

FOREWORD

ROMANCE lies not alone in history, but in the misty, half-forgotten legends bequeathed to us by peoples who have vanished from the earth.

Most loved, most poignant in romance, the tales of those old champions who stood, a Christian wall, between free Britain and the Saxon spears. It is not of them, however, not of Arthur the King, of Gawain, Lancelot, and Tristram, that this story tells, though its theme is a legend of their time — aye, older still: a legend of the pride, the love, the gallantry of Roman Britannia, the last far-flung colony of Rome.

It was Julius Caesar who first loosed the eagles of empire on that isolated Celtic island, Britain beyond the sea. Following him, the empurpled emperors made the land their own, first subduing, then winning the hearts of its half-barbaric warriors. Together, Celt and Roman built a strong, rich civilization, half Italy, half Britain, from the Channel to the towering wall that now lies, crumbling and plundered, along the Scottish border.

The power and luxury of Rome in the fertile south and east so bewitched the hearts of the Britons that they loved to boast of the scanty Roman blood that mixed with theirs, and gladly served the Empire in its legions.

Where, before, towns of wattle, reed, or rough-hewn stone had stood, the marble palaces and pillared temples of Rome rose in stately grandeur to the British sky.

“Romans” these city-dwelling Celts called themselves; and in strange, barbaric accents they spoke the Latin tongue.

But, proud in savage freedom, their wilder kinsmen to the north and west scorned Roman ways and Roman servitude. In Cornwall — which the

Romans called Damnonia — in Wales and north of the Humber, fierce tribesmen maintained their ancient Celtic freedom and their fathers' speech. Between them and the Roman Celts the eternal feud of hillman against plainsman defied the Italian legions and the Italian gods — defied all that came from Rome, except that greatest of Rome's gifts, the Cross of Christ.

Then, from untamed depths of European forests, the wild Germanic barbarians flung themselves against the Empire, broke the legions, profaned the temples, and crushed into bloody dust the glorious pomp of Rome. The last enfeebled emperors called their eagles back to Gaul, to Italy, to save the doomed city of the Caesars. A part of this forlorn hope, the armored cohorts and the bannered horsemen, rode away from Britain, never to see its white cliffs and its wide, sweet-smelling downs again.

Behind them they left a people weakened, unprotected, but dauntless with the ancient courage of their Celtic sires and the pride of their Roman traditions. The legions were no more than gone, when the mail-clad Saxons in a thousand ships swept down upon the Kentish coast, seeking more fertile lands and softer homes across the sea. Mercilessly they spoiled the land with flame and sword, killing, enslaving, trampling under foot the Celtic-Roman war banners and the vestments of Christ's priests.

But, schooled in the Roman squadrons, a prince of battles rose in Britain to repel the invader: Arthur the King, greatest among many great and valiant British chiefs.

And when at last the Saxon tide rolled over him, drowning out the Roman name and Celtic liberty in the cities of the West — Aquae Sulis, known to us

as Bath; Glevum, the Gloucester of our days; Corinium, on whose ruins Cirencester stands — then other heroes rose to withstand the flood of heathendom.

Yet, foot by foot and mile by mile, the Saxons pressed their victims back. Two hundred years the unrelenting warfare raged, the heathen ever reenforced by fresh fleets from over the eastern sea. There are splendid pages in the tale, glorious years when the Romanized Britons almost drove the invader back into the ocean.

It is of one such interval of British glory that this story tells: an interval shrouded in the veil of tradition, a woof of misty legend through which the crimson thread of history sparkles here and there, only to be lost again; legend which plays, as the waves play with the stones they wash and roll, with the tale of a lost land — the land of Lyonesse.

For there lingers still among the older folk of Cornwall the last, faint breath of a land once great and beautiful, now sunk beneath the sea. The monkish Norman chroniclers have set down strange tales of its glories, its palaces and frowning walls, its heaven-pointing churches, fragrant with incense and pulsing with the chant of priests.

None knows what vanished people built its cities, or how or when it fell; but men say that the ocean rose and swallowed it up in a single day. And every scattered, broken fragment of tradition declares that this land of mystery lay between Land's End and the Scilly Isles, where now the tortured waters toss and moan above its church bells and the bleached bones of its citizens.

The pomp of a great name surrounds lost Lyonesse; for here, it is said, dwelt that famous prince and hero of King Arthur's Table Round, Tristram. First of minstrels and of lovers, bravest and

unhappiest of knights, he sailed from Lyonesse to Cornwall, to serve King Mark the Cruel. To Lyonesse he returned, when he had slain Marholt of Ireland; and thence embarked for Brittany to woo Iseult of the White Hands. Therefore, if such a fair, lost land there were, the peaks of the Scilly Isles rise above its ocean grave, and the mighty granite walls of Land's End mark its eastern boundary.

The legends say that Arthur the King was the first champion of Roman Britain; and Tristram was his knight. So it may well be that Lyonesse the Fair was once the farthest outpost of Roman power and Roman grandeur; doubtless in this vanished land were born the armored horsemen that for a time flung back the triumphant march of the Saxon shield walls, and all but drove them from the British Isles.

Isolated by the moors and crags of Cornwall, almost surrounded by the sea, it must have been as Roman as the Roman wall itself, as Roman as the radiating Roman roads that lay like a network of stone over all Britain. If this be true, then its soft-sounding name may only be the time-worn remnant of a bit of soldiers' Latin: Legionis Asa, the Altar of the Legion.

Before the Normans came, before Alfred of England humbled the Danes, Lyonesse had sunk beneath the waves. Its columned porticoes and stately halls lie many fathoms deep; but its name lives on. Old fishermen still boast that when the sea is still, they can hear its church bells ring far down beneath the rippling keel.

And of that time when Lyonesse sent forth its Roman horse against the Saxon, of its beauty and its pride, this tale would tell. It would be hard to find warriors better bred or better matched. They made history, and history has rewarded the Saxon. The soldier of Legionis Asa lies beneath

the sea — forgotten.

THE LOST LAND

The sea lies over Lyonesse —
Fair Lyonesse, lost Lyonesse —
Gray waves wash over Lyonesse,
The city of the foam.
The dogfish drive the mackerel
Where once the Saxon shield walls fell;
And lapped with seaweed, pearled with shell
The vanished legion's home.
Hunted o'er moor and ocean crag
The armored cohorts came,
When Rome's imperial eagles flew
From Scythia and Timbaktu
To seas without a name.
Where hidden peoples lived unknown,
They builded walls and fanes of stone,
And watched their Celtic allies drag
With aching loins o'er ancient paths
The blocks for senate-house and baths,
To make a tiny Rome, —
The power of Rome, her holiness,
The wit to rule, the Cross to bless,
The Sceptre and the Keys.
An altar they upreared to God,
And o'er the teeming, sea-girt sod
Rome ruled by grace of these.

A little land, a shining land,
Belted with granite walls;
A city bright with palaces,
With colonnaded palaces,
And glorious capitals;
Where gleaming dome and sculptured arch
And marble temple glowed,
Where booted feet trod Roman street
As legions clattered forth to meet
The yellow-haired barbarian hordes,
And Arthur with his bannered lords
Greeted the horsemen's stately march
Adown the Cornish road.

Vanished is lordly Lyonesse,
The last far shrine of Rome;

No more the Empire's lances ride
In thundering squadrons through the tide
Of ravening heathen spears.
Ten fathom down her topmost towers,
Her fragrant rose-entangled bowers,
Dream the eternal years.
The salt sea lulls dead Lyonesse,
The fighting legion's home.

The waters lie o'er Lyonesse —
Proud Lyonesse, brave Lyonesse —
The emerald waves hide Lyonesse,
Where pulsed the heart of Rome.
But if you sail some sunlit noon,
When winds are still and waters croon,
Far, far beneath the drifting keel
You'll hear the church bells softly peal,
And see, in fancy's faerie haze,
The shimmering roofs of Roman days —
The long-lost walls of Lyonesse,
Where good King Arthur sleeps upon
The sunken isle of Avalon;
And silvery fish swim on and on
Through the white streets of Lyonesse,
The British Legion's home.

