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WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS  
and other 'Stories

by  
NAOMI MITCHISO



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**B**UT HE HAD SENT A MAN BEFORE  
THEM, EVEN JOSEPH, WHO WAS  
SOLD TO BE A BOND SERVANT: WHOSE  
FEET THEY HURT IN THE STOCKS, THE  
IRON ENTERED INTO HIS SOUL :  
UNTIL THE TIME CAME THAT HIS  
CAUSE WAS KNOWN, THE WORD OF  
THE LORD TRIED HIM."

# WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS



# *The Hostages*



## *The Hostages*

THERE were only three of us left now; the others had been hung over the ramparts, one every morning. Phabion was still sick and we didn't know what to do with him; he was only a child, and cried for his mother at nights; some of the others had done that, and I would have too, but I was fifteen and had to set a good example. They used to take us out on to the walls, and whip us where the men from our own Cities could see us; of course they had the right to do it, but some of us weren't very old, and used to cry even at the thought of it, which was bad for every one. But we could look out when we were taken up, and there was our camp, spread and shining below us; once there was an attack while we were there and we all cheered, but the Romans paid us back in kicks for that. I saw the banner of Mireto from time to time, and thought I could make out my father at the head of the spearmen, and my big brother with him; and once I saw a herald whom I knew, and called out to him, but he didn't hear me. Every day we hoped the town would fall, though we should very likely have been killed before anyone could get to us; still, it was a chance, and better than being dragged out and choked like dogs at the end of a rope. We knew our people were pressing hard and might soon starve the town out; for the last week they had given us nothing but water and a very little bread; the one who was chosen to be hung every morning used to leave his share of the bread to any

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one he liked. There wasn't too much water, either the last day Tannes and I had given it all to Phabion we thought we should be able to eat his bread - he wouldn't touch it — but we were too thirsty.

I was awake all that night, though Tannes slept for a little. I leant up against the wall at the back, with Phabion's head on my shoulder; he seemed easier that way. I thought about home, and tried to imagine I was in my own room; I wondered if they were looking after my pony properly, and I tried to remember whether I'd mended the bridle before I was sent away as a hostage to the Romans; I couldn't be sure, and it worried me.

When it was just light Tannes woke up and said he heard shouting; we both listened and I heard it too, He went over to the slit, but of course he could see nothing; he used always to think he might see something some time. But certainly there was cheering, and Tannes said he was sure we'd taken the town; but it wasn't the first time he'd thought that, and I wasn't hopeful, particularly as nothing else happened for hours. My back was very sore from the beating, and we'd had no chance of a wash for weeks. Phabion was better after his sleep, and thirsty, but the water was all gone.

Then the door opened, and the man we called the Boar-we all hated him-came in. I wondered which of us he was going to take, and rather hoped it would be Tannes, because I was much better at looking after Phabion -I didn't want it to be *him* anyhow, Tannes asked him what had happened - he

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never could learn not to — and the man nit nis Hand with the iron key, and then said, "The General's come, and your people have all run away." That was hard hearing for us; we knew it wasn't true about our army having run, but we supposed they'd withdrawn, and we were very unhappy, but we said nothing and waited. He went on: "You dogs, you ought to be hung, but the General's begged your lives and you've been given to him."

We didn't quite understand at once, and then a great tall man came in, all in armour, with a golden helmet, plumed with a black horse-tail; he could only stand upright in the middle of the arch; he looked at us and asked, "Are these all that are left?" The Boar stood at attention as he said, "Yes, sir," and then to us: "Down on your knees before your master!" I don't remember what Tannes did, but I simply sat and stared at the General; one can't think very quickly after one hasn't slept all night. The Boar came over and hit me, and I was afraid he was going to hit Phabion; so I knelt, and Phabion knelt, leaning against me, and Tannes knelt in the other corner. The light came in through the doorway, behind the General, and he looked very big, as if he could tread us into the ground; a little wind came in too and I heard the horse-hairs rustling against the bronze.

He was speaking to us, but I didn't hear it all; I was thinking that we were going to live, and I was glad and thankful, and then I thought that our army was beaten, and perhaps my father and brother were



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killed; I felt that I loved Mireto, my City, terribly, and that it would be awful if the Romans were to take her; and then I thought it might be better to die after all.\* I heard the General saying that our lives were forfeit, but that he had asked that we should be spared, and then about how wicked it was of the League of the Cities to have broken the treaty; I was wondering if it was any use my telling him that bad treaties ought to be broken, but just then Phabion slipped forward and I had to catch him; he felt very hot and was breathing fast. The General came up to us and stooped over him; Phabion threw his arms round my neck and held on tight with his face pressed into my shoulder; the General said, "Don't be frightened," and lifted his head quite gently; he asked how long he'd been like this, and I told him ten days, and said could we have some water for him. He asked if we had not had any, and I said yes, but that Phabion had had his share and our share too, but he was all burnt up and always wanted more. He turned round to the Boar and the metal plates on his kilt swung against my face; he told him to get us water, and then felt Phabion's head and hands, and told me he thought he would live. When the water came Phabion let go of me with one hand and drank and looked up at the General, and Tannes drank, and then I drank; I've never tasted anything as good as that water; I felt quite different at once, and I would have spoken to the General to justify our Cities, only he went out.

That day we had dried figs with our bread, and in

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the evening they brought some milk for Phabion. We heard how the General had marched up secretly and surprised and scattered our camp and relieved the town; a few days afterwards the Boas told us peace had been made; some of the Cities were given up to Rome, and the walls of Mireto had to be pulled down. Tannes and I talked it over; we wondered whether we ought to outlive the disgrace — *his* City was to pay tribute and have Rome for over-lord — but finally we made up our minds to go on living for a little longer at least; we didn't quite know how to kill ourselves, and besides there was Phabion; his City had to pay tribute too, but he didn't understand the shame of it, like we did.

By the time they let us out, Phabion was much better, but we were none of us very strong. They tied us into a wagon; we sat on the bottom, out of the sun, and saw the tops of the trees that we passed under along the road, but not much else. The journey took eleven days, and then we stopped outside the walls of Rome. There was dust all over everything, dust in our hair and ears and eyelashes, dust caked on our hands and feet, white dust on the bread and fruit we ate. The wagon was drawn up on the inside of a square, and we sat on the edge trying to see what was happening; prisoners — our own men — were brought in under guard, formed up and chained; of course we all looked hard to see if there was anyone we knew among them; often we thought we saw faces of friends, but they never were. Then one of my father's men was marched past and I shouted to

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him; he turned and called to me that my father had escaped, but he didn't know about my brother; still, that was something. There were women prisoners too, from the towns that had been taken, and armour and horses and gold cups from the altars of the Gods. Tannes saw one cartload from his own City and raged at being so helpless. And then Phabion cried out and said he saw his cousin among the women, a white-faced girl with eyes swollen from tears and dust; we all called, but she didn't hear or heed, and Phabion was terribly disappointed.

