Black Magic

A Tale of the Rise and Fall of the Antichrist

By Marjorie Bowen

PART I

THE NUN

CHAPTER 1

SUNSHINE

In the large room of a house in a certain quiet city in Flanders, a man was gilding a devil.

The chamber looked on to the quadrangle round which the house was built; and the sun, just overhead, blazed on the vine leaves clinging to the brick and sent a reflected glow into the sombre spaces of the room.

The devil, rudely cut out of wood, rested by his three tails and his curled-back horns against the wall, and the man sat before him on a low stool.

On the table in front of the open window stood a row of knights in fantastic armour, roughly modelled in clay; beside them was a pile of vellum sheets covered with drawings in brown and green.

By the door a figure of St. Michael leant against a chair, and round his feet were painted glasses of every colour and form.

On the white-washed wall hung a winged picture representing a martyrdom; its vivid hues were the most brilliant thing in the room.

The man was dressed in brown; he had a long dark face and straight dull hair; from the roll of gold leaf on his knee he carefully and slowly gilded the devil.

The place was utterly silent, the perfect stillness enhanced by the dazzle of the blinding sun without; presently the man rose and, crossing to the window, looked out.

He could see the sparse plants bordering the neglected grass-grown paths, the house opposite with its double row of empty windows and the yellowing vine-leaves climbing up the tiled roof that cut the polished blue of the August sky.

In between these windows, that were all closed and glittering in their golden squares, busts of old and weary philosophers were set; they peered out blindly into the unfathomable sunshine, and the dry tendrils of the vine curled across their leanness.

In the centre square of grass was an ancient and broken fountain; some tall white daisies grew there, and the pure gold of their hearts was as bright as the gilding on the devil within.

The silence and the blaze of the sun were one and indescribable.

The man at the window rested his elbows on the sill; it was so hot that he felt it burning through his sleeve; he had the air of one habitually alone, the unquestioning calm that comes of long silences; he was young and, in a quiet fashion, well-looking, wide in the brows and long in the jaw, with a smooth pale skin and cloudy dark eyes, his hair hung very straightly, his throat was full and beautiful.

In expression he was reserved and sombre; his lips, well shaped but pale, were resolutely set, and there was a fine curve of strength to his prominent chin.

After a time of expressionless gazing at the sun-filled garden, he turned back into the room, and stood in the centre of the floor, with his teeth set in his forefinger looking ponderingly at the half-gilded devil.

Then he took a bunch of beautifully wrought keys from his belt, and swinging them softly in his hand left the chamber.

The house was built without corridors or passages, each room opened into another and the upper ones were reached by short dark stairways against the walls; there were many apartments, each of a lordly design with the windows in the side facing the quadrangle.

As the man moved lightly from one chamber to the next his footfall displaced dust and his gaze fell on cobwebs and the new nets of spiders, that hung in some places across the very doorways.

Many curious and gorgeous objects were in those deserted rooms; carved presses full of tarnished silver, paintings of holy subjects, furniture covered with rich-hued tapestry, other pieces of arras on the walls, and in one chamber purple silk hangings worked with ladies' hair in shades of brown and gold.

One room was full of books, piled up on the floor, and in the midst of them stood a table bearing strange goblets of shells set in silver and electrum.

Passing these things without a glance the young man mounted to the upper storey and unlocked a door whose rusty lock took his utmost strength to turn. It was a store-room he entered—lit by low long windows looking on the street and carefully shrouded by linen drawn across them; the chamber was chokingly full of dust and a sickly musty smell.

About the floor lay bales of stuff, scarlet, blue and green, painted tiles, old lanterns, clothes, priests' garments, wonderfully worked, glasses and little rusty iron coffers.

Before one of these the young man went on his knees and unlocked it.

It contained a number of bits of glass cut to represent gems; he selected two of an equal size and a clear green colour, then, with the same gravity and silence with which he had come, he returned to the workshop.

When he saw the devil, half bright gold, half bald wood, he frowned, then set the green glass in the thing's hollow eye-sockets.

At the twinkling effect of light and life produced by this his frown relaxed; he stood for a while contemplating his handiwork, then washed his brushes and put away his paints and gold leaf.

By now the sun had changed and was shining full into the room casting hot shadows of the vine leaves over the little clay knights, and dazzling in St. Michael's wet red robe.

For the second time the young man left the room, now to go into the hall and open the door that gave upon the street.

He looked on to an empty market-place surrounded by small houses falling into decay, beyond them the double towers of the Cathedral flying upwards across the gold and blue.

Not long ago the town had been besieged and this part of it devastated; now new quarters had been built and this left neglected.

Grass grew between the cobbles, and there was no soul in sight.

The young man shaded his eyes and gazed across the dazzling dreariness; the shadow of his slack, slim figure was cast into the square of sun thrown across the hall through the open door.

Under the iron bell that hung against the lintel stood a basket of bread, a can of milk and some meat wrapped in a linen cloth; the youth took these in and closed the door.

He traversed a large dining-room, finely furnished, a small ante-chamber, came out into the arcaded end of the courtyard, entered the house by a low door next the pump and so into his workshop again.

There he proceeded to prepare his food; on the wide tiled hearth stood a tripod and an iron pot; he lit a fire under this, filled the pot with water and put the meat in; then he took a great book down off a shelf and bent over it, huddled up on a stool in the corner where the shade still lingered.

It was a book filled with drawings of strange and horrible things, and close writing embellished with blood-red capitals. As the young man read, his face grew hot and flushed where it rested on his hand, and the heavy volume fell cumbrous either side his knee; not Once did he look up or change his twisted position, but with parted lips and absorbed eyes pored over the black lettering.

The sun sank the other side of the house, so that the garden and room were alike in shadow, and the air became cooler; still the young man made no movement.

The flames leapt on the hearth and the meat seethed in the pot unheeded.

Outside the vine leaves curled against the brick, and the stone faces looked down at the broken fountain, the struggling grass and the tall white daisies; still the young man, bending lower, his heated cheek pressed into his palm, his hair touching the page, bent over the great tome on his knee.

Not the devil with his green eyes staring before him, not St. Michael in his red robe by the door, not the martyr in the bright winged picture were more still than he, crouched upon his wooden stool.

Then, without prelude or warning, the heavy clang of a bell woke the silence into trembling echoes.

The young man dropped the book and sprang to his feet; red and white chased across his face, he stood panting, bewildered, with one hand on his heart, and dazed eyes.

Again the bell sounded.

It could only be that which hung at the front door; not for years had one rung it; he picked up the book, put it back on the shelf, and stood irresolute.

For a third time the iron clang, insistent, impatient, rang through the quiet.

The young man frowned, pushed back the hair from his hot forehead and went, with a light and cautious step, across the courtyard, through the dark dining-chamber into the hall.

Here for a second he hesitated, then drew back the bolt and opened the door.

Two men stood without.

One was most gorgeously attired, the other wore a dark cloak and carried his hat in his hand.

“You cannot want me,” said the youth, surveying them. “And there is no one else here.”

His voice fell full and low, of a soft quality, but the tone was sombre and cold.

The splendidly-dressed stranger answered—“If you are Master Dirk Renswoude, we are most desirous to see and speak with you.”

The young man opened the door a little wider. “I am Dirk Renswoude, but I know neither of you!”

“I did not think so,” the other answered. “Still, we have a matter to ask you of. I am Balthasar of Courtrai and this is my friend, whom you may call Theirry, born of Dendermonde.”

“Balthasar of Courtrai!” repeated the youth softly; he stood aside and motioned them to enter.

When they had passed into the hall he carefully bolted the door; then turned to them with a grave absorbed manner.

“Will you follow me?” he said, and went before them to his workroom.

The sun had left chamber and garden now, but the air was golden warm with it, and a sense of great heat still lay over the grass and vines seen through the open window.

Dirk Renswoude moved St. Michael from the chair and tossed a pile of parchments off a stool.

He offered these seats to his guests, who accepted them in silence.

"You must needs wait till the supper is prepared," he said, and with that placed himself on the stool by the pot, and, while he stirred it with an iron spoon, openly studied the two men.

Balthasar of Courtrai was gorgeous; his age might be perhaps twenty-six or seven; he was of a large make, florid in the face with a high red colour and blunt features; his brows were straight and over fair, his eyes deep blue and expressionless; his heavy yellow hair was cut low on his forehead and fell straightly on to his neck.

He wore a flat orange hat, slashed and cut, fastened by purple cords to the shoulder of a gold doublet that opened on a shirt of fine lawn; his sleeves were enormous, fantastic, puffed and gathered; round his waist was a linked belt into which were thrust numerous daggers and a short sword.

His breeches, of a most vivid blue, were beruffled with knots and tassels, his riding-boots, that came to his knees, stained with the summer dust, showed a small foot decorated with gilt spurs.

He sat with one hand on his hip, and in the other held his leathern gloves.

Such the picture, Master Dirk Renswoude, considering him coldly, formed of Balthasar of Courtrai.

His companion was younger; dressed sombrely in black and violet, but as well-looking as a man may be; he was neither dark nor fair, but of a clear brown hue, and his eyes were hazel, swift and brilliant; his mouth was set smilingly, yet the whole face expressed reserve and some disdain; he had laid his hat on the floor beside him, and with an interested glance was observing the room.

But Balthasar of Courtrai returned Master Dirk Renswoude's steady gaze.

"You have heard of me?" he said suddenly.

"Yes," was the instant answer.

"Then, belike, you know what I am here for?"

"No," said Master Dirk, frowning.

Balthasar glanced at his companion, who gave no heed to either of them, but stared at the half-gilded devil with interest and some wonder; seeing this, Balthasar answered for himself, in a manner half defiant and wholly arrogant.

"My father is Margrave of East Flanders, and the Emperor knighted me when I was fifteen. Now I am tired of Courtrai, of the castle, of my father. I have taken the road."

Master Dirk lifted the iron pot from the fire to the hearth.

"The road to—where?" he asked.

Balthasar made a large gesture with his right hand.

"To Cologne, perhaps to Rome, to Constantinople . . . to Turkey or Hungary.''

"Knight errant," said Master Dirk.

Balthasar tossed his fine head.

"By the Rood, no. I have ambitions."

Master Dirk laughed.

"And your friend?" he asked.

"A wandering scholar," smiled Balthasar. "Also weary of the town of Courtrai. He dreams of fame."

Theirry looked round at this.

“I am going to the Universities,” he said quietly. “To Paris, Basle, Padua—you have heard of them?”

The youth’s cloudy eyes gleamed.

“Ah, I have heard of them,” he replied upon a quick breath.

“I have a great desire for learning,” said Theirry.

Balthasar made an impatient movement that shook the tassels and ribbons on his sleeves.

“God help us, yes! And I for other things.”

Master Dirk was moving about setting the supper. He placed the little clay knights on the window-sill, and flung, without any ado, drawings, paints and brushes on to the floor.

Silence fell on them; the young host’s bearing did not encourage comment, and the atmosphere of the room was languid and remote, not conducive to talk.

Master Dirk, composed and aloof, opened a press in the wall, and took thence a fine cloth that he laid smoothly on the rough table; then he set on it earthenware dishes and plates, drinking-glasses painted in bright colours, and forks with agate handles.

They were well served for food, even though it might not be the princely fare the Margrave’s son was used to; honey in a silver jar, shining apples lying among their leaves, wheaten cakes in a plaited basket, grapes on a gold salver, lettuces and radishes fragrantly wet; these Master Dirk brought from the press and set on the table. Then he helped his guests to meat, and Balthasar spoke.

“You live strangely here—so much alone.”

“I have no desire for company. I work and take pleasure in it. They buy my work, pictures, carvings, sculptures for churches—very readily.”

“You are a good craftsman,” said Theirry. “Who taught you?”

“Old Master Lukas, born of Ghent, and taught in Italy. When he died he left me this house and all it holds.”

Again their speech sank into silence; Balthasar ate heavily, but with elegance; Dirk, seated next the window, rested his chin on his palm and stared out at the bright yet fading blue of the sky, at the row of closed windows opposite, and the daisies waving round the broken fountain; he ate very little. Theirry, placed opposite, was of the same mind and, paying little heed to Balthasar, who seemed not to interest him in the least, kept curious eyes on Dirk’s strange, grave face.

After a while the Margrave’s son asked shamelessly for wine, and the youth rose languidly and brought it; tall bottles, white, red and yellow in wicker cases, and an amber-hued beer such as the peasants drank.

The placing of these before Balthasar seemed to rouse him from his apathy.

“Why have you come here?” he demanded.

Balthasar laughed easily.

“I am married,” he said as a prelude, and lifted his glass in a large, well-made hand.

At that Master Dirk frowned.

“So are many men.”

Balthasar surveyed the tilting wine through half-closed eyes.

“It is about my wife, Master, that I am here now.”

Dirk Renswoude leant forward in his chair.

“I know of your wife.”

“Tell me of her,” said Balthasar of Courtrai. “I have come here for that.”

Dirk slightly smiled.

“Should I know more than you?”

The Margrave's son flushed.

"What you do know?—tell me."

Dirk's smile deepened.

"She was one Ursula, daughter of the Lord of Rooselaare, she was sent to the convent of the White Sisters in this town."

"So you know it all," said Balthasar. "Well, what else?"

"What else? I must tell you a familiar tale."

"Certes, more so to you than to me."

"Then, since you wish it, here is your story, sir."

Dirk spoke in an indifferent voice well suited to the peace of the chamber; he looked at neither of his listeners, but always out of the window.

"She was educated for a nun and, I think, desired to become one of the Order of the White Sisters. But when she was fifteen her brother died and she became her father's heiress. So many entered the lists for her hand—they contracted her to you."

Balthasar pulled at the orange tassels on his sleeve.

"Without my wish or consent," he said.

The young man took no heed.

'They sent a guard to bring her back to Rooselaare, but because they were fearful of the danger of journey, and that she might be captured by one of the pretenders to her fortunes, they married her fast and securely, by proxy, to you. At this the maid, who wished most heartily, I take it, to become a nun, fell ill of grief, and in her despair she confided her misery to the Abbess."

Balthasar's eyes flickered and hardened behind their fair lashes.

"I tell you a tale," said Dirk, "that I believe you know, but since you have come to hear me speak on this matter, I relate what has come to me—of it. This Ursula was heiress to great wealth, and in her love to the Sisters, and her dislike to this marriage, she promised them all her worldly goods, when she should come into possession of them, if they would connive at saving her from her father and her husband. So the nuns, tempted by greed, spread the report that she had died in her illness, and, being clever women, they blinded all. There was a false funeral, and Ursula was kept secret in the convent among the novices. All this matter was put into writing and attested by the nuns, that there might be no doubt of the truth of it when the maid came into her heritage. And the news went to her home that she was dead."

"And I was glad of it," said Balthasar. "For then I loved another woman and was in no need for money."

"Peace, shameless," said Theirry, but Dirk Renswoude laughed softly.

"She took the final, the irrevocable vows, and lived for three years among the nuns. And the life became bitter and utterly unendurable to her, and she dared not make herself known to her father because of the deeds the nuns held, promising them her lands. So, as the life became more and more horrible to her, she wrote, in her extremity, and found means to send, a letter to her husband."

"I have it here." Balthasar touched his breast. "She said she had sworn herself to me before she had vowed herself to God—told me of her deceit," he laughed, "and asked me to come and rescue her."

Dirk crossed his hands, that were long and beautiful, upon the table.

"You did not come and you did not answer."

The Margrave's son glanced at Theirry, as he had a habit of doing, as if he reluctantly desired his assistance or encouragement; but again he obtained nothing and answered for himself, after the slightest pause.

"No, I did not come. Her father had taken another wife and had a son to inherit. And I," he lowered his eyes moodily, "I was thinking of another woman. She had lied, my wife, to God, I think. Well, let her take her punishment, I said."

"She did not wait beyond some months for your answer," said Master Dirk. "Master Lukas, born of Ghent, was employed in the chapel of the convent, and she, who had to wait on him, told him her story. And when he had finished the chapel she fled with him here—to this house. And again she wrote to her husband, speaking of the old man who had befriended her and telling him of her abode. And again he did not answer. That was five years ago."

"And the nuns made no search for her?" asked Theirry.

"They knew now that the girl was no heiress, and they were afraid that the tale might get blown abroad. Then there was war."

"Ay, had it not been for that I might have come, said Balthasar. "But I was much occupied with fighting."

"The convent was burnt and the sisters fled," continued Dirk. "And the maid lived here, learning many crafts from Master Lukas. He had no apprentices but us."

Balthasar leant back in his chair.

"That much I learnt. And that the old man, dying, left his place to you, and—what more of this Ursula?"

The young man gave him a slow, full glance.

"Strangely late you inquire after her, Balthasar of Courtrai."

The Knight turned his head away, half sullenly.

"A man must know how he is encumbered. No one save I is aware of her existence . . . yet she is my wife."

Dusk, hot and golden, had fallen on the chamber. The half-gilded devil gleamed dully; above his violet vestment Theirry's handsome face showed with a half smile on the curved lips; the Knight was a little ill at ease, a little sullen, but glowingly massive, gorgeous and finely coloured.

The young sculptor rested his smooth pale face on his palm; cloudy eyes and cloudy hair were hardly discernible in the twilight, but the line of the resolute chin was clear cut.

"She died four years ago," he said. "And her grave is in the garden . . . where those white daisies grow"

CHAPTER II

THE STUDENTS

"Dead," repeated Balthasar; he pushed back his chair and then laughed. "Why—so is my difficulty solved—I am free of that, Theirry."

His companion frowned.

"Do you take it so? I think it is pitiful—the fool was so young." He turned to Dirk. "Of what did she die?"

The sculptor sighed, as if weary of the subject.

"I know not. She was happy here, yet she died."

Balthasar rose.

"Why did you bury her within the house?" he asked half uneasily.

"It was in time of war," answered Dirk. "We did what we could—and she, I think, had wished it."

The young Knight leant a little way from the open window and looked at the daisies; they gleamed hard and white through the deepening twilight, and he could imagine that they were growing from the heart, from the eyes and lips of the wife whom he had never seen.

He wished her grave was not there; he wished she had not appealed to him; he was angry with her that she had died and shamed him; yet this same death was a vast relief to him.

Dirk got softly to his feet and laid his hand on Balthasar's fantastic sleeve.

"We buried her deep enough," he said. "She does not rise."

The Knight turned with a little start and crossed himself.

"God grant that she sleep in peace," he cried.

"Amen," said Theirry gravely.

Dirk took a lantern from the wall and lit it from the coals still smouldering on the hearth.

"Now you know all I know of this matter, he remarked. "I thought that some day you might come. I have kept for you her ring—your ring—"

Balthasar interrupted.

"I want none of it," he said hastily.

Dirk lifted the lantern; its fluttering flame flushed the twilight with gold.

"Will you please to sleep here to-night?" he asked. The Knight, with his back to the window, assented, in defiance of a secret dislike to the place.

"Follow me," commanded Dirk, then to the other, "I shall be back anon."

"Good rest," nodded Balthasar. "To-morrow we will get horses in the town and start for Cologne."

"Good even," said Theirry.

The Knight went after his host through the silent rooms, up a twisting staircase into a low chamber looking on to the quadrangle.

It contained a wooden bedstead covered with a scarlet quilt, a table, and some richly carved chairs; Dirk lit the candles standing on the table, bade his guest a curt good-night and returned to the workroom.

He opened the door of this softly and looked in before he entered.

By the window stood Theirry striving to catch the last light on the pages of a little book he held.

His tall, graceful figure was shadowed by his sombre garments, but the fine oval of his face was just discernible above the white pages of the volume.

Dirk pushed the door wide and stepped in softly.

"You love reading?" he said, and his eyes shone. Theirry started, and thrust the book into the bosom of his doublet.

"Ay—and you?" he asked tentatively.

Dirk set the lantern among the disordered supper things.

"Master Lukas left me his manuscripts among his other goods," he answered. "Being much alone—I have—read them."

In the lantern light, that the air breathed from the garden fanned into a flickering glow, the two young men looked at each other.

An extraordinary expression, like a guilty excitement, came into the eyes of each.

“Ah!” said Dirk, and drew back a little. “Being much alone,” whispered Theirry, “with—a dead maid in the house—how have you spent your time?”

Dirk crouched away against the wall; his hair hung lankly over his pallid face.

“You—you—pitied her?” he breathed.

Theirry shuddered.

“Balthasar sickens me—yea, though he be my friend.”

“You would have come?” questioned Dirk. “When she sent to you?”

“I should have seen no other thing to do,” answered Theirry. “What manner of a maid was she?”

“I did think her fair,” said Dirk slowly. “She had yellow hair—you may see her likeness in that picture on the wall. But now it is too dark.”

Theirry came round the table.

“You also follow knowledge?” he inquired eagerly.

But Dirk answered almost roughly.

“Why should I confide in you? I know nothing of you.”

“There is a tie in kindred pursuits,” replied the scholar more quietly.

Dirk caught up the lantern.

“You are not aware of the nature of my studies,” be cried, and his eyes shone wrathfully. “Come to bed. I am weary of talking.”

Theirry bent his head.

“This is a fair place for silences,” he said.

As if gloomily angry, yet disdaining the expression of it, Dirk conducted him to a chamber close to that where Balthasar lay, and left him, without speech, nor did Theirry solicit any word of him.

Dirk did not return to the workroom, but went into the garden and paced to and fro under the stars that burnt fiercely and seemed to hang very low over the dark line of the house.

His walk was hasty, his steps uneven, he bit, with an air of absorbed distraction, his lip, his finger, the ends of his straight hair, and now and then he looked with tumultuous eyes up at the heavens, down at the ground and wildly about him.

It was well into the night when he at last returned into the house, and, taking a candle in his hand, went stealthily up to Balthasar’s chamber.

With a delicate touch he unfastened the door, and very lightly entered.

Shielding the candle flame with his hand he went up to the bed.

The young Knight lay heavily asleep; his yellow hair was tumbled over his flushed face and about the pillow; his arms hung slackly outside the red coverlet; on the floor were his brilliant clothes, his sword, his belt, his purse.

Where his shirt fell open at the throat a narrow blue cord showed a charm attached.

Dirk stood still, leaning forward a little, looking at the sleeper, and expressions of contempt, of startled anger, of confusion, of reflection passed across his haggard features.

Balthasar did not stir in his deep sleep; neither the light held above him nor the intense gaze of the young man’s dark eyes served to wake him, and after a while Dirk left him and passed to the chamber opposite.

There lay Theirry, fully dressed, on his low couch. Dirk set the candle on the table and came on tiptoe to his side.

The scholar's fair face was resting on his hand, his chin up-tilted, his full lips a little apart; his lashes lay so lightly on his cheek it seemed he must be glancing from under them; his hair, dark, yet shining, was heaped round his temples.

Dirk, staring down at him, breathed furiously, and the colour flooded his face, receded, and sprang up again.

Then retreating to the table he sank on to the rush-bottomed chair, and put his hands over his eyes; the candle flame leapt in unison with his uneven breaths.

Looking round, after a while, with a wild glance, he gave a long, distraught sigh, and Theirry moved in his sleep.

At this the watcher sat expectant.

Theirry stirred again, turned, and rose on his elbow with a start.

Seeing the light and the young man sitting by it, staring at him with brilliant eyes, he set his feet to the ground.

Before he could speak Dirk put his finger on his lips.

Hush," he whispered, "Balthasar is asleep." Theirry, startled, frowned.

"What do you want with me?"

For answer the young sculptor moaned, and dropped his head into the curve of his arm.

"You are strange," said Theirry.

Dirk glanced up.

"Will you take me with you to Padua—to Basle?" he said. "I have money and some learning."

"You are free to go as I," answered Theirry, but awakened interest shone in his eyes.

"I would go with you," insisted Dirk intensely. "Will you take me?"

Theirry rose from the bed uneasily.

"I have had no companion all my life." He said. "The man whom I would take into must be of rare quality—"

He came to the other side of the table and across the frail gleam of the candle looked at Dirk.

Their eyes met and instantly sank, as if each were afraid of what the other might reveal.

"I have studied somewhat," said Dirk hoarsely. "You also—I think, in the same science—"

The silent awe of comprehension fell upon them, then Theirry spoke.

"So few understand—can it be possible— that you—?"

Dirk rose.

"I have done something."

Theirry paled, but his hazel eyes were bright as flame.

"How much?" then he broke off—"God help us—"

"Ah!—do you use that name?" cried Dirk, and showed his teeth

The other, with cold fingers, clutched at the back of the rush-bottomed chair.

"So I is true—you deal with—you—ah, you—"

"What was that book you were reading?" asked Dirk sharply.

Theirry suddenly laughed.

"What is your study, that you desire to perfect at Basle, at Padua?" he counter-questioned

There was a pause; then Dirk crushed the candle out with his open palm, and answered on a half sob of excitement—

"Black magic—black magic!"

CHAPTER III

THE EXPERIMENT

"I guessed it," said Theirry under his breath, "when I entered the house."

"And you?" came Dirk's voice.

"I—I also."

There was silence; then Dirk groped his way to the door.

"Come after me," he whispered. "There is a light downstairs."

Theirry had no words to answer; his throat was hot, his lips dry with excitement, he felt his temples pulsating and his brow damp.

Cautiously they crept down the stairs and into the workroom, where the lantern cast long pale rays of light across the hot dark.

Dirk set the window as wide as it would go and crouched into the chair under it; his face was flushed, his hair tumbled, his brown clothes dishevelled.

"Tell me about yourself," he said.

Theirry leant against the wall, for he felt his limbs trembling.

"What do you want to know?" he asked, half desperately; "I can do very little."

Dirk set his elbows on the table and his chin in his hand; his half-veiled gleaming eyes held Theirry's fascinated, reluctant gaze.

"I have had no chance to learn," he whispered. "Master Lukas had some books—not enough—but what one might do—!"

"I came upon old writings," said Theirry slowly. "I thought one might be great—that way, so I fled from Courtrai."

Dirk rose and beckoned.

"I will work a spell to-night. You shall see."

He took up the lantern and Theirry followed him; they traversed the chamber and entered another; in the centre of that Dirk stopped, and gave the light into the cold hand of his companion.

"Here we shall be secret," he murmured, and raised, with some difficulty, a trap-door in the floor. Theirry peered into the blackness revealed below.

"Have you done this before?" he asked fearfully.

"This spell? No."

Dirk was descending the stairs into the dark.

"God will never forgive," muttered Theirry, hanging back.

"Are you afraid?" asked Dirk wildly.

Theirry set his lips.

"No. No."

He stepped on to the ladder, and holding the light above his head, followed.

They found themselves in a large vault entirely below the surface of the ground, so that air was attained only from the trap-door that they had left open behind them.

Floor and walls were paved with smooth stones, the air was thick and intolerably hot; the roof only a few inches above Theirry's head.

In one corner stood a tall dark mirror, resting against the wall; beside it were a pile of books and an iron brazier full of ashes.

Dirk took the lantern from Theirry and hung it to a nail on the wall.

“I have been studying,” he whispered, “how to raise spirits and see into the future—I think I begin to feel my way;” his great eyes suddenly unclosed and flashed over his companion. “Have you the courage?”

“Yes,” said Theirry hoarsely. “For what else have I left my home if not for this?”

“It is strange we should have met,” shuddered Dirk.

Their guilty eyes glanced away from each other; Dirk took a piece of white chalk from his pocket and began drawing circles, one within the other on the centre of the floor.

He marked them with strange signs and figures that he drew carefully and exactly.

Theirry stayed by the lantern, his handsome face drawn and pale, his eyes intent on the other’s movements.

The upper part of the vault was in darkness; shadows like a bat’s wings swept either side of the lantern that cast a sickly yellow light on the floor, and the slender figure of Dirk on one knee amid his chalk circles.

When he had completed them he rose, took one of the books from the corner and opened it.

“Do you know this?” With a delicate forefinger he beckoned Theirry, who came and read over his shoulder.

“I have tried it. It has never succeeded.”

“To-night it may,” whispered Dirk.

He shook the ashes out of the brazier and filled it with charcoal that he took from a pile near. This he lit and placed before the mirror.

“The future—we must know the future,” he said, as if to himself.

“They will not come,” said Theirry, wiping his damp forehead. “I—heard them once—but they never came.”

“Did you tempt them enough?” breathed Dirk. “If you have Mandrake they will do anything.”

“I had none.”

“Nor I—still one can force them against their will—though it is—terrible

The thin blue smoke from the charcoal was filling the vault; they felt their heads throbbing, their nostrils dry.

Dirk stepped into the chalk circles holding the book.

In a slow, unsteady voice he commenced to read.

As Theirry caught the words of the blasphemous and horrible invocation he shook and shuddered, biting his tongue to keep back the instinctive prayer that rose to his lips.

But Dirk gained courage as he read; he drew himself erect; his eyes flashed, his cheeks burnt crimson; the smoke had cleared from the brazier, the charcoal glowed red and clear; the air grew hotter; it seemed as if a cloak of lead had been flung over their heads.

At last Dirk stopped.

“Put out the lantern,” he muttered.

Theirry opened it and stifled the flame.

There was now only the light of the burning charcoal that threw a ghastly hue over the dark surface of the mirror.

Theirry drew a long sighing breath; Dirk, swaying on his feet, began speaking again in a strange and heavy tongue.

Then he was silent.

Faint muttering noises grew out of the darkness, indistinct sounds of howling, sobbing.

“They come,” breathed Theirry.

Dirk repeated the invocation.

The air shuddered with moanings.

"A—ah!" cried Dirk.

Into the dim glow of the brazier a creature was crawling, the size of a dog, the shape of a man, of a hideous colour of mottled black; it made a wretched crying noise, and moved slowly as if in pain.

Theirry gave a great sob, and pressed his face against the wall.

But Dirk snarled at it across the dark.

"So you have come. Show us the future. I have the power over you. You know that."

The thin flames leapt suddenly high, a sound of broken wailings came through the air; something ran round the brazier; the surface of the mirror was troubled as if dark water ran over it; then suddenly was flashed on it a faint yet bright image of a woman, crowned, and with yellow hair; as she faded, a semblance of one wearing a tiara appeared but blurred and faint.

"More," cried Dirk passionately. "Show us more—"

The mirror brightened, revealing depths of cloudy sky; against them rose the dark line of a gallows tree.

Theirry stepped forward.

"Ah, God!" he shrieked, and crossed himself. With a sharp sound the mirror cracked and fell asunder; a howl of terror arose, and dark shapes leapt into the air to be absorbed in it and disappear.

Dirk staggered out of the circle and caught hold of Theirry.

"You have broken the spell!" he gibbered. "You have broken the spell!"

An icy stillness had suddenly fallen; the brazier flickered rapidly out, and even the coals were soon black and dead; the two stood in absolute darkness.

"They have gone!" whispered Theirry; he wrenched himself free from Dirk's clutch and fumbled his way to the ladder.

Finding this by reason of the faint patch of light overhead, he climbed up through the trap-door, his body heaving with long-drawn breaths.

Dirk, light-footed and lithe, followed him, and dropped the flap.

"The charm was not strong enough," he said through his teeth. "And you—"

Theirry broke in.

"I could not help myself—I—I—saw them."

He sank on a chair by the open window and dropped his brow into his hand.

The room was full of a soft starlight, far away and infinitely sweet; the vines and grasses made a quivering sound in the night wind and tapped against the lattice.

Dirk moved into the workshop and came back with the candle and a great green glass of wine.

He held up the light so that he could see the scholar's beautiful agonised face, and with his other hand gave him the goblet.

Theirry looked up and drank silently.

When he had finished, the colour was back in his cheeks.

Dirk took the glass from him and set it beside the candle on the window-sill.

"What did you see—in the mirror?" he asked.

"I do not know," answered Theirry wildly. "A woman's face—"

"Ay," broke tn Dirk. "Now, what was she to us? And a figure like—the Pope?"

He smiled derisively.

"I saw that," said Theirry. "But what should they do with holy things?—and then I saw—"

Dirk swung round on him; each white despite the candle-light.

“Nay—there, was no more after that!”

“There was,” insisted Theirry. “A stormy sky and a gallows tree—” His voice fell hollowly.

Dirk strode across the room into the trailing shadows.

“The foul little imps!” he said passionately. “They deceived us!”

Theirry rose in his place.

“Will you continue these studies?” he questioned.

The other gave him a quick look over his shoulder.

“Do you think of turning aside?”

“Nay, nay,” answered Theirry. “But one may keep knowledge this side of things blasphemous and unholy.”

Dirk laughed hoarsely.

“I have no fear of God!” he said in a thick voice. “But you—you are afraid of Sathanas. Well, go your way. Each man to his master. Mine will give me many things—look to it yours does the like by you—”

He opened the door, and was leaving, when Theirry came after him and caught him by the robe.

“Listen to me. I am not afraid. Nay, why did I leave Courtrai?”

With resolute starry eyes Dirk gazed up at Theirry (who was near a head taller), and his proud mouth curled a little.

“I may not disregard the fate that sent me here,” continued Theirry. “Will you come with me? I can be loyal.”

His words were earnest, his face eager; still Dirk vas mute.

“I have hated men, not loved them, all my life—most wonderfully am I drawn to thee—”

“Oh!” cried Dirk, and gave a little quivering laugh.

“Together might we do much, and it is ill work studying alone.”

The younger man put out his hand.

“If I come, will you swear a pact with me of friendship?”

“We will be as brothers,” said Theirry gravely. “Sharing good and ill.”

“Keeping our secret?” whispered Dirk—“allowing none to come between us?”

‘Yea.”

“You are a-tune to me,” said Dirk. “So be it. I will come with you to Basle.”

He raised his strange face; in the hollowed eyes, in the full colourless lips, were a resolution and a strength that held and commanded the other.

“We may be great,” he said.

Theirry took his hand; the red candle-light was being subdued and vanquished by a glimmering grey that overspread the stars; the dawn was peering in at the window.

“Can you sleep?” asked Theirry.

Dirk withdrew his hand.

“At least I can feign it—Balthasar must not guess—get you to bed—never forget to-night and what you swore.”

With a soft gliding step he gained the door, opened it noiselessly, and departed.

Theirry stood for a while, listening to the slight sound of the retreating footfall, then he pressed his hands to his forehead and turned to the window.

A pale pure flush of saffron stained the sky above the roof-line; there were no clouds, and the breeze had dropped again.

In the vast and awful stillness, Theirry, feeling marked, set apart and defiled with blasphemy, yet elated also, in a wild and wicked manner, tiptoed up to his chamber.

Each creaking board he stepped on, each shadow that seemed to change as he passed it, caused his blood to tingle guiltily; when he had gained his room he bolted the door and flung himself along his tumbled couch, holding his fingers to his lips, and with strained eyes gazing at the window. So he lay through long hours of sunshine in a half-swoon of sleep.

CHAPTER V

THE DEPARTURE

He was at length fully aroused by the sound of loud and cheerful singing.

> "My heart's a nun within my breast
> So cold is she, so cloistered cold" . . .

Theirry sat up, conscious of a burning, aching head and a room flooded with sunshine.

> "To her my sins are all confest—
> So wise is she, so wise and old—
> So I blow off my loves like the thistledown"

A burst of laughter interrupted the song; Theirry knew now that it was Balthasar's voice, and he rose from the couch with a sense of haste and discomfiture.

What hour was it?

The day was of a drowsing heat; the glare of the sun had taken all colour out of the walls opposite, the grass and vines; they all blazed together, a shimmer of gold.

> "So I blow off my loves like the thistledown
> And ride from the gates of Courtrai town" . . .

Theirry descended.

He found Balthasar in the workshop; there were the remains of a meal on the table, and the Knight, red and fresh as a rose, was polishing up his sword handle, singing the while, as if in pleased expression of his own thoughts.

In the corner sat Dirk, drawn into himself and gilding the devil.

Theirry was conscious of a great dislike to Balthasar; ghosts nor devils, nor the thought of them had troubled *his* repose; there was annoyance in the fact that he had slept well, eaten well, and was now singing in sheer careless gaiety of heart; yet what other side of life should a mere animal like Balthasar know?

Dirk looked up, then quickly down again; Theirry sank on a stool by the table.

Balthasar turned to him.

"Are you sick?" he asked, wide-eyed.

The scholar's dishevelled appearance, haggard eyes, tumbled locks and peevish gathering of the brows, justified his comment, but Theirry turned an angry eye on him.

"Something sick," he answered curtly. Balthasar glanced from him to Dirk's back, bending over his work.

“There is much companionship to be got from learned men, truly!” he remarked; his blue eyes and white teeth flashed in a half amusement; he put one foot on a chair and balanced his glittering sword across his knee; Theirry averted a bitter gaze from his young splendour, but Balthasar laughed and broke into his song again.

> “My heart’s a nun within my breast,
> So proud is she, so hard and proud,
> Absolving me, she gives me rest” . . .

“We part ways here,” said Theirry.

“So soon?” asked the Knight, then sang indifferently—

> “So I blow off my loves like the thistledown,
> And ride through the gates of Courtrai town.” . . .

Theirry glanced now at his bright face, smooth yellow hair and gorgeous vestments.

“Ay,” he said. “I go to Basle.”

“And I to Frankfort; still, we might have kept company a little longer.”

“I have other plans,” said Theirry shortly.

Balthasar smiled good-humouredly.

“You are not wont to be so evil-tempered,” he remarked.

Then he looked from one to the other; silent both and unresponsive.

“I will even take my leave;” he laid the great glittering sword across the table.

Dirk turned on his stool with the roll of gilding in his hand.

At his cold gaze, that seemed to hold something of enmity and an unfriendly knowledge, Balthasar’s dazzlingly fresh face flushed deeper in the cheeks.

“Since I have been so manifestly unwelcome,” he said, “I will pay for what I have had of you.”

Dirk rose.

“You mistake,” he answered. “I have been pleased to see you for many reasons, Balthasar of Courtrai.”

The young Knight thrust his hands into his linked belt and eyed the speaker.

“You condemn me,” he said defiantly. “Well, Theirry is more to your mind—”

He opened his purse of curiously cut and coloured leather, and taking from it four gold coins laid them on the corner of the table.

“So you may buy masses for the soul of Ursula of Rooselaare.” He indicated the money with a swaggering gesture.

“Think you her soul is lost?” queried Dirk.

“A choired saint is glad of prayers,” returned Balthasar. “But you are in an ill mood, master, so good-bye to you and God send you sweeter manners when next we meet.”

He moved to the door, vivid blue and gold and purple; without looking back he flung on his orange hat.

Theirry roused himself and turned with a reluctant interest.

“You are going to Frankfort?” he asked.

“Ay,” Balthasar nodded pleasantly. “I shall see in the town to the hire of a horse and man—mine own beast being lamed, as you know, Theirry.”

The scholar rose.

“Why do you go to Frankfort?” he asked. He spoke with no object, in a half-sick envy of the Knight’s gaiety and light-heartedness, but Balthasar coloured for the second time.

“All men go to Frankfort,” he answered. “Is not the Emperor there?”

Theirry lifted his shoulders.

“’Tis no matter of mine.”

“Nay,” said Balthasar, who appeared to have been both disturbed and confused by the question, “no more than it is my affair to ask you—why go you to Basle?”

The scholar’s eyes gleamed behind his thick lashes.

“It is very clear why I go to Basle. To study medicine and philosophy.”

They quitted the room, leaving Dirk looking covertly after them, and were proceeding through the dusty, neglected rooms.

“I do not like the place,” said Balthasar. “Nor yet the youth. But he has served my purpose.”

And now they were in the hall.

“We shall meet again,” said Theirry, opening the door.

The Knight turned his bright face.

“Like enough,” he answered easily. “Farewell.” With that and a smile he was swinging off across the cobbles, tightening his sword straps.

Against the sun-dried, decayed houses, across the grass-grown square his vivid garments flashed and his voice came over his shoulder through the hot blue air—

> “So I blew off my loves like the thistledown
> And rode through the gates of Courtrai town.”

Theirry watched him disappear round the angle of the houses, then bolted the door and returned to the workroom.

Dirk was standing very much as he had left him, half resting against the table with the roll of gilding in his white fingers.

“What do you know of that man?” he asked as Theirry entered. “Where did you meet him?”

“Balthasar?”

“Yea.”

Theirry frowned.

“At his father’s house. I taught his sister music. There was, in a manner, some friendship between us . . . we both wearied of Courtrai . . . so it came we were together. I never loved him.”

Dirk returned quietly to the now completely gilded devil.

“Know you anything of the woman he spoke of?” he asked.

“Did he speak of one?”

Dirk looked over his shoulder.

“Yea,” he said; “ ‘besides, I was thinking of another woman.’ They were his words.”

