FORD FORD MADOX

THE YOUNG LOVELL

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The Young Lovell / A Romance:

Содержание

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Ford Madox Ford
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"When they were come to Hutton Ha'
They ride that proper place about,
But the laird he was the wiser man,
For he had left nae gear about."

Border Ballad.

PART I

I

In the darkness Young Lovell of the Castle rose from his knees, and so he broke his vow. Since he had knelt from midnight, and it was now the sixth hour of the day, he staggered; innumerable echoes brushed through the blackness of the chapel; the blood made flames in his eyes and roared in his ears. It should have been the dawn, or at least the false dawn, he thought, long since. But he knew that, in that stone place, like a coffer, with the ancient arched windows set in walls a man's length deep, it would be infinitely long before the light came to his eyes. Yet he had vowed to keep his vigil, kneeling till the dawn …

When the night had been younger it had been easier but more terrible. Visions had come to him; a perpetual flutter of wings, shuddering through the cold silence. He had seen through the thick walls, Behemoth riding amidst crystal seas, Leviathan who threw up the smoke and flames of volcanoes. Mahound had passed that way with his cortège of pagans and diamonded apes; Helen of Troy had beckoned to him, standing in the sunlight, and the Witch of Endor, an exceedingly fair woman, and a naked one, riding on a shell over a sea with waves like dove's feathers.

The Soldan's daughter had stretched out her arms to him, and a courtesan he had seen in Venice long ago, but her smile had turned to a skull's grinning beneath a wimple. He had known all these for demons. The hermit of Liddeside with his long beard and foul garments, such as they had seen him when they went raiding up Dunbar way, had swept into that place and had imperiously bidden him up from his knees to drive the Scots from Barnside, but he had known that the anchorite had been dead this three years and, seeing that the Warden of the Eastern Marches and the Bishop of Durham, with all his own father's forces and all theirs, lay in the castle and its sheilings, it was not likely that the false Scots would be so near. Young gallants with staghounds, brachets and Hamboro dogs had bidden him to the chase; magicians with crucibles had bidden him come view their alembics where the philosopher's stone stood revealed; spirits holding flames in their hands had sought to teach him the sin against the Holy Ghost, and Syrians in robes of gold, strange sins. There had come cooks with strange and alluring messes whose odours make you faint with desires, and the buttling friars from friaries with great wine-skins of sack. But all of them, too, he had known for demons, though at each apparition desire had shaken him.

All these he had taken to be in the nature of the very old chapel, since it had stood there over the tiresome and northern sea ever since Christendom had come to the land, and it was proper to think that, just as those walls had seen the murdering of

blessed saint Oddry by heathens and Scots whilst he sang mass, and even as pagans and sorcerers had in the old times contended for that ground, now, having done it in the body, in their souls they should still haunt that spot and contend for the soul of a young lording that should be made a knight upon the morrow. But when the tower-warden had churned out four o'clock the bird of dawn had crowed twice…

Three times would have been of better omen. At that moment Satan himself, the master fiend, with legs of scarlet, a bull's hide sweeping behind and horns all gold and aquamarine, had been dancing with mighty leaps above a coal fire, up through which, livid and in flaming shrouds, there had risen the poor souls of folk in purgatory. And with a charter from which there dangled a seal dripping blood to hiss in the coals and become each drop a viper – with this charter held out towards Young Lovell, Satan had offered him any of these souls to be redeemed from purgatory at the price of selling his own to Satan.

He had been about to say that he knew too much of these temptations and that the damnation of one soul would be infinitely more grievous to Our Lady than the temporary sojourn in purgatory of an infinite number. But at the crowing of the cock Satan and his firelit leer had vanished as if a candle had been blown out in a cavern…

There had begun an intolerable period of waiting. He tried to say his sixty Aves, but the perpetual whirling of wings that brushed his brow took away his thoughts. He knew them

now for the wings of anxious bats that his presence disturbed. When he began upon his Paters, a rat that had crept into his harness of proof overset his helmet and the prayer went out of his head. When he would have crossed himself, suddenly his foster-brother and cousin, Decies of the South, that should have watched in the chapel porchway, began to snore and cried out in his sleep the name "Margaret." Three times Decies of the South cried "Margaret."

Then Young Lovell knew that the spirits having power between cockcrow and dawn, in the period when men die and life ebbs down the sands – that these spirits were casting their spells upon him.

These were the old, ancient gods of a time unknown – the gods to whom the baal fires were lit; gods of the giants and heroes of whom even his confessor spoke with bated breath. Angels, some said they were, not fallen, but indifferent. And some of the poor would have them to be little people that dwelt in bogs and raths, and others held them for great and fair. He could not pray; he could not cross himself; his tongue clove to his jaws; his limbs were leaden. His mind was filled with curiosity, with desire, with hope. He had a great thirst and the cramp in his limbs. He could see a form and he could not see a form. He could see a light and no light at all.

Yet it was a light. It was a light of a rosy, stealing nature. It fell through one of the little, rounded windows, the shadows of the crab-apple branches outside the wall, moving slowly across the

floor. When he looked again it was gone and not gone. Without a doubt some eyes were peering into the chapel; eyes that could see in the dark were watching him. Kind eyes; eyes unmoved. His heart beat enormously…

And then he was upon his feet, reeling and stretching out his arms, with prayers that he had never prayed before upon his lips. Then prudence came into his heart and he argued with himself. It was to himself and to no other man or priest that he had vowed to watch above his harness from midnight to dawning. That was a newish fashion and neither the Border Warden nor the Prince Bishop would ask him had he done it or no. They would knight him without this new French manner of it. Then he might well go to see if the dawn were painting the heavens. He fumbled at the bar and cast the door open, stepping out.

It was grey; the sea grey and all the rushes of the sands. The foam was grey where it beat on the islands at sea and in the no-light the great cliff of his father's castle wall was like grey clouts hung from the mists. He perceived an old witch toiling up the dunes to come to him. She had a red cloak and a faggot over her shoulder. She waved her crutch to make him await her, and suddenly he thought she sailed, high in the air from the heavy sand to the stone at his feet. He thought this, but he could not be sure, for at that moment he was rubbing the heavy sleep from his eyes.

"That ye could do this, well I knew," he said, "but I had not thought to see ye do it over my ground."

Often he had seen the old witch. Sometimes she was in the form of a russet hare, slinking into her bed when he had been in harness without bow or light gun or hounds to chase her with. At other times he had seen her in her red cloak creeping about her affairs in the grey woods by Barnside.

Her filthy locks fell across her red eyes and she laughed so that he repented having spared her life in the woods.

"Gowd ye sall putten across my hand," she said, and her voice was like the wither of dried leaves and the weary creak of bough on bough in a great gale when the woods are perilous because of falling oaks. He answered that he had no gold because he had left his poke in his chest in the castle.

And with great boldness she bade him give her one of the pearls from the cap that hung at his belt. He reached to his left side for his sword, but it lay in the chapel across his armour of damascened steel and bright gold.

"Ye shall drown in my castle well when I have this business redded up," he said, but he wished he had slain her with his sword, for she was a very evil creature and it was not well in him to let her corrupt the souls of his poor. He lifted from his girdle his tablets to write down that the witch must drown, but the tablets the pen and the knife were tangled with their red silken tassels and skeins. A heavy snore came from within the chapel porch where Decies of the South was sleeping against the wall.

"If my bride had not begged your life of me…" the Young Lovell began.

Decies of the South muttered: "Margaret," just at his left hand.

"Bride," the old witch tittered. "Ye shall never plight your troth. But that sleeper shall be plighted to my lording's bride and take his gear. And another shall have his lands."

"Get you back to Hell!" the Young Lovell said.

"Look," the witch cried out.

She pointed down the wind, across the miles of dim dunes underneath where the Cheviots were like ghosts for the snow. The dunes rose in little hummocks amongst grey fields. A high crag was to the left. It was all grey over Holy Island; smoke rose from its courtyard. Dunstanburgh was lost in clouds of white sea spray, and in great clouds the sea-birds were drifting inland in strings of thousands each. Still no sun came over the sea.

The witch pointed with her crutch…

A little thing like a rabbit was digging laboriously at the foot of the crag; it ran here and there, moving a heavy stone.

"That man shall be your master," the witch cried.

A white horse moved slowly across the dunes. It had about it a swirling cloud of brown and a swirling cloud of the colour of pearly shells.

"And that shall be your bane," the witch said, in a little voice. "Ah me, for the fine young lording."

Young Lovell coursed to the shed beyond the chapel yew where his horse whinned at the sound of his voice. He haled out the goodly roan that was called Hamewarts because they had

bought him in Marseilles to ride homewards through France; his father and he had been to Rome after his father did the great and nameless sin and expiated it in that journey. He had ridden Hamewarts up from the Castle of Lovell so that, standing in the shed whilst his master kept his vigil, the horse might share his benediction.

The roan stallion lifted his head to gaze down the wind. He drew in the air through his nostrils that were as broad as your palm; he sprang on high and neighed as he had done at the battle of Kenchie's Burn.

The horse had no need of spurs, and young Lovell had none. It ran like the wind in the direction of the white steed at a distance. Nevertheless, the rider heard through the muffled sound of hoofs on the heavy sand the old witch who cried out, "Eya," to show that she had more to say, and he drew the reins of his charger. The sand flew all over him from beneath the horse's feet, and he heard the witch's voice cry out:

"To-day your dad shall die, but you's get none of his lands nor gear. From the now you shall be a houseless man."

But when he turned in his saddle he could see no old beldam in a scarlet cloak. Only a russet hare ran beneath the belly of Hamewarts and squealed like a new-born baby.

Whilst he rode furiously as if he were in chase of the grey wolf Young Lovell had leisure to reflect, he had ample time in which to inspect the early digger and the beclouded horse. At eight o'clock he was to be knighted by the double accolade of

the Warden of the Eastern Marches and of the Prince Bishop, following a custom that was observed in cases of great eminence or merit in the parties. And not only was Young Lovell son to Lord Lovell of the Castle, but he had fought very well against the Scots, in the French wars and in Border tulzies. So at eight, that he might not fast the longer, he was to be knighted. It was barely six, for still no sun showed above the long horizon of the northern sea.

It was bitter cold and the little digger, with his back to the rider, was blowing on his fingers and muttering over a squared stone that had half of it muddied from burial. At first Young Lovell took the little man for a brownie, then for an ape. Then he knew him for Master Stone, the man of law.

He cried out:

"Body of God, Master Furred Cat, where be's thy gown?"

And the little man span round, spitting and screaming, with his spade raised on high. But his tone changed to fawning and then to a complacence that would have done well between two rogues over a booty.

"Worshipful Knight," he brought out, and his voice was between the creak of a door and the snarl of a dog fox, though his thin knees knocked together for fear. "A man must live, I in my garret as thou in thy castle bower with the pretty, fair dames."

"Ay, a man mun live," the Young Lovell answered. "But what sort of living is this to be seeking treasure trove on my land before the sun be up?"

"Treasure trove?" the lawyer mumbled. "Well, it is a treasure."

"It is very like black Magic," Young Lovell said harshly. "A mislikeable thing to me. I must have thee burnt. What things a man sees upon his lands before the sun is up!"

"Magic," the lawyer screamed in a high and comic panic. "God help me, I have nothing of Mishego and Mishago. This is plain lawyer's work and if your honour will share, one half my fees you shall have from the improvident peasants."

At the high sound of his voice Hamewarts, who all the while was straining after the white horse, bounded three strides; when Young Lovell took him strongly back, he had the square stone at another angle. Upon its mossed side he saw a large "S" carved that had two crosses in its loops, upon the side that was bare was one "S" with the upper loop struck through.

"Body of God, a boundary stone," he cried out. "And you, Furred Cat, are removing it." He had got the epithet of Furred Cat from talking to the Sire de Montloisir whilst they played at the dice.