Then we were taken out of the wagon over to a heap of chains and one of the soldiers found light ones for us. Then we waited at the edge of the road till our turn came. The Roman soldiers went by first, crowned and singing; after them our prisoners, chained together; and more Romans; and trophies of swords and spears, and the pick of the cattle that had been taken; and more Romans; and a great line of women and children, and pictures of the battles, and ox-carts full of gold and silver, well guarded; and more Romans still, and more prisoners; and we were bitterly angry and sad. Then there was a place for us, and we joined the march with Roman soldiers in front of us and at each side. At first there was nothing but choking dust, until we got to the suburbs, where the streets had been watered, which kept the dust down and was pleasant to the feet. But then the crowds began, crowds of shouting enemies at the two edges of the road; they frightened me more than anything; we were so helpless and alone in the

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middle of them, and sometimes the noise would suddenly swell up into a roar all round us, and Phabion would shrink up close to me; once or twice they threw things at us, but nothing sharp enough to cut. A man who walked in front of us kept on repeating in a shout that we were the hostages from the Cities who were spared by order of the General and that the rest were hung. He said it over and over again like a corncrake: I would have given a lot to kill that man. We must have had seven or eight miles to walk in the sun at the pace of the slowest oxen; at first I looked about me and whispered to the others from time to time and sang our marching song under my breath, but later I was too tired to do anything but stumble along with my head down. My hands were chained behind my back so that I couldn't even wipe the sweat off my forehead or the dust out of my eyes. About half-way Tannes cut his foot on a sharp stone and fell, but one of the guards picked him up and helped him along. I was miserable about Phabion; he wasn't well yet and the sun was burning on our heads; he knew he must go through the day without whimpering for the honour of his City, and he did it well, but I could feel how much it was costing him and I could do nothing to help him; I was thankful when the soldier on his side said, "I've a child of my own," and took him on to his shoulder for part of the way. The day seemed endless, but suddenly we were halted in a great square place where someone was speaking from the top of a flight of steps. I saw the General a long way off, wearing a

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laurel wreath and a purple robe, but I was too tired to see much; all those great white buildings were swimming in the heat and there wasn't a breath of wind to blow away the smell, that seemed everywhere, of leather and onions, and the hot crowd.

When the Triumph was over and our chains were taken off, we were locked up in a little barred room, a prison of some sort, with straw on the flag-stones. We lay there, thankful for the dark and quiet, and slept like the dead all night. The first day a woman, who seemed too dazed to speak, brought us food; the second day another woman brought it; she was Phabion's cousin. He rushed up to her with, "Where's mother?" and she burst into tears and put her arms round him. She had seen his father dead of wounds and knew his mother and the baby sister were burned in a house with some other women who'd tried to escape from the soldiers. But she could hardly speak about it; something terrible must have happened to her too; and she mightn't stay with us. Phabion cried all that day, and even while he slept he was sobbing and calling, "Mother, mother"; I couldn't bear it, I put my hands over my ears so as not to hear, but I knew it was going on all the time and I couldn't sleep at all. Tannes was very much upset; he seemed to have thought that when it was all over he could go back to the old life, but this showed him that he couldn't; perhaps it was lucky for him that his mother was dead years before. Mireto had not been sacked, so my mother and sisters should have been safe, and I knew my father had escaped, but my brother might

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be killed or anything; and besides, I was the eldest and I realized it all better: how this was the end of the League of the Cities, our Gods were powerless, and our hope and honour in ashes.

The next morning we were taken away again; we were used to obeying orders now. An old soldier with a black beard was in charge of us; he wouldn't answer questions or let us talk among ourselves much. As we went through the streets a woman recognized us and threw a dead rat: it hit Phabion; but I was glad it wasn't a brick. We had a long way to walk (though we got a lift for a few miles on a wagon that was leaving the town empty), first along one of the big main ways that went out between gardened houses and under arches, right into the country, and then along a lane with deep ruts, beside vineyards and cornfields; it was past noon when we came to a long low house with a walled garden where there were pomegranate trees. There was no one to be seen, and the soldier stopped, sat down on the bottom step of the ones that led up to the house door, and ate bread and onions. We sat on the ground beside him and waited, and the afternoon got hotter and hotter; we were all very tired. We'd had nothing to eat since early that morning — we hoped the soldier would give us something, but he didn't, and of course we couldn't ask. Tannes was complaining of his foot, which was badly swollen: I tied it up with fresh grass and a strip torn from my own tunic. Phabion was crying all the time, quite hopelessly; his face was streaked with dirt and tears, and his hair was

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tangled into grey knots all over his head. I was unhappy enough myself; I tried to tell them stories, but that reminded us of home and made it all worse. Phabion put his head down on my knee, and I felt his hot little face, wet against my skin. Tannes cried every time he moved his foot, and I was near it myself, but I thought of our being among the enemy and that we must show we were men. Still nobody came; sometimes we heard a cock crowing behind the house, and once a reaper passed through the trees in front of us with a scythe over his shoulder, but he never looked our way.

Then we heard voices inside the house and a lady came out on to the steps, with a maid carrying a basket behind her. The soldier saluted and spoke to her; she was all in blue, with the western sun on her face and hair. She ran down the steps and saw us. "Oh," she said, "oh-you children! You poor children!" and in a moment she was beside me and had gathered Phabion up into her arms; he lay there limp with his eyes half-shut, still crying. "Have you been here all day," she asked, "with nothing to eat?" I nodded and she called up to the maid to bring food and drink quickly. I was glad to see how angry she was with the soldier; she sent him away and sat down on the steps, with Phabion on her knee sobbing a little less. The maid brought milk and barley cakes and pears and grapes; we ate everything, and she fed Phabion herself. Then the General came round from the other side of the garden; I knew him at once, though he was wearing a woollen tunic and

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sandals instead of armour; the bailiff (though we didn't know who he was till afterwards) was at his side. I stood up, and his wife stood up holding Phabion to her breast.

He looked at us kindly enough and told the bailiff to take Tannes and me down to the pool to wash. We went with him, Tannes limping badly; it was a broad, shallow, stone basin, with sunflowers growing round it. We stripped and went in and washed off layers and layers of dust and sweat, and swam among the lily pads till he told us to come out. They brought us clean clothes and we put them on with our hair dripping; he took us back to the house, to a clean, light room with blankets spread on the floor for us, and Tannes sat on a table while someone bandaged his foot properly. Then Phabion came in and told us how the women of the house had washed him and dressed him and been kind to him, and he lay down on the blankets and I covered him, and he went to sleep almost at once. Then the General sent for me; he was sitting alone in a tall chair, with candles behind him. He asked me if I thought we should be ransomed; I said I believed Tannes and I would be, but that Phabion's father and mother were killed, so I couldn't tell about him. He sent me away, and the mistress met me in the hall and asked if Phabion was asleep.

The next day we were left alone most of the time, to eat and rest, but after that, when Tannes' foot was better, we were given work to do about the farm and garden, under the bailiff; it wasn't hard — getting



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in the grapes and apples, feeding the geese, driving the cows home, and so on. Phabion got well wonderfully quickly, and forgot about his mother for hours together; the mistress petted him a lot and the General spoke to him whenever he saw him.

But the weeks went on and the autumn was going; there were frosts at night; once round the pond and out was as far as we cared to swim. But none of us heard anything from our homes. And then one day the General sent for Tannes to tell him he'd been ransomed, and his uncle was waiting to take him away. In an hour he'd said good-bye to us and was gone; I've never seen him since. Of course Phabion and I were glad for his sake, but it made me wonder what was going to happen to me; I thought of all sorts of things; perhaps the soldier might have been wrong about my father; perhaps he was dead and my brother was dead, and all our money was gone; perhaps I" should never see Mireto and my mother and our house again. Every one was good to us, but of course we were no more free than any of the slaves, and I didn't like to think of all my life being like that. At one time I thought of running away, but I should probably have been caught, and anyhow I should have had to leave Phabion; I had a plan that my father should ransom him too and he should come back and live with us and be my little brother, now that he had no one of his own kin left. We used to talk about that in the evenings.

But it was winter now. We were busy pruning the vines and fruit trees; Phabion worked with me, but

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of course I had longer hours and did more. After it was dark the mistress used often to have us in and we sat with them, making withy plaits, while the General talked about farming and wild beasts and told us all his adventures. Sometimes he talked about Rome, things she had done in the past, things he said she would do in the future. I thought about Mireto and said nothing, but Phabion seemed to believe it. We worshipped with them too: the country Gods are the same all the world over. Sometimes we went out after wolves and once I was in the thick of it, when either a hound or the wolf bit me in the arm. Looking back on it all now it seems such a waste of time that I didn't really enjoy it; but then I didn't know what had happened at home.

