it down—Bohemond muttered to Godfrey:—

"Fair Duke, I know not when, yet once—I swear it by the thumb-bone of St. Anthony in my hilt—I have seen his face before." But the Duke replied:—

"How before, my lord? Not on the Crusade, surely. Perhaps among the Arabs of Sicily."

Bohemond shook his head. "Not there." And the examination of Eybek went on.

Then the Christian chiefs pressed him closer, and Hugh of Vermandois demanded: "But what of Phirous? For the Prince of Tarentum tells us this Armenian is high in the favor of Yaghi-Sian, that he is a Christian at heart, having been a renegade, and anxious to return to the only true faith."

"Noble lord," replied the Oriental, through the interpreter, "if the Emir Bohemond believes the tales told him by Phirous, he is less wise than I deemed him. Phirous is in the confidence of Yaghi-Sian day and night."

"*Ha!*" interposed Duke Godfrey, dropping his jaw, and Bohemond's sly face flushed with wrath and incredulity.

"Is it not as I said, fair lords?" cried Robert of Normandy, bringing his fist down upon the long oaken table before him. "What has the Prince of Tarentum been trying to lead toward, save shame and disaster?"

"Insolent!" roared Bohemond, on his feet, with his sword half drawn; "you shall answer to me for this, son of the Bastard!"

Then the Norman Duke's blade started also. But above his angry shout rang the cry of Bishop Adhemar.

"In the name of Christ, sweet sons, keep peace! Sheathe your swords! You, Prince of Tarentum, rejoice if we learn the deceit of Phirous in time. You, Robert of Normandy, do not triumph; for Bohemond has only sought to advance the victory of Our Lord!"

"Fair lords," commanded Godfrey, sternly, "let us save our swords for the unbelievers, and be quiet while we hearken to this Arabian. In truth he appears a pious and loyal man."

Then all kept silence while Eybek continued to explain that Phirous had been all the time in the counsels of the emir, that there was a plot to induce the Christian chiefs to adventure themselves inside the walls by pretending to betray a tower. Once inside, an ambush was to break out, and the flower of the Christians would be destroyed.

Bohemond raged, and stormed, and tried to browbeat the fellow into contradictions. The Prince spoke Arabic and needed no interpreter; but the other clung to his tale unshaken. Only men noticed that he hung down his head, as if afraid to let the red glare of the cressets fall fairly on his face, and that when there was a stir among the lesser chieftains as a certain newcomer took his seat at the foot of the table he averted his gaze yet more. Presently, baffled and willing to own his hopes blasted, the Tarentine turned away.

"St. Michael blot out that Armenian! He has taken my gold and deceived me. This Arab's story clings together too well not to be true." And the Prince started to leave the tent with a sullen countenance, for he had come to the council with swelling hopes.

"The finger of God is manifest in this," commented Godfrey, piously. "Had not Duke Robert brought this man before us we would all, with Bohemond, have stepped into the pit dug by our enemies."

"Verily," cried Adhemar, "this Eybek is a true friend of Christ; his reward shall not fail him."

The Arab bowed low before the bishop and Bouillon, and muttered some flowery compliments in his own tongue.

"Lead him away," commanded Duke Robert to his squires. "In the morning we will question further." As they obeyed, one took a torch from its socket on the tent-pole, and, holding it high, the ruddy light fell full on the face of the Arabian. An instant only, but with that instant came a cry, a shout.

"Hossein!" and Richard Longsword had bounded from his seat as if an arrow dashed from a crossbow. One snatch and the torch was in his hand, held close under the Arab's face. The luckless man writhed in a clutch firm as steel. Richard held up the light so that every feature of his victim lay revealed. "The man!" And at the exclamation, and sight of the iron mood written on Longsword's face, Eybek's bronzed face turned ashen pale.

There was silence in the council tent for one long minute. Then Richard was speaking very calmly:—

"Fair lords, we are all deceived. This man is no Christian escaped from Antioch. What he is, those who know the manner of the captivity of Mary de St. Julien, my dear wife, can tell. On the day of

the coming of the Egyptian embassy he was in company with a band of infidel horsemen that I dispersed. The tale he has told you touching Phirous is doubtless a lie, to cast discredit on the Armenian, and bring his scheme to naught, if Yaghi-Sian has not been warned by him already." At Longsword's words a howl of wrath went round the council table.

"Traitor! Dog of Hell!" Duke Robert was threatening; "he shall know what it is to play false with the heir of William the Norman!"

"*Te Deum laudemus!*" Bishop Adhemar was muttering. "Verily we were all deceived in him, as we believed ourselves deceived in Phirous; yet God has brought the counsels of the crafty to naught; they have fallen in the pit they had digged for others!"

And Duke Godfrey added: "The Prince of Tarentum will thank you for this, De St. Julien. Let this accursed Arabian be led away and fettered."

But Richard held his prey fast. "Fair lords, this is the boon I crave: give me the life or death of this fellow. By Our Lady I swear he shall not find either road an easy one."

Then twenty voices chorussed, "Yes! yes! away with him!" So Richard led, or rather dragged out his victim. Eybek struggled once while they traversed the long tent-avenues of the sleeping camp,—and only once; for he found that in Longsword's hands he was weaker than a roe in the paws of a lion. The Norman did not speak to the captive, or to any in his train, until outside his own tents. The ever watchful Herbert, standing sentry, hailed him.

"Does Musa sleep?" was all Richard said. And in a moment the Spaniard had glided from the tent, and was crouching by the smouldering camp-fire.

"Ever awake?" asked Longsword, wondering; and the reply was, "Allah will not grant sleep when I think of—" But here the Andalusian's ready tongue failed.

"Look!" Richard drew the captive down by the red coals, and whispered his name. Then Herbert gave a great shout, which brought Sebastian, Theroulde, De Carnac, and more from their tents, and they lit many torches.

Now what befell Eybek that night we need not tell. For the ways of Herbert and De Carnac were not those of soft ladies, who embroider tapestry all day in a rose bower; and the Ismaelian was no sleek serving-page, who cried out when the first thorn bush pricked him. But before Richard Longsword lay down that night he had heard somewhat of Iftikhar Eddauleh, and of another more important than Iftikhar, which made his sleep the lighter. At dawn he was outside Godfrey's tent awaiting speech with the good Duke. When Bouillon heard what he was seeking, the Norman was instantly admitted; and Godfrey marvelled and rejoiced at sight of the fire and gladness that shone in Longsword's eyes.

"Well met, and ever welcome, fair Baron," was the Lorrainer's greeting; "and will you ride to-day with your men toward Urdeh, and southward to see if you may sweep in a few droves of beeves and a corn convoy?"

"My Lord Duke," quoth Richard, curtly, "I cannot ride to Urdeh to-day or to-morrow."

The Lorrainer gave him a shrewd glance.

"Fair son," said he, half affectionately, "you have been dreaming on what that captive spy threw out. Do not deny."

"I do not deny, my lord. And now I come to ask you this: Will the cause of Christ suffer great hurt if I ride on no more forays for the week to come, or for the next, or, if God so will,"—he spoke steadily,—"or never?"

The Duke's gaze was more penetrating than before.

"Beware, De St. Julien; you ride to death if you trust the word of that Eybek, even under torture. We only know of him this—the Father of Lies is no smoother perjurer."

Richard answered with a laugh:—

"Eybek has said to me thrice, 'Cid, as Allah lives, I swear I warn you truly,—strike off my head or torture as you will,—know this: you ride to death when you ride to Aleppo.'"

"To Aleppo?" demanded Godfrey.

"At Aleppo Iftikhar Eddauleh holds Mary Kurkuas prisoner, and I go to Aleppo to seek my wife," was Longsword's half-defiant reply.

"Madman!" The Duke struck his heavy scabbard on the ground to double his emphasis.

"'Mad' only as I set the love and joy of one of God's pure saints before peril that no cavalier, who is true to his knightly vows, could have right to shun."

"How will you go? Antioch resists. We can detach no large force. Your own St. Julieners can do nothing."

"My lord," said Richard, steadily, "I shall go alone, save for one comrade—my brother, Musa the Egyptian emir,—who will fail me when God Himself loves evil. He is Moslem, but I would sooner

have him at my side than any Christian cavalier from Scotland to Sicily; for what human craft and wit and strength can do, that can he."

The Duke, leaning heavily upon his sword, a smile half sad, half merry, upon his face, slowly replied: "You are both very young; God loves such—whatsoever their faith! You are right, De St. Julien—you must go. I will ask Bishop Adhemar to pray for your safe return."

So Richard returned to his tents and made the last preparations, said farewell to many, and last of all to Sebastian. The priest's heart, he knew, was very full when Richard knelt for the words of blessing, and at the end Sebastian gave him the kiss of peace.

"Go forth, dear son," was the word of Sebastian; "fight valiantly for Christ; fear not death. But by the grace of God bring the lost lamb home. And I—I will wrestle with God, beseeching that Michael and Raphael and Gabriel, the warriors of heaven, may spread their broad shields over you. And may He who plucked the three children from the fire, and Daniel from the paw of the lion, and Peter from the dungeon of Herod, deliver you also, and her whom you seek! Amen."

When Sebastian had finished, Richard mounted Rollo. He wore no armor save the Valencia hauberk beneath his mantle; but Trenchefer was girded to his side. Musa was beside him on a deer-limbed Arabian. They crossed the Orontes on the bridge of boats behind the camp of Duke Godfrey. The tents and bright river orchards were fading from sight; on before lay the sunlit rolling Syrian country. Suddenly the thunder of a charger at speed came up behind them. Richard turned inquiringly. A moment later the strange rider had dashed abreast—had drawn rein; and Longsword rubbed his two eyes, doubting his vision—beside him was Godfrey, Duke of Lorraine.

"My lord—" the Norman had begun. The Duke, he saw, was in no armor, and bore only his sword. Godfrey galloped along beside Rollo.

"Fair son," said he, smiling, "has the noble lady, Mary the Greek, less chance of succor if three cavaliers ride to her aid than if only two?"

"Impossible!" cried Longsword, distrusting now his ears; "it is you that are mad, my Lord Duke. Your position, your duties, the army! Doubtless we ride to death, as you well said."

Godfrey's laugh was merry as that of a boy.

"Then by Our Lady of Antwerp three swords will keep heaven farther away than two! Know, De St. Julien, that to my mind nothing stirs in the camp for the next two weeks. I grow sluggish as a cow, listening to Raymond's and Bohemond's wranglings. Renard will spread in the camp that I have led a foray southward, and let men miss me if they will. Enough to know my arm and wits can do more for once at Aleppo than at Antioch."

"Yet this is utter rashness," urged Richard, in last protest; "to ease my own conscience, turn back—for my sake do it!"

"For your sake," was the smiling answer, "I will keep my Marchegai neck to neck with Rollo. I am not so old a knight that I have forgotten the sniff of an adventure. When I put on the chieftain, I could not put off the cavalier."

Richard did not reply. To shake off Godfrey was impossible. Presently the Norman in his own turn laughed.

"On, then, to Aleppo! To Aleppo, be it for life or death!" cried Musa; and Richard added: "Tremble, Iftikhar,—the three best swords in the wide earth seek you!" Then each gave his horse the head.

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# CHAPTER XXXIV

## HOW MUSA PRACTISED MAGIC

In the city of Aleppo, close by the great Mosque Jami' el-Umawi, there stood a warehouse that was more than commonly busy on a certain spring morning. This warehouse was of two stories, built of coarse brown rubble, and only entered from the narrow, dirty street by a plainly arched passageway. Once within, however, the newcomer beheld a large court, surrounded on the lower floor by little shops; and on the upper floor, the whole length of the four sides of the court, ran a wooden gallery, behind which were storerooms and lodgings for the wayfaring merchants, who made this spot a sort of hostelry and rendezvous. The shops below were humming with busy traffic. Here on one side lay the *sook* of the jewellers, and on the opposite were arrayed the tiny stalls of the dealers in copper wares. The court was crammed with braying donkeys, bright-robed Syrians, and the ubiquitous *sakkas*, the water-bearers, who for a trifle poured a draught from the camel-skin sacks on their backs, to any who wished. The *sakkas* were jostled by the sellers of orange-flower water; these in turn by the tall, black eunuchs who were clearing the way for a closely veiled lady intent on visiting the jewellers; while through the midst of men and beasts swept a stately, venerable sheik from the college at the mosque, who rained down a curse,

devoting to *Hawiyat*, the seventh and nethermost hell, the luckless donkey-boy that had brushed a dirty hand upon the doctor's red silk scarf over his shoulders.

The worthy jeweller Asad, whose shop was on the right side of the court, had long since spread out his array of gemmed rings, silver cups, tiring pins, and Indian necklaces, and sat back in his little niche nodding sleepily, now and then opening one eye to see if the lady who followed the eunuchs was coming to visit him. But the wares of his rival Ibrahīm kept her busy, and Asad contentedly closed his eye, and nodded once more, saying: "Leave to Ibrahīm her trade. To-day his, to-morrow mine. So Allah will prosper us both!" And, despite the fact that one of the serving-lads who followed the sheik was casting a covetous glance upon the handy treasures, the good Asad nearly fell asleep on the mat-covered seat. Presently a question roused him.

"Worthy sheik, can you tell me if you possess any Andalusian corals? If so, be so gracious as to show them. Not that I would buy—" But here Asad, with a keen scent for business, had opened both eyes, and was looking at his inquirer. A well-formed, handsomely featured Arab was standing before him; the lines of the face young, but the hair and beard not a little white. The stranger was dressed decently enough, but the long, loose *aba* over the jacket was worn and soiled with dust, as were also the white leather shoes. "A Moslem gentleman of good breeding, but perhaps decayed family," was the estimate of the jeweller. And he answered slowly:—

"Be welcome in peace! Sit with me upon the rug! Here, boy, run to the confectioner's and bring us cups of sherbet." So the stranger put off his shoes and crossed his feet on the carpet, facing Asad. The shop was so small that a second visitor would barely have found room. Asad opened a little chest, and brought forth a tray of coral necklaces, which he submitted to his visitor.

"*Bismillah!*" cried the other, "I feel the water hang on my eyelids when I see this red coral! My heart goes back to my own country I have not seen for many a year."

"Verily," exclaimed the jeweller; "and have you come from Spain? Your speech shows you no Syrian."

"It is true; from Spain. Five years since I left my dear home in Malaga for Mecca, to visit the city of the Apostle—on whom be peace! Allah confound the robbers that stripped me as I returned across the desert! I had taken upon myself a vow not to return until I had gained sevenfold the thousand dirhems with which I set forth. Being nigh penniless, I have wandered far and near,—Medina, Bagdad, Ispahan, Bussorah, Damascus, Cairo,—all I have visited, and little by little Allah blesses me with gain. Now I am in Aleppo seeking to sell some woollen cloaks of Shirāz; but my longing for my own country is so great, I said to myself, 'Let me but spend a trifle on some corals of Andalusia, to remind me of my dear Malaga!'"

"The Most High favor you!" responded the good jeweller, who knew that kind wishes cost nothing. "See,—this necklace—it is worth twenty dirhems—yet receive it as a gift,—it is yours for ten." The Spaniard's only response was a grunt. Then, after long silence: "Have I the treasures of Solomon the Wise? I care little for the coral,—a poor necklace; it were dear at three!" It was Asad that grunted now, but he only answered: "Have I not three wives and seven children? Will you impose on my generosity?" And then both men, knowing perfectly well they were on the highroad to a fair bargain, took the cups which the boy had brought, and began to converse on quite alien matters. "A noble city is this Aleppo," began the Spaniard; "only Cordova and Malaga, saving always Bagdad, are finer!" "*Ya!*" cried Asad, "you over-praise your Spain. Yet Aleppo is a noble city. Would to Allah we had as noble a prince to rule over it!"

"So!" exclaimed the other; "then Redouan is not loved?"

Asad spat far out into the court to prove his disgust.

"On the last day Sultan Redouan's good deeds will weigh less than an ant's. Hear—three years since he slew his brothers, Bahram and Abouthaleb, as caution against conspiracy. His tyranny drives another brother, Dekak of Damascus, into revolt. He makes Yaghi-Sian of Antioch his enemy. Aboun Nedj'n, his vizier, is all cruelty and beheadings. Last of all, we are delivered over to the clutch of Iftikhar, the Ismaelian, whose evil deeds Allah requite!"

"Iftikhar? I have heard the name."

"Cursed be the day of his birth! The sultan cringes to him as to the very kalif! He has become possessed of El Halebah, the wonderful palace outside the city."

"And he is there now?"

"Yes; though soon he departs. In a few days he will lead off his band of Ismaelians to join the host which Kerbogha of Mosul is leading against the Christians at Antioch. Eblees pluck them also! There is a rumor that if the two overcome the Christians, they turn their arms against the kalif and the arch-sultan next. But woe for us! taxes grow each day. The gatherers are insatiate. Redouan grinds us at Iftikhar's bidding."

"*Wallah*, I am interested; tell more of this Iftikhar."

"Alas, brother, I know little to tell. These Ismaelians keep too close. They talk only with their daggers." Asad lifted the necklace; the Spaniard eyed it carelessly: "Four dihrems?" suggested he. "I wrong my household; yet say six," was the answer. The other shook his head. Asad dropped the necklace; then cried, "*Ya!* Khalid, come hither and tell this worthy sheik of Iftikhar

Eddauleh!" And at the shout a tall, gaunt Arab in a muezzin's flowing robe and ample green turban came groping through the crowd, dexterously threading his way, though entirely blind. Then there were greetings, and Khalid squeezed himself betwixt the others and was seated.

"Blind?" answered he, in reply to a question. "Yes, blind by the blessing of Allah. Once I had sight and starved as a beggar. Then one day I stole, and the High Kadi put out my eyes. Next, the old muezzin at the great mosque died. They desired a blind man to succeed him, for the minaret is so high those with eyes can peer into the vizier's harem court and squint at his women. So I was chosen, and never since have lacked good bread and a warm sleeping-mat,—thanks to the Compassionate!"

"But I desired to hear of Iftikhar, the Ismaelian," said the Spaniard, smiling.

"Verily," ran on the blind man, "I can tell you a tale concerning him, for there is no gossip in all Aleppo that does not blow into my ears. They say he has a captive of marvellous beauty—a Christian." "A Frank?" was the question. "No, a Greek; more fair than the maids of Paradise, who are tall as palm trees. He has her in the palace El Halebah, and seeks to win her love, so the eunuchs tell."

"*Mashallah*, I am astonished. Why should he ask her love if once he possessed her?"

The blind man blinked slyly.

"A strange tale; I had it all from Wasik, who was one of the eunuchs that guarded her. It seems the Ismaelian has once been among the Christians (Allah broil all in Gehenna!); there he saw and loved her, but she would have none of him. Then war threw her into his hands, and he moved earth and heaven to make her favor him. Gifts, dresses, fêtes, serving-maids fair as the moon—he gave all, with El Halebah to be her dwelling; and she repaid only pouts and high words. At last he learns that she still sets great store on her husband, a Frankish emir with their host at Antioch."

"Her husband?" asked the Spaniard, carelessly.

"You have heard his name—Richard of the Great Cimeter—a terrible emir who slays his captives ruthlessly."

"I have heard of him; go on."

"*Ya!* Iftikhar prepares his band to go to Antioch, and swears he will take this houri with him, that she may see the fate of her dear Franks with her own eyes. He vows likewise he will give her Emir Richard's head to fondle, since she loves it so."

"Verily he is a bloody man," commented the Spaniard.

"It is so; yet his captive will find she had best put the clouds from her face and try to please him. He is a man of will harder than Damascus steel."

The Spaniard took up the coral necklace and eyed it critically.

"Five dirhems?" suggested he. "Take it for five, yet count it as a gift. Alas, my profit!" sighed Asad.

The other drew the coins from a lank pouch, waited while Asad bit each to prove it, placed the coral under the folds of his turban, then whispered to the muezzin, "Friend, follow me,"—the same time slipping a coin into his closing palm. Asad's eyes shut in a contented cat-nap when adieus were over; profit enough gained for one day. Khalid followed the stranger into the bustling street.

"Good father," said the stranger, affably, "do you know, this tale of the Emir Iftikhar is most interesting. Why? Because it is most marvellous any prince should go to such lengths to court favor with a mere captive, be she brighter than the sun. But you surely repeat gossip on the streets, you do not know the eunuchs, or have access yourself to El Halebah?"

Khalid chuckled, "I swear by Mohammed's beard there is not a courtyard about Aleppo I may not find and enter, blind though I am. The gate of El Halebah is as open to me as to a glutton the way to his mouth, and I chatter all day with the eunuchs." His questioner began to rattle his money-bag.

"Friend," said the Spaniard, "you appear an honest man. Now swear thrice by Allah the Great that you will not betray me, and to-night you shall count over fifty dirhems."

"Allah forbid!" cried the muezzin, raising his hands in holy horror. "I cannot know what wickedness you desire to make me share."

"And I swear to you I have no attempt against any man's goods, or wife, or life, or honor; and you shall count seventy dirhems?"

"I cannot; how can I go before the Most High on the last day with some great sin on my soul!"

"*Ya!* Eighty, then?" A long pause; then Khalid answered very slowly, and his seared eyeballs twinkled:—

"Impossible!—yet—a—hundred—"

"They are yours!" was the prompt reply.

"Oh, fearful wickedness! how can I satisfy the Omnipotent? Yet"—and the blind eyes rose sanctimoniously toward heaven—"the divine compassion is very great. Says not Al Koran, 'Allah is most ready to forgive, and merciful'?"

"You will swear, then?" demanded the other, promptly.

"Yes," and Khalid folded his hands piously while he muttered the formula; then added, "Now give me the money."

"Softly, brother," was the reply. "Remember well the other words of the Apostle, 'violate not your oaths, since you have made Allah a witness over you,' The money in due time; now lead me and do as I shall bid, or in turn I swear you shall not finger one bit of copper."

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Now it befell that on the afternoon of the day when Khalid the blind muezzin sold his conscience for a hundred dirhems, Hakem and his fellow-eunuch Wasik sat by the outer gate of the great court of El Halebah with a *mankalah* board between them, busy at the battle they were waging with the seventy-two shell counters. As they played, their talk was all of the languishing state of the Star of the Greeks, and how since her attempted flight to Antioch all the temper seemed to have burned out of her mettle.

"I protest, dear brother," quoth the worthy Wasik, studying the game-board, "doves of her feather cannot perch all day on a divan, saying and doing nothing, and not droop and moult in a way very grievous to Cid Iftikhar."

"The Cid's commands are very strait—refuse her nothing in reason, only make plain to her that he is the master. *Wallah*, I little like this manner of bird! To my mind there hatches trouble when a woman refuses so much as to rage at you. This very day I said in my heart, 'Go to, now, Hakem; pick a quarrel with the Star of the Greeks; she will be happier after giving a few pecks and claws.' I call the Most High to witness—she submitted to all my demands meekly, as though she were no eaglet, but a tethered lamb! An evil omen, I say. Allah forbid she should die! Iftikhar would make us pay with our heads!"

And Wasik shrugged his shoulders to show agreement with Hakem's last desire. Before he replied there was a loud knocking at the gate; the lazy porter stopped snoring, and began to shout to some one without.

"For the sake of Allah! O ye charitable!" was the cry from outside, evidently of a beggar demanding alms.

"Allah be your help! Go your way!" the porter was replying, and adding: "Off, O Khalid, blind son of a stone-blind hound! Must I again lay the staff across you!"

But a second voice answered him:—

"Not so, O compassionate fellow-believer; will you drive away a stranger whom the excellent Khalid has led here, craving bounty? Allah will requite tenfold any mercy. See, I am but just come from Mecca. Behold a flask of water from the holy well Zemzem, sovereign remedy for the toothache. I ask nothing. Let me but sit awhile in the cool of the porch. I am parched with the heat of the way."

Hakem had reputation for being a pious personage.

"Let the worthy pilgrim come in!" he commanded, the porter obeying. Wasik had his doubts.

"This is Saturday, the most unlucky day; beware!" he muttered.

But Hakem would have none of him. Behind Khalid there entered a tottering fellow, bent with age, gray and unkempt; a patch over one eye, his blue kaftan sadly tattered, his turban a faded yellow shawl. He swung a huge hempen sack over one shoulder and trailed a heavy staff.

"Allah requite you and your house!" was his salutation, as he dropped heavily upon the divan under the shaded arcade.

"And you also," replied Hakem, ever generous at his master's expense. "Be refreshed. Eat this cool melon and be strengthened."

The pilgrim put aside the plate. "Give to Khalid. Alas! I can eat nothing that was not eaten by the Prophet (Allah favor and preserve him!); such is the rule of my order of devotees. And who may say the Apostle did or did not eat the rind of a melon!" The eunuchs laid their heads together.

"A very holy man!" "A most worthy sheik; a true saint; a *welee*!" their whispered opinions. So they kissed the old man's hand; called him "father"; brought sherbet, dates, and bread. After the stranger had eaten and edified them all by his pious conversation, presently his one eye began to twinkle very brightly, and he started to unpack his sack. Suddenly he drew forth a long iron spike, and plunged it down his throat to the very butt; then drew it out, laughing dryly at the

wide eyes of the eunuchs. "Verily," cried he, "I am versed in 'high' magic—the noble art handed by the obedient angels and genii to devout Moslems. I know the 'great name' of Allah, uttering which bears me instantly to the farthest corner of the world; see!" A puff of smoke blew from his mouth; a flash of fire followed. Hakem was all eyes when the sheik rose, drew from his sack a number of brazen pots, placed them on the pavement, blew a spark seemingly from his mouth, and the bowls gave forth a blue aromatic smoke. The eunuchs began to quake under their ebony skins. The sheik turned toward them.

"My sons—I show great marvels; many should see. Your master—away? But are there no 'flowers of beauty' in the harem who would admire the one-eyed Sheik Teydemeh, the greatest 'white' magician in all the land of Egypt?"

Hakem put his mouth to Wasik's ear. "Bring out Morgiana and the Greek. Let them be thickly veiled."

Wasik hesitated. "We are bidden to keep the Greek closely in the harem," he remarked.

"We are bidden to see that she does not pine away with naught but grief to think of. Bring both forth."

Before the magician had finished unburdening his mysterious sack, Wasik led in a lady all buried in silks and muslins. Hardly were her dark eyes visible under the veils. "I bring the Greek," whispered Wasik to Hakem; "she obeyed me like a dumb ox, but Morgiana is in her moods and will go nowhere."

The lady sat upon the soft divan listlessly, hardly so much as rustling her dress. The sheik rose, mumbled words doubtless of incantation, and commenced reeling cotton ribbons from his lips till they littered the floor. Then he drew from his teeth a score of tin disks big as silver coins, again poured water into a borrowed cup, and gave it to Hakem to drink—behold, the water was become sugar sherbet! Then the magician blew on a tiny reed flute a strain so sweet, so delicious, Hakem verily thought he heard the maids of Paradise; and as he sang the sheik began to juggle with balls, first with one hand, tossing three balls; then laying aside the flute he kept six flying, all the time dancing and singing in a low quaver in some tongue that the eunuch did not understand, but thought he had once heard spoken among the Franks of Sicily. Presently the sheik threw up two more balls, making eight speed in the place of six; and he danced faster, spinning round and round amid the smoking bowls, until he came to a stand right before the veiled lady, who was no longer listless now, but sat erect, eager, her bright eyes flashing from beneath her veil, though Hakem did not see—all his gaze was on those flying balls. The sheik halted before her, spinning upon one foot, yet keeping his place. Suddenly he broke off his chant in the unknown tongue and sang in Arabic with clear, deep voice:—

"Sweet as the wind when it kisses the rose
  Is thy breath;
Blest, if thine eyes had but once on me smiled,
  Would be death.
Give me the throat of the bulbul to sing
  Forth thy praise,
Then wouldst thou drink the clear notes as they spring
  All thy days;
Nard of far Oman's too mean for thy sweetness,
  Eagle-wings lag at thy glancing eyes' fleetness;
By thy pure beauty, bright gems lack completeness,
  Lady, ah! fairest!"

And Hakem did not see the rustling nor hear the little sigh under the muslin and silk, for the sheik had sped round in his dance once more; again chanting in that foreign tongue some incantation, doubtless to unseen powers to aid him in his art. Then the wonder-worker halted, wiped the foam from his lips, and began new tricks; blowing a little earthen bowl from his mouth, —drawing a live rabbit from one of the smoking bowls,—and performing many marvels more, till the eunuchs showered on him all the small change they had about them, and gave him a great basket of dates and figs to carry to the khan where he said he lodged.

That night as Hakem, with clear conscience, went to bed, he observed to Wasik: "Truly, the visit of the one-eyed juggler was better than fifty elixirs for bringing back bloom to the Star of the Greeks! Surely, if one such mountebank can cheer her thus, she shall be fed on white magic each day. Cid Iftikhar will summon hither every skilful conjurer from Damascus to Bagdad."

And Wasik answered: "By the Prophet, it is true. We are to tame *Citt* Mary, but not to break her spirit. Give her mind its food as well as her body. She is not like our Arab maids, whose Paradise a new necklace can girdle!"

So these good servants took counsel.

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That night also Richard and Godfrey took their counsel with Musa the Spaniard. Safe hidden in the gloom of a stall that joined the great court of the khan, which stood on the Alexandretta road

without the western gate of Aleppo, they had no fear of eavesdroppers. An irksome day it had been for the two Franks. Long since, the sun had burned them bronze as many a Moor, and what with their black dyed hair and their coarse Oriental dress, none had questioned when Musa, who passed himself as a travelling Berber merchant, declared them his body-servants. But Godfrey had little Arabic. Richard's accent would soon betray. Common prudence forced them to sulk all day in the stall of the khan, while Musa went forth to make his discoveries. Now that he was back, their tongues flew fast.

"And have you seen her?" That was Richard's first question.

"*Bismillah*, I have; or at least two eyes bright as suns, peering from under a great cloud of veils! Recall how I made you think at Cefalu I was possessed by 'sheytans,' because of my art-magic!" answered Musa, laughing in his noiseless fashion. "*Ya!* When did old Jamī]l at Cordova dream, while he taught an idle student his art, that by it I would earn six dirhems and a mess of figs? I met a mountebank conjurer, bought of him his gear—wretchedly poor tricks they were,—and then found a worthy blind muezzin, in a way I will tell, to get me entrance into the very court of El Halebah. Enough; the good eunuch Hakem thought me a true *welee*, and brought out one of his cagelings to see my magic. I was bound to make sure she was truly *Citt* Mary who was pent up in the palace before you and I thrust our necks into peril; also I knew the chance of failure was less if she were warned. So I sang an incantation—in your Provençal, and clapped on to that a verse I composed before her at Palermo. When I saw her muslins and silks all a-flutter, I sang my French again, and it was more of being ready for a visit in the night than of the efreets and jinns that aid a true magician. Therefore I say this: All is ready. To-night the Star of the Greeks says farewell to Iftikhar or—"

But Musa repeated no alternative.

"And the way of escape?" asked Godfrey. "By St. Nicholas of Ghent, this is no bachelor's adventure!"

Musa laughed again.

"Verily, as says Al Koran, 'No soul knoweth what it shall suffer on the morrow, but Allah knoweth;' nevertheless, so far as human wit may run, much is prepared. Understand, Cid Godfrey, that Iftikhar has sent away from El Halebah the greater part of his Ismaelian devotees to join the force of Kerbogha. About the palace lie two hundred at most; a few stand sentry upon the road from Aleppo, a few more lie in the palace; but nearly all have their barrack in the wood beside the Kuweik, some distance northward."

"St. George!" swore the Duke, "how discover all this? Can you see through walls as through Greek glass?"

Musa laughed again: "Allah grants to every man separate gifts! To me to grasp many things with few words and few eyewinks. I am not mistaken."

"It is true, did you but know him, my lord; it is true," added Richard.

Musa continued: "Round dirhems smooth many paths, even amongst the Ismaelians. With the aid of the reprobate muezzin I discovered that *Citt* Mary is held in the westerly wing of the palace, and guarded by Hakem and a few other eunuchs. I ate salt with the chief of the watch on the Aleppo road—a generous man who will take a hint swiftly! He understands I have desire to bear away an Armenian maid belonging to Beybars, the chief steward. When I come up the way in company with two comrades, he and his men are blind. We go up to the palace; we go away; no questions. Beside the highroad to Antioch will be tethered our horses. I have bought in the Aleppo market a desert steed swift as the darts of the sun. We enter the palace with the armed hand—shame indeed if our three blades are no match for the sleepy eunuchs! Once possess her, rush for the horses—then, speed,—speed for Antioch, trusting Allah and our steeds. For as the Most High lives, there will be hot pursuit!"

"There is no better way," commented Richard, drawing up a notch in his sword-belt.

"St. Michael and St. George!"—swore Godfrey again—"a noble adventure! Joy that I came from Antioch!"

"Joy or sorrow we shall know full soon," was Musa's sober reply. "We shall read a marvellous page in the book of doom this night; doubt it not!"

"And we set forth—?" continued Richard.

"At once,—the night grows dark for the eye of an owl," answered the Spaniard. "Darkness is kind; we must not waste it."

"Lead, then," commanded Godfrey. "The horses are ready; there is food in the saddle-bags."

"Follow,—and Allah be our guide!" and the Andalusian took his own steed by the bridle.

There was darkness and silence in the court of the great khan. The arrow-swift horses of a Persian trader slept in one stall; a tall dromedary shook his tether in another. Richard brushed upon a shaggy donkey; trod upon a mongrel dog, that started with a sullen howl. From one remote stall came a ray of torch-light, and the chatter of merchants discussing the profits of the last Oman caravan. A single watchman stared at them when they led their beasts through the

wide gate. The three were under the stars. Musa took the bridle of the horse just bought, and the others followed him. Richard trod on as in a dream; twice he passed his hand before his eyes as if to brush away the blackness that was unbroken save for the star mist.

"To-night! To-night!" he was repeating.

"What, to-night?" asked Godfrey.

"To-night I may touch the hair of Mary Kurkuas. Is not that chance worth the hazard of death? But you?"

"I serve Christ best to-night when I serve one so loved by Him as the Lady of St. Julien. Let us hasten."

They said little more. The night was dark indeed, but Musa seemed bat-eyed. He led across the Kuweik, through the orchards—dim and still, until at a tamarisk bush he halted. There they left the horses. Richard made sure that the lady's saddle on the fourth horse was strapped fast. Musa spoke not a word, but led away swiftly. They were entering the wood. Richard was treading at an eager pace, with a swelling heart, when suddenly he heard a sound behind him,—looked back,—and behold, on all sides, as if called from earth by enchantment, were the dim figures of men! And he could see, even in the darkness, that the dress of each was white.

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# CHAPTER XXXV

## HOW RICHARD HEARD A SONG

Now what befell came so swiftly that in after days Richard could never tell it all. Sure it is, that had Trenchefer and Godfrey's sword and Musa's cimeter left sheath, there had been another tale. For in the twinkling that Richard cast a backward glance, a noose whistled through the air and closed about the Norman's shoulders, locking his arms helpless. And with the whistling rope came a rush of feet and many hands seizing him. One struggle—he could scarce gather wits to resist; he was helpless as a birdling before the snake. At the same instant came the crash and gasp of two desperate conflicts more—Godfrey and Musa likewise seized. As Richard grasped it, the Spaniard succumbed as readily as he. But the great Duke was not lightly taken. Draw he could not, but his mighty hand tore clear of the rope and dashed more than one assailant down before, with ten upon him, he was mastered. All was done in less time than the telling. Almost before Longsword's soul cried "danger," a torch was flashing in his eyes, and a dozen dark Syrian faces pressing close. The torch was held high, and flashed before him twice. Blinded by the glare, he saw nothing beyond the ring of faces. From the dark shadow came a voice—a voice he had heard before: "*Bismillah!* The Frank, Richard Longsword, at last!"

The Norman did not cry out. Native sense told him that help there was none, and all the teaching of the stern school wherein he was bred had taught him to bear in silence. All stood while Richard saw the torch carried to the other knots of white-robed men. Then again the voice: "This is the Spaniard, Cid Musa, the son of Abdallah." And now a great shout of triumph: "Praised be Allah, destroyer of His enemies! We take the Emir Godfrey, chief of the Frankish unbelievers!"

Longsword had no need to be told that this was Zeyneb's voice. He was about to break forth with defiance and curses upon the dwarf, when in the torchlight he saw a form taller than the others, the plumes of a haughty helmet, the flash of gilded steel. The captors gave way to right and left as the chieftain—so he clearly was—advanced until face to face with Richard.

"Do you know me? I am the one-time commander of Count Roger's guard, the Egyptian Iftikhar Eddauleh."

The grand prior had spoken naturally, without bravado.

And Richard answered in like vein:—

"I claimed the honor of your friendship once, my Lord Iftikhar. Fate has kept us long asunder."

Iftikhar's plumes nodded.

"And brings us together at last. Doom leads to El Halebah you and the valorous Cid Musa and this noble emir, who is strange to me. The night advances; let us go."

Before his captive could reply, the Egyptian had faded in the dark. An Ismaelian laid his hand on Richard's sword-belt to disarm him. Trenchefer clanked. Iftikhar spoke out of the gloom:—

"Leave the sword, Harun. A Frank cavalier loves better to part with life than with weapon. *Wallah!* Let them keep their blades and feel them at their sides; but knot fast,—their strength is as seven lions!"

They passed a second cord around Richard's arms, drawing back and pinioning them tight above the elbows. A heavy hand on either shoulder urged him forward. The Norman steeled his muscles, made one effort as never before to snap the bands. Useless; even his giant strength

failed. Unresisting he was led blindly on through the gloom, the captors treading rapidly. They were soon in a grove of trees, where the matted leafage cut off the least ray of light. The torch, which only flared when shaken, sank to a glow dim as a firefly. Underfoot Richard could feel dry twigs crack, and he smelt the fresh earthy odor of fern brakes and bird-loved thickets. The only sounds were the footfalls and the chirp, chirp of the crickets. Then a faint gloaming shone where the trees arched and opened: they were again beneath a clear sky. The Norman saw the silver band of a stream creeping to the Kuweik—barely flashing under the starlight, for moon there was none. His guards led forward; under their tread a floating bridge rang hollow, and the water gurgled up around the casks.

For one moment Richard pondered whether he could leap into the water, and drift down-stream with his arms pinioned. Folly—had he not his mail-shirt, and Trenchefer still at his side? A stone would float lighter! They had passed the bridge; again were in the woods. Some uncanny night bird was flapping from bough to bough; he could hear the whir of heavy wings, hoarse cries, blending with the song of the crickets. Did not ravens croak when men drew nigh their dooms? Was it river mist only that was hanging in cold beads upon his brow? Still the white-robed company led onward. Not a word spoken—when might this journey end? Richard listened to the beating of his own heart—merciful saints, why so loudly? Behind he knew were led Godfrey and Musa; they two walking to death, and for his cause! The Mother of Mercies knew it had been by none of his willing. Out of the dark was creeping that vision dreaded so often,—repelled so often,—which he had vainly hoped had faded away forever. Gilbert de Valmont slain beside the altar! Richard looked up at the stars shimmering between the leaves. "Ere these stars fade in sunlight"—spoke a voice (from within or without, what matter?)—"you, Richard de St. Julien, will be accounting to God for the soul of that guiltless boy." And though Longsword thought of the Pope's pledge of absolution, of all the infidels he had himself slain in the name of Christ, of all his sufferings in the chastisement at Dorylæum,—all merit seemed turned to sin, and the word of Urban weak to unlock the mercy of God in His just anger. "*Mea culpa! mea culpa! mea maxima culpa!*" Other prayers came not, nor did his heart find room for curses against Iftikhar or grief for Mary. He thought of her; but truth to tell he was too numbed to dwell on her agony, on the certitude of her lifelong captivity. And still the white-robed company led him onward, onward.

