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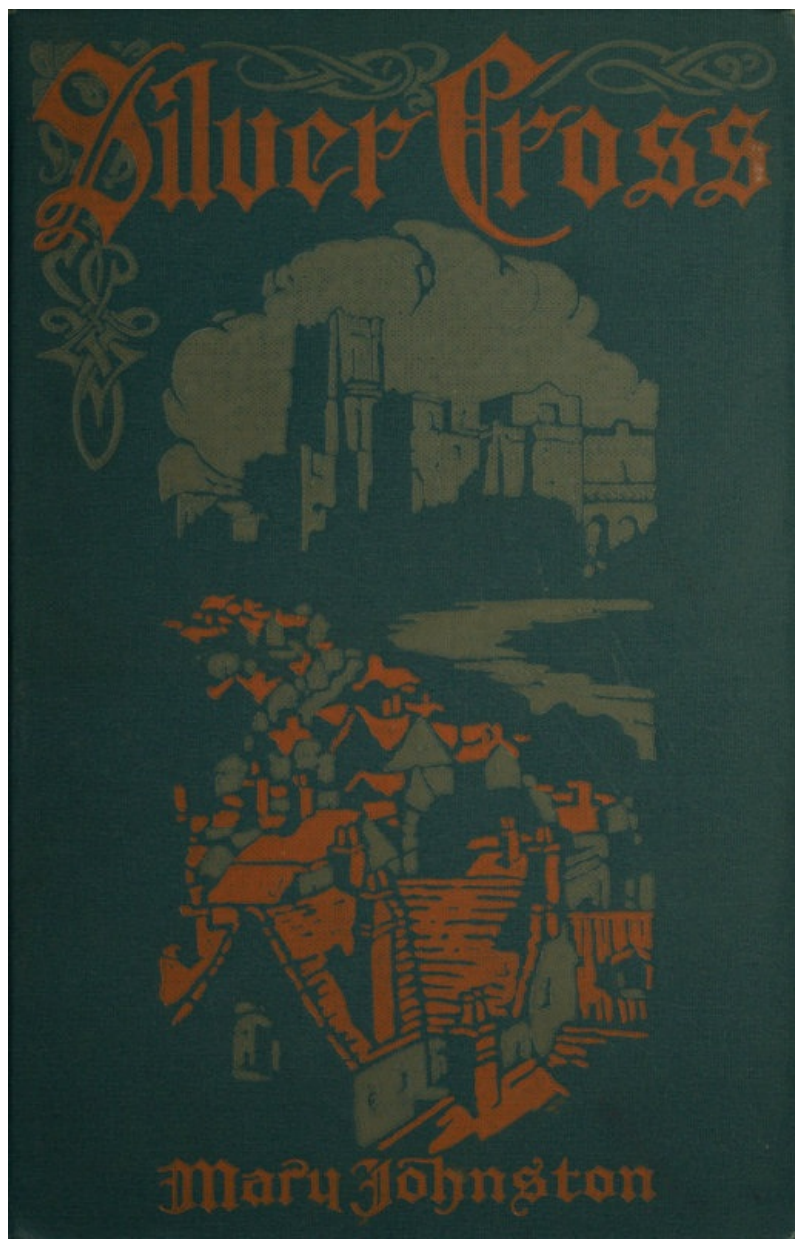
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Transcriber's Note

Variant spelling is retained, a very few changes have been made to standardize punctuation and spelling.



SILVER CROSS

By

MARY JOHNSTON



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SILVER CROSS
CHAPTER I

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HENRY THE SEVENTH sat upon the throne.

The town of Middle Forest had long since pushed the forest from all sides. Its streets, forked as lightning, ran up to the castle and down to the river. The river here was near its mouth, and wide. The bridge that crossed it had many arches. Below the bridge quite large craft, white and brown and dull red, sailed or dropping sail, came to anchor. Answering to hour and weather the water spread carnation, gold, sapphire, jade, opal, lead and ebony. Now it slept glassy, and now wind made of it a fretful, ridged thing. The note of the town was a bleached grey, but with strong splashes of red and umber. A sharp, steep hill upheld the castle that was of middle size and importance, built by the lords Montjoy and held now by William of that name.

Behind the town a downward sloping wood tied the castle hill to fields and meadows. The small river Wander ran by these on its way to join the greater stream. Up the Wander, two leagues or so, in a fertile vale couched the Abbey of Silver Cross. Materially speaking, a knot of stone houses for monks—Cistercians, White Monks—a stately stone house for God and his Son and Mary; nearby a quite unstately hamlet, timber, daub and thatch, grown haphazard by church and cloister; many score broad acres, wood and field, stream and pasture, mill, forge, weirs, and a tenant roll of goodly length,—such was Silver Cross. So far as physical possessions went what in this region Montjoy did not hold Silver Cross did and what the two did not hold Middle Forest had managed to wrest from them in Henry Sixth's time. Silver Cross had, too, immaterial possessions. But once she had been wealthier here than she was now. That time had been even with a time of material poverty. Now she had goods, but she did not have so much sanctity. Yet there were values still, marked with that other world's seal; it is useless to doubt that.

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The thorn in Silver Cross' flesh was not now Montjoy nor Middle Forest, with both of whom she had for years lived in amity. The thorn was the Friary of Saint Leofric—Dominican—across the river from Middle Forest, but tied to it by the bridge, holding its lands well away from Montjoy and Silver Cross, but rival nevertheless, with an eye to king's favour, cardinal's favour, and bidding latterly, with a distinctness, for popular favour. That was the wretched, irritating thorn, likely to produce inflammation! Prior Hugh of Saint Leofric—ah, the ambitious one!

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Silver Cross possessed in a splendid *loculus* the span-long silver cross that the lips of Saint Willebrod, the martyr, had kissed after head and trunk were parted. In ancient times it had worked many miracles, but in this modern day the miraculous was grown drowsy. Saint Leofric had the bones of Saint Leofric,—all, that is, save the right hand and arm. That is, once and for ages these had lacked. But now—this very Easter—the missing members had been found: miraculously pointed out, miraculously found! There had been long pause in working miracles, but now Saint Leofric was working them again. Middle Forest talked more of Saint Leofric who was, as it were, a foreigner, being across the river, lord of nothing on this side—than it talked of Silver Cross that was its own. Not alone Middle Forest, but all this slice of England. Silver Cross found the mounting bruit discordant, a very peacock scream. Silver Cross slurred the fresh miracles of Saint Leofric and detested Prior Hugh. Silver Cross's own abbot, Abbot Mark, said that Apollyon made somewhere a market.

The river lay stretched and still, red with the sunset, deep blue where the blue summer sky yet abided. "Like the Blessed Virgin's robe and cloak!" said Morgen Fay. "The bridge is her gemmed

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girdle.”

Morgen Fay’s house was a river-side one, built up sheer indeed from the river so that one might take welcomes, flung toys, from passing boats. Morgen Fay took them, leaning from her window. Her voice floated down in return; sometimes she flung a flower. She had a garden, large as a kerchief, beside the house, hidden almost by a jut of the old town wall. Here she gathered the flowers she flung. Sometimes he who had been in the boat came again, walking, to her door that was discreet, in the shadow of the wall. But he only gained entry if he were somehow friend of a friend. And all alike must be *armiger*, or at least not the least in the burgher world. And, logically, only those of these entered who could be friends and pay. Would you have love for nothing? She had an answer always ready to that. “I must live!”

The sunset spread. There was more red than blue. “She is so close wrapped in her mantle that you can hardly see the heavenly blue core of her.—Oh, Mother and Mother and Mother—where are we and what are we?”

Morgen Fay went into her garden. Company was coming for supper. Best break a few more flowers. The flowers were June flowers, roses and yellow lilies, larkspur and pinks. They had the sunset hues. The owner of the garden broke them, tall herself as the lilies, white and vermeil like the roses.

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The sunset died out and the river stretched first pearl and then lead and then ebony.

Morgen Fay had a little oaken room where boards were laid upon trestles and covered with a fringed cloth, and dishes and flasks and goblets set upon this. An old woman, large but light upon her feet, spread the table, Morgen helping. The old woman’s son kept the street door. He was a lazy lout but obedient, strong, too, of his fists and with a voice that could summon, if need were, not the dead but the watch. His name was Anthony, the old woman’s Ailsa, and Morgen Fay had known them since she was a young child. Now they were in her employ.

Said Ailsa, “’Tis Somerville’s company?”

“Yes. You know that. How many candles? You’d best bring three more.”

“Yes, I will. Is that the gown you’re going to wear?”

“Yes. It’s my best.”

“It’s not the one you like the best—so ’t isn’t your best after all, is it? You don’t like Somerville as well as you did last Lady Day.”

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“What does it matter if I like him or don’t like him?”

“Oh, you won’t keep him if you don’t like him! He’ll go as others have gone. ‘Keep!’ Lord! With most of blessed women it’s the other way ’round!”

She brought the candles. “Do you like Master Bettany?”

“I don’t know.”

“He’s richer than the knight—just as he’s younger. I say that Somerville’s holding a light for his own house’s sacking!”

“I say that I am tired. I like neither man nor woman, I nor thou.”

“Are you cold? Will you have a little fire? Here, take wine!”

“Joy from wine is falseness like the rest. Give it to me!”

Morgen drank. “I’ll have just time to put on the other dress if you think it sets me better.”

She went and put it on, returning to the oak room. Ailsa regarded results with eyes of a friendly critic. “It does! Montjoy knows how to choose—learned it, I reckon, in France!” She stood with her hands on her hips. She, too, had taken wine and now she loosed tongue, regarding all the time the younger woman with a selfish and unselfish affection, submitting to the wonder of her, but standing up for the right by prescription of half-ruling the wonder. Morgen had a voice of frankincense and music with a drop of clear oil. Ailsa had more of the oil and a humbler music. “Say you ‘Falseness?’ Say you ‘Coldness?’ Say you ‘Darkness!’ You’re a bright fool, Morgen-live-by-the-river!”

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“Granted I am a fool,” said Morgen, and kneeled on the window seat.

The older woman’s voice rose. “Doesn’t fire warm you, and good sweet sack? Don’t you lie soft? Don’t you have jewels and gold work and silk of Cyprus? Don’t gentlemen and rich merchants come for your stroking? Haven’t you got a garden where you can walk and a tight house, and a pearl net for your hair, and a velvet shoe? Doesn’t Montjoy protect you for old time’s sake—even though now the fool goes off after religion? Religion! Don’t you go to Mass and give candles—wax ones—and doesn’t Father Edwin, your cousin, make all safe for you in that quarter? Oh, the Saints! There’s king’s power, and there’s priest’s power, and there’s woman’s power! World slurs you and world loves you, Morgen and Morgen! Go to! Fie on you! Shorten your long face! Where’s falseness—anything to speak of, that is? Where’s coldness and darkness? The world’s been a good world to you, mistress, ever since you danced at the Great Fair here, and Warham House saw you and took you and taught you! A pretty good world!”

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“As worlds go—poor, dumb things! Yes, I say they are poor, dumb things! Light the candles!”

The large woman drew close the curtains over the window that gave upon the street and lighted the candles. There was wood laid within the fireplace. She regarded this. “It’s a cool June

—and, Our Lady! we seem to need mirth here to-night! Fire and wine—wine and fire!”

She left the room for the kitchen, and returning with a flaming brand, struck it amid the cold wood. All took fire. “Better, isn’t it? I hear company’s footfall!”

The company thought the oak room shining to-night. They thought Morgen Fay fair and joyous. Sir Robert Somerville was yet in love,—none of her old loves went wholly out of love. But he was not so fathoms deep in love as once he had been. He had left the miser stage and now he was at the expansive, willing to feed pride by showing his easy wealth. He moved a tall man of forty-odd, with a quick, odd grimacing face, not unpleasing. He had a decisive voice and more gesture than was the country’s custom. With him came a guest in his house to whom he wished to show the oak casket and the gem it contained, a cousin from the other side of England, Sir Humphrey Somerville, to wit,—and Master Thomas Bettany, son and heir of the richest merchant in Middle Forest. They kissed Morgen Fay who put on magic and welcomed them. It was as though the river outside, that had been lead to ebony, ran now through faint silver back to rose.

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There was a settle by the fire and Morgen sat here, and by her Sir Robert, and Sir Humphrey opposite, and Master Bettany in a poorer chair in front of the flames. Master Bettany was the youngest there,—a great, blond boy with blue eyes of daring, with enormous desire for adventure, experience, plots and mysteries. Salt and sugar must be elaborately planned for, approached with a delicate, shivering sense of danger, of play and play again and something to risk, or truly life was not sugared nor salted! He was for islands said to be danger-circled and with a witch for queen! He was likewise modest and kind-hearted, and as he could not devise evil, the evil he believed in was highly artificial. Sir Humphrey Somerville was as large for man as Ailsa was for women. He had brown hair and a beak of a nose and the eyes of a wag, but behind the waggery something formidable in his face.

Such as they were, they had a merry evening, when the food was brought and the wine was poured; and Morgen, too, turned merry, though, as ever, she kept measure, for that was the way she ruled.

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CHAPTER II

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UP in the castle also was company to supper. William, Lord of Montjoy, entertained his cousin, Abbot Mark from Silver Cross, and Prior Matthew of Westforest, a dependent House further up the Wander. Montjoy showed a small, dark, wistful man. The Abbot had too much flesh for comfort, a great, handsome, egg-shaped face, and a manner that oozed bland, undoubting authority. He had long ago settled that he was good and wise. But, strangely, was left the struggle to be happy! It took a man’s time! Just there, something or some one perpetually interfered! But it was something to be sure that you served God and Holy Church. Asked how he served, he might, after cogitation, have answered that he served by his being. Moreover, as times went, he was scrupulous, gave small houseroom to scandal, ruled monk and tenant, beautified the great church of Silver Cross, bought Italian altar pictures.

Matthew of Westforest was another sort. Tall and shrivelled and reddish, he had another manner of wit.

The three supped in the castle hall, at the upper end of a table accommodating a half-score above the salt and thrice that number below. Beside Montjoy sat Lady Alice, his wife. There were likewise a young girl, his daughter Isabel, and his sister, also young, married and widowed, Dame Elenore.

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Abbot Mark talked much to these three, benevolently, with gallantry looking around corners. The Prior maintained silence here. The features he secretly praised were the beautiful features of Outward Advancement. Montjoy at supper talked little. After a life of apparent unconcern he was beginning to think of soul’s life. Perhaps once a day he felt a shift of consciousness. Now it came like a zephyr from some differing, surely sweeter clime, and now like a clean dagger stroke. After these events, which never took more time to happen than the winking of an eye, he saw some great expanse of things differently. He was learning to lie in wait for these instants. Laid one to another, they were becoming the hub around which the day’s wheel ran. But truly they were but instants and came but once in so often, taking him when it pleased them. And the lightning might have showed him—perhaps did show him—that there was an unknown number of things yet to change. They might be very many. He knew in no wise definitely whence came the fragrant air and the dagger strokes.

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At the moment when the chronicle opens, he had turned back, in his questing, to the broad realm of Holy Church. Holy Church said that she sat, acquiescent, wise, at the door through which such things came. In fact, she said, she had the keys. Montjoy, being no fool, saw, indeed, how much of the portress was lewd and drunken. But for all that surely she had been given the keys! Given them once, surely she could not have parted with them! He rebuked the notion. And truly he knew much that was good of the portress, much that was very good. He thought, “I will better serve Religion”—conceiving that to be Holy Church’s high name. But he was bewildered between high name and low name, between the saint there in the portress and the evident harlot. Between the goodness and the evil!

He was led by a longing for union and he only knew that it was not for old unions that once had contented. He could have those at any time if he willed them again. But he knew that they would

not content. The longing was larger and demanded a larger reciprocal. He was knight-errant now in the interior land of romance, out to find that reciprocal, visited with gleams from some presence, but wandering often, turning in mistake now here, now there.

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Supper ended. Abbot Mark had come to the castle for counsel, or at the least, for intelligent sympathy. It was too general in the hall. The withdrawing room would be better. They went to this, but still there was play, with a fire for a cool June evening, with lights and musical instruments, Dame Elenore's hands upon the virginals, young Isabel's fresh voice singing with a young knight, man of Montjoy's, two gentlewomen serving Lady Alice murmuring over a tapestry frame,—and the Abbot soothed, happy, in the great chair near Dame Elenore. Prior Matthew shook himself. "Business! Business!" was his true motto and inner word. He spoke in a low voice to the Abbot, deferentially, for the Priory deduced from the Abbey, but monitory also, perhaps even minatory. Abbot and Prior alike knew that when it came to business the Prior had the head.

The Abbot sighed and turned from Dame Elenore to Montjoy who was brooding, chin on fist, eyes on fire. "We must ride early to Silver Cross, Montjoy! Counsel is good, they say, taken in the warm, still hour before bedtime."

Dame Elenore lifted her hands from the virginals. Montjoy's wife spoke to her women and, the song being done, to her daughter. "We will go, my lord. Give you good night! Your blessing, Lord Abbot!" She kneeled for it, as did young Isabel and Dame Elenore and the two gentlewomen and the young knight and Gilbert the page. The Abbot blessed; the women and the young men took their departure. Montjoy and Silver Cross and Westforest had the room and the fire and through the window the view, did they choose to regard it, of the town roofs and twisting, crack-like streets, and of the river, now under the gleaming of a rising moon, and a line that was the bridge, and a mound on the farther side crowned by a twinkling constellation, lights of Saint Leofric's monks. The Abbot did so look, walking heavily the room and pausing by the window. It was with peevish face and gesture that he returned to the great chair "Do you hear each day, Montjoy, louder news of what Hugh is doing?"

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"Is it Prior Hugh, or is it Saint Leofric? If it be Hugh, I say that long since we knew that he was ambitious and glory-covetous. If it be the saint—how shall you war against him?"

"If Saint Willebrod would arise to war—"

"Would they war—two saints?"

"Would he not come to aid of St. Robert, St. Bernard, St. Stephen and Abbey of Silver Cross? Just as Montjoy would draw blade for his suzerain? Chivalry, loyalty and fealty must hold in heaven," said the Abbot.

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"If there is One behind Saint Leofric—"

"Never believe it!" The Prior spoke hastily. "Moreover, my son, it is certainly not Leofric. It is Hugh!"

Montjoy sat brooding. His guests watched him. Presently he spoke. "Two days ago, returning from hawking in Long Fields, I met a man who had sat and woven baskets from his youth because he could not walk, being smitten in both feet. He was walking, he was skipping and running. 'Saint Leofric! Saint Leofric!' he kept crying out, and those with him cried, 'Saint Leofric! Saint Leofric!' I halted one of them. 'The right hand and arm—the right hand and arm that were found, lord! He touched but the little finger—and look how he leaps and runs!'"

The Abbot groaned.

"I rode on farther and I met a stream of folk on their way to the bridge. They had made themselves into a procession and were chanting. I remember easily and I can almost give you their chant. It ran something like this."

He began to chant, but not loudly.

"They were found through a dream,
They were shown to Brother Paul,
A saintly monk,
Where they rested
Under a stone
In a place prepared of old
In Saint Leofric's great church!
The white bones,
The right arm and the right hand,
Miraculous!
In the monk's dream
They shone through the stone
Making a pool of light.
Saint Leofric painted in the window
Came down and kneeled over it."

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Again the Abbot groaned. "So saith Hugh!"

“Good Prior Hugh made to dig.
There in sweet earth,
In spices and linen,
The right hand and arm
At last!
Yea, it shineth forth—
Saint Leofric smileth in his window!”

The Abbot groaned the third time. “Sathanas smileth!”

“Now are the bones together,
They shine with a sunny light,
Working miracles!—
From the four corners come
The sick and the sorrowful—”

“Aye! Bringing gifts!”

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“Saint Leofric’s name is in all mouths,
His glory encreaseth over Silver Cross!”

“I should not have said it—I should not have said it!” cried the Abbot. “But with the inconstant and weak generality it doth! What is it this part England rings with—yea, that the rest of England begins to learn? Do we not hear that a pilgrimage comes from London itself? *The missing bones of Saint Leofric have been found!*”

“And have they not?” said Montjoy.

There followed a pause. A log cracked and fell upon the hearth. Light and shadow leaped about the room. The Prior spoke. “It is a matter of observation,” he said, and seemed to study his ring, “that there are cases when acts belie as belief, whether it be correctly addressed to a reality or squandered before a falsity.”

“I have met that witch,” answered Montjoy, “and she palsies me!” He went to the window and stood looking out at the moon-silvered town and river. Presently back he came. “Against what or whom do you shake a lance? If it be against a saint and his true miracles, I lay the quarrel down—”

Abbot Mark spoke weightily. “And so should I, Montjoy, and so should I! But if it be against falsity? If it be against Hugh and his frauds?”

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“Prove that!”

The Abbot turned toward the Prior. The latter nodded and spoke. “We brought with us two wandering friars—Franciscans. Westforest has known them long. They are not the idle and greedy rogues that bring us down with the people. They are right Mendicants, travelling from place to place to do good. Will it please you have them summoned?”

A silver bell stood upon the table. Montjoy struck it. His page appeared, took commands and bowing vanished. Abbot Mark began to speak of the church at Silver Cross and how he would make it so rich and beautiful! Now Montjoy loved this church. Buried beneath it were his parents, and buried his first young wife, the one whom he loved as he did not love Dame Alice. It was she he had loved through and beyond Morgen Fay, loving something of her in that sinner from whom, in concern for his soul, he had parted. He listened to the Abbot. Certainly Silver Cross was the highest, the most beautiful, and must be kept so! He knew Silver Cross, church and cloister, in and out, when he was a boy and after. He had love and concern for it—love almost of a lover—jealous love. Prior Hugh and Saint Leofric must not go beyond bounds!

The two friars entered, Andrew and Barnaby, honest-looking men, Andrew the more intelligent. They stood by the door with hands crossed and Montjoy observed them. Given permission to advance and speak they came discreetly, with modesty, into conclave. Without preamble, they began.

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The Abbot spoke. “My sons, the Lord Montjoy who hath ever been devout toward Saint Willebrod and his Abbey of Silver Cross—yea, who hath been, like his father before him, advocate and protector and enricher of the same, bringing from overseas emeralds, rubies and sapphires for that marvel the casket where lies that world’s marvel, the cross of Saint Willebrod—the Lord Montjoy, my sons, would have from your own lips that which you heard and saw in April, it now being late June.—Question them, Matthew, so that they may show it forth expeditiously.”

The Prior squared himself to the task. “Where were you, my sons, two weeks before Easter?”

“Across the river, reverend father. The granddame of Brother Barnaby here, living at Damson Lane, was breathing her last and greatly wishful to see him. She died—may her soul rest—and we buried her. Then we would go a little further, not having been upon yonder side for some while.”

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“You did not go brawling along, nor fled into every alehouse as if Satan were after you?”

“Lord of Montjoy, we are not friars of that stripe. We are clean men and sober, praise God and Our Lady!”

"Aye, aye, they speak truth, Montjoy.—Well, you walked in country over there, avoiding Friary and town—if one can call that clump of mud, pebble and thatch a town!"

"Why did you do that?"

"Brother Barnaby, lord, had had a dream. In it a Shining One plucked up towns like weeds and threw them one by one into a great and deep pit. There was left alive only country road, heath and field and wood. So he awoke quaking and said, 'I go through never a town gate this journey!'"

"That was a discomfortable dream!"

The Abbot spoke. "I interpret it. The towns, one by one, are that one which Hugh, dreaming and dreaming again, thinks to see rise beside his Friary, built from pilgrims' wealth, with hostels for pilgrims and merchants to sell them goods, and a great house for nobles who come!—But a Shining One, Hugh! topples them into ditches, yea, into gulfs, as fast as you build them! Ha! Go on, my son!"

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"So we passed the town and we wandered, reverend father, until we came to the chapel of Damson Hill, three miles from Saint Leofric's, where the dead country folk lie under green grass. Damson Wood is hard by, where watches and prays the good hermit Gregory—"

"Aye, aye, a good man!" said Montjoy.

"By now the sun was setting. He gave us water and bread, and after praying we lay down to sleep with only our gowns for bed and bedding. Brother Barnaby and I slept, but on the middle of the night we waked. Then saw we the hermit standing praying, and when he saw that we no longer slept he said to us, 'Misdoing is moving through this night. Misdoing in high places!' So he went to the door and stood a long time looking out, then took his staff and strode forth, and Brother Barnaby and I followed."

"I know that he is said to have the greater vision," said Montjoy. "Moreover, once in my life, he told me high truth."

"Where did the holy man go, my son?"

"He went through the black night, reverend father, to Damson Hill and to the great and ill-kept graveyard under the shadow. Brother Barnaby and I followed him. He walked softly and he walked swiftly and he walked silently, and when we came there we did not stop by the chapel which truly is a ruin, but we went on to the far slope of the yard—"

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The Prior said, "Where they are buried who died long since, of the plague that came in King Richard's time."

"I know the place," said Montjoy.

"Reverend father, there are three yew trees, old, I reckon, as Damson Hill, and thick. Like one who knows what he is about he passed within the castle of these and we followed and made a place whence we looked forth like eyes out of a skull. And we saw, across the dead field, a little light burning blue and coming toward us. Arm of the hill hid it from the road. But had any belated seen it he would most certainly have thought, 'A ghost among the graves!' and taken to his heels."

"It came toward you. Who carried it?"

"One of six, reverend father. We were there in the yew clump with less noise than maketh a bat. They came closer and closer and at last they came close, and now they did not shelter their lantern for they thought, 'The shoulder of the hill and the yew trees hide, and who should be abroad in this place in the black and middle night, and who should know of a villainy working?'"

The Abbot brought his finger tips together. "It is ever discovered!—They dig a pit and fall into it; they open a grave and lift out their own perdition!"

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"They opened a grave?"

"Yes, lord. A very ancient, sunken one."

"Some unknown," said the Prior. "Some wretch of ancient time, seized by the plague, dying—who knows?—unshriven, lazarus mayhap or thief! Proceed, my son!"

"Two had spades. They spread a great cloth. They lay the green turf to one side of this, and in the middle the earth of the grave. They work hard and they work fast, and a monk directs—"

"Monk of Saint Leofric's?"

"Aye, lord, Dominican. White-and-black. They open the grave and they bring forth bones—the frame of that perished one."

The Abbot groaned. "Perished mayhap in his sins—yea, almost certainly in his sins—and so no better than heathen or than sorcerer!"

"They spread a second cloth, and having shaken forth the earth, they put in it the bones of that obscure—yea, right arm and hand with the rest—"

"See you, Montjoy?"

"Then, having that which they need, they fill in the grave with care. They put over it the sod they had taken away. Rain and sun must presently make it whole. And probably no man hath ever gone that way to look. So the six went away as though they had moth wings, and now with no

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light—”

“Yet they give forth that right hand and arm doth shine, giving light whereby a reading man may read! Wherefore—oh, Hugh!—shone it not by Damson Hill?”

Said Montjoy, “All this is enough to father Suspicion, but the child must be named Certainty.”

“Then listen further!—Proceed, my son. You two and the hermit followed?”

“We followed, reverend father. Under Damson Hill those six parted, and three went by divers ways, belike to their own dwellings. But the three with the bones they had digged went Saint Leofric’s road. We followed Blackfriar and his fellows who would be lay brethren. The moon shone out. We followed to Friary Gate and saw them enter.”

“And then?”

“Gregory the hermit turned and went again to Damson Wood, and we with him. When we came to his cell there was red east.”

“What did you think of what you had seen?”

“We could conceive naught, lord. We did not know that which was to be proclaimed in Easter week. But the hermit said thrice, ‘Villainy! Villainy! Villainy! A shepherd hath turned villain!’”

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Brother Barnaby came in. “He said besides, ‘I see what you cannot see, good brothers! But dimly, and I cannot explain to myself what I see.’”

“I had forgot that.”

“He said also. ‘Talk not, till you know of what you are talking,’ and he took from us a promise of silence.”

“I was coming to that, brother.—We are not gabblers, reverend father. We left Damson Wood and came down to the bridge and crossed river to our own side. We said naught, remembering, ‘Talk not till you know of what you are talking.’ Two days went by, and then near Little Winching, up the Wander, down lay Brother Barnaby with a fever, and I must nurse him for a month. He, being very sick, forgot, and I being busy and concerned, nigh forgot Damson Graveyard and Saint Leofric’s Gate. Then, Brother Barnaby getting well and we walking in a fair morning to Little Winching, there meets us all the bruit!”

“And still”—Brother Barnaby came in again—“we said nothing. But it burned our hearts. So said Brother Andrew, ‘We will go take this thing to Prior Matthew of Westforest.’”

“And so they did, according to right inner counsel,” said the Prior. He turned in his chair. “You may go now, my sons. But on your obedience, speak as yet to none other of these things!”

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Brother Andrew and Brother Barnaby craved blessing, received it and vanished. There was pause, then, “If we check not Hugh,” said the Abbot, “we shall have loss and shame, being no longer the first, the pupil of the eye, to this part England!”

“If they spoke,” said Montjoy, “none would believe them against the miracles. Nor do I know if I would believe. Say that one saw the robbed grave—what then? One travels not much further! I would believe, I think, the hermit.”

“Then will you ride, Montjoy, to Damson Wood?”

“Yes, I will go there. But my believing and yours and Gregory’s and the friars’ make not yet the people’s believing. Here is stuff for splendid quarrel with Hugh—but in the meantime go the folk in rivers, touch the relics and are healed!”

“What we need,” said the Prior, and he spoke slowly and cautiously, “is counter-miracle.”

“Yes, but you cannot order the Saints!”

“No.”

It was again the Prior who spoke and apparently in agreement. The Abbot sighed. “Well, let us to bed!—Go to Damson Wood, Montjoy, and then ride to Silver Cross.”

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“I will do that. I see,” said Montjoy, “the mischief that this thing does you—”

Even as he spoke he had a vision of the Abbey church of Silver Cross. He saw the tombs and the sculptured figure of Isabel whom he had loved, and the great altar painting of Our Lady done in Italy. Under the breath of his mind he thought that that form and face were like Isabel’s. So like that almost she might have been in that Italian painter’s mind when he painted this glorified woman standing buoyant, in carnation and sapphire, among clouds that thinned into clear blue that passed in its turn into light that blinded. He saw the glowing glass in the great windows; he saw the gems—the gems that he had given among them—sparkling in the golden box that held the silver cross. He saw the people on holy days flooding the famous church. They warmed with eyes of life the stone mother and father, the stone Isabel. The many people’s bended knees, their recognition, helped to assure eternal life in the Queen of Heaven pictured in the great painting,—and surely so in Isabel, the picture was so like her! The more people the more life—Isabel surely safely there in the eternal Bride and Mother—and if Isabel then surely he, too, her lover and husband, he, too, Montjoy! The people must flow there still, recognising life when they saw it and as it were, giving life, increasing life.

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Anything that turned the people away from Silver Cross became in that act the enemy of Montjoy; anything that kept them flowing there, that made them more in number, the friend of Montjoy.

But Abbot and Prior, lodged in connecting chambers and speaking together before they laid themselves to sleep in huge beds, shook their heads over him. Or rather the Abbot did so. The Prior was not liberal with sighs and gestures. "He'll agree to no shift that smacks of the lie, however slight, necessary, simply defensive, pious it be—"

"Are you sure? I am not," answered Matthew. "But if he will not—keep him blind like other men, blind and usable! He may indeed prove more usable for being blind."

CHAPTER III

[Pg 32]

THAT same night the monk, Richard Englefield, lay upon his pallet in his cell at Silver Cross. The moon shone in at the small window. He was addressed to observing with his mind's eye a round of other places upon which she shone. The grange where he had been born and had spent childhood and somewhat of boyhood, rose softly. The mill water caught light, the gable end of the house stood, a figure like a silver shield enlarged,—shield of Arthur, shield of Tristram, shield of an old enchanter! The fields spread in moonlight where he worked. He smelled the upturned clods and the springing corn, and he smelled the sere fields under October moon. The moon shone on the town, that was not Middle Forest, where he had been apprenticed to a worker in gold. The moon made the roofs that mounted with their windows, and the plastered house with the criss-cross of timbers, into a rood screen for a giant's church. Beyond lay the sea, and the moon made for herself a path across that.

Stella Maris—

The sea under moon. He had been across the sea, to France and to Italy, but that was after the rood-screen town. It was when he had become a master workman, a skilled goldsmith, working for princes, working as an artist works, and when he had come to books—to books—to books.—The moon on the sea, on the coasts of Italy!

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The moon on the graves of kindred and friends,—the cold moon. The moon above weariness and sighing—nights unsleeping, walkings abroad—plans spun and plans torn apart and shredded to the winds. The moon upon sins, the moon upon sorrows.

The moon shining down on the sea, on the coasts of Italy!

The moon upon the hours after work, when he read by the candle, when he put it out and looked upon the night.—Moonlight streaming in at the old room's window, the window so high in the high roof of the tall, old house.

Thought and thought and thought!—Conviction that there was some adventure—

Warfare, warring and sinning, lusting. Pride that beset him. Pride of being proud. Very love of self-love. Very care of self-care. Self!

The moon on the coasts of Italy!

Men he had known, out of many men, and talk with them. The old priest.

The moon on the coasts of Italy!

The old priest.—Illness. Long illness when death's door had seemed to open. The priest still. Recovery—and still the priest.

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Wickedness again. Self-will and self-laudation. Self! Longing, longing and discontent, and ashes in the mouth. Longing and naught to still it. Not work and not thought!

The priest again. Longing. One thing laid down and another taken up and laid down. Hunger—hunger and thirst—cold and hunger and thirst. If you were in warm taverns, if you were in palaces, yet cold and hunger and thirst. You must hunt warmth, you must hunt bread, you must hunt water. And when you thought you had found came the snow in at the door, came the harpies and snatched the tables away!

God—Christ and His Mother—heaven. They had the food—the water that quenched thirst,—the inner fire.

Where were you nearest, nearest?

Work fallen away because he must hunt. Cronies and those whom he thought friends estranged.