One day I was coming up to the house with my pruning knife and a great bundle of prunings to burn; Phabion had gone in, but I had stayed to finish the row, and it was nearly dark; I heard hoofs behind me, turned, and there was my father! I threw down the bundle and ran to him, and he was off his horse and had me in his arms, all in a moment. The horse grazed by the roadside and we talked. Of course I asked first about mother and every one. "My little son," he said, "you didn't hear all this long time! All's well at home, but you know I'd spent all the money we had in arming my men. There was nothing left, and I had all I could do to raise enough to buy you both back. Did you know your brother was taken prisoner during the siege? I couldn't find him for months; he had been sold as a

## *The Hostages*

slave in the Roman market, and I bought him back first: he was having a bad time. But I thought you would be well treated here — they've not been unkind to you, son?" He looked at the bundle of wood, and then at the bound place on my arm where I'd had the wolf-bite. I told him they'd all been kind and what sort of life it was; he put me up on his horse — it was fine to be in the saddle again — with the prunings behind, and we went up to the house. The General met my father and took him in, and I led the horse round to the stables and bedded him down.

When I came in they'd settled my ransom, and father said we should go home the next day. I was so happy I could hardly think, and then, with a jump, I remembered Phabion. "Oh, father," I said, "can't you buy back my friend too? He's got no one left, and I told him I'd take him home with me." Father looked miserable and said he couldn't — I found out afterwards how hard the ransom money had been to come by — but that he'd try to later, for the honour of the Cities. But the General said, "I don't want to have Phabion ransomed; I've another plan for him; call him and we'll see." He came in, and the mistress with him; he ran over to me and took my hands: "Oh, you're going," he said, "you're going back to your mother and I shall be left all alone I" But the General leaned forward, saying, "Phabion, you know I've no children of my own. Will you come and live with me always, and be my son?" and the mistress spoke softly to him: "Stay

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with us, dear/' And Phabion looked at them and looked at me and then looked down on the floor, wondering. And I said, "Think of your City, Phabion! Don't put yourself into the hands of the enemy!" and he said to me, "Would it be very wrong to stay? I think I'd like to stay/' I would have spoken, but my father stopped me and spoke himself: "You know that I'm of the Cities, child, on your side; so you can trust me; and I advise you to stay." Then Phabion went over to the mistress and put his arms round her neck, and she and the General kissed him, and called him son. And the General gave back the ransom money to my father and said to me that while there was peace I should always be welcome in his house.

The next day father and I set out for home. Phabion came with us as far as the main road, and there we said our good-byes. Phabion went back to the house, and father and I struck out over the hills for Mireto. We were back within the week and everything was right again. I found I hadn't mended my pony's bridle, but my brother had done it for me after he came home.



# *Vercingetorix and the Others*

*to*

VILMOS *and* ANTAL BEKASSI

## *Cottia went to Bibracte*

**Y**OU see, there was nowhere very much else for me to go; M. couldn't leave me in Rome, because of that dreadful man making love to me — and I couldn't do anything about it, could I, with father encouraging him, not to speak of his position? - and the Province wasn't much better; you've really no idea of all the tenth-rate people one meets there! And besides, I saw so much more of him this way; after all, we'd only been married six months, so we couldn't help being rather glad! But anyhow, there I was in that funny little town Noviodunum, and there I should stay till the end of the campaign. Of course we never expected anything to happen like it did; we thought there'd perhaps be a little fighting — those tribes in the north, who were always trying to revolt — but punishment, not war; if he'd had any idea of how things really were, M. would never have let me stay, and I should have missed it all.

It was dreadfully cold up there that winter, but I had my new furs, and besides M. used to get leave half the time. We had the dearest, silliest wooden house, all thatched into a point at the top; of course it was all very primitive to begin with — almost nothing but a table and some cooking-pots — but I set to work and bought carpets and curtains, and got some chairs made on a nice Italian model, and a bed; and then I'd brought a few things with me from home. So soon I had the



## Vercingetorix and the Others

sweetest little place of my own for M. to come to.

Oh, those winter evenings with a great fire of pine logs and M. coming in and the gleam of his armour! My dear, you can't think what it's like; I was just *too* happy! Then we'd have supper together, just nothing, a chicken and some little cakes, and a cup of wine between us. And then sometimes after that I'd let my hair down and sing or dance for him; we used to pretend I was a dancing-girl, and then he'd make love to me - that way! And oh, do you know what happened one time?—we found half the slaves standing in the doorway, looking on, and me with my hair over my face and my dress slipping off one shoulder! M. *was* so angry: I don't know what he didn't want to do to them all; but I wasn't really angry myself—not a bit; I expect I ought to have been, but somehow I wasn't! You know one can't be dignified all the time.

Besides, they were nice people; when all's said and done I like the Gauls. One has to deal with them the way they're accustomed to: they're not like Greeks. But they're very clean, they don't mind what they do for you once you've been kind to them, and if they do break your best glass, well, they always come and tell you instead of hiding it or saying it was one of the others. Of course they eat a great deal—I was horrified to find how much meat my household got through in a week, but M. laughed at me—and they're quarrelsome, and if you give them a chance they talk all day, and of course if you let them get drunk they're perfectly

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horrid; but they do get through their work like no one else, and if you're a woman alone in a house I should certainly advise you to have Gallic slaves,

I had a lot of time on my hands when M. wasn't there; there was no one to visit, and of course no theatres or amusements, and I couldn't go into the country by myself. There was always my lute, to be sure, and I didn't play so badly, and I had my sparrow, "Sweet," and my little dog. But still I had to do something — I never could bear sitting still! — so I learnt to speak Gallic (it made my housekeeping much more satisfactory) and I used to weave linen on a loom like I remember my old nurse doing.

Then one day the baggage and hostages were sent into the town with a great escort. I watched from a funny little balcony in front of the house — there was a garden towards the river at the other side — and by and by M. came and joined me. That was the first time I'd seen him looking worried about things: we were just beginning to get rumours of the chiefs conspiring, and Caesar was in Rome. But of course I wouldn't think of leaving the town; we all believed the Haeduan were safe then.

M. had to see to the hostages and find quarters for them all; and he hadn't got it settled very satisfactorily when he came back. "It's not at all easy," I remember him saying. "The townspeople here are old enemies to some of the hostages — it wouldn't be safe to leave them within murdering distance. And yet I don't quite see how I can keep the children in camp; I suppose we must, though." "What sort of

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

children?" I asked. "Oh, well, they're all sons of the chief men in some tribe or another; poor kids, they're as frightened as anything." Then I had an idea: "Oh, M.," I said, "couldn't you give me a couple to look after?" He looked at me then with the sort of smile that makes me pleased all over, and said, "Do you think you really could, Cottia?" I almost wished I hadn't, but of course I said I'd love it, and he told me exactly how safe I was to keep them—it was rather like being trusted with someone's best pearls! - and how important they were. So I got the room next mine ready, and had a bolt put to it, and told them to cook some more supper; and then I fetched my cloak and went straight off to the camp with M. to find them.

And really I'd had so little to do with children! Being the youngest myself, and all the cousins older than me, and never seeing a child except Julia's two, who are dreadfully forward — well, I felt too silly saying I'd take charge of these ones! But of course I didn't say so to M. and we got to the camp. I do love soldiers! I can't help it, I always have: the Legate was so charming to me, too, and I do like being saluted: that's M. really, of course, not me, but still I always enjoy it. But I was much too nervous this time.