CHAPTERS

I	THE LAST ROMANS	3
II	THE CITY OF THE LEGION	23
III	THE MADNESS OF NIALL	37
IV	VENTIDIUS STRIKES BACK	53
V	THE VEILED WOMAN	67
VI	MORITURI SALUTAMUS	78
VII	AMBUSH	94
VIII	THE SAXONS COME	110
IX	MORE MASQUERADE	127
X	THE HILL OF SLAUGHTER	141
XI	BY THE WATERS OF SUL	157
XII	BURIED TREASURE	169
XIII	OUT OF THE GRAVE	176
XIV	VANISHED!	186
XV	THE MAN WITH THE BROKEN NOSE	201
XVI	WOLVES OF THE SEA	212
XVII	THE BENEVOLENT DESPOT	223
XVIII	THE HAMMER AND THE CROSS	232

XIX	THE BATTLE OF STONEHENGE	244
XX	SORBIODUNUM	255
XXI	COUNTERSTROKE	261
XXII	OFF BELLERIUM	269
XXIII	THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER	281
XXIV	HAND TO HAND	287
XXV	THE WRATH OF GOD	298
XXVI	MOTHER BRITAIN	310

ILLUSTRATIONS

DISARMED, DRUSUS CAUGHT THE SAXON'S WRIST	Frontispiece
ON THE CREST OF THE NEAREST SAND DUNE TOWERED A TALL HORSEMAN IN ROMAN ARMOR	8
SNATCHING UP A JAVELIN, FARINMAEL HURLED IT WITH ALL HIS GREAT STRENGTH	147
LONG, FOAMING TENTACLES OF WATER SNATCHED AT THE HINDMOST	312

CHAPTER I THE LAST ROMANS

Gray fog hid the cliffs of Cornwall. None of the riders could see a lance-length beyond his horse's ears. But between the hiss of the ebbing surf and the boom of the next wave, breaking far below, they could hear the creak of each other's saddles and the faint tinkle of their chain mail.

"Halt! Holy Saint Brigid! Prince!"

"What is it, Niall of the Sword?" answered a low, young voice.

"The path ends, Prince! We stand on the brink of the cliff. And hark!"

"I hear nothing, Niall, save the sea. And forget not that I am the Princess. Twice have you called me Prince."

The youth smoothed his voice to a sound like hidden music, to fit the part he played, and laughed in self-enjoyment of his art. Laughter — that was Meriaduc, son of Owain ap Urien.

"Be silent, Prince — cess!"

The man's voice was low and vibrant with warning. His keen ears strained for the sound he had heard between two breakers. It came again: the tock-tock of oars on tholepins. Rhythmic, menacing, it pulsed like the death-watch in a moldering wall.

"*Warigeath tha clifu! Fremme Woden!*"

The cliffs reechoed to the hoarse shout of mingled fear, prayer and command.

The stripling prince in his sister's clothes flung up his head — a gesture old Niall loved. It was one of the little things that kept alive his faith in the boy's destiny — this gay-hearted boy, heir to dominion over a brave people, a people struggling for its very existence against the heathen from over the sea; this gentle, graceful boy who fainted

at the sight of blood, and could deceive the women themselves when he put on their garments. But there was no sign of weakness in the erect, slim figure whose horse was drawn close to Niall's.

"Saxons," he muttered. "Saxons — even here!" Niall of the Sword cursed savagely.

"Aye, Saxons! By the love your father bears me, Prince — Princess — I pray you turn back. To the right of us is naught but crags and fog; to the left a headlong plunge to the sea and the mercy of heathen pirates; a precipice in front, and the saints know what lies beyond. Let us flee while there is time! Rude as the Cornishmen are, they are of our own faith, and will at least protect us from the heathen spears."

The boy shook his head; the other could just see him through the gray curtain of fog.

"Never!" he answered firmly. "My father bade us go to Bellerium, and go we will, though ten thousand Saxons bar the way. Make room!"

Urging his horse past the old man's before he could be stopped, he rode straight over the edge of the cliff. His mount took the descent with a snort of fear and a great slithering of loose stones. Niall groaned; but no crash of a falling body came to his straining, anxious ears. Instead he heard the hoofs of the horse strike beaten earth, and the soft voice of its rider call:

"The path goes on and down. It is steep, but not perilous. Follow on!"

At once Niall took the descent. Owain's son lacked not courage, that

was certain. Again the clink of steel and creak of leather broke the intervals of gray silence as the twenty troopers of the escort, one after another, rode down the steep trail, to find themselves on the level sand with the surf breaking close beside them.

"Princess!" Niall of the Sword called softly. "Aye," he muttered to himself, "and Gwenlian would have done it too!" Many of Owain's court thought the Princess Gwenlian better mettle for the throne than her brother Meriaduc, with his swooning, his songs, and his pranks. Yet they thought this sadly, for they all loved the boy — aye, they loved him.

"Princess!" Old Niall repeated the call, a shade louder.

"Here!"

The word was almost a laugh, youth's challenge to adventure.

"We go on? Let it be so, then. If only those accursed Saxon dogs do not hear us!"

The deep, soft sand dragged at the horses' hoofs. Niall gave a quiet command; the cavalcade turned toward the sea and along the harder wave-packed

beach. For more than a mile they rode at a walk, till a puff of warmer air drew a warning grunt from Niall.

"The fog will thin now," he cautioned, "for the wind rises. We shall be needing to make a run for it!"

Almost as he spoke, the air grew clearer in shreds and patches; a faint, sickly sun shone through the fast-melting fog. Along the southern sea, the beach stretched out farther and farther, rising inland into wind-carved dunes. The cliffs of Cornwall lay behind to the eastward.

Turning in the saddle, Niall uttered a startled cry, which came back a hundred times as loud, in a fierce, many-throated yell:

"*Weallas!* Britons!"

Out of the offshore fog, not far behind the two- and-twenty riders, a dragon-prowed longship surged in through the shallowing waters and grounded with grating keel. Forty oars tossed aloft; the port shield rail thronged with eager warriors. Springing from fore deck and rowing bench, the Saxons flung themselves over the side, waded through the surf, and charged along the beach. Their brandished weapons caught the feeble glint of the sun.

"Spur! Spur!" Niall shouted, and seizing Meriaduc's rein, set off in swift flight.

Imperiously Meriaduc snatched the bridle free and turned to look at his foes. The sight of so fair a face and the long black hair above a woman's gown brought a roar of delight from the heathen.

Meriaduc rode for life along the unknown shore. Behind galloped the mounted escort — twenty tall warriors in blackened chain mail and flapping black cloaks. After them raced the Saxons, between seventy and eighty pirates armed with heavy spears, with swords and axes, swift-footed and long-winded, lusting for fight and plunder. A few of them reluctantly stayed behind to guard the stranded galley.

The chase streamed on, pursuers and pursued tailing out, the fugitives gaining in spite of the weariness of their mounts. Niall of the Sword looked back over his shoulder, a derisive challenge on his lips, but

turned swiftly back again at the cry of Meriaduc:

“Niall! We are trapped!”

Through the mist before them rose a mighty cliff that seemed to run inland interminably, blocking the beach from the water’s edge to the very limit of the landward vision.

“Inland!” Niall shouted.

Wheeling to the sword hand, the riders galloped along the granite wall into a lingering fog-bank that screened its end from view. On they pounded blindly, till Niall, now in the lead, reined in so sharply that his horse pawed the air.

“The rock turns!” he cried. “We must fight!”

A projecting salient of the cliff barred their road. In the pocket which it formed with the main line of the headland, the fog still lay thick; Niall’s hand groped along a smooth, damp wall. He shouted a command; the score of warriors formed up in double rank and drew their long, straight broadswords.

The old commander’s heart ached anxiously for Owain’s son, knowing that at the first blood drawn he would swoon like the woman he appeared; and a good soldier, sorely needed in the fray, would have to bear a poor one to shelter. He turned to Meriaduc.

“To the rear! Hide in that angle of the cliff!” he commanded.

Meriaduc’s eyes flashed anger; then, dulled with shame, wrapping his sister’s cloak about him, he obeyed. Slowly his soldiers trotted toward the straggling pursuers, not eighty yards distant.

Seeing their victims at bay, the Saxons halted and collected into a

compact wedge, shields lapped together above projecting points. For a moment the hostile ranks surveyed each other coolly; then Niall pointed out to sea, a grim smile on his lips. A second Saxon ship was drawing swiftly landward, its shield rail lined with archers ready to loose.

“Men of Owain,” he addressed his warriors, “there is but one hope, and that a small one. Break that shield wall and spur through. The second rank will take Princess Gwenlian in charge. Princess!”

Meriaduc rode out from behind the cliff angle.

“Now!” barked Niall. “For Owain and North Wales! Peck, ye Ravens!”

The riders stiffened, about to drive in the spurs. As their muscles tightened, a commanding voice, neither Saxon nor Briton, shouted —

“Halt! Stir not!”

Saxon and Briton alike turned at the command. On the crest of the nearest sand dune towered a tall horseman in Roman armor. With his eye fixed on the Saxon wedge, he raised his long, heavy lance.

“Look!” he commanded in British.

The embattled enemies followed his gesture to the comb of the headland. The fog was gone; the projecting arm of the cliff now appeared, not as a granite ledge, but as a steep ramp of concrete. Above, crowning the cliff, a great gray castle lifted its battlements above the shore.