Hunt and hunt and hunt. Dig inside, and outside serve—

Where was the outer land that was nearest inner?

God and Christ and His Mother and heaven. They dwelled in the inner that he was hunting. Holy Church was the nearest land.

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The moon on monastery fields—the moon on the coasts of Italy!

The rising moon in the dark wood where he walked and tried to talk to God and his soul—and at last shut his hands and buried his forehead upon them against an oak tree, and said, "I become a monk."

The moon on the garden of herbs, the moon on Silver Cross cemetery.

He had been thirty then, and the dark wood was six years ago.

At first had seemed quenching—but now was cold, hunger and thirst again!

O God—O Christ—O Star of the Sea, shine forth! Oh, heaven, appear!

The moon on the coasts of Italy!

They were fair, with rock and olive, with gray and creamy and rose-hued towns, and over the towns sky that was heart of blue, and in the towns Italian life.

He must tell in confession how all that was coming of late to haunt him. When he plunged into these towns the hunger vanished for a time. But it came again. And in his heart he knew that he wished it to come. "O All-Knowledge and All-Beauty, let me not cease to be driven and to be drawn until I find thee—until I find thee!"

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The bell rang for the office of the night. He rose and presently stood chanting, with his brother monks, in the church of Silver Cross. The candles burned, the windows were lead against the starry sky. He knew the stars that were behind them, he saw them in their clusters.

The candles showed in part the great painting of the Blessed among women. He could piece out here also what they did not show. There was splendour in the figure and face, a magic of beauty, and he loved it.

The chanting filled the dark hollow of the church.

The Abbot had dispensation from the night office. The sub-prior was in his place. Moreover, the Abbot was away, having ridden on his white mule, with attendants, to Middle Forest, to the castle of Montjoy.

The office ended, the cell again and sleep. Dawn. Lauds. Breakfast. The reader for the day reading from the life of a saint. "And an angel came nightly to his cell and showed him the scenery of heaven and the Blessed moving there. And his brethren began to know of this, for the light shined out of his cell."

Brother Richard Englefield did not work in field or garden. He had worked so for two years. Then Abbot Mark making discoveries, there had been given him a stone room with a furnace, goldsmith's tools and two Brothers for helpers. If you had a master maker among your monks waste him not in digging, sowing, weeding and gathering! Now he made lovely things for the church, and for the Abbot's table. He made presents for the Abbot to send prelates and princes. The Abbot bragged of his work. When great visitors came they were shown him in his smithy.

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Not only so, but because he was silent—brown-blond, tall and still, like King David in the picture—and evidently a hunter after God, and scrupulous to do all the Rule demanded, and all that it allowed of austerity supererogative—he had fame as monk. Some of his brethren wished him well and leaned upon his presence, taking as it were his sunlight, valuing him in and for Silver Cross. Two or three who also hunted God met him and understood him. Others found in him a reproach, and others were indifferent or secretly laughed. Silver Cross was much like the world. Brother Richard continued his struggle and his hunting, under an exterior still as the church, stripped and simple.

Work this day—work on a rich silver salt cellar for the Abbot to give to a bishop. As he worked in his stone room with his hammers and gravers it was coming across him with a breath of mockery—it was coming with a breath of mockery like a wind from a foggy sea—"Above and below the salt at a bishop's table. Above and below the salt—Christ's table. Nicodemus above the salt—blind Bartimeus and the woman of Samaria below?"

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He shook off phantasy. The Abbot was his spiritual father whom he had undertaken to obey, not criticise. True monk must obey and not question,—not question, not doubt, not compare, not judge. He must kill Imagination, wagging so. Oh, Truth and Beauty—Truth and Beauty—Truth and Beauty!

The sun on Gethsemane. The sun on the Blessed among women sitting on her doorstep, behind her the sound of the carpenters working.

Sext. The chanting, and the windows ruby and emerald, sapphire and amethyst glass, the glowing patterns, the rows of small figures. The dark vault of the church and the shafts of gold dust. The cool, the sense of suspension. The great picture burning forth—the Blessed among women!

For long now the picture had taken his heart. She was so glorious—she was so sure—she was an ardent flame mounting with a golden passion upward! And yet she was tender, compassionate. None might doubt that, looking at her lips and the light and shadow, the modelling, beneath the eyes. She was so tall—did she turn her head, so and so would be the exquisite long line of the throat. Almost at times he thought she turned her head. She was alive—splendidly so, with glory. "Blessed among women—Blessed among women—hold me more fully—take me with you into heaven—take me—!"

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Afternoon and work still. The sun going down. Vespers. The Magnificat. The red-gold light on the picture, uncertain, making her to seem to move. So would she stand in the round. "Blessed among women—Blessed among women, I am here, thy child and lover! Make me whole—take me with thee. Speak, speak to me!"

Night. He did not sleep in the dormitory. There were six cells of privilege, established when Abbot Reginald of old had made certain alterations. Brother Oswald who was writing the

Chronicle of Silver Cross, Brothers Peter and Allen who illuminated the great Psalter, Brother Timothy who had been longest monk of Silver Cross and was growing like a child, Brother Norbert who was the Abbot's kinsman had the five, and Brother Richard who made wealthy things in gold and silver the sixth. So was not the Rule, but in many things nowadays abbots modified Rule.

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Compline. Night in his cell. "Ah, if the noble and rich visions were but more real! Ah, if I had the power to move and make move! Ah, if the picture would become Herself—for me, for me!"

CHAPTER IV

[Pg 41]

MONTJOY rode through a dewy June morning. He crossed the bridge, his horse's hoofs sounding deeply, an air from the sea filling nostrils, the light striking sails of fishing boats gliding away below the arches where all widened. Montjoy was bound for Damson Wood.

Montjoy rode homeward in the evening, after a day in the deep wood, after a visit to Damson Hill graveyard. His two stout serving men, riding the brown and the roan behind him, thought it a strange visit.

Nearing the bridge Montjoy checked the black horse and turning slightly, looked back at Saint Leofric's mound. There was now full, level flow of reddened light, and the mound was bathed in it. The church stood up in that light, the cloister walls were made faery.

"Oh, Hugh and Hugh! I walk in your heart and I see the dark engines, and I walk in your mind and it is a hold for sorceries!"

He put his horse into motion. "Such a plan and such a course could never have come to Mark! Though it might have come to Prior Matthew."

He was upon the bridge. Others were crossing. Sir Robert Somerville he caught up with. "Well met, Somerville!"

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"My lord Montjoy—" Somerville presented his kinsman riding beside him. The sunset reddened and reddened. The waters glowed below the arches, the boats moved, a barge slipped underneath, emerged and went up stream, its rowers singing. The dark houses rose from the river bank. One that was narrow and latticed, close to the old wall, drew their eyes. The sunset made its windows to blaze. Somerville and Montjoy both saw, without the physical eye, the courtesan, Morgen Fay.

Somerville began to talk of where he had been. He had been to show his kinsman Saint Leofric's and a miracle.

Said Sir Humphrey, "I have always desired to see a miracle."

"Saw you one?"

"You gibe!" said Somerville. "But we did see one. It would not be wise, even for Montjoy, to doubt to the throng that we saw one!"

"What happened?"

"A woman received her sight."

They left the bridge. The dying rose of the sun touched Middle Forest's High Street. Folk were yet abroad, going this way and going that; most or all going home. Droning sound was in the air; then Saint Ethelred's bell began to ring.

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Somerville talked on. He lived so, with vivacity, like a quick sword playing with joy in its own point and edge, like wine liking its own sparkle from beaker to cup. To a certain depth he could read Montjoy. Old rivalries, jealousies conflicts existed between Somerville and Montjoy. Now all the sea above was calm, but those ancient tendencies stayed like reefs below. Light-drawing boats could pass above them, but greater craft might be in danger.

Somerville's quick and agreeable voice jettied on. His eye, quick as a hawk's, marked the small erect man riding the black horse. If Montjoy in his nature had sensitive tracts, far be it from Somerville not to touch these! Do it always, though with swordly skill, keeping one's self invisible, invulnerable!

Montjoy, it was evident, did not like Saint Leofric's miracles. Why? Somerville, using wit, found part of it. All affairs were seesaw! You go up; I go down. Up Saint Leofric; down Saint Willebrod. Up Dominican; down Cistercian. Up Prior Hugh; down Abbot Mark, Montjoy's kinsman. Up Friary; down Silver Cross, enriched by, linked to, the castle on the hill. Up neighbour's glory; down my glory! If Montjoy, as apparently was the case, identified his glory with that of Silver Cross—Why, or to what extent, who cared? He did it, that was evident! His doing it answered for Somerville's cue.

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Somerville with malice dilated upon the throng at Saint Leofric's and the mounting excitement. He had a vigour and colour of speech that lifted the scene bodily across the river and set it in the High Street. He appealed for corroboration to his cousin. The latter, though he could not guess all, guessed some motive and fell easily in with his kinsman and host. Not only the great play over there, the singing and weeping, the light in the church and the shout of joy—but he could report the stir that was spreading through England. Indeed, it was said that the Princess of Spain was

coming—

Montjoy thought, "That Princess should give her presence to Silver Cross. She should smooth Isabel's tomb with her hand. Life should come from her eyes to the picture."

Somerville was drawing comparisons, and yet he lived this side the river, up the Wander indeed, where from any hilltop he might see Silver Cross!

"It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest!" said Montjoy, harshly.

Somerville laughed and shot across a hawk glance. "But if it is true? Look at Abbot Mark and then at Prior Hugh! The last ascetic, fired, ever praying; the first—But he is your kinsman, Montjoy, and I touch him not—" [Pg 45]

"I want truth," said Montjoy, and his voice had an angry croak.

"Then in truth is he one whose abbey would show miracles? Who says great sanctity shows anywhere at Silver Cross? Is it carping to cry out against sloth and indulgence? If they are near home, I believe in confessing they are near home! Has Silver Cross one monk who may stand with the Friar to whom hand and arm appeared?"

"I could tell you—," burst forth Montjoy, then checked himself. "I know not of the monks," he said, "though there be two or three—I know not in these days of any place more or less slothful than another. We are all drunken and dazed, we have sinned so long! But of old Silver Cross was a saintly place!"

"Oh, I'll give you 'of old'! Well, Saint Leofric may redeem the time! And surely for that we must rejoice!"

"If it be redeemer and not Iscariot—yes! But Saint Leofric's miracles are false miracles!"

He spoke with an energy of passion, forgetting caution. He spoke louder than his wont. They were passing through the market square and folk in numbers were about. Montjoy's voice reached the nearer circle of these. There fell upon the centre of Middle Forest a pause, a hush. It was as though the world had come to an end! Then like a bolt from the tawny sky laced with blue and rose, fell a great voice, "You lie, lord of Montjoy!" [Pg 46]

It was so thick, loud and startling that Montjoy himself, thrilling, dragged his horse back upon haunches. Somerville, too, started. It took a moment to see that the voice proceeded from a Black Friar, a man with the frame of a giant, who had been climbing the stone stair to the upper street. They were passing the stair foot; he heard and turned. Now he was set as in a pulpit above them. His great bell voice reached half the dwindled market. The folk were already looking Montjoy and Somerville way. Those hearing Montjoy needed no explanation, but explained to their fellows. Montjoy's words ran around the market place. With agitation a wave of folk lifted itself and began to flow toward steps and toward checked horses. The Black Friar's voice took thunder tone. "Who discredits Saint Leofric discredits God and Our Lady and Her Son!"

A woman shrilled from a booth of earthenware and hats of plaited straw. "Don't ye anger the Saint and dry up his miracles, Montjoy! Don't ye! My dumb daughter is coming from up the Wander. Don't ye!" [Pg 47]

"Don't ye!"

"My palsied brother is going!"

"The morn I take my child—"

"Don't ye!"

A mob was gathering. Above their heads the Dominican, great figure in great pulpit, with point and energy recited as it were a rosary of Saint Leofric's deeds, and between them scarified doubt. Said Somerville with an excited laugh, "Wasp's nest was not empty, Montjoy!"

Montjoy had power, Montjoy had his own kind of popularity. He was thought a lord of his word and of generous notions, rather a godly lord. He had the gift of shy and subtle loving, and so he loved Middle Forest and it hurt him always when they differed.—Now what? He saw in a grim flash of cold, uncaring light, that his world was not going to have Saint Leofric's miracles false.

No use saying anything—

He must even recover if he could its liking, must render harmless to himself Black Friar's lightning.

What to say? How positively to lie? Excuse stuck in his throat. At last he managed to shout forth. "You know me, good folk. If I doubt, it is not Saint Leofric that I doubt!" [Pg 48]

"Whom dost thou doubt? Prior Hugh, whose austerities, whose prayers and fastings brought the blessing? What dost thou doubt? That the woman who this morn was blind now sees?"

"That you cannot doubt, Lord of Montjoy!" said Somerville in a loud voice. "Sir Humphrey Somerville and I saw that wonder! The woman *sees*—praise Our Lady and Saint Leofric!"

Having cleared himself he found himself willing to aid in extricating Montjoy. Give him the prick of being aided! "The sun is strong to-day, and my lord Montjoy hath been long in saddle and is weary and half-sick! So for one instant, good friends, the devil had his ear! It is naught—he will shake the fiend off. Hurt him not by mistrusting him! Presently will you see him on pilgrimage himself to Saint Leofric's!"

Montjoy, dry-voiced, tried to speak. He was dark red, his voice broke in his throat. Suddenly,

sharply turning Black King, he touched him with his heel and rode from the market place. "See you, he is really a sick man!" cried Somerville and pushed his bay after him. Sir Humphrey followed, and Montjoy's two serving men.

Middle Forest knew the lord of the castle for an increasingly devout man. It could not even now see him as scoffer. Sir Robert Somerville, now, was much more like a scoffer than was Montjoy! For a moment folk hung in the wind, then the larger number agreed to give Montjoy the benefit of the doubt. Probably to-morrow he would come praising Saint Leofric! Envious Satan did attack each one in turn! The buzz and hum continued, but it left the key of anger. The Black Friar, having vindicated the right, climbed triumphantly the stair to the upper street.

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On castle road where the Wander road diverged Montjoy abruptly said good night. His voice was moved, sonorous, thrilling with hurt pride. He seemed eager to leave them, to mount to his old castle that was not so large, not so threatening, after all!

When he was gone Somerville laughed, and Sir Humphrey complaisantly with him. They trotted on upon the Wander road, a great manor house and supper before them, three miles up the vale. "When all's spoken," said Somerville, "I have a back-handed liking for that lord that's just left us! I like him enough inwardly to quarrel with him, and frustrate him, and make sure that he thinks not too well of himself! I preoccupy myself with him. The day is stale when I run not somehow against him! What miracle he decrys, will I cry up; or what he cries up, will I decry!"

He began to whistle, sweet and clear as a blackbird.

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"Lyken I wander
My love for to see—
My love for to see
On a May morning,
Where she goes dressed
In cramoisie—"

CHAPTER V

[Pg 51]

NOT on a May but on a June morning—five days in fact after his supper at the house of Morgen Fay—Master Thomas Bettany found himself some miles up the Wander, and with him, riding the gray mare, a bale of sample cloths strapped to saddle, John Cobb the apprentice, with whom, when he did not think to be stiff, he was upon the best of terms. He was up the Wander upon business for his father, that rich merchant who would one day leave him house and gear and trade. Then would he himself, Thomas Bettany, be Middle Forest merchant,—who wanted only to sail for the New World that one Columbus had recently discovered!

He rode absorbed in discontent. Finally he again took up speech with John Cobb.

"It's a dull life! I wish something would happen—anything!"

"There be the miracles."

"I haven't any hand in them. You can't be interested unless you're doing something yourself.—I'd rather be a robber than just trotting from shop and trotting back again.—Hist, John! What's behind yon tree?"

"Where?"

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"There! A big, black man! Two—four, five! Draw your weapon, man!"

John struck hand to the dirk at his waist. His eyes enlarged, his lips clapped shut. Then, "They bain't but little fir trees!—You're grinning!—Your pranking and mystery-playing'll break you one day!"

"I wish it had been Robin Hood—"

They rode through the wood. It was a bright morn after rain. The trees showered them with diamonds, the world smelled like a pomander box. When they were out from the trees and amid tilled land every blade of springing grain carried jewels. Far up in a light blue sky a lark was singing.

"By're lady!" said John Cobb. "If I were taken up by Somerville and went to sup with Morgen Fay, I'd not be saying life was dull!"

"He nor no one else has 'taken me up.' His uncle married my father's cousin. Bettany's a name that has sounded well since long time. My father helped him, too, with monies—but that's nothing either!—Somerville and I are friends."

"Like you and me?"

"No!—His being 'Sir Robert' and older doesn't make any difference."

He was superbly sure of that and rode with his blond head up like a youthful, adventurous king. "As for Morgen Fay, I'd think more of her if I hadn't seen last Candlemas—you know whom!"

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"That's Mistress Cecily. She's a fair one! But I don't believe she's pricked your heart much either. You're just for the New World and men and adventure. It would make me proud though to

sup with Morgen Fay.”

“Oh, you’ll never, my poor John! I tell you what she’s like. She’s like something you see in poetry. But Cecily walked in first, into my keep and hold. Besides, I wouldn’t interfere with Robert.”

“Robert!” John Cobb could but admire, while Master Thomas Bettany tossed his clear whistle up to the lark singing.

So many birds were singing! The two were now riding by the Wander, through Westforest land. Mounting a little hill they saw below them monastery walls and roofs, not a large place, set among trees by the water’s side. Some of the old forest held here.

Their business was with Westforest. The house of Bettany sold Silver Cross and Westforest woollen cloth for monks’ gowns. Presently they were at the gate. The porter opened to them, and the stable Brother took their horses, and a third Brother carried them to the guest house where they were set in a room. All was very grave and in order. Master Thomas Bettany at the window heard bells and saw the monks pacing two by two. He had never before been to Westforest. Saint Ethelred in Middle Forest was his church. Neither with any sufficiency did he know Silver Cross. He had been five times perhaps, when there was festival, in the great church. Only this year was his father using him thus in business.

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The monk reappeared and had them to the refectory where they were served with ale and bread and cheese. Thence they went to a business-like room where met them Brother Oswald, steward and purchaser for the Priory. He gave Master Thomas Bettany good greeting, and John Cobb a shorter one. John Cobb opened the bale of cloths.

Business advanced. A Brother appeared to do duty as steward’s clerk. Thomas Bettany turned into merchant not unshrewd. He did things with his might, when he could be brought to do them at all. Now he pictured and bargained and was not behind Brother Oswald in ability.

The hour and more of marketing passed. Brother Oswald, straightening himself from the table at last, paid his compliment. “No manner of doubt, my son, but that you be merchant, son of merchant!”

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“If Westforest be not content—”

“Oh, we are content.”

“—and I have here,” said the younger Bettany, “the fine white wool—”

“That is for reverend father the Prior to see. Let your man take it up and we will go to the parlour.”

They crossed the cloister to a large, well-windowed room that gave upon walled garden. On a bench without sat a monk with book and rosary, and he would get audience for them with reverend father. Presently the inner door opened and Prior Matthew stood before them. Thomas Bettany and John Cobb kneeled for his blessing, and when that was had John Cobb spread the table with lengths of fine white cloth. The Prior chose, nor was long about it. The Abbot of Silver Cross loved finery, dressing much like a lord of this world. But Prior Matthew scorned all that and kept near in apparel to ancient simplicities.

Selection made, orders given and taken, the Prior leaned back in his seat. His deep-set eyes surveyed the younger Bettany. “I know your father for a sensible man. I have heard that you are a wild youth, a will-o’-the-wisp, ready for God knoweth what plots and pranks!”

If Thomas inwardly recognised large portion of himself he could outwardly but lift deprecating, bright blue eyes. “I am changing what I can change, reverend father.”

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“Ha! Let us hope it,” said the Prior. “Well, and what makes most ado just now in Middle Forest?”

“Reverend father, the miracles across the river.”

Prior Matthew bit his nail. “That is as I supposed. It mounts and mounts.—I would get from you, too, the cry after that burst of wonders!—But there is the vesper bell. Go into church, my son! afterwards I will talk with you in the garden.”

The church at Westforest was not like the church of Silver Cross. That was great, this was small. That had starry windows of rich glass, that had tombs of lords and ladies, that had the great altar picture. This was plain and cold of aspect. Yet was there an altar painting, and now sunlight and candle light showed it for what it was,—copy, done half as large, of the Silver Cross great picture. The Lady of Heaven lifted a rich Italian face, rose toward heaven, toward God the Father and God the Son, with a rich, Italian beauty, nobly done by the great Italian, her painter,—rose with love and majesty, with memory of sorrow and of earth-stain falling away, fading, falling, with height of joy opening; rose with bliss and power, who yet understood, who knew children’s crying and would answer; rose from world’s woe, from the dust, to heaven. She was heaven, the Rose of Heaven. Yet had she been painted in Italy from mortal woman. Queen of Heaven, but with framework of likeness to earthly faces. “Like Isabel—like Isabel!” at this moment Montjoy cried to himself, in the church of Silver Cross.

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In the small grey church at Westforest young Thomas Bettany had place where he might well and plainly view the smaller picture, but well copied from the first and greater. Light beat against draperies pure red and pure blue and upon form and face, rising from darkness into glory. He looked worshipfully, and he felt worship.

But when vespers were done, and the Prior kept him alone with him walking in the garden, John Cobb not here, only Prior Matthew and Thomas Bettany pacing between the blue flags and the rose trees, he burst out suddenly, very young and very bold. "Reverend father, did ever you see Morgen Fay?"

"God forbid! No!"

"She is much like yonder picture."

"What picture?—Not the altar picture!"

"Of course this is holy and heavenly—and she is only faery—"

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"'Faery!'—She is an accursed woman!"

The Prior stood still, his hand upon the espaliered pear tree against the south wall. His thin face, his tall thin figure grew extraordinarily alive. "Do you never tell that fancy!" His voice had a fearful sternness. "Do you never tell that fancy to any living wight!"

Thomas Bettany himself was afraid of it. "Jesu knows I would not do Our Lady disrespect!"

"It will be heinous disrespect if you say that that sinner hath her face—"

Bettany carefully made distinctions. "I meant not like Her—but like the woman the painter must have used just for hint of form and face! Once I saw a monk painting on a missal border where it said 'Rose of Sharon.' But he had in a cup beside him which he looked often upon a rose from the garden."

"Well, speak not of such things!" said the Prior impatiently. "The generality understands them not. They think not that things are but lifted or lowered, set in light or in darkness. You but hurt yourself!"

"That is true enough!" thought the merchant's son.

They paced the walk to a stone bench set before fruit trees whose shadow was now long upon the grass. The Prior, head sunk in cowl, was thinking. He sat down, the young man standing before him. "The miracles—"

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Bettany set sail upon that story. Last week a woman had received her sight. Three days ago a man for years bedridden had walked. Yesterday had come a shipmaster carrying his daughter in his arms. "Praise! Praise!" shouted the people. It was like a Great Fair for numbers, at Saint Leofric's! At times bridge was thick with folk.

And then midway in his recital to which he was warming, which he was now colouring rightly, Prior Matthew, with a sudden start and jerk, returned to the picture and had from him promise not to let pass his lips to any other that sinful fancy.

He promised, seeing himself that facts were not always for shouting.

Morgen Fay who was merchant and sold herself, who had great beauty and dark eyes, and who wore those reds and blues, might be picked—or one like her might be picked—a common rose out of common garden, and a painter might take her for line and feature and hue and sublimate all—and yet the *Rosa Mystica*, the God Bride and Mother, be never hurt, be never the worse for that, where she looked from high heaven, pitying all and helping who would be helped,—pitying, perchance, Morgen Fay!

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CHAPTER VI

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JUNE vanished, July rode in heat, August had golden armour, September was russet clad and walked through crimson orchards and by wine presses. In Italy, by wine presses!

In the Abbey of Silver Cross more and more did note fall upon Englefield. He was unaware of that. He had entered upon a stretch of the inward way where the landscape was absorbing,—the inner landscape and the inner encounters. Outwardly he grew more and more conformed to the Abbey idea of fledgling saint, but he hardly held it in consciousness that he did so. He was rapt to the inner land where he hunted the Word, where he sought for the Grail. But he put his body in the attitudes that the great adventurers, where they were monks, seemed to have worn. He wished their assurances and blisses, and he imitated.

Not having come to monastery from indolence and softness, he found in this no especial difficulty. First artisan, then artist, he well enough knew hard and spare living, vigil, concentered action, swift, deep and still. He had that over many an one who would be saint, but must first develop muscle. He had will, he had mind, though both were restive beings, with wings that seemed between Lucifer's and Gabriel's. Richard Englefield's problem was to draw all the Lucifer into Gabriel. As a detail in the achievement he conformed, with what absoluteness was possible at Silver Cross, to the first hard discipline of the Order. Where for long had been relaxation, his procedure here astonished and here rebuked, pleased and displeased. He went on, in a preoccupation too great to note that watching, hunting the Word. "Blessed among women, help me toward it!"

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The great picture was become integral to his life. "Beauty like that—Beauty with Holiness—I would Beauty and I would Holiness! I would Power to make my Beauty and Holiness come true!"

He prayed to the Blessed among women. "Blessed among women, show me how! Bring me sunshine for my growth!"

He worked in his stone room, with the precious metals that they gave him. The furnace glowed. His long, strong and skilful fingers moved with their old skill, as on a lute. But he worked scarce seeing the beauty of what he made, with the taller man in him gone elsewhere, gone out hunting, gone hawking for pure Wisdom, pure Beauty, pure Power. He prayed in the church and the monks watched him. When he turned toward the picture light seemed to pass from it to him. [Pg 63]

The Abbot noted him. The sub-prior brought the Abbot refectory talk, talk of the brethren's common room. He brought comment of Brother Norbert whose cell was next Brother Richard's. The Abbot heaved a sigh. "Well, we have need of a saintly monk!"

He was not silent upon the growing saintliness of Brother Richard. Visitors of high degree, pausing at Silver Cross, heard him say, "Even as Friar Paul of Saint Leofric's—" Visitors pursuing their road, going, it might well chance, straight to Saint Leofric's, made mention of this monk. The vale of Wander spoke of him. The Prior of Westforest said in chapter house, "Had we one brother like Brother Richard of Silver Cross—" Not only to his monks, but he said it to the country around, "Brother Richard of Silver Cross—"

Montjoy said "Brother Richard of Silver Cross," but he said it very differently from the Abbot and the Prior. He said with a kind of passionate reverence and hope. He wished there to be true saints; he wished there to arise one out of Silver Cross. He wished a saint, a saint kneeling beside Isabel, kneeling with Isabel beneath the great picture, whose form, whose face in which God was dawning, was like Isabel. Isabel like Her, though maybe in that degree from Her—that was Morgen Fay from Isabel whom surely, too, she resembled. [Pg 64]

Middle Forest had rumour of the monk at Silver Cross.

Prior Hugh spoke of him at Saint Leofric's but he spoke in scorn and drew plans for greater and greater guest houses.

Sir Robert Somerville, having need to see Silver Cross as to a bit of debatable ground touching Abbey fields and manor wood, rode into Abbey close upon a misty, pearly day. He had his talk in the Abbot's most comfortable parlour, sub-prior at hand to aid memory. The land certainly leaned to the Abbey side of the wall, or had been brought skilfully to lean by Abbey lawyers. Somerville saw that it were wisest to leave it debatable, awaiting some more fortunate aspect of manor stars. He slid from the subject, but with a sparkle in his eye. That glint always came when he ticketed a grudge and put it somewhere for safe keeping until it could be paid.

And as he thought it would be displeasing to the Abbot, he began presently to talk of Saint Leofric's, to whom by now great fame had cleaved, by whose wall was building a town—

"Friar Paul—his visions—!" exclaimed the Abbot and broke off. There was no good, as Montjoy had proved, in casting pebble or boulder of discredit. The people were besotted, joined to their idol, this very Dagon that Hugh had set up! If Contrariness were not already in possession then the hermit Gregory's death in July had set her high on throne! The Abbot covered his eyes with his hand, then said, "There is a monk here that I hold to be holy as any living Dominican!" [Pg 65]

"Hath he vision?"

"Yea," said the Abbot, then in his heart. "He must have!"

"It is not sufficient!" said Somerville. "Nothing now but revelations and healings following will even Silver Cross! Greater revelations, greater healings than Saint Leofric. You can't go down the stair in such things. You must go up."

He spoke with fine malice. Abbot Mark glanced at him and said smoothly, "Very true, my son! but Heaven does not ask our will nor way in such matters! If it smiles, it smiles. Nor can it be limited to one handful. It may be that in this England we have touched a harvest week, as it were, and that many a sheaf will be thrown down."

He rose. "Come! I will show you Brother Richard." [Pg 66]

He whom they sought was standing at the table in the room where he worked. Between his hands was a bowl of silver whereon he had wrought vine leaves and grapes. He put down his work and kneeled before the Abbot, then stood with crossed hands and lowered eyes. He was brown-blond, tall and still, with a face of dimmed power, dimmed beauty.

When they had gone away, said Somerville, "Lord Abbot, Friar Paul is twice as thin and pale as yonder monk, and hath eyes that burn like coals! He would never see within him nor bring forth, vine leaves around a silver bowl! He sees but saints and martyrs filling his cell and speaking to him out of glories!" He nodded as he finished.

The staccato of his voice drummed like a rude heel upon the Abbot's now fevered desire. Said the Abbot's will, deep down, "He shall see all that is necessary. Oh, Hugh. I will oust you yet!"

Somerville rode away. Halfway to his house, up the Wander, his mind perceived something that made him laugh. "I am not prophet, yet will I prophesy! Before spring there will be miracles at Silver Cross!"

It was a foggy day, a grey pearl, with shadows that were trees. [Pg 67]

“Aha and Aho!
Mankind and its woe,
Children at their playing,
Straying, straying!
Little marsh fire
That the sun is,
Thou art a liar,
Little marsh fire!”

Somerville often made poems as he rode. Now he made this one.

The next day was foggy still, and the Abbot was not wont to ride abroad in fog. Yet he called for his white mule and for two Brothers to attend him, and rode, booted and wrapped warm, to Westforest.

There may be imagined a chessboard, and Prior Matthew, with Abbot Mark for backer, sitting studying, mouth covered by hand. He must play against Prior Hugh, invisible there, or perhaps against mere cosmic insensibility to advantages accruing from full streams of profit and glory, fuller than the Wander, flowing down Wander vale. Chess takes time and thought. If there come inspirational gleams take them as evidence that Nature begins to lean with you—but continue your study, mentally advancing now this piece and now that, going slow, going sure, making your combinations with more than grey spider’s skill! So Prior Matthew played. Abbot Mark was more impatient and would have things without working for them, which is to say without deserving them. In the mysterious cave of this world where all players must play, failure always impended. If it did not fall, that was because you were a good player. The Prior’s hollow cheek grew more hollow, his intent, small, deep-set eyes more intent.

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On this day, folded as in wool, in the parlour that was warmed by blazing logs on stone hearth, that gave upon the autumn garden, much to-day like a ghost-garden, Prior indicated to Abbot move and then move and then move again.

“God pardon us!” breathed the Abbot. “That’s a bold thing!”

“Bolder than Hugh? I think not so. Or if it is we need to be bolder than he. Boldness hurts not, but the lack of skill in boldness. Attain the miracles, and Silver Cross arises re-gilt. Streams of pilgrims—nay, you may tap and dry up *his* stream of pilgrims! Abbey built and magnified for ages. Attain them not, and all is vain, for our lifetime at least! We may go sleep, fogged and obscured forever, in the vale of Wander! Both houses and in us the Order.”

“I know that we need to be bolder than Hugh.”

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“We need more living colour to draw, and a louder drum.”

The Abbot took for his own, saying of Somerville’s, “You cannot go down the stair in such things. You must go up the stair. There’s too much risk.”

“Oh, yes, plenteous! So had Hugh risk. But when the fish had once bitten no mortal man could get hook from its mouth!”

“Meaning by the fish the people? Yes. But if Hugh and me and you, Matthew, be all three taken in mortal sin?”

“Has he hurt Saint Leofric? Or Saint Dominic his Order? Or the folk whose bodies are healed? Does not glory go up to heaven like incense?”

“It is true. If it be venial sin, then Our Lady, an altar of pure silver to thee!”

“That will be well! It will still more beautify the church. But cease,” said Matthew, “to have this monk work at thy gold and silver! It goes not with kneeling and fasting all day and vigil at night, with great and sole visions and voices, and favour from the Saints!”

“Very good. I will put him to his book and solitude.”

The Prior took quill and drew upon a leaf of paper a plot of cells and passageways. “You will empty these five cells.”

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“Aye. They shall go back to dormitory.”

“Door is to be here and door there. To get it done, while masons are upon it—and for other reasons as well—give your monk penance for some fault, sending him out of Silver Cross to Westforest. Let me have him for a month, no less.”

“What will you do with him?”

“I will indoctrinate him with expectancy.”

“Do you know,” said Mark doubtfully, “he is one that might one day become true saint.”

“Think you so? Well, I wish him innocent and believing—even as I hold Friar Paul across river may be innocent and believing!”

“Innocent!” The Abbot groaned. “But you and I and Hugh will not be innocent!”

“No. We shall be wise and bold for the glory of our heritage. Choose—and choose now—which you will have!”

The Abbot chose. The chess game went on. Outside the day folded in, fold on fold of white wool

and grey wool, fog coming up from the sea.

CHAPTER VII

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THE fog wrapped the river. The bridge showed now a few arches and now none. Boats were moths in a moth dimness and silence. Saint Leofric's mount across the water could not be seen. The walls of the houses on this side stood chill and grey, or faded away into a dream. The garden below barely lived, a wistful, faded place, no colour even to dream of colour.

Morgen Fay hated the day. "Miserable! I want to go live in the sun!"

"Will you have your book? Will you have your tapestry frame?"

"No!"