The grounds were opening before him. The wood broke away to right and left. Richard saw the vague tracery of a wide-stretching palace,—colonnades, domes, pinnacles, all one dim maze in the starlight. For the first time he spoke to his guards.

"This is El Halebah? Tell me—why are our heads not struck off at once?"

"The grand prior wills otherwise," replied Harun, at his side.

"Are we to be put to death speedily, or long reserved?"

The Ismaelian became confidential.

"Cid, you talk as becomes a brave man. I should like to see you with your great sword in battle. Who am I, to know the desire of Iftikhar? Yet I think this: if Christians may enter Paradise, ere midnight you will be sitting at banquet with the maids of pure musk."

"Then why this delay—this endless journey?"

Harun shook his head.

"I am only the grand prior's hands and feet. You will see."

Richard had faced death in battle twenty times and more, and never yet had felt a tremor. But riding to battle was not walking to meet the doom handed down by Iftikhar Eddauleh. The Norman feared not death, but life. Life through the ages of ages! Life shaped for eternal woe, eternal weal, by the deeds of a few earthly moments. Hell earned by that instant at Valmont! Heaven grasped for in the transfiguration at Clermont! And the issue mystery! mystery fathomless! Kept with God, the All-merciful; but behind all, ordering all, His awful righteousness! Richard knew as well as he knew anything that never in earthly body would he see that mist of stars again; he looked up into the violet-black dome, and trembled, for he knew he was drawing near the Almighty's throne.

They trod up the smooth gravel leading to the palace. The great valves of the portals opened noiselessly at some unseen bidding, then closed behind. A single flickering lamp went before, as they glided through long corridors, or under airy domes, where the wan light struggled up to colored vaulting,—gleamed, vanished. The feet touched soft rugs, and clicked on marbles. More doors opened. The Norman was led down stairways, along stone galleries, where the air was foul and chill. Presently there were more lamps ahead, the ceiling was higher. Richard sniffed sweet fresh air. They were in a room of no great size; floor, walls, vaulting, of gray stone; a stone bench running along the walls; one or two niches, where perhaps in daytime a few rays struggled in. Bronze lamps swung from chains, casting a wavering, ghostly light, as they puffed in the wind that crept through the scanty windows.

Others had preceded the captives into this chamber. Two figures advanced to greet them, as the three were halted,—the lofty Iftikhar, the dwarf Zeyneb. It was the latter that first spoke. To Musa he paid an obsequious salaam.

"The peace of Allah be yours, most noble Cid Musa," his greeting.

"And with you, the strife of Eblees!" replied the Andalusian, whose tongue at least was not pinioned.

"O valorous cavaliers!" protested Zeyneb, raising his hands. "What misfortune! Bow to the Omnipotent's will; what is doomed is doomed! It was doomed that I should behold you, son of Abdallah, creeping about Aleppo and El Halebah. Clever disguises,—not my Lord Iftikhar himself could have penetrated so admirable a conjurer. How adorably was Hakem toyed with! *Wallah*, I could scarce have bettered it myself!"

Musa repaid with one of his softest smiles.

"Were my wealth that of Ormuz, how could I repay your praise, O Kalif of the black-hearted jinns! I equal in guile Zeyneb, the crooked-backed toad of the gallant Iftikhar? Forbid it, Allah!"

Zeyneb laughed, not very easily. He wished Musa's tongue were as fast as his arms. The dwarf salaamed again.

"No more; I leave you to my Lord Iftikhar. Enough, you know it was I—I, Zeyneb the dwarf, the hunchback—who discovered the wiles of Musa the great cavalier; who led him and his two valiant Frankish comrades into my master's power. And remember, Cid Richard, the word on the wall at La Haye: 'Three times is not four. There is a dagger that may pierce armor of Andalus.'" A third salaam, then, "The mercy of Allah be with you; my lord will tell how many moments are left in which to rain curses on your poor slave Zeyneb."

Musa shrugged his shoulders, a gesture more eloquent than any he could make with his hands.

"And think not," he answered still sweetly, "my friends or I have breath or wind to waste cursing such as you. I thank your courtesy; we shall never meet again to requite it."

"Never?" queried Zeyneb, cocking his evil head. "Not on the Judgment Day when, says Al Koran, 'Allah shall gather all men together, and they shall recognize one another'?"

The Spaniard cut him short.

"Fly! Think not the All Just will so much as raise again your soul, even to plunge it into the hell where wait garments of fire. Soul you have not, unless base vermin have. When they rise from the dead, so will you—no sooner!"

Zeyneb would have ventured reply, but Iftikhar pointed down a passage. The dwarf vanished instantly. Musa spat after him. "Purer air, now his stench is not by!" his comment.

Iftikhar, who had been silent, turned to his captives.

"My lords," said he, gravely, speaking Provençal, "we meet again at last, as I have long desired."

"You are wrong, my emir," interrupted Longsword. "At Dorylæum I sought you long and vainly."

"And I think it well," continued the Egyptian, flushing, but not raising his voice, "since we shall not soon meet again, that I say a few things. This Duke Godfrey, as your friend, shall fare as do you."

"Say it out, fledgling of Satan! Say it out," roared the Duke. "You will summon the headsman. By Our Lady of Antwerp, you will find those before Antioch who will not forget!"

"Gallantly done, my lord," taunted Richard. "At Palermo you boasted you loved to talk with a foe over two sword-blades; Syrian nard softens your courage and your arm."

Iftikhar lost control for a moment, and boasted wildly.

"*Ya*! You may well curse, for I have triumphed. As a lion you have lived; as a dog you shall die. The grudge is old; the vengeance sweetens with the years. Father, brother, mother, sister, I have taken from you. Yes, by the splendor of Allah, your bride also! Mary, Star of the Greeks, is mine! I will place your head before her. I will say, 'See, see, Richard, your lord, your husband.' For I have conquered—have conquered utterly!"

He paused to gather breath. Richard was silent, repeating to himself the proverb that "stillness angers most." The Egyptian recovered his control, and went on. "You, Richard Longsword," said he, "you, Cid Musa, and you, Duke Godfrey, have come to Aleppo to steal away my prize. You fail. You shall, as Allah reigns, count out the price! I designed to start for Antioch to-morrow, intent on taking your heads to the Star of the Greeks. And I should not have failed. Kerbogha's host is but ten leagues from your Christian camp. You know nothing. You will be struck as by a bolt from the clear sky. Knight and villain, you shall die far from Jerusalem,"—the Egyptian broke off in a laugh; for the Duke, steel against his own peril, had turned gray at this tale of danger to the army.

"Ah! my Lord Godfrey," went on Iftikhar, "it matters little to you whether you end all at Aleppo or at Antioch. For on my faith as a cavalier, I swear there shall not one man of all your host escape. Already Kerbogha advances beyond Afrin, and not a Christian dreams. Your scouting parties are gallantly led, fair Franks!"

"Dear God," prayed Richard, "not for our sakes, but for the love of the army of Thy Son, suffer us even now to escape this Thine enemy!" But Iftikhar continued: "I speak too long. Enough that I shall bring you this night before the tribunal of the Ismaelians, since the dagger is only for those

whom our judgments cannot otherwise reach. You shall stand before our *Daïs*, that is to say the 'masters,' and our *Refiks*, that is the 'companions,' and it will be asked you if you sought the hurt of any Ismaelian. Make what defence you may. If the tribunal decide against you, you are delivered over by the court, and the world hears of you no more."

"Spare the mockery," thundered Richard, blazing forth at last. "Slay; but summon no judges who are sworn against all mercy!" Iftikhar's answer was a gesture toward the passage. "Look!" and Richard leaped forward, bound as he was, so fiercely that he nigh flung down the three Ismaelians that held him. Two eunuchs were leading Mary Kurkuas into the chamber. Longsword had never known a moment like this. Then, if never before, he felt the pains of hell. Angry God and angry devil might devise nothing worse. Mary was led before him. She was very white,—white dress, white hands, white face; and her eyes seemed to touch the bare gray room with brightness. They must have told her what awaited, else she had never been so calm and still and beautiful. So beautiful! Was Mary, Mother of God, sitting upon the Heavenly Throne, fairer than she? Blasphemy?—but the thought would come! And she did not moan, nor cry in agony. That was Mary's way,—Richard knew it,—that she was ready to turn Iftikhar's desires against himself, and make her last vision one of strength and of peace. With all the pain,—pain too deep for words,—under the influence of her eyes, he felt a sweet, holy spell creeping over him, and knew that the bitterness of death was past.

The two negroes led her until she stood beside Iftikhar. The Egyptian towered over her, splendid as Satan when robed as angel of light. The grand prior looked upon her face; and Richard knew he saw all the brightness of heaven therein. But a cloud passed across the countenance of Iftikhar, as if in that moment of earthly triumph he felt there was something passing betwixt his captive and his slave which not all the might of the "devoted" could win for his own. The Egyptian pointed from Mary to the Norman—his voice very proud.

"Look, Star of the Greeks, my vow is made good. Behold how Allah has favored Iftikhar Eddauleh. You indeed see Richard de St. Julien, your husband."

Mary was stately as a palm when she answered.

"And do you think, Cid, that you have led me hither to see me kneel at your feet, to hear me moan for mercy for these men? I know you over-well, Iftikhar Eddauleh. No human power can turn that heart of yours when once it is fixed. But God in His own time shall bow you utterly. I do not fear for Richard, for these his friends, for myself. Life sometimes is nothing so precious that it is worth buying with too great a price. For these to whom God says 'Go,' the time will not seem long; and for me, to whom He says 'Stay,'—I shall be given strength to bear your power or that of other demon. But there is greeting in the end with naught to sunder. And to you,—to you,"—her eyes were not lamps now; they were fiery swords, piercing the Ismaelian through,—"God perhaps lengthens out many days of sin and glory, that for every instant on earth there may be an æon hereafter of woe."

Iftikhar's face had turned to blackness. He raised his hand to smite. Richard thought to see him fell the Greek to the stones; but his uplifted arm lowered, the spasm of madness passed.

"Ask anything, anything but the lives of these men!" cried he, half pleading, to turn away the bitterness of her curse; "and as Allah lives I will not deny!"

"Take Richard Longsword, and then take all else. For God and His angels witness, you spread betwixt you and me a sea ten thousand years shall see unbridged!"

"I cannot! I cannot spare!" the words came from Iftikhar as a moan. "Let Richard Longsword live, and I shall win you never!"

And Richard was about to cry that life was worthless if Mary humbled herself in his behalf. But the Greek spoke for him.

"One boon, Cid Iftikhar. I do not plead for these men. I know my husband and Cid Musa would rather die by your cord than see me on my knees before you. Kill or spare, you can never win more of me than my body, held already. But now let me go; I can do nothing here."

Iftikhar motioned to the blacks to lead her away.

"Richard, my husband," said she, softly, "you and Musa and my Lord Godfrey did wrong to come hither; but I love you for it more. God will be kind. You will not find it long to wait for me in heaven."

"May Christ pity you, sweet wife!" answered the Norman.

"He will pity, do not fear." That was all she said. She was gone. Her wondrous eyes lit the room no more; but a peace was lighted in Richard's heart, which naught could take away. Iftikhar turned abruptly the moment the Greek had vanished.

"My friends," declared he, with an ill-assumed irony, "I can do nothing further to serve you. Before midnight our long accounting is ended. Leave to Allah the rest. Others will care for you at the tribunal."

Richard held up his head proudly.

"And I, Richard Longsword, standing in the presence of death, do cite you, Iftikhar Eddauleh, to

stand with me before no less a tribunal than the judgment seat of Almighty God. There to answer, not as Moslem to Christian, but as man to man, for the blood you have shed wantonly, the foul deeds you have plotted, the pure women you have wronged, the very saint of God you have brought to agony. At His judgment seat I will accuse you, and you shall make answer to Him and all His holy angels. So say I!"

"And I!" thundered Godfrey.

"And I!" cried Musa.

They saw the Ismaelian's face flush once more. By an effort he reined his curses. Without a word he vanished. Richard turned to his comrades.

"Dear friends, this is the last adventure," said he. "Heaven is witness I did not pray you to go with me to Aleppo."

"You did not," was the answer of both. And Musa added: "My brother and you, fair lord, we are at the end. You are praying to your gentle Issa; I to Allah, the One. Yet our hearts are pure; and be you right or I, do not think God will lift some to Paradise, and speed some to hell, because your mothers taught to call on Christ, and mine to call on Allah."'

The Spaniard fixed his sweet and winning gaze upon the great Duke of Lorraine, upon Godfrey, the chief of the slayers of the infidels; and the Duke answered (only Richard knowing what the words meant from such lips):—

"No, by Our Lady of Pity; be you Moslem, be you Christian, Sir Musa,—I would that many of the army of the Cross stood so blameless as you in the sight of God. For never in all my life have I met more spotless cavalier than you have proved. I am proud to call you comrade."

One of the white-robed Ismaelians had entered the chamber, and uplifted his hand.

"The tribunal waits," he announced. "Come!"

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Iftikhar Eddauleh left the gallery in the cellars of El Halebah with a strange storm raging in his breast. Victory, pride, the sense of having at last settled all grudges—in this he exulted. But with it all came the knowledge that the death of Richard Longsword meant the death of the last hope to make Mary the Greek other than his slave. She had truly said,—the Egyptian knew it,—old age might come, æons might speed, but henceforth Iftikhar would be only to her as malevolent jinn. The grand prior cursed himself for the mad folly that had led him to bring Mary and Richard face to face. She had been brought to give agony; she had given strength. Iftikhar knew that the sight of her presence, the sound of her voice, had stolen away the sting of death from the Norman. Likewise he knew that, with all the "devoted," with all the glory of his state, he was weaker than the will of this unshielded woman, that he could put forth all his might to crush that will, and do it in vain. In the eyry apartment of Morgiana, he found the four around whom, next to himself, the life of El Halebah revolved—Mary, Zeyneb, Morgiana, and Hakem. The Greek was standing beside the divan whereon sat the Arabian wife. Her face was very pale, her eyes so bright that their fire seemed not of this world. She was calm, and her words came soft and slow. But not so Morgiana; Iftikhar foresaw the lightnings the moment he entered. He was, however, in no mood to quail. Ignoring the others, he strode to Morgiana, and began half severely:—

"Moon of the Arabs, it is late. I commanded you to retire early."

Morgiana lifted her blue eyes.

"I have heard. Well?"

"Do you disobey before my face?" retorted the grand prior.

The answer came when Morgiana leaped to her feet.

"Away, away, hound of Eblees! Away, away, begotten of the sheytans! Get you gone, or even I shall curse you!"

Iftikhar doubted his ears. Never had Morgiana reviled him thus.

"Silence; my will is law!" And he struck her with his open palm on her mouth. Struck once, then recoiled, for a flame of wrath flashed with the red flush on Morgiana's face, such as the Egyptian had never seen before. Now he saw, and drew back. Morgiana spoke very slowly, sign of deepest anger.

"Strike—strike—again! and by the Great Name of Allah, I swear I will bide my time, and murder you in your bed."

And Iftikhar, man of passion and blood, felt his own blood creeping chill. Half he felt a knife at his throat. His answer died on his lips. Morgiana was speaking rapidly now:—

"Look on the Greek, Iftikhar Eddauleh! Look on the Greek. Do you know what pain is, and agony, beyond your conceiving? See it there—see it there—and tremble! For I say to you, every tear that

Mary, the Star of the Greeks, shall shed, every drop her torn heart bleeds, is reckoned against your name in the great book of Allah. Yes; and you, Iftikhar, shall pay the price—the price—the price—through the long years of eternity. Therefore tremble, for earth and sea shall be confounded ere the All-Just forget one pang, one deed of darkness!"

Iftikhar tore the dagger from his belt. He had words at last now.

"You are mad. I will kill you!"

"Kill me?" Morgiana threw back her black hair, and laughed as would an invulnerable jinn. "Kill me? Can you think of nothing worse?" And again she laughed.

The Egyptian shrank back a step or two, as she advanced. Suddenly her laughter ended, her voice became calm.

"Cid Iftikhar," she said quietly, "you see I am in no mood to receive commands to-night. Neither does *Citt* Mary crave your company. You have triumphed, my Cid. Doom favors you. You must not exult mercilessly. Be magnanimous; leave us alone this night."

Iftikhar responded almost perforce to this appeal.

"I grant anything in reason, Morgiana. Rage no more, I will leave you." And he was gone with a low salaam. Zeyneb made to follow him, but his foster-sister recalled.

"Zeyneb," said she, "I wish you to tell us of the state of the prisoners. Will Iftikhar return to see the execution?"

The dwarf showed his white teeth. He marvelled that Morgiana should question thus with Mary present, but, nothing loth, replied: "He will not; he goes to his chamber to sleep. In the morning they bring him the heads."

Mary's white cheeks grew whiter, but the Arabian did not hesitate.

"And when will the execution take place?"

Zeyneb grinned again. "The bells on the water-clock say it is the end of the fourth hour of the night; at the end of the fifth hour, unless the tribunal clears them,"—his grin broadened,—"Harun twists the cord."

Morgiana drew up one little foot on the divan, and clasped it with both hands.

"*Wallah!* How admirable has been your trap, foster-brother. Mary had told nearly all you had done, before Iftikhar broke in upon us. Woe to us, and joy to you! Allah grant we may have our day also. So it was you alone that penetrated the disguise of Cid Musa. Allah himself might hardly outwit you!"

Zeyneb smiled at the flattery. "I am honored, foster-sister."

"And tell this," demanded she, letting her foot drop to the rugs, "are the faithless sentries warned?"

"*Mashallah*, no! They think all is well. In the morning they are seized and beheaded. We led the prisoners to the palace by another way."

"What escapes you, my Zeyneb!" cried the other, rising and stepping toward the doorway. "But tell me this,—are the horses of these three adventurers taken?"

Zeyneb gave a start and a curse.

"Blasted am I! Forgotten! Iftikhar left all in my hands. The horses are still where they were tethered. They will be taken by morning. I will go and send for them at once."

Before he could cry out, Morgiana had dashed to the door and shot the bolt.

"*Wallah!* You rave," howled the dwarf, smitten with fear. "Help, Hakem!" For Morgiana, with arms outstretched, stood before the door, her face flaming defiance.

"Mary," cried Morgiana, "are you very strong? Pluck that adder Hakem round the neck, and hold fast! For the life of Richard Longsword, hold!"

Dwarf and eunuch had sprung on Morgiana, but the Greek also. Right round the body of the effeminate Hakem Mary cast her white arms, caught him, held him; for the strength of an angel was given her, and the eunuch's strength was that of a fatted sheep. Meantime Morgiana and Zeyneb waged their fiercer battle.

"Mad woman!" raged the dwarf, writhing, struggling, snapping as for dear life. "You shall be flogged for this, beheaded, flayed! Release, or you die! Release! Let go, or—" But Morgiana wrested him almost from his feet as they struggled, and every time he saw the terrible purpose in her eyes his heart sank lower. And still they wrestled.

"Help! Rescue!" shrieked the dwarf, feeling himself nigh mastered. Even louder howled Hakem, tight held in the vise of Mary's arms.

Shrill above their cry was the laugh of Morgiana. "Aye, shriek! Call as you will," sped her boast. "Louder!—louder! Call Iftikhar, the eunuchs, the 'devoted.' Far below, none hear. Cry louder—we

are alone in the tower of the palace. Call! Call! None hears save Allah, and it is He who fights for me! Call again! Make the stars pity, and rain their aid—naught is nearer!"

Zeyneb wrested one hand free. For a twinkling he brandished a dagger. A second twinkling, it flew from his hand across the room.

"*Ya!*" rang the shout of his assailant. "See! I am strong, strong, and Allah fights for me,—for Morgiana the blue-eyed maid of Yemen! *Bismillah*, it is done!"

And with the word Zeyneb's feet spun from beneath him. He fell heavily to the floor; so heavily that despite the rug he was senseless in a flash. Morgiana, with a great cry of delight, bounded after his dagger, secured it, was at Mary's side. Hakem was struggling desperately. He could not shake the Greek's hold, and dared not do her harm. The Arabian held the knife edge to his throat.

"Hakem," came her voice, hard as steel on steel, "let your heart say the 'Great Prayer,' the *Fat'hah*. You are going to die."

"Spare," pleaded the Greek, beginning to tremble, "spare that God may spare us!"

"Dead snakes never bite!" came the answer.

Mary never forgot the terrible glow on Morgiana's face when that deed was done, which made the Greek shiver. The body of the eunuch dropped from her arms, lay upon the rugs, the blood spurting from the neck. The Arabian was kneeling over the prone form of Zeyneb. She thrust away the vest, laid a hand on his heart.

"Living!" whispered she, raising her eyes. "I may do wrong, but he is my foster-brother, and faithful to Iftikhar."

The Greek was too faint to do anything; but Morgiana rapidly plucked the curtain from the doorway, tore into strips, knotted about the dwarf's arms and feet. Then she felt in his bosom and drew forth a small key.

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The three bronze lamps high up in the vault were flickering dimly. The shadows of the pillars lay long and dark across the gray slabs of the pavement. Upon the floor in irregular semicircle sat a score of figures in white mantle and turban, red girdle and shoes. The figures were rigid as marble, features moving not, lips speaking not; only the dark eyes flashed back the shimmerings of the lamps. In the centre of the group, and facing the others, another figure was standing, habited like the rest, save that the turban was black, and a great diamond, bright as a tiger's eye, twinkled against it. This figure was speaking.

"Musa, son of Abdallah, and you, Godfrey and Richard, lords of the Franks,"—the words came cold and metallic,—"you have been brought before the tribunal of the holy Order of Ismael. You have been accused of being the foes and plotting the hurt of the Grand Prior of Syria, Iftikhar Eddauleh. Nor have you denied this; you have confessed you desired his hurt, you have boasted you desired his death and dishonor. And now it behooves to ask, were you acquainted with the lot of those who so much as imagine harm to the least 'aspirant,' a *Lasīk* of the sacred Ismaelians, far from comparing such to the vice-gerent of our Lord Hassan Sabah's self?"

Whereupon Musa, facing the semicircle, with Richard and Godfrey at his side, answered in his melodious Arabic:—

"We well understand that he who offends against one of your order shall sooner receive mercy from Eblees than from you. Knowing that, we went forth; knowing that, we stand here. Our foe is Iftikhar Eddauleh. You are his slaves; bought cattle were not his more utterly. Proceed to sentence."

Rain beating an iron wall had made deeper dint than his words on that array of stony features. A long silence—then the former speaker looked upon his colleagues. Slowly he began: "It is the custom, O Ismaelians,—and it is here observed,—that those admitted to the degrees called *Tessis* and *Teevil*, the sixth and seventh of our holy brotherhood, shall sit in judgment upon those brought within danger of the cord. You have heard these men and the accusation. The mysteries of our order, the mandate of our Lord Hassan Sabah, are known to you. Yet let me repeat the word of the first of the seven Imams, the Lord Hossein the martyr, as runs the revered tradition, 'He that offendeth the least of you, let him wash away his guilt in his own blood.' Therefore I command that whosoever of you may believe these men cleared and worthy of liberty, let him speak forth; but whosoever thinks they should endure the cord, keep silence. For speech is life, and silence is death. I have spoken."

Silence—while the lamps flickered, flickered, and the shadows swung on floor and walls; and still the chief stood facing the twenty, who moved not, nor gave sound. Then at last—after how long! he spoke,—a voice as from the grave.

"There is no word. Let the law be fulfilled. Judgment is pronounced. The cord!" The chief seated himself and there was stillness as before, until a distant bell pealed out, once, twice, thrice, four times,—five! With noiseless step, the tall Harun glided from behind a pillar and plucked Musa's

elbow.

"Doom!" Harun held up a silken noose, plaited tight, and pointed to the floor. "Kneel," he commanded softly; "you are Moslem, I grant you this joy, you shall not see your friends die."

Musa turned to the Franks. Their hands were bound, but their eyes could greet.

"Sweet friends," said he, smiling as ever in his gentle, melancholy way, "we must part. But my hope in Allah is strong. We shall meet before His throne!"

"God is with us all!" answered Richard. "He is very pitiful."

But Godfrey did not speak. Longsword knew his thoughts were not of Musa, nor of the tribunal, nor even of the shadow of death; but of the Christian host surprised by Kerbogha, and of the Holy City left in captivity.

"I am ready," said Musa to Harun; and he prepared to kneel.

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A tremor, a wind of the spirit, seemed passing over all those chiselled faces. Musa and all others heard music,—a song,—quavering, sighing, throbbing melody, wafted down the long underground galleries from very far away. At first no clear word was borne to them, but the sweetest note Richard in his life had heard. Was the great change come so nigh that one heard God's white host singing? Musa stood fast. Harun was rooted also, the cord hung limp in his hand, all forgotten, save the wondrous song. Now at last the burden came dimly:—

> "Genii who rule o'er the tempest and wind,
> Peris who tread where red coral lies deep,
> Show forth your haunt that my fleet foot may find
> Where the cool moss caves 'neath the green waves sleep.
>
> "Lie they under the sea that by Ormuz darkles,
> Or the broad blue bay of the Golden Isles?
> Or where breeze-loved haven in far west sparkles,
> Alight with the sun's ne'er-vanishing smiles?"

The voice swelled nearer; the rhythm was quicker, measure shorter, words stronger. The song became a prayer, a cry.

> "Away! away from the grief and jarring
> Of this toilsome life and its pang I'd be!
> Forgetting earth and all strife and warring,
> Wrap me away to the breast of the sea!
>
> "Wreathe me chaplets with sea-flowers brightest,
> With the feath'ry sea-mosses make me dressed!
> Make my pillow the wind-spray whitest;
> Rock me to sleep on the storm-waves' crest!"

Was it day that was dawning on each of those stony faces? Why this whisper; this rustle of white gowns; this mutter "Allah! Allah!" under the snowy turbans? "Truly God's angels come!" Richard's soul cried. He thought to see the vaulting open; the heavens fleeing away as unclean. What angel could sing of paynim genii and peris? But the voice yet approached, ever louder, clearer:—

> "Sing, oh, sing, all ye fair, pure spirits!
> Spirit I, to your band I'd flee;
> Blest the soul who for aye inherits
> To rove with you through your kingdom free!"

Now the song was so near that all eyes ran into the dark for the oncoming singer, and every white robe had risen when the last lines sounded:—

> "Clearer, clearer the silvery pealing
> Of enchanted bells steals my heart afar!
> Soon I'll see, all the mists unsealing,
> The genii's lord on his pearl-wrought car!"

Silence. They saw a light flash in the low doorway, saw it glisten on jewels, an empress's pride. A woman entered, tall as a spear, stately as a palm, black tresses flowing as a fair vine, and eyes and face to shame the houris. Around her bare throat flashed a great chain of emeralds; there were diamonds and rubies on her coronet; gold and gems on her bare brown arms; gold and gems on her sandals, that hid not the shapely feet. Her robe was one lustrous sea of violet silk, rippling about her as she glided, not walked. And as she came, she spread abroad a new melody; no words now, but only a humming, a soft, witching note, as if bidding all the spirits of the air flit at her footsteps to do her behests. Her left hand upraised the lamp; her right was held high also,

and on one finger flashed something that doubled the quivering flame—a ring set with a single emerald.

Onward she came; and right and left the company made way for her. And Harun dropped his cord, began to mutter: "*Allah akhbar!* The maids of the Gardens of Fountains have come down to dwell amongst men!" But the stranger—spirit or woman, who might say?—came on till she stood before the three captives. At the mandate in her eyes all other eyes followed her. No more she sang, but spoke, proud as the queen of the genii legions.

"Hear! tremble! obey!" She held the emerald higher. At the sight thereof there was a new stir, new whispers; the Ismaelians were bowing to the pavement. "Behold it! The ring of Hassan Sabah, your lord! I say to you, whoever shall disobey the command of the bearer of this ring, be his merits never so great, Allah shall cut him off from the joys of Paradise! Obey! and the honeyed kiss of the daughters of the land of the River of Life is on your lips!"

She swept the flashing ring to and fro before the eyes of the cowering twenty.

"Reverence therefore the will of the bearer of the ring," she ran on; "obey, were it on the camel-driver's finger; obey the more, since it is on mine,—I, at whose word the hosts of the darkness fall trembling, at whose nod the troops of the upper winds fly obedient!"

Needless her exhortation. One cry from twenty: "We obey! We are your slaves, O lady of Allah's own beauty! O empress of genii and men!" And the stranger, scarce pausing, rushed on:—

"See! your judgment is false! See, I am sent by Allah to bring to naught your desires! I command —I, the blue-eyed maid of Yemen, whose walk is with the stars! Release these captives. Their doom is unwritten."

**"ALL BLINDLY, HE KNEW THEY WERE MOUNTING STAIRWAYS"**

Richard had beheld all as does the man treading in a dream; who knows he dreams, yet cannot waken. Dreaming, he had seen this strange spirit enter; dreaming, he heard; dreaming, he saw a quiver, as of resistance, pass round that ring of sculptured faces; the eyes bright as snakes, and more pitiless, questioned once,—once only. The deliverer shot across their company one lightning glance—majesty, supremacy, scorn. Still dreaming, Richard saw in her hand a dagger; and then—dreamt he still?—he felt the bands upon his arms sever. He stood free—and Godfrey and Musa free! But his protectress was speaking again:—

"Behold—I say to you, Allah has cast his mantle over these three to deliver them. Forget this night. Follow me not; for, as the Most High rules, you shall curse disobedience in the quenchless Gehenna! Tremble again—you have seen great things—and now, farewell."

Richard felt her hand upon his arm.

"Come," she said softly, "and Allah will yet aid you!"

The chamber of the tribunal, the semicircle of white robes, Harun and the cord—all were gone. Richard was still in his dream. He trod onward, feeling no floor beneath his feet. The wavering light of his protectress went before him. In the narrow galleries they traversed, the darkness closed after him. All blindly, he knew they were mounting stairways, were gliding through murky passages. Suddenly the air was again sweet; Richard saw around him the dim vista of a line of white columns, and above, the hazy canopy of a great dome.

The woman halted, again upraised her lamp.

"I see Cid Richard Longsword," said she, "and his good comrades, Cid Musa and Cid Godfrey. If Allah favor us, I will now lead you to Mary the Greek!"

At these words Richard knew he dreamed no longer; his belief was—God had already raised him to heaven.

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# CHAPTER XXXVI

## HOW THE ISMAELIANS SAW TRENCHEFER

The voice of Musa recalled the Norman to the things of earth. "*Citt*, protectress sent from Allah!" the Andalusian was crying, "do my ears fail? Is your voice strange? When have I heard it before? In Palermo?"

"In Palermo," reëchoed the stranger, "in Palermo, when by the Most High's favor I warned you against Iftikhar Eddauleh." The name of his enemy roused all the fires in Richard's breast.

"Lead on!" boasted he, nigh fiercely. "Lead on! and in the name of every saint, Trenchefer shall weigh out his price to the Ismaelian to-night!"

His voice was rising to a war-cry, when Musa clapped his hand on his friend's mouth. The lady had upraised a warning finger; a tremor of mingled fear and wrath seemed shaking her.

"Hist, Cid Richard! Are you mad? The palace is full of armed men. Safety is leagues away. And I declare to you, that unless you swear by the great name of Issa you worship, to do Iftikhar to-night no hurt, I will cry aloud, and you perish as surely as by Harun's bowstring."

"Iftikhar?" questioned Richard, in amaze. "Iftikhar? You have given freedom to his arch foe, and yet you say to me, 'Spare'?"

"My lord," said the lady, gently, "Mary the Greek shall tell you why I do this. Swear, if you would see her face—not die." And, conjured by that all-potent name, Richard took a willing oath; Godfrey likewise, and Musa after his manner. The lady raised her lamp once more.

"Follow softly," she warned; "many sleep all about us. I must lead you the length of the palace."

Then came another journey through the enchanted darkness, lit only by the lamp and the gleam of the gems at the strange deliverer's throat. They crossed the great hall, treading gently, Richard's hand on the hilt of Trenchefer, for nigh he expected to see goblins springing from the dark. Once across, the lady halted; opened a door. In the glow of the lamps Longsword saw a giant negro prone upon the rug, at his side a naked sabre. Trenchefer crept halfway from the sheath, as he turned, unfolding his mighty hands. But their guide gave him no heed. The black slumbered on.

The door closed. They sped down a long gallery, swift and silent as flight in a dream; another door, another guardsman. This time the negro was awake, standing at his post.

"Now!" came between Godfrey's teeth; and three swords were ready to flash. The lady smiled, sprang before them. At sight of her the sentry bowed low.

"Habib," said she, gently, "these are they I said I would bring you. Remember—you have for them neither ears nor eyes."

"I am blind and dumb, my *Citt*," was the answer.

She beckoned, the three followed; the guardsman was lost in the gloom. "I begged his life of Iftikhar a year since," explained the lady, "therefore Habib is grateful."

A second gallery, an open arcade, a sight of the stars twinkling between the plumes of the palm trees, and the puff of the sluggish southern wind. They came to a new door, where a lamp burned low. The door was open. A stairway wound upward lit at intervals by flickering sconces. The lady halted.

"Cid Richard," said she, "you shall go up with me, and take your wife; let these two remain below in the shadow."

Musa smiled and salaamed; Godfrey laughed in his beard. "You need no comrade now, fair knight," said he to Richard.

The Norman's step was on the stairway, as he leaped ahead of the lady. At last! At last! That was all he knew. God had indeed "stopped the mouths of the lions, had quenched the violence of fire!" Three steps Richard had covered with his bound; but at the fourth he was frozen fast. A cry, a cry of terror, of despairing pain, sped down the stairway:—

"Morgiana! Help me, for the love of God!"

Whose voice? Longsword knew it above ten thousand; and with it flew others—curses, howls, cries for help.

"Hakem dead! Zeyneb bound! Rouse Cid Iftikhar! Morgiana,—death to Morgiana!"

Louder the din; Richard turned to his protectress half fiercely: "What is this? Shall I go up?"

She had covered her face with her hands.

"Allah pity! Allah have mercy!" moaned she, quaking with sobs. "He fights against us. Go or stay, we shall soon die."

Now at last leaped forth Trenchefer.

"Follow who will," thundered Richard to Godfrey and Musa, who needed no bidding.

Fast sped they; faster, Richard. Had he wings when he mounted the stairway? A second cry of utter despair, the rush of more feet. Longsword saw the last stair, saw the room, many torches and many forms; black eunuchs all, some clutching at a struggling woman, some bending over a prostrate form, some standing around Zeyneb, whose hands were upraised in malediction.

"Iftikhar! Send for Cid Iftikhar!" he was raging; and every voice swelled the babel.

But above them all pealed the thunder of the Norman. What profit silence now! "God wills it. St. Julien and Mary Kurkuas!"

Eblees leaping from the cloven rock smote no greater terror than Richard bounding upon the blacks. Arms some had, but arms none used; for Trenchefer dashed them down as the flail smites, ere one could raise or draw. Richard sought Zeyneb; but the dwarf, the only one with wits enough to fly, darting through a door, was gone into the darkness. "God wills it! St. Julien and Mary Kurkuas."

Richard again flung out his battle-cry; but none stood against him. He stared about the room, saw the dead form in the corner, a negro dying beside him, a second prone by the head of the staircase, the rest all fled,—all save one.

Richard felt his knees smiting together, and a darkening mist veiling his eyes. He tried to speak; there came no word. Trenchefer fell clanging to the floor. Something was touching him, pressing him. Into the ringing in his ears stole one name, his own; out of the mist before his eyes floated one face. Then God gave back sight and speech.

"Mine for life and for death!" came from his lips.

"What is death if once you kiss me!" flew the answer.

But neither said more, nor thought more. What soul may have thoughts in such an instant! Only Richard knew that never in his whole life had Heaven granted him joy like this.

Mary was laying her warm, smooth hands upon his shoulders. Her lips were close to his own. She was speaking.

"Richard, the peril is very great. You should have fled the moment Morgiana saved you. For my sake you all have committed great sin!"

"And would you not thus have sinned for me?" replied the Norman. Mary did not reply. Her own heart told that Richard spoke well. Then she said softly:—

"Sweet husband, I will not be frightened. I can fear nothing now. Only you must not let Iftikhar possess me again. Holy Mother of God! you must not let him regain me!" And Richard, who knew what she meant (for when did he not read all in her eyes?), answered, holding out Trenchefer:—

"Iftikhar shall not regain you. By the wounds of Christ I swear it. Ah, how Our Lord will welcome a sweet angel like you when you fly up to the gate of heaven!"

And Mary laughed at his words, for many things had become more terrible than death.

"I rejected once the escape of death as a sin," said she, "but I know it will be no sin now. What, with you beside, is there left to fear, living or dying?"

"Living!" cried the Norman, snatching a cloak to cast about her. "God will not suffer the wicked to torture such as you. St. Michael speed my arm with all the strength of heaven!"

He had not seen Godfrey and Musa mounting to the chamber, or Morgiana following. He had not heard the tenfold din rising in the palace and without. But now he heard a howl of fury fit to pass a demon's lips.

"May you scorch forever!" Richard turned. He saw Iftikhar Eddauleh, cimeter in hand, springing through the doorway. The Ismaelian was without armor; he wore the white robe of his order only.

Rage unspeakable almost drowned the curses in his throat.

"Die! Die, both of you!" that was his mad cry. Before Richard could grasp Trenchefer the Egyptian was on him, had torn Mary from his arms, was shortening his weapon to run him through. But Longsword needed no weapon. "For Mary's sake!" cried his soul; while one hand caught Iftikhar's sword wrist, the other clutched the Ismaelian's body. A struggle, a crash, and the grand prior measured length on the carpet. Richard bent over him, Trenchefer in hand. One thrust through the body, and Iftikhar Eddauleh would have passed from the wrath of man. The great sword was rising when Morgiana tore at the Norman's arm. "Your oath!" cried she, with livid face; "spare!" Longsword paused. "What is he to you, woman?" demanded he, sternly.

"He is to me as Mary the Greek to you," answered the Arabian, defiantly. Richard withheld his hand. Iftikhar was staggering to his feet, but was weaponless. His conqueror pointed toward the doorway.

"Fair cavalier," said he in Provençal, "get you gone. For sake of my oath to this woman, I spare you once. When we next meet, God judge betwixt us."

The Egyptian drew himself up proudly.