"Indeed it is more profitable than treasure-troving and seeking the philosopher's stone," the lawyer tittered, and he rubbed, from habit, his hands together, so that little, triturated grains of mud fell from them into the peasant's poor, boggy grass. "This is Hal o' the Mill's land, and I have moved the stone a furlong into the feu of Timothy Wynvate. There shall arise from this a lawsuit that shall last the King's reign out. Aye, belike, one of the twain shall slay the other. His land your honour may take back as forfeit,

and the other's as deodand. I will so contrive it, for I will foment these suits and have the handling of them. By these means, in time, your lordingship may have back all the lands ye ever feu'd. In time. Only give me time…"

The Young Lovell lifted up his fist to the sky. The most violent rage was in his heart.

"Now by the paps of Venus and the thunder of Jove, I have forgotten the penalty of him that removeth his neighbour's landmark! But if I do not die before night, and I think I shall not, that death you shall die. Say your foul prayers, filth, your doom is said…"

Master Stone lifted up both his hands, clasped together, to beg his life of this hot but charitable youth. But Young Lovell had leaped his horse across a dune faster than the words could follow him.

He came upon a narrow strip of nibbled turf running down a valley of rushy sand-hills. Hamewarts guided him. They went over one ridge and had sight of the white horse; they sank into another dale and lost it.

On the summit of the next ridge Hamewarts became suddenly like a horse of bronze and the Young Lovell had a great dizziness. He had a sense of brown, of pearly blue, of white, of many colours, of many great flowers as large as millstones. With a heavy sense of reluctance he looked behind him. The mists were rising like curtains from over Bamborough; since the tide was falling the pall of spray was not so white on Dunstanburgh. Upon

his own castle, covering its promontory near at hand, they were hoisting a flag, so that from there the tower warden must have already perceived the sun. From over the castle on Holy Island the pall of smoke was drifting slowly to sea. No doubt in the courtyard they had been roasting sheep and kine whole against the visit of the Warden and the Prince Bishop who would ride on there with all their men by nine of the clock.

In every bay and reedy promontory the cruel surf gnawed the sand; the ravens were flying down to the detritus of the night, on the wet margins of the tide. The lawyer was climbing over the shoulder of a dune, a sack upon his back; a shepherd, for the first time that spring, was driving a flock of sheep past the chapel yew. There was much surf on Lindisfarne.

Suddenly, from the middle of the bow of the grey horizon there shot up a single, broadening beam. Young Lovell waved his arm to the golden disk that hastened over the grey line.

"If you had come sooner," he said to the sun, "you might have saved me from this spell. Now these fairies have me."

Slowly, with mincing and as if shy footsteps, Hamewarts went down through the rushes from that very real world. Young Lovell perceived that the brown was a carpeting that fluttered, all of sparrows. It had a pearly and restless border of blue doves, and in this carpet the white horse stepped ankle-deep without crushing one little fowl. He perceived the great-petalled flowers, scarlet and white and all golden. On a green hill there stood a pink temple, and the woman on the back of the white horse held a

white falcon. She smiled at him with the mocking eyes of the naked woman that stood upon the shell in the picture he had seen in Italy.

"But for you," he heard himself think, "I might have been the prosperest knight of all this Northland and the world, for I have never met my match in the courteous arts, the chase or the practice and exercises of arms."

And he heard her answering thoughts:

"Save for that I had not called thee from the twilight."

II

The Warden of the Eastern Marches, who was Henry Percy, fourth Earl of Northumberland, said that there was too much of this silken flummery. He desired to get back to the affairs of King Henry VII and a plain world where there were too many false Scots. The Lord Lovell of the Castle agreed with him, but said that the women would so have it. He was an immense, gross man, the rolls of fat behind his head, growing black curly hair that ran into his black and curly beard, mantled high up on his neck. His eyes were keen, peeble-blue, sagacious and mocking. The Lady Rohtraut, his wife, a fair, thin woman of forty-three, one of the Dacres of the North, leaned across the Bishop Palatine to disagree with the Warden. Thin as she was she wore an immense gown of red damask worked with leaves, birds and pomegranates. Her sleeves brushed the ground, her

hood of black velvet had a diamond-shaped front, like the gable of a house, and was framed in yellow gold set with emeralds that her lord had brought from Venice to get her back to a good temper, though he never did. The broad edging of brown fur from her sleeves caught in a crochet of the gilded steel on the Bishop Palatine's armour which had been taken from the Saracens in the year 1482, they having rieved it from the Venetians.

The Lady Rohtraut said that these things had been ordered after the leaves of a written book that had been sent her by her cousin Alice from the King's court in London. This book was called "Faicts of Arms," and the King himself who loved good chivalry had bade it be printed tho' that would be long in doing. There the order of these things had been set forth, and she had done her best to have fashion of it right, though with only men to help her, she imagined that Messire de Montloisir would laugh if he did not happen to be on his bed of sickness.

But she had them there to the number of eleven score, gentry, priests and commonalty with many men-at-arms to hold the herd back with their pike-staves. The great stone hall she had had painted with vermilion, green and gold. Enormous banners with swallow-tails fell from the gilded beams of the roof. They displayed the snarling heads of red tigers, portculles, two-hued roses, and a dun cow on a field of green sarcenet in honour of the Bishop Palatine. The table at which they sat, the men divided from the women, had its silken cloth properly tabled out in chequers of green and vermilion. The pages with their proper

badges walked to and fro before the table as they should do, and, as they should be, the people of no privilege were penned in behind the columns of the hall where they made a great noise. She would not have anything lacking at the sacring of her one son.

Sir Walter Limousin, of Cullerford, who had married her daughter Isopel, sneered at these words of his mother-in-law. He sat at the right hand of his father-in-law. Sir Symonde Vesey, of Haltwhistle, who had married the daughter Douce, and sat beyond Sir Walter, said loudly that too much gear went to waste over these Frenchifications of the Young Lovell and his dame. Their two wives said that indeed their mother was over-fond.

Their mother, who was a proud Dacre with the proudest of them, flushed vicious red. She said that her daughters were naughty jades, and if their husbands had not three times each been beggared by Scots raiders they might have had leave to talk so. But, being what they were, it would be better if they closed their mouths over one who had paid all his ransoms, whether to the Scots or on the bloody field of Kenchie's Burn, with sword-blows solely. She had paid one thousand marks to artificers of Brussels for stuffs to deck that hall and the street of the township where it led from the chapel whence her fair, brave son should come; so that banners and carpets hung from the windows, the outer galleries, stairways and the roofs where they were low. And she wished she had spent ten thousand on her son who had won booty enough to pay all she had laid out on him and her daughters'

husbands' ransoms besides – after the day of Kenchie's Burn.

The Warden said that he wished by the many wounds of God that the stripling would come. There was too much babble of women there. They had come into these parts, the Bishop of Durham and he, to see what levies might be made from castle to castle and so to broom all false Scots out of the country from thereaways to Dunbar. And there they sate who should have been on the northward road before sunrise listening to this clavering of women. The young Lovell was a springald goodly enow, and the knights of Cullerford and Haltwhistle were known to blow on their fingers when they should be occupied with the heavy swords.

Sir Walter Limousin looked down his nose. He was a grim and silent craven that did little but sneer. Sir Symonde, who was brave and barbarous enough, but unlucky, smote so heavily the silver inkhorn standing before him that it flattened down its supports and stained the chequered fairness of the table.

The Percy cast his old glance aside on Sir Symonde.

"Aye, Haltwhistle," he said drily, "ye will break more than ye will take." And he went on to say that, in his day, he having been dubbed knight on the field, it had been done with a broken sword and the wet on it wiped across his chops to blood him the better. And he wished that Young Lovell would come.

The Lady Rohtraut said that without doubt her son was saying some very long and very precious prayers. The Warden said that belike, and more likely, the young fellow was unable to fasten

the whimsy-marees of his new-fashioned harness and was stuck up there in the old chapel like a fool amid the evidences of his folly. The Lord Lovell said nay then, that a band of youngsters had gone up to the chapel, and the little Hal his son's page had reported that his master would soon be there, the page having run, whilst the Young Lovell was riding at a foot pace.

"He had better have kept his page to buckle his harness," the Border Warden harped on.

"Nay then," the Lady Rohtraut said with a flushed and angry face – no person nor page could enter into the sacred chapel till her son should be issued out in his panoply least they should disturb the angels of God who would invisibly assist her son at his harnessing.

The Bishop, whose dark head came out of its steel armour like a cormorant's out of a hole, looked all down that board to find a sympathetic soul. He had a lean, Italianate face, and had pleased the King Richard the Third – then Duke of Gloucester – rather because of a complaisance than a burly strength. He was very newly come to the Palatine Country. For he had been the King's Friend in Rome many years and, in fear of King Henry the Seventh – because the Bishop was reputed a friend of Richard Crookback after Bosworth – he had gone across the seas until now.

So that what with the clerkly details of his coming into the bishopric, this was his first tour of those parts and he did not well know those people. Therefore he had spoken very little.

This John Bishop Palatine was, in short, a cautious and well-advised churchman, well-read not only in the patristic books but in some of the poets, for in his day he had been long in Rome and later dwelt in Westminster, where the printing was done, though the King was even then pulling down Caxton's chapel to build his own more gorgeous fane.

This bishop then, set first the glory of God, good doctrine and his see, as his duty was. And after that he hoped that he might leave renown as a great clerk who had added glory, credit, power and wealth, whether of copes of gold or of lands, to his most famous bishopric.

That was why, throughout this discussion he had observed the face of a young woman that sat beyond the ladies Rohtraut, Isopel and Douce. She was the Lady Margaret of the Wear, coming from the neighbouring tower of Glororem, and that day he was to bless her betrothal to Young Lovell of the Castle. She was a dark girl, rising twenty, and with brownish features, open nostrils, a flush on her face and dark eyes of a coaly-sheen, all of one piece of black, so that you could not tell pupil from iris.

She had never spoken, as became her station, since she was the youngest woman there. But the Bishop Palatine had observed her looks as each uttered his or her thoughts, and from this he knew that she regarded the Lady Rohtraut with tender veneration, and the lower classes behind the pillars with dislike and contempt, for when their voices became loud she had lowered her black brows and clenched her hand that lay along the table.

Upon the Border Warden and upon the gross Lord Lovell she had gazed with a tolerant contempt, upon the Knight of Cullerford with a bitter scorn, upon Haltwhistle with irony, and upon their two wives that should be her sisters-in-law, with high dislike. He perceived that, like the Lady Rohtraut, she had read the book called "Faicts of Arms," for, when the lady Rohtraut had been speaking of it, she had leaned sideways over the table, her lips parted as if she could hardly contain herself. He saw also that she was of great piety, since every time Our Lady was mentioned in that debate she inclined, and when it was Our Lord, she did the like and crossed herself. And this pleased the Bishop Palatine, for these observances were not so often seen as could be done with. Moreover, he knew that, plainly to the eye she had given all her heart – and it was a proud and hot one – to the Young Lovell. At each mention of his deeds her dusky cheeks would flush up to her white forehead and she would pass her gemmed hands before her eyes as if they saw a mist of gladness.

The Bishop was glad that the will of God and the bent of his own mind could let his speech, that he was thinking upon, jump so well with that lady's desires, and so he addressed himself at first to the Lady Rohtraut, young Lovell's proud mother.

He had not, he said, spoken before in that high assembly because he was so newly come among them that, although he well knew that he was their father in God and in a sense their temporal protector, yet he did not wish to show himself to them as a rash and ardent fool by dictating upon matters that he might

well know little of.