The large woman, Ailsa, shrugged and went to Tony in the warm kitchen. They talked there. "Now she is nightingale or moon in the sky—and now she is lion-woman or panther-woman—and now she is just a slut that I could whip—!"

Up in the oak room Morgen Fay lay face down among the cushions of the long window seat. Ennui was in the room like the fog. It was in her veins, her mouth. "I am set face to a dead wall, and I shall be here forever! Unless the wall is broken and my feet are let to move, I will say that life is a naught, a nothing-wall restraining nothing from nothing, a dead grin on a dead face!"

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"Nothing—nothing—nothing!" ran through her head and sat in her heart. "Nothing—grey nothing—black nothing. I am come to that. I stick in that. I go not up nor down, nor to nor fro. Nothing—nothing—nothing! Nothing that yet is wretched, being nothing!"

She lay with dark eyes hidden in bend of arm. "Oh, something—something—something come to me!"

She lay in the grey room in the world of grey fog. A pebble wrapped in a glove, thrown from without, struck the glass of the window above her. She knew that kind of sound, that kind of knock. "Ho, you within!" At first she meant not to look, not to answer. It was all grey nothing—no sun out there to lift the cloud. Habit, old, dull and very strong, at last haled her from her pillows and set her face against the pane. She could not see. She pressed the catch that opened the small square in the larger square. Now the fog poured in, and the sound of the river. She made out the small boat below, one man standing in it.

He saw her face come out of the mist. Blue eyes looked into black eyes. "Ah, so doleful is it in this fog!" cried young Thomas Bettany.

"Aye, and aye again. I yawn with death up here!"

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"So grey it is none will see and steal my boat fastened here. Foot here and foot there, and so I could climb—were the window opened more wide!"

She opened it. He did as he had pictured and entered the oak room. "I have been," she said, "in two minds whether to hang myself or drown myself. I want no kisses. I like you because you have blue speedwell eyes and are truly gay. If you can sit and talk and make me who sit inside gay, do it! If you cannot—back to the river!"

"Your blue and red warm the grey cloud. Are you melancholy? Sometimes I am so until I would give the world a buffet and depart."

"You are nineteen and a young king and know naught about it!" said Morgen Fay. She took her seat by the small fire on the hearth and he sat opposite. He had no amorous passion for her and she knew it. Once she would have set herself to making him find it. Now she did not care. She had not cared once this year. She felt no amorous movement toward him, but she liked him. She was thirty-two. Now, sitting there, she could have said "Son—"

He nursed his knee, looking now at the blue and red flames and now at Morgen Fay.

"To get back a gay heart why not go to Saint Leofric's?"

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"I don't believe in miracles. If they are, they are for others, not for me."

"Why don't you believe?"

"I don't know. I know a deal of Morgen Fay and there's a deal I do not know. But neither what I know nor what I do not know creeps and prays to a dead man's bones. All that to me is a mockery! I laugh at it and against it. Some are healed? Doubtless! Many! But believed they so of it, a rose in my garden, so they smelled it, kissed it, believed it was rooted in Paradise, would heal them! They heal themselves. Believing! Believing! I would that I had it. So easy to cure one's self! Oh, the self is the wonder that is so dark and is so bright, so strong and so feeble!"

She looked at him sombrely, hunger in her face.

"If you said all that outside—"

"Aye, indeed, if I said it! Morgen Fay that has 'scaped sheet and candle all these years might have them now, but for a different reason! I'll not say it outside—nor inside on a different day. To-day I would tell the truth, for there is no sparkle in lying!"

She brooded over the fire. "What is the truth? Now I believe what I have said—and to-morrow I

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might go swimming toward a miracle! I have swam so in the past—believed with the shoal there was food there. But no! It shall not be again toward dead-white bone!”

He began, blue-eyed, young and keen, to talk of travel that he wanted so badly! He was talking as youth might talk to motherhood, who always listened. Cathay and Ind by the western way! They hung over the fire, the fog came about the house; they were far, far, far away!

When it was growing dusk, before Ailsa brought the candles, he went through the window and down as he had come to his boat,—and so off like a moth.

If he had not left Morgen Fay gay of heart, yet listening and speaking, and never a caress between, liking this boy and travelling a bit with him, her mood was less ashen, or began to glow amid its ashes. She bent herself over the fire, she put her locked hands over her forehead, she rocked herself; desire and mind went wandering together. “Forest—forest deep and still. Landless sea, salt and clean. Solitude, solitude—and out of it the Miracle rising—and Morgen Fay dead at its feet—but I safe forever, healed forever! But it will not come, my Miracle, it will not come, it will not come!”

The dark increased. Ailsa brought the candles.

The next eve brought Somerville,—alone, in mood of return but not otherwise in good mood. A man of many levels, something had crossed him and he perched to-day upon one of the lower levels of himself. Morgen Fay’s mood to-night was soulless, hard and reckless. She was not nightingale, nor moon in the sky, nor lion-woman nor panther-woman; she was nearer the slut that Ailsa would have under her fingers. She drank much wine with Somerville.

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When he was at this ebb and scurf of himself he liked so to loosen her tongue, for she could then flay for him—skilfully as ever Apollo flayed Marsyas—that breadth of living, that cluster of folk or that individual that he chose to lead to her. Perhaps she knew them, or perhaps she took them and their acts from his lips. Either way, with a vigour of disdain, a vigour of hate, of anger against an universe that was increasingly giving her now ennui and now whips of scorpions, she drew from them and held aloft a skin of attributes and motives that made dreadful laughter for the onlookers. She and Somerville were the onlookers.

In these moods he was her demon and she was his. They sat cheek by jowl, in the lowest strata of themselves, drinking each the worst of the other, poisoning and poisoned. When they came to embraces, to a pitiful, animal revivification—thinking so to get light and solace—that was the lesser harm.

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Somerville brought into their talk Brother Richard Englefield. “There is a monk at Silver Cross. Watch for appearances and miracles there also!”

“What can church say to us? Where’s honesty? Here, Rob, here!”

“He is a tall, brown-gold man that was a goldsmith once. He can still make you lovely things in silver and gold.”

“So he becomes cheating alchemist and all his gold is lead and brass!”

“Much like thine own!” said a loud voice within Morgen Fay. She struck at it, would not have it, poured to-night, being to-night a slut, muck and mire upon it.

“Let him cheat—and Silver Cross cheat, and Saint Leofric’s, and Prior Hugh and Abbot Mark! I would have them cheat, bringing their inward outward! It is there. Let the horn blow for the toad to come forth!”

“I wish to see,” said Somerville, “the play they make! It will be players and masquers worth the fee! There will be Saint Willebrod, or who else they can impress, and Brother Richard, and a new Somewhat or That Which that works miracles—or an old That Which working with youth come again!”

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“We are fallen on evil times! No miracles save those we work ourselves! And we are so clumsy!”

“Abbot Mark may be clumsy. I hold that the Prior of Westforest will marshal the play.”

“And they are more safe than coiners in some forest cavern!”

“That, sweetheart, is because we are so hungry for miracles. See how we beg Saint Leofric for more! We are so lantern-jawed that we will take marsh grain, so it be baked in a loaf!”

She laughed. “All gaunt with hunger—getting wolf-toothed. I, too, have whined and will whine again, for a miracle!”

He poured her more wine. “It’s a wicked old world! The only way is to grin and shove it along.”

“Unless you stop it with a rope. If I were sure I *could* stop it.”

“Drink your wine. Here’s to Brother Richard—dog-monk noseing out the unearthly!”

She drank. “Here’s to Prior Matthew the marshal! If it’s to be a good play, I would be a playgoer!”

“Here’s to the rotten time—the hungry people!”

“Here’s to the rotten time—the hungry people.” She drank, then set slowly down the cup and put her crossed arms upon the table and bowed her head upon them. She and Somerville were down, down, far down in themselves.

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RICHARD ENGLEFIELD listened to the Abbot's assertion that making of inner vessels of gold for heaven's use was of more import than were dishes for abbot's table and for gifts. He agreed, but his mind said, "Since when did you find that out?"

Moreover, he would miss his work. He missed it.

When he came to confession he met another change,—namely, severity in penance. Heretofore he had been the severe one with himself. Now his spiritual fathers took it over. "Why?" asked his mind, but his hunger for holiness and his will harnessed to that hunger rebuked his mind. "Have we not agreed that they are our masters in heavenly law? Then learn the lessons they give! Cease to cavil and question! Did you so with Godfrey the Master Smith?"

He accepted penance, watched, fasted, scourged himself. He grew very thin, less strong of frame than he had been. Sleeplessness, even when he was given or gave himself leave to sleep, fastened itself upon him. It was as though his soul ceaselessly walked a dungeon. "O God, where is thy heaven? If I might see it or feel it!"

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The great picture in the church lost its mystery and enchantment and power. It was a dead canvas to him. "O my soul, come thou forth!"

He was kept solitary in his cell. Solitude did not appal him, seeing that he had ever been artist, able to people it. But one day when a strong sunbeam came through the window his mind said loudly, and as it were it shook him by the shoulders. "Why this straitness with thee? What are they about?"

But he was afraid to listen,—Richard Englefield, fearing for his soul. Fear, casting about for aid, found Vanity in a small hidden chamber, sitting there with closed lids, somewhat faint and unnourished. He brought her forth and sent her up, strengthening as she came. "It is seen that I begin to light this monastery! They would trim the lamp."

Fear, Vanity, Pride and Old Credulity!

At Martinmas the Abbot sent him to Westforest. It was heavy penance for monk to go to Westforest that was small, hard and bare beside Silver Cross, that had rude living, that owned a Prior could give tasks, set one to heavy and distasteful work. Brother Richard Englefield was not put to handwork, but again to watching, fasting, cries to all the Saints, to Jesu and Mary Mother and God the Father.

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He fell ill at Westforest. He was not laid in hospital but left in the Westforest penitential cell, though they spread a pallet for him where had been bare stone. Prior Matthew visited him here. He came in the day, and he came, taper in hand, by night. He had a medicine which he gave Brother Richard. He himself dropped a few dark drops into a cup of water or of milk and held it to the monk's lips. "Drink!" After the first time Richard Englefield tried to put it away. "On your obedience!" said the Prior sternly. The monk drank.

He began to recover from the illness that had prostrated him. But something seemed to have gone from his life and something seemed to have come into it. One night in this cell he heard a voice. "Richard! Richard!" it cried. He could not tell whence it came; it seemed above him. He sat up. "Who speaks?" But when it said "Willebrod, who was martyred," he stared incredulous. Sunshine and mind and his old workshop in the old high-roofed town flooded back to him. "Is voice from heaven twin pea to voice of earth? I have even heard better voices of earth!" He seemed again to be working in the red, pleasant light of his old furnace, knowing good and not-so-good when he met them. He thought, "If I do not go to sleep I shall be seeing, hearing, like any madman!" He turned, drew the scant covering over him and slept.

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But the next day Prior Matthew said that he was not so well, and, on his obedience he drank again the dark medicine. The taste of it was stronger, there was more of it. Again he heard voices. "Are they true voices—or what?" But he was dull to them, uncaring of them. "Surely I would know the ring of gold!"

He grew better, rose from his pallet and moved about the cell, was permitted now to go, when rang the bell, into church. Sent there for penance one winter eve between vespers and compline, he suddenly, at a turn of the stone corridor, dark, chill and deserted, saw what he must suppose to be a vision. There was a great patch of light and in it a man standing who must be Saint Willebrod because he was dressed and coloured and more or less featured like Saint Willebrod in the painting on the wall, and he carried a silver cross. Brother Richard stood still. Then, making to advance, his foot struck some obstruction. Weakened as he was, he stumbled and fell. When he could rise the vision was gone.

Only Vanity could explain why the Prior should become his confessor. The fact of the voices and the vision was drawn forth. "You are greatly honoured, my son! If greater favour yet comes to you, forget not humility—"

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But he told of his own honesty how cold voices and vision left his heart, how unamazed his mind, and that he could but think them dreams of his sickness somehow bodied forth. The Prior looked sternly and shook his head. "They come truly, we hold! But it is seen that thou art as dull as ditch water—black ember that will not respond—tongue that hath lost taste—soul that will not be fervent! Scourge thyself into meekness to heaven—into that glow that will take whatever

cometh!"

Richard Englefield plied the scourge. He was weak now and his eyes dazzled, and truly phantasies pageanted before him in sound and line and colour. He saw images, and sometimes they were beautiful and sometimes deadly. He heard sounds, and some were honey-sweet and others grating or mocking. But still said his being, "They come from no High Reality. Have I not, being artist, always in some sort heard and seen? O God, O God! help thou me who am dead!"

Prior Matthew regarded him darkly. Westforest rode one day to Silver Cross, talked there with Abbot Mark. "There has been mistake! He is not your Friar Paul kind!"

The Abbot's pride arose. "For three years Silver Cross hath seen him one apart!"

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"Perhaps! He would not," said Matthew sourly, "have far to go, as monks are in these days, to stand apart and above. My point is that you cannot make him ecstatic. So far it is beyond me to set the mill running! He hath been ill, and his body hath arrived at emaciation. I have given him that elixir you wot of. Usually it sets the fancy skipping, brews a kind of wild readiness at seeing, hearing! And, if I read him aright, he wants heaven to descend upon him. I provided him to hear and see one who told him he was Saint Willebrod. Brother Anselm, you know, whom I took from among the players, and is—God pardon us!—as dog to my hand—" He spread out his hands.

The Abbot groaned. "The end that we propose is good!"

"Assuredly it is! It all goes into the homely bag of homely deceits necessary in this poor world. But the end is that as yet we have done naught!"

The Abbot sighed. "Could we take him into counsel?"

"No!"

"Then what shall we do? You have heard that Saint Leofric healed the French Knight? He gave candlesticks of pure gold. Shall we give it all up, Matthew?"

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"Not yet. If I could find his true heart and mind—then might we beckon appearances that corresponded. He seems interested in a far land and in somehow going there—and going has to be bodily, all of him! What appears will have to strike him down, like Saint Paul on Damascus road—clean him of doubt, be a blaze to him, a burning bush!"

The Abbot sighed. Prior Matthew sat fixed, with cloudy brows, seeking inspiration.

He returned to Westforest. The next day, sitting in Prior's stall in the cold, small church, he kept his eyes fast upon the monk Richard. He noted his turning, he noted his uplifted, now bloodless face, and his eyes directed to the copy of the Silver Cross picture. Prior Matthew half closed his own eyes, covered, as was his wont when he was playing chess, his mouth with his hand.

Again the Prior sat as confessor. The kneeling monk met gathered subtlety and old skill. Deep, recessed matters, loves and longings, must come forth.

The Prior listened, questioned, listened, and at both was skilfull. He imposed penance, and in part it was to be performed at Silver Cross, "—returning there as you do, my son, this week."

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The monk bowed his head. He had not known when, or indeed if ever, he should return to Silver Cross. It was among his efforts at self-crucifixion not to care. As it was his effort here and at Silver Cross to withdraw attention from outward happenings, outward talk. No other of his brethren knew so little as he of the flare and clang about Saint Leofric.

He returned to Silver Cross. The bell rang for the noon office. He went into church with his brethren. With them he bowed, stood, chanted, kneeled. It was nigh to Christmas tide, a clear winter day. The sun dwelled in each jewel pane of the windows and shot thence arrows of love. The sun blessed nave and aisles and high groined roof. The candles stood like angels, the great picture glowed. It was a home-coming. Warmness wrapped his heart that had been naked and desolate. All grew fair, honest, friendly. He was glad to see the Brothers, even those he had most distasted, glad to see Abbot Mark, cloister and church, all things! Out of topaz and amber a beam touched the carven tomb of Montjoy's wife. It warmed the Lady Isabel, lying in robe and mantle with a half smile upon her face. Not Montjoy only, but also Richard Englefield thought stone form and face had strange likeness to those of the Glorified in the picture. Now the light warmed her, too, the pale, golden lady, so still, so still, waiting for the Resurrection.

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Amber light, topaz light. But on the great picture every heart-red, every heavenly blue, every rose and every lily, the upward flowing amethyst and the diamond light above, where no more might be seen. His heart bowed, his heart grew alive. "Ah, Blessed among women, I am come back!"

CHAPTER IX

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WILLIAM, Lord of Montjoy, was ignorant of what machinations might be in progress up the Vale of Wander. The Abbot had said, "Would he be helpful? It is for the glory of Silver Cross church, which, truly, is for him his lady whom he must serve!"

The Prior shook his head. "No! No more than that monk himself! Let him think naught save that there is holiness there!"

Abbot Mark drew groaning breath. "There was—there is—there shall be—!"

Montjoy, in his castle yard, played for exercise at buffets with the squire Ralph, then turned to castle wall, and with his arms resting upon stone parapet, looked downward and outward, gargoyle-wise. But he was not such; he was living knight, struggling to reach Heavenly City.

It was snowing. Montjoy, wrapped in mantle, drew hood over head and let it snow. The flakes fell thickly, large and white. Castle rock dropped black to castle hill that was whitening. Hill met Middle Forest that piled toward hill. The roofs were high, the roofs were steep. They were brown, they were black, they were whitening. Where were chimneys rose feathers of smoke. These were houses full and well-to-do. There were chimneys unfeathered. [Pg 90]

Sweet—sweet, deep—deep, went Saint Ethelred's bell. Sweet—sweet, deep—deep, the bell of the Poor Clares. Sweet—sweet, deep—deep, the bell of the small Carmelite house. The snow was a veil, but he saw the river and the whitening bridge. Across, Saint Leofric's mount might hardly be seen, might be guessed, as it were—cloud friary, cloud church, cloud houses around, all set in a cloud. Thick, thick fell the snow in great flakes.

Sweet—sweet, deep—deep rang the bells. He thought he could hear Saint Leofric's. On a clear day when the wind was right, he could hear from this wall, far and thin, the bells of Silver Cross. To-day it could not be for this ever-passing, ever-present wall in white motion. Yet he imaged the hearing. Silver Cross—Westforest up Wander—Saint Leofric—Saint Ethelred—Poor Clares—Carmelite—they rang, and it was Christmas season.

Montjoy's dark and serious eyes grew misty. "We strive and buffet—cross joys, cross wills—yet, O true Lord, every bell is sweet! Even Saint Leofric's—" He gripped with energy the stone coping. "But it is so despite thee, Hugh, despite thy lying that one day shall choke thee!" [Pg 91]

Silver Cross bells swung to the inner sense. They chimed, they rang unearthly clear and sweet, they rang clean. "Faulty is the time, and Silver Cross has been faulty—but never and never and never has it been nor will it be branded thief—as you, O Hugh, have branded that which was given you in charge!"

The snow fell, the snow fell. The roofs whitened, whitened. The smoke feathers that had been pale against dark now were dark against pale. The river and the bridge began to be hidden.

There was a high-roofed house with more than one great chimney stack out of which rose and waved full and plummy smoke feathers. Down chimney great burning logs, flame wrapped and purring, made the house warm, it being the house of the merchant Eustace Bettany. Alongside stood his warehouse and his shop, and one passed by doors from the one into the other. His house was clean, well-fitted. To-day, it being Christmas tide, he had shut shop and given holiday, and was gone, he and his wife and two daughters, to a kinsman's house to dine and talk around kinsman's fire, and listen to some music from viols and rebecs. His son, young Thomas, had turned wilful and would not go. Nor would he, this day, go to seek a jolly crew in some tavern. He often enough did that, but to-day his mood was indoors. Having house to himself, he piled on wood and summoned John Cobb. "You've on your mad dreaming cap!" said the latter. [Pg 92]

Thomas plied the ash stick. "If I have not a play to go to, must I not make the play? I cannot sit still. I must run, dance, fly. I would a witch would come down chimney and show me how!"

John Cobb crossed himself.

The fire burned, the fire sang. The snow fell, large flakes, white, down coming with an intimate, cool grace.

Somerville rode into town. He rode musingly, wrapped in a great grey mantle, with a wide, grey, stiffened felt hat, keeping snow from him much like a shed roof. He had ridden from manor to Silver Cross where he had been entertained. Now he rode on to Middle Forest, and he rode in a deep study. Certain muscles twitched in his odd, brown face. Upon setting out he had not meant to go farther than Silver Cross. He hardly knew why he should ride on down Wander. Perhaps he might think that he wanted time to think. But below consciousness decisions were already made, actions acted. That was what drew the muscles about mouth and eyes and, sitting in his wrist, turned his big bay horse down Wander, not up. He might think that he was thinking, but old life was acting after old fashion. He rode through falling snow, and he rode not in the mood of one night at Morgen Fay's, but in a pleasanter, brisker mood. He felt amused, speculative, genial, triumphant. It was well to find human nature through and through the ancient, pleasant, faulty pattern! He did not dislike it—marry, no! It strengthened, buttressed, warmed and pleased his sense of himself to feel warp and woof so continuous. [Pg 93]

Silver Cross had this day withdrawn all claim to that debated good mile of land. It had acknowledged Somerville's right. Parchment crackled in his pocket, parchment with Abbot Mark's name and seal at bottom. Land at last in his hand. Why? Somerville knew why. "I am bought for the miracles." Laughter played over his quick face.

Prior Matthew had "chanced" to be at Silver Cross. "He is the puppet master!"

Nothing had been divulged as to form of puppets, or that there were puppets, or for that matter miracles. Certainly nothing was said of purchase. All had been warm, friendly, with an air of Yule. "But when there are miracles—believe and cry aloud that it is so! Never bring cold to wither them, snow to cover them! Be a friend, and in our camp!" Somerville laughed. After an old habit, he hummed, he sang as he rode: [Pg 94]

“Turn thy coat—
Turn thy coat,
Having the land,
Having the land.
So few know when they are bought!
But all are bought,
Few, few escape!”

He looked through snow to castle rock. “Ha, Montjoy, do you escape?”

For a moment a hand, as it were, wiped life from his face, leaving it haggard and empty. But witches trooped at whistle, sardonic mirth came back. “We buy and we are bought! Why not—if the world is Pennyworth Fair? If little good is had, so is little harm. It’s an empty barn, Montjoy, where the wind whistles!

“Little good will come,
Little harm will come
Of Abbot Mark,
Of Silver Cross—
While away the day with plucking at the lute’s three strings!”

He rode through Middle Forest High Street and coming to the door of Master Eustace Bettany, dismounted and knocked. John Cobb let him in, and Thomas Bettany was most glad to see him. But he would not tarry. He had stopped in passing to ask Thomas to make him a visit at Somerville Hall. Thomas was blithe to say yes,—if his father could spare him.

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“Oh, he will spare you!” said Somerville intelligently.

His sworn follower laughed a little. In truth Somerville was important. Merchants spared sons to visit knights.

He mounted the big bay, he rode on down High Street. Thomas and John Cobb watched from the door dwindling horse and man, taken into the snow world and hidden there. Then they shook from their coats the flakes big as guilders and returned to the fire. “Now you’ve got your pleasure and your play! Did your witch bring him though?”

“No!” His blue eyes regarded John Cobb with a bright and distant look. “I’ll take you with me, John, for my man—”

The snow fell. The roof, the streets all were white. Sound wrapped itself in wool, in far time. The folk in the ways, the carts and wagons, the strong horses, went in a wafted veil. It witched them, witched the place and hour. As the snow fell fewer and fewer were abroad. Somerville also heard the bells ring.

Morgen Fay’s house watched the head of the old wall grow white, and the bridge grow white, and the flakes melt in the river. A dusky plume waved from the chimney. Below was burning wood, and Morgen Fay moved from it to window and from window back again.

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She was glad to see Somerville. “If ever I needed counsel, I need it now! What is Ailsa? She cannot give it, nor can Tony! What are the others who come here? They have not thy wit, or they are too young or too old. Montjoy has wiped me from his dear soul!”

“Your eyes are red. Were you weeping for that?”

“No! And I wept not much. It does no good. My cousin, Father Edwin, is dead.”

“I knew not that he ailed!”

“Ay, he is dead. And there comes to me warning that Father Edmund will preach against me in Saint Ethelred and at town cross.”

“Can there arrive great harm? Middle Forest likes thee pretty well!”

“Oh, once, I know, I might have sailed out of storm—”

“Why not again?”

“With the miracles—with Saint Leofric blazing there? Middle Forest is become good! I tell you I see before me stoning and misery!”

He studied the fire. He was inclined to agree with her that her hour had struck. “Well! You have had years of down-lined nest—of merry life!”

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“So wind will blow less cold and stones bruise less? Merry life? Oh, aye, sometimes!”

“What will you do to escape?”

“Marry, tell me! Tell me, Rob!”

She came and put her hand upon his breast. She felt him draw slightly back from her. She stood away herself and her dark eyes pierced him; she sighed. Presently she said, “Thou, too! thou, too! Well, out of common decency, counsel me!”

He cogitated. “While there is yet time you might get secretly away—to London or elsewhere.”

“Oh, I want not to go! This is home. I should miss my river and my garden.”

"Montjoy?"

"In old days he might—because that I look like that Isabel who looked like Our Lady in the Silver Cross picture. But now I know not that he would shield, nor that he could. He hath put himself awry with all the folk."

Somerville laughed. "Aye, I have seen that! Let him speak now against rising zeal at his peril! Out upon him will rush the hive!"

He sat regarding her with very bright eyes. "Man lives to learn! Until this moment I knew not that of Montjoy, nor that you are like—as now I see you are like—that picture! Why did you never tell me that?" [Pg 98]

"I know not. I have some grace—like a little star, far, far away!"

He regarded her meditatively. "You are a mixture! A hand shakes the phial until the dregs are on top."

"I wish they were skimmed off and thrown away. But all of me might then be gone, oh, all of me! Tell me what I am to do, Robert!"

Leaning back in his chair, he looked now at her and now at the fire. "Priest against priest! Father Edwin dead. Seek afield. None at the Carmelites, no! Saint Leofric gives no help. Silver Cross—"

"Oh, Abbot Mark must trot his mule beside Zeal-for-goodness! Not else can he keep apace with the time!" Morgen Fay burst into laughter. She laughed, and then she sat silent with her head bowed upon the settle's arm.

"If he preaches—Father Edmund—at town cross, best were it that you disappear."

"Lock house against better days and vanish—aye, where?"

"There's many a place."

"Aye, far away. I do not will to go far away. May not I have true love beside all the untrue?" [Pg 99]

"Poor wretch! It is nigh smothered!" said Somerville and laughed; after which he sat in silence and all manner of odd and mocking lights played in his face. "Well, disappear up Wander!"

"How far up?"

"Well, not as far as Somerville Hall. That may not be. But there is the ruined farm that bears toward Silver Cross. Put on country dress and darken your face, and David and his wife who live there will take you in—Alice or Joan. I will speak to them. You may bide there until we are less good."

There was silence. A red coal fell with a silken sound. Out of window all was white and still. "I despair," said Morgen Fay. "Not for this danger nor for that but I—I myself. I despair."

"If there were any way to buy Silver Cross—" He sat and looked into the fire.

The snow fell thick, thick and white. It hid the bridge, it hid Saint Leofric, it hid the castle of Montjoy. It wrapped the town. Dusk came to help it. Snow and night wrapped the time and place.

In the night it ceased to snow and cleared. Winter stars and purple dawn and saffron day. The sun sprang up and beneath him lay a diamond earth. Somerville, riding up Wander, pulled his hat over eyes, so dazzling were the light shafts. [Pg 100]

Out from the road that turned aside to Silver Cross came upon his mule the Prior of Westforest, attended by two monks. There was greeting. "Ride on with me to Westforest, Sir Robert!"

They rode together and when they came to Westforest Somerville dismounted and went with Prior Matthew into his parlour.

CHAPTER X

BROTHER ANSELM had been transferred, it seemed, from Westforest to Silver Cross. Richard Englefield found him here, and in the cell that had been Brother Oswald's. The latter, with Brothers Peter, Allen and Timothy, were gone into dormitory. Only Brother Norbert was left. In the six cells dwelled Brother Anselm, Brother Norbert and himself. There had been other changes. A great rood was put up in his cell. Broad and dark, a poor wooden Christ hanging thereon, it overspread a third of one side of the cell. It stood there, shadowy against a shadowy wall, as all the cell was shadowy,—the thin winter light stealing in by day, the one taper by night.

Richard Englefield the goldsmith had seen many a great rood in England and France and Italy. He had seen poor carving, rude and struggling thought and unskilful hand, hardly attaining to truth, hardly to strength, hardly to beauty. But beauty and strength and truth had been longed for. This carving, this rood, showed him no such thing. "Not the way it is done, but the dream is wrong." It grew faintly horrible to him.

The long winter days, the knees upon stone. "O God, O God! Where is light, where is meaning? In me is wold and thicket and bog and the stars put out!" [Pg 102]

Only the picture stayed with him, made somehow significance, somehow warmth. Now it paled

and now it glowed.

He ate little, slept little. He crucified his body. Like the insistent sweet ringing of a bell, forever, forever, Silver Cross suggested, suggested. Surely, in some sort, heaven should descend! He was earning it. He began to have visions, but they were pale, confused, forms without significance or with the significance hidden. They said naught that might lift the Abbey of Silver Cross to a height that should equal Saint Leofric's mount.

Twelfth night—Candlemas Day—Lent in sight—and Saint Leofric blazing high! Not that only, but Middle Forest beginning to manifest holiness and uncloak sin. Father Edmund of Saint Ethelred had no vision but the vision of a rod for the wicked. But he had a preaching power! He stood upon the steps of town cross and his white heat turned the icicles to water. The sinner, Morgen Fay, was fled,—none knew whither. They said likely to London town. They sacked her house, they drummed the old woman and the youth, her servants, out of town. Both sides of river and up Wander vale, enthusiasm gathered light in eyes, red in cheeks. There began to be prophets and religious dancers. In Middle Forest High Street appeared a band of flagellants. The air was taking fire. "Now, now or never!" said Prior Matthew.

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The ruined farm, that had been small and poor even before fire had half destroyed it, stood gaunt, blackened, sunk in loneliness behind winter forest through which few walked. Margery and David, blear-eyed and simple, living in the part that held together, found the helper-woman, Joan, strong but moody, now ready to laugh at a little thing and now dark as a tempest over the wood that shut out the world. Somerville the master had said, "Take her!" They had obeyed, and if they speculated it was sluggishly.

Past the holly copse stretched land of Silver Cross, woodland with a woodman's path through. Somerville came by this. He talked with Joan or with Morgen Fay under the hollies where the berries were so red and the leaves so glossy and barbed. She said vehemently, "No!" and she said, "No!" and "No!" again, but more dully, pettishly.

"It's sin. I've done much, but I haven't done that!"

"You choose then a powerful enemy—"

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She raised her arms above her head. "If you will show me where the world is not wicked—!"

"Psha! Do you remember a foggy night when we talked? Return to that mood and say, 'It is a play, and I can do it wonderfully!' You could—you can!"

"I do not see that Abbot Mark can harm me more than I am harmed!"

"Think you so? Should there come a band of monks to break the house and hale you forth—strip you and fling you into Wander, or maybe into fire? If Silver Cross but speaks to Saint Ethelred, Abbot Mark to Father Edmund? If I withdraw my hand? Do not look like a queen in a book! I mean only that in no wise can I save you further. Montjoy is not powerful enough, even if he would, and I have here less power of arm than has he. You must save yourself."

"I think that your Abbot Mark and Prior Matthew are devils!"

"No. They are not. They are honest men trying to assure and increase that which they hold to be their own. Human stuff, even as you and I!"

"Human stuff! Well, I would choose another stuff if I might!"

"No, you would not, poor Morgen Fay, by the chill Wander! You chose this. Well, will you, or will you not?"

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"I will not."

"You think that you will not. However, you will. If you do not you are lost."

"Lost to what?"

"Well, to ease—to your own kind of command—finally perhaps to your life."

She said in a strangled voice. "As I came here to this house so will I walk on by day or by night and come to another town."

He turned quickly. "Try it!—or rather do not try it! You will find that you cannot."

The holly berries were red, the leaves glossy and barbed. She looked at the pale winter sky. "Is it sky? It seems to me a poor tent that we have struggled to get up—poor, mean, low, ragged. I would it might fall and kill us!"

He smiled indulgently. "No, you do not so! Any day you could kill yourself. But you love life. Go to, now! Look at the curious dance of the time correctly! Mumming is no great sin. What! All the saints and higher than the saints were on the market-place stage last Middle Forest Fair. They talked and walked—even the Highest! Very good! It is but Miracle Play again, and truly for no ill ends—"

Red holly berries, barbed leaves. He won her to stand and listen, though with heaving bosom and dark brows. Pale sky and voice of Wander and birds of winter in naked oak and beech. The ruined farm—and her house above the river and her garden turned against her. Father Edmund preaching at town cross against the wicked time and each remaining sin—and they had swept up her house and garden and drummed forth Ailsa and Tony, who were God knew where! And Montjoy nor any cared any longer! Barbed leaves and miserable world bent on injury! He won her to nod her head and then to break into reckless laughter.

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THE monk Richard awoke, he knew not why. He woke widely, collectedly, his forces drawn to a point of expectation. "Awake, awake! Look!" seemed to echo in his soul that had suddenly grown quiet. When he had slept his cell was flooded by the moon. Still there was her silver light. He sat up. He was with absoluteness aware of a presence in the cell. Never before, in his pale visions, had he had this sense of startling, of reality,—not at Westforest, not here at Silver Cross. He knew that there was a being in his cell. Neither could he nor did he doubt it. A voice spoke to him, and it was golden-sweet and rich and wonderful. "Richard!"

He turned himself. Light that was not moonlight, though it blended with the moonlight, and in it, *real*, the Blessed among women!

Could he doubt? It was the great picture come alive! Could he doubt? She spoke—and he had not uttered that dart of thought. "Not that that painter could see me as I am in glory—but knowing that thou lovest me so, I come to thee so! I come to thee as thou canst see me, Richard!"

She was *real*, she was not tinted air. *Real*—oh, *real*! Soft playing light was about her feet, her form, her head, her outspread and glorious dark hair. Her eyes were books, her mouth upland meadows of flowers; the blue and red of her dress, her mantle, trembled and was alive. Life went out of her toward him, his life leaped to meet it. Life at last, *life!* *life!* He sprang from his pallet, he kneeled in his monk's robe. He put his forehead to the stone.

