

# **WILLIAM STEARNS DAVIS**

GOD WILLS IT! A TALE OF  
THE FIRST CRUSADE

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## Содержание

PREFACE	6
PROLOGUE	7
CHAPTER I	13
CHAPTER II	18
CHAPTER III	25
CHAPTER IV	29
CHAPTER V	32
CHAPTER VI	38
CHAPTER VII	43
CHAPTER VIII	47
CHAPTER IX	54
CHAPTER X	64
CHAPTER XI	68
CHAPTER XII	71
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	75

**William Stearns Davis**  
**«God Wills It!» A Tale of the First Crusade**

*TO MY LONG-TIME FRIEND ARTHUR WASHBURN I DEDICATE  
THIS TALE OF THE DAYS OF FAITH*

## PREFACE

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

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

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

*W. S. D.*

Harvard University.

## PROLOGUE

### HOW HILDEBRAND GAVE A BATTLE CRY

High noon in Italy. Without, a hot sun, a blue bay, a slow sea-breeze; within, a vaulted chamber, bare stone walls, a few blazoned pennons upon the pillars, here and there pictured tapestries, where one might see many a merry tourney and passage-at-arms. Very gentle were the footfalls, though the room was not empty: the whispers were so low that the droning buzz of a bee, which had stolen in at the narrow window, sounded loud as a mill wheel. There were a score of persons in the chamber: tonsured priests in white stoles, and monks in black cassocks; knights in silvered hauberks; a white-robed Moor with the eyes of a falcon and the teeth of a cat; and a young lad, Richard, son of Sir William the castellan, a shy boy of twelve, who sat upon the stone window seat, blinking his great eyes and wondering what it all might mean. No eye rested on the lad: the company had thought only for one object,—a figure that turned wearily on the velvet pillows, half raised itself, sank once more. Then came a thin voice, gentle as a woman's:—

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

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

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

Abd Rahman salaamed until his turban touched the rushes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A wistful shadow passed across the face of Gregory.

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

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

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

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

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

And the Pope answered, lifting himself unaided:—

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

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

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

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

The pontiff gasped for breath; his voice sounded again.

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

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



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

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

"Is it written?"

"It is written, Holy Father."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sebastian, my brother-monk!"

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

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

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

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

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

But the stranger arose.

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

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

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

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

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

But the Pope was writhing in agony.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Again Gregory broke forth: "Unjust Sebastian, eleven years since I pleaded with King Henry, setting forth the miseries of Jerusalem; ever has my soul been torn for her captivity. Did I not profess

myself ready to lead over land and sea to the Holy Sepulchre? Then the devil stirred Henry to his onslaught on the Church, and God has opened no door for this righteous warfare."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His voice pealed like a trumpet, like the shout of a dauntless captain leading through the deathly press. All looked on him. When his hands stretched on high, every other hand was outstretched.

Nearer they crowded, and the swords of the Norman knights leaped from their scabbards,—there was the clang of mail, the flash of light on bare steel,—highest of all the sword of Godfrey. Hildebrand struggled to rise; Sebastian upbore at one side, Odon at the other. The Pope gazed upward toward the vaulting—seemingly through it—beyond—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER I

### HOW BARON WILLIAM SALLIED FORTH

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Allah!" grunted Nasr, the Moor, "the young *Cid* is right. Never have I seen a better falcon. And he does well to harbor the old grudge against the boisterous De Valmont, who will get his dues if the Most High will! Ha, ha!" And the old rascal began croaking in his throat, thinking he was laughing.

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

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

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

Richard yawned and commenced to scratch his head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I thank your episcopal grace," quoth Richard, still very dutifully; and then his eye lit on another of the travellers,—one much more to his liking than the reverend prelate; for a lady sitting on a second white mule had thrust back the yellow veil from before her face, and the Norman caught a glimpse of cheeks red as a rose and white as milk, and two very bright eyes. Only a glimpse; for the lady, the instant he raised his gaze, dropped the veil; but she could not cover up those dark, gleaming eyes. Richly dressed was she, after the fashion of the Greeks, with red ribbons on her neck and a blue silk mantle and riding-hood. Her mule had a saddle of fine, embossed leather, and silver bits. At her side

rode an old man in a horse-litter led by foot-boys; he also daintily dressed, and with the handsome, clear-cut features and venerable white beard of a Greek gentleman. The lady had dropped her veil at his warning nod, but now she bent over the mule and half motioned to Richard.