The second galley was driving in toward shallow water, her archers waiting only till her course should bring them within range. Emboldened by the shouts of their fellow-pirates, the shield wall began to surge

forward. Again the strange horseman lifted his spear, pointing it toward the Saxon ranks.

As at a signal, something flashed on the castle wall; the air was rent by a tearing hum. A boulder, seeming to blot out the sun, swept down from the sky to seaward, fell crashing into the waist of the approaching ship, and broke her in two. With a gurgling rush the waters engulfed her; the heads of her crew dotted the sea.

Again and again a sullen twang sounded from above, and great darts, heavier than any man could wield, tore into the compact front of the advancing Saxon shield wall. No foe could be seen, yet one after another the terrible steel-tipped beams rent great gaps in the pirate ranks. Whoso was struck was hurled back through the rank behind, torn half in two, while the cruel dart sped on to bury itself in a second breast. The Saxons faltered, gave back, and broke for the shore.

“Now!” Niall shouted. “At them!”

The twenty Celtic horsemen broke into a gallop, their long blades flashing in the sun. But before they could close, a trumpet sounded, and a squadron of heavy cavalry, clad from top to toe in close-fitting scale armor, clattered out from the dunes and thundered past them with leveled lances. They swept up the fleeing Saxons as a broom sweeps dust, their spears piercing mail and flesh. Behind them surged the black-clad Ravens, eager to be in at the death, their swords flashing down and rising red.

A pitiful remnant of Saxons reached the water's edge, plunged in and strove to thrust off the stranded

galley. Niall would have ridden them down, but the stranger waved him back.

Hardly had he reined in, when the hail of missiles from the castle was renewed, pelting the surface of the sea, piercing the light planks of the ship, striking the Saxons under as they stood or swam. The water was tinged with blood; corpses strewed the shore.

Niall cantered over to his deliverer.

“A pretty slaughter,” he commented, “but a poor fight.”

The stranger shrugged his broad shoulders.

“A better fight would have landed you in Purgatory,” he answered. “Who is in command among you?”

Meriaduc, pale, his face resolutely turned from the scene of battle, rode up beside them. He lifted his troubled blue eyes frankly to the stranger's warm hazel ones, searching his face earnestly.

Here was such a man as the young prince had never seen in his native hills: an inch short of six feet, his erect carriage made him seem much taller; his girth and limbs were those of a well-conditioned athlete; his broad, square brow and chin, and Roman nose were those of a conquering Caesar. Dark with that warm, clear-skinned complexion peculiar to the Roman, his face lighted with appreciation of Meriaduc's grace of carriage and girl-like beauty, as the Welsh youth rode up.

Accustomed as Meriaduc was to this kind of tribute when he played the girl, a blush for his own manhood suffused his cheeks, but his eyes did not falter. Very simply and with

becoming firmness he answered the stranger's question:

"I," he said, "am Gwenlian, daughter of Owain of North Wales. Owain sends me on an errand to your people, under the protection of Niall of the Sword —" with a charming inclination of the head introducing the old warrior — "Niall of the Sword," he repeated, with a touch of proud affection, "Captain of Ravens. With all my heart I thank you for your timely help."

The stranger flung back his scarlet cloak and saluted, his finely molded corselet flashing like a mirror as it caught the sun.

"I am Marcianus Drusus, Prefect of the Damnonian March. I am proud to have been of service to King Owain's daughter. He and my father rode together against the Saxons under the banner of King Arthur. It has gone ill with Britain since good King Arthur's death."

"Ill indeed," the grateful princeling answered seriously. "These forty years the Saxons have been establishing their kingdoms in the east, raiding farther and farther inland, masking their falseness under a pretense of peace. Now they advance in force, burning cities, desecrating churches, slaughtering and enslaving our people. My father has given up the security of his capital on the Scottish border to spend his old age in riding up and down the marches from Carlisle to Caerleon, from Powis to Corinium, striking swift blows at the invader with his gallant horsemen, the Ravens.

"But now the West Saxons set great hosts afoot, conquering new kingdoms year by year, and my father has

neither the strength nor the troops to hold them off much longer. Therefore I have come to your province to ask help for my race, and yours, and—" again the blush threatened to mount — "a refuge for myself."

Drusus smiled encouragingly; but the boy's blush had been for his own disguised manhood. His sister Gwenlian was indeed to have gone on just this errand; but now she lay bedridden in Aquae Sulis, helpless with alternate pain and torpor. Feeling an unexpected shame for his masquerade in the presence of this stalwart Roman soldier, Meriaduc forced himself to think of the importance of his mission. With all his heart he longed to grow as tall, as broad, as brown, as brave as the Prefect of the Damnonian March, to be a man like him, his companion, in time his equal. But with his sister's garb he bore his sister's errand; and to carry it through he must act with his finest skill, exert his utmost charm.

Drusus reflected soberly on the news from North Wales.

"We are out of the world here in Legionis Asa," he observed. "I hold the borders to keep at least this little Roman corner of Britain safe from the barbarian. Here we do not know how the warfare goes in the north and east."

"All the land between Strathclyde and the German Ocean is overrun by the Saxon hordes," the counterfeit Gwenlian answered. "Nothing of Britain remains save North Wales from Cumbria to the Severn, the midlands from Glevum to Corinium, Cornish Damnonia, and your own Legionis Asa. Damnonia and your

province have never helped us since King Arthur's death. Alone, we of Wales fight a hopeless battle."

The blue eyes sought the brown ones appealingly. "It cannot be that your folk will refuse us aid," Meriaduc went on softly, playing his woman's part. "Here on your very border, Saxon blood has been spilled. Your coasts have felt the grating keels of Saxon ships. Yours is the greatest remnant of Roman power in Britain; yours is the wisdom of Rome, the valor of the legions, the heritage of the Empire!

"Though we of the hills do not recognize your sovereignty, we look to you for strength, aye, for leadership, in our struggle for life. You cannot refuse us!"

Drusus' eyes kindled kindly. Encouraged, the suppliant went on:

"Why should not you, the heirs of Celtic liberty and Roman glory, stand side by side with your Celtic comrades in a cause that means life or death to us all?"

Drusus smiled sadly. Lady Gwenlian's sex and her inexperience carried her along so swiftly!

"All you say is true," he replied, "but—" and his face clouded—"there are many of our citizens who would hold aloof, preferring that we keep our Roman isolation. They say, and I think truly, Princess, that Legionis Asa has a sacred obligation to maintain the culture and traditions of that Rome which, save for us, is dead. While Legionis Asa stands secure, and only for so long, Imperial Rome yet lives."

He averted his eyes. Anxious for smoother ground, he let his gaze dwell on the Ravens under Niall's command,

and remarked courteously:

"At least Britain is not lost while such soldiers live. I have often heard of the valor of Owain's Ravens, but never before have I seen them. It would please me to stand beside them in battle. God grant that I may."

"Does it not rest with you?" Meriaduc asked.

Drusus shook his head.

"A soldier must obey orders. . . . But I am thoughtless; you are weary with your long, perilous journey, and need rest. I will guide you to the city, and, if you permit, claim the hospitality of my cousin Tullia Marciana for you."

For an instant each held the other's gaze. Perceiving how completely the keen eye of Drusus was deceived, Meriaduc began to comprehend, as never before, how like his sister he was. Indeed, their resemblance was the marvel of his father's kingdom. In taking on her robes, he took on, too, something of her softer loveliness. He was glad to read no hint of dawning sentiment in Drusus' eyes. The prefect's steadfast glance showed only a silent understanding of the dangers a girl must have undergone to bring her father's message to Legionis Asa, an appreciation of fine spirit and courage, worthy a princess. Meriaduc's young, hero-worshipping heart leaped with the resolve that the Roman should not be disappointed in him.

The situation into which he had plunged himself seemed suddenly full of peril; yet he must make the most of it. His sister Gwenlian had been left in Aquae Sulis to drink the curative waters; and the mission to Legionis Asa could not be delayed. Meriaduc knew what Gwenlian did not suspect:

that his father, while seeking the protection of the Roman province for his daughter, counted heavily on the eloquence of her beauty, not less than on her spirit, to move the Senate there to favor his plea for help. So Meriaduc, understanding this, had resolved that if the influence of a beautiful woman could help his country in dealing with the politicians of Legionis Asa, his country should have that influence. Nobody but Niall would know.

Niall had opposed the plan, but the headstrong boy had had his way. In truth, Meriaduc had not consulted the stern old warrior. He had merely appeared in Gwenlian's robes, and completely beguiled Niall with a story of sufficient recovery to proceed on the journey, even acting the languid girl in something less than full health for a few hours, and enjoying to the utmost the old soldier's tender solicitude.

