

WHEN THE DEVIL RULED

By Marion Polk Angellotti

THERE is a plenitude of strange tales still related in Normandy by those not yet become sufficiently wise to turn their backs on the legends of the past. For example, they will tell you—if you care to listen—about what chanced in the reign of old Duke Richard and his wife, Judith of the Bretons.

These two, it appears, had an only son, called Richard for his father; and when the boy sickened, grew thin and pasty-white, and trembled on death's threshold uncertain whether to retreat or pass on, a panic took them. Was wild Normandy to be left without a ruler? Was the King of France to get his greedy clutches on the realm, so hardly won, so hardly held? They went down on their knees, importuning the saints for another heir, one who should be strong as his Norse forefathers. They walked barefoot to Ouen's shrine, made such splendid offerings as shortly became the talk of Europe. But the saints, deaf-eared, blind-eyed, stood unresponsive in their niches; the boy Richard grew always thinner, whiter; the royal prayers seemed no more than so much wasted breath. And in an evil hour the Duchess Judith, who was a woman of strange fancies, addressed her supplications to the devil. If you doubt this you will be informed that it is well known how when Rollo, Normandy's first duke, lay dying, he by turns sent gold to Christian altars and offered up captives to his Norse gods; and between such conduct and praying to the devil, is there so wide a difference? The question is plainly unanswerable. Let the tale proceed.

The devil proving kinder than the saints, a son was presently born to the Duchess Judith, and christened Robert amid great rejoicings—but it was whispered that the

holy water used at the christening dried on the prelate's fingers before he could do his work. Thus the business began badly, and continued as it had begun. The boy Robert grew in the likeness of his donor, becoming a curse to his parents, the realm and himself; while as for young Richard the sickly, his health mended from the time of his brother's birth, so proving the Duchess's impious prayer to have been made without any need.

How much of this tale is true, let each man decide as he likes, but it is certain that there once reigned in Normandy a duke who succeeded his brother Richard, with strong suspicion of having poisoned him. To us of today, this man is known as father of the great William, England's conqueror; but his courtiers called him Robert the Magnificent, because of the mad splendor of his life; and to his people, the length and breadth of his realm, he was known for his wild deeds as Duke Robert the Devil.

It is about rulers that strange tales cluster thick. Common folk have to jog along as best they can without such aid, and the people of rock-perched Falaise never thought of accounting by any legend of a devil donor for the black moods of their neighbor Foulbert, who had been born to a tanner's lot instead of a duke's. Indeed, to hold that sort of talk in his presence would have been far from safe. No one ever baited Foulbert, no one ever mocked him, for though his townsmen had scant love for him they had much fear. He was a very dark, sullen man, with a pair of lowering eyes that lightened and gleamed when he was angry, a skin tanned like his own leather hides, and a smell of the tanning vats always clinging about him. While not over-tall, he had wiry limbs, and much work had made iron of his muscles, so that

he possessed an extraordinary strength. At all times a peasant's silence was his, and in his worse moods he said not a word for days together.

This sullen humor of Foulbert's is an important thing in our tale. For two-score years it did no more than work the bane of its owner and of some who clashed with him; then, of a sudden, it made history, by sending him where he had no business to be—hunting in the forest of Eraines, which was sacred to the use of his duke. Little enough Foulbert cared for that when the black dog rode his shoulders; to break the law gave him high content. Was a man not made of flesh and blood, then, because he was a tanner? Or were dukes carved out of heavenly stuff, that they should possess even the wood beasts, the wood birds? They would not let poor folk breathe if they could prevent it, would rulers! Ho, Saint Ouen—but poor folk would see about that!

So he went; and our story proper opens in a spot deep in the Eraines forest, all green leaves and gold filters of sunlight, with Foulbert the tanner on his knees beside a stag of twelve points. He was ripping at the dead creature's skin with his knife when there came a great crashing among the bushes, a horse forced its way through and stumbled snorting to its knees, and out of the saddle half leapt, half fell, with many oaths, a man whom Foulbert knew to be the Sire Herlevin de Conteville, lord of many lands about Falaise and reputed gossip of the Norman duke.

"What have we here, just heaven?" said Sire Herlevin as soon as he had got back his breath; and then: "Ha, my friend, I know you! You are the tanner of Falaise!"

There was no denying the statement, and Foulbert, murderously angry, recog-

nized as much. A rare turn of fate, this—to be caught red-handed, bending over his prize! Well, it was of a piece with the way the saints always served him. He thought flight was his best chance, and sprang to his feet.

"I would not counsel you," said De Conteville. "to do that, since I have a horse, and four legs go faster than two. I was saying, was I not, that you were the Falaise tanner. Well, you will never tan again—instead, you will hang. Do you find the prospect a pleasant one?"

He broke off as a hunting hum was sounded loudly at a little distance; and Foulbert snarled at him: "Do you think to hang me, my lord? You can do much, but not that. You are no master of these forests—"

"Here comes one who is," said Sire Herlevin.

Again the bushes crashed, and another man thundered into sight. He rode a black horse, and wore a green hunting suit bedizened with gold. For the rest, he had a giant's figure, a mane of blond hair, glittering blue eyes, and an air of crazy splendor that at once alarmed and dazzled. "Ha, Herlevin! What sport, man?" he cried, and rocked out of his saddle to the ground.

"No beasts, no birds, beau sire—only a rogue from Falaise. It appears that your forests are kept for the convenience of tanners," said De Conteville in answer.

The Duke of Normandy looked first at the thief, then at the noble deer beside him. His eyes were hard and pitiless, like blue jewels. "You will hang, my friend," he said, as Sire Herlevin had said it; but on the last word his face changed. "Saint Ouen! I know who you are! It is you whom my Falaisians think invincible because once you killed a saucy armorer with your

bare hands—is it not so? Then I have wanted speech with you for a long time. Come here, Foulbert the tanner!"

He waited for obedience, and Foulbert, who had at first no thought of rendering it, shortly found with surprise that he was standing close before his lord.

"Listen to me, rogue. I am a merciful ruler now and again—and, moreover, I like to fight with those who are strong! The devil put that curse into my blood; it flames there; it will not come out for all the prayers of the monks whom I keep on their knees by day and by night, interceding for me, doing penance. Well, that is no affair of yours. What I would say is that you look a strong man, and have the name of being so. Very good; come try to choke the life out of me as you choked it from that armorer! Succeed, and you go back to your vats; but if you fail you will get hempen coin in payment, since, by heaven, no men shall come hunting in my forests who cannot prove themselves better men than I!"

Normans were well used by now to crazy conduct on the part of their duke. Foulbert knew him by hearsay, Sire Herlevin through long acquaintance, and neither felt any great wonder at his proposal, though De Conteville thought it ill done of a ruler to waste time on such carrion when a single blast of his horn could have summoned the forest guards. To protest would be useless, he knew, therefore he stood back, and a moment later witnessed the beginning of an uncommon wrestling bout, a hand-to-hand struggle between a tanner and a royal duke.

For some time there were no sounds save hard breathing, the rustic of crushed leaves underfoot, loud oaths from Duke Robert and snarling mutters from Foulbert. One might have thought that

two wild beasts contended for mastery. Then the strife was over; the tanner lay on his back and sought for breath with gasping sobs, and the Duke, kneeling over him, put out hands to seize his throat.

"Name of God! So you thought yourself a strong man, knave?" cried Robert the Devil, looking like his namesake. "Having killed some poor rogue of your own condition, you think you can also best your ruler, and come flaunting into his forests to kill deer? Ho, why should I wait for my guards to bring their halters? These two hands of mine are halter enough, if I choose to fasten them about your neck, to twist them a single time—"

Foulbert the sullen was no coward, yet he yielded to panic now. This blond giant with the gleaming eyes was the man about whose lineage Normans whispered at night, bent over the hearth, casting fearful glances across their shoulders. Yes, here was the devil, no doubt of that! He panted out an entreaty, and, since he was true son of his land, the entreaty was a cunning one. "Spare me, lord! Let me go—and I will tell you how the Sire de Cinteaulx makes sport of you in Falaise!"

The Duke's hands, already about his throat, loosened their grasp. For a moment Robert knelt motionless; then he shifted his weight a little, so that Foulbert might find breath to speak. "If you are playing with me," he said, "you will regret it, my friend! Now, what is this about the Sire de Cinteaulx?"

It was a full minute before the tanner could go on. He gasped, felt at his twisted neck, and finally began to talk in a fashion midway between his old sullenness and his new terror.

"It is like this, lord. You banished the Sire, saying that as all his holdings were hereabouts you could starve him into

submission. When he was ready to do you homage and penance in one, by crawling the length of Falaise with a saddle atop of him, he might come back." Foulbert paused to groan and draw breath, for besides being in pain from the treatment he had had at the Duke's hands, he was making the longest speech of his life. "Well, the Sire swore openly that he would outwit you, would come monthly into Falaise and get his revenues from his steward, who remained here to look after his lands—" Foulbert had been mouthing this defiance with a hint of spite, but he paused now, very abruptly. The Duke's face was like that of some Norse god worshiped by his ancestors—fierce, merciless, splendidly a-rage. His hands stirred; he had a sudden look of desiring to kill someone—De Cinteaulx by preference, but, failing him, any man who was near.

"He has done it, my lord," said Foulbert in a hurry. "He enters Falaise in a pilgrim's robe, and meets his steward in my house. He comes tomorrow; you may take him there. I would not grieve to see him hang, I, for he treats me insolently, as all great folk treat my sort—"

The Duke of Normandy got to his feet, leaving the released tanner to writhe to and fro and pant his relief. "I see, Herlevin," he commented to his friend, "that there is nobler game afoot for us than this Master Foulbert. I will hunt De Cinteaulx, and let the tanner go, forgiving him the lesson he merits for aiding my vassals against me. Perhaps, when all is said, he has had lesson enough—I think his neck will be sore for many days, and his back, too. Is it not so, my friend?" He laughed at Foulbert's sullen jerk of the head. "There, sling your deer across your shoulder, and get out of my forest of Eraines for evermore!"

He clambered into his saddle, wound his horn and crashed off through the bushes, a towering figure, all gold and green like the trees about him. Sire Herlevin, who by contrast to his master appeared doubly black, grim and steellike, lingered to watch with satisfaction how Foulbert staggered up from the ground and began to feel his twisted body. "You will know better than to go hunting in Eraines another time, I think!" Such was the comfort he offered. "And, at that, you have come off easily." Then he, too, spurred out of sight, obeying an impatient blast on the Duke's horn.

Foulbert stood uncertainly on his feet, showed his teeth in a snarl, and shook clenched hands toward the vanished men. Limping, he walked over to where the deer waited with its life blood turning the grass red, and bent down and seized it by the feet to drag it away. He felt torn as if by a rack; movement was a torture to him; yet he was far too dogged to leave his prize behind. "A devil, indeed!" he muttered, as he set off. "May he shortly rule in hell, instead of in Normandy!" The bushes closed after him, and silence settled down on the green solitude of Eraines.

II

IN those times Falaise, being the warder of the sea plains and the grim guardian of a large part of Normandy the Lower, was a far stronger place than now; and it was richer, too. Nobles a-plenty went in and out of the Porte-du-Chateau and the Porte-du-Comte; there were great houses scattered in the narrow streets, and outside the roads from Caen and Tours and Brittany met, bringing merchants and traders from far away. The town climbed the green slopes of the hill, and above it, on the cliff, towered the royal castle,

overlooking on one side the green, misty valley, on the other the cleft through which the Ante flowed. In this castle Robert the Devil lived when he came from Rouen to Falaise—such visits chanced seldom; he had come only two or three times in his life, before his meeting with Foulbert in the woods—and from there he descended next day to the tanner's house, wrapped in a cloak and accompanied by Herlevin de Conteville, who thought poorly of the excursion and said so.

"If another man than you were in question, beau sire," said he, "I would call it a fool's errand. Why not have your men surround the house, bring out this clever Sire de Cinteaulx and hang him in the city square?"

The Duke, striding on ahead, tossed a laugh back across his shoulder, and replied that Herlevin was too fond of hanging people out of hand. "Such is always your advice, man. Hang him, hang him! You make of it a sort of chanted litany. Now I, too, like to kill my foes, but sometimes I like still better to have sport with them, as yesterday I had sport with the tanner. Who knows, perhaps today will bring better doings yet!"

He had more cause than he guessed to say it. At that very instant Fate, whose weaving had begun in Eraines forest, was bestirring herself in rocky Falaise; and Harlette, Foulbert's daughter—of whose existence the Duke was calmly unaware—stood at the fountain and considered whether she should go down to the valley or return homeward. Fate worked hard and fast; Harlette turned slowly up her destined path. And meanwhile Sire Herlevin was answering his master.

"It may have been sport for you," said he, "but it was assuredly not sport for him.

Death would be little worse than that gullet grip of yours. As for the other matter, I cannot say why gallows were made if not to hang rogues— But behold Foulbert's house, if you care to enter any such kennel!"

The street was of the narrowest, and the house of a sort to match the street, being wooden, mean and squat, like the buildings that elbowed it. Duke Robert set his hand on the door, entered with De Conteville at his heels and found himself in a dark, low-roofed room. The floor was broken in spots; the light, flickering dimly through a single window, showed that the air was full of blue smoke, and touched the smoldering fire before which hung Foulbert's hard-won deer. But there was nobody in sight.

"Plainly the tanner has discretion," said Robert, peering about with narrowed eyes. "He wants to see neither the Sire de Cinteaulx whom he betrays, nor myself whose strength of the hands is not to his fancy; so he takes himself off to his tanning down there in the Valdante. Hey, Foulbert, you are too shrewd a man for your place! I will send you as counselor to the French king, who has less sense than you, and is forever getting into troubles from which

I must cut him a way out!" He laughed loudly, being in crazy spirits, and then stopped and clapped a hand on his friend's wrist. "Someone comes, De Conteville; do you hear? Is it our quarry?"