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

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

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

Richard shrugged his shoulders and laughed:—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nasr showed his sharp, white teeth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Father and son embraced almost in bear-fashion, each with a crushing hug. Then Richard must needs kiss his mother, the fair Lady Margaret of Auvergne, sweet and stately in her embroidered bleaunt, with golden circlet on her thick gray-gold hair; after her, Eleanor, a small maiden of sixteen, prim, demure, and very like her mother, with two golden braids that fell before her shoulders almost to her knees; and lastly, Stephen, a slight, dark lad, with a dreamy, contemplative face and an eye for books in place of arrow-heads, whom the family placed great hopes on: should he not be bishop, nay Pope, some bright day, if the saints favored?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first was a well-fed priest, but with a tattered cassock and a great red welt swelling upon his bare poll; the second, a dark-eyed Greek peasant of the country in a dress also much the worse for



wear; and the third, a tall, gaunt old Moor, whose one-time spotless white kaftan and turban were dust-sprinkled and torn. They all cried and bellowed at once, but the priest got out the first coherent word.

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

And here the Greek broke in:—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER II

### HOW RICHARD WON THREE FRIENDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ready, my men?"

"Ready, lord."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Richard Longsword," was the answer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Of course," replied Musa; "I was surprised at the country house of Hajib this morning, and taken before I could kill more than two of the pirates. In their chief I recognized a corsair long in the service of Yusuf. They aimed to bear me in chains to Cordova, that the Almoravide might gloat over me alive, ere calling the headsman. You saw how they rained their blows at me, when they saw rescue at hand."

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

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

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

The Spaniard shook his hand in warning.

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

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

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

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

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

But the daughter broke out, a little hotly:—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The mules of the bishop's party, which had been taken when the pirates fell upon them, had been recovered, and the bishop began to stop groaning over his bruises. The Baron remarked that, although the baggage had been retaken, it was too late to repack and make the journey that day. One and all, they must go back to Cefalu and enjoy the hospitality of the castle. The bishop demurred, when he saw that the Moslem Musa was bidden to share the feast; but he was very hungry, and reflected that Christ and Mohammed were impiously good comrades in Sicily. He and the priests with the Greek and his daughter mounted the mules and started away, just as Herbert rode up with the tidings that the Berbers' ship had long since put to sea. As for the great black horse that had nigh carried Mary away from her rescuers, the grateful prelate bestowed him upon Richard. "He was an

unruly beast," declared the bishop, "*furiosus, impetuosus, perditus equus*, in whom a devil beyond all doubt had entered; and if the Baron's son desired him, he was welcome, though he feared, instead of a gift, he was bestowing a cursing." But Richard beheld the huge crupper and chest of the great beast, watched his mighty stride, and reflected that such a *destrer* would bear quite as safely in battle as one with the prized white coat and greyhound feet. Therefore he thanked the bishop and led the horse away.

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



## CHAPTER III

### HOW RICHARD WON A BROTHER

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

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

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

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

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

befallen my father, and I would have been cast into the convent of Antiochus 'to live with the angels,' as they call taking the veil, at Constantinople."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I?" quoth Richard, wool-gathering.

The lady laughed at her indiscretion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cæsar Manuel hobbled to his feet.

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

The Baron muttered something to the effect that there was still much wine—a pity to miss it. Mary rose and deliberately allowed Richard to bend and kiss her hand, courtesied before the Baron and his lady, knelt while the half-tipsy bishop hiccupped out a benediction. Stately as a queen, she drew herself up, but her last shaft was darted at the Cæsar. "Dear father, are you not sorry I am so little contrite?" then to Richard, "And you, my lord, do not forget we go to Palermo!" There was a rustle of her dress; Manuel limped after; three serving-varlets brought up the Greeks' rear. They were

gone. Richard started again—looked about. His mother and sister had risen also. The Baron and the bishop had reached that stage of joviality where the holy man was commencing to sing and brandish his flagon. Richard tasted the wine—insipid; how unlike the sweet fire of the cups proffered by the lady! Musa had glided from his reverie,—was casting about sharply.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Richard was silent; then cried out:—

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

But Musa pressed his arm closer, and more kindly.