And in the end, as Meriaduc knew he would, Niall fell in, grumblingly, with his madcap prince's plan. Though three years younger than his sister, Meriaduc was as tall and as handsome. Niall had listened in amazement while the young prince modulated his tones to a clear sweetness that was Gwenlian's own. The old Raven's ingrained, rugged honesty withheld complete approval still; but inconsistently and involuntarily he reveled in the beauty of the acting, and his memory was soon recalling to him the last night in Owain's court.

There had come to the court that evening a minstrel of rare talent, in whose throat dwelt a lark. He had held the noisy, rude assembly silent and rapt for hours. In the hush after

one of his songs, a young officer of Ravens voiced a thought, not conscious that he spoke till his own words fell on his ears.

"As I live," he breathed, "it is no minstrel that, but our own Prince Meriaduc up to his tricks!"

It broke the spell. There followed much loud laughter and shouted compliments to the prince's mimicry. The bewildered minstrel was besought to own up, to throw off the disguise. Meriaduc had slipped out of the hall, a short time before, on business of his own, and was about to reenter when he heard the officer's words. He remained behind the door curtain and, through a place worn thin and easily made into a peephole, watched the impromptu farce.

The poor minstrel was frantic with his efforts to guess what was this rough northern game, and how he was expected to play his part in it, when Meriaduc stepped forth, unobserved in the excitement, and began to sing one of the minstrel's songs, his voice rising high and sweet above the din. The court burst into renewed acclamation. Every one loved the merry prince. But Meriaduc was fifteen, and at that age in King Owain's land a man must be a man.

But this man, a king's son, chose to be a woman, and in that guise was even now about to enter Legionis Asa. All in the service of his hard-pressed country, it was true; and there was no doubt that a beautiful, high-spirited princess would have more influence than a prince who could not fight. Niall sighed profoundly.

His musings were broken short. The prefect swung about and issued a

command in Latin:

“*Retrorsum!*”

The squadron of heavy cavalry swung into column of fours and rode up the ramp. At a signal from Drusus, Niall and the Ravens followed. Side by side princess and rescuer rode after them.

With strangely mingled feelings Meriaduc studied the massive workmanship and skilful construction of the great military ramp. Rising like the shoulder of a mountain, straight as an arrow, and slightly ridged to keep the horses' hoofs from slipping, it was built of huge blocks and slabs of Roman concrete.

How many men had labored for how long to raise its mighty bulk, and how many years the land of Legionis Asa must have lived in peace to perfect the work!

Would such a folk disturb their comfort, their entrenched security, to save a people whom the Romans regarded as barbarians? What though the people of Legionis Asa were half British? Roman civilization and Roman pride made them regard themselves as a superior race, an island of culture in a sea of semi-savagery. His people would seem a little better to them than the heathen Saxons.

Meriaduc pointed to the ramp.

“But why is it unwallled?”

The prefect's thin lips were touched with a smile.

“You will see,” he answered.

In a moment more the hoofs of their horses rang bell-like on hollow metal: two great plates of bronze, each three paces long, extending the full width of the ramp to its unparapeted edges. An almost imperceptible line showed

where the two plates met.

When they had all passed over the plates, Drusus called to the squadron trumpeter who rode ahead —

“Sound, Furco!”

The cavalryman blew a ringing call. An echoing clang of metal replied. Meriaduc looked back. The bronze plates had vanished. Where they had been, emptiness yawned from side to side of the roadway. At a second signal the bronze leaves rose on shrieking hinges, till their edges met once more.

“The ramp is hollow there,” Drusus explained. “It is a hundred feet from the roadway to the sand, and twenty more to the granite rock beneath on which the foundation rests. Those plates are supported by massive beams of well-seasoned oak, thrust out or withdrawn at will by counterweights, through greased channels in the concrete. Mark how the tops of the side walls rise to a polished knife-edge, so that none may mount thereby.”

“I could cross that hole on a long plank,” criticized Niall of the Sword.

“But you would need more than one plank to get troops across, and while you were laying your bridge, the engines on the walls would crush you with stones as they but now crushed the Saxons.”

Niall looked up at the huge castle crowning the height. Steel flashed above the T-shaped Roman battlements as sentries paced to and fro; long arms of metal-bound wood rose from the platform like the threatening limbs of giants. Niall saw that the range was too long for arrows, and that the entire ramp was commanded by the battery above. He

was silent.

Before them the armored horsemen rode on, their muscular bodies clothed in close-fitting scale mail from head to foot, like polished silver statues. Their helmets of tempered plate, fitted with visor and cheekplates in front, sloped down behind to a ridged curtain of steel, protecting the neck to the very hollows of the shoulders. As much as the giant wall itself, they expressed to the Welshmen the might and confident strength of Legionis Asa, the last corner of what was once the world-encircling Roman Empire.

Into Meriaduc's memory flitted fragments of old tales recited to him and Gwenlian when they were children by their nurse, a hill woman from the wild Welsh mountains, bits of ancient folklore repeated by rough soldiers around the fires: how the Romans of Legionis Asa were more than mortal, men with the strength of giants and the weird knowledge of magic art, whereby they built sky-sweeping walls and glistening fairy cities of jeweled towers and shimmering palaces.

They passed a second pair of hinged plates and came to a turn in the ramp. Above this turn the road wound along the face of the cliff in a triple turn, roughly parallel with the castle wall, and now the ramp itself was walled and battlemented. When they had made the turn, a clang of bronze caused the newcomers to look back. An enormous gate had closed behind them.

"The officers who could lead an army to victory past your castle," said Niall, moved to pay tribute to the defenses, "have never been born."

The last turn of the ramp brought them to the castle gates, flanked by tall, round towers connected by a galleried and loop-holed gate house. At Drusus' nod, the sentry on the nearer tower called to the keepers of the gate below, and the two bronze leaves swung slowly inward.

In the broad street between the long rows of barracks on the left and the officers' quarters on the right, a half company of infantry were doing sword exercises. Sturdy, broad-shouldered men, they were clad in leathern doublets reenforced with straps of steel across breast and back, steel caps and knee breeches steel-scaled halfway down to the thigh. They bore large, rectangular shields with convex faces, and were fencing with blunted broadswords, double the weight of those used in battle.

Glancing from the mighty walls and the stalwart soldiers to the straight streets and ordered bustle of a Roman camp, Meriaduc smiled sadly.

"I came with a plea for help from Britons to Britons," he sighed, "and I find only Romans. Romans of British blood, speaking Latin, wearing Roman dress, living in Roman fortresses, forgetful of all that once was Celtic Britain!"

"We are both Britain and Roman here," Drusus answered. "I think you will not find us forgetful of our mother Britain."

He dismissed his troopers, bade a centurion see to the lodging of the Ravens and conducted Niall and the "princess" to the officers' mess.

"I can offer you only the simple fare of a soldier," he apologized, "but even pulse, goat's meat and sour wine may

serve after a rough journey.”
The princess smiled graciously.
“Often we of the North think ourselves fortunate to get so much,” he said, “and I am sure that an officer and a noble who lives so simply must still feel the British blood course more swiftly than the Roman in his veins.”
A group of centurions rose as they entered, and, presented to the

Princess of North Wales, went through the formal stateliness of the Roman salutation. Drusus removed his heavy, scarlet-plumed helmet. Niall started and stared at him.
“By all the Saints!” he blurted out. “Roman you may be in speech, dress and thought, but I’ll swear your heart is British. No man with hair that red was ever anything but a Celt!”

CHAPTER II THE CITY OF THE LEGION

“It is not honorable for a British princess to enter a strange city without her escort,” Niall protested; but Drusus was not to be moved.

“The Roman law forbids troops — even our own — to be brought within the city limits,” he explained. “Only officers on leave and foreign emissaries are excepted. You are both welcome, but your men will find good quarters in Castellum Maris. It must be so. I am sorry.”

“It is a wise law,” said Meriaduc, smiling at the prefect. “You are a strong escort of yourself, and I could not see your land with a better guide. Ah, and I am indeed to see Bellerium, the fairy city of the West! I have heard that your capital is built of gold and precious stones, and inhabited by a happy folk, stronger and wiser than other men.”

Drusus laughed indulgently.

“Such strength and wisdom as we have come from Rome, who taught us the lesson of unity and the arts of peace and war. As for happiness, all are happy or unhappy as God wills. I doubt not that even those of our race now enslaved by the Saxons feel their hours of pleasure, when oppression rests less heavily upon them.”

Meriaduc turned his wide blue eyes full on the prefect. They seemed to darken with the sudden gravity that settled in them.