Theirry sat down; he felt faint and weak.

“I know not. There were so many. As we travelled together he made his prayers to one Ysabeau, but he was secret about her—never his way.”

“Ysabeau,” repeated Dirk. “A common name.”

“Ay,” said Theirry indifferently.

Dirk suddenly raised his hand, and pointed out of the window at the daisies and the broken fountain.

“What had he done if *she* had been living?” he asked, then without waiting for a reply he began swiftly on another subject.

“I have finished my work. I wished to leave it complete—it was for the church of St. Bavon, but I shall not give it them. Now, we can start when you will.”

Theirry looked up.

“What of your house and goods?” he asked.

“I have thought of that. There are some valuables, some money; these we can take—I shall lock up the house.”

‘‘It will fall into decay.”

“I care not.” With a clear flame of eagerness alight in his eyes he flashed a full glance at Theirry, and, seeing the young scholar pale and drooping, disappointment clouded his face.

“Do you commence so slackly?” he demanded. “Are you not eager to be abroad?”

“Yea,” answered Theirry. “But—”

Dirk stamped his foot.

“We do not begin with ‘buts’!” he cried passionately. “If you have no heart for the enterprise—”

Theirry half smiled.

“Give me some food, I pray you,” he said. “For I ate but little yesterday.”

Dirk glanced at him.

“I forgot,” he answered, and set about re-arranging the remains of the meal he and Balthasar had shared in silence.

Theirry sat very still; the door into the next room was open as he had left it on his return, and he could see the line of the trap-door; he felt a great desire to raise it, to descend into the vault and gaze at the cracked mirror, the brazier of dead coals and the mystic circles on the floor.

Looking up, his eyes met Dirk’s, and without words his thought was understood.

“Leave it alone now,” said the sculptor softly. “Let us not speak of it before we reach Basle.”

At these words Theirry felt a great relief; the idea of discussing, even with the youth who so fascinated him, the horrible, alluring thing that was an intimate of his thoughts but a stranger to his lips, had filled him with uneasiness and dread. While he ate the food put before him, Dirk picked up the four gold coins Balthasar had left and looked at them curiously.

“Masses for her soul!” he cried. “Did he think that I would enter a church and bargain with a priest for that!”

He laughed, and flung the money out of the window at the nodding daisies.

Theirry gave him a startled glance.

“Why, till now I had thought that you felt tenderly towards the maid.”

Dirk laughed.

“Not I. I have never cared for women.”

“Nor I,” said Theirry simply; he leant back in his chair and his dreamy eyes were grave. “When young they are ornaments, it is true, but pleasant only if you flatter them, when they are overlooked they become dangerous—and a woman who is not young is absorbed in little concerns that are no matter to any but herself.”

The smile, still lingering on Dirk’s face, deepened derisively, it seemed.

“Oh, my fine philosopher!” he mocked. “Are you well fed now, and preaching again?”

He leant against the wall by the window, and the intense sunlight made his dull brown hair glitter here and there; he folded his arms and looked at Theirry narrowly.

“I warrant your mother was a fair woman,” he said. “I do not remember her. They say she had the loveliest face in Flanders, though she was only a clerk’s wife,” answered the young man.

“I can believe it,” said Dirk.

Theirry glanced at him, a little bewildered; the youth had such abrupt changes of manner, such voice and eyes unfathomable, such a pale, fragile appearance, yet such a spirit of tempered courage.

"I marvel at you," he said. "You will not always be unknown."

"No," answered Dirk. "I have never meant that I should be soon forgotten."

Then he was beside Theirry, with a strip of parchment in his hand.

"I have made a list of what we have in the place of value—but I care not to sell them here."

"Why?" questioned Theirry.

Dirk frowned.

"I want no one over the threshold. I have a reputation—not one for holiness," his strange face relaxed into a smile.

Theirry glanced at the list.

"Certes! How might one carry that even to the next town? Without a horse it were impossible."

Silver ware, glass, pictures, raiment, were marked on the strip of parchment.

Dirk bit his finger.

"We will not sell these things Master Lukas left to me," he said suddenly. "Only a few. Such as the silver and the red copper wrought in Italy."

Theirry lifted his grave eyes.

"I will carry those into the town if you give me a merchant's name."

Dirk mentioned one instantly, and where his house might be found.

"A Jew, but a secretive and wealthy man," he added. "I carved a staircase in his mansion."

Theirry rose; the ache in his head and the horror in his heart had ceased together; the sense of coming excitement crept through his veins.

"There is much here that is worthless," said Dirk, "and many things dangerous to reveal, yet a few of those that are neither might bring a fair sum—come, and I will show you."

Theirry followed him through the dusty, sunny chambers to the store-rooms on the upper floor. Here Dirk brought treasures from a press in the wall; candlesticks, girdles with enamel links, carved cups, crystal goblets.

Selecting the finest of these he put them in a coffer, locked it and gave the key to Theirry.

"There should be the worth of some gulden there," he said, red in the face from stooping, and essayed to lift the coffer but failed.

Theirry, something amazed, raised it at once.

"'Tis not heavy," he said.

"Nay," answered Dirk, "but I am not strong," and his eyes were angry.

Theirry was brought by this to give him some closer personal scrutiny than as yet he had.

"How old are you" he asked.

"Twenty-five," Dirk answered curly.

"Certes!" Theirry's hazel eyes flew wide. "I had said eighteen."

Dirk swung on his heel.

"Oh, get you gone," he said roughly, "and be not over long—for I would be away from this place at once—do you hear?—at once."

They left the room together.

"You have endured this for years," said Theirry curiously. "And suddenly you count the hours to your departure."

Dirk ran lightly ahead down the stairs, and his laugh came low and pleasant.

“Untouched, the wood will lie for ever,” he answered, “but set it alight and it will flame to the end.”

CHAPTER V

COMRADES

They had been a week on the road and now were nearing the borders of Flanders. The company of the other had become precious to each; though Theirry was grave and undemonstrative, Dirk, changeable, and quick of temper; to-day, however, the silence of mutual discontent was upon them.

Open disagreement had happened once before, at the beginning of their enterprise, when the young sculptor resolutely refused, foolishly it seemed to Theirry, to sell his house and furniture, or even to deliver at the church of St. Bavon the figures of St. Michael and the Devil, though the piece was finished.

Instead, he had turned the key on his possessions, leaving them the prey of dust, spiders and rats, and often Theirry would think uneasily of the shut-up house in the deserted square, and how the merciless sunlight must be streaming over the empty workroom and the daisies growing upon the grave of Balthasar’s wife.

Nevertheless, he was in thrall to the attraction of Dirk Renswoude; never in his life had he been so at ease with any one, never before felt his aims and ambitions understood and shared by another.

He knew nothing of his companion’s history nor did he care to question it; he fancied that Dirk was of noble birth; it seemed in his blood to live gently and softly; at the hostel where they rested, it was he who always insisted upon the best of accommodation, a chamber to himself, fine food and humble service.

This nicety of his it was that caused the coolness between them now.

At the little town they had just left a fair was in holding, and the few inns were full; lodging had been offered them in a barn with some merchants’ clerks, and this Theirry would have accepted gladly, but Dirk had refused peremptorily, to the accompaniment of much jeering from those who found this daintiness amusing in a poor traveller on foot.

After an altercation between the landlord and Theirry, a haughty silence of flashing eyes and red cheeks from Dirk, they had turned away through the gay fair, wound across the town and out on to the high road.

This led up a steep, mountainous incline; they were carrying their possessions in bundles on their backs, and when they reached the top of the hill they turned off from the road on to the meadows that bordered it, and sank on the grass exhausted.

Theirry, though coldly angry with the whim that had brought them here to sleep under the trees, could not but admit it was an exquisite place.

The evening sun overspread it all with a soft yet sparkling veil of light; the fields of long grass that spread to right and left were more golden than green; close by was a grove of pine-trees, whose tall red trunks shone delicately; above them, piled up rocks starred with white flowers mounted against the pale blue sky, beneath them the hillside sloped to the valley where lay the little town.

The streets of it were built up and down the slopes of the hill, and Theirry could see the white line of them and the irregular shapes and colours of the roofs; the church spire sprang from the

midst like a spear head, strong and delicate, and here and there pennons fluttered; they could see the Emperor's flag stirring slowly above the round tourelles of the city gate.

Theirry found the prospect very pleasant; he delighted in the long flowering grass that, as he lay stretched out, with his face resting in his hand, brushed against his cheek; in the clear-cut grey rocks and the hardy yet frail-looking white flowers growing on the face of them; in the up-springing lines of the pine-trees and the deep green of their heavy foliage, intensified by the fading blue beyond. Then, as his weariness was eased, he glanced over his shoulder at Dirk; not being passionate by nature, and controlled by habit, his tempers showed themselves in a mere coldness, not sullenness, the resort of the fretful.

Dirk sat apart, resting his back against the foremost of the pine-trees; he was wrapped in a dark red cloak, his pale profile turned towards the town lying below; the evening air just stirred the heavy, smooth locks on his uncovered head; he was sitting very still.

The cause of the quarrel had ceased to be any matter to Theirry; indeed he could not but admit it preferable to lie here than to herd with noisy beer-drinking clerks in a close barn, but recollection of the haughty spirit Dirk had discovered held him estranged still.

Yet his companion occupied his thoughts; his wonderful skill in those matters he himself was most desirous of fathoming, the strange way in which they had met, and the pleasure of having a companion—so different from Balthasar—of a kindred mind, however whimsical his manner.

At this point in his reflections Dirk turned his head.

"You are angry with me," he said.

Theirry answered calmly.

"You were foolish."

Dirk frowned and flushed.

"Certes!—a fine comrade!" his voice was vehement.
"Did you not swear fellowship with me? How do you fulfil that compact by being wrathful the first time our wills clash?"

Theirry turned on his elbow and gazed across the flowering grass.

"I am not wrathful," he smiled. " And you have had many whims . . . none of them have I opposed."

Dirk answered angrily.

"You make me out a fantastical fellow—it is not true."

Theirry sat up and gazed at the lazy sunset slowly enveloping the distant town and the hills beyond in crimson light.

"It is true you are as nice as a girl," he answered. "Many a time I would have slept by the kitchen hearth—ay, and have done, but you must always lie soft as a prince.

Dirk was scarlet from brow to chin.

"Well, if I choose," he said defiantly. "If I choose, as long as I have money in my pocket, to live gently. . ."

"Have I interfered?" interrupted Theirry. "You are of a lordly birth, belike."

"Yea, I am of a great family," flashed Dirk. "Ill did they treat me. No more of them . . . are you still angry with me?"

He rose; the red cloak slipped from his shoulders to the ground; he stood with his hand on his hip, looking down at Theirry.

"Come," he said gravely. "We must not quarrel, my comrade, my one friend . . . when shall we find another with such aims as ours . . . we are bound to each other, are we not? Certes! you swore it."

Theirry lifted his beautiful face.

"I do like you greatly," he answered. And in no wise blame you because you are weakly and used to luxury. Others have found *me* over gentle."

Dirk looked at him out of the corners of his eyes.

"Then I am pardoned?"

Theirry smiled.

"Nay, I do regret my evil humour. The sun was fierce and the bundles heavy to drag up the hill."

Dirk sank down upon the grass beside him. "Truly I am wearied to death!"

Theirry considered him; panting a little, Dirk stretched himself his full length on the blowing grass. The young scholar, used and indifferent to his own great beauty, was deadened to the effect of it in others, and to any eye Dirk could be no more than well-looking; but Theirry was conscious of the charm of his slender make, his feet and hands of feminine delicacy, his fair, full throat, and pale, curved mouth, even the prominent jaw and square chin that marred the symmetry of the face were potent to attract in their suggestion of strength and the power to command.

His near presence, too, was fragrant; he breathed a faint atmosphere of essences and was exquisite in his clothes.

As Theirry studied him, he spoke.

"My heart! it is sweet here—oh, sweet!"

Faint airs wafted from the pine, and the wild flowers hidden in the woods below them stole through the grass; a glowing purple haze began to obscure the valley, and where it melted into the sky the first stars shone, pale as the moon. Overhead the dome of heaven was still blue, and in the tops of the pines was a continuous whispering of the perfumed boughs one to another.

"Now wish yourself back in the town among their drinking and swearing," said Dirk.

"Nay," smiled Theirry. "I am content."

The faint purple colour slowly spread over everything; the towers of the town became dark, and little sharp lights twinkled in them.

Dirk drew a great breath.

"What will you do with your life?" he asked.

Theirry started.

"In what manner?"

"Why, if we succeed—in any way—if we obtain great power . . . what would you do with it?"

Theirry felt his brain spin at the question; he gazed across the world that was softly receding into darkness and his blood tingled.

"I would be great," he whispered. "Like Flaccus Alcuin, like Abelard—like St. Bernard."

"And I would be greater than any of these—as great as the Master we serve can make his followers."

Theirry shuddered.

"These I speak of were great, serving God."

Dirk looked up quickly.

"How know you that? Many of these holy men owe their position to strange means. I, at least, would not be content to live and die in woollens when I could command the means to clothe me in golden silks."

The beautiful darkness now encompassed them; below them the lights of the town, above them the stars, and here, in the meadow land, the night breeze in the long grass and in the deep boughs of pine.

"I am but a neophyte," said Theirry after a pause. "Very little have I practised of these things. I had a book of necromancy and learnt a little there . . . but . . ."

"Why do you pause?" demanded Dirk.

"One may not do these things," answered Theirry slowly, "without—great blasphemy—"

Dirk laughed.

"I care nothing for all the angels and all the saints. . ."

"Ah, peace!" cried Theirry, and he put his hand to his brow growing damp with terror.

The other was silent a while, but Theirry could hear his quick breathing rising from the grass. At length he spoke in a quiet voice.

"I desire vast wealth, huge power. I would see nations at my footstool . . . ah! . . . but I have a boundless ambition. . . ." He sat up, suddenly and softly, and laid his hand on Theirr's arm. "If they . . . the evil ones . . . offered you that, would you not take it?"

Theirry shuddered.

"You would! you would!" cried Dirk. "And pay your soul for it—gladly."

The scholar made no answer, but reclined motionless, gazing over the human lights in the valley to the stars beyond them; Dirk continued—

"See what a liking I have for you that I tell you this—that I give you the secret of my power to come. . . ."

"'Tis my secret also," answered Theirry hastily. "I have done enough to bring the everlasting wrath of the Church upon me"

"The Church," repeated Dirk musingly; he was of a daring that knew not the word fear, and at this moment his thoughts put into words would have made his companion shudder indeed.

Gradually, by ones and twos, the lights in the town were extinguished and the valley was in darkness.

Theirry folded up his cloak as a pillow for his head and lay down in the scented grass; as he fell into a half sleep the great sweetness of the place was present to his mind, torturing him.

He knew by the pictures he had seen that Paradise was like this, remote and infinitely peaceful. Meadows and valleys spreading beneath a tranquil sky . . . he knew it was desirable and that he longed for it, yet he must meddle with matters that repelled him, even as they drew him, with their horror.

He fell into heavy dreams, moaning in his sleep.

Dirk rose from beside him and walked up and down in the dark; the dew was falling, his head uncovered; he stooped, felt for his mantle, found it and wrapped it about him, pacing to and fro with calm eyes defying the dark.

Then finally he lay down under the pines and slept, to awake suddenly and find himself in a sitting posture.

The dawn was breaking, the landscape lay in mists of purple under a green sky, pellucid and pale as water; the pines shot up against it black, clear cut, and whispering still in their upper branches.

Dirk rose and tiptoed across the wet grass to Theirry, looking at him asleep for the second time.

The scholar lay motionless, with his head flung hack on his violet cloak; Dirk looked down at the beautiful sleeping face with a wild and terrible expression on his own.

Like wine poured into a cup, light began to fill the valley and the hollows in the hills; faint mystic clouds gathered and spread over the horizon. Dirk shudderingly drew his mantle closer; Theirry sighed and woke.

Dirk gave him a distracted glance and turned away so rapidly and softly that Theirry, with the ugly shapes of dreams still riding his brain, cried out—"Is that you, Dirk?" and sprang to his feet. Dirk stayed his steps half-way to the pines. "What is the matter?" he asked in an odd voice. Theirry pushed the hair away from his forehead. "I know not—nothing."

The air seemed suddenly to become colder; the hills that on all sides bounded their vision rose up stark from grey mists; an indescribable tension made itself felt, like a pause in stillness.

Dirk stepped back to Theirry and caught his arm; they stood motionless, in an attitude of expectancy.

A roll of thunder pealed from the brightening sky and faded slowly into silence; they were looking along the hills with straining eyes.

On the furthest peak appeared a gigantic black horseman outlined against the ghostly light; he carried a banner in his hand; it was the colour of blood and the colour of night; for a moment he sat his horse, motionless, facing towards the east; then the low thunder pealed again; he raised the banner, shook it above his head, and galloped down the hillside.

Before he reached the valley he had disappeared, and at that instant the sun rose above the horizon and sparkled across the country.

Theirry hid his face in his sleeve and trembled terribly; but Dirk gazed over his bent head with undaunted eyes.

CHAPTER VI

THE LADY

Through the blunt-pointed arches that gave on to the sunny gardens a thin stream of students issued from the lecture-room.

Behind the castellated roof of the university the mountains appeared, snow cold against the sun-lit sky; at the bottom of the gently sloping garden lay the town of Basle with the broad blue Rhine flowing between the glittering houses.

The students came in twos and threes and little groups, laughing together over the doctor who had been lecturing them, over some point in their studies that had roused their amusement, or merely because it was a relief after being confined for hours in the dark hall.

The long straight robes, dark shades of purple, blue and violet, fluttered behind them in the summer wind as they gradually dispersed to right and left among the trees.

Theirry, walking with two others, looked about him for Dirk, who had not attended the lecture.

"We are going up the river," said one of his companions. "We have a fair sailing boat—it will be pleasant, by Ovid!"

"Will you come?" asked the other.

Theirry shook his head.

"Nay, I cannot."

They both laughed.

"See how he is given to meditation! He will be a great man, certes!

"I have a matter that commands my time," said Theirry.

"Dear lover of rhetoric! Hark to him—he will even sit in the shade and muse!"

"'Tis cooler," smiled Theirry.

They came to a pathway bordered with laurels and dark glossy plants, and from a seat amid them Dirk rose at their approach.

He was distinguished from the others by the greater richness of his dress; his robe, very voluminous and heavy, was of brown silk; he wore a gold chain twisted round his flat black cap, and his shirt was of fine lawn, laced and embroidered.

The two students doffed their hats in half-mocking recognition of the exquisite air of aloofness that was his habitual manner.

He gave them a steady look out of half-closed eyes.

"Hast learnt much to-day?" he asked.

"Aristotle is not comprehended in an afternoon," answered the student, smiling. "And I was at the back—Master Joris of Thuringia yawned and yawned, and fell off his stool asleep! The Doctor was bitter!"

"It was amusing," said the other. "Yet he was not asleep, but swooned from the heat. Mass! but it was hot! Where were you?"

"Improving my Latin in the library. This after-noon I have put the story of Tereus and Philomena into the vulgar tongue."

"Give you good even." The two linked arms. "We know a joyful inn up the river."

As they disappeared Dirk turned sharply to Theirry.

"Did they ask your company?"

"Yea."

Dirk frowned.

"You should have gone.

"I had no mind to it. They are foolish."

"Ay, but we are beginning to be remarked for closeness in our habits. It would not be pleasant should they—suspect."

"'Tis not possible," said Theirry hastily.

"It *must* not be," was the firm answer. "But be not churlish or over reserved."

"I wish for no company but thine," replied Theirry. "What have I in common with these idlers?"

Dirk gave him a bright tender look.

"We need not stay here over long," he answered. "I do think we know all this school can teach us."

Theirry put back the laurel bough that swung between them.

"Where would you go?" he asked; it was noticeable how in all things he had begun to defer to the younger man.

"Paris! Padua!" flashed Dirk. "Would you consider that? One might attain a reputation, and then—or one might lecture —in any large town—Cologne, Strasbourg."

"Meanwhile—?"

"Meanwhile I progress," was the whispered answer. "I have essayed—some things. Will you come to my chamber to-night?"

"Ay—secretly?"

Dirk nodded; his grave young face under the student's flat hat was slightly flushed; he laid his hand on Theirry's arm.

"I have something to tell you. Here it is scarcely wise to speak. There is one who hates me—Joris of Thuringia. Now, good-bye."

His great eyes lit with a look of strong affection that was flashed back in Theirry's glance; they clasped hands and parted.

Theirry looked after the brown, silk-clad figure, as it moved rapidly towards the university, then he took his own way, out of the gardens on to the hill-side, away from the town.

With his hands clasped behind his back, and his handsome head bent, he followed aimlessly a little path, and as he wound his way through the trees wild day-dreams stirred his blood.

He was on the eve of putting himself in possession of immense power; these evil spirits whom he would force to serve him could give him anything in the world—anything in the world!

The phantasmagoria of golden visions that arose to blind and intoxicate him, the horror of the means employed, dread of the unthinkable end to come, were not to be put into any words.

He sat down at length on a fallen tree trunk and gazed with rapt eyes down the silent forest path.

He did not know where he was; certainly he had come farther than ever before, or else taken a strange turn, for through the pine-stems he could perceive castle walls, the gates rising from the piled-up rocks, and it was unknown to him.

Presently he rose and walked on, because his galloping thoughts would not allow his body to rest, and still giving no heed to the way, he wandered out of the forest into a green valley shaded by thick trees.

Down the centre ran a stream, and the grass, of a deep green colour, was thickly sown with daisies white as the snow shining on the far-off mountains.

Here and there down the edge of the stream grew young poplar trees, and their flat gold leaves fluttered like a gipsy's sequins, even in the breezeless air.

Theirry, absorbed and withdrawn into himself, walked by the side of the water; he was unconscious of the shadowed hush and quiet of the valley, of the voices of birds falling softly from the peace of the frees, and the marvellous sunlight on the mountains, the castle, rising beyond its circle of shade up into the crystal blue; before his eyes danced thrones and crowns, gold and painted silks, glimpses of princely dwellings and little winged, creeping fiends that offered him these things.

Presently a human sound forced itself on his senses, insistently, even through his abstraction.

The sound of weeping, sobbing.

He started, gazed about him with dazed eyes, like a blind man recovering sight, and discerned a lady upon the other side of the stream, seated on the grass, her head bowed in her right hand.

Theirry paused, frowned, and hesitated.

The lady, warned of something, glanced up and sprang to her feet; he saw now that she held a dead bird in her left hand; her face was flushed with weeping, her long yellow hair disordered about her brow; she gazed at him with wet grey eyes, and Theirry felt it imperative to speak.

"You are troubled?" he asked, then flushed, thinking she might term it insolence.

But she answered simply and at once.

"About him I am"—she held the little brown bird out on her palm; "he was on the small poplar tree—and singing—he held his head up so"—she lifted her long throat—"and I could see his heart beating behind the feathers—I listened to him, oh! with pleasure"—fresh tears started to the eyes that she turned on Theirry—"then my miserable cat that had followed me leapt on him—and slew him. Oh, I chased them, but when I got him back he was dead."

Theirry was extraordinarily moved by this homely tragedy; it could not have occurred to him that there was matter for tears in such a common thing; but as the lady told the story, holding out,

as if secure of his sympathy, the poor little ruffled body, he felt that it was both pitiful and monstrous.

"You may chastise the cat," he said, for he saw the elegant soft animal rubbing itself against the stem of the poplar.

"I have beaten her," she confessed.

"You can hang her," said Theirry, thinking to console still more.

But the lady flushed up.

"She is an agreeable cat," she answered. "She cannot help her nature. Oh, it would be an odious cruelty to hang her!—see, she does not understand!"

Theirry, rebuked, was at a loss; he stood looking at the lady, feeling helpless and useless.

She wiped her eyes with a silk handkerchief, and stood in a piteous meek silence, holding her dead bird in a trembling hand.

"If you buried it—" suggested Theirry desperately. "I do think it would have wished to be buried here—"

To his joy she brightened a little.

"You think so?" she asked wistfully.

"Certes!" he reassured her eagerly. "See, I have a knife—I will make a pleasant grave."

She stepped to the edge of the stream as near as she could to him, and because she came unconsciously, with no thought for anything save the bird in her hand, Theirry thrilled with a great pleasure, as should a wild deer come fearlessly.

"I cannot cross—the water is too wide," she said. "But will you take him and make his grave?"

She went on one knee among the sorrel leaves and daisies. Theirry had a swift picture of her as she leant forward, stretching her arm towards him over the stream that divided them. He had seen fair women in Courtrai, he saw in her the most admired points of these, glass grey eyes, small features, an arched red mouth, white skin and yellow hair; she was no more beautiful than many ladies who had left him cold, but he found himself anxious to please her, and he had so far never tried to win a woman's favour.

Her pale red dress rippled about her on the grass; her curls and her veil were blown back from her face; Theirry knelt and held out his hand.

Over mid-stream their fingers touched; he took the bird, and she drew back hastily.

As he, still on his knees, looked at her, he saw that she was no longer unconscious; she stood erect as if commanding herself not to fly, and (as she was very slender) he likened her to the pale crimson pistil of a lily which has yellow on the head—her hair, he told himself.

"I am vexed to trouble you"—she spoke haltingly. There were so many things he wished to say in answer to this that he said nothing, but took his knife from his belt and cut a little square of turf.

"You are a clerk from the college?" she asked.

"Ay," he answered, and wished fiercely he could have given himself a finer name.

"There are many learned men there," she said courteously.

He would not have believed it possible to find in himself such care over a trivial thing as he now took over this little bird's grave, for he knew she watched him with judgment in her eyes.

The unholy day-dreams that had vexed and enthralled him were completely forgotten in this new feeling.

The lines of a verse he had not noticed when he read it came back to him, beating in his head.

“Pleasant is she of a fair white favour,
Sweet her caress as the ripe grape’s flavour,
And her lips are like the rose in their savour.

Seeing her my pulses quicken,
I turn from common things and sicken,
For the quiet wood where the May buds thicken.

Hearing her my breath is taken,
My bold heart bowed and shaken,
And I from sloth at last awaken.”

He dug into the soft brown earth with the point of his knife, lined the grave with leaves, and picked up the little bird.

For a moment he held it in his hand as she had done.

And he dared not look at her.

Then he laid it in the ground and replaced the grass and daisies.

When he raised his head, his face flushed from stooping, he saw that she was no longer watching him, but she had turned sideways and was gazing at the distant woods.

He had leisure now to mark the details of her appearance.

Though slender she was of a full make and tall; her brows were very arched and darker than her hair, her mouth dipped at the corners and was firmly set; she seemed of a grave manner and very modest in her bearing.

Theirry rose from his knees; she turned. “I thank you,” she said; then, on a quick breath—“do you often come here?”

He answered foolishly.

“Nay—never before—I did not know the place.”

“That is my home yonder,” said the lady.

“Yours?” and he pointed to the castle walls.

“Yea. I am an orphan, and the Emperor’s ward.”

She looked at the point of her shoe showing beneath her pale crimson robe. “What town do you come from?” she asked.

“Courtrai.”

“I know no town save Frankfort.”

A silence fell between them; the wicked grey cat walked in a stately manner along the edge of the stream.

“I shall lose her,” said the lady. “Good even, gentle clerk. My name is Jacobea of Martzburg. Perhaps I shall see you again.”

He had never felt more desirous of speaking, never less capable; he murmured—

“I do hope it,” and coloured burningly at his awkwardness.

She gave him a half look, a flash from grave grey eyes, instantly veiled, and with an unsmiling mouth bade him again, “Good even.”

Then she was gone after the cat.

He saw her hasten down the side of the stream, her dress bending the grasses and leaves; he saw her stoop and snatch up the creature, and, holding it in her arms, take the path towards those lordly gates. He hoped she might look back and see that he gazed after her, but she did not turn her head, and when the last flutter of pale red had disappeared he moved reluctantly from the place.

The sky was gay with sunset; as he walked through the wood, bars of orange light fell athwart the straight pine trunks and made a glitter on his path; he thought neither of those things that had occupied him when he had passed through these trees before, nor of the lady he had left; in his mind reigned a golden confusion, in which everything was unformed and exquisite; he had no wish and no ability to reduce this to definite schemes, hopes or fears, but walked on, enwrapped with fancies.

On the slopes that adjoined the garden of the college Theirry came upon a little group of students lying on the grass.

Just beyond them the others were standing; Dirk noticeable by his rich dress and elegant bearing, and another youth whom Theirry knew for Joris of Thuringia.

A glance told him there were words between them; even from where he stood he could see Dirk was white and taut, Tons hot and flushed.

He crossed the grass swiftly; he knew that it was their policy to avoid quarrels in the college.

"Sirs, what is this?" he asked.

The students looked at him; some seemed amused, some excited; his heart gave a sick throb as he saw that their glances were both unfriendly and doubtful.

One gave him half-scornful information.

"Thy friend was caught with an unholy forbidden book, though he denies it; he cast it into the river sooner than allow us a sight of it, and now he is bitter with Joris' commentary thereon."

Dirk saw Theirry, and turned his pale face towards him.

"This churl insulted me," he said; "yea, laid hands on me."

A burst of half angry, half good-humoured laughter came from Joris.

"I cannot get the little youth to fight—by Christus his Mother! he is afraid because I could break his neck between my finger and thumb!"

Dirk flashed burning eyes over him.

"I am not afraid, never could I fear such as thee; but neither my profession nor my degree permit me to brawl—be silent and begone."

The tone could not fail to rouse the other.

"Who art thou," he shouted—"to speak as if thou wert a noble's son? I did but touch thy arm to get the book—"

The rest joined in.

"Certes, he did no more, and what *was* the book?"

Dirk held himself very proudly.

"I will no more be questioned than I will be touched."

"Fine words for a paltry Flemish knave!" jeered one of the students.

"Words I can make good," flashed Dirk, and turned towards the college.

Joris was springing after him when Theirry caught his arm.

"'Tis but a peevish youth," he said.

The other shook himself free and stared after the bright figure in silk.

"He called me 'son of a Thuringian thief!' " he muttered.

A laugh rose from the group.

"How knew he that?—from the unholy book?"

Joris frowned heavily; his wrath flared in another direction.

"Ya! Silence! Son of a British swineherd, thou, red face!"

The group seethed into fisticuffs; Theirry followed Dirk across the gardens.

CHAPTER VII

SPELLS

Theirry found Dirk as he was passing under the arched colonnade.

"Prudence!" he quoted. "Where is *your* prudence now?"

Dirk turned quickly.

"I had to put on a bold front. Certes, I hate that knave. But let him go now. Come with me."

Theirry followed him through the college, up the dark stairway into his chamber.

It was a low arched room, looking on to the garden, barely furnished, and containing only the bed, a chair and some books on a shelf.

Dirk opened the window on the sun-flushed twilight.

"The students are jealous of me because of my reputation with the doctors," he said, smiling. "One told me to-day I was the most learned youth in the college. And how long have we been here? But ten months."

Theirry was silent; the triumph in his companion's voice could find no echo in his heart; neither in his legitimate studies nor in his secret experiments had he been as successful as Dirk, who in ancient and modern lore, in languages, algebra, theology, oratory had far outshone all competitors, and who had progressed dangerously in forbidden things.

Theirry shook off the feeling of jealousy that possessed him, and spoke on another subject.

"Dirk, I saw a lady to-day—such a lady!"

In their constant, close and tender companionship neither had ever failed in sympathy, therefore it was with surprise that Theirry saw Dirk perceptibly harden.

"A lady!" he repeated, and turned from the window so that the shadows of the room were over his face.

Theirry must have a listener, must loosen his tongue on the subject of his delicate adventure, so he proceeded.

"Ay—'twas in the valley—a valley, I mean—which I had never seen before. Oh, Dirk!" he was leaning against the end of the bed, gazing across the dusk. "'Twas a lady so sweet—she had—"

Dirk interrupted him.

"Certes!" he cried angrily; "she had grey eyes belike, and yellow hair—have they not always yellow hair?—and a mincing mouth and a manner of glancing sideways, and cunning words, I'll warrant me—"

"Why, she had all this," answered Theirry, bewildered. "But she was pleasant, had you but seen her, Dirk."

The youth sneered.

"Who is she—thy lady?"

"Jacobea of Martzburg." He took obvious pleasure in saying her name. "She is a great lady and gracious."

"Out on ye!" exclaimed Dirk passionately. "What is she to us? Have we not other matters to think of? I did not think ye so weak as to come chanting the praises of the first thing that smiles on ye!"

Theirry was angered.

"'Tis not the first time—and what have I said of her?"

“Oh enough—ye have lost your heart to her, I doubt not—and what use will ye be—a love-sick knave!”

“Nay,” answered Theirry hotly. “You have no warrant for this speech. How should I love the lady, seeing her once? I did but say she was fair and gentle.”

“’Tis the first woman you have spoken of to me—in that voice—did ye not say—‘such a lady’?”

Theirry felt the blood stinging his cheeks.

“Could you have seen her,” he repeated.

“Ay, had I seen her I could tell you how much paint she wore, how tight her lace was—”

Theirry interrupted.

“I’ll hear no more—art a peevish youth, knowing nothing of women; she was one of God’s roses, pink and white, and we not fit to kiss her little shoes—ay, that’s pure truth.”

Dirk stamped his foot passionately.

“Little shoes! If you come home to me to rave of her little shoes, and her pink and white, you may bide alone for me. Speak no more of her.”

Theirry was silent a while; he could not afford to lose Dirk’s companionship or to have him in an ill temper, nor did he in any way wish to jeopardise the good understanding between them, so he quelled the anger that rose in. him at the youth’s unreasonabloness, and answered quietly—“On what matter did you wish to see me?”

Dirk struggled for a moment with a heaving breast and closed his teeth over a rebellious lip, then he crossed the room and opened the door of an inner chamber.

He had obtained permission to use this apartment for his studies; the key of it he carried always with him, and only he and Theirry had ever entered it.

In silence, lighting a lamp, and placing it on the windowsill, he beckoned Theirry to follow him.

It was a dismal room; piled against the walls were the books Dirk had brought with him, and on the open hearth some dead charred sticks lay scattered.

“See,” said Dirk; he drew from a dark corner a roughly carved wooden figure some few inches high. “I wrought this to-day—and if I know the spells aright there is one will pay for his insolence.”

Theirry took the figure in his hand.

“’Tis Joris of Thuringia.”

Dirk nodded sombrely.

The room was thick with unhealthy odours, and a close stagnant smoke seemed to hang round the roof; the lamp cast a pulsating yellow light over the dreariness and threw strange shaped shadows from the jars and bottles standing about the floor.

“What is this Joris to you?” asked Theirry curiously.

Dirk was unrolling a manuscript inscribed in Persian.

“Nothing. I would see what skill I have.”

The old evil excitement seized Theirry; they had tried spells before, on cattle and dogs, but without success; his blood tingled at the thought of an enchantment potent to confound enemies.

“Light the fire,” commanded Dirk.

Theirry set the image by the lamp, and poured a thick yellow fluid from one of the bottles over the dead sticks.

Then he flung on a handful of grey powder.

A close dun-coloured vapour rose, and a sickly smell filled the room; then the sticks burst suddenly into a tall and beautiful flame that sprang noiselessly up the chimney and cast a clear and unnatural glow round the chamber.

Theirry drew three circles round the fire, and marked the outer one with characters taken from the manuscripts Dirk held.

Dirk was looking at him as he knelt in the splendid glow of the flames, and his own heavy brows were frowning.

"Was she beautiful?" he asked abruptly.

Theirry took this as an atonement for the late ill temper, and answered pleasantly—

"Why, she was beautiful, Dirk."

"And fair?"

"Certes, yellow hair."

"No more of her," said the youth in a kind of fierce mournfulness. "The legend is finished?"

"Yea." Theirry rose from his knees. "And now?"

Dirk was anointing the little image of the student on the breast, the eyes and mouth with a liquid poured from a purple phial; then he set it within the circle round the flame.

"'Tis carved of ash plucked from a churchyard," he said. "And the ingredients of the fire are correct. Now if this fails, Zerdusht lies."

He stepped up to the fire and addressed an invocation in Persian to the soaring flame, then retreated to Theirry's side.

The whole room was glowing in the clear red light cast by the unholy fire; the cobweb-hung rafters, the gaunt walls, the books and jars on the bare floor were all distinctly visible, and the two could see each other, red, from head to foot.

"Look," said Dirk, with a slow smile.

The image lying in the magic circle and almost touching the flames (though not burnt or even scorched), was beginning to writhe and twist on its back like a creature in pain.

"Ah!" Dirk showed his teeth. "The Magian spell has worked."

A sensation of giddiness seized Theirry; he heard something beating loud and fast in his ear, it seemed, but he knew it was his heart that thumped so, up and down.

The figure, horribly like Joris with its flat hat and student's robe, was struggling to its feet and emitting little moans of agony.

"It cannot get out," breathed Theirry.

"Nay," whispered Dirk, "wherefore did ye draw the circle?

The flame was a column of pure fire, and it cast a glow of gold on the thing imprisoned in the ring Theirry had made; Dirk watched in an eager way, with neither fear nor compunction, but Theirry felt a wave of sickness mount to his brain.

The creature was making useless endeavours to escape from the fiery glare; it groaned and fell on its face, twisted on its back and made frantic attempts to cross the line that imprisoned it.

"Let it out," whispered Theirry faintly.

But Dirk was elate with success.

"Ye are mad," he retorted. "The spell works bravely."

On the end of his words came a sound that caused both to wince; even in the lurid light Dirk saw his companion pale.

It was the bell of the college chapel ringing the students to the vespers.

"I had forgotten," muttered Dirk. "We must go—it would be noticed."

"We cannot put the fire out," cried Theirry.

“Nay, we must leave it—it must burn out,” answered Dirk hurriedly.

The creature, after rushing round the circle in an attempt to escape had fallen, as if exhausted with its agony, and lay quivering.

“We will leave him, too,” said Dirk unpleasantly.

But Theirry had a tearing memory of a lady kneeling among green grasses and bending towards him with a dead bird in her hand—tears for it on her cheeks—a dead bird, and this—

He stooped and snatched up the creature; it shrieked dismally as he touched it, and he felt the quick flame burn his fingers.

Instantly the fire had sunk into ashes, and he held in his hand a mere morsel of charred wood.

With a sound of disgust he flung this on the ground.

“Should have let it burn,” said Dirk, with the lamp held aloft to show him the way across the now dark chamber. “Perchance we cannot relight it, and I have not finished with the ugly knave.”

They stepped into the outer chamber and Dirk locked the door; Theirry gasped to feel the fresher air in his nostrils, and a sense of terror clouded his brain; but Dirk was in high spirits; his eyes narrowed with excitement, his pale lips set in a hard fashion.

They descended into the hall.

It was a close and sultry evening; through the blunt arches of the window, dark purple clouds could be seen, lying heavily across the horizon; the clang of the vesper bell came persistently and with a jarring note; though the sun had set it was still light, which had a curious effect of strangeness after the dark chambers upstairs.

Without a word to each other, but side by side, the two students passed into the ante-chamber that led into the chapel.

And there they stopped.

The pale rays of a candle dispersed the gathering dark and revealed a group of men standing together and conversing in whispers.

“Why do they not enter the church?” breathed Theirry, with a curious sensation at his heart. “Something has happened.”

Some of the students turned and saw them; they were forced to come forward; Dirk was silent and smiling.

“Have you heard?” asked one; all were sober and subdued.

“A horrible thing,” said another. “Joris of Thuringia is struck with a strange illness. Certes! he fell down amongst us as if in the grip of hell fire.”

The speaker crossed himself; Theirry could not answer, he felt that they were all looking at him suspiciously, accusingly, and he trembled.

“We carried him up to his chamber,” said another. “He shrieked and tore at his flesh, imploring us to keep the flames off. The priest is with him now—God guard us from unholy things.”

“Why do you say that?” demanded Theirry fiercely. “Belike his disease was but natural.”

A look passed round the students.

“I know not,” one muttered. “It was strange.”

Dirk, still smiling and silent, turned into the chapel; Theirry and the others, hushing their surmises, followed.

There were candles on the altar, six feet high, and a confusion of the senses came over Theirry, in which he saw them as white angels with flaming haloes coming grievingly for his destruction. A wave of fear and sorrow rushed over him; he sank on his knees on the stone floor and fixed his

eyes on the priest, whose chasuble was gleaming gold through the dimness of the incense-filled chapel.

The blasphemy and mortal sin of what he had done sickened and frightened him; was not his being here the most horrible blasphemy of all?—he had no right; he had made false confessions to the priest, he had received absolution on lies; daily he had come here worshipping God with his lips and Satan with his heart.