But still, having listened a decent while to their minds he would say something. Of facts and the practice of arms he would not declare himself all ignorant. He was a churchman, but he was of that church militant that should one day be the Church Triumphant – triumphant there in Heaven, but here in Northumberland, militant very fully. It was true that it would not much become him in those days of comparative peace to strike blows with the iron mace. It was rather his part to stand upon a high place observant of battles and sieges. And, if he wore arms, it was rather as a symbol than as of use. He hoped that, as his reverend and sainted predecessors in the see had done, he might confer on such arms a grace of holiness, and therefore with much travel and research, he had arms as golden as might be found for him by his trusty messengers, that their fair richness might shine to the greater glory of God. For himself he would as lief wear sackcloth and rusty pots.

In most things he must bow to the wiseness of the Earl of Northumberland. Being blooded upon a hot field with spurs gilded with the tide from the veins of men had produced very good men. It had doubtless produced better men than to-day might see the doubles and counterparts of. Those days before had been simpler and better. These days were very evil. There was in the land a spirit of luxury, sinful unless it had guidance, bestial unless it had control, and for want of counsel horrid, lecherous and filthy by turns. Theirs, by the will and blessing of God and

by the wise rule of His vice-gerent – for so he would style their good King, though it was not the habit – theirs were days of near peace. The kingdom was no longer rent by dissensions; famine and pestilence came more seldom nigh them than in the days of their fathers of which they had read. In consequence, they had great wealth such as had never before been seen. Where their fathers had had woollens they had silks, satins and patterned damasks beyond compare for lascivious allurements; where their fathers had eaten off trenchers of bread, they had plates of silver, of gold, of parcel gilt or at the very least of latten.

Now all these things were the blessing of God in the highest, but they might well become the curse of Satan that dwelleth in the Pit. God had given them bread, but they might turn it to bitter stone; He had given them peace, but it might turn to a sword more sharp than that of Apollyon or Geryon. Arma virumque cano, the profane poet said, but the man he sang of was blessed and so his arms.

Therefore he, the Bishop Palatine, since he would not see all this splendour of God go down, as again Vergil saith, sicut flos purpurea aratro succisa, leant all his weight in the scale for the blessing and the sacring of arms. In the books of chivalry they should read not of vain pomps, but of how arms should be laid upon altars; not of luxurious feasts, but of how good knights held vigils and fasts and kept themselves virgin of heart to go upon quests that the blessed angels of God did love. So they might read of the blessed blood in its censor and of the lily-pure knights that

sought it through forest and brake. And these books were very good reading.

The Warden suddenly laughed aloud.

"God keep your washed capons from a border fray!" he exclaimed, and shook his lean sides. The Bishop looked sideways upon him.

"I have not heard that Sir Artus of Bretagne slew the less pagans because he was of a cleaned heart, nor Sir Hugon of Bordeaux neither."

"I do not know those knights," the Percy said grimly. "Maybe they would have slain less if it had been Douglases and Murrays and other homely names."

"Nay, it was fell pagans," the Bishop said seriously. "You may read of it in virtuous and true histories it were a sin to doubt of, so greatly does the virtue of God and His glory shine through them."

"Well, if it be matter of doctrine my mouth is shut," the Warden said good humouredly. "I did not know it had been more than a matter of fashion. Yet I think it is early days to prate of our peaceful times. It is but three months since Kenchie's Burn and not three years since the false Scots had their smoke flying over the walls of Durham."

The Bishop bent his head obediently before the Warden.

"In these matters I will learn of you," he said; and the Warden answered:

"They are all I have to teach you. In my high day there were

none of your books and stories."

It was agreed that the Bishop and the Warden came off with level arms, the Bishop having spoken the more, but the Warden had sent in heavier stone shot. And all people were agreed that the Bishop was a worthy and proud prince.

At that moment the Almoner whispered in the Bishop's ear and laid a parchment before him. He begged the Bishop to sign this appointment. For the day drew on, they must ride very soon and might not again be in those parts for a year or more. It was to make the worthy Magister Stone, of Barnside, bailiff for the Palatinate in those parts, this side of Alnwick to the sea. This lawyer was a very skilled chicaner and there were suits to come very soon between the see and the Lords Ogle and Mitford, touching the Bishop's mills at Witton and on Wearside. The Bishop was aware that one of the Almoner's clerks must have had money of the lawyer; nevertheless he signed the appointment, for he knew they would never let him have any other man. A Prince Bishop cannot go searching for scriveners of honesty like Diogenes lacking a lanthorn.

The dispute as to the rules of chivalry went on in spite of the Bishop's abstraction from it. Indeed, the Lord Lovell of the Castle, who had not much reason for loving churchmen, spoke the more loudly because the Bishop was occupied with his papers. He was a jovial man, not much loved by his wife whom he delighted to tease. If he had any grief it was that his natural son, Decies of the South, had never shown himself a lad of any

great parts. This lad was reputed to be his natural son, though he was called Young Lovell's foster brother. Nevertheless who was his mother no man knew.

What was known was this.

Six years before the Lord Lovell did some grievous sin, but what that too was, no men knew. He had been called before the former Bishop of Durham; the Lady Rohtraut had, then and afterwards, been heard to rate him soundly. He had given five farms to the Bishopric and had then gone on a Romer's journey, by way, it was considered, of penance. At any rate, he had gone to Rome in sackcloth, taking with him his son, the Young Lovell, who travelled very well appointed and, on the homeward way, had acted as his page. They had taken ship from the New Castle to Bordeaux and from Bordeaux to Genoa, where, falling in with a party of English *Condottieri* in the pay of the Holy Father, they had travelled in safety to the city of the seven hills.

On the homeward road they had travelled more like great lords, having enlisted a train of followers, and staying in the courts of Princes of Italy until they came again to Marseilles. The Young Lovell, who was then sixteen, had been permitted, by way of fleshing his sword, to fight with the captains of the Prince of Fosse Ligato against the men of the Princess of Escia. He had slept in pavilions of silk and saw the sack of two very rich walled cities whilst his easy father, who had seen fighting enough in his day, dallied over the sweet wines, lemons and the women with dyed hair of the Prince's Court.

In Venice, whilst his father had toyed with similar cates, the young Lovell had been present at a conclave, between the turbaned envoys of the Soldan and the Venetian council, over the exchange of prisoners taken in galleys of the one side and the other.

Therefore as travelling went, the young man had voyaged with his eyes open, having made friends of several youths of Italy and learned some pretty tricks of fence as well as sundry ways of dalliance.

The father regarded his son with not disagreeable complacency, like a carthorse who had begotten a slight and swift barb. The boy's soft ways and gentle speeches amused him till he laughed tears at times; his daring and hot, rash passions pleased his father still more. He had challenged six Italian squires on the Lido to combat with the rapier, the long sword, the axe and the dagger, and only with the rapier had he been twice worsted – and this quite well contented his father, who regarded him as a queer, new-fangled growth, but in no wise a disgraceful one. He set the boy, in fact, down to his mother's account. And this he did with some warrant, for the boy was the first blond child that had been born to the Lovells in a hundred years.

Further back than that the Lovells could not go. They were descended from one Ruthven, a Welsh brigand of whom, a hundred and twenty years before, it was written that he and his companions kept the country between the Rivers Seine and Loire so that none dare ride between Paris and Orleans, nor between

Paris and Montargis. These robbers had made that Ruthven a knight and their captain. There were no towns in that district that did not suffer pillage and over-running from them, not Saint Arnold, Gaillardon, Chatillon or even Chartres itself. In that way Ruthven had amassed a marvellous great booty until, the country of France having been submitted to the English, he had set sail, with much of his wealth, for Edinburgh, but liking the Scots little, after he had married a Scots woman called Lovell, he had come south into the Percies' country. It had happened that the Percies had at that date five squires of their house in prison to the Douglas and had little money for their ransoming. So this Ruthven had bought of them seventy farms and land on which to build an outer wall round the fortress that, boastfully, he called the Castle, as if there had been no other castle in that land. And indeed, it was a marvellously strong place, over the sea on its crags of basalt.

Thus had arisen, from huge wealth, the great family of the Lovells of the Castle. For Ruthven had not wished to be known by his name, and indeed King Henry V swore that none of that name should have Lordship nor even Knighthood, though the Ruthven of that day fought well at Agincourt, losing three horses, two of which he had taken from French lords. So, since that day they had been the Lords Lovell of the Castle with none to gainsay them, though till latterly they had been held for rough lords and not over-reverend. The Percies looked down their noses when they met them, and so did the captains of Bamburgh and Holy

Island. However, in the year 1459 the Lord Lovell had found the Lady Rohtraut of the Dacres to marry him and, having had three daughters, she bore him the Young Lovell though one of the daughters died.

At any rate; they had travelled home from Marseilles, father and son, very peaceably together, going from castle to castle of the French lords and knights, under a safe-conduct that had been granted them by the French envoy to the Holy Father in Rome, though there was war between the countries of France and England, the King Edward the Fourth having suddenly made a raid into the country of the lilies. And the courteous way with which the French lords treated them made them much wonder because they did not think a Scots lord would have so easily travelled through the Border Country or a Border lord through Scotland.

Therefore, when they came to Calais, they went quietly home to England without turning back to war in France. That was according to their oath to Messire Parrolles at Rome, though some of King Edward's lords and courtiers mocked at them and it was said to be in the King's mind to have fined them, not for having observed, but for having taken such an oath. However, when they came into the North parts, at Northallerton, they met with the Duke of Gloucester, the King's brother, who treated them very courteously and absolved them of ill intentions because at the time they had taken the oath peace had been between England and France, or at least no news of the war had

reached Rome. This Richard, Duke of Gloucester, brother of King Edward, was much loved in the North, of which region he was then Lord-General. He dealt with all men courteously, giving simple and smiling answers to simple questions and never failing to answer favourably any petition that he could grant, or refusing others with such phrases of regret as made the refusal almost a boon of itself. He inflicted also no harsh taxes and took off many others, so that in those parts he was known as the good Duke of Gloucester.

He treated the Lord Lovell and his son with such smiling courtesy that they very willingly went with him, before ever their home saw them, on a journey that he was making towards Dunbar, and it was in the battle that some Scots lords made against them on the field of Kenchie's Burn that the Young Lovel did such great things. He took prisoner with his own hands a great Scots lord, own cousin to Douglas, in a hot mêlée, where, before he was taken, the Scots lord, being otherwise disarmed by the Young Lovell, knocked with his clenched fist, nine teeth down the throat of Richard Raket, that was the Young Lovell's horse boy. And this lord having cried mercy, the Young Lovell pursued so furiously against the Scots that he slew many of them before nightfall and was lost in a great valley between moors and slept on the heather. There he heard many strange sounds, such as a great cry of dogs hunting overhead, which was said by those who had read in books to be the goddess Diana chasing still through the night the miserable shade of the foolish Actæon. And between

two passages of sleep, he perceived a fair kind lady looking down upon him, but before he was fully awake she was no longer there, and this was thought to be the White Lady of Spindleston, though it was far from her country. But still that spirit might have loved that lording and have sought his company in the night for he was very fair of his body. And it was held to be a sign that he was a good Christian, that this lady vanished upon his awakening, for in that way spirits have been known to follow Good Knights from place to place for love of them, and in the end to work them very great disaster.

So at least that was interpreted by the young monk Francis of the order of St. Cuthbert who was with the army when, in the morning, Young Lovell came to it again after he had been held for dead. But the monk Francis had read in no books, having been an ignorant rustic knight of that country-side, that had become a monk for a certain sin. The Young Lovell found, indeed, that, whilst he had been so held for dead this young monk had much befriended him. For his father, the Lord Lovell, had shewn a disposition to adopt that Decies of the South and to give him the fruits of the young Lovell's deeds, such as the ransoming of the Scots lord and the knighthood that the Duke should have given him had he been found on the field at the closing of the day. The young monk had however protested so strongly that the Young Lovell was not dead, but had in his face the presage of great and strange deeds, whether of arms or other things – so hotly had the young monk made a clamour, that the old lord was shamed and

had for the time desisted.