The hostages were all together, under guard; the big boys were in chains, and I did think it was rather a shame - they couldn't possibly have escaped. They all stared at me, and I felt so uncomfortable; M. had gone off to see the other officer in charge. I pre-

## *Veroingetorix and the Others*

tended not to look at them, but of course all the time I was, out of the corner of my eye. I wondered which I'd get: some of them looked such big rough things the Belgians particularly — and I was sure I wouldn't be able to manage them. Then I heard such a miserable sniff from one side; I couldn't help looking round. There was a big pile of baggage on my right, and for a moment I didn't see the children crouching beside it; they were two little boys with long cloaks wrapped close round them. The smallest had his head turned away, but his shoulders were shaking wretchedly. The bigger one just sat looking at him; I think he was too nearly crying himself to be able to do anything. Suddenly he saw me; he stiffened all over and caught tight hold of his bundle. I smiled at him as nicely as I knew how, and after a minute he reached out a hand and touched the little one's shoulder, and he looked round too, with his face very white against the piled baggage.

Now, there's one accomplishment of mine that I'm rather ashamed of, but still I never forget it: and that's making faces. When I was small I used to practise hard wriggling my nose and eyebrows, so as to make the slaves laugh at dinner; and they always did, though they knew my father would be angry with them. So now I began doing it, at the children; first of all they just stared, and then, very slowly, the elder one let a huge grin waver across his face, and then the other gave a little, sudden laugh and whispered something to his brother. They obviously were brothers, when one began to think of it; they'd got

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

the same curly, brown hair, and fine-cut faces, and they both had red woollen cloaks with yellow lines criss-cross all over them.

I wanted to speak to them, but I didn't quite know what to say. However just then M. came back. "I've settled it up," he said. "Oh, which?" — I was so afraid it was going to be a great, rough one! But he called aloud: "Danorix!" and the bigger of my two brothers jumped up. I really was pleased: things do so seldom happen like that. I took his hand and he looked up at me; I suppose he thought I was going to make faces again. Then the little one scrambled to his feet and ran forward and caught hold of his brother, crying in Gallic, "Oh, me too!" so I said "Yes, both of you!" and M. nodded. They picked up their bundles and came along, one at each side of me.

Supper was ready, so we put them between us at the table; they sat up very straight and wouldn't drink anything but water, and when they thought we weren't looking, Danorix held his little brother's hand under the table.

What does one talk to children about? I wanted to start a conversation and make friends with them, but they only said yes and no; and at first I found their accent puzzling. I asked them all the obvious things: how old they were? seven and nine; were they tired? well, a little; could they ride? oh, yes; had they any brothers and sisters? "I'm the eldest," said Danorix. "But we've got two sisters." lurca, the little one, added, "Mother's dead: last year," and choked. I

## *Uercingetorix and the Others*

tried to change the subject: "What are you going to do when you're grown up?" — a silly question, but I couldn't think of anything else. Danorix threw his head back: "We're going to be soldiers!" "And fight the Germans?" asked M., amused. Danorix shook his head violently, "No, the Hoeduans!" Fortunately the slaves were all at the other end of the room, so they didn't hear,

I took them *off* to bed after that; they were very dirty after their journey, and I was so glad to see they wanted to wash without my telling them to. They were beginning to talk a little more now, and were very anxious to know what was happening to the others. Danorix had a funny mark on his chest in blue; I didn't like to say anything (you can't be too tactful with barbarians), but he saw me looking and said: "That's the Owl; it means I'm going to be chief. If I get killed, lurca can have it done on him." I called one of the slaves to help us to undo the bundles which the children had fastened up with raw hide cords so tight that we couldn't get the knots undone. The man came in and he saw the owl mark too, and all at once he fell on his knees and began gabbling away in Gallic. Then Danorix started talking too, and put his hands on the man's head, while the man kissed the edge of his coat, I asked what it was. "He's one of my men," said Danorix. "The Haeduans took him prisoner. Can he stay and help us?" "Of course," I said, and the man followed them about, worshipping them with his eyes, like a dog.

When they were rolled up in their blankets, both

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

together like little dormice, I bent down to say good night to them. Iurca the kid, the little one, caught me round the neck and gave me a good hug. Danorix didn't—I'm sure he thought he was much too old! — but as I was going he caught me by the skirt, "Do you know what I'd do if I was at home?" "No, what?" "I'd have a big, big sword, and I'd hang it up just there!" — he pointed to the wall by his head — "Has your man got a big sword?" "Yes," I said, thinking I might as well improve the occasion, "in case little boys are naughty!" Both of them laughed at that, looking adorably round among the blankets. "That's what father says," said Iurca, "but he never does!" "Good night, you little villains!" And as I went out I heard them both laughing softly still.

They were very shy the next morning, and played a funny game by themselves with little white stones, marked with spots; they wouldn't tell me what it was, but the Gallic slave seemed to know. Such a queer little couple they were! Sometimes they'd be laughing and racing about and chattering away to me and every one else, as if the whole world belonged to them; and then half an hour later they'd both be down in the dumps, sitting in a corner holding hands and crying, not letting anyone come near them, just a pair of small, hard backs if I wanted to pet them! And then it would be gone as soon as it came, and they'd be as jolly as crickets. The only thing they always liked, however they were feeling, were my dog and bird; they were never tired of watching them; but I found them much more amusing to look after

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

than any animals! They were very fond of music, too; they cut themselves reed pipes out of the river; Danorix fell in, doing that, and I was afraid he was going to catch cold — it was the middle of winter — but he didn't. The pipes weren't very good, though, because they ought to be made of fresh summer rushes, not old, dry ones.

That time M. went back to the legion looking rather worried; I couldn't make out quite what it was; he wasn't even very sure himself, only he had the feeling that something was going to happen. The last thing he said was, "You will be careful of the hostages, Cottia? All our lives may depend on them!"

The next week we had the news of that terrible rising at Cenabum; they'd massacred every single man and woman — Roman, I mean — including an officer we knew. Perhaps you remember they caught the man who started it last year, and had him executed. Almost on the top of that came the first stories of trouble among the Arvernians. We weren't frightened at first, though we knew Caesar was away in Italy. The officer in command came to see me and asked whether he should take my two hostages to the camp, but I said they were quite safe — I was much too proud of their having been trusted to me ever to give them up like that! I asked him what he thought of the situation; he said he had just come from seeing the Haeduan magistrates, who all assured him of the loyalty of their state, and Noviodunum most of all, and that he thought we were quite safe. But one rumour came on the top of another. First we heard



## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

that Gergovia had stayed loyal to Rome, and the chief there had banished his nephew who was starting a rebellion; but the next day we heard that the nephew had come back at the head of a huge army, and it was the uncle and the loyalists who had been banished. Of course we didn't think very much of it, even so; every one said there was no need for me to be anxious: this young man and his followers couldn't do anything: if it had been some of the old chiefs from the north, Ambiorix, for instance, we might well be alarmed, but as it was it would all be put down in a few weeks. I remember being told the name and then forgetting it the next day; nobody'd heard of Vercingetorix then.

I'd had no news of M. for some time, when at last a message came through; he must have written it in a great hurry, and it had been some time on the way. He told me to send my hostages to the camp and ask for a guard as far as the Province for myself. It ended with an underlining, "*Noviodunum is not safe*" I took the letter round to head-quarters, but they said I couldn't possibly leave the town: it might have been safe when the letter was written, but now it would be most dangerous, and they couldn't let me; they were beginning to be uneasy that day. This was the last I heard of M. for months and months.