A groan broke from him, he bowed his beautiful face in his hands and his shoulders shook. He thought of Joris of Thuringia writhing in the agony caused by their unhallowed spells, of the eager devils crowding to their service—and far away, in a blinding white mist, he seemed to see the arc of the saints and angels looking down on him while he fell away further, further, into unfathomable depths of darkness. With an uncontrollable movement of agony he looked up, and his starting eyes fell on the figure of Dirk kneeling in front of him.

The youth's calm both horrified and soothed him; there he knelt, who had but a little while before been playing with devils, with a face as unmoved as a sculptured saint, with a placid brow, quiet eyes and hands folded on his breviary.

He seemed to feel Theirry's intense gaze, for he looked swiftly round and a look of caution, of warning shot under his white lids.

Theirry's glance fell; his companions were singing with uplifted faces, but he could not join them; the pillars with their foliated capitals oppressed him by their shadow, the saints glowing in mosaic on the drums of the arches frightened him with the unforgiving look in their long eyes.

"Laudate, pueri Dominum,
Laudate nomen Domini,
Sit nomen Domini benedictum,
Ex hoc nunc et usque in saecuium.

A Solis ortu usque ad occasum
Laudabile nomen Domini."

The fresh young voices rose lustily.; the church was full of incense and music; Theirry rose with the hymn ringing in his head and left the chapel.

The singers cast curious glances at him as he passed, and when he reached the door he heard a patter of feet behind him and turned to see Dirk at his elbow.

"I have done with it," he said hoarsely.

Dirk's eyes were flaming.

"Do you want to make public confession?" he demanded, breathing hard. "Remember, it is our lives to pay, if they discover."

Theirry shuddered.

"I cannot pray. I cannot stay in the church. For days I have felt the blessing scorch me."

"Come upstairs," said Dirk.

As they went down the long hall they met one who was a friend of Joris of Thuringia.

Dirk stopped.

"Hast come from the sick man?"

"Yea."

"He is mending?"

Theirry stared with wild eyes, waiting the answer.

"I know not," said the youth. "He lies in a swoon and pants for breath."

He passed on, something abruptly.

“Did ye hear that?” whispered Theirry. “If he should die!”

They went up to Dirk’s bare little chamber; the clouds had completely overspread the sky, and neither moon nor stars were visible.

Dirk lit the lamp, and Theirry sank on to the bed with his hands clasped between his knees.

“I cannot go on,” he said. “It is too horrible.”

“Art afraid?” asked Dirk quietly.

“Yea, I am afraid.”

“So am not I,” answered Dirk composedly.

“I cannot stay here,” breathed Theirry, with agonised brows.

Dirk bit his forefinger.

“Nay, for we have but little money and know all these pedants can teach us. ’Tis time we began to lay the corner-stones of our fortune.”

Theirry rose, twisting his fingers together.

“Talk not to me of fortunes. I have set my soul in deadly peril. I cannot pray, I cannot take the names of holy things upon my lips.”

“Is this your courage?” said Dirk softly. “Is this your ambition, your loyalty to me? Would you run whining to a priest with a secret that is mine as well as yours? Is this, O noble youth, what all your dreams have faded to?”

Theirry groaned.

“I know not. I know not.”

Dirk came slowly nearer.

“Is this to be the end of comradeship—our league?”

He took the other’s slack hand in his, and as he seldom offered or suffered a touch, Theirry thrilled at it as a great mark of affection, and at the feel of the smooth, cool fingers, the fascination, the temptation that this youth stood for stirred his pulses; still he could not forget the stern angel he thought he had seep upon the altar, and the way his tongue had refused to move when he had striven to pray.

“Belike, I have gone too far to turn back,” he panted, with questioning eyes.

Dirk dropped his hand.

“Be of me or not with me,” he said coldly. “Surely I can stand alone.”

“Nay,” answered Theirry. “Certes, I love thee, Dirk, as I have never cared for any do I care for thee. . . .”

Dirk stepped back and looked at him out of half-closed eyes.

“Well, do not stop to palter with talk of priests. Certainly I will be faithful to you unto death and damnation, and be you true to me.”

Theirry made a movement to answer, but a sudden and violent knock on the door checked him.

They looked at each other, and the same swift thoughts came to each; the students had suspected, had come to take them by surprise—and the consequences——

For a second Dirk shook with suppressed wrath.

“Curse the Magian spell!” he muttered. “Curse Zerdusht and his foul brews, for we are trapped and undone!”

Theirry sprang up and tried the inner door.

“’Tis secure,” he said; he was now quite calm. “I have the key.” Dirk laid his hand on his breast, then snatched a couple of volumes from the shelf and flung them on the table.

The knock was repeated.

“Unbolt the door,” said Theirry; he seated himself at the table and opened one of the volumes.

Dirk slipped the bolt, the door sprang back and a number of students, headed by a monk bearing a crucifix, surged into the room.

"What do you want?" demanded Dirk, fronting them quietly. "You interrupt our studies."

The priest answered sternly—

"There are strange and horrible accusations against you, my son, that you must disprove."

Theirry slowly closed his book and slowly rose; all the terror and remorse of a few moments ago had changed into wrath and defiance, and the glow his animal courage sent through his body at the prospect of an encounter; he saw the eager, excited faces of his fellow-students, crowding in the doorway, the hard and unforgiving countenance of the monk, and he felt unaccountably justified in his own eyes; he did not see his antagonists standing for Good, and himself for Evil, he saw mere men whose evident enmity roused his own.

"What accusations?" asked Dirk; his demeanour appeared to have changed as completely as Theirry's had done; he had lost his assured calm; his defiant bearing was maintained by an obvious effort, and his lips twitched with agitation.

The students murmured and forced further into the room; the monk answered—

"Ye are suspected of procuring the dire illness of Joris of Thuringia by spells."

"It is a lie," said Dirk faintly, and without conviction, but Theirry replied boldly—

"Upon what do you base this charge, father?"

The monk was ready.

"Upon your strange and close behaviour—the two of you, upon our ignorance of whence you came—upon the suddenness of the youth's illness after words passed between him and Master Dirk."

"Ay," put in one of the students eagerly. "And he lapped water like a dog."

"I have seen a light here well into the night," said another.

"And why left they before the vespers were finished?" demanded a third.

Theirry smiled; he felt that they were discovered, but fear was far from him.

"These are childish accusations," he answered. "Get you gone to find a better."

Dirk, who had retreated behind the table, spoke now. "Ye smirch us with wanton words," he said pantingly. "It is a lie."

"Will you swear to that?" asked the monk quickly.

Theirry interposed.

"Search the chamber, my father—I warrant you have already been peering through mine."

"Yea."

"And you found—?"

"Nothing."

"Then are you not content?" cried Dirk.

The murmur of the students swelled into an angry cry.

"Nay—can ye not spirit away your implements if ye be wizards?"

Great skill do you credit us with," smiled Theirry. "But on nothing you can prove nothing."

Although he knew that he could never allay their suspicions, it occurred to him that it might be possible to prevent the discovery of what the locked room held, and in that case, though they might have to leave the college, their lives would be safe; he snatched up the lantern and held it aloft.

"See you anything here?"

They stared round the bare walls with eager, straining eyes; one came to the table and turned over the volumes there.

“Seneca!” he flung them down with disappointment; the priest advanced and gazed about him; Dirk stood silent and scornful, Theirry was bold to defy them all.

“I see no holy thing,” said the monk. “Neither Virgin, nor saint, nor *prie-Dieu,* nor holy water.”

Dirk’s eyes flashed fiercely.

“Here is my breviary;” he pointed to it on the table.

One of the students cried—

“Where is the key? To the inner chamber!”

There were three or four of them about the door; Dirk, turning to see them striving with the handle, went ghastly pale and could not speak, but Theirry broke out into great wrath.

“The room is disused. No affair of mine or Dirk. We know nothing of it.”

“Will you swear?” asked the priest.

“Certes—I will swear.”

But the student struggling with the door cried out—

“Dirk Renswoude asked for this room for his studies! I do know it, and he had the key.”

Dirk gave a great start.

“Nay, nay,” he said hurriedly, “I have no key.”

“Search, my sons,” said the priest.

Their blood was up; some ten or twelve had crowded into the chamber; they hurled the books off the shelf, scattered the garments out of the coffer, pulled the quilt off the bed and turned up the mattress.

Finding nothing they turned on Dirk.

“He has the key about him!”

All eyes were fixed now on the youth, who stood a little in front of Theirry, he continuing to hold the lamp scornfully aloft to aid them in their search.

The light rested on Dirk’s shoulders, causing the bright silk to glitter, and flickered in his short waving hair; there was no trace of colour in his face, his brows were raised and gathered into a hard frown.

“Have you the key of that chamber?” demanded the priest.

Dirk tried to speak, but could not find his voice; he moved his head stiffly in denial.

“But answer,” insisted the monk.

“What should it avail me if I swore?” The words seemed wrenched from him. “Would ye believe me?” His eyes were bright with hate of all of them.

“Swear on this.” The monk proffered the crucifix.

Dirk did not touch it.

“I have no key,” he said.

“There is your answer,” flashed Theirry, and set the lamp on the table.

The foremost student laughed.

“Search *him,”* he cried. “His garments—belike he has the key in his breast.”

Again Dirk gave a great start; the table was between him and his enemies, it was the only protection he had; Theirry, knowing that he must have the key upon him, saw the end and was prepared to fight it finely.

“What are ye going to do now?” he challenged.

For answer one of them leant across the table and seized Dirk by the arm, swinging him easily into the centre of the room, another caught his mantle.

A yell of “Search him!” rose from the others.

Dirk bent his head in a curious manner, snatched the key from inside his shirt and flung it on the floor; instantly they let go of him to pick it up, and he staggered back beside Theirry.

"Do not let them touch me," he said. "Do not let them touch me."

"Art a coward?" answered Theirry angrily. "Now we are utterly lost. . . . ."

He thrust Dirk away as if he would abandon him; but that youth caught hold of him in desperation.

"Do not leave me—they will tear me to pieces." The students were rushing through the unlocked door shouting for lights; the priest caught up the lamp and followed them; the two were left in darkness.

"Ye are a fool," said Theirry. "With some cunning the key might have been saved. . . ."

A horrid shout arose from those in the inner room as they discovered the remains of the incantations. . . .

Theirry sprang to the window, Dirk after him. "Theirry, gentle Theirry, take me also—can see I am helpless! A—ah! I am small and pitiful, Theirry!"

Theirry had one leg over the window-sill.

"Come, then, in the fiend's name," he answered. A hoarse shout told them the students had found the little image of Joris; those still on the stair-way saw them at the window.

"The warlocks escape!"

Theirry helped Dirk on to the window-ledge; the night air blew hot on their faces and they felt warm rain falling on them; there was no light anywhere.

The students were yelling in a thick fury as they discovered the unholy unguents and implements. They turned suddenly and dashed to the window. Theirry swung himself by his hands, then let go.

With a shock that jarred every nerve in his body he landed on the balcony of the room beneath.

"Jump!" he called up to Dirk, who still crouched on the window-sill.

"Ah, soul of mine! Ah, I cannot!" Dirk stared through the darkness in a wild endeavour to discern Theirry.

"I am holding out my arms! Jump!"

The students had knocked over the lamp and it had checked them for the moment; but Dirk, looking back, saw the room flaring with fresh lights and seething figures pushing up to the window.

He closed his eyes and leapt in the darkness; the distance was not great; Theirry half caught him; he half staggered against the balcony.

A torch was thrust out of the window above them; frenzied faces looked down.

Theirry pushed Dirk roughly through the window before them, which opened on to the library, and followed.

"Now—for our lives," he said.

They ran down the dark length of the chamber and gained the stairs; the students, having guessed their design, were after them—they could hear the clatter of feet on the upper landing.

How many stairs, how many before they reach the hall!

Dirk tripped and fell, Theirry dragged him up; a breathless youth overtook them; Theirry, panting, turned and struck him backwards sprawling. So they reached the hall, fled along it and out into the dark garden.

A minute after, the pursuers bearing lights, and half delirious with wrath and terror, surged out of the college doors

Theirry caught Dirk's arm and they ran; across the thick grass, crashing through the bushes, trampling down the roses, blindly through the dark till the shouts and the lights grew fainter behind them and they could feel the trunks of trees impeding them and so knew that they must have reached the forest.

Then Theirry let go of Dirk, who sank down by his side and lay sobbing in the grass.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CASTLE

Theirry spoke angrily through the dark.

"Little fool, we are safe enough. They think the Devil has carried us off. Be silent."

Dirk gasped from where he lay.

"Am not afraid. But spent . . . they have gone?"

"Ay," said Theirry, peering about him; there was no trace of light anywhere in the murky dark nor any sound; he put his hand out and touched the wet trunk of a tree, resting his shoulder against this (for he also was exhausted) he considered, angrily, the situation.

"Have you any money?" he asked.

"Not one white piece."

Theirry felt in his own pockets. Nothing.

Their plight was pitiable; their belongings were in the college, Probably by now being burnt with a sprinkling of holy water—they were still close to those who would kill them upon sight, with no means of escape; daylight must discover them if they lingered, and how to be gone before daylight?

If they tried to wander in this dark likely enough they would but find themselves at the college gates; Theirry cursed softly.

"Little avail our enchantments now," he commented bitterly.

It was raining heavily, drumming on the leaves above them, splashing from the boughs and dripping on the grass; Dirk raised himself feebly.

"Cannot we get shelter?" he asked peevishly. "I am all bruised, shaken and wet—wet—"

"Likely enough," responded Theirry grimly. "But unless the charms you know, Zerdusht's incantations and Magian spells, can avail to spirit us away we must even stay where we are."

"Ah, my manuscripts, my phials and bottles!" cried Dirk. "I left them all!"

"They will burn them," said Theirry. "Plague blast and blight the thieving, spying knaves!" answered Dirk fiercely.

He got on to his feet and supported himself the other side of the tree.

"Certes, curse them all!" said Theirry, "if it anything helps."

He felt anger and hate towards the priest and his followers who had hounded him from the college; no remorse stung him now, their action had swung him violently back into his old mood of defiance and hard-heartedness; his one thought was neither repentance nor shame, but a hot desire to triumph over his enemies and outwit their pursuit.

"My ankle," moaned Dirk. "Ah! I cannot stand. . . ."

Theirry turned to where the voice came out of the blackness.

"Deafen me not with thy complaints, weakling," he said fiercely. "Hast behaved in a cowardly fashion to-night."

Dirk was silent before a new phase of Theirry's character; he saw that his hold on his companion had been weakened by his display of fear, his easy surrender of the key.

"Moans make neither comfort nor aid," added Theirry.

Dirk's voice came softly.

"Had you been sick I had not been so harsh, and surely I am sick . . . when I breathe my heart hurts and my foot is full of pain."

Theirry softened.

"Because I love you, Dirk, I will, if you complain no more, say nought of your ill behaviour."

He put out his hand round the tree and touched the wet silk mantle; despite the heat Dirk was shivering.

"What shall we do?" he asked, and strove to keep his teeth from chattering. "If we might journey to Frankfort—"

"Why Frankfort?"

"Certes, I know an old witch there who was friendly to Master Lukas, and she would receive us, surely."

"We cannot reach Frankfort or any place without money . . . how dark it is!"

"Ugh! How it rains! I am wet to the skin . . . and my ankle . . . ."

Theirry set his teeth.

"We will get there in spite of them. Are we so easily daunted?"

"A light!" whispered Dirk. "A light!"

Theirry stared about him and saw in one part of the universal darkness a small light with a misty halo about it, slowly coming nearer.

"A traveller," said Theirry. "Now shall he see us or no?"

"Belike he would show us on our way," whispered Dirk.

"If he be not from the college."

"Nay, he rides."

They could hear now, through the monotonous noise of the rain, the sound of a horse slowly, cautiously advancing; the light swung and flickered in a changing oval that revealed faintly a man holding it and a horseman whose bridle he caught with the other hand.

They came at a walking pace, for the path was unequal and slippery, and the illumination afforded by the lantern feeble at best.

"I will accost him," said Theirry.

"If he demand who we are?"

"Half the truth then—we have left the college because of a fight."

The horseman and his attendant were now quite close; the light showed the overgrown path they came upon, the wet foliage either side and the slanting silver rain; Theirry stepped out before them.

"Sir," he said, "know you of any habitation other than the town of Basle?"

The rider was wrapped in a mantle to his chin and wore a pointed felt hat; he looked sharply under this at his questioner.

"My own," he said, and halted his horse. "A third of a league from here."

At first he had seemed fearful of robbers, for his hand had sought the knife in his belt; but now he took it away and stared curiously, attracted by the student's dress and the obvious beauty of the young man who was looking straight at him with dark, challenging eyes.

"We should be indebted for your hospitality—even the shelter of your barns," said Theirry.

The horseman's glance travelled to Dirk, shivering in his silk.

“Clerks from the college?” he questioned.

“Yea,” answered Theirry. “We were. But I sorely wounded one in a fight and fled. My comrade chose to follow me.”

The stranger touched up his horse.

“Certes, you may come with me. I wot there is room enow.”

Theirry caught Dirk by the arm.

“Sir, we are thankful,” he answered.

The light held by the servant showed a muddy, twisting path, the shining wet trunks, the glistening leaves either side, the great brown horse, steaming and passive, with his bright scarlet trappings and his rider muffled in a mantle to the chin; Dirk looked at man and horse quickly in silence; Theirry spoke.

“It is an ill night to be abroad.”

“I have been in the town,” answered the stranger, “buying silks for my lady. And you—so you killed a man?”

“He is not dead,” answered Theirry. “But we shall never return to the college.”

The horseman had a soft and curiously pleasing voice; he spoke as if he cared nothing what he said or how he was answered.

“Where will you go?” he asked.

“To Frankfort,” said Theirry.

“The Emperor is there now, though he leaves for Rome within the year, they say,” remarked the horseman, “and the Empress. Have you seen the Empress?”

Theirry put back the boughs that trailed across the path.

“No,” he said.

“Of what town are you?”

“Courtrai.”

“The Empress was there a year ago and you did not see her? One of the wonders of the world, they say, the Empress.”

“I have heard of her,” said Dirk, speaking for the first time. “But, sir, we go not to Frankfort to see the Empress.”

“Likely ye do not,” answered the horseman, and was silent.

They cleared the wood and were crossing a sloping space of grass, the rain full in their faces; then they again struck a well-worn path, now leading upwards among scattered rocks.

As they must wait for the horse to get a foothold on the slippery stones, for the servant to go ahead and cast the lantern light across the blackness, their progress was slow, but neither of the three spoke until they halted before a gate in a high wall that appeared to rise up, suddenly before them, out of the night.

The servant handed the lantern to his master and clanged the bell that hung beside the gate.

Theirry could see by the massive size of the buttresses that flanked the entrance that it was a large castle the night concealed from him; the dwelling, certainly, of some great noble.

The gates were opened by two men carrying lights. The horseman rode through, the two students at his heels.

“Tell my lady,” said he to one of the men, “that I bring two who desire her hospitality;” he turned and spoke over his shoulder to Theirry, “I am the steward here, my lady is very gentle-hearted.”

They crossed a courtyard and found themselves before the square door of the donjon.

Dirk looked at Theirry, but he kept his eyes lowered and was markedly silent; their guide dismounted, gave the reins to one of the varlets who hung about the door, and commanded them to follow him.

The door opened straight on to a large chamber the entire size of the donjon; it was lit by torches stuck into the wall and fastened by iron clamps; a number of men stood or sat about, some in a livery of bright golden-coloured and blue cloth, others in armour or hunting attire; one or two were pilgrims with the cockle-shells round their hats.

The steward passed through this company, who saluted him with but little attention to his companions, and ascended a flight of stairs set in the wall at the far end; these were steep, damp and gloomy, ill lit by a lamp placed in the niche of the one narrow deep-set window; Dirk shuddered in his soaked clothes; the steward was unfastening his mantle; it left trails of wet on the cold stone steps; Theirry marked it, he knew not why.

At the top of the stairs they paused on a small stone landing.

"Who is your lady?" asked Theirry.

"Jacobea of Martzburg, the Emperor's ward," answered the steward. He had taken off his mantle and his hat, and showed himself to be young and dark, plainly dressed in a suit of deep rose colour, with high boots, spurred, and a short sword in his belt.

As he opened the door Dirk whispered to Theirry, "It is the lady—ye met to-day?"

"To-day!" breathed Theirry. "Yea, it is the lady."

They entered by a little door and stepped into an immense chamber; the great size of the place was emphasised by the bareness of it and the dim shifting light that fell from the circles of candles hanging from the roof; facing them, in the opposite wall, was a high arched window, faintly seen in the shadows, to the left a huge fire-place with a domed top meeting the wooden supports of the lofty beamed roof, beside this a small door stood open on a flight of steps and beyond were two windows, deep set and furnished with stone seats.

The brick walls were hung with tapestries of a dull purple and gold colour, the beams of the ceiling painted; at the far end was a table, and in the centre of the hearth lay a slender white boarhound, asleep.

So vast was the chamber and so filled with shadows that it seemed as if empty save for the dog; but Theirry, after a second discerned the figures of two ladies in the furthest window-seat.

The steward crossed to them and the students followed.

One lady sat back in the niched seat, her feet on the stone ledge, her arm along the window-sill; she wore a brown dress shot with gold thread, and behind her and along the seat hung and lay draperies of blue and purple; on her lap rested a small grey cat, asleep.

The other lady sat along the floor on cushions of crimson and yellow; her green dress was twisted tight about her feet and she stitched a scarlet lily on a piece of red samite.

"This is the chatelaine," said the steward; the lady in the window-seat turned her head; it was Jacobea of Martzburg, as Theirry had known since his eyes first rested on her. "And this is my wife, Sybilla."

Both women looked at the strangers.

"These are your guests until to-morrow, my lady," said the steward.

Jacobea leant forward.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and flushed faintly. "Why, you are welcome."

Theirry found it hard to speak; he cursed the chance that had made him beholden to her hospitality.

“We are leaving the college,” he answered, not looking at her. “And for to-night could find no shelter.”

“Meeting them I brought them here,” added the steward.

“You did well, Sebastian, surely,” answered Jacobea. “Will it please you sit, sirs?”

It seemed that she would leave it at that, with neither question nor comment, but Sybilla, the steward’s wife, looked up smiling from her embroidery.

“Now wherefore left you the college, on foot on a wet night?” she said.

I killed a man—or nearly,” answered Theirry curtly.

Jacobea looked at her steward.

“Are they not wet, Sebastian?”

“I am well enough,” said Theirry quickly; he unclasped his mantle. “Certes, under this I am dry.”

“That am not I!” cried Dirk.

At the sound of his voice both women looked at him; he stood apart from the others and his great eyes were fixed on Jacobea.

“The rain has cut me to the skin,” he said, and Theirry crimsoned for shame at his complaining tone.

“It is true,” answered Jacobea courteously. “Sebastian, will you not take the gentle clerk to a chamber—we have enough empty, I wot—and give him another habit?”

“Mine are too large,” said the steward in his indifferent voice.

“The youth will fall with an ague,” remarked his wife. “Give him something, Sebastian, I warrant he will not quarrel about the fit.”

Sebastian turned to the open door beside the fireplace.

“Follow him, fair sir,” said Jacobea gently; Dirk bent his head and ascended the stairs after the steward.

The chatelaine pulled a red bell-rope that hung close to her, and a page in the gold and blue livery came after a while; she gave him instructions in a low voice; he picked up Theirry’s wet mantle, set him a carved chair and left.

Theirry seated himself; he was alone with the two women and they were silent, not looking at him; a sense of distraction, of uneasiness was over him—he wished that he was anywhere but here, sitting a dumb suppliant in this woman’s presence.

Furtively he observed her—her clinging gown, her little velvet shoes beneath the hem of it, her long white hands resting on the soft grey fur of the cat on her knee, her yellow hair, knotted on her neck, and her lovely, meek face.

Then he noticed the steward’s wife, Sybilla; she was pale, of a type not greatly admired or belauded, but gorgeous, perhaps, to the taste of some; her russet red hair was splendid in its gleam through the gold net that confined it; her mouth was a beautiful shape and colour, but her brows were too thick, her skin too pale and her blue eyes over bright and hard.

Theirry’s glance came back to Jacobea; his pride rose that she did not speak to him, but sat there idle as if she had forgotten him; words rose to his lips, but he checked them and was mute, flushing now and then as she moved in her place and still did not speak.

Presently the steward returned and took his place on a chair between Theirry and his wife, for no reason save that it happened to be there, it seemed.

He played with the tagged laces on his sleeves and said nothing.

The mysterious atmosphere of the place stole over Theirry with a sense of the portentous; he felt that something was brooding over these quiet people who did not speak to each other, something intangible yet horrible; he clasped his hands together and stared at Jacobea.

Sebastian spoke at last.

"You go to Frankfort?"

"Yea," answered Theirry.

"We also, soon, do we not, Sebastian?" said Jacobea.

"You will go to the court," said Theirry.

"I am the Emperor's ward," she answered.

Again there was silence; only the sound of the silk drawn through the samite as Sybilla stitched the red lily; her husband was watching her; Theirry glancing at him saw his face fully for the first time, and was half startled.

It was a passionate face, in marked contrast with his voice; a dark face with a high arched nose and long black eyes; a strange face.

"How quiet the castle is to-night," said Jacobea; her voice seemed to faint beneath the weight of the stillness.

"There is noise enough below," answered Sebastian, "but we cannot hear it."

The page returned, carrying a salver bearing tall glasses of wine, which he offered to Theirry, then to the steward.

Theirry felt the green glass cold to his fingers and shuddered; was that sense of something awful impending only matter of his own mind, stored of late with terrible images?

What was the matter with these people . . . Jacobea had seemed so different this afternoon . . . he tasted the wine; it burnt and stung his lips, his tongue, and sent the blood to his face.

"It still rains," said Jacobea; she put her hand out of the open window and brought it back wet.

"But it is hot," said Sybilla.

Once more the heavy silence; the page took back the glasses and left the room.

Then the door beside the fire-place was pushed open and Dirk entered softly into the mute company.

CHAPTER IX

SEBASTIAN

He wore a flame-coloured mantle that hung about him in heavy folds, and under that a tight yellow doublet; his hair drooped smoothly, there was a bright colour in his face, and his eyes sparkled.

"Ye are merry," he mocked, glancing round him. "Will you that I play or sing?" He looked, in his direct burning way at Jacobea, and she answered hastily—

"Certes, with all my heart—the air is hot—and thick—to-night."

Dirk laughed, and Theirry stared at him bewildered, so utterly had his demeanour changed; he was gay now, radiant; he leant against the wall in the centre of them and glanced from one silent face to another.

"I can play rarely," he smiled.

Jacobea took an instrument from among the cushions in the window-seat; it was red, with a heart-shaped body, a long neck and three strings.

"You can play this?" she asked in a half-frightened manner.

"Ay." Dirk came forward and took it. "I will sing you a fine tune, surely."

Theirry was something of a musician himself, but he had never heard that Dirk had any such skill; he said nothing, however; a sense of helplessness was upon him; the atmosphere of gloom and horror that he felt held him chained and gagged.

Dirk returned to his place against the wall; Sybilla had dropped the red lily on to her lap; they were all looking at him.

"I will sing you the tune of a foolish lady," he smiled.

His shadow was heavy on the wall behind him; the dark purple hues of the tapestry threw into brilliant relief the flame hues of his robe and the clear pale colour of his strange face; he held the instrument across his knees and commenced playing on it with the long bow Jacobea had given him; an irregular quick melody arose, harsh and jeering.

After he had played a while he began to sing, but in a chant under his breath, so that the quality of his voice was not heard.

He sang strange meaningless words at first; the four listening sat very still; only Sybilla had picked up her sewing, and her fingers rose and fell steadily as the bodkin glittered over the red lily.

Theirry hid his face in his hands; he hated the place, the woman quietly sewing, the dark-faced man beside him; he even hated the image of Jacobea, that he saw, as clearly as if he looked at her, brightly before him.

Dirk broke into a little doggerel rhyme, every word of which was hard and clear.

"The turkis in my fine spun hair
  Was brought to me from Barbarie.
My pointed shield is rouge and vair,
  Where mullets three shine royallie.

Now if he guessed,
  He need not wait in poor estate,
But on his breast
  Wear all my state and be my mate.

For sick for very love am I,
  My heart is weak to kiss his cheek;
But he is low, and I am high,
  I cannot speak, for I am weak."

Jacobea put the cat among the cushions and rose; she had a curious set smile on her lips.

"Do you call that the rhyme of a foolish lady?" she asked.

"Ay, for if she had offered her love, surely it had not been refused," answered Dirk, dragging the bow across the strings.

"You think so?" said Jacobea in a shrinking tone.

"Mark you, she was a rich lady," smiled Dirk, "and fair enough, and young and gentle, and he was poor; so I think, if she had not been so foolish, she might have been his second wife."

At these words Theirry looked up; he saw Jacobea standing in a bewildered fashion, as if she knew not whether to go or stay, and in her eyes an unmistakable look of amazement and horror.

"The rhyme said nothing of the first wife," remarked Sybilla, without looking up from the red lily.

"The rhyme says very little," answered Dirk. "It is an old story—the squire had a wife, but if the lady had told her love belike he had found himself a widower."

Jacobea touched the steward's wife on the shoulder.

"Dear heart," she said, "I am weary—very weary with doing nought. And it is late—and the place strange—to-night—at least"—she gave a trembling smile—"I feel it—strange—so—good even."

Sybilla rose, Jacobea's lips touched her on the forehead.

The steward watched them; Jacobea, the taller of the two, stooping to kiss his wife.

Theirry got to his feet; the chatelaine raised her head and looked towards him.

"To-morrow I will bid you God speed, sirs;" her blue eyes glanced aside at Dirk, who had moved to the door by the fire-placer and held it open for her; she looked back at Theirry, then round in silence and coloured swiftly.

Sybilla glanced at the sand clock against the wall.

"Yea, it is near midnight. I will come with you." She put her arm round Jacobea's waist, and smiled backwards over her shoulder at Theirry; so they went, the sound of their garments on the stairs making a faint soft noise; the little cat rose from her cushions, stretched herself, and followed them.

Sebastian picked up the red silk lily that his wife had flung down on the cushions; the candles were guttering to the iron sockets, making the light in the chamber still dimmer, the corners still more deeply obscured with waving shadows.

"You know your chamber," said the steward to Dirk. "You will find me here in the morning. Good-night."

He took a bunch of keys from his belt and swung them in his hand.

"Good-night," said Theirry heavily.

Dirk smiled, and threw himself into the vacated window-seat.

The steward crossed the room to the door by which they had entered; he did not look back, though both were watching him; the door closed after him violently, and they were alone in the vast darkening hall.

"This is fine hospitality," sneered Dirk. "Is there none to light us to our chamber?"

Theirry walked to and fro with an irregular agitated step.

“What was that song of yours?” he asked. “What did you mean? What ails this place and these people? She never looked at me.”

Dirk pulled at the strings of the instrument he still held; they emitted little wailing sounds.

“She is pretty, your chatelaine,” he said. “I did not think to see her so soon. You love her—or you might love her.”

His bright eyes glanced across the shadowy space between them.

“Ye mock and sneer at me,” answered Theirry hotly, “because she is a great dame. I do not love her, and yet—”

“And yet—?” goaded Dirk.

“If our arts can do anything for us—could they not—if I wished it—some day—get this lady for me?”

He paused, his hand to his pale brow.

“You shall never have her,” said Dirk, biting his under lip.

Theirry turned on him violently.

“You cannot tell. Of what use to serve Evil for nought?”

“Ye have done with remorse belike?” mocked Dirk. “Ye have ceased to long for priests and holy water?”

“Ay,” said Theirry recklessly, “I shall not falter again—I will take these means—any means—”

“To attain—her?” Dirk got up from the window-seat and rose to his full height.

Theirry gave him a sick look.

“I will not bandy taunts with you. I must sleep a little.”

“They have given us the first chamber ye come to, ascending those stairs,” answered Dirk quietly. “There is a lamp, and the door is set open. Good-night.”

“You will not come?” asked Theirry sullenly.

“Nay. I will sleep here.”

“Why? You are strange to-night.”

Dirk smiled unpleasantly.

“There is a reason. A good reason. Get to bed.” Theirry left him without an answer, and closed the door upon him.

When he had gone, and there was no longer a sound of his footstep, a rustle of the arras to tell he had been, a great change swept over Dirk’s face; a look of agony, of distraction contorted his proud features, he paced softly here and there, twisting his hands together and lifting his eyes blindly to the painted ceiling.

Half the candles had flickered out; the others smoked and flared in the sockets; the rain dripping on the window-sill without made an insistent sound.

Dirk paused before the vast bare hearth.

“He shall never have her,” he said in a low, steady voice as if he saw and argued with some personage facing him. “No. You will prevent it. Have I not served you well? Ever since I left the convent? Did you not promise me great power—as the black letters of the forbidden books swam before my eyes; did I not hear you whispering, whispering?”

He turned about as though following a movement in the person he spoke to, and shivered.

“I will keep my comrade. Do you hear me? Did you send me here to prevent it?—they seemed to know you were at my elbow to-night—hush!—one comes!”

He fell back against the wall, his finger on his lips, his o her hand clutching the arras behind him.

“Hush!” he repeated.

The door at the far end of the chamber was slowly opened; a man stepped in and cautiously closed it; a little cry of triumph rose to Dirk’s lips, but he repressed it and gave a glance into the pulsating shadows as if he communicated with some mysterious companion.

It was Sebastian who had entered; he looked swiftly round, and seeing Dirk, came towards him.

In the steward’s hand was a little cresset lamp; the clear, heart-shaped flame illuminated his dark face and his pink habit; his eyes looked over this light in a burning way at Dirk.

“So—you are not abed?” he said,

There was more than the aimless comment in his tone, an expectation, an excitement.

“You came to find me,” answered Dirk. “Why?”

Sebastian set the lamp on a little bracket by the window he put his hand to his neck, loosening his doublet, and looked away.

“It is very hot,” he said in a low voice. “I cannot rest. I feel to-night as I have never felt—I think the cause is with you—what you said has distracted me he turned his head. “Who are you? What did you mean?”

“You know,” answered Dirk, “what I am—a poor student from Basle college. And in your heart you know what I meant.”

Sebastian stared at him a moment.

“God! But how could you discern—even if it be true?—you, a stranger. But now I think of it, belike there is reason in it—certes, she has shown me favour.”

Dirk smiled.

“’Tis a rich lady, her husband would be a noble, think of it.”

“What ye put into me!” cried Sebastian in a distracted voice. “That I should talk thus to a prating boy! But the thought clings and burns—and surely ye are wise.

Dirk, still leaning against the wall, smoothed the arras with delicate fingers.

“Surely I am wise. Well skilled in difficult sciences am I, and quick to see—and understand—take this for your hospitality, sir steward—watch your mistress.”

Sebastian put his hand to his head.

“I have a wife.”

Dirk laughed.

“Will she live for ever?”

Sebastian looked at him and stammered, as if some sudden sight of terror seared his eyes.

“There—there is witchcraft in this—your meaning—”

“Think of it!” flashed Dirk. “Remember it! Ye get no more from me.”

The steward stood quite still, gazing at him.

“I think that I have lost my wits to-night,” he said in a low voice. “I do not know what I came down to you for—nor whence come these strange thoughts.”

Dirk nodded his head; a small, slow smile trembled on the corners of his lips.

“Perchance I shall see you in Frankfort, sir steward.”

Sebastian caught at the words with eagerness.

“Yea—I go there with—my lady—” He stopped blankly.

“As yet,” said Dirk, “I know neither my dwelling there nor the name I shall assume. But you—if I need to I shall find you at the Emperor’s court?”

“Yea,” answered Sebastian; then, reluctantly, “What should you want with me?”

“Will it not be you who may need me?” smiled Dirk. “I, who have to-night put thoughts into your brain that you will not forget?”

Sebastian turned about quickly, and caught up the cresset lamp.

“I will see you before you go,” he whispered, horror in his face. “Yea, on the morrow I shall desire more speech with you.”

Like a man afraid, in terror of himself, filled with a dread of his companion, Sebastian, the pure flame of the lamp quivering with the shaking of his hand, crossed the long chamber and left by the door through which he had entered.

Dirk gave a half-suppressed shiver of excitement; the candles had mostly burnt out; the hall seemed monstrous in the gusty, straggling light. He crept to the window; the rain had ceased, and he looked out on a hot starless darkness, disturbed by no sound.

He shivered again, closed the window and flung himself along the cushions in the niched seat. Lying there, where Jacobea had sat, he thought of her; she was more present to his mind than all the crowded incidents of the past day; his afternoon passed in the sunny library, his evening before the beautiful witch fire, the wild escape into the night, the flight through the wet forest, the sombre arrival at the castle, were but flitting backgrounds to the slim figure of the chatelaine.

Certainly she had a potent personality; she was exquisite, a thing shut away in sweet fragrancy. He thought of her as an ivory pyx filled with red flowers; there were her trembling passionate emotions, her modest secrets, that she guarded delicately.

It was his intention to tear open this tabernacle to wrench from her her treasures and scatter them among blood and ruin; he meant to bring her to utter destruction; not her body, perhaps, but her soul.

And this because she had interfered with the one being on earth he cared about—Theirry; not because he hated her for herself.

“How beautiful she is!” he said aloud, almost tenderly.

The last candle fluttered up and sank out; Dirk, lying luxuriously among the cushions, looked into the complete blackness with half-closed eyes.

“How beautiful!” he repeated; he felt he could have loved her himself; he thought of her now, lying in her white bed, her hair unbound; he wished himself kneeling beside her, caressing those yellow locks; a desire possessed him to touch her curls, her soft cheek, to have her hand in his and hear her laugh surely she was a sweet thing, made to be loved.

Yet the power that had brought him here to-night had made plain that if he did not take the chance of her destruction set in his way, she would win Theirry from him for ever.

He had made the first move; in the dark face of Sebastian the steward he had seen the beginning of— the end.

But thinking of her he felt the tears come to his eyes; suddenly he fell into weary weeping, thinking of her, and sobbed sadly, face downwards, on the cushion.

Her yellow hair, mostly he thought of that, her long, fine, soft, yellow hair, and how, before the end, it would be trailing in the dust of despair and humiliation.

Presently he laughed at himself for his tears, and drying them, fell asleep; and awoke from blank dreamlessness to hear his name ringing in his ears. He sat up in the window-seat.

His eyes were hot with his late tears; the misty blue light of dawn that he found about him hurt them; he shrank from this light that came in a clear shaft through the arched window, and, crouching away from it, saw Theirry standing close to him, Theirry, fully dressed and pale, looking at him earnestly.

“Dirk, we must go now. I cannot stay any longer in this place.”

Dirk, leaning his head against the cushions, said nothing, impressed anew with his friend's beauty. How fine and fair a thing Theirry's face was in the colourless early light; in hue and line splendid, in expression wild and pained.

"I could not sleep much," continued Theirry. "I do not want to see them—her—again—not like this—get up, Dirk—why did you not come to bed? I wanted your company—things were haunting me."

"Mostly her face?" breathed Dirk.

"Ay," said Theirry sombrely. "Mostly her face."

Dirk was silent again; was not her loveliness the counterpart of his friend's?—he imagined them together—close—touching hands, lips—and as he pictured this he grew paler.

"The castle is open, there are varlets abroad," cried Theirry. "Let us go—supposing—oh, my heart! supposing one came from the college to look for us!"

Dirk considered; he reflected that he had no desire to meet Sebastian again; he had said all he wished to.

"Let us go," he assented; his one regret was that he should not see again the delicate face crowned with the yellow hair.

He rose from the seat and shook out his borrowed flame-coloured mantle, then he closed his tired eyes as he stood, for a very exquisite sensation rushed over him; nothing had come between him and his friend; Theirry of his own choice had roused him—wanting him—they were to go forth together alone.

CHAPTER X

THE SAINT

They were wandering through the forest in an endeavour to find the high road; the sun, nearly at its full strength, dazzled through the pines and traced figures of gold on the path they followed.

Theirry was silent; they were hungry, without money or any hope of procuring any, fatigued with the rough walking through the heat, and also, it seemed, lost; these facts were ever present to his mind; also, every step was taking him further away from Jacobea of Martzburg, and he longed to see her again, to make her notice him, speak to him; yet of his own desire he had left her castle ungraciously; these things held him bitterly silent.

But Dirk, though he was pale and weary, kept a light joyous heart; he had trust in the master he was serving.