"Do not deceive yourself, Cid Richard. You will be overwhelmed by numbers. Though you spare me, I will not spare you."

Longsword in turn threw back his head.

"Nor do I ask it. We owe each other—nothing. Go!"

And Iftikhar foamed out of the room, gone as suddenly as he had entered. There was silence for a moment.

"My friends," said Richard, "let us make haste. Shall we not fly?" Morgiana laughed, as so often, very scornfully.

"Verily you Franks are fools. Do you say 'go'? Are you angels with swords of fire, that you can blast ten thousand? Hark! fifty approach the door by which we entered! All the Ismaelians about El Halebah are alarmed. Iftikhar boasts well; we are soon hewn in pieces."

There was indeed a din, hundreds of voices, many torches shaking and flitting about the groves, and coming nearer, dogs barking, armor clanging. The whole cantonment of the Ismaelians was astir to avenge the violation of the palace. Musa had bowed his head.

"Alas! dear brother," said he, after his gentle manner, "clearly Allah has written our dooms! We pass from death to death. But we can now die sword in hand!"

Then Richard held up Trenchefer, so that the reddened blade glittered in the lamplight.

"This is no time to die!" cried he; "let others die! Let us do the deeds God has appointed. The life of my wife, the safety of the army of Christ, are at stake, and with Our Lord's help we shall make our boast over Iftikhar!"

The others looked at him. For the first time Mary saw that mad fire in his eyes which once burned the hour when he wrested triumph from death at Valmont—a thing terrible to see, but Mary did not quail. In a strange way the sight of him told her they were then not to die; for a prophet stood before her, a prophet whose evangel would be given that night with steel.

Richard surveyed the room. It was square, of no great size, lighted in day by a high lantern. On his right descended the stairway to the arcade of the palace; before him opened the wide door that led down the dark corridor. The door itself was of wood and weak. The winding stairway was steep and narrow; one man could make good the ascent against a host. But to defend the door was nothing easy. Just beyond it the passage widened, making space for numbers. Longsword turned to Morgiana. "Is there no other door?" he demanded.

She shook her head. "None that will open." She tore back the Kerman tapestry, and revealed a solid door in the wall, barred and bolted into the casement. "This door has been sealed for years; the firm wall is little stronger. It leads to another stairway, but the former masters of El Halebah closed it." Duke Godfrey, who had swept the room with a captain's eye, snorted with satisfaction.

"Good!" cried he, "only two entrances to defend. By St. Michael, the *jongleurs* shall have some brave strokes to sing, before we are amongst the angels!"

Mary looked from one to the other of her terrible protectors. Musa had put off his despair; Richard leaned on Trenchefer, a lion crouching for his spring; Godfrey—terror of the paynims—pranced up and down the doorway, clattering his great blade, and calling on every Moslem devil to draw nigh and be satisfied. Mary knew then, if never before, that to her mighty husband and his peers death was a very pleasant thing, if only it came in knightly guise. There was redoubled din in the passage, more din below the stairway. Richard addressed Musa, "Guard the stairs, the Duke and I can care for the door," and he sprang to Godfrey's side.

The Greek threw her arms about him, beseeching.

"Dear husband, as you love me,—strike once, and free me from Iftikhar forever!" And she held down her head. But Richard laughed, as St. George might, crushing his dragon.

"Yes, by the splendor of God,—as I love you!—I will strike not once, but many times; and Iftikhar shall never touch you!"

He caught her in his giant arms, pressed her to his breast, put her away. "Pray for us!" his words; "your prayers will outweigh Trenchefer!" But Mary only stared about in dread, wishing to cry, to shout, but her voice was frozen. Morgiana's hand plucked her away.

"Back!" commanded the Arabian; "you can do nothing. They are all in Allah's hands. Let us await doom."

Morgiana forced her to a corner of the room, and thrust her upon a divan. Mary heard a thunderous command in the voice of Iftikhar, a rush of many feet, a clash and crash of targets and sword-blades,—then, in mercy, sight and hearing fled.

Down the passage, lit by wavering lamps and flambeaux, charged the white-robed Ismaelians, the commands and curses of the grand prior speeding them. Not a man but was a trained sword hand, and had been in the battle press a score of times. But they never knew before how deep the Frankish bear could bite. Side by side—armed only with their great blades—Godfrey and Richard met them in the passage. Then came the rush, the shock. Godfrey swung to left; to right whirled Trenchefer. Left and right, each felling his man; and cimeters dashed from hands as stubble, shields were smitten through as if of gauze. After the shock came the recoil; new charge and new repulse. The long Frankish swords hewed down the Ismaelians before their short cimeters could strike. There were three corpses before the door, but the two were still standing. Third charge—again flung back! Iftikhar raged at his men.

"Scorpions! Lizards! Will you let two men mock you? Is it thus you earn Paradise?"

"We may fight men, not jinns!" howled an old *daïs*. Richard brandished Trenchefer.

"Come you, Iftikhar Eddauleh! The account is long!"

The grand prior forced himself forward.

"It is long!" foamed he. "Eblees pluck me if it is not paid."

"Back, Cid," pleaded the Ismaelians; "they have the might of the rebel efreets!"

"Fools!" thundered Iftikhar, putting all by; "follow, who dares!" His eye lit on Morgiana within. "Allah blast me utterly, wench," rang his menace, "if you see the dawning."

Morgiana's answer was to tear the ring from her finger, and dash it in his face.

"See, see! You have cursed, mocked, triumphed! But I conquer! You shall possess the Greek, never, never!"

Iftikhar cut her short by dashing on Richard as a stone from a catapult. Twice sword and cimeter clashed; thrice, and the Norman's strength dashed through the Ismaelian's guard. Iftikhar fell, but Trenchefer had turned in the stroke. He was not maimed. Ere Richard could strike again, the "devoted," with a great cry, flew after their chief, to drag to safety. Godfrey slew one, but his body became the shield. They plucked Iftikhar from danger. He stood, blaspheming heaven. There was blood on his shoulder, but he snatched for a weapon.

"*Allah akhbar!*" groaned Morgiana, falling on her face; "he is nigh slain!" Richard laughed in derision.

"Slain? He has strength to kill many good men yet; cursed am I, that my wrist turned."

"Again! Again!" raged the grand prior; and the "devoted" dashed upon the two Franks, but only to be flung back as before. At the narrow stairway, many had tried to ascend; none had passed Musa, "Sword of Grenada."

Mary was awaking from her oblivion. Still the clatter of swords, the howl of the Ismaelians, the loud "Ha! St. Michael!" of the two Franks. Never had she loved Richard Longsword as now, when she saw him standing beside the great Duke—the two o'ermatching the fifty. Heaven was very near, she knew it; but the vision of God's White Throne could hardly be more sweet than the thought—"Richard Longsword is doing this for me, for me!" And the Norman? How changed from the helpless ox the Ismaelians had dragged to slaughter! How the touch of warm breath and soft hair on his cheek, by a great mystery, had sped the might of the paladins through his veins!

The "devoted" renewed the onset. When Iftikhar sought to lead them, they thrust him back. When the Frankish swords proved again too strong, they brought lances and javelins. With darts they would crush down these destroying jinns. But Godfrey plucked up a low ebony table, tore three legs clear, holding the table-top by the fourth before him as a shield, and dashed the other three amongst the foe. A javelin quivered in the casement; he tore it clear, and sped it clean through target and cuirass of a bold Ismaelian. No more darts were flung: to supply weapons to this man were madness. Iftikhar urged yet another attack; he was met by stolidity and silence.

"Sheytans!" howled he, "are you not 'devoted'? Will you pawn Paradise for Gehenna?"

It was Harun the executioner who answered. "My Cid—sweet is Paradise, but the journey these promise is too swift. Strike off our heads at will,—Allah defends your enemies."

Iftikhar laid down his cimeter, and with outstretched arms approached the fateful doorway. The

two were awaiting him, blood on their cheeks, their hands, their dress. But he knew their strength was still terrible; in their grasp were those swords,—those swords he in his arrogancy had left them, when he should have disarmed.

Richard bowed and saluted with Trenchefer.

"We are hardly winded, my lord," quoth he, though in truth his breaths came fast. "I reproach the saint that ended our adventure together!"

Iftikhar came a step nearer.

"De St. Julien," said he, in a voice that shook, in mere striving for calmness, "you are indeed a valiant man; and you also, my Lord Godfrey. I honor you, and cry against Allah that we must meet as foes not friends. But you are no jinns, though my cowards bellow it. You have wounds both. You must soon go down. Ten you may slay, but not hundreds. I make you a fair proffer of life and honor"—he dropped his voice—"of life, honor, and safety for the army of the Franks."

Godfrey's hand almost dropped the hilt at this last; but he answered:—

"I am simply companion to my Lord de St. Julien. In this adventure he leads. Make conditions with him."

Iftikhar faced Richard. "Ride free, then," said he; "receive your horses. I swear it is not too late for your host to be warned. My Ismaelians shall conduct you through the net spread by Kerbogha; but on this condition—that you give back to me—" his voice faltered; his eye wandered to the corner of the room within—"give back to me alive the Star of the Greeks."

Richard felt as though dashed by a thunderbolt. Yield Mary to Iftikhar as price of his own life? God knew he never thought on that! But should he set her joy and his before the lives of dear comrades, who had ridden lightly to the jaws of death in his quarrel? Above all, should he peril the army of the Cross because Mary loved peace in heaven rather than the pleasures of El Halebah? No words came to his lips; he turned appealing eyes to Godfrey, who spoke nothing. But in the silence Mary spoke. She had risen, had advanced to the doorway. The two enemies—the Egyptian, the Norman—gazed at her as upon a treasure for which life were a trivial price.

"Dear husband," her voice came, sweetly as bells across the misty sea, "you know what you should say. God will avenge me in His own time, and reward me and reward Iftikhar each according to justice. I have borne so much, I can bear a little more. You must save yourselves, must warn the army. It was a sin to go to Aleppo; now Heaven allows you to ride away scatheless. Do not distrust Iftikhar; he violates no oath."

What might Richard say? His wife before him—in all her beauty! To save her he would have felt it untold joy to die. He knew that she herself loved death more than life in this renewed captivity. And yet there she stood, pleading—pleading, as never before, to be left to her captivity. What might he do? Mother of God, he was of too frail stuff to answer! But the great Duke, whose hand was the heaviest, whose heart the purest, in all broad France, made answer for him. Very gravely he was replying to Iftikhar.

"My lord, I have faith enough in God to believe that He will not suffer His army and His cause to perish, because we withhold this price—the agony of one of His angels. Go back to your men, my lord. We shall hold them at bay as long as He wills. And rest assured that, before they master us, the Lady de St. Julien shall have granted her, as she has prayed, a swift death at our swords, rather than a slow one in your palace."

"Think better, for the love of Christ, my Duke!" pleaded Mary, making to fall on her knees. But Godfrey had spoken; and Richard spoke too and very gently:—

"Sweet wife, you will find heaven no darksome place. Please God I shall be good enough sometime to see you there." Then he turned to Iftikhar, his poise high, his voice hard. "Go back, my lord, uncover the pit, unchain the fiends, lead on your devils! Yet know that the first foe that crosses this threshold will see my wife's dead body!"

"Dear Son of God!" cried Mary, "will you throw your lives away? Musa, you are wise, plead with them."

But the Spaniard, who had been playing a part equal to the others, turned at his post by the stairway, and salaamed after his fashion.

"I have heard my brother and Cid Godfrey. Allah indeed pity us, if we yield the Star of the Greeks!"

Richard raised Trenchefer.

"Now, Iftikhar Eddauleh!" commanded he, "again—begone! Or, unarmed as you are, I kill you!"

The Egyptian knew by his foe's eye it was no idle boast; he knew also that prayers were futile upon the three.

"Brave cavaliers," said he, with a bitter smile, "I can do nothing for you. Wonderful are your Frankish swords and that of Cid Musa. But you shall feel a cimeter that will test their temper, be it never so keen."

He was gone, and disappeared behind the band of Ismaelians who eyed the Franks from a safe distance down the passage. Mary saw him vanish, and turned first to Musa, then to Godfrey, then to Richard, and kissed the first two on the forehead, her husband on the lips.

"Dear friends," she said gently, "you add sin to sin for my sake. The end cannot be far away. But God is very near, and I fear nothing."

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# CHAPTER XXXVII

## HOW ROLLO CARRIED WEIGHT

Iftikhar had vanished. The Ismaelians on guard had retreated down the long gallery. Musa from his post declared that only a few sentries remained at the foot of the stairs. Morgiana, who had crouched in silence on a divan during the combat, arose, and without a word opened a cupboard in the side of the wall. She drew forth a silver flagon and cups, proffering each of the three combatants a spiced wine that sent new life through their weariness. Godfrey relieved Musa at the staircase, and the Spaniard, going to the open window, leaned forth to espy the next move of Iftikhar. In the starlight he could only see the tracery of the forest of palms, and here and there, ghost-like, a white dress flitting. The lamps in the chamber were flickering low. Morgiana extinguished most, and poured the remaining oil into two,—leaving barely enough light to break the gloom in the vaulted chamber. It had suddenly become very still through the palace. Almost was Richard persuaded that the Egyptian by some magic had departed with all his "devoted." In the oppressive silence none tried speech. Mary had returned to her post on the divan, and Richard knew she was sobbing, though no sound came. Musa stole noiselessly about the room, completing his inspection. Once he paused at the sealed door, and flung himself against it—adamant had scarce seemed firmer. He came to Richard's side and shook his head. "Some new attack is preparing," was his whisper; "in what way, Allah alone knows! I see no road to escape."

"The sealed door?" asked Longsword.

"The spell of Solomon has turned it to iron. We can escape only over the Ismaelians, or on the wings of Roc, the giant bird, whose back upbears an army."

"Then over the Ismaelians be it!" quoth the Norman, laughing grimly; and he added, "Ah, brother, you know well my proverb: 'Easier go through the wall than mount it'!"

But Musa did not laugh in reply.

"Brother mine," said he, "I think you and Cid Godfrey are each mighty as Jalut, whom you call 'Goliath.' But Iftikhar says well; you are no jinns. In the last charge the Ismaelians nearly passed you, and all would have been over."

Richard made an angry gesture.

"Good, then! What is left to fear? I think Trenchefer can still sting before his master's fingers loosen." But his voice grew very grave in turn,—"Were it not for my wife! But we have chosen!"

"We have chosen, my brother. Trusting in Allah we went to Aleppo; trusting in Him let us wait. But we have not struck in vain. Iftikhar shall never set eyes on the sorrow of the Star of the Greeks." A cry from Godfrey brought Musa to his side.

"Now by St. Nicholas of Ghent!" swore the Duke, in Languedoil. "What new devil's devisings? Look, Sir Musa! What do you see in the dark?" He pointed from the casement by the stairs, into the night.

Musa strained his eyes. "I see many men; they are bearing bales, I think; perhaps of straw and grass. They are approaching the door at the stairway." Without a word Godfrey caught a second of the ebony tables,—nothing light,—raised it to the sill—cast it down. A great howl of pain, and many curses; then the rush of a score of feet. The defenders awaited a new attack by the stairs, where Musa's cimeter had already sped three; but the Ismaelians did not ascend. They fled back into the gloom, and an instant later half a dozen arrows twittered in at the window and dashed harmlessly against the wall.

"Cover the lamps!" commanded Godfrey; "they give light to aim." Morgiana hid them behind a curtain. But despite the darkness there came more arrows, and yet more; in vain hopes to harm by a chance shaft.

"They waste bowstrings," muttered the Duke. "Lie close a little longer!" As he spoke a short moan came from Mary's divan. Richard quitted guard, and was beside her instantly. "Lights!" ordered he. And Morgiana brought a lamp, despite the danger. There was an arrow pinning the Greek's left arm just below the elbow to the cushion, and the blood was flowing. Before her husband could cry out, she plucked fourth the shaft with her own hand. There was no tremor, and her lips were firm, though very white.

"It is nothing!" said she, looking upward. "Do you forget my wound the day before Dorylæum?"

But Richard was nigh to weeping when he saw the blood.

"Dear God!" cried he, "wilt Thou suffer even this?"

Mary smiled. "Now, by St. Basil, you almost weep, while your own face is all wounds."

"And are not seven drops of your blood seven lakes to me?" declared Richard. The arrows flew past him, but he stood with his mailed body between Mary and the window, until Musa had made a bandage of the tapestry and Morgiana could hide the light. Brave were his wife's words, and brave her face, but Longsword heard her murmur, "Sweet Mother of Jesus—let the next arrow touch my breast, and end there all the pain."

"Ah! little wife," said he, when he kissed her, "I do not think God will vex you much longer. Surely He will save us soon for earth, or for heaven!"

A voice was ringing down the darkened gallery,—Iftikhar's voice. "You Franks and Cid Musa: again, I demand, will you yield the Greek and go free?"

"We will not!" thundered Godfrey, unhesitatingly.

"*Bismillah!*" came reply. "You have chosen. Behold!"

A kettledrum boomed once, twice; and as a fresh flight of arrows dashed into the room, suddenly lights darted across the palace lawn below. A cry broke from Godfrey:—

"Fire! They have brought straw to the entrance and will so destroy us. Iftikhar is mad thus to ruin his palace!"

Morgiana looked at him quietly.

"He is no more mad than for many a day. You know little his passion for Mary. This wing of the palace is partly severed from the rest; but Iftikhar will burn all El Halebah to destroy us!"

Already below sprang a crackle, a roar, as the night wind caught the flame. In a moment up drifted a puff of smoke, a red glare ever brightening.

"The palace is marble," declared Godfrey, leaning over the parapet, despite the shafts.

"Enough also of wood and stucco to glow like Gehenna!" replied Musa, grimly. "Such is the manner of our palaces."

The smoke blew thicker, the arrows pelted so rapidly that even Godfrey was fain to drop behind the casement. There was another rush of feet in the gallery. Richard bounded to the door.

"Praised be St. Michael!" shouted he; "there is still food for Trenchefer." But the Ismaelians halted at a safe distance; did not advance; only stood with swinging cimeters, as if awaiting attack.

"Hear their feet below!" growled Godfrey; "they bring more fuel! Hark the roar! The very palace burns."

Musa thrust his head into the scorching smoke eddy.

"You say well, Cid Godfrey; we are in Allah's hands, and shall see Him face to face full soon!"

A crash below was followed by a second, a third. Up the stairway shot a wavering shaft of flame; the smoke that had been rising to the vaulted dome began to sink and stifle. Richard turned to Morgiana.

"Lady," he said, while he leaned on Trenchefer, "God may reward you for your deed to-night, but not ourselves. Had not His will been otherwise, you would have saved us. You can do nothing more. Fly down the gallery."

As if in echo came Iftikhar's voice:—

"Morgiana need not think to escape. Verily her body shall scorch now, as her false soul hereafter."

Even at that dread moment Richard shuddered at the passion the Egyptian struck forth from Morgiana's eyes; but her only answer was the cry:—

"Then shall my curse light on you forever!" And at that curse, no blame if Iftikhar trembled.

Thicker the smoke, brighter the glare, higher the flame. They felt the pavement under the rugs grow warm. Iftikhar thundered once more:—

"For the last time—choose life and freedom, or the fire!"

Godfrey had leaped beside Richard.

"Ha! This is the end of the hunting. Well, St. George aid us, we will not be grilled here, with that gallery open and fifty cimeters ready to speed us to heaven!"

Richard cast a look forward,—behind.

"There is nothing else!" said he. But Trenchefer shook in his hands, for Mary was standing at his

side.

"Dear lord and husband," said she, once more, "you have promised. I know your arm is strong. Let us go away together,—far away, far away,—to the love and light and peace!"

And she held down her head. But Richard that moment felt his muscles hard as bands of steel. Should she die, with him so strong, with the might of the saints shed over him as never before? Should she die, and by his hand?

"I wait, dear heart," she was saying, "hasten!"

The fire shot up the stairway in one raging, devouring column. But Trenchefer did not strike.

"Morgiana!" was Richard's fierce cry, "if the sealed door were shivered, is there escape?"

The Arabian had crouched upon the floor.

"Yes!" gasped she, "when Allah sends a miracle."

"And that He shall! *God wills it!*" and Richard sent the Crusader's war-cry out into the smoke and fire. The very shout made his might fivefold.

Through the smoke he bounded to the sealed portal, dashed against it, a lion against his cage. It stood firm; but he felt the bolts give way in their fastenings. A marble pendant hung betwixt the windows. He wrenched it from its mortar setting, swung it on high, and crashed it upon the door. In after days men found this marble in the wreck and marvelled at the might of the Christians. At the first blow the wood and iron sprang inwards as with a groan. Twice!—the stones in the casement crumbled, the pivots started. Thrice!—and before the iron of Richard's north-sprung strength the weaker iron of the door gave way.

"God wills it!" Over the storm of fire again he flung the cry. Iftikhar had seen—the Ismaelians had seen the attack on the door—the miracle! One and all had sped forward,—at the doorway had met Godfrey and Musa, and their tireless blades.

A crash below; the firm floors were shivered; flames leaped between. But the sealed portal—it was sealed no longer! Richard was back in the press at the other door. The marble block was lifted on high, and as it sped from his hand it dashed down the tall Harun, who never felt his hurt. Trenchefer was again flashing in the Ismaelians' faces. They drew back, crying:—

"No deed of man! We may not fight with Allah!" and Iftikhar with them. Three steps forward leaped Richard—not a man loved death enough to meet him face to face. The floor was quaking beneath them.

"Back, back, for the love of Christ!" rang the shout of Godfrey; for Longsword in his pride would have charged them all. It was Musa who plucked Mary in his arms, and bounded through the fire. Morgiana flew across the flame as though on wings. Godfrey caught Richard by an arm, and drew him after. From the new opening Richard glanced backward. Red flames roared betwixt him and Iftikhar. The wreck before him held his gaze as by enchantment, but the others dragged him away. The smoke was eddying after them into the new portal; soon the fire would follow. Haste was still their sole safety. Before them were the dimly lighted rooms of the palace; and Morgiana led their way.

Well that they had such guidance. The command of Iftikhar sounded loudly to cut off the fugitives when they should come forth. But Morgiana sped on before them, swift as the flight of a dream, through dark galleries and under arcades where the flame glared all around. They followed witlessly, not knowing whether she led to life or death. Suddenly, as if by magic, the palace and its blazing battlements were left behind them, their feet trod soft grass; their nostrils drank in the pure air; and above the haze of vapor and sparks glittered the fairer haze of the stars. The Arabian led them far on into the wood.

"Where were your horses tethered?" demanded Morgiana, halting.

"At the tamarisk by the road to the palace," answered Musa.

"Good, then," replied she; "follow this shorter path you see in the starlight. Mount, spur, and Allah spread the cloak of compassion over you. I can do nothing more!"

"St. Maurice!" swore Richard and Godfrey together, "shall we never reward you?"

They could see Morgiana's eyes flash in the firelight. "This will be reward—never again to hear the name 'Mary'!"

Before they could say more the Arabian had flung her arms about the Greek, kissed her once, and vanished in the night.

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Despite the danger of pursuit, Morgiana's departure for an instant broke the spell of delirium that had possessed the fugitives for the hour. They were under the canopy of the forest. They heard the roar of the burning, which was dimmed by the dense barrier of the trees. The chamber

of judgment; the chamber of battle; the struggle for life and death; Morgiana, their good angel—all had vanished—whither! For a moment the four were silent, drinking deep of the sweet air, their hearts stirred by emotion too strong for words. It was the Spaniard whose wits returned first.

"*Allah akhbar!* What is this, down the path?" And his whisper plucked back the others to the world of danger. A party of men and horses were coming straight toward them from the palace.

"Now, by St. George!" cried the Duke, "we need our prayers! They have taken horse to follow."

The hoofs were thundering behind them. Richard felt Mary trembling in his arms with mortal dread. To have endured so much and to fail now!

"Holy Mother!" she was crying softly, "are the horses far away?"

But Richard laughed aloud and the others also. Then he trumpeted through his hands, and Godfrey and Musa did likewise. Down the road they heard a stamping and snapping of tether-ropes. And as they ran three great beasts came prancing out of the dark to meet them—Rollo puffing with his huge mouth in his master's face. The others were mounted in a twinkling; but Richard gazed in vain for the Arabian prepared for Mary. There was a crash in the road not forty paces away. Over his head flew many arrows. The grip of his arm about Mary tightened.

"Little wife," spoke he, in her ear, "will you trust Rollo?"

"I will trust *you*!" came the answer.

No other way; with his right hand Richard gripped the pommel and leaped with his burden. And at the press of weight, Rollo gave a long leap forward, as close upon them in pursuit swung another, a rider on a tall horse; behind him, a mass of dark forms, sparks striking from the flying hoofs.

Richard felt his wife shrink closer to him, and above the yell of the Ismaelians heard her cry:—

"Carry us safe, dear Rollo, for the love of Christ! The need is great!"

Iftikhar was breasting them, on a steed the pride of El Halebah's stables. The Ismaelian drew bow, and sent a shaft crashing against them. The leathern saddle-flap turned it, and Richard taunted: "Truly you love the Greek! Will you strike her?"

"Better dead than yours!" came back, and with it a second arrow, against Longsword's shoulder. He reeled, but the Valencia mail was not faithless. Tightening his grasp, Richard swung Mary so that his own body was between her and the Egyptian. He drew Trenchefer. Rollo needed no bridle. At touch of the knee, the beast swerved so suddenly that Iftikhar's mount was nigh over-ridden. Before the Egyptian could cast away the bow and draw, the Christian sword fell. The Ismaelian barely shunned it. Not so his horse; for the good sword cleft through the saddle and severed the spine. Iftikhar went down with his falling steed, while Rollo tossed out his heels and flew onward.

But a precious moment had sped, brief though the encounter. Almost as Iftikhar fell, the Ismaelian band closed upon his conqueror. The dawn was strengthening. Richard could see the foe about him—dark Syrians, white-robed, with crooked bows, cimeters, and brass-studded targets. They raised a mighty yell as they saw the prey they had tracked so long locked, seemingly, in their hands. A thousand marks Longsword would have pledged for his good target to cast behind Mary; but his own body was the living shield. No place this, to swing Trenchefer now. Speed, the speed of Rollo,—in that and in Our Lady he trusted.

"*Bismillah!* Glory to Allah! The Christian jinn is taken!" roared the foremost Ismaelians, with their screaming arrows. One shaft home, and Rollo was crippled. But he, great brute, was wiser than many men. He needed no word, no spur. Close to the ground, after his wont, he dropped his muzzle. Then when he felt the reins slack on his neck and Richard's fingers gently combing his mane, he struck out in a stretch no steed of Fars or Khorassan could outpace. Two bounds, it seemed, plucked him out of that circle of death; with the long way clear, and the press behind. Through eyes half opened, Mary saw hills, rocks, trees, speeding past under the pale light, as though runners in a race. They had left the green wood; were on the highroad, flying westward. Eastward, behind the howling pack, all the sky was bright, but not all the glow was from the dawning. A tower of fire was leaping toward heaven. All the groves were traced darkly against the red glare, but faded swiftly as Rollo thundered westward.

Arrows, or what she deemed arrows, were whistling past her head. There were a score of mad voices close behind: "Shoot! Slay! Strike the horse! The grand prior's houri! A great reward!"

Then more arrows; but it was nothing easy to send a shaft from a plunging saddle into the dimness, and strike a dragon flying as Rollo flew. She heard Iftikhar shout once more—the fall had not harmed him, for he was again mounted—"To every man a hundred dirhems, if you bring down the horse!"

Her fear had become overmastering now. She was frightened as a little child. Her face was very close to her husband's. Despite the pace, she spoke.

"Richard, do not forget. You have promised. Strike, before too late."

The other's answer was a glance behind into the half-light. Mother of Pity, how close the infidels

were! Then he bent forward, and spoke to Rollo,—not in Greek, Arabic, or Provençal, but in his own Norman French.

"On, my horse; on, my sweet swallow! Will you be run to death like a fawn? Shall the paynims say, 'There are no steeds like the steeds of the East?' Remember your glory, my Rollo! Remember the lists at Palermo! How you outpaced the winds at Dorylæum. And the brave days at Antioch, gone by! And will you now fail, swiftest of the *destrers* of France?"

Did the black brute understand? Did he know that he had been born and bred, that for those few moments, double-mounted as he was, he should speed swifter, ever swifter, beyond range of those shafts whereof one must soon strike home?

But the Ismaelians saw, and Iftikhar saw, who cursed his men by every sheytan, vowing stake and torment if they failed. Longsword still urged:—

"Onward! Onward! the *jongleurs* sing of Ogier's Broiefort, of Bayard the fleet steed of Renaud, but swiftest of all shall they set Rollo bearing master and lady, casting shame on the beasts of the Moslems. Bravely done, yet faster! Faster, and faster yet! See, the arrows are falling short! Hear,—they curse and call on their Prophet vainly for aid. On, Rollo; as I feel your stride, I grow proud, yet you can make it longer. On, Rollo; another such shaft, our riding is ended! On, Rollo; you bear rarer than gold in the saddle now! On, Rollo; God loves a good horse's speed. They shall deck you in ribbons, my Rollo, and Herbert shall kiss your dear black lips when I tell the tale. All the Julieners shall be glad; in old age they shall say, 'No steed now like to Rollo, the great horse of our seigneur.'"

And Rollo? Long had been his stride, longer now; swift, swifter now. No reed-limbed southern-born he; spaniel-sleek, and spaniel-tender. Where the road was rough, his great hoof bit out the rock and sent it flying; where smooth, the Ismaelians saw no wings, but they saw his flight. Godfrey and Musa led the chase, but not as Rollo. No arrows for them; the pursuers knew their prey. The eyes of the Ismaelians' steeds were blood-shot, bits foaming; arrow after arrow sped,—fell shorter. Mary saw yawning before them a wide gully, cut deep by the spring torrent. Life—death—flashed up in an instant. She felt Rollo draw his huge limbs together,—a bound, and cleared; a safe recovery; the horse ran on. Godfrey passed safely. Musa's charger stumbled, but reined up dexterously, recovered, flew on. The Ismaelians struck the gully together; two leaders went down, were trampled out in a breath, horse and man. The rest still spurred after. But Richard, as he counted the ells betwixt him and the black mass of the pursuit, saw the patch of dark road widening slowly, but surely. More arrows now; when these flew very wide, a single rider shot ahead of the rest. In the brightening dawn Richard saw the pursuer prodding with a cimeter-point to add to the spur sting.

Again Richard put his head close to his steed's ear. "Faster again, my Rollo; faster yet, I say! Only a little more. Iftikhar pricks cruelly now, cruelly. When did I that, to give you speed? Ha, we are better friends! You are winning a great race—are heading the fleetest steeds of Fars, of Khorassan. You are winning! I grow more proud—proud of Rollo, king of the *destrers* of France!"

The answer was a final burst of speed, and Richard knew he had never ridden so before. Iftikhar's men vainly strove to keep pace with their leader; one after another goaded, dashed forward, dropped from the chase. Musa's peerless Arabian, Godfrey's Marchegai ran neck to neck behind Rollo, but they bore no double burden. Richard's heart went with his eyes when he saw the last effort of the pursuit. For a moment the space betwixt pursued and pursuers lessened,—but only for a moment. Then the precious stretch of road grew wider, ever wider. There came a moment when even the steeds of El Halebah could do no more. Iftikhar still led; but he was not mad enough to pursue alone three such spirits. Richard heard his last curse of bootless rage. There was a last vain flight of arrows: one chance shaft whirled past Rollo's ear; the blood was started. That was all. Musa waved his cimeter as a parting defiance. The Ismaelians had halted. For the first time Mary and Richard had eyes for other things than the flying Rollo. They saw and marvelled that the darkness had gone. The sun had risen and was hanging a ball of red gold on the eastern horizon. Aleppo, El Halebah, and its gardens had vanished, as though but a vision of the night. All about were the rolling, arid Syrian fields.

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When Iftikhar returned to El Halebah, the fire had utterly destroyed the wing of the palace containing the harem. Only through desperate efforts by the Ismaelians who had not joined in the pursuit was the remainder of the building saved. The grand prior's first act was to order search to be made for Morgiana. The "devoted" failed in their quest as completely as in the chase of the fugitives. The Arab seemed to have bidden the rock open and receive her. Breathing forth his vows of vengeance, Iftikhar had retired for the evening, before riding to join Kerbogha; but Zeyneb wandered from the half-wrecked palace into the gardens. He was alone in one of the remotest glades, when of a sudden his arm was plucked, and glancing about he beheld in the dimness the face of Morgiana. Where she had hidden, he did not know nor did she tell. He tried to shout; she plucked his throat as fiercely as on the previous night when she had mastered him.

"*Ya*," he heard her demand; "will you call the 'devoted'? Will you deliver me up to Iftikhar?"

"He swears he will have you flayed alive," gasped the dwarf; "why should I save you after what

you have done to me?"

"Why?" laughed Morgiana. "Listen, Zeyneb. Did Hakem awake after I cut his throat? What hindered me to do the like to you."

Zeyneb hung his head. "It is true," he confessed; "you spared me."

"I spared you," she reëchoed, laughing after her unearthly manner, "not through love—Allah forbid!—but because you were my foster-brother, and faithful to Iftikhar. The Greek is gone—gone forever—praised be the Most High! Iftikhar in his mad pride will go to Antioch, where—and the omens of the smoke never lie—only woe awaits. He casts me away, but I will not leave him. He curses; I will never forsake. I am strong, I can yet save."

"Allah!" cried the dwarf—her spell once more over him—"what do you desire?"

"That you aid me to go to Antioch. You have means and wits. Then, unknown to him, I shall be at Iftikhar's side, to stand betwixt him and the danger."

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# CHAPTER XXXVIII

## HOW RICHARD AND MUSA AGAIN PARTED

Rollo had dropped to a slower pace; at last had halted. Richard had set Mary down on a grassy hummock and gone back to his steed. The great beast was reeking with sweat, panting in strong gusts such as blow from a smithy's bellows. Richard plucked off his outer mantle—long since tattered—and rubbed the steaming flanks and back of the brute; while all the time he patted him, and praised him for having done a deed right worthy of a Christian *destrer* pacing the steeds of the unbelievers. But it was Mary who rose, and put her fair white arms round black Rollo's neck, and her cheek against the white spot on his forehead.

"Ah! dear Lord Jesus Christ," said she, "if there be indeed a heaven where good horses go, surely our Rollo will be there, a very angel!"

Richard laughed merrily, when he imagined the huge brute duly decked with halo and with wings. But Rollo, sensible fellow, who knew that he had only done his duty as became an honest horse, sniffed for water, found none, and then began to munch the thorny wayside thistles with as much relish as might a desert camel. Musa and Godfrey had dismounted, and were praising their steeds also. Well they deserved it, but neither had borne the burden of Rollo, or run as did he. When Richard turned once more to Mary, she gave a great cry.

"Mother of Sorrows," began the knight, "were you wounded?"

"I!" the Greek was saying. "They have nigh slain you! You have a hundred wounds!"

In truth Longsword was no pretty sight. For one could not fight and ride a night long, and not have bloody cheeks, bloody hands, and a cut on the right thigh where a cimeter had brushed away the Valencia mail. Richard wiped it off as best he could.

"It is nothing!" protested he, gayly; "ten times have I bled worse, and never been the sadder,—at Dorylæum, and time and again about Antioch."

"Ah, Richard," said she, "some day it may befall that if not you, another will be sadder if you risk your dear life lightly."

"And why not risk it, when I deemed you were worse than dead to me?"

Mary lifted her face. "But I am not dead, sweet husband; for my sake do not throw your life away. Above all, swear you will shun to meet Iftikhar. He is a terrible man."

But the Norman shook his head. "Dear life—say to me 'Pluck me down three stars,' and I will try; but avoid Iftikhar I cannot. God created us both; but not a world large enough to hold us both. Yet do not fear."

"Ah! Richard," said she, smiling in turn, "you also are a terrible man as well as Iftikhar. I tremble when I think I have the love of beings so grand, so valorous, as you. I know my love and my pain stand often but one step apart. But I have chosen you. And you must play your game, and—when God wills—die your death in your own way; while I will love and trust you to the end."

Though his face was bleeding, she kissed him.

"I am a cavalier's daughter, and a cavalier's wife," said she, more lightly; "red wine and white must be alike to me."

Then Musa and Godfrey came up, courteously asking if the lady was well, and heaping praise on Rollo.

"There lies a ravine with a sweet spring, beyond the next hillock," said Musa, who never forgot a

road once travelled. "Let us ride thither. From its crest we can command a wide view, if any party approaches. Let us rest a little—the Star of the Greeks slept none too much last night."

Mary pouted at the suggestion that they must wait for her alone. But in truth the horses sadly needed a halt. Richard knew Godfrey's heart was in the camp at Antioch lying unwarned of the impending danger. But even his Marchegai walked wearily as they climbed the little hill. The sun was fast mounting upward, promising a clear, hot day. Beyond the hillock, as the Spaniard had said, was a deep, cool ravine, an oasis in the desert of dry grass and thistle, where a little spring bubbled from the limestone, and threaded down a rocky bed. Over all swayed a few aged cypresses, an oleander thicket, ferns, and the twining wild vine. Here they drank till thirst was ended. Then while the three horses nibbled the grass, Richard found bread, and cheese, and broken meat in the saddle-bags, and they had their feast. That ended, the men saw the eyes of the Greek were very heavy, though she vowed she was not weary.

"No fear, dear lady," quoth Musa. "As we watch, not a crow can fly within a league without our seeing. It is safest to ride by night. Let me stand sentry for a time; then I will rouse Richard, and Lord Godfrey shall relieve in turn." So, having resaddled the horses, and prepared for instant flight, he took his cimeter and climbed to the summit. Godfrey cast himself beneath a cypress, and his snoring soon told its story. Mary's eyes were scarcely peeping now.

"Come, my Lord Baron," said she, smiling drowsily; "let your little wife fall asleep with her head in your lap."

And lying under the spreading trees, she did as she wished; for how could Richard refuse her? She cast a last look into his face.

"How you have changed! How fierce your great beard makes you! You will be more marked with scars than your father. Once I thought the only man I could love must be a beautiful youth like the Apollo of Scopas in our Constantinople home. How different! I ought to fear you, as all men fear you. But I do not—do not. For you are—Richard."

The last words had come very slowly; there came no more. There was a little flutter of her breast and lips when she turned in her sleep. Richard sat a long time; his hands—great clumsy hands—now on her hair, now on her forehead, now on her neck. What had he done so pleasing to Heaven that he had been possessed of this—of this! The events of the past night buzzed about him—the shadow of death in so many forms!—how unreal the horrors seemed as they flitted by! He knew he ought to lay Mary's head upon the grass and relieve Musa's watch. But his eyes also were very heavy. He could not bring himself to disturb that crown of hair. The ravine and the trees grew dim. At last Richard thought he was back in St. Julien a-hunting, only the dogs were pulling down Harun, the Ismaelian, in place of a stag. This also passed away; he seemed drifting onward, onward,—until he heard a voice close by:—

"*Wallah!* How beautiful she is, and how she loves him!"