The two men stood back in the shadow, eyes on that door behind which Fate was busy. It swung open, pushed by a foot; on the threshold appeared a woman with a water jar balanced on her head. Perceiving the Duke and Sire Herlevin, she stood still and stared at them, and they looked back

at her in their turn, finding her a sight well worth the looking on.

To understand fairly the story of Harlette, Foulbert's daughter, one must admit at once that she was no disguised princess, no girl of a spirit above her station. Instead, she was peasant-like as the loose garment that clothed her, leaving her full throat uncovered, showing her bare feet and ankles a-glisten with spilt water; and the beauty which beyond denial she had was the beauty of a peasant woman. She was made well, but very strongly, and her features were strong, too, over-strong almost. She had hair of the shade called russet, bright and heavy. Her eyes were of a curious color, warm golden brown, with glints of red; their lashes were straight, their brows thick. She looked stolid and rather sullen, and was in no hurry about addressing the two men.

"What do you want, lords?" she said at last, coming forward and setting her jar on the floor, and in the act spilling a part of its contents. There was in her voice a quality as of one not fond of speaking; the words came slowly, with a kind of resentfulness.

The Duke jerked his head toward Sire Herlevin, who obeyed the gesture. "Our own affair that, wench," said he in his short, grim fashion, which resembled nothing else so much as a snap of steel.

She looked at him, and also at Robert, to whom from the first she had given the better part of her notice. Then, without any further question, she turned away. Moving slowly, she went about her business in this and that part of the room, turning the deer that hung by the fire, setting her cooking staff to rights. The Duke's eyes followed her, very bright, very blue; it seemed that for the moment he had forgotten his plans for the

entertainment of the Sire de Cinteaulx. And presently he spoke.

"You waste few words, eh? I had heard that women were given to much chattering—a mistake, it appears. Also, by the Virgin, I had understood that they were a prying, curious gentry! Is it not so, then, and do you care nothing about the meaning of our presence?"

She paused in her work, regarding him from under down drawn brows. Again her words came as if drawn up difficultly from a far depth. "Can I make you speak if you have a mind to be still? Or if you choose to tear down my father's roof, can I help it? You will do what you want, as is the way of great folk. For me, I will save my breath, and watch what comes."

It was plain that the Duke found her to his fancy, both for her good looks and for the amusement her short speech gave him. He leaned against the table, watching her. "Well," said he, "since obviously you are not one to go crying a secret through the streets, I will trust you with ours. We are duke's men; we are here on the business of Norman Robert. Have you ever seen him, that sovereign?"

Harlette nodded a slow head. "I have seen the Devil once, but not out of armor. He rode up toward the castle, on a black horse. He was of your height, I think—broad, towering." There was no suspicion in the statement; Harlette the peasant was not quick of wit.

"Well," said the Duke again, pulsing with hidden laughter, "if you have not had speech with him, you have heard talk of him, I suppose? You know the talcs of how the devil fathered him, how the Norse pirates gave him their blood for heritage, so making him feared and hated of all good Christians?"

Harlette answered with stolid scorn: "I have heard those tales. They are great foolery." She paused, and seemed to reflect, slowly but shrewdly. "He should wed," she ended. "He would do better then."

By this time Sire Herlevin was grimacing at her in the effort to hint that she was walking a perilous path; but as she never glanced his way, she saw nothing—nor was she likely to have guessed his meaning if she had. As for the Duke, he was hugely diverted.

"Wed—wed?" he cried. "The Norman devil? Mother of God—and where could he get a wife? Heigh, the tales of his mad fits are known all over Europe; no princess would dare mate with him, for her life's sake—"

"It is pity, then," said Foulbert's daughter. "A princess might do worse. They are sometimes easier of humoring than quieter folk, these wild men."

"Eh, so?" said Robert of Normandy, whom every man in his domains feared worse than hellfire. "And how would you use the devil-duke?"

Once more she reflected, setting her teeth in her full lip. Then she said: "All men are alike, I suppose, I would use this duke as I use my father. When he was weary, I would give him food. When he laughed, I would give him to drink. When he raved, I would go about my business. And at all times I would fret him with as few words as might be." She went over to the hearth and turned the smoking deer.

"A shrewd plan, by heaven!" said Duke Robert, still laughing, but with eyes a-gleam. "Yet maybe less clever than it sounds—for this devil does other things than rave, do you not know that? He has dragged men at his horse's hoofs; he has put his hands on the throat of a foe and

choked his life out; he has done killing with sharp steel. How if he used you so?"

Stolid, scornful, she shrugged her contempt. "What cause for fretting, if he did? Have we not all to die some day? I would sleep sound enough of nights, even though I knew he planned to kill me by poison, as he killed his brother—"

"Be silent, triple fool!" said the Sire de Conteville in a low, fierce mutter.

The warning went unheard, drowned in a shout from Robert, a mad cry of pain and rage. In a moment the Duke of Normandy was before Harlette, his hands a-twitch, his eyes glaring, his face whitely terrible. "Ha, you dare? You dare say what never a bishop in my lands dares breathe? Saint Maclou—holy Ouen—but you shall not say it twice I I can kill with my fingers as well as by poison, II" His hands went up toward her full brown throat.

If the girl had moved, she had been dead on the instant; but she did not move. Her eyes widened a little; her upper lip rose over her teeth, as an animal's might have done; otherwise she stood stolidly, not giving back a step, confronting the Duke in what seemed a half-angry surprise. To such an attitude Robert was not used. When the frenzy took him servants fled, tumbling over each other at the door; courtiers vanished like shadows; churchmen hurried chapelward to pray for his better ease. Harlette's calm struck him like a blow, shocking him, turning his mood. "Saint Maclou! Saint Ouen!" he cried again, but now in a choking voice and in what seemed a passion of fear. His face was twisted with dread instead of rage. He fell away from the girl, reeled backward toward the wall. Then, suddenly, he shuddered down on his knees, and his cloak, catching on the table edge, fell off him, disclosing the splendid gold and

green habit of yesterday, the uncut red jewels at the throat, the falling mane of tossed blond hair.

"Dear heaven! Dear saints!" cried the Duke of Normandy, on the floor of the tanner's hut. His voice rose shriek-ingly, like the voice of a lost soul. "Let God crush me—let Christ fling me to burn in hell! What guilt has there been to equal mine, since Cain sinned? Mary undefiled—what hope is there for such as me?" It was the aftermath of his frenzy, a remorse more horrible than his rage.

Sire Herlevin snarled fiercely at Harlette. "Now, fool, you have set him off! In these moods none can quiet him—it is of as much use to talk to the thunder, the lightning. Well did I know how little good would come of dealing with rogues who should be hanged!"

Foulbert's daughter was standing with one hand on the table, calm as ever, unshaken by a tumult that few men could have faced without blenching. Her eyes remained always on the Duke's prone form; they were half-angry at first, resentful in a smoldering fashion, as if she reflected on how this man had gulled her into speech; then, as she heard Robert's torn groans, his panting breath, his desperate cries to the saints, it seemed that her anger died. Advancing slowly and without flurry, she put a strong hand on his shoulder.

"To grieve is a fool's act," said Harlette stolidly. "And tears will not bring back the dead."

Again her steadiness appeared to do its work on him. He stopped his groans, lay for a time shaken by shudders, and at last looked up with wild, haunted eyes. "I am a murderer," he said, muttering. "I am accursed among men. God will bring me to ruin, to an end of horror—"

She answered without emotion: "He made you as you are."

The Duke struggled upon his feet, quieter, but panting still. "A murderer am I," he said again, peering before him like one who sees a vision. "My brother comes to me by day, by night. He rides beside me, stands close against my couch. At the hunt I see him flit through the trees; in the streets, at the banquet, always he is there! And men know my guilt. My courtiers whisper it between flatteries; my people mouth it between their cheers—"

"Well, and will words hurt you?" said Foulbert's daughter.

Sire Herlevin was nodding jerkily, growling fierce satisfaction. Here was a wench of sense, one who first turned the edge of Duke Robert's fury and saved her own menaced life, then set to work at easing his wild fancies with her shrewdness, as a cool touch might ease a fevered head. A pity, thought De Conteville, that some prince of Europe had not possessed a daughter of this sort, and given her to the Duke in wedlock! Things would then have gone better in Normandy during late years, fewer mad deeds have been done, fewer men have died by sudden violence!

"Have you got back your wits, beau sire?" said he, masking relief with gruffness. "It is time, for I hear out there a footfall which no doubt heralds De Cinteaulx—and it would be a rare jest for him to find his dread lord, Normandy's terror, cowering on his knees and whimpering like a child who shakes at a good wife's specter talk!"

There were indeed steps to be heard approaching, slowly, cautiously— The Duke gave ear to them; and at once the look of horror, melting from his blue eyes, was replaced by the gleam that spelt battle

frenzy. His hand went up sharply, gesturing for silence. The steps came nearer; the two men stood back in the shadow, tense and ready, and Harlette watched them from the hearth, her brows drawn down, her lip caught between her teeth. In the end the door swung open, and there came into the smoky room a pilgrim in gray weeds.

"Hey, reverend man, welcome to Falaise! What shrine do you visit? What road do you follow?" said the Duke of Normandy, in a low voice that bore some likeness to the meeting of a sword with a sword.

At this salutation the pilgrim appeared not at all gratified. He sprang backward, sharply; but Duke Robert sprang more quickly still, and stood between his quarry and the door, a glittering figure, fair head back-tossed, eyes cold and bright, lips a-curve in a chill smile; and Sire Herlevin, dark and grim, moved also, so that he was close to the newcomer. For a time silence endured. Then Duke Robert began to speak, apparently without relevance.

"I have heard," said he, "that to recall men once seen is a very royal trait. And I now perceive with pleasure that it is a trait which I jiosscs. Herlevin, does it not appear to you that there is about this monkish visitor some strange likeness to our old friend the Sire de Cinteaulx?"

Having said so much he paused, waiting. And in a little time the pilgrim put up a slow hand, thrust his gray hood back on his shoulders, and showed the passion-twisted face of a man who, raging, urged his rage on, lest mounting fear supplant it. "So you have caught me, my lord!" said the Sire de Cinteaulx.

"A pretty trap—a game well played. And what is it your good pleasure to do with me now?"

"Have you not had sufficient trouble with the rogue, beau sire? Hang him, then!" urged De Conteville, after his custom.

The Duke laughed like a man beside himself. "I will have better pastime than that," he cried, and strode to the door and blew a great blast on the gold-chased horn that hung about his neck. At the sound waiting figures sprang up in a fashion that seemed magical; they tumbled out of dark archways, from darker doorways, from around sheltering corners—the narrow street seethed with them, grim men-at-arms from Falaise castle, with the folk of the town trooping curious at their heels. Meanwhile Robert stood towering on the threshold; nor did he stir until a pair of the men had dragged forward and laid at his feet his great hunting saddle, gold-wrought and chased. Then he turned, still laughing, to the Sire de Cinteaulx, who was grinning wryly and reflecting on his own likeness to a hare amid a snarling pack of hounds.

"Ha, De Cinteaulx," said he, "is your memory as good as mine? Do you recall the homage I bade you do me—the penance which you, stubborn rogue, swore not to perform while the sun shone in the heavens? You will be wise to prove more compliant now, by Saint Oucn! Come, will you crawl through Falaise with my saddle atop of you, thus showing that when I demand service you are my beast of burden, no greater thing? Or shall I set you tomorrow to dangle from my highest tower, as De Conteville counsels?"

There was a silence, tense and long—a time of rare delight to all in the packed street—while the Sire de Cinteaulx calculated his chances, and found them un-encouraging. Presently he shrugged. "Needs must," he decided, with his wry

smile, "when the devil drives." At which half-hearted jest all men laughed, and the Devil of Normandy louder than any other.

De Cinteaulx went down on his knees with that, put his hands also to the ground, received the heavy saddle on his shoulders and set off on his path of penance. He went with set teeth, and wasted much breath in cursing. It was a long journey through Falaise; his load galled him; there would be many wagging tongues, many doors and windows lined with curious eyes. He reflected that to shake dice with Duke Robert was scarce worthwhile. As for Robert himself, he swung on a horse brought forward by one of his men, and rode slowly down the street, a little behind the Sire de Cinteaulx. But as he turned the corner he looked back once, toward where Foulbert's daughter stood in her door.

III

It was Friday of the week, the discomfiture of the hardy Sire de Cinteaulx having chanced on a Tuesday. Clouds had been blown up from seaward, and lay piled behind Falaise castle, gray upon white; there was a mist over the lower plains, a nip of autumn in the air; but Harlette gave no heed to these things. She had come down from Falaise, and was now walking toward the woods—not Eraines forest where her father had hunted his deer, but wilder Gouffern in the distance.

As she went she looked straight before her from under low-drawn brows, not taking notice of any she passed. Sometimes she panted, sometimes her hand went up to her heart; this was not from fatigue, but because of her thoughts. She had, indeed, plenty to consider, for she was fresh from a meeting with Duke Robert.

On each of the three days that had passed since De Cinteaulx did reluctant penance, these two had met in the little valley of the Ante. Robert came down from where the castle lowered over the river, and halted at foot of the steep cliff; Harlette followed the custom of the Falaise women, standing with her feet in water to the ankles, washing and drying on the rocks her armful of household gear. The first day Robert had laughed, jested and talked, mostly about the splendid wars he had made in the past, and the yet more splendid ones with which he planned to divert himself in future. Chi his second visit, being in a mood that would have terrified everyone of his courtiers save the grim Sire Herlevin, he said hardly anything, but sat staring with dangerous blue eyes, glooming and muttering, while Harlette worked on unmoved. The third day he talked to her of love.