"We shall be helped yet," he said. "Were we not hopeless last night when one came and gave us shelter?"

Theirry did not answer.

The forest grew up the base of the mountain chain, and after a while, walking steadily, they came out upon a gorge some landslip had torn, uprooting trees and hurling aside rocks; over this bare space harshly cleared, water rippled and dripped, finding its way through fern-grown rocks and boulders until it fell into a little stream that ran across the open space of grass and was lost in the shadow of the trees.

By the side of it, on the pleasant stretch of grass, a small white horse was browsing, and a man sat near, on one of the uprooted pines.

The two students paused and contemplated him; he was a monk in a blue-grey habit; his face was infinitely sweet; with his hands clasped in his lap and his head a little raised he gazed with large, peaceful eyes through the shifting fir boughs to the blue sky beyond them.

"Of what use he!" said Theirry bitterly; since the Church had hurled him out the Devil was gaining such sure possession of his soul that he loathed all things holy.

"Nay," said Dirk, with a little smile. "We will speak to him."

The monk, hearing their voices, looked round and fixed on them a calm smiling gaze.

"Dominus det nobis suam pacem," he said.

Dirk replied instantly.

"Et vitam aeternam. Amen."

"We have missed our way," said Theirry curtly.

The monk rose and stood in a courteous, humble position.

"Can you put us on the high road, my father?" asked Dirk.

"Surely!" The monk glanced at the weary face of his questioner. "I am myself travelling from town to town, my son. And know this country well. Will you not rest a while?"

"Ay." Dirk came down the slope and flung himself along the grass; Theirry, half sullen, followed.

"Ye are both weary and in lack of food," said the monk gently. "Praise be to the angels that I have wherewithal to aid ye."

He opened one of the leather bags resting against the fallen tree, took out a loaf, a knife and a cup, cut the bread and gave them a portion each, then filled the cup from the clear dripping water.

They disdained thanks for such miserable fare and ate in silence.

Theirry, when he had finished, asked for the remainder of the loaf and devoured that; Dirk was satisfied with his allowance, but he drank greedily of the beautiful water.

"Ye have come from Basle?" asked the monk.

Dirk nodded.

"And we go to Frankfort."

"A long way," said the monk cheerfully. "And on foot, but a pleasant journey, certes."

"Who are you, my father?" asked Theirry abruptly. "I saw you in Courtrai, surely."

"I am Ambrose of Menthon," answered the monk. "And I have preached in Courtrai. To the glory of God."

Both students knew the name of Saint Ambrose.

Theirry flushed uneasily.

"What do you here, father?" he asked. "I thought you were in Rome."

"I have returned," replied the saint humbly. "It came to me that I could serve Christus"—he crossed himself—"better here. If God His angel will it I desire to build a monastery up yonder—above the snow."

He pointed through the trees towards the mountains; his eyes, that were blue-grey, the colour of his habit, sparkled softly.

"A house to God His glory," he murmured. "In the whiteness of the snows. That is my intent."

"How will you attain it, holy sir?" questioned Theirry.

Saint Ambrose did not seem to notice the mocking tone.

"I have," he said, "already considerable moneys. I beg in the great castles, and they are generous to God His poor servant. We, my brethren and I, have sold some land. I return to them now with much gold. Deo gratias."

As he spoke there was such a pure sweetness in his fair face that Theirry turned away abashed, but Dirk, lying on his side and pulling up the grass, answered—

"Are you not afraid of robbers, my father?"

The saint smiled.

"Nay; God His money is sacred even unto the evildoer. Surely I fear nothing."

"There is much wickedness in the heart of man," said Dirk. And he also smiled.

"Judge with charity," answered Ambrose of Menthon. "There is also much goodness. You speak, my son, with seeming bitterness which showeth a soul not yet at peace. The wages of the world are worthless, but God giveth immortality."

He rose and began fastening the saddle bags on the pony; as his back was turned Theirry and Dirk exchanged a quick look.

Dirk rose from the grass and spoke.

"May we, my father, come with you, as we know not the way?"

"Surely!" The saint looked at them, his eyes fixed half yearningly on Theirry's beautiful face. "Ye are most welcome to my poor company."

The little procession started through the pine forest; Ambrose of Menthon, erect, spare, walking lightly with untroubled face and leading the white pony, burdened with the saddle bags containing the gold; Theirry, sombre, silent, striding beside him, and Dirk, a little behind, in his flame-coloured mantle, his eyes bright in a weary face.

Saint Ambrose spoke, beautifully, on common things; he spoke of birds, of St. Hieronymus and his writings, of Jovinian and his enemy Ambrose of Milan, of Rufinus and Pelagius the Briton, of Vigilantius and violets, with which flowers, he said, the first court of Paradise was paved.

Dirk answered with a learning, both sacred and profane, that surprised the monk; he knew all these writers, all the fathers of the Church and many others, he quoted from them in different tongues; he knew Pagan philosophies and the history of the old world; he argued theology like a priest and touched on geometry, mathematics, astrology.

"Ye have a vast knowledge," said Saint Ambrose, amazed; and in his heart Theirry was jealous.

And so they came, towards evening, on to the road and saw in a valley beneath them a little town.

All three halted.

The Angelus was ringing, the sound came sweetly up the valley.

Saint Ambrose sank on his knees and bowed his head; the students fell back among the trees.

"Well?" whispered Dirk.

"It is our chance," frowned Theirry in the same tone. "I have been thinking of it all day—"

"I also; there is much money. . . ."

‘‘We could get it without . . . blood?"

"Surely, but if need be even that."

Their eyes met; in the pleasant green shade they saw each other's excited faces.

"It is God His money," murmured Theirry.

"What matter for that, if the Devil be stronger?"

"Hush! the Angelus ends."

"Now—we join him."

They sank on their knees, to rise as the saint got to his feet and glanced about him; at the edge of the wood they joined him and looked down at the town below.

“Now we can find our way,” said Dirk in a firm, suddenly changed voice.

Ambrose of Menthon considered him over the little white pony.

“Will you not bear me company into the town?” he asked wistfully; he did not notice that Theirry had slipped behind him.

Dirk’s eyes flashed a signal to his companion. “We will into the town,” he said, “but without thy company, Sir Saint, now!”

Theirry flung his mantle from behind and twisted it tightly over the monk’s head and face, causing him to stagger backwards; Dirk rushed, seized his thin hands, and strapped them together with the leather belt he had just loosened from his waist, and between them they dragged him into the trees.

“My ears are weary of thy tedious talk,” said Theirry viciously, “my eyes of thy sickly face.”

They took the straps from the pony and bound their victim to a tree; it was an easy matter, for he made no resistance and no sound came from under the mantle twisted over his face.

“There is much evil in the heart of man,” mocked Dirk. “And much folly, oh, guileless, in the hearts of saints!”

Having seen to it that he was securely fastened the two returned to the pony and examined their plunder.

In one bag there were parchments, books, and a knotted rope, in the other numerous little linen sacks of varying sizes.

These they turned out upon the grass and swiftly unfastened the strings.

Gold—each one filled with gold, fine, shining coins with the head of the Emperor glittering on them.

Dirk retied the sacks and replaced them in the saddle bags; neither of them had seen so much gold together before; because of it they were silent and a little trembling.

Theirry, as he heard the good yellow money chink together, felt his last qualms go; for the first time since he had entered into league with the spirits of evil he had plain evidence it was a fine thing to have the Devil on his side. A stupefying pleasure and exaltation came over him, he did not doubt that Satan had sent this saintly man their way, and he was grateful; to find himself possessed of this amount of money was a greater delight than any he had known, even a more delightful thing than seeing Jacobea of Martzburg lean across the stream towards him.

As they reloaded the pony, managing as best they might without the straps, Dirk fell to laughing.

“I will get my mantle,” said Theirry; he went up to Ambrose of Menthon, telling himself he was not afraid of meeting the saint’s eyes, and unwound the heavy mantle from his head.

The saint sank together like the dead.

Dirk still laughed, mounted on the white pony, flourishing a stick.

“The fellow has swooned,” said Theirry, bewildered.

“Well,” answered Dirk over his shoulder, “you can bring the straps, which we need, surely.”

Theirry unfastened the monk and laid his slack body on the grass; as he did so he saw that the grey habit was stained with blood, there was wet blood, too, on the straps.

“Now what is this?” he cried, and bent over the unconscious man to see where he was wounded.

His searching hand came upon cold iron under the rough robe; Ambrose of Menthon wore a girdle lined with sharp points, that at every movement must have been torture, and that, at their brutal binding of him, had entered his flesh with an agony unbearable.

“Make haste!” cried Dirk.

Theirry straightened his back and looked down at the sweet face of Saint Ambrose; he wished that their victim had cried out or moaned, his silence being a hard thing to think of—and he must have been in a pain.

"Be quick!" urged Dirk.

Theirry joined him.

"What shall we do with—that man?" he said awkwardly; his blood was burning, leaping.

"'Tis a case for the angels, not for us," answered Dirk. "But if ye feel tenderly (and certainly he was pleasant to us) we can tell, in the town, that we found him. ' Deo gratias,' he mocked the saintly, low calm voice, but Theirry did not laugh.

A splendid yellow sunset was shimmering in their eyes as they came slowly down into the valley and passed through the white street of the little town.

They visited the hostel, fed the white pony there and recounted how they had seen a monk in the wood they had just traversed, whether unconscious in prayer or for want of breath they had not the leisure to examine.

Then they went on their way, eschewing, by common consent this time, the accommodation of the homely inn, and taking with them a basket of the best food the town afforded.

Clearing the scattered cottages they gained the heights again and paused on the grassy borders of a mighty wood that spread either side the high road.

There they spread a banquet very different from the saint's poor repast; they had yellow wine, red wine, baked meats, cakes, jellies, a heron and a basket of grapes, all bought with the gold Ambrose of Menthon had toiled to collect to build God's house amid the snows.

Arranging these things on the soft grass they sat in the pleasant shade, luxuriously, and laughed at each other over their food.

The heavens were perfectly clear, there was no cloud in all the great dome of sky, and, reflecting on the night before, and how they had stood shivering in the wet, they laughed the more.

Then were they penniless, with neither hope nor prospect and in danger of pursuit. Now they were on the high road with more gold in their possession than they had ever seen before, with a horse to carry their burdens, and good food and delicate wine before them.

Their master had proved worth serving. They toasted him in the wine bought with God His money and made merry over it; they did not mention Ambrose of Menthon.

Dirk was supremely happy; everything about him was a keen delight, the fragrant perfume of the pine woods, the dark purple depths of them, the bright green grass, the sky changing into a richer colour as the sun faded, the mountain peaks tinged with pearly rose, the whole beautiful, silent prospect and his comrade looking at him with a smile on his fair face. A troop of white mountain goats driven by a shepherd boy went past, they were the only living things they saw.

Dirk watched them going towards the town, then he said—

"The chatelaine . . . Jacobea of Martzburg—" he broke off. "Do you remember, the first night we met, what we saw in the mirror? A woman, was it not? Her face—have you forgotten it?"

"Nay," answered Theirry, suddenly sombre.

Dirk turned to look at him closely.

"It was not Jacobea, was it?"

"It was utterly different," said Theirry. "No, she was not Jacobea."

He propped a musing face on his hand and stared down at the grass.

Dirk did not speak again, and after a while of silence Theirry slept.

With a start he woke, but lay without moving, his eyes closed; some one was singing, and it was so beautiful that he feared to move lest it should be in his dreams only that he heard it.

A woman's voice, and she sang loud and clearly, in a passion of joyous gaiety; her notes mounted like birds flying up a mountain, then sank like snowflakes softly descending.

After a while the wordless song died away and Theirry sat up, quivering, in a maze of joy.

"Who is that?" he called, his eager eyes searching the twilight.

No one . . . nothing but the insignificant figure of Dirk, who sat at the edge of the wood gazing at the stars.

"I dreamt it," said Theirry bitterly, and cursed his waking.

CHAPTER XI

THE WITCH

In a back street of the city of Frankfort stood an old one-storied house, placed a little apart from the others, and surrounded by a beautiful garden.

Here lived Nathalie, a woman more than suspected of being a witch, but of such outward quiet and secretive ways that there never had been the slightest excuse for even those most convinced of her real character to interfere with her.

She was from the East—Syria, Egypt or Persia; no one could remember her first coming to Frankfort, nor how she had become possessed of the house where she dwelt; her means of livelihood were also a mystery. It was guessed that she made complexion washes and dyes supplied secretly to the great court ladies; it was believed that she sold love potions, perhaps worse; it was known that in some way she made money, for though generally clothed in rags, she had been seen wearing very splendid garments and rich jewels.

Also, it was rumoured by those living near that strange sounds of revelry had on occasion arisen from her high-walled garden, as if a great banquet were given, and dark-robed guests had been seen to enter her narrow door.

That garden was empty now and a great stillness lay over the witch's house; the hot midsummer sun glowed in the rose bushes that surrounded it; red roses all of them, and large and beautiful.

The windows of the great room at the back of the house had their shutters closed so that only a few squares of light fell through the lattice-work, and the room was in shadow.

It was a barely furnished chamber, with an open tiled hearth on which stood a number of bronze and copper bowls and drinking vessels. In the low window-seat were cushions of rich Eastern embroidery, hanging on the walls, hideous distorted masks made of wood and painted fantastically, some short curved swords, and a parchment calendar.

Before this stood Dirk, marking with a red pencil a day in the row of dates.

This done he stepped back, stared at the calendar and frowned, sucking the red pencil.

He was attired in a grave suit of black, and wearing a sober cap that almost concealed his hair; he held himself very erect, and the firm set of his mouth emphasised the prominent jaw and chin.

As he stood there, deep in thought, Theirry entered, nodded at him and crossed to the window; he also was dressed in dull straight garments, but they could not obscure the glowing brown beauty of his face.

Dirk looked at him with eyes that sparkled affection.

"I am making a name in Frankfort," he said.

“Ay,” answered Theirry, not returning his glance. “I have heard you spoken of by those who have attended your lectures—they said your doctrines touched infidelity.”

“Nevertheless they come,” smiled Dirk. “I do not play for a safe reputation . . . otherwise should I be here?—living in a place of evil name?”

“I do not think,” replied Theirry, “that any go so far as to guess the real nature of your studies, nor what it is you pursue “ And he also smiled, but grimly.

“Every man in Frankfort is not priest-beridden,” said Dirk quickly. “They would not meddle with me just because I do not preach the laws of the Church. I teach my scholars rhetoric, logic and philosophy . . . they are well pleased.”

“I have heard it,” answered Theirry, looking out of the window at the red roses dazzling in the sunshine; Dirk could not guess how it rankled with his friend that *he* obtained no pupils, that no one cared to listen to his teaching; that while Dirk was becoming famous as the professor of rhetoric at Frankfort college, he remained utterly unknown.

“To-day I disclosed to them Procopius,” said Dirk, “and propounded a hundred proposition out of Priscianus—should improve their Latin—there were some nobles from the Court. One submitted that my teaching was heretical—asked if I was a Gnostic or an Arian—aaid I should be condemned by the Council of Saragossa—as Avila was, and for as good reasons. . . .”

“Meanwhile . . .”

Dirk interrupted.

“Meanwhile—we know almost all the wise woman can teach us, and are on the eve of great power. . . .”

Theirry pushed wider the shutters so that the strong sunlight fell over the knee of his dark gown.

“You perhaps,” he said heavily. “Not I—the spirits will not listen to me . . . only with great difficulty can I compel them . . . well I wot that I am bound to evil, but I wot also that it doth little for me.”

At this complaint a look of apprehension came into Dirk’s eyes.

“My fortune is your fortune,” he said.

“Nay,” answered Theirry, half fiercely, “it is not . . . you have been successful . . . so have not I . old Nathalie loves you—she cares nothing for me—you have already a name in Frankfort—I have none, nor money either . . . Saint Ambrose’s gold is gone, and I live on your charity.”

While he was speaking Dirk gazed at him with a strengthening expression of trouble and dismay; with large distracted eyes full of tenderness, while his cheeks paled and his mouth quivered.

“No—no.” He spoke in protest, but his distress was too deep and too genuine to allow of much speech.

“I am going away from here,” said Theirry firmly.

Dirk gasped as if he had been wounded.

“From Frankfort?” he ejaculated.

“Nay . . . from this place.”

There was a little silence while the last traces of light and colour seemed to be drained from Dirk’s face.

“You do not mean that,” he said at length. “After we have been . . . Oh, after all of it—you cannot mean . . .”

Theirry turned and faced the room.

“You need not fear that I shall break the bond that unites us,” he cried. “I have gone too far yea, and still I hope to attain by the Devil’s aid my desires. But I will not stay here.”

“Where will you go?”

Theirry’s hazel eyes again sought the crimson roses in the witch’s garden.

“To-day as I wandered outside the walls I met a hawking party. Jacobea of Martzburg was among them.”

They had been in Frankfort many weeks, and so had she, yet this was the first time that he had mentioned her name.”

“Oh!” cried Dirk.

“She knew me,” continued Theirry; “and spoke to me. She asked, out of her graciousness, if I had aught to do in Frankfort . . . thinking, I wot, I looked not like it.” He blushed and smiled. “Then she offered me a post at Court. Her cousin is Chamberlain to the Queen—nay, Empress, I should say—and he will take me as his secretary. I shall accept.”

Dirk was miserably, hopelessly silent; all the radiance, the triumph that had adorned him when Theirry eutered were utterly quenched; he stood like one under the lash, with agonised eyes.

“Are you not glad?” asked Theirry, with a swell in his voice. “I shall be near her. . .

“Is that a vast consideration?” said Dirk faintly. “That you should be near her?”

“Did you think that I had forgotten her because I spoke not?” answered Theirry. “Also there are chances that by your arts I may strengthen—”

Through the heavy golden shadows of the room Dirk moved slowly towards the window where Theirry stood.

“I shall lose you,” he said.

Theirry was half startled by the note in his voice.

“Nay . . . shall I not come here . . . often? Are you not my comrade?”

“So you speak,” answered Dirk, his brow drawn, his lips pale even for one of his pallor. “But you leave me. . . . You choose another path from mine. He wrung his frail hands together. “I had not thought of this.”

“It need not grieve you that I go,” answered Theirry, half sullen, half wondering. “I wot I am pledged deeply enough to thy Master.” His eyes flashed wildly. “Is there not sin on my soul?—Have I not awakened in the night to see Saint Ambrose smile at me? Am I not outside the Church and in league with Hell?”

“Hush! hush!” warned Dirk.

Theirry flung himself into the window-seat, his elbows on his knees, his palms pressed into his cheeks; the sunlight fell through the open window behind him and shone richly in his dark brown hair.

Dirk leant against the wall and stared down at him; in his poor pale face were yearning and tenderness beyond expression.

At last Theirry rose and turned to the door.

“Are you going?” questioned Dirk fearfully.

“Yea.”

Dirk braced himself.

“Do *not* go,” he said. “There is everything before us if we stay together. . . if you . . .” His words choked him, and he was silent.

“All your reasoning cannot stay me,” answered Theirry, his hand on the door. “She smiled at me and I saw her yellow hair . . . and I am stifled here and useless.”

He opened the door and went out.

Dirk sank on the brilliant gold cushions and twisted his fingers together; through the half-closed shutters he could see that marvellous blaze of red roses and their sharp green leaves, the garden wall and the blue August sky; he could hear a bird singing, far away and pleasantly, and after a while he heard Theirry sing, too, as he moved about in an upper chamber. Dirk had not known him sing before, and now, as the little wordless song fell on his cars, he winced and writhed.

"He sings because he is going away."

He sprang up and crossed to the calendar; a year ago to-day he and Theirry had first met; he had marked the day with red—and now—

Presently Theirry entered again; he was no longer singing, and he had his things in a bundle on his back.

"I will come to-morrow and take leave of Nathalie," he said; "or perhaps this evening. But I must see the Chamberlain now."

Dirk nodded; he was still standing by the calendar, and for the second time Theirry passed out.

"Oh! oh!" whispered Dirk. "He is gone—gone— gone—gone."

He remained motionless, picturing the Court Theirry would join, picturing Jacobea of Martzburg; the other influences that would be brought to bear on his companion—

Then he crept to the window and pushed the shutter wide, so that half the dark room was flooded with gold.

The great burning roses nodded in unison, heavy bees humming among them. Dirk leant from the window and flung out his arms with sudden passion.

"Satan! Satan!" he shrieked. "Give him back to me! Everything else you have promised me for that! Do you hear me! Satan! Satan!"

His voice died away in a great sob; he rested his throbbing head against the hot mullions and put his hand over his eyes; red of the roses and gold of the sunshine of the Eastern cushions blended in one before him; he sank back into the window-seat, and beard some one speak his name.

Lifting his sick gaze, he saw the witch standing in the centre of the floor, looking at him.

Dirk gave a great sigh, hunched up his shoulders, and smoothed his cuffs; then he said, very quietly, looking sideways at the witch—

"Theirry has gone."

Nathalie, the witch, seated herself on a little stool that was all inlaid with mother-o'-pearl, folded her hands in her lap and smiled.

She was not an old nor an ugly woman, but of a pale, insignificant appearance, with shining, blank-looking eyes set in wrinkles, a narrow face and dull black hair, threaded now with flat gold coins; she stooped a little, and had marvellously delicate hands.

"I knew he would go," she answered in a small voice.

"With scant farewell, with little excuse, with small preparation, with no regret, he has gone," said Dirk. "To the Court—at the bidding of a lady. You know her, for I have spoken of our meeting with her when we were driven forth from Basle." He closed his eyes, as if he made a great effort at control. "I think he is on the verge of loving her." He unclosed his eyes, full, blazing. "This must be prevented."

The witch shook her head.

"If you are wise, let him go." She fixed her glimmering glance on Dirk's smooth pale face. "He is neither good nor evil; his heart sayeth one thing, his passions another—let him go. His courage is not equal to his desires. He would be great—by any means;—yet he is afraid—let him go. He

thinks to serve the Devil while it lurks still in his heart: ‘At last I will repent—in time I will repent!’—let him go. He will never be great, or even successful, for he is confused in his aims, hesitating, passionate and changeable; therefore, you who can have the world— let him go.”

“All this I know,” answered Dirk, his fingers clutching the gold cushions. “But I want him back.”

“He will come. He has gone too far to stay away.”

“I want him to return for ever,” cried Dirk. “He is my comrade—he must be with me always—he must have none in his thoughts save me.”

Nathalie frowned.

“This is folly. The day you came here to me with words of Master Lukas, I saw that you were to be everything—he nothing; I saw that the world would ring with your name, and that he would die unknown.” She rose vehemently. “I say, let him go! He will be but a clog, a drag on your progress. He is jealous of you; he is not over skilful . . . what can you say for him save that he is pleasant to gaze upon?”

Dirk slipped from the cushions and walked slowly up and down the room; a slow, beautiful smile rested on his lips, and his eyes were gentle.

“What can I say for him? ’Tis said in three words—I love him.”

He folded his arms on his breast, and lifted his head.

“How little you know of me, Nathalie! Though you have taught me all your wisdom, what do you know of me save that I was Master Lukas’s apprentice boy?”

“Ye came from mystery—as you should come,” smiled the witch.

And now Dirk seemed to smile through agony.

“It *is* a mystery—methinks to tell it would be to be blasted as I stand; it seems so long ago—so strange—so horrible . . . well, well!”—he put his hand to his forehead and took a turn about the room—“as I sat in Master Lukas’s empty house, painting, carving, reading forbidden books, I was not afraid; it seemed to me I had no soul . . . so why fear for that which was lost before I was born? ‘The Devil has put me here,’ said I, ‘and I will serve him . . . he shall make me his archetype on earth, . . . and I waited for his signal to bid me forth. Men talked of Antichrist! What if I am he?’ . . . so I thought.”

“And so you shall be,” breathed the witch.

Dirk’s great eyes glowed above his smiling lips.

“Could any but a demon have such thoughts? . . . then Theirry came, and I saw in his face that he did what I did—knew what I knew; and—and”—his voice faltered—“I mind me how I went and watched him as he slept—and then I thought after all I was no demon, for I was aware that I loved him. I had terrible thoughts—if I love, I have a soul, and if I have a soul it is damned;—but he shall go with me— if I came from hell I shall return to hell, and he shall go with me;—if I am damned, he shall be damned and go hand in hand with me into the pit!”

The smile faded from his face, and an intense, ardent expression took its place; he seemed almost in an ecstasy.

She may make fight with me for his soul—if he love her she might draw him to heaven—with her yellow hair! Did I not long for yellow locks when I saw my bridal? . . . I have forgotten what I spoke of—I would say that she does not love him. . . .”

“Yet she may,” said the witch; “for he is gay and beautiful.”

Dirk slowly turned his darkening eyes on Nathalie.

“She must not.”

The witch fondled her fingers.

“We can control many things—not love nor hate.”

Dirk pressed a swelling bosom.

“Her heart is in the hand of another man—and that man is her steward, ambitious, poor and married.”

He came up to the witch, and, slight as he was, beside the withered Eastern woman, he appeared marvellously fresh, glowing, and even splendid.

“Do you understand me?” he said.

The witch blinked her shining eyes. “I understand that there is little need of witchcraft or of black magic here.”

“No,” said Dirk. “Her own love shall be her poison . . . she herself shall give him back to me.”

Nathalie moved, the little coins shaking in her hair. “Dirk, Dirk, why do you make such a point of this man’s return?” she said, between reproach and yearning. She fondled the cold, passive and smiling youth with her tiny hands. “You are going to be great;” she mouthed the words greedily. “I may never have done much, but you have the key to many things. You will have the world for your footstool yet—let him go.”

Dirk still smiled.

“No,” he answered quietly.

The witch shrugged her shoulders and turned away.

“After all,” she said in a half whine, “I am only the servant now. You know words that can compel me and all my kind to obey you. So let it be; bring your Theirry back.”

Dirk’s smile deepened.

“I shall not ask your aid. Alone I can manage this matter. Ay, even if it jeopardise my chance of greatness, I will have my comrade back.”

“It will not be difficult,” nodded the witch. “A silly maid’s influence against thine!” she laughed.

“There is another will seek to detain him at the Court,” said Dirk reflectively. “His old-time friend, the Margrave’s son, Balthasar of Courtrai, who shines about the Emperor. I saw him not long ago—he also is my enemy.”

“Well, the Devil will play them all into thy hands,” smiled the witch.

Dirk turned an absent look on her and she crept away.

It grew to the hour of sunset; the red light of it trembled marvellously in the red roses and filled the low, dark chamber with a sombre crimson glow.

Dirk stood by the window biting his forefinger, revolving schemes in which Jacobea, her steward, Sybilla and Theirry were to be entangled as flies in a web; desperate devilry and despairing human love mingled grotesquely, giving rise to thoughts dark and hideous.

The clear peal of a bell roused him, and he started with remembrances of when last this sound through an empty house had broken on his thoughts—of how he had gone and found Theirry without his door.

Then he left the room and sought the witch; she had disappeared; he did not doubt that the summons was for her; not infrequently did she have hasty and secret visitors, but as she came not he crossed the dark passage and himself opened the door on to the slip of garden that divided the house from the cobbled street—opened it on a woman in a green hood and mantle, who stood well within the shadow of the porch.

“Whom would you see?” he asked cautiously.

The stranger answered in a low voice.

“You. Are you not the young doctor who lectures publicly on—many things? Constantine they call you.

“Yea,” said Dirk; “I am he.”

“I heard you to-day. I would speak to you.”

She wore a mask that as completely concealed her face as her cloak concealed her figure. Dirk’s keen eyes could discover nothing of her person.

“Let me in,” she said in an insistent, yet anxious voice.

Dirk held the door wide, and she stepped into the passage, breathing quickly.

“Follow after me,” smiled Dirk; he decided that the lady was Jacobea of Martzburg.

CHAPTER XII

YSABEAU

Dirk and the lady entered the room he had just quitted; he set a chair for her near the window and waited for her to speak, but kept his eyes the while on her shrouded figure.

She wore a mask such as he had often seen on ladies; fantastic Italian taste had fashioned them in the likeness of a plague-stricken countenance, flecked green and yellow, and more lively fancy had nicknamed them “melons” from their similarity to an unripe melon skin; these masks, oval-shaped, with a slit for the mouth and eyes, and extending from the brow to the chin, were an effective concealment of every feature, and high favourites among ladies.

For the rest, the stranger’s hood was pulled well forward so that not a lock of hair was visible, and her mantle was gathered close at her throat; it was of fine green cloth edged with miniver; she wore thick gauntlets so that not an inch of her skin was visible.

“You are well disguised,” said Dirk at last, as she made no sign of speaking. “What is your business with me?”

He began to think that she could not be Jacobea since she gave no indication of revealing herself; also, he fancied that she was too short.

“Is there any one to overhear us or interrupt?” the lady spoke at last, her voice muffled a little by the mask.

“None,” answered Dirk half impatiently. “I beg that you tell me who you are.”

“Certes, that can wait;” her eyes sparkled through their holes in contrast with the ghastly painted wood that made her face immovable. “But I will tell you who you are, sir.”

“You know?” said Dirk coldly.

It seemed as if she smiled.

“The student named Dirk Renswoude who was driven forth from Basle University for practising the black arts.”

For the first time in his life Dirk was taken aback, and hopelessly disconcerted; he had not believed it possible for any to discover the past life of the learned doctor Constantine; he went red and white, and could say nothing in either defence or denial.

“It was only about three months ago,” continued the lady. “And both students and many other in the town of Basle would still know you, certes.”

A rush of anger against his unknown accuser nerved Dirk.

“By what means have you discovered this?” he demanded. “Basle is far enough from Frankfort, I wot . . . and how many know . . . and what is the price of your silence, dame?”

The lady lifted her head.

“I like you,” she said quietly. “You take it well. No one knows save I. I have made cautious inquiries about you, and pieced together your story with my own wit.”

“My story!” flashed Dirk. “Certes! Ye know nought of me beyond Basle.”

“No,” she assented. “But it is enough. Joris of Thuringia died.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Dirk.

The lady sat very still, observing him.

“So I hold your life, sir,” she said.

Dirk, goaded, turned on her impetuously.

“Ye are Jacobea of Martzburg—”

“No”—she started at the name. “But I know her—”

“She told you this tale—”

Again the lady answered—

“No.”

“She is from Basle,” cried Dirk.

“Believe me,” replied the stranger earnestly, “she knows nothing of you—I alone in Frankfort hold your secret, and I can help you to keep it . . . it were easy to spread a report of Dirk Renswoude’s death.”

Dirk bit his finger, his lip, glared out at the profusion of roses, at the darkening sky, then at the quiet figure in the hideous speckled mask; if she chose to speak he would have, at the best of it, to fly Frankfort, and that did not suit his schemes.

“Another youth lives here,” said the lady. “I think he also fled from Basle.”

Dirk’s face grew pale and cunning; he was quick to see that she did not know Theirry was compromised.

“He was here—now he has gone to Court—he was at Basle, but innocent, he came with me out of friendship. He is silly and fond.”

“I have to do with you,” answered the lady. “Ye have a great, a terrible skill, evil spirits league with you . . . your spells killed a man—” She stopped.

“Poor fool,” said Dirk sombrely.

The stranger rose; her calm and self-possession had suddenly given way to fierce only half-repressed passion; she clasped her hands and trembled as she stood.

“Well,” she cried thickly. “You could do that again—a softer, more subtle way?”

“For you?” he whispered.

“For me,” she answered, and sank into the window-seat, pulling at her gloves mechanically.

A silence, while the dying red sunlight fell over the Eastern cushions and over her dark mantle and outside the red roses shook and whispered in the witch’s garden.

“I cannot help you if you tell me nothing,” said Dirk at length in a grim manner.

“I will tell you this,” answered she passionately. “There is a man I hate, a man in my way—I do not talk wildly; that man must go, and if you will be the means—”

“You will be in my power as I am now in yours,” thought Dirk, completing the broken sentence.

The lady looked out at the roses.

“I cannot convey to you what nights of horror and days of bitterness, what resolutions formed and resolutions broken—what hate, and what—love have gone to form the impulse that brought me here to-day—nor does it concern ye; certes enough I am resolved, and if your spells can aid me—” She turned her head sharply. “I will pay you very well.”

“You have told me nothing,” repeated Dirk. “And though I can discover what you are and who is your enemy, it were better that you told me with your own lips.”

She seemed, now, in an ill-concealed agitation.

“Not to-day will I speak. I will come again. I know this place . . . meanwhile, certes, your secret is safe with me—think over what I have said.”

She rose as if to take a hasty departure; but Dirk was in her way.

“Nay,” he said firmly. “At least show your face— how shall I know you again? And what confidence have you in me if you will not take off your mask? I say you shall.”

She trembled between a sigh and a laugh.

“Perhaps my face is not worth gazing at,” she answered on a breath.

“I wot ye are a fair woman,” replied Dirk, who heard the consciousness of it in her alluring voice.

Still she hesitated.

“Know ye many about the Court?” she asked.

“Nay. I have not concerned myself with the Court.”

“Well, then—and since I must trust you—and like you”—her voice rose and fell—“look at me and remember me.”

She loosened her cloak, flung back the hood and quickly unfastening the mask, snatched it off.

The disguise flung aside, she was revealed to the shoulders, clearly in the warm twilight.

Dirk’s first impression was, that this was beauty that swept from his mind all other beauty he had ever beheld; his second, that it was the same face he and Theirry had seen in the mirror.

“Oh!” he cried.

“Well?” said the lady, the hideous mask in her band.

Now she was disclosed, it was as if another presence had entered the dusky chamber, so difficult was it to associate this brilliance with the cloaked figure of a few moments since.

Certainly she was of a great beauty, smiting into breathlessness, a beauty not to be realised until beheld; Dirk would not have believed that a woman could be so fair.

If Jacobea’s hair was yellow, this lady’s locks were pale, pure glittering gold, and her eyes a deep, soft, violet hue; the throwing back of her cloak revealed her round slender throat, and the glimmer of a rich bodice.

The smile faded from her lips, and her gorgeous loveliness became grave, almost tragic.

“You do not know me?” she asked.

“No,” answered Dirk; he could not tell her that he had seen her before in his devil’s mirror.

“But you will recognise me again?”

Dirk laughed quietly.

“You were not made to be forgotten. Strange with such a face ye should have need of witchcraft!”

The lady replaced the mottled mask, that looked the more horrible after that glimpse of gleaming beauty, and drew her mantle over her shoulders.

“I shall come to you or send to you, sir. Think on what I have said, and on what I know.”

She was obscured again, hidden in her green cloak. Dirk proffered no question, made no comment, but preceded her down the dark passage and opened the door; she passed out; her footstep was light on the path; Dirk watched her walk rapidly down the street then closed the door and bolted it. After a pause of breathless confusion and heart-heating excitement, he ran to the back of the house and out into the garden.

It was just light enough for the huge dusky roses to be visible as they nodded on their trailing bushes; Dirk ran between them until he reached a gaunt stone statue half concealed by laurels; in front of this were flags irregularly placed; in the centre of one was an iron ring; Dirk, pulling at this, disclosed a trap door that opened at his effort, and revealed a flight of steps; he descended from the soft pure evening and the red roses into the witch's kitchen, closing the stone above him.

The underground chamber was large and lit by lamps hanging from the roof, revealing smooth stone walls and damp floor; in one side a gaping blackness showed where a passage twisted to the outer air; on another was a huge alchemist's fireplace; before this sat the witch, about her a quantity of glass vessels, retorts and pots of various shapes.

Either side this fireplace hung a human body, black and withered, swinging from rusted ropes and crowned with wreaths of green and purple blotched leaves.

On a table set against the wall was a brass head that glimmered in the feeble light.

Dirk crossed the floor with his youthful step and touched Nathalie on the shoulder.

"One came to see me," he said breathlessly. "A marvellous lady."

"I know," murmured the witch. "And was it to play into thy hands?"

The air was thick and tainted with unwholesome smells; Dirk leant against the wall and stared down the chamber, his hand to his brow.

"She threatened me," he said, "and for a moment I was afraid; for, certes, I do not wish to leave Frankfort . . . but she wished me to serve her—which I will do—for a price."

"Who is she?" blinked the witch.

"That I am come to discover," frowned Dirk. "And who it is she spoke of—also somewhat of Jacobea of Martzburg"—he coughed, for the foul atmosphere had entered his nostrils. "Give me the globe."

The witch handed him a ball of a dark muddy colour, which he placed on the floor, flinging himself beside it; Nathalie drew a pentagon round the globe and pronounced some words in a low tone; a slight tremor shook the ground, though it was solid earth they stood on, and the globe turned a pale, luminous, blue tint.

Dirk pushed back the damp hair from his eyes, and, resting his face in his hands, his elbows on the ground, he stared into the depths of the crystal, the colour of which brightened until it glowed a ball of azure fire.

"I see nothing," he said angrily.

The witch repeated her incantations; she leant forward, the yellow coins glistening on her pale forehead.

Rays of light began to sparkle from the globe. "Show me something of the lady who came here to-day," commanded Dirk.

They waited.

"Do ye see anything?" breathed the witch.

"Yea—very faintly."

He gazed for a while in silence.

"I see a man," he said at last. "The spells are wrong . . . I see nothing of the lady—"

"Watch, though," cried the witch. "What is he like?"

"I cannot see distinctly . . . he is on horseback . . . he wears armour . . . now I can see his face—he is young, dark—he has black hair—"

"Do ye know him?"

“Nay—I have never seen him before.” Dirk did not lift his eyes from the globe. “He is evidently a knight . .. he is magnificent but cold . . .ah!”

His exclamation was at the change in the ball; slowly it faded into a faint blue, then became again dark and muddy.

He flung it angrily out of the pentagon.

“What has that told me?” he cried. “What is this man?”

“Question Zerdusht,” said the witch, pointing to the brass head. “Maybe he will speak to-night.”

She flung a handful of spices on to the slow-burning fire, and a faint smoke rose, filling the chamber.

Dirk crossed to the brass head and surveyed it with eager hollow eyes.

“The dead men dance,” smiled the witch. “Certes, he will speak to-night.”

Dirk turned his wild gaze to where the corpses hung. Their shrivelled limbs twisted and jerked at the end of their chain, and the horrid lurid colour of their poisonous wreaths gleamed through the smoke and shook with the nodding of their faceless heads.

“Zerdusht, Zerdusht,” murmured Dirk. “In the name of Satan, his legions, speak to thy servant, show or tell him something of the woman who came here to-day on an evil errand.”

A heavy stillness fell with the ending of the words; the smoke became thick and dense, then suddenly cleared.

At that instant the lamps were extinguished and the fire fell into ashes.

“Something comes,” whispered the witch.

Through the dark could be heard the dance of the dead men and the grind of their bones against the ropes.

Dirk stood motionless, his straining eyes fixed before him.

Presently a pale light spread over the end of the chamber, and in it appeared the figure of a young knight; his black hair fell from under his helmet, his face was composed and somewhat haughty, his dark eyes fearless and cold.

“’Tis he I saw in the crystal!” cried Dirk, and as be spoke the light and the figure disappeared.

Dirk beat his breast.

“Zerdusht! ye mock me! I asked ye of this woman! I know not the man.”

The brass head suddenly glowed out of the darkness as if a light shone behind it; the lids twitched, opened, and glittering red eyeballs stared at Dirk, who shouted in triumph.

He fell on his knees.

“A year ago to-day I saw a woman in the mirror; to-day she came to me . . . who is she?. . . Zerdusht—her name?”

The brass lips moved and spoke.

“Ysabeau.”

What did this tell him?

“Who was the knight ye have shown me?” he cried.

“Her husband,” answered the head.

“Who is the man she seeks my aid to . . . to . . . who is it of whom she spoke to me?”

The flaming eyeballs rolled.

“Her husband.”

Dirk gave a start.

“Make haste,” came the witch’s voice through the swimming blackness. “The light fades.”

“Who is she?”

“The Empress of the West,” said the brass head. A cry broke from Dirk and the witch; Dirk shrieked another question.

“She wishes to put another in the Emperor’s place?”

“ Yea;” the light was growing fainter; the eyelids flickered over the red eyes.

“Whom?” cried Dirk. Faint, yet distinct came the answer—

“The Lord of Ursula of Rooselaare, Balthasar of Courtrai .“

The lids fell and the jaws clicked, the light sank into nothingness, and the lamps sprang again into dismal flame that disclosed the black bodies of the dead men, hanging slackly with their wreaths touching their chests, the witch crouching by the hearth—

And in the centre of the floor Dirk, smiling horribly.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SNARING OF JACOBEA

The great forest was so silent, so lonely, the aisles of a vast church could have been no more sanctified by holy stillness.