That Decies of the South was a son much more after the old lord's heart than ever the Young Lovell, for all his prowess, could be. He loved the one son whilst he dreaded the other, since he was too like his mother that was a Dacre and despised the Lovells or the Ruthvens.

This Decies the Lord Lovell had picked up at Nottingham on their homeward road, and, finding him a true Lovell, had made no bones about acknowledging him for a son though he never would say who his mother was or how he should come by the name of Decies. But he was rising twenty-one, like the Young Lovell, heavy, clumsy, very strong and an immense feeder. He was dark and red-cheeked and cunning and he fitted his father as a hand fits a glove. Nevertheless he had done little at Kenchie's Burn, he had slept so heavily. It had been no man's affair to waken him, he having drunk very deeply of sweet wines the night before. That battle began at dawn and travelled over many miles of land, so that when Decies of the South came up the Scots were already fleeing.

The old lord did no more than laugh, but he felt it bitter in his heart. And, as it had been on that day, so it continued, the one half-brother being always up in the morning too early for the other. They made very good companions hunting together, though it was always the Young Lovell that had his dagger first in the throat of the grey wolf or the red deer, and the Decies who came second when outlaws, or else when the false Scots, must

be driven off from peel towers that had the byres alight beneath them and the farmers at death's door above, for the smoke and reek. Nor was it because the Decies lacked courage, but because he was slow in the uptake and, although cunning, not cunning enough.

Or it may have been that he was too cunning and just left the honours to the Young Lovell who was haughty and avid of the first place. For the Lady Rohtraut took very unkindly to the Decies and made him suffer what insults she could; only the lower sort of the castle-folk willingly had his company, and the old lord was growing so monstrous heavy that it was considered that his skin could not much longer contain him. He had led a life of violence, sloth, great appetites and negligent shamelessness, so that the Decies considered that he would soon have need of protectors in their place. The old lord might leave his lands, but much of his lands were the dower of his wife and upon his death would go back to her hands alone. For the lands of the Castle and the gear and gold and silver that were in the White Tower under the night and day guard of John Bulloc, the old lord might leave the Decies what he would, but the Young Lovell could take it all.

The Decies would find neither lord nor lord bishop nor lawyer to espouse his cause. Moreover, though his father might give him gold and gear whilst he lived, the Decies had no means whereby to convey it to a distance and no place in the distance in which to store it, besides it would surely be taken by moss-troopers and little cry made about it. For in those days all the North parts were

full of good, small gentry robbing whom they would, like the Selbys of Liddell, the Eures of Witton or Adam Swinburn.

For the times were very unsettled, and no man could well tell, in robbing another, whether he were a knight of King Richard's despoiling the King's enemies or a traitor to King Henry robbing that King's lieges, and there was little for the livelihood of proper gentry but harrying whether in the King's cause or in rebellion. So that if the Decies' money on its way to safe quarters should be taken, there would be little or no outcry since he was nothing to those parts. So he was a very good brother to the Young Lovell and followed him like his shadow.

III

So there they all sat at the chequered table and the Lord Lovell watched them with his cunning eyes and speculated upon the dissensions that lay beneath all their fair shew of courtesy. And he wondered how, from one or the other, he might gain advantage for his son Decies. It was not that he hated the Young Lovell, but he wished Decies to have all that he might and something might come of these people's misliking of each other.

For all Bishop Sherwood's praising of the security of the times under a beneficent vice-gerent of God, he knew that the Bishop little loved King Henry the Seventh, and the King trusted him so very little that never once would that King send to the Bishop the proper letters of array that should empower him to raise

forces along the Borders. Thus the Bishop could raise men only in his own dominions between Tees and Tyne and westward into Cumberland.

The Bishop had made his speech and shewed great courtesy only for the benefit of the Earl of Northumberland, whilst for that Border Warden he felt really little but contempt and some dislike. For this Henry, Earl Percy, Warden of the Eastern Marches and Governor of Berwick Town, had deserted King Richard very treacherously on the field of Bosworth, for all he spoke and posed as a bluff and bloody soldier who should be a trusty companion.

Thus the Bishop feared the Percy, regarding him as a spy of the King's, for King Richard was much beloved in the North and the Bishop of Durham had been one of the only two Bishops that had upheld him at the coronation, which was why his banner of the dun cow upon a field of green sarcenet had then been carried before that King. And after Bosworth where King Richard was slain, the Bishop had fled to France, from which he had only ventured back the August before. There had been many rebellions in the North and they were not yet done with; nevertheless the Bishop feared that the cause of the King Usurper would prevail.

The Earl Percy, on the other hand, distrusted the Bishop, since, unlike the Duke of Gloucester, he knew himself to be hated by gentle and simple in those parts, and more by simple than the others. Many poor men – even all of the countryside – had sworn to murder him, for he was very arrogant and

oppressive, inflicting on those starving and disturbed parts, many and weary taxes for the benefit of his lord, King Henry the Seventh, and the wars that he waged in other places. This was a thing contrary to the law and custom of the North. For those parts considered that they had enough on their hands if they protected their own lands and kept the false Scots out of the rest of the realm. Nevertheless, the Lord Percy continued to impose his unjust taxes, taking even the horse from the plough and the meat from the salting pots where there was no money to be had. The Lord Percy knew that he went in great danger of his life, for when, there, a great lord was widely hated of the commonalty his life was worth little. Nay, he was almost certain, one day, to be hewed in pieces by axes or billhooks, since the common people, assembling in a great number would take him one day, when he rode back ill-attended from hunting or a raid.

Thus the Percy desired much to gain friendship of the Bishop and his partisans to save his life. So he shewed him courtesy and spoke in a pious fashion and had invited him, as if it were his due, to ride on this numbering of the men-at-arms in Northumberland, although, since the King had sent the Bishop Palatine no letters of array, it was, strictly speaking, none of the Bishop's business.

The Lord Lovell himself had taken no part at Bosworth Field, and glad enough he was that he had not, for he would have been certain to have been found on the losing side. But he had been sick of a quinsy – a malady to which very stout men are much

subject – and, not willing that the Young Lovell should gain new credit at his cost – for he must have gone with his father's men-at-arms, horses and artillery – the Lord Lovell bade his son stay at home and not venture himself against the presumptuous Richmond.

And, looking upon the people there, the fat man chuckled, for there was not one person there who had not lately suffered from one side or the other. The Lord Percy had spent many years in the Tower under Edward IV; Henry VII had taken from the Bishop many of his lands and had made him for a time an exile. His haughty wife had suffered great grief at the death of her best brother whose head came off on Tower Hill to please the Duke of Gloucester, and Edward IV had had Sir Symonde Vesey five years in the Tower and had fined Limousin of Cullerford five hundred pounds after Towton Field. The proud Lady Margaret had lost her father and all his lands after the same battle, the lands going to the Palatinate.

The Lady Margaret and her mother – they were Eures of Wearside – had sheltered in farms and peel towers, lacking often sheets and bed covering, until the mother died, and then the Lady Rohtraut had taken the Lady Margaret, to whom she was an aunt. All these Tyne and Wearside families were sib and rib. The Lady Rohtraut had had the Lady Margaret there as her own daughter and kinswoman, and the Lord Lovell had had nothing against it. For the Eures and Ogles and Cra'sters and Percies and Widdringtons and all those people, even to the haughty Nevilles

and Dacres of the North, were a very close clan. He himself had married a Dacre to come nearer it, and it made him all the safer to shelter an Eure woman-child. And then, in his graciousness at coming into the North, and afterwards, after the battle at Kenchie's Burn, the Duke of Gloucester, at first making interest with his brother, King Edward IV., and then of his own motion, had pardoned that Lady the sins of her father, had bidden the Palatinate restore, first the lands on Wearside and then those near Chester le Street, and also, at the last, those near Glororem, in their own part, which were the best she had. And, finally, King Richard had made the Lady Rohtraut her niece's guardian, which was a great thing, for since she was very wealthy, the fines she would pay upon her marriage would make a capital sum.

So they had found the Lady Margaret on their coming back from Rome, wealthy and proud, sewing or riding, hawking, sometimes residing in their Castle and sometimes in her tower of Glororem which was in sight. The young Lovell had lost his heart to her and she hers to him between the flight of her tassel gentle and its return to her glove, so that it looked as if the name of Lovell bade fair to be exalted in those parts, by this marriage too, and if the Lord Lovell had anything against it, it was only that she had not chosen his other son Decies. But there it was, and he must content himself with paring what he could from her gear, and his wife's and young Lovell's while he lived, for he intended to buy Cockley Park Tower of Blubberymires from Lord Ogle of Ogle – and to set the Decies up in it. And his wife had some

outlying land at Morpeth that he would make shift to convey to his son, so that Decies would have a goodly small demesne and might hold up his head in that region of the Merlays, Greystocks and Dacres.

His son should have the lands of Blubberymires and part of Morpeth; furnishings for his tower to the worth of near a thousand pounds, jewels worth nine hundred and more, fifty horses and the arms for fifty men, and for his sustenance firstly his particular and feudal rights, market fees, tenths, millings, wood-rights, farmings, rents and lastly such profits of the culture of his lands as it is proper for every gentleman to draw from them. And, considering what he could draw from his own Castle, he thought that the Decies should have such beds, linen, vessels of latten and of silver, chests and carvings in wood, tapestries, utensils, and all other furnishings as should make him have a very proper tower. From his wife's castle at Cramlin, or her houses at Plessey and Killingworth, he could get very little. Upon his marriage and since, he had stripped them very thoroughly, and when he last rode that way, he had seen that at Cramlin, the rafters, ceilings, and even the very roofs had fallen in, so that it had become very fitting harbourage for foxes. And this consideration grimly amused him, to think what his lady wife should find when he was dead and her lands came to her again. For she had not seen them in ten years, and imagined her houses to be in very good fettle, but he had turned the money to other uses. It was upon these things that this lord's thoughts ran, since

he had nothing else for their consumption. He was too heavy to mount a horse in those days; he could read no books, and talking troubled him. Even the lewd stories of his son Decies in his cups sent him latterly to sleep; he could get no more much enjoyment from teasing his proud wife by filthy ways and blasphemy, and he hated to be with his daughters or their two husbands. Thus, nothing amused or comforted him any longer save watching contests of ants and spiders, and even these were hard to come by in winter, as it was then in those parts where spring comes ever late.

There penetrated into the babble of their voices slight sounds from the open air, and a hush fell in the place. Without doubt they heard cheering, and quickly the pages of all the company ranged themselves in a parti-coloured and silken fringe before the steel of the men at arms that held the commonalty behind the pillars. The great oaken doors wavered slowly backwards at the end of the hall, and they perceived the road winding down from them through the grass on the glacis, the greyness of the sea and sky, and the foam breaking on the rocks of the Farne Islands. A ship, whose bellying sails appeared to be almost black, was making between the islands and the shore. At times she stood high on a roller, at times she was so low amongst the tumble that they could hardly see more than the barrels at the mastheads and the red cross of St. Andrew on her white flag. The Border Warden said that this was the ship of Barton, the Scots pirate, and some held that this was a great impudence of him, but others said that

the weather was so heavy outside that he was seeking the shelter of the islands, and certainly none of their boats could come at him in the sea there was. And this topic held their attentions until the sound of a horn reached them. This was certainly the Young Lovell's page seeking admission to the Castle, so that he was near enough.