Richard raised his head. Musa was standing beside him; the sunbeams were slanting from the west.

"Holy cross!" exclaimed the Norman; "the day is sped. I have slept through all. And Duke Godfrey?" Musa smiled.

"Look!" The good Duke was still in the sleep of the righteous.

"You have been sole sentinel. Why did you not wake us?" cried Richard. Musa again laughed.

"If I can wield no cudgels of marble, I have a manner of strength. Many a night long at Cordova I have counted the hours over my books. My fellows said, 'Musa is like Allah; he never sleeps.' No foe in sight; no need of haste."

There was a stir on Richard's lap; the long lashes unclosed.

"Have I slept very long?" said the Greek, with a pretty sigh.

"None too long," answered the Spaniard. "I have made bow and arrows, and killed two desert partridges. Let us sup and be off."

Godfrey awoke and cursed the devil that made him sleepy. Musa had made a fire. They ate with a relish. Then Richard swung his wife into the saddle, and Rollo pranced gleefully as he took the road with his precious burden. They rode steadily until far into the night, meeting no one; then halted, resting on the dry grass until the moon had risen and lit the way. As they galloped onward, once or twice they thought they heard hoof-beats and saw distant objects moving; but nothing came close to threaten. The sun had but just risen when they climbed a commanding height east of the Orontes, where the fair valley, spreading down to Antioch, lay full in view. Godfrey was leading, when Richard saw him rein Marchegai short, and heard a bitter cry. "God Himself is leagued against us!"

Below the whole plain was covered with the squadrons of a countless host!

From their hilltop they could view the strange army in its fulness. Near by, a squadron of light horsemen were speeding, their arms flashing under the brightening sun. Farther on a brown line was winding—small as of creeping ants; but Longsword knew he beheld footmen on the march, and their numbers were thousands. Perched on a knoll in the hills were gay pavilions, and above them glittered a sultan's twin banners, silver and gold. Beyond them was a second pair, enringed by other tents; beyond these a third, a fourth; and the eye grew weary counting the companies. Iftikhar had indeed boasted well—Kerbogha and all the might of the East was moving to the succor of Antioch. God alone knew if the Christian host would be warned in time! The Norman brushed his hand across his eyes, as if to dispel this ill-fraught vision. But vision it was not. The innumerable host, the marching columns, the sultans' and emirs' encampments, still were there.

For a moment all were dumb. Musa spoke first.

"As the Most High lives, this is a magician's work!"

Godfrey only smiled gravely.

"No, fair sir, it is the army of Kerbogha. When I quitted camp, we hoped he was still delaying before Edessa. But come he has, and unless I greatly fail, there are none in the army that dream he is so near."

"So near, and not discovered?" demanded Longsword. The Duke laughed wearily. "Even you, De St. Julien, do not know how feeble has been our scouting. From the lowlands about Antioch we can see little of this host; only a few advance squadrons that will retire when charged. I greatly fear—"

But Richard interposed: "That the Army of the Cross is near surprise, as Iftikhar vaunted. But are not Christ and Our Lady still with us? Has God ceased to hear prayer?"

The elder knight crossed himself. "It is true, fair sir, our faith is very weak. We are still stronger than ten thousand thousand paynims!" Then he turned almost fiercely upon Musa. "And you, Sir Infidel, is your heart with this army and its purpose? They are of your own faith. Do you wish them well?"

Musa shook his head thoughtfully:—

"They fight not for Islam, but for their own dark ends. Can any good thing come from Kerbogha, Iftikhar's ally? I serve the kalif of Egypt, not the emir of Mosul."

They said no more. What was left to say? The hopes of a day had been blasted in an instant. Seemingly the army of the emir lay directly across their road to the city. As the hilltop was exposed to view, they retired behind to where a tiny brooklet started amid a clump of date palms. And well they did, for as they drew rein came a click and canter, and a single Arab horseman whirled down the hill slope, thinking least of all to meet an enemy. Before any knew it, he was face to face with them, had halted with a yell, stared once, turned to fly; but Godfrey had touched Marchegai, and he bounded beside the Arab, whom the Duke unsaddled before he could draw cimeter. Richard ran to him, as also Musa. So they held the prisoner fast, and led him to the brooklet, nipping his throat tightly to choke an outcry. Then, when the horse also had been taken, and his captors had him on his back, Godfrey held a dagger at his throat to give good reason for talking softly. The rascal whined piteously to be killed without torture; for, he moaned, the Franks were wont to broil prisoners alive for eating.

"Stop croaking, frog," commanded Longsword, fiercely. "Only as you speak truly, may you keep a whole windpipe;—if not—" The silence was the most terrible threat. So the wretch told a story that seemed likely enough. He was a light rider serving with Dekak of Damascus. Kerbogha's host had advanced from Edessa, constantly swelling in numbers. There were twenty-eight emirs from Syria and Mesopotamia with him; Kilidge Arslan, burning to avenge the defeat at Dorylæum, the former emir of Jerusalem, and many princes more had led their myriads. The army had solemnly sworn by the beard of the Prophet to leave not one Christian to return to Frankland to tell the tale. They had advanced by stealthy marches from Afrin, and were now within a few leagues of Antioch itself; but to the prisoner's best knowledge the Christians had not discovered them. Then came an astonishing piece of news: while Kerbogha had advanced, Antioch had fallen. Two days earlier,—so the tale in the Moslem camp ran,—Phirous the Armenian had betrayed a tower to Bohemond, and all the city except the citadel had fallen to the Crusaders. This was the sum of the fellow's tale, and Godfrey liked it little.

"So Bohemond made shift to take the city while he thought me away on the southern foray!" growled he, almost bitterly. "*Gratias Deo*,—I ought to say. But I know the manner of these knaves that follow us. Seven days long they will plunder, kill, and revel, thinking of ten thousand things before scouting. They will be snared one and all. Kerbogha will surprise the city. It will be their grave,—the grave of fools!"

"And why is not the army moving?" demanded Richard.

"We wait for Cid Iftikhar with all his Ismaelians. Men whisper that it is he in private council, not Kerbogha, who will rule the war."

Richard smiled grimly.

"Cid Iftikhar has had cause to delay. But tell me: does the line of Kerbogha compass the whole

city? How may we enter?"

The dagger's edge was cold against the Arab's throat, a goodly check to lying, and there was something in Richard's eye that made it dangerous to haggle with the truth.

"Cid,—I tell you truly,—it will be a great peril for any Christian to try to enter Antioch. But if you ride to the south and then westward, touching the river below the city, I think you might pass, if Allah favor."

Longsword withdrew the dagger.

"See!" commented he; "the word of a Frank is inviolate. Swear you will whisper, not even to the winds, you were met by us; and you are free. Only we must keep your horse."

The Arab swore by the "triple-divorcement" (an oath Musa declared all-abiding), and rejoiced to struggle to his feet.

"I am secret as the Judgment book, my Cid!" quoth he, in his gratitude. Godfrey motioned him away.

"Remember your oath, then, and begone."

The fellow climbed the hillside, blessing Allah he was still alive. But those he left had a gloomy council. They were in no state for high and brave speech. Presently Richard began in his quiet way, sure token of determination: "We cannot remain here. Others may pass, in greater numbers. We have captured a fresh horse, and must make over the saddle for my wife."

But Musa stood listless, his eyes on the ground.

"We are in Allah's hands, brother," said he, with a despairing wave of the hand. "We have done all men might. Useless—fate is wearied with saving us. We can do nothing more. If our doom is written, it is written."

And Richard saw that the proud spirit of his friend was bowed at last. The heart of Musa was sprung from the East; the word "fate" was a deadly talisman to him, as to all his race. But the Norman caught him roughly by the shoulder.

"Rouse up, Musa, son of Abdallah! Do not anger God by saying, 'He puts forth His arm to save us all in vain,—to save from the cord, the cimeter, the fire, and the arrow, only to wait for slaughter like cows!' We have good swords and strong hearts still! Bowed heads never won triumph. Rouse up; your wits are not frozen. When one wills to have victory, victory is at hand."

Musa lifted his face; his eyes were again flashing.

"You say well, brother; I am turned coward. Do what you will; I follow."

Richard swept his arm around in a circle.

"We cannot recross this barren country; no refuge there. And Antioch must be warned. But there is safety for my wife and for you."

"Safety for me and for Musa? What?" Mary, long silent, demanded.

Richard hesitated; then drove on into seemingly reckless words.

"You have wits keener than your cimeter, Musa, and can tell a tale to deceive sage Oberon. Take my wife; ride boldly into the camp of Kerbogha. Say you are an Arab gentleman with a Greek slave fleeing from the Frankish raiders at Alexandretta; that Turkomen bandits met your party on the way and scattered it. Dress up the tale—they will believe you. Unless you meet Iftikhar or Zeyneb face to face, none will doubt. At first chance sail for Egypt, and be safe."

"And you and Cid Godfrey?"

Richard pointed over the hill toward Antioch; then drew back his mantle. Upon the ring-shirt was the red cross of the Crusade.

"We are soldiers of Christ, and must warn our brethren."

"*Mashallah!* You shall attempt nothing," cried the Spaniard. "You rebuked me; yet you rush into the arms of death! Your wife!"

And Godfrey added eagerly:—

"Yes, by St. Denis,—my duty calls to Antioch, but not yours. One can pass as safely as two. Think of your wife, De St. Julien. If Musa prospers at all, he can pass you for a body-servant or the like. I alone will go to Antioch."

Richard was very pale, and Mary likewise; but before he could answer, she thrust herself between the Norman and his friends.

"You say well, my lord and husband," said she, simply; "you belong first to Christ and then to me."

"O sweet lady," broke out Musa, "pray him for your sake, if not for his own, to go with us; to forget his madness."

Mary looked from one to the other. Her hands clasped and unclasped nervously, but her voice was calm and sweet.

"No, brave Musa, I cannot say to Richard 'turn back,'—though my Lord Godfrey says it. Cursed would be my love for him, and his for me, if thus he was turned from his vow to Our Lord, and from duty to his comrades. I did not love him, to make him slave to my fears and desires. Rather I saw him as something higher far than I; like a mountain whose shadows would cover me; but whose height I would not lessen. For my heart—as your heart and Duke Godfrey's heart—tells me his duty is in the city, not with me. And whether he dies—which Christ forbid!—or lives to see the victory, I shall know my love has been sweeter than all the pain."

Mary stood with her head erect; her eyes bright, but not with tears.

Richard turned to the others, smiling.

"Ah; good friends, how can I be weak when my dear wife is so strong!" They did not answer. Then he touched Musa, leading him aside. "I must speak with you."

The Andalusian's eyes were wet. He was no ice-bound northerner, to nurse his fires deep within, and to wax more stony the more they burned.

"Musa," said Richard, very directly, "we have been to each other as few brothers and fewer friends. God knows why you have run this peril. Yet I believe you care more for the Greek than for any woman, if you have loved any, save as a sister."

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders almost gayly.

"If to any woman I could yield," said he, lightly, "it were to her, peerless from Andalus to Ind! Alas, I am clothed in some magic armor the darts of the eyes of the houris may not pierce; yet if any eyes could pierce, it would be those of Mary de St. Julien."

Richard held his lips close to the other's ear.

"Musa," said he, "I may get into Antioch; but a long road lies still to Jerusalem. Where the arrows sing, I must be. And if I fall"—he spoke lower—"Mary will be alone. She cannot go to La Haye and be wedded to another by her uncle, as would surely be her fate. Not a kinsman remains at Constantinople. You must"—he hesitated—"you must swear to me that you will love her; that if I die, she shall be your wife. For Moslem as you are, no man breathes I would rather see with his arms about her than you. You alone can make her forget me; make her look forward and laugh in the sunlight."

Why were beads of sweat on the Spaniard's brow? Why came his breath so swift and deep? But he answered steadily:—

"Brother mine, you ask a great thing; yet I accept it. If it is written by the stars that you fall, I swear I will stand in your place to the Star of the Greeks. May she never want love and service while life is mine! But till that day I will be to her as a brother, no more, no less; and let Allah speed the hour when I can give her back spotless to your arms."

They said no more, those two strong men; their clasped hands sealed the pledge. Richard walked back to Mary.

"Dear heart," said he, "we Franks have a proverb, 'Hunger drives the wolf from the woods.' We cannot stand here forever. Why should we grieve? Have I not seen your face two nights and a day; and do I not commit you to the noblest friend in all the wide earth? When I enter the city, I will show three red shields above the Gate of St. George; and if all goes well with you, let Musa contrive to set three lances with red pennons before it at an arrow's flight, as sign that your tale is credited and you are safe in Kerbogha's camp."

"We will not fail," said Musa, calmly. Richard adjusted the saddle of the captured horse so that Mary might ride. No stragglers were at the moment in sight. The Norman kissed his friend on both cheeks. He pressed the Greek once to his breast. Death was not paler than she; but she did not cry.

"You are my cavalier, my saviour, my husband," said she, lifting her eyes. "You are your Roland and our Greek Achilles! Dear God, what have I done that for an hour you should love me?"

"Our Lady keep you, sweet wife!" was the only answer.

"And you, Richard mine."

That was all that passed. Musa spoke his farewell with his eyes. Godfrey bowed ceremoniously to the Spaniard; kissed the lady's hand. His honest heart was too deeply moved for words. Richard swung onto Rollo without touching stirrup. He did not look back. Marchegai cantered beside. The horses whirled their riders over the hillside. Soon the view before and behind was hid by the close thickets that lined the foothills. Richard rode with his head bent over Rollo's black mane, letting the horse thunder at will at the heels of Marchegai. The Norman's thoughts? Drowning men, report has it, live a long life through in a twinkling. Richard's life was not long; yet not once, but many times, he lived it over during that ride—the good things, the evil; and the evil were so many! And always before his sight was the vision of that face, pale as marble, the eyes fairer than stars—that face he had put away because of the love for the unseen Christ.

Now of much that passed in that ride Richard remembered little; but he followed Godfrey blindly. And a voice seemed to repeat in his ears time and again: "Turn back, Richard Longsword, turn back. You can yet rejoin Musa and Mary. There is safety in the camp of Kerbogha. You are not needed in the threatened city. Leave the army to God. You have long since slain enough Moslems to clear your guilt and vow."

But Richard would cross himself and mutter prayers, calling on every saint to fight against the assailing devils. As he rode, he saw remnants all about of the old pagan world where there had been love of sunlight, of flowers, of fair forms, and men had never borne a pain or struck a blow for love of the suffering Christ or the single Allah. They were on a road, he knew, that led to the Grove of Daphne. He had heard Mary tell of the sinful heathen processions that once must have traversed this very way,—revellers brimming with unholy mirth, their souls devoted to the buffets of Satan.

Once he and Godfrey drew rein at a wayside spring to water the horses. Lo, beside the trickling brook was a block of weather-stained marble, carved into the fashion of a maiden fair as the dawn. Mother of Christ! Was it not enchantment that made that stony face take on the likeness of Mary the Greek? What heathen demon made the lips speak to him, "Back! back! Do not cast your life away"?

"St. Michael—away, the temptress!" he thundered, and with Trenchefer smote the stone, so that the smile and the beauty were dashed forever. "*Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison!*" prayed Richard; "Holy St. Julien, patron of my house, forbid these fiends to tempt me!"

Yet all the wood seemed full of witchery and the voices of devils,—the old pagan devils, Pan, and Apollin, and Dian, and Hercules, and countless more,—who whispered ever that Christ and His heaven were very far away; that life was sweet, the sun was sweet, and sweetest of all a woman's love. But Richard muttered his prayers and rode onward; trusting that they might meet the infidels in flesh and blood, not sprites of the air whose arrows no ring mail could turn.

At last, after the sun had climbed high, and the horses had dropped to a weary pacing, there was a shout behind, —an Arab yell,—the clatter of scabbards and targets. Down a leafy way charged a squadron of Bedouin light horse, twenty, perhaps, and more. But Rollo and Marchegai had a fair start, well out of arrow range; and the unbelievers soon learned the speed of Frankish steeds. A long race, though not such as that when Iftikhar had led the chase. When at last the Bedouins turned back, their beasts all spent, the knights' mounts too had little strength to spare. Woods were still on every hand, when the two painfully walked beside their horses. As they climbed the slopes of Mount Silpius in the early afternoon, on the last stage to the city, suddenly from beyond a bend in the trees came the pounding of horsemen, fifty at least; and the sound neared fast.

Richard cast a glance at Godfrey.

"My lord," said he, "Rollo is at the end of his speed. We cannot run from fresh horses."

The Duke shook his head when he heard the deep pants of Marchegai. "It is true," he answered. "I think we had best say 'Our Father,' and look to our swords."

But down the forest lane came a clear voice, singing lustily the sweet Languedoc:—

"Merrily under the greenwood flying,
*Zu, zu*, away to my Mirabel!
Swift! For my lady waits long,—is sighing!
*Zu, zu*, more speed to my Mirabel!"

"De Valmont's voice, as I hope for heaven!" cried Richard, dropping the bridle. And straight toward them cantered a merry body of cavaliers and men-at-arms, Louis's broad pennon leading.

"*Ahois!* Forward! Infidels!" thundered the Valmonter, couching lance as he saw the two awaiting him. But there was a loud laugh when the two knights were recognized.

"Holy Mass!" swore Louis; "and were not you, my Lord Godfrey, on the foray to Urdeh?"

The Duke shook his head, the instinct of a leader once more uppermost.

"I was not," quoth he, curtly, explaining nothing. "And you, De Valmont? What means this party so far from the walls?"

"We rode after Sir Philip of Amiens, who rode with a few knights this way from the city this morning, and has not returned. We fear they met Arabs. It is rumored the Prince Kerbogha is as near as Afrin, and advancing!"

"By the Holy Trinity, he *is* advancing!" shouted the Duke, mounting with a leap. "Leave Philip of Amiens to God; he is long since passed from your aid. Back to the city with speed, if you wish not for martyrdom."

And wearied though Marchegai was, Godfrey made him outpace all the rest as they raced toward Antioch. Richard saw the Christian banners on the walls as he drew near. Once inside the gates he needed nothing to tell him the city had been sacked in a way that bred slight glory to the soldiers of the Cross. He left Godfrey to rouse the chiefs, and to spread the dread tidings of Kerbogha's approach. His own St. Julieners he found in the house of a Moslem merchant they had unceremoniously slaughtered. They were so drunken that only Herbert and Sebastian were able

to receive him. A gloomy tale they gave him—the city stormed, then a massacre of the Antiochers,—Christian and Moslem alike,—so terrible that even the fiends must have trembled to find mortal spirits more bloody than they. After the orgy of killing had come days of unholy revellings, drunkenness, and deeds no pen may tell. To crown all, the provisions found in the city had been so wasted, that starvation was close at hand. Richard in his turn told how it had prospered with him at Aleppo. Sebastian sighed when he heard of Mary in the custody of Musa.

"Can honey come out of wormwood?" cried he. "God may allow this infidel to serve Christians in their peril; yet even then with danger to the soul. Ah, dear son, either you must break this friendship with the Spaniard of your own will, or rest assured God will break it for you. Doubt not—light and darkness cannot lie on the same pillow; neither can you serve God and this Mammon whose name is Musa."

"Father," said Richard, "had you stood as I and Musa did, both in the presence of death, you would not speak thus."

But the answer was unflinching.

"I declare that had you both died, your soul would have gone to heaven, or purgatory, and his to the nethermost hell, to lie bound forever with the false prophet and rebel angels."

Richard's thoughts were very dark after Sebastian's words. Was there a great gulf sundering him eternally from the Spaniard? But soon he had little time for brooding on puzzles for the churchmen. The walls had barely been manned on Duke Godfrey's orders, and the foraying parties called in, before the hosts of Kerbogha swarmed down the valley, seemingly numberless. The Moslem garrison of the citadel made desperate sallies. On the day following Richard's return the party led by the gallant Roger de Barnville was cut to pieces before the walls. Each day the bread-loaves grew dearer and smaller. There was ceaseless fighting by sunlight and starlight. Each day the taunts of the Arabs were flung in the Crusaders' teeth, "Franks, you are well on the way to Jerusalem!" Truly the besiegers were become the besieged. As the days crept by the Christians were few who did not expect to view the Holy City in heaven before the Holy City on earth.

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# CHAPTER XXXIX

## HOW PETER BARTHELMY HAD A DREAM

On Saturday, the fifth day of June, in the Year of Grace one thousand and ninety-eight, Kerbogha appeared before Antioch with a countless host. On the Saturday following a small loaf of bread sold among the Christians for a gold byzant; an egg was worth six deniers; a pound of silver was none too much for the head of a horse. Men who had endured bitter sieges in the home-land, who had marched across the parching deserts of Isauria without a groan, now at last began to confess their sins to the priest, and to prepare to die. For help seemed possible from none save God—and God was visibly angry with His servants for the blood and passion at the city's sack.

On the day after his entrance, Richard Longsword showed three red shields on the minaret, and after a little, to his unspeakable joy, there were three lances with red pennons set close together before the Gate of St. George. Mary and Musa were safe in the camp of Kerbogha, and Richard blessed St. Michael and our Lady ever Virgin. Yet for a while he was angry with Heaven. If he had entered the city so easily, might not Mary have come in at his side? What need of parting? But he did not keep these feelings long; and his thankfulness was deep when he knew that at least his wife was not seeing gallant seigneurs, even the very Count of Flanders, begging in the city streets for a bit of bread, nor was herself enduring the awful hunger.

For the famine was the last stroke of the wrath of God upon His unworthy people. Thousands had died when the first hordes, led by Peter the Hermit and Walter Lackpenny, had been cut off by Kilidge Arslan; thousands more at Dorylæum; tens of thousands when they tracked the desert and besieged Antioch. But this was the crowning agony. When the news came that Kerbogha was approaching, the princes had indeed done what they could. Messengers had rushed down to the coast to bring up provisions landed by the friendly Italian merchants; foraging parties had been sent to sweep the country. But nine months long Syria had been harried by the armies. In a few days all the Christians were face to face with starvation. Pleasanter far to spend their last strength in the daily battles with Kerbogha, who ever pressed nearer, than to endure the slow agony in the city. Yet the infidels won success upon success. The Moslem garrison of the castle made continual sorties; the outlying forts of the Christians were defended gallantly, but in vain. Each day drifted into the starving city some tale of the pride and confidence of Kerbogha—how when squalid Frankish prisoners were haled before him, his *atabegs* had roared at his jest, "Are these shrunken-limbed creatures the men who chatter of taking Jerusalem?" and how he had written to the arch-sultan: "Eat, drink, be merry! The Franks are in my clutch. The wolf is less terrible than he boasted!"

In the city the cry again was, "God wills it!" But the meaning was, "God wills we should all perish or become slaves;" and on every hand was dumb lethargy or mad blasphemy.

New misfortunes trod upon old. In a sortie Bohemond the crafty and brave was wounded; Tancred's and Godfrey's valor ended in repulse. The foe pressed closer, damming the last tiny stream of provisions that trickled into the doomed city. Boiled grass, roots, leaves, leathern shields, and shoes; the corpses of slain Saracens—the Franks had come even to this! Richard feasted with Duke Godfrey on a morsel from a starved camel. The good Duke sacrificed his last war-horse except Marchegai, and then the lord of Lorraine was more pinched for food than the meanest villain on his distant lands. As day passed into day despair became deeper. Many, once among the bravest, strove to flee in the darkness down to the port of St. Simeon and escape by sea. Many went boldly to the Moslem camp, and confessed Islam in return for a bit of bread. "Rope-dancers," howled the survivors, of those who by night lowered themselves from the walls. And Bishop Adhemar talked of the fate of Judas Iscariot. But still desertions continued, from the great counts of Blois and of Melun down to the humblest.

One day Richard was cut to the quick by having Prince Tancred, who kept the walls, send him under guard one of his own St. Julien men, who had been caught while trying to desert. Richard had prided himself on the loyalty of his band, and his fury was unbounded.

"Ho! Herbert, rig a noose and gibbet. Turn the rascal off as soon as Sebastian has shriven him!" rang his command.

To his surprise a murmur burst from the men-at-arms about, and he surveyed them angrily.

"What is this, my men? Here is a foul traitor to his seigneur and his God! Shall he not die?"

Then a veteran man-at-arms came forward and kissed Richard's feet.

"Lord, we have served in the holy war leal and true. But it is plain to all men that God does not wish us to set eyes on Jerusalem! We have parents and wives and children in dear France. We have done all that good warriors may, now let us go back together. To-night lead us yourself along the river road, and let us escape to the port of St. Simeon."

No thundercloud was blacker than Richard Longsword's face when he answered, hardly keeping self-mastery:—

"And does this fellow speak for you all?"

"For all, lord," cried many voices. "Did you not promise to bring us home in safety, to lead us back safe and sound to Nicole, and Berta, and Aleïs? Surely we did not take the cross to die here, as starving dogs. Let us die with our good swords in our hands as becomes Christians, or in our beds, if God wills."

Richard had drawn out Trenchefer, and swept the great blade round. "My good vassals," he said in the lordly fashion he could put on so well, "you know your seigneur. Know that he is a man who has thus far gone share and share to the last crumb with his people, and will. Does not my belly pinch? do not I live without bread? But I say this: this man shall die and so shall every other die a felon's death who turns craven, or I am no Richard, Baron de St. Julien, whose word is never to be set at naught."

There was a long silence among all the company that stood in the broad court of the Antioch house. They knew well that Richard never made a threat in vain. They did not know how great was the pain in the heart of their seigneur. There was silence while the body of the deserter was launched into eternity.

"Amen! Even so perish all who deny their Lord!" declared Sebastian. Richard's heart was very dark when he visited Rollo that day. Thus far, by great shifts, he had secured forage. All the other St. Julien beasts had perished; men muttered at Longsword for sparing the horse. But after that ride from Aleppo he would sooner have butchered Herbert.

But was this to be the end of the Crusade? of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Clermont? of the agony of the march? Better if all had ended with the bowstring at Aleppo. No, not better; for Mary was saved.

A gloomy council came that afternoon at the Patriarch's palace, under Godfrey's presidency; no hope—the Greek Emperor they had awaited was reported retreating! The iron men at the council groaned. Guy, brother of Bohemond, cried out against God Himself.

"Where is Thy Power, now, Lord God?" rang his despairing blasphemy. "If Thou art all-powerful, why dost Thou let these things be? Are we not Thy soldiers, and Thy children? Where is the father or the king who would suffer his own to perish when he has power to save? If now Thou forsakest Thy champions, who will henceforth fight for Thee?"

"Peace!" interrupted Bishop Adhemar; "is not God angry with us enough already? Will you rouse Him further by your blasphemies?" And Guy retorted madly:—

"Angry, *Sanctissime?* Look on our faces, my lord bishop. Do they look as if we had feasted? There are mothers lying dead in the street this moment, with babes sucking at their milkless breasts. I say we have nothing more to fear from God. He has shown us His final anger; mercy, indeed, if with one great clap He could strike us all dead and end the agony. What is to be done, if not to die, one and all, cursing the day we put the cross upon our breasts?" And the speaker almost plucked the red emblem from his shoulder. Adhemar did not reply, and Raymond of Toulouse asked very gravely, turning to Godfrey:—

"Have you sent the heralds to Kerbogha, as the council agreed, offering to yield the city and return home, on sole condition that our baggage be left to us?"

Godfrey's face was even darker than before when he replied: "Yes, Lord Count; there is no need of many words, nor to examine the heralds. Kerbogha will listen to only one surrender—submission at discretion—after which he will decide which of us he will hale away into slavery, which put to death."

The Norman Duke and Gaston of Béarn had risen together.

"Fair princes," cried the latter, "we are at our wits' end. There will soon be no strength left in a man of us to strike a blow, and the Moslems will take us with bare hands. Dishonor to desert, and we will never separate. Yet let us bow to God's will. His favor is not with the Crusade. Let us cut our way down to the port, and escape as many as can."

"And so say I," called Duke Robert. "And I," came from Hugh of Vermandois. "And I," shouted many of the lesser barons. But Tancred, bravest of the brave, stood up with flashing eyes. "I speak for myself. I reproach no man, seigneur or villain. But while sixty companions remain by me, of whatever degree, I will trust God, and keep my face toward His city!"

"There spoke a true lover of Christ," cried Adhemar, his honest eyes beaming; and Godfrey's haggard face brightened a little. "You are a gallant knight, my Lord Prince," said he. "These others will think differently when they have slept on their words. Better starve here than return to France, if return we can. We have asked Kerbogha's terms—we have them. 'The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel,' as says Holy Writ. How can we return with all the paynim nations jeering at us, crying, 'See! See the boasted Frankish valor!' We can do no more to-day; let us meet again to-morrow."

"To-morrow we shall be yet hungrier," muttered Guy of Tarentum, as he went out at Longsword's side. "Except a miracle come of God, Kerbogha has us." "Except a miracle!" repeated Adhemar. Richard carried home the words. Had God turned away His face from His children? Were the brave days when the Red Sea swallowed Pharaoh's myriads, when four lepers delivered starving Samaria from the Syrian hosts but as *jongleurs'* tales of things long gone by? He told Sebastian what had passed among the chieftains, and Sebastian only answered with a wandering gaze toward heaven.

"These are the days of God's wrath! Now appears the host foretold in the Apocalypse—the four angels loosed from the river Euphrates, come forth with their army of horsemen, two hundred thousand, and for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, shall they slay the third part of mankind."

"Father," said Richard, "do you know what the princes say? 'Except a miracle, we are delivered to Kerbogha.' Are the days of God's mercy spent? Were the Jews more righteous than we, that they should be saved by wonders from heaven, and we perish like oxen? I speak not for my own sake—though the saints know it is hard to keep a stout heart over a nipping belly—but for my men, for the whole host. Pestilence is treading behind the famine. This day five thousand have died in Antioch—cursing the hour they took the cross and the God who led them forth. I say again: How can these things be—God sit silent in yonder blue heaven, and still be good?"

Sebastian brushed his bony hand across his face as though driving away a mist, and ran on wildly:—

"Kerbogha is the beast foretold in the beginning! The beast and the false prophet, which is Mohammed, have deceived those who have the mark of the beast; and all such with those that have worshipped his image shall share with the beast and the false prophet in the lake of fire, burning with brimstone."

"Yes, dear father," said Richard, simply; "but the vengeance of God is long delayed!"

Sebastian gave no answer. All that afternoon he went among the dying, who lay like dogs in the streets, holding up the crucifix, telling them of the martyrs' joys; that death by sickness and famine was no less a sacrifice to God than death by the sword.

"Fear not, beloved," were his words to those whose last speech was of home and longed-for faces, "you are going to a fair and pleasant country, very like dear France, only brighter and richer than France, if that may be. There, as far as you can see, is a plain of soft green grass, and the sky is always blue; and there is a lovely grove with whispering trees laden with fruit of gold; and the fountain of 'life and love' sparkling with a thousand jets, and from it flows a river broader and fairer than any in the South Country. Here all day long you will dance with the angels, clothed in bleaunts of red and green, and crowned with flowers as at a great tourney; and all your friends will come to you; there shall be love and no parting, health and no sickness; nor fear, nor war, nor labor, nor death; and God the Father will smile on you from His golden throne, and God the Son will be your dear companion."

So many a poor sufferer flickered out with a smile on his wan lips at Sebastian's words, while he thought he was catching visions of the heavenly country, though there was only before his dying eyes the memory of a sunny vineyard or green-bowered castle beside the stately Rhone or the circling Loire.

Thus Sebastian spent his day. But Richard heard him repeat many times—"A miracle! except we

be saved by a miracle!" And toward evening the Norman saw his chaplain deep in talk with the half-witted priest, Peter Barthelmy, and another Provençal priest named Stephen.

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Count Raymond sat at the end of the day in his tent before the castle, and facing him was Bishop Adhemar. There was no hope, no courage, left in the army at the close of that gloomy day. Bohemond had had to fire his followers' barracks to drive them forth to fight on the walls. When the alarm trumpets sounded an attack, men only muttered, "Better die by the sword than by a month-long death of starving." Gloomy had been the dialogue, and at last the Count asked:—

"Dear father, have masses been duly said, and prayers offered Our Lady that she will plead with Christ for His people?"

And Adhemar answered: "Prayer day and night. All night long I and the Bishop of Orange lay outstretched after the form of the cross, beseeching Our Lord. The cry rises to heaven unceasingly. But God remembers all our sins; there is no sign save of wrath."

And the good Bishop was stirred when he saw a tear on the bronzed cheek of the great Count of the South. "I must go among the men," said Raymond; "the saints know I can say little to hearten."

But he was halted by his worthy chaplain, Raymond of Agiles, now grave and consequential. "My Lord Count, and you, your Episcopal Grace," began he, importantly, "there has been a notable mercy vouchsafed this poor army,—a miracle,—a message sent down from very Heaven!"

"Miracle? Miracle of mercy?" cried the Count, banging his scabbard. "These are strange words, my good clerk; we have none such to hope for now!"

"Beware," interposed Adhemar, warningly, for he saw that the chaplain was flushed and excited. "When men's bodies are weak, the devil finds his darts lodge easily. Beware, lest Satan has cast over your eyes a mist, and held out false hopes."

But the chaplain would not be denied.

"Noble lords," quoth he, boldly, "here is a man who declares to me, 'St. Andrew has appeared in a dream, saying, "You shall find the Holy Lance that pierced our dear Lord's side, and by this talisman overcome the unbelievers!"' Will you not hear his tale?"

"And who is this fellow?" urged Adhemar.

"Who, save the unlettered and humble priest, Peter Barthelmy, whom your Episcopal Grace knows well."

Adhemar shook his head hopelessly. "There can be no help in Peter Barthelmy. There are in the host ten thousand saintlier than he, and wiser, and no vision has come to them."

"Yes, my Lord Bishop," cried the chaplain, eagerly; "but is it not written, 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes?' Cannot God, who made the dumb ass speak, and who appeared unto the child Samuel and not to the wise Eli, make His instrument the untaught clerk Peter of Marseilles?"

There was an honest ring in the chaplain's words and a pious faith behind them, that made Bishop Adhemar grow humble and cross himself.

"*Mea culpa, Domine*," he muttered, "grant that my pride in my own high estate and wisdom should be rebuked by making this unlearned priest indeed Thy instrument of deliverance." Then aloud, "Admit this man; let us question him, and see if he be of God or Satan." So Count Raymond waited, and his chaplain went forth and led in the priest Peter Barthelmy.

A rough-featured, heavy-handed peasant's son was this Peter. He had gone into holy orders, he scarce knew why; his highest hope had been a little village "cure," where he could tell saints' stories to the girls, and baptize the new-born babes, and enjoy a pot of wine on feast-days, and grow old in peace. But men said that he loved to pray, was very humble, also was fond of having long and circumstantial dreams. When he found himself before the great Count of the South, and Adhemar "the Father of the Army," his speech came thickly, and his knees smote together under his cassock. But Adhemar, whose heart was compassion to all save infidels, told him not to fear, if he had a clean conscience, but to tell them boldly; for they would not despise him, even if poor, untaught, and a villain's son. So Peter found his tongue, and his tale ran after this wise:—

During the siege of Antioch, one midnight there had been a great earthquake, and as Peter called to Heaven in his fear, lo, two men in bright garments stood before him in his hut,—one young and more beautiful than any born on earth, the other old, with hairs all gray and white, his beard long and divided, his eyes black, his countenance very terrible, and he bore a transverse cross. Then the elder man had said, "What do you?" And Peter, trembling, answered, "And who are you, good lord?" Then the other replied: "Arise, and fear not. I am Andrew, the Apostle. Gather the Bishop of Puy, and the Count of St. Gilles and Toulouse, and say, 'Why does the Bishop neglect to preach and to warn and to bless the people?'" Then St. Andrew told Peter he would show him the lance

with which the pagan centurion, Longinus, pierced the side of Christ, and this lance he must give to Count Raymond, for such was the will of God. So St. Andrew led Peter through the Saracens into Antioch to the Church of St. Peter by the north gate, and opened the ground before the steps of the altar and showed him the lance. And Peter held in his hand the precious metal, with the water and blood still rusted upon it. St. Andrew commanded him to go to the church with twelve men, after the city was taken, and dig, and he should find it. Then the saint replaced the lance, led Peter back to his own hut, and disappeared.

"But why did you conceal this so long?" asked Adhemar; "why did you disobey the Holy Saint?"

"Ah, my Lord Bishop," was the answer, "your Grace sees I am a poor, stammering wretch. Not once, but four times, has the Holy Saint appeared to me, warning and threatening, because I feared to make bold and come before the princes and your Grace with my commission." Then Peter told how he had tried to escape the commands of the saint, and how the saint had pursued him, until his fear of punishment from heaven was greater than his fear of the scoffs of man, and thus he had come to the Count and Adhemar.

When the priest was finished, the Bishop and Count sent him away, and sat for a long time deep in thought; for whether he spoke out of malice, or fancy, or inspiration from above, who might say? The chaplain, Raymond of Agiles, waited without the tent, and received the decision of Adhemar.

"Let him abide until to-morrow. During the night let us pray again earnestly, and see if the night and the morning bring any sign that the wrath of God is turned away."

So the night came, and a thrill went through all the starving city, when it was rumored that the Bishop would go to the Church of St. Peter to offer solemn petition for a sign from God, whether He would vouchsafe a miracle. And as a hundred thousand despairing eyes watched the heavens, about midnight there came a sortie of the Turks from the citadel, and there was fighting in the streets. But, lo! just when the strife was fiercest, and the Christians almost gave way, there was a rushing noise in the upper heavens; Crusaders and Moslem saw a great star of glowing fire rush downward, so that the city and the camps of Kerbogha were lit bright as day. Then the star burst in three pieces over the paynim camp, as if God were raining down fire upon the unbeliever, as upon old Sodom; and for the first time in many weary days the Christians dared to raise their heads, and cry: "God wills it! He will still have mercy!"

The night passed; and in the morning there came the priest Stephen, who went before the princes as they sat in council beneath the castle. And he in turn told a story that made men cross themselves and mutter their *Glorias*. For according to Stephen's tale, he had gone to the Church of the Holy Virgin, believing the Turks were broken in, and wishing to die in God's house. But when the foe did not come, and all his companions slept, a young man with a blond beard, the most beautiful form he had ever seen, appeared to him, and a bright cross shone above the head, token that this was Our Lord. Then while Stephen adored, Christ said to him, "I am the God of Battles; tell me the name of the chief of the army." And Stephen replied, "Lord, there is no one chief; but Adhemar is most revered." Whereupon Our Lord answered: "Tell Bishop Adhemar to bid the people return unto me, and I will return unto them. Let the cavaliers invoke my name when they ride into battle. And after five days, if my commands are obeyed, I will have pity on my people." Then at Christ's side appeared a lady, more beautiful than day, who said, "Lord, it is for these folk in Antioch I have made intercession for Thy favor." So Our Lord and His Blessed Mother vanished, and Stephen could hardly wait for the day to tell his story to the army.