Even the summer wind that trembled in the upper boughs of the huge trees had not penetrated their thick branches and intertwined leaves, so that the grass and flowers were standing erect, untroubled by a breath of air, and the sun, that dazzled without on the town of Frankfort did not touch the glowing green gloom of the forest.

Seated low on the grass by a wayside shrine that held a little figure of the Madonna, Nathalie the witch, hunched together in a brown cloak, looked keenly into the depths of cool shade between the tree trunks.

She was watching the distant figure of a lady tremble into sight among the leaves of the under-growth.

A lady who walked hesitatingly and fearfully; as she drew near, the witch could see that the long yellow dress she held up was torn and soiled, and that her hair hung disarranged on her shoulders; breathing in a quick, fatigued manner she came towards the shrine, but seeing the witch she stopped abruptly and her grey eyes darkened with apprehension.

“‘What is amiss with Jacobea of Martzburg,” asked the witch in her expressionless way, “that she walks the forest disarrayed and alone?”

“I am lost,” answered Jacobea, shrinking. “How do you know me?

“By your face,” said Nathalie. “How is it you are lost?

“Will you tell me the way to Frankfort?” asked Jacobea wearily. “I have walked since noon. I was accompanying the Empress from the tournament and my horse broke away with me—I slipped from the saddle. Now I have lost him.”

Nathalie smiled faintly.

“I know not where I am,” said Jacobea, still with that look of apprehension in her sweet eyes. “Will you set me on my path?”

She glanced at the shrine, then at the witch, and put her hand to her forehead; dazed, she seemed, and bewildered.

“Of what are you afraid?” asked Nathalie.

“Oh, why should I be afraid!” answered Jacobea, with a start. “But—why, it is very lonely here and I must get home.”

“Let me tell your fortune,” said the witch, slowly rising. “You have a curious fortune, and I will reveal it without gold or silver.”

“No!” Jacobea’s voice was agitated. “I have no credence in those things. I will pay you to show me the way out of the forest.”

But the witch had crossed softly to her side, and, to her manifest shrinking terror, caught hold of her hand.

“What do you imagine you hold in your palm?” she smiled.

Jacobea endeavoured to draw her hand away, the near presence of the woman quickened her unnamed terror.

“Lands and castles,” said the witch, while her fingers tightened on the striving wrist. “Gold and loneliness—”

“You know me,” answered Jacobea, in anger. “There is no magic in this . . . let me go!”

The witch dropped the lady’s hand and smoothed her own together.

“I do not need the lines in your palm to tell me your fortune,” she said sharply. “I know more of you than you would care to hear, Jacobea of Martzburg.”

The lady turned away and stepped quickly but aimlessly down the shaded glade.

Nathalie, dragging her brown cloak, came lightly after.

“You cannot escape,” she said. “You may walk in and out the trees until you die of weariness, yet never find your way to Frankfort.”

She laid her small thin fingers on the soft velvet of Jacobea’s yellow sleeve and blinked up into her startled eyes.

“Who are you?” cried the lady, with a touch of desperation in her faint voice. And what do you want with me?”

The witch licked her pale lips.

“Come with me and I will show you.”

Jacobea shuddered.

“No, I will not.”

“You cannot find your way alone,” nodded the witch.

The lady hesitated; she looked around her at the motionless aisles of trees, the silent glades, she looked up at the arching boughs and clustering leaves concealing the sky.

“Indeed I will nay you well if you will guide me out of this,” she entreated.

“Come with me now,” answered Nathalie, “and afterwards I will set you on your way.”

“To what end should I go with you?” exclaimed Jacobea. “I know you not, and, God help me, I mistrust you.”

The witch shot a scornful glance over the lady’s tall figure, supple with the strength of youth.

“What evil could I do *you?*” she asked.

Jacobea considered her intently; indeed she was small, seemed frail also; Jacobea’s white fingers could have crushed the life out of her lean throat.

Still she was reluctant.

“To what end?” she repeated.

Nathalie did not answer, but turned into a grass-grown path that twisted through the trees, and Jacobea, afraid of the loneliness, followed her slowly.

As they went through the forest, the green, still forest, with no flower to vary the clinging creepers and great blossomless plants, with no sound of bird or insect to mingle with their light tread and the sweep of their garments on the ground, Jacobea was aware that her senses were

being dulled and drugged with the silence and the strangeness; she felt no longer afraid or curious.

After a while they came upon a pool lying in a hollow and grown about with thick, dark ferns; the sunless waters were black and dull, on the surface of them floated some dead leaves and the vivid unwholesome green of a tangled weed.

A young man in a plain dark dress was seated on the opposite bank.

On his knees was an open book, and his long straight hair hung either side of his face and brushed the yellow page.

Behind him stood the shattered trunk of a blasted tree, grown with fan-shaped fungi of brilliant scarlet and blotched purple and orange that glowed gorgeously in the universal cold soft greenness.

"Oh me!" murmured Jacobea.

The young man lifted his eyes from the book and looked at her across the black water.

Jacobea would have fled, would have flung herself into the forest with no thought but that of escape from those eyes gazing at her over the pages of that ancient volume; but the witch's loathsome little hands closed on hers with a marvellous strength and drew her, shuddering, round the edge of the pond.

The youth shut the book, stretched his slender limbs, and, half turning on his side, lay and watched.

Jacobea's noble and lovely figure, clothed in a thick soft velvet of a luminous yellow hue; her blonde hair, straying on her shoulders and mingling with the glowing tint of her gown; her grave and sweet face, lit and guarded by grey eyes, soft and frightened, made a fair picture against the sombre background of the dark wood.

A picture marred only by the insignificant and drab-coloured figure of the little witch who held her hand and dragged her through the dank grass.

"Do you remember me?" asked the youth.

Jacobea turned her head away.

"Let go of her, Nathalie," continued the youth impatiently; he rested his elbow on the closed book and propped his chin on his hand; his eyes rested eagerly and admiringly on the lady's shuddering fairness.

"She will run," said Nathalie, but she loosened her hold.

Jacobea did not stir; she shook the hand Nathalie had held and caressed it with the other.

The young man put back his heavy hair.

"Do you know me?"

She slowly turned her face, pearl pale above the glowing colour of her dress.

"Yes, you came to my castle for shelter once."

Dirk did not lower his intense, ardent gaze.

"Well, how did I reward your courtesy? I told you something."

She would not answer.

"I told you something," repeated Dirk. "And you have not forgotten it."

"Let me go," she said. "I do not know who you are nor what you mean. Let me go."

She turned as if to move away, but sank instead on to one of the moss-covered boulders that edged the pond and clasped her fingers over the shining locks straying across her bosom.

"You have never been the same since that time you sheltered me," said Dirk.

She stiffened with dread and pride.

“Ye are some evil thing,” she said; her glance was fierce for the passive witch. “Why was I brought here?”

“Because it was my wish,” answered Dirk gravely. “Your horse does not often carry you away, Jacobea of Martzburg, and leave you in a trackless forest.”

The lady started at his knowledge.

“That also was my will,” said Dirk.

“Your will!” she echoed.

Dirk smiled, with an ugly show of his teeth.

“Belike the horse was bewitched—have ye not heard of such a thing?”

“Santa Maria!” she cried.

Dirk sat up and clasped his long fingers round his knees.

“You have given a youth I know a post at Court,” he said. “Why?”

Jacobea shivered and could not move; she looked drearily at the black water and the damp masses of fern, then with a slow horror at the figure of the young man seated under the blasted tree.

“I do not know,” she answered weakly, “I never disliked him.”

“As ye did me,” added Dirk.

“Maybe I had no cause to love you,” she returned, goaded. “Why did you ever come to my castle? why did I ever see you?”

She put her cold hand over her eyes.

“No matter for that,” mocked Dirk. “So ye liked my comrade Theirry?”

She answered as if forced against her will. “Well enough I liked him. Was he not pleasured to encounter me again, and since he was doing nought—I—but why do you question me? Can it be that you are jealous?”

The young man pulled his heavy brows together.

“Am I a silly maid to be jealous? Meddle not with things ye cannot measure, it had been better for you had you never seen my comrade’s fair face—ay, and for me also,” and he frowned

“Surely he is free to do as he may list,” returned Jacobea. “If he choose to come to Court .

“If ye choose to tempt him,” answered Dirk. “But enough of that.”

He rose and leant against the tree; above his slender shoulder rose the jagged tongue of grey wood and the smooth colour of the clustering fungi, and beyond that the forest sank into immense depths of still gloom.

Jacobea strove desperately with her dull dread and terror, but it seemed to her as if a sickly vapour was rising from the black pool that chilled her blood to horror; she could not escape Dirk’s steady eyes that were like bright stones in his smooth face.

“Come here,” he said.

Jacobea made no movement to obey until the witch clutched her arm, when she shook off the clinging fingers and approached the spot where Dirk waited.

“I think you have bewitched me,” she said drearily.

“Not I, another has done that,” he answered. “Certes, ye are slow in mating, Jacobea of Martzburg.”

A little shuddering breath stirred her parted lips; she looked to right and left, saw nothing but the enclosing forest, and turned her frightened eyes on Dirk.

“I know some little magic,” he continued. “Shall I show you the man you would wish to make Lord of Martzburg?”

“There is no one,” she said feebly.

“You lie,” he answered. “As I could prove.”

“As you cannot prove,” she returned, clasping her hands together.

Dirk smiled.

“Why, you are a fair thing and a gentle, but you have rebellious thoughts, thoughts ye would blush to whisper at the confessional grate.”

She moved her lips, but did not speak.

“Why did your steward come with ye to Frankfort?” asked Dirk. “And his wife stay as chatelaine of Martzburg? It had been more fitting had he remained. What reward will he receive for his services as your henchman at the Court?”

Jacobea drew her handkerchief from her girdle and pressed it to her lips.

“What reward do you imagine I should offer?” she answered very slowly.

“I cannot tell,” said Dirk, with a hot force behind every word. “For I do not know if you are a fool or no, but this I know, the man waits a word from you—”

“Stop!” said Jacobea.

But Dirk continued ruthlessly—

“He waits, I tell you—”

“Oh God, for what?” she cried.

“For you to say—‘you think me fair, Sebastian, you know me rich and all my life shall prove me loving, and only a red-browed woman in Martzburg Castle prevents you coming from my footstool to my side’—said you that, he would take horse to-morrow for Martzburg and return a free man.”

The handkerchief fell from Jacobea’s fingers and fluttered on the dark ferns.

“You are a fiend,” she said in a sick voice. “You cannot be human to so touch my heart, and you are wrong, I dare to tell you in the name of God that you are wrong—those evil thoughts have never come to me.”

“In the name of the Devil I am right,” smiled Dirk.

“The Devil! Ye are one of his agents!” she cried in a trembling defiance. “Or how could you guess what I scarcely knew until ye came that baleful night?—what he never knew till then—ah, I swear it, be never dreamt that I—never dreamt what my favour meant, but now—his—eyes—I cannot mistake them.”

“He is a dutiful servant,” said Dirk, “he waits for his mistress to speak.”

Jacobea sank to her knees on the grass.

“I entreat you to forbear,” she whispered. “Whoever you are, whatever your object I ask your mercy. I am very unhappy—do not goad me—drive me further.”

Dirk stepped forward and caught her drooping shoulders in his firm hands.

“Pious fool!” he cried. “How long do you think you can endure this? how long do you think he will remain the servant when he knows he might be the master?”

She averted her agonised face.

“Then it was from you he learned it, you——”

Dirk interrupted hotly—

“He knows, remember that! he knows and he waits. Already he hates the woman who keeps him dumb; it were very easily done—one look, some few words—ye would not find him slow of understanding.” He loosened his grasp on her and Jacobea fell forward and clasped his feet.

“I implore you take back this wickedness, I am weak; since my first sight of you I have been striving against your influence that is killing me; man or demon, I beseech you, let me be!”

She raised her face, the slow, bitter tears forced out of her sweet, worn eyes; her hair fell like golden embroidery over the yellow gown, and her fingers fluttered on her unhappy bosom.

Dirk considered her curiously and coldly.

"I am neither man nor demon," he said. "But this I tell you, as surely as he is more to you than your own soul, so surely are you lost."

"Lost! lost!" she repeated, and half raised herself.

"Certes, therefore get the price of your soul," he mocked. "What is the woman to you? A cold-hearted jade, as good dead now as fifty years hence—what is one sin the more? I tell you while you set that man's image up in your heart before that of God ye are lost already."

"I am so lonely," she whispered piteously. "Had I one friend—" She paused, as though some one came into her mind with the words, and Dirk, intently watching her, suddenly flushed and glowed with anger.

He stepped back and clapped his hands.

"I promised you a sight of your lover," he said. "Now let him speak for himself."

Jacobea turned her head sharply.

A few feet away from her stood Sebastian, holding back the heavy boughs and looking at her.

She gave a shriek and swiftly rose; Dirk and the witch had disappeared; if they had slipped into the undergrowth and were yet near they gave no answer when she wildly called to them; the vast forest seemed utterly empty save for the silent figure of Sebastian.

Not doubting now that Dirk was some evil being whom her own wicked thoughts had evoked, believing that the appearance of her steward was some phantom sent for her undoing, she, unfortunate, distracted with misery and terror, turned with a shuddering relief to the oblivion of the still pool.

Hastening with trembling feet through the clinging weeds and ferns, she climbed down the damp bank and would have cast herself into the dull water, when she heard his voice calling her—a human voice.

She paused, lending a fearful ear to the sound while the water rippled from her foot.

"It is I," he called. "My lady, it is I."

This was Sebastian himself, no delusion nor ghost but her living steward, as she had seen him this morning in his brown riding-habit, wearing her gold and blue colours round his hat.

She mastered her terror and confusion.

"Indeed, you frightened me,"—a lie rose to save her. "I thought it some robber—I did not know you.

Fear of his personal aid gave her strength to move away from the water and gain the level ground.

"I have been searching for you," said Sebastian. "We came upon your horse on the high road and then upon your gloves in the grass, so, as no rider could come among these trees, on foot I sought for you. I am glad that you are safe."

This calm and carefully ordered speech gave her time to gather courage; she fumbled at her bosom, drew forth a crucifix and clutched it to her lips with a murmur of passionate prayers.

He could not but notice this; he must perceive her soiled torn dress, her wild face, her white exhaustion, but he gave no sign of it.

"It was a fortunate chance that sent me here," he said gravely. "The wood is so vast—"

"Ay, so vast," she answered. "Know you the way out, Sebastian?"

She tried to nerve herself to look at him, but her glance was lifted only to fall instantly again.

“You must forgive me,” she said, struggling with a fainting voice. “I have walked very far, I am so weary—I must rest a while.”

But she did not sit, nor did he urge that she should.

“Have you met no one?” he asked.

She hesitated; if he had encountered neither the woman nor the young man, then they were indeed wizards or of some unearthly race—she could not bring herself to speak of them.

“No,” she answered at length.

“We have a long way to walk,” said the steward.

Jacobea felt his look upon her, and grasped her crucifix until the sharp edges of it cut her palm.

“Do you know the way?” she repeated dully.

“Ay,” he answered now. “But it is far.”

She gathered up her long skirt and shook off the withered leaves that clung to it.

“Will you lead the way?” she said.

He turned and moved ahead of her down the narrow path by which he had come; as she followed him she heard his foot fall soft on the thick grass and the swishing sound of the straying boughs as he held them back for her to pass, till she found the silence so unendurable that she nerved herself to break it; but several times she gathered her strength in vain for the effort, and when at last some foolish words had come to her lips, he suddenly looked back over his shoulder and checked her speech.

“’Tis strange that your horse should have gone mad in such a manner,” he said.

“But ye found him?” she faltered.

“Ay, a man found him, exhausted and trembling like a thing bewitched.”

Her heart gave a great leap—had he used that word by chance—

She could not answer.

“Ye were not hurt, my lady, when ye were thrown?” said the steward.

“No,” said Jacobea, “no.”

Silence again; no bird nor butterfly disturbed the sombre stillness of the wood, no breeze stirred the thick leaves that surrounded them; gradually the path widened until it brought them into a great space grown with ferns and overarched with trees.

Then Sebastian paused.

“It is a long way yet,” he said. “Will you rest a while?”

“No,” she replied vehemently. “Let us get on— where are the others? surely we must meet some one soon!”

“I do not know that any came this way,” he answered, and cast his brooding glance over the “trembling weariness of her figure.

“Ye must rest, certes, it is folly to persist,” he added, with some authority.

She seated herself, lifting the hand that held the crucifix to her bosom.

“How full of shadows it is here,” she said. “It is difficult to fancy the shining of the sun on the tops of these darkened trees.”

“I do not love forests,” answered Sebastian. As he stood his profile was towards her; and she must mark again the face that she knew so bitterly well, his thin dark cheek, his heavy-lidded eyes, his contained mouth.

Gazing down into the clusters of ferns at his feet, he spoke—

“I think I must return to Martzburg,” he said.

She braced herself, making a gesture with her hand as if she would ward off his words.

“You know that you are free to do what you will, Sebastian.

He took off his right glove slowly and looked at his hand.

"Is it not better that I should go?"

He challenged her with a full sideways glance.

"I do not know," she said desperately, "why you put this to me, here and now."

"I do not often see you alone."

He was not a man of winning manners or of easy speech; his words came stiffly, yet with a purpose in them that chilled her with a deeper sense of dread.

She opened her hand to stare down at the crucifix in her palm.

"You can leave Frankfort when you wish—why not?" she said.

He faced her quickly.

"But I may come back?"

It seemed to Jacobea that he echoed Dirk's words; the crucifix slipped through her trembling fingers on to the grass.

"What do you mean? Oh, Sebastian, what do you mean?" The words were forced from her, but uttered under her breath; she added instantly, in a more courageous voice, "Go and come as you list, are you not free?"

He saw the crucifix at her feet and picked it up, but she drew back as he came near and held out her hand.

He put the crucifix into it, frowning, his eyes dark and bright with excitement.

"Do you recall the two students who were housed that night in Martzburg?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Is not one now at Court?"

"I would mean the other—the boy," answered Sebastian.

She averted her face and drooped until the ends of her hair touched her knees.

"I met him again to-day," continued the steward, with a curious lift in his voice, "here, in this forest, while searching for you. He spoke to me."

Certainly the Devil was enmeshing her, surely he had brought her to this pass, sent Sebastian, of all men, to find her in her weariness and loneliness.

And Sebastian knew—knew also that she knew—outspoken words between them could be hardly more intolerable shame than this.

"He is cunning beyond most," said the steward.

Jacobea lifted her head.

"He is an enchanter—a wizard, do not listen to him, do not speak to him—as you value your soul, Sebastian, do not think of him."

"As I value some other things," he answered grimly, "I must both listen to him and consider what he says."

She rose.

"We will go on our way. I cannot talk with you now, Sebastian."

But he stood in her path.

"Let me journey to Martzburg," he said thickly; "one word—I shall understand you."

She glanced and saw him extraordinarily keen and moved; he was lord of Martzburg could he but get her to pledge herself; in his eagerness, however, he forgot advice. "Tell her," said Dirk, "you have adored her for years in secret." This escaped his keenness, for though his wife was nothing to him compared with his ambition, he had no tenderness for Jacobea. Had he remembered to feign it he might have triumphed and now; but though her gentle heart believed he held her dear, that he did not say so made firmness possible for her.

"You shall stay in Frankfort," she said, with sudden strength.

“Sybilla asks my return,” he said, gazing at her passionately. “Do we not understand each other without words?”

“The fiend has bewitched you also,” she answered fearfully. “You know too much—-you guess too much—and yet I tell you nothing, and I, I also am bewitched, for I cannot reply to you as I should.”

“I have been silent long,” he said. “But I have dared to think—had I been free—as I can be free—”

The crucifix was forgotten in her hand.

“We do evil to talk like this,” she said, half fainting.

“You will bid me go to Martzburg,” he insisted, and took her long cold fingers.

She raised her eyes to the boughs above her.

“No, no!” then, “God have compassion on me!” she said.

The thick foliage stirred—Jacobea felt as if the bars of a cage were being broken about her—she turned her head and a little colour flushed her cheek.

Through the silvery stems of the larches came some knights and a page boy, members of the party left to search for her.

She moved towards them; she hailed them almost gaily; none, save Sebastian, saw her as they turned towards Frankfort raise the crucifix and press her lips to it.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SNARING OF THEIRRY

Dirk and the witch kept company until they reached the gates of Frankfort.

There the young man took his own way through the busy town, and Nathalie slipped aside into the more retired streets; many of the passers-by saluted Dirk, some halted to speak with him; the brilliant young doctor of rhetoric, with a reputation made fascinating by an air of mystery, was a desired acquaintance among the people of Frankfort. He returned their greetings pleasantly yet absently; he was thinking of Jacobea of Martzburg, whom he had left behind in the great forest, and considering what chances there might be, either for Theirry or Sybilla the steward’s wife.

He passed the tall red front of the college, where the quiet trees tapped their leaves against the arched windows, turned over the narrow curved bridge that spanned the steadily flowing waters of the Main, and came to the thick walls surrounding the Emperor’s castle.

There for a moment he paused and looked thoughtfully up at the Imperial flag that fluttered softly against the evening sky.

When he passed on it was with a cheerful step and whistling a little tune under his breath; a few moments brought him to the long street where the witch lived, a few more to her gate, and then his face lit and changed wonderfully, for ahead of him was Theirry.

Flushed and panting, he ran to his friend’s side and touched him on the arm.

Theirry turned, his hand on the latch; his greeting was hurried, half shamefaced.

“My master and most of the Court were at the tourney to-day,” he said. “I thought it safe to come.”

Dirk withdrew his hand, and his eyes narrowed.

“Ah!—ye are beginning to be circumspect how ye visit here.”

“You word it unkindly,” answered Theirry hastily. “Let us enter the house, where we can talk at ease.”

They passed into the witch's dwelling, and to the room at the back that looked into the garden of red roses.

The windows were set wide, and the scented softness of the evening filled the half-darkened chamber; Dirk lit a little lamp that had a green glass, and by the faint. flame of it gazed long and lingeringly at Theirry.

He found his friend richly dressed in black and crimson, wearing an enamel chain round his bonnet, and a laced shirt showing at his bosom; he found the glowing, bright charm of his face disturbed by some embarrassment or confusion, the beautiful mouth uneasily set, the level brows slightly frowning.

"Oh, Theirry!" he cried in a half-mournful yearning. "Come back to me—come back."

"I am very well at Court," was the quick answer. "My master is gentle and my tasks easy."

Dirk seated himself at the table; he watched the other intently and rested his pale cheek on his hand.

"Very clearly can I see ye are well, and very well at Court—seldom do ye leave it."

"I find it difficult to get here often," said Theirry.

He crossed to the window and looked out, as if the room oppressed him, and he thought the prospect of the roses pleasanter than the shadows and lamplight within.

"Ye find it difficult," said Dirk, "because your desires chain you to the Court. I think ye are a faithless friend."

"That am not I—ye know more of me than any man—I care more for ye than for any man—"

"Or woman?" added Dirk dryly.

An impatient colour came into Theirry's cheeks; he looked resolutely at the red roses.

"That is unworthy in you, Dirk—is it disloyal to you to know a lady—to—to—admire a lady, to strive to serve and please a lady?"

He turned his charming face, and, in his effort to conciliate, his voice was gentle and winning. "Truly she is the sweetest of her kind, Dirk; if you knew her—evil is abashed before her—"

"Then it is as well I do not know her," Dirk retorted grimly. "Strangely ye talk—you and I know we are not saints—but belike ye would reform—belike a second time ye have repented."

Theirry seemed in some agitation.

"No, no—have I not gone too far? Do I not still hope to gain something—perhaps everything?" He paused, then added in a low voice, "But I wish I had never laid hands on the monk. I wish I had not touched God His money—and when I see her I cannot prevent my heart from smarting at the thought of what I am."

"How often do you see her?" asked Dirk quietly.

"But seldom," answered Theirry sadly. "And it is better—what could I ever be to her?"

Dirk smiled sombrely.

"That is true. Yet you would waste your life dallying round the places where you may sometimes see her face."

Theirry bit his lip.

"Oh, you think me a fool—to falter, to regret;— but what have my sins ever done for me? There are many honest men better placed than I—and without the prospect of hell to blast their souls."

Dirk looked at him with lowering eyes.

"You had been content had you not met this lady."

“Enough of her,” answered Theirry wearily. “You make too much of it. I do not think I love her; but one who is fallen must view such sweetness, such gentle purity with sorrow—yea, with yearning.”

Dirk clasped his hand on the edge of the table.

“Maybe she is neither so pure nor so gentle as you think. Certes! she is but as other women, as one day ye may see.”

Theirry turned from the window half in protest, half in excuse.

“Cannot you understand how one may hold a fair thing dear—how one might worship—even—love?”

“Yes,” answered Dirk, and his great eyes were bright and misty. “But if I—loved”—he spoke the word beautifully, and rose as he uttered it—“I would so grapple his—her soul to mine that we should be together to all eternity; nor devil nor angel should divide us. But—but there is no need to talk of that—there are other matters to deal with.”

“Would I had never seen the evil books or never seen her face,” said Theirry restlessly. “So at least I had been undivided in my thoughts.”

He came to the table and looked at Dirk across the sickly, struggling flame of the lamp; in his hazel eyes was an expression of appeal, the call of the weak to the strong, and the other held out his hands impulsively.

“Ah, I am a fool to trouble with ye, my friend,” he said, and his voice broke with tenderness. “For ye are headstrong and unstable, and care not for me one jot, I warrant me—yet—yet you may do what you will with this silly heart of mine.”

There was a grace, a wistful affection in his face, in his words, in his gesture of outstretched hands that instantly moved Theirry, ever quick to respond. He took the young doctor’s slender fingers in a warm clasp; they were very quickly withdrawn. Dirk had a notable dislike to a touch, but his deep eyes smiled.

“I have somewhat to tell you,” he said, “at which your impatience will be pleased.”

He went lightly to a press in the wall and brought forth a mighty candlestick of red copper, branched and engraved three half-burnt candles remained in the sockets; he lit these, and the room was filled with a brighter and pleasanter light.

Setting the candlestick on the table, where it glowed over Theirry’s splendid presence, he returned to the cupboard and took out a tall bottle of yellow wine and two glasses with milk-white lines about the rims.

Theirry seated himself at the table, pulled off his gloves and smoothed his hair back from his face.

“Have you seen the Empress?” asked Dirk, pouring out the wine.

“Yea,” answered Theirry, without interest.

“She is very beautiful?”

“Certes!—but of a cloying sweetness—there is no touch of nobility in her.”

Dirk held the wine out across the table and seated himself.

“I have heard she is ambitious,” he said.

“Ay, she gives the Emperor no rest; for ever urging him to Rome, to be crowned by the Pope as Emperor of the West;—but he better loves the North, and has no spirit to rule in Italy.”

“The nobles chafe at his inaction?” asked Dirk. “’Tis not idle questioning.”

“Mostly, I think—do we not all have golden dreams of Rome? Balthasar—ye mind him, he is Margrave of East Flanders now, since his father was killed at the boar hunt—and powerful, he is mad to cross the Alps—he has great influence with the Emperor. Indeed, I think he loves him.”

Dirk set down the untasted wine.

"Balthasar loves the Emperor!" he cried.

"Certes! yes—why not? The Margrave was always affectionate, and the Emperor is lovable."

A second time Dirk raised the glass, and now drained it.

"Here is good matter for plots," he said, elegantly wiping his lips. "Here is occasion for you and me to make our profit. Said ye the Devil was a bad master?—listen to this."

Theirry moved the candlestick; the gold light dazzled in his eyes.

"What can Emperor or Empress be to us?" he asked, a half-bewildered fear darkening his brows.

"She has been here," said Dirk. "The Lady Ysabeau."

Theirry stared intently; a quick breath stirred his parted lips; his cheeks glowed with excited colour.

"She knows," continued Dirk, "that I, Doctor Constantine of Frankfort College, and you, meek secretary to her Chamberlain, are the two students chased from Basle University."

Theirry gave a little sound of pain, and drew back in the huge carved chair.

"So," said Dirk slowly, "she has it in her power to ruin us—at least in Frankfort."

"How can I hold up my head at Court again!" exclaimed Theirry bitterly.

Dirk noted the utterly selfish thought; he did not mention how he had shielded Theirry from suspicion.

"There is more in it than that," he answered quietly. "Did she choose she might have us burnt in the market place—Joris of Thuringia died of his illness that night."

"Oh!" cried Theirry, blenching.

"But she will not choose," said Dirk calmly. "She needs me—us—that threat is but her means of forcing obedience; she came secretly to my lectures—she had heard somewhat—she discovered more."

Theirry filled his glass.

"She needs us?" he repeated falteringly.

"Cannot ye guess in what way?"

Theirry drank, set down the half-emptied glass, and looked at the floor with troubled eyes that evaded the other's bright eyes.

"How can I tell?" he asked, as if reluctant to speak at all.

Dirk repressed a movement of impatience.

"Come, you know. Shall I speak plainly?"

"Certes!—yes," answered Theirry, still with averted face.

"There is a man in her way."

Theirry looked up now; his eyes showed pale in his flushed face.

"Who must die as Joris of Thuringia died?" he asked.

"Yes."

Theirry moistened his lips.

"Am I to help you?"

"Are we not one—inseparable? The reward will be magnificent."

Theirry put his hand to a damp brow.

"Who is the man?"

"Hush!" whispered Dirk, peering through the halo of the candle-flame. "It is the Emperor."

With a violent movement, Theirry pushed back his chair and rose.

"Her husband! I will not do it, Dirk!"

“I do not think ye have a choice,” was the cold answer. “Ye gave yourself unto the Devil and unto me—and you shall serve us both.”

“I will not do it,” repeated Theirry in a shuddering voice.

Dirk’s eyes glimmered wrathfully.

“Take care how you say that. There are two already—what of the monk? I do not think you can turn back.”

Theirry showed a desperate face.

“Why have ye drawn me into this? Ye are deeper in devils’ arts than I.”

“That is a strange thing to say,” answered Dirk, very pale, his lips quivering. “You swore comradeship with me—together we were to pursue success—fame—power—you knew the means—ay, you knew by whose aid we were to rise, you shared with me the labours, the disgrace that fell on both of us. Together we worked the spells that slew Joris of Thuringia—together we stole God His gold from the monk; now— ay, and now when I tell you our chance has come—this is your manner of thanking me!”

“A chance!—to help a woman in a secret murder?”

Theirry spoke sullenly.

“Ye never thought our way would be the way of saintship—ye were not so nice that time ye bound Ambrose of Menthon to the tree.”

“How often must you remind me of that?” cried Theirry fiercely. “I had not done it but for you.”

“Well, say the same of this; if you be weak, I am strong enough for two.”

Theirry pulled at the crimson tassels on his slashed sleeves.

“It is not that I am afraid,” he said, flushing.

“Certes! you are afraid,” mocked Dirk. “Afraid of God, of justice, maybe of man—but I tell you that these things are nought to us.” He paused, lifted his eyes and lowered them again. “Our destiny is not of our shaping;—we take the weapons laid to our hands and use them as we are bid. Life and death shall both serve us to our appointed end.”

Theirry came to the other side of the table and gazed, fearfully, across at him.

“Who are you?” he questioned softly.

Dirk did not answer; an expression of dread and despair withered all the life in his features; the extraordinary look in his suddenly dimmed eyes sent a chill to Theirry’s heart.

“Ah!” he cried, stepping back with manifest loathing.

Dirk put his hand over his eyes and moaned.

“Do you hate me, Theirry? Do you hate me?”

“I—I do not know.” He could not explain his own sudden revulsion as he saw the change in Dirk’s face; he paced to and fro in a tumult.

Dark had closed in upon them and now blackness lay beyond the window and the half-open door; shadows obscured the corners of the long chamber; all the light, the red gleam of the candles, the green glow of the lamp, shone over the table and the slight figure of Dirk.

As Theirry stopped to gaze at him anew, Dirk suddenly lowered his white hand, and his eyes, blinking above his long fingers, held Theirry in a keen glance.

“This will make us more powerful than the Empress or the Emperor,” he said. “Leave your thoughts of me and ponder on that.”

He withdrew his hand and revealed lips as pale as his cheeks.

“What does that mean?” cried Theirry. “I am distracted.”

“We shall go to Rome,” replied Dirk; there was a lulling quality of temptation in his tone. “And you shall have your desires.”

“My desires!” echoed Theirry wildly. “I have trod an unholy path, pursuing the phantom of—my desires! Do you still promise me I shall one day grasp it?”

“Surely—money—and power and pleasure, these things wait you in Rome when Ysabeau shall have placed the imperial diadem on Balthasar’s brow. These things—and”—it seemed as if Dirk’s voice broke—“even Jacobea of Martzburg,” he added slowly.

“Can one win a saint by means of devilry?” cried Theirry.

“She is only a woman,” said Dirk wearily. “But, since you hesitate, and falter, I will absolve you from this league with me;—go your way, serve your saint, renounce your sins—and see what God will give you.”

Theirry crossed the room with unequal steps.

“No—I cannot—I will not forego even the hope of what you offer me.” His great eyes glittered with excitement; the hot blood darkened his cheek. “And I pledged myself to you and your master. Do not think me cowardly because I paused—who is the Emperor?” He spoke hoarsely. “Nothing to you or to me. . . . As you say, Joris of Thuringia died.”

“Now you speak like my comrade at Basle,” cried Dirk joyfully. “Now I see again the spirit that roused me to swear friendship with you the night we first met. Now I—ah, Theirry, we will be very faithful to one another, will we not?”

“I have no choice.”

“Swear it,” cried Dirk.

“I swear it,” said Theirry.

He went to the window, pushed it wider open and gazed out into the moonless night.

Dirk clasped and unclasped his hands on the table, murmuring—

“I have won him back—won him back!”

Theirry spoke, without turning his head.

“What do you mean to do next?”

“I shall see the Empress again,” answered Dirk.

“At present—be very secret;—that is all—there is no need to speak of it.”

Now it was he that was anxious to evade the subject; his eyes, bright under the drooping lids, marked the vehement, desperate eagerness of Theirry’s flushing face, and he smiled to see it.

“Your absence may be noticed at the palace,” he said softly. “You must return. How you can help me I will let you know.”

But Theirry stood irresolute.

“It seems I have no will when you command me,” he said, half in protest. “I come and go as you bid me—you stir my cold blood, and then will not give me satisfaction.”

“You know all that I do,” returned Dirk. He rose and raised the copper candlestick in both hands. “I am very weary. I will light you to the door.”

“Where have you been to-day?” asked Theirry.

“Did you see the Court returning from the tourney?”

The candle-flames, flaring with the movement, cast a rich glow over Dirk’s pallid face.

“No—why do you ask?” he said.

“I know not.” Theirry’s crimson doublet sparkled in its silk threads as his breast rose with the irregular breaths; he walked heavily to the door, gathering up his black mantle over his arm.

“When may I come again?” he asked.

“When you will,” answered Dirk. He entered the passage and held up the heavy candlestick, so that a great circle of light was cast on the darkness. “Ye are pledged to me whether ye come or no—are ye not?”

“Certes! I do think so,” said Theirry. He hesitated.

“Good-night,” whispered Dirk.

Theirry went down the passage.

“Good-night.”

He found the door and unlatched it; a soft but powerful breath of air fluttered the candle-flames almost on to Dirk’s face; he turned back into the room and shut himself in, leaving darkness behind him. Theirry stepped into the street and drew the latch; a few stars were out, but the night was cloudy. He leant against the side of the house; he felt excited, confused, impatient; Dirk’s abrupt dismissal rankled, he was half ashamed of the power exercised over him by his frail comrade, half bewildered by the allurement of the reward that promised to be so near now.

Rome—splendour, power—Jacobea of Martzburg—and only one stranger between him and this consummation; he wondered why he had ever hesitated, ever been horrified; his anticipations became so brilliant that they mounted like winged spirits to the clouds, catching him up with them; he could scarcely breathe in the close atmosphere of excitement; a thousand questions to which he might have demanded answer of Dirk occurred to him and stung with impatience his elated heart.

On a quick impulse he turned to the door and tried the handle.

To his surprise he found it bolted from within; he wondered both at Dirk’s caution and his softness of tread, for he had heard no sound.

It was not yet late, but he did not desire to attract attention by knocking.

Full of his resolution to speak further with Dirk, he passed round the house and entered the garden with the object of gaining admittance by the low windows of the room where they had been conversing.

But the light had gone from the chamber, and the windows were closed.

With an exclamation of impatience Theirry stepped back among the rose bushes and looked up.

Dirk’s bedchamber was also in darkness; black and silent the witch’s dwelling showed against the still but stormy sky. Theirry felt a chill run to his heart—where had the youth gone so instantly, so silently? Who had noiselessly bolted door and windows?

Then suddenly a light flashed across his vision; it appeared in the window of a room built out from the house at the side—a room that Theirry had always imagined was used only as a store-place for Nathalie’s drugs and herbs; he did not remember that he had ever entered it or ever seen a light there before.

His curiosity was stirred; Dirk had spoken of weariness—perhaps this was the witch herself. He waited for the light to disappear, but it continued to glow, like a steady star across the darkness of the rose garden.

The heavy scent of the half-seen blooms filled the gusty wind that began to arise; great fragments of cloud sped above the dark roof-line of the house; Theirry crept nearer the light.

It had crossed his mind many times that Dirk and Nathalie held secrets they kept from him, and the doubt had often set him raging inwardly, as well he knew the witch despised him as a useless novice in the black arts; old suspicions returned to him as, advancing warily, he drew near the light and crouched against the wall of the house. A light curtain was pulled across the window, but carelessly, and drawn slightly awry to avoid the light set in the window-seat.

Theirry, holding his breath, looked in.

He saw an oval room hung with Syrian tapestries of scarlet and yellow, and paved with black and white marble; the air was thick with the blue vapour of some perfume burning in a copper brazier, and lit by lamps suspended from the wall, their light glowing from behind screens of a pure pink silk. The end of the apartment was hidden by a violet velvet curtain embroidered with grapes and swans; near this a low couch covered with scarlet draperies and purple cushions was placed, and close to this a table, set with a white cloth bearing moons and stars worked in blue.

Across this cloth a thick chain of amber beads was flung; a single tall glass edged with gold and a silver dish of apples stood together in the centre of the table.

As there was no one in the room to attract his attention, Theirry had leisure to remark these details.

He noticed, also, that the light close to him in the window-seat was the copper candlestick he had seen, not long since, in Dirk's hands.

With a certain angry jealousy at being, as he considered, duped, he waited for his friend's appearance.

Mystery and horror both had he seen at the witch's house, yet nothing ever disclosed to him helped him now to read the meaning of this room he peered into.

As he gazed, his brows contracted in wonderment; he saw the violet curtain gently shaken, then drawn slightly apart in the middle.

Theirry almost betrayed himself by a cry of surprise. A long, slender woman's hand and arm slipped between the folds of the velvet; a delicate foot appeared; the curtain trembled, the aperture widened, and the figure of a girl was revealed in dusky shadow.

She was tall, and wore a long robe of yellow sendal that she held up over her bosom with her left hand. She might have just come forth from the bath, for her shoulders, arms and feet were bare, and the lines of her limbs noticeable through the thin silk.

Her head and face were wrapped in a silver gauze. She stood quite still, half withdrawn behind the curtain, only the finely shaped white arm that held it back fully revealed.

Her appearance impressed Theirry with unnameable dread and terror; he remained rigid at the window gazing at her, not able, if he would, to fly. Through the veil that concealed her face he could see restless dark eyes and the line of dark hair; he thought that she must see him, that she looked at him even as he looked at her, but he could not stir.

Slowly she came forward into the room; her feet were noiseless on the stone floor, but as she moved Theirry heard a curious dragging sound he could not explain.

She took up the amber beads from the table and put them down again; on her left hand was a silver ring set with a flat red stone; supporting her drapery with her other hand, she looked at this ornament, moved her finger so that the crimson jewel flashed, then shook her hand, angrily it seemed.

As the ring was large it fell and rolled across the floor. Theirry saw it sparkling under the edge of one of the hangings.

The woman looked after it, then straight at the window, and the pale watcher could have shrieked in horror.

Again she moved, and again Theirry heard that noise as of something being trailed across the floor.

She was drawing nearer the window; as she approached she half turned, and Theirry saw flat green and dull wings of wrinkled skin folded on her back; the tips of them touched the floor—these had made the dragging sound he had heard.