There was little need of speech about the matter; what wanted saving had been said long since by their hearts. From their first meeting each had drawn the other as the magnet draws iron. The Duke, for his part, was taken by the girl's face, and yet more by her stolid peasant calm, so removed from his own crazy royal splendor; even her dumbness pleased him. He, who could master wild Normandy, and had conquered great nobles and made sport of them, and was known for a better man than the French king, his suzerain, was yet helpless before himself. His endurance had its limits; when pushed to them, he knew himself on the verge of madness; but Harlette, he felt, could never be pushed so far. Whatever came to her, she would meet it with that same silence, only knitting her brows a little over the pain. She rested him, strengthened him, would have drawn him even if she had been

hard-featured. Instead, she had beauty; and his heart flared into love.

It was a mad love, a hot love. Whether or no the devil had mixed in Robert's affair, it is certain that the old pirates had. His fathers were the great blond Norsemen of the fjords, marauding giants, who came out of the mistlands in dragon ships, and with shouts to Thor and Woden took the world for their use, seizing crowns, lands, the niched saints of convent chapels—whatever thing caught their eyes by color or lure. Had he not Rollo's blood a-pulse in his veins, this Robert? He, too, strode through the world taking what he wanted; he had desired the Norman throne and its three emblems—the sword girt about the middle, the mantle draped across the shoulders, the crown set upon the head—and had possessed himself of them, at price of a life. Now he wanted Harlette, and his impulse was to take her as a Norse pirate might have taken a foe's daughter.

"Come up to the castle, girl!" It was so he talked to her. "There is nothing in Normandy that is not yours for the asking—lands, titles, gold! I will bestow holdings on you; I will hang you with jewels like the saints in the church! Come up to the castle!"

She looked sullen as she answered. "I do not want gold. I care nothing about lands. What should I do up there in your halls, among great folk who would make a mock of me? My place is in Falaise, in the tanner's hut."

The Duke laughed. "I would more people were of your way of thinking. From dawn till dark men beg of me these things for which you have so little care; and from dark till dawn they he awake, devising new means to get them from me. Well, then, being so poor, I can only offer love."

He must have been duller than he was not to perceive that such an offer was another matter; she breathed hard, and a smoldering light came into her red-brown eyes. "Will you have that, Harlette—will you take it, and give me your love in change? Who knows—Mother of Heaven—it may be that with you beside me I would not, after all, go mad, as my barons swear I must do yet!" He continued to laugh, but there was a flash of terror beneath his mirth. "Farewell, my girl. Tomorrow you shall tell me your mind."

He went back to where his fortress perched over the valley, and behind its strong walls imparted to Sire Herlevin how affairs were going. "If I must," he said, "I will have her by force—to carry her off would be a simple enough thing; but I want her of her own will, and think I will get her so. She loves me, Herlevin, do you hear?"

"She is not the first woman to do that," shrugged De Conteville, who was still out of temper because the Sire de Cinteaulx had not been hanged conformably to his advice. "Are there so many blond giants in the world that women should deny their eyes the pleasure of looking on you, or so many famous soldiers? Moreover, you are known to be a ruler, which in such affairs is no hindrance! Yet it is a pity. She appears a good wench; you would do well to leave her in peace, and to make yourself a suitable match with a king's daughter."

"If I made such a marriage," said the Duke, "I would shortly have another murder on my soul." He shook like a sick man over the words, but went on laughing resolutely. "Would a princess take joy in my fashion of life—hunting all day long, fighting with men when wolves and bears fail me? And my blood curse, would it be to her taste? When my next mad fit came

over me, she would turn pale and shrink, and so seal her doom. The terror of others turns me to a devil indeed, Herlevin. I should have killed you long since, save that for some strange reason you have never feared me."

Sire Herlevin smiled sourly. "If you think that, beau sire, you are dull of wit, or else I feign well. Do you recall how once you came at me with a hunting knife? My knees were water that day."

Meanwhile Harlette was walking through Gouffern forest, without a glance to left or to right. The branches drooped heavily about her; their leaves were more gold than green, since autumn was coming fast, and the ground was scattered with a like gold powdering. Harlette's brows were always knitted; she was turning over her fate in a mind not quick by nature.

Eh, dear Virgin, but here was a lover to come into a girl's life! Strange—she could not think of him without panting, without a sense that the world reeled and the solid earth slipped under her feet. Robert the Magnificent, the conqueror of mighty vassals, the lord of cities and castles without number, the French king's kinsman and prop and stay! Robert the Devil, hero of whispered tales which, at their worst, proved him a being invincible! Ah, and Robert the man—gigantic, overpowering, a Norse god, with blue eyes hot on her face and quick voice wooing her with words like saints' music! He loved her, miracle of miracles! And she? Saint Ouen—was there need to ask that? What could any woman do but love him, from the moment when her gaze met his?

Yet she had misgivings, and they worked gnawingly in her mind, and she faced them stolidly and with her peasant shrewdness. Could any bond between her

and her sovereign be of good omen? She, Harlette, in the great castle—what had she to do there? And it would be a sin; God would be angry, and the saints. If she went to the Duke, she pondered with resentment, some ill would surely befall her.

Framed among the trees rose a little hill, in the side of which opened blackly a small and rocky cave. Here was her goal, the dwelling of the old hermit of Gouffern, about whom Falaise folk told as many histories as there are fingers on the hands. A few sure facts stood clear of the mystery which hung over him. He had lived in the cave a half-century, seeming old when first he came; he ate only wood berries and the like, and little of those; he was a very wise man, and aided the needy by answering their questions, though mostly in a fashion that did not please them. It was held doubtful whether or not his knowledge was unholy, but of its usefulness there was no doubt at all. Men said he had left the world through hate of it, and this appeared likely from the scorn with which he spoke of its doings, the half-veiled malice he showed toward those who dwelt in its midst.

At present he was sitting in the mouth of his cave, a bent figure, white-headed and white-bearded, with bare arms and legs emerging from a torn garment of wolfskin. For a time Harlette stood between the tree trunks, regarding him. Habit had sent her to get his counsel; but what could he do for this new gnawing pain at her heart, or what could any man do, or even the distant Virgin? In the end she came slowly forward, paused before the cave, and held out what was the remnant of Foulbert's deer. "I have brought you a gift, old man," she said.

The hermit did not stir, did not look toward her or what she offered; his pale, watery eyes stared on into the forest depths, as if he were alone; but Harlette, knowing this to be his custom, felt no discomposure. She set the deer meat beside him, then seated herself on a rock near by.

"Old man," she said, "I have come for counsel-"

Again the hermit took no notice of her, and again she knew that he had heard. She leaned on the rocky wall at her back, considering what she had to say; a shaft of sun fell on her hair, reddening it, and red lights glowed and burned in her gold-brown eyes. Presently she began to speak, slowly and stolidly, while the hermit continued to sit hunched together without apparent thought of her or her talk.

"I am Harlette, the tanner's daughter. A duke loves me—Lord Robert, who is called the Devil. He would have me leave my home, go up to live in the castle. Shall I go, or stay? I want to hear your mind."

She stopped, breathing harder. There was silence, during which the hermit stared on, seemingly lost in thought. At last, still without looking at her, he parted his lips and began to speak. His voice was high and quavering, the voice of an old man, of one very far removed from all the joy and pain and passion of a tumultuous world; but in his eyes there was a pale gleam of spite, as if it pleased him that others should know the stress and storm which had once been his.

"You ask me a simple question enough. I will answer it with other questions. Have you got beauty, to be given for a brief toy? Have you eyes to lighten a little while with love's fires, then to weep blind? Have you a heart to drain dry, a soul to fling under a

man's feet for his trampling? Such are the gifts a peasant brings to a loving lord!" The glimmer of malice was deepening under his eyelids, though he never turned his look on the girl. "Have you got these things, and do you want to give them? Then go to your Duke."

When the pause had endured for many moments Harlette rose to her feet. Her breath was coming hard and hoarsely; her eyes smoldered like red fires; she drew her strong brows down and stared from under them at the hermit, while her words fell in their slow, difficult, resentful fashion. "I have got all these things. And I would give them all, without thought, if so my lord could get one minute of content, or even ease from his mad torments. It matters nothing what comes to me, if he has his will. *I thank you, old man. You have taught me my mind.*"

The hermit sat motionless, hunched together, pale gaze on the tree trunks, where the violet shadows of dusk were lengthening. As for Foulbert's daughter, she gave him no more heed, but turned from him and went away through the trees, walking steadily and surely, as she had come.

IV

IT was very near nightfall when Harlette reached Falaise. Surging, jostling thoughts had attended her, weighting her feet; but once in sight of the town gates she quickened her pace, recalling the evening meal she had to make ready before her father's coming. As she went she kept her eyes on the grim black mass of the castle that towered over Falaise. Duke Robert lived there—Duke Robert, who loved her! So thinking, she did not notice the spiteful, side wise, sneering glances she got as she

passed, did not hear the hateful laughter or the muttered words.

Tongues had been busy in the town of late hours; and they had, surely, been given choice enough morsels for their rolling. When a royal duke meets three days at the washing stones with a tanner's daughter, would any village keep silence about it? Moreover, Gonor had seen these trysts—Gonor, the buxom yellow-haired wench who was held the peasant beauty of Falaise; and the sight had driven her into a storm of furious malice, with good cause. A year earlier Duke Robert had come to his castle here; he had descended to a people's dance, and had made merry at it, as was sometimes his custom. Harlette had been at home that night, nursing Foulbert through a fit of sick drunkenness, but Gonor had been on the dancing green, and had done all that woman could do to win notice from her duke. As for him, he had seemed blind to her. And now, looking out of her narrow window, she saw Harlette standing ankle deep in the Ante water, at work on her washing, and Robert the Magnificent beside her, ablaze with gold and gems, wooing like a lovesick peasant! At the sight Gonor's face named. She was out of the house in a flash, darting here and there, whispering, starting a rumor that shortly swept Falaise like wildfire.

In all the town there were few people who bore Harlette any love. She had to take the blame of her father's evil moods and deeds; though it was said she lived no happy life with him, yet she had never been known to make complaint or seek pity—instead, she stood doggedly to Foulbert, and turned a sullen front on all who were not his friends. Women hated her for her good looks; she had made foes of her suitors by curt denial. All told, she

was no woman to make friends, though a woman perhaps to give fierce, measureless love when her heart awoke, and therefore she stood alone in this hour of her need. What Falaise might have applauded in another, it raged to see in her. Harlette, Foulbert's daughter, to be chosen out by the great Duke, set up over them, let to ride in state through their midst, given leave to carry her beautiful sullen head higher than ever? Pay homage to Harlette—cry her hail? Not while the saints reigned! They curled their lips at her and her shameful bargain. She dared come walking serenely through the streets, eh? It was at home she should be, hiding her face from decent gentry!

As for Harlette herself, she had other things than her townsfolk to fill her thoughts, and never dreamed what was in the wind till an old cutler, more soft-hearted than his fellows, slipped out into the street and put a hand on her sleeve. "You take risks, girl!" said he, muttering in her ear. "Some ill drink for you is brewing hereabouts. If you want you can come inside my door, and wait for a better minute!"

Harlette stood still, looking first at the speaker, then about her. Yes, storm signals were abroad, plain enough to be seen by any who knew Falaise. There were muttering, leering groups on the street comers, curious faces at the windows, fierce hateful eyes everywhere. Even as she looked came what was the torch set to the thatch. From high above, Gonor's yellow head was thrust out, Gonor's spiteful blue gaze flamed down on her rival, Gonor's voice was raised shrilly. "Jesu, gossips, see the Duke's *mie*, walking like anyone! Why does she not ride in a litter, with lights borne before her to show off her proud face? Is he tired of

her already, our lord, that he sends her trudging through folk who are only honest, only clean-named?"

On the instant there were cries from all quarters, jeers, evil taunts, while Harlette stood amid the tumult with head thrown back and teeth set in her lip, and about her the look of an animal driven to bay by snapping dogs. Perhaps in her need she thought of Duke Robert; at least there rose in her eyes a fierce scorn that was fine to see. She looked about her a single time, then turned her face forward, and walked on her way as if the street were an empty one.

"Ho, pure Virgin! The Duke's *mie* holds us not worth a look, not worth a word! She wastes speech only on royal folk nowadays, folk with crowns and scepters!" It was Gonor again, crying from her window.

Down below the tumult grew momentarily. Men cried to Harlette to get them grace from the Duke; women prayed her to beg them dowries, since she herself would need none in her life. Others cried shame on her and menaced her. She went on between their mouthing ranks, stolidly, as if unconscious of them. A stone was flung, struck her cheek, and cut it; she took no notice, seemed unaware. For a little it appeared that Gonor was to get her plain desire, and see her rival thrown down and trampled. Then, slowly but surely, the noise began to lessen. Memories of Robert the Devil, and of certain devil deeds of his, were passing through more minds than one. He had killed men for less than this—who could say but tomorrow there would be a gallows set up in the Falaise marketplace? A sick reaction began; men fell back with fear quenching their spite, and Harlette, unmoved, passed down a free street and entered her door.

Once in shelter, she stood for a moment in the center of the room, her breath coming quickly, her brows drawn into a frown. Then she went about her work quietly enough, mending the fire, setting the table in readiness against her father's coming. From time to time she put up her hand and touched her cut check. Otherwise it appeared that she had forgotten the happenings of the last half-hour, for she looked no more resentful than was her custom.