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The voice came again—oh, the voice! "Richard, list to me!"

All heaven was speaking to him and filling him—him, him who had been so unhappy!—with joy and power.

"Thou hast loved me well, and so thou hast drawn me, servant Richard, knight Richard, my poet Richard! I love all places—but now I love this place well and would do it good."

He found daring to speak. "Star of me—Bringer of me into full being—"

"Thou canst not know all the counsel of heaven. I will come again, renewing thy joy. But now hearken what thou art to do, unquestioning, as thou lovest me! The morn comes. When rings the bell for lauds, when thy brethren flock into church, haste thou, haste! Stand before them. Cry, thou that lovest me. 'This night hath the Blessed among women appeared to me, Richard Englefield!' And she saith, 'Speak to all of Silver Cross, and say thou for me, Of old I loved this place, and I will love it again, for I see it returning to its first strength and worship!' Say thou, 'I will give it room again in men's minds. I will return and show a thing whereby multitudes shall be healed and glory shall come!'"

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There was pause, then "Be thou he, Richard, who loveth me well, through whom I shall speak! Morn cometh. The bell begins to ring."

The soft, the playing light withdrew. He felt her still—oh, *real*!—then in the darkness, into it, behind it as it were, she was gone. He knew that she was gone into utter light.

But here was vacancy, faint moonbeams, a cell of shadows. But the comfort and the passion and the splendour were in his heart, his veins, his blood, in the potent cells of his body! With power, with success, they summoned the brain to do them service. He believed like a child, and he was the impassioned lover.

He felt more than man. A great lightness and gaiety, a rest upon promise, held him one moment, and the next a longing, an agony,—and all was huge and resonant, deep, wide and high; and all was fine and small and subtle and profoundly at home! Time and space had radically changed for him.

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He was yet kneeling when the bell for lauds began to ring. Rising, he saw through the window the setting moon,—then he was gone.

The candles were lighted. It was not Abbot Mark's wont to be seated there, in Abbot's stall, for lauds. But he was here, picked out by the light. The hollow of the church was all dark; the choir, the ranged monks, thinly dyed with amber. When he passed the tomb of the Lady of Montjoy he thought that a warmer light laved it, touching the stone almost to life. But the great picture—ah, the great picture! He lifted to it light-filled eyes. She was there—she was in heaven—she had stood in his cell. His being was in her hands; he lay with the Babe in her arms.

He would give her message rightly! It seemed almost that the church waited for it, the windows where the dawn was bringing faint, faint colours. A great wave of feeling swept him, affection and pity for Silver Cross. Once it had been saintly and a light for all wanderers. Dear would it be, dear and rich and sweet if it all could come again, the old, simple power!

With that he heard his own voice, as it were the voice of another, lifted but profound, too, a deep, a rushing music, since what he had to tell was heaven's music. The Abbot summoned him to stand upon the step, lifted high above Silver Cross monks. He gave forth her words, and the world seemed to him an altar, and the candles suns, and he felt himself that he spoke like a strong angel.

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There were ejaculations, cries of praise, snatches of prayers. The Abbot kneeled—the sub-prior—all! The picture seemed to glow, to bend forward, to bless. In the faces of the simpler monks sat pure awe and belief. Some wept. There were two or three ecstatic faces. Those who had been

lazy or proud or sensual or lying showed to his thinking smitten. He had not liked them, but now they were like poor faulty children to him, to be loved still, so brimming was his power!

Brother Norbert, whom certainly he had not liked, cried aloud, "Now Silver Cross shines again—shines brighter than the bones of Saint Leofric!"

Brother Norbert, too, stepped into the deep-throbbing inner Paradise. While there arose a cry of "Praise Our Lady!"—while the Abbot kneeled before her image—while, as though she had said "Sing!" the church filled with singing, Brother Richard knew bliss. The dawn was in the windows, the great sun struck through, there was golden day. But his thought was, "Will she come to-night?"

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The day was on him, and it was unsupportable, with the fervour, with the talking, with the restlessness of the Abbey-fold. He had longed to go to his old workroom, to light the furnace, to take up work. But that had been long forbidden. It was March. Lay Brothers and tenants were plowing Abbey fields. He would have worked with them, but again was forbidden. But he had at least permission to go forth under open sky. He might walk in orchard or garden. Silence was enjoined. He felt no sorrow as to that; silence was needed to talk with Heaven.

The March day was bright, sunny, still, not cold. Two Abbey men were pruning the fruit trees. Richard Englefield signed that he would help. He worked for hours and the work was welcome. He must steady himself in order to feel again and again and steadily—in order to know every strange flower and divine essential thread!

Long day went slow-footed by, and yet were its moments gems and blossoms. He did not reason, he did not think; he only knew strange bliss and strange pain and expected both to continue.

Vespers—the picture—the Magnificat. Exalted as he was he knew that there was exaltation about him, in the church. Did he care to bring it before his mind he would have agreed that by now tidings of so great import must have gone here, gone there. No more than incense or music or light could it be kept at the starting point! Presently it would be far and near.

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Prior Matthew of Westforest sat next the Abbot's stall. That was to be expected, Silver Cross and Westforest being mother and daughter. The hollow of the church showed clusters of folk from Wander side. That, too, was to be looked for. The Lord of Montjoy stood beside the tomb of Isabel; often he came to Silver Cross, and it was not to be wondered at that he was here to-day, summoned doubtless by Abbot Mark. Montjoy's dark face showed exaltation. It glowed; you would have said there was personal triumph. Richard Englefield felt for Montjoy sudden kinship and liking.

What faces were turned to him, what looks were cast upon him, what watchings, what judgments, hopes, he knew not. After the first habitual sweep of the eye, after the first movement of spirit toward Montjoy, he was the picture's.

The church grew wide as earth. The chanting went up long coloured lanes to heaven's gate. The setting sun sang, and the rising moon sang, and the stars, as through the dusk they strode nearer.

It was night. He was alone in his cell. Again he slept. He waked and knew that he was in her presence.

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Softened glory, diminished that he might see her as he could see her. Her red and her blue, her form, her face, her voice—kneeling, he trembled with his joy as with a burden too great to bear. It was as ocean wave to a babe. Vast, crested, it curved above him. His life might go—he cared not for that, if on the other side of life he might still adore!

The voice! "Richard! Say thou for me to Silver Cross, 'Go by the orchard, go by the hill where feed the sheep. Go to where shines a fir tree against the steep hill. Beside it you will find fallen earth and a little cave made bare, and in the stone over the cave my name. Let the Abbot of Silver Cross and the holiest among you enter. There shall you find a little well of clear water, and by token beside it a rose. The well hath been blessed by me and by all the host of heaven. Make you of the grot a chapel. Set my image there; make it a place that I may love. Make for the well a pool, and whosoever drinks of it and whosoever bathes therein, if he have faith he shall be completely healed, be he ill either of body or estate!'"

The music fell, then rose again. "That is my task for thee, Richard! That is the errand thou wilt do for me."

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The voice ceased. He thought that the light began to go away, her form to dim. He cried aloud, fear pushing him to wild utterance. "I will do it! But wilt thou come again? I may not live unless thou wilt come!"

There seemed pause, then said the voice like the balm of the world. "I will come once again—and perhaps thereafter, so thou servest me firmly!" And, as he bowed his head, as tears of sweetness, of exquisite rest in her word, rushed to his eyes, she was gone. Darkness—and again through the window the declining moon, and immediately the bell for the dawn office.

SILVER CROSS went in procession. The Abbot with the Prior of Westforest walked ahead and there followed chanting monks. Then came lay Brothers and villagers and a quarter of the countryside and a half-score from Middle Forest. The Lord of Montjoy walked. Bright was the morning, high and crisp; white frost on ground. Rounding the hill they cried, "The fir tree!"

They knew not how it was, but the tree, the first confirmation, seemed to spring before them, magical, mighty, a veritable tree of life. Many may have noted it before, through the years, standing like a sentinel before the hill, and thought only, "A great tree, with good shade for shepherds in hot summer tide!" But now marvel clothed it.

The wind began to play through the stretched wires of Imagination. The harp was sounding.

It was the Prior of Westforest who cried, "Lo, the fallen earth! Not touched from without, but pushed from within!"

It lay in truth, sod, earth and rock, to right and left, as though Might would come forth and had done so.

The procession broke from column into a throng as of bees, eyes toward their queen. There was the opening into the hill like a door with a great stone for lintel. The Abbot spoke to the monk Richard. "Read thou!" A breath of assent ran like wind through wheat. "Aye, aye, the one she came to!"

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Richard Englefield read the name cut there and gave it to the folk as he had given in Silver Cross church the message. Tall, spare, gold-brown, in daily seeming stripped to simplicity and quietude, but now with that around him that made for catching of the breath, he stood and read and turned and gave the name of the Blessed among women.

The Abbot and the Prior of Westforest entered the small cavern. The bright sun was there; it was light enough. With them they took the monk Richard, and Brother Oswald whom all knew for right monk and Brother Ralph. There entered, too, the Lord of Montjoy. At first he would not. "She saith, Take the good—" But the Abbot drew him by the hand. There went in likewise one from Middle Forest,—Father Edmund the Preacher.

There was the well,—a little basin of clear water bubbling from the farther rock. It was March and the world leafless. But close beside the water lay a fresh rose, nor red nor white, of a colour like the dawn. Stem and leaf and blossom it lay, and in the water appeared its likeness. The Abbot stooped toward it. Montjoy laid hand on him. "No! Let this man lift it!" He and Richard Englefield and Brothers Oswald and Ralph saw a transfigured rose. It glowed, it beat; it was seen through tears.

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Brother Richard kneeled before it, touched it with his forehead. Then in his two hands he bore it through the opening of the grot and showed it, lifted, to the folk.

Out of the hushed throng rang a voice. "The cave and well of Our Lady of the Rose!"

"That is it! That is it! Our Lady of the Rose!"

The Abbot lifted his hands. "It shall be kept for aye in reliquary. Lord of Montjoy—"

"I will give the reliquary!" Montjoy saw in imagination the rose blooming for aye, sending through gold and precious stones light and fragrance to Isabel.

It seemed that the sub-prior had brought from the Abbot's house a silver dish and a square of fine white linen. Brother Richard laid the rose in the silver thing that he himself had carved.

Now all that might would press into the grot. At last order was had and like links of a massy chain in and forth passed the throng. There was a woman from Wander Mill, dumb for years, and it was known that she had not won healing from Saint Leofric. Now she came, she stooped, she lifted water in her hands and drank. She rose, she turned, she stammered, made strange sounds, then burst forth clear. "Praise God! Praise Blessed Lady!—Oh, children, I am speaking!"

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Tears were in all eyes.

One other was healed that day,—a man whose fingers were bent into his hand so that he could not straighten them nor work at his trade.

There was a great Mass and high devotion at Silver Cross. There were offerings for at once lining with fine stone the grotto of Our Lady of the Rose, for providing a fair, wide basin for the well, for a glorious image.

Earth, water and air seemed servants to bear the news. The hum of it was like wild bees through Wander vale. Middle Forest listened at sunset to Father Edmund. "True—true, my children! We have preached and wrought, scourging forth evil! This country wins a new name. From accursed, it becomes blessed!" The river heard and the bridge and Saint Leofric's Mount and the Friary and Prior Hugh. The bells of Saint Ethelred rang and of the Carmelites and the Poor Clares. The castle of Montjoy heard. Somerville Hall heard, and the house of Master Eustace Bettany.

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The ruined farm heard,—but so dull and trouble-bent were David and Margery that they cared not. Little things only could get into Margery's mind, and a little thing was turning there. Joan, the helper-woman, slept in a loft that was reached by an outside stair. Margery had swimming in the head and feared this stair and rarely went to loft. But this day Joan might be anywhere, but could not be found at hand. Margery climbed the stair and peered about. Very blank up here, with flock bed and ancient chest and some hanging things. But in the window under the thatch, in the sunshine of a mild day, stood the tiny rose tree that Joan had brought with her under her

cloak when she came to the ruined farm two months since. She said she brought it because she loved it, and she begged an earthen jar and put in rich soil and planted afresh that which she had taken from such a jar in order to bring it so great a distance,—in short from the great port town twenty leagues away. Now, at the ruined farm, she must have nourished it well and kept it warm, for it was green and leafy. Margery, going over to admire it, set herself to turn the jar that she might better see. The jar fell and broke. The earth heaped itself on the floor, the stem and leaves were bruised. “Alack!” cried Margery and hurried down stairs, for she thought she heard Joan. Though in form she was the mistress it was not so essentially. She explained volubly when, in another hour, there confronted her Joan with a shard of the jar in her hand. She would remember the loft and the little rose tree, but the news of miracles at Silver Cross, brought by a straying shepherd, whistled through like wind over grass that when the stir was gone forgot.

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The March sunset flared splendid. The dusk fell like violets. The stars, advancing, were taper flames and an angel vast as all mankind held each. The moon would not rise till late. “Come, oh, come, come, Rose of Heaven!” So the monk Richard Englefield in his dark cell.

He must sleep, he would sleep, he would trust, not clamor nor force. He slept, he waked; she was there, she appeared to him. “Rose of Heaven, Rose of Heaven—Voice of Heaven, Blessed One—My Lady!”

She was there to confirm him in worship, to say, “Well done, thus far!” to say, “Pray thou—praise thou—live thou, humble, obedient, shedding holiness on Silver Cross!”

“Wilt thou come again?”

The voice that was music said, “Live in memory and live in hoping! But now, Richard, farewell!”

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Darkness where had been light. The kneeling monk stretched his arms, strained his eyes, but there was darkness. He heard no movement, but she was not there! Empty cell, and a black cloud across the moon!

CHAPTER XIII

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SHE came no more. Night after night of dark,—only the star Memory and the sapphire star of passionate hope that once again, once again he would wake, clear, still, and know her there. “Even after years, oh, heaven that holds her, oh, God that sustains her! Even after years beyond counting.”

She came no more. The nights were slow dark raindrops, heavy, full, one after the other falling, slow falling, not to be counted. They made rosaries, they would make rosaries for aye. “Then I must go to her. Where is the eagle will show me the path?”

March—April. The rose in reliquary, the cave stone lined, the well widened into a fair pool with steps for going down, for coming up, one in so many healed! April—May. Noise of Silver Cross like a waving of forest trees, like a humming of all the bees in the meadows. Folk coming, going; more folk and more folk coming! At the Abbey a greater guest house in planning; in shambling village taverns, booths, houses rising. Pilgrims on foot and pilgrims on horseback and in litter. A bishop stayed three days in the Abbot’s house, there was rumour that the cardinal might come. The bells of Silver Cross rang jubilee.

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Middle Forest relied now upon its own side of the river. Montjoy in his castle looked younger by ten years. He looked like some crusading Montjoy of long ago, long ago. The river murmured of both banks; the bridge seemed to have two loves. But the mount of Saint Leofric, though it said, “Praise for doubling!” seemed rather to wish to say, “Out upon division!” Prior Hugh, though he spoke gracious words, looked warped and wan and cogitative.

Early May at the ruined farm and Somerville and the helping-woman Joan in the forest, under a beech tree pale green and silver grey, springing tall and stretching wide. “I will to go back to my house by the river! All the world is joyous and grown softened—Oh, I hear it with the ear inside of ear and I touch it with the touch inside of touch! Good was done for all of the evil, was it not, Rob?”

He laughed. “Oh, woman—! You can’t go back. Father Edmund has three voices where he had one! Moreover—”

“Moreover—?”

“See you, Morgen, go up to London town.”

“And why should I go to London town?”

“Ask for that Westforest and Silver Cross.”

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Under the beech tree was carpet of last year’s leaves. She lifted and crumbled them in her hands. “When I said that I would be secret, I meant not telling! They have no call to fear me.”

“Perhaps they tell themselves that. Or perhaps they see faint menace every time they look this way!”

“They promised that trouble should cease. I was going back to my own house over my own garden, by the river that I like to hear by day, by night. They said that Father Edmund should be checked. Presently I was to find that I might slip back—”

"What is promised is not easy sometimes to perform. They will give you gold in London. London is rich, and you are Morgen Fay. Go, and be powerful there!"

"And you—and you? Oh, I remember that you go once in five years to London!"

"If you cried out in Middle Forest market place what was done not a soul would believe you!"

"No. It is too monstrous!"

"Then and there the folk might tear you limb from limb for wild blaspheming. They are truly quite safe."

She broke into high laughter. "Then let them leave me alone, and let them keep promise! It irks me that they are so false! Here are two months, and not yet may I go back! And Ailsa and Tony, where are they? I see them begging or in gaol!"

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"You should be happy," he said, "that you are not beggar nor in gaol."

There fell silence. The beech tree sprang light green and silver, the sky was blue, the blackbirds talked, a thrush sang, wandering airs went by. The world was sweet. But she crushed the dead leaves and sat still.

"You must go. Need or no need, they will have it so! Nor can you stay at the ruined farm forever. Something will happen endangering you—endangering me."

She said. "Is life wicked—or are we wicked—or are we dull and lifeless—stones, broken twigs, dead leaves? Many an one says that I am wicked, and doubtless I am at times. I know it—I know it! And then again I am not wicked. So if I say that you are so, poor Sir Robert Somerville? Perhaps I am mistaken—perhaps I am right. It's a weary way to knowledge!"

"Were you gentler," he said, "had you not such a tongue, you would find that the winds did not rock your nest so roughly!"

He stood up. "Ah, go!" she said. "Go! I have seen it coming—now it comes! Your road's to John o' Groat's house and mine's to Land's End!"

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"You mock the wind," he answered, "with your nest fixed so firm upon the bough!"

He went away by woodman's path, and she to the ruined farm. "Eh, lass!" said Margery at dusk. "You can work when your mind's to it!"

The third day from this Somerville and she were again in the wood. "I am going. It is trudge! All of you make a north wind that I set my back against and go! Nor will I cry for it, Somerville!"

"You have no need to. They shall give you money. Walk or ride in a cart from here through the later half of night, keeping disguise. Come to the port in a day or so and find there the *King Arthur* bound for London. Find, too, upon the ship Ailsa—"

Red flowed over her face. "Oh, the power that men, and honest men, own! It is enough to make one willing to sell soul to devil!"

He waved that aside. "It is for your own safety that you are going. And were I wholly wicked I should not be here, nor Ailsa at the port awaiting you—"

She said. "That is true. I thank you there, Rob!"

She broke a spray of hazel, set her teeth in the green wood, then threw it away. "Shall we say good-by now, you and I?"

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"Not just yet. Something has arisen since we sat here the other day. I have seen Prior Matthew."

"Aye?"

"There is needed one more appearance. Question has arisen as to Saint Willebrod—if he rests still or if actively he aids! There are some who are devoted to him. Once more then!"

"Oh, I will not!"

His bright eyes dwelt upon her, all the lights played in his odd face. "Why not, Morgen? Be good-natured! I nor none am doing badly by you."

"What do you get from this?"

"The old debatable land—and a piece that was not debatable. I love land! And I get playgoer's enjoyment, watching from a good, quiet seat—and comfort that we're all fruit just pleasantly specked and wasp-eaten—and some mirth from Montjoy's ecstasy. So be good! What! There are houses by Thames in London. You may have a garden still—plant your rose tree there."

It was high May weather. As once before Thomas Bettany had errand up the Wander, —merchant errand of account-to-be-paid. This time it was with Oak Tree Grange beyond Silver Cross. He rode in the May tide and with him rode John Cobb, and they had done the errand. Oak Tree Grange lay out of the world, and now they were on a cart track, nothing more.

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Young Bettany rode light and happy on his big grey horse. May world was a fair world, fair, sweet, gay, kind! He whistled clear and strong. "I swear I saw God sitting on yon cloud!"

Said John Cobb, "I'm going to Silver Cross to get this old scar taken off my face."

"Silver Cross. I don't know."

They were riding by a wood, old, uncut, dim. "This is Somerville's land now! He always claimed

it, and now the Abbey allows it.”

John Cobb looked about him. “I know now where we are. Over there, a mile through, is a ruined farm. Lonely! It’s so lonely you lose yourself—and there’s a ghost walks in the wood.”

“Let’s go look.”

John was not averse, being in the other’s company. They left cart track and rode over yielding earth under old trees. There was no path and the trees must be rounded. The way they had come sank from sight, almost it might seem from mind, so quick the place took them. Bettany’s blue eyes sparkled. He loved all this; he might come at any moment upon wizard’s tower. What indeed they came upon was another faint track, leading north and south. “Abbey is that way and Somerville Hall that way, and over there is the turn to the road we left. They come in and go out that way—but, Lord, there’s mortal little travel! You might say it’s a witched place.”

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“That is what I like!” said the other. “Oh, if I might I would travel far!”

They rode as though it were bottom of the sea, it was so green and silent. Bettany turned in his saddle and studied the lay of the place. “When Somerville goes to Silver Cross I think he takes this way. It’s not so far.”

“Turn here to the ruined farm. David that lives here, I’ve heard my mother say, was foster brother to Sir Robert’s father.”

They rode on and now they saw the ruined farm between the trees. A wreck it seemed, like a broken ship slipped down to sea floor. Then by a thorn in bloom stood up Morgen Fay.

“Who are you?”

“Who are you?”

In a moment she knew him and Bettany knew her for all her servant dress and stained face. “How do you come here—how do you come here? You are in London—”

John Cobb crossed himself. “Like she be a sorceress, too—”

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Morgen stepped from the thorn to the side of the big grey horse. She met blue eyes with dark eyes. Her lips smiled, her eyes and under her eyes. “Oh, the saints!” she said. “I can but be glad to see you, lad! You are no telltale! Can you teach your man to be none either?”

“I can that. But Morgen Fay, how did you grow here?”

He swung himself down from his horse and stood beside her. John Cobb gaped. “Send him a little away,” she said, “but do not let him out of sight. This world’s a danger-bush where the thorn is always near the may!”

They talked. “Do you remember that foggy day when you climbed through window? I have not seen you since! I like you, though not the way that all expect. I wish I might have had you for brother. Well, they would stone me—burn me, maybe—in the market place, Father Edmund preaching over me! I dwell at the ruined farm.”

Intelligence flashed between them. “Somerville saved you—put you here. I think the better of him!” He spoke sturdily, a young spiritual adventurer.

She looked at him with eyes that seemed to have considered a myriad matters. She sighed—she stretched her arms in a yearning gesture in the dim gulf of the world into which the wood seemed to have turned. “It is away to London! Maybe I shall never again see you nor Somerville nor Montjoy, who is too good now to be seen close, nor Middle Forest High Street that I danced in when I was a little girl, nor my house that I liked, though often was I wretched in it! Nor my garden that the old wall mothered, nor river that I listened to and listened to. Well, tide and time we run away! But where we run to, that is a question for a wise man! They say that we run to heaven or to hell—and I shouldn’t dare say my road was the first!”

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Without warning Thomas Bettany found himself priest. “If you’ve strayed into wrong road, turn and take the other! You’ve got more than you think of the other in you now. Turn, Morgen!” He regarded her with a sudden startled face. “By the rood! It’s the Great Adventure.”

She looked at him with more of the thorn in her face than the bloom. From beyond an oak came John Cobb’s warning voice. “Some one’s coming! Two or three!”

“Go at once!” said Morgen Fay, and so meant it that she wrought their going. Bettany, obeying her, rode without turning his head, straight through the wood. The trees fell like fountains between the two and the thorn bush. To the right lay the ruined farm, but they pushed on and came after a mile to the narrow, little travelled road that led at last to the highway that, passing Silver Cross, ran on to Middle Forest.

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CHAPTER XIV

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HE turned his face from the wall to which it had been set. Light was in the cell. He turned his body; he rose. “Oh, my Lady—”

In the torrent rush of feeling he came close before he kneeled. The light-swathed form stepped back from him. He knew overwhelming, aching, bursting sense of felicity that yet was pain, was hunger. The float of the red and blue drapery, the face that was the face of the picture, the

height, the sense of heaven in one Form—

On his knees he came nearer. His eyes were not hidden as before, waiting for her to speak. He could not other; he did not think at all. He would have put hands about her feet and with his eyes drink power and beauty and love.

She went back from him again. Something untoward happened. Her foot and shoulder struck the great rood, pushed slightly forward from the wall. It spun aside. Behind it showed in plain light a low and narrow doorway, with door swinging outward, closed and hidden, all times but this, by the great cross. Light showed the very rope and pulley by which the masking wood was pushed forward and drawn back. Light showed through into Brother Norbert's cell; in the very opening showed Brother Norbert and over his shoulder the white face of Brother Anselm. While Richard Englefield rose to his feet, the shape that he had esteemed of glory turned, bent itself and vanished through the opening. Light went out. [Pg 135]

There was an effort to close the door but before it could be done his knee and shoulder were there to prevent. There was a sound of breathing, of muttering, then a hurry of feet. He broke through into Brother Norbert's cell and felt that it was empty.

There was still a flickering light. It came from a great, thick candle, almost a torch of wax, thrown into a corner but not yet extinguished. He caught it up and the flame sprang whole again. It showed him much of apparatus. There was the yet unclosed opening above, reached by a short ladder, through which the shaft of light had been sent into his cell. There were other things,—tools, cords, bits of candle, cloths, what not. Mind light blazed. He saw why the cells had been emptied of old occupants; he saw that these openings had been made while he was at Middle Forest, he saw that they had used the great rood for mask. A mantle lay upon the floor,—red, with blue and red linings. He lifted it and saw that it was earthly cloth, though fine and thin. He saw the jointed wires that could be stretched by the hand and so the tissues be made to seem to float. He saw that they had put upon him a cheat. He dropped the mantle but kept the torch in hand. The door of the cell giving upon stone passage was swinging open. He burst through, he ran down the passage. This way would have gone the whole complex monster, to be overtaken and slain in fury. He ran, smoke and flame streaming behind him, but at the bend of passage came upon half a dozen monks. Of these, four seemed just awakened. But Brother Norbert and Brother Anselm were wildly awake. He threw down the torch, he closed with Brother Norbert. "Alas! Brother Richard! You are mad! Help!" [Pg 136]

Brother William that was a giant fell upon him. They pinned him down. The sub-prior appeared with two or three more at his heels. "O Our Lady! Hath he gone mad!" He fought with them all. "Robbers of souls!" he shouted. They haled him into refectory that was near-by. One ran for Brother Walter the leech. But Brother Norbert and Brother Anselm vanished in the direction of the cell he had left. "You are cheats and murderers!" he cried, to the true bewilderment of three or four. Brother William, at a nod from the sub-prior, thrust cloth into his mouth, wound and tied the gag. Brother Walter came. "What is wrong? What is wrong? Doth he rave? They do so oft after so much hath come to them!" He was haled down the passage to the cell he had left. All was quiet there, ordered, still, plain monk's cell, lighted only by the lights they brought. The opening was closed and the great rood in place. When he made to attack it, push it aside, they cried out in horror and the sub-prior ordered his arms tied. Finally, perhaps because he had ceased to struggle and seemed to be collecting his wits, and a madman with wits was notoriously dangerous, they bound him with a rope to the window stanchions and went off to put his case before the Abbot. Brother Walter the leech would have stayed, but the sub-prior sharply forbade. He seemed to hesitate whether or no to leave Brother Norbert but at last signed him forth. The rope was strong, the man was quiet. Let him be till council was taken! Solitude and none to hear was regimen, time out of mind, for mad monk! [Pg 137]

They went. The cell was like a tomb, and he bound in it. It was dark, with a faint sense of morning in the air.

Despite all weakening Richard Englefield was yet strong of body. And he had rage that came like a giant to possess him, and a will that was now gathered, collected, and hurled through space to one point. He broke the cord that bound his arms. This done he could free himself from the gag and unknotted at last the rope that bound him to the stanchions. It was now to break stanchion and cross bar and clear the window. He did this. He climbed through the window, held by his hands, dropped to earth. It had been impossible to the sub-prior or to Brother Norbert, but it was not impossible to him. It was all done quickly. Stone rang beneath his feet. Light shone in the Abbot's house. Doubtless all were gathered there,—the thieves and murderers! Where was that one, that painted fiend, who had given him cap and bells to wear through life? Through life—through eternity! The church rose dark. He looked at the stars above it, and they seemed to him sparks from a mean and smoky fire. Now he was at Silver Cross outer wall. He climbed it and came down upon the other side with cuts and bruises that he did not feel. A palest light shone in the east. Behind him, over him, he heard the bell for lauds. He knew where ran the highway down Wander vale to Middle Forest. He went straight like a wild wind blowing down. All since he had waked was done as it were in one moment. [Pg 138]

CHAPTER XV

IN Middle Forest it was market morning, high May weather and many abroad. Country folk, [Pg 139]

town folk, folk from across river made a humming and buzzing in High Street and the market place. The sun was an hour up, and all thrifty marketers out of house. Saint Ethelred's bells rang, the Carmelites', the Poor Clares'. Father Edmund walked about; there were two of Leofric's friars from over river. May sun struck the castle, up the steep hill from market. The bells stopped. Eyes, thoughts, turned this way and that.

A Silver Cross monk sped like an arrow through the market place. He was at town cross, on the lower step, on the upper step. He faced around. "Middle Forest! Ho, Middle Forest!"

They recognized him. All the countryside, flocking now to Silver Cross church, had sought with their eyes for Brother Richard. Near or at distance, he had been pointed out to many. A cry arose and spread. "The monk of Silver Cross!" Those close at hand came closer; those afar hastened to the thickening centre. He flung his arms out and up. He seemed to appeal to Middle Forest, but also to high heaven,—or he seemed to threaten high heaven. His voice rang and reached like Montjoy's trumpets. He told what he had to tell, and all those ears drank it in and all those eyes stared and mouths gaped. He had power, and now it was power at the top of its straining. As he told, what he told they believed.

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He paused, gasping, his face working. From the step beside him sprang forth another voice, that of Father Edmund, master-preacher and scourge of the vices of the time. "Who alone, in all earth around us, would dare so to blacken the Mother of God, the Bride of Heaven? Have I not cried that she was never gone but hidden hereabouts—the harlot and sorceress, Morgen Fay!"

Richard Englefield heard. He knew not the name or its associations, but his mind leaped fiercely upon it. Mind leapt like a famished wolf. Then, straight up from a dark well, rose memory of a chance-heard talk among the coarser sort, in the Brothers' common room,—talk of Middle Forest from which one had come. That day he had risen and gone away and stopped his ears with work. So she was Morgen Fay, the harlot!

Enormous commotion rose around him. There ran and jangled a multitude of voices. Impossible to Middle Forest to forego the present sensation! But the good and glory now flowing from Silver Cross! Equally impossible to question and forego that! Out of it all burst finally the great cry, "Is there no Blessed Well, no Cavern of Our Lady, no Rose in reliquary? But we know there are the healed! Here's one was healed! The monk is mad!" Came like a bolt from Saint Ethelred's porch one whom all knew,—Friar Martin, the Black Friar. He, too, stood on town cross steps,—and half Middle Forest was here! The Black Friar's eyes gleamed and that which gleamed in them was love of the glory of Saint Leofric. Out poured the bull voice. "The healed? They will stay healed! They need not fear! Their faith in good made them—makes them whole! What! The stars are above the tavern lights! But here, verily, hath been tavern lights, pothouse lights. But healing! You shall not lack healing while stands Saint Leofric!"

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The place was grown like an angered hive. Father Edmund and Friar Martin were a pair to change bewilderment into passion. Father Edmund hunted sin calling itself Morgen Fay. The Black Friar had a pointing finger for the leper spot in Silver Cross. Middle Forest grew to sound of forest in tempest. So much swayed with Father Edmund, so much went with Saint Leofric over Silver Cross, so much beat against the two, asserting Silver Cross's total innocence, save maybe for a monk's deceit and madness! So many held purely for self and sought out the profit. Market place grew pandemonium.

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Out came a strong citizen voice, Master Eustace Bettany's. "Have Brother Richard up to the castle! Let Montjoy hear!"

It was a channel and brought relief of pouring into channel. Hands were upon the monk to urge him. "Montjoy! Yes, tell Montjoy!"

The castle hill was sunny, the castle gate was dim, the castle court sunny, the castle hall dim. So many folk buzzed on castle road, below wall; so many were let into court and buzzed there, so many entered hall. From castle hill, if you looked Silver Cross way, you might see rapidly moving dust, growing larger, coming nearer. That was Abbot Mark and Prior Matthew.

CHAPTER XVI

[Pg 143]

MONTJOY—yes, Montjoy!

A house that he had loved came down about Montjoy's ears. A garden that he had tended the swine rooted up. One came and threw filth against his Love.

He seemed to understand this monk and the monk to understand him. For an instant they were brothers in suffering and rage.

Sow it with salt—Silver Cross!

Abbot Mark and Prior Matthew. Who best to send to cardinal and to Rome on that business? Procure their degradation! Have them cursed with bell, book and candle!

The whore—let her be burned slowly until she was ashes!

O Isabel—Isabel—Isabel!

O Kingdom of Heaven that hath suffered wrong!

Montjoy sat with a working face. He sat in his great chair on the dais in castle hall and his hands gripped the arms of the chair. At last he spoke with voice of one underground who has fire still but has lost the light of day. "Well, as for thee, monk—"

"Give me, no more, that name!" cried the man addressed. "The monk is dead. I am Richard Englefield, the Smith!"

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At that moment entered bruit of the arrival of Abbot and Prior. "Yes, yes, let us see them!" said Montjoy, and who knows what hope sprang up in his heart. He believed Richard Englefield, but there pressed against his belief all the weight of old, loved Silver Cross, and the weight of the priest and the weight of Mother Church. Things happened, vile things, as they happened in Kingdom, in Nobility and Knighthood. But for all that Knighthood was heroic and Holy Church holy. Child could not go against mother, lover against beloved. Let us at any rate hear what this Iscariot Abbot and Prior shall say! And with that rolled for the first time upon Montjoy's mind Saint Leofric, and he heard the joy of Hugh who was not discovered. "That this vileness that he saith were not true!" cried Montjoy within. "O Isabel, that it were not true!"