News came through to Noviodunum rather slowly, and often the townspeople got it before we Romans did. At first it was all Caesar's coming back from Italy and victory everywhere; we felt our friends at Cenabum were being well revenged. Vercingetorix

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

could do nothing when he had Caesar against him — so we thought. Then when Avaricum was burnt we were sure the rebellion was really at an end. I found Danorix was going to have a birthday that same week, so I gave him a big box of dried fruits, and we had some of the hostage children in and played games on the grass by the river. One of them was Iurca's special friend; he was the son of a chief of the Bituriges, and his home was in Avaricum, so most likely he was an orphan and friendless by now; he was very sad, poor child, and wouldn't play with the others. The Haeduans were very much impressed too with our victory; several of the magistrates sent their wives and daughters to see me with all sorts of presents and compliments; I didn't believe in them though, and my two little boys used to hide when they came, and make faces from behind the curtains.

About now some more hostages were sent in, and a good deal of baggage too, and corn; we saw some lovely remounts for the cavalry being led along, and there were great chests full of official papers. Then we heard how Caesar was besieging Gergovia with Vercingetorix inside, and of course we all expected to hear of its fall in a week or two. But at first no news came, and then, when it did come, it was to say our army had been beaten and Caesar was marching north to join Labienus—and then ? I was told I must prepare to move at an hour's notice. You ought to have seen how differently those horrid Hseduans behaved then! No more saying they were our brothers, no more visits from the chiefs' wives - not

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

that I cared! —no more running up to me in the streets and asking what I thought the fashions were going to be: oh, no! They'd tell me to my face that we were all going to be driven out of Gaul with our tails between our legs. I stayed in the house all day with the doors barred, and played with the children; they didn't like the Haeduan any more than I did, and though we didn't talk about that, it was something to know it was there.

One evening the children were in bed, and I was sitting at my loom working out a pattern in blue and yellow; it was quite quiet, and I could just hear the river outside. I had a lamp beside me as it was nearly dark, and I wasn't thinking of anything; only my mind was full of a picture of linen threads and the pattern that ought to be coming on the loom. Suddenly I woke up with a start and listened to the echoes of a scream somewhere quite close, and then I noticed that there'd been a noise growing for the last minute or two, men's voices and feet - and something else. I ran to the door and listened, and heard what I'd never heard before: the rattle of swords fighting in earnest.

Two of the slaves ran in: "Mistress, they're coming! Down to the river!" For a moment I didn't understand; then I caught up my cloak that I had always ready, saying, "Fetch the children!" But just then came a bang on the door and a clatter-clatter of metal hammered against it; the slaves stood gaping, and; I called out myself as loud as I could, "Who's there?" But it was a Roman voice I heard, a man ask-

## *Verclngetorix and the Others*

ing desperately to be let in; I dropped the bar and opened, and he sprang through, a young centurion with his helmet off and a great bleeding cut on his head. I barred the door again; he held on to my loom with one hand and panted, "I was sent to fetch you — my men — all killed - the devils!" and looked fearfully at the door. Another of the servants ran in: "The river's no good — they're down there!" Then their own man came with Danorix and lurca, still pink and yawning from their beds. The centurion told me to call all my slaves together; so I did, and bound up his head as well as I could.

They hurried in, ten or twelve of them, and my own maid, who could hardly stand for fright. I said, "Who's going to stay by me?" and more than half shouted they would. I ordered the rest to go; they slunk off; then I promised the ones who were left their freedom if they saved us, and told them to see to the doors and windows. They ran off and we heard the noise outside getting louder, and with it more screams and a crackle of flames. Suddenly it all shifted round to the garden side, and there was a great crash, and then — they were in. The centurion jumped up, one hand at his head, the other at his sword. I picked up lurca and ran behind the loom, calling to Danorix; I don't know what I hoped, only I never thought of doing anything heroic. I saw my groom come staggering into the room with a spear right through his throat, and then a wild, horrible rush of the mob, and my centurion knocked over and trampled on, I remember certain things: seeing ajar

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

falling and making a move to catch it, seeing my maid in the middle as white as chalk, with a dash of blood on her cheek, and seeing Danorix with all his teeth showing stab upwards into a man's side from behind. The loom checked them just for a moment and that saved me; I stood perfectly still, and lurca was too frightened to move. Their leader came to a stand within a foot of me.

"Where is the other child?" I said. "Bring him to me, please." "You're my prisoner!" yelled the man, but I only stared at him and said again, "Bring me the child." From somewhere in the middle of them a man hoisted over Danorix with his hands tied, "Are they yours?" "Yes," I said, thinking that was best. "Now take me to the magistrates," They were yelling at me from the back of the crowd, but the ones in front seemed sobered, and no one even suggested binding me, I carried lurca on one arm — he was a good weight! - and put the other round poor Danorix, who was badly bruised and crying a little. I bent down and whispered to him in Latin, "You're my Marcus now," and he understood and answered in Latin too, "Yes, mother." We had to step over the body of their man, who was lying dead in the doorway. As we went out I saw several of them glancing enviously at my necklaces (I used to go about with them all on in those days, just in case) and at last a boy snatched one from behind and it broke, but that was all the insult I had, except of course the things they shouted at me.

The streets were packed with people, but most of

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

the killing was done indoors or in the camp outside; we saw little except a few flaming houses, though we heard quite enough that was horrible. Round one corner we ran into another armed band, who stopped us, shouting that they were after the hostages. One of them grabbed Danorix, but I held on to him, saying they were my children, and the man let him go. Somebody held up a torch to my face, and said, "You aren't old enough!" but the others had gone on, and no one noticed.

Of course the magistrate I was taken to, who was a man M. and I had met several times, knew the children at once, but he let me keep them with me. We were all three locked up, and I untied Danorix; lurca had never really woke up, so he went to sleep again at once on my cloak, but Danorix was far too wide awake; he'd killed a man and been in a battle and now he was a man himself! Then all at once he began crying again, and threw himself on to the floor: he went to sleep at last in my arms; I didn't get much sleep myself that night.

The next day a man unlocked the door and bade us follow him; I asked where we were going. "Bibracte," he said. I told him I must have food for the children, and after a little grumbling he produced it. We were all put into a cart, and set *off* for Bibracte. I'd time to wonder then; I questioned everybody I saw, but usually they wouldn't answer me, or else they'd say they were conquering the world, or some nonsense. I did find out that they'd murdered the officer in command and his nice wife, and in fact

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

almost all the Romans at Noviodunum, and that they'd got hold of the baggage and Caesar's papers and all our hostages. There were hardly any Roman prisoners except me — my house was a little out of the way — but I saw some of the hostages. Of course a good many of them came from tribes friendly to the Haeduan, or too powerful to harm, like the Arvernians, and they'd been let go at once and were riding among the chiefs, but some of them were old enemies, or else they belonged to weak tribes that the Haeduan wanted to frighten; and these I didn't see. Horrible, horrible people to murder their own flesh and blood! I was afraid for my two, but as they'd not been killed in the riot that night they had a chance at least. It took us a good four days getting to Bibracte, and I can't say it was a comfortable journey. There was no news to be had of M.'s legion, so I didn't know if he was dead or alive, or what was happening at all. But we got there at last.

It's a steep climb up, but it's made easier for carts by the big ruts they've cut in the stone at each side of the main road. We were lodged in a queer little house, half underground, with one barred window at the level of the road, which had been an enamel-worker's forge. We got there in the evening, tired out and hungry, and were bundled in by the men. It was nearly dark and we looked about us, trying to see what sort of place it was. Then a woman came out of the inner room with a small clay lamp in her hand, and her hair in plaits over her shoulders. "Who are you?" she asked. I answered, "I'm a Roman pris-

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

oner." She held up the lamp to look at me and the children and said, "These aren't yours." I didn't deny it to her. "I'm Adianta," she went on, "My husband's Comm of the Atrebatas, and he's here." I said, "My name's Cottia, and my husband's a Roman officer, but I don't even know if he's alive." She took me by one hand and Danorix by the other, saying she would find us food, and we went into the inner room.