The monstrous head of a caparisoned horse, held back by ribands of green and vermilion silk, came into view by the arch. It rose on high and disappeared, so that they knew it was rearing. Then it came all down again and forged slowly into view, the little page Hal and Young Lovell's horse boy, Richard Raket, that had lost his teeth at Kenchie's Burn, holding the shortened ribands now near the bit on either side. The common men threw up their bonnets and took the chance of finding them again; the ladies waved scarves, the Bishop made a benediction. The man in shining steel was high up in the archway against the sea. Such bright armour was never seen in those parts before, the light poured off it in sheathes, like rain. The head was quite round, the visor fluted and down, at the saddle bow the iron shaft of the partisan was gilded; the swordbelt and the scabbard were of scarlet velvet set with emeralds. This was the gift of the Lady Rohtraut, and those were the Lovell colours. The shield showed a red tiger's head, snarling and dimidiated by the black and silver checkers of the Dacres of Morpeth; the great lance was of scarlet wood tipped with shining steel.

Those of them who had never seen the Young Lovell ride

before, said that this vaunted paragon might have done better. For, when the horse was just half within the hall, and after the rider had lowered his lance at once to salute the company, and to get it between the archway, and had raised it again, the horse, enraged by the shout that went up from that place like a cavern, sprang back so that its mailed stern struck the rabble of grey fellows and ragged children that were following close on. The steel lance-point jarred against the stone of the arch, and the round and shining helmet bumped not gracefully forward over the shield. This was held for no very excellent riding, and some miscalled the horse. But others said that it was no part of a knight's training to manage a horse going rearwards, and no part of a horse's to face festivals and cheers. A knight should go forward, a horse face war-cries and hard blows rather than the waving of silken scarves.

But they got the horse forward into the middle of the hall, where it stood, a mass of steel, as if sullenly, on the great carpet of buff and rose and greens. This marvel that covered all the clear space hung usually on the wall to form a dais, and the Young Lovell had bought it in Venice with one half of the booty that he had made in the little war against the Duchess of Escia. It weighed as much as four men and four horses in armour, and had made the whole cargo of a little cogger from Calais that brought it to Hartlepool harbour, whence, rolled up, it had been conveyed to the castle upon timber-trugs. Few men there had seen the whole of it. It had been taken by Venetians from a

galley of the Soldan's, and was said to be a sacred carpet of Mahound's. Some men were very glad to see it, but some of the monks there said that it favoured idolatry and outlandish ways. But these were the very learned monks of St. Cuthbert that had a monastery at Belford, near there. They stood to the number of forty behind the Bishop and had habits of undyed wool. But the young monk, Francis, who had befriended the Young Lovell before, maintained now stoutly that it was a very good thing that the gear of Mahound should first be trampled underfoot and then coerced into a Christian office such as that of the creation of a good knight. The Lady Rohtraut heard his words, and looking round at him said that he should have a crucifix of gold for his inner chamber at Belford, if the rules allowed it, or if not, five pounds of gold and ambergris to anoint the feet of his poor and bedesmen at Maundy tide. The young monk lowered his eyes and thanked her. He was a Ridley that had killed his cousin by a chance arrow sent after a hare, and so he had gone into this monastery to pray perpetually for his cousin's soul.

That man in armour now delivered his lance to his little page, his shield to the page of a friend of his, a Widdrington; his sword to Michael Eure, a cousin of the Lady Margaret, to be an honour to her, and Richard Raket and other grooms came round the horse while the rider descended and then they led the horse away. But he never raised the fluted steel of his visor. And when he was kneeling on high cushions of black velvet, since his steel shoes of tapering and reticulated rings were near two foot long, as the

fashion was, the Bishop asked him if he would not uncover his face. But he whispered in the ear of the little page, and presently that boy said without fear in a high voice that the worshipful esquire had sworn an oath in the chapel that no woman should look upon his face or hear his voice until he was both knighted and betrothed. Those who upheld pure knight errants said that this was a very good vow, but the Percy laughed till his tears came.

Then, in a high voice, but in an Italian accent, for he had been many years the King's Advocate and Ambassador at Rome and had there learnt his latinity and love for the profane poets, Ovid, Vergil the Magician, and many others – the Bishop recited the words of the oath that this esquire should take. There was his duty to the Bishop Palatine to find for him, when he came to be a baron, sixteen knights when letters of array were sent out, and, by the year, sixty bushels of wheat, one hundred of oats and peas, ten carts of oat straw and ten of wheat when the Bishop and his men harboured within ten miles of the Castle, and the Bishop to have the rights of infangthef throughout his lands. Also he would observe the privileges of all clerks and of Durham sanctuary within those lands. The Bishop read also the oath to the King, for the Lord Percy had little Latin. The Knight, when he came to be a Baron, should find for the King's service, north of the Humber when the King's letters of array were read, twenty-two knights, or six only if the Bishop had before sent his letters calling for sixteen. For such lands as he should get from his mother he should

pay the King four horseshoes of gold whenever the King lay at Morpeth, and for the Lovell lands a gold cup filled with snow whenever the King lay within the Cheviot country. The goods of all those convicted of treason within his territories at Morpeth should go to the Bishopric; those from the other parts one-tenth to the King, six-tenths to the Bishop, one-tenth to the monastery of St. Cuthbert at Belford, and the remainder to himself.

These oaths having been recited, a page of the Bishop's brought a feretory that had lain on the coffin of St. Cuthbert, and a Percy page a testament; the esquire laid his right hand first on one and then on the other, being still on his knees, and then held up his hand whilst the page recited that that good esquire vowed faithfully all these things. Then the Bishop drew his sword and touched the steel left shoulder of the esquire with the hilt that had the form of the cross, this being the symbol that he would be a good knight and soldier of Christ and Our Lady. Then all the people cheered and cried out and the Bishop said loudly —

"Surge et vocabitur in nomine Dei et Regis nostri Sir Paris Lovell Castelli."

The Percy laughed and asked what those words were, and when the Prince Bishop had told him, still laughing, he smote the metal in the same place with the flat of his sword and mocked the Bishop with the words —

"Stand up in the name of God. And in the King's name be called henceforth, Sir Paris Lovell of the Castle." To name her son Paris had been a whimsy of the Lady Rohtraut since Paris of

Troy was a goodly knight, and also it stood for a symbol that he might retake Paris Town if the English had it not at the time when he was a man, and so that name had pleased the great Talbot which was a good thing at the time of his birth.

Then the good knight stood up upon his long feet and the Percy cried out that they should get the business of the betrothal over with speed, and so they did, the knight and the Lady Margaret who came out, kneeling on black cushions before the Prince Bishop. She was wearing a great and long green gown, to the making of which there had gone twenty-six yards of patterned damask from the city of Bruges. It was worked with leaves and birds and pomegranates, so that it was very rich in folds. Her ribbons in her shirt were of scarlet silk and her fur edgings of the red fox. Her hood was of white and red velvet, the gables at the front being of silver set with large pearls, and her hair fell in two black plaits to her heels where she knelt. So when the Bishop had recited their oaths they stood up and the knight pushed up his visor and looked at the lady. Those few that could see his face cried out as if they had seen a ship strike on a rock, so they raised their hands. The others only marked that haughty lady shrink back upon her feet, with a great flowing of her garments as she drew them together towards her. She cried out some words of detestation that no man heard but he, and then with her fist she struck him in the face.

Then he turned upon the high table, grinning and unashamed, the dark eyebrows that seemed to have been painted in with tar,

the red cheeks and the lascivious lips of Decies of the South.

All those at the high table stood up on their feet, lifting their hands above their heads and crying out. The Decies cried towards his father, lifting also his mailed arm to heaven —

"See justice done to me. My half-brother is gone upon a sorcery. His lands and gear are forfeit to me that inform against him and his name and bride have been given me by the Prince Bishop."

Then the lawyer, Magister Stone of Barnsides by Glororem, ran across the hall from the little door in the great ones. He began, as it were, a sort of trafficing between the Knight and the Bishop, not neglecting the Lord Percy and the Knight's father, but running backwards and forwards between the one and the other, raising his hands to their breasts and squeaking, though there was no hearing what he said. His weazened face, his brown furred gown, his chattering voice and his long jaw worked incessantly so that he resembled a monkey that was chewing straws with voracity and haste. A Widdrington, a Eure and a Selby, desperate young men and fast friends of the young Lovell, rushed upon the Decies with their daggers out. But the Bishop pushed them back and cried out for silence. And because all there saw that the Lady Rohtraut, upon her feet, was pointing down at the Lord Lovell and calling out to him, they held their tongues to hear what she was saying. They caught the end of a sentence calling upon the Lord Lovell to have that filthy and blaspheming bastard cast from the top of the White Tower. Then all eyes saw that the Lord

Lovell was laughing.

He had begun with a slow grin: by little and little he had understood that his son at last had made a fine, impudent stroke. He had struck his thigh with his hand; he had tried to cry out that this was the finest stroke of all and that his son had got up early enough, at last. But he could get no words out.

Then he had begun his laughing. He laughed, rolling from side to side: he laughed, shaking so that his leathern chair cracked beneath him. His stomach trembled in an agony of laughter, his eyes gazing painfully and fixed at the scarlet and green chequers of the tablecloth. Between tornadoes of shaken laughter he gasped for breath, and all the while the Lady Rohtraut stood gazing down upon him as if he were a loathsome dog struck with a fit. All men there stood still to watch him laugh.

And suddenly he threw his arms above his head, his face being purple and his eyes closed like a drunkard's. With the passion and strength of his laughter the blood gushed from his mouth and nose like falling scarlet ribbons. His body came forward on the tablecloth; monks and doctors craned forwards over him. The Percy moved disdainfully away as if from a sick and filthy beast, and over the table the body shook and quivered in the last gusts of laughter.

The Decies, with his sword drawn, moved backwards to the arch at the door, and first the Lady Isopel of Cullerford, the Lord Lovell's daughter, came round to speak to him, and then the Lady Douce of Haltwhistle, her sister. They stood looking

back at their mother, and then they called to them their husbands, Sir Symonde and Sir Walter Limousin. They stood at talk, Sir Symonde shrugging his shoulders and Cullerford grunting whilst the ladies caught them earnestly by the arms, leaning forwards. Then they called to them the lawyer, Magister Stone, who was no great distance away, and he brought with him the Prince Bishop's Almoner, a dry man with but one eye who had a furred hood up, to keep away the draughts, since he suffered from the earache. Then they beckoned to them certain of their armed men and Sir Henry Vesey of Wall Houses, a knight of little worth in morals but a great reiver. And so, by little and little, they had a company, mostly ill-favoured but violent around them. So they perceived that the Lady Rohtraut had fallen in a swoon, and the knight of Cullerford went forward and begged the lords and lordings and the company to avoid that hall and go upon their errands, since there was sorrow enough, and his brothers-in-law and their wives would take it kindly if they could be left alone with their mother. And, since he was the husband of the lady's daughter, they listened to him and went out, and the Vesey of Haltwhistle saw to it that they had their horses, and soon there were few left in the hall but the Lord Lovell, who had a leech, bending over him. The Lady Rohtraut, having fallen back in her chair, was being tended by the Lady Margaret and an old woman of seventy called Elizabeth Campstones. Then the daughters and the Decies went about in the Castle and were very busy.

IV

The Young Lovell felt as if he had came up out of a deep dream. He knew that the lady of the white horse thought to him:

"And I have all the time of the sea and the sky and beyond," but she spoke not at all – no words and no language that he knew. Only it was as if he saw her thoughts coursing through her mind as minnows swim in clear water. And he knew that, before that, he had thought, as if beseechingly:

"Even let me go in Christ's name, for I have many businesses."

She had a crooked and voluptuous mouth, mocking eyes of a shade of green, a little nose, a figure of waves, a high breast crossed with scarlet ribbons, and hair the colour of the yellow gold, shining with the sun, each hair separate and inclining to little curls. In short she was all white and gold save for her red and alluring lips that smiled askant, and he thought that he had never seen so bright a lady, no, not among the courtesans of Venice. His heart at the sight of her hair beat in great, stealthy pulses; his throat was dry and the flowers grew all about her. And she sat there smiling, with the side of her face to him, and he heard her think —

"This mortal man shall be mine."