Night had long since fallen when Foulbert came in, fresh from his tanning, with leathern apron and reddened arms. He shambled heavily across the room, shook a chair by the table with his weight, and sat with propped elbows, scowling blackly. Harlette served him, and he ate. There was nothing to show whether or not he had heard of his daughter's late misadventure, since he often went for days without speech or greeting to her, and the dour look he wore was a habit.

When he had ended his meal Harlette set about clearing the table, and he sat looking moodily before him; only as she put out a hand for his cup did he lean forward and seize both her wrists in an iron clutch. "That cheek wound— where did you get it?" he said darkly, breathing fast.

This black passion of his was sufficient to tell Harlette that he knew his answer, but she remained by him with no sign of discomposure. "I got it from our neighbors," she said after a pause, and speaking, as always, as if speech were painful.

Fury burned in her father's narrow eyes. "So, you admit that? The Falaisians stone you? And you bear yourself in such a way that men can call you the Devil's *mie*?"

His grip had tightened on her wrists, which already were bruised; but she made no effort to pull loose. "They have called me so." It was all she said.

He waited for more, and when nothing came it seemed that his rage boiled over. "Well, have you no words in you, or do you think it a proud thing to be named like this? You stand there dumb—maybe you are what they call you!" He shook her to and fro, his grip tightening yet further, so that she set her lips; but her voice was steady enough as she answered.

"I might be if I would. It is the Duke's will."

Foulbert got to his feet, still holding her. Apart from Harlette's beauty, there was great likeness in their sullen, resentful faces; and the tanner spoke in a fashion much like his daughter's—slow, difficult, hard. "His will, eh? Who gave him leave to have a will with you? Ha, the Norman devil! One day his fingers go fiddling with my gullet, the next they stroke your cheek! And do you think any good will come of dealings between you and this lord? Do you want to roll in the dust, to have all the town laugh when he turns you off?"

The red lights glowed in Harlette's eyes. She said again: "It is the Duke's will."

"Eh, saints!" said Foulbert deep in his throat, his hand moving out toward the knife on the table. "Maybe I had best kill you, and make an end!"

At this threat she did not waver any more than she had done three days earlier at the Duke's attack. "Kill, then," she answered, shrugging.

Foulbert flung her back against the wall. "Aye, go to your Devil, if you choose—let him befool you for a week, then leave you forever! Make yourself the scorn of Falaise! But mark me, if you see him once again you have no more place in this

house of mine! I am a plain tanner; I have no dealing with such great folk as the true-loves of dukes! You understand?"

She nodded shortly and without comment, straightening her torn dress, but giving her bruised wrists no glance. Foulbert resumed his place at the table and sat there glooming, and Harlette, having covered up the coals on the hearth, went across the room and flung herself on her pallet bed.

V

WHEN Duke Robert the Devil learned what had passed in the streets of Falaise, there came upon him such a fury as made all his courtiers get as far from him as might be, and caused even the grim Herlevin de Conteville to feel uneasy lest some shred of this royal rage touch his garments and annihilate him. Trying to placate his lord by feigning rage on his own account, he suggested that several of the Falaisians be hanged out of hand—a bit of counsel which Robert scorned as insufferably gentle, laughably merciful. Nothing would do but that Falaise be wiped out utterly, with sword and fire, and the barren place where it had stood be granted as a holding to Harlette!

By good luck it was midnight when the news reached the castle, brought by a busybody who would better have held his tongue. Duke Robert first talked of a night raid, then agreed to wait till morning for his vengeance; and sunrise brought other counsel. Falaise was too strong a town to be thrown away; the Falaisians were too taxable a swarm of rogues to be lightly rooted out; and Normandy's master, if a dangerous man, was a shrewd man as well, much alive to his own advantage. Soon after the coming of a dank gray dawn

Robert was awakening Sire Herlevin and pouring a new scheme into his sleepy ears.

"It is like this, man!" he cried, very exultant. "If I kill these scum, why then, I kill them, and there is an end of the matter—they can suffer no longer, nor feel regret, but are underground and a deal more at peace than I! Is it not better to crucify their souls, by means of the avarice and envy that consume them? I shall lay a tax on their shoulders—oh, a tax for the raising of which they will need to toil both late and early; and they shall know that these heaped coins are given to Harlette, to hire her serving women, to clothe her royally! That will be a thorn in their flesh, eh, to toil for her, to sweat for her?"

"But there is more to follow. She shall have her high triumph over the envious gallows carrion, and no later than tonight; for she shall come up here to me with a guard of nobles about her, as a princess comes to a sovereign, as Gisele the French king's daughter came to Duke Rollo! A deal of peering and staring there will be on the streets as she passes, I think! Well, what do you say to this?"

It mattered very little what Sire Herlevin said. He had the wit to perceive as much, and contented himself with a grunt and a shrug.

At a little before noon Harlette carried her water jar down to the Ante, as if royal love, hermit's counsel and public outrage had none of them changed her life's tenor; and the jar was no more than filled when Duke Robert came striding up. For some time he said nothing, but only stood looking down on her with the blue blaze of his eyes, so that, as always when he was about, she seemed to feel the earth slip away from under her.

Presently he began: "You have got a cut in the cheek, Harlette. Whence did it come?" This was the same question that Foulbert had asked, but it was put now with a great difference.

She raised her hand absently, touched the cut with it, then let it fall. "It is no matter," she said, impassive. "I would bear worse than that for you."

Here was more than she had yet granted him in words; his eyes glowed deeper as he listened. "Well, and have you taken thought of my love talk? Have you a mind to follow me whom others shun?"

She stood before him as a purchased slave stands before a master. "I have taken thought. I belong to my lord; I will do his will."

Duke Robert drew a deep breath and muttered some sort of thanksgiving to the saints. "That is well. We will know good cheer up yonder, you and I, eh? And when will you give me ease, Harlette? If I send tonight to fetch you, will you come then?"

Once more there was no trace of feeling about her save in her burning eyes. "When my lord wants me, let him send."

Such submission in a creature so strong and sullen was an overpowering thing; half laughing, half fiercely eager, the Duke made as if to test it. "Not many in Normandy would say as much, my girl! What—you will walk by the Norman devil, smoothing his path as he strides to meet his devil-father? You will risk sudden violence, torture, death, all the things that men say I bring on those about me?" He paused, and for assent she jerked her head. At the gesture it seemed that the mirth was smitten off the Duke's lips, that a sob rose in his throat. "Name of high God, but no ill shall come to you for this! Let all others fear me, but you shall never have such cause, my dear."

She answered: "I shall not fear you. Kill me if you wish. When that is your will it shall be mine, too."

They looked at each other for a moment more, then Harlette raised her water jar and set it on her head, and began to mount the path to Falaise, never looking back.

Her die was cast now, her bridge burned behind her. Whatever came, for so long as she lived she was no more than the slave of this royal madman, this splendid, dangerous lover who made a toy of Normandy and used bloody wars for pastime, and whom all feared but her. Ill would come to her, yes, surely. She must give up her father, who loved her in his rough fashion, and whom in her fashion she loved. She must toss away, so she knew vaguely, the hope of paradise. What did this matter, if she could serve the Duke, ease his remorse a little, as once already she had done? Her heart went out to him in a sort of fierce protection. She saw herself keeping watch over him, driving off his madness with her strength. Through the afternoon she sat over a scant fire, watching the coals with narrow eyes as red as they. These hours, she knew, were the end of her old life. It had not been an over-happy one, that was truth; but at least it had been a known thing, a sure thing. Now she was to go to a world which held promise of fearful new joys, but in which there could never be any safety, any rest.

By and by, as dusk drew near and the nip of the air grew keener, she caught faint sounds in the distance, horses' hoofs, voices, laughter. At once she got to her feet and stood in the center of the floor with her old look of an animal at bay. The tumult grew; the street outside was full of stir and bustle, loud calls, hoofs knocking on the flagstones. Harlette did not move,

stood still with her hands clenched at her sides. The door swung slowly open, and on the threshold appeared a figure with the savor of courts about it, silk-clad, begemmed, with a short Norman mantle slung across the shoulders—the great Lord of Val-es-Dunes, from whose way in the streets Harlette had been warned off a score of times. Behind him, out in the narrow road, she caught glimpses of other nobles well known to her by sight—the Count of Ry, the Sires of Bray and Aubigny, the Lords of Brionze and Moulton and Troarn and Blainville; she saw fine horses with brodered saddlecloths, the gleam of gold, the pomp of jewels and bright cloaks, the flash of steel. Further back, very dimly to be made out, were peering eyes, bright with hate. Already the townfolk were alive to this strange new event. They had had excitement a-plenty in the last week, with the humbling of the Sire de Cinteaulx and the stoning of Foulbert's daughter; what was to come now?

The Lord of Val-es-Dunes advanced into the room, took off his feathered cap and swept the rude floor with it. To him and his friends their fetching of a tanner's wench to the royal castle was a great jest; they had laughed over it all the way down; but its cream lay in the doing of its every part soberly, and he waited with a face of deference till the others had packed themselves in the door, bareheaded like himself. "Your escort, dame," he said then to Harlette, with a wave of the hand, "come at bidding of the Duke to convoy you to the castle."

Harlette looked back at him levelly. He was laughing at her in his sleeve. This lord; and the nobles behind him were mocking her, too, as was natural enough in men so high over her. Why had the

Duke sent such gentry? But it did not matter; nothing mattered any more, save the Duke's will.

"Well, dame?" said the Lord of Val-es-Dunes.

Harlette answered: "I will go to my lord." Their mirth was plain enough to her; what she never guessed was that many a man there envied Duke Robert, and thought her sullen beauty as well worth looking on in peasant as in princess.

She moved across the room and through the doorway, between lines of nobles. In the street, close to the door, a great black horse waited—the horse which all Falaise knew for the Duke's. She was aided into the saddle, and the lords, too, sprang up with much splendid confusion and mingling of bright colors, blending of scarlet and purple and gold. The ride castleward began.

She was not to forget that ride till the day of her death. They went along the narrow ascending streets, up, up the white roadway, with the castle always perching blackly before them, a goal which it seemed they were never to reach. A rain was gathering; clouds were blown about the sky, thick and gray; the air held a chill dampness. Close at hand, every window was packed, every door; no tongue but clacked low taunts and whispered evil things, no eye but looked askance and prophesied. There was spite everywhere—spite, and hate, and envy. The troop wound on in slow splendor. Harlette, in its midst, never looked to right or left; went stolidly, as if she saw nothing; but she saw all. The Duke had called this progress her triumph, and maybe it was so; but it was her penance as well, and she was at men's mercy, as if set in a sheet at a church door. Nevertheless, she felt not so much shame as dull distaste for the

pageantry. She had made her choice for all time. So long as she should live, she would do anything that Duke Robert willed.

The town was left behind, seething and buzzing. The castle loomed close at hand. Now, indeed, Harlette felt her heart pound and her breath come fast, though to the curious eyes that watched she seemed unshaken. "I think there are princesses who might show less calm on the way to our Duke," said the Count of Ry to the Lord of Troarn; and the latter nodded assent. They were very high up, able to see out across the cloud-driven valleys and the great forests. Here were the walls at last; the drawbridge was lowered, the troop rode clattering over. And here was the square courtyard, packed from end to end, with doors and windows crowded, and in the midst of all Duke Robert, standing in the robes he had worn when they crowned him at Rouen, bearing the ducal crown and cloak and sword.

A high blare of trumpets rang out to greet the tanner's daughter; the troop came to a halt; the nobles drew apart, half to the left, half to the right. Then Robert, advancing, lifted Harlette in his arms, and before them all set his lips to hers.

"Welcome to Falaise, heart of mine! Welcome to the house that is yours, as its lord is yours!"

In Harlette's ears his words drowned the trumpet blare. In her eyes his splendid giant's figure shut out the packed throng. She saw, heard, remembered only him. Still holding her in his arms, he lifted her across the castle threshold.

There was high feasting that night in the banquet room. A hundred torches flared on the painted walls; the board showed no plate that was not gold plate, and Duke Robert and Harlette sat side by side at the table's head, he dressed with a sort of

barbarous splendor, she in a gemmed robe, with gold bands in her hair. The merrymaking was loud and long, and no man had ever seen Robert in higher spirits, more full of jests and laughter; but Harlette scarcely unclosed her lips, only sat stolid and impassive, and looked at her duke with smoldering eyes. "Very late the revels broke up, and then largesse was scattered in the courtyard—gold coins tossed in heaps from every window—as was done at the mating of a ruler and a ruler's daughter.

VI

WHEN Dame Harlette—as for the most part she was now called—rode into the Duke's castle, the curious had one consoling thought to hug: it would not be for long, this scandal. Fate was not wont to prove overkind to girls of low birth who caught the notice of princes. What was their lot? A little pleasure, a brief time of lovemaking, sweet words, sweet deeds, then shortly coldness and forsaking. Maybe a year of happiness if the saints were generous; and maybe threescore years to follow, of dragging days and bitter bread. Duke Robert was a great lord, free of courts—he would tire soon enough of this tanner's daughter, this Harlette!

They nodded meaningly and pursed their lips, and gave her a year. Then she would come back among them, and be scorned. There would be plentiful punishment for her brief pride, her maddening escort of nobles, her progress that had set them near mad with rage to see her raised so high. She rode up like a queen, did she? Ah, but let her wait! They would repay her when she came back to sit in their midst; they would drive home the fact of her abandonment, with word, with look, never forgetting, though she lived to be a crone of

eighty, whining and shaking, toothless, like old Popee yonder who shivered palely in the full glare of the sun!

As for Harlette, had her townsfolk known it, she was no more sanguine than they. When she was thought most scornful, most exultant, she was in fact most humble. She went to Falaise castle with a heart steeled for whatever came. If her royal lover tired of her in a month, a week, a day, good; she lived only for his pleasure; she would go without protest, whenever he desired it.