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER IV

### HOW RICHARD WENT TO PALERMO

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

But in the days that followed he was not idle. First of all the bishop's gift, the great black horse, had to be wrestled into submission; no light task, for the mighty beast would rage like a bull; but in the end the brute was conquered, and "Rollo"—such was his christening—became Richard's boon comrade and second self; dear as those horses whereof the *jongleurs* sang, that would snatch their masters from the midst of a host of foes, or recognize them returning home after seven years, when the riders' own wives had forgotten them. But this was the least the raid of the Berbers had brought to Richard, for he and Musa became grappled to each other by bonds of friendship that tightened each day. The Spaniard had sealed his gratitude by the gift of a Valencia hauberk, inwrought with gold wire, light almost as velvet, on whose links once the sword of Cid Campeador had turned. And Musa brought also a wonderful chessboard of rock crystal with men of silver, over whose magic squares the Norman was to puzzle many an hour; but beyond all else, Musa brought himself—more a marvel every hour to Richard Longsword. What had he not learned and done! A swordsman whose prowess in the fence tested Richard's utmost skill; a poet whose musical Arabic must have charmed many a fair brunette by the darkling Guadalquivir. He could talk of elixirs, alembics, and horoscopes. The learning of the University of Cordova was his; he could read Greek and Latin, and had a smattering of the Languedoc. Only a consistent Moslem he was not,—neither going to the mosque on Fridays, nor abstaining from wine nor remembering the fasts; and when Richard asked, "Will you turn Christian?" Musa had replied, laughing, "I am of the rationalist school of the Kalif Mamun,—reason alone is the father of religion; even the commands of Al-Koran are not fetters to bind, when reason directs otherwise."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Musa shook his head.

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

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

Musa shrugged his shoulders.

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

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

So days sped, and a letter came to Musa from Palermo, from his uncle the great merchant Al-Bukri, the "general syndic" of the capital. There was promise of patronage and high office with the Fatimite court at Cairo. Would the Spanish knight come down to Palermo for consultation? And Richard vowed loudly he would travel to the city too, only his heart grew sad when Musa spoke of parting and a career in Egypt. "Be not troubled, brother mine," quoth Musa, lightly; "what is fated, is

fated; as for my fortune, so far as man may dispose, I say as did once an Egyptian kalif, 'I carry my kingdom here!'" and he slapped the hilt of his cimeter. And Richard, when he thought of what awaited in Palermo, went about with his head in the air. Night and day had the vision of the Greek been before his face. Would he not hew through hosts to possess her? Had he not already won a name and a fame—as a true sprig of the Longswords? Was not the lady in his debt, had she not shown all favor? What hindered him to recount his father's fiefs to Manuel, and say, "Sir, give me your daughter!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER V

### HOW RICHARD WON TWO FOES

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

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

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

Yet they were very merry. De Valmont had equal fame as troubadour and as cavalier. He had brought the princess an "improvised" *canso*, wherein he protested his abject wretchedness when the light of her face was hid from him, professed himself her slave, and conjured heaven, since she still remained so cold, to take away his life, that he might no more suffer. At this poem Mary professed herself delighted; for she was long past blushing at lip service. Then Iftikhar, swelling with jealousy,



matched the Provençal with his Arabic, which Mary, like any cosmopolitan Byzantine, understood well; he sang how all the black-eyed maids of Paradise burned in jealousy of the Greek, how before her beauty each nightingale forgot his song, and a hundred genii flitted about her, feasting their ravished eyes. Whereat Louis, in rivalry, would have capped his song with another, when a serving-lad announced Richard Longsword and Musa of Granada.

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

Mary greeted the newcomers warmly; warmly—yet to Richard how different was she from that merry girl who had pressed the cup to his lips that fateful evening at Cefalu! He had come expecting to demand, and to carry away; and behold! the laughing maid was a stately princess; her suitor was one of a score of young men who loved without hope; his rivals were the most valorous cavaliers in all the broad island. He had but set eyes on De Valmont and the emir, when he saw his day-dreams vanish in thin air. What had he, unknighthed, comparatively unrenowned, to proffer, when such champions sought her grace?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The emir cast a disdainful eye upon Longsword.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, doubtless he is a splendid knight."

"But you are not his friend? Why?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

More silence save for the bulbuls and the fountain.

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

"Father!" cried out Mary, in protest.

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

But Mary shook her head angrily.

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

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

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

"My faults?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Of life's wild sea of murk incertitude,

Their gentle touch upon the helm is pressed,  
Their hand points out the beacon star of good,  
Where we shall make our harbor and have rest:—

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER VI

### HOW ROLLO MET INSULT

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

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

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

The Egyptian grinned again, a little angrily.