“There can be no pleasure, no happiness,” he insisted, but with the gentleness of the girl he impersonated, “where there is not liberty. You say Rome gave you unity, and by unity

you have preserved yourselves from the darkness that has fallen over the rest of Britain. It is unity that I come to urge upon you — union with us who still hold out against the heathen, that Britain may be free, and all its people know the blessings of Roman enlightenment.”

Drusus felt himself carried away by the princess’ enthusiasm. Often he, too, had dreamed such dreams of a free, united island, led by Legionis Asa to liberty and civilization. A new, fresh eagerness flooded his mind. A beautiful woman pleads powerfully, as Owain knew, whether her lips speak or her eyes.

“You give me new hope,” Drusus replied. “I would give much if you could appear in person before our Senate, but there Niall must speak for you. Custom forbids women to take part in our councils.”

Meriaduc modestly veiled his eyes. So the Senate was not to see him in his sister’s role! But he would doubtless meet them — some of them — individually. He would surely have his opportunities.

He raised his shining eyes with every appearance of guilelessness, and entreated:

“But you also will speak for me?”

“I ask nothing more than the chance to serve you,” Drusus answered. “Indeed, I have long wished for a closer friendship between your people and mine.”

Niall of the Sword, picking his teeth with a dagger, watched the two with open satisfaction. He saw and

understood the prefect's ready sympathy, his interest in the pretended Gwenlian's beauty, touched to radiance as it was by the fire of patriotism. He saw the quick response of eye to eye, of smile to smile, of serious mood to serious mood; the spontaneous friendship of two young, wholesome souls.

Niall's own respect for Drusus was ungrudging; he judged men with a soldier's eye. He fell into pleasant musing, the expectation of an errand well performed, a successful embassy, aided by the influence of the powerful Drusus. The young prince was wise for his years. But how the old soldier wished it were Gwenlian herself who sat there.

"My month's leave began last night," the prefect was saying. "I should have gone to the city to-day even if you had not come. My legate will take over the castle."

A trooper entered to report that the horses were ready. Outside stood a comfortable carriage, upholstered and cushioned, into which the prefect assisted Meriaduc, while a soldier, who took the seat beside him, examined the lash of his long whip.

Drusus' powerful roan charger stood by, snapping at its groom and stealing sly kicks at a second saddled horse awaiting Niall. But Meriaduc, turning a dazzling smile upon the prefect, urged him to share the carriage.

"It is not well for a guest to part company with a pleasant host."

Niall elected to ride in the carriage too. Drusus took the reins.

Two swift Irish horses drew them briskly down the wide, straight via principalis which halved the space

enclosed by the castle walls and through the rear gate, where the guard turned out in the prefect's honor. Crossing the drawbridge over the wide, dry moat, the carriage sped across the parade ground and past the fields where details of prisoners were bringing in forage, while soldiers off duty tended their own vegetable gardens.

Straight as a lance to the northwest ran the road they traveled: a noble road, built up from bedrock like a city wall, smooth-paved with massive hexagonal blocks of granite. Roman tombs and rude stone sepulchres of earlier races, stood by the roadside.

"They are smelting tin ahead there," said Niall presently. "I see the furnace smoke."

"Stannatio, the Tinnners' Town," replied Drusus. "We shall be there soon. Men have smelted tin there since before Pytheas of Marseilles voyaged to this land in the days of Alexander the Great." They came to the compact little town, by the shore of a lovely lake. Its narrow, twisting lanes were centuries older than the Roman roads that cut straight through to the ancient market place. There the military road from Castellum Maris joined another leading to a lesser fortress on the northern shore to form the main highway to Bellerium.

Just then, however, the market place and all three highways that led from it were blocked by what looked and sounded like a riotous mob. Hundreds of half-naked, shock-haired men, brandishing uncouth clubs, were being roused to frenzy by the words of one of their number, who was fervidly exhorting them from the steps of the

wine shop. As the carriage approached, a yell burst forth that made the horses rear in fright. But at sight of Drusus, skilfully controlling the terrified team, the crowd drew back and made way, cheering with delight as he avoided a charcoal-burner's donkey and swung on two wheels into the Bellerium road.

"Only an open-air meeting of the miners' court," Drusus informed them, as soon as he could make himself heard above the uproar as they left the town behind. "It is their ancient privilege to try all cases arising among themselves, save only those that involve the death penalty. That sounded to me like a case of ore stealing."

"It sounded to me like war and rebellion!" declared Niall. "But never have I seen a prettier bit of driving. Will you let me try the reins now? Years ago it is since I have driven such horses, and many miles across the water. The best horses and the best men come from Ireland!"

Drusus smiled at the Raven's zeal and surrendered the reins to him.

"Niall is an Irishman," Meriaduc explained. "You know, perhaps, the Ravens are all Irish?"

"No," Drusus answered. "Tell me something about them, Princess."

"My father learned the art of war under King Arthur, forty years ago," began Meriaduc, nothing loath. "Britain was stripped of her best fighting men after the Roman legions went away. Then came the Saxon hordes, flooding out the country, already bereft of its youth. To meet them, King Arthur had to make one man do the work of ten.

"He trained his few warriors as heavy cavalry, who charged and burst the heathen shield walls by sheer weight of horse and metal. But, as you know, his last great battle swept away his bravest squadrons and broke our strength beyond recovery.

"My father fled with a handful of faithful vassals to the hills. Deeper and deeper drove the Saxon raids, close to the borders of North Wales. In our mountains they were helpless against us, but we could not recover an inch of the lowlands. Terrible is that stubborn, compact Saxon infantry! Our Welshmen could neither crush nor face them; nor could we learn to fight on horseback.

"So Owain, my father, formed cavalry from the Irish immigrants who had come into our country, and eagerly they flocked to his banner, for they knew he would show them good fighting. They are hard riders, and bigger of bone than our men. Seven hundred of them are in his service; and these, from their black mail and black mantles, men call the Ravens.

"So far, no Saxon square has ever stood against them. But now the barbarians, having settled the quarrels among themselves which saved us for forty years, are pouring across the borders in such numbers that soon even the Ravens will be unable to hold them. That is why my father sent me here for help, remembering that in his youth the Roman cities of this island rendered Arthur more help than our own wild Britons."

"What a land to loot!" Niall broke in, marveling at the countryside through which they rode.

The road ran between rich lowlands on the south and fertile, gently rolling uplands to the north. Between the plain and the hills flowed a river, halving the peninsula of Legionis from its source in the lake to its outlet in the distant Atlantic. A clean-ruled line, the road ran in the river valley all the way.

Every foot of the land seemed to be under cultivation. A strange sight for Britain, the glossy-leaved olive groves; for even Cornish Damnonia had not so soft a climate as its sea-girt extension of Legionis. Every little farm nestled about its own trim farm-house; here and there a larger estate surrounded a luxurious villa of white granite. Thatched huts were rare. It was a country neither of slaves nor of peasants, but of comfortable small freeholders.

Drusus pointed to the farther hills, rolling up vineyard-clad to the north, with occasional outcroppings of granite such as are seen in Cornwall, but white and finer grained.

"Yonder are the quarries and the mines," he said. "Our people trade tin and fish to the Irish for horses."

"I knew it!" Niall exulted. "What other breed could bear the weight of your troopers, with their armor and all?"

"Look!" Drusus exclaimed. "There lies Bellerium!,,

Far to the west, a huge hill loomed against the declining light. Beneath it, a mass of white buildings gradually took form and seemed to spread out on either hand as the carriage rolled on.

"Bellerium is your chief village?" the Irish tribesman asked.

Drusus kept a straight face, but his eye sparkled.

"Bellerium is our city! The capital and single city of Legionis Asa — the largest city left to Rome west of the Hellespont!"

His face grew sad, his heart suddenly heavy with the thought of the great empire that had been, and which now was divided among German barbarians.

The red glow of the setting sun kindled into fire the nearing domes and pinnacles of the gleaming city. Meriaduc gazed with awed rapture and quickening pulse at its splendor of which he had heard so many fanciful tales. In the rosy light, it seemed indeed an elfin capital, its grandeur softened into dainty opalescence in the unreality of evening.

The sky was still faintly pink as they rode in through the city gate, a single magnificent arch, unwallied, spiritedly carved with battle scenes, and surmounted by a figure of Victory in a four-horse chariot. The prefect's voice, subdued, yet exalted, seemed to chant in his guests' ears as he told of its significance.

"A monument to the men of Britain who went forth to defend Rome," he explained. "When the Saxons first seized the fair cities of the southeast, the hard-pressed provincials sent a message to Rome. 'Help us,' they wrote to the consul, 'the Saxons overwhelm us.'"