With a tortured cry wrung from him he flung up his hand to shut out the dreadful thing. She heard him, stopped and gave a shriek of dread and anguish; the lights were instantly extinguished, the room was in absolute darkness.

Theirry turned and rushed across the garden. He thought the rose bushes catching on his garments were hands seeking to detain him; he thought that he heard a window open and a flapping of wings in the air above him.

He cried out to the God on whom he had turned his back—

"Christus have mercy!

And so he stumbled to the gate and out into the quiet street of Frankfort.

CHAPTER XV

MELCHOIR OF BRABANT

The last chant of the monks died away.

The Sabbath service was ended and the Court rose from its place in the Emperor's chapel, but Jacobea remained on her knees and tried to pray.

The Empress, very fair and childishly sweet, drooping under the weight of her jewelled garments even with three pages to lift her train, raised her brows to see her lady remaining and gave her a little smile as she passed.

The Emperor, dark, reserved, devout and plainly habited, followed with his eyes still on his breviary; he was leaning on the arm of Balthasar of Courtrai; the sun falling slantwise through the high coloured windows made the fair locks and golden clothes of the Margrave one glitter in a dazzling brightness.

Jacobea could not bring her thoughts to dwell on holy things; her hands were clasped on her *prie-Dieu*, her open book was before her, but her eyes wandered from the altar to the crowd passing down the aisle.

Among the faces that went by she could not but mark the beautiful countenance of Theirry the secretary to the Queen's Chamberlain; she noticed him, as she always did, for his obvious calm handsomeness, to-day she noticed further that he looked grieved, distraught and pale. Wondering at this she observed him so intently that his long hazel eyes glanced aside and met hers in an intense gaze, grave and sad.

She thought there was a question or an appeal—some meaning in his look, and she turned her slender neck and stared after him, so that two ladies following smiled at each other.

Theirry kept his eyes fixed on her until he left the C chapel, and a slow colour crept into his cheek.

When the last courtier had glittered away out of the low arched door, Jacobea bent her head and rested her cheek against the top of the high *prie-Dieu;* her yellow hair, falling from under her close linen cap, hung in a shimmering line over her tight blue velvet gown, her hands were interlaced beside her cheek, and her long skirt rippled over her feet on to the stone pavement.

Could her prayers have been shaped into words they would have been such as these—

"Oh Mary, Empress of Heaven, oh saints and angels, defend me from the Devil and my own wicked heart, shelter me in my weakness and arm me to victory!"

Incense still lingered in the air; it stole pleasantly to her nostrils; she raised her eyes timidly to the red light on the altar, then rose from her knees clasping her breviary to her bosom, and turning she saw Theirry standing inside the door watching her.

She knew that he was waiting to speak to her, and, she knew not why, it gave her a sense of comfort and pleasure.

Slowly she came down the aisle towards him, and as she approached, smiled. He took a step into the church; there was no answering smile on his face.

"Teach me to pray, I beseech you," he said ardently. "Let me kneel beside you—"

She looked at him in a troubled way.

"I?—alas!" she answered. "You do not know me."

"I know that if any one could lead a soul upwards it would be you."

Jacobea shook her head sadly.

"Scarcely can I pray for myself," she answered. "I am weak, unhappy and alone. Sir, whatever your trouble you must not come to me for aid."

His dark eyes flashed softly.

"You—unhappy? I have ever thought of you as gay and careless as the roses."

She gazed on him wistfully.

"Once I was. That day I saw you first—do you remember, sir? I often recall it because it seemed—that after that I changed—" She shuddered, and her grey eyes grew wet and mournful. "It was your friend."

Theirry's face hardened.

"My friend?"

She leant against the chapel wall and gazed passionately at the Chamberlain's secretary.

"Who is he? Surely you must know somewhat of him."

"My friend—" repeated Theirry.

"The young scholar," she said quickly and fearfully, "he—he is in Frankfort now."

"You have seen him?"

She bowed her head. "What does he want with me? He will not let me be in peace—he pursues me with horrible thoughts—he hates me, he will undo my soul—"

She stopped, catching close to her the ivory-covered book and shivering.

"I think," she said after a second, "he is an evil thing."

"When did you meet him?" asked Theirry in a low fearful voice.

Jacobea told him of the encounter in the forest; he marked that it was the day of the great tourney, the day when he had last seen Dirk; he remembered certain matters he had uttered concerning Jacobea.

"If he has been tampering with you," he cried wrathfully, "if he dares—"

"Then you know somewhat of him?" she interrupted in a half horror.

"Ay, to my shame I do," he answered. "I know him for what he is; if you value your peace, your soul—do not heed him."

She drew away.

"But you—you—Are you in league with him?"

Theirry groaned and set his teeth.

"He holds me in a mesh of temptation—he lures me into great wickedness."

Jacobea moved still further back; shrinking from him into the gloom of the chapel.

"Oh!" she said. "Who—who is he?"

Theirry lowered his eyes and frowned.

"You must not ask me." He fingered the base of the pilaster against the door.

"But he troubles me," she answered intensely. "The thought of him is like some on clinging to my garments to drag me down."

Theirry lifted his head sharply to gaze at her tall slender figure; but lifted his eyes no higher than her clasped hands that lay over the breviary below her heart.

"How can he or such as he disturb you? What temptation can you be beguiled with?"

And as he saw the delicate fingers tremble on the ivory cover, his soul was hot and sore against Dirk.

"I will not speak of what might beguile me," said Jacobea in a low Voice. "I dare not speak of it—let it go—it is great sin."

"There is sin for me also," murmured Theirry, "but the prize seems almost worth it."

He bit his finger and stared on the ground; he felt that she shuddered and heard the shiver of her silks against the chapel wall.

"Worth it, you say?" she whispered, "worth it?"

Her tone made him wince; he could fancy Dirk at her shoulder prompting her, and he lifted his head and answered strongly—

"You cannot care to know, and I dare not tell, what has put me in the power of this young scholar, nor what are the temptations with which he enmeshes me—but this you must hear"—his hand was outspread on his bosom, pressing on his heart, his hazel eyes were dilated and intense—"this—I should be his, utterly, wholly his, one with him in evil, if it were not for you and the thought of you."

She leant her whole weight against the stone wall and stared at him; a shaft of dusty sunlight played on the smooth ivory book and her long fingers; fell, too, glowingly across the blue velvet bosom of her dress; but her throat and face were in shadow.

"You are the chatelaine of Martzburg," continued Theirry in a less steady voice, "and you do not know me—it is not fit that you should—but twice you have been gentle with me, and if—and if you could so care, for your sake I would shake the clinging devils off—I would live good and humble, and scorn the tempting youth."

"What must I do to help you?" answered Jacobea. "Alas! why do you rate me so high?"

Theirry came a step nearer; he touched the border of her long sleeve.

"Be what you are—that is all. Be noble, pure—ah, sweet I—that seeing you I can still believe in heaven and strive for it."

She looked at him earnestly.

"Why—you are the only one to care, that I should be noble and sweet. And it would make a difference to you?" Her questioning voice fell wistfully. "Ah, sir—were you to hear a wicked thing of me and know it true—did I become a vile, a hideous creature—would it make a difference?"

"It would—for me—make the difference between hell and paradise."

She flushed and trembled.

"Certes, you have heartened me—nay, you must not set me in a shrine—but, but— Oh, sir, honour me and I will be worthy of it."

She raised an appealing face.

"On my knees," answered Theirry earnestly, "I will do you worship. I am no knight to wear your colours boldly—but you shall win a fairer triumph than ever graced the jousts, for I will come back to God through you and live my days a repentant man—because of you."

"Nay—each through the other," said Jacobea. "I think I too—had . . . ah, Jesu! fallen—if some one had not cared."

He paled with pain.

"What did he—that youth—tempt you with?"

“No matter,” she said faintly. “It is over now—I will be equal to your thoughts of me, sir. I have no knight, nor have wished for one—but I will often think of you who have encouraged me in this my loneliness.”

“Please God,” he said. “We both are free of devilry—will you make that a pact with me? that I may think of you as far above it all as is the moon above the mire—will you give me leave to think you always as innocent as I would have my Saint?”

“Your worship, sir, shall make me so,” she answered gravely. “Think no ill of me and I will do no ill.”

He went on his knee and kissed the hem of her soft gown.

“You have saved me,” he whispered, “from everlasting doom.”

As he rose, Jacobea held out her hand and touched him gently on the sleeve.

“God be thanked,” she said.

He bent his head and left her; she drew from her bosom the crucifix that had been her companion in the forest and kissed it reverently, her heart more at ease than since the day when first she met Dirk Renswoude.

Returning to the great hall of the palace with quick resolve to return to Martzburg or to send for Sybilla forming in her mind, she encountered the Empress walking up and down the long chamber discontentedly.

Ysabeau, who affected a fondness for Jacobea, smiled on her indolently, but Jacobea, always a little overawed by her great loveliness, and, in her soul, disliking her, would have passed on.

The Empress raised her hand.

“Nay, stay and talk to your poor deserted lady,” she said in her babyish voice. “The Emperor is in his chamber writing Latin prayers—on a day like this!” She kissed her hand to tile sunshine and the flowers seen through the window. “My dames are all abroad with their gallants—and I Hazard what I have been doing?”

She held her left hand behind her and laughed in Jacobea’s face; seen thus in her over-gorgeous clothes, her childlike appearance and beauty giving her an air of fresh innocence, She was not unlike the little image of the Virgin often set above her altars.

“Guess! “ she cried again; then, without waiting for an answer—“Catching butterflies in the garden.”

She showed her hand now, and held delicately before Jacobea’s eyes a white net drawn tightly together full of van-coloured butterflies.

“What is the use of them, poor souls?” asked Jacobea.

The Empress looked at her prisoners.

“Their wings are very lovely,” she said greedily. “If I pulled them off would they last? Sewn on silk how they would shimmer!”

“Nay, they would fade,” answered Jacobea hastily.

“Ye have tried it?” demanded the Empress.

“Nay, I could not be so cruel . . . I love such little gay creatures.”

Reflection darkened Ysabeau’s gorgeous eyes.

“Well, I will take the wings off and see if they lose their brightness.” She surveyed the fluttering victims. “Some are purple . . . a rare shade!”

Jacobea’s smooth brow gathered in a frown of distress.

“They are alive,” she said, “and it is agreeable to them to live; will you not let them free?”

Ysabeau laughed; not at all babyishly now.

“You need not watch me, dame.”

“Your Grace does not consider how gentle and helpless they are, indeed”—Jacobea flushed in her eagerness—“they have faces and little velvet jackets on their bodies.”

Ysabeau frowned and turned away.

“It amuses you to thwart my pleasures,” she answered. She suddenly flung the net at Jacobea. “Take them and begone.”

The chatelaine of Martzburg, knowing something of the Empress, was surprised at this sudden yielding; looking round, however, she learnt the cause of it. The Margrave of East Flanders had entered the hall.

She caught up the rescued butterflies and left the chamber, while the Empress sank into the window-seat among the crimson cushions patterned with sprawling lions, pulled a white rose out of her belt and set her teeth in the stem of it.

“Where is Melchoir?” asked the Margrave, coming towards her; his immense size augmented by his full rich clothes gave him the air of a golden giant.

“Writing Latin prayers,” she mocked. “Were you Emperor of the West, Lord Balthasar, would you do that?”

He frowned.

“I am not such a holy man as Melchoir.” Ysabeau laughed.

“Were you my husband would you do that?” His fresh fair face flushed rose colour.

“This is among the things I may not even fancy.”

She looked out of the window; her dress was low and loosened about the shoulders, by cause of the heat, she said, but she loved to make a pageant of her beauty; red, bronze and purple silks clung about her fastened with a thick belt; her pale gold hair was woven into a great diadem of curls above her brow, and round her throat was a string of emeralds, a gift from Byzantium, her home.

Purposely she was silent, hoping Balthasar would speak; but he stood, without a word, leaning against the tapestry.

“Oh God!” she said at last, without turning her head, “I loathe Frankfort!”

His eyes glittered, but he made no answer.

“Were I a man I would not be so tame.”

Now he spoke.

“Princess, you know that I am sick for Rome, but what may we do when the Emperor makes delays?”

“Melchoir should be a monk,” his wife returned bitterly, “since a German township serves him when he might rule half the world.” Now she gave Balthasar her lovely face, and fixed on him her violet eyes. “We of the East do not understand this diffidence. My father was an Aegean groom who took the throne by strangling the life out of his master—he ruled strongly in Ravenna, I was born in the purple, nursed in the gold—I do not fathom your northern tardiness.

“The Emperor *will* go to Rome,” said the Margrave in a troubled voice. “He will cross the Alps this year, I think.”

Her white lids drooped.

“You love Melchoir—therefore you bear with him.”

He lifted his head.

“You, too, must bear with him, since he is your lord, Princess,” he answered.

And the Empress repressed the words she longed to utter, and forced a smile.

“How stern you are, Margrave; if I but turn a breath against Melchoir—and, sometimes, you wrong me, forgetting that I also am your friend.”

Her eyes were quick to flash over him, to mark how stiffly and awkwardly he stood and could not look at her.

"My duty to the Emperor," she said softly, "and my love, cannot blind me to his weakness now; come, Lord Balthasar, to you also it is weakness—even your loyalty must admit we lose the time. The Pope says—Come—the King of the Lombards will acknowledge my lord his suzerain—and here we stay in Frankfort waiting for the winter to cut off the Alps."

"Certes he is wrong," frowned the Margrave. "Wrong . . . if I were he—I would be Emperor in good sooth and all the world should know that I ruled in Rome

She drew a long breath.

"Strange that we, his friend and his wife, cannot persuade him; the nobles are on our side also."

"Save Hugh of Rooselaare, who is ever at his ear," answered Balthasar. "He brings him to stay in Germany."

"The Lord of Rooselaare!" echoed the Empress. "His daughter was your wife?"

"I never saw her," he interrupted quickly. "And she died. Her father seems, therefore, to hate me."

"And me also, I think, though why I do not know," she smiled. "His daughter's dead, dead . . . oh, we are very sure that she is dead."

"Certes, she was as good as another;" the Margrave spoke gloomily. "Now I must wed again."

The Empress stared at him.

"I did not think you considered that."

"I must. I am the Margrave now."

Ysabeau turned her head and fixed her eyes on the palace garden.

"There is no lady worthy of your rank and at the same time free," she said.

"You have an heiress in your train, Princess— Jacobea of Martzburg—I have thought of her."

The rich colours in the Empress's gown shimmered together with her hidden trembling.

"Can you think of her? She is near as tall as you, Margrave, and not fair—oh, a gentle fool enough—but—but"—she looked over her shoulder—"am *I* not your lady?"

"Ay, and ever will be," he answered, lifting his bright blue eyes. "I wear your favour, I do battle for you, in the jousts you are my Queen of Love— I make my prayers in your name and am your servant, Princess."

"Well—you need not a wife." She bit her lips to keep them still.

"Certes," answered Balthasar wonderingly. "A knight must have a wife besides a lady—since his lady is ofttimes the spouse of another, and his highest thought is to touch her gown—but a wife is to keep his castle and do his service.

The Empress twisted her fingers in and out her girdle.

"I had rather," she cried passionately, "be wife than lady."

"Ye are both," he answered, flushing. "The Emperor's wife and my lady."

She gave him a curious glance.

"Sometimes I think you are a fool, yet maybe it is only that I am not used to the North. How you would show in Byzantium, my cold Margrave!" And she leant across the gold and red cushions towards him. "Certes, you shall have your long straight maiden. I think her heart is as chill as yours."

He moved away from her.

"Ye shall not mock me, Princess," he said fiercely. "My heart is hot enough, let me be."

She laughed at him.

“Are you afraid of me? Why do you move away? Come back, and I will recount you the praises of Jacobea of Martzburg.”

He gave her a sullen look.

“No more of her.”

“And yet your heart is hot enough—”

“Not with the thought of her—God knows.”

But the Empress pressed her hands together and slowly rose, looking past Balthasar at the door.

“Melchoir, we speak of you,” she said.

The Margrave turned; the Emperor, velvet shod, was softly entering; he glanced gravely at his wife and smilingly at Balthasar.

“We speak of you,” repeated Ysabeau, dark-eyed and flushed, “of you . . . and Rome.”

Melchoir of Brabant, third of his name, austere, reserved, proud and cold, looked more like a knight h of the Church than King of Germany and Emperor of the West; he was plainly habited, his dark hair cut close, his handsome, slightly haughty face composed and stern; too earnest was he to be showily attractive yet many men adored him, among them Balthasar of Courtrai, for in himself the Emperor was both brave and lovable.

“Cannot you have done with Rome?” he asked sadly, while his large intelligent eyes rested affectionately on the Margrave. “Is Frankfort grown so distasteful?”

“Certes, no, Lord Melchoir—it is the chance! the chance!”

The Emperor sank in a weary manner on to a seat.

“Hugh of Rooselaare and I have spoken together and we have agreed, Balthasar, not to go to Rome.”

The Empress stiffened and drooped her lids; the Margrave turned swiftly to face his master, and all the colour was dashed out of his fresh face.

Melchoir smiled gently.

“My friend, ye are an adventurer, and think of the glory to be gained—but I must think of my people who need me here—the land is not fit to leave. It will need many men to hold Rome; we must drain the land of knights, wring money from the poor, tax the churches—leave Germany defenceless, a prey to the Franks, and this for the empty title of Emperor.”

Balthasar’s breast heaved.

“Is this your decision?”

The Emperor answered gravely—

“I do not think it God His wish that I should go to Rome.”

The Margrave bent his head and was silent, but Ysabeau flung her clear voice into the pause.

“In Constantinople a man such as *you* would not long fill a throne; ere now you had been a blinded monk and I free to choose another husband!”

The Emperor rose from his seat.

“The woman raves,” he said to the pale Margrave. “Begone, Balthasar.”

The German left them; when his heavy footfall had died into silence, Melchoir looked at his wife and his eyes flashed.

“God forgive my father,” he said bitterly, “for tying me to this Eastern she-cat!”

The Empress crouched in the window-seat and clutched the cushions.

“I was meant for a man’s mate,” she cried fiercely, “for a Cæsar’s wife. I would they had flung me to a foot-boy sooner than given me to thee—thou trembling woman’s soul!”

“Thou hast repaid the injury,” answered the Emperor sternly, “by the great unhappiness I have in thee. My life is not sweet with thee nor easy. I would thou hadst less beauty and more gentleness.”

“I am gentle enough when I choose,” she mocked. “Balthasar and the Court think me a loving wife.”

He took a step towards her; his cheek showed pale.

“It is most true none save I know you for the thing you are—heartless, cruel, fierce and hard—”

“Leave that!” she cried passionately. “You drive me mad. I hate you, yea, you thwart me every turn—”

She came swiftly across the floor to him.

“Have you any courage—any blood in you—will you go to Rome?”

“To please your wanton ambition I will do nothing, nor will I for any reason go to Rome.”

Ysabeau quivered like an infuriated animal.

“I will talk no more of it,” said Melchoir coldly and wearily. “Too often do we waste ourselves in such words as these.”

The Greek could scarcely speak for passion; her nostrils were dilated, her lips pale and compressed.

“I am ashamed to call you lord,” she said hoarsely; “humbled before every woman in the kingdom who sees her husband brave at least—while I—know you coward—”

Melchoir clenched his hands to keep them off her.

“Hark to me, my wife. I am your master and the master of this land—I will not be insulted, nay, nor flouted, by your stinging tongue. Hold me in what contempt ye will, you shall not voice it—by St. George, no!—not if I have to take the whip to hold you dumb!”

“Ho! a Christian knight! “ she jeered. “I loathe your Church as I loathe you. I am not Ysabeau, but still Marozia Porphyrogentris.”

“Do not remind me thy father was a stableman and a murderer,” said Melchoir. “Nor that I caused thee to change a name the women of thy line had made accursed. Would I could send thee back to Ravenna!—for thou hast brought to me nought but bitterness!”

“Be careful,” breathed Ysabeau. “Be careful.”

“Stand out of my way,” he commanded.

For answer she loosened the heavy girdle round her waist; he saw her purpose and caught her hands.

“You shall not strike me.” The links of gold hung from her helpless fingers while she gazed at him with brilliant eyes. “*Would* you have struck me?”

“Yea—across your mouth,” she answered. “Now were you a man, you would kill me.”

He took the belt from her arm, releasing her. “That *you* should trouble me!” he said wearily.

At this she stood aside to let him pass; he turned to the door, and as he lifted the tapestry flung down her belt.

The Empress crept along the floor, snatched it up and stood still, panting.

Before the passion had left her face the hangings were stirred again.

One of her Chamberlains.

“Princess, there is a young doctor below desires to see you. Constantine, his name, of Frankfort College.”

“Oh!” said Ysabeau; a guilty colour touched her whitened cheek. “I know nothing of him,” she added quickly.

“Pardon, Princess, he says ’tis to decipher an old writing you have sent to him; his words are, when you see him you will remember.”

The blood burnt more brightly still under the exquisite skin.

“Bring him here,” she said.

But even as the Chamberlain moved aside, the slender figure of Dirk appeared in the doorway.

He looked at her, smiling calmly, his scholar’s cap in his hand.

“You do remember me?” he asked.

The Empress moved her head in assent.

CHAPTER XVI

THE QUARREL

Dirk Renswoude laid down the pen and pushed aside the parchment, and lifted heavy eyes with a sigh of weariness.

It was midday and very hot; the witch’s red roses were beginning to shed their petals and disclose their yellow hearts, and the leaves of the great trees that shaded the house were curling and yellowing in the fierce sun.

From his place at the table Dirk could mark these signs of autumn without; yet by the look in his eyes it seemed that he saw neither trees nor flowers, but only some image evoked by his thoughts; presently he picked up the quill, bit the end of it, frowned and laid it down.

Then he started and looked round with some eagerness, for a light sound broke the sleepy stillness, the door opened, and before his expectant gaze Theirry appeared.

Dirk flushed and smiled.

“Well met,” he said. “I have much to say to you.” He rose and held out his hand.

Theirry merely touched it with his fingers.

“And I am come because I also have much to say.” Dirk’s manner changed, the warmth died from his face, and he gave the other a keen glance.

“Speak, then.” He returned to his seat, took his face between his two delicate hands, and rested his elbows on the table. “I was writing my lecture for to-night, certes, I shall be glad of a diversion.”

“You will not be pleased with mine,” answered Theirry his expression was grave and cold, his dress plain and careless; he frowned, lifted his eyebrows continually, and played with the buttons on his doublet.

“Be seated,” said Dirk.

Theirry took the chair he proffered.

“There is no need to make an ado,” he began, obviously with an effort. “I am not going on with you..”

“You are not going on?” repeated Dirk. “Well, your reasons?”

“May God forgive me what I have done,” cried Theirry in great agitation; “but I will sin no more— I have resolved it—and ye cannot tempt me.”

“And all you swore—to me?” demanded Dirk; his eyes narrowed, but he remained composed.

Theirry clasped his restless fingers.

“No man is bound to bargains with the Devil . . . I have been weak and wicked—but I mingle no more in your fiendish councils—”

“This is for Jacobea of Martzburg’s sake.”

“It *is* for her sake—because of her that I am here now to tell you I have done with it—done with you!”

Dirk dropped his hands on to the table.

“Theirry! Theirry!” he cried wildly and sorrowfully.

“I have measured the temptation,” said Theirry; “I have thought of the gain—the loss—I have put it aside, with God’s help and hers—I will not aid you in the way you asked me—nor will I see it done.”

“And ye call that virtue! “ cried Dirk. “Poor fool—all it amounts to is that you, alas!—love the chatelaine.”

“Nay,” he answered hotly. “It is that, having seen her, I would not be vile. You meditate a dastard thing—the Emperor is a noble knight.”

“Ambrose of Menthon was a holy monk,” retorted Dirk. “Who choked the pious words in his throat? Joris of Thuringia was an innocent youth—who sent him to a hideous death?”

“I!” cried Theirry fiercely; “but always with you to goad me on! Before the Devil sent you across my way I had never touched sin save in dim thoughts but you, with talk of friendship, lured me from an honest man’s company to poison me with forbidden knowledge, to tempt me into hideous blasphemies— and I will have no more of it!”

“Yet you vowed comradeship with me,” said Dirk. “Is your loyalty of such quality?”

Theirry sprang violently from his chair and paced heavily up and down the room.

“You blinded me. . . I knew not what I did. . . but now I know; when I—I—heard her speak, and heard that you had dared to try to trap her to destruction—”

Dirk interrupted with a low laugh.

“So she told you that! But I warrant that she was dumb about the nature of her temptation!”

“That is no matter,” answered Theirry; “now she is free of you, as I shall be—”

“As you vowed to her you would be,” added Dirk. “Well, go your way—I thought you loved me a little—but the first woman’s face!”

Theirry stood still to front him.

“I cannot love that which—I fear.”

Dirk went swiftly very pale.

“Do you—fear me, Theirry?” he asked wistfully.

“Ay, ye know too much of Satan’s lore—more than you ever taught me,” he shuddered uncontrollably; “there are things in this very house—”

“What do you mean—what do you mean?” Dirk rose in his place.

“Who is the woman?” whispered Theirry fearfully; “there is a woman here—”

“In this house there are none save Nathalie and me,” answered Dirk on the defensive, his eyes dark and glowing.

“There you lie to me; the last time I was here, I turned back swiftly on leaving, but found the door bolted, the lights out, all save one—in the little chamber next to this—I watched at the window and saw a gorgeous room and a woman, a winged woman.”

“You dream,” answered Dirk in a low voice. “Do you think I have enough power to raise such shapes?”

“I think ’twas some love of yours from Hell— whence you came—”

“My love is not in Hell, but on the earth,” answered Dirk quietly—“yet shall we go together into the pit—as for the woman, it was a dream—there is no gorgeous chamber there.”

He crossed the room and flung open a little door in the wall.

“See—old Nathalie’s closet—full of herbs and charms—”

Theirry peered into an ill-lit apartment fitted with shelves containing jars and bottles.

"The enchantment that could bring the woman could change the room," he muttered, unconvinced.

Dirk gave a slow, strange look.

"Was she beautiful?"

"Yea—but—"

"More beautiful than Jacobea of Martzburg?"

Theirry laughed.

"I cannot compare Satan's handmaiden with a lily from Paradise."

Dirk closed the closet door.

"Theirry," he said falteringly, "do not leave me—you are the only thing in all the universe can move me to joy or pain—I love you, utterly."

"Out on such affection that would steal my soul—"

He was turning away when Dirk laid a timid hand upon his sleeve.

"I will make you great, ay, very great . . . do not hate me——"

But Theirry gazed fearfully at the youth's curious pale face.

"I will have none of you."

"You do not know how dear I hold you," insisted Dirk in a trembling voice; "come back to me, and I will let your lady be——"

"She can scorn ye . . . defy ye . . . as I do now!"

And he flung off the slim hand from his arm and strode away down the long room.

Dirk drew himself together and crouched against the wall.

"Will she? certes, I wonder, will she?" he cried. "You will have none of me, you say, you reject me; but for how long?"

"For ever," answered Theirry hoarsely.

"Or until Jacobea of Martzburg falls."

Theirry swung round.

"That leaves it still for ever."

"Maybe, however, only for a few poor weeks—your lily is very fragile, Theirry, so look to see it broken in the mud—"

"If you harm her," cried Theirry fiercely, "if you blast her with your hellish spells—"

"Nay—I will not; of herself she shall come to ruin."

"When that is, I will return to you, so—farewell for ever——"

He made a passionate gesture with his hand as if he swept aside Dirk and all thoughts of him, and turned quickly towards the door.

"Wait!" Dirk called to him. "What of this that you know of me?"

Theirry paused.

"So much I owe you—that I should be silent."

"Since, if you speak, you bring to light your own history," smiled Dirk. "But—about the Emperor?"

"God helping me I will prevent that."

"How will you prevent it?" Dirk asked quietly; "would you betray me as a first offering to your outraged God?"

Theirry pressed his hand to his brow in a bewildered, troubled manner.

"No, no, not that; but I will take occasion to warn him—to warn some one of the Empress."

Dirk hunched his shoulders scornfully.

“Ah, begone, ye are a foolish creature—go and put them on their guard.”

Theirry flushed.

“Ay, I will,” he answered hotly. “I know one honest man about the Court—Hugh of Rooselaare.”

A quick change came over Dirk’s face.

“The Lord of Rooselaare?” he said. “I should remember him, certes; his daughter was Balthasar’s wife—Ursula.”

“She was, and he is the Emperor’s friend, and opposed to the schemes of Ysabeau.”

Dirk returned to the table and took up one of the books lying there; mechanically he turned the pages, and his eyes were bright on Theirry’s pallid face.

“Warn whom you will, say what you will; save, if ye can, Melchoir of Brabant; begone, see, I seek not to detain you. One day you shall come back to me, when yon soft saint fails, and I shall be waiting for you; till then, farewell.”

“For *ever* farewell,” answered Theirry. “I take up your challenge; I go to save the Emperor.”

Their eyes met; Theirry’s were the first to falter; he muttered something like a malediction on himself, lifted the latch and strode away.

Dirk sank into his chair; he looked very young and slight in his plain brown silk; his brow was drawn with pain, his eyes large and grieved; he turned the books and parchments over as though he did not see them.

He had not been long alone when the door was pushed open and Nathalie crept in.

“He has gone?” she whispered, “and in enmity?”

“Ay” answered Dirk slowly. “Renouncing me.”

The witch came to the table, took up the youth’s passive hand and fawned over it.

“Let him go,” she said in an insinuating voice. “He is a fool.”

“Why, I have put no strain on him to stay,” Dirk smiled faintly. “But he will return.”

“Nay,” pleaded Nathialie, “forget him.”

“Forget him! “ repeated Dirk mournfully. “But I love him.”

Nathalie stroked the still, slim fingers anxiously.

“This affection will be your ruin,” she moaned.

Dirk gazed past her at the autumn sky and the overblown red roses.

“Well, if it be so,” he said pantingly, “it will be his ruin also; he must go with me when I leave the world—the world! after all, Nathalie”—he turned his strange gaze on the witch—“it does not matter if she hold him here, so long as he is mine through eternity.”

His cheeks flushed and quivered, the long lashes drooped over his eyes; then suddenly he smiled.

“Nathalie, he has good intentions; he hopes to save the Emperor.”

The witch blinked up at him.

“But it is too late?

“Certes; I conveyed the potion to Ysabeau this morning.” And Dirk’s smile deepened.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MURDER

“Balthasar,” said the Emperor, in pity of his friend’s sullen face, “I will send ye to Rome to make treaty with the Pope since it goes so heavily with you to stay in Frankfort.”

The Margrave bit the ends of his yellow hair and made no answer.

The Empress half hay along the seat against the wall. She wore a white and silver gown; on the cushion, where her elbow rested to support her head, lay a great cluster of crimson roses.

On low stools near her sat her maidens sewing, three of them embroidering between them a strip of scarlet silk.

It was the dining hall, the table laid already with rudely magnificent covers; through the low windows, from which the tapestry was looped back, was to be seen a red sunset sky flaming over Frankfort.

"Nay, be pleasant with me," smiled the Emperor; he laid his arm affectionately round the Margrave's huge shoulders. "Certes, since I took this resolution not to go to Rome, I have nought but sour looks from all, save Hugh."

Balthasar's good-humoured face cleared.

"Ye are wrong, my Prince; but God wot, I am not angered—we can manage without Rome"—he heroically stifled his sigh—"and who knows that ye may not change yet?" he added cheerfully. Ysabeau looked at them as they paced up and down, their arms about each other, the golden locks and the black almost touching, the gorgeous purple and red habit of the Margrave against the quiet black garments of the Emperor.

She yawned as she looked, but her eyes were very bright; slowly she rose and stretched her slender body while the red roses fell softly to the ground, but she took no heed of them, fixing her gaze on the two men; her husband seemed not to know of her presence, but the Margrave was hotly conscious of her eyes upon him, and though he would not turn his upon her, nevertheless, she marked it and, in a half-smiling way, came and leant on the table that divided them.

The sunset flashed final beams that fell in flushing rosy lines on the gold and silver goblets and dishes, struck the Empress's embroideries into points of vivid light, and shone marvellously through Balthasar's brilliant locks.

"Surely we are late to-night," said the Emperor.

"Yea," answered Balthasar; "I do not love to wait."

He stopped to pour himself a tankard of amber wine and drank it at a draught.

Ysabeau watched him, then snatched up the fallen roses and laid them on the cloth.

"Will not my lord also drink?" she asked; the fingers of her right hand were hidden in the red flowers, with her left she raised a chased flagon in which the sunlight burnt and sparkled.

"As you please, Princess," answered Melchoir, and gazed towards the light indifferently.

"Ye might have poured for me," murmured the Margrave in a half voice.

Her hand came from the roses and touched a horn glass bound with silver, it lingered there a moment, then rose to her bosom; Balthasar, absorbing her face, did not notice the gesture.

"Another time," she answered, "I will serve you, Balthasar of Courtrai." She filled the glass until the wine bubbled at the brim. "Give it to my lord," she said.

Balthasar laughed uneasily; their fingers touched upon the glass, and a few drops were spilled.

"Take care!" cried the Empress.

Melchoir turned and took the goblet.

"Why did you say—take care?" he asked.

"Between us we upset the wine," said Ysabeau.

Melchoir drank.

"It has an ugly taste," he said.

She laughed.

“Is it the cupbearer, perchance?”

“The wine is good enough,” put in Balthasar.

The Emperor drank again, then set it down.

“I say it is strange—taste it, Balthasar.”

In an instant the Empress intervened.

“Nay”—she caught up the glass with a movement swifter than the Margrave’s—“since I poured, the fault—if fault there be—is mine.”

“Give it to me!” cried Balthasar.

But she made a quick motion aside, the glass slipped from her fingers and the wine was lost on the floor.

As Balthasar stooped to pick up the goblet, the Emperor smiled.

“I warn you of that flagon, Margrave.”

The pages and varlets entered with the meats and set them on the table; they who sat at the Emperor’s board came to take their places; Theirry followed his master and fixed quick eyes on the Emperor.

He knew that Melchoir had been abroad all day at the hunt and could not have long returned, hardly could their designs upon him be put in practice tonight; after the supper he meant to speak to Hugh of Rooselaare, this as an earnest of his final severance with Dirk.

As the beautiful shining crowd settled to their seats, the young secretary, whose place was behind his master’s chair, took occasion to note carefully the lord who was to receive his warning.

The candles, hanging in their copper circlets, were lit, and the ruddy light shone over the company, while bright pages drew the curtains over the last sunset glow.

Theirry marked the Empress, sitting languorously and stripping a red rose of its petals; Melchoir, austere, composed, as always; Balthasar, gay and noisy; then he turned his gaze on Hugh of Rooselaare.

That noble sat close to the Emperor. Theirry had not, so far, studied his personal appearance though acquainted with his reputation; observing him intently he saw a tall, well-made man dressed with sombre elegance, a man with a strong, rather curious face framed in straight, dull brown hair.

There was something in the turn of the features, the prominent chin, dark, clear eyes, pale complexion and resolute set of the mouth that gradually teased Theirry as he gazed; the whole expression reminded him of another face, seen under different circumstances, whose he could not determine.

Suddenly the Lord of Rooselaare, becoming aware of this scrutiny, turned his singularly intent eyes in the direction of the young scholar.

At once Theirry had it, he placed the likeness. In this manner had Dirk Renswoude often looked at him.

The resemblance was unmistakable if elusive; this man’s face was of necessity sterner, darker, older and more set; he was of larger make, moreover, than Dirk could ever be, his nose was heavier, his jaw more square, yet the likeness, once noticed, could not be again overlooked.

It strangely discomposed Theirry, he felt he could not take his warning to one who had Dirk’s trick of the intense gaze and inscrutable set of the lips; he considered if there were not some one else—let him go straightway, he thought, to the Emperor himself.

His reflections were interrupted by a little movement near the table, a pause in the converse.

All eyes were turned to Melchoir of Brabant.

He leant back in his seat and stared before him as if he saw a sight of horror at the other end of the table; he was quite pale, his mouth open, his lips strained and purplish.

The Empress sprang up from beside him and caught his arm.

"Melchoir!" she shrieked. "Jesu, he does not bear me!"

Bahthasar rose in his place.

"My lord," he said hoarsely, "Melchoir."

The Emperor moved faintly like one struggling hopelessly under water.

"Melchoir!"—the Margrave pushed back his chair and seized his friend's cold hand—"do you not hear us . . . will you not speak?"

"Balthasar"—the Emperor's voice came as if from depths of distance—"I am bewitched!"

Ysabeau shrieked and beat her hands together.

Melchoir sank forward, while his face glistened with drops of agony; he gave a low crying sound and fell across the table.

With an instantaneous movement of fright and horror, the company rose from their seats and pressed towards the Emperor.

But the Margrave shouted at them—

"Stand back—would you stifle him?—he is not dead, nor, God be thanked, dying."

He lifted up the unconscious man and gazed eagerly into his face, as he did so his own blanched despite his brave words; Melchoir's eyes and cheeks had fallen hollow, a ghastly hue overspread his features, his jaw dropped and his lips were cracked, as if his breath burnt the blood.

The Empress shrieked again and again and wrung her hands; no one took any heed of her, she was that manner of woman.

Attendants, with torches and snatched-up candles, white, breathless ladies and eager men, pressed close about the Emperor's seat.

"We must take him hence," said Hugh of Rooselaare, with authority. "Help me, Margrave."

He forced his way to Balthasar's side.

The Empress had fallen to her husband's feet, a gleam of white and silver against the dark trappings of the throne.

"What shall I do!" she moaned. "What shall I do!"

The Lord of Rooselaare glanced at her fiercely.

"Cease to whine and bring hither a physician and a priest," he commanded.

Ysabeau crouched away from him and her purple eyes blazed.

The Margrave and Hugh lifted the Emperor between them; there was a swaying confusion as chair and seats were pulled out, lights swung higher, and a passage forced through the bewildered crowd for the two nobles and their burden.

Some flung open the door of the winding stairway that ascended to the Emperor's bed-chamber, and slowly, with difficulty, Melchoir of Brabant was borne up the narrow steps.

Ysabeau rose to her feet and watched it; Balthasar's gorgeous attire flashing in the torchlight, Hugh of Rooselaare's stern pale face, her husband's slack body and trailing white hands, the eager group that pressed about the foot of the stairs.

She put her hands on her bosom and considered a moment, then ran across the room and followed swiftly after the cumbrous procession.

It was now a quarter of an hour since the Emperor had fainted, and the hall was left—empty.

Only Theirry remained, staring about him with sick eyes.

A flaring flambeau stuck against the wall cast a strong light over the disarranged table, the disordered seats, scattered cushions and the rich array of gold vessels; from without came sounds of hurrying to and fro, shouted commands, voices rising and falling, the clink of arms, the closing of doors.

Theirry crossed to the Emperor's seat where the gorgeous cushions were thrown to right and left; in Ysabeau's place lay a single red rose, half stripped of its leaves, a great cluster of red roses on the floor beside it.

This was confirmation; he did not think there was any other place in Frankfort where grew such blooms; so he was too late, Dirk might well defy him, knowing that he would be too late.

His resolution was very quickly taken: he would be utterly silent, not by a word or a look would he betray what he knew, since it would be useless. What could save the Emperor now? It was one thing to give warning of evil projected, another to reveal evil performed; besides, he told himself, the Empress and her faction would be at once in power—Dirk a high favourite.

He backed fearfully from the red roses, glowing sombrely by the empty throne.

He would be very silent, because he was afraid; softly he crept to the window-seat and stood there, motionless, his beautiful face overclouded; in an agitated manner he bit his lip and reflected eagerly on his own hopes and dangers . . . on how this affected him—and Jacobea of Martzburg.

To the man, dying miserably above, he gave no thought at all; the woman, who waited impatiently for her husband's death to put his friend in his place, he did not consider, nor did the fate of the kingship trouble him; he pictured Dirk as triumphant, potent, the close ally of the wicked Empress, and he shivered for his own treasured soul that he had just snatched from perdition; he knew he could not fight nor face Dirk triumphant, armed with success, and his outlook narrowed to the one idea—"let me get away."

"But where? Martzburg!—would the chatelaine let him follow her? It was too near Basle; he clasped his hands over his hot brow, calling on Jacobea.

As he dallied and trembled with his fears and terrors, one entered the hall from the little door leading to the Emperor's chamber.

Hugh of Rooselaare holding a lamp.

A feverish feeling of guilt made Theirry draw back, as if what he knew might be written on his face for this man to read, this man whom he had meant to warn of a disaster already befallen.