It had been then that he had prayed her in Christ's name to let him go, and that she had answered that she had all the time of this earth and beyond it.

He turned Hamewarts slowly down the dune, though his heart lay behind him, and, like a mortally wounded man upon a dying horse, he rode towards his Castle where it towered upon the crag. The day was very bright, in the white sand the wind played with the ribbed rushes, and very slowly Hamewarts went. To judge by the sun he had not stayed more than a half-hour in that place, if so long, for it was very little above the horizon. He had not thought the day would prove so bright. The sea was very blue: the foam sparkled and was churned to curds, and the little wind was warm from sunwards. He saw the shepherd coming down a very green slope below the chapel, and the white sheep, with whiter lambs, spreading, like a fan below him. Behind him, over that shoulder, Meggot, their goose girl, was driving her charges, a great company of grey with but three white ones amongst them.

In a stupid way he thought that this great brightness in an early and raw spring day must come from having seen so beautiful a lady; so, it was said in stories, were good knights' hearts elated after such a sight. But he was aware that his heart was like the grey lead in his side, and leaden sighs came heavily from him.

When he came to the gate in the outermost wall he tirled wearily at the pin. He was aware of a monstrous heaviness and tire in all his limbs. A man opened the little grating; loud yawns came from him and, very sleepily, he let down bars and chains and the gate back. From this gateway a short, white road went slantwise, up a green bank, to the chief gate of the Castle.

Young Lovell never looked at this man's face, and slowly he

rode up the steep. He heard the man say:

"What lording be ye?" but he rode on mute. The man came running after him, his armour rattling like pot-lids. He caught Hamewarts by the bridle and, looking earnestly at Young Lovell's face, he said:

"Master, I mauna let ye pass only I ken your name." And then he cried out, and his eyes were almost out of his head:

"The Young Lovell!" He ran like a hare up the broad road; his hose were russet coloured.

Young Lovell grumbled to himself that it was strange to set so new a man to the gate that he should not know his master's son, and stranger still that the man should be of the men of his sister's husband of Cullerford, for all their followers had russet beneath their steel facings.

And then he saw old Elizabeth Campstones that had been help-maid to his mother's nurse, coming out of the littlest door of the inner castle wall and down the path across the green grass of the glacis. She was all in hodden grey, she carried a great basket of tumbled clouts upon her head, and so the tears poured from her red eyes that at the first she did not see him though she came into the road at his horse's forefoot. But when he said:

"Why greet ye, Elizabeth?" she looked up at him on high as he sat there, as if the sun dazzled her eyes. And then she screamed, a high long scream. She caught at her basket and she ran to his bridle.

"Come away," she cried out. "Cullerford and Haltwistle have

ta'en your bonny Castle. Your father's dead. Your mother's jailed. There is no soul of yours true to you here."

If there was one thing that distinguished the Young Lovell amongst the captains of the North – and his name was very well known to the Scots of the Border – it was that he was quick in thinking. And now, the kindling passion of war being the one thing that could drive away the thirst of love, made him see, as if it were a clear table laid out before him, the minds of his sisters that he knew very well and the dispositions of his brothers-in-law as well as the reed of the Decies that was not concealed from him. And, there being very little decency in his age, he knew that an hour or so in the Castle with his father dead and his mother no doubt grieved and shut in her bower, the men leaderless, since he, that had been his father's lieutenant and ancient was absent – that short hour or two that had gone by – and it might well have been that his father had died over his cups at the board whilst he himself, the night before, was a-watch over his arms – would very well suffice to put Cullerford and Haltwhistle in possession of his Castle with all his own men butchered during their sleep. In those days it was grab while you could and get back at your leisure.

With the pressure of his knee, he moved Hamewarts a yard forward and aside; he leant over his saddle bow and caught the old woman under the shoulders. He lifted her, basket and all – for in the midst of grief, fear and danger, she would cling first to the clouts that were her feudal duty – and the great horse with the

pressure on his mouth, cast up his head and wheeled round again towards the gate at which they had entered. There came the bang of a saker, but without doubt it was rather to rouse the Castle than aimed at them, for they heard no ball go by them. Then there was a sharp scratch as if a cat had spat, and just above his head an arrow stuck itself through the basket of clouts. Hamewarts went back downwards in long bounds.

Three other arrows set themselves in the grass beside their course; one fell on the road, one carried off his scarlet cap with its frontal and jewel of pearls. But that arrow too transfixed itself in the basket and pinned the cap there; so it was not lost, and that was a good thing, for the pearls were worth two hundred pounds. And as he rode he thought that that was not very good shooting.

The men-at-arms, wakened from sleep, had gummy and unclear eyes; their bows, too, must have been strung all night and that had made the strings slacken and be uncertain. It was an evil and untidy practice, but it showed him firstly that fear of attack must be in that place, and secondly that some of his own men might be without the castle and apt to essay to take it again. Moreover, though he had not time to turn, he knew that they must have fired from the meurtrières of the guard house; if they had taken time to open the great doors they must have struck him like a hare, for he had not been thirty yards from the walls.

Hamewarts clattered in his heavy gallop under the archway of the gate out into the village street, and the Young Lovell thanked our Saviour that the porter had been too amazed to go back and

close it, but had run to warn the Castle. Without that he had been caught like a fox in a well. When he was through and well outside, he caught up his horse, and turning, gazed in again under the arch. The inner walls of the Castle rose immense and pinkish, with their pale stone, above the green grass. The sun shone on such of the windows – about twenty – that had glass in them. One of these casements opened and he saw the naked shoulders of his sister Douce, holding a sheet over her breasts as she gazed out to mark why the tumult was raised. He observed thus that, in one night, as he thought it, his sister had taken their mother's bower for herself. It was no more than he would have awaited of her.

He perceived then the large gate of the Castle on top of the mound roughly burst open and there came running out thirty men in russet who ranged themselves in a fan-shape on the slope. Last came a man in his shirt and shoes – Limousin of Haltwhistle. The men in russet held bows in their hands and the man in his shirt waved his hands downwards. The archers began to come down, but not very fast and with caution. The Young Lovell knew they thought that very belike he had already raised the country against them and had men posted in ambush behind the outer walls.

He rode slowly away with the old woman before him. The street was very broad and empty in the morning sun. The cottages were all thatched with sea-rushes and kelp, all the doors stood open and the swine moved in and out. Two cottages had been burnt to the ground and lay, black heaps, sparkling here and there with the wetness of the dew. He marvelled a little that they did not

still smoke, for they must have been set alight since last nightfall. He considered the sleeve of his scarlet cloak that was very brave, being open at the throat to shew his shirt of white lawn tied with green ribbons. He saw that the scarlet was faded to the colour of pink roses. He looked before him and, on a green hill-side, he was aware of a great gathering of men and women bearing scythes whose blades shone like streaks of flame in the sun. Also, at their head went priests and little boys with censers and lit candles. The day was so clear that, though they were already far away, he could see the blue smoke of the incense.

He rode slowly forward, pensive and observing all that he might. The old woman sat before him, but she was breathing so fast with the late galloping of the horse that she could not yet speak. The windows of the one stone house in that place were still shuttered and barred, so that without doubt the lawyer still slept. Then he remembered that he would have that man hanged without delay. Without doubt he left his windows shuttered to give false news, for certainly, that morning, he had seen him moving those stones. He looked about him to see if in the open barns and byres he could not see any horse of the Prince Bishop or the Percy or any of their men polishing their head-pieces or their pikes. But, though many of the barns stood open, none could he observe.

He looked over his shoulder and saw that the archers were come to the gateway and were peering sideways out, with a due caution. Then some of them came through and stood with their

backs to the wall, waving at him their hands and shouting foul words. They would not come any further for fear he had an ambush hidden amongst the byres and middens of the village. So, still slowly, he rode on between heaps of garbage where the street was narrow and a filthy runnel went down.

At the top the street grew very wide till it was a green swarded place with many slender, sea-bent trees to make a darkened shade up against the walls of the small monastery of Saint Edmund. He considered whether he should go in there, but he remembered that there were only a few monks and they had no men-at-arms to guard those who sought sanctuary with them from pursuers not afraid of sacrilege. He determined, however, to make his way to another monastery – the great and powerful one of Belford, where they had fifty bowmen and two hundred men-at-arms to guard them against the Scots. There he would go, unless the old woman told him other news when her breath came back. Then the old thing whimpered:

"Set me down, master. I cannot speak on horse-back." He let her slide to the ground and, with the basket transfixed by the two arrows, she fell on her knees. And then she crossed herself and gave thanks to God for his coming so well off, and afterwards, his long-toed shoes being just on a level with her lips and she on her knees, she set her mouth to the shoe that was on the right side where she was, and then placed it over her head as far as the basket gave her space. He wondered a moment that this old woman should be so humble that was used to treat him as

a dirty little boy, long after he had fought in great fights, she having nursed his mother before and him afterwards. But then he considered that she was doing homage for such small goods as she had and this was the first of his vassals to do this thing. And again he observed that the bright scarlet of his shoe and the bright green – it being particoloured and running all up his leg to his thigh – these were dull pink and dull brown. They had been the brightest colours that you could find in the North.

Elizabeth Campstones stood up.

"Where will you go to, my master Paris?" she asked. "Woeful lording, where will you find shelter?"

"The Belford monks, I think, will give me the best rede and admonition," he said. "There I am minded to ride now."

"Then come you down from the brown horse," she said, "and walk beside me on Belford road, for ye could go no better journey, only I cannot speak up to you with this basket on my poll."

He came down from the brown horse, and as he did so his stirrup leather cracked and that was more than passing strange for he had had them new two days before. So when he was come round Hamewarts' head and had the reins through his arm, he said to the old woman:

"Now tell me, truly, what day is this?"

"This day is the last day of June," she answered. "My master Paris, it is three months from the day that you gat you gone, and ye are a very ruined lord and the haymakers have gone to the

high hills."

He answered only, "Ah," and walked thoughtfully forward. He had known that that lady was a fairy…

He walked with the old woman beside him, through the little grove of thin trees, by the bridle gate into the yard of the square, brown church with the leaden roof, and so out into the field where it mounted towards the Spindleston Hills.

Halfway up the low hillside there was a spring with blackthorn bushes, sea-holly and broom in thick tufts about it. The sun fell hot here, early as it was. A grey goat wandered through the rough and flowery thicket and many great bees buzzed. He sat himself down upon a soft-turfed molehill and left Hamewarts to crop the bushes. The old woman stood looking at him curiously and with a sort of dread, for a minute. Then she took the basket from her head and began to lament over it.

The two arrows transfixed it through and through, so that it was impossible for her to draw out her cloths and linen. Lord Lovell came out of his trance of thought a moment. He looked upon the woman, and then, taking the basket from her, he broke off the feathered end of each arrow and so drew them right through the basket. The old woman pulled out her clouts and said, "Eyah, eyah." Through each clout one arrow or the other had made one, two or many round holes.

"These," she lamented, "are all that your mother has for her bed or her body. All her others your sisters have taken."

"I am considering," he answered her, "how I best may save

my mother."

She took her linen to the spring which was deep and clear, and began sedulously to soak piece after piece, rinsing it over and over as she knelt, and beating it with an oaken staff upon an oaken board that she had in her basket bottom. And as she hung each piece over the bramble bushes she looked diligently into the scene below her to see what was stirring in the Castle or the village. Young Lovell had selected that high spot so that they might know what was agate by way of a pursuit. She saw, at intervals, three men on horseback go spurring up the street from the Castle arch, but she did not disturb her master with the news. She thought it better to leave him to his thinking, for she considered that he would hit upon some magic way out of it. She imagined that he had dwelt that three months amongst wizards and sorcerers that he should have met during his vigil in the little old chapel that was a very haunted place.