Now when the stories of Stephen and Peter Barthelmy had run through the host, it was a marvel surpassing to see how the skies were brightened; and if a man doubted, he stifled his doubts within his breast, as being little less than blasphemy. Richard Longsword in days to come was accustomed to wonder what it was that Sebastian had said to the two priests, when they talked so earnestly together. But he spoke to no man, only gave thanks in silence.

"Let us cast all sin from our hearts," admonished Adhemar in the council; "for it is manifest God will not keep His anger forever." Then all the princes took a great oath to remain faithful to the Holy War; and when the Arabs cried to the sentries on the walls: "Out, Franks, out! Show us the Christian valor!" the reply came boldly now: "Patience, Sons of Perdition! The devil double-heats his fires against your coming!"

So the appointed five days sped, and though many yet died, the very famine seemed easier to bear. Every gaunt Frank whetted his sword, and if prayer and vigil avail aught, or one cry to God from thousands on thousands, it should have availed them. No more blasphemy and scoffings now; only one desire: "The lance! the lance! Then rush against the infidel!"

"Sebastian," said Richard, "do you know, if the lance is not found, the whole host will curse God; perhaps turn infidel for a loaf of bread?"

"I know it," came the solemn answer; "but it is sin to doubt."

"Yes, but I am weak in faith. How great is the power of Kerbogha!"

Sebastian's answer was an uplifted hand.

"Would God I could do as did Elisha to his servant, and open your eyes; for now, as then, the host of the ungodly lie round the city, but behold the mountains are full of horses and chariots of fire to deliver the Lord's elect!"

# CHAPTER XL

## HOW THE HOLY LANCE WAS FOUND

In the morning the Crusading Chiefs prepared to dig for the Holy Lance. Richard was touched when he left his men, to see how, despite their murmurings, the honest fellows tried to put on a brave face. "Ha, Herbert!" cried De Carnac, "the rats we feasted on last night were better than a St. Julien boar." And the man-at-arms forced the counter-jest, "After so much rat-flesh I shall lose all taste for venison." "Three of our rats," snickered Theroulde, "are better than giant Renoart's dinners—five pasties and five capons all for himself."

But this was strained merriment. Richard at the council found he was appointed to go with Count Raymond, Raymond of Agiles, the Bishop of Orange, Pons de Balazan, Ferrard de Thouars, Sebastian, and five more, to dig for the lance. Bishop Adhemar, good soul, lay ill, but his prayers were with them. The twelve took Peter Barthelmy and went to the Church of the Blessed Peter, a gray stone building, domed after the Eastern manner. When they came to the threshold they knelt and said three *Paternosters* and a *Credo*; then the Bishop of Orange blessed their spades and crowbars, sprinkling each implement with holy water. All about the church in the narrow streets stood the people, far as the eye could see—gaunt skeletons, the bronzed skin drawn tight over the bones, the eyes glittering with the fire of dumb agony. When the company entered the church, there went through the multitude a half-audible sigh, as all breathed one prayer together; and many started to follow the twelve, though none cried out or spoke a word. But Count Raymond motioned them back. Then all who were in the church—and like all the churches during the siege, it was crowded with men and women—were bidden to rise from their knees and go away.

Slowly the church was emptied. Then when the last worshipper was gone, the twelve put-to the gates; and all, saving the Count and the Bishop, took a spade or crowbar. Peter Barthelmy led them up to the stairs leading to the high altar, at its south side. Here the priest turned, and pointing to the pavement said, in awestruck whisper, "Here! at this spot the holy saint took the lance from the ground, and laid it back again, in my dream."

"Amen! and amen!" repeated the Bishop. Then all the rest knelt a second time, while he blessed them, making over each the sign of the cross. When they arose, they remained standing until he gave the word. "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen!"

The pickaxe in the hands of Raymond of Agiles smote first on the pavement. There was a crash, as the mosaic pattern shattered. Then the others bent to their toil. The costly glass and stone work flew out to every side, then the gray cement, then the chill, dark earth, and with all the speed and strength that was theirs the twelve slowly pushed downward.

It was a strange scene. The windows of the church were very small. Over the altar, with its painted and gem-crusted ikons of the saint, twinkled a pair of candles; above the heads of the thirteen, far up against the dark dome, shone a pair of silver lamps, flickering, with a ruddy glare. The shadows hung upon the cold pillars of the old basilica. They saw faint images of painted martyrs and angels peering down from the frieze and vaulting. Every stroke of their tools rang loud, and awakened echoes that died away behind the maze of far-off arches.

Digging and still digging, the earth flew fast under their eager hands. The Count forgot his proud title and broad baronies, caught a spade, and toiled as became a villain bred to the soil. All the time they labored the Bishop chanted psalm after psalm, and the sound of his voice was a double spur to the work, if spur were needed. But after they had labored a great while, and the trench was growing broad and deep, every man began to have a half-confessed sinking of heart. They laid down their tools, searched the great pile of earth that was rising in the aisle; found in it only pebbles and a few bits of broken pottery, but no wonder-working lance!

Yet Peter Barthelmy encouraged them.

"Dear lords and brothers," said he, undauntedly, "do not grieve. Believe me, the Blessed Andrew went far deeper into the earth than have we. You have not dug down yet to the sacred relic."

So, though their arms were growing weary, they fell again to the toil, and the Bishop chanted louder than ever:—

"'In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me.'"

More and more feverish grew the toil. Richard drove his own spade down, as if very life depended on each stroke, and who might deny it?

"By St. Michael!" was his oath, "we will find the lance, though we dig to Satan and his imps to pluck it up!"

So for a still longer time they wrought, until their hands were sore, arms and backs lame, and still only dark earth and sandy pebbles. When at last they paused for breath, each one looked in his fellow's face, and saw reflected there his own waning hope. But still Peter urged:—

"Be confident, dear friends and lords; deeper yet was the lance when I saw it. Do not distrust the saint!"

They toiled still longer, until by noting the shortening of the candles on the altar they knew that noon was long past, and the day was speeding. None dared utter his doubts. But at last Count Raymond declared that he could stay no more; it was his turn to go and command the fort before the Gate of St. George. Richard could see the anguish on the face of the great lord of the South.

"What shall I say to the people who are waiting without the church?" demanded he of Peter Barthelmy; "they will be plunged in despair when they know we have failed."

"Ah, Lord Count, do not lose faith in the saint! That were mortal sin! Can St. Andrew lie?" replied Peter, between the strokes of his mattock.

"St. Andrew cannot lie, but Provençal priests can," was the Count's menacing retort. "Think well on your sins, my good clerk. If you have been tempted by the devil to deceive us in this—rest assured the people will pluck you in pieces."

"I do not fear," said Peter, steadily, with the stolid resignation of the peasant born.

"You shall be taught to fear," muttered the Count; then to the others, "My Lord Bishop, my other lords, and you good Christians, I say farewell;" and he added bitterly,—"and let God have mercy upon our souls, for we can hope for nothing more on earth."

The Count was gone. And then for the first time, like the howling of a distant gale, they heard a raging and roaring around the basilica, creeping in through the thick walls and tiny windows.

"The multitude grows angry," muttered Pons de Balazan. "They have waited long." Then he went forth, and tried to calm the impatient people, and called in other proper men, to take the places of such of the twelve as had grown weary.

But no man took Richard's place. Not his own life, but the lives of a hundred thousand, shut up in that starving Antioch, hung on their toil. The chance of failure was so frightful, that not even he, whose fingers had learned so well to fight, to whom the life of a man was so small a matter, dared look that future in the face. Had the rest all forsaken, he would have toiled on, spading forth the earth, raising the dark mound higher, ever higher.

And all the company wore grim, set faces now, as they wrestled with their strengthening despair, except Peter Barthelmy and Sebastian. The monk was working with an energy surpassed only by Richard himself. Longsword saw that he was still calm, that the light in his usually terrible eyes was even mild; and as the two stood side by side in the trench, Sebastian said to him: "Why fear, dear son? Are we not in God's hands? Can He do wrong, or bring His own word to naught?"

The Norman answered with an angry gesture:—

"Truly our sins must be greater than we dreamed, to be punished thus—to be promised deliverance, and have Heaven mock us!"

Sebastian's reply was a finger pointed upward to the painted Christ, just behind the two lamps.

"Be not fearful, O ye of little faith!"

Richard fought back the doubts rising in his soul, and flung all his strength anew into his work.

The noise without the church was louder now. They could hear shouts, curses, threats, rising from a thousand throats.

"Deceiver, the devil has led him to blast us with false hopes! Impostor, he dreamed nothing! Out with them; out with them all! The whole company is leagued with Satan! Kill the false dreamer first, then yield to Kerbogha; he can only slay us!"

These and fifty more like shouts were ringing fiercely. Presently there was a crashing and pounding at the gates of the church. "Open, open! There is no lance! Slay the deceiver!"

Richard turned to the Bishop, who in sheer weariness had ceased chanting. "*Reverendissime*, the people are getting past control. In a moment they will break in on us and commit violence at the very altar; go and reason with them while there is yet time."

"Open! open! Death to Peter the Provençal!"

The roaring had swelled to thunders now. The strong iron-bound gates were yielding under the strokes of mace and battle-axe. Richard flung down his spade, and gripped Trenchefer. He would not defend the deceiving priest; but no unruly men-at-arms should touch a hair of Sebastian, if he also was menaced. But just as the portals began to give way, Peter Barthelmy, stripped of girdle and shoes, his hands empty, and only his shirt on his back, leaped into the deep black pit. Even as the doors flew open, but while the crowd stood awed and hesitant at sight of the dim splendor of the nigh empty church, Raymond of Agiles fell on his knees and prayed loudly:—

"O Lord God of battles and of mercy, have pity on Thy people. Have mercy! Give us the lance, sure token of victory!"

And the moment his words died away, Peter Barthelmy lifted one hand up from the pit—and in his hand *the rusted head of a lance*!...

Now what followed no man could tell in due order. For afterward Raymond, the chaplain, was sure that he was the first to seize the lance from Peter, and kiss it fervently; and Sebastian and the Bishop and Richard Longsword each claimed the same for themselves. But all the toilers were kneeling ranged behind the Bishop, as he stood in the centre of the great aisle, and upheld the relic in sight of the multitude thrusting its way in.

"Kneel! Thank God with trembling!" rang the words; "for He has had mercy on His army, has remembered His elect! Behold the lance that pierced our Saviour's side!"

And at these words a wondrous sobbing ran through the swelling company; after the sobbing, a strange, terrible laughter, and after the laughter one great shout, that made the dark vaulting echo with thunder.

"*Gloria in excelsis Deo! et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis!*" so they sang in the church. But now the tidings had flown on wings unseen to the thousands without, and all the streets were rolling on the greater doxology: "*Laudemus te; benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te; gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam!*"

When Richard came out of the church, he was met by a cry from countless voices: "Hail! Richard de St. Julien! You were one who found the Holy Lance! The favor of God and the love of Christ go with you! May you ever prosper. You were one of those who saved us all!"

**"AND IN HIS HAND THE RUSTED HEAD OF A LANCE"**

"No, sweet friends," said the Norman to those who could hear. "We are all saved by the favor of God. I am only like you, a very sinful man." And he bowed his head, remembering his misdeeds, and wondering why he was chosen to have part in so great a mercy. But the people would not listen to him or his fellows. They carried the twelve, and Peter Barthelmy at their head, borne on high to the palace of the Patriarch; and there the dear Bishop Adhemar was roused from his sickness, and cured in a twinkling by the cry that shot on ahead of the company, "*Gloria! Gloria!* The lance! The lance! Let us fall upon Kerbogha!"

The cry came to the men on the walls, and to Duke Godfrey, who crossed himself and swore seven candlesticks of gold to our Lady of Antwerp. The Moslems heard it, and those who were wise said, "Let us pray Allah to shield against the Frankish valor, if once it be kindled."

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Only one shout now throughout the city. From the weakest and hungriest, "Battle!" But Godfrey restrained those who wished to fight that very night. "Nothing rash," he urged; and it was determined to send an embassy to bid Kerbogha raise the siege or offer fair combat. They sent as envoys Peter the Hermit, and one Herluin who knew the infidels' speech; also Richard

Longsword, because he likewise spoke Arabic, and could cast a soldier's eye on the emir's camp. The parley sounded, and a gorgeously dressed *atabeg* met the envoys at the Bridge Gate to lead them to Kerbogha. The Moslem made large eyes at the little monk with his rope girdle and tattered cassock, the humble interpreter, and the ponderous Frankish baron, in threadbare bleaunt and clattering a sword no arm from Tunis to Bokhara could wield.

"And is this embassy clothed with power to deal with our commander?" demanded the wondering *atabeg*. "The passions of the Lord Kerbogha are swift. Do not play with him."

"Friend," said Richard, soberly, "you shall find that we lack not authority."

Therefore the three were led into the paynim camp, of which the chief part lay north of the river. Here they saw that the might of the East had indeed gathered about Kerbogha: wiry Seljouks of Kilidge Arslan, brown Arabs from the Southern deserts, graceful Persians, dark-eyed Syrians in the white dress of the Ismaelians, gaudily clad Turkoman cavaliers from Khorassan and Kerman, Tartar hordesmen from the steppes of the far East; all stood about, pointing, whispering, jeering at the three Franks. "Were these the terrible men who had won Nicæa and Dorylæum, and taken Antioch?" ran the titter. But no one molested them, as the *atabeg* escorted through the avenues of black camel's-hair tents, interspersed with the gayer silken pavilions of the emirs. Then at last they found themselves before the palace tent of Kerbogha. Here they were led at once before the Moslem chief himself, who was clothed in gold, silk, and jewels, worth ten baronies in France. He was surrounded by the emirs and petty sultans, standing close about his throne; on his left hand was Kilidge Arslan the Seljouk, and Dekak lord of Damascus; on his right a figure Richard knew full well, clothed though he was in gilded, jewel-set armor from head to heel, Iftikhar Eddauleh! All around the tent were ranged Kerbogha's bodyguard, three thousand picked Turkish horsemen, panoplied in flashing steel; while the three envoys were led up a lane of giant negro mace-bearers, whose eyes followed the least beck of their lord, whose golden girdles and red loin-cloths shone doubly bright against their ebony skins. Richard, as he came, saw the stores of food and wine laid out for the pleasure of the infidels, while good Christians were starving. He saw the camels of the hospital corps of Kerbogha, and the host of physicians waiting here with their medicine chests, while in Antioch thousands had died of pestilence. Then his heart grew hard, and he held his head very high, as he and his companions walked down the file of negroes and stood before Kerbogha.

Now the chamberlains who were at the foot of the throne had motioned to the Franks to bow down, and kiss the carpet before Kerbogha; but the three stood like statues. When the silence was long, Kerbogha spoke forth, not veiling impatience.

"Fools, how long will you carry yourselves so arrogantly? It is yours to humble yourselves, not play the part of lords. A strange embassy this—who are you? What do you seek?"

And Harluin respectfully, but firmly, answered:—

"Lord, we are the envoys of the princes in Antioch; and this venerable hermit named Peter will speak for us."

A thousand eyes were on the little monk when he stepped forward. There was no sign of fear, his own eyes were very bright; he returned the haughty gaze of Kerbogha as if he were himself arbiter of life or death. Harluin strove to interpret for him; but Peter had recalled his Syriac learned on the pilgrimage, and some angel gave him the gift of tongues. Then right in the teeth of Kerbogha and the emirs the tattered monk flung his challenge:—

"Your Highness, the assembly of the chiefs shut up in Antioch have sent me to you to bid you cease from this siege of the city which the mercy of God has restored to us. The blessed Peter, prince of the Apostles, has by virtue of the will of God plucked it from you, never to return. Now, therefore, take choice: raise the siege of this city without delay, or prepare for instant battle. If you will, send any number of champions into the lists, and let them meet an equal number of our own; but if you will not—know that God is preparing to cut your host short in its sins! Nevertheless, our word is still—peace. Return to your own country, the Christians will not molest you. We will even put up prayers that your hearts may be touched with the Gospel and your souls delivered from perdition. Sweet indeed to call you brethren, to conclude betwixt Frank and Turk abiding peace! Otherwise, let there be war; and let the just God of battles judge between us! Surprise us, you cannot; neither will we steal victory. But in fair field, man to man, will we meet you,—with few or with many,—and teach your haughty mouths the taste of Christian valor!"

When the monk had finished, there ran a low growl and bitter laugh amongst the emirs and guardsmen, while Iftikhar laughed loudest of them all.

"Ha! noble monk!" he cried in French, "and you, my Lord de St. Julien, one would never think such bold words could flow out of such empty bellies!"

Richard made him no answer. He saw Kerbogha's right hand twitch, as if to sweep it from left to right, the sign for instant decapitation of the envoys,—an order that fifty eager negroes would have fulfilled. But the general frowned on his guards who started forward, and reined in his fury.

"Peter, take back to Antioch the only resolution left to you and your starving host, whose feasts are on grass and vermin. Let the beardless youth deliver themselves up to me, and I will let them live as my slaves, and of my friends and vassals. Let the young girls come out,—they shall be kept safe in our harems; they say the Frankish maids are fair. As for all those with beards or white

hair, it shall rest with me to put them all to the edge of the sword, or slay some, and load the rest with chains;" and as he spoke he pointed to the leg irons and manacles which lay in great heaps all about the pavilion, ready for the Christian captives. "Yield now, and to *some* I may show mercy. Let not your babbling priests deceive you. Allah has turned against you. Where are your crucified Messiah and your false apostles, that they let you perish like gnats? Yield now; the axe is kinder than death by starving. To such as become Moslem, Al Koran commands to show compassion; for the rest, they must yield themselves into my hands, and take what I will. Do not wait until to-morrow; if you are taken *then*, cry on your God, who could not save even himself from the cross, to save you from my fury!"

When Kerbogha was finished, a great shout went up from the Moslems. "*Allah akhbar!* Away with the infidels!" and there was a rush, as if to hew the three in pieces then and there. But the general motioned them to keep peace, and Peter, whose daring passed a lion's, flashed back his reply:—

"To-morrow, lord of Mosul, you shall judge whether Mohammed, the false prophet, can prevail against the crucified Christ."

"Away! They rush on ruin!" shouted Kerbogha. "Back to the city with them!"

The little monk cast one last glance of defiance at the figure on the throne, and with a slow and steady step the three Christians turned their backs on the gorgeous company, unheeding a thousand threats that buzzed around their ears. Last of all went Richard, and, as he went, a voice called after him in French:—

"Ho! Richard Longsword, stay!"

The Norman halted; he was face to face with Iftikhar Eddauleh. The Ismaelian had thrown back his helmet, so that the gilded plates no longer concealed his face, which wore a very ugly smile. His teeth shone white and sharp as a tiger's, but his poise was lordly as ever.

"I am at your service, my lord!" said the Christian.

Iftikhar dropped his voice to a whisper:—

"You are well fed in Antioch! Your cheeks are thinner than on the day you held the lists at Palermo!"

"And I have done many things since then, my lord, as have you," came the answer. Iftikhar's eyes seemed hot irons to pierce through his enemy, when he replied:—

"Between us two lies so great a hate, that if we were both in Gehenna, I think we would forget our pains in joy of seeing the other scorching."

"That is well said, my lord. But why detain me? I know all this."

Iftikhar's voice sank yet lower, that none of the great company might hear. "You had your day at Aleppo, but to-day is mine. Kerbogha holds your host in the hollow of his hand, yet at my word he will let you march unhindered to Jerusalem."

"I do not follow you, Cid Iftikhar."

The voice became a mere whisper, but how hoarse! "Deliver up to me Mary Kurkuas safely, and I will swear by Allah the Great, that Kerbogha raises the siege!"

Richard laughed in his turn now, for it was joy to see his enemy's pain. "My lord, you cannot tempt me! Praise God Mary Kurkuas is anywhere but in Antioch among our starving host!" But even the Norman almost trembled when he saw the storm of blind fury on the Ismaelian's face.

"Where, as Allah lives,—where is the Star of the Greeks?" raged Iftikhar, his voice unconsciously rising.

"Not all your deaths and torments in the dungeons of El Halebah will wring that from me."

"Then by the Apostle of Allah!" foamed Iftikhar; and he clutched at the Norman's arm, while seeking his own hilt. Kerbogha cut him short:—

"Cid Iftikhar, the Christians are madmen; yet respect the embassy. Let this fellow go!"

Iftikhar flung the arm from him.

"Go then, go," rang his threat in Arabic, which a hundred heard. "To-morrow we will clear the reckoning. It grows ever longer. Do you know," and he showed his white teeth, "I have killed your sister Eleanor with my own hand?"

Richard bowed in his stateliest fashion.

"My lord," said he, "my sister was long since worse than dead; I did not know she was in El Halebah when I came to Aleppo, or I might have rescued. Our Lady is merciful; she has peace. And as for me—ask your own heart if I am a harmless foe; remember you fell at Aleppo twice, thrice, and by my strength! So let God judge us, and give fair battle!"

"Let Him judge!" retorted Iftikhar, turning, and Kerbogha shook out his handkerchief, the signal for the breaking up of the assembly.

So the three Christians were led away, and they did not quail when wild desert dervishes flourished bare cimeters over their heads, and chanted from Al Koran:—

"Strike off their heads and strike off their fingers!

"They shall suffer because they resisted Allah and his apostle!

"Yea, the infidels shall suffer the torment of hell fire!"

While Richard heard Peter muttering softly to himself:—

"Happy shall he be who rewardeth thee, as thou hast served us!

"Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones!"

At last, despite the curses, the three were again safe and sound before the Bridge Gate. They entered, and were surrounded by a vast crowd demanding the result of the embassy. When Peter wished to tell the people of the threats and ragings of Kerbogha, Duke Godfrey, who had been the first to hear, feared lest any should be discouraged. So Peter merely declared that Kerbogha wished instant battle, and was taken before the chiefs. There he and Longsword told of the might and splendor and insolence of the Moslems, how Kerbogha had blasphemed the name of Christ and breathed forth cruelty against the besieged. Then even among the chieftains, despite the miracle of the lance, a few faint hearts trembled. But Bishop Adhemar, standing up, lifted his eyes to heaven and recited solemnly:—

"This is the word of the Lord concerning Kerbogha, as once against Sennacherib, king of Assyria:—

"'Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.

"'But I know thy abode, and thy rage against me.

"'Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way thou camest.

"'For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake and for my servant David's sake!'"

When Adhemar had spoken, there was only one thought at the council,—battle on the morrow! and the heralds-at-arms went through the city, bidding every man prepare to march with the dawn. It was very late, but no man sought his bed. Richard was long with Bohemond, Tancred, Duke Robert, and Godfrey, telling all that he had seen in the Moslem camp: how that despite the numbers and the splendor, discipline seemed lax, and the divisions very ill placed.

Even while the chiefs were in council, all Antioch was rejoicing over a great boon—another favor of Heaven. A secret magazine of corn had been discovered; and a meal of good food was set before every man that night, something that was priceless gain to those who were to struggle for their lives at cockcrow.

There was no despairing now; no helpless lethargy, no longing for "gentle France." One had thought the victory already gained, to go among the host and hear everywhere the *Te Deums* in honor of the Holy Lance and the battle-cry,—so cheerful now,—"God wills it! To Jerusalem!"

The whole host made ready for battle that night with prayer and sacrament. The priests went their rounds through the army, confessing each man; and many a hardened sinner, who had taken even the cross lightly, had his heart melted when his comrades were exchanging the kiss of love, and saying, "God keep us all, dear brothers; who knows but that to-morrow night we shall be sitting with the angels!"

It was almost the gray of dawn when Richard went among his men. He found them cheerful, arms ready, anxiously awaiting the signal for battle.

"My good vassals," said the Norman, "we all stand in the presence of God, seigneur and peasant. You have been faithful vassals to me, and I have tried to be a kindly and just lord to you. Yet if any man have a grievance against me—say on! Let all hear him."

But many voices answered, "You have been a father and elder brother to us, lord; may we all die for you if need be!"

"And I for you!" replied the Baron, deeply touched. Then, after a pause, "Now, my men, are we prepared—body and soul—for victory on earth, or the sight of God the Father?"

"Ready," gruffly replied Herbert; "Sebastian has made us all spotless as young lambs."

"You have many sins to confess, brother," slyly hinted Theroulde. "Sad if you have forgotten some odd killing, that will rise up for judgment!"

"Think of your own lies and cheating," snapped the man-at-arms.

But Sebastian only cried, "Peace! peace!" and told how the meanest villain who died fighting on the morrow was sure of a heavenly throne and a kingdom greater than that of Philip of France. If their past had been wicked, here was an easy penance—given by Bishop Turpin at Roncesvalles, "to smite their best against the infidels"; and always let them remember that all the angels

clapped their hands when an unbeliever fell under the sword, and there was joy unspeakable in the heart of God.

With a vast company the St. Julieners marched through the Bridge Gate at red dawn. "God wills it!" arose the shout from thousands on thousands, while the monks and priests upon the walls began to thunder forth the great psalm:—

"Let God arise: let His enemies be scattered!"

There was a terrible gladness in all hearts—they must fight paynims unnumbered; defeat was death. But death meant welcome to Christ's right hand; victory, the spoiling of Kerbogha.

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# CHAPTER XLI

## HOW LIGHT SMOTE DARKNESS

Now the full story of the battle of Antioch can be told only by that strong angel in whose book are treasured the records of the brave deeds done in faith. When that awful book is unsealed, it will be known why the spirits of evil beguiled Kerbogha into sitting idly in his tent at chess, while the Christian host was issuing from Antioch; why the two thousand Turks who held the head of the Iron Bridge scattered like smoke at the Crusaders' first bolts, to let the starving Franks lead their twelve "battles" across the river, and put them in close array confronting the Moslem line. Long, however, before the grapple came, Kerbogha and his *atabegs* had taken the saddle, and the Christians saw arrayed against them horse and foot innumerable; a wide sea of flashing steel, of bright turbans and surcoats, tossing pennons and lances on plunging desert steeds. From the extreme left wing with the Holy Lance as special talisman borne by Raymond of Agiles where Bishop Adhemar commanded, to the right of the long line where Hugh of Vermandois led, there ran a thrill, and each man whispered to his neighbor "Now!" and steeled his muscles for the shock. No jests and laughter as often before a battle; not a soul now had heart for that. But every eye was bright, every lip firm, and the breath came quick and deep. There was dead hush when Adhemar in mitre and stole went down the line followed by a great company of priests bearing smoking censers, and in their midst a high crucifix. And when he spoke each casqued head bowed, each knee was bent. At the sight even the Moslems seemed to keep silence.

"The peace of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost be in your hearts and keep you. And in the name of the Holy Trinity do battle. Amen!"

So sounded the great benediction. When all rose to their feet, and were locking close the spear hedge, Richard Longsword, one of the few mounted knights who rode as guard around the Holy Lance, heard as it were the roaring of a tempest coming down the wind from the host of Kerbogha, a wild clangor of *atabals* and kettledrums, and the clash of myriad cymbals, and higher and shriller than all, the yell from the mad devotees of Arabia and Khorassan:—

"*La ilaha ill' Allah! La ilaha ill' Allah!*"

The cry pealed from a hundred thousand throats; and the stoutest soldier of the Cross felt a shiver and a tingling, though he were veteran from many a well-fought field. Now, at last, was the issue left to their good swords and God!

But while the Moslem war-shout rent the cloudless dome of morning, an answering echo rolled onward from the Christians, and as if the very shout were the signal, the long line rushed forward, the thousands moving as one.

"God wills it! Death to the unbelievers!"

The lines sprang toward each other like lions of the waste; the broad plain country that stretched northward from the river grew narrow under their swift feet. Then avalanche smote avalanche, light wrestled with darkness!

No horseman's and archer's battle as at Dorylæum; no passage at arms between chieftains while the hosts stood by! But man to man they fought; the starving Franks looking into swarthy faces, where black eyes glanced fire and white teeth flashed hate. So for a moment the Turkoman cavalry strove to break through the Christian spear hedge,—for few French fought mounted that day. But the blooded chargers recoiled from the dense line of lances, and swinging swords, and battle-axes, as from a barrier of live fire, and reeled back to leave the plain red with dying steeds and stricken riders.

The first blood only. For when Kerbogha saw that his horsemen could not ride down the defiant foe at will, he flung forward his archers and javelin-men, until the air grew dark with flying death that searched out the stoutest armor. Then while the arrows yet screeched, and men were falling fast, the Arabians and Turks charged home. Charged—but though the spear wall wavered, it was not broken—while above the shouts and howls of the infidels beseeching Allah, sounded the chanting of the psalm from the priests who stood behind the men-at-arms:—

"Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let them also that hate Him, flee before Him!"

So for the second time the Moslems reeled back. And when Kerbogha, sitting in the midst of his guard at the rear of the battle, saw it, he tore his beard in rising fury, and bade Kilidge Arslan the Seljouk lead his squadrons in circuit to fall on the Christians' rear. Now a third time the Moslems came forward, slowly now, horse and foot, their imams and ulamas crying to them to remember the beauty of the houris, the joys of martyrdom, and to hew in pieces the blasphemers of the Prophet.

At this Richard, who knew Arabic and the fury of the unbelievers, called to his men to lock close about the Holy Lance, for now indeed was the fated hour. Then the Christians heard, outrunning the breeze, the wild howl of the dervishes, to whom death was more welcome than a quiet sleep: —

"Hell and Eblees are behind you! Victory or Paradise before you! Forward!"

"Stand fast, men of Auvergne!" rang the Norman's command; and every lance was braced when the third shock smote them. No charging, recoiling, countercharging, in this supreme wrestle between Christ and Mohammed. The dead piled themselves higher, higher. The desert steeds were spitted like birds on the Frankish lances. The stoutest spears shivered like reeds, and targets were cleft as wicker; but the hand-to-hand combat never slackened. Kerbogha was throwing into the press all his numbers. Again and again Richard Longsword, with Gaston of Béarn, the Count of Die, and Raimbaut of Orange, who fought under Adhemar's banner, charged out, and did deeds of valor to be forgotten only with the last *jongleur*. Each time, as the foe gave way, the hard-pressed Christians set up their *Laus Deo*, dreaming they had the victory. But each time the infidels surged back to the onset; pressing closer, smiting harder, and drowning the Crusaders' prayer to Our Lady with their mad "Allah! Allah!"

Richard, who fought about the Holy Lance, twice saw it reel in the hands of Raymond of Agiles, as fifty unbelievers pressed close. But the Christian footmen around it were a living wall, and not a dervish who put out his hands to grasp the lance turned back alive. Still the battle wavered. Rumors came down the line, now that Godfrey on the centre was victorious, now that Bohemond was desperately beset by Kilidge Arslan. Richard looked to his men; gaps in the lines. Brave fellows whom he loved well were moaning or speechless under those red heaps. But the infidels were still thronging in. The gaps were closed. The fight raged as though the blood spilled were but oil cast into a furnace.

And presently as Richard fought around the lance, he saw a stately figure in gilded armor that he knew well despite the closed helmet,—saw it come pressing through the ranks of the Moslems.

"Ho! Iftikhar Eddauleh," rang the Norman's challenge, as the roar of the conflict lulled for a twinkling, "face to face, and man to man!"

The only answer by the Ismaelian was a lowered lance, and Rollo flew out to greet the charge. For a moment those standing by gave place. They met unhindered. Under the shock each lance flew to splinters, and the good steeds were flung on their haunches.

"Again!" burst from the emir, as his cimeter glanced in the sun. "Again!" And Richard with Trenchefer rode straight at him, the unspeakable hate blinding to all things save his foe. Three times they fenced, and the sparks flew at every stroke. With the fourth, Trenchefer sheared off the black plumes on the Ismaelian's crest. A sweeping blow from Iftikhar answered, but Richard's stout shield parried it.

"God wills it! St. Julien and Mary Kurkuas!" shouted the Norman, flinging his old battle-cry in the face of his mortal foe. But the ruling powers would not let these mad spirits fight longer. Suddenly, in a way none could foresee, the line of battle, as it will, swayed in a great shock; and here Moslems were thrown back, here forward, and comrades were torn asunder. The two were caught in the eddy and whirled wide apart, bitterly against their wills.

"The lance! The lance is in danger!" the Christians were shouting; and Richard saw the holy standard sink out of sight in the seething vortex of battling men and beasts.

"Rescue, rescue, Christian cavaliers!" Bishop Adhemar was moaning; and all unarmed as he was, the prelate was about to thrust himself from behind the protecting shield wall into the death-press. But Gaston of Béarn and Die and Orange, as well as Longsword, were before him. Richard saw Gaston snatch the lance out of the clutch of two Turkomans who grasped it, and hew down both—a blow for each. Then the lance was raised once more, and all Crusaders praised God, and fought more stoutly.

So for long the battle raged; no man knowing how it had fared farther down the line, having wits only for his own struggle, and fighting even that blindly. But suddenly upon the wind black smoke came driving down upon the Christians. At first they scarce knew it in the fierce delirium. Then the smoke came denser, hotter; dimming their eyes, and setting all a-gasping. And almost sooner than the telling, the very grass under their feet was in a flame, fanned onward by a breeze that dashed the fire in their faces, while the deadly blast swept away from the Moslems. Whereupon, for the first time that day, a terrible panic fell on the Christians, as even the dead soil seemed thus to rise up and war against them. Men cast down their swords to flee,—all the horses plunged wildly; while with a shout of triumph, the infidels, blessing their Prophet, pressed on to snatch

the victory.

But at the very moment when all the world seemed turned to ruin, Bishop Adhemar ran down the line up-bearing the crucifix. A hundred paynim arrows sped toward him; not one flew true, for some angel turned all aside.

"See!" was his cry above the howls of the dervishes. "See, Christians, the sufferings of your Lord! Stand fast, if you would prove that Christ died not in vain!"

And when the Franks thought of their God upon the tree,—of the Holy Agony,—their own agony was forgot. Wounded men, whose life was running out in blood, sprang to their feet and fought like Roland's peers; those who had turned to flee, looked back, ran again into the press through the mad flames, and gave the Moslems blow for blow.

Yet this could not last forever; the limit to what human might could do was very near. Denser the smoke, hotter the fire. Barely with all his strength could Richard now hold Rollo, and he knew while yet he fought, that unless the smoke were turned, the boast of Kerbogha would not be vain. A wail of despair was rising from the Christians: "*Kyrie eleison! Kyrie eleison!*" and the triumphant "*Allah akhbar!*" of the Moslems seemed the sole answer.

Then, even with his sinful and corporeal eyes, each Crusader had proof that on his side strove the Lord of Battles! For as the smoke blew blinding, with a great gust the wind changed, and the fire that Kilidge Arslan had lit for his foes' destruction turned to his own. Strong and fresh from the west came a piping sea-breeze, and the smoke swept in one heavy cloud into the faces of the infidels! So sudden the deliverance, that the Franks stood speechless, marvelling at this great act of God. And while thus they stood, Bishop Adhemar pointed with his staff toward the northern hills.

"Behold, Christians! Three knights clothed in white armor, the succor promised by God! The martyrs George, Demetrius, and Theodore fight for us! Forward, all who love Our Lord!"

Forward and ever forward. No faltering now, for it was the Moslems that were howling to the Prophet to save them from the smoke and the flame, and were shrinking back in panic. Down the line the Christian trumpets were sounding the charge, and the news flew fast that Godfrey and Tancred were sweeping all before them, while Hugh and Bohemond held their own.

Then a marvellous madness seized the host of Adhemar. It was midday; they were starving; they had fought for life since dawn, but each man felt his feet wings when crossing that fire-seared plain.

"God wills it! Death to the infidels!"

At the cry even the dervishes gave way. The onrush of the Christians made the unbelievers scatter to the four winds; the fleet desert-steeds of the horsemen, caught in the press and panic, struggled vainly to escape and lead the flight. The Franks were upon them! the Franks had been granted victory by Allah! It was fate! Let who could shun his doom!

"And the stars in their courses fought against Sisera!" cried Sebastian, swinging his mace at the head of the St. Julien men as they joined in the onset. Then suddenly as had changed the wind, the Christians hardened their ranks to endure again the shock; for, brushing aside their fleeing comrades, came the white-robed "devoted,"—the Ismaelians, held by Iftikhar as a last reserve,—sent forth to snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat; twelve thousand wild spirits whose one longing was to slay Christians, and hasten to the embraces of the black-eyed maids of Paradise. Fair upon the Frankish line, broken and disorganized even by victory, Iftikhar flung his thunderbolt. Over the dead and over the living charged the Ismaelians. With them went again the battle-shout raised by so many Moslem armies, never in vain:—

"*La ilaha ill' Allah! La ilaha ill' Allah!*"

"Bear up, Christians! This is the last charge!" urged Gaston of Béarn, but more than brave words were needed to turn that blast. The "devoted" smote the Frankish spear hedge, and for the first time that day broke through it. The Holy Lance went down under twenty slain; the Christian war-cry was drowned by the howl of the Ismaelians: "*Allah akhbar!* Victory! Victory!" As out of a dream, Richard saw that the battle had swept round him, with only hostile faces on every side. But he had no time to think of peril; for he was face to face again with Iftikhar Eddauleh himself, and at the sight he sent Rollo straight against the grand prior.

"Again! Cid Iftikhar, let God judge between us!" he cried. But the Ismaelian avoided the shock, swerving to one side, and answered: "Fool! Allah has already judged! Take him prisoner, slaves! Pluck him from his horse!"

Nothing easy; for though twenty of the "devoted" leaped to the ground to do as bidden, they found nothing sweet in the taste of Trenchefer. Richard put the face of Mary Kurkuas before his eyes while he fought: should he never see her more? The thought made his arm strong as forged steel. But just as the Ismaelians were crying to their lord that the terrible Frank could never be taken alive, and begging to use their swords, a blow of a mace crushed Longsword's right shoulder. His arm sank at his side, and Trenchefer nigh dropped from the numbed fingers. He saved the sword with his left hand, casting away the shield.

"Yours! Seize! Bind!" exhorted Iftikhar. Yet even now there was a struggle, for Rollo that loved

his master well made his great hoofs fly as he plunged and reared, and Richard's left arm dealt no weak blow.

"Cowards!" thundered the grand prior; "let me curb in the horse!" But while he pressed nearer, a terrible howl of dread went up from the "devoted" themselves.

"Allah save us! All is lost! The Christians conquer!"

And as Iftikhar and Richard looked about them they saw the "battles" of Tancred and Godfrey, that had not endured the Ismaelian's charge, bearing down in serried line to drive this last Moslem squadron from the field.

"Turn, Iftikhar Eddauleh!" Louis de Valmont's voice was ringing, "turn, and fight!" But Iftikhar only gave a bitter curse, and spurred away among his men. Adhemar's division had been shattered, not dispersed. The Christians were pressing in on all sides. The cry was spreading that Kilidge Arslan was in flight. The Franks saw Iftikhar re-forming his "devoted"—much less than twelve thousand now, though none had fled away; they half heard the imprecation he called upon them if they rode in vain. They formed, they charged; each rider a demon upon a steed possessed. They cast away their lives with an awful gladness. But the Christian spear wall was as iron, though pressed by springing steel. There was no other charge. Where the Ismaelians struck, they fought; where they fought, they died; and where they died, no other Moslems leaped to take their place. The thunderbolt had fallen—the storm had passed!