I'd been very lucky already, but I think my greatest luck was finding Adianta; she was kind to us, she stopped the soldiers from insulting us, and, what was almost more, she told us what was happening. Comm, her husband, had been our ally in the old days; Cxsar had made him king and given him all kinds of honours; but now even he had joined with the Arvernian. They'd all met at Bibracte to elect Vercingetorix general again, but the Haeduans, who had only just come in, were jealous of him. They wanted to frighten and bribe the other tribes into choosing one of their chiefs; that accounted for their dealings with the hostages. We tried to find out if Celtigun, the children's father, was there, but there was a great crowd of chiefs and Adianta didn't know.

When Comm came to the house I kept out of the way in the little room where the enamelling tools used to be put, and told the children stories. But one day I heard him coming shouting along, and Adianta asked me to fasten the brooch on her shoulder. I did what she asked and ran back to my room. Comm came clattering in, and this time four or five others



## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

with him. They called for drink, which Adianta brought, and then they all began talking at the tops of their voices and singing. I didn't hear or heed what it was, till I heard Adianta protesting, and then suddenly Comm burst in on to me and pulled me out. Adianta ran between me and the chiefs, but her husband swung her back, laughing at her, and they all closed round me.

I can tell you I Was frightened then! Those hairy great giants with their swords and wolf-skins, all shouting and roaring with laughter every way I looked! One of them threw a full wine-cup over me, and then the others, though I heard Adianta indignantly crying to them to stop. I stood there with my hair and clothes all drenched with the wine, and my hands over my face; then I was pushed from behind and one of them caught me and kissed me; I screamed, and he pushed me across to another. Then it was just a nightmare of a five minutes with all those drunk barbarians pulling me about one way and another; I was struggling all the time, trying to get away, and feeling an open mouth or a great mat of beard under my hand every time, and shrieking to Adianta to help me. I ended up in a man's arms with my hands held over my head, and he squeezing me up to him and kissing my neck; I could feel his great hot body against mine, and I didn't know what wasn't going to happen. But anyway I bit his ear as hard as I could, and he let go and swore.

I fell on to my knees on the floor, and Adianta knelt beside me and told Comm just what she thought of

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

him. I looked up at the man who'd been holding me; he was the tallest of the lot, with coral brooches and great knobbly gold bracelets all up his arms; he wore bright red stuff sewn with gold, and long fringes to it, and his cloak was white fur. He was drunk and standing with one hand on the table and the other on his sword hilt; he'd blue eyes and ruddy-brown hair, and his ear was bleeding all down his neck, where I'd bitten it. He was half laughing and half scowling, and the others all had their eyes on him. Suddenly Comm gave a great shout, "There's Rome kneeling to Vercingetorix!" Because it was Vercingetorix all the time, though I hadn't known it. Rather unsteadily he let go of the table and pointed to me: "Gaul is merciful: Rome may rise." I got to my feet and had a good look at him; suddenly he made a grab: "Rome must pay tribute, though!" I ducked behind Adianta, and he caught one of her plaits instead. Then I saw two of the chiefs holding Danorix and Iurea — Adianta told me afterwards how they'd fought when I was screaming for help — and I ran over to them.

I think Comm was ashamed of himself, and perhaps he didn't like seeing his wife kissed, even by the general, so he interrupted: "What's to be done with these two?" Vercingetorix shook himself and frowned at the children: "Who are they?" "Hostages from Noviodunum: for Celtigun." "Isn't he here, curse him?" "No." "If he's not here by to-morrow, hang them both. That'll teach him to be late!" "Oh, you can't!" I cried, but Adianta clapped her hand over

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

my mouth and bade me be quiet. And Danorix spoke for himself: "Father will come! We hate the Haeduans, and they're your enemies!" "Listen to the Owlet, he's about right!" laughed one of the others. But Vercingetorix was still angry: "A pretty way he's shown his friendship, that Celtigun! How did they get here? I thought those fools of Haeduans would have killed them off." "She brought them." Comm pointed to me. "Oh, did she! They're allies of Rome, then! I haven't done with Rome!" He made a step towards me, and I didn't know what to do now, but another man came in hurriedly, a man who wasn't drunk. He caught Vercingetorix by the arm. "They're waiting for you to speak!" "You bird of ill omen, Lucter! Tell them I'm busy!" "Busy! Tell them you're in the moon!" "Come out of this!" "Oh, very well!" He stretched himself for a great yawn and turned, then threw back over his shoulder: "Remember, if Celtigun's not here, they're to be hung to-morrow."

Adianta looked very grimly after them. "I shall see what I can do," she said. "Til talk to my husband; but I don't know . . ." She shook her head, then, turning to me, "They're all mad to-day because of the Arvernian being elected general again in spite of everything; they were awake all last night. What silly babies men are! and nobody to punish them when they break things." She began wiping up the wine: "Your dress is all stained; you must wear one of mine while we wash it."

I don't think lurca quite realized what the threat

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

meant, but Danorix did; his teeth were chattering, and he could hardly speak. Adianta did her best, but all she could get was that they should be given till the latest possible moment the next day. "There's a good chance for you," she said to the children, but neither of us thought there was any. That was another bad night, with Danorix trying hard to be brave; poor darling, he was still afraid of the dark room, and they wanted to hang him till he was dead!

The next morning seemed to rush away frightfully quickly. Adianta and I tried hard to stop the children thinking about it, and gave them the best dinner we could possibly cook, but it wasn't much good. I felt their eyes on me all the time; I knew they must be thinking I could do something, but of course I couldn't. The afternoon was worse. I asked Adianta if we couldn't possibly smuggle them away, but she said it was hopeless to try. Iurca wanted to look out of the window, so I went over with him and lifted him up. It was too low to see much in front — only men up to the waist and horses' legs. But farther down the street one could see more. I tried to talk about everything that passed and amuse him that way, but he got tired of it, and I was just lifting him down when he said, "Stop!" and then, "That's our Owl!"

"What!" I cried, and Adianta and Danorix ran up too. Then Iurca began beating on the bars and crying, "Father, father!" "Is it?" I asked. "Are you sure?" Danorix whispered yes, and then his knees shook and he fainted. But the Owl was drawing level with us; I shouted with all my might, "Celtigun!"

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

and Adianta ran to the door. "Celtigun!" I shouted again, and saw all the legs running up and down. Then there was a great stream of people pouring in through the open door, and I picked Danorix up. A man snatched him away from me, and then lurca, and every one behind yelled and clashed their swords together.

Adianta told Celtigun to take the children with him, as it might be safest. That was just as well, as they came for the children in the evening, and for a few minutes they wouldn't believe their father had come. That's the worst of a big tangled town like Bibracte.

I was sent for in the morning and begged Adianta to come too; I did my hair as well as I could, and put on the necklaces I had left, but my dress was badly stained. It was a glorious day, and all the streets were crammed with people, who stared at me. The chiefs were mostly in a big paved square in the centre of the town, talking and quarrelling and looking at one another's armour, all in those bright barbarian colours, with blazons painted on their shields, Celtigun and my two little hostages were standing together, watching it all; he kissed my hands and began thanking me, and the children jumped up and down, wanting to tell me everything! Then he broke off short and raised his open hand. It was Comm and Vercingetorix. They looked different in the open sunlight; or perhaps it was only their not being drunk.