At last he raised his head and said:

"Old woman, tell me truly now, all your news."

What she knew first was that, on the morning when the Lord Lovell had died, all the lords and knights and the Prince Bishop and the others being gone from the hall, there remained only the dead lord, his wife in a swound, the Lady Margaret Eure and her. Then Sir Walter Limousin of Cullerford with his wife Isopel and the other sister had approached with several men of theirs in arms and had carried the good body of her senseless lady up to a little chamber in the tower called Wanshot, in the very top of it. She,

Elizabeth Campstones, had carried her lady's feet, but all the rest of her bearers had been men-at-arms. The Lady Margaret had followed them up into that little stone cell and asked them what they would do with that lady in that place. But no one of them answered her a word, high and haughty as she was, and at last they went away and left them, the Lady Rohtraut just coming to herself on a little, rotting frame bed that had no coverings but the strings that held it together.

The Lady Margaret had sought to go out with them, calling them all proud and beastly names and she was determined to set her own men that she had there, to the number of twenty, all well armed, to make war upon these and to raise the Castle. But when she came to the doorway that was little and low Sir Simonde Vesey set his hand upon her chest and thrust her back so hard into the room that she fell against the wall and lost her breath. When she had it again the door was locked and it was of thick oak, studded deep with nails.

Finely she raved, but when she came to, the Lady Rohtraut was in a sort of stupour, sitting still and shaking her head at all that they said. She thought this must be a dream that would vanish upon her awakening, and so it was lost labour to talk.

So they remained until well on into the afternoon, seeing nothing but the ceaseless run of the clouds and the sky and the gulls upon the Farne Islands and the restless sea, from their little window. Then there came three weeping maids of their lady's, bearing bedding that they set down on the floor, and a little food

and some wine that were placed upon the window-sill. But these girls spoke no word, for Sir Simonde Vesey stood outside and looked awfully upon them. The Lady Margaret made to run from the room, but two men that stood hidden put their pikes to her breast so that she ran upon them, and would have been sore hurt only they were somewhat blunted.

The Lady Rohtraut sat for a long while eating a little white bread that she crumbled in her fingers, and sipping at the wine from the black leather bottle, but still she said little, which was a great pity.

Towards four of the afternoon, to judge by the shadows, Sir Simonde let himself in at the door and asked the Lady Margaret if she would forthwith marry the Decies. She said no, not if Sathanas himself branded her with hot irons to make her do it. Sir Simonde said she might as lief do it since she was betrothed to that good knight and that could never be altered. Then she caught at the little dagger with which she was wont to mend her pens. It hung in her girdle, and Sir Simonde went swiftly enough out at the little door.

The Lady Margaret chafed up and down that small place, but those women said little, for they knew well what this all meant in the way of robbery and pillage and bending them to their wills. But the Lady Margaret swore that she would have the Eures of Witton and the Widdringtons and the Nevilles themselves – aye and the spy Percies – who were all her good cousins, and they should hang the Decies and do much worse to the Knights of

Cullerford and Haltwhistle.

And no doubt she had the right of it, for long after it was dark they saw a glow of light illumining in a dreary way the face of the White Tower, so that the Lady Margaret thought it was a fire of joy or at least a baal-blaze, but Elizabeth Campstones said that it was houses burning in the township. Then a man with a torch came through the little doorway and lighted in the Magister, or as he now was, the Bailiff Stone, since the Prince Bishop had signed the appointment for him that morning. This rendered him safe against any persecution or processes of laymen in those parts, nevertheless, when the torch-bearer had stuck his torch in a ring by the door and gone away, the lawyer would have the little door left open, and they knew afterwards that it was done so that the men without might rescue him if the Lady Margaret meant to strike or slay him, for she could have slain five of such lean cats.

Before the Lady Margaret could bring out a question, for she was astonished and could not think why such a person should come there, he broke into a trembling gibber:

"Oh, good kind ladies; oh, gentle sweet and noble dames, for God His love and sufferings, save all our lives and houses of which two are burning!"

The Lady Margaret asked highly what all this claver was and what he wanted.

"These are very violent and high-stomached people," the lawyer babbled quaveringly on. "Two houses of the township they have burned, and hanged the husbandmen for an example.

So that if you do not save us…"

He stretched his hands to the Lady Rohtraut, but she looked before her and said nothing.

"Well, go you and make common cause with them," the Lady Margaret said to him contemptuously. "So you will save your neck.

"Ah, but no," he answered miserably but with a sort of professional and cunning air. "I must be on the side of the law."

"Then what does the law say?" she asked as bitterly. "I will warrant you will not be far from the top dog."

He began, however, to whine and wring his hands and said that he had not long to live if he could not win these ladies to do the wills of the violent people who had taken that Castle, not but what it might not be said that they had not some shew of equity on their sides.

"I thought we should come near there," the Lady Margaret said; "come, Master, what is the worst on 't?"

"Ah, gentle lady," the lawyer said, "this is at the best a grievous matter; at the worst it is…" And he waved his hand as if there were no speaking of it.

"Go on," the Lady Margaret said grimly.

"I have been so confused," the lawyer answered, "with much running here and there and seeing such blood flow and the hearing of such threats…"

"Come, come," the lady said, "you are a man of law and such a clever one that if I threw you out of this window you could tell

the law of it or ever you fell to the ground."

"I am not saying," he retorted, with a sort of relish, "that I go in doubts concerning the law. What perplexes and affrights me is the fall of great and powerful lords. As to the torts, replevins, fines, amercements and the other things too numerous to recite, I am clear enough."

"Well, it is in the fall of mighty lords that the rats of your trade find bloody bones to gnaw," she answered him. "But if you are too amazed at the contemplation of the wealth that you shall make out of this to tell me, get you gone. If not, speak shortly, or I warrant you a few cousins of mine shall burn this Castle and you in a little space."

The lawyer shrank at these words and she went on:

"I trysted with my cousin Widdrington to meet him at Glororem at six to-night and bade him fetch me hence with what companions he needed at twelve if I were not home, so you have but an hour."

"Ah, gentle lady," the lawyer said, "it is three hours."

"Well then, you have kept me twelve hours here," the lady said; "I shall pay you in full for your entertainment."

"Ah, gentle lady," the lawyer sighed, "not me, not me!"

She answered only: "Out with your tale."

He hesitated for a moment, and then began with another sigh:

"For your noble cousin Paris, Lord Lovell, I fear it is all done with him."

"I think he may be dead that he did not come to his betrothal

with me," the lady said. "If that is so you have my leave to tell me."

"It is worse than that," he groaned. "Woe is me, that noble lordings should bend to violent passions."

The Lady Margaret looked at him with disdain.

"If ye would tell me," she said, "that the Young Lovell is gone upon a sorcery, ye lie."

Again the lawyer sighed.

"It is too deeply proven," he said. "These poor eyes did see him and two other pairs – both his well-wishers, even as I am."

"Even whose?" she asked. "And what saw ye?"

"For the eyes," the lawyer said, "they were those of the Decies and of an ancient goody called Meg of the Foul Tyke."

"For well-wishers," the Lady Margaret answered, "you well-wish whence your money comes; the Decies would claim my cousin's land and gear: and Meg of the Foul Tyke, though the best of the three is a naughty witch in a red cloak. I have twice begged her life of my lording."

"The more reason," Master Stone said, "why you should not doubt she is your well-wisher, even more than the young lording's. And that is why she would see you have a better mate."

The lady said: "Aha!"

"I will tell you how it was," the lawyer said. "I could not very well sleep that night because I had been turning of old parchments, where, to make a long story short, I had found that if the Lord Lovell should, on the next day, swear to give the Bishop

the rights of ingress and fire-feu over his lands in Barnside he should do himself a wrong. For, since the days of that blessed King, Edward the Second, those lands have been held by *carta directa*…"

"Get on; get on," the Lady Margaret cried.

"But this is in the essence of the thing," the lawyer protested, "for a *carta directa*…"

"I will not hear this whigamaree," the lady said, "Let us take it, though no doubt you lie, that you had found certain parcels of sheepskin. But understand that we have stomachs for other things than that dry haggis."

"That is a lamentable frame of mind," the lawyer said, "for look you, a carta of that tenure is the best that can be come by." But, at a gesture of the lady's hand, he began again very quickly: "I spent a night of groaning and sighing, for it was a grievous dilemma. On the one hand, my beloved young lord might do himself a wrong by swearing away his chartered rights. On the other hand, if I should tell him that I had found them, this might be deemed foul play by the Pro-proctor Regis Rushworth, who is a lawyer for the house of Lovell in the Palatine districts. Though how it is that Rushworth knoweth not of this charter I cannot tell."

"How came you by them?" the lady asked. "Without a doubt you stole them to make work."

"They were old papers that were there when I bought the study of my master that was Magister Greenwell," the lawyer

answered, and again the lady said: "Get on; get on."

"So, at the last," Stone continued, "I made, after prayer, the resolution and firm intent to tell my lord. And so I arose, remembering how he would be praying in the chapel, and gat me into the street. And there, in the grey dawn, I lighted upon Meg of the Foul Tyke, who was returning from gathering of simples by the light of the moon in the kirkyard."

"There was no moon last night," the Lady Margaret said.

"Then, by the light of the star Arcturus," the lawyer claimed. "Well, my first motion was to rate her for a naughty witch. And so I did full roundly till that woman fell a-weeping and vowed to reform."

"Well, you were more powerful than the prophets with the Witch of Endor," the lady mocked him.

"And, seeing her in that good mind," Stone went on with his tale, "I remembered that she was a very old woman – the oldest of all these parts. So I told her that if she could remember matters of Barnside years agone, since she was in a holier mind, without doubt the young lording would be gracious to her and would grant her a halfpenny a day to live by; so she might live godly, after repenting in a sheet… So she remembered very clearly that one Hindhorn of Barnsides, Henrice Quinto Rege, had been used, once a year, at Shrovetide, to drag with three bullocks, an oaken log bound with yellow ribbons to the Castle. This was direct and blinding evidence that the right of fire-feu …"

"Well, you went with the old hag to the chapel," the Lady

Margaret said. "I can follow the cant of your mind and spring before it."

"But you may miss many and valuable things," he retorted. "As thus… Whilst we went up the hill, this old goody, being repentant and weeping, cried out when she heard whither we were bound: 'Alas! Horror! Woe is me!" and other cries. And, when I pressed for a reason, she said that the young lording was a damned soul and that was one of her sins. For she had taught him magic and the meeting-places of warlocks; one of which was that chapel that was an ill-haunted spot, and that was why the lording was there at night. And she was afraid to go near the chapel; for the warlocks would tear her limb from limb. And the familiar and succubus of the Young Lovell was the toad that was, in afore time, the step-mother of the Laidly Worm of Spindleston, that to this day spits upon maidens, so much she hateth the estate of virginity, as often you will have heard."

The lawyer paused and looked long at that lady.

"So that old witch repented?" she said at last, but she gave no sign of her feelings.

"There was never a more beautiful repentance seen," the lawyer said. "So she sighed and groaned and the tears poured off her face to think that she had corrupted that poor lording…" And it had been her repentance, he went on, that had let them see what they had seen, and so made it possible for them to save him.

Now when they came to the chapel, said the lawyer, the young lording, as if he were demented, came rushing out from the door,

and the Decies who had watched all night in the porch came out after him, and asked him what he would. But he answered nothing to the Decies and nothing to them, but, with a marvellous fury, like a man rushing in a dream, he ran into the shed where his horse was tethered, and bringing it out, so he galloped away that his long curls of gold flapped in the wind. It was not yet cockcrow, but pretty clear.