And now praised be God the Son, and Mary ever Blessed! The infidels were become as stubble to Prince Tancred's sword, and to Bohemond, Hugh, and Godfrey. Loud and victorious sounded now the chant, ever repeated:—

"Let God arise; let His enemies be scattered!"

And scattered they were! "How is it, Lord?" said the chronicler; "how dare men say that it was not Thy doings that the great host of Kerbogha melted like the spring snows before us, when we were weak with famine, and one where they were three? How, save by Thy help, did our poor jaded steeds fly like eagles after their Arabs, and overtake those chargers swifter than the lightnings? How, save by Thy grace, did Prince Tancred ride alone against an hundred, and see them flee as leaves before the gale?" How? The whole army knew, for the age of doubting had not come.

"Not unto us, Lord; not unto us! But unto Thy name be the glory!" was the prayer of Adhemar, as he stood with his priests about him, while far to the eastward and northward drifted the rout and pursuing. For there was no valor in the Moslems now. Their chiefs fled swiftest of all; one way Kerbogha, another Dekak of Damascus, another Kilidge Arslan. And their camp with a treasure worth half the wealth of France, and swarming with eunuchs and harem women, had become a spoil to the servants of God and His Christ. The thought however was not of spoil, but of pursuit and vengeance. Loudest of all among the priests sounded the voice of Sebastian, urging on the warriors.

"The heathen are sunk down into the pit that they made; in the net which they made is their own foot taken! Pursue—follow after; tarry not; for this is the acceptable day of the Lord—the day when one of you shall chase a thousand; when you shall smite the infidels as Israel smote Amalek—man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass! Destroy, let not one escape!"

Fierce and unflagging the pursuit. Tancred mounted his footmen as swiftly as they could capture horses, and hunted the fleeing Moslems over plain and mountain. Here and there the despairing Turks and Arabians turned like beasts at bay when the terrible Franks crashed on them. But there was no strength left in a Moslem's arm. Doom—doom against the servants of the Prophet had been decreed by the stars—not the might of all Islam could turn back the stroke of fate. Here and there the raging Christians came on foes who cast down the useless weapons, and stretching out their hands, cried in a tongue which all knew: "Quarter! Mercy!" But they had better pleaded with stones; for that day there was none of mercy. The battle had begun with the morning; the shadows were lengthening on the hills when Tancred turned back his pursuers near Harin, halfway to Aleppo, and rode back toward Antioch, still galloping, for fear his comrades had squandered all the spoil.

Long before the last chase was ended, Richard Longsword had been borne to the city. Despite his crushed shoulder and lifeless arm, he had urged on Rollo to the pursuit, almost hoping that he would meet Iftikhar once more; though how, all maimed, he could have fought the Ismaelian, St. Michael only knew. He saw the last struggle around the encampment of Kerbogha, where the camp-followers tried to defend the palisade and were destroyed by firing the barrier; he saw the Christians dragging out the spoil,—rarest silk and webs of Ind, and unpriced gems; fifteen thousand sumpter camels; howling slave girls; shivering servants. He knew that the great battle, the battle against the infidel he and his fellows had dreamed of so long, had been fought, and won; and that the tale of the victory would fly from Britain to Tartary. And yet he half felt a sense of sadness: he had met Iftikhar Eddauleh face to face, and yet the Ismaelian lived. They told him that when the last charge failed Iftikhar had turned his steed's head and ridden away, joining Kerbogha and the fleeing emirs and *atabegs*. Then Richard breathed a deep curse; for he knew, though no clear reason came, that the grand prior, coward though his flight had proven him, would in some way work great ill either to himself or those he loved. He bade the St. Julieners search the camp to find if Mary Kurkuas and Musa had been present at the battle. No trace; he

was at once saddened and relieved. Then, just as the first procession of triumph, laden with dainties and rich wines from the camp for the starving city-folk, was preparing to enter Antioch, the Norman felt of a sudden the firm earth whirling, and as his sight dimmed, the din in his ears drowned all the *Glorias* and *Te Deums* of the rejoicing multitude. Herbert saw him reel on Rollo's back, and caught him just as he dropped to the earth. Sebastian loosed his casque—found it full of blood; a dervish's blade had cleft to the bone. His shoulder was crushed; from ten more spots he was bleeding. The St. Julieners laid their baron on a litter of lances and bore him to the city. Nor did Richard know aught more for many days.

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# CHAPTER XLII

## HOW MORGIANA WOUND HER LAST SPELL

Wrong had been done Iftikhar, when the Franks boasted he had fled headlong with Kerbogha and his coward *atabegs*. Had all his peers in the Moslem host fought as he, there might have been fewer Christian *Glorias*. Where death was thickest he had sought it. Under his cimeter had sped many a Frankish life. At the end he had led the final charge of his "devoted," maddest rider in all that headlong band. But doom had been against him; the Ismaelians had died where they could not conquer. Iftikhar, escaping fifty deaths, had thrown himself into a band of flying Turkomans, beseeching, threatening, adjuring, to make them turn for a last stand. One howl met his prayer.

"Fate is against us! Flee! Flee! Allah aids the Franks!"

He struck the fugitives with his cimeter; they fled more swiftly. He thrust his beast across their path; the good Arabian was nigh swept down in the vortex of the panic. Panic everywhere, the Franks flying after, each Christian a raging jinn whose joy was slaying.

Then at last Iftikhar knew he could do no more, and he turned the head of his wounded steed to ride on the Christian lances. But just as he was casting shield away, that death might light more quickly, the hand of a strange rider plucked his saddle rein, and before the grand prior could strike at the unknown, Zeyneb's voice sounded in his ears above the "*Montjoye!*" of the onrushing French:

"What, Cid? You ride to death?"

"Unhand!" thundered Iftikhar, "all is lost! I know how to die!"

But Zeyneb with a wondrous strength had tugged at the bits and swung the charger's head; and close by, the Egyptian saw another rider, unarmored, in a flowing dress,—but the face was turned from him.

"You are mad, lord!" cried Zeyneb. "Do not cast yourself away. Fate will change, Allah willing!"

Then, as Iftikhar struggled to turn, a squadron of flying Persian light horse struck them, and swept the three riders away perforce in its flight.

"Faster, faster!" the Persians were shrieking; "the Franks! Their horses are vultures! their strength as of monsters!"

Iftikhar cursed while he strove vainly to escape them and ride against the pursuers.

"Fools, sons of pigs and Jews!" roared he; "see, scarce ten men follow, and you an hundred. Turn; ride them down!"

"They are ten sheytans," yelled the rest, spurring harder. "Speed, brothers, speed!"

Iftikhar glanced back. Behind him flew De Valmont and Tancred, who knew him by his armor, and taunted:—

"Face to face, Cid Iftikhar; did you fly thus at Palermo?"

But the Persians pricked their beasts to a headlong gallop; the Franks rode down some, and slew them; the rest made their escape. When the Christians left the chase in the evening, Iftikhar found himself with a wounded and weary steed upon the bare Syrian hill slope, with only Zeyneb for escort. The strangely dressed rider he had noticed, followed half an arrow flight behind; but the Egyptian gave little heed. Hardly had he drawn rein before another squadron of breathless riders joined him, their horses' flanks in blood and foam. Their chief was Kerbogha, master that morning of two hundred thousand sword-hands, master that night of scarce fifty. Iftikhar bowed his casque in gloomy salutation, but the lord of Mosul did not return it.

"Cid Iftikhar," came his words, cold as ice, "we have played our chess-game with fortune. Mated! and we play no more! Forget that I have known you!"

"I do not understand, my lord!" protested Iftikhar, his color rising.

"Clearer, then," and Kerbogha peered backward, lest the Frankish banners tossed again in the

gloaming. "We went to Antioch first to crush the Franks, but also to gather, unhindered and unsuspected, an army to grind Barkyarok and the Kalif. We gathered the army. Where it is now, demand of the winds and the blood-red plain! Our plot is ended. Barkyarok will suspect. Let Hassan Sabah gain his empire in his own way. I must save myself by forswearing the Ismaelians and be all loyalty to the arch-sultan. As for you, let Allah save or slay, you are neither friend nor foe to me. Go your way; forget me, as I forget you!"

"But our oaths—our pledge of comradeship till death!" urged Iftikhar, in rising wrath.

"Death? A hundred thousand dead Moslems have wiped out the bond. Cursed be the day I listened to your plots!"

"Then answer sword to sword!" raged the Egyptian, in frenzy, and ready to join mortal grapple. But a shout from the emir's escort sent Kerbogha fleeing away, without so much as replying.

"The Franks! They follow! Flight, flight!"

A false alarm, but the lord of Mosul and his fifty had vanished in the thickening twilight; his speed such that the hoof-beats were soon faint in the distance. Iftikhar looked about him. The night was sowing the stars. The young moon was shining with its feathery crescent. Far and wide stretched the desolate hills, fast fading into one black waste. Lost! the battle lost! the hope of empire lost! the vengeance on Richard lost! the love of Mary Kurkuas lost! He had only a wounded horse, his cimeter, and his arms. That morning twelve thousand men would have died for him at his nod. Yes, and had died! It was the stroke of doom, the doom that had been written a million years, before Allah called the heavens out of smoke, the earth out of darkness; and there was no escaping. The Christians had turned back to Antioch, but Iftikhar knew where to find them. He could ride back on his tracks, enter their camp, slay seven men before dying himself, and give the lie to the taunts of De Valmont and Tancred. So doing he would save one last treasure—his honor.

"Zeyneb!" he said sternly, "go your way. You are at the end of your service. I must ride to Antioch."

"And why to Antioch, Cid?"

"To win back the honor you stole from me."

Iftikhar had leaped to the ground to tighten his girths, when the strange rider came beside him and dismounted. As he rose from his task, he saw a veiled woman facing him; and while he started and trembled, she swept the veil from her face. Morgiana standing in the moonlight!

For an instant not a word passed. Then Iftikhar spoke: "Morgiana, surely Eblees will gain you at last, since he sends you here." His voice was shaking with towering passion.

"I have come to save you, my Cid," answered she.

"To save me?" burst from the Egyptian. "To save me? To drag down to Gehenna rather; to speed me to endless torture!"

She turned her face away. "Not that," she pleaded, "not that. Have I not loved you, and been ever faithful?"

He sprang at her, caught her by the throat.

"You have indeed *loved me*! Hearken: through your love for me you strengthened the Greek to resist me; through your love for me you saved Richard and his comrades, and plucked the Greek from me; through your love the accursed Norman and Duke Godfrey were able to escape, to warn their army, when ready to drop unresisting into the net spread by Kerbogha. This siege, this battle, this loss of myriads, is your handiwork; is *yours*,—and for it you shall die. Would to Allah I had killed you long ago!"

He had drawn his cimeter, and brandished above her. She raised her eyes and looked at him unflinching.

"*Wallah!*" cried he, wavering, "there is magic in your eyes. The sheytans aid you! Yet you shall die!"

Morgiana's face was not pale now; all the blood had returned; her eyes were brighter than red coals. She wrested her neck from his grasp, and caught his sword-hand, held it fast, with a strange, giant-like strength that frighted him.

"Strike!" cried she; "but as Allah lives and judges, first hear. Where are your twelve thousand? I have seen them all dead. Your hopes of power? Sped to the upper air. And the Greek? Allah knoweth. All these lost, but not I. No, by the All-Great you shall not strike until you hear me; for I am strong—stronger than you. I have been cursed, but have not replied; been hated, but paid in love; been wronged, but remained faithful. Now hope goes to ruin; war, love, friends,—all is lost, —saving I. But me you shall not lose. Either on earth you shall keep me near, to joy in your joys, to sorrow in your sorrows; or dying, my spirit shall be yet closer, to follow your path in heaven, earth, or hell—bittering every sweet, trebling every woe, haunting, goading, torturing, until you curse tenfold the hour you forgot the love of Morgiana, maid of Yemen!"

And when Morgiana had spoken, she cast Iftikhar's hand from her, and bowed her head, as if

waiting the stroke. But the Ismaelian's arm had fallen. He stood as in a trance, for before his storm-driven soul passed the vision of that Morgiana of other days, before the babe died and he set eyes on the Greek,—those days when he boasted he asked no Paradise, for the kiss of the fairest houri was already his. His sword-arm trembled. The woman said not a word, but raised her eyes again, not burning, but mild and tender he saw them now, lit with soft radiance in the dim moonlight. He felt the mad fury chained as by some resistless spell. Presently he spoke, the words dragged as it were from the depths of his soul:—

"Some jinn is aiding you! Live then this once. I shall be cursed again for sparing."

Morgiana's only answer was to kneel and kiss his feet. Then she rose and stood with bent head and folded arms waiting his wishes. But Zeyneb had flitted between.

"Cid," he said abruptly, "there are horsemen approaching, very likely Christians; the gallop is that of heavy northern horses. Let us ride."

"Ride?" asked the dazed Iftikhar, "whither?" And he looked at Morgiana. His iron will was broken; he was content to let her lead him. She had already remounted.

"Toward Emesa, my Cid," she said directly.

"And what is there?" asked he, still dazed.

"The road to Egypt. You have still a name and a fame. All is not lost while Allah gives life. You are still young. The Egyptian kalif will rejoice to welcome such a warrior to his service."

"*Mashallah!*" cried Iftikhar, raising his hands, "when did you devise all this for me?"

"Many days since, lord. For in the hemp smoke it was written Kerbogha and the 'devoted' should fail."

"And you have been hidden at El Halebah?"

"No," she replied, "I have been closer than you dreamed, in your tents before Antioch, concealed by Zeyneb, to be near you when the need should be great. When the Christians stormed the camp I was taken by Duke Godfrey. In gratitude he set me free, and gave me a horse. I found Zeyneb and followed after you, that you might not cast your life away."

He went up to her as she sat on the saddle, put his arms about her, kissed her many times. And upon that Syrian hillside, under the stars, Morgiana found her moment of Paradise. He said nothing; but the Arabian laughed as she looked up at the sky.

"Praised be Allah, All-merciful," she cried. "The old is sped, the new is waiting. Mary the Greek is gone—will be forgotten. May I never hear word of her again!"

"I have been blind to the love of this woman," muttered Iftikhar, bounding into the saddle; "I have been blind, and Heaven restores sight. Yet if Mary the Greek is to be forgotten, may she never again cross my path. But this is left to Allah."

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# CHAPTER XLIII

## HOW THE ARMY SAW JERUSALEM

Of the weary days passed by Richard Longsword while his wound was healing, of how Sebastian and Herbert bled him, poulticed him with poppy leaves, and physicked him with sage, there is no time to tell. Neither is there space to relate the lesser misfortunes that befell the Crusaders, after the greatest misfortune at the hands of Kerbogha had been escaped through Heaven's mercy. For in the days that the army waited in Antioch a great plague fell upon it, which swept away all the weak and aged the famine had spared. Chief amongst those taken was Bishop Adhemar, who was not permitted in this mortal body to see the triumph of the cause he loved so well. There were quarrels and desertions amongst the chiefs. Hugh of Vermandois went away to Constantinople and returned no more. Raymond of Toulouse, and Bohemond, who took Antioch for his own principality, were at strife unceasing,—once passing the lie before the very altar. Thus the season was wasted, and the host frittered away its time around Antioch. Richard recovered and grew mightily impatient. To Jerusalem he must go, or the blood of Gilbert de Valmont must rest upon his soul. Long since the desire of knightly adventure had been fully sated. But his northern determination was unshaken as ever. His heart was always running ahead of the loitering host. To sweeten his delay, a letter had come through a Jew merchant from Tyre. Musa's tale had been received in Kerbogha's camp; he had been kindly entreated, but he had at once obtained transport to Tyre, whence he expected a ship for Egypt. Mary was well. In Egypt she would await the end of the war. Then, however Allah might rule the issue, Richard would be free to return homeward, and could receive back Mary safe and spotless from his brother's care.

So Richard took courage, and counted the days till once more he could see the pleasant hills of Auvergne, the teeming valley; and dreamed of the hours when he would sit in the castle halls,

with Mary at his side, and how they would fleet the days under the ancient trees beside the green-banked fosse, forever, forever. But those blessed days could not come till the Holy City was ransomed; and no spirit was gladder than Longsword's when the host started southward in the long-awaited springtime.

At last the army had begun its final march, not an emir drawing sword against it; for the fear of Frankish valor had spread over all Islam. None of the host had desire for besieging any city save Jerusalem, and when they sat down before Archas they met only discomfiture. But while before Archas, Peter Barthelmy, puffed with pride, vowed he would silence those who ventured—after safe lapse of time—to doubt the miracle of the holy lance. Waxing confident, and boasting new visions from St. Andrew, he offered himself for the ordeal. In the presence of the whole host he passed down a lane of blazing fagots. None denied that he left the flames alive; but a few days later he was dead. "Impostor," cried the Northern French, who said the fire smote him, as being a deceiver. But the Provençals called him a martyr, having passed through the flames unhurt, but trampled down by his enemies in the throng when he came forth from the fire. As for Sebastian, he would only cock one eye, when asked of the miracle of the lance, and keep silence. Once Theroulde said to his face:—

"Father, were you a sinful man, I should say you were itching to peddle forth a good story."

But the story Sebastian never told.

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Soon enough poor Barthelmy's fate was forgotten. For the host was now treading a soil made sacred by the steps of prophets and apostles and holy men of old. The Franks forgot weary feet, the long journey and all its pains, when the march wound under the rocky spurs of Lebanon, and by the green Sidonian country. From Tyre they saw the blue sea, behind whose distant sky-line they knew beloved France was lying. They traversed the plain of Acre, climbed Carmel's towering crest. And now the swiftest marching seemed feeble. Jerusalem was nigh—Jerusalem, the city of God, goal of every hope, for whose deliverance myriads had laid down their lives. The toilsome way through Illyria, the passage-at-arms at Dorylæum, the march of agony through "Burning Phrygia," the starving, the death grapple in battle, and the pestilence at Antioch—all forgotten now! "God wills it! To Jerusalem!" was the cry that made the eager steps press onward from sun to sun; and men found the summer nights too long that held them back. A strange ecstasy possessed the army. Without warning whole companies would break out into singing, clashing their arms and running forward with holy gladness.

"God is with us! The saints are with us! Jerusalem is at hand!" was the shout that flew from lip to lip, as the host passed Sharon, and prepared to strike off from the coast road for the final burst of speed across the Judean plains to the Holy City. Richard rode on, as in an unearthly dream. Half he thought to see legions of angels and hoary prophets rise from behind each hilltop. When he set eyes on a great boulder, a thrill passed at the thought, "Jesus Christ doubtless has looked on this." Almost sacrilege it was for Rollo to pound the dusty road; blessed dust—had it not felt the mortal tread of fifty holy ones, now reigning in eternal light?

So the march hastened. When the dusty columns tramped through Lydda, every man beat his breast, and said his *Pater noster*, in memory of St. George the warrior, who there had won his martyr's crown. At Ramla they halted to adore the very ground where Samuel the Prophet of God had been born.

And now at the end of a day's march they were only sixteen short miles from Jerusalem, and the leaders held a council. For some who even to the last were faint-hearted wished to march past Jerusalem and strike Egypt, since it was said water and provisions were failing about the Holy City. But Godfrey, standing in the assembly, said after his pure, trustful manner:—

"We came to Palestine, not to smite the Egyptian kalif, but to free the tomb of Christ. Bitterly reduced as we are in numbers, let us only go straight on. Will God, who plucked us out of the clutch of Kilidge Arslan and Kerbogha, suffer us to fail at the last? Up tents! weariness, away! and forward this very night!"

Then all the braver spirits cried with one voice: "We will not fail! God wills it!" So the order spread through the camp, though hardly yet pitched, to march forward at speed; and when the army heard it they blessed God, and each man strode his swiftest to be the first to set eyes on Jerusalem.

It was the evening of the ninth of June in the year of grace one thousand and ninety-nine; three years and a half since the great cry had swelled around Urban at Clermont, that the Christian army set out for this last march to the Holy City. The Christian army—alas! not the army that had ridden forth from France,—that had arrayed itself so splendidly on the plains of Nicæa! For of the hundred thousands, there were scarce fifty thousand left; and of these, twelve thousand alone were in full state for battle. The bones of the martyrs lined the long road from the Bosphorus to Judea. Many had fallen behind, sick; many had turned back craven. But the head of an army dies hardest; of the twelve thousand warriors that pricked their weary steeds across the arid Syrian land, not one but was a man of iron with a soul of steel. Bohemond and Hugh and Stephen of Blois had deserted; but Robert the Norman was there, with Raymond of Toulouse, Tancred, and

Godfrey, bravest of the brave.

A little after nightfall they struck camp, with the bright eastern stars twinkling above them. As they marched, they saw before them all the plains and mountains ablaze, where the commandant of Jerusalem was burning the outlying villages, to desolate the country against their coming. Richard Longsword, who rode with Tancred and a picked corps sent ahead to seize Bethlehem, heard the tales of the despairing native Christians who came straggling in to greet their deliverers. They blessed the saints in their uncouth Syriac for the help they had awaited so long, and bade the Franks be speedy with vengeance; for the Egyptian governor was breathing out cruelty against the servants of Christ.

"And who may this commandant be?" demanded the Norman of an old peasant who spoke a little Greek.

"Iftikhar Eddauleh, once of the cursed Ismaelians, lord," answered the fugitive, whimpering when he glanced toward his blazing vineyard. "Oh! press on, for the love of Christ! The Egyptians have driven my son and my daughter like sheep inside of Jerusalem, to hold as hostages. They say that the emir even threatens to destroy the tomb of Our Lord in his mad ragings!"

Richard thundered out a terrible oath.

"Now, by the Trinity and Holy Cross, God do so to me if Iftikhar Eddauleh long escape the devil! He, emir of Jerusalem! Praised be every saint, we shall yet stand face to face!"

And under the starlight Rollo, as if knowing that the last stretch of the weary road had come, ran onward with his long, unflagging gallop. It was very dark; but the red glare of the villages was sure beacon. Once Rollo stumbled and barely recovered. Longsword dropped his companions one by one. A single thought possessed him now,—over those dark, low-lying hills, barely traced under the stars, lay Jerusalem—City of God on earth! And in Jerusalem waited his mortal foe, and the vengeance he had wooed so long! Vengeance, sweet as the kiss of Mary Kurkuas; sweeter, if so might be. In his revery, as he galloped, he saw neither hills, nor stars, nor road; he dreamed only of Trenchefer carving its way through the Ismaelian.

Vengeance, the clearing of his vow, return to France, to love—all these just on before! Richard was lost in the vision. Suddenly the click and thunder of a steed at headlong pace shook him from the revery. What rider this, that gained on Rollo? A voice through the darkness:—

"Ho! friend; why so fast? Your company!"

It was the voice of Godfrey. Richard had reined instinctively. The Duke was beside him.

"By St. George, fair lord," cried the Norman, "where is your own corps? Why ride you here alone?"

Godfrey laughed under his helmet.

"Could I leave Tancred the glory and the boast, 'I first set eyes on the Holy City'? Under cover of the dark I left Baldwin du Bourg to bring up my men, and spurred forward. I knew that with me would ride one whose right arm is none the weakest."

"Forward, then!" returned Richard; "I have joy in your company, my lord."

"Please God, we shall meet a few infidels and avenge the burned villages," muttered Godfrey, as they flew on. "Ten paynims to one Christian are fair odds with Jerusalem so nigh!"

But the wish was unrealized. They rode for a while in silence; met no more fugitives, nor any of the garrison. Presently the horses fell to a walk. The light of the burning hamlets died away. Very dark—only in the farthest east there was a dim redness. No smouldering farmhouse, a light brightening slowly, slowly. A soft warm southern wind was creeping across the plain. To the left the twain just saw black cedars massed in a dark ravine. There was an awe and hush on all the earth. Behind came the clink of arms, the click of men and steeds; but from Tancred's company drifted no murmur. Who craved speech at such an hour? Slower the steps of the horses. A hill slope extended before—a blank form in the dark. The wind seemed to hush as they advanced. Richard knew that never in all life had awe possessed him more utterly. He heard the water trickling in a hidden brooklet. Out of a tamarisk whirred a wild partridge. How great the noise! Did Rollo know he trod down holy ground, his great feet fell so softly? The sky grew brighter—rocks, trees, hillocks springing to being; the blackness was gray, the gray was tinged with red, the stars were fading.

Godfrey whispered softly to Richard:—

"From what the pilgrims say, we now climb the Mount of Olives. Before us lies the chapel of the Ascension, beyond—Jerusalem! Let us kneel and pray that God make us worthy to behold His Holy City."

The two knights dismounted, fell on their knees, their hearts almost too full even for silent prayer. "So many agonies, so bitter loss, so many days! At last! At last!" This was all Richard Longsword knew. He tried to confess his sins; to say *mea culpa*, but his one thought was of thanksgiving. With Godfrey he rose and led Rollo by the bridle upward. They ascended slowly, reverently, counting each rock and nestling olive tree. And with their mounting, mounted the light. Now Richard looked back—a wide, dim landscape faded away into the rosy east, peaks and

plain, more peaks all desolate, and farthest of all a little steel-gray shimmer, where he knew the Dead Sea lay. Still the light strengthened, making all the landscape red gold; the naked chalk rock to the west lit with living fire. Behind hasted the whole van—footmen running abreast of the horsemen, priests outstripping the warriors, and one priest speeding before all—Sebastian. He overtook the two knights, breathless with his speed; but the new light not brighter than the light in his eyes. He said nothing. The three pressed forward. Four and twenty hours, barely halting, all had advanced, but who was weary?

Suddenly the host behind broke forth chanting as they toiled upward,—the psalm tenfold louder in the morning stillness:—

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness.
Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north,
The city of the great King."

The chant went up to heaven and seemed to call forth more light from the glowing east. Suddenly every voice hushed,—silence as never before. For all thoughts went deeper than word or cry. The last mist stole upward, a thin gray haze; the sun-ball hung behind the highest peak of Moab. His tip crept above it; Longsword glanced back. A cry from Sebastian recalled him.

"Jerusalem!"

It came as a great cry and sigh in one from the priest. He had cast himself on the bare summit and kissed the holy rock.

Richard and Godfrey looked westward, and bathed in the dawn—*they saw the Holy City*. They saw gray walls and a dim brown country, naked almost of tree or shrub, and white houses peering above frowning battlements. Dominating over all they saw the dome of the mosque on the Sacred Rock,—token of the enemies of Christ. What mattered it now?

"Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" the cry was passing down the line, and made the climbing easy as though on eagle's wings.

"Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" Richard saw strong men falling on their faces, as had he. And his and every other's cheek was wet, for tears would come,—no shame when they looked upon the city of their risen Lord! Gray stones and brown cliffs, thorns and thistles, dust and drought, naked plains, burned by blasting heat; so be it! This their goal, the object of an untold agony! Could human hearts be filled so full and not break? Godfrey flung his arms about Richard, and their iron lips exchanged the kiss of awful gladness. Words they had none, save that one word. They named the Holy City a thousand times: "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" And men prayed God then and there to die, for already their souls were wrapt to heaven. Tancred the haughty, who had just come up, saw at his side a simple man-at-arms, a plodding peasant's son; but the great Prince had forgotten all, save that for both one Saviour died.

"My brother! My brother in Christ!" Tancred was pleading, as he gave the kiss of love, "Pray for me! pray for me! I am a very sinful man!"

They remained thus upon the mountain, weeping and laughing and stretching forth their hands, till the sun had risen far above the mountains. Had the Egyptians sallied forth to smite, scarce a sword would have flashed, so dear seemed martyrdom. But at length the hour of transfiguration was past. Godfrey had risen for the last time from his knees. He mounted and pointed with his good sword to the minarets and the clusters of spears upon the lowering battlements.

"Forward, Christians!" rang the command; "the infidels still hold the City of God! Forward! there is yet one fight to be won in Our Lord's dear name!"

Then another cry thundered from the army, each blade leaping from scabbard:—

"God wills it! God wills it!" And the unbelievers must have seen the Mount of Olives a sea of flashing steel, while the bulwarks of Zion rang with the shouting.

"Yes," Richard heard from Sebastian, bowing low his head, "this truly is the will of God! The hour of my deliverance from this evil world is nigh."

The ranks closed, and as the host marched down the slopes of Olivet, the priests sang, advancing:—

"Blessed City, heavenly Salem,
  Vision dear of Peace and Love,
Who of living stones art builded,
  Art the joy of Heaven above,
And with angel cohorts circled,
  As a bride to earth doth move!"

Then the whole army rolled out the mighty *Gloria*:—

"Laud and honor to the Father!
  Laud and honor to the Son!
Laud and honor to the Spirit!

Ever Three and ever One!
Con-substantial, Co-eternal!
While unending ages run!"

So the cliffs echoed back the singing, the Christian host moved onward, driving the last squadrons of the Egyptians inside the walls, and sending divisions southward to raise Tancred's standard over Bethlehem. All that day the Crusaders streamed over the heights of Emmaus, raising the song of Isaiah:—

> "Awake, awake, O Jerusalem: break forth into joy: put on thy beautiful garments: for the Lord hath comforted His people: He hath redeemed Zion."

But Richard had driven Rollo close to the Gate of St. Stephen, mocking a cloud of infidel arrows, and on the walls directing the garrison, he had seen a figure in gilded armor he would have known among ten thousand. That night, if his vows against Iftikhar Eddauleh had been strong, they were threefold stronger now.

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# CHAPTER XLIV

## HOW MORGIANA BROUGHT WARNING

How, as related in his letter, Musa had entered the camp of Kerbogha, made his guileful tale believed, and escaped safely with Mary Kurkuas to Tyre, we have no need to tell. When the Spaniard was landed at that city, he dreamed unwisely that his troubles were at an end. An easy voyage to Damietta, an easy journey to Cairo, and at Cairo a spacious palace awaited him as emir in service to the Fatimite Mustaali. There the Greek could spend the time in quiet and luxury until the Crusade had run its course. But, again, Musa was to learn that the book of doom contains many things contrary to the wish of man. While at Tyre a letter came from the omnipotent grand vizier, Al Afdhal, ordering him to hasten at once to Jerusalem and assume the post of second in command. A high honor; and the vizier added that the Spaniard had been given this signal trust, both because all in Cairo had learned to put confidence in his valor and discretion, and because the Christians would be sure to reach the city soon, where the defenders should be familiar with their warfare.

Musa spent half a day in vain maledictions over this letter. By refusing the kalif's daughter he had put his neck in peril once; to decline this second honor would be to invite the bowstring. Hardly could he bring himself to lay his dilemma before the Greek. She had been lodged with all honor in the harem of the Egyptian governor of the city, for Musa had passed her before the world as his own Christian slave. When the Spaniard came to her, he professed himself willing to throw over his position in Egypt and fly to Tunis, if she bade him. But Mary only smiled and shook her head. "Dear friend," said she, "you shall go to no more pains on my behalf. The Holy Mother knows I spend many an evening crying when I think of all the brave men, just and base, who have died or run perils for my sinful sake."

"Then what am I to do?" protested the Spaniard, with one of his eloquent gestures. "Go to Jerusalem?"

Mary was silent for a long time; then said directly:—

"Ah, Musa, I am Christian bred, but were all Moslems like you, I could hate none. Leave that to the priests, like Sebastian! If you go to Jerusalem and the Christians attack, as attack they will, you will defend the city, will fight to the last?"

Musa nodded soberly. "Would to Allah I could do anything else! But Jerusalem is scarce less sacred to my people than to yours. To us it is '*El Kuds*,' the 'Sanctuary of Allah'; and even *I*"—and he smote his breast—"must die in the breach or on the walls before an armed Frank enter!"

Mary looked at him, and saw by his face more than by the words that he would indeed die if put to the last gasp.

"Musa," she said softly, throwing that grave light into her eyes which had made Richard cry he saw all heaven therein, "you speak truly. God keep you safe; but, Christian or Moslem, you must follow the path that duty opens. You must go to Jerusalem, for so your Allah clearly wills!"

"And," protested the Spaniard, "I shall send you to Cairo? You will be lonely in the great harem of my palace, with only servants and eunuchs to wait on you. For I must conform to the customs of my country, and let no lady in my care wander forth."

Mary shook her head in violent dissent.

"Why should I not go with you to Jerusalem? If the city falls, will not my husband be at hand to receive me? If the defence is made good,"—she stared hard at the pavement,—"I know my Richard Longsword will not live to see defeat; and then—"

She broke short; her eyes were bright with tears.

"*Wallah!* what may I say to comfort you?" cried the Andalusian, in distress. But Mary sprang from the divan and stood before him, eye meeting eye.

"Musa," she said quietly, "I am a woman, and Heaven gives me a few wits. I know well what Richard said to you that moment he drew you aside before we were parted near Antioch."

The Spaniard reddened and stirred uneasily. As if by sympathy, the Greek flushed also; but she continued:—

"Dear Musa, we can best speak plainly one to another. Whether you have ever borne love for woman as Richard has borne love for me, I greatly doubt. Strange man, once I was angry, even while I blessed you, that when so many professed love, your only word was friendship. But all that is past now. I am the wedded wife of your dearest comrade. If he die, save Baron Hardouin in Provence, I have no other friend in the wide earth but you. If Richard dies, and Heaven is kind, I shall not live long. But people cannot die when they wish. If my husband is taken away, it is right that you should possess me. I cannot give you the deepest love; nor expect it from you. But so long as you live, I shall be content—for, saving Richard Longsword, you are the purest, noblest—Christian or Moslem—who treads God's earth."

Mary outstretched her hand to the Spaniard, who did not take it, but knelt and kissed the hem of her dress.

"Star of the Greeks," he said, smiling after his soft, melancholy way, "how good that we can look into one another's eyes and see 'trust' written therein. May the All-Merciful put far the day that will make you other than my brother's wife! But you shall go to Jerusalem."

Mary pressed her hands to her forehead.

"Holy Mother," she cried, "is it mercy to send Richard and Musa both to Jerusalem, where one must surely die!"

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders. "If the Most-High watch over my brother, waste no tears in fear for me. I shall live or die, as is fated, and the day of death is fixed, be a man on battle-field or on his bed."

"Your destiny is cruel," declared the Greek. But Musa answered, "Destiny is the will of Allah, and even the hard things from Him are sent in mercy."

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So Mary fared by easy journeys to Jerusalem, and not to Cairo. In the Holy City they said the lieutenant-commandant kept a lady in his harem, but that wakened no comment. Musa had means and rank to secure a comfortable house on the north of the city, by the Gate of Herod; to fit it with all needful luxury, to provide Nubian eunuchs and Syrian serving-maids. The Greek had learned at Aleppo to be content with the close harem life, and Musa went to all lengths to please her. When he could spare time, he read and sang to her all day long; played chess and backgammon; matched her in contests of verse; repeated his jugglery tricks. He provided books in plenty—the Arabian histories; Macoudi's "Prairies of Gold," the great geography; and Greek manuscripts—Homer, Sophocles, Plato, and more. The Spaniard loved to sit at Mary's feet, hearing her read in her own rich native accent the hexameters that throbbed with the wrath of Achilles, and all the other stories of the old pagan world so long departed. Mary took all his attention with a kind of mute wonder, having long since ceased to marvel at his devotion. "Am I not utterly in his power?" she would say to herself. "Could he not take me forever from Richard Longsword by his mere wish?" So she would be silent, admiring the friendship that could go to lengths like this. For though they constantly talked of the Norman, Musa never breathed a word that was not to Richard's praise—of his valor, purity, steadfastness, and lofty purpose, telling Mary often that she was wedded to the noblest cavalier in Frankland or Islam.

So for Mary at Jerusalem, as for Richard at Antioch, the slow winter crept by. And in the spring came the news that the Christian host was coming southward by forced marches. Musa's face was sad when he brought Mary the tidings, though it was only what each had expected. But neither was prepared for the sudden thunderbolt that crashed upon them just as the Christians broke camp before Archas. A messenger came into the city from Cairo, bringing word that Iftikhar Eddauleh, the one-time Ismaelian chief, had landed at Alexandria, been received with high favor by the kalif and vizier, appointed to the chief command at Jerusalem, and was on his way thither with heavy reënforcements for the garrison. Musa—ran the vizier's orders—was to retain his post as second; and with two such officers, so well schooled in the Christians' mode of warfare, the kalif made no doubt of a successful defence.

No opportunity for drawing back now. A new embassy was being sent to the Franks to try to halt their march by a peace at the last moment. But Musa feared to intrust it with a letter for Richard, as the members were all appointed by Iftikhar himself, who arrived in Jerusalem almost as soon as the first messenger. The Spaniard presented himself to his chief at the Castle of David, the mighty stronghold on the western wall of the city. When the two cavaliers met face to face, without a word to Musa, Iftikhar ordered every guard and slave out of his presence, and the

twain stood staring hard at one another for a long time in silence. Presently Musa said simply:—

"Cid Iftikhar, we have been personal enemies, and owe each other many a grudge; but this is no time nor place for private broils. I am your lieutenant, ready to die in defence of *El Kuds*. Command me in anything touching my duty as a soldier, and I obey to the last."

Iftikhar's face was very stern when he answered:—

"You say well, my Lord Musa. At a convenient time Allah grant that I may reckon with you. Only with Richard the Norman have I an account that is longer. But to-day let us toil as one man for the defence of Jerusalem; for, as the All-Just reigns, we have no light task before us!"

"Then," asked the Spaniard, "until the city is saved we are at truce?"

"At truce," assented Iftikhar, nodding. But he would not accept Musa's proffered hand. And when the Spaniard went back to Mary he cautioned her gravely to remain close in the harem. Likewise he sent many of his servants out of the city, retaining only those most trusty; admonishing all not to breathe on the streets or to their gossips that a Grecian lady was lodged in his palace.

But now came a series of days, each more terrible for Mary than the one before. Musa would have told her little, but he found that keeping back the news made her grieve yet more; therefore he related all. As the Franks advanced, Iftikhar had sent out his squadrons and laid waste the country for leagues about, filling up the wells, scarce leaving one house standing, that the Christians might find no comfort or provision. On this work Musa had ridden, though he loved it little.

At last the Christians were at hand; and Mary, looking from her harem balcony, saw the hills covered with the familiar Frankish armor and the white-stoled priests and the forest of tossing lances. But though the eunuchs and city folk cowered and whimpered, Mary knew the Egyptian garrison was made of stouter stuff,—not blind fanatics, like the Ismaelians, but men who would defend the walls to the last.

On the next day Mary was fain to lie in her chamber, stopping her ears, and pleading with every saint; for the Christians were assaulting. Then at evening came silence. Musa returned, dust-covered, his cheek bleeding where an arrow grazed, but safe; and Mary knew the onslaught had failed. With her own hands she stripped off the weary Spaniard's armor.

"The Christians rush on ruin," was his bitter tale. "With only one ladder they tried to scale. With a second they might have mastered. They endured our rain of bolts, stones, and Greek fire as if pelted by dry leaves. They have perished by hundreds. Well that Allah is all-wise; He alone knows the need of this war!"

"And Richard?" asked Mary, scarce venturing the word.