Vercingetorix made me a bow, saying, "Will Rome forgive?" "No!" I said, but he was smiling at me so

## *Uercingetorix and the Others*

nicely that at last I changed my mind and said, "Well, yes. But I wouldn't have if anything had happened to the children !" "No," he said, "you're right," and laid one hand on Iurca's shoulder. I saw Celtigun looking black at that, and so did Vercingetorix, for he said, "I don't want to make enemies. If I forget how late you were in coming, will you forget what didn't happen to your sons?" He held out his right hand, which Celtigun looked at for a minute doubtfully, and then took with a great shake. After that he turned to me again: "I'm glad you've forgiven me too, Rome. But your dress — how careless we were ! Adianta, you must get her a new one, a Gallic dress, the best you can find, because Rome must learn to admire us! And in the meanwhile" — he took out one of his coral shoulder brooches — "Rome must accept this." I put my hands behind my back: "No! I'm the wife of a Roman officer and you're a rebel!" The others looked terribly shocked, and Adianta made a movement to stop me; but he didn't mind, he only held it out, smiling still: "Ah, but I'm not a rebel to this Rome!" and he pinned it on to my dress.

I wonder sometimes whether I ought to have taken it; but he's conquered and a prisoner, and the whole of Gaul is a province, so it can't matter. And M. thought it didn't matter when I told him; he said the brooch must go down as an heirloom. Anyhow, I did take it. It's a great thing for a man to have a smile like that!

Nothing much else happened, only after that I was allowed to do anything and go anywhere I liked.

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

Adianta and I bought a dress, but of course it was only a great woollen thing with long sleeves in the Gallic fashion — M. hardly knew me in it. And then Celtigun said, would I marry him! I suppose he thought they were going to win and it was a great honour, but I «told him very plainly that it wasn't. The children were disappointed, though, and couldn't make out why I wouldn't.

It was rather uncomfortable being free and respected and yet not being able to stop the things one saw going on. As a matter of fact there weren't many Roman prisoners, and when there were they'd usually let me help. But I did see some of the unfortunate Remi, who'd stayed loyal to us; they were treated worse than mad dogs, loaded with chains, knocked about, and beaten by anyone who'd a mind to; I don't know what happened to them in the end.

One never knew what was going on anywhere else it of course I didn't believe what they told me — and was half a year since I'd heard from M. But every thing happened unexpectedly; one day the chiefs were swarming all about the town, and their men rioting round the walls, as usual; and the next day they'd all cleared out and were gone. Adianta went too with her husband, but Celtigun left the children, and I took charge again. The hottest of summer was over, and we got cool winds sweeping over Bibracte; it was a healthy place, and the horse-flies didn't come up so high. We heard all sorts of rumours: battles and pursuits and stratagems; I didn't know what to believe; in the end I didn't believe anything, I didn't

## *TJercingetorix ana the Others*

believe when I heard Vercingetorix was besieged and hard put to it in Alesia. But that story went on. All the men who were left marched down out of Bibracte, and I could see how every one was hating me more than usual for being a Roman.

One day the children were having dinner; I remember I'd promised to make them dolls afterwards with the crayfish claws (we used to have crayfish very often), and I was thinking what a funny mixture of man and baby they were. Suddenly we heard a clattering of horse-hoofs coming up the street and Danorix jumped up: "That's father!" "Nonsense!" I said. "Sit down, Danorix." But it was. He was blood and dust all over and wild-eyed like a beast. "We're beaten!" he said, and snatched up a cup and drank. "How?" I asked. "Your people. Smashed 1 Broken in little bits! All that great army! I've come for the boys." "Oh, are they to go?" I cried. "Yes, home, home. They must forget." "And me?" "You forget too." "But I mean what's to happen to me?" "You're right enough; the Romans will be here on our heels. They've beaten us, I tell you!" The children had been listening very quietly. "Get the things, lurca!" cried Danorix, and we bundled them up together, while Celtigun finished all the food there was on the table.

He had ridden ahead of his men, but some of them came up now, with their horses blowing and sweating. One who was badly wounded was lifted off and left in the house with me, and his horse was taken for the children. lurca hung back, holding on to my



## *^Oercingetorix and the Others*

hand: "Oh, I do wish you were coming too!" But Danorix was flushed and excited, he ran up to me and kissed me hard, then scrambled on to the horse; he had their bundle, and I hoisted lurca up in front of his father, who shouted to the men; they wheeled their horses and were *off*. I waved to the children as long as I could see them — good-bye, good luck — and they waved back.

For the next day or two I hardly went out of the house. I couldn't be sure how true it all was, but I couldn't help hoping; and that would mean I should hear about M. very soon - whatever had happened to him. I think I was more anxious in those few days than for months before. I looked after the wounded man as well as I could, and he seemed to be getting better. I was feeding him when I heard the first shouts outside, and I know I jumped up and left him to go on as best he could.

I stood in the doorway and watched them marching in, and heard the orders in crisp Latin, and the steady tramping, all in step, and saw the dark heads and the straight, firm ranks — Roman citizens and soldiers! - and I leant against the door-post crying with joy, though they'd all have thought I was a Gaulish woman. Then round the corner came the Eagles I knew, and I held my breath and waited. But he was there right in front, and I heard my voice all shrill and queer as I called to him. For a moment he didn't know me in my new dress with my hair plaited, and he and every one all stared at me. Then he cried out himself, and we ran into one another's arms

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

in the middle of the street; and they all cheered.

I found out afterwards he'd thought I was killed at Noviodunum, and he'd made a vow to take no prisoners. But wasn't it extraordinary? The man I'd been looking after got well, so we took him back with us; you've seen him often enough; he's one of my litter-bearers. I've quite a lot of Gauls in the household now; it's so useful being able to talk their language. I don't know about Adianta or anyone else; we left Gaul as soon as we could.

But I wonder what happened to the hostages.

## *in from Alesiasia*

Sois pitoyable! Pars, va chercher Cleariste  
Et dis lui que je vis encore pour la revoir.  
Tu la reconnaitras, car elle est toujours triste.

HÉRÉDIA.

"GET on!" The voice behind him made him jump and he dropped a stone. He was getting on, getting on as hard as he could — what in hell did they think he was doing? "Get on!" The voice sounded cold and ominous, a whip-lash of a voice; it passed again. In his hurry he began putting the stones on badly. "By God, if you don't work quicker than this—!" Oh, his first day when he didn't know the work! His hands were trembling; despairingly he felt that the voice would come back, but he couldn't—couldn't—do more than this! Suddenly the man on his right, the man who was building his bit of wall best and quickest, turned round to him, shoved his stones straight and laid a dozen in the time he would have taken with three; without a word the man did it and then went back to his own bit just as silently — no time to talk. The voice passed him this time, but paused on his right: "You lazy swine, get on!" and the crack of a whip.

About twenty slaves were terracing a hill-side for vines, building walls and filling in. There was no sound from any of them, except that voice, the overseer walking up and down. Don't they ever sing? thought Tyndarus, but somehow he knew they never

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

did. A little later the voice cried an order; he didn't hear what it was, but the man on his right said "Stop!" and himself dropped straight down to the ground in the little shelter of his wall. Tyndarus dropped too and lay for a moment panting and recovering, then looked up and began to whisper thanks for the help, but "Don't talk!" the man snapped back: the rest was too short and precious.

Towards evening he was staggering back from the stone-heap with a skinful; he slipped and nearly had the whole thing over; it was the same man who caught his arm and steadied the load and saved it from falling. He was kept later than the others to finish his bit of wall, and when he got back to the rock-caves they were barred into at night, they had mostly eaten their supper. He thought there'd be none for him and nearly cried with disappointment and emptiness; but again that man was beside him and pushed across a crust of loaf and some cheese, with "That's yours; I kept it," and walked away. "Who is it?" he asked a man who was still eating. "That? The man from Alesia."

"Oh! Is he a Greek?"

"No, he's a Gaul. That's all I know about him."

Tyndarus finished the cheese and took what was left of the bread in his hand; he looked for the Gaul and saw him sitting in a corner, rather by himself; he went over and sat down next him; the man frowned and half turned his back.

"I — I wanted to say I was grateful," began Tyndarus. "Three times to-day -1 do thank you."