Thus those three, standing there and lamenting, saw how, at no great distance, but just under Budle Crags, there was a fire lit, and round it danced wonderful fair women and some old hags and witch-masters, but most fair women.

The lawyer, saying this, gazed hard at the Lady Margaret, but once again the lady said no more than —

"Aye, my cousin was always one for fair women."

"So he kissed and fondled them; it was so horrid a sight…" the lawyer went on.

"Now is it a horrid thing," the lady asked, "to see a fine lording kiss a fair woman?"

"I only know," the lawyer said, "that at once all we three fell to devising how you, ah, most gentle lady, might be saved from the embrace of this lost man; and how that poor lording might be saved from his evil ways, and have his lands and all his heritage preserved to him."

"And the upshot," the lady asked, with a dry pleasantness, "was what the Decies did in the Great Hall."

When the Young Lovell, sitting amongst the furze and broom,

had heard so far, he sighed with a deep satisfaction. The old Elizabeth had told her tale of sorcery alleged against himself at an intolerable length, dwelling on the nature of linen clouts here and there, and upon all that she had said to the Lady Rohtraut when she lay in the swoon. But he kept himself quiet and did not interrupt her; he had listened to her tales since he had been a young boy, and knew that if you hastened her they took five times as long. Yet he sat all the while on tenterhooks for fear she should say they had seen his meeting with the lady that sat upon a white horse amongst doves and sparrows. Had they seen that it might have gone ill with him in a suit at law. For, if they had seen it, it was twenty to one that there would be other witnesses; the place was well frequented by people journeying from Bamburgh to Holy Island. Nay, he would have been visible to the very fishers upon the sea, and to stay with such a lady, he well knew – though at the moment he sighed deeply – would be accounted a felony of the deepest magic kind in any ecclesiastical court.

But now he knew that this lawyer was simply lying, and that was an easier thing. He saw, and so he told Elizabeth Campstones, how they had hit upon that tale. The lawyer coming by the chapel, after the Young Lovell had threatened him with death for the moving of his neighbour's landstones, and the old witch meeting with him, after she had been threatened with drowning for her wicked ways; both trembling with fear, since they knew him for a man of his word and a weighty but just lord in those lands, had come together to the chapel door. No doubt

they had entered in, meaning to steal his armour that was visible lying there, and hold it for ransom as the price of their miserable lives. But in the deep porch they would see the Decies snoring like a hog.

Him they wakened, and, the old witch's mind running on sorcery, the lawyer's on suits, and the Decies desiring to have his heritage and his bride, whilst the other two desired to save their lives; all three together had hit upon this stratagem that would give them what they desired. For in those days there was in Northumberland a stern hatred of the black arts, which had grown the greater since the twelve children of Hexham, two years before, had been slain, that their blood and members might stew in a witch's broth – a thing proven by many competent witnesses. So that, if the Decies should come in and claim the Young Lovell's knighthood, name, and the rest, he might, with the support of his father, make a pretty good suit of it, and, maybe, take the whole. And, if the Young Lovell should come back soon for his armour, they would murder him. Thus, the lawyer, and the witch, the one with a rope to cast over his neck, and the other with a sharp dagger, hid waiting behind the thick pillars, whilst the Decies dressed in his half-brother's harness.

And it had worked better for them than they had expected, so that now they held the Castle, and the law might be very hard set, if it ever made the essay, to get them out of it.

For, as Elizabeth Campstones presently told him, they had taken all the charters and the deeds of the Castle to Haltwhistle,

where the one knight had them hidden up, and all the deeds and charters of his mother's lands and houses to Cullerford, where the other kept them. The Castle itself they held all three, the Decies and the two knights – or rather their two ladies – being captains there by turns of three days each, and dividing the revenues of it very fairly.

They had cast out all the men-at-arms that were any way faithful to the Young Lovell, taking away their arms too. For they, with their armed men, had been in possession of the Castle and had taken the keys of the armoury, whilst the Lovell men were without arms and leaderless. So that some of the Lovell men had become bedesmen at the monastery at Belford, and many perished miserably about the country in the great storm of the second day of April, whilst some had taken to robbery, which was all that was left them. Those in the Castle had hired men from the false Scots and other ragged companions of the Vesty that was Sir Symonde's brother, and there they all dwelt comfortable, having between them about three hundred men-at-arms and a numerous army of bowmen, but no cannon. They deemed that they could well await any assault of the Young Lovell if he should return. They considered that he had been slain by the outlaw Elliotts, who had been seen to ride by, three miles north of the Castle, going up into the Cheviots.

But all these things happened only after they had settled with the Lady Margaret in that little room. And that had happened in this way, Elizabeth Campstones said:

After the lawyer told her the tale about the fair witches she had broken into no cries and oaths as he had expected; not even when he had particularised one witch with red hair and great breasts that danced and sprang all naked over a broomstick, with her hair tossing, and how the Young Lovell had singled this witch out for favours apart. The Lady Margaret said only —

"And so you two and the Decies…"

"We stood there weeping and lamenting," the lawyer said.

"I marvel that not one of you had heart to adventure for the caresses of such fair women as you have told me of. Had ye been men ye would."

The lawyer answered with an accent of horror:

"But witches and warlocks!"

"Ah, I had forgotten," the lady said. "So ye wept and turned your heads away. And afterwards?"

"After they were gone," Magister Stone answered, "we fell to devising how we might rescue you, ah gentle lady, from that lost knight and himself from himself." That was to be in this way: The Decies should seek to possess himself of the lands, knighthood and name of the Young Lovell, and, if he did this with the irrevocable blessing of the Lord Bishop, the act of the Border Warden, who in those parts stood for the King, as well as in presence of his father, he might establish a very good title whether of presumption or possession. And if in the same way he might be betrothed to the Lady Margaret in the presence of the Lady Rohtraut to whom she was ward and with the formal

rite of the Church, which like the other is irrevocable, the Young Decies would be in a very fair way to achieve his pious desires.

"And that should be as how?" the Lady Margaret asked.

He desired, the lawyer said, to hold the Young Lovell's heritage only as a faithful steward and brother and, so holding it with a very arguable title, neither Prince Bishop or King could extort from it any very great fines or amercements. Meanwhile the Decies should consummate that very night his wedding with the Lady Margaret whom, after the betrothal, he alone could marry. And they had a good priest there present and himself ready to draw up marriage charters enough to fill two bridal chests. And, the more to incline her to this, it was the mind of the gallant Decies to allow her such marriage lots, dowers and jointures, out of the heritage of the Young Lovell as together with her own lands of Glororem and the other places, and by inducing the Lady Rohtraut to forego the great fine that they should pay her upon her marriage, would leave them one of the richest married pairs of that part of the King's realms.

And when the Lady Margaret asked how that should be brought about, and the particulars, feudal and direct, of the deeds he would make, he went off into a great flood of Latin and Norman words of the law. At last she said:

"I make out nothing of all this talk. But I think I will not marry with a great toad that hath a weasel gnawing at his vitals."

"Ah, gentle lady…" the lawyer began, and his voice rose in its tones.

"To put it shortly," the lady continued, "the great toad is the gallant Decies, for toads do shelter under other men's rocks and stones, and this gallant – for I will not rob him of the title you give him, and I know no other by which to call him – is minded to shelter under the stones and rocks of my cousin's Castle that in God's good time shall be my cousin's and mine. And for who the weasel is that gnaweth at the vitals of the gallant Decies I will not further particularise, since I might well go beyond courtesy. So now get you gone, or I will wave one of the clouts from this little window which, by the light of the burning houses, my cousins the Eures and the Widdringtons and the Percy shall perceive from where they wait upon Budle Crags, and very soon you shall be hanging from the White Tower to affright the morning sun. And that I promise you…"

The lawyer protested in various tones, rising to a sick squeak, but she said no more to him. It was not true what she said, that her cousins were waiting to fall upon the Castle, though they would well have done it on the next morning or in two days' time. But the lawyer did not know that it was not true and so he shivered and went away.

A little later there came Henry Vesey of Wall Houses, the evil knight that was brother to Sir Symonde. He had a red nose, a roving eye and staggered a little. He affected a great gravity, but she laughed at him. His cloak was monstrous and of green, slit all down the great sleeves to show the little coat of purple damask. His shirt was wrought up into a frill very low down in his neck, so

that it showed much of his chest, and in his stiff biretta of scarlet he had a jewel of scarlet that held five white feathers. His hair, which was reddish, fell almost to his shoulders, for he affected very much to be in the fashions of his time – more than most lordings and knights of that part. And, indeed, the Lady Margaret considered him a very proper, impudent gentleman.

"Cousin Meg!" he began, and then he stammered with the liquor that was in him. But he achieved again an owlish gravity and a sweet reason. His proposition was that, still, she should marry the Decies and that he himself would wed the Lady Rohtraut so that he could defend her interests the better. And so they could all live there comfortably together, for it was better to live in one great family than scattered here and there. The Lady Margaret was already laughing, but he continued with a great gravity, that, as for the Decies, he loved her so desperately he did not dare to come nigh her, but, now he had no need to conceal it, was rolling about the carpet in the great hall, bellowing with the pain of his passion.

"Well, I have been aware of it this many months," the lady said, "and it is a very comfortable love that will not let him come nigh me. I pray it may continue."

At that Vesey of Wall Houses fell to laughing.

He tried to explain that he had come to her with the idea that she might be more apt to wed the Decies if she knew that, by his wedding the Lady Rohtraut, the Castle should have for its head and guidance, such a sober, answerable, prudent and valorous

head as himself.

"So the cage of apes made the parrot their captain when they went a-sailing to the Indies," she said, and then he laughed altogether.

"Nay, indeed Meg, sweetmouthed Meg," he said, "will ye still keep troth to the monstrous wicked, idolatrous, blaspheming lording called Lovell that dances with fair naked witches and all the other horrid things that we would all do if we could? Consider your wretched soul!"

But his liquorish manner showed that he believed nothing of that witches' dance, and indeed he was pretty sure that the Young Lovell had been carried off by the outlaw Elliotts that had been seen near that place, and that he would return and send them ransom.

"Friend Henry," the Lady answered, "good Sir Henry, if my love, who is a gallant gentleman, would not dance and courteously devise with beautiful women, naked or how they were, I should think the less of him supposing they entreated it. But I do not believe that he did this thing such as the calling up of succubi, however fair, since his desire for me only was so great, and that ye well wis."

"Ah well," the Vesey sighed, "sweet mouth that ye are, if it was I that had the ordering of this Castle I should not let you go so easily."

"That I well believe and take it kindly," the lady said.

"But, being as it is," he continued, "the poltroons, my brother

and Cullerford and their wives and the Decies and the lawyer tremble so at the thought of your kinsmen camped on Budle Crags that they are minded to open the gates on this pretty bird. But well I know that it is a lie, though they will not hear me."

"In truth there is a monstrous great host awaits the waving of my kerchief," she said, "with nine culverins planted there and all; and ye know what the culverins did to Bamburgh?"

He closed one eye slowly and then he sighed. "Well, I must take you down," he said, "I am a reckless devil, woe is me, and if there are no Widdringtons and the rest there now, I know that Wall Houses would burn to-morrow and I should hang when they caught me… But oh, I repent me to let you go…" And he regarded her with very amorous and melancholy laughing eyes.

"Friend Henry," she laughed, "if you will open the doors for me, for me, for your good behaviour you may kiss me twice, once here and once at the gate, for I dare say, if the truth be known, though you are too much drunk to be clear and not drunk enough to speak the truth, you are more the friend of me and of my love than any here."

"Well, they are a curst crew," he said, "and I will not hang with them; only, where there are pickings I must have my poke, and that is good Latin."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.