"I saw him all reckless, in his open steel cap! My heart turned to ice when he began to climb the ladder with Trenchefer in his teeth. He laughed at our arrows. A stone overturned the ladder; he fell, then rose unhurt from under a heap of slain, and was about to mount once more when a priest—Sebastian, doubtless—dragged him out of view."

Mary blessed the saints for this mercy, and was constant in prayer; for women could only pray while strong men had the easier deeds of fighting and dying. While the Christians were building their siege engines, there were no more assaults. But this only postponed the days of evil. Mary could see that Musa was laboring under extreme excitement. In her presence he affected his old-time gayety and playful melancholy. But once she caught him in an unguarded moment, gazing upon her so fixedly, that had he been Iftikhar, she would have thrilled with danger; and once she overheard him in his chamber crying aloud to Allah as if beseeching deliverance from some great temptation, and from the evil jinns that were tearing his breast.

"Dear Musa," said Mary, "what is it that makes you grow so sad?"

But the only answer was the gentle laugh, and the remark, "*Wallah*,—and with your Christians pressing us night and day, and all preparing for the death grip, will you marvel I am not always merry?"

"True," she replied; "but I know it is not the siege that darkens you."

Musa said nothing. In fact she saw him seldom. The wretched Jerusalem Christians were kept at forced labor on the walls, and sight of their piteous state made Mary hate all Moslems save the Spaniard. Presently rumor had it the Franks had completed their engines. Mary saw the great procession around the city, after the fashion of the Israelites around Jericho,—the priests, the knights, the men-at-arms, a great company that marched from the valley of Rephaim, beside Calvary, to the Mount of Olives, where they halted for exhortings to brave deeds, by the chieftains and priests. The hymns and brave words Mary did not hear; but she did hear the blasphemies of the Moslems, as from the walls they held up crosses in the sight of all the Christians, heaping filth upon them, and shouting, "Look, Franks, look; behold the blessed cross!" But the Greek knew deep down in her heart that they blasphemed to their own destruction; and Musa half shared her thought, when that night he parted from her to go upon the walls.

"Star of the Greeks," he said, salaaming, "the Christians' engines are ready, and their host in array to attack with the morning. Allah alone knows what we shall see by another sunset. Keep close within the harem. I cannot return until about this time to-morrow evening."

And he was gone, leaving Mary to pass a sleepless night with awaking to a wretchedness she had never felt before. Not dread for herself this time. Richard would be face to face with death—and Musa! What if *both* should be cut down! Then let Iftikhar Eddauleh or any other demon in mortal guise possess her; this world would be one blackness, and trifles would matter little. She tossed on her pillow till daybreak, then rose to greater misery. What mockery to pray; to cry to God and the saints! If they were all righteous, why had they created in her that stubborn will which would not bow to their decree? Under her lattice in the narrow dirty streets the corps of the garrison were rushing to and fro. She could see the ebon Ethiopians clashing their huge targets and sabres as they ran toward the walls, while the war-horns and kettledrums blared and boomed unceasingly.

"This way, true believers!" came the shout. "The Franks are advancing. He who speeds one Christian to hell blots out ten thousand sins!" But over the din of arms sounded the cry of the muezzins from the Mosque el-Aksa, and all the other lesser fanes, calling the people to prayer. Looking up at a minaret close by, Mary could see the pigeons still nesting under the balcony; and when the waves of clangor hushed an instant, she could hear the coo, coo, of mate to mate, as if the brown earth were calm and peaceful as the azure dome.

So the day commenced. As the sun climbed higher, the rock on which Jerusalem was founded trembled under the crash of bursting war. Mary, sitting upon the house roof, could hear all the tumult in the city streets, and see the garrison massing on the battlements by the Gate of Herod.

How long a day! The eunuchs, timorous as their mistress, gave her little heed. But a few grapes and figs were all the food the Greek cared to touch. About the third hour of the morning she knew the conflict was joined. From that time till sunset the roar of assault and defence went up to heaven as one continuous thunder. The shouts of Christian and Moslem; the crash of mangonel and catapult; the hurtling of myriad arrows and stones,—all these made a raging babel that spoke but a single word—"Death!" For Mary, it was one long-drawn terror. Long since had she, with her woman's heart, ceased to care whether the blessed Christ or Allah reigned within the bulwarks of the Holy City. She only knew that her husband and a man who had become dearer to her than a brother were in the midst of that chaos. Again and again she heard a mighty crash from the battlements, sounding above the unending din, that told of a triumph won by besiegers or besieged. Twice her heart leaped to her throat, as shrieking men flew down the street, calling on Allah to "have mercy; the city was taken." And twice again others passed, bawling out their *Bismillahs*, telling how the Franks had been utterly crushed. It was noon, and still the thunders grew louder. The third hour after noon; were the heavens of adamant that they did not crack asunder at the roaring? The fourth hour, and under the balcony galloped an Egyptian officer.

"*Allah akhbar!* Rejoice, O Moslems! The Christians have been repulsed on all hands!" he was proclaiming; "they will never assault again. The Lord Iftikhar has made a sally from the breach, and all their engines are burning!"

"Victory for the true faith! *Allah akhbar!*" shouted the squadrons that raged after him. "To the gates! a sally! cut off the Franks ere they can flee to the hills!"

Mary bowed her head. The Franks repulsed, defeated, scattered; the Crusade lost, and Richard Longsword,—never, the Greek knew well, would her husband turn back from a stricken field to breathe out his fiery spirit on his bed. But the clangor of arms and shouting did not die away. The sun was dropping lower now, but the battle seemed blazing hotter than when the day was young. In the street women and city-folk ran this way and that. From their cries Mary knew not what to think. To remain longer on the housetop she could not, though Musa commanded a thousand times. She must know the worst or die. The cowering maids and eunuchs gave her never a thought. She cast a veil about her face and rushed down into the street. The way was plain before her. In a great press of soldiers, citizens, and shrieking women, she was swept on toward the Gate of Herod, scarce knowing whither she went. As she moved on blindly, jostled and thrust about by rude hands, she knew that the din was lessening, the thunder from the walls intermitting. Now, as she looked toward the battlements, she could see the engineers making fast the machines, the archers running from the towers. Through the gate was pouring a cavalry corps, the horses bleeding and panting, the men battered and bleeding also. Many bore shivered lances; many brandished red blades; many toiled wearily on foot. It needed none to tell her that the sally had failed, else why did the great gate clash to in a twinkling the instant the last rider passed under? And in through the closing portal rang the good French war-cry, almost at the riders' heels, "*Montjoie St. Denis!*" So the Franks had been repulsed, but not scattered. The leaguer had not been raised. There must be other days of horror.

"St. Theodore guide me!" prayed Mary to herself, "I must be back instantly. Musa would be justly angry if he found me in this throng." And she turned from the gate, thankful, yet fearful. What had befallen Richard and Musa that day of blood? The multitude surged backward, carrying her toward the inner city. In the rude press the veil was swept from her face. She knew that soldiers were pointing at her, and passing the word "Look—a houri!" But she heeded little, only forced her way up the narrow street to regain the house. The throng made space for her, for they knew she was an emir's lady, and many improper deeds were forgiven on a day like this. She reached the friendly portal; reëntered the harem. The cowering maids and eunuchs stared at her dishevelled hair and dress, but hardly knew that she had been gone. Mary returned to her post on the housetop, and from the shouting in the street below learned that the Christian attack on the walls had been entirely repulsed, but that Iftikhar had lost many men in the sally. Just after sunset came a cavalryman with a note scribbled on a bit of dirty vellum.

"Musa to the ever adorable Star of the Greeks. Allah has kept Richard Longsword safe through battle. I also am well. I think the Christian machines so wrecked by our Greek fire, no assaults will take place for many days. I will come to you before midnight. Farewell."

A brief letter, but it made the dying light on the western clouds very golden to Mary Kurkuas. So Richard lived, and Musa also. What thoughtfulness of the Spaniard to imagine her fears and send reassurance! The buzzing streets grew calmer. She heard the muezzins calling the evening "*maghreb* prayer" over the city. The eunuchs had so far awakened from their terror as to be able to bring her a few sweet cakes and some spiced wine. The Greek felt little weariness, despite her sleepless night. She would await Musa, hear from him the story of the battle, and how he knew Richard was well. With a quieting heart she left the roof balcony, ordered a lamp in her harem chamber, opened the book-closet and began to unroll her Pindar. She was just losing herself in the rhythm and splendor of a "Nemean" when a eunuch interrupted with his salaam.

"A woman to see the *Citt* Mary,—who will not be denied." Before Mary could answer, the curtain had been thrust aside, and she saw in the dim glint of the lamp the face of Morgiana!

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# CHAPTER XLV

## HOW RICHARD HAD SPEECH WITH MUSA

In the days that the Christians lay about Jerusalem, after the first assault had failed, Richard learned to know every ring on that gilded coat of armor which shielded the commandant of Jerusalem. Iftikhar had borne a charmed life those four and twenty days of the siege; a thousand bolts had left him unscathed; his voice and example had been better than five hundred bowmen at a point of peril. Along with Iftikhar, Richard noted a second mailed figure upon the walls, more slender than the emir, nimble in his sombre black mail as a greyhound; and his presence also fired the Egyptians to fight like demons. Longsword bore about in his heart two resolves, to lay Iftikhar Eddauleh on his back (of this he was trebly resolved) and to discover who this black-armored warrior might be. Had he never seen that graceful figure make those valorous strokes before? So Longsword nursed his hate and his curiosity, and threw all his energy day and night into the siege works.

In the days that came it pleased Heaven to put a last test upon the faith and steadfastness of the army. Not even in burning Phrygia had they parched more with thirst. Midsummer, a Syrian sun, a country always nearly arid, and all the pools stopped by Iftikhar, ere he retired within the city; —no wonder there was misery!

"O for one cooling drop from some mountain stream of France!" Had the army joined in one prayer, it would have been this. For a skinful of fetid water, brought far, fetched three deniers, and when the multitude struggled around the one fountain Siloam, often as the scanty pool bubbled, what was it among so many? To secure water to keep the breath in Rollo, Richard went nigh to the bottom of a lightened purse; and still the heavens would cloud and darken and clear away, bringing no rain, but only the pitiless heat.

In Phrygia, and even at Antioch, men had been able to endure with grace. But now, with victory all but in their grasp, with the Tomb of Christ under their very eyes, how could mortal strength brook such delay? Yet the work on the siege engines never slackened. A rumor that a relieving army was coming from Egypt made them all speed. Out of the bare country Northern determination and Northern wit found timbers and water and munitions. They built catapults to cast arrows, mangonels to fling rocks. Gaston of Béarn directed the erecting of three huge movable towers for mounting the ramparts. There were prayers and vows and exhortations; then on Thursday, the fourteenth of July, came the attack—the repulse.

It must have been because Mary Kurkuas's prayers availed with God that Richard did not perish that day. If ever man sought destruction, it was he. When he saw the stoutest barons shrinking back, and all the siege towers shattered or fixed fast, he knew a sinking of heart, a blind rage of despair as never before. Then from the Gates of Herod and St. Stephen poured the Egyptians in their sally to burn the siege towers. Longsword was in the thickest of the human whirlpool. When he saw the garrison reeling back, and Iftikhar Eddauleh trying vainly to rally, he pressed in mad bravado under the very Gate of Herod, casting his war-cry in the infidels' teeth. But while a hundred javelins from the walls spun round him, of a sudden he heard a name—his own name, shouted from the battlements; and the blast of darts was checked as if by magic. The chieftain in the sombre armor had sprung upon the crest of the rampart, had doffed his casque, and was gesturing with his cimeter.

"Musa!" cried the Norman, falling back a step, scarce knowing what to hope or dread.

The Spaniard, while ten thousand stared at him, friend and foe, bowed and flourished in salutation, then, snatching up a light javelin, whirled it down into the earth at Longsword's feet.

"Death to the infidel!" the Christian crossbowmen at Richard's heels were crying as they levelled.

But the Norman checked them with the threat:—

"Die yourselves if a bolt flies!"

Then he drew the dart from the ground, and removed a scrap of parchment wrapped round the butt.

"Be before the Gate of Herod two hours after sunset. Bear the shield with the St. Julien stag, and the sentinels will not shoot. Your wife is in the city and is well."

And while Richard read, the Spaniard had saluted the wondering Christians once more and vanished behind the rampart. The Norman walked away with a heart at once very light and very heavy. Musa in Jerusalem, Mary in Jerusalem, Iftikhar in Jerusalem! A great battle waged all day, and to all seeming lost,—the Crusade a failure! He heard men, who all those awful years had never blenched, whispering among themselves whether they could make their way to Joppa and escape to France, since God had turned His face away. As he passed through the camp, Tancred and Gaston both spoke to him, asking whether in duty to their men they ought to press the siege longer. Should they wait, the great Egyptian army would come, and not a Christian would escape. But Richard, with his vow and the blood of Gilbert de Valmont on his soul, replied:—

"Fair lords, answer each to your own conscience; as for me, I will see the Cross upon the walls of Jerusalem to-morrow, or die. There is no other way."

And both of these chieftains, who had been hoping against hope, answered stoutly:—

"Our Lady bless you, De St. Julien! You say well; there is no other way for those who love Christ!"

So Richard waited outside the Gate of Herod during the soft gloaming, while the night grew silent, and when, after the searchers for the dead and dying had gone their rounds, naught was heard save the whistling of the scorching wind as it beat against the walls and towers, laden with the dust and blight from the desert. No soldiers' laughter and chatter from the camp that night; no merriment upon the battlements. The Christians were numbed by their defeat; the Moslems knew the storm had not passed.

Then, when it had grown very dark, he heard a bird-call from the gateway,—a second,—and when he answered, a figure unarmed and in a sombre caftan drew from the blackness. The Norman and the Spaniard embraced many times in profoundest joy.

They sat together on the timber of a shattered catapult, and told each other the tale of the many things befallen since they parted on the hill before Antioch.

"And Mary?" Richard would ask time and again.

"She is more beautiful than the light, after the tempest passes and the rainbow comes. We talk of you daily, and of her joy and yours when the Crusade is ended."

Richard groaned from the bottom of his soul.

"Would God," he cried, "my own fate were woe or weal to me, and not to another. It must have been sinful to keep her love after I took the cross. For how can I have joy in heaven, if"—and he crossed himself—"I am ever worthy to pass thither, thinking that Mary is in tears?"

Musa pressed his hand tighter.

"You are sad to-night. Why not? I know the stake you set on the Crusade, yet bow to the will of Allah. What is destined is destined by Him; what is destined by Him is right. Cannot even a Christian say that? You have done all that mortal man can; the task is too hard. Your vow is cleared. Return to France. Mary shall go with you. Have joy in St. Julien, and think of Musa, your brother, kindly."

But Richard had leaped to his feet.

"No, as God lives and reigns!" he cried, "I will not bow. We have endured a great defeat. You know all; I betray no trust. Our towers are nigh wrecked, our throats are burned with drought, half our fighting-men are wounded, you have two warriors in the city to one in our camp. But know this, brother mine that you are: we Franks differ from you Moslems. For in the face of disaster you cry 'Doom,' and bend your necks; but we hold our heads proudly and cry 'On, once more!' And so we master very doom; for there is no doom to strong men who forget that black word 'fate'!"

Musa put his hand affectionately around the Norman's ponderous shoulders.

"Verily, O Richard, I think if the rebel jinns were to gather a squadron of Franks about them, they could shake even the throne of Allah!"

"I am in no jest," replied Richard, and his tone told that he spoke true. But Musa said, doubting:—

"I cannot believe you can attack again before the Egyptian army comes. It is right to fight so long as there is hope. Allah never commands men to invite death."

"Then answer this," demanded the Christian, hotly; "if you lay in my tent, would you turn back and hear all France say, 'This is one of the cavaliers who rode to Jerusalem, found the paynim arrows bitter, and rode away'? By the splendor of God, you would die ten thousand deaths before!

You dare not deny; I know you well."

"No, my brother," said Musa, very simply, "I do not deny. But for Mary's sake do not throw your life away."

The Norman laughed bitterly.

"By your 'doom' I perish as soon over my cups at St. Julien as on the siege tower at Jerusalem. God knows what comes to-morrow. Tell Iftikhar Eddauleh that I ask no greater favor from Heaven than to meet him once more face to face. Yet after his craven flight at Antioch I wonder he has courage to bear himself so valiantly on the walls."

"I will tell him; and believe me, he was no coward, as I hear, at Antioch. From his own lips to-day I learned he wishes nothing better than to meet you."

"And you will guard Mary from him?—ever?"

"While Allah grants me breath."

"You are a true brother, Musa, son of Abdallah!" cried the Norman, pressing the other's hand in a grasp that brought pain even to those fingers of steel. "Sometimes I think you are a better friend to me than I to myself."

"And no message for Mary?" asked the Spaniard, softly.

Richard drew his hand across his face. He did not speak for a long while. Then the words came very slowly:—

"Either to-morrow at this time we are masters of the city, or you can know that I am discharged forever of all vows and warfare. Does Mary know what we said together, at parting at Antioch?"

"She knows. And she accepts."

"That is well. Tell her I can leave only this message: 'I have from the hour I left her carried myself as became a Christian cavalier. I have prayed for grace to live and grace to die. I know that after the first pain is past she will wonder why she ever had love for the rude Frankish baron, when she has the favor of the most gallant emir, the most courtly prince, the purest-hearted man, Christian or Moslem.' For though you cannot yearn for her with the fire that burns in me, I can trust you never to let her grow hungry for love."

"Yes: but—" Musa laughed a little nervously—"but if the city is taken? What of me? Will you lead me in fetters back to St. Julien?"

Richard saw the implication.

"No, by St. George," he protested, "you shall not die! I will go to every friend, and I have many, and beseech them if we conquer to spare you."

Musa only laughed again.

"And where you would scorn to live, I must hold back?"

Both were silent; for they saw the inevitable issue. Then Musa spoke again: "Again I say it, what is doomed, is doomed. We are in the Most High's hands. So long as you bear your St. Julien shield I shall know you, and if we meet no blows shall pass. But wear a closed helmet. I quaked when I saw you mocking the arrows in your open casque."

Both were standing. There was nothing more to say. Richard's heart was very sad, but Musa comforted.

"No fears—is not Allah over us both? Will He not dispose all aright,—to-night,—to-morrow,—forever,—though we may not see the path?"

The two men embraced; and, without another word, Richard saw the form of Musa vanish into the darkness.

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Of all the councils of the chiefs, none at Antioch was so gloomy as the one held the night after that day of battle and defeat. Duke Robert the Norman spoke for all when he cried in his agony:—

"Miserable men are we! God judges us unworthy to enter His Holy City!"

"Have we endured all this pain in vain?" answered Godfrey. "Unworthy we are, but do we not fight for the glory of Christ?"

"We have fought stoutly as mortal men may!" groaned the son of William the Bastard. "Twice repulsed, half our men slain, our towers wrecked. Where are my brave cavaliers from Rouen and Harfleur? Dead—dead; all who were not happy and died on the march!"

Then silence, while the red torches in Godfrey's tent flickered. Robert the Norman bowed his head and wept, sobbed even as a child.

But Robert, Count of Flanders, broke out madly:—

"By St. Nicholas of Ghent, why sit we here as speechless oxen? Let us either curse God and the false monks who led us on this devil's dance, and every man speed back to his own seigneury, if so Satan aid him; or let us have an end of croaks and groans, bear our hurts with set teeth, and have Jerusalem, though we pluck down the wall with our naked hands." But not an answer or token followed his outburst; and after a pause he added bitterly: "Yes, fair lords; my cousin of Normandy speaks well; we are unworthy to deliver the Holy City. Let us go back to dear France, and think of our sins." Still silence; and then, with an ominous tread, Gaston of Béarn entered, in full armor and with drawn sword.

"Good brothers," quoth he, gazing about a little blankly, and meeting only blank helplessness, "I, who hold the lines while you counsel, have only one word—speed. The rumor passes that the siege is to be raised, the Crusade abandoned. Half the army is ready to fly. Breathe it once, and the shout will be, 'For France!'—and the host scatters like sheep toward Joppa; while those more devoutly minded will cast their naked breasts on the Moslems' spears to earn martyrdom in place of victory."

Godfrey roused himself by a great effort.

"As God lives," he protested, "we cannot suffer the Crusade to fail. We cannot say to all the widows and orphans of France, 'Your husband, your father, died like headstrong fools.'"

"We have wrought all that the paladins of Charlemagne wrought, and more," tossed back Robert the Norman, hopelessly.

A voice lower down amongst the lesser chiefs interrupted:

"You are wrong, my lord of Normandy."

The Conqueror's son rose in his dignity.

"Wrong? Who speaks? I will not have my honor questioned."

The others saw Richard Longsword rising also. His face was very set and stern, he held his head proudly.

"I say it, 'You are wrong.' No man has done all that the paladins of old have done until, like them, he stops prating of the anger of God, and dies with his face toward the paynim and twenty slain around. Take heed, my lords, lest we think too much of our unworthiness, too little of the captivity of the Tomb of Our Lord; and how in freeing it the price of all our sins is paid. I did not come to council to learn how to lead my men to Joppa, but how we were one and all to mount the breach, or perish in the moat."

There was a ring in Richard's voice hard as the beaten anvil; and, before Robert could reply, more than one voice cried: "So say I! And I! Never can we slink back, and look in the eyes of the women of France!"

"I cry pardon, fair lords," said Longsword. "I am a young knight to instruct my betters." But Godfrey answered him:—

"There is none of us too great to listen to brave words like these;" and Tancred, leaping up, added: "Yes, by God's help I will make it good on my body against any who cry 'backward,' till the city be won. Away with all these bats of darkness that are lighting on our heads! How does the night advance?"

"By the stars, midnight," answered Gaston, just entered.

"Good," ran on the Prince, sweeping all before him. "Pass the word through the host that we assault at dawn. Let every spare hand work to repair the towers. Let the rest sleep. We can make shift to move my Lord Godfrey's tower. If we have suffered without the walls, rest assured the infidels have splintered some bones within." The ebb tide had turned. The flood ran swiftly now.

"God wills it! Attack with the morning!" the two Roberts were crying, as loud as the rest. And others shouted:—

"An end to divisions. Let us have one leader! Let us proclaim Godfrey king. To-morrow we will crown him in Jerusalem!"

But the pure-hearted Duke beckoned for silence, and answered: "God forbid, dear brothers, that I should be styled 'sire,' and wear crown of gold, where my Saviour was spit upon and crowned with thorns. We have one work now—to storm the city."

"The infidels are attacking the machines!" thundered Raimbaud of Orange, from the tent door. "To the rescue, fair lords!"

"Rescue! Rescue!" cried all, flying forth with drawn swords. And while Raymond and Tancred went to beat back the sally, Richard found himself close to Godfrey. "Our Lady bless you, De St. Julien," said Bouillon, grasping Richard's hand. "It was only a word you said; but a word in season will raise or pluck down kingdoms. How shall I reward you? I was near despair when I saw the gloom settling ever blacker over the council."

"Only this, fair Duke, that I may be in the front of the assault."

"Rashest of the rash! Some day the saints will grow weary of protecting you, and you will be slain."

"What matter, if all else is well?"

So Richard hastened off into the night, found his own encampment in the maze of tents, and told his men there was to be no retreat—that with the morning the storm would be renewed.

"And will you follow your seigneur, now as ever?" was his question to the fifty gaunt, mailed figures (all of his five hundred that were left) that grouped before the dying camp-fire.

"Through all hell,—though each Moslem were a thousand devils!" answered De Carnac; and every St. Julien man roared forth "Amen!"

"Good!" returned their lord. "And by St. Michael, you shall have chance to prove your vow!"

Then, having heard that the sortie was repulsed, Richard went to his own tent. He found Sebastian sitting by the doorway. As the young Baron entered, the priest without a word arose and kissed him gently on either cheek. And even in the dim firelight Richard could see a wonderful glow of peace and joy upon the face of the ascetic. "Dear father," said he, wondering, "what happiness has come, that you seem so glad? And why is it thus you kiss me?"

Whereupon Sebastian put his arm about Richard's neck, stroking his hair with the other hand, and at last said very softly, "I have had a vision."

"A vision?" And Richard smiled amid the darkness, for Sebastian's visions came every other night. But the priest only continued, guessing his thought: "No, your lips need not twitch. For this vision was of a manner different from any that I have ever seen before. As I lay here, of a sudden I woke, and saw the dim camp-fire and stars glitter as I see now, and heard the chatter and groaning of the men. But of a sudden a youth, clothed in a whiteness passing snow, bright and with wings, stood by me, and said most gently, 'Sebastian.' And I answered: 'Yes, Lord. What may I do in Thy service?' And he replied: 'Be of good cheer. God hath seen thy good works, and how thou hast crucified the flesh and all carnal lusts, and knowest how thou hast wrestled in prayer. Now rejoice; the end of thy toil in this evil world draws nigh. But before thou shalt see with the eyes of the spirit the heavenly Jerusalem and the blessed host, with thy mortal eyes thou shalt see the Cross triumphant on the walls of the earthly Jerusalem. And this hour comes quickly.' Then while I lay in bliss unspeakable he had vanished." Richard was very grave.

"Dear father, you do not long for heaven so much that you would leave me?"

But Sebastian answered softly: "It shall be as God wills. You will be comforted. It is written, 'He giveth His beloved sleep'—sleep after the toil and the pain and the crushing of sinful self. And then to wake and see our dear Lord's blessed face! You would not grudge me that?"

"No, dear father," said Richard, submissively; "but yet I pray God will ordain otherwise." Sebastian only kissed him again, lay down on the hard earth, and was soon in quiet sleep. Longsword went to his men, told them to sleep also, for they must rise with dawn. But as for himself his eyes were not heavy, despite the terrible day. As Herbert lay dozing, he heard from his master's tent the ominous click, click, of a whetstone. "The 'little lord' is sharpening Trenchefer," muttered the man-at-arms. "The devil help the Moslems who stand in his path to-morrow. The devil help Iftikhar Eddauleh if the two come face to face."

Richard sat in the dark, the great sword across his lap, handling it lovingly, smoothing each rust-speck that touched his finger's nail, making the long blade razor-keen. And had a lamp flashed on his face, his features would have showed harder than his blade. His heart was at peace—at peace with an awful gladness. Father, mother, sister, brother, were all to be avenged on the morrow when he fronted Iftikhar Eddauleh. That some saint would aid him to meet the Egyptian he did not doubt. And then? But Richard never so much as wondered what would befall, after Trenchefer had smitten once and fairly on that gilded mail.

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# CHAPTER XLVI

## HOW IFTIKHAR CEASED FROM TROUBLING

When the Arabian's eyes lit upon Mary, Morgiana gave a little cry, ran to the Greek, and caught her in her arms. For a moment the two were so wrapt in the joy of meeting that all else was forgot. But quick as the first flood of gladness passed, Morgiana broke forth with the eager demand:—

"Musa? Musa? where is the Spanish emir?"

"Upon the walls, where are all the chieftains," was the wondering Greek's answer.

"*Wallah!* and when will he return?" ran on Morgiana, beginning to tremble as Mary held her, as though in some mastering dread.

"I do not know; at any time,—now,—or not till midnight. Dear God—what has befallen? what may I do? You are turning pale, and your hands are cold!"

"Allah have mercy on us both, unless Musa comes! Iftikhar has discovered you!" cried Morgiana, calming herself with a mighty effort. And now it was the Greek's turn to tremble.

"Iftikhar?"—the word came across her pallid lips faint as a dying groan. "How? When? Speak, as you love me—"

Morgiana thrust back the dark hair that had fallen over her eyes, and drew herself up half scornfully.

"Foolish woman! Is there not sorrow enough, that you need make more? Why did you wander into the streets at sundown? Why did you let the veil slip from your face? Zeyneb, my foster-brother, whom the sheytans love and the angels hate, looked on you,—followed you,—saw you enter the house, and sped straight to Iftikhar! Speak—speak—" and the Arabian plucked at Mary's arm fiercely, while in her eyes was again the mad gleam of old. "Why should I not curse you? you who have wronged me, utterly! When I was just winning back Iftikhar's love, and all the evil past was being forgot!—now—now I have lost him once more. And you—you are my ruin. As Allah lives I will curse you, and your lily-white beauty!"

Mary was indeed white as the lily, or whiter, if that may be; but she caught both of Morgiana's wrists and held fast. Under the calm influence shed from her eyes the Arabian's wandering gaze grew steady.

"Enough!"—she cut the other short—"you did not come hither only for maledictions. How have you learned? What will Iftikhar do?"

"Learned?"—Morgiana threw back her head and laughed. "I heard Zeyneb repeating all to Iftikhar. Do? I only saw the Egyptian's face—the passion, the longing, the hate. He will come to seize you without delay. Not even Musa can save you. Is not Iftikhar lord of Jerusalem? I wonder he is not here already, finding I have fled his harem at the Castle of David."

But Mary remained calm.

"Tell me, my sister, what am I to do? You are all wits. Better death by fire than one touch from Iftikhar."

"The Christian camp," pleaded the Arabian. "There are friends, your husband, safety. Oh, were but Musa here, you could be sent without the walls ere it is too late."

"By the water-clock it lacks midnight an hour," said Mary, quietly. "The Spaniard may be here any moment. But I cannot dream that Iftikhar, at a time like this,—with the very city at stake,—will forget all, quit his duty on the walls, to tear a defenceless maid away to his harem."

Morgiana laughed again, very bitterly. "Fool you are, in very truth! Iftikhar cares more for the lashes of your eyes than for a thousand Jerusalems,—for a thousand of his own lives. You will be at his mercy before daybreak, though the Christian cavaliers sack the city."

There was the clatter of hoofs on the pavement, a shouting, a clang of armor and arms. Mary gave a great sigh of relief. "Musa; he has come from the walls with his guard." But Morgiana blasted the hope with one cry: "Hear! The Egyptian's voice!" And Mary reeled as she stood; for she heard a voice she knew right well thundering, "Guard the house about, and down with the door." Then came the resounding knock of a cimeter-hilt on the portal. The Greek sprang to the lattice over the street. In the narrow way below were fifty Soudanese negroes, with ruddy torches, tossing their spiked flails and spears; while beating at the door was a lordly figure in gilded armor—Iftikhar himself.

Morgiana saw Mary trying to speak to her; at least the lips moved. The blows on the portal redoubled.

"Open, open, or I kill you all!" rang Iftikhar's command, sounding above his own strokes. The eunuchs and maids of the household ran chattering and screaming from the lower rooms, as if they might find protection beside their mistress.

"There is no hope," said Morgiana, sullenly, holding down her face; "we have both played our game, and we have lost."

And the Arabian, all the fire and steel gone out of her, fell to her knees, cast her mantle over her head, shaking with sobs and groans. Mary trod proudly toward the head of the stairway leading to the lower court. Over her head hung a great bronze candelabra. She knew the light fell full upon her; she was sure she was never more beautiful than at that instant, when her face was bloodless as Parian marble. One resolve was in her heart—to let Iftikhar gather no sweets by her vain agony and tears. She was the great Greek princess, with the blood of Cæsars in her veins, never more conscious of her dignity and pride.

The weak house door had shivered. There was a heavy step in the court below, a voice commanding: "I will enter alone. Let the rest stand guard." Mary saw Iftikhar at the foot of the stairs; his gilded mail twinkling, his naked cimeter in hand, his black-plumed casque thrust back so that the face was bare. How splendid, almost how beautiful, he was, striding on in the pride of his power! But when he saw the white face and burning eyes of the Greek looking down upon

him, even his wild spirit was reined for an instant. And while he halted on the first stair, Mary spoke, in tones cold as the winter wind.

"You come as ever, my Lord Iftikhar, unbidden, and with a naked sword. Are the cavaliers who saw your back at Antioch hidden in this house, that you must burst in to beard them?"

The sting of her words was as salt on a wound. The answer was a curse upon jinns and angels who should stand between him and his prey. His feet flew up the stairway, but the Greek remained steadfast.

"You see, Cid Iftikhar, I am weak, and with empty hands. But without the walls is Richard Longsword, who will speak to you in my behalf. This is your night, my lord; but in the morning—"

"Leave the morning to the rebel jinns!" rang the Egyptian's cry. "To-night, to-night,—I possess you. To-night! To the castle with all speed!" He snatched her in his impure arms. He crushed her to his breast, and pressed on her cold cheeks burning kisses. Mary neither struggled nor moaned. What she said in her heart was heard only by God. In his delirium Iftikhar saw neither Morgiana nor any other. He leaped down the stairs three at a bound,—his captive in his arms.

"*Allah akhbar!*" went his shout through the lower court. "I have won; the stars fight for me. Mine, to do with as I will!" And he kissed her again on lips and neck. Then of a sudden he stopped motionless, as though a charmer had made him stone, for outside in the street was sounding an angry command to the Soudanese to make way—the voice of Musa.

The grasp of the Egyptian on his prey never weakened, though his weapon was out once more. Yet Mary, in his grasp, for the first time began to struggle,—helpless as bird in the snare,—but her call sped out into the street shrilly: "Rescue! Rescue, for the love of God!"

For reply she saw the Soudanese by the door dashed to one side like shapes of wood, and across the threshold strode Musa, in no armor, but his cimeter also in hand. A glance, and the Spaniard knew all. He took one step toward Iftikhar, as if to cross swords without passing a word. Then, with point outstretched, he spoke, but mildly, as if in grave irony.

"Cid, is this the manner of Egyptian emirs in keeping truce?" Iftikhar's only response was to make his grip of Mary's arm so vise-like that she cried out with pain.

Musa spoke again, still gently. "Cid, this is my own house, my own harem. For what cause is it surrounded by your negroes, and violated?"

Iftikhar pointed toward the door with his cimeter. "I made truce with you," he retorted defiantly, "not with *her*." And he glared madly at the Greek. "Away, or the Soudanese strike off your head!"

The Spaniard calmly let his weapon sink to the pavement, and smiled as he leaned upon it. "Good emir, we have our hands busy—as Allah knows—to defend *El Kuds*. Do we well to nurse private lusts and hates, while the jewel of Islam trembles in the balance?"

"Off!" came the hot reply. "Off, or you die this instant!"

Musa lifted his eyes from the floor, and gave the Egyptian glance for glance. "I do well to tremble!" was his answer, the voice higher now, with a ring of harshness. "I do well to tremble! Remember the tourney at Palermo, my lord emir! Was it Iftikhar Eddauleh who crowned his turban with the prize?" And he stood on guard across the door. "Remember a night like this at Monreale."

The face of Iftikhar was black with his fury. For an instant there was a grating in his throat, thickening every word. "*Ya!* Dogs from Nubia, smite this mutineer down! Hew him down, or I hang you all!"

The Soudanese stared at him, rolling the whites of their great eyes, but not a spiked flail rose, not a foot crossed the threshold.

"Are you, too, rebels?" howled the Egyptian, his breath coming fast.

Musa had turned to the fifty.

"Hear you, Moslems. In an hour like this, with the Sacred City at stake, shall your emir or another dip hands in a private quarrel? What do I, save defend my own house, and my own harem? Have I not wrought on the walls manfully as Iftikhar? Dare any deny it?"

A shout came from the Soudanese:—

"You say well. You have been the sword and shield of Jerusalem, no less than the emir!"

"Hounds of Eblees! Will you not hew him down?" raged Iftikhar.

A gray-headed negro, captain of the fifty, fell on his knees before the Egyptian. "Cid, command, and we follow through the Christian camp; but we are the slaves of Kalif Mustaali, Commander of the Faithful, not yours for private feud. We cannot obey."

"Traitors!" the veins in Iftikhar's forehead were swollen now. "Know that this is no slave of Musa, son of Abdallah, but the wife of Richard Longsword, a chief of the Franks. You aid the infidels in saving!" But the Soudanese did not stir.

"And where reads Al Koran," retorted Musa, "'Thou shalt possess thyself of thine enemy's wedded wife'? For the sake of peace and El Islam leave the Greek till the siege be ended."

"For the sake of El Islam suffer me to depart with her unhindered." Iftikhar cast the woman across his left arm as though a toy, and swinging his blade, sprang toward the portal.

"Make way!" rang his last warning.

"Then let Allah judge the wrong!"

Musa was before the entrance, his cimeter waving. Iftikhar knew well he had no light combat in store. He cast Mary from him as he might a stone, and sprang to his work.

"I am not balked, as at Monreale!" he hissed from his teeth.

"No, *Bismillah*! I can kill you now!" flew the answer.

The steels rang sharp, stroke on stroke. Musa was without armor; but he had torn his cloak from his shoulders and covered his left arm. The cimeters were of equal length, and every time they clashed there flashed fire. Musa sprang aside from the doorway at the first blow, and worked his way into the middle of the court, where the light was stronger and there was ample space. This was no duel with long swords, as between Richard and Louis, where sledge-hammer strength was victor. The Spaniard's blade was both sword and shield. Again and again the Egyptian gave a sweeping stroke, a lunge, and felt his "Damascus" parried by the turn of a wrist, or to pierce only the air. Well that he wore armor! Time and again Musa's weapon clashed on his hauberk, making the chain mail ring and its wearer reel. Click, click, sang the blades, and so the two fought on.

"*Allah!*" the Soudanese would cry every time the Spaniard seemed ended by some downright stroke. Yet he never bled, but paid blow for blow. It was a marvel to see them. What Musa lost for lack of arms, was half returned in nimbleness. The Egyptian twice staggered in his armor, twice recovered. Musa had pricked him upon the neck, and the blood was running over the gilded shirt. But the fury of a thousand jinns was in his arm; still he fought.

Mary stood against the pillar by the upper stair, watching the combat as if through a mist. Deeds and words had flown too fast for catching. She was nigh asking herself: "Why this stamping? Why this ring of steel? What is this to me?" She saw Iftikhar shoot his point squarely toward the Spaniard's breast. Before the horror could be felt, Musa had doubled like a snake. The blade flew over him. At his counter-stroke there was more blood on the Egyptian's cheek. For an instant he winced, then rushed to the attack with redoubled fury. Twice more around the court they fought. And then there was a strange thing: for Morgiana, with hair flying and eyes bright as meteors, sped down the stairs. One moment she stood, as if terror froze her; then with a fearful moan ran straight toward the fighters. "As Allah lives, you shall not slay Iftikhar!" she shrieked, and snatched Musa behind, holding fast by the girdle. Only for an instant, for the Spaniard dashed her from him with a fist. But she was back, snatched again, and clung, despite the blows, while all the time Iftikhar pressed harder.

"Die you, die we, but not Iftikhar!" she screamed once more. Another twinkling, and the emir would have driven home. But in that twinkling the Greek found strength and wit. The Mother of God doubtless sped down the strength by which she tore loose Morgiana's hold. The Arabian writhed in her tight embrace; struggled with feet, nails, teeth, like a frenzied tigress at bay. "Allah! Allah!" came her moan; "you shall not, you must not, hold me! Let us all die, but not Iftikhar! Not he! None, none shall kill him!"

Mary trembled at the horror graven on Morgiana's face; but her arms held strong as steel.

"Release! Release!" pleaded Morgiana, piteously now; "he is my all, my all. Not Allah's self shall kill him!"