Eight years had passed, and to no other woman had he given a glance. If triumph over her sneering world were any balm to her, that balm was hers; not any whisper or scorn or taunt could take it away. More and more, as time progressed, she held the Duke of great Normandy, till all Europe was chattering of this affair between a ruler and his peasant wench. Robert went to Rouen and elsewhere, made wars, subdued vassals, aided the French king—and pounded homeward, galloping hard, to sit with Harlette in his arms. What had begun as a fancy had turned to a strong passion, the one settled thing in his wild life; he who could never have loved a woman of his own rank had found his mate in this shrewd silent girl from the streets of Falaise. And her love, too, had grown, though she would not have thought that possible. More than ever the Duke was sun and moon to her, and earth and heaven; still, when he came to her suddenly, her breath stopped and the world seemed to reel, and pride in his mad splendor made her heart leap. To be in his presence was sufficient happiness, whether she lay in his arms, or served him his wine cup, or stood in the shadow and feasted her eyes on him. To talk to him she never cared; words were always an irk-

some effort to her. Almost dumb for days at a time, she wanted only to be about him and do him service.

But these hours with her lover were her only joy, and the things which others envied her she found hateful. Pomp, feasts among great lords, the splendor of the rooms where she lived, the fine robes she wore, the jeweled bands she put in her hair—unreal trifles, fretting baubles, all of them! She would have been more at ease barefooted, in her old torn dress, and far happier back in the mean house where her father sat blacker and grimmer than before her going, dreaded by the whole of the village. She cared as little for lands and castles, would have none of them at Robert's urging. As for the Duke's nobles, she never felt otherwise than stolidly wretched in their midst, though she fronted them daily with unflinching calm. Since she never exchanged words, few had a chance to sneer at her; since she never proffered friendship, none could slight her; but they could, and did, leave her in solitude. Had she done as many another would have done in her place, alternated love with repentance, fears, prayers before the altar, there would have been priests to comfort and exhort, women to weep and offer sympathy. Instead, she was thought hard and scheming, and her shrewdness made her many foes. Duke Robert had come to lean on this peasant girl—an unbelievable thing.

"By Jesu's Cross, Harlette," he would say, "you have sharper eyes than mine! Now tell me what you see in the Lord of Moults."

To this question, put to her in a crowded hall, she answered after reflection: "I see a jackal who wants to get a share of your meat, but not to risk his skin by helping you hunt it." The shrewd comment was

never forgotten, and the Lord of Moults, as was natural, never forgave its maker.

Another time the Sire de Cinteaulx, he who had done penance with the saddle on his back, was seeking Harlette's good word with the Duke, and tried to please her with overdone flatteries, talk about her power, her greatness, her noble attributes. When at last his speech broke under the sullen scorn of her eyes, she said only: "My lord, I think you are a great liar." These happenings never failed to delight Duke Robert, who swore she had keener wits than any baron of his council.

She paid deep for her snatches of happiness, did Harlette; none the less deeply that she paid with a calm face and an untwisted lip. Never for a moment could she feel secure, or know when she must be turned away from Falaise to see her splendid lord no longer, not to hear again the voice she worshiped. There was, of course, constant talk about marriages for Duke Robert. And Harlette knew that he must wed in the end; did not all lords do that? She would have had no thought of blaming him for it, any more than a slave would blame her master's marriage. So she waited always, in a kind of dumb, fierce torment, thinking that her every happy hour might be the last. *

Her first anguish of this sort came a year after she went to Falaise castle, and soon after she had given the Duke a son,

the boy William, who was later to be crowned King of England and known as the Conqueror. Beaudoin, the Flemish Count—who, being cast in a different mold from his forefather and namesake, Beaudoin Bras-de-Fer, needed much help in the conflict that was forever seething around him, and had to thank Robert the Devil for giving him back a menaced throne—chose this inauspicious time to propose a match between his sister and the Duke. Robert declined the offer with civility, and in private laughed at it; but there was little mirth in Harlette's sick heart, for she saw plainly that what had been urged once would be urged again.

Perhaps once a year something of the sort occurred. The humbled Count of Champagne, Otho, wanted to buy good terms that way; Canute of England fancied that if he could bind Robert to him by alliance, he might be allowed to do thief's work unchecked, and dispossess young Alfred and the younger Edward, the children of Robert's sister; other rulers, such as those of Anjou, Burgundy and the southerly provinces, wanted such a match because the Duke would be a rich kinsman and a powerful, and above all a peerless ally in war, better to have for one than against. Each of these sovereigns gave Harlette—of whom they all had heard, and about whom they jested—such hours of torment as no man could ever know. But the eight long years, passing, found her still throned at the Duke's side; and now came the final test of her power over him.

Something was in the wind. She saw it plainly, glimpsed it in the whispering of the courtiers and their side glances, the half-hidden excitement, the lessened respect she got when the Duke was not there to note. Plainly it was supposed her

day was over, and her foes were rejoicing. But what had chanced? What could it be? She would not ask, but throughout those days of horrible waiting she was like the Duke's shadow, always standing dumbly in the corner of whatever room he frequented, her brows fiercely knitted, her lip fretted by her strong teeth.

In the end it was De Conteville who gave her enlightenment. These two had come little by little to be friends, as indeed was not strange, since each had something of the hard, grim strain possessed by the other. To Sire Herlevin alone, in the Duke's following, did Harlette commonly show her thoughts, led to it by a frankness on his part that others might have called brutal. "Duke Robert will tire of you yet, wench!" he would say, when some talked-of marriage had blown by for the moment and her empire was safe; and she: "It is likely. I am ready, by day or by night, to go." That was the way people talked down in the narrow streets of Falaise, in the marketplace, about the tanning vats, and it gave no distress to Harlette. The smooth stabs of the courtiers were another matter; they left her without refuge, with no defense save her eternal silence.

This time Sire Herlevin came to her as she sat on a heap of cushions, staring from the window toward where Eraines forest stretched green. The Duke was hunting that day, and as for the moment she could not have him to gaze upon, she made the best of it and looked instead at the place that held him; so lost was she in her fierce contemplation that she did not know of De Conteville's approach until he spoke. "Well, Dame Harlette," he began, "have you your fine robes made into a packet, your gems put together for carrying away? For I suppose you know that when dukes

take royal wives, they cannot keep their true-loves of old about them."

Harlette stiffened all over. So, here then, as she had guessed, lay the cause of all those nods, those whispers, those sneering glances! She did not turn her eyes on Sire Herlevin, but kept them fixed, burning and smoldering, on the distant forest. "With whom does my lord wed? And when?"

De Conteville answered rather more brutally than before, perhaps because he pitied her, and because pity was to him a new thing and not a pleasant one.

"When? How should I know that? But I suppose with all haste, lest a match so splendid slip through his fingers. And do you ask with whom? I tell you only this—there have been at Rouen envoys from the French king, awaiting our Duke; he has bidden them meet him here; they are looked for today. It is known that they come to talk about a marriage pact, and that Sire Henry has a young daughter of whom to dispose. A bolt from the blue that, eh? And a fine offer for any man not a king, name of God? Would many refuse it, do you think?"

Steadily if fiercely, she answered: "None would refuse it. I have foreseen it long. Now it will be."

"Well, to wed is a good thing!" said Sire Herlevin. "By marriage a woman gets a ring on her finger, a priest's blessing mumbled over her—matters on which, it appears, great store is set; and a man gets someone to watch his house and his comfort. My thoughts have turned that way of late, but I want no baron's daughter, no match of policy, II Hearken, Harlette, shall we two mate the night Duke Robert brings home his princess?"

Wretched, impatient, Harlette sat frowning at him. "You make a mock of me. Great lords do not wed my like."

"Nor do dukes commonly love them," said De Conteville, in his grim fashion. "Yet a duke has loved you long, and I will wed you when you choose."

Strangely, she felt no gratitude, but rather anger. "I belong to my lord. I have nothing to give other men. When he casts me off, I go," she said fiercely. Sire Herlevin laughed to hide the sword stab her words gave him, jibed a little more, counseled her to pack up her gear for departure and went away.

The French envoys arrived before sunset, a very brilliant troop in bright armor and gay cloaks and floating plumes, with banners borne before them; and the Duke of Normandy gave them hearing after supper, in the hall. It was a strange audience indeed; the Duke was but just home from the forest, and still clad in his hunting suit; he held a wine cup in one hand, and had Harlette on his knee, with his left arm about her. The envoys, who had looked for a solemn meeting in a council chamber, with graybeards present to give advice, made some slight demur as to speaking. But the Duke was not often denied the having of what he wanted and in what fashion he chose, and in a short time the spokesman had begun to recite his part.

His speech was a formal one, and tedious. He told of the King his master's high gratitude to his good ally, Duke Robert, who had aided him against unnatural kinsmen and rebel vassals, and given him back a throne ravished from him by these traitors. He had cause to hold Robert dearer than his own brothers, had French Henry; and he wanted a closer bond still. Convenient to the purpose, he

had a daughter. She had been sought by kings—but there was one better fitted to her than any king of Europe. Her dowry would be this and that, cities, provinces, so much gold. What was the Duke's mind in the affair?

When the last word had been said, Duke Robert shook his great shoulders and burst out into laughter, wholehearted mirth.

"My friends," said he, "get back to the King of France, for you waste his time sorely hereabouts and can serve him better at other courts. Tell him I remain his very good ally, his brother sovereign. When he chooses he shall have, as before, my right arm to fight for him, my men to keep peace in his vexed land, if need be my heart's blood, shed in his aid! But he will not have the marrying of me; he must give his lady daughter to one of those kings who so desire her." He set down his wine cup and showed Harlette to them with a wave of the hand. "Here is all the wife I want, all I shall ever have. Tell your master there lives but one woman who can dwell unmurdered with Norman Robert—tell him it is ill meddling with devils, and that he would serve the princess very poorly if he gave her such a lord!"

Having thus made them tremble at sound of one of his surnames, he called the other to their minds and proved himself Robert the Magnificent, by having gifts brought out and lavished on them—cloth of gold. Eastern stuffs, great uncut jewels. To his brother the King he sent a finer present yet, and the finest of all to the princess of whom he would have none. Then he dismissed them, and they went away, very glad to be quit of their business with this splendid, appalling person. As for Harlette, when she was alone with her

lord she said no word of content or gratitude, indeed no word at all, good or bad. She only turned her face down against Duke Robert's sleeve, and knew, with a slow, fierce joy, that she was to serve him for a little time more.

VII

BUT only for a little time; for she was, by now, too well aware of the truth to blink it. There was afoot against her a worse foe than any royal princess, and its name was madness. How she had fought that enemy, how she had contended with it each inch of the way, none could ever guess save herself, and in some scant measure the Sire de Conteville. But she was beaten, beaten; and her foe was stronger than she.

To the world it appeared that Duke Robert grew greater and greater as time went on. So he did, in achievements, for the more the fire of his madness burned in him, the less rest he could take, the less he found ease in anything save the swirl of furious combat. In these moods he flung himself afresh into King Henry's service, sweeping the French realm as bare of royal enemies as a man's ungloved hand is bare; he got in payment Chambord and Pontoise and the whole of French Vexin, and valued them less than the few moments' surcease of remorse which the worst of the fighting had given him. He so bore himself against Count Otho of Champagne as to have that haughty ruler cringing at his foot, crying for peace, purchasing it at an unreasonable price. He frightened Canute of England, made him divide his kingdom with his robbed nephews. His daredevil splendor in warfare became the bane of Europe, and left a mark that can still be seen dimly, as if through mists; and in his own day.

too, men saw him through a mist, a mist of fear, across which he loomed a great gleaming battle figure, incredibly terrible. But it was the fever of his madness that drove him, and he paid for his triumphs later, moaning before the altars, fighting a remorse that no priest could take away.

The shadow of his murdered brother was with him always, in peace or war. Even in his tent, at night, before a battle. Sire Herlevin would hear him muttering in his sleep. "Pity, high heaven! Am I never to have peace—never, never? Did I not repent, even before my crime was done? Did I not send to bid them fling away the poison—was it my deed that the horse fell dead, that the message never reached its goal? Mercy, dear saints! Mercy, gentle Virgin!" When there was no seething battlefield to engage him, his moods were at their worst, and then he hanged men and ravaged lands and burned castles, only because of the fever that burned his blood and denied him rest. His courtiers dreaded him now as they did not dread fire; when he rode down a street the people scurried out of his way like chased mice; in all his domain there was no one who did not fear him, save only the tanner's daughter.

It was with this enemy that Harlette fought her losing fight over the body of the Duke. She had done much. In the early years she had found it a simple thing to quiet his frenzy with her calm, her shrewdness, her possessed silence. Later it was not so easy. Not once nor twice, but many times, he had come near to killing her, and she had faced him sullenly and steadily, without tremor. "Kill me if you wish. It is yours, my life," she said once, at what she believed her last moment. After these attacks came reaction; he would catch her in his arms, cry for her for-

givenness, rain kisses on her face. She took the one event as stolidly as the other, but as the months passed she suffered more and more; for she knew that sanity could not endure long in a man tormented like this.

The end came in a strange way, at a scene of merriment. It was a banquet, and at the same time a funeral feast; for it was held in honor of the final downfall of the Sire de Cinteaulx. This noble, always a thorn in the Duke's flesh, had capped the measure of his iniquities by aiding to escape from Normandy a certain vassal who lay under royal displeasure. When Duke Robert heard the tale, he sat for a time very quiet but with gleaming eyes, and then sent a messenger to bid the Sire de Cinteaulx attend him. The Sire, being a wise man, did no such thing, but went to his distant castle as fast as a pounding horse could carry him, pulled the drawbridge up after him and began to prepare for a siege. Before long he got it, and in a fortnight the castle had fallen to Robert's attack—men said the devil aided in the business, riding invisible at the Duke's side—and De Cinteaulx was in chains. He was brought back to Falaise in that condition, tied to his horse; in the morning he was to be hanged, as De Conteville had advised long ago and now advised again. Meanwhile, Duke Robert and his courtiers feasted, and Harlette was at the board, too.