Morgen Fay! The Lord of Montjoy was dead ember there, and all the breathing of *Morgen Fay* might not relume. "O High God, I would live cleanly! That harlot, wherever she is, doth always only evil!"

Silver Cross—Silver Cross! The church, Isabel's tomb and the great picture. He saw that *Morgen Fay* could have played it because she had the height and faintly, faintly the face. Isabel was the true likeness and *Morgen Fay* the false, the evil. "Let her burn, who deserveth it if ever any did!"

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Silver Cross, and cold wretchedness and grinning, mocking Satan if it were no better than Saint Leofric! Mark a kinsman, too. All honour smirched!

Again his eyes were for Richard Englefield. To have believed that Heaven had singled you out—to have had vast raptures of mind and heart, all fragrance, all flavour, all light, all music, all warmth, all lifting—to have fallen at the feet of the Brightest Star, to have had the honey of touch and the honey of word and the honey of smile, and knowledge that all was immortal and holy, all was heavenly true!—to have had that and believed it eternal—and then to have fallen, fallen, gulf upon gulf, dreary world by dreary world, to last mire and stubble, nay, past that into caverns of hell—

Abbot Mark came into the hall, he and Prior Matthew, and behind them Brothers Anselm and Norbert with Walter the leech and six besides. Out of these monks five at least knew only that the fiend had made sortie against and taken and poured madness upon the holy man, yesterday the pride, the boast, of Silver Cross. Abbot Mark—large, authoritative, stately—showed pallor indeed, but also concern and innocency and high unawareness that Silver Cross did or could stand in any danger. As for Prior Matthew, he stood and moved, red, dry, cool, collected, always a man with a head. Abbey monks, drawing together, looked trustingly upon their Superiors and pityingly, it was seen, upon Brother Richard, standing very gaunt and ghastly white, with blazing eyes.

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Montjoy faced that entry. All Silver Cross with long venerableness and power, great church of Silver Cross, the jewel windows, the picture, the sculptured Isabel upon her tomb entered also castle hall and drowned it into vaster space and into significances otherwise and potent. Something of rigidity went out of the lord of Montjoy. Trust—trust!

Friar Martin, the Black Friar, saw it go—clouds again mounting against Saint Leofric. And all the hall full of people, hanging divided in wish and thought! He felt it running through, "Was it not monstrous, unthinkable—were there not explanations—was it reasonable now—and if it was all a cheating show, where was Middle Forest? Why, left holding a great bag of Loss!" The Black Friar felt, as though he were Leofric's Hugh, stricture about the heart. Good Chance was quitting, the fickle jade!

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Yet when Montjoy stepped toward the Abbot, pale Accusation stepped with him. "Lord Abbot—Lord Abbot, you are in time! You have fouled Christendom—oh, if you have fouled Christendom!"

But the Abbot seemed not to notice words and mien. He cried, "O Montjoy, the holy man, good Brother Richard, hath gone mad! Yesterday he broke into a frightful babbling, the fiend at his ear, the fiends within him! The morn, Walter the leech leaving him awhile, thinking that loneliness might do somewhat, he burst window, broke cloister! Whereupon we ourselves follow him, not knowing what harm he doth to himself and to all! For alas! he now doubteth the happening of the Great Miracle and clamoureth that it was the demon. We know, alas! how at times it happeneth! Overmuch light, the weak soul bending aside from Heaven-grace, the fiends gathering to torment and perplex, and were it possible, to defeat light! The warder faints. Madness enters. Poor soul, alas! yet Heaven did use him! Heaven-grace and the miracle persists, though for him be madman's cell—"

He stood, father Abbot, in his large face godly concern for all awryness. He loomed. All Silver Cross seemed with him, Silver Cross through the centuries. Three fourths in the hall turned that way. "He crieth otherwise," said Montjoy, and with a gesture set Brother Richard and his Superior face to face.

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Cried Richard Englefield, "Thou shameless, false shepherd! Thou lying Abbot of a rotted fold!"

At which a young monk, Brother Wilfrid, so forgot himself, defending good, shaming ill, that he rushed against the mad monk. "Son!" thundered the Abbot and brought Brother Wilfrid to his knees, crying, "Pardon!"

Truly Richard Englefield maddened. He saw how it would end, and the legion before him. His vision swam and darkened, light foam came about his lips. He sent out a loud, hoarse and broken voice. "Fraud! Fraud! Lord of Montjoy, come to Silver Cross and see!"

The Black Friar, straining forward with the rest, caught at that word, "Fraud!" He did not dare to echo it aloud, for now, in a moment as it were, many a hundred year of Silver Cross, many a goodly deed and use penetrated, reverberated here, large space entering somehow small space, riving it apart. Old authority, long veneration, the great Abbey church, Montjoy's love for it, Middle Forest's clinging to it—Friar Martin had thundered one misty afternoon against Montjoy's doubting of Saint Leofric. Montjoy had had to down head and slink homeward. Now Friar Martin wished to shout, "Fraud! Fraud!" and, "It began in envy of Saint Leofric his great glory!" But he was afraid. There might be no proof. If the monk were not already mad he would soon be so.

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Prior Matthew of Westforest moved a piece. Still, conclusive, calming, entered his voice. "It is seldom well to take madman's advice! But here it seemeth to me well. Lord of Montjoy, you cannot do better than to ride with us to Silver Cross."

Lean and strong, and a master chess player, he came to front of the dais, and lifting voice, entered into explanation of Brother Richard's sad illness and of the ways of the fiend who for this time had overthrown the saintly man. But he would recover—Prior Matthew had no doubt of it—under Walter the leech's care, amid his brethren at Silver Cross, or at Westforest, where was smaller range, stricter solitude. He should have tendance; he should have prayers. "As for that Presence that did descend upon him. She the Blessed is not harmed! Men and women of Middle Forest, the Rose still rests in reliquary, the Healing Well still heals! Let them that are sick come prove it!"

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Edmund the Preacher cried out mightily. "If it be so, still hath the devil compacted with the harlot, Morgen Fay! How else could the thought of her, the form of her, enter here? The devil made her to be seen in monastery cell, thrusting aside True Queen! Seek her out, bind her to the stake by town cross and burn her! Never else will this countryside be cleansed!"

Prior Matthew looked with narrowed eyes. "There is truth in what you say, Edmund the Preacher! Long hath she been great scandal!" He thought, "Best that she have her cry quickly and be done with it! All the poison out at once in one dish, not trailing forever, word here and word there! She set sail, long ago, to come to this end. This year or next, what matter?"

And he saw that it would make diversion. Let her clamour what she would of what she had done! It would be the fiend speaking. Silver Cross and Matthew of Westforest against a mad monk and a harlot!

Silver Cross and Westforest and Montjoy. He saw as in a scroll that Montjoy would never wholly believe nor yet wholly disbelieve.

Richard Englefield cried again, "Ride at once, Montjoy! They will have burned ladder and ropes and cloaks and scarfs. But the door behind the rood—they have not had time there—"

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"What is that? What?" cried the Abbot sharply. "Door behind rood?"

"Where was none, door was made between my cell and yonder villain monk's! So you sent me for penance to Westforest, so it was done. Then a great rood, great and black, was set before it. Yea, you used Christ on the cross for mask! Dim was it in that cell—never had I light in that cell! Now I have light—now it burns! Aside she pushed salvation—in she stepped, mincing like a harlot, having taken sugar for her voice—"

Abbot Mark fairly shrieked with horror. "Oh, if we did not know that it is Sathanas himself that speaketh, not the poor man whom he hath laid in bonds! Door—door!" He summoned sub-prior.

"Reverend father, door truly was made, it being once plan to take the wall down wholly, making of two cells one and using it for an infirmary. Then it was found that the light was not good, and the plan was abandoned. Stone was set back in the opening, and true it is that a rood being about that time placed in each cell, it was fastened, in this man's and in Brother Norbert's, against that wall. Of all his story it is the only truth! In his madness he must have torn the rood aside and seen that once there was opening, though now stone-filled and mortared. After that what Sathanas saith to him God forbid that we should know or repeat!"

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"Shall I believe?" whispered Montjoy. "Shall I not believe? O Isabel—O Lady near whom moveth Isabel—"

Richard Englefield towered. He stretched his arms, he raised his face. "O Christ, if thou be true—O Blissful One, Eternal Virgin, if thou be real—"

But summer sun shone on.

It was Prior Matthew who summed up and delivered judgment in Montjoy's hall. "Ride with us now to Silver Cross, Montjoy—and do you come also, Edmund the Preacher, and you, Master Eustace Bettany, and any and all others who will! Yea, make throng and procession! What! Shall there be division between Silver Cross and Middle Forest who have dwelled together since the Confessor's day? Sometimes eh, Middle Forest?—we have quarrelled, but not for long, have we? Ours, after all, one bed and one hearth! Doth Silver Cross grow rich and great, it is for Middle Forest. Doth Middle Forest increase, Silver Cross goes smiling. Remember the saintly abbot—Abbot Robert—and how did he and his monks when befell the Plague! Remember war, and we stood together. And now Heaven blesseth both, and Holy Well, a thousand years from now, shall still be Holy Well!"

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He had it now—Mark and he had it in their four hands! If they carried it carefully, and they would do so, four hands obeying the Prior of Westforest's head. Now for the trouble maker, the crazed one who failed to see or hear Interest though she shouted at him and pulled him by the robe! Prior Matthew gave a short order to Silver Cross monks. "Take him!"

Brother Norbert, Brother Anselm, Brother Wilfrid and the others fell upon Brother Richard. Short, hard struggle, and they had him. Brother Norbert bound his arms with hempen girdle. As he still shouted accusations, at the Prior's nod they gagged him. "Not holy man who may be holy man again, but Apollyon who now hath seized the tower and speaketh from the gate!"

Montjoy sat in his lord's chair and looked straight before him. Truth, truth—is it not profoundly likely to be here? Were it not for Hugh of Saint Leofric, could ever he have doubted it? The monk's tale,—fantastic, like a romaunt! Say, darkly, it is true; what other can cry Aye! and strengthen it, or No! and dash it into dreams? *Who other but Morgen Fay?*

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It formed in Montjoy's mind that that harlot must be found.

Prior Matthew, Brother Richard silenced, had present eyes for the Black Friar there to one side, standing grimly for Saint Leofric. "Now and here!" said within the Westforest chess player. Matthew spoke in his dry, reasonable voice.

"Ride you, too, with us, Friar Martin! You shall have mule. What! Saint Leofric and Saint Willebrod, be sure they ride together! Shall we not make England and Christendom ring for that all this corner of earth, this side river, that side river, Silver Cross and Saint Leofric alike are blessed? Bridge over river shall be to you and be to us, and I see it built thick and high with booths and rooms for pilgrims! The Princess of Spain goes to-day to Saint Leofric's tomb, to-morrow to Holy Well! To-day the Dauphin heareth mass in Silver Cross, to-morrow goeth in procession around Saint Leofric his church! Both ways he passeth through Middle Forest. Common good—common good! What else is worth anything in this life? The more massive the bruit, the broader, higher, shooteth the fame of all!"

It was undeniable! Black Friar thought somewhat surlily, "If I go I can at least take account of all to Prior Hugh. And there is something in 'If you can't increase apart, increase together'!"

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Rested that fanatic, Father Edmund the Preacher. Better always have Father Edmund preach for you, not against you! He could any time whip calm sea into storm. The chess player considered him, to whom just now Morgen Fay, the harlot, stood for all harlotry, whether of brain or heart. When all heinousness was believed of Morgen Fay, then would the countryside be roused at last, then would every man, woman and child become huntsman! Father Edmund meant to continue to believe Brother Richard's story. Why not? She was capable of it. Certain abbeys of this later time were capable. Father Edmund was one to cry under the Pope's great window, "Reform! Reform!"

Prior Matthew saw the weather thickening. Presently from that quarter lightning flash and thunder clap! "Boldness my wisdom!" he breathed.

His dry voice, somehow powder red like his hair and tint, dry, rarely loud but procuring attention, continued to hold all ears. "As to the harlot, Morgen Fay, would you have my mind? It is quite likely she be hidden somewhere within five leagues. Now Sathanas worketh underground and taketh evil mind to evil mind, or often to weak mind, or to mind that was Sathanas' enemy against whom he useth every springe! So to my thought it hath been here. Heaven permitteth—yes, to try faith, Heaven permitteth! The fiend works what seemeth victory, good man turning toward him. Whom doth he use? Yea, there is it! Harlot consenting, he yesternight taketh her image and with it entereth neither by door nor window cell of Brother Richard; yea, entereth his mind and his eye and his ear, his will, his belief and his heart. Brother Richard thinketh, 'It is the great True Pearl!' And falleth upon his knees before empty air, for the devil fixeth images within, not without. But the devil gives never for proof Holy Well that healeth a score a week! And the devil hath had only yesternight. Yea, moreover, midway Heaven sendeth some aid and he that hath been holy man seeth that it is not she who came before, but stained wax and that the devil cheateth him! Whereat the devil, that harlot no doubt still aiding, leapeth, greatly angered, upon his mind, teareth and bruiseeth it tiger-wise and bringeth it for this time into huge confusion and madness. Again Heaven suffereth it, and suffereth him to cry and accuse as madmen ever cry and accuse, that by trial of our faith we may all be brought clearer. But Heaven willeth always that we defeat the fiend and his instruments. Aye, search for these and grind them small and so grieve and weaken that Evil One who rides invisible!"

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Father Edmund cried. "She said, 'Aye, aye!' or the devil could not use her! Lord of Montjoy, town of Middle Forest, Abbey of Silver Cross, Priory of Westforest and Priory of Saint Leofric, I, Edmund the Preacher, summon you by souls' welfare to join search for the Plague-spot, the Witch-mark! When she is burned then may the monk recover his mind, then may the True Pearl, the Very Rose, show again, the toad be banished from the Holy Well, Saint Leofric and Saint Willebrod be sworn brothers, Montjoy give again with joy to Silver Cross, Middle Forest prosper, and all England and the Princess of Spain and the Dauphin come in pilgrimage!"

CHAPTER XVII

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WHEN upon his knees he had come most close to her, when she felt his hands, his brow, his

breathing against her sandalled feet, she had given back in a kind of terror. Then, all unluckiness!

Flying, she had dropped her mantle. Brother Norbert, Brother Anselm and their terrified white faces! Brother Anselm coming after her, out of the cell, down the stone passage. Another coming after, great torch in his hand, smoke and flame streaming backward his face like Death and Judgment! Brother Anselm's breathing on her cheek, his hand seizing, pushing her, who needed no urging, for now she knew panic.

The outward-giving porter's cell that they used—the door, quick! Through, clap it to behind, draw bolt across—opposite door, quick! Short passage again, the little postern. Anselm had the key, Brother Edward the porter sleeping elsewhere this night. Open—open! Morgen Fay knew agony until she saw the stars over Abbey orchard.

Wall and the ivy tods which made no ladder necessary. Up! and on wide wall-top rest a moment, breathe and look back. Bell was ringing, lights hurried here, hurried there in Abbey, but the orchard between lay still, at peace and bathed in moonlight. Down the wall on forest side, where footholds had been cunningly made. Brother Anselm spoke. "I will work them over so that even they cannot be found."

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"Through the poplar wood there is a path," she said. "Go back, and I will run alone to the ruined farm. Never—never—never more, Morgen Fay!"

They spoke in whispers. "Aye, it is better. God knoweth what trouble we shall have now! But you, mistress, you will be dumb?"

"Oh, aye! All night, on pallet, under eaves, in the ruined farm, I was stretched so fast asleep! I dreamed only of my house by the river and my garden where now are blooming pinks and marigold!"

"Better that than dream of red flame!" said Anselm. "Haste now!"

He slipped back over the wall; she was in poplar wood.

The moon shone so that she could find her way. Thin wood gave into deep wood, beech, oak. Her feet felt the slight path. A doe and fawn started from her, hare bounded across, owl hooted, moon shone and light was beaten by branch and leaf into thousands and thousands of silver pieces. She ran; she felt drunken.

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There was near a league to go. Her pace slowed, she stood drawing hard breath, then went on again but not running. None were after her; she heard none after her. Here clung darkness, or cold, mysterious, shifting light. The air hung cool, very still, with faint fragrances. Her mind had wings, great dark ones, and now it beat in the passages and cells of Silver Cross, and now at the ruined farm, and now about and through Somerville Hall. It went also to Middle Forest and into Montjoy's castle. Back it beat to the ruined farm, and Somerville to-morrow, in this wood, and then London road. London road! No doubt now. London road! Her mind sought London town, but that hung distasted, weary, drear and threatening. "O Morgen, why so? Will there not be Montjoys and Somervilles there—aye, greater ones. Mayhap princely ones!" But she hated London road and London town. "Oh, what are the hands that hold me here—cannot hold but would hold!" To-morrow, to-morrow, next day at latest, London road, London road!

Going through the dark wood, she no longer felt panic. Perhaps it was so and perhaps it was not so that all Silver Cross was roused, those who knew and those who did not know. She knew that not twenty there did know; and at first she had felt the hands of all those others, the guiltless, upon her, against her. Almost she had felt their stoning. But those who knew were foxes and serpents,—cunning, cunning! They would provide safety for themselves and so for her, too, bound in the same bundle with them. "With the foxes and serpents," she thought.

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Now she walked steadily, about her mighty trees, overhead the moon, in her ears the million small forest tongues, in her nostril the smell of fern. The night did not terrify her, she was warm in her frieze cloak. She saw the ruined farm sunk in dimness and sleep. By the outside stair she would creep up to her room, Joan the serving-woman, so negligible a soul. To-morrow would come Somerville. Morgen Fay, so negligible a soul.

A voice went through her. "Who neglecteth? Soul, soul, who neglecteth?"

She would not answer. She ran again under the moon, upon the forest path.

Forest broke away. The ruined farm all in the moonlight and Margery and David sleeping like the long dead. The long dead—the long dead. "Am I the long dead?"

She crept up the stair and as she did so the cock was crowing. Here was loft chamber, here straw bed cleanly covered. Frieze cloak dropped, her body stood in moonlight, dressed in the colours and the fashion of the great picture. Morgen Fay took off the raiment and folded it and laid it upon the bench under the window. "As soon as it is light I will burn it." She felt fatigue, overpowering, extreme, and dropped upon the bed and drew over her the cover and hid her face from the moonlight in her arms, in her hair.

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But at first light she stood up. One might not sleep this morning, not yet! She put on her dress of serving-woman, took up the raiment from the bench, made it into a small bundle, covered it with her frieze cloak and went down the stair. Margrey and David stirred in their part of the house. She heard them talking, the woman screaming to the man who was deaf. A tall, blooming lilac stood by the beehives. Here she hid her bundle, went and returned with a brand from the hearth, shielded in an earthenware pitcher. Taking it up again, she bore all away from the house

into stony field. Thorn trees springing up presently hid her and her ways from the house. Here, in a corner was a flat, hearth-like space. She gathered dead twigs, took her brand from the pitcher and made fire. She opened the bundle and piece by piece burned all, then with a thorn bough scattered the ashes. Mantle and veil had been left in Norbert's cell. "Fire there, too, last night," she thought. "Hiding fire, cleansing fire."

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At the house door Margery cried to her, "Have you baked the cakes and drawn the ale? Or have you been to Fairies' Hill? There's a witched look about you!"

She worked an hour and then another while Margery watched and grumbled, then when the old woman's back was turned away she slipped. "Joan! Joan!" But she was gone to wood of beech and oak and ash. Somerville must come soon, oh, no doubt of it!

Oak and beech and ash wore the freshest green. Underneath spread grasses and flowers. The sun came down in a golden dust, birds sang, bees hummed, air held still and fine. She sat and nursed her knees, or turning stretched fair body of Morgen Fay on summer earth. He did not come, Somerville did not come. So weary was she that she slept for a while. Waking, she found the sun at noon. She must go back to the house and hear if anything had been heard. Nothing! it might as well have been in dreamland, a thousand, thousand leagues from Wander side.

She sat at the table with David and Margery, drank ale and broke bread. The two quarrelled weakly, faded leaves on the edge of winter. She felt suddenly that it was so with all things. As though it were the greatest cloud that ever she had met or had dreamed, as though it were night that made other nights light, blackness rolled over her. She rose, pushed back her stool and quit the house. Certes, the sun shone. It made no difference; she was night, night! Her feet took her to the wood, anywhere, anywhere! She must have movement. But night, night, and horror of the spirit. She groaned, she flung herself down under an oak and pressed her forehead to its great root. She was leaf that had left the tree, whirling down.

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Blackness, emptiness, nothingness—but not peace, no! The end, Morgen Fay, the end, the end!

It seemed to her that she swooned, and that then she came again. Now there was evil grey, but grey.

It seemed to her that she put out her hand and that it closed upon a robe. It seemed to her that she put her forehead to this. She said, "Mother!" It seemed to her that hands came down to her and touched her, that there was a breathing, that a voice said, "O Thyself!"

She lay against trees in darkness and in ache.

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Somerville found her here. "Asleep? Art asleep?"

She sat up. "No. Awake. I have done a villain thing."

He regarded her with his odd, twitching face, somewhat pale to-day, and the smile a dry grimace. "If thou hast so, thou art like to pay for it! All came out. Your monk broke cloister and told it at town cross."

"Yea, did he? He has manhood."

"There was all town to hear. Father Edmund tossed thy name forth like a ball."

She moistened her lips. "So?"

"Then the monk told it in castle hall. Montjoy believed."

"Believed it of me? Well, I did it."

"Then arrive Abbot Mark and Prior Matthew, riding hard from Silver Cross. Now comes about the strangest thing. I doff my cap, I lout my knee to Westforest!"

He told. She drew hard breath, then broke into terrible laughter. "So, the monk is in the madhouse and they drive a stake for me by town cross? But the Abbot and the Prior and the crew that worked for them, and Sir Robert Somerville—oh, have you no little penance at all? Must be that you are to say a hundred paternosters or give a tall wax candle! Nothing? Scot free? If they take me, I will tell!"

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"If you do, it does you no good nor them any harm! Prior Matthew usually spins without a fault."

"'Us,' Rob! Does 'us' no harm!"

He jerked his shoulders. "'Us' then. I was at home. Thomas Bettany brought me all this two hours ago. I came as soon as I could think it out. Search is up already, Morgen! They course here and they course there. Presently the ruined farm. I run high danger, standing talking here."

"Begone, then! Quick, Rob, quick!"

Somerville turned red under her tone. "Naturally, I am all thy care! Thou bitter witch!"

"Didst ever burn thy finger? It is not pleasant to burn finger. Well, now, counsel!"

"Counsel is to hide as deep and as soon as may be."

"Where?"

"I thought of those thick alders by Wander brook—a mile of them. If you lie close to the ground, and they have not dogs—"

"Dogs!"

"If search sweeps over, not finding, then to-night a wagon filled with straw will cross Wander brook at the old bridge, going Londonward. This is all that I can do. I do no more, by all the Saints!"

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"Why," she said, "I do not after all wish thee to burn beside me! Alders by Wander brook."

He said, "Hark!" raising his hand.

They heard it, distant rout of voices. "Go!" he said. "Run! No time for love-parting! I must return to the Hall."

"I wish no love-parting!" she answered. "That is dead. But farewell—farewell, Rob! Now you go to the Hall but I to Wander brook."

He was listening. "They come louder!" When he turned his head, she was gone. He saw her brown dress beyond ash stem and bough; now she was deep in fern. He heard her movement, then silence. Still a brown gleam, then that vanished. He stood still, he put hands to face and drew a breath deep and long, then turning he walked rapidly through the forest to his park and his hall. The ruined farm he had already visited. David and Margery had their word. "A serving-wench? Yes, they had had one—Joan. Country from toward Minchester. But she was gone—a se'ennight since." Somerville had climbed the steps into the loft room. Little was here of Joan or Morgen Fay. But what was, he himself had carried and given to hearth flame. There was one thing, a rose tree in a great crock, and this most carefully he had destroyed.

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Now, walking fast toward Somerville Hall, he thought, "Have you done wickedly, knight? Why, not so wickedly! A little here, a little there, but no great amount anywhere. Even chance, they may not beat the alders." He made for himself a picture of London and a little house by the Thames, and Robert Somerville coming to its door, it opening and Ailsa saying, "Why, enter, knight! Flowers and candles and wine—"

Morgen Fay crouched among rushes, beneath alders at the edge of a wide brook. It was still and sunny, warm, the water singing drowsily. Two dragon flies in blue mail. The reeds met over her head; it was still as creation dawn. A trout leaped, clouds sailed overhead, blue sky returned, vast, shining, deep as forever. A butterfly and the dragon flies, a small tortoise among reeds, a blackbird in the alders,—stillness, stillness, sun, remoteness. Her muscles relaxed. She thought, "Oh, after all—"

Then came the voices. She cowered, lay flat, looking only with terror to see if she made chasm in the reeds. They waved above her. "Oh, perhaps—perhaps—" She prayed. Then she heard the dogs, and they opened cry. She heard a shout, "They've got her!" and as they came with great bounds she rose from among the reeds. She would have run, but could not. She raised her voice, "Call off the dogs, and I will come to you!"

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CHAPTER XVIII

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SAID Master Eustace Bettany to Thomas Bettany, his son:

"Idle—thou art idle! Hadst as well be in the new Indies as in my countinghouse! Paper costs—and there thou goest scrawling, scrawling, and never a sum adding nor thinking out market!" He snatched the whitey-brown sheet. "Waste makes want! What are you scribbling there? 'I saw it in a flash—I saw it in a flash!' What is it, prithee, that you saw in a flash?"

Thomas Bettany rubbed his eyes. "That the world's a great merchant, father, selling herself to herself and buying herself from herself."

The elder glanced suspiciously. "Will you be turning monk?"

"No, though I think there be good monks, good abbots and good priors."

"Of course there be good monks, good abbots and good priors! God forbid that you go believing witch's story and mad monk's tale!"

"What would happen if I did, father?"

"Madman's whip and bread and water and a chain! Go to, Thomas, what is wrong?" Suspicion sat in his eyes. "That's a new thought and one I like not! Were you among the reachers for flowers that grew by harlot house? Were you?"

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Thomas Bettany shook his head. "I've told you I wanted Cecily." He rose from chair and desk. "Eh, father, also I would like a ship that sails and sails away—with me, and Cecily! Now let me be going, for I told Martin Adamson that I would come myself for his monies."

"Aye? Then go—and do you remember, Thomas, that you're all the son I have, and that I have been good to you!"

Thomas Bettany went afoot through Middle Forest. "'All the son I have, and I have been good to you.' *All the life I have and I would not burn. All the life I have and I would not burn.*' That's Morgen Fay in prison yonder."

The day was hot with a cloud drawing over. Hot and still with a green light. Folk in the street looked upward. "Rain coming!" Thomas Bettany meant to go to the house of the debtor. But there was no hurry. It was a long day. Long day and short day. "Prison day must be long day, O Saint John, long day! But short day, seeing that it pulleth and hasteth toward death day—Friday. And

now it is Monday.”

Fascination drew him by the town cross. They would not set stake and fagot till Thursday. “How doth it feel when the iron hoop goes round? How doth the heart strive and choke when the torch comes to the straw? I feel it in myself! Doth Somerville feel it in himself? Doth Montjoy?”

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Persons spoke to him in the market square. He was young and big and gay and well liked. He answered enough to the point, and went on; and now here was the prison, tall and black among ruinous, ancient, steep-roofed houses, set under the castle hill with tower and wall above, and over these and all that slate sky with greenish light. Deep archway and iron door and men lounging. He went by Morgen Fay alone in the dark, and he knew that what she had told to burgher and lord and churchman was true—he had seen it in a flash—and a terrible and wicked act had she done, meriting hell where she would burn forever! But then, Somerville, but then the Abbot and the Prior?

Thomas Bettany, who had owned a young, clean, gay heart, perceived that the world had taken plague.

He wandered. He would not go home, nor yet to the debtor’s house. Rain held off, but the sky was covered, the light green, the air still and hot. He went down to the river. The bridge,—there were pilgrims upon it, a double line of them, chanting, coming from Saint Leofric. To-morrow they would go to Silver Cross, and Holy Well would heal one at least, maybe two or three.

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It made no difference what the monk of Silver Cross had cried nor what Morgen Fay. Was healing then within one’s own mind and heart? Was there the Holy Well?

Thomas Bettany went down the watersteps, found boatmen and their craft and hired a row-boat for an hour. He would row himself. “Storm coming, master!” “Aye.” “If it were Friday now, it might put out fire, and that would be sore pity! Saint Christopher knoweth the boats on this river that have rowed to Morgen Fay’s house! Well, it used to be a fair sight, her window and her garden, and all the time she was witch and devil’s paramour! They do say Montjoy will walk barefoot to Canterbury because in old times he was her fere!”

Bettany rowed away. “She is a human being. Say it, and I think that you say all.”

River, river, and houses standing up, and on the other side willows. “River, I wish you would drown fire. Fire is good where it should be, but at times it acheth to be drowned. And then again water acheth for the fire.”

He rowed with long, slow strokes. Houses went by under the dull sky and they seemed to look with menace. “That only can truly help that hath not been truly harmed. That, too, I see,” said Thomas Bettany, “in a flash.”

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A house by an old wall, brooding to it. Small houses and small garden. The garden was turned wilderness. He caught colours that might be flowers, but the weeds were thick and high. A window—and casement slowly turning outward. All the garden trim, but shrouded in mist, the houses shrouded in autumn mist, the river—and Morgen Fay looking out.

Rowing away fast from that he shot up river and then to the other side, and beneath willows shipped oars and sat head on hands, thinking first how all impossible it was, and then, very wretchedly of Somerville.

Sky darkened still further. With a long sigh, he took up his oars and rowed slowly back to the bridge. Going up the water steps he had it now in mind to ride, storm over, to Somerville Hall. It did not need, for in High Street he came upon Somerville on his big bay horse. Somerville saw him and waited until he crossed to bridle. “Aye, Thomas?”

“I was going to ride to the Hall. Where can we speak together?”

“Come to the Maid and Garland. And look more blithe! The Turks have not entered England.”

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The Maid and Garland had a parlour for Sir Robert—oh, always! They went into a little panelled room, and Somerville turned upon the younger man, the burgher’s son. “Well?”

“I saw it in a flash.”

“Saw what?”

“Much, Somerville! You held Morgen Fay in your hand there at the ruined farm. Plotters to become as great at least as Saint Leofric could not have gotten at her, she could not have joined with them without your knowing! Oh, and I saw, too, that land that you got at last without trouble, after years and years of trouble!”

“Let me alone!” said Somerville hoarsely. “You young fool!”

“From all that I can hear she has not said your name, not once! It was of her own movement, once Abbey and Priory would promise her safety and London town and gold. ‘Thou monstrous witch! Thou daughter of the Father of Lies!’ crieth Silver Cross and Westforest and Middle Forest; aye, even, I hear now, Saint Leofric. But for all that, Robert—”

“Robert?”

“Sir Robert Somerville. But for all that I know, I think, where most lying lies. Save for the Great Lie that she acted and made, and wicked it was to do it! But if she is the wicked one, who else beside? And though she be made of evil is she to burn without a word, who says no word herself?”

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Somerville answered him. “Are you mad? What do you mean? When they stoned her out of town

I made it possible for her to hide at the ruined farm. I am badly repaid, and I close my mouth, and if they ask me there I will lie to them, pardie! Put her at the ruined farm, not I! But who asketh? It is enough that she be pure Satan with Satan. Witch found here, why easily found there! Who believes but what they wish to believe? Who can save her from her burning? God, perhaps, if He chose to do it!"

"Then I will go pray," said Thomas Bettany. "I was not her lover."

"Psha!" said Somerville. "She was a common lover."

The young merchant turned red. "Only great fright could make you say that, Somerville!"

"Were you noble," answered Somerville, "I would take that up. As it is, let us be better strangers."

"That bargain is made, merchant with 'Sir' to your name!"

Somerville opened the parlour door. "Reckoning, host—and a cup of sack!" When the younger man had gone, as he did go immediately, he turned back to the room to sit at table with his wine and wait out the storm which had now come pelting. Dusk was the air and a chill wind came in at crevices. A boy arrived to lay and kindle a fire. The flames reddened the room. Somerville, hand around cup, sat and watched them.

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Storm over, he left the Maid and Garland, mounted his big bay and rode out of town.

"Who can tell
The weird he drees?
Who can read
His shield that hangs
In hall above?
Parcel gilt, pied white and black.
Alas!"

CHAPTER XIX

[Pg 178]

As soon as might be, Montjoy would go that pilgrimage to Canterbury. Had it been true, that frightful story, were Mark and Westforest treacherous, Silver Cross down in the mire, evened and more than evened with Hugh across the river, he would have gone not to Canterbury only, but to Rome, to Palestine! Only there, in Gethsemane garden—

He sat, a slight, dark man with a worn, handsome face, beneath a cedar in his castle garden. This was lord's corner. A castle, God wot, is a public place! But just here was retirement, appropriated long since and possessed for long. Wall and ivy and cedar row, and hardly a narrow window to overlook! Montjoy once had been quick for company, but now for long he sighed toward solitariness. Solitariness that still should be splendour!

Silver Cross—Silver Cross—Silver Cross! The splendour must run through it, bathing the tomb of Isabel, bathing the life-above-death of Isabel! Bathing also Silver Cross, church and abbey, the old form, antique, fair, one's Lady, old yet young through the centuries!

The soul. How to keep the soul in joy? If not in joy, at least in humble peace.

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Montjoy saw himself a grey palmer, state and place laid down. His daughter wedded come Martinmas to Effingham—another year and her son born—then he might go and have word with his own suzerain. Palmer—the road, the shrines, the houses of the religious; quiet, quiet, unobstructed room for dreams of God.