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

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

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

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

Richard's hand started towards his hilt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sorry comfort it was to Longsword, especially as the princess gave him and the emir only enough of the talk to let them know she remembered they were there. As for Iftikhar, black jealousy drove him forth quickly. He salaamed himself away, and went tearing down the road to Palermo,

uttering invocations to all the evil jinns, to blast Louis de Valmont's happiness for many a long year. But Richard would not own to such defeat; while Louis and Mary bartered merry small talk, he sat beside the old Cæsar, and found in the noble Greek, after the crust of dignity was broken, a man of the world who could tell his story.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The knight frowned blackly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER VII

### HOW DE VALMONT SENT HIS GAGE

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, as I said, the breach was stoutly defended. My Lord Count orders up his boasted Saracen guard, and bids my Lord Iftikhar lead the storm: once, twice, they charge—are beaten back—the third time when ordered, say they are not fond of dying—too many comrades are fallen already. Then while the emir hung back, forward comes my Lord Richard and Musa, his friend; they will lead the

storm. A few mad Franks follow them. They win the breach and the castle. St. Theodore must have aided. They say my Lord Richard had as many wounds as you have fingers, when they took him up. No, do not stare about thus: Bardas said he only lost a little blood. But they have made him a knight after the fashion of these Franks, by Duke Roger's own hand; and to Musa they gave I know not what presents. And now seeing that the rebels have sued for mercy, the Count is coming back with all his men, and sent off pigeons from Stromboli saying that he will arrive to-morrow."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Richard collected himself with a mighty effort.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"*Ei*, my lady," chattered she, "all Palermo is talking of it, and Bardas has brought me all they say. It is told that this morning Sir Richard went to the Cathedral, and confessed to a priest and received the host; then he set hand on a box of holy relics and swore something secret, but doubtless terrible. A little later, lo! in comes Sir Louis and does the very same. Then right in the porch of the church they came face to face, and Sir Louis broke out with revilings terrible to hear, and finally

cried, 'You are not an equal fit to kiss my cheek; "villain" you are, or little better, who should kiss my spurs!' Whereupon Sir Richard gave him a great box on the ear, which nearly knocked him down, crying, 'This is the kiss I give you!' And then and there they would have drawn, but other gentlemen dragged them asunder by main force, and took them to Count Roger, who, when he found he could not compose their quarrel, demanded of each his knightly word that they would remain apart until the great tourney, which will be when the envoys from the Egyptian emperor come. Then the two will meet, and Our Lady guard their lives!"

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

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

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

## CHAPTER VIII

### HOW IFTIKHAR SPED A VAIN ARROW

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

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

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

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

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

The days sped slowly for Mary Kurkuas. De Valmont and Longsword were bound by pledge to Count Roger not to wait on her till after the tourney. Bitterly Mary reproached herself for her folly. Did not all Palermo know how she had given her glove to De Valmont? And Richard? Why had she held that cup to his lips that night at Cefalu? Mere gratitude? Was not that repaying her preserver with more than friendship? And was she not willing to pay? Such her questions—never answered. Poor little Countess Blanche, Count Roger's daughter, soon to be exiled as given in marriage to the king of Hungary, would have laughed with glee to have two such gallant cavaliers joust with her name on their lips. But Mary's heart told her that it was very wrong. Her father's health failed fast; she was filled with foreboding. Musa and Iftikhar were the only visitors at Monreale now. Musa was ever the

same,—gentle, sweet-voiced, courtly, never unduly familiar. Iftikhar at times swelled with a passion that nearly betrayed him; but Mary was too accustomed to ardent lovers to take alarm. Yet at times, to her dismay, she saw he really held that their religion was no barrier between them, and that he would gladly have stood on equality with Richard and De Valmont. One day it befell that the fire in the emir nearly flashed out. He had paid a more than commonly florid compliment, and Mary twitted him.

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

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

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

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

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

But Iftikhar only frowned the more.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sweet as the wind when it kisses the rose  
Is thy breath!  
Blest, if thy lips had but once on me smiled,  
Would be death!  
Give me the throat of the bulbul to sing  
Forth thy praise:  
Then wouldst thou drink the clear notes as they spring  
All thy days!



Nard of far Oman's too mean for thy sweetness,  
Eagle wings lag at thy glancing eyes' fleetness;  
By thy pure beauty, bright gems lack completeness;  
Lady, ah, fairest!

Were I a genie, with rapture I'd seize thee;  
I'd haste away  
To magic-wrought cavern, all jewelled and golden;  
There I'd stay  
While the long glad years with printless feet wheeling  
Leave no trace,  
Save only new beauty and soft love revealing  
In thy face.  
The speeding of ages would breed us no sorrow;  
I'd shrink from no past, and dread naught of the morrow;  
The laugh in thine eyes, that alone I would borrow,  
Lady, ah, rarest!"