The Duke was in a gay mood, though feverish, as always of late. He made jests about the recent skirmish and the present emotions of De Cinteaulx, and then wanted to know what had passed at Falaise during his absence. They told him that a peasant had been caught poaching in Eraines wood, and was now lying below in the donjon, waiting for execution on the

morrow. The tale struck a chord in Robert's memory; he turned to Harlette where she sat speechless beside him. "If that black father of yours had not gone a-hunting in Eraines," cried he, "I might never have seen you, heart of mine— might never have had you at my side to cheer me on the way my feet must tread, the way to hellfire! For sake of him and what he set in train, I have a mind to pardon this fellow; and moreover I am in a festal mood tonight, and disposed to hang no villain but De Cinteaulx."

His eyes swept about among his nobles. "How do you say, my lords? Shall we have in the rogue? Shall we get a bit of diversion by first ordering his immediate death, then turning him loose with a piece of gold?"

Nobody at the table had the power of reading the future, or of guessing the frightful end that the play was to have. There was great laughter and crying of assent and pounding of knives on the board; everyone was mirthful but Harlette.

The Duke sent out a command, which was promptly obeyed. In a very short time the hangings at the door were withdrawn, and a pair of guards pushed in a wild, haggard, half-starved fellow who staggered across the floor, stared with blinded eyes at the splendid company and the gold-littered table, and, having got breath, shook the room with the Norman cry for justice. "*Harot Harot*" It was a hopeless wail, coming from a man who already guessed his fate.

Duke Robert leaned forward, blue eyes gleaming. "You cry for justice, rogue? You have boldness, truly, since it is justice I mean to deal out to you, and in such a fashion as you will not like! If you had asked for mercy, now— Saint Maclou!

Have you never heard what comes to folk who go poaching in my woods?"

The peasant crouched backward, peering at Robert's great towering figure; he was mad with terror, half crazy like his sovereign. "Mercy, lord, mercy! I was a-hungred; I had no bread!" He flung himself on his knees and groveled; but the Duke went on laughing, and gestured to the guards.

"Take out this carrion. Give him the justice he demands with so much clamor—set him to dangle from my highest tower!"

In an instant more the affair would have been at an end, leaving all who sat at the table in a pleasant humor. But unhappily, to the crazed peasant, the prospect of imminent death seemed no jest. Foaming bloodily at the mouth, struggling in the arms of his jailers, he turned on the Duke a convulsed face and snarled at him through bared teeth. "Eh, eh! Kill me then, Devil! Kill all poor men who put fingers on a scrap of meat to keep flesh on their bones— and eat off gold, go in silk, you who slew a brother, you who mock God!" He shook to and fro in a burst of laughter, high and insane.

There was terrible silence while a man might without haste have counted five. Then the table went over with a great crash, littering the floor with food and wine and gold plate and drinking cups. The Duke of Normandy was on his feet, towering over the peasant, bending back his head with the left hand and clutching in the right a knife caught up from the board. It hung poised, flashed downward, sheathed itself at the base of the man's neck; he fell with a choking death shriek—lay huddled together, like a heap of rags, against the Duke's foot. Once more the brief hush reigned.

"Pretty work for a banquet, beau sire! Maybe you will let them take him away now, if you have had your will of him," said Sire Herlevin, at his lord's side.

Duke Robert had wrenched his knife free, was raising it again. The torches had fallen with the table, and now lay scattered about the floor, glowing, half quenched; their light showed the great figure, the tossed mane, the mad blue eyes that roamed menacingly here, there, about the circle of risen nobles. "Ha!" cried Duke Robert, in a high, terrible voice. "Men talk of me this way? And which of you gave the rogue his hint—aye, which of you? Will you tell me, or shall I kill you all?" It seemed that he was about to fling himself forward.

Harlette got between him and his lords, and gestured toward the door. "Go," she muttered, short of breath, but plainly with unshaken wits. "Go unless you want to die! Let none stay here but me!"

There was need of no second bidding; they struggled for the door in blind horror, fighting for place, trampling the dead man's body. Only Sire Herlevin stood his ground, though the Duke's mad, glaring eyes were full upon him. Harlette saw that he remained. "Fool! Fool! Will you go?" she said fiercely. And at that he shrugged, and a moment later the arras fell behind him.

Harlette went up to Robert. "Give me the knife, my lord."

The flight of the nobles had turned his rage. "They leave me!" he panted, shaken all over, his lips touched whitely with foam. "They fall off from me! Hey, and what wonder? Do they not know me for a leper, shunned by God, doomed to burn? All know it, even the peasants." His voice sunk to a stealthy whisper; his eyes narrowed and began to peer about him among the shadows; it seemed that he was

searching, with terrible furtiveness, for something which lurked there and threatened him. "Yes, they know it. For see you, girl, my brother goes creeping through Falaise of nights, in the hours when spirits may walk abroad! And he whispers to my people, telling them of the poison cup I brewed, of his death in torment. And then he leaves them pale-cheeked and smitten with horror. He comes up from the village by the castle road, silently, swiftly, as wind goes. The men-at-arms who watch my doors cannot halt him; he glides between them, steals through hall and chamber, stands by my couch—" Of a sudden his roving, peering eyes fixed themselves on a spot against the hangings. "Why, look yonder! He is here now; I see him in the shadows, there by the arras! He is coming, he is creeping on me—the light shines across his face—O Christ! *Richard!*" His voice rose to a shriek. "My hour is come at last, just God! For a long time I have glimpsed this dimly—now at last I see it plain! To kill others is useless. It is myself I must kill!"

He poised the knife, ready for the blow; and then Harlette sprang on him, her hands fastening on his wrist. He shrieked out again, cursed, cried to her to let him free; but she held fast. "Stand off, or by heaven you die!" he snarled at her; and she snarled back: "I will never stand off. I care nothing whether I die or not." They fought pantingly, all about the room. The mad Duke was the strongest man in Normandy, but somewhere Harlette got power to stand against him; he tore off her fingers a dozen times, but they clasped again; he flung her from him, and she regained her hold before he could strike. Then his foot slipped in a patch of spilt wine, and he went down at full length, the

knife jolting out of his grasp and dropping, all a-glitter, beside a dying torch.

For a long time he lay like one stunned, while Harlette, panting, disordered, stood tense against the wall, and stared at his prone figure with fierce eyes. By and by he stirred a little; she was alert on the instant, but without need. "Harlette," he said in a dull, anguished voice. "Harlette." It was like the cry of a child. She went over to him, crouched down beside him and took his hands. So they remained moment after moment, without speech.

An hour had passed, and Harlette stood alone in the disordered banquet hall. The Duke had got to his feet a few moments since, and stared about him for a time with blinded eyes, and at length had rocked out of the room and down the staircase. Following him at a distance, as a dog follows a dangerous master, she saw him go into the chapel and kneel down on the stone steps before the altar, and knew that he would remain there for many hours, as was his custom after his mad fits. Slowly she came back to the hall, and stood there reflecting, with her lip drawn between her teeth.

Here was the long-deferred end of all things. While the Duke's madness might be held even a little at bay, there had been hope; now there was none. Well enough she recalled how foreign wars had been kindled for his easing, how men to whom he was but a dreaded name had fallen on red battlefields because he must drown remorse; and she blamed him no more for this than she would have blamed the sun for killing mortals with its golden heat. Let him slay vassals to his heart's content, if it brought him ease; let him kill folk like this peasant, so she thought, looking down impassively at the huddled form that lay at her feet, the pool of blood beside it. Aye,

and let him kill her, Harlette—for what was she save his woman—and what was her life worth, save for his pleasure? But now he desired to kill himself. She had thwarted him for the moment; but his impulse would come again, when she was not near.

Her slow, shrewd brain groped in the dark, searching, rejecting. Fiercely she resented her own dullness of wit. To whom could she turn for counsel? Not to the nobles who had fled like scared boys, nor yet to her one friend. Sire Herlevin. Had any ever helped her in her life? Ha, yes! The years seemed to fall away; she saw herself sitting in a cave mouth in the woods of Gouffern, getting advice from an old hermit, who made plain to her the inner secrets of her heart.

Going to the narrow window, she peered out. There had been mists abroad in the afternoon, rain at dusk when the Duke's triumphant cortege rode home; and now, at midnight, a storm was blowing. Crooked lightning flashes came at intervals, showing dense black clouds from which the water fell heavily. Gouffern would be an ill place tonight. By tomorrow the storm might pass—yes, but by tomorrow the Duke's subdued madness might again flare up.

Harlette left the banquet hall, picking her way amid the Utter, not glancing at the murdered peasant. In her chamber she found the fire gone out, and her two tirewomen asleep on the floor. Not disturbing them, she took a long dark cloak from a chest beneath the window, muffled herself in it, and shrouded her head in its hood. Then she went below stairs and out of the castle. She was halted at the gates, but pushed her hood back and showed her face, and was allowed to

pass. A moment later she was out in the night, walking fast.

VIII

How Harlette made her way through Gouffern can never be known. There was a footpath which she sought out, and to which she held, keeping it by touch of foot and finger, bending to feel it when in doubt lest she might have strayed to right or left; and sometimes she had forked lightning to guide her. The forest was drenched, a gravelike place; the stripped branches tossed and moaned, and the ground was thick with sodden leaves.

For a half-hour and more she struggled on against the storm, making the best speed she could, breathing heavily for sheer effort. Then, of a sudden, she saw before her in the blackness what seemed a tiny point of light—It wavered, lessened, vanished, a firefly; it showed itself again, appeared to grow and strengthen—and she knew it for the hermit's fire. After that she stumbled through the sodden forest without thought of the path, following the fire point till it grew to a thing of brightness and flame, a beacon that broke the night with red beams. In the end she crossed a wet space of earth, stood at the mouth of the cave and looked within.

The hermit sat between the rocky walls, hunched over the fire, staring before him with pale, lusterless eyes. He seemed no older, no younger than on her eight-years-past visit; one might have supposed that time had forgotten him. Also, despite the lateness of the hour and the wild weather, he followed the custom she remembered—showed no surprise at her arrival, seemed not to know that she was there.

Somewhat dazed by the sudden light and warmth after her journey through the black woods, she came in stiffly and halted close to the fire. Such visits, she recalled, began always with a gift. At present she had about her nothing which she thought as useful as the deer-meat she had offered him before; but she took off her finger a wide band of pale gold, pierced and twisted, with an emerald flickering greenly in its center. "For you, old man," she said, and laid it down beside him.

He ignored it; plainly, like its giver, he thought it an unreal and useless thing, though many a man in Falaise would have done wild deeds for that green stone. Meanwhile Harlette sat down by the fire and loosened her drenched cloak. The flames touched her bared brown throat and the rich dress under it; danced, too, on the jewels stuck in her heavy russet hair, and made them glow as her narrowed eyes glowed. She looked splendid and sullen, like a slave loaded with battle spoil by some barbarian king.

By and by she said: "I want counsel again. Do you know what has come to me in these years?"

He looked beyond her with indifference. "How should I know it? What have I to do with the world, or with women? I am far from such things, save when they come beating at my doors," he said in the high, thin voice she remembered.

She pushed her wet hair backward. "I went to my Duke. I have served him a long time. I have given him some ease. But now I can help him no more; he goes mad slowly, and I look on. What shall I do, old man?"

She seemed to see that look of pale malice once more in his eyes, but for a little he kept silence, and they both sat staring at the red-gold coals. Then he said:

"Listen, woman. I bade you go to your Duke if you had a heart to drain dry, eyes to weep blind, a soul to be trampled. You went with a high head, as is the way of youth—and now you come breaking my solitude, asking me a question already answered. Your Duke goes mad, and you who cased him once can ease him no more? Fool—is it not plain that your hour is over, that another must take your task? Mark him well—he will be turning to some new thing, as men do, as they have always done. Is it a woman? Put her in his arms. Is it a desire of another sort? Buy it for him at price of your life, your heart, your soul! I say no more."

He huddled over the fire again, and began to mutter under his breath. Harlette got to her feet and stumbled off through the drenched stretches of Gouffern, pondering dully on what he had said, turning it over and over, looking in vain for any way to practise it. When she entered Falaise castle again all was quiet; save for the men who kept watch, the place slept. She went into the keep, passed through halls lighted in ghostly fashion with flickering torches and softly approached the chapel. Standing in its doorway, with her mantle hanging about her like a wet shroud and dripping rainwater in pools on the floor, she looked for the Duke.

It was a small place and a dark one, but all a-teem with splendor—rich vestments, painted images, robed saints, gleam of gold and jewels about the shrines. Candles glowed softly, and in their light, on the altar steps, Robert the Devil knelt as he had knelt before Harlette's going, stiffly and with a convulsed and upturned face. For long spaces of time he was still, save for his rapidly moving lips; but at intervals he moaned chokingly or cried out, and

bent forward and laid his forehead on the stone.

"Oh, God's Mother! I am on the threshold of madness. Oh, saints of mercy! Will you drive me mad for my sins?" The terrible cry rang through the chapel, like the wail of a lost soul.

Harlette stood staring at him and frowning wretchedly, careless of her dripping garments and the chill cold that held her, aware only of the gnawing pain at her heart. Stubbornly she forced her mind back to the words of the hermit. "He will be turning for case to some new thing, as men do. Why, it was truth, that; a little time since he had turned to her for strength; now he turned to prayer and the chapel altar!"