The Lord of Rooselaare advanced to the table; he was frowning fiercely, about his mouth a dreadful look of Dirk that fascinated Theirry's gaze.

Hugh held up the lamp, glanced down and along the empty seats, then noticed the crimson flowers by Ysabeau's chair and picked them up.

As he raised his head his grey eyes caught Theirry's glance.

"Ah! the Queen's Chamberlain's scrivener," he said. "Do you chance to know how these roses came here?"

"Nay," answered Theirry hastily. "I could not know."

"They do not grow in the palace garden," remarked Hugh; he laid them on the throne and walked the length of the table, scrutinising the dishes and goblets.

In the flare of flambeaux and candles there was no need for his lamp, but he continued to hold it aloft as if he hoped it held some special power.

Suddenly he stopped, and called to Theirry in his quiet, commanding way.

The young man obeyed, unwillingly.

"Look at that," said Hugh of Rooselaare grimly.

He pointed to two small marks in the table, black holes in the wood.

"Burns," said Theirry, with pale lips, "from the candles, lord."

"Candles do not burn in such fashion." As he spoke Hugh came round the table and cast the lamp-light over the shadowed floor.

"What is that?" He bent down before the window.

Theirry saw that he motioned to a great scar in the board, as if fire had been flung and had bitten into the wood before extinguished.

The Lord of Rooselaare lifted a grim face.

"I tell you the flames that made that mark are now burning the heart and blood out of Melchoir of Brabant."

"Do not say that—do not speak so loud!" cried Theirry desperately, "it cannot be true."

Hugh set his lamp upon the table.

"I am not afraid of the Eastern witch," he said sternly; "the man was my friend and she has bewitched and poisoned him; now, God hear me, and you, scrivener, mark my vow, if I do not publish this before the land."

A new hope rose in Theirry's heart; if this lord would denounce the Empress before power was hers, if her guilt could be brought home before all men—yet through no means of his own—why, she and Dirk might be defeated yet!

"Well," he said hoarsely, "make haste, lord, for when the breath is out of the Emperor it is too late . . . she will have means to silence you, and even now be careful . . . she has many champions."

Hugh of Rooselaare smiled slowly.

"You speak wisely, scrivener, and know, I think, something, hereafter I shall question you."

Theirry made a gesture for silence; a heavy step sounded on the stair, and Balthasar, pallid but still magnificent, swept into the room.

A great war-sword clattered after him, he wore a gorget and carried his helmet; his blue eyes were wild in his colourless face; he gave Hugh a look of some defiance.

"Melchoir is dying," he said, his tone rough with emotion, "and I must go look after the soldiery or some adventurer will seize the town."

"Dying!" repeated Hugh. "Who is with him?"

"The Empress; they have sent for the bishop until he come none is to enter the chamber."

"By whose command?"

"By order of the Empress."

"Yet I will go."

The soldier paused at the doorway.

"Well, ye were his friend, belike she will let you in."

He swung away with a chink of steel.

"Belike she will not," said Hugh. "But I can make the endeavour."

With no further glance at the shuddering young man, who held himself rigid against the wall, Hugh of Rooselaare ascended to the Emperor's chamber.

He found the ante-room crowded with courtiers and monks; the Emperor's door was closed, and before it stood two black mutes brought by the Empress from Greece.

Hugh touched a black-robed brother on the arm. "By what authority are we excluded from the Emperor's death-bed?"

Several answered him—

"The Queen! she claims to know as much of medicine as any of the physicians."

“She is in possession.”

Hugh shouldered his way through them.

“Certes, I must see him—and her.”

But not one stepped forward to aid or encourage; Melchoir was beyond protecting his adherents, he was no longer Emperor, but a man who might be reckoned with the dead, the Empress and Balthasar of Courtrai had already seized the governance, and who dared interfere; the great nobles even held themselves in reserve and were silent.

But Hugh of Rooselaare’s blood was up, he had always held Ysabeau vile, nor had he any love for the Margrave, whose masterful hand he saw in this.

“Since none of you will stand by me,” he cried, speaking aloud to the throng, “I will by myself enter, and by myself take the consequences!”

Some one answered—

“II think it is but folly, lord.”

“Shall a woman hold us all at bay?” he cried. “What title has she to rule in Frankfort?”

He advanced to the door with his sword drawn and ready, and the crowd drew back neither supporting nor preventing; the slaves closed together, and made a gesture warning him to retire.

He seized one by his gilt collar and swung him violently against the wall, then, while the other crouched in fear, he opened the door and strode into the Emperor’s bed-chamber.

It was a low room, hung with gold and brown tapestry; the windows were shut and the air faint; the bed stood against the wall, and the heavy, dark curtains, looped back, revealed Melchoir of Brabant, lying in his clothes on the coverlet with his throat bare and his eyes staring across the room.

A silver lamp stood on a table by the window, and its faint radiance was the only light.

On the steps of the bed stood Ysabeau; over her white dress she had flung a long scarlet cloak, and her pale, bright hair had fallen on to her shoulders.

At the sight of Hugh she caught hold of the bed-hangings and gazed at him fiercely.

He sheathed his sword as he came across the room.

“Princess, I must see the Emperor,” he said sternly.

“He will see no man—he knows none nor can he speak,” she answered, her bearing prouder and more assured than he had ever known it. “Get you gone, sir; I know not how ye forced an entry.”

“You have no power to keep the nobles from their lord,” he replied. “Nor will I take your bidding.”

She held herself in front of her husband so that her shadow obscured his face.

“I will have you put without the doors if you so disturb the dying.”

But Hugh of Rooselaare advanced to the bed. “Let me see him,” he demanded, “he speaks to me!”

Indeed, he thought that he heard from the depths of the great bed a voice saying faintly—

“Hugh, Hugh!”

The Empress drew the curtain, further concealing the dying man.

“He speaks to none. Begone!”

The Lord of Rooselaare came still nearer.

“Why is there no priest here?”

“Insolent! the bishop comes.”

“Meanwhile he dies, and there are monks enow without.”

As he spoke Hugh sprang lightly and suddenly on to the steps, pushed aside the slight figure of the Empress and caught back the curtains.

"Melchoir!" he cried, and snatched up the Emperor by the shoulders.

"He is dead," breathed the Empress.

But Hugh continued to gaze into the distorted, hollow face, while with eager fingers he pushed back the long, damp hair.

"He is dead," repeated Ysabeau, fearing nothing now.

With a slow step she went to the table and seated herself before the silver lamp, while she uttered sigh on sigh and clasped her hands over her eyes.

Then the hot stillness began to quiver with the distant sound of numerous bells; they were holding services for the dying in every church in Frankfort.

The Emperor stirred in Hugh's arms; without opening his eyes he spoke—

"Pray for me . . . Balthasar. They did not slay me honourably—"

He raised his hands to his heart, to his lips, moaned and sank from Hugh's arm on to the pillow,

"Quia apud Dominum misericordia, et copiosa apud eum," he murmured.

"Eum redemptio," finished Hugh.

"Amen," moaned Melchoir of Brabant, and so died. For a moment the chamber was silent save for the insistent bells, then Hugh turned his white face from the dead, and Ysabeau shivered to her feet.

"Call in the others," murmured the Empress, "since he is dead."

The Lord of Rooselaare descended from the bed. "Ay, I will call in the others, thou Eastern witch, and show them the man thou hast murdered."

She stared at him a moment, her face like a mask of ivory set in the glittering hair.

"Murdered?" she said at last.

"Murdered!" He fingered his sword fiercely. "And it shall be my duty to see you brought to the stake for this night's work."

She gave a shriek and ran towards the door. Before she reached it, it was flung open, and Balthasar of Courtrai sprang into the room.

"You called?" he panted, his eyes blazing on Hugh of Rooselaare.

"Yes; he is dead—Melchoir is dead, and this lord says I slew him—Balthasar, answer for me!"

"Certes!" cried Hugh. "A fitting one to speak for you—your accomplice!"

With a short sound of rage the Margrave dragged out his sword and struck the speaker a blow across the breast with the flat of it.

"So ho!" he shouted, "it pleases you to lie!" He yelled to his men without, and the death-chamber was filled with a clatter of arms that drowned the mournful pealing of the bells. "Take away this lord, on my authority."

Hugh drew his sword, only to have it wrenched away. The soldiers closed round him and swept their prisoner from the chamber, while Balthasar, flushed and furious, watched him dragged off.

"I always hated him," he said.

Ysabeau fell on her knees and kissed his mailed feet.

"Melchoir is dead, and I have no champion save you."

The Margrave stooped and raised her, his face burning with blushes till it was like a great rose.

"Ysabeau, Ysabeau!" he stammered.

She struggled out of his arms.

“Nay, not now,” she whispered in a stifled voice, “not now can I speak to you, but afterwards—my lord! my lord!”

She went to the bed and flung herself across the steps, her face hidden in her hands.

Balthasar took off his helmet, crossed himself and humbly bent his great head.

Melchoir IV lay stiffly on the lily-sewn coverlet, and without the great bells tolled and the monks’ chant rose.

“De Profundis . . .”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PURSUIT OF JACOBEA

The chatelaine of Martzburg sat in the best guest-chamber of a wayside hostel that lay a few hours’ journeying from her home. Outside the rain dripped in the trees and a cold mountain wind shook the signboard. Jacobea trimmed the lamp, drew the curtains, and began walking up and down the room; the inner silence broken only by the sound of her footfall and an occasional sharp patter as the rain fell on to the bare hearth.

So swiftly had she fled from Frankfort that its last scenes were still before her eyes like a gorgeous and disjointed pageant; the Emperor stricken down at the feast, the brief, flashing turmoil, Ysabeau’s peerless face, that her own horrid thoughts coloured with a sinister expression, Balthasar of Courtrai bringing the city to his feet—Hugh of Rooselaare snatched away to a dungeon—and over it all the leaping red light of a hundred flambeaux.

She herself was free here of everything save the sound of the rain, yet she must needs think of and brood on the tumult she had left.

The quiet about her now, the distance she had put between herself and Frankfort, gave her no sense of peace or safety; she strove, indeed, with a feeling of horror, as if they from whom she had fled were about her still, menacing her in this lonely room.

Presently she passed into the little bed-chamber and took up a mirror into which she gazed long and earnestly.

“Is it a wicked face?”

She answered herself—

“No, no.”

“Is it a weak face?”

“Alas!”

The wind rose higher, fluttered the lamp-flame and stirred the arras on the wall; and laying the mirror down she returned to the outer chamber. Her long hair that hung down her back was the only bright thing in the gloomy apartment where the tapestry was old and dusty, the furniture worn and faded; she wore a dark dress of embroidered purple, contrasting with her colourless face; only her yellow locks glittered as the lamplight fell on them.

The wind rose yet higher, struggled at the casement, seized and shook the curtains and whistled in the chimney.

Up and down walked Jacobea of Martzburg, clasping and unclasping her soft young hands, her grey eyes turning from right to left.

It was very cold, blowing straight from the great mountains the dark hid; she wished she had asked for a fire and that she had kept one of the women to sleep with her—it was so lonely, and

the sound of the rain reminded her of that night at Martzburg when the two scholars had been given shelter.

She wanted to go to the door and call some one, but a curious heaviness in her limbs began to make movement irksome; she could no longer drag her steps, and with a sigh she sank into the frayed velvet chair by the fireplace.

She tried to tell herself that she was free, that she was on her way to escape, but could not form the words on her lips, hardly the thought; her head throbbed, and a Cold sensation gripped her heart; she moved in the chair, only to feel as if held down in it; she struggled in vain to rise. "Barbara!" she whispered, and thought she was calling aloud.

A gathering duskiness seemed to overspread the chamber, and the tongue-shaped flame of the lamp showed through it distinct yet very far away; the noise of the wind and rain made one long insistent murmur and moaning.

Jacobea laughed drearily, and lifted her hands to her bosom to try to find the crucifix that hung there, but her fingers were like lead, and fell uselessly into her lap again.

Her brain whirled with memories, with anticipations and vague expectations, tinged with fear like the sensations of a dream; she felt that she was sinking into soft infolding darkness; the lamp-flame changed into a fire-pointed star that rested on a knight's helm, the sound of wind and rain became faint human cries.

She whispered, as the dying Emperor had done— "I am bewitched."

Then the Knight, with the star glittering above his brow, came towards her and offered her a goblet.

"Sebastian!" she cried, and sat up with a face of horror; the chamber was spinning about her; she saw the Knight's long painted shield and his bare hand holding out the wine; his visor was down.

She shrieked and laughed together, and put the goblet aside.

Some one spoke out of the mystery.

"The Empress found happiness—why not you?—may not a woman die as easily as a man?"

She tried to remember her prayers, to find her crucifix; but the cold edge of the gold touched her lips, and she drank.

The hot wine scorched her throat and filled her with strength; as she sprang up the Knight's star quivered back into the lamp-flame, the vapours cleared from the room; she found herself staring at Dirk Renswoude, who stood in the centre of the room and smiled at her.

"Oh!" she cried in a bewildered way, and put her hands to her forehead.

"Well," said Dirk; he held a rich gold goblet, empty, and his was the voice she had already heard. "Why did you leave Frankfort?"

Jacobea shuddered.

"I do not know;" her eyes were blank and dull. "I think I was afraid

"Lest you might do as Ysabeau did?" asked Dirk.

"What has happened to me?" was all her answer. All sound without had ceased; the light burnt clear and steadily, casting its faint radiance over the slim outlines of the young man and the shuddering figure of the lady.

"What of your steward?" whispered Dirk.

She responded mechanically as if she spoke by rote. "I have no steward. I am going alone to Martzburg."

"What of Sebastian?" urged the youth.

Jacobea was silent; she came slowly down the chamber, guiding herself with one hand along the wall, as though she could not see; the wind stirred the arras under her fingers and ruffled her gown about her feet.

Dirk set the goblet beside the lamp the while he watched her intently with frowning eyes.

"What of Sebastian?" he repeated. "Ye fled from him, but have ye ceased to think of him?"

"No," said the chatelaine of Martzburg; "no, day and night—what is God, that He lets a man's face to come between me and Him?"

"The Emperor is dead," said Dirk.

"Is dead," she repeated.

"Ysabeau knows how."

"Ah!" she whispered. "I think I knew it."

"Shall the Empress be happy and you starve your heart to death?"

Jacobea sighed. "Sebastian! Sebastian!" She had the look of one walking in sleep.

"What is Sybilla to you?"

"His wife," answered Jacobea in the same tone; "his wife."

"The dead do not bind the living." Jacobea laughed.

"No, no—how cold it is here; do you not feel the wind across the floor?" Her fingers wandered aimless over her bosom. "Sybilla is dead, you say?"

"Nay—Sybilla might die—so easily."

Jacobea laughed again.

"Ysabeau did it—she is young and fair," she said. "And she could do it—why not I? But I cannot bear to look on death."

Her expressionless eyes turned on Dirk still in sightless fashion.

"A word," said Dirk—"that is all your part; send him ahead to Martzburg."

Jacobea nodded aimlessly.

"Why not?—why not?—Sybilla would be in bed, lying awake, listening to the wind as I have done— so often—and he would come up the steep, dark stairs. Oh, and she would raise her head—"

Dirk put in—

"Has the chatelaine spoken?' she would say, and he would make an end of it."

"Perhaps she would be glad to die," said Jacobea dreamily. "I have thought that I should be glad to die."

"And Sebastian?" said Dirk.

Her strangely altered face lit and changed.

"Does *he* care for *me?"* she asked piteously.

"Enough to make life and death of little moment," answered Dirk. "Has he not followed you from Frankfort?"

"Followed me?" murmured Jacobea. "I thought he had forsaken me."

"He is here."

"Here—here?" She turned, her movements still curiously blind, and the long strand of her hair shone on her dark gown as she stood with her back to the light.

"Sebastian," said Dirk softly.

He waved his little hand, and the steward appeared in the dark doorway of the inner room; he looked from one to the other swiftly, and his face was flushed and dangerous.

"Sebastian," said Jacobea; there was no change in voice nor countenance; she was erect and facing him, yet it might well be she did not see him, for there seemed no life in her eyes.

He came across the room to her, speaking as he came, but a sudden fresh gust of wind without scattered his words.

"Have you followed me?" she asked.

"Yea," he answered hoarsely, staring at her; he had not dreamed a living face could look so white as hers, no, nor dead face either. He dropped to one knee before her, and took her limp hand.

"Shall we be free to-night?" she asked gently.

"You have but to speak," he said. "So much will I do for you."

She bent forward, and with her other hand touched his tumbled hair.

"Lord of Martzburg and my lord," she said, and smiled sweetly. "Do you know how much I love you, Sebastian? why, you must ask the image of the Virgin—I have told her so often, and no one else; nay, no one else."

Sebastian sprang to his feet.

"Oh God!" he cried. "I am ashamed—ye have bewitched her—she knows not what she says."

Dirk turned on him fiercely.

"Did ye not curse me when ye thought she had escaped? did I not swear to recover her for you? is she not yours? Saint Gabriel cannot save her now."

"If she had not said that," muttered Sebastian; he turned distracted eyes upon her standing with no change in her expression, the tips of her fingers resting on the table; her wide grey eyes gazing before her.

"Fool," answered Dirk; "an' she did *not* love you, what chance had you? I left my fortunes to help you to this prize, and I will not see you palter now—lady, speak to him."

"Ay, speak to me," cried Sebastian earnestly; "tell me if it be your wish that I, at all costs, should become your husband, tell me if it is your will that the woman in our way should go."

A slow passion stirred the calm of her face; her eyes glittered.

"Yes," she said; "yes."

"Jacobea!"—he took her arm and drew her close to him—"look me in the face and repeat that to me; think if it is worth—Hell—to you and me."

She gazed up at him, then hid her face on his sleeve.

"Ay, Hell," she answered heavily; "go to Martzburg to-night; she cannot claim you when she is dead; how I have striven not to hate her—my lord, *my* husband." She clung to him like a sleepy child that feels itself falling into oblivion. "Now it is all over, is it not?—the unrest, the striving. Sebastian beware of the storm—it blows so loud."

He put her from him into the worn old chair. "I will come back to you—to-morrow."

"To-morrow," she repeated—"when the sun is up."

The wind rushed between them and made the lamp-flame leap wildly.

"Make haste!" cried Dirk; "away—the horse is below."

But Sebastian still gazed at Jacobea.

"It is done," said Dirk impatiently, "begone."

The steward turned away.

"They are all asleep below?" he questioned.

"Nor will they wake."

Sebastian opened the door on to the dark stairway and went softly out.

"Now, it *is* done," repeated Dirk in a swelling whisper, "and she is lost."

He snatched up the lamp, and, holding it aloft, looked down at the drooping figure in the chair; Jacobea's head sank back against the tarnished velvet; there was a smile on her white lips, and

her hands rested in her lap; even with Dirk's intent face bending over her and the full light pouring down on her, she did not look up.

"Gold hair and grey eyes—and her little feet," murmured Dirk; "one of God's own flowers—what are you now?"

He laughed to himself and reset the lamp on the table; the lull in the storm was over, wind and rain strove together in the bare trees, and the howlings of the tempest shook the long bare room.

Jacobea moved in her seat.

"Is he gone?" she asked fearfully.

"Certes, he has gone," smiled Dirk. "Would you have him daily on such an errand?"

Jacobea rose swiftly and stood a moment listening to the unhappy wind.

"I thought he was here," she said under her breath. "I thought that he had come at last."

"He came," said Dirk.

The chatelaine looked swiftly round at him; there was a dawning knowledge in her eyes.

"Who are you?" she demanded, and her voice had lost its calm; "what has happened?"

"Do you not remember me?" smiled Dirk.

Jacobea staggered back.

"Why," she stammered, "he was here, down at my feet, and we spoke—about Sybilla."

"And now," said Dirk, "he has gone to free you of Sybilla—as you bid him."

"As I bid him?"

Dirk clasped his cloak across his breast.

"At this moment he rides to Martzburg on this service of yours, and I must begone to Frankfort where my fortunes wait. For you, these words: should you meet again one Theirry, a pretty scholar, do not prate to him of God and Judgment, nor try to act the saint. Let him alone, he is no matter of yours, and maybe some woman cares for him as ye care for Sebastian, ay, and will hold him, though she have not yellow hair."

Jacobea uttered a moan of anguish.

"*I* bid him go," she whispered. "Did God utterly forsake me and I bid him go?"

She gave Dirk a wild look over her shoulders, huddling them to her ears, as she crouched upon the floor.

"You are the Devil!" she shrieked. "I have delivered myself unto the Devil!

She beat her hands together, and fell towards his feet.

Dirk stepped close and peered curiously into her unconscious face.

"Why, she is not so fair," he murmured, "and grief will spoil her bloom, and 'twas only her face he loved."

He extinguished the lamp and smiled into the darkness.

"I do think God is very weak."

He drew the curtain away from the deep-set window, and the moon, riding the storm clouds like a silver armoured Amazon, cast a ghastly light over the huddled figure of Jacobea of Martzburg, and threw her shadow dark and trailing across the cold floor. Dirk left the chamber and the hostel unseen and unheard. The wind made too great a clamour for stray sounds to tell. Out in the wild, wet night he paused a moment to get his bearings; then turned towards the shed where he and Sebastian had left their horses.

The trees and the sign-board creaked and swung together; the long lances of the rain struck his face and the wind dashed his hair into his eyes, but he sang to himself under his breath with a joyous note.

The angry triumphant moon, casting her beams down the clouds, served to light the hittle wooden shed—the inn-stable—built against the rocks.

There were the chatelaine's horses asleep in their stalls, here was his own; but the place beside it where Sebastian's steed had waited was empty.

Dirk, shivering a little in the tempest, unfastened his horse, and was preparing to depart, when a near sound arrested him.

Some one was moving in the straw at the back of the shed.

Dirk listened, his hand on the bridle, till a moonbeam striking across his shoulder revealed a cloaked figure rising from the ground.

"Ah," said Dirk softly, "who is this?"

The stranger got to his feet.

"I have but taken shelter here, sir," he said, "deeming it too late to rouse the hostel—"

"Theirry!" cried Dirk, and laughed excitedly. "Now, this is strange—"

The figure came forward.

"Theirry—yes; have you followed me?" he exclaimed wildly, and his face showed drawn and wan in the silver light. "I left Frankfort to escape you; what fiend's trick has brought you here?"

Dirk softly stroked his horse's neck.

"Are you afraid of me, Theirry?" he asked mournfully. "Certes, there is no need."

But Theirry cried out at him with the fierceness of one at bay—

"Begone, I want none of you nor of your kind; I know how the Emperor died, and I fled from a city where such as you come to power, ay, even as Jacobea of Martzburg did—I am come after her."

"And where think you to find her?" asked Dirk.

"By now she is at Basle."

"Are ye not afraid to go to Basle?"

Theirry trembled, and stepped back into the shadows of the shed.

"I want to save my soul; no, I am not afraid; if need be, I will confess."

Dirk laughed.

"At the shrine of Jacobea of Martzburg? Look to it she be not trampled in the mire by then."

"You lie, you malign her!" cried the other in strong agitation.

But Dirk turned on him with imperious sternness. "I did not leave Frankfort on a fool's errand—I was triumphant, at the high tide of my fortunes, my foot on Ysabeau's neck. I had good reason to have left this alone. Come with me to Martzburg and see my work, and know the saint you worship.''

"To Martzburg?" Theirry's voice had terror in it.

"Certes—to Martzburg." Dirk began to lead hi horse into the open.

"Is the chatelaine there?"

"If not yet, she will be soon; take one of these horses," he added.

"I know not your meaning," answered fearfully; "but my road was to Martzburg. I mean to pray Jacobea, who left without a word to me, to give me some small place in her service."

"Belike she will," mocked Dirk.

"You shall not go alone," cried Theirry, becoming more distracted, "for no good purpose can you be pursuing her."

''I asked your company."

Impatiently and feverishly Theirry unfastened and prepared himself a mount.

“If ye have evil designs on her,” he cried, “be very sure ye will be defeated, for her strength is as the strength of angels.”

Dirk delicately guided his steed out of the shod; the moon had at last conquered the cloud battalions, and a clear cold light revealed the square dark shape of the hostel, the flapping sign, the bare pine-trees and the long glimmer of the road; Dirk’s eyes turned to the blank window of the room where Jacobea lay, and he smiled wickedly.

“The night has cleared,” he said, as Theirry, leading one of the chatelaine’s horses, came out of the stable; “and we should reach Martzburg before the dawn.”

CHAPTER XIX

SYBILLA

Sebastian paused on the steep, dark stairs and listened.

Castle Martzburg was utterly silent; he knew that there were one or two servants only within the walls, and that they slept at a distance; he knew that his cautious entry by the donjon door had made no sound, yet on every other step or so he stood still and listened.

He had procured a light; it fluttered in danger of extinction in the draughty stairway, and he had to shield it with his hand.

Once, when he stopped, he took from his belt the keys that had gained him admission and slipped them into the bosom of his doublet; hanging at his waist, they made a little jingling sound as he moved.

When he gained the great hall he opened the door as softly and slowly as if he did not know emptiness alone awaited him the other side.

He entered, and his little light only served to show the expanses of gloom.

It was very cold; he could hear the rain falling in a thin stream from the lips of the gargoyles without; he remembered that same sound on the night the two students took shelter; the night when the deed he was about to do had by a devil, in a whisper, been first put into his head.

He crossed to the hearth and set the lamp in the niche by the chimney-piece; he wished there was a fire—certainly it was cold.

The dim rays of the lamp showed the ashes on the hearth, the cushions in the window-seat, and something that, even in that dullness, shone with fiery hue.

Sebastian looked at it in a half horror: it was Sybilla’s red lily, finished and glowing from a samite cushion; by the side of it slept Jacobea’s little grey cat.

The steward gazing in curiously intent fashion recalled the fact that he had never conversed with his wife and never liked her; he could not tell of one sharp word between them, yet had she said she hated him he would have felt no surprise; he wondered, in case he had ever loved her, would he have been here to-night on this errand.

Lord of Martzburg!—lord of as fine a domain as any in the empire, with a chance of the imperial crown itself—nay, had he loved his wife it would have made no difference; what sorry fool even would let a woman interfere with a great destiny—Lord of Martzburg.

With little reflection on the inevitable for his wife, he fell to considering Jacobea; until to-night she had been a cipher to him—that she favoured him a mere voucher for his crime; for the procuring of this or that for him—a fact to be accepted and used; but that she should *pray* about him—speak as she had—that was another matter, and for the first time in his cold life he was

both moved and ashamed. His thin, dark face flushed; he looked askance at the red lily and took the light from its niche.

The shadows seemed to gather and throng out of the silence, bearing down on him and urging him forward; he found the little door by the fireplace open, and ascended the steep stone stairs to his wife's room.

Here there was not even the drip of the rain or the wail of the wind to disturb the stillness; he had taken off his boots, and his silk-clad feet made no sound, but he could not hush the catch of his breath and the steady thump of his heart.

When he reached her room he paused again, and again listened.

Nothing—how could there be? Had he not come so softly even the little cat had slept on undisturbed?

He opened the door and stepped in.

It was a small, low chamber; the windows were unshrouded, and fitful moonlight played upon the floor; Sebastian looked at once towards the bed, that stood to his left; it was hung with dark arras, now drawn back from the pillows.

Sybilla was asleep; her thick, heavy hair lay outspread under her cheek; her flesh and the bed-clothes were turned to one dazzling whiteness by the moon.

Worked into the coverlet, that had slipped half to the polished floor, were great wreaths of purple roses, showing dim yet gorgeous.

Her shoes stood on the bed steps; her clothes were flung over a chair; near by a crucifix hung against the wall, with her breviary on a shelf beneath.

The passing storm clouds cast luminous shadows across the chamber; but they were becoming fainter, the tempest was dying away. Sebastian put the lamp on a low coffer inside the door and advanced to the bed.

A large dusky mirror hung beside the window, and in it he could see his wife again, reflected dimly in her ivory whiteness with the dark lines of her hair and brows.

He came to the bedside so that his shadow was flung across her sleeping face.

"Sybilla," he said.

Her regular breathing did not change.

"Sybilla."

A swift cloud obscured the moon; the sickly rays of the lamp struggled with darkness.

"Sybilla."

Now she stirred; he heard her fetch a sigh as one who wakens reluctantly from soft dreams.

"Do you not hear me speak, Sybilla?"

From the bewildering glooms of the bed he heard her silk bed-clothes rustle and slip; the moon came forth again and revealed her sitting up, wide awake now and staring at him.

"So you have come home, Sebastian?" she said. "Why did you rouse me?"

lie looked at her in silence; she shook back her hair from her eyes.

"What is it?" she asked softly.

"The Emperor died," said Sebastian.

"I know—what is that to me? Bring the light, Sebastian; I cannot see your face."

"There is no need; the Emperor had not time to pray, I would not deal so with you, therefore I woke you."

"Sebastian!"

"By my mistress's commands you must die tonight, and by my desire; I shall be Lord of Martzburg, and there is no other way—"

She moved her head, and, peering forward, tried to see his face.

"Make your peace with Heaven," he said hoarsely; "for to-morrow I must go to her a free man."

She put her hand to her long throat.

"I wondered if you would ever say this to me—I did not think so, for it did not enter my mind that she could give commands."

"Then you knew?"

Sybilla smiled.

"Before ever you did, Sebastian, and I have so thought of it, in these long days when I have been alone, it seemed that I must sew it even into my embroideries—'Jacobea loves Sebastian.'"

He gripped the bed-post.

"It is the strangest thing," said his wife, "that she should love you—you—and send you here to-night; she was a gracious maiden."

"I am not here to talk of that," answered Sebastian; "nor have we long—the dawn is not far off."

Sybilla rose, setting her long feet on the bed step.

"So I must die," she said—"must die. Certes! I have not lived so ill that I should fear to die, nor so pleasantly that I should yearn to live; it will be a poor thing in you to kill me, but no shame to me to be slain, my lord."

As she stood now against the shadowed curtains her hair caught the lamplight and flashed into red gold about her colourless face; Sebastian looked at her with hatred and some terror, but she smiled strangely at him.

"You never knew me, Sebastian, but I am very well acquainted with you, and I do scorn you so utterly that I am sorry for the chatelaine."

"She and I will manage that," answered Sebastian fiercely; "and if you seek to divert or delay me by this talk it is useless, for I am resolved, nor will I be moved."

"I do not seek to move you, nor do I ask you for my life. I have ever been dutiful, have I not?"

"Do not smile at me!" he cried. "You should hate me."

She shook her head.

"Certes! I hate you not."

She moved from the bed, in the long linen garment that she wore, slim and childish to see. She took a wrap of gold-coloured silk from a chair and put it about her. The man gazed at her the while with sullen eyes.

She glanced at the crucifix.

"I have nothing to say; God knows it all. I am ready."

"I do not want your soul," he cried.

Sybilla smiled.

"I made confession yesterday. How cold it is for this time of the year!—I do not shiver for fear, my lord."

She put on her shoes, and as she stooped her brilliant hair fell and touched the patch of fading moonshine.

"Make haste," breathed Sebastian.

His wife raised her face.

"How long have we been wed?" she asked.

"Let that be."

He paled and bit his lip.

“Three years—nay, not three years. When I am dead give my embroideries to Jacobea, they are in these coffers; I have finished the red lily—I was sewing it when the two scholars came, that night *she* first knew—and you first knew—but I had known a long while.”

Sebastian caught up the lamp.

“Be silent or speak to God,” he said.

She came gently across the floor, holding the yellow silk at her breast.

“What are you going to do with me?” she whispered. “Strangle me?—nay, they would see that— afterwards.”

Sebastian went to a little door that opened beside the bed and pulled aside the arras.

“That leads to the battlements,” she said.

He pointed to the dark steps.

“Go up, Sybilla.”

He held the lamp above his haggard face, and the light of it fell over the narrow winding stone steps; she looked at them and ascended. Sebastian followed, closing the door after him.

In a few moments they were out on the donjon roof.

The vast stretch of sky was clear now and paling for the dawn; faint pale clouds clustered round the dying moon, and the scattered stars pulsed wearily.

Below them lay the dark masses of the other portions of the castle, and beside them rose the straining pole and wind-tattered banner of Jacobea of Martzburg.

Sybilla leant against the battlements, her hair fluttering over her face.

“How cold it is! “ she said in a trembling voice. “Make haste, my lord.”

He was shuddering, too, in the keen, insistent wind.

“Will you not pray?” he asked again.

“No,” she answered, and looked at him vacantly. “If I shriek would any one hear me?—Wiil it be more horrible than I thought? Make haste—make haste,—or I shall be afraid.”

She crouched against the stone, shivering violently. Sebastian put the lamp upon the ground.

“Take care it does not go out,” she said, and laughed. “You would not like to find your way back in the dark—the little cat will be sorry for me.”

She broke off to watch what he was doing.

A portion of the tower projected; here the wall was of a man’s height, and pierced with arblast holes; through there Sybilla had often looked and seen the country below framed in the stone like a picture in a letter of an horäe, so small it seemed, and yet clear and brightly coloured.

Beneath the wall was a paving-stone, raised at will by an iron ring; when lifted it revealed a sheer open drop the entire height of the donjon, through which stones and fire could be hurled in time of siege upon the assailants in the courtyard below; but Jacobea had always shuddered at it, nor had there been occasion to open it for many years.

Sybilla saw her husband strain at the ring and bend over the hole, and stepped forward.

“Must it be that way?—O Jesu! Jesu! shall I not be afraid?”

She clasped her hands and fixed her eyes on the figure of Sebastian as he raised the slab and revealed the black aperture; quickly he stepped back as stone rang on stone.

“So,” he said; “I shall not touch you, and it will be swiftly over—walk across, Sybilla.”

She closed her eyes and drew a long breath.

“Have you not the courage?” he cried violently. “Then I must hurl you from the battlements. . . it shall not look like murder. . .”

She turned her face to the beautiful brightening sky.

“My soul is not afraid, but . . . how my body shrinks!—I do not think I can do it. . .”

He made a movement towards her; at that she gathered herself.

"No—you shall not touch me."

Across the donjon roof she walked with a firm step.

"Farewell, Sebastian; may God assoil me and thee."

She put her hands to her face and moaned as her foot touched the edge of the hole . . . no shriek nor cry disturbed the serenity of the night, she made no last effort to save herself; but disappeared silently to the blackness of her death.

Sebastian listened to the strange indefinite sound of it, and drops of terror gathered on his brow; then all was silent again save for the monotonous flap of the banner.

"Lord of Martzburg," he muttered to steady himself; "Lord of Martzburg."

He dropped the stone into place, picked up the lantern and returned down the close, cold stairs. Her room . . . on the pillow the mark where her head had lain, her clothes over the coffer; well, he hated her, no less than he had ever done; to the last she had shamed him; why had he been so long?—too long—soon some one would be stirring, and he must be far from Martzburg before they found Sybilla.

He crept from the chamber with the same unnecessary stealth he had observed in entering, and in a cautious manner descended the stairs to the great hall.

To reach the little door that had admitted him he must traverse nearly half the castle; he cursed the distance, and the grey light that crept in through every window he passed and revealed to him his own shaking hand holding the useless lamp. Martzburg, his castle soon to be, had become hateful to him; always had he found it too vast, too empty; but now he would fill it as Jacobea had never done; the knights and her kinsfolk who had ever overlooked him should be his guests and his companions.

The thoughts that chased through his brain took curious turns; Jacobea was the Emperor's ward . . . but the Emperor was dead, should he wed her secretly and how long need he wait? . . . Sybilla was often on the donjon keep, let it seem that she had fallen . . . . none had seen him come, none would see him go . . . and Jacobea, strangest thing of all (he seemed to hear Sybilla saying it) that she should love him. . . .

The pale glow of a dreary dawn filled the great hall as he entered it; the grey cat was still asleep, and the shining silks of the red lily shone like the hair of the strange woman who had worked it patiently into the samite. He tiptoed across the hall, descended the wider stairs and made his way to the first chamber of the donjon.

Carefully he returned the lamp to the niche where he had found it; wondering, as he extinguished it, if any would note that it had been burnt that night; carefully he drew on his great muddy boots and crept out by the little postern door into the court.

So sheltered was the castle, and situated in so peaceful a place, that when the chatelaine was not within the walls the huge outer gates that required many men to close them stood open on to the hillside; beyond them Sebastian saw his patient horse, fastened to the ring of the bell chain, and beyond him the clear grey-blue hills and trees.

His road lay open; yet he closed the door slowly behind him and hesitated. He strove with a desire to go and look at her; he knew just how she had fallen . . . when he had first come to Martzburg, the hideous hole in the battlements exercised a great fascination over him; he had often flung down stones, clods of grass, even once a book, that he might hear the hollow whistling sound and imagine a furious enemy below.

Afterwards he had noticed these things and how they struck the bottom of the shaft,—lying where she would be now; he desired to see her, yet loathed the thought of it; there was his horse,

there the open road, and Jacobea waiting a few miles away, yet he must linger while the accusing daylight gathered about him, while the rising sun discovered him; he must dally with the precious moments, bite the ends of his black hair, frown and stare at the round tower of the donjon the other side of which she lay.

At last he crossed the rough cobbles; skirted the keep and stood still, looking at her.

Yes—he had pictured her; yet he saw her more distinctly than he had imagined he would in this grey light. Her hair and her cloak seemed to be wrapped close about her; one hand still clung to her face; her feet showed bare and beautiful.

Sebastian crept nearer; he wanted to see her face and if her eyes were open; to be certain, also, if that dark red that lay spread on the ground was all her scattered locks . . . the light was treacherous.

He was stooping to touch her when the quick sound of an approaching horseman made him draw back and glance round.

But before he could even tell himself it were well to fly they were upon him; two horsemen, finely mounted, the foremost Dirk Renswoude, bare-headed, a rich colour in his cheek and a sparkle in his eyes; he reined up the slim brown horse.

"So—it is done?" he cried, leaning from the saddle towards Sebastian.

The steward stepped back.

"Whom have you with you?" he asked in a shaking voice.

A friend of mine and a suitor to the chatelaine— of which folly you and I shall cure him."

Theirry pressed forward, the hoofs of his striving horse making musical clatter on the cobbles.

"The steward!" he cried; "and . . ."

His voice sank; he turned burning eyes on Dirk.

"—the steward's wife that was," smiled the youth. "But, certes! you must do him worship now, he will be Lord of Martzburg."

Sebastian was staring at Sybilla.

"You tell too much," he muttered.

"Nay, my friend is one with me, and I can answer for his silence." Dirk patted the horse's neck and laughed again; laughter with a high triumphant note in it.

Theirry swung round on him in a desperate, bitter fierceness.

"Why have you brought me here? Where is the chatelaine?—by God His saints that woman has been murdered. . ."

Dirk turned in the saddle and faced him.

"Ay, and by Jacobea of Martzburg's commands."

Theirry laughed aloud.

"The lie is dead as you give it being," he answered—"nor can all your devilry make it live."

"Sebastian," said Dirk, "has not this woman come to her death by the chatelaine's commands?"

He pointed to Sybilla.

"You know it, since in your presence she bade me hither," answered Sebastian heavily.

Dirk's voice rose clear and musical.

"You see your piece of uprightness thought highly of her steward, and that she might endow him with her hand his wife must die—"

"Peace! peace!" cried Sebastian fiercely, and Theirry rose in his saddle.

"It is a lie!" he repeated wildly. "If 'tis not a lie God has turned His face from me, and I am lost indeed!

"If 'tis no lie," cried Dirk exultingly, "you are mine—did ye not swear it?"

“An’ she be this thing you name her,” answered Theirry passionately—”then the Devil is cunning indeed, and I his servant; but if you speak false I will kill you at her feet.”

“And by that will I abide,” smiled Dirk. “Sebastian, you shall return with us to give this news to your mistress.”

“Is she not here?” cried Theirry.

Dirk pointed to the silver-plated harness.

“You ride her horse. See her arms upon his breast. Sweet fool, we left her behind in the hostel, waiting the steward’s return. . . .”

“All ways ye trap and deceive me,” exclaimed Theirry hotly.

“Let us begone,” said Sebastian; he looked at Dirk as if at his master. “Is it not time for us to begone?”

It was full daylight now, though the sun had not yet risen above the hills; the lofty walls and high towers of the huge grey castle blocked up the sky and threw into the gloom the three in their shadow.

“Hark!” said Dirk, and lifted his finger delicately. Again the sound of a horse approaching on the long white road, the rise and fall of the quick trot bitterly distinct in the hard stillness.