"But the emperor himself sent back word that even Rome, the sacred city, was threatened by the barbarians, into whose hands the great province of Gaul was already falling. So the men of Britain — your forefathers and mine, Princess — took counsel, gathered together a full legion of their

bravest and best, and sent them overseas to Gaul, with this message: 'Rome can not help us; so we, who are dying, give our last blood to save Rome.'

"That legion never returned: its bones whiten the plains of Gaul. That arch preserves their memory." They passed between splendid columned buildings of white granite, with sculptured capitals and pediments alive with boldly executed figures of athletes contending, soldiers fighting, priests offering sacrifice.

Beyond lay a public square, fully four hundred feet in depth and half again as long. Meriaduc's eyes grew big with wonder at the majestic colonnades and graceful porticoes on three sides of the square; the rows of stately shops hung with awnings of richly embroidered silk, which merchants' assistants were even now taking down; the throngs of people: bearded men in white tunics, graceful, dark-eyed women in many-colored silks and fine linen, with high-piled hair arranged in fantastic coils and towers. Here and there were men in light armor, girt with short swords and carrying heavy staves — the city police.

In the cool of the summer evening, the citizens strolled under the porticoes of the tall buildings, greeting friends, buying cool drinks of corner venders, laughing easily, taking the air in dignified yet comfortable enjoyment. A group of merry urchins splashed about the fountain in the center of the square. It caused Meriaduc to wonder: These folks were happy, unlike his own struggling people.

"The new forum," Drusus commented. They were driving more slowly now.

"It was built in the reign of Constantine, the first Christian emperor. The old city lies to the west, beyond the Ictis causeway. It was an ancient town even before the Fifth Legion, the Fortuna Triumphans, was cut off in the Damnonian fogs and scaled the cliffs where Castellum Maris stands to-day. They seized and fortified this port, where Greek and Phoenician galleys once came for tin.

"The natives soon made peace with the Romans and accepted alliance with the Empire. That legion never went back. From those sturdy Romans, mingling with the native Celtic stock, we of Legionis Asa are descended. The name of our land, in the soldiers' dialect, means 'Altar of the Legion', for on the site of their first camp in this land, the soldiers built an altar to the allied gods of Rome and Britain.

"When Constantine made Rome turn to Christ, missionaries made their way hither by sea. Traders and artisans came from Rome; sculptors from Gaul, from Italy, from Greece. Larger ships were built, trade flourished, the city became rich and beautiful. The old site was abandoned to the poorer folk — fishermen for the most part — and a new city was built about this forum. See yonder basilica!"

He indicated a long, low-domed edifice, filling the entire southern side of the forum.

"That is the Church of St. Helena. Its frescoes are the wonder of Britain. It was built by refugees from Kent, fled hither from the Saxons, in gratitude for their deliverance."

The carriage had stopped while Drusus talked. A voice hailed him from the basilica porch:

“Oh, Drusus! Is the gallant soldier free from cares of war? What news from the frontier?”

A tall, slender man of about Drusus' own years advanced toward the carriage with mincing step. They two alone, of all the men about the forum, wore no beards; but there was no other resemblance between them. The intruder was gorgeously clothed in a long-sleeved tunic of yellow silk and slashed overmantle of Tyrian purple; long, perfumed curls fell to his shoulders. His large, lustrous dark eyes were gentle and mournful, like a woman's; his chin was long and pointed.

As he spoke he gestured languidly with delicate, well-kept hands, and a slow smile curled on his full lips. A long, thin dagger hung at his waist from a golden girdle; his soft Cordovan shoes were red, with a rich design in gold thread.

Drusus greeted him with scarcely veiled reluctance.

“Hail, Nicator! Little news from the frontier, and I suppose you can tell me less of the city. I shall see you in the morning.”

“Wait!” called the other as the horses began to move. “I saw the lovely Tullia to-day. Her eyes were red with weeping for you. She will rejoice at your return.”

As he spoke, the dainty Nicator surveyed Meriaduc with eyes grown bold. Meriaduc endured the gaze a little scornfully, but Niall, being almost without a sense of humor, scowled savagely at the dandy.

“I must go on now, Nicator, but I promise to see you to-morrow,” Drusus insisted. “I have business for the

Senate, and I look for your support.”
“Call on Ventidius first, then,” Nicator replied shamelessly. “I dare not stir without him, you know. Farewell, if you must be off.”

The carriage rolled away, Nicator watching it curiously till it disappeared down a side street past the basilica. At the same time Meriaduc was asking merrily:

“Was that a man or a woman?”

“A little of each,” Drusus answered with a short laugh. “Soft as a woman, bold as a man, cunning as a serpent, he is the son of an old Roman British family. It is said — I think truly — that there is a dash of Syrian Greek about him. He plays the ancient Roman dandy, apes dead fashions, and pretends to live in a world that has perished.

“Yet he is a shrewd politician, the jackal of Ventidius, who owns the government of Legionis Asa. Between them, there is little that slips through their fingers. It will be unpleasant work winning their support for your mission, Lady Gwenlian, but it must be done, for they control over half the votes

in the Senate. Nicator, thanks to his master Ventidius, is Prefect of Police.”

“If I had only known,” Meriaduc murmured with a half-concealed twinkle.

The street they followed crept up a steep hill. On its crest a puff of clean salt air stung their cheeks. Here the close-built houses of the lower city gave way to walled gardens and luxurious dwellings. Lamps gleamed from slender-columned portals to right and left, and others twinkled, level above level, beyond them on the slope

of St. Mary's Mount.

"Here we stop," Drusus directed with a familiar, affectionate gaze toward a richly carved doorway, flush with the street, and lighted with two bronze lamps.

Springing from the carriage, Drusus offered his hand to Meriaduc, and Niall leaped after. The soldier who had ridden with them took the reins and guided the horses through an arched gate leading to the stables.

At the prefect's knock, the bronze door swung inward, revealing a delightedly grinning slave against the background of a brilliantly lighted hall, panelled with dark wood. Lamps of bronze and silver hung from the carved ceiling, and shone on painted insets in the walls.

The slave preceded them down the hall. He passed through a curtained doorway, spoke a few words in Latin. Light footsteps ran across the floor behind the curtains, a slender hand thrust them aside, and a tall girl of rich, imperious beauty came regally forth. Her face, alight with welcome, clouded just perceptibly at sight of the strangers; but her greeting, as Drusus introduced the Welsh princess, was

courteous and cordial.

"It is good to see you again, Tullia," Drusus said, smiling. "Where is Aunt Sophonisba?"

"Where should she be but at some silly shrine or other?" Tullia Marciana retorted. "Just now it is Isis-worship. Her soul would be in sore peril if she were not a good Christian at heart. She will return soon. Centurion, you are welcome."

This last to Niall, giving him the nearest possible Latin title to his own. Understanding no word, he replied as well as he could in Welsh flavored with a rich Irish brogue.

They passed into a large, square room with lofty, frescoed ceiling. The mosaic floor shone in the lamplight like a mass of clustered jewels; the embroidered hangings gave an effect of depth and softness, rich beyond compare.

"I will leave you to my cousin, Princess," Drusus said, and, to his kinswoman in Latin:

"Tullia, if you love me, speak to her in British. She knows no word of our tongue. Come, Centurion!" Mouth agape, the Irishman followed.

CHAPTER III THE MADNESS OF NIALL

The moon rose, round and tremulous, out of the ocean. In its mellow light the water stretched out heaving, as it emerged from its cloak of darkness. Its light touched the garden with sudden life; a marble bust against a background of some satinleaved shrubs gleamed in pale, clear outlines under its radiance. Far down, where the walls of a white building shone ghostly among the pines, a nightingale burst into tumultuous song. A faint sea breeze stirred the broom, wafting fragrance into the halfenclosed court.

Forgetful of all but the beauty of the night, Meriaduc gave a sigh of happiness. A slim figure in a white robe — the gift of Tullia — he rested his hands, having lightly marveled that they should look so small and white in the moonlight, on the marble rail of the garden seat.

Had he really remembered who he was, he might have rested a soft cheek against a rounded arm, or something like that, instead of sitting there boyishly erect, his eyes shining with a light near to rapture as he listened to the bird whose notes seemed to voice the beauty all around him.

The boy was thinking that if he had not been born to be a king, he would have chosen to be a minstrel, and do his part toward making his people great by singing to them of great things.

Drusus stood not far off, watching his guest. With the doffing of his armor for the woolen tunic, hose, and mantle of home and comfort, he had laid aside also the repressed dignity that the feel

of steel and brass compels. He was home — in the house of his fathers, in the garden where he had walked with his mother when a little boy, while she planned the fair pleasure-ground she would leave to her son. That bust, the fine, stern features of which now stood out sharp against the tall shrubs, was his father's image, the memorial of a gallant officer.