She stood considering, brows drawn down, mind working with a slow, shrewd steadiness. It may be that love lent her wit, for little by little she unraveled the puzzle. To her religion was a name, a thing of churches, burning candles, colored saints with clasped hands, figures of Christ twisting on the cross; and to think of it made her uneasy, turned her sullen, since she knew that somewhere was a Being who was angry at her for having yielded to her lord. But Robert thought differently. He must have relief, and by these things to which he cried. Where were they? Above, no doubt; but heaven was very distant, and the Duke's guilt was near and terribly real. Could she find nothing on earth to help him?

Of a sudden a name, heard long ago, sprang searingly through her mind. Jerusalem! Once she had listened while a priest talked of such a city, telling how men went there and prayed on a certain spot where the Lord had agonized; how their sins were lifted off them, and their souls had peace forever! Where the place

was she had no clear notion—very far, dim in the distance. What if Duke Robert went to this Jerusalem?

At the thought she made a quick jealous movement, half panther, all peasant; her hands clenched at her sides, her lip came off her teeth. Was she to give up her possession, till now so tigerishly held? Not to be in her lord's arms, not to serve him his cup, not to touch his hand or even rest her eyes on him—eh, it would be the end of her life; her sun would go out, her world be black! Well, what did that matter? Maybe if she had been his duchess she could have had selfish whims; but she was only his woman, his servant.

For a moment more she stood looking at him, torn by fierce, hot pain, yet fixed in her intent as Fate is fixed. Then she turned away without any backward glance, and began to climb the winding stairs that led to her chamber.

One who grows up as a peasant girl, working from dawn to dusk, afoot in all weathers, has at least the reward of strong health. Many a woman would have died of Harlette's jaunt into Gouffern; but she paid the event no more tribute than a somewhat restless tossing on her couch through what remained of the night, and was up at sunrise as was her custom, quietly awaiting Duke Robert.

She waited for him the whole of the day, sitting almost motionless above stairs, looking out of the window with such eyes of dumb, furious pain as a trapped animal shows. Secretly, she was impatient for her lord's coming, eager to know the worst. But the Duke stayed on hour after hour in his chapel, fighting with the tide of remorse and madness, and no one, not even Sire Herlevin, dared go near him. Only when night fell and the torches were

kindled and the supper laid out did he come to Harlette in her chamber.

He was very feverish still, but quiet, being worn to utter exhaustion. From time to time he yawned deeply, then shivered and started, and leapt half out of his chair in a surge of the old mad terror. He said nothing, and Harlette, too, did not speak, but gave him food and wine, which he consumed with a sort of fierceness. When the meal was ended she set about her work. Still on her knees beside him, as she had knelt to press the wine cup against his lips, she spoke in the calm way one uses when talking of a matter already settled.

"My lord will be going to Jerusalem, before much time has passed?"

The Duke looked at her vaguely. His dulled brain had caught no more than the one word.

"Jerusalem?" he said, repeating.

Still and stolid, she knelt on. "Yes. For my lord has sick fancies; the devil torments him for a sin he did long ago. When men suffer in that way, they go to a holy place; they kneel and talk to God—"

He understood her now; she saw the terror fade out of his haunted eyes, banished by an uncertain gleam of hope. Ha, she was on the right path; she had read him well! It seemed to her that she had a knife sticking in her heart, but she made no movement, only went on speaking with steady slowness.

"My lord will do that, too. He will go to Jerusalem and pray. And his sin will be forgiven, and he will have peace."

The Duke of Normandy struggled up on his feet with a gasping cry; Harlette saw his face flame with wonder, eagerness, unbelieving joy. For a full moment he was dumb, and then the words came from him in a torrent, peltingly, with sharp pauses between—a sob of thanksgiving, the

paeon of one long tormented, who at last sees relief in sight.

"Sweet saints, I praise you! See me in the dust before you, mighty God! Eh, for years I have stumbled in the dark, repenting, agonizing—now comes a lightning flash to break my night; now you end my strife as by a miracle! Yes, I will cast my crown off, fling away my scepter, put on a pilgrim's robe and walk barefoot over the rough stones. I will traverse Europe, going unarmed, passing but one night in any spot. At last I will come to Jerusalem, kneel at the Sepulcher, cry to Christ to give me ease. The sacred blood will heal me; the wounds in the hands, in the feet, will cry aloud in my behalf; crowned Mary will bend down from where she sits in bliss, the saints will receive my prayer—and I shall have peace, and Richard will never again creep behind me, whispering of a world to come, of a soul forever lost! Ah, Lord Christ, Lord Jesu, I thank you now!"

Harlette was panting, drawing her breath in sharp, torn gasps. But she only said: "It will be so."

Duke Robert reeled and stumbled, fell down on one knee, tried vainly to regain his feet. Stupor was creeping about him, as always after his fits of madness and the vigils that followed them; his outcry had been the final crash of the thunder storm, the last leap of the fire before its sinking. Harlette bent over him and lowered him gently on the heap of wolfskins that lay against the wall. "Let my lord sleep," she said, "since all is well now."

He muttered, "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" and tried to pull himself up; but already his lids were drooping.

"Let my lord go to sleep," she said again, and he did indeed sleep, almost on her last word.

She crouched at his head, hardly breathing. Only her eyes were alive, it seemed; and they, hot and smoldering, were turned on the Duke's breast, where a gold cross hung by a chain. The look they held was a strange thing—half dull anger at this symbol that lured away her lover; half passionate gratitude for the peace it was to bring him. Hour after hour went by, and still she kept her fierce watch. She had torn out her heart and offered it to buy her lord his desire; she seemed to feel the blood ooze from it drop by drop; she suffered a gnawing jwiin that was like to endure to her life's end. Yet a savage triumph was hers also, for Robert the Devil was sleeping with no sign of torment on his face; and this rest of his was her work,

IX

WHEN the news ran through Normandy that the great Duke was to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, there was much outcry among both lords and people. Such a journey was dangerous in those days; the man who made it braved fierce heat and fiercer cold, agues and fevers, violent death at the hands of the Saracens who held and oppressed the Sepulcher. If Duke Robert went, it was likely he would not return, and then what would come to the realm? For years now, while the rest of Europe had writhed in war throes and mighty countries had been torn apart, Normandy had lain snug under the hand of its great soldier-lord, its foes beaten off, its marches advancing instead of receding, its ills only such as came on it through the fierce temper of its sovereign. But what if he died somewhere * in a far land, and left his subjects with no heir of his to rule over

them? In a flurry and on their knees, they begged him to remain.

The only part of this argument to which Duke Robert seemed to give any heed was the mention of his lacking heir. Over that he pondered with narrowed eyes, and at last struck the table a great blow, like a man who solves a question to his pleasure; but at the rest he laughed, as he was always laughing nowadays. Since the night when Harlette had turned his thoughts to Jerusalem, it was plain that a mantle of guilt and remorse had fallen off his shoulders. In mad high spirits he set his face toward the land over the seas; he would go there as soon as he might; in the meantime all things had regained their savor. He loved to hunt, and spent hours in the woods; feasting gave him diversion as formerly it had done; Harlette's face had its ancient power over him. He strode through the castle like a Viking god, splendid, all-conquering, irresistible, as he had been in the days when Harlette first came to him—those days when madness, though already his housemate, was not yet his daily comrade. As for her, she remained no less impassive than before. If in her savage pain she wondered how any could be light of heart, or if to see him so changed was balm to her, she gave no sign that could be read.

For some time after his subjects had made useless protest about his going, it appeared that Duke Robert was turning something over in his mind. Then one morning he kissed Harlette, summoned a train of lords to attend him, called for young William, Harlette's son and his—a boy now of seven years—and rode away with the child at his side. Of what his destination might be he said nothing, and Harlette, sitting by her window, straining her eyes along the road by which he went,

had a month for reflection before she saw him again.

The cortege returned at last, Robert at its head, in higher spirits than when he had gone, if that were possible. Plainly joy and triumph rode him harder than he rode his horse, and when he was out of his saddle and in the hall he caught the silent Harlette off her feet and held her pressed against him, talking fast and eagerly into her ear.

"Do you want a bit of merry news, heart of mine? Do you want to know a wonderful thing, a thing scarce credible? Then hear the tale of what I have been about this past month!

"I went first to Paris, spurring as my foes spur when I follow them; I clattered a-horseback into the King's palace on the island; I stood in front of the throne, and our boy stood with me. Then, when French Henry had kissed my cheek and made compliments, I said:

"Beau sire, you have been pleased to say many times that I have done you service against certain foes of yours, and that you desired to make me a suitable return. Well, you shall now have your chance. I am going on a pilgrimage, and though I hope to come back shortly and aid you again, and somewhat better than I have done yet, it may be that I am oversanguine and that the Saracens will get me; and if die I do, I want to leave Normandy an heir of my blood. Here is my son, young William—will you, my suzerain and the Norman overlord, acknowledge him as Duke after me?" I got his consent easily, and then pounded back to Rouen, where at my command all my barons took a like oath. Moreover, I have sent messengers to Brittany, where my kinsman Duke Alain consents to act as regent for the boy if I leave my bones to bleach in Palestine.

What have you to say to this, sweet? Your son and mine to rule in Normandy—it is well thought of, eh?"

She met his triumph stolidly, as her custom was, not betraying her thoughts, "I rejoice with my lord, as always." But in secret she knew another fierce pang. Her boy, strong and splendid, a relic of her great lover—he, too, then, was to be taken from her; for certainly she, peasant Harlette, could have no part in him once he was a crowned sovereign. Hey, well, her lord desired it, and there was an end.

The time for departure drew very near; preparations went on busily; hasty plans were made for the future. Duke Robert's heir being over-young for dealing with affairs of state, the duchy was to be ruled by Gilbert Crespon, the great Count of Brionne, who would make report of all he did to the Breton regent; Raoul de Gace*, a noble and a famed soldier, would be the boy's governor, dwelling with him at Falaise. The hill town was a place of tumult—every day saw some new lord arrive to follow the Duke on his pilgrimage; the castle had turned to the likeness of a camp. In the midst of this confusion Harlette one morning encountered Herlevin de Conteville on the staircase, and stopped to address him for the first time in many weeks.

"Sire Herlevin," she said, "do you go with my lord?"

De Conteville had the look of a man in an ill temper. He stood blackly silent before answering. "I stop at Falaise," he said in the end. She stared; and in a moment he broke out at her with sudden, grating fury. "Go with the Duke, you ask? Aye. and leave you unguarded by any friend? Folk hereabouts hold you dear, is it not so—would never plan mischief against you, once Robert's hand was off them?"

Saints, woman, have you no wits, that you think yourself safe?" He showed his teeth in a laugh that was like a snarl. "A rare peasant girl are you, a rare tanner's daughter! A duke loves you for eight years; and I, a noble, would give up my war honor, staying here to guard you—"

She broke in on him with hot, angry eyes.

"I—I! Does it matter what comes to me? You would call yourself the Duke's friend, yet not follow him into the strange land to keep between him and danger? Not tend him if he gets a wound? Not watch him if he takes a fever? And you think I have given up all, to have his friends stop here to guard me? What sort of talk is this?"

After a time Sire Herlevin said: "You are a good wench, Harlette." Then he turned and went down the stairs, and it was shortly noised about Falaise that he was to follow the Duke to Palestine.

The eve of the departure, arrived at last, found Robert and Harlette alone for a brief moment at the falling of dark. It was their farewell, for the Duke was now to hold vigil in the castle chapel; after that he would be purified, bound on a holy quest; he must glance aside at no woman, least of all at this one who had set his feet in the path he was treading. His spirits were still very high, and he took leave of her with jesting and caresses, as if he were doing no more than ride into Rouen. "Will you long for me, my girl, while I am across seas? Eh, but a little time will see me back in Falaise, holding you on my knee, drinking out of the cup you put to my lips, telling you strange tales of outland sights. And I shall be a sane man again, a man no longer companioned by the devil, stalked no more by a tormenting ghost. That will be your doing—by Jesu, there lives in the world no woman who is your like!"

She said: "I have tried to serve my lord. I am glad you go to get peace."

"Farewell for a little time, my Harlette. Never forget me while I am gone."

"When I forget my lord, I shall be dead."

He kissed her again and strode away, still laughing, to his vigil. He never knew that she kept it with him, crouching outside the chapel door till the coming of the cold, dark dawn.

When Harlette saw the Duke in a pilgrim's robe of gray, his feet bare, his blond mane covered by a hood, his eyes flashing blue and bright from the gathered folds, a dizziness took her and made the crowded courtyard swim in waves of darkness, and she had need to clutch at the window for support. It seemed that a great gulf had been set between her and her lord, that God and his Church had intervened to part them. She felt suddenly assured that never again would she see him, never again serve him. But after a moment she took her hand off the window ledge and stood as stolidly as ever, watching the cortege depart.

It wound down the steep road, passed slowly through the town. Priests and nobles followed it; there was glint of armor, sheen of mantles and surcoats, pomp of holy gear and swinging censers and chanted songs. Harlette saw only one figure, one that dwarfed all the rest—Duke Robert the Magnificent, looking more splendid now than ever he had done in glittering mail. She never knew that curious, spiteful eyes were on her, did not guess that the grim gaze of Sire Herlevin came back to her from across his shoulder for as long as he could see her window. Her mind held a single thought—to the last moment she must keep the Duke in sight. She continued to stand looking after

him till the procession was a mere crawling splotch of color, very far distant.

Duke Robert was on his way to Palestine to buy peace for his soul, and Harlette was alone in Falaise.

X

NEWS traveled slowly in those times, yet traveled with sufficient sureness.