The sky was lead, the light greenish, the air hot and still. He would be glad when the storm burst and the land was drenched. Afterward it would smile once more. He thought, "The Flood is needed again, so wicked is the earth! Oh, my God, am I of the family of Noah? Do I build with gopher wood the Ark that saves? Do I enter Christ? Doth He enter me?"

The cedars clung dark, they darkened the day yet more. Montjoy looked into a cell at Westforest and saw there Richard Englefield. Surely he is mad, though he lies so still, with his face buried in his arms!

Brother Richard.

Montjoy looked into the prison under the castle hill and saw Morgen Fay.

Not for five years have I touched her, O Christ!

The prison closed. The sky hung so still and hung so heavy! Lightning and thunder would be welcome, rising wind and splash of rain. Friday would be welcome. The bramble burned, the hindering, evil bramble, harmful to the sheep, vexful to the shepherd—"O Christ, is there hardness? But the field must be cleared of bramble. Aye, it is worse than bramble. Mandrake and hemlock and helebore, and the children are endangered!"

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Montjoy saw Holy Well and the great picture, and that fine, fine reliquary of pure gold that rejoicing—Satan afar and all the mind in health—Brother Richard had wrought for the Rose, Montjoy bringing the gold. Yesterday Montjoy had gone to Silver Cross and to Holy Well. There

had been pilgrims a hundred, and they kneeled, praying and singing. The day was fair as this was foul, and had bubbled and laughed that crystal well, sunlight into sunlight! They had cups of silver and of horn and of tree and of clay, and one by one they drank while the singing rose around. He, Montjoy, had seen a cripple fling away his crutch and stand and run, and a palsied man grow firm. "Who healeth them? Thou, thou, who truly didst appear to Brother Richard!"

Even now, in this oppressive day, under this dull sky, Montjoy felt again that exaltation. He looked around him and up to the lowering heaven. "Little, weak castle—murky roof of ignorance—yet is there clear power!"

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The rain began to fall.

In the night-time, waking, he found horror with him, something cold, something forlorn and suspicious. It deepened. He left his great bed and Montjoy's wife sleeping, put thick gown around him and went noiseless into the oratory opening from the great chamber, cold in the beams of a moon growing old. No peace! At the turn of the night, when afar he heard cock crow and his dogs bark, he determined that he would go that morning to confession to Father Edmund at Saint Ethelred's. That was the sternest, the most dedicated, the most single of eye and will! To him he would confess everything that he would if he could save from her death the harlot and witch.

Morning came and all the castle took up busy and talkative life. Montjoy rode to Saint Ethelred's. Father Edmund? Oh, aye! he would hear him, and Father Edmund thought. "Time that lords give over slothful and unwise confessors! Father Ambrosius hath forever done him hurt."

Montjoy was long upon his knees. He accepted heavy penance, took shrift humbly, came forth from Saint Ethelred's with a colourless face like a gem.

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Riding back to the castle, when he came to prison street he turned his black horse and rode slowly by the dark prison. He had told Father Edmund all his thoughts and in the bale was the thought, "I will visit her there in that dungeon before Friday. Is not that Christian, O God, if my deepest heart that is now thine seems to bid me to go?" But Father Edmund had been greatly stern. "Satan wrestleth for thy deepest heart! Hear me now! It is forbidden! Go not to, speak not to that All-Evil! If thou dost she will draw thee with her into hell! Thou thinkest, 'Once I was familiarly with her', and cowardice and heartlessness now only to think and never to say, 'God have mercy upon thee, poor soul!' Son, son, that is devil's bait! He will come and stand and ask thee, 'Is it knightly?' It is his wile, to clothe himself in light! As for the witch, she lacks not soul counsel! Since she was taken, each day have I preached to her. I will hold the cross before her chained to stake. She shall see it, lifted high, till flame takes eyes. But thou, my son, I lay it upon thee, leaving here, to ride by the prison, and to say as thou ridest. 'Sin, I will no longer sin with thee, nor come into thy company!' Say it!"

"Sin, I will no longer sin with thee, nor come into thy company."

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"So! And son, thou wilt come with thy squires and thy men on Friday to town cross."

So Montjoy rode by the prison.

It was dark in there, fetid and dark, and Morgen Fay the sinner had little to think of but her sins. She could not blink them that they were many.

Her sins and death, and after that the Judgment. Death and Judgment and for her Hell, or at the best the direst corner of dire Purgatory and the longest stay. Ages there, while souls of thieves and murderers left her one by one and went upward, and never a word for the one who must stay. At the best, the very best, and perhaps even that gleam had no reality! Not Purgatory, but everlasting Hell.

CHAPTER XX

[Pg 184]

RICHARD ENGLEFIELD, in Westforest cell, might lie without movement, head buried in arms, but that was when he must sleep in order to gain and keep strength, or when Prior or Brother Anselm visited him, it being posture good as another for a monk now in sooth going melancholy mad.

Once Brother Anselm, who had been taken from strollers playing in barns and inns, said to the Prior, "He playeth!" Whereupon the Prior strictly watched, but at last said, "Not so. Truth!" And then, like such chess masters, because he had bent what he thought all his mind to it and was assured, he obstinated in his opinion of the board and every piece upon it. "No, it is truth! I have seen it before. Melancholy that forgets how to speak and then after a time mere childishness that will not stint from speaking, though it be only of green fields and cowslip balls! Then silence again like an old sick hound and at last he dies!"

Brother Anselm's doubt had been but momentary. He agreed now with Prior. Also he said, "One helpeth forth the sick hound."

The Prior of Westforest took his lean chin from his lean hand. "I have heard that the Greeks writ over their temples, 'Nothing too much.' Where the good of all is in question let the soul take necessary burdens, but not unnecessary ones! This were unnecessary."

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Richard Englefield was not going melancholy mad, though he played that he was. He worked. He worked while he lay still upon the cold floor, face hidden by stretched arms, or when he sat moveless, staring into naught with empty, woe-begone face. "Think me melancholy mad, do! So

the sooner will you leave me the cell!" They went. For hours he had the dim place to himself, and at night he had it.

Monk of Silver Cross was gone, whirled away to the dark country behind Chaos and there dead and buried peacefully. Here was Richard Englefield the master goldsmith. And yet not that either. Here was one who had risen behind goldsmith and monk, who had come up like a tree that was not suspected.

He worked, Richard the smith. He gained, no man knew how, two bits of iron. The cell was grated. He filed through a bar and then another, and in the night-time broke the whole away. Fortune or wonder or the miraculous or some natural air into which he had broken was with him. It might have been the last, his will was so awakened, so in action. His fury towered, but it was still fury, very deep and dangerous, bitter passion of a man with mind and will. He saw Success and drew her to him as giants draw. In the dead night he got away. [Pg 186]

Westforest formed but a small House and it lay close to Wander. Stripping off his robe he made it into a bundle and with rope girdle tied it upon his shoulders. Then, naked, he plunged into the Wander and swam a mile downstream. Coming to the bank he rested, then swam the second mile, under the late risen moon. Cocks were crowing. He passed grey meadow and dreaming corn and came to a forest where it overhung the Wander. "Here is good place to leave!" He quit the water, shook his body and dried it with fern, untied and unrolled monk's gown and put it on. "Brother Richard? Nay, monk is as will is! Richard Englefield, a smith in gold and silver!"

He was away now from Wander, in the forest, the morn pink above the trees, violet among and beneath the branches. In yonder direction lay Silver Cross and not so far, neither. Middle Forest! Could he get, unmarked, to Middle Forest. Had he one friend there—but he had none. Could he get to the shipping upon the river, below the bridge. Could he find a boat that would take him to the sea and then he cared not where! He saw Success. "Aye, I will!" But this robe must somehow be changed for world-dress, and he must have a purse and money in it. Hard to manage! But Success was his Moorish slave and would bring them. [Pg 187]

He strode on. He was going toward the town through what was left of the ancient, all-covering forest. Hereabouts was yet a great wood with deer and hare and bird and fox. Paths ran through but between them spread bounteously the forest. First light gave way to gold light. He was hungry. He took the crust of bread that he had saved from yesterday and ate it as he walked. Also he found strawberries. When the sun was well up he came to rest under an oak, to think it out.

He had some hope that Westforest would hold that he had drowned himself. Yesterday had been a hot and livid day, ending in storm. They would be able to trace him to the water edge. Would they drag the Wander, seeing that the Prior must wish to make sure? But the Wander running swiftly might carry him down. Using Prior Matthew's eyes he saw monk caught among stones on Wander bottom, or, a log, shoved down Wander length to greater river and so at last to sea, white bones for merman's children. He thought with Prior's brain, "So, it is very well!" And if Wander had him not, but he strayed on dry land, Brother Richard of Silver Cross, mad now though once greatly blessed, there would ensue some trouble of taking him, some explaining, but no more than that! Richard Englefield saw the net, how strong and wide it was, the fishers here being so much mightier than the fish. So mighty were they that they could spare the fish even if it leapt clear. For if it went and told all other fish and fishermen, what odds? Mind in all was made up what to believe! Richard Englefield laughed, but his laughter was worse to hear than had been sobbing. [Pg 188]

He tried to make a plan, but it was hard to plan out of this! Best still trust Success. He took a pebble and tossed it, then followed it. Narrow road little travelled. He walked upon this some way and saw a horseman coming. Out of track into a hazel brake, wait and see what like he might be! Sun glinted, boughs waved, birds sang, over all things lay a pearly moisture after storm.

Young Thomas Bettany, riding from town because town oppressed him, taking idle way and ancient road because to-day bustle liked him not, errandless and leaving John Cobb at home, rode through the old forest with hanging head. He would mend the world if he knew how, but he did not know how. [Pg 189]

Coming to brake his horse started aside. Thomas crossed himself. A monk was standing there, seemed to have stepped forth from it. "Is it a ghost? By Saint John, Brother! you look it and you do not look it!"

He knew him now, having seen him at Silver Cross thrice, maybe, since the finding of Holy Well. Thomas Bettany felt himself tremble a little. *Brother Richard—if he were mad*—but then he remembered himself that he was hardly so! They said he was mad, an Abbot and a Prior whose deeds might not be scanned. Brother Richard! Though some were guilty the monk was not. Again he saw things "in a flash." The monstrous disappointment—Heaven's boon companion, then fall—fall—fall! How sharp the stones and black the land!

He spoke in a whisper. "Did you break last night from Westforest?" All the countryside knew that Brother Richard, now alas! utterly mad, was to be hidden there in a grated cell.

Richard Englefield knew not why Success was here. He said, "You know me then? Who are you?"

"Thomas Bettany, merchant's son."

"I greatly need," said the man by the hazels, "burgher's dress, a purse of money, and to reach some ship in river that presently makes sail." Having spoken, he waited again upon Success. [Pg 190]

"I shall have to ride to Middle Forest and back," said Thomas Bettany. "Over yonder a mile lies a ruined farm. No one goes by wood that way. Walk till you see the house through trees, then lie close till I come." Few words more and he turned horse and presently disappeared down the leafy road.

Englefield moved off into deep forest toward the ruined farm. It was Success. It was of a piece with breaking free from Priory. Maybe there were gods who said, "Thou touchedst nadir, now we let thee rise!" Maybe it was the Will, so fulfilled and potent that it became magician. Trust far enough, and the bird comes flying! But not trust like that at Silver Cross—no!

Deep wood, beech and ash and oak, very silent, very lonely. At last it thinned and he saw through trees an old, small, ruinous farmhouse, broken, neglected, haunted maybe. He made out a man slowly working in a field. A grey horse grazed, a cock crew, but there seemed no dog to bark.

He drew back under trees, found a bed of leaf and moss and threw himself down. He was tired, tired! Body was tired but not spirit. That should not flag. No, no! said the will. But sleep—it was necessary to sleep. [Pg 191]

He did so for a time, but then he waked clearly and suddenly. Where he had been in dreams he did not know, nor where in the deep realm behind dreams. But there had been large and happy stillness, full ocean and serene sky. Whence—whence? From heaven, and had he mounted there, the True Ones pitying? From heaven's opposite? Then again had come upon him that rapture that befell at Silver Cross—three nights' rapture—rapture at the feet of a harlot of harlots! Evil had been the rapture through and through, that had seemed so heavenly glorious, heavenly sweet! Never to have guessed—never to have known—to have been incapable of knowledge! True and false alike to him, hideousness and beauty alike, he who had thought he knew beauty! Incapable—incapable. That had seemed Success—oh, high Success!

The sun rode high and streamed in warmly. He found shadow and lay upon his face, arms outstretched along the earth, hands breaking twigs with which the ground was strewn.

This part of earth looked full to sun, then glided from strongest vision, then took it obliquely, beginning to think of cool, dark rest from it, filled with memories. At three by country dials he heard a horse brushing through the forest and presently saw Bettany with merchant's pack strapped before him, not a pack large and noticeable, but sufficing to show that the House of Bettany attended to business and was not too proud to attend in person. [Pg 192]

At four by dial Richard Englefield stood under the oak in good hosen, shoon, shirt and doublet, with cap, with cloak, with leather belt and knife, with leather purse and silver in it and hidden in bosom pocket woollen purse with gold. Gaunt he was as any wolf, and overcast with pallour, needing days of sun and air to bring him back to what he was a year ago in Silver Cross, or further back to the gold-brown master smith not unknown in cities and in princes' courts. Just that smith would never come back. This smith had himself been laid upon a Vulcan's anvil. The fire showed, the hammer showed.

Thomas Bettany said, "Monk not again because of them hereabouts?"

"Not so. Because of myself."

The other continued, "God wot there is not the old saintliness! I have heard wise men cry that unless there came reform God will loose lions."

"Perhaps. But come as it may I am absolved from monastery." [Pg 193]

"Abbot Mark and Prior Matthew be not everywhere. There are good abbots, good, religious houses—"

"Aye, I doubt not. Even at Silver Cross and Westforest are some true pilgrims and finders. But I am absolved. Brother Richard lies drowned in Wander. This is Richard Englefield, a smith in gold and silver. But since it may not be wisdom to say that till I reach London port or maybe France, then Richard Dawn, a traveller. What of ship?"

"It is the *Vineyard*, lying in the pool and sailing day after to-morrow at dawn. The master, a young man, Diccon Wright, is beholden to me. I found him at the Golden Ship, and he will do it."

"Day after to-morrow at dawn."

"There is nothing for it," said Bettany, "but that you should bide where you are through to-night and to-morrow. Then at eve I will come with a horse for you. Canst ride?"

"Oh, aye!"

"There is no moon. We make through country to pool side and find there a boat that Diccon sends. So the *Vineyard* and away."

"You are good to me, brother!"

The other answered, "I somehow owe it. And not to you only. But here only does it seem that I can pay." [Pg 194]

He took from pack loaf of bread, pound of cheese and a bottle of ale. "Here we be! Nay, I have had dinner. Well, I will eat a little to keep you in countenance, Master Dawn!"

They ate under the greenwood tree, close screened around with thorn and fern. "It will be cold to-night sleeping here. There is a loft at the farm. The old man and woman dodder and are blind and deaf. There is a straw bed. But strange and elfin were it, I think," said Bettany slowly, "if you

slept there."

"In old years I have slept out colder nights than this is like to be. And a cell is cold."

"Well, the cloak is thick. Nay, drink! I may have my fill when I get back to father's house."

CHAPTER XXI

[Pg 195]

SUN came more and more slanting through the trees. Eating was done. The two sat in forest light and coolness, and they went over plans step by step so that there might rest no misunderstanding nor any happening unprovided against. "The *Vineyard* boat, and the word is 'Gold and silver.' South around Middle Forest and then east. Leave the ruined farm at dusk to-morrow."

"I have found a great hollow tree," said Englefield and pointed to it. "If any come, in I creep!"

"Good! Unless there are dogs," Bettany said. With that he fell into silence.

The other, half-reclining, also was silent. Gold light playing over him showed how gaunt he was and his face how lined and smitten.

Bettany spoke. "Dost think True Religion has taken any hurt?"

"How should True Religion take hurt, having been all the time in another country?"

The young man mused. "To have thought one's self Chosen out of all the world because of one's qualities—and then to be thrown back, past one's old dwelling, past, past, down past the whole world—"

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Richard Englefield spoke. "I looked on Medusa. Do you know what is that, to look on Medusa? And looking, to open on the knowledge that you yourself were the artist?"

"Eh?" said Thomas Bettany. "But the first of it must have been glorious! Honey and kingship and worship and safety for aye!"

"*Honey and kingship and worship and safety for aye.* Just that! Then the hair turned to snakes."

Silence in the forest. Bettany moved a little. "Friday. I suppose you are glad of Friday?"

"What happeneth Friday?"

"She burns at town cross. Morgen Fay."

"*What have I to do with that?*"

Forest silence filled with tongues. Bettany untied his horse and strapped the empty leathern case before the saddle. He looked at the discarded habit of monk of Silver Cross. "Put it in the hollow tree?"

"No. In the deep sea to-morrow night."

"Better in river. Then if 'tis found, as like enough it may be, surely—all say—you were drowned!"

He stood, bridle in hand. "Morgen Fay. She had a house by the river and a fair, small garden. Aye! she was harlot, but then what were Montjoy and Somerville and others? It is a speckled earth. There is other sale than that? Aye, she made it, and bought blackness and flame and peril maybe for ever and ever. Because she was harlot and Father Edmund preached mightily just then against her, they broke her house and garden and stoned her forth from town. Then one that I know who is speckled, too, hid her for a time. Then, as fate or somewhat would have it, came to Prior Matthew knowledge that she had to certain eyes much of outward face and form of the great picture, so that he who painted might have set her before him for first model. That knowledge and that she was still in Wander vale. So all followed. She thought she was buying ransom—safety if not honey. Once I saw played at the Great Fair *Faustus and the Devil*. Faustus thought he would buy happiness, and here was to-day and perhaps would never come to-morrow and death! So she thought. Safety and perhaps house and garden once more, and maybe to-day will last! But *thy soul is required of thee*,—and she is in prison waiting."

[Pg 197]

He mounted horse. "I will come ere sunset to-morrow. When you hear *Otterbourne* whistled, it is I."

"Should something happen," said Englefield, "and all this go awry, still have you done for me what if I had younger brother or dear comrade or old fellow-worker with me in my craft, I might have hoped for—"

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"I don't know why I do it, but I must do it. For a time I thought of you five times a day as most blessed. You were heaven's courtier, you were sailing on heaven's ship! Now you are man like me, though older than me, and I see you need a friend. You thought you had so great a one—and then there was blackness! I'm nothing but Thomas Bettany, but I'll set you at least on the *Vineyard*. Let's say no more!"

The merchant rode away. The master goldsmith was left by the ruined farm in Wander forest.

He saw the red orb of the sun descend past boles of trees. It sank beneath the earth. All the west hung fire red, then the colour faded. "I will go now to sleep, and God knoweth I need it!"

When I come to London, or rather, I think, to France—”

Down he lay. Bettany’s cloak was thick, the leaves and moss a pleasant bed, soft dusk around, the forest a cradle with cradle song. “Sleep—sleep! Sleep—sleep!”

But sleep was at the antipodes. “This place—what is this place?”

“Bitter Shame, Very Anger, strengthen me! Let me not pity the witch! Let me not feel her misery mine! Let me not long to see her face, touch her, hold her!”

“*Shall I desire the dragon that slew me? Shall I cherish Medusa? Burning—burning!*”

He sprang to his feet and walked the wood, up and down, up and down. He moved with disordered steps, twigs and boughs striking him. The long June day left still a radiance.

He threw himself down and lay with face buried. Time dropped away, drop by drop, and each drop a world and an æon.

Dark clear night, moonless but starlight.

Thomas Bettany, returning to Middle Forest, found at his own door a ship’s boy sent by Diccon Wright. The latter was again at the Golden Ship and would see him there. He went and found that the matter was that *Vineyard* boat could not be at landing first planned. The *Alan-a-Dale* had come in and chosen to drop anchor just there. Best now the old landing by the reeds. Bettany agreed. Old landing by the reeds.

Home again and preparing for bed he determined to rise early and ride to the ruined farm. If at dusk aught happened and he did not reach the man nor tell him of where now he was to go—then mischance enough! With a long sigh he put himself into his comfortable merchant’s bed in comfortable merchant’s room. He slept and waked, slept and waked and at last an hour before dawn gave up sleeping and lay staring before him. “Now it is Wednesday. To-morrow is Thursday, and then Friday.”

Light stole into the chamber. He rose, moved softly, dressed quietly, stole downstairs, unbarred the small door and was out in court and across to merchant’s stable. Here he saddled his horse, Black Prince. East was daffodil; morning star shone over the castle. Poor Clares’ bell rang lauds, Black Prince went by the softer ways as though velvet shod. So at peace was the land that town gates were no longer closed at night. The industrious young merchant riding through rode off toward Wander forest.

Sun had risen when he came nigh to the ruined farm and began to whistle “Otterbourne.” Beech and ash and oak, fern and thorn, and by a thorn tree he who had been, but was no more Brother Richard. “Well, in these days, many leave cloister—

‘But gae ye up to Otterbourne
And wait there day is three;
And if I come not ere three day is end,
A fause knight ca’ ye me.’”

Thomas Bettany, dismounted now, looked with wonder at the other who stood tall and gold-brown and determined. A night had made a difference!

“You must have slept well under oaken tree!”

“No. I did not sleep.”

“Then faery queen must have visited you! Truly you have the look of it!”

“I longed for your coming, fellow worker, and that I should not have to wait for it till eve! Who brought it about? Still that Success!”

“*Vineyard* boat cannot be at the landing I told you of. It is now the old landing by the reeds. It seemed best to let you know without delay.”

“Had you not come I might have stained my face and gone into town, changing voice, changing step and figure—Richard Dawn, traveller with gold in his purse, sending from the inn to Master Thomas Bettany—”

“I think well that all the Folk in Green have been here! It is such a place as they flock to. Morgen Fay hid here at the ruined farm.”

“No! *She walked in this wood.*”

Green light and purple light and gold. Throstle and finch and cuckoo, robin and lark. Fern up-growing, wild plants in bloom, the wood a chalice of odours, censer swinging. Englefield put his hands to his temples. “Friday!”

“What is it, man?”

The other moved to a tree whose great roots pushed above the soil. “Come sit here, younger brother, and listen to me!”

Thomas Bettany obeyed and he moved as one in a dream, or as though the wood had grown a magic wood. “You have become leader here. Something has come to bloom and to fruit in you in a night!”

“I shall not go upon the *Vineyard* unless there go two.”

"Two?"

"Unless she that lies in prison goes."

"Morgen Fay!"

"Aye. Morgen Fay—Morgen Fay."

Bettany put hands to tree to steady himself. "What is here?"

"Didst never read that man holds within himself autumn, winter, spring and summer, the moon, the earth, the sun and the four kingdoms? Maybe the fifth, but we have not come to that yet."

"Friday."

"Are you not willing that she should vanish from them, cheating the cheaters? Friday. Death in flame!"

"God, He knoweth. I think that she should live!"

"Look at me!"

Thomas Bettany looked. Again he steadied himself, he drew hard breath.

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"How could you get her out of prison? It is not to be done!"

"Then no ship takes me to-night or to-morrow night! Friday. There will I be by town cross!"

"Not in two days could you save her!"

"Suppose we try?"

Thomas Bettany stared at an artist in daring. This gold-worker had imaged, drawn and beaten out many a bold pattern, many an intricate and subtle. Now he said, "Come, deliver what material you may! How lies prison within and without? Who are there? Tell what you know. We have to-day which is Wednesday and to-morrow which is Thursday. The *Vineyard* must not sail before cockcrow Friday."

"I could not buy Diccon there! I might beg him for love."

"However you do it, you will do it. I see in fine air within gross air a ship that weighs anchor at dawn, Friday. Now, tell!"

Bettany described with minuteness that prison and its economy. "I have a man, John Cobb. His cousin Godfrey is gaoler."

"So, thou seest!"

"But there is naught I know of that would buy Godfrey. Keys might be melted in his hold but he would not give them up! Town, castle and Church know Godfrey."

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"Then let him not know that they are gone."

"That is not possible."

"It is possible, or I would not see the *Vineyard* sailing Friday. Everything is possible save her burning. Can your man sit with Godfrey, drinking ale with him maybe, and come to handling and fingering keys great and small, and questioning, 'This is great door, this inner ward, and this where she lies who burns a-Friday?'"

"So much as that is possible."

Englefield, leaving him seated, staring, took himself three turns between thorn and oak, by ash and beach. The forest was gold, the day was gold, the morrow gold and he the smith. He returned. "Have you a piece of wax, fine and smooth, such as might be held secretly in palm of hand, softening just enough with heat of body?"

Bettany gave an abrupt small laugh. "I've read of that in a book from the Italian! But if John Cobb were bold enough and skilful enough to take—Godfrey's face being buried in tankard—impress of keys, what then, beseech you, unless you had all the fairies?"

"Sun is an hour high. If I could have that mould here ere he rises again! But it must be well done, well taken, with pains. Our keys must turn in our locks."

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"In the greenwood? I know that Brother Richard made wondrous things! But this were to make wondrously!"

"I planned through the night—this plan, that and the other. But this one is best. When the moon rose and again at first dawn I went softly about that house yonder. None saw nor heard; they were sleeping. The man has burned charcoal, and surely they have oven or hearth. Gold in this purse may buy them, seeing they cannot know whom I am nor what we do. You say they are old and losing wit."

"Furnace and fuel and print of keys in wax and smith—"

"Do you bring me iron and the tools. I shall show you."

"Thou'rt a bold man!"

"Thou'rt another!"

NOT John Cobb but Thomas Bettany, who knew whom here he could trust, sat on a Wednesday afternoon in gaoler's room, drank ale with Godfrey and once more petitioned for one look at the witch.

"Nay, nay!" said Godfrey and shook his huge head. "Rule is rule! Time was I wouldn't ha' minded pleasuring you, Master Thomas, but word has come and a downright word, too, from powers. 'Look you, Godfrey, that you do not open that door to any save Father Edmund who preaches to witch so that it may not be said she goes to hell without preaching!' So I do not so. You are not the first gallant who hath come and said, 'Godfrey, let me have a look at the witch!' But no, says I to all. Rule is rule!" He set down his can. "I could tell you, but I won't. Not just young will-o'-wisp like you, but one that's older and should be weightier! But I won't call name."

"I can call it for you," thought the other. "It was Somerville."

"Coming by night, too!" said Godfrey.

Young Master Thomas Bettany made a pettish movement. "Saint John! What's the use of carrying that great bunch of keys if you cannot turn them at your will! Let me weigh them now!" [Pg 207]

Godfrey, smiling broadly, laid the bunch on table. He was a giant, and Thomas Bettany had been known to him since he was urchin and went by to school. "Great key—inner ward—key you turn on her?"

Godfrey nodded. "Eh, eh! She has been a fair woman, has she not, and danced lightly? Marsh fire, will-o'-wisp! Now she lies all her length on cold ground, and when I open the door she saith, 'Is't Friday?'"

"Hark ye! Some one's knocking."

Godfrey turned head. "It sounds as they were!" Rising from table, he went to the door. "Nay, only noise in the street."

"I thought it was the other door."

Godfrey stepped from the room and walked a little way down the stone passage. He returned. "'Tis nothing! And William sits there to answer."

"If William wakes now how doth he keep awake by door yonder at night?"

"He gets sleep enough. Prowling around, sometimes I find him sleeping when he should be waking! But there be few in prison and little trouble. In old times, when the kings were fighting together, it was different!" [Pg 208]

He took up the keys and fastened them at his belt. "If any could bring witch to confession you'd think it would be Father Edmund, wouldn't ye? But she's like a block!"

"Confess what?"

"Just all the story of how the devil came to her and she sold him her soul for ease and triumph. But he's not a bargain-keeper—never was! And how he flew with her through air and stone wall, and set her in Brother Richard's cell, in place of Queen of Heaven. What she said and did, and how the devil, all of a sudden seeing that heaven had struck Brother Richard with the knowledge, 'This is not the Queen, this is not the true bright one!' went about to confuse all Brother Richard's wits, turning him into worse than Doubting Thomas, for now he doubts all things both before and after. But she sticks to saying, 'It was I from the first, and the devil was Prior Matthew, Abbot Mark consenting.' And Father Edmund preacheth again. Eh, but Friday cometh and she will soon be but a story! Morgen Fay and the devil."

Thomas Bettany rode once more with merchant's pack to Wander forest, having first gone to Golden Ship by the water side, where he met Diccon Wright and bought him with love. It was again rose dawn. To one who at edge of town stopped and questioned him, he said that he was riding to Somerville Hall. [Pg 209]

"Do you not know Sir Robert has gone to London? He rode away yesterday with three behind him."

"Oh, aye! But there was message left for me. One day I'll travel myself! View Rome and Constantinople and Cambalu."

"It's in my mind that he did not wish to see Morgen Fay burn."

"Maybe so! I'd rather myself see fairies by moonlight or a fair still garden."

Ruined farm and David and Margery to whom gentlemen were gentlemen, whatever strange things they wished, and rose nobles were rose nobles. "Oh, aye! Who is there for us to tattle to save it be Dobbin and the cow? There's naught doing like that Joan who turned to be a witch named Morgen? We might ha' had trouble there, but Somerville stepped in and turned it aside. So you'll ha' to do, Master Bettany, if there's any mistaken doing here—"

"Aye, I will. But there's none."

This was a day of gold dust, still, warm, a haze and floating stillness. Ruined farm and forest hereabouts might have had a hedge around them like the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. No ears heard fine smithwork, for Philemon and Baucis were deaf, and went beside to planted field. The fairies might have heard. [Pg 210]

Mid-afternoon Thomas Bettany returned to town. Near the old wall, now on the high road, he overtook a string of pilgrims footweary and dusty. The leader hailed him, handsome young burgher riding a fine horse. "Canst tell us, master, what inn is best for us?"

"Try the Joyful Mountain. Whence do you come?"

From Minchester, it seemed. To Saint Leofric and Silver Cross. "And we've just heard news about a fearful witch and that she'll be burned to-morrow. We shall see that first. Thank ye, and our blessing, master!"

Thomas Bettany gave to his family the supper hour and showed himself during it affectionate son and brother. "Eh, Thomas!" thought the old merchant, and like the pilgrims he, too, gave him blessing, though an inner one.

Marian, his sister, who was a mouse for quietness, said suddenly, "Oh, I would that to-morrow were gone by! If I were Morgen Fay to-night—"

Master Eustace Bettany rated her. "Say naught like that even in jest!"

"I was not jesting."

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"Thou'rt so far from Morgen Fay that thou shalt not say, 'If I were Morgen Fay—'"

"She is woman."

"Witches have left womanhood. Be silent!"

Table was taken away. Eustace Bettany disappeared through the door which led to countinghouse. Marian came to Thomas in the deep window. "Stay awhile, Thomas, and read with me 'Romaunt of the Rose!' Cousin hath sent us, too, 'The Grey Damsel and Sir Launfal.'"

But Thomas could not stay. He kissed her and went forth into the sunset. By town cross they were piling wood. Saint Ethelred's bells rang. The young man stood and prayed.

Dusk came over all like brooding wings. Stars brightened above the castle. Up there Montjoy, seated in his great chair, listened to Prior Matthew of Westforest.

"Not to hear of it till now—!"

"It is not yet three nights ago, Montjoy. And it seemed, and still seemeth best to seek quietly. We have had, to my mind, too much indeed of buzz and clatter! I wish for quiet to descend upon us."

"Ah, I also!" sighed Montjoy. "So the soul may return to her proper work! But open—all things should be open!"

"In reason, aye! But the world is idle and will make scandal if it may."

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Montjoy pressed back of clasped hands over eyes. "The world is thistle and precipice! I have fearful dreams at night. Welcome will it be to me, oh Christ, when I may go my pilgrimage!" Rising from his chair he walked to and fro, then returning to the table, laid touch upon a great and splendidly bound book, fine work upon fine parchment, illuminated head letters and borders. He touched it reverently. "See you, so beautifully done, two hundred years ago! Chronicle of Silver Cross. I have been reading as I have read a hundred times! Miracles then a-plenty, and such goodness, such spiritual men, that all seemed grown pure Nature! I thought the gloss and freshness were all back, but I do not know—I do not know—I do not know!"

Prior Matthew said quietly, "Until this madness Brother Richard was a good and holy monk. How else should Heaven have found him as glass to shine through? And now if, as we think, he lies drowned in Wander, it does not seem to us self-murder. The mad are not accountable there. Again, he may have slipped and fallen. So now Our Lord may clear his mind, and his purgatory done, he will again be wise and holy."

"Purgatory lasteth long!" said Montjoy. "Thistle and mire pit, thirsty desert, precipices! And what if he did not drown but roams at large, telling with flaming eyes and tolling voice and large gesture his story of not one but many Satans?"

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"The whole region knows that he is mad. Were he so abroad, how long before we should have known it? Oh, we have questioners and seekers out, but quietly! Hour by hour Wander grows to us the more certain. Yesterday we dragged, but the water runs swiftly and may have carried him down."

"Death. Well, who should tremble at that unless he be sold to wickedness?"

Through open windows they heard compline bell. "To-morrow draws on. There will be a great concourse. Saint Leofric and Silver Cross and Westforest, country folk and all the town, seamen and pilgrims. And what to see? A woman burning."

The Prior spoke serenely, invisibly his hand making final move, providing mate. "Nay, Montjoy, Good vindicated, Ill consumed, Warning spread!"

Thomas Bettany absented himself from Middle Forest.

Dark night, clear and dark. Lights twinkled in tall houses, lantern and torch twinkled and flared in narrow streets. Glowworm points from those belated moved over the bridge. Night deepened. Lights went out one by one, cluster by cluster. Now there were great spaces of naught between twinklers and flarers. Dark space widened, twinklers and flarers growing lonely, separated afar from one another. Ships below the bridge had lanterns, but the ships were few. Lights lessened, lessened, until you might say Middle Forest was in darkness. Lanterns of the watch went slowly

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about, but wary eye might know where watch had been and where it was now and where it would presently be. Cautious foot might tread among the three. Of course, if shout were raised, watch hearing it would come running.