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

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

The emir broke forth hotly:—

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mary sighed when the emir was gone.

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

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

"I should be very happy, should I not?" exclaimed she, with a laugh not very merry. "See, since I have come to Palermo, here are Richard Longsword and De Valmont with blades drawn on my account; the emir sighs like the west wind, and is all gloom and restlessness; and you, Sir Musa," she went on boldly, "were you to speak out your own heart, are wishing them all three dead, that you

might have no rival. Holy Mother," added she, with half a sob, half a laugh, "I am too much loved! What am I, silly girl, that so many brave cavaliers should pawn their souls for my poor sake!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That evening as she sat with a taper at her reading-desk, the purple vellum leaves of George of Pisidia's learned epic brought little forgetfulness. While she was staring at the words, Bardas, the serving-man, startled her: "The emir Iftikhar to see the gracious princess." And without awaiting permission the Egyptian entered. He was in his splendid panoply,—gold on the rings of his cuirass,

two broad eagle wings on his helmet, between them burned a great ruby. Under the mail-shirt hung the green silk trousers with their pearl embroidery, gems again on the buckles of the high shoes, more gems on the gilded sword hilt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Iftikhar made no attempt to conceal his rage.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then she went to her father.

## CHAPTER IX

### HOW TRENCHER DROVE HOME

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

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

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

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

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

Mary shook her head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Count Roger had risen.

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

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

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

Then came respite, while the lists were cleared for the Saracens' games,—for the wise Count suffered no ill-blood to breed by letting Christian ride against Moslem. The Egyptian cavaliers took part—stately men, in red, silver-embroidered tunics, with blue, gem-set aigrettes flashing in their turbans. No less gallant were the Sicilian Saracens, and Iftikhar most brilliant of them all. A small palm tree was set in the midst of the arena,—the trunk bronze, the leaves one sheen of gold-foil. A

silver dove dangled from a bough, in the bill a golden ring. Then the Arab heralds proclaimed that each horseman should ride in turn, catching the ring upon his lance; and he who once failed should not try again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And you?"

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

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

"Given, my lord."

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

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

Then the kettledrums boomed, while the ten dashed together. A fair sight, without the bloodshed of the Christians' tourney. As each rider swept forward after breaking his reed, he dashed on past attendants standing with a sheaf of unbroken lances, dropped his shivered butt, snatched another, and spurred back to the contest. The horses caught their masters' spirit, and threw up their



heels merrily as they flew on charge after charge. Well matched were all; only on the seventh round did an agile Sicilian, by a quick crouch in the saddle, elude an Egyptian's reed while fairly breaking his own. The dust rose high. The horses panted. One by one the combatants dropped out. At last, after the multitude had howled and cheered till weary, the dust cloud settled, and revealed that of one party of five not one remained contesting; of the other, side by side sat Musa and Iftikhar Eddauleh.

The great Count shook his head, and Mary had little joy. They at least knew what fires would spur on the emir, when he rode; but to deny the crowd their sport would have meant riot,—nay, bloodshed,—what with their thousands standing on the benches, pressing the palings, shaking earth and air with tumult. The two contestants mounted new horses and sat face to face; behind each stood an attendant with the sheaf of reed lances. Count Roger swept his eye over the lists.

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

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

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

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

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

Prince Tancred had bounded into the arena.

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

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

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

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

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

The Egyptian drew himself up very proudly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The two rode once more—met; broke fairly. Men heard their voices for an instant raised high—curse and defiance, doubtless. Who might say? A second time—all eyes following. Mary saw the

Spaniard swing nimbly in his saddle. The emir's lance overshot harmlessly; his own snapped fairly on the target. Another mighty shout—Musa had won!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ho, Louis de Valmont! Ho, Louis de Valmont! My master awaits you! Here stands the good knight, Sir Richard of Cefalu, armed for fair battle, ready to make good on his body against cavalier

or villain who denies that Louis de Valmont is base-born, unknightly, unworthy to wear his spurs of gold!"

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

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

Then Theroulde threw back, still advancing:—

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

And Bernier paid in return:—

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

But Theroulde was undaunted, and boasted haughtily:—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Count frowned upon the Auvergnier:—

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

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

Tancred had stepped beside Richard.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen,*" came the words slowly; and at the last, Roger signed to the four. "Cut!" his command. The axes fell as one. Their sound was hid by the bursting tumult. Quick as light the horses caught the greensward with mighty strides. Behind, the dust spumed thick. As they flew, each rider swung lightly forward, lance level with thigh, shield over the crouching chest.