But of the past Drusus had little thought. His eyes, seemingly absorbed in contemplation of his guest, were really looking beyond her, trying to read the future of her people. Feeling the prefect's gaze at last, the young prince remembered his woman's role.

"I should think" — his voice was music—"that you could not bear to leave so fair a spot even for an hour. Truly you are blessed in your land. Can Paradise itself be lovelier?"

Down below, far past the terraces with their unseen flowers, the sea whispered to the cliffs. Drusus roused himself to reply:

"Though Paradise be lovelier, I am content here." "Heresy!" It was the light laugh of Tullia, from the arbor at his right. "I have heard an ancient tale, Drusus, that there is a shrine on the isle of Cyprus, where on summer nights the pagan goddess Venus returns to vex the souls of men.

"They say that she bewitches the pious monks so that they forget their prayers and think not of the saints. Can it be that Venus has risen from our British foam to bewitch your Christian soul?"

There was more than a tinge of malice

in the question. She had been watching him from the arbor.

The elf of mischief, never far from the surface of Meriaduc's soul, chuckled ever so softly. Was Tullia jealous of him?

"Nonsense!" Aunt Sophonisba scolded from among the roses. "This is the night of Isis. Do you not see the full, round moon, and smell the flowers? On such evenings she, the Goddess of the Heavens, exerts her full power. The priest says —"

Tullia laughed again, a silvery, scornful peal.

"It is the old heathen in our Roman blood, Mother. Try as we will, we can not forget the kind old gods, the playful nymphs, the trumpet call of Pan from the thickets. These summer nights set the old gods to peeking out again around each tree, peering through every bush."

"Hush!" The mother, scandalized, forgot her affected zeal for strange cults in the shock of her daughter's pagan outburst. "You say sinful things, Tullia."

Drusus turned his face toward the arbor.

"I was dreaming. I had forgotten you were here. I—"

"Come, Mother! And you too, Princess! Let us leave him to his dreams, since they make him forget us."

Tullia's radiant beauty glowed in the moonlight as she stepped from the arbor.

Meriaduc half rose, but settled down again. "It is so lovely here," he said.

Tullia turned on her heel and whisked into the house. After a moment's hesitation, Aunt Sophonisba followed her daughter.

"I am cold," she stopped to say, and shivered a little. "The sea air will bring back the pain in my shoulders."

Drusus hastened to offer her his mantle, but she refused, and left the garden. The prefect walked j over to Meriaduc.

"The nights are cool here," he said. "Since my aunt rejects my mantle, will you not take it, Princess? The fogs of Castellum Maris have so hardened me that I do not need it."

Meriaduc inclined his head in assent. Drusus laid the woolen cloak about the bare shoulders, thinking they were rather sturdier than Tullia's, as became a maiden of the North. None knew better than Meriaduc that this was no lover's gallantry, though, he suspected, it might look like that to Tullia, who appeared for a moment at a window, and then turned quickly away.

Meriaduc, in the midst of his mischief, was feeling that sense of security and fraternal content the presence of Drusus inspired in him. The young prince did not want a love affair on his hands, messing up his more serious business.

A little delicate, wary coquetting of those senators— well and good; even a little pretended soft partiality for Drusus when Tullia was near to be vexed by it — that would keep him from missing Gwenlian too much and make things more homelike.

But there was to be no really jolly fun-making, he told himself, such as he could have in his Welsh hills. As for the prefect, he was probably too much courted by the ladies, anyway, to be easily susceptible.

"You have been very kind to me,"

Meriaduc said gratefully in his most maidenly manner. "You saved me from the Saxons; your aunt gave me shelter and hospitality; Tullia Marciana replaced my travel-worn garments with fine raiment of her own. I feel as if I had laid aside all the old rough life of our hills, the haste of flight, the toil and discomfort of the camp, the bleak, dark, wooden halls of my people, to enter a new existence of light and beauty."

"God grant it may be so!" Drusus breathed fervently.

"Ah, but it can not be. If your Senate is so gracious as to grant my father's plea, I shall dwell somewhere in this city till the wars are over, and then return to my own people. I wonder where I shall lodge while I am here? I can not burden you much longer with my presence."

"The Senate will doubtless grant you a residence," Drusus said. "You will be given a town house and a villa, with servants and lands, for as long as you remain in Bellerium. But if you wish to make us happy, you will stay with us instead. It is no burden, but an honor."

He spoke in all sincerity, knowing indeed that Sophonisba would feel the honor as keenly as he. His aunt was no more proud of her stately hospitality than she would be of the opportunity to entertain a foreign princess. Even the prestige of the Marcianus blood would be enhanced by the visit of such a guest. Sophonisba's pride in her position was as great as the real kindness of her heart.

"I have no more fears for my mission," warmly answered Meriaduc, with

moist eyes and a soft, assured little laugh. "A people so generous to the stranger will not refuse to help their kinsfolk of the hills. It is long since I have been so happy as your kindness has made me."

"I hope you are right, but I should be a poor friend if I did not warn you that the affair may turn out badly. Ventidius must be won over before the Senate will promise anything. But I will see Ventidius to-morrow."

"Ah, to-morrow!" A girlish sigh, yet a voice that rang with true feeling. "So much — the happiness, the very lives — of so many — depend upon it." "To-morrow!" Drusus echoed, speaking louder than Meriaduc. His voice carried to the house, and was met by a ripple of Tullia's laughter.

A few moments later her voice, rich, vibrantly sweet, sang in malicious audacity a snatch from Horace:

*"Ask not what fate may hide
behind to-morrow,
What chance of bliss, what
unknown care or sorrow.
Seize the glad hour! Clear gain
each joy you borrow!
To-day is yours. Despise not love
and laughter,
But kiss her, lad! A fig for the
hereafter!"*

She sent a clear-cut, low-pitched laugh trilling into the garden after the song. Drusus stirred uneasily. Only the recollection that his guest knew no Latin saved him from the cruelest embarrassment. What did Tullia mean by it?

Meriaduc, sensing the uneasiness, and fearing that his host might want to retire to more serious pastime than talking to a pretty girl in a moonlit

garden, rose gracefully from the marble seat, saying:

"It is late. Let us go in."

Drusus' cloak he did not surrender till he stood in the doorway with Tullia's eyes upon him; then, with a calculating prettiness of manner, he permitted Drusus to remove it.

"Surely, Drusus, you will not interfere further in this absurd affair!"

The Welsh princess and Tullia had left the breakfast table. Aunt Sophonisba looked at her nephew with an air of imperial arrogance that ill became her plump features.

"Why should we, the descendants of the Caesars," she continued, "disturb ourselves for the sake of skin-clad savages? We should only destroy our comfort, weaken our strength and fall an easy prey to the Saxons."

Drusus gazed at her in astonishment.

"But last night," he protested, "you were eager to have me use my influence in Owain's favor."

A look of calm superiority stared him down. Sophonisba had had a bedtime talk with Tullia.

"Last night," she retorted crushingly, "I knew less than I know now. It does not become you, Drusus."

He forced a patient smile. It was little use, he knew, to argue with Aunt Sophonisba.

"The Princess Gwenlian is scarcely a skin-clad savage," he answered kindly.

"But her eyes!" exclaimed his aunt.

"And her manners! The girl is a little barbarian, affectedly trying to live up to her new surroundings. And I do not like the way she looks at you, Drusus. She is playing with you, twisting you about her finger, for the sake of your influence with the Senate. And you —

why, this very morning, the little Welsh flirt kept you so engrossed that Tullia spoke to you thrice without receiving an answer. You will break the child's heart."

So that was it? Square chin raised, Drusus met his aunt's eyes almost angrily.

"This is folly!" he exclaimed. "Tullia has no eyes for me; to her I am a mere soldier. She prefers poets, like Ausonius Venter. Why keep bringing up that old agreement between my father and yourself, when Tullia was in her cradle? She has no intention of marrying me, nor I of marrying her. My cousin and I are cousins and old playfellows — no more."

Sophonisba's eyes threatened a deluge. Only the presence of Niall, lingering over the wine basin, restrained her. The Irishman was blissfully ignorant of the altercation going on in Latin. Recognizing the storm signals, Drusus rose.

"I go now to see Ventidius," he announced.

Sophonisba's patrician nostrils twitched scornfully.

"Ventidius? Since when has a Marcianus dealt with such scum as he? Why must my nephew soil his clean hands with low politics?"

"I shall soil no one's hands, dear Aunt. You may trust me."

"I hope so," she sighed. "But I hardly know you now, Drusus. Your life in camp has coarsened you so. You no longer recline at your meals, like a Christian, but sit bolt upright like any barbarian Celt." A delicate return to scorn on the last words.