Midnight and after.

Godfrey had good wine to-night, brought him by Master Thomas Bettany. Godfrey thought, "Brought for present to soften me to let him look at the witch!" He grinned and took the wine but kept to "Rule is rule!" "Very fine Jerez sack," explained the young merchant, "out of a lot bought in London. And will you give a stoup to William and Diggory? Diggory is a great fellow of his inches! I saw him Sunday wrestling in long meadow."

Godfrey drank the Jerez wine with his supper, and he poured a great cup for William and for Diggory. They drank. "Aye, aye! Bettany knows how to choose the best!"

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Deep night.

CHAPTER XXIII

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DEEP night. Over the castle Pegasus, over town southward the Eagle, walking down the west the Ploughman, low in the southwest the Scorpion, due south the Archer, on the meridian the Lyre.

Deep night in prison. Morgen Fay waked. "What use in sleeping? I shall do no work to-morrow."

Memory. For some ease, take Memory by the hand, but go with her into old countries, not into those near at hand! She remembered a forest like to Wander forest, and she remembered an ocean with shells upon the beach. So cool the air, and the water going over her, cool, cool and restful! She remembered music.

Once a grey-beard begging friar had told her that all things that ever were or are or can be were but parts of music. "Listen, and you will hear! Gather the notes and make them into strains. Put the strains together—you will begin to have a notion! When you have lived long enough you will come to hear the strains made of strains and how they combine. All the jangle is imperfect music, music finding itself—"

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Music. So it was all music? A long way to-night to where you might see that!

Dancing. Once it had come to her herself, watching sunbeams and some nodding, waving trees and a long ripple over wheat, and feeling a wind that kept measure, that dancing was somehow a great and sweet idea of some great Gayheart. "Shall I dance in prison and hear music, and to-morrow flying this way?"

Love. What is that?

She thought. "I have never seen it. I know it not. Perhaps for garden and Ailsa and little white rose tree. Ah, yes! But I have loved my way, and fire on my hearth and wine on my table. Now I will have enough of fire, and there is a wine they say of wrath. Love—love! What is it, Morgen Fay? If there be such a country I shall not see it. Where do you go to-morrow, Morgen Fay, and what anguish in the going?"

"O God, O my God, make wider the little passage between me and thee!"

So dark—so dark. Night and night and night!

A little noise at the door, but not like Godfrey's hand. She sat up, being near the door, the place was so small. Stealthily, stealthily, a sliding noise. She felt the door open and rose to her knees. "Who's there?"

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"Friends! Don't make any noise." One came in at the door and touched her. "Morgen, it is Thomas Bettany. You are willing to follow me? Then come at once."

She rose and followed. The door was shut behind her. The second man, stooping, turned the key and withdrew it. A little way down the passage with no more noise than moths—door of inner ward—through it, too, turn key and take out, find cross passage. The second man who had not spoken held the least, small light. A cresset, too, burned dimly, swinging from a beam. A man lay sleeping by the wall,—Diggory, Godfrey's helper. It seemed that he was sleeping soundly. A turn, a wider space, and the great door and William sleeping upon a bench. Open, great door. Light showed a chain and a staple broken out of wall—open! Out of prison. Starlight—the street—soft and swift like moth and bat. Lanterns and footsteps of the watch. Press into angle of Saint Ethelred's porch and cease to breathe while they go by! Avoid market place, cross High Street, softly, swiftly; find Saint Swithin's Street, narrow, steeply descending toward the river. River in the ears, and the old disused water steps, and beside them a boat. Thomas Bettany's voice saying, "*Gold and silver*," and the man in the boat answering, "*Gold and silver in the Vineyard*. Step ye in!"

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Down the river, and by the house of Morgen Fay and into the widening of water that was called the Pool.

There were but three men, Bettany and the man with him and he who had held the boat and who was called Diccon. The man who had opened doors sat very silent. But so were all, saying nothing, rowing silently. And Morgen Fay was still, still! Oh, the divine night air and the stars and

the cool water, cool and singing! A ship rose before them. It seemed they were going there.

Thomas spoke to her. "Your name is Alice now, not Morgen. Remember! Alice—Alice Dawn. This ship is the *Vineyard* and it touches at three ports. You will be safely put ashore, and here is gold." A purse slid into her lap.

Ecstasy of freedom, air and the stars. Alice—Alice Dawn! She put her forehead upon her knees and laughed. "Oh, all of you, what will you *not* see to-morrow! Now you have your miracle!"

The ship coming closer and closer, a tall ship and making ready to sail. "Whither? And will I find Ailsa?"

"I cannot tell as to that. Diccon Wright, the master there, is a helpful man. And the Saints are above us. I do not fully know," said Thomas under breath, "what I have done!" [Pg 220]

The ship came near. "Ah, how dark it was in prison! Thank you and bless you!"

Andromeda lay across the northeast, the Crown was in the west, the Swan overhead. "Ship oars," said Diccon. "Here we are!"

"You quit me now, Thomas?"

"Aye. I must be at home and in bed if there come any calling!"

"Are you endangered?"

"No! They will call it again the devil. Where all have tender hands he is the best one to pull the nuts from the fire!"

"Good-by, then. I shall bless you every day and it shall not hurt you!"

"I never thought that it would, Morgen Fay."

"No. Thou'rt clean! Good-by, good-by, good-by!"

The ship overhung them,—bowsprit and carved sea goddess, body of ship and high forecastle, masts, spars and rigging. And the stars shone between, and men were up there making sail among the stars, and all the air sang around and the water sang. Morgen Fay had her own courage. It was coming to her from far and near. She felt like a child. Something in her was crumbling away, or something within her, after long groping, was painfully lifting itself into higher air. "*I have tasted evil, I have tasted good; I like better the last taste.*" [Pg 221]

The rowers ceased to row. A rope was flung, a manner of ladder of rope slipped over the side. Master of the *Vineyard* and Thomas Bettany spoke low together, then the former mounted to his ship. "Now, Alice Dawn—God bless you!"

"God bless you."

She was light and strong. She climbed, she stood in the waist of the *Vineyard* and turning herself, looked to see the boat put off with two. But the rower who had not spoken, the man who had been silent in street and lane, who had opened doors silently in prison, was climbing from boat to *Vineyard* deck. Light from a lantern by the mast fell upon him. Burgher's dress, cap of blue, young beard of brown-gold upon his face. "Where?—where?"

Bodily there rose before her the cell at Silver Cross and all the sudden lights, coloured by some old secret device, that bloomed about her and her floating drapery, and this man upon his knees. With a cry she turned to the boat. Two seamen had descended in Diccon's place. It was *Vineyard* boat, it would put Bettany ashore and return, and no boatmen at the main water steps have any tale to tell. Already the boat was away from the ship. "Friend! friend!" [Pg 222]

Richard Englefield stood beside her. "He cannot return, nor help us further, Morgen!"

CHAPTER XXIV

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LONDON folk went up and down. Palace where sat a strong king, Tower where traitors lay in ward, wall maintained through the centuries upon the base the Romans laid, Aldgate, Newgate, Ludgate, Bishopsgate. London Bridge, London Stone, Baynard Castle, old Temple without the Templars, with the lawyers. Blackfriars, Whitefriars, Greyfriars, Austin Friars, Crutched Friars, crowd of monasteries and nunneries, great buildings of stone, lesser buildings of wood, churches and churches, and a good way out of town Westminster, where the king was building his great chapel with the wonderful roof. Sixty thousand, maybe seventy thousand people in London. Learned men were there, artists were there, merchants there, men of the Church, of the law, of the sword. Hidden Wickliffites, hidden Lollards were there. Astrologers and alchemists were there and men of the rosy cross. Navigators and discoverers were there, striving to show Henry what to do to balance or counter Ferdinand of Spain and Emmanuel of Portugal. Mechanics and artisans were there, many and many men of many crafts. Guilds and guilds. London of the bells, of the Wall and the Thames; London outer, London inner. [Pg 224]

Near the Old Jewry ran a narrow street where dwelled many workers in metal—ironsmith, coppersmith, silversmith, goldsmith—not the great known workers but the lesser ones that the great hired. A narrow street of poor houses, dark and noisy, or dark and still. The children were poured into the street, the women sat in the doors or clacked up and down. From some houses came always the clink of metal upon metal, from others the workers went away to other places of

work. At night they returned. Now the sun cleansed all, now the fog came dull-footed into the street and the houses and stayed.

Jankin, a worker for an armourer, opened the door of an old house. A large room, which was a workshop, and four small rooms, and out of the house had recently been carried a bier. The man who died had been an old, independent metal worker. Here still were his furnace and his tools. Whatever had been his family it was gone; apprentices who had dwelled with him were away to other masters. "But his custom would come back," said Jankin. "The whole thing for so many pounds. Something down, but the most could be worked out. 'Tis said there's a ghost in the house, and so they don't sell or rent it easily."

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The man with him said, "I rent it and buy the tools."

Jankin answered, "If you do the work you used to do, master, 't will be like planting a tree in a flowerpot!"

"No. And 'master' me no more, Jankin!"

"*Diccon Dawn*. It comes strange! But many a man and a great man is in danger. Well, you were never much in London, master, and you're changed. Eh, those days I was with you in Paris! I hear them still between hammer strokes, and they come around me like fairies. And you'll live here?"

"Aye."

"The great vase you made for the cardinal! Tall as a man, and a wreath of silver dancers! And he would have you to sup with him—and even I in the hall had venison pasty and marchpane and such wine as Saint Vulcan drinks!"

"Let us go to the owner."

Five days ago Wander Forest.

Owner of the house, heir of the dead man's furnishings, was found. Yes, yes! let and sell on easy terms, Jankin, who was responsible, answering for Richard or Diccon Dawn, and the latter's gold pieces also answering. The long June day saw the whole completed, key in the hand of Diccon Dawn, and still two hours lacking of sunset.

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Quoth Jankin, "I can get you plain work to start on."

He stood a middle-aged, surly, doggedly faithful man. "If you chose to work with me again, Jankin—?"

Jankin regarded workroom, regarded street through wide, low window. "Well, I will! I'd like to watch tree break flowerpot!"

Through the street alone, into the outer street near the river, a poor street also, filled with a great clanging noise. Men-at-arms poured by, going for some reason to the Tower. When they were passed he met a country cart, two girls, sisters, seated and a boy walking beside the horse. They had strawberries and they were crying them. "Strawberries! Strawberries! Make you young again! Strawberries!"

Down a cross street he saw the river and it was running sunset gold with beds of violets. He entered a poor house where lodged sailors' wives, and here he sought and found Morgen Fay. "Come with me! I want to show you something."

After a moment of silence she moved toward him and they went out together. They went through the street, a tall man and a woman very poorly clad, tall almost as he, and of a rich beauty. There was a great sunset this eve, bathing London and Thames and these two.

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Diccon Dawn opened the door. They entered the workshop. "This place is now mine. I do not know if you know it, but I am a smith in gold and silver."

Jankin had brought and left upon the table a loaf and cheese, a pitcher of ale and a platter heaped with strawberries. Moreover there was water provided and candles in the stand and he had swept the room. All the tools of this trade were about; at the back stood the furnace. The room faced the south and the west, and through the window streamed the glowing light. They entered, they drank a little water, then stood and faced each the other.

She spoke. "We came away upon the ship together, two mortals in the most merciless danger. 'That cannot be helped!' I thought, after the first astounding when all the blood went from my heart and my knees bent under me. The *Vineyard* shook us down together like two leaves in London. 'That cannot be helped,' I thought, 'but now the wind will drive the one north and the other south!' 'Lodge at the Old Anchor,' says *Vineyard* master. I go there, and I find you there before me. Still the wind does not rise. But now it must!"

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"You have gold," said the other. "I saw him to whom we owe more than gold give it to you. There is still lodging at the Old Anchor. Return there if you choose. I will walk with you. You shall lodge as you have lodged, and I as I have lodged. But this house is now mine. Lodge here, Morgen Fay!"

"No! Now at last we speak together! Now at last!"

"Now at last!"

She stood away from the table, he nearer window. Gold and red sunset was behind him, a gold and red pool upon the floor between them, and a rosy light struck her—face, head and throat.

It was again—it was again!

She cried, "Cell at Silver Cross, and you on your knees before heaven, and I the ape!"

He put his hands before his face. "All heaven was mine!"

"Dressed so, like the great picture, and with my fingers drawing or slackening cords that made the blue mantle to wave and lights to brighten. Oh, God—oh, God!"

"It is so, yet they brighten."

She leaned against the wall, clasping her hands above her forehead. "Through wickedness and mire and hell and silly paradises I could come at times to her garden gate and feel her within, though ever was a fence between us! Her the Blessed, Her the Mother, Mother of All! A sweet song of her, a bright picture of her is that one who moved in Bethlehem and went down into Egypt and came back to Nazareth! A little song, a little story of her is the great picture in Silver Cross. All songs and all stories have her in them! But what I did, because I thought I was in danger and because there was mire in me, was to choose to clip the gold coin and take it from where it was needed and buy perdition with it! I chose to lie and cheat, to mock and perjure, to make her small and ugly—Her the Blissful, Her the Wholly Pure, Her the Strong and Beautiful!"

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Richard Englefield turned to the window. Fiery light! The moon on the coasts of Italy! Fiery light!

Moments dropped, far apart, slowly, one after the other. Morgen Fay spoke again, in a changed tone. "I am not going back to the old life. To please myself I learned to make lace and I can make it rarely. There is here a guild of sewing women and lace-makers. A sailor's wife told me."

"Work if you will, Morgen. But do you lodge here!"

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"Why—why?"

They moved. Light seemed to pour over them, red light. A horn was blown in the street. Again she cried out. "It is heaven that you love and seek, far above this and all sinning! When I was ape I saw that, the light falling on your face!"

"Heaven, yes—heaven grown small maybe, but heaven that man understands! Give me heaven!"

She cried, "Oh, the ape has done murder!"

"No! No murder was done. I thought so at first, and indeed it might seem so, but it was not. *Diccon and Alice Dawn*. Lodge here, Morgen, lodge here!"

The fiery light, the music in the street. The brown-gold figure, the smith in gold and silver, tall, like King David in the window of Saint Ethelred. "Decide! It is for you to decide!"

All her life seemed to come around her. All her life up to the ruined farm and Wander forest, and then and for a long time Wander forest, ruined farm. And then in full, sounding and lighted, Silver Cross. Four times in all. Prison, the *Vineyard* ship and the Old Anchor. Fire-red and brown-gold and shreds and lines of blue. Horns in the street, but somewhere a lute and a viol. *Build as build you can! Vineyard* ship, Old Anchor, fiery street, house of the smith, colour and odour of roses, viol, lute. She moved, she sat down by the table and buried her face in her arms. Presently he lighted the candles. "Come, Morgen, come and see the whole of it!"

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"No!" said Morgen Fay and rose to her height. She stood up. "No! It is not little me thou art seeking—little me, little thee. Perhaps—it is great daring to say it—perhaps I also who have been ape am seeker! At any rate, I'll not give thee tinsel who needeth gold! And now I am going back to Old Anchor."

CHAPTER XXV

[Pg 232]

CLINK of metals striking together, hammer sound, sound of the wheel, sound of the fed furnace, sound of voices among metals. Diccon Dawn, worker in rich metals with Jankin to help and a boy to help Jankin. All day were voices in the long room, footsteps to and fro, sound of the craft. Richard Englefield beginning again to make beautiful things.

As he worked he saw a lace-maker. Rich and beautiful lace.

He saw Wander forest, he saw the ruined farm, he saw Middle Forest, the prison there and the house by the river.

He worked from dawn to dusk. Work,—let some ease come that way! He was artist at work and some lightening came. One must love all.

The nights at first brought him long and faintly terrible dreams. He could not remember them in sequence, but some had horror and some had beauty, and now and again his brain caught from them small, vivid pictures.

Then, one night, he saw, half he thought in dream and half not in dream, a furnace and seated within it a man with a hammer and an anvil, and on the anvil a man, and they were both the one man, only the man with the hammer was the greater in aspect.

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Work, work, and at last, after terrible dreams, pray! But no set prayers, only a wild cry upward to the man with the hammer.

The street lay baked clay under the sun, the street darkened beneath cloud. Rain poured down, cleansing and sweetening, making brooks of gutters, pattering and driving, singing the clean and the fresh, turning when out came the sun into uncounted glistening or rainbow orbs. Wind swept the street, a great bellows quickening life. Fog stole in, and the familiar became a foreigner, strange, remote, chill; surely the world was dying! Then came the sun, and the world was not dying.

He went to Old Anchor. The street of half ruinous houses was filled with a crowd of voices of sea-going and from-sea-returning folk. A woman with a child told him where to find her. She sat with bobbins in her hand, at a lace pillow. "Thou'rt pale! Weave, weave like this all day long!"

"So I buy bread. I do well."

"So wretched a place! Morgen, come to my house. Richard and Alice Dawn—brother and sister." [Pg 234]

"No—no!"

They talked, they parted. Old Anchor and Thames side and street of the smiths. That night, lying awake, suddenly he saw her life; he passed into a calm and wide and lifted moment and saw it spread from childhood. Seeing so, it appeared his own experience,—not appeared, but was. Something like a great shutter closed upon that moment, then there opened another as wide and as deep. Space, there was space! "I have standing and moving room again!"

After a week he went once more to Old Anchor. "Morgen, I better understand your life and my life. This place harms you. Come into the smiths' street and to the house where I am and where there is all room. We have need to be together and to learn together."

"No—no!"

Again he went away. The next day, suddenly, while he was turning in his hands a bar of silver, his thoughts for a moment ran gold. He was back with a certain day in his stone workroom at Silver Cross and he was making a cup for Abbot Mark to give to a bishop. The great picture was in his thoughts, the Blessed among women. There were rolling fields and the villages of Palestine. Palestine? Everywhere she was, she was everywhere! That day had been two years ago. Now again to-day he saw that everywhere she was, that she was everywhere. Everywhere! In all realms, upper and lower, afar and near, great and small. Everywhere. Who had hurt her? No one and nothing. Naught!

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Who had hurt him? No one.

That night he saw a great thorny field and two wanderers. Each had a great burden on his shoulders and each a staff. There seemed a path of pilgrimage. And now one came full upon it and pursued it and now the other. But they were not together, and there seemed a desolateness. Each fell away into the thorns and came again with toil. The mist closed all away. Again Richard Englefield prayed. "If it be in God that we are together—"

Night passed, day passed. Night again in the street of the smiths. A light through the window, a cry in the street, a bell that leaped into clanging. Fire! Fire!

Diccon Dawn hurrying on clothing, went with the rest. It seemed to be on the water side and to the eastward,—a great fire. When they came to the Thames they saw that it was a stretch of old buildings, a maze where the poor lived, together with seafaring folk. So joined were the houses that it might be one, or they might be ten. Old Anchor—Old Anchor!

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The sky was murk and flame, any face might be read; the fire-ocean leaped in breakers, roared, licked up and sucked under. All the air was sound, all the bells were ringing, all the heart was bursting. Middle Forest! A heap of fagots by town cross.

Old Anchor, and many heroic things done that night by men and women and children. But a man, a goldsmith, entered farthest, endured longest, brought forth in his arms whom he had gone to seek, out of the heart of it. "Is she dead? No! Dead with the smoke, and fire has touched her arms and her breast and her sides. Who is she? The man's sister. Where will he take her? He will carry her through the street to his house. Diccon Dawn, a goldsmith. He will nurse her there—oh, tenderly, tenderly."

It was so.

He nursed here there, oh, tenderly, and she came back to life and to strength through much suffering.

"It hurts? I would that I could take that!"

"Oh, aye, it hurts sore! But I will keep it and bear it and see it change."

"So much more I know about thee than I used to know! Thou hast courage."

"So much more I know of thee. Thou hast strength, patience. If I moan with the pain, it helps me to utter it." [Pg 237]

"See thou, it is meant for us to be together."

CLINK of metals striking together, hammer sound, sound of the wheel, sound of the fed furnace, sound of voices among metals. Up and down this was the strain of the smiths' street. Summer, autumn, winter, spring, round went the wheel.

The street lay hot under the sun, the street stretched dim and breathless under clouds. Rain poured down, freshness and song of the sea drawn into the air. The wind sang his great song of vigour. Fog came and shut the eyelids of the world, then passed away and one started as from sleep. Snow fell in small flakes or in large flakes, in few or in many. The street lay white, the roofs white.

All day voices in the long workroom, footsteps to and fro, sound of the craft, Diccon Dawn fashioning beautiful things. He had helpers, Jankin and a boy, and also his sister, Alice Dawn.

There was that which she could do and he showed her how. Those who came that way in the smiths' street saw a brother and sister, a tall pair, working together. Beside this, she toiled like all the women in the street. She kept the house clean, she bought the food and cooked it, she took ewer and pail and went to the well. To and fro, to and fro. At the well were women, in the street were women. She greeted and answered greeting. Sometimes she was drawn into a knot of talkers. But she spoke little herself. "Alice Dawn? Whence, then? The other end of England? Thy brother does fine work, they say. When didst learn to work with him? He has gotten thee a good gown and it sets thee like an earl's wife!" When she was gone they talked of her. "How old should you think? She has too still ways for me! She looks like a queen. Nay, lass, to my thinking like a quean!"

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Clink, clink, clink in the street of the smiths. Water from the well, dashing over the stones, water brought home in great ewer or pail, balanced so.

Sometimes at sunset, go, the two of them, down to the river. Sunday beyond the wall into green country, into sere autumn country, into winter country. Mix and not mix with those about them, live and let live, keeping observation as near as possible to ebb tide. Live—let live! Live—let live! In this time the herb found some growing room. Away from the smith's street they saw the able king go by with his able men, the queen with her ladies. They saw the cardinal and his train. They heard of a Lollard burned, and they went not there; of a sorceress burned and they went not there. They went somewhat silently and softly that day. So long as they ran not foul of some one's earthly ambition or his jealousy or his fear, there was going room. Once they heard a street preacher mourning that the time was so lax. A great time, an active time, but lax, lax! What was this New Learning and crying that Authority was within? Every day, somewhere, a monk broke from cloister and a priest began to babble. For the bookmen, they were writing perdition! Differers springing up like weeds, laughter rising, folk prying into vain knowledge, conceiving a thing called "freedom."

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Clink, clink, clink in the street of the smith.

Diccon and Alice Dawn. Out of blind feeling there rose, they knew not just when nor how, desire for that light which is comprehension. "Tell me—" "Tell me—"

Breadth by breadth, work of the day done, or on holidays, they unrolled the bale of old life and regarded the figures, the outer figures and the figures of thought and feeling. Each grew to be to the other a vast and deep and fortunate object of study. She would say, "When you were in France, tell me—" or "What like was thy mother?" And he, "Tell me, Morgen, of thy childhood and thy girlhood." Her childhood became his and his became hers. The like with girlhood and boyhood. They learned, orb of orb, ocean of ocean, sharing and growing richer by the sharing. "I remember" and "I remember."

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"I was a young girl, just over childness. I was dancing. My father and mother watched. I do not know if they were truly my father and mother, but I called them that. They watched me and they watched the crowd watching. They always did that. If the crowd did not grow warm, then afterwards in the booth they beat me. Oh, they beat me sore! So I always thought *into* the crowd as it were and willed it as hard as I might, 'Oh, love my dancing! Oh, love to look at me!' I thought it so hard that sometimes it seemed that the crowd and I were one, and I beat their flame upward so that they, too, were dancing and liking it. But I remember that day something beat my flame upward, too, far upward and very wide! And the very earth and world was dancing, whirling and rising like a golden ball in air, and great figures sat around, laughing and applauding and crying, 'You will do! You will do!'"

"Once in Italy, with my master Andrew the Goldsmith, I was walking alone by olive trees and blue sea. The sun was low, there was the greatest beauty! Then gold Apollo walked with me. I saw him in lines of pale gold, and I felt him a great god, calm and happy. Vulcan is for the smiths, but I changed that day to Apollo. Not that I left Vulcan, but Apollo, too. The next month I made for Andrew the Goldsmith a cup which when he looked at he said, 'Thou'rt accepted!'"

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"I remember—"

"When thou rememberest me—and I remember thee—"

"Will we come to remember all?"

Up and down, to and fro in the smiths' street. Snow was falling, great flakes, softly, smoothly. Jankin looked out of window. "Here cometh a great Blackfriar!"

He walked along the street, a big Dominican out on his travels. Richard Englefield glanced, but did not recognize him, though, a moment afterwards, as he bent to his work, there rose in mind a picture of Montjoy's hall the day he stood there, bound and gagged, like to burst in his rage and

agony. Now he laid hand on graver's tool and fell to work. He was fashioning a silver dish like a shell. Jankin took his cap and cloak and said good night, for the short day was closing.

Morgen Fay crossed the street in the snow, returning to the house from some errand. Reaching the doorstone, she stood there a little because of delight in the great white flakes. A friar spoke to her, "Eh, my sister, a white Christmas!"

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"Aye, Brother, they are coming like white butterflies."

He looked more fully upon her, "Push back your hood, woman!"

She knew him. "Ah! Middle Forest!" Her heart stood still, then she changed as she could expression of her face, roughened her voice. "Whiter than last Christmas, Brother! That was a brown one here in London."

"It was white in Middle Forest!" He stared in doubt. "What is your name?"

"Alice Dawn, Brother."

Still he stared, but she saw his uncertainty increase.

"Did ever you have a sister who called herself Morgen Fay?"

She shook her head. "I had one named Mercy."

"By Saint Thomas, likenesses are strange things!" said Friar Martin. "There's something that binds them together, if we could but get it clear!" He looked up at the smith's sign. "'Diccon Dawn. Silver and Gold.' Alice Dawn! Well, you are like, all the same, so you had better say your beads, my daughter, and keep from ill ways! *Benedicite!*"

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He went on through the snowy street.

Diccon Dawn looked up from the fluted shell. "You are as pale as the snow! What is it?"

"Is Jankin gone, and the boy? Here is Friar Martin of Saint Leofric's."

"Here!"

"In the street. He has gone by. But I know that he will return."

Englefield rose from the silver work and they stood in the dusky room. "Did he know you?" he asked.

She told.

He said, "It was chance his being here! He saw what he thought was chance likeness. It will pass from his mind."

"It may and it may not. Will there be raised a cry against me—against us? Look!"

Hidden themselves, they looked through the window. Other side the street, in the falling snow, stood Friar Martin, intent upon the goldsmith's house and sign. A man going by was stopped and questioned. Alone once more, the friar gazed, dubitated, drew his picture. Diccon? A Richard made silver dishes for Abbot Mark. June. He came into this house in June, and none in these parts had known him before. And an Alice Dawn like as a twin to Morgen Fay!

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The friar made a movement. "*If this be so, what gain to Saint Leofric?*" But first it was to tell beyond peradventure of a doubt if it were so! He crossed the smith's street and with his staff knocked upon the door of Diccon Dawn.

"Shalt open to him?"

"If I do he may find likeness. If I do not—"

They stood in the dusky place, a long room with the red fire eye of the small furnace dully winking, with the snow falling, falling. The friar knocked again. "If we do not answer, then surely will he say, 'Witch's house!'"

Englefield moved toward the door, but Friar Martin, impatient and bold, did not wait, but lifting the latch, pushed inward. It was dusk, beyond seeing clearly.

"Are you the smith?"

"Aye, Brother. Can I serve you?"

"I would see your work. But I cannot do so without light."

"Work hour and shop hour are over. Best come to-morrow."

"To-morrow we may all be dead. Canst not light candle?"

"Aye, I can." He took a brand from the fire and suited action to word. "There is not much here." He held the candle to the silver shell, but Friar Martin, who helped himself through life, shot out his hand and took the taper and held it to the smith. Diccon Dawn stood in the light and formed face of London smith who knew that in these later days friars upon their travels were what they were and must be taken so. They had their whims!

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But Friar Martin said, "Did ever you wander by a stream called Wander? Do you know a town named Middle Forest, and the Abbey of Silver Cross?"

Diccon Dawn shook his head. "I stick to my work, Brother. It's night and snowing fast!"

Light—light! It seemed to blaze around. "Didst never make silver dishes for abbots?"

"No. I have a humbler trade. It nears curfew, Brother!"

"I met a woman upon your doorstep. Your wife or perhaps your sister?"

"My sister,—Curfew, Brother!"

The other was thinking, "I do not yet know wholly, but I guess, I guess!" He said aloud, "Do smiths have visions? Doth heaven ever open in this street?"

"All streets are ways to that. Curfew, Brother!"

It was dusk save for the one taper and the fire eye in the back of the room. The friar was almost a giant, but the smith, too, was a strong man, and somewhere in the house dwelled a witch! He had matter enough to turn and twist this way and that, during the night, preparing the vial of wrath. "Aye, it is late! I will go, having seen your silver work!"

He went. The street was snowy. His great sandalled foot made no sound. Going, a little chime rang in his brain. "I see the gain of Saint Leofric! I see the gain of Saint Leofric!"

In the dusky room the two moved closer together. "Thy danger." "Thine!" "Ah, our danger!"

"Act, then!" He looked from the window. "Out of gate ere it is quite night!"

They had warm mantles, good shoes. They made a packet of food, took coin from the strong box. Englefield wrote a short letter and placed it where Jankin should find it the first thing coming in, in the morning,—find it, read it and burn it, though there was naught in it that could harm Jankin. Jankin and the boy had had their wage paid that day. Out quietly into the deep twilight, the snow falling.

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CHAPTER XXVII

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A cot at the side of a wood, and a woodchopper and his sister who gathered faggots. The owner of the wood employing them, a miserly old man in a manor house, kept little company, stirred little abroad, neither hunted nor hawked. They had the still wood, the small cot. Sometimes the steward of the place, sometimes a fellow servant dropped in upon them, but by no means every day. Sound of axe, sound of falling tree, sound of breaking branch and dead leaves underfoot and of March wind. Hours of toil, then the cot, a fire on the hearth and homely fare.

Before he became smith he had been lad of the farm. A cot like this, work like this, was but an old chime chiming again. She had had a hardy, difficult childhood. It rose again upon her at the ruined farm, in Wander forest. Life of the hand, life of the arm and shoulder was not new; it was old.

Life of the passions; that was old.

Life of the awakening mind—life of the slowly kindling soul—life passing away from old life—that had a divine newness.

The wind murmured and sought, and brought boughs to strike against wall and roof. Fire burned on the hearth, light and shadow went around the room. Some one knocked, then opened the door. "I am the charcoal burner, I've got a child here who is ill!"

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He had him in his arms a thin and gasping six-year-old.

"It's his throat, and he's burning in this cold wind! He'll choke to death."

They laid him on a bed. The charcoal burner was big and black with a black that brushed off. "What can ye do to help?"

They helped, but Morgen Fay the most, for she took the child upon her knees and with long, fine fingers drew from his throat the stuff that choked. Through the night she crooned to him, comforted him, and at the dawn they wiled him to take a little broth that Richard made, after which he slept, still in her arms.

"Leave him here till he is well."

"I do not mind, if you do not mind. He will give ye a lot of trouble."

"Leave him!"

They looked after this boy and he became a great light and play to them. When he was better they took him with them, wrapped in a mantle, into the wood and sat him in the sunshine. Diccon Dawn felled a tree and hewed it into logs for the manor house, Alice Dawn brought faggots, heaping together for the manor cart. When they must rest they sat in the sun with the boy, and the great wind rushed and laughed and clattered in the wood.

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"Tell me a story!" said the boy. Richard told saint's legend, Christ-child story.

"Now you tell one!" Morgen told the story of the Great Good Elf.

Afterwards Richard said, "We could not have told those stories if we were not getting well."

In the cot at night, in the firelight, again the boy. "Tell me a story—tell me a story!"

"All our lives to make these stories. All our lives of us all!"

"All!"

The child slept, the little flame sang, bough of tree struck the cot. They sat and seemed to look

down and seemed to look up a road that went forever.

Wild flowers appeared. The child gathered them. Morgen wore a knot at her bosom, Richard one in his cap. "Tell me a story—tell me a story!"

The charcoal burner came and took away his son. He gave rude thanks and said that henceforth they were friends. They missed the lad until they found that they had him still.

The wind pushed the high cloud ships and certain trees put on their earliest touch of green. They rested in the wood from chopping and gathering, and seated upon the felled tree, smelled the fragrance of the world. [Pg 251]

"Tell me a story—tell me a story—"

Again within the cot, and the wind fell at purple twilight, then rose again roaring, and the flame bent this way and bent that. Quiet together—still together.

"What is fire?"

"What is beauty?"

"What is music?"

April air, April wood. Rang the axe, bent and straightened the faggot gatherer. Showers came up, but thick fir trees gave shelter. Rain stopped. Being upon a little eminence in the wood they saw the great bow, the seven-coloured bridge.

April rain, April greenery, April sunshine. The axe rang, the tree fell. They rested from toil, leaning against the sunken mass, and waiting so, became aware of the movement of horses, coming nearer through the wood, and presently of voices. Sit quietly behind branches of felled tree, and let all go by, at a little distance, five or six of them!

But they came nearer and nearer, brushing through the wood, a hawking party from a great house the other side a line of low hills, cutting off a distance by leaving the road and crossing this piece of earth. Nearer and nearer, and presently it was seen that they would pass the felled tree. The woodchopper and the faggot gatherer sat still. [Pg 252]

A big man, no longer young, with a beak of a nose and a waggish yet formidable mouth, a quite young man and a young woman, and the other two falconer and helper, carrying the hawks. They would go pacing by. But the big man always spoke, sitting his big horse, to woodchoppers and ditchers and thatchers, charcoal burners and the like! It was as though one stopped to observe a robin or wren or blackbird. "Cousin bird, what have you to say to the so-much-more-than-bird observing you?" So now he drew rein and gave greeting.

"Hey, woodchopper, a fine day for felling!"

"Aye, it is, your honour!"

"You fell for old Master Cuddington? He should stir out, he should go hawking! Is your mate there weeping or ugly that she sits turned away, and her face in her hand?"