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

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

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

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

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

Sebastian, who stood by, cut him short.

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

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

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

But still the Provençal pressed, and still the Norman held him. Mary saw De Valmont's blade shun Trenchefefer. His sword half turned as Richard attempted parry,—but smote the Norman's helmet-crest. Mary almost thought she could see the fire-spark leap in bright day. But ere she could thrill with dread, Longsword had staggered, recovered, returned the stroke. Quick, deep as from huge bellows, heard she their breaths. Each moment her heart cried, "All is over!" as some doughty blow fell. But it would be parried, or turned on the good mail. On they fought,—fought till mild women rose from the benches and shouted as not before in that day's mad games; and old cavaliers, who set a battle

before a feast, stood also with a terrible light in their eyes, blessing the saints for showing them such sword-play! As Mary watched, her thoughts raced thick and fast: now she longed to laugh, now to weep; now only to hear no more of the click and clash of those long swords. Would it never end?

But now Prince Tancred was again with his head beside Count Roger. "The Auvergnier fails!" Men began to cry out that De Valmont no longer gave back the Norman's blows; only parried. And, of a sudden, Mary saw the iron tower of Richard Longsword, that had stood firm so long, leap as with new life. Twice Trenchefefer sprang high, and crashed upon De Valmont. Twice the Auvergnier tottered. Thrice—De Valmont's guard shivered as a rush—through shield, hauberk, gorget cleft the Vikings' blade. The shield flew in twain. The Provençal fell with a clash of mail, and, as he reeled, Mary could see the spout of blood where the sword had bitten the shoulder.

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

"Richard Longsword! Richard of Cefalu!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mary bowed to the Count:—

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

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

They bore Richard back to Palermo in high procession. All the knights swore that he had outdone all the cavaliers of the tourney, and must receive the chief prize. A great banquet and dance was held at the castle; the halls rang with music and the clink of wine-cups; the floors shook beneath a thousand twinkling feet. The young knights to prove their hardihood danced in the armor worn all day,—chain mail jingling in time to the castanets. The *jongleurs* sang new *chansons*; the ladies blazed in brighter silks and velvet; a myriad flambeaux flickered over all. Only Mary Kurkuas was not there, nor was Emir Iftikhar, delight of the ladies. To Richard and to Musa there were homage and flattery enough to addle wiser wits than theirs. Richard danced till the morn was paling, despite two great welts on his forehead. Two young ladies—"flowers of beauty," the *jongleurs* cried—brought to him

the prize of honor, a shield set with jewels and blazoned with four stripes of gold. Each added to her pleasant words a kiss. In truth, not a cavalier's daughter there that night would have said nay to Richard Longsword, had he prayed for anything. When at full dawn he fell asleep, it was to dream of gallant sword-play, throbbing music, and bright eyes, but the eyes were always those of Mary Kurkuas.

## CHAPTER X

### HOW IFTIKHAR SAID FAREWELL TO SICILY

Richard Longsword spent the winter in Palermo. There had come a letter oversea from his grandfather, old Baron Gaston of St. Julien in Auvergne, beseeching his daughter to send to France her son, who, fame had it, was a mighty cavalier. He was needed to set right his barony, for he himself grew weak and his vassals quarrelsome. But though Richard's eyes danced when he thought of France, and he won from Musa a pledge to postpone any Egyptian service till the new adventure was well over, he lingered in Sicily. For the life of Cæsar Manuel that winter ebbed fast. In early spring came a stately dromon streaming with purple flags, to bear him back to Constantinople, and a great letter in vermillion ink sealed with gold, pledging the favor of Alexius to his "dear cousin," and entreating his return to the palace by the Golden Gate. But on the day the imperial messenger landed, they were bearing Manuel Kurkuas to his last rest. The Greek Bishop of Palermo was there, also Count Roger, Tancred, and many seigneurs. Then when it was over, and Mary had seen all and done all, with the white face and dry eyes of those true women who can weep for little things but not for great, she found herself alone in the world and utterly desolate. The house of Kurkuas had been a decaying stock. Even at Constantinople her relatives were distant. Only in Provence, at La Haye, dwelt her uncle, whom she had never seen,—brother of her long-dead mother. Either she must go to him or return to Constantinople, where were many ministers and admirers, but only the Princess Anna to be her true friend. Yet Mary would not leave Monreale. The Palace of the Diadem was hers. All day long she would sit in its twilight courts beside the fountain, reading or trying to read, with only Sylvana for companion. When Richard or Musa went each day to ask for her, she would send kind greetings; but said she could not see them. Sylvana, however, was a wise woman as became her years; and one day, behold! Musa was led into the court of the fountain unheralded, and the princess must needs speak with him.