At intervals of weeks, such and such a piece of intelligence about the Duke of Normandy would find its way to Paris, thence to Rouen, thence at last to where Falaise perched on its rocks. Duke Robert had entered Constantinople, to give an instance; and though that city was well used to the sight of sumptuous princes, he had been a ten days' wonder there, both for his own giant's form and blond Frankish splendor, and for the gold which he tossed about him as another man might have flung chaff. Later, it was heard he had passed through Antioch. At the walls he had by chance jostled against a gatekeeper, who, seeing no more in him than a gray-robed pilgrim, had given him a smart blow of the mace. There had been cries among the Norman lords at this outrage, and for a moment it had seemed that the hardy mortal would scatter his limbs to the four winds; but Robert the Devil, who at home was wont to kill men for a rash word, had laughed—laughed heartily and with a good will, in such fashion as brought the raised arms of his followers down to their sides.

"Here is a penance pilgrimage indeed, by God's throne," cried he, "if I am to be buffeted peasant-wise by dogs like these! It is very well; it is very fitting. I hold that good blow more dear than Rouen, my chief city!" So the gatekeeper got a tossed purse of gold in lieu of sudden death.

When news of such a sort was brought to Harlette, she heard it without comment or show of feeling; indeed, her sullen dumbness was rarely broken nowadays. Most of her time she passed in Duke Robert's chamber, sitting among the things that had been his and regarding them with passion, or staring from the window at the road by which he had gone. Whispers from Falaise reached her; it was said there that even if the Duke came home, to her he would never return. Such gossip was balm to her townfolk, balm above all to yellow-haired Gonor, now grown fat and far from lovely, but no less jealous of the Duke's *mie* than of old. To Harlette it meant nothing what talk was bruited. Of her own will she had put in her heart a pain that gave her no time for thought of pin pricks.

Time wore on, and presently came a piece of news so startling as to turn the minds of the Falaisians far from Harlette. It was learned that on his way through Lesser Asia there had come on the Duke of Normandy a sharp sickness. Many rumors flew about. Some said he had been poisoned by an infidel, who envied the Christian God so splendid-appearing a servant. Others thought he had eaten a noxious fruit; a few believed he had caught a fever on the journey. One thing alone was sure—despite his suffering he had not halted.

For a month all Normandy waited tensely. Then there came back to his home near Saint-Quentin a Norman baron who, returning himself from a visit to the Sepulcher, had encountered Duke Robert the Devil, borne in a litter by four Saracens, and followed by the rest of his troop in a state of great distress and anxiety for his welfare.

This Sire d'Avranches said that the Duke was certainly a very ill man, yet seemed in crazy good spirits. (These, in fact, had never flagged once since the night when Harlette did her work, easing his soul and searing hers.) A fever and a sickness were on him, but he was fighting them as he had fought foes all his life, and with as great battle joy. He had thrust his head through the litter curtains, and had recognized the Sire d'Avranches on the instant; and, "Ho, my friend," he had cried, "when you walk Norman soil again, tell my people you have seen their Duke on his way to Paradise, borne by four devils!" He had laughed as he uttered the words, said d'Avranches, but not one of his following had laughed with him; their air had been more that of men who desired to weep.

When these tidings had been given her Harlette sat in the castle day after day like a dead woman. She had never wept in her life, nor did she weep now; there were no tears in her. She did not pray either; she knew God would not listen to prayers from her like. She only sat or stood about in the shadows of Robert's chamber, and seemed, from her burning eyes, to be daring fate to wreak any ill on her Duke.

After another month of this waiting had gone by, her tirewomen came to her at perhaps an hour before dusk with the news that a man in pilgrim's dress, one claiming to bear tidings for her ear, was in the outer chamber. She went into the room, and found there a strong, heavy-limbed man in a gray robe. As she came in he pushed the hood off his face; and she saw that it was Herlevin de Conteville.

Sire Herlevin was sparer than he had been a year ago, had furrowed lines in his brow and cheeks, and looked like one into whose very bones weariness has eaten. He

stood for a while looking at Harlette, and made no offer to speak until she came a step forward and addressed him with fierce eyes.

"Where is my lord, Sire Herlevin? What do you here without him? Have you left him in his fever, and come home to live more daintily than on the road? I say, where is he?" She was breathing hard between her words.

"He is where he will not need me again," said Sire Herlevin—"no, nor need you either. Hearken—our troop is inside the Rouen walls; in an hour the news will be running hither and yon, even to Falaise. For me, I spurred ahead that you might know the truth first, as your right is. Harlette, my girl, Duke Robert is dead."

Beneath his eyes Harlette's face seemed to harden, to take on a grim peasant dullness. She made no outcry; there were no tears on her thick straight lashes; only her brows were drawn down, her eyes smoldered, her breast panted. By and by she said, "Tell me the rest." He noted that her hands were clenched, as if to strike.

Briefly and brutally he gave her the whole of the tale. "You will have heard," he ended, "how the sickness took him. Had he stopped his journeying and lain snug for a time, tended by Eastern doctors, he might have got back his strength. But it was his will to proceed—and who could stay him? Can men chain the lightning, bind the thunder?"

"My lord was lord of us all," said Harlette. "What more?"

"He entered Jerusalem," Sire Herlevin went on. "He prayed at the Sepulcher. made splendid offerings, cried to us that at last he had the peace he sought. Then we begged him to rest, to tend his fever. He laughed. 'I am for the road again,' said he, 'and for my Norman marches, and for

Falaise high on its rocks.' We set out next morning at sunrise, but each day we must needs go slower, because always his strength was lessening. By that time we knew well enough that there was no hope, but whether he, too, knew it I cannot say, for it seemed that as he grew weaker his spirits rose higher. 'Never fear, comrades,' so he would cry if he saw us looking sour; 'I shall yet live to hold Harlette again on my knee!' And then—"

Harlette said, "Go on." He had paused, because she had panted hoarsely.

"I have no more to give you," said Sire Herlevin. "He died at Nicaea, and lies buried in the basilica of Saint Mary of that city, where we interred him with suitable splendor." He sobbed suddenly and fiercely, deep in his throat. "By Saint Ouen," he snarled, "but I loved him, devil or no!"

For a moment longer Harlette stood staring from the window, down at the Valdante where once Duke Robert had wooed her as she stood ankle deep in running water. Then, sure that De Conteville's tale was ended, she turned slowly and crossed the room, halting only at the door. "A new Duke reigns now, Sire Herlevin. Are you his friend?"

He nodded briefly. "I swore as much to Duke Robert, both at Rouen and by his deathbed."

"I thank you for that," she answered. "Farewell; we shall not meet again."

He looked at her, his head jerking up sharply. "And why not? Where would you go? Are you not the young Duke's mother, and is not your place here beside him?"

She shook her head. "Once I was a man's love, but never a duke's wife. Now I am a child's mother, but I may not be mother of a duke. I have no place here now my lord does not need my service, and I go."

When De Conteville spoke again it was harshly as ever, and with no lover-like choice of words; yet the eyes that he kept on her were kind eyes. "Well thought of, by heaven! In your stead who but a fool would stop here, getting mockery from envious tongues? Come to my castle, then; let the priest do his work over us! Never fear me, Harlette; I will not vex you—I am little enough at home. I have need of a woman to keep my house—do you come keep it, while I fight about Rouen for young Duke William!"

Again she shook her head. "I will never do that. I will have no man but my lord."

Not being one to show pain, he shrugged his shoulders. "If you will not, why, then, you will not, and there's an end. But I will take heed that no harm touches you, for you are a good wench. We will talk further of this tomorrow, when you have had rest. Until then, farewell, Harlette."

"Farewell, Sire Herlevin."

Harlette had never learned to give her hand to be kissed. De Conteville was no courtier, to come and take it. They did no more than look at each other for an instant, with eyes that were not unkind; and then Harlette went slowly from the room.

In the next chamber she paused for a brief time near the threshold, looking over at a couch beside the window, where a boy lay asleep. Young as he was, he had about him a look of Duke Robert, a promise of the same strength and splendor, though the set of his hard jaw spoke of a likeness to Harlette. As she stared at him her breath came harder, her lip rose off her teeth in its savage fashion, but she did not approach to touch or caress him. He was Duke now, Duke of great Normandy. She had no part in him any more, and very

soon she turned and passed into the further room.

Slowly and deliberately, like one acting of a set purpose, she laid off her rich mantle and jeweled dress, took the gold baubles out of her hair, shook it down and braided it. Then, going to her chest under the window, she drew forth something. It was the dress of a peasant girl, the mean robe she had worn when she first came to the castle. For a moment she continued to hold it and look down at it. Then she put it on, and stood bare-throated and with bare feet, the Harlette of eight years past.

Before stirring again she turned her eyes once about the chamber, which was full of old possessions of the Duke. An outworn sword of his was there, some hunting gear, a brodered cloak of the short Norman fashion, a wolfskin which had formerly covered his couch. She looked at all these things with the eyes that a dog fastens on the belongings of its master, and then drew her hood over her face and went out of the room, moving steadily and without noise on her bare feet.

It was chill autumn, as it had been on that long-past night of her coming. Dusk was near, and a pale sunset had piled the sky with clouds of gray and gold. Harlette walked down the steep road up which she had come a-horseback, companioned by men in armor and bright silks; the stones cut her feet and made them bleed, but she did not note it. Most people were indoors at this hour, and the few she met did not glance at her twice, since she seemed no more than a peasant woman with her hood drawn close against the night damp.

She reached the village and passed through its narrow streets, walking under the windows from which her townsfolk had cried taunts at her as she came home

from her speech with the Gouffern hermit. Now she was in the street where her father lived; now she was at his door. She put her hand against it, swung it open and went in.

The place was quite dark save for the remnants of a fire on the hearth. Harlette first laid off her hood, and remained for a moment looking about her; then she crossed to the chimney and mended the fire, working at it till the room was well alight with its flames. After that she went about her business as if she had never been away, finding what food was to hand, preparing it and setting it on the table, filling a drinking cup. At the moment when all was ready save for the cutting of the bread she heard a heavy step without; the door opened again, and Foulbert entered.

Years of anger, years of helpless rebellion, had set their seal on the tanner's features. He was more dark, more grim, more violent than of old; he walked with head bent, like a man who goes a hated round. When his foot was no more than across the threshold he caught sight of his daughter. He cried out, gutturally, chokingly, and fell back a step, putting up his hand to clutch at the door. Then silence followed, while Harlette, having looked at him once, went on with her work of cutting his bread.

For many minutes the tanner's eyes were busy. They flashed, first, from his daughter to the knife she held; there was danger in that instant. But he made no movement, and presently his gaze went back to her face. After what seemed a very long time he let his clenched hand drop, came forward heavily and without speaking, and sat down by the table and began to eat.

Harlette went about her business once more, serving him, bringing him what he needed. He ate slowly; none could have told what his thoughts were. Only at the last mouthful did he look up suddenly at his daughter and break the silence with a grim, fierce question.

"Your Devil—where is he?"

Harlette paused in her work and replied stolidly: "My lord is dead, very far off. All Falaise will know it soon."

A sudden flash of joy, of contented hatred, lightened in Foulbert's eyes. He waited for a moment, looking at her, gloating. There was a strange likeness between their faces; it was plain that henceforth, her short happiness being ended, Harlette was to be as dull, as hard, as sullen as her father.

"And your boy, where is he now?"

She answered in the same fashion as before. "I have no boy. The new Duke is up at the castle, as is fitting. Tomorrow he goes to Rouen, to meet the Breton duke his uncle, and to be crowned."

On her last word a noise broke out in the distance. It drew swiftly nearer, increased in volume, swelled to uproar. The two within, remaining motionless and with fierce gaze locked, heard the clatter of horses in the streets, the lifted shouts half drowned in wailing. "*Duke Robert is gone! The Duke is dead!*" It was the cry of the messengers from Rouen, speeding on their way with their fearful news.

When the tumult had swept past, Foulbert took his last mouthful, despatched it and got up slowly. "Well, I told you how it would be, eh? I told you how you would have need to crawl back here, if you went to your Devil! He in hell, you in the dust—I have long looked for it, this night!" He got no answer from her, and seemed to expect none. Crossing the

room, he unfastened a rude coffer that lay against the wall, took out a heap of coins, counted them, and lastly stored them in his pouch. As he straightened his eyes fell on Harlette's dropped cloak, the one thing not of her old wearing that she had brought from the castle. His lips curled open; he seized the thing fiercely.

"The fiends take it!" he snarled, and flung it on the coals.

Harlette stood by indifferently, watching him. He turned to the wall, tore loose a ragged old mantle that swung there, and held it out. For an instant she looked at it. Then she took it without comment and drew it about her.

"Come," said Foulbert. "Soon we shall be where none know our names or faces."

Still without making answer, she followed him across the room and out of the door, which he drew shut after them. They turned side by side down the darkness of the crowded street. All Falaise was afoot and in tumult over the news from Palestine, but the thoughts of every man and every woman were with their dead

ruler, and none took any heed of the two silent figures. They went on steadily, passed out of the Port du Comte, and turned their faces toward the Caen road. Harlette, not slackening her speed, looked back once across her shoulder. The black castle of Falaise, where slept the boy who was to lead the Normans into England and shake the world with echoes of his triumph, loomed against a few faintly tinted clouds that were already dying; the place had lights in every window, seemed aflame. Below, the town, too, was flaring into brightness. The press was thickest about the church doors; there men were making ready to bear torches through the streets before the chanting monks, as was the custom when a Norman ruler died.

"Well? You look behind you?" snarled Foulbert the tanner. "What have you to do with Falaise, now?"

Harlette made him no answer, nor did she look back again. They passed on along the road. The darkness swallowed them up.