“Who is this?” whispered Sebastian; he caught Dirk’s bridle as if he found protection in the youth’s near presence, and stared towards the blank open gates.

A white horse appeared against the cold misty background of grey Country; a woman was in the saddle: Jacobea of Martzburg.

She paused, peered up at the high little windows in the donjon, then turned her gaze on the silent three.

“Now can the chatelaine speak for herself,” breathed Dirk.

Theirry gave a great sigh, his eyes fixed with a painful intensity on the approaching lady, but she did not seem to see either of them.

“Sebastian,” she cried, and drew rein gazing at him, “where is your wife?”

Her words rang on the cold, clear air like strokes on a bell.

“Sybilla died last night,” answered the steward, “but I did nought. And you should not have come.”

Jacobea shaded her brows with her gloved hand and stared past the speaker.

Theirry broke out in a trembling passion.

“In the name of the angels in whose company I ever placed you, what do you know of this that has been done?”

“What is that on the ground?” cried Jacobea. “Sybilla—he has slain Sybilla—but, sirs,”—she

-looked round her distractedly—“ye must not blame him—he saw my wish. . . .”

“From your own lips! “ cried Theirry.

“Who are you who speak?” she demanded haughtily. “*I* sent him to slay Sybilla. . . .” She interrupted herself with a hideous shriek. “Sebastian, ye are stepping in her blood!”

And, letting go of the reins, she sank from the saddle; the steward caught her, and as she slipped from his hold to her knees her unconscious head came near to the stiff white feet of the dead.

“Her yellow hair! “ cried Dirk. “Let us leave her to her steward—you and I have another way!”

“May God curse her as He has me,” said Theirry in an agony,—“for she has slain my hope of heaven!”

“You will not leave me?” called Sebastian. “What shall I say?—what shall I do?”

“Lie and lie again!” answered Dirk with a wild air; “wed the dame and damn her people—let fly your authority and break her heart as quickly as you may—”

“Amen to that!” added Theirry.

“And now to Frankfort!” cried Dirk, exultant. They set their horses to a furious pace and galloped out of Castle Martzburg.

CHAPTER XX

HUGH OF ROOSELAARE

Dirk took off his riding-coat and listened with a smile to the quick step of Theirry overhead; he was again in the long low chamber looking out on the witch’s garden, and nothing was changed save that the roses bloomed no longer on the bare thorny bushes.

“So you have brought him back,” said Nathalie, caressing the youth’s soft sleeve; “pulled his saint out of her shrine and given her over to the demons.”

Dirk turned his head; a beautiful look was in his eyes.

“Yea, I have brought him back,” he said musingly.

“You have done a foolish thing,” grumbled the witch, “he will ruin you yet; beware, for even now you hold him against his will; I marked his face as he went into his old chamber.”

Dirk seated himself with a sigh.

“In this matter I am not to be moved, and now some food, for I am so weary that I can scarcely think. Nathalie, the toil it has been, the rough roads, the delays, the long hours in the saddle—but it was worth it!”

The witch set the table with a rich service of ivory and silver.

“Worth leaving your fortunes at the crisis? Ye left Frankfort the day after the Emperor died, and have been away two months. Ysabeau thinks you dead.”

Dirk frowned.

“No matter, to-morrow she shall know me living. Martzburg is far away and the weather delayed us, but it had to be; now I am free to work my own advancement.”

He drank eagerly of the wine put before him, and began to eat.

“Ye have heard,” asked Nathalie, “that Balthasar of Courtrai has been elected Emperor?”

“Yea,” smiled Dirk, “and is to marry Ysabeau within the year; we knew it, did we not?”

“Next spring they go to Rome to receive the Imperial crown.”

“I shall be with them,” said Dirk. “Well, it is good to rest. What a thick fool Balthasar is!”

He smiled, and his eyes sparkled.

“The Empress is a clever woman, answered the witch, “she came here once to know whither you had gone. I told her, for the jest, that you were dead. At that she must think her secret dead with you, yet she gave no sign of joy nor relief, nor any hint of what her business was.”

Dirk elegantly poured out more wine

“She is never betrayed by her puppet’s face—an iron-hearted fiend, the Empress.”

“They say, though, that she is a fool for Balthasar, a dog at his heels.”

‘‘Until she change.”

“Belike you will be her next fancy,” said Nathalie; “the crystals always foretell a throne for you.”

Dirk laughed.

“I do not mean to share my honours with any—woman,” he answered; “pile up the fire, Nathalie, certes, it is cold.”

He pushed back his chair with a half sigh on his lips, and turned contented eyes on the glowing hearth Nathalie replenished.

“And none has thought evil of Melchoir’s death?” he asked curiously.

The witch returned to her little stool and rubbed her hands together; the leaping firelight cast a false colour over her face.

“Ay, there was Hugh of Rooselaare.”

Dirk sat up.

“The Lord of Rooselaare?”

“Certes, the night Melchoir died he flung ‘Murderess!’ in the Empress’s face.”

Dirk showed a grave, alert face.

“I never heard of that.”

“Nay,” answered the witch with some malice, “ye were too well engaged in parting that boy from his love—it is a pretty jest—certainly, she is a clever woman, she enlists Balthasar as her champion—he becomes enraged, furious, and Hugh is cast into the dungeons for his pains.” The witch laughed softly. “He would not retract, his case swayed to and fro, but Balthasar and the Empress always hated him, he had never a chance.”

Dirk rose and pressed his clasped hand to his temple.

“What do you say? never a chance?”

Nathalie stared at him.

“Why, you seem moved.”

“Tell me of Hugh of Rooselaare,” Dirk in an intense voice.

“He is to die to-night at sunset.”

Dirk uttered a hoarse exclamation.

“Old witch!” he cried bitterly, “why tell me this before? I lose time, time.”

He snatched his cloak from the wall and flung on his hat.

“What is Hugh of Rooselaare to you?” asked Nathalie, and she crept across the room and clung to the young man’s garments.

He shook her off fiercely.

“He must not die—he, on the scaffold! I, as you say, I was following that boy and his love while *this* was happening!”

The witch fell back against the wall, while overhead the restless tread of Theirry sounded. Dirk dashed from the room and out into the quiet street.

For a second he paused; it was late afternoon, he had perhaps an hour or an hour and a half. Clenching his hands, he drew a deep breath, and turned in the direction of. the palace at a steady run.

By reason of the snow clouds and the bitter cold there were few abroad to notice the slim figure running swiftly and lightly; those who were about made their way in the direction of the market-place, where the Lord of Rooselaare was presently to meet his death.

Dirk arrived at the palace one hand over his heart, stinging him with the pain of his great speed; he demanded the Empress.

None among the guards knew either him or his name, but, at his imperious insistence, ‘they sent word by a page to Ysabeau that the young doctor Constantine had a desire to see her.

The boy returned, and Dirk was admitted instantly, smiling gloomily to think with what feelings Ysabeau would look on him.

So far all had been swiftly accomplished; he was conducted to her private chamber and brought face to face with her while he still panted from his running.

She stood against a high arched window that showed the heavy threatening winter clouds without; her purple, green and gold draperies shone warmly in the glitter of the fire; a tray of incense stood on the hearth after the manner of the East, and the hazy clouds of it rose before her.

Until the page had gone neither spoke, then Dirk said quickly— "I returned to Frankfort to-day."

Ysabeau was agitated to fear by his sudden appearance.

"Where have you been?" she asked. "I thought you dead."

Dirk, pale and grave, gave her a penetrating glance.

"I have no time for speech with you now—you owe me something, do you not? Well, I am here to ask part payment."

The Empress winced.

"Well—what? I had no wish to be ungrateful, 'twas you avoided me."

She crossed to the hearth and fixed her superb eyes intently on the youth.

"Hugh of Rooselaare is to die this evening," he said.

"Yea," answered Ysabeau, and her childish loveliness darkened.

For a while Dirk was silent; he showed suddenly frail and ill; on his face was an expression of emotion, mastered and held back.

"He must not die," he said at last and lifted his eyes, shadowed with fatigue. "That is what I demand of you, his pardon, now, and at once—we have but little time."

Ysabeau surveyed him curiously and fearfully.

"You ask too much," she replied in a low voice; "do you know why this man is to die?"

"For speaking the truth," he said, with a sudden sneer.

The Empress flushed, and clutched the embroidery on her bodice.

"You of all men should know why he must be silenced," she retorted bitterly. "What is your reason for asking his life?"

Dirk's mouth took on an ugly curl

"My reason is no matter—it is my will."

Ysabeau beat her foot on the edge of the Carpet.

"Have I made you so much my master?" she muttered.

The young man answered impatiently.

"You will give me his pardon, and make haste, for I must ride with it to the market-place."

She answered with a lowering glance.

"I think I will not; I am not so afraid of you, and I hate this man—my secret is your secret after all."

Dirk gave a wan smile.

"I can blast you as I blasted Melchoir of Brabant, Ysabeau, and do you think I have any fear of what you can say? But"—he leaned towards her—"suppose I go with what I know to Balthasar?"

The name humbled the Empress like a whip held over her.

"So, I am helpless," she muttered, loathing him.

"The pardon," insisted Dirk; "sound the bell and write me a pardon."

Still she hesitated; it was a hard thing to lose her vengeance against a dangerous enemy.

"Choose another reward," she pleaded. "Of what value can this man's life be to you?"

“You seek to put me off until it be too late,” cried Dirk hoarsely—he stepped forward and seized the hand-bell on the table—“now an’ you show yourself obstinate, I go straight from here to Balthasar and tell him of the poisoning of Melchoir.”

Instinct and desire rose in Ysabeau to defy him with everything in her possession, from her guards to her nails; she shuddered with suppressed wrath, and pressed her little clenched hands against the wall.

Her Chamberlain entered.

“Write out a pardon for the Lord of Rooselaare,” commanded Dirk, “and haste, as you love your place.”

When the man had gone, Ysabeau turned with an ill-concealed savagery.

“What will they think! What will Balthasar think!”

“That must be your business,” said Dirk wearily.

“And Hugh himself!” flashed the Empress. The youth coloured painfully.

“Let him be sent to his castle in Flanders,” he said, with averted face. “He must not remain here.”

“So much you give in!” cried Ysabeau. “I do not understand you.’’

He responded with a wild look.

“No one will ever understand me, Ysabeau.”

The Chamberlain returned, and in a shaking hand the Empress took the parchment and the reed pen, while Dirk waved the man’s dismissal.

“Sign,” he cried to her.

Ysabeau set the parchment on the table and looked out at the gathering clouds; the Lord of Rooselaare must have already left the prison.

She dallied with the pen; then took a little dagger from her hair and sharpened it; Dirk read her purpose in her lovely evil eyes, and snatched the lingering right hand into his own long fingers.

The Empress drew together and looked up at him bitterly and darkly, but Dirk’s breath stirred the ringlets that touched her cheek, his cool grip guided her reluctant pen; she shivered with fear and defiance; she wrote her name.

Dirk flung her hand aside with a great sigh of relief.

“Do not try to foil me again, Marozia Porphyrogentris,” he cried, and caught up the parchment, his hat and cloak.

She watched him leave the room; heard the heavy door close behind him, and she writhed with rage, thrusting, with an uncontrollable gesture of passion, the dagger into the table; it quivered in the wood, then broke under her hand.

With an ugly cry she ran to the window, flung it open and cast the handle out.

When it rattled on the cobbled yard Dirk was already there; he marked it fall, knew the gold and red flash, and smiled.

Showing the parchment signed by the Empress, he had commanded the swiftest horse in the stables. He cursed and shivered, waiting while the seconds fled; his slight figure and fierce face awed into silence the youngest in the courtyard as he paced up and down. At last—the horse; one of the grooms gave him a whip; he put it under his left arm and leapt to his seat; they opened the gate and watched him take the wind-swept street.

The market-place lay at the other end of the town; and the hour for the execution was close at hand—but the white horse he rode was fresh and strong.

The thick grey clouds had obscured the sunset and covered the sky; a few trembling flakes of snow fell, a bitter wind blew between the high narrow houses; here and there a light sparkling in a window emphasized the colourless cold without.

Dirk urged the steed till he rocked in the saddle; curtains were pulled aside and doors opened to see who rode by so furiously; the streets were empty— but there would be people enough in the marketplace.

He passed the high walls of the college, galloped over the bridge that crossed the sullen waters of the Main, swept by the open doors of St. Wolfram, then had to draw rein, for the narrow Street began to be choked with people.

He pulled his hat over his eyes and flung his cloak across the lower half of his face; with one hand he dragged on the bridle, with the other waved the parchment.

"A pardon!" he cried. "A pardon! Make way!" They drew aside before the plunging steed; some answered him—

"It is no pardon—he wears not the Empress's livery."

One seized his bridle; Dirk leant from the saddle and dashed the parchment into the fellow's face, the horse snorted, and plunging cleared a way and gained the market-place.

Here the press was enormous; men, women and children were gathered close round the mounted soldiers who guarded the scaffold; the armour, yellow and blue uniforms and bright feathers of the horsemen showed vividly against the grey houses and greyer sky.

On the scaffold were two dark, graceful figures; a man kneeling, with his long throat bare, and a man standing with a double-edged sword in his hands.

"A pardon!" shrieked Dirk. "In the name of the Emperor!

He was wedged in the crowd, who made bewildered movements but could not give place to him; the soldiers did not or would not hear.

Dirk rose desperately in his stirrups; as he did so the hat and cloak fell back and his head and shoulders were revealed clearly above the swaying mass.

Hugh of Rooselaare heard the cry; he looked across the crowd and his eyes met the eyes of Dirk Renswoude.

"A pardon!" cried Dirk hoarsely; he saw the condemned man's lips move.

The sword fell. . . .

"A woman screamed," said the monk on the scaffold, "and proclaimed a pardon."

And he pointed to the commotion gathered about Dirk, while the executioner displayed to the crowd the serene head of Hugh of Rooselaare.

"Nay, it was not a woman," one of the soldiers answered the monk, "'twas this youth."

Dirk forced to the foot of the scaffold.

"Let me through," he said in a terrible voice; the guard parted; and seeing the parchment in his hand, let him mount the steps.

"You bring a pardon?" whispered the monk.

"I am too late," said Dirk; he stood among the hurrying blood that stained the platform, and his face was hard.

"Dogs! was this an end for a lord of Rooselaare!" he cried, and clasped his hand on a straining breast. "Could you not have waited a little—but a few moments more?"

The snow was falling fast; it lay on Dirk's shoulders and on his smooth hair; the monk drew the parchment from his passive hand and read it in a whisper to the officer; they both looked askance at the young man.

"Give me his head," said Dirk.

The executioner had placed it at a corner of the scaffold; he left off wiping his sword and brought it forward.

Dirk watched without fear or repulsion, and took Hugh's head in his slim fair hands.

"How heavy it is," he whispered.

The quick distortion of death had left the proud features; Dirk held the face close to his own, with no heed to the blood that trickled down his doublet.

Priest and captain standing apart, noticed a horrible likeness between the dead and the living, but would not speak of it.

"Churl," said Dirk, gazing into the half-closed grey eyes that resembled so his own. "He spoke—as he saw me; what did he say?"

The headsman polished the mighty blade.

"Nought to do with you, or with any," he answered, "the words had no meaning, certes."

"What were they?" whispered the youth.

"Have you come for me, Ursula?' then he said again, 'Ursula.' "

A quiver ran through Dirk's frame.

"She shall repent this, the Eastern witch!" he said wildly. "May the Devil snatch you all to bitter judgment!"

He turned to the captain, with the head held against his breast.

"What are you going to do with this?"

"His wife has asked for his head and his body that he may be buried befitting his estate."

"His wife!" echoed Dirk; then slowly, "Ay, he had a wife—and a son, sir?"

"The child is dead."

Dirk set the head down gently by the body.

"And his lands?" he asked.

"They go, sir, by favour of the Empress, to Balthasar of Courtrai, who married, as you may know, this lord's heiress, Ursula, dead now many years."

The snow had scattered the crowd; the soldiers were impatient to begone; the blood stiffened and froze about their feet; Dirk looked down at the dead man with an anguished and hopeless expression.

"Sir," said the officer, "will you return with me to the palace, and we will tell the Empress how this mischance arose, how you came too late."

"Nay," replied Dirk fiercely. "Take that good news alone."

He turned and descended the scaffold steps in a proud, gloomy manner.

One of the soldiers held his horse; he mounted in silence and rode away; they who watched saw the thick snowflakes blot out the solitary figure, and shuddered with no cause they understood.

CHAPTER XXI

BETRAYED

Nathalie stood at the door with a lantern in her hand.

Dirk was returning; the witch held up the light to catch a glimpse of his face, then, whispering and crying under her breath, followed into the house.

"There is blood on your shoes and on your breast," she whispered, when they reached the long chamber at the back.

Dirk flung himself on a chair and moaned; the snow lay still on his hair and his shoulders; he buried his face in the bend of his arm.

"Zerdusht and his master have forsaken us," whimpered the witch. "I could work no spells tonight, and the mirror was blank."

Dirk spoke in a muffled voice, without raising his head.

"Of what use magic to me? I should have stayed in Frankfort."

Nathalie drew his wet cloak from his shoulders. "Have I not warned you? has not the brass head warned you that the young scholar will be your ruin, bringing you to woe and misery and shame?"

Dirk rose with a sob, and turned to the fire; the one dim lamp alone dispelled the cold darkness of the room, and the thin flames on the hearth fell into ashes before their eyes.

"Look at his blood on me!" cried Dirk, "his blood! Balthasar and Ysabeau make merry with his lands, but my hate shall mean something to them yet—I should not have left Frankfort."

He rested his head against one of the supports of the chimney-piece, and Nathalie, peering into his face, saw that his eyes were wet.

"Alas! who was this man?"

"I did all I could," whispered Dirk . . . "the Empress shall burn in hell."

The sickly creeping flames illuminated his pallid face and his small hand, hanging clenched by his side.

"This is an evil day for us," moaned the witch, "the spirits will not answer, the flames will not burn . . . some horrible misfortune threatens."

Dirk turned his gaze into the half-dark room.

"Where is Theirry?"

"Gone." Nathalie rocked to and fro on her stool.

"Gone! " shivered Dirk, "gone where?"

"Soon after you left he crept from his chamber, and his face was evil—he went into the street."

Dirk paced up and down with uneven steps.

"He will come back, he must come back! Ah, my heart! You say Zerdusht will not speak tonight?"

The witch moaned and trembled over the fire.

"Nay, nor will the spirits come."

Dirk shook his clenched fist in the air.

"They *shall* answer me."

He went to the window, opened it and looked out into blackness.

"Bring the lamp."

Nathalie obeyed; the faint light showed the hastening snowflakes, no more.

"Maybe they will listen to me, nay, as I say, they *shall."*

The witch followed with the swinging lamp in her hand, while they made their way in silence through the darkness and the snow, in between the bare rose bushes, over the wet, cold earth until they reached the trap-door at the end of the garden that led to the witch's kitchen. Here she paused while Dirk raised the stone.

"Surely the earth shook then," he said. "I felt it tremble beneath my feet—hush, there is a light below!"

The witch peered over his shoulder and saw a faint glow rising from the open trap, while at that moment her own lamp went suddenly out.

They stood in outer darkness.

“Will you dare descend?” muttered Nathalie. “What should I fear?” came the low, wild answer, and Dirk put his foot on the ladder . . . the witch followed . . . they found themselves in the chamber, and saw that it was lit by an immense fire, seated before which was an enormous man, with his back towards them; he was dressed in black, and at his feet lay stretched a huge black hound.

The snow dripped from the garments of the newcomers as it melted in the hot air; they stood very still.

“Good even,” said Dirk in a low voice.

The stranger turned a face as black as his garments; round his neck he wore a collar of most brilliant red and purple stones.

“A cold night,” he said, and again it seemed as if the earth rumbled and shook.

“You find our fire welcome,” answered Dirk, but the witch crouched against the wall, muttering to herself.

“A good heat, a good heat,” said the Blackamoor.

Dirk crossed the room, his arms folded on his breast, his head erect.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

“Warming myself, warming myself.”

“What have you to say to me?”

The Blackamoor drew closer to the fire.

“Ugh! how cold it is!” he said, and stuck out his leg and thrust it deep into the seething flames.

Dirk drew still nearer.

“If you be what I think you, you have some reason coming here.”

The black man put his other leg into the fire, and flames curled to his knees.

“I have been to the palace, I have been to the palace. I sat under the Empress’s chair while she talked to a pretty youth whose name is Theirry—a-ah! it was cold in the palace, there was snow on the youth’s garments, as there is blood on yours, and the Emperor was there. . . .”

All this while he looked into the fire, not at Dirk.

“Theirry has betrayed me,” said the youth.

The Blackamoor took his legs from the fire unscorched and untouched, and the hell-hound rose and howled.

“He has betrayed you, and Ysabeau accuses you to save herself; but the devils are on your side since there is other work for you to do; flee from Frankfort, and I will see that you fulfil your destiny.”

And now he glanced over his shoulder.

“The witch comes home to-night, to-night, the work here is done, take the road through Frankfort.”

He stood up, and his head touched the roof; the gems on his throat gave out long rays of light . . . . the fire grew dim; the Blackamoor changed into a thick column of smoke . . . that spread. . .

“Hell will not forsake you, Ursula of Rooselaare.”

Dirk fell back against the wall, thick vapours encompassing him; he put his hands over his face. . . .

. When he looked up again the room was clear and lit by the beams of the dying fire; he gazed round for the witch, but Nathalie had gone.

With a thick sob in his throat he sprang up the ladder into the outer air, and rushed towards the desolate house.

Desolate indeed; empty, dark and cold it stood, the snow drifting in through the open windows, the fires extinguished on the hearths, a dead place never more to be inhabited.

Dirk leant against the door, breathing hard.

Here was a crisis of his fate; betrayed by the one whom he loved, deserted, too, it seemed, since Nathalie had disappeared . . . the Blackamoor . . . he remembered him as a vision . . . a delusion perhaps.

Oh, how cold it was! Would his accusers come for him to-night? He crept to the gate that gave on to the street and listened.

"Nathalie!" he cried forlornly.

Out of the further darkness came a distant hurry and confusion of sound.

Horses, shouting, eager feet; a populace roused, on the heels of the dealer in black magic, armed with fire and sword for the witches.

Dirk opened the gate, for the last time stepped from the witch's garden; he wondered if Theirry was with the oncoming crowd, yet he did not think so, probably he was in the palace, probably he had repented already of what he had done; but the Empress had found her chance; her accusation falling first, who would take his word against her?

He wore neither cloak nor hat, and as he waited against the open gate the thick snow covered him from head to foot; his spirit had never been afraid, was not afraid now, but his frail body shivered and shrank back as when the angry students fronted him at Basle.

He listened to the noises of the approaching people, till through these another sound, nearer and stranger, made him turn his head.

It came from the witch's house.

"Nathalie!" called Dirk in a half hope.

But the blackness rippled into fire, swift flames sprang up, a column of gold and scarlet enveloped house and garden in a curling embrace.

Dirk ran out into the road, where the glare of the fire lit the swirling snow for a trembling circle, and shading his eyes he stared at the flames that consumed his books, his magic herbs and potions, the strange things, rich and beautiful, that Nathalie had gathered in her long evil life; then he turned and ran down the street as the crowd surged in at the other end, to fall back upon one another aghast before the mighty flames that gave them mocking welcome.

Their dismayed and angry shouts came to Dirk's ears as he ran through the snow; he fled the faster, towards the eastern gate.

It was not yet shut; light of foot and swift he darted through before they could challenge him, perhaps even before the careless guards saw him.

He was a fine runner, not easily fatigued, but he had already strained his endurance to the utmost, and, after he had well cleared the city gates, his limbs failed him and he fell to a walk.

The intense darkness produced a feeling of bewilderment, almost of light-headedness; he kept looking back over his shoulder, at the distant lights of Frankfort, to assure himself that he was not unwittingly stumbling back to the gates.

Finally he stood still and listened; he must be near the river; and after a while he could distinguish the sound of its sullen flow coming faintly out of the silent dark.

Well, of what use was the river to him, or aught else; he was cold, weary, pursued and betrayed; all he had with him were some few pieces of white money and a little phial of swift and keen poison that he never failed to carry in his breast; if his master failed him he would not go alive into the flames.

But, hopeless as his case might seem, he was far from resorting to this last refuge; he remembered the Blackamoor's words, and dragged his numbed and aching limbs along.

After a while he saw, glimmering ahead of him, a light.

It was neither in a house nor carried in the hand, for it shone low on the ground, lower, it seemed to Dirk, than his own feet.

He paused, listened, and proceeded cautiously for fear of the river, that must lie, he thought, very close to his left.

As he neared the light he saw it to be a lantern, that cast long rays across the clearing snowstorm; a glittering, trembling reflection beneath it told him it belonged to a boat roped to the bank.

Dirk crept towards it, went on his knees in the snow and mud, and beheld a small, empty craft, the lantern hanging at the prow.

He paused; the waters, rushing by steadily and angrily, must be flowing towards the Rhine and the town of Cologne.

He stepped into the boat that rocked while the water splashed beneath him; but with cold hands he undid the knotted rope.

The boat trembled a moment, then sped on with the current as if glad to be freed.

An oar lay in the bottom, with which for a while Dirk helped himself along, fearful lest the owners of the boat should pursue, then he let himself float down stream as he might. The water lapped about him, and the snow fell on his unprotected and already soaked figure; he stretched himself along the bottom of the boat and hid his face in the cushioned seat.

"Hugh of Rooselaare is dead and Theirry has betrayed me," he whispered into the darkness.

Then he began sobbing, very bitterly.

His anguished tears, the cruel cold, the steady sound of the unseen water exhausted and numbed him till he fell into a sleep that was half a swoon, while the boat drifted towards the town.

When he awoke he was still in the open country. The snow had ceased, but lay on the ground thick and untouched to the horizon.

Dirk dragged his cramped limbs to a sitting posture and stared about him; the river was narrow, the banks flat; the boat had been caught by a clump of stiff withered reeds and the prow driven into the snowy earth.

On either side the prospect was wintry and dreary; a grey sky brooded over a white land, a pine forest showed sadly in dark mournfulness, while near by a few bare isolated trees bent under their weight of snow; the very stillness was horribly ominous.

Dirk found it ill to move, for his limbs were frozen, his clothes wet and clinging to his wincing flesh, while his eyes smarted with his late weeping, and his head was racked with giddy pains.

For a while he sat, remembering yesterday till his face hardened and darkened, and he set his pale lips and crawled painfully out of the boat.

Before him was a sweep of snow leading to the forest, and as he gazed at this with dimmed, hopeless eyes, a figure in a white monk's habit emerged from the trees.

He carried a rude wooden spade in his hand, and walked with a slow step; he was coming towards the river, and Dirk waited.

As the stranger neared he lifted his eyes, that had hitherto been cast on the ground, and Dirk recognised Saint Ambrose of Menthon.

Nevertheless Dirk did not despair; before the saint bad recognised him his part was resolved upon. . . .

Ambrose of Menthon gazed with pity and horror at the forlorn little figure shivering by the reeds. It was not strange that he did not at once know him; Dirk's face was of a ghastly hue, his eyes shadowed underneath, red and swollen, his lank hair clinging close to his small head, his clothes muddy, wet and soiled, his figure bent.

"Sir," he said, and his voice was weak and sweet, "have pity on an evil thing."

He fell on his knees and clasped his hands on his breast.

"Rise up," answered the saint. "What God has given me is yours; poor soul, ye are very miserable."

"More miserable than ye wot of," said Dirk, through chattering teeth, still on his knees. "Do you not know me?"

Ambrose of Menthon looked at him closely.

"Alas!" he murmured slowly, "I know you."

Dirk beat his breast.

"Mea culpa!" he moaned. "Mea culpa!"

"Rise. Come with me," said the saint. "I will attend your wants."

The youth did not move.

"Will you solace my soul, sir?" he cried. "God must have sent you here to save my soul—for long days I have sought you."

Saint Ambrose's face glowed

"Have ye, then, repented?"

Dirk rose slowly to his feet and stood with bent head.

"May one repent of such offences?"

"God is very merciful," breathed the saint tenderly.

"Remorse and sorrow fill my heart," murmured Dirk. "I have cast off my evil comrades, renounced my vile gains and journeyed into the loneliness to find God His pardon . . . and it seemed He would not hear me. . . ."

"He hears all who come in grief and penitence," said the saint joyously. "And He has heard you, for has He not sent me to find you, even in this most desolate place?"

"You feed me with hope," answered Dirk in a quivering voice, "and revive me with glad tidings . . . may I dare, I, poor lost wretch, to be uplifted and exalted?"

"Poor youth," was the tender murmur. "Come with me."

He led the way across the thick snow, Dirk following with downcast eyes and white cheeks.

They skirted the forest and came upon a little hut, set back and sheltered among the scattered trees.

Saint Ambrose opened the rude door.

"I am alone now," he said softly, as he entered. "I had with me a frail holy youth, who was travelling to Paris; last night he died, I have just laid his body in the earth, his soul rests on the bosom of the Lord."

Dirk stepped into the hut and stood meekly on the threshold, and Saint Ambrose glanced at him wistfully.

"Maybe God has sent me this soul to tend and succour in place of that He has called home."

Dirk whispered humbly—

"If I might think so."

The saint opened an inner door.

"Your garments are wet and soiled."

A sudden colour stained Dirk's face.

“I have no others.”

Ambrose of Menthon pointed to the inner chamber. There Blaise died yester-eve; there are his clothes, enter and put them on.”

“It will be the habit of a novice?” asked Dirk softly.

“Yea.”

Dirk bent and kissed the saint’s fingers with ice-cold lips.

“I have dared,” he whispered, “to hope that I might die wearing the garb of God His servants, and now I dare even to hope that He shall grant my prayer.”

He stepped into the inner chamber and closed the door.

CHAPTER XXII

BLAISE

Ambrose of Menthon and his meek and humble follower rested at Châlons, on their way to Paris.

For many weeks they had begged from door to door, sleeping in some hermit’s cell or by the roadside when the severity of the bitter nights permitted, occasionally finding shelter in a wayside convent.

So patient, so courageous before hardship, so truly sad and remorseful, so grateful for the distant chance of ultimate pardon was Dirk, that the saint grew to love the penitent vagabond.

No one eager to look for it could have found any fault with his behaviour; he was gentle as a girl, obedient as a servant, rigid in his prayers (and he had a strangely complete knowledge of the offices and penances of the Church), silent and sorrowful often, taking no pleasure in anything save the saint’s talk of Paradise and holy things.

Particularly he loved to hear of the dead youth Blaise, of his saintly life, of his desire to join the stern Brotherhood of the Sacred Heart, in Paris, of his fame as one beloved of God, of the convent’s wish to receive him, of his great learning, of his beautiful death in the snowy evening.

To all this Dirk listened with still attention, and from Saint Ambrose’s rapt and loving recital he gathered little earthly details of the subject of their speech.

Such as that he was from Flanders, of a noble family, that his immediate relatives were dead, that his years were no more than twenty, and that he was dark and pale.

For himself Dirk had little to say; he described simply his shame and remorse after he had stolen the holy gold, his gradual sickening of his companions, the long torture of his awakening soul, his attempts to find the saint, and how, finally, after he had resolved to flee his evil life and enter a convent, he had run out of Frankfort, found a boat waiting—and so drifted to Saint Ambrose’s feet.

The saint, rejoicing in his penitence, suggested that he should enter the convent whither they journeyed with the tidings of the holy youth’s death, and Dirk consented with humble gratitude.

And so they passed through Châlons, and rested in a deserted hut overlooking the waters of the Maine.

Having finished their scanty meal they were seated together under the rough shelter; the luxury of a fire was denied their austerity; a cold wind blew in and out of the ill-built doors, and a colourless light filled the mean bare place. Dirk sat on a broken stool, reading aloud the writings of Saint Jerome.

He wore a coarse brown robe, very different from his usual attire, fastened round the waist with a rope into which was twisted a wooden rosary; his feet were encased in rude leather boots,

his hands reddened with the cold, his face hollow and of a bluish pallor in which his eyes shone feverishly large and dark.

His smooth hair hung on to his shoulders; he stooped, in contrast with his usual erect carriage.

Pausing on his low and gentle reading he looked across at the saint.

Ambrose of Menthon sat on a rough-hewn bench against the rougher wall; weariness, exposure, and sheer weakness of body had done their work at last; Dirk knew that for three nights he had not slept . . . he was asleep now or had swooned; his fair head fell forward on his breast, his hands hung by his side.

As Dunk became assured that his companion was unconscious, he slowly rose and set down the holy volume. He was himself half starved, cold to the heart and shuddering; he looked round the plaster walls and the meek expression of his face changed to one of scorn, derision and wicked disdain; he darted a bitter glance at the wan man, and crept towards the door.

Opening it softly, he gazed out; the scene was fair and lonely—the distant tourelles of Châlons rose clear and pointed against the winter clouds; near by the grey river flowed between its high banks, where the bare willows grew and the snow-wreaths still lay.

Dunk took shivering steps into the open and turned towards the Maine; the keen wind penetrated his poor garments and lifted the heavy hair from his thin cheeks; he beat his breast, chafed his hands and walked rapidly.

Reaching the bank he looked up and down the river; there was no one in sight, neither boat nor animal nor house to break the monotony of land, sky and water, only those distant towers of the town.

Dirk walked among the twisted willows, then came to a pause.

A little ahead of him were a black man and a black dog, both seated on the bank and gazing towards Châlons.

The youth came a little nearer.

“Good even,” he said. “It is very cold.”

The Blackamoor looked round.

“Are you pleased with the way you travel?” he asked, nodding his head. “And your companion?”

Dunk’s face lowered.

“How much longer am I to endure it?”

“You must have patience,” said the black man, “and endurance.”

“I have both,” answered Dirk. “Look at my hands—they are no longer soft, but red and hard; my feet are galled and wounded in rough boots—I must walk till I am sick, then pray instead of sleeping; I see no fire, and scarcely do I touch food.”

The hell-hound stirred and whined among the osiers, the jewels in the Blackamoor’s collar flashed richly, though there was no light to strike them.

“You will be rewarded,” he said, “and revenged too—o—ho—o! it is very cold, as you say, very cold.”

“What must I do?” asked Dirk.

The black man rubbed his hands together.

“You know—you know.”

Dirk’s pinched wan face grew intent, and eager.

“Am I to use . . . this?” He touched the breast of his rough habit.

“Yea.”

“Then shall I be left defenceless.” Dirk’s voice shook a little. “If anything should happen—I would not, I could not—oh, Sathanas!—I could not be revealed!

The Blackamoor rose from among the willows.

“Do you trust yourself and me?” he asked.

Dirk put his thin hand over his eyes.

“Yea, master.”

“Then you know what to do. You will not see me for many years—when you have triumphed I shall come.”

He turned swiftly and ran down the bank, the hound at his heels; one after another they leaped into the waters of the Maine and disappeared with an inner sound.

Dunk straightened himself and set his lips. He reentered the hut to find Ambrose of Menthon still against the wall, now indeed wearily asleep; Dirk came softly forward; slowly and cautiously he put his hand into his bosom and drew out a small green-coloured phial.

With his eyes keenly on the saint he broke the seal, then crept close.

By Saint Ambrose’s side hung his rosary, every bead smooth with the constant pressure of his lips; Dunk raised the heavy crucifix attached, and poured on to it the precious drop contained in the phial.

Saint Ambrose did not wake nor move; Dunk drew away and crouched against the wall, cursing the bitter wind with fierce eyes. . . .

When the saint awoke, Dirk was on the broken stool reading aloud the writings of Saint Jerome.

“Is it still light?” asked Ambrose of Menthon amazedly.

“It is the dawn,” answered Dunk.

“And I have slept the night through.” The saint dragged his stiff limbs from the seat and fell on his knees in a misery of prayer.

Dunk closed the book and watched him; watched his long fingers twining in the beads of his rosary, watched him kiss the crucifix, again and again; then he, too, knelt, his face hidden in his hands.

He was the first to rise.

“Master, shall we press on to Paris?” he asked humbly.

The saint lifted dazed eyes from his devotions.

“Yea,” he said. “Yea.”

Dunk began putting together in a bundle their few books, and the wooden platter in which they collected their broken food; this being their all.

“I dreamt last night of Paradise,” said Saint Ambrose faintly, “the floor was so thick-strewn with close little flowers, red, white, and purple . . . and it was warm as Italy in May. . . .”

Dunk swung the bundle on to his shoulder and opened the door of the hut.

“There is no sun to-day,” he remarked.

“How long it is since we have seen the sun!” said Saint Ambrose wistfully.

They passed out into the dreary landscape and took their slow way along the banks of the Maine.

Until midday they did not pause, scarcely spoke; then they passed through a little village, and the charitable gave them food.

That night they slept in the open, under shelter of a hedge, and Ambrose of Menthon complained of weakness; Dunk, waking in the dark, heard him praying . . . heard, too, the rattle of the wooden rosary.

When the light came and they once more recommenced their journey the saint was so feeble he was fain to lean on Dunk's shoulder.

"I think I am dying," he said; his face was flushed, his eyes burning, he smiled continuously.

"Let me reach Paris," he added, "that I may tell the Brethren of Blaise. . . ."

The youth supporting him wept bitterly.

Towards noon they met a woodman's cart that helped them on their way; that night they spent in the stable of an inn; the next day they descended into the valley of the Seine, and by the evening reached the gates of Paris.

As the bells over all the beautiful city were ringing to vespers they arrived at their destination, an old and magnificent convent surrounded with great gardens set near the river bank.

The winter sky had broken at last, and wreathed and motionless clouds curled back from a clear expanse of gold and scarlet, against which the houses, churches and palaces rose from out the blue mist of evening.

The straight roof of the convent, the little tower with its slow-moving bell, the bare bent fruit trees, the beds of herbs, sweet-smelling even now, the red lamp glowing in the dark doorway, showed themselves to Dirk as he entered the gate,—he looked at them all intently, and bitter distant memories darkened his hollow face.

The monks were singing the Magnificat; their thin voices came clearly on the frosty air.

> "Fecit potentiam in brachio suo:
> dispersit superbos mente cordis sui."

Ambrose of Menthon took his feeble hand from Dunk's arm and sank on his knees.

> "Deposuit potentes de sede,
> et exaltavit humiles."

But Dirk's pale lips curled, and as he gazed at the sunset flaming beyond the convent walls, there was a haughty challenge in his brooding eyes.

> "Esurientes implevit bonis,
> et divites dimisit manes.
> Suscepit Israel puerum suum,
> recordatus misercordiae suae."

The saint murmured the chanted words and clasped his hands on his breast, while the sky brightened vividly above the wide waters of the Seine.

> "Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros
> Abraham et semini ejus in saecula."

The chant faded away on the still evening, but the saint remained kneeling.

"Master," whispered Dirk, "shall we not go in to them?"

Ambrose of Menthon raised his fair face.

"I am dying," he smiled. "A keen flame licks up my blood and burns my heart to ashes—' Sustinuit anima mea in verbo ejus.'" His voice failed, he sank forward and his head fell against the grey beds of rue and fennel.

“Alas! alas! “ cried Dirk; he made no attempt to bring assistance nor called aloud, but stood still, gazing with intent eyes at the unconscious man.

But when the monks came out of the chapel and turned two by two towards the convent, Dirk pulled off his worn cap.

“Divinum auxilium maneat semper nobiscum.”

“Amen,” said Dirk, then he ran lightly forward and flung himself before the procession.

“My father! “ he cried, with a sob in his voice.

The priests stopped, the “amens” still trembling on their lips.

“Ambrose of Menthon lies within your gates a dying man,” said Dirk meekly and sadly.

With little exclamations of awe and grief the grey-clad figures followed him to where the saint lay.

“Ah me!” murmured Dirk. “The way has been so long, so rough, so cold.”

Reverently they raised Saint Ambrose.

“He has done with his body,” said an old monk, holding up the dying man.

The flushed sky faded behind them; the saint stirred and half opened his eyes.

“Blaise,” he whispered. “Blaise”—he tried to point to Dirk who knelt at his feet—” he will tell you.” His eyes closed again, he strove to pray; the “De profundis” trembled on his lips, he made a sudden upward gesture with his hands, smiled and died.

For a while there was silence among them, broken only by a short sob from Dunk, then the monks turned to the ragged, emaciated youth who crouched at the dead feet.

“Blaise, he said,” one murmured, “it is the holy youth.”

Dirk roused himself as from a silent prayer, made the sign of the cross and rose.

“Who art thou?” they asked reverently.

Dunk raised a tear-stained, weary face.

“The youth Blaise, my fathers,” he answered humbly.