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

Musa smiled sweetly and gravely.

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

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

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

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

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



green on the parchment, were spread before her. Sylvana had her hand on the bellows, as her mistress sang the mad old pagan chorus of Euripides:—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The gossips at Palermo bandied the tale about, almost before those concerned in it knew it themselves. No one marvelled; all said that Richard Longsword had fairly won his prize, and Mary Kurkuas would never have shame for her lord. Only the Emir Iftikhar communed darkly with his own heart, and with certain sworn followers of his in the Saracen guard. The good syndic Al-Bakri

was a mighty newsmonger. A certain neighbor brought him a story; he in turn dealt it out to Musa; and the Spaniard gave Richard Longsword strong reasons for wearing his Valencia mail shirt under his bleaunt. Baron William had returned to Cefalu. But when a letter came from his son, the seigneur sent straightway, bidding Richard come home, and bring with him Mary Kurkuas, who it was not meet should remain alone, with only Sylvana and the serving-men and maids at Monreale. Richard, hasty mortal, would have had her to church before setting out. But Mary shook her head. The turf was not yet green over the grave of the Cæsar, and she owed a duty to her mother's kinsfolk in Provence. If Richard was to go to Auvergne, she would go with him to La Haye, the barony of her uncle, and there might be the wedding. So with Sylvana as duenna, away they went to Cefalu. There dear Lady Margaret opened her heart wide to the motherless Greek; and they spent many a merry day, with guests and good company coming from far and near to drink at the Baron's board, and to pledge the health of "the peerless lady, Mary Kurkuas, the fairest of her age in all Sicily and France." Day after day Richard and Mary rode forth together; for the Greek was as mad a rider as though born on the saddle. The white falcon was on her wrist; they chased the luckless quarry over thicket and brake, while Longsword laughed as he saw how Mary dashed beside him. And there were long evenings, when in the soft gloaming, and no other was near, they could sit in Lady Margaret's bower outside the castle walls, with the sleeping flowers clinging all about, and a little stream tumbling gently in the ravine below. Here every breath was eloquence, every word a poem, and the voice of Mary sweeter than Musa's lute. Only Mary,—for Richard was all blind these days,—noticed that Musa and Herbert were ever watchful; that Musa always insisted that his friend wear the Valencia shirt; that even when the lovers rode off seemingly alone, there would be Musa or Herbert or Nasr riding within bowshot.

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

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

But Mary only answered very gravely:—

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

"Certainly, daughter," replied Sebastian, soberly.

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

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

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

"Daughter, daughter," protested Sebastian.

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

Then of a sudden came a day when the even flow of life at Cefalu was rudely shaken. Richard and Mary had ridden with some retinue to games which Baron William's neighbor, the Lord of Pollina, had been holding. The jousts had been hot, though not so fierce as to be bloody. Richard had refused to ride, for all the country-side stood in some awe of him. Musa had won the hearts of all the ladies, as he ever did, by his dashing horsemanship and grace. Evening was beginning to fall. They were still two miles from Cefalu, and before them opened a long, shaded avenue of holm-oak and cypress, through which shimmered the failing light. Mary touched whip to her fleet palfrey. The good horse shot forward, and beside her raced Richard, leaving the rest behind. They had swung into the avenue, the steeds were just stretching their necks for a headlong pace, when lo, as by magic,

behind a thicket rose three men, and in a twinkling three arrows sped into Longsword's breast! The clang of the bow and Mary's cry were as one. But even as Richard reeled in the saddle, Musa and Nasr were beside him, at a raging gallop. The Norman shivered, sat erect. One arrow was quivering in his saddle leather, two hung by the barbs from his mantle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XI

### HOW RICHARD FARED TO AUVERGNE

Now when the south wind blew gently with the advancing spring, Richard set forth for Auvergne. With him went Sebastian, rejoiced to see "that very Christian country of France," and Herbert his arch-counsellor, and Nasr with a score of tough Saracens, very fiends as they looked, Baron William's old retainers, who would have followed the devil with a stout heart so long as he led to hard blows and good plunder. Just before he started, Richard was admonished by his father not to rush into quarrel with Raoul, the brother of Louis, whose lands of Valmont lay close by St. Julien. "A rough, bearish fellow," William called him, who had won the name of the "Bull of Valmont" by his headlong courage. He had broiled with Louis, chased him from the fief, and now lived alone with his mother, the Lady Ide, and young brother Gilbert. Just now, report had it, he was at sword's points with the abbot of Our Lady of St. Julien, who claimed freedom from tolls upon the Valmont lands, and William warned his son against being used by the monk to fight his unchurchly quarrel. So Richard promised discretion, kissed his mother for the last time; and away he went on a stanch galleon of Amalfi headed for Marseilles, and making Palermo on her voyage from Alexandria.