"I have come home in time to have my manners mended," he laughed. In

British he said to Niall: "We must be off, Centurion!"

In deference to the Senate Drusus wore light armor and his scarlet robe of office. Niall sighed with content as he mounted the mettlesome Irish mare the prefect had ordered for him.

"Call yourself Roman," he muttered. "I know better! Red hair, a good arm in a fight and a dainty taste in horseflesh mean just one thing!" The Irishman had no eyes for the well-built streets of long, two-storied villas, typical Roman-British dwellings of the wealthier folk.

Each had but a narrow frontage on the street and ran far back into its own grounds. Roses and brilliantly flowering vines climbed the stone lower story, to twine about the half pillars supporting the projecting wooden second story and fling their blossoms upward to the tiles.

Niall of the Sword was on horseback, riding with a congenial companion on an important errand, and he heeded nothing else. One building, however, caught his eye.

"A church!" he exclaimed. "I have not said a prayer for a fortnight!"

He had seen a tiny basilica, its roof surmounted by a cross.

Drusus restrained him with difficulty.

"Business first!" he urged. "We have much to do this morning."

The house of Ventidius, a huge, over-ornamented building in debased Gallo-Roman style, impressed the Raven more than any he had seen.

"Who lives there?" he asked.

Being told —

"Ventidius?" he repeated. "Is he the king?"

Drusus laughed.

"No," he replied, "but he might as well be. He is a politician, if you know the word. He has half Bellerium in his pouch. His father made his money in the slave trade, before that was made unprofitable by the immigration of free refugees from the districts overrun by the Saxons. Now we have but little slavery, outside the larger households.

"Every free man of good physique serves his time in the army, and all soldiers who have seen active service are entitled to land. That was my father's doing: he modeled his plan on the Roman system of colonizing farm lands with retired veterans. Ventidius hated him for it, till the rascal found a way to win the soldiers' votes. Now he interests himself in getting huge appropriations for pensions. In addition, he owns more than half of Bellerium's shipping."

Ventidius was not at home. The slave suggested that he might have gone to the baths, and thither Drusus led his companion.

The splendid system of public baths introduced by the Romans still flourished in Legionis Asa. On the west side of the forum a large, porticoed, marble palace housed this chief resort of Bellerian men. Passing through a well-lighted atrium, lavishly frescoed and adorned with statues of dead notables, the two entered the dressing room, where groups of men were already standing, naked and unembarrassed, talking together amicably.

All greeted Drusus effusively, and when Niall was presented as a captain of the famous Ravens, they accorded him much honor. The Irishman,

astonished at such indifference to privacy, could scarcely conceal his confusion.

"Has Ventidius come?" Drusus asked.

"In the sweating room. But what has the lordly Drusus to do with Ventidius?"

"I am thinking of applying for a pension," the prefect answered; and the jest was greeted with much laughter.

Drusus led Niall through one long chamber after another: the anointing room, the cold baths, the well-warmed tepidarium where the bathers basked after coming from the hot bath, and into the hot room itself.

This last was well patronized in the morning, and a dozen heads poked up from steaming tubs to hail the newcomers. One, scraping a sleek skin with a metal strigil, chuckled at the mention of Ventidius.

"He is steaming his paunch in yonder," the bather informed him. "Nicator is with him. They mean mischief this morning, for their heads were close together when they came in."

The sweating room was a vaulted chamber above great furnaces, heated by the steam from pipes opening through the walls, and ventilated by an opening in the roof. Flat-topped benches lined the walls and ran in rows along the floor; but only two, in a far corner, were occupied. Here, side by side in all the naked glory of contrasted fat and leanness, lay Ventidius and his henchman.

"Drusus! And clothed!" Nicator exclaimed, raising himself on one elbow.

The light from a large window of milky, opaque glass fell on his slender,

sinewy body.

"Man, you will perish in this steam! What are you doing in the baths in that condition?"

"I came to see you and Ventidius," the prefect explained.

Nicator laughed.

"I thought you were trying to get rid of me last night, but I am glad to see you meant what you said."

Ventidius, a man once powerful, but now flabby with the fat of middle age, raised an eagle-beaked, many-chinned head, looked, grunted and sank back again.

"I can understand your wanting to see me," Nicator went on, "for I am an interesting person; but Ventidius!"

The rascal raised his hands in mock surprise.

"Business?" Ventidius grunted.

"Business."

And Drusus solemnly presented Niall, officer of Ravens and envoy extraordinary of Owain ap Urien, King of North Wales.

Nicator eyed the Irishman with frank interest, greeted him warmly and winked at Drusus to convey his amusement at Niall's uncouthness.

Yet he was genuinely interested. The fame of the Ravens, those mysterious fighting men who had shattered the stoutest Saxon bands, and rolled the barbarian terror back from their borders when all the south and east had fallen, was a common subject for wonder even in Legionis Asa. Ventidius merely reached out a flabby palm and grunted again.

Speaking in British, Drusus outlined the reason for the embassy, and left the rest to Niall, who explained with native eloquence the danger that

threatened his people. North Wales would have all it could do to beat back the next onrush of the invaders; the splendid city of Aquae Sulis, just over the border, had twice seen mounted bands of Saxon raiders from her towers. The security of Wales and of Cornish Damnonia meant the security of Legionis Asa itself. All the scattered remnants of free Britain must stand or fall together.

“Aquae Sulis threatened!” Nicator exclaimed in real concern. “Why Aquae Sulis is as Roman as Bellerium! Ventidius, we must do something about this.”

Ventidius grunted.

Drusus realized that he must win over Ventidius if he expected to win Nicator’s support. Well-wishing as the dandy might be, he would not dare break faith with the man who held his career in the hollow of his hand. The prefect addressed himself to the politician:

“This is a reasonable request King Owain makes of us, Ventidius. Nicator is right: We can not let our sister-commonwealth of Aquae Sulis perish. There is only one way to save her: Send troops to Owain and the townsmen. Moreover, our own safety is at stake.”

He narrated briefly the appearance of the two Saxon galleys off Castellum Maris.

“Both there and at this port we are well fortified,” he concluded, “and Damnonia stands between us and the heathen hosts. But we have no war fleet of our own. We must unite with the Welsh to crush the Saxons now, before they send their countless galleys to blockade Bellerium.”

“What if they send those galleys while our fighting men are saving the Welsh?” Ventidius objected.

“The heathen can spare few ships till the Welsh are crushed. If we can throw them back from the Welsh border, we can send our united armies east, drive them out of Britain and keep them forever from threatening us here.”

Ventidius sat up, kneading his perspiring paunch. Shooting a keen glance at Drusus, he demanded: “How much will the Welsh pay?”

Disgusted, Drusus retorted angrily:

“You had best ask their envoy.”

Ventidius, quite unashamed, turned to Niall, and asked in Welsh:

“How much will your king give us for our help? What will my commission be?”

Every hair in the Irishman’s beard bristled with indignation. Even Nicator averted his eyes in shame.

“My king,” Niall answered thickly, “holds honor above price. You, who call yourselves Romans and deem us barbarians, ask a price for that which the British blood in your veins should compel you to do unasked!”

“I do nothing without a price,” Ventidius retorted. “Pay me, and I will see what I can do; refuse, and you will not make enough votes in the Senate to get a single horseman.”

Drusus turned away, sick at heart.

“I will lay the matter before the Senate this afternoon,” he declared. “I know your influence, Ventidius, but I will not believe there is so little honesty in the Senate of my country as to reject a plea that involves our safety and our honor. Farewell!”

He turned away, but Ventidius called

after him: "Wait! Nicator tells me the Welsh princess is beautiful. I will talk terms with her." Turning to Niall, he said in British:

"I have refused my help, do you understand? Yet, if you meet my terms, I will consider the matter. I know you hillmen have little money. I am a rich man, rich enough to buy all Wales and give your starveling king all the luxuries that should go with a crown. I rule Bellerium; but these proud semi-Romans look down on me because I am not noble. If Owain will give me his daughter's hand, I will persuade the Senate to send him an army."

Niall's eyes were terrible.

"Give — you —" he gasped. "You!"

With a howl of rage, he seized Ventidius in his mighty arms, lifted his naked, slippery bulk on high and flung him through the window. As he crashed to the pavement, his tender flesh gashed by broken glass and torn on the stones beneath, Ventidius raised a wail of anguish.

Nicator languidly slipped to his feet.

"Now the eggs are broken!" he exclaimed reproachfully. "Drusus, you should keep your barbarian in hand —"

The frenzied Raven bore down upon him, swept him up even as he spoke and hurled him after his master. Then, his eyes aflame, Niall burst from the room, Drusus at his heels.