But Mary shut her eyes and held tighter. The Arabian might smite, bite, tear; she could not shake that hold. Only the terrible monotony of the combat seemed unending. Click—click—went the blades; the two were still fighting. How much longer could she hold fast? A cry of terror from Morgiana made her fingers weaken. The Arabian slipped from them at a bound.

"Allah! He reels!"

Morgiana had flown to pluck the Spaniard's girdle. Too late! The Greek saw Iftikhar tottering as the tall pine totters at its fall. And just as Morgiana touched Musa, his long blade swept down the Egyptian's guard, and caught the neck just above the mail. There was a thundering shout from the Soudanese. Iftikhar slipped, made one faint effort to lift his point; slipped once more; fell with clash of armor; and with a fearful cry his wild spirit sped—whither? God is not judged.

There was silence,—silence in which they heard the slow night wind creeping by in the street. Iftikhar had stretched his length. He lay without stir or groan. Morgiana had recoiled from Musa as if from the death angel. Mary saw her standing motionless as the stucco pillar, looking upon the face of the dead. The Spaniard, steaming and panting, pressed his red blade into the sheath, and caught at a pillar, saying never a word. Then when the stillness had grown long, Morgiana gave a little cry and sigh, more of surprise than of dread, and stepped softly until she stood close beside the dead. Iftikhar's casque had fallen from his head; his face was fixed in an awful smile; he looked straight upward with glassy eyes and opened teeth. When Morgiana gazed down upon him, she was still once more. Then came a scream of agony. She fell upon her knees; she lifted

that motionless head. Though the blood flowed from the great wound all over her delicate hands, she tore loose the hauberk, and laid the head in her lap, staring hungrily for some sign.

"Iftikhar! Iftikhar!" she cried, as if perforce to make the deaf ears hear. "Do you not see? Do you not know? It is I, Morgiana, your blue-eyed maid of Yemen, who have toiled for you, grieved for you, joyed for you,—yes, will die for you! Speak! Speak one word, and say you are still here!"

She raised her head as if to listen for the voice that would never come.

"O Iftikhar, soul of my soul, light of my eyes, joy of my joy! have you not one word for me,—for me who have clung fast to you these many years through all? Speak, though it be but to curse me! Speak, though it be of love for the Greek! You will not, cannot, go out now and leave me here alone,—alone, alone!"

No answer. Mary heard her own heart-beats, the crooning of the wind in the streets, the deep breaths of Musa.

Suddenly Morgiana let the limp head fall, and leaped to her feet, blood-stains on dress and hands and face.

"Dead!" she cried; "dead!" casting toward Mary a look so terrible that the Greek drew back. "Dead! Gone forever! Forever, forever!" And Morgiana's voice died away as if far off into the coming ages. Then once more she fell upon the dead form, kissed the speechless lips, and cooed into the deaf ear, saying sweet and pleasant things as in the lovers' days of long ago. But all the soft words ended in a cry of agony. Again she rose and faced Musa and the Greek.

"In Allah's name be you cursed! You for your strength, and you for your beauty! For the beauty that stole Iftikhar from me,—that led him to ruin, to death,—cursed, ten thousand times! May the jinns of evil crush you! May all Gehenna's fires wither you! May the Most High forget you from His mercy—" Mary was sobbing now:—

"Sweet sister, pity me," was her plea. "What have I done? Forget the Egyptian. How has he paid back your great love for him? He was unworthy of such love." But Morgiana only tossed her blood-stained arms on high.

"Fool, fool; am I not a woman? Did I love him by my reason? Worthy or unworthy, I *have* loved him. Enough!"

She tore at her bosom; drew forth a tiny silver vial. It was at her lips before Musa could seize it.

"Poison!" shouted he.

The face of the Arabian turned livid; her eyes wandered. "He is mine; mine! Beyond the stars, where no Christian may come with her beauty! Beyond the stars, where is Paradise and rest!"

She fell upon Iftikhar's dead form; one paroxysm, one groan; her hand was resting on the emir's face, her lips close to his. Musa laid his hand above her heart, drew it back and said nothing. Then again a long silence, while he examined the silver vial.

"Strychnine," he said softly; "the Egyptians often use it. Swifter than a falling star."

Mary buried her face in her hands, and swayed while she sobbed in her fathomless grief. "Holy St. Theodore, have mercy; Mother of God, have mercy; Jesus Christ, have mercy! It is my fault—mine! I cannot bear it!"

"Yours? Never, Star of the Greeks," protested Musa. "How was it you that led Iftikhar to his madness, and put frenzy in this woman's heart?"

But Mary wiped her eyes, and told all that had befallen. How she had gone into the streets; how Zeyneb had seen, had told Iftikhar, and sent him to his death. Before the Spaniard could reply, another strange step was on the threshold. It was that of a Nubian in scarlet surcoat, giant tall,—Ammar, third in command.

"In Allah's name," was his demand as he entered, and recoiled in his horror at the sight, "what means this rumor on the streets? Where is the Cid Iftikhar Eddauleh?"

"His body?—there!" answered the Andalusian, pointing downward. "Allah accounts with his soul."

"*Mashallah!*" and Ammar nigh drew his cimeter, "you have slain the emir, commandant of the city!"

"He rushed on ruin, good comrade. It was a private quarrel, and he is wrong. Ask of these guardsmen, is it so."

"It is so! *Wallah*, the emir was mad. It is so!" came voices from the doorway. Ammar's face was lowering when he demanded:—

"Yet how will you answer to Al Afdhal, the vizier?"

Musa drew himself to full height haughtily.

"Victory covers all pasts. Let me fling back the Christians and Al Afdhal will forget to question. If defeated"—Musa swept his hand in a wide gesture—"I will not be here to make reply. And now you, O Ammar, are my lieutenant, and I commandant this night of Jerusalem. Leave Iftikhar

Eddauleh to Allah, and get you to the ramparts, for there is work in store." The clatter of a horseman in the streets cut him short; a breathless messenger was entering. "*Allah akhbar!*" gasped the courier, "I am from the Gate of St. Stephen. We have sallied forth to burn the Franks' siege towers. All the unbelieving jinns aid them. The towers are repaired. We were driven back with loss. They attack at dawn."

"Fellow, fellow," began Musa, while Ammar dropped his jaw in surprise, "no tales, as you love your head! With my own eyes I saw those towers in ruins—they can never be fought again."

"In Allah's great name I do not lie," flew back the answer; "and the Christians have just flung the corpse of an Egyptian inside the city on a mangonel, with letters saying they send us the courier from Al Afdhal, who promises aid, but that they will be in Jerusalem ere he can set forth from Egypt."

The Spaniard cast about a lightning glance of high command; never was Iftikhar more lordly. "Then for El Islam we shall win glory or martyrdom by another sun. Lead to the walls, Cid Ammar, I follow instantly. Call all the city-folk to repair the breach. Hurry the Greek fire and oil caldrons from the citadel. We must each have a thousand hands betwixt now and morning. But on your lives say nothing of Iftikhar."

"Allah! Allah! Death to the Franks! Death!" roared the Soudanese, vanishing down the dark street as suddenly as they had come. But Ammar halted. "Cid," said he, gravely, "you are indeed commandant, but if the news flies out at this last grapple that Iftikhar lies dead, needless to tell how every sword-hand will weaken. The name of Iftikhar is worth a thousand in the death-grip. What is to be done?" Musa had bent over the corpses, and was unbuckling the Egyptian's gilded armor.

"See," declared he, holding up the gem-set baldric, "I will put on the emir's mail. I have his height; none will miss his shoulders. With the casque drawn down, all but those in the secret will know nothing. I can again put on my own sombre armor, and appear elsewhere on the wall. The host will think they have both commanders. Ere the truth is known the city is saved."

"Allah! You have the craft of Solomon! So be it!"

"Breathe not a word of this to any. Bid the Soudanese keep silence. Deny the rumor. Haste five spare mangonels over to the west wall; nine to the northern. Illumine the Franks with Greek fire, shoot arrows and stones incessantly. I will be on the Stork Tower at the northwest bastion without delay; do you look to the western city."

Ammar salaamed; was gone. Musa had finished stripping and putting on Iftikhar's armor. Save for the plumed helm that he held in his hand, who could say he was not the Egyptian?

"Take these corpses away," was his command to the eunuchs; "anoint and embalm them carefully. They must have honorable burial." Then he turned to Mary.

"Star of the Greeks, I must go upon the walls again. Hard indeed it is to leave you. But be comforted, Richard is well. I have talked with him. Our speech was all of you."

Mary was ready to weep once more, but held back the tears. Sweet and strong was her face when she answered:—

"Dear Musa, I know all that lies at stake this night and coming day. I can bear much. I am ready for whatever God may send. Once I called you my own cavalier at Palermo. Be such still. May the God who loves us all—Christian, Moslem—be with you and Richard Longsword."

She took the helmet from his arms. He knelt; with her own hands she fitted it after he had caught her hands, and kissed each one. Then he rose, clothed head to foot in the gilded mail.

"God go with you, my cavalier," said the Greek. "I may not say, 'send victory.' Farewell."

The stately plumes swept the pavement when the Spaniard salaamed. "Fear nothing, lady," was all he replied; "remember the arm of the Most High is under all. His will over all. What is to us most ill, is to Him most good. Farewell."

He bowed again,—vanished from the doorway,—was swallowed up in the black night. Mary heard him mount; heard his horse's hoofs dim away in the distance. All the slow wind brought was a far-off murmur and rumble of many toilers on the walls. And Mary went up the staircase to seek her chamber and to pray.

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# CHAPTER XLVII

## HOW TRENCHEFER WAS BROKEN

Again high noon. The Syrian sun beat pitilessly, but Richard and his peers thought little of sun or star that Friday as they toiled on the levers and ropes of the great *beffroi*, the siege tower of Godfrey. From daybreak they had been urging the ponderous fabric across rock and ravine,

though its three tall stories of rough-hewn timber quaked and tottered on the rollers, though its facing of undressed hides had turned a hundred blazing arrows. Half the day they had wrought, while their crossbowmen vainly strove to quench the showers of missiles the Nubians rained upon them. Now, with the tower five hundred feet from its goal, lo! all the sally-ports and the broad gates of Herod and of St. Stephen were flung wide, and forth sallied the garrison,—ebon devils whose only whiteness was their teeth.

"At them, Christians! Forward, in Our Lady's name!" rang the cry of Duke Godfrey. Then all around the tower had surged the battle, the infidels calling "Fire!" and the Christians struggling to save it; but in the end the Moslems were flung back, thinned and saddened by Frankish bolts and blades. Richard, in one moment of the succeeding calm, breathed a prayer of praise to Heaven, "*Gloria! Gloria!* At last! At last!" for he knew that the final hour was drawing nigh. And in the lead of the Nubians, and last of them to turn back, had he not seen that figure in gilded mail he had singled for his vengeance? At the thought of that vengeance even the vision of Mary grew dim, and the weight of his own sins was forgotten. Therefore of all the mad spirits, that day of glory and of wrath, none was madder than he, and none strained the pulleys harder.

Four hundred feet still to cover; four hundred leagues seemingly were traversed easier! For while the great tower lumbered on, groaning as a dragon at his death, the unbelievers set new engines on the walls and smote the Christians, even as God smote Sodom and Gomorrah. After the arrow hail came the catapult darts of two ells long, and stones of a man's own weight blew down as snow from the housetops. After the darts and the stones came things more terrible—glass vessels spitting fire; whereupon all the ground had turned to flame, and from the tower rose smoke and the crashing of timbers.

"Greek fire! Hell loosened! Save who can!" went up the wail of the Christians. But the great Bouillon, treading amid the flames as through a gentle rain, called above the din: "Christ is still with us! Forward in His Name!" Then all courage returned. They brought vinegar and quenched the burning earth. The *beffroi* shook off the fire and crept onward.

Three hundred feet now! The tower was swayed each instant by the shock of the Moslem enginery—darts, stones, fire; it withstood them all. Around the gilded crucifix, fixed high above the summit, a thousand screeching arrows of the infidels had sped. It stood unscathed against the calm blue sky, as amid a realm of eternal peace; and the Christians, looking upon the image of their Lord, rejoiced and pressed forward.

Then again the sally-ports were opened; a second sortie more furious than the last. This time the champion in gilded mail laid about him among the Christians as if Satan's self were raging against God's saints. Richard pressed hard toward him to cross swords; but the strife held them asunder. Gaston of Béarn measured strength with the arch-infidel, and all the Franks groaned when they saw the Viscount fall. But his vassals sprang over him, and locked their shields around him, making the Moslem champion give back. Godfrey, who was cast with Richard for a moment, asked, "And is this not Iftikhar Eddauleh?" The answer was a nod of the head, but he heard behind the closed helm which Longsword, contrary to wont, was wearing, the words muttered, "Father, mother, sister, brother," and knew the Egyptian would need all his might that day.

So for a second time they fought, and for a second time, though two Moslems sallied forth to one of the Christians, the defence found Frankish steel too keen. Their chief strove to rally them, but in vain. Only his sweeping blows thrust back the hardy knights, who followed the unbelievers to the very drawbridge. The gates clanged in the face of the assault, and again from battlement and flanking tower pelted the storm of death. But the *beffroi* still crept on.

Two hundred feet. Tower and wall were so close that the Christian bowmen on the summit could begin to shed a counter rain of missiles upon the infidels to quench that dashing from their enginery. Richard, toiling at the lever, saw a man-at-arms, who was working a catapult, fall, stricken through by a heavy bolt. The Egyptians raised a yell of triumph from the walls; the machine stood useless. Instantly out of the press around the tower rushed a priest—Sebastian! no armor save the holy armor of his white stole. The paynim shafts buzzed over him; to flies he would have paid greater heed. Richard saw the man of fasting and prayer lay the great arrow, draw home the huge bow, press the lever. There was a howl of rage on the walls,—the tall Ammar had fallen under the shaft. Richard ran to the priest's side.

"Back, father!" shouted he, "you rush on death!"

The priest left his toil to kneel beside a stricken bowman. None save the dying heard his voice; but he pointed to the glittering Christ on the sky-raised crucifix. There was a smile on the face when Sebastian laid the head of the dead gently down. The priest looked Richard calmly in the eye, though an arrow flew between them while he spoke.

"I must be about my Father's business," was all he said. Without more words he was back at the catapult, bending, levelling, shooting more than one infidel at every bolt. High above the clangor swelled his voice at each triumph. "Die, Canaanite! die, Amorite! Thou art my battle-axe and weapons of war! With thee will I break in pieces the nations! I will break in pieces captains and rulers!"

Richard knew he was in God's hands and left him. The Christian enginery was at last beginning to tell. Under their missiles he saw the battlements crumbling; dared he hope he saw the firm curtain-wall totter? Richard knew it was long past noon. When last had he touched food or drink or tasted sleep? But when he thought of the deeds to be done ere sunset, and saw that figure in

gilded mail upon the walls, he dwelt no more on thirst or slumber.

One hundred feet; every finger's length bought with ten lives, but the price was not in vain. Men were beginning to count the moments before they could set foot on the rampart. Yet at this point a terrible rumor flew through the army. "The vinegar fails! We cannot master the fire!" And as if bad news was borne by the fleeting winds, the Moslems instantly rained down more flame-pots, then still more, when nothing quenched them. In a twinkling the rock below the walls seemed burning, the rawhide facing of the tower scorched, a great cry of agony rose heavenward from the Franks.

"The devil fights against us!" howled many. But, as before, the word of Godfrey was better than ten thousand fresh sword-hands. "Stand by! Christ is greater than the devil!" he commanded. And Renard of Toul cried, "Forward, cavaliers; now is the time to die!" But Godfrey answered him, "Now is the time in Christ's strength to live." When the news came that Raymond's and Tancred's attacks had failed, his only shout was, "Praised then be St. Michael, for to us is left the victory!"

Then it was the Franks bore witness to their faith; for even the Moslems trembled when they saw those terrible knights of the West standing amid the hail of darts, while the firm soil belched flame, the tower was wrapped in smoke,—beating the fires with their swords, casting on earth with their hands, wrestling at the levers, though the levers themselves were burning, and still forcing the *beffroi* onward, onward!

For men were past hoping, fearing, suffering, now. In the sweet delirium their lives went out without a pang, though their bodies were flaming. And the last sight of the dying was the great crucifix and the Christ thereon, emblem of sacrifice before which lesser sacrifice was counted nothing. Not a Christian engine was working; the most were fast turning to ashes. But the tower, while it blazed, toiled forward. The burning grass at Antioch had been nothing beside this valley of death; but the wall was becoming very near. For the thousandth time Richard was straining at his lever, when Godfrey came to him.

"All is lost, De St. Julien!" came the hoarse whisper.

"Lost? And why lost, my lord?" said Richard, with a dreadful calmness.

"Hist! Look on the ground before; it slopes downward to the moat. The engineers have blundered. When the tower is tilted its crest will be below the battlement; we cannot mount upon the wall."

Richard stared upward through the smoke.

"We can beat down the battlement; it is yielding."

"Are you St. George?" cried the Duke; "every mangonel burns."

Longsword pointed to the left. "All burning save one!" his answer. There was one mangonel so close under the walls that when all its crew were shot dead no others had ventured to man it.

"As Christ died," came from Godfrey, "put that at the foot of the walls; find a breach in ten *credos* or the fire triumphs."

The men of St. Julien followed their seigneur. At last they knew they should fulfil their vow. The garrison, when it saw them, turned on their company all manner of fire and death. But the Auvergners who lived never counted their dead. By main force they tugged the mangonel up beside the *beffroi*, trampled out the flame for an instant. A flying stone shivered Longsword's shield; Herbert thrust his own on Richard's arm, a plain shield with only the red cross of the Crusade. De Carnac fell while they set the rock of half a mule's weight in place; their seigneur pressed up the huge counterpoise; drew the rope. The long arm swept creaking into the air; every war-cry died while the huge missile sped. The rock smote the battlement where the first attacks had weakened it. The upper face of the curtain wall crumbled inward. Out of the wreck a murk of dust was rising. For fifty feet the battlement had been beaten down far lower than was the summit of the tower.

"Forward again! For the love of Christ! Forward!" Godfrey's voice; and it swelled into the sound of ocean waves as ten thousand throats reëchoed it. The Moslems were uplifting a howl of wild despair. Did they fight men or sheytans, whose home was flame? But Richard saw the champion of the gilded mail still on the ramparts. The tower was now springing toward the wall as if a spirit of life had entered, so many were the eager hands. The infidel fires were spent. The Christian bowmen were shooting so pitilessly, not an Egyptian catapult was working. Up the dizzy ladder on the rear face of the tower Longsword clambered in spite of armor. The drawbridge at the crest the stones had long since dashed to flinders; what matter? For Heaven suffered two long beams from one of the defenders' engines to fall outward. The Crusaders caught them, laid them side by side,—a bridge with width of half an ell,—a dizzy height below, but beyond, Jerusalem!

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Men tell that it was the end of the third hour of that Friday afternoon,—at the very moment Jesus Christ cried, on the Cross, "It is finished!"—that the tower of Godfrey was brought beside the walls; and the cavaliers, who had faced death so many times that day, gathered on its summit, to

enter the Holy City. To right and left the walls had been swept bare of defenders by the bowmen. The cry passed that a warrior in arms of white stood on the Mount of Olives, waving his shield to urge on God's soldiers,—St. George, patron of holy victory. But though the other Moslems were fled away, there was one who remained steadfast. As Longsword gained the crest of the tower, he saw at the head of the narrow bridge that figure in gilded mail, with sword bared, helmet closed, twenty Christian bolts glancing off his panoply while he awaited the first to cross. And every Frankish voice cried, "Iftikhar, emir of Jerusalem!"

Already upon the crest were standing the great Duke himself and Renard of Toul, Baldwin du Bourg, and many more. Yet for an instant none started—for it seemed tempting God to tread that bridge with fifty feet to the rock-hewn moat below, then meet the thrust of that cimeter. At Godfrey's call the bowmen threw over the Moslem a cloud of arrows; but the gilded mail was proof. Still he stood,—then with the courtliest flourish to his foes, drew back three steps from the head of the perilous bridge, leaving a foothold for his challenger. Again he stood guard, and all the Christians shouted, "A gallant knight, though infidel!" while the Duke bade the bowmen spare him; so notable a cavalier must die at a cavalier's own hands. There was an eager rush of those who would cross first, and smite the first blow,—Longsword eagerest of all. But a stranger knight leaped before him. The Frank sped over the dizzy path; stood upon the shattered wall. Once the swords met; but at the second blow the Christian dashed backward into the empty air—they heard the clang of his armor in the moat below.

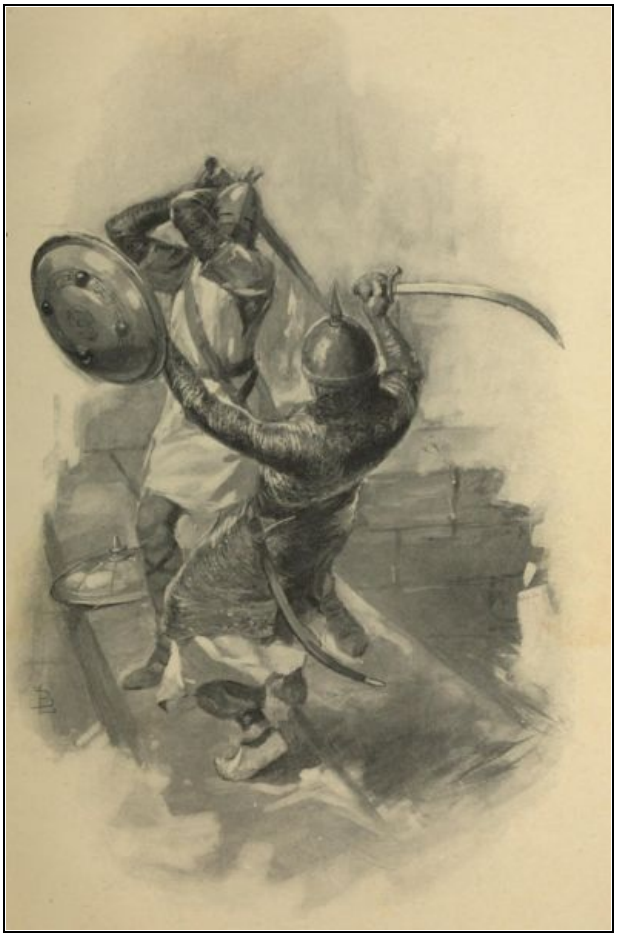
"My prey!" pleaded Richard. But to his bitter wrath again, De Valmont had leaped before him, crossed the bridge, and all men kept silent while the Auvergner put forth all might and skill. Then of a sudden they saw the Moslem's thin blade lash under Louis's heavy weapon, smite full upon the side, and De Valmont went backward also. As he tumbled, a projecting beam broke his fall. In the moat they saw his stirrings, and cried out, "Still alive!" Men sought him, exclaiming, "Miracle!" But a great awe had come on the Christians. Who was this that could smite Sir Louis at ten passes? Godfrey thrust himself forward.

"Make way, fair knights! I, myself, will meet this paladin!" But Richard held him, as he touched the bridge.

"This is my own foe, my lord; your promise!"

Godfrey turned, and Richard shook the lightnings out of Trenchefer, as he ran across the narrow way. With him went a great prayer half uttered by the whole host,—"*Dominus tecum!*" as every man saw him standing with his feet on the brink of death, his face toward the infidel.

Richard showed naught but calmness. He trod the perilous path quickly as though he sought his bride. Trenchefer felt light as a rush to his strong right arm. The wall, the moat, the death below, he never saw; his eyes were only for that gilded mail—the mail of Iftikhar. This was the moment for which he had wept, had prayed! Behind that hated armor he saw forms never again to be met on earth—mother, father, sister, brother. He thought of the pains of his wife, and his own long sorrow. He was proud of the splendor, the valor, of the Moslem,—the greater glory in the victory. God had indeed willed that he should hew the last of the way to Jerusalem.



**"THE INFIDEL GAVE WAY"**

Scarce had he taken stand on the shattered parapet before the infidel was paying him blow for blow. At the third fence Longsword knew he had met his match, for no mean cavalier with a cimeter's light blade could turn a downright stroke of Trenchefer. At the fourth Richard took one step back—another would have sent him beyond love and hate. But his rage rose in him; at the fifth the infidel gave way. A great stillness was around; the sun was sinking in unclouded brightness; the Egyptians, cowering behind their battlements, bated their prayers to Allah as they gazed; the Christians forgot to invoke Our Lady. Richard, finding that a few smith's blows were profitless, fell to a slow and steady foil and fence; putting forth all his art, and every pass and feint that had never failed before. But he marvelled as he fought, seeing his subtlest strokes turned by that thin blade, which he deemed to have brushed away in a twinkling. Had he never before fenced with that cunning hand? The Moslem's shield now shattered; Longsword swept his blade low and parried; in a flash the other passed his cimeter from right hand to left, and the weapon dashed full upon the Norman's shoulder, ere he could raise Trenchefer. But the Valencia "ring-mail"—Musa's gift—was yet proof. Ere the Moslem could strike twice, Richard recovered, cast away his own shield, and pressed closer.

At a sweeping stroke of Trenchefer he slipped, and all the Franks moaned. But the infidel—gallant as his foe—did not press home the chance. Richard stood again, and struck as never before. "Paladins both!" rang from the Christians. Now at last men knew Longsword fought for life, not for vengeance only. Again the Franks began to tremble.

"The Egyptians rally; new companies mount the walls!" thundered Duke Godfrey; "beat them back or all is lost!"

The crossbowmen stood to their task like good men and true. They swept away the Nubians clustering on the battlements, but others swarmed after. A moment more, and not one but a hundred blades would close the perilous bridge.

"Across with a rush; sweep the champion down!" cried many Christians. But the great Duke answered, "Either in knightly fashion or not at all, let us take Jerusalem." His word was scarce spoken before one vast shout made the tower rock with the quaking earth, "*Gloria tibi, Domine!*" Trenchefer had sprung aloft; the cimeter flew to parry; the Norman's blade turned flatwise, but no mortal arm could have borne up against that stroke. The Christian drove home upon the shoulder, beating in the armor, though he might not pierce. The Moslem's weapon flew from his hand; he staggered, fell upon the walls, while past him and his victor leaped the exulting Franks.

Richard stood erect, but panting, while the brothers Lethalde and Engelbert of Tournai leaped upon the upper battlement, and with them Baldwin du Bourg and Reimbault Creton, mighty cavaliers all. A cry went up that would drown every other din that day of strife, "*God wills it!*" flung to the bending heavens. The Egyptians upon the walls fought at bay—how vainly! Richard knew the great day had come; the Holy City was won, his arch foe smitten; the journey, the agony, the pouring of the wine of life, had not been vain. God had remembered the toils of His people. Then, as he looked, he saw Sebastian in his white robe, leaping across the bridge. But

just as his foot touched the crumbled wall, a chance arrow from some despairing Nubian caught him fairly on the breast. He fell, the white stole fast turning red. Richard caught him in his arms.

"Father," he pleaded, "dearest father, you will not die; see, the victory!"

Sebastian's lips were moving. Richard bent low—a woman's name, "Philippa." "Philippa?" the name of the priest's boy love? Who might say? But at this instant Sebastian started from Richard's arms, and pointed upward. "Look!" and Longsword beheld Godfrey setting the great crucifix from the tower upright upon the battlement of the Holy City. Sebastian's face glowed with an awful smile. He had seen it, Gregory's vision—*the Cross triumphant on the walls of Jerusalem*.

"Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," came the thin voice, "according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen—" but the rest was heard by the angels about the Throne.

Richard gently lowered the head, stood, and stared about. Already the slaughter was begun on the walls and in the streets. From the Gate of St. Stephen thundered the battle-axes of Tancred and his host, whose strength swelled with the victory. Two thoughts were foremost in Longsword's mind,—"Mary; the Spaniard." He had not seen Musa on the walls. What had befallen? They were crying, "No quarter, slay!" He must act quickly. Suddenly his eye passed from Sebastian to the form of his victim. Holy Mother! the infidel stirred,—he was not dead! The casque was slipping back from the Moslem's face. The wounded man half raised himself, put forth a hand, and pushed away the helmet. Not for ten kingdoms would Richard have looked upon that face; but he could not turn away. And when the casque fell, Longsword beheld the face of Musa, son of Abdallah.

Those passing across the bridge heard a cry of pain that followed them to their dying bed. They saw Richard Longsword uplift Trenchefer with both his arms, and dash it upon the rock. Midway the great blade of the Vikings snapped asunder, and almost with a mortal groan.

"Dear God," called Richard, "is it thus at last the price of Gilbert's blood is paid!"

Then they beheld that man, who had wrestled with fire and death from dawn, cast his own helmet away, snatch the infidel in his arms, soothing and whispering like a woman, while his tears ran freely, as those of a little child.

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# CHAPTER XLVIII

## HOW RICHARD SAW THE SUN RISE

How the Holy City was sacked by the men of the West; how the infidels paid for unbelief and blasphemy with their own blood; how the blood in the porch of the mosque of Omar plashed up to the bridles of the horses,—these things this book will not tell. For its story is of the deeds of men—not of demons, as their foes cried—nor of avenging angels, as their own hearts boasted. Neither is there need to tell how Zeyneb's life went out under a Frankish sword, nor how Herbert and Theroulde found Mary at the house by the Gate of Herod. It was theirs to save her from death or worse, at the hands of the raging victors, who deemed all in the city Moslem, that night of rapine and sin. Through Saint Stephen's gate they brought her forth, while in Sion, the upper city, the last Egyptians yet stood at bay, and Tancred and Raymond were leading to the final slaughter. Mary said not a word, while the St. Julieners led her through the sack and ruin, and through a thousand scenes at which her pure heart sickened. But when they had passed the wrecked portal, and the hill of Olivet lay before them, clothed in the gold and purple of the evening light, she said softly to Herbert: "And is my dear Lord Richard well?" For though they had said as much at first, yet their looks were so grave she was ill at ease. Then Herbert answered, "Blessed be St. Michael, sweet lady, he is well, though death plucked at him a hundred times." Then Mary asked—half guessing the reply—"And know you anything of his friend, the Spaniard Musa?" But the veteran glanced at Theroulde, and the *jongleur* answered: "Dearest mistress, he lies sorely wounded in our baron's tent—grief to tell, though he is Moslem!" Then the Greek bowed her head, and with no more speech they led her to the camp. At the tent door Richard came to meet her, treading softly, and neither spoke when he clasped her to his breast. He led her within where Musa was lying upon a pallet of mantles and saddle-cloths. Mary knelt beside him, touched him. He did not speak or move, though still alive.

"He will die?" she whispered, raising her eyes.

"He will die," answered her husband, very softly. "His armor is not pierced, but all his shoulder has been beaten down. Not all the physicians of his Cordova may heal." Then he took Mary by the hand, and they sat beside the bed. In whispers he told of all that had befallen that day, and learned from her how it befell that Musa wore the armor of Iftikhar. And Mary bowed her head once more, saying it was her own blind folly that sent Musa to his fate. But Richard stroked her tenderly, though his own heart was over full; then made her lie down, promising to waken her if the Spaniard came to himself. So a little past midnight Richard touched her, and she saw that the tent was lighted by lamps brought from the city, and there were silken cushions under Musa's

head. The Andalusian was speaking.

"The Star of the Greeks? Is she here?"

"I am here, Musa, dear brother of my husband!" said the lady, at his side. "Speak, and say you will master death as you mastered Iftikhar Eddauleh; that you will forgive this rash disobedience of mine which brought you all this woe!"

Musa's face wore one of its old, soft, melancholy smiles.

"Ah! Rose of Byzantium," said he, half whimsically, "do you think I am so great I can hurl back doom? I grow too proud with the praise. Forgive you? Forgive what—that you loved Richard Longsword, and wished to know it was well with him? No more of that. I forgive, if aught needs forgiving. As for dying, as well to be sped by Trenchefer as by any blade. It was written by Allah upon the canopy of the stars, and Allah does all things well."

"Ah, would God I could die in your stead, my brother, my brother," began Richard, while those terrible tears out of manliest grief would come.

"And the Star of the Greeks, what says she?" began Musa, again smiling. But he checked, when he saw the gust of sorrow sweeping across Mary's face. Then in a darker tone, he added, "No more of this, as you love me; no more, as I love you—love you both." His gaze was not on Richard, but on his wife. And the woman's heart first caught the strange stress of his voice and the light in his dimming eyes.

"Love *me*?" her words with a start.

Musa half raised his head from the pillows.

"Why shall I not say it now?" came the reply, almost proudly. "Loved you? I have ever loved you, truly as ever man loved, from the hour I saw your face, and heard your voice, when we plucked you from the Berbers." Then to Richard, "Dear brother, feel in my breast." And the Norman drew forth a soiled and folded bit of scarlet ribbon. "Do you remember, Star of the Greeks, the day you gave me this—when I held the lists against Iftikhar at Palermo? It has been at my lips each night since before I fell asleep. For I have loved you—have loved you—long." The words came very slowly now, for the flood of life was ebbing fast. But the Norman broke out:—

"Dear God, and all these years, my brother, you have not breathed this! I made mockery of your monkish state, and you smiled on, doing all to bring us two together and to give us joy!"

"Assuredly, can the outlaw kite make a nest for the lark? Had I loved her as little as Iftikhar loved her, I would have served brute passion alone; have made my love only of her beauty and her kisses. But I knew while she knelt to your Christ and I to my Allah, we could never love soul with soul. Therefore my joy was this, to see her grow more beautiful as your bride, brother that you are, though not in blood."

"And was it so easy to do all this that I never dreamed it? that I marvelled to myself, 'Why is Musa so devoted, yet so true to Richard, my husband?'" asked Mary, with quivering lips. The breath of the Spaniard was coming still more slowly, but he answered, smiling: "After I had you utterly in my power—after the parting at Antioch—I swore a great oath I would never, save when dying, confess I saw you as other than a sister while Richard lived. It was hard; I was tempted; often the power of Eblees and his jinns was strong. But I fought them away with Allah's might. I have mastered, I have kept my vow. She is yours again, my brother, your own pure wife."

"Holy Mother," cried Mary, in her pain, "had I known this three days since, how would God have tortured me! God knows, while I never had an untrue thought touching Richard,"—and she looked fairly upon her husband,—"yet, Christian or Moslem, had Musa said the word, how would my breast have been torn!"

"Yes, and no shame," the Norman was interrupting, "for what I marvel at is this,—how you and Musa could look upon each other's face one day, and yet keep love for me."

But Musa whispered: "Leave the secret to Allah, Most High. I am near the ending now. You of the West have conquered. You have indeed wrung victory from very doom, your vow is cleared. The next Genoese ship bears you homeward to St. Julien, to the castle and the mountains of fair Auvergne. You will not forget, under that sweet French sky, the Spaniard, whose body lies beneath the dust of that Jerusalem he died to save, though all in vain?"

"Till they chant my death mass—never!" whispered Richard; but Mary made no reply. "It is a long way from *El Kuds*," Musa's pallid lips ran on, "to the orange groves and shining vegas, by the Guadalquiver and the Darro. But the pathway to the throne of Allah can be trodden while an arrow flies. Do not believe the priests, my brother, nor the imams of Islam, who say, 'only Christian,' 'only Moslem,' can meet before the Most High's face. Whether your Christ were Son of the Eternal or earth-sprung prophet, I know not. If to be true Christian is to wear the pure heart of Mary de St. Julien, then in truth the son of Mary the Virgin was the son of the All-Merciful. But this is hid. We shall meet—you, and you, and I—in some blessed spot where the word is 'love,' not 'war.'" His breath failed him; Mary took his head upon her lap and stroked his temples with her soft, white hands. Richard did not speak. Presently the Spaniard spoke again, a whisper, as of the far retreating wind:—

"Yes, I have been faithful to my love,—my brother,—my promise."

Mary glanced toward Richard, and he nodded gently. She bent over Musa and kissed him twice upon the lips. A smile broke upon the Spaniard's face. There came a faint sigh and a folding of the hands, as if to rest. Mary raised her head.

"He is not here," she whispered; and Richard answered softly, "Sweet wife, that was the fairest deed of all your life."

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Just as the dawn was glowing, Richard stood before his tent on Olivet, and at his side Mary de St. Julien, his wife. It was very still, peaceful as a summer Sabbath of La Haye in far Provence. They clasped hands as they listened to a distant chant and singing. The priests were raising the matin hymn from the rock of Sion, where infidel muezzins had called on the single Allah for so many sinful years. They saw the east change from crimson to red fire, the redness brighten to golden flame; then all the ridge of Moab glowed in light, as on that morning when the host first stood before Jerusalem. The last mists crept from the hills—thin blue clouds that faded away in the burning azure. And last of all the sun mounted upward slowly, his glory trailing far, as though reluctant for his daily race. They saw coming from the city a company of priests, white-stoled, and bearing in their midst a bier, Sebastian going to that rest which shall know waking only at God's last trumpet.

"Let us pray," said Mary, gently, "for the souls of all the brave men and true who have died. Let us pray for the soul of Musa."

So they knelt, while the chant of the priests drew ever nearer. When they rose, the disk of fire had leaped above the topmost peak, and was touching each dome, each battlement, of the Holy City with living light. They saw the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Rock of Calvary. The slow breeze crept through the scattered olive trees that crowned the Mount of the Agony. It was silent,—for a moment the priests had ceased chanting, and the sun went on his upward way, shedding over Mary's face an aureole as of gold. Richard put his arm about his wife, and looked deep into her eyes. And in those eyes he saw a strength, a love, a sweetness, not there that first hour they sped madness through his frame, when he curbed in Rollo with half-boyish might.

"Mary," said he, softly, in his Norman French, "my own true lady wife, it is five years since we first looked on each other—long years. But there are many left, please God. Will you go back to France with me, that by your aid and prayers I may prove a just lord to the lands of St. Julien?"

"I will go to the earth's ends with you, dear lord and husband," said she; and she also spoke in French. Then she pressed him closer. "Ah, sweet life, the night is sped; the sun fast rises. All the past is gone—Musa, Sebastian, Iftikhar, Morgiana,—and we—we only—are left to each other. I will forget I was born a Greek. I will speak your own sweet French, and be your loving wife; and we shall grow old together, ever loving one another, and the dear God more. And Musa—" but Richard had his word:—

"We will bear his name upon our hearts; and if so be I am suffered to stand before the throne of light, there will my brother be also. For on the earth there did not tread a soul more loved by God"—he hesitated—"and the Lord Christ, than he."

Then he kissed Mary once more, holding her head back in his strong arms, that the brightness might transfigure all her beauty. The procession of priests was very near, its leader, Raymond of Agiles. The two knelt once more, that they might receive the good priests' blessing and proffer new prayers for the sainted dead. And while they knelt, the company burst forth into singing, until the rock of Olivet gave back the sound:—

"Laud and honor to the Father!
  Laud and honor to the Son!
Laud and honor to the Spirit!
  Ever Three and ever One;
Con-substantial, co-eternal,
  While unending ages run!"

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