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

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

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

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

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

"I will never play the Philistine woman to you, my Richard," answered Mary, lightly. Then as a sweet and sober light came into her eyes: "Oh, dear heart, I know well what you must be! It is true the world is very evil. We are young, and the light shines fair; but there is a day to dance, and a day, not to mourn, but to put by idle things. You will be a great man, Richard," with a proud, bright glance into his face; "men will dread you and your righteous anger against their wickedness; God will give you mighty deeds to do, great battles to win, great wrongs to right, and perhaps"—here with another glance—"they will think you grow hard and sombre, when it is only because you dare not turn back

from your task, but must think of duty, not of childish things. But I will still be with you; and when you go away to the wars, as go you must, I will never weep till your banner is out of sight; and if I do weep, I will still say, as you said, 'It is no dreadful thing for a brave gentleman to die, if he dies with his face toward the foe, and his conscience clear.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Never again was Longsword to ride with fairer visions and a merrier heart. He was in France, the home of knightly chivalry, of Christian faith. As they passed through Aix and Avignon and Orange, and all along the stately Rhone, the wealthy lords and ladies entertained him in their castles, Theroulde paying by his stories for all the feastings and wassail. And Richard carried his head high, for the fame of his deeds in Sicily had run overseas; and men honored him, and the great countesses gave

soft looks and words,—with more perchance, had he only suffered. "Verily," thought Richard in his heart, "the *jongleurs* did well to sing that when King Alexander the Great lay a-dying, he had only one sorrow,—that he had not conquered France, head of the whole world." But for the ladies, their troops of troubadours and their "courts of love," Richard had only pleasant words, no more. For Longsword had a vision before his eyes that two years before he had never dreamed. Fairer than all knightly glory, the sweet delirium of battle, the cry of a thousand heralds proclaiming him victor, rose the dream of a strong and beautiful woman ever beside him; her voice ever in his ears, her touch upon his arm, her breath upon his cheek; and from year unto year his soul drawing to itself joy and power merely by looking upon her—this was the dream. And Richard marvelled that once his life had found rest in hawking and sword-play. So as he rode northward, all the little birds upon the arching trees sang that one name "Mary"; and the great Rhone, hastening seaward, murmured it from each eddy and foaming boulder; and the kind west wind whispered it, as it blew over the pleasant corn-lands of Toulouse and Aquitaine.

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XII

### HOW RICHARD CAME TO ST. JULIEN

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

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

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

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

But Sebastian shook his head.

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

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

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

The Spaniard threw up his hands in inimitable gesture.

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

"And that forbodes—?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ho, sirrah; and are we on the Baron of St. Julien's land?" No answer; then again, "Are we on the Baron of St. Julien's land?" Still no answer, while the scoundrel gazed about like a cornered cat, looking for chance to escape. Herbert grasped his ear in no gentle pinch.

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

"Yes, this is his land."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And is my lord the Baron well?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Lord," said Bertrand, "over yonder mountain lies the castle of Valmont: its seigneur, Raoul, has for years been at feud with your grandfather, my lord. Much blood has flowed to neither's advantage. When Louis went away, the two barons made a manner of peace; but of late they quarrelled, touching the rights to certain hunting-land. The suzerain, Count Robert of Auvergne, is old; he gave judgment



against Raoul, but had no power to enforce. Four days since Baron Gaston went upon the debatable land to lay a hound; with him only Gaspar, the huntsman. Raoul and many men meet them; high words, drawn swords; and after our Baron had slain three men with his own hands, the 'Bull of Valmont' takes him. Raoul is in a black rage, and his enemy in his power."

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

"Go on," said he, very calmly.

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

"The 'hot-bowl'?"

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

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

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

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

"Nothing, lord. De Carnac is our chief; but when we knew you were coming, and heard how you had laid the Bull's brother, Louis de Valmont, on his back, great knight that he was, we waited; for, we said, 'When Sir Richard comes, we shall be led by one of St. Julien's own stock, and we shall see if he loves Raoul more than do we.'"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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