"It is her way. She means nothing."

"She seems a fine lass—should not be in the dumps! Hey, my girl!—No?"

"*Robins and wrens must not be perverse,*" the big man said sharply. "Lift your head, woman, or I shall think you're hiding the plague!" [Pg 253]

She turned upon him a twisted face. Brown she was and dressed after another fashion than on a supper time in Middle Forest when the June eve was cool and a fire crinkled on the hearth, and Ailsa brought more wine, and Robert Somerville said, "Morgen Fay—and hath she not look of the name?" Brown and dressed poorly and changed, and yet Sir Humphrey Somerville stared.

"I've seen you before, but where? Oh, now I know where! Well, and is it so!"

He laughed, he seemed about to descend from his horse and enter into talk, and then to bethink himself, looking sidewise at his daughter and her lover. At last it was, within himself, "I'll think a while and come quietly again. To-morrow, aye, to-morrow!" Aloud he said, "Flower garden, and something about a witch—but all women are witches! And so you live now on this side of the hills? And now I remember me something of a letter from my cousin, and a great trouble you were in!"

He looked from her to Richard Englefield, but having no knowledge there, saw only a brown-gold woodchopper. Taking a noble from his pouch he spun it down upon the ground between them. "Old Cuddington pays poorly. Seest it? Vanish not between to-day and to-morrow, Egyptian!" [Pg 254]

He backed his big horse; he and his daughter and her lover and the men with the hawks rode on through the wood. Drooping branches came between; they were hidden, they were gone.

"He thinks that I could not nor would. But I can and do!"

She stood. "It is Somerville's cousin. Once I feasted him in the house by the river."

They looked deep into the deep wood, they looked to the cot from which came a tranquil blue feather of smoke. Then said Englefield, "It is naught but travel again! Beyond this wood runs the wold for a long way, then we drop to the sea and to fishing villages. Come, then! The day is good, the night is starry."

"Two Egyptians over the wold."

"We have been together, I think, upon many wolds, in woods and havens, in Egypt and elsewhere. Come then, Morgen!"

They left Master Cuddington's axe and cords and cot and furnishing. They took a loaf that she had baked and a bundle of clothing and what coins were left from the smiths' street, and at sunset fared forth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

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It stretched afar, the great wold. They were out upon it under the moon. All wildness, all loneliness! If there were a track it was a faint one. The ground rolled; all opened to the sky, a little lower and a little higher; around and above was immensity sewn with points of significance. They found bushes to shelter them from the murmuring and seeking wind and slept deeply. The night turned toward day. Are you awake?—Aye!

In the east shone the palest light. Huge lay the wold, and the sky was night save for that far illuming. Cool hung the air and still, still, still.

The wold began to colour. They ate of their loaf and took up their bundle and trudged again. April in the world. They were well together, with a great natural fitness. It did not matter if they talked or if they walked a long way in silence. One was to the other; they accorded. Once he said, "I have no knowledge how old we are. This wold is old, our earliest forefathers trod it, but we were there!"

"Aye! They and ourselves and all."

All lonely was the wold and yet it was filled. The noon sun turned it gold. They felt a light warmth, a slight wind, a waving fragrance, a multitudinous fine sounding. They rested; they went on again.

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A dog came limping toward them, yelping, in trouble. His paw was hurt, half crushed, apparently, by some rolling, falling mass. Just here lay hollow land, with the smallest stream gliding through. Englefield bathed the paw, set it right, and they tore cloth and bound it up. The dog's wagging tail and his eyes said, "Friends! I am glad you came!" For a time he kept with them, but his home was over the wold, and with a final wag of the tail and lick of the hand, he left them. They watched him growing smaller and smaller till he disappeared behind a wavelet of earth.

The wold hereabouts was wavy, ridged. They followed the thread of water that had by it a faint path. Presently it ran beneath a high bank, a steep, escarped hill. An uprooted tree caught their eye, then a great heaped disorder of raw earth. "Look!" said Englefield. "The hillside has caved and fallen. It was that that caught the dog."

The path was covered. They must cross the streamlet and go around the broken mass. They had almost cleared it when they saw over the thread of water a human figure, half buried, unconscious.

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They worked until he was free. A leg was broken, forehead bleeding from a great cut. They dashed water upon him and he sighed and opened his eyes, a young man roughly dressed, with the seeming of fisherman or sailor. "The hill fell! I was thinking of gaffer and gammer that I was going to see and the hill fell!"

"Was there any one else?"

"No. 'Tis a lonely place—a great wold. There was a dog running about—not mine. I'm thankful to ye, but I think my leg's broken, and my head is singing, singing."

"Do you know the wold? Where is the house you were going to?"

"It's Gaffer Garrow, the shepherd. There's the wold hostel, too—the Good Man. But it's not a good inn—they be robbers! My head is singing."

"Let's see if canst stand. Now arms about shoulders. So!"

Half carrying him, they followed the stream. When he failed, Englefield carried him outright. So they went, very slowly, down the hollow land, a long way, until they saw Gaffer Garrow's furze heap and hut. An old man and woman and a shepherd lad and a girl came forth to meet them. "Alack and alack, and Jack, what's happened?"

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Diccon Dawn, it seemed, could set a bone. When it was done and the sailor on his straw bed, with gaffer and gammer and younger brother and sister to his hand, Diccon and Alice Dawn went on over the wold. The young girl walked a little way with them to show the way, seeing that they were going to the sea. "You will come to the Good Man, but I would not lodge there. Then you will come to three trees, then will be wold a long way, then you will smell the sea."

At turning, she said. "Our Jack might have died there, earth over him! Our Lady must have been walking before you. I see Her sometimes in the even, walking the wold."

They walked it, the girl returning to her hut, and they seemed to be alone, except for Silver Cross rising.

The Good Man topped a low wave of the April earth. They saw it against cool, blue sky, with an ash and an aspen pricked out above either end. Men and women were in the doorway. Richard

Englefield and Morgen Fay went by, though the host called to them and an urchin came running after. "Hey! This be the Good Man, the only hostel this half of wold!"

Diccon Dawn shook his head. "We are in haste."

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"I make guess that ye have not the reckoning!" The urchin grinned, threw dry turf and pebble against them and ran away.

Silence came down around them and upon them and within them. The sun was westering, the wold growing purple. The stillness became both fine and vast, a permeating and encircling hush within the hush. *Wait—wait—wait!* Out of it or into it pushed shadowy sorrows, ancient poignancies. The wold grew peopled with these.

The sun descended. The horizon rose up and took it; a chill and mournful light spread evenly, then withdrew, evenly, slowly. It was dusk. The wold was spectral; all was spectral.

They came to a ring of ancient stones, placed there long ago by long-ago inhabitants of that island and now grown about with whin and thorn and furze. They like the wold, seemed now eternal, now going away, fading away. It was to rest here and sleep here; it was the best place. They lay down. There was silence, and still—faint, faint, in dark lines and pallid silver lines—rose Silver Cross!

Full night, and descending and climbing stars. Then the moon, silver, great, mounting above the clean, sweeping wold-line, silvering the wold, silvering all. Now the air was stillness wholly, and now there came a sighing. Sleep, one must sleep, weary enough with travelling! Yet sleep was not in the wold, with all else that was there.

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From above—from above—oh, from above come help!

But it seemed there was only the wold and the air and the moon. Only somehow sorrow.

Deep in the night he perceived that Morgen Fay had risen from where she was lying by a great stone and had moved without the ring. Presently he saw her at some distance, standing in the open wold, very still, regarding the heavens, then moving slowly, walking beneath the moon. A light wave of the wold hid her from his sight. A momentary dart of fear and loneliness went through him, as though the wold had taken her, as though she would go on forever that way and he this. But no; nothing would come of that, nothing would come that way! No—no! They were together, together in this sadness of the wold, strangely together in this separateness, together in the very hauntings and hostilities of the past; together on this wold, this present night—together now—together to-morrow and the next day and the day after, together though walls of the night and the moonlight, or of the day and the sunlight were between their bodies.

The profound, the starry night. All the stars, all the moons and the earths, aspects and moods of a Mighty One! Power, Wisdom, Goodness, Beauty.—

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Richard Englefield's body sat still as a stone. Most is done, seen and felt in a moment. The vastest takes no time, but the placing of that moment took time. The wold changed, the night and day, the here and there, the now and then, the you and I, all the opposites.

At last he rose and moved out upon the wold. He did not know which way Morgen had gone, but she was here, as he was here. He stood with a deep and quiet heart, looking forth over the lonely and happy wold. The moon shone, a light and musical wind rose and fell. He was aware of an immense tranquility with something of awe running through like a clean fragrance, like myrrh. It was so still, it was so wide and deep and high.

He turned slightly, as though a hand had drawn him. He saw on the wold the great picture, the Blessed among women.

Eyes ceased in light. Other eyes opened.

Out of the quiet dark came Morgen Fay and kneeled beside him. "Let me tell—for one instant—ah, the instant!—I saw us as the All. I saw thee in light, and then I saw us as the All."

CHAPTER XXIX

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It was still the wold when under pale fine sunshine they came to a smithy, rude and poor, set beneath a long wave, where a road went by. Lonely was the wold, lonely and lonely, yet folk did travel across it. Here, too, horses must be shod and cart and wagon mended, though not many nor often. But the place seemed dilapidated, the smith an old man. He could not do, he said, what was needed to be done. Custom, if you could call it custom, was dwindling; he needed a helper. He looked at Englefield and said that he seemed a strong fellow now! "What might be your name?"

They had changed names when they left Master Cuddington, that seeming wiser. "Godfrey the smith, and this is Joan."

"Smith, now! Can you do this—and this?"

A middle aged woman called from the hut that adjoined. "Get them to stay, father, get them to stay! There be pilgrims a-horseback, coming by to-morrow!"

"Where would we dwell?"

The old man had a gnomish, elfin humour. "There's a great empty palace yonder, waiting king and queen!" He pointed with a shaking forefinger to a hut a hundred yards away, close to the earth wave that rose in pale gold, green and purple and held it as in a cup. Sky hung a deep and serene blue, sunshine was sifted gold, spring flowerets bloomed on the wold and all the bees in the land were humming there. Lonely and could be well loved, the great wold! Godfrey the smith looked to Joan.

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"Aye, I will it if you will it!"

Great wold and day and night, and the smithy with the older and the younger smith, and the lubberly boy that helped, and the few travellers and comers-by. Work done with satisfaction and the wold to rest in, walk in, by times. Hut of the old man and his daughter and the lubberly boy, hut of Joan and Godfrey, Emmy was the daughter's name and she had second sight.

She took to Joan. "You're eternal. He's eternal, too. And so am I. Eternity—Eternity—Eternity." She went off upon the word into her own visions.

May and June. "And it was a good day when you came!" quoth the old man in his throaty, under-earth voice. "Came to the palace, king smith and queen lace-woman!"

July, and the wold very rich, and the sunshine strong and the starry nights soft, immense, musing, brooding, tender. The wold was a world, away in space from sister worlds, yet throwing bridges across, invisible as spider's thread in sunshine. July—August. Gold on the wold, gold in the sky, gold and sapphire.

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September. Said Emmy, "I see some one coming, riding a bay horse."

They were walking the wold. "Maybe 'tis to-morrow," said Emmy, "maybe next day, maybe next week. I cannot see his face but he means to ride to the smithy on great wold."

The day was golden, golden September. Everything spread wider, everything lifted higher. All things had their roots down, down, but all things climbed and broadened, inviting the air and the wind and the sun.

"Ah, warmth in light! Ah, light in warmth!"

"Aye, aye!" said Emmy. "The world's no so bad if you take it large."

Back in a great amber twilight to smithy and huts.

In the morning anvil and iron and hammer. Glow of fire, sweeping past of wold wind. A man on a bay horse, a man behind him riding a black mare, came to the smithy. Richard Englefield, looking up, met full the eyes of Somerville.

He knew him, remembering him with Abbot Mark, coming to view him at work, at Silver Cross. He felt in his hands again a silver bowl, around it silver vine leaves. Somerville drew his breath and moistened his lips, then smiled with oddly twitching face. "Brother Richard—"

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"I am Richard Englefield, and here on the wold Godfrey the smith."

"When you were woodchopper, seven leagues yonder, it was Diccon Dawn."

"Aye, so."

"There was Alice Dawn, saith my cousin. Diccon and Alice Dawn. Is she here?"

Englefield, standing, looked afar over wold and then into the vast, quiet blue sky. "Yes. Leave horse and man and come with us to the hill yonder."

A tiny stream ran by the smithy. He kneeled and laved his face and hands and arms, dried them, and moved with Somerville, dismounted, toward the hut under gold and purple waves of the wold.

"Morgen!"

She came forth. Wold went into mist, reeled and was Wander forest and ruined farm. Wander forest, ruined farm, Robert Somerville.

"Morgen—Morgen Fay!"

The wold came back, wold and sky and Richard the smith. More than that. There came, as it were, a blue mantle around her; she felt an arm, a breast, a face looking down, great as the sky and the earth, supernally fair and filled with supernal love. "O Mother, All-Mother!"

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Richard was speaking, quickly, "Let us go, Morgen, we three, to the hilltop and talk together there."

They went, climbing the earth-wave, to a level of grass and heath whence one saw all the wold rippling afar. "Sit down—sit down!" The sun shone, the wind went careering. Who will speak first? They let Somerville do that, who sat with eyes now on Morgen and now on gold specks afar in the wold. "Not-change and change—and which is the great miracle perchance the Saints know! I seem to know the whence, Morgen, but as to the where and the whither—"

She said, "Listen, Somerville! There was a Morgen, there is a Morgen, there will be a Morgen. 'There will be' is the ruler. Say that I died by fire but that I live again pardoned!"

He regarded her. A mist came over his eyes, the odd, grimacing face worked. Up went a hand to cover it, then dropped. "Ah, Morgen Fay, I, too, perchance, must do some dying! I had to come to find you, but you are safe and safe enough, for all my finding!"

She said, "Aye, Rob, do I not know that of you? Tell me, have you heard aught of Ailsa?"

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No, he had not. But he told them this and that of Middle Forest and Wander vale. Thomas Bettany? He was well and was wedding young Cecily Danewood. Middle Forest, Castle, Saint Leofric, Silver Cross and Westforest. Montjoy, having made one pilgrimage, was now, they said, gone another.

The wold rolled afar, sun shone, wind breathed. Blue sky had cloud mountains. Blue sea, pearl mountains, and that invisible that held and was both, and rising with both surpassed. The wind sang, the fragrance ran.

Richard Englefield told of his life. Boyhood and the goldsmith, France and Italy, the tall houses, the seeking, the priest, Silver Cross. "Now thine, Somerville!"

Awhile ago Somerville would have thought this impossible, but now, quietly reminiscently, he spread out for himself and for them Somerville's life, dark and light. And then there spoke Morgen Fay. The clean wind, the dry light, went about the hill.

"And all was changing all the time, changing and waking and learning, through earth and air and water and fire! And now it begins to know that it wakes and learns—and that is all, Rob—and now are we all born again."

"Born again," said Somerville? "Is that possible?"

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"It has happened." Englefield was speaking. "And now Middle Forest is dear again, and Silver Cross is dear again, and street of the smiths is dear, and Cuddington wood and this wold. And you and me and Morgen and Emmy yonder, and all."

"Is Abbot Mark dear? And is Prior Matthew, too?"

Godfrey the smith laughed. "Why, when they wish it we can talk together, being after all one!"

"It is true we talk together," said Somerville, "and I feel no anger against you, and you seem to have none against me."

"I have none. And beautiful is this day and restful, here on the hill top. And God is in the world and here."

The sun stood at noon. Clean air, dry air, autumn wealth and rest, and beyond the autumn, across the winter, spring,—ever higher, ever richer, ever with more music! They left the hill and came to smithy and huts. They gave Somerville and his man bread and ale, and then the three said farewell.

Somerville on his bay horse rode over the wold. Old habit as he rode, horses' hoofs beating so, brought forth rhythm and words.

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"Who can tell
The road he's led?
The glint of gold—
In each that worth—
That's here, that's there,
That vanisheth!
'It ne'er had birth!
Then comes again,
Daffodil from winter earth.
Star shining out, when storm lies dead!"

CHAPTER XXX

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THE wold hung November grey. "Snow in that cloud," quoth the old smith. "Elf of the world wants a white flower!"

"Snowy night a year ago!" said Morgen Fay.

Emmy spoke. "A many are coming by, hurrying, for they want to get across the wold before air is white and ground is white."

So the smiths somewhat looked for many, but that day passed and the night and part of the next day and none came. Snow, too, held off. Sky pallid grey, earth grey, and all unearthly still. Then a packman came by, going from a town south of the wold to a town north of it, and he had news. He had ridden ahead of thirty who would stop for rest at the Good Man. "Prior and his monks and so many lay brothers stoutly armed and mounted. Great church folk changing visits."

"Beyond-Wold Abbey?"

"Aye, going there. Have come a long way, they say, stopping at friaries and castles. They're Blackfriars. Ah, it is policy for men to visit now and then, getting away from home, changing stories and learning a bit! Prior's a man like the rest of us! Tail man told me when I walked beside him a bit. They've got a saint's bone with them, and a many poor souls have been healed in this town and that castle."

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"What like is the prior?"

"Tall bent man, thin as paper, very pale, with black eyes."

"That is not Westforest!" said Godfrey the smith, and looked over the grey wold to see if they were coming.

Morgen answered, "No, not Prior Matthew. But it hath a sound of another I have seen going down High Street and by town cross."

"Saint Leofric's Friary," said the packman. "Other side England. Aye, bone of Saint Leofric. Prior Hugh."

Through grey air a flake fell, then another and another. "Thirty with him, do you say? Is there by chance a giant of a friar—you could not miss him if he were there—Friar Martin?"

"Oh, aye, I think I saw him," said the packman. "There was a huge brother bestriding the strongest horse! Well, I say, say I, black friars, white friars, grey friars and brown friars are at times ill as they're sung, and at times good as they're sung, and most times in between the two! But I say for the most part England's had good of them. In the most and for the long run!"

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He was speaking to the brown-gold smith. That one agreed with him. "I think so, too, brother—though I've had my buffets—for the most part and in the long run!"

The packman had his pony shod and was ready to depart. Snowflakes were few; he would reach the end of the wold, the sea and his small haven before night. He looked at the gold-brown smith, hesitated, then, "Come ye apart for a word!" They moved out under the hill. "You've got a fair woman with you. Do you remember a carter yesterday morn?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, he saith at the Good Man that he saw you in London, you and the woman there, though you did not see him. He saith a black friar raised that quarter of London against you and the woman, but especially the woman for she was a sorceress. But when they came to the house and beat in the door, you were gone, the two of you. There was one Jankin, but he knew naught. Well, Harry the carter told all that at the Good Man yestereve. I thought you might like to know. I might not have told, but she hath a great look of a sister of mine who's dead. It is easy to cry sorcery, and hard to down the cry!"

"Aye, it is. Take our thanks, friend!"

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The packman mounted his pony and went away through the grey day, the few flakes of snow.

"Are you going, too?" asked Emmy. "I see you over wold and you do not come back. But I wish you to come back and I must weep!"

"We are pilgrims—we cannot stay! Some one has set us a pilgrimage."

In an hour they had parted with the old smith and with Emmy. Englefield and Morgen Fay went over the wold, not by the road, but by a shepherds' path, running hereabouts over and between low hills. From the first of these they looked back. They could see, almost closely, the smithy and the hut under the hill. They had loved this place, loved the wold.

"Love it still and take it with us! So I have the rose tree and Ailsa and the garden. All things we love go with us, nor can we ever help that."

"So who loveth most hath most treasure!"

They looked back to the smithy and then to the road that ran almost beneath them on this hill top. Now they could see approaching a mounted company, thirty at least, still a good way off but growing larger with a steady pacing movement.

"Let us watch. They do not dream we are here. Move yonder and the furze will hide."

Prior Hugh of Saint Leofric, with him a dozen monks and the rest stout lay Brothers, rode thoughtfully, mounted on his white mule. Out of grey day, athwart the gathering snow, pictures formed for him. The man and woman above him, hidden on the hill brow, also saw pictures, vivid, defined, one after the other. Friar Martin, huge on huge horse, looked upward as he passed. They saw his great tanned face, his black beard wagging ever for Saint Leofric. Loyalties—loyalties!

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There passed Prior Hugh and his following. Reaching the smithy they halted and dismounted.

Richard Englefield and Morgen Fay went on over the wold, taking faint, broken paths of shepherds. The sky was grey and came close, they saw not a living thing on the wold before them, the flakes began to fall a little more thickly. An hour passed, and now they talked together and now they were silent.

Down came the flakes; the flakes came down. Now they were white and many, steadily, steadily falling. Before long they seemed to quicken, they became a soft vast multitude, they hid as with curtains the wold all around.

"This is the path?"

"Aye, but there will be a great snow."

They walked as fast as they might, but the path ran up and down or wound in the trough of the low waves of whitened earth. They could not eat the leagues. And ever the snow came faster. "Three hours yet of daylight. Time enough to reach Brighthaven. But if the snow covers the path—"

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The snow covered it. An hour went by.

"We have all the wold for path! But eastward there lies the sea. And by my reckoning Grey Farm should be near."

"The snow cometh so we cannot be sure—"

"Art warm?"

"Aye."

Another hour and it was dusk and the snow came steadily, hugely, and where was sea or east or west or north or south could no longer be told with assurance. No house or hut, and now at last cold, great cold and weariness.

"Grey Farm may be yonder or yonder, but we cannot see. Lost is but lost—never forever lost!"

Night! Cold now and ever falling snow, and no path or all path. No light, no shape other than the wold shape and the snow shape and the night shape.

"Art very weary?"

"Yes, weary!"

"If we lie down here and sleep it will be to part with life. Let us try awhile longer. Just a fold of land may keep from us Grey Farm light." [Pg 276]

They tried, but no house or light arose. Only they heard something after a time.

"Hark to that! What is it?"

"It is the sea!"

It came to sound louder. No lights of haven, nor could they have seen them, perhaps, behind the great moving veils and under woldside and cliff.

"I fear to go farther this way for the cliffs! We may fall—"

"It roars, the sea, and there are lights in my eyes and a singing afar. I must lie down. I cannot go farther."

"A little more—a little more. See! I can help thee so."

"Ah, I love thee! But I cannot—Do you not hear music playing?"

"Here are bushes bent from the sea. Creep under—so! There—now if we die we die together."

The falling, falling, falling snow, and at the base of rock the sounding sea.

"What art thou doing? Take thy cloak again!"

"No, I am warm, warming thee."

The snow fell ceaselessly.

"I am not afraid nor suffering now. No fear, no pain! And thou hast none?" [Pg 277]

"None!"

Snow falling—snow falling. The great sea sounding and sounding.

"Richard, there are violets. It is Wander forest, but so changed."

In the night the snow ceased to fall. Dawn came like a white rose, the shredded petals covering all the earth.

A small and humble House of Carmelites, set upon a cliff a league from Brighthaven, kept a goodly habit. After tempest, after snow on wold, it sent out so many Brothers seeking if there were any harmed. So on this morning as of fine white wool these at last came upon the cliff brow and to a line of furze bushes mounded white. They would have passed them by, for all the earth was heaped with snow and no footprint anywhere save their own deep ones. But a young Brother saw a bit of blue mantle. "Oh, here!"

With their hands they beat away the snow and with their arms they lifted. The man and woman moved feebly. They lived, though in an hour, maybe, they would not have lived. The Brothers bore them to the House and made for them warmth and cheer. Life flowed again, red came to the lip, light to the eyes, strength to the frame. They rested through that day and night in the guest house of the monastery. [Pg 278]

The Prior was a saintly man, big of frame, simple and wise. The second morning the two stood before him to give him thanks and say farewell. He looked at them somewhat long before speaking. "You are goodly to look upon," he said. "I see that you have been through much and will go through more before heaven is complete. But you are bound for heaven and Who dwells therein. Take and give blessing!"

The wold was silver, the sea blue, the sky blue crystal. The road shown, they went forth from the Carmelites to come to Brighthaven. They walked hand in hand. "How beautiful is the world!"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE Lord of Montjoy returned from his second and greater pilgrimage. This time he had seen

Jerusalem. He was palmer. Bit of palm was wrought into his sleeve, stitched into his hat. The Lady of Montjoy held his castle for him, his son-in-law, young Isabel's baron, giving advice across five leagues. Montjoy had been gone nigh three years, for once, taken prisoner by the Turks, he had been held three months in noisome prison, and once fever had taken him captive, and once shipwreck and a desert strand had held him long. Now, returning, he had come through Italy and through France, alone and afoot, for that was his pilgrimage. Now he moved across Brittany. There were many shrines in Brittany, and it held him while he went from the one to the other. But he neared the sea coast and the port where he would take ship for England.

A slight dark man with earnest seeking eyes, wrapped in palmer's grey with palmer's hat and staff and scrip, walked a Brittany road, and pictures of his travels walked with him. They were many, as though a lifetime had been spent between castle of Montjoy and Jerusalem wall and back again. So many that they must come like a breadth of the earth between him and the pictures of three years gone, or five years gone, or more. That was true, but now and then breadth of earth became cloud merely; cloud parted, and there were ancient pictures fresh again.

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Now for days they were English pictures. "Because I am nearing home! They come out to meet and greet me." But while they were clear they came also into company of later pictures. His castle knew thousand other castles, his town multitude of other towns; Silver Cross and Westforest many and many abbeys and priories. And the palmer, having grown, could in a measure hold all together and look out upon and through them. So with the palmer's whole life.

Montjoy travelled seaward. The day was bright and Brittany had to him a flavour of home. Moreover at dawn had come Isabel. She seemed now to float by his side, her feet just above the grey road. Twice it had been so in Italy, thrice in the Holy Land. It had been a small thought, that holding her confined to castle there above Middle Forest, or to church of Silver Cross where lay only her old robe, or to this or that faint ring in time! She was everywhere and every time. She was living, she was with him, here, now!

"For I, too, change into that space and time," thought Montjoy.

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Silver Cross, when he came to look at it, still was dear. He regarded it tranquilly within and without. There sat Mark, yonder moved the Brothers. The church filled, they chanted, windows became sheets of jewels, the great picture glowed, light washed the sculptured tomb beneath which lay, sunken into earth, that which was not Isabel. Here moved her spirit, near him on Brittany road—enough, enough of her spirit to make Promise into a glowing rose!

Light washed Silver Cross that was five hundred years old and might have five hundred more to live. In a thousand years there was good and evil, but more good than evil. Even had that strange tale of five years ago been found to have in it some truth—had there been canker—still, still, not always had there been canker, nor would there be always! Canker was never the last word. If there had been canker there at Silver Cross, or more or less? He did not know, he could not tell if it were so. His mind, pondering long, had seen certain things—but he did not know. He must let it alone and, anyhow, go a pilgrimage.

Almost five years. The palmer had grown. He saw them now in a pattern, Silver Cross and Saint Leofric and Westforest. Then light came through the pattern and melted all into a stronger and finer thing. Just as Isabel moved more golden, finer, more real, for all that when he put forth hand, hand did not touch. Spirit touched. Just as in Bethlehem of Judea, one starlight night, he had become aware that if the kingdom of Heaven was within, then was within also the Supernal Mother and Bride, within also the Christ.

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Montjoy, a grey figure, walked the grey road and thought he heard the sea. It was early morn, and a rose stole into the world. As he walked the pictures lifted, stood and passed.

He had grown so that without any conscience pang at all he was glad that Morgen Fay had not been burned there by town cross. They had lighted the fagot pile, anyhow, for perchance it might make her suffer, the witch flown away with the demon! It had burned away in smoke and flame, but now for long he knew it had not harmed her. Harming and healing were not just as men thought them! Morgen Fay. Where was she? He saw her behind circumstance, like Isabel, like the great picture, like herself, like Morgen Fay. And Morgen Fay, neither, had been just as he thought her. Seeing further he might see her still more really, as he now saw Montjoy and Silver Cross and all things else more really.

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The sea sounded, and he came over white road to sight of it. Below lay a fishing village; he saw the nets and the boats. A small, poor place it was, but it had the salt of the sea and the rose of the morning. Montjoy, coming down to it, found himself on clean sand and the tide coming in. Certain boats were up and away, he saw their deep-coloured sails standing out between sand and horizon. Others for reasons bided this day in haven. Two or three were drawn upon the beach, and here, too, above the tide a new boat was making. About this was gathered a small crowd of folk, perhaps a score in all. As Montjoy came near he saw that they were listening to one who spoke, standing upon the sand among the shavings and chips, underneath the clean bowsprit. Some were from other boat or from work upon the nets or from the line of houses. A score, perhaps, seated and standing, eyes turned to the speaker.

The sea, ancient, youthful, made her everlasting song. Air breathed salt and fresh, colour was rife. Boats, houses, the incoming wave, the line of low cliff, fell into picture. Montjoy has seen so many! Could he have painted he might paint forever and only begin.

He heard a voice speaking, a voice with quality, that somehow stirred the pictures. They trembled, pushed slightly by others behind. "Love and understand! Lay hold where you can,

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begin where you will!"

He asked a woman leaning against a boat near the new boat. "Who is it?"

"It is the smith Richard. He dwelleth in town a league away, but at times he cometh this way."

"Is he preaching?"

"No. But he talketh to us at times."

"He uses your tongue well, but still I would say—"

"Aye, he comes from over the water."

Montjoy moved into the ring of fisher folk. A great flapping hat of palmer shadowed his face. Those about saw straying pilgrim and gave him room.

Richard a smith, not Breton but English. A tall, gold-brown, simple-seeming man, strong enough, quiet enough, loving enough of face—and now level ray of the morning sun lighted his face.

He did not drown in Wander!

How much was true and how much was mistake of the much that the many found to say? Like the thunder and murmur and waves of the sea rose within voices and voices and yet voices. Abbot Mark's voice Prior Matthew's, Prior Hugh's, Friar Martin's, Father Edmund's, the Hermit by the Old Burying Ground, Brothers Andrew and Barnaby, Anselm's, Norbert's, Somerville's voice, voice of Master Eustace Bettany and of young Thomas Bettany, voice even of Godfrey the gaoler, voices of pilgrims chanting, Middle Forest's voice, voices of Silver Cross, voices of his own squires and castle folk, voice of Westforest and Wander vale. Voice of Morgen Fay. Further back, voice of Isabel, and then again the heavy waves. "O God, *Thy* voice!"

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The hubbub sank away. The tide came in with a quiet rhyme. Morning sand shone in a great golden stillness. Village and sea and boats held in contentment. The fisher folk sat or stood, listening. The speaker was speaking, Montjoy a pilgrim, listening, agreeing. Quiet and the salt air and the sun. Quietness and certitude. *I am, from everlasting to everlasting.*

The gold-brown man ceased his speaking or his answering questions, for it had been largely questioning and answering. Lifting a bundle that lay beside him he looked to a league-distant point striking out into the sea, where seemed more houses than were here. One of the fishermen spoke. "I'll take you, master, in the *Nightingale*."

The small sailboat carried the palmer also,—the palmer and Richard the smith and two boatmen. The latter were still for questions. "You have been to Jerusalem? What like is it?"

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"It is so and so," answered the palmer. "But I say with this man, 'Let us now build the New Jerusalem!'"

The smith turned to him, "There is something in your voice, friend—"

The red sail and the blue sea, the salt, and the divine fresh morning. "Is there?" answered Montjoy. "And there is something in yours—"

The other said in English, "Naught's impossible ever! A long pilgrimage from an English castle?"

"Aye, brother! At Avignon I was shown a great cup made in Paris fifteen years ago by the English goldsmith, Englefield."

The town in front of them was growing larger. The younger boatman had still his questions about Galilee and Olivet. The fresh wind carried the boat fast. Here was a long wharf and the town, and quitting the *Nightingale*, and thanks and partings with the boatmen, then a street and tall houses heaping toward a castle on the hill. "The lady of the castle loveth pilgrims," said Englefield. "And yonder is the great house of the Franciscans."

"If I may I would go with you."

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"As you wish, Montjoy."

Folk were about them, voices and movement. "Is there a quiet place?"

"There is an old garden at the edge of the town, over the sea."

"Then let us go there."

They went. Pine trees sighed around, earth lay carpeted with purple needles. They sat beneath a very great tree, and saw as from a window azure ocean, and a great ship, white-sailed, making into the west.

"I have been far, far without," spoke Montjoy, "but farther, farther within. When I used to watch you at Silver Cross I believed in you. Again, listening by the boat yonder, I believed. I have made a journey and come where I was not before. And still I journey. I can listen now to whatever you may tell me. Listen, and maybe understand."

"I have made a journey, too, Montjoy, and come where I was not before." He took up a handful of purple needles and let slip quietly away while he talked. He told their story,—his story and Morgen Fay's.

The pine grove stood above the sea, speaking always with a multitudinous low voice. Far and far, deep and deep, stretched Mother Ocean. The white ship, purposeful, still and sure, sped its way from haven unto haven. The great vault of heaven held all.

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"You are together, you and Morgen Fay?"

"Aye, together."

From the grove might be seen the high roofs of the town climbing to a huge, four-towered castle.

"I work again as goldsmith, making for who will buy. Yonder you may see the roof of our house. An old workman of mine, now palsied and helpless, lives with his brother in that fishing village. On a holiday, as this is, I walk to see him. It has come about that I may talk to folk here and there—in that fishing village and elsewhere."

"Is there no danger in that?"

"Perhaps! But those who have lived and suffered and learned through living and suffering, may help. So with Morgen Fay and so with me."

"I would see her if I might."

"Come then and sleep this night in the smith's house."

They went there. A small, timbered house, one story overhanging another, old, quiet, with the castle soaring above and the bell of the church of the Franciscans ringing near. Within, in a dusky wide room, rose from her book Morgen Fay, jewel-like, rose-like, flame-like. Montjoy, looking, saw nothing that wounded Isabel, nor that wounded the Reality behind the great picture at Silver Cross.

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THE END

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