## *Uercingetorix and the Others*

For a minute the other said nothing, then spoke as if with rather an effort: "I remember what it was like when I came here first; there's nothing to thank me for."

"You got the whip instead of me."

"Once! Do you think I'm not used to that? But you've got to learn to look out for yourself here. And to lay your stones so that they don't move. Watch me to-morrow. You're a Greek, aren't you?"

"Yes, an islander. They said you were a Gaul."

"I am a Gaul still. Did you ever hear of Alesia?"

"No."

"Well, it doesn't matter. What did you do before?"

"I was a shepherd at home."

"Slave?"

"Well, there was a lord, but he never came. We were all happy there."

"Happy! What's your name?"

"Tyndarus. And yours?"

Again the Gaul hesitated. "I'm called Mogh. But you don't want my name."

"I do; you've been kind to me. And I'm alone here. That's your name — Mogh?"

"No, but you can call me by it. Now, you get to sleep; you don't know this place, you've got to be at work by dawn."

The next day it was more terracing, and Tyndarus learnt from the Gaul, and grew nearly quick enough to satisfy the powers over him. Again he asked his supper neighbour about Mogh.

"What do you want with him?" the man asked.

## *\*Dercingetorix and the Others*

"He's got the worst temper in the world — knock you down as soon as look at you. Keep out of his way,"

"Why's he been helping me, then?"

The man shrugged his shoulders: "He won't go on, anyway. You let him be."

"I like him."

"Like away then; but don't blame me if he gets you into trouble."

The man went off, leaving Tyndarus uneasily wondering whether he should go on and try to make friends, or leave things alone. He looked at his hands, where he'd skinned them against the stone, and sucked at the sorest place.

"Take care!" said the Gaul from behind him. "Don't let your blisters break," and reached over his shoulder for a hand. "You have though! That'll hurt to-morrow. I'll help you a bit if I can."

Tyndarus looked up, not knowing what to think of this man, who stood half-shadowed and big in the light from a lantern on the floor, holding some rough bone dice.

"Will you play?" he asked.

"I've nothing to stake," said Tyndarus, and then, seeing the Gaul frown, half afraid and half eager he added, "Unless my supper to-morrow."

"Very well. Choose your dice. I stake this" — he tossed up a coin — "It's all the money I have." They threw and Tyndarus lost. "I give you back your supper," said the Gaul, "Try again." They changed dice and played again; a second time the Gaul won.

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

"It's yours now," said Tyndarus, thinking unhappily of a hungry evening to-morrow, but the winner picked up the dice:

"What's the use? I'll ask something else of you instead: some time. Why were you sent here? You don't look like the sort we get mostly."

"I tried to get home, but I was caught and sent here as a punishment; I don't know if it's for always or just for a time."

"Don't talk about always! You want to get home still?"

"It's no use trying."

"Not yet: some day — if you care enough."

"Enough! Ah God, yes. My girl's there."

"You've a girl, have you!" The Gaul stood up and tied the dice and the coin into his belt. "What was she like?"

"How can I make you see her? It's her eyes, I think, and her smile. She's got long, fine hands, and dusky hair, not quite black but like thick smoke; and when she runs — and when she bends her neck — oh, it's like a wind off the sea in summer! Everything loved my Cleariste; she was so good with the calves, and her father's vines had the best grapes in the island. She could cut a swathe with any of us, too; she's nearly as tall as I am."

"That sounds fine. But my girl was little, so little I could pick her up and carry her in my arms like a lamb. She's dead, though. Tyndarus, will your girl have been true to you?"

"She's as true as light — Cleariste! Even if she

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

thought I was dead. And it's not a year. You're making me hope again, Moghl"

"That's what I meant. Were you taken in battle?"

"No, there's been no war in the islands for long; it was pirates. They're always about there; they land and raid and go, like wolves. There were three or four of us out on the cliffs with the sheep; we saw the galley setting in towards us, but we thought at first it was a Rhodian trader. When we saw it wasn't, Chremes ran off to warn the elders, and the rest of us started driving in the sheep; but we hadn't time. There was a neck of land, very rocky, that we had to get over, and the pirates came up from the bay and cut us off there. Of course we stood by the sheep and made a fight for it; we'd got our iron-bound poles, and knives too, and the dogs helped us. But we hadn't much chance; we were tied up and they drove our sheep down to the galley; they killed the dogs too — God's curse on them! They made a fire on our beach and started drinking, they and their women; but then one of their men ran down with a warning and they hurried on board again; so Chremes must have got safe to the elders. I lay on deck with the rope cutting my wrists, and watched my island getting littler and darker as the sun set behind it; the waves of our wake went back at each side, straight and even as furrows, rust-red in the sundown; then they turned grey and cold, and the island was gone, and it was night. And there's never been a good dawn for me since then."

The Gaul looked hard at Tyndarus; it was nearly



## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

dark now, because the lantern had gone out; but there was a vague light coming in through the bars of the opening; he said, "I think it's you I've been looking for."

"What for?" asked Tyndarus; and then, "I want to know about you."

"To-morrow. Don't get straw stuck in your hands to-night."

"But tell me now."

"No. Lie down and stop talking." And Tyndarus obeyed him, surprised and interested, and even a little hopeful.

The next day his hands were very sore, but fortunately he was put to carrying loads of stone or earth most of the time. When he had time to think he wondered about the Gaul, but there was no talk that evening. Mogh came in with a cut head and a vile temper, and answered Tyndarus nothing but curses. For five days his temper went on, till the islander began keeping out of his way and trying to make friends with the others; they were a poor lot mostly, Greeks or barbarians, one lousier than the last, who had been sent here either as a punishment, or else because they were too stupid or lazy or bad-tempered for anything else. Tyndarus was very unhappy all that time; even at night, turning and twisting among the straw, trying to scrape it up into a pillow, with sore hands and back, and either the wind blowing in cold from outside or else the stale, choking smell of the cave, even when he slept, he could not dream of Cleariste and the island, only of

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

He went on: "Well, it was like that for three years. Then — did you ever hear of our war?"

"Yes, the rebellion against Rome."

"Call it that if you like — I don't! But yet there was a time I thought not so different. We were away off, up in Alesia, and news came slowly. At first we thought it was just the Arvernians, and we were no friends of theirs. Theft it seemed to be a bigger thing: more people coming in. But there'd been fighting for the last six years and we not in it, so we thought no more for a time. But then it was the Haeduans, our over-lords, joining, and that looked like us. Some of my friends had gone off already, but I hadn't; I was building a house for us to live in; it was time for Taissa and me to marry — she'd been my sweetheart long enough, and we thought there might be going to be a child. There wasn't, though. But anyway I didn't care what was going on outside Alesia. Then one day there was a great shouting at the gates and I got down to see — I'd been fixing the shingles on our roof — and I saw men driving in wagons and great herds of oxen. Armed soldiers were guarding them, and I asked what they were for; the man looked all scorn at me and answered they were Vercingetorix' men provisioning the town — in case. 'But it won't be needed,' he said, 'so don't you be afraid, muck-heap 1' No wonder they didn't like us; but I was angry then. They went away, though, and I got the house finished, and Taissa began putting her things together.

"One evening she and I went out on to one of the

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

hills; we lay among the pines, thinking of nothing but each other; it was one of those late summer evenings that go on for ever. Then we heard a noise in the valley below us; at first we didn't heed it, but it went on, louder and louder, till we looked — and ran for the town. It was an army in retreat, tearing over the hills back into Alesia, horse and foot all mixed up and jamming at the gates. We didn't understand what it would mean at first, not till Csesar came and we saw him digging in all round us. That was the beginning of the siege.

"They took my new house for the soldiers; we townspeople thought ourselves lucky if they left us a roof over our heads. I offered myself as a soldier at once; I thought it was the safest thing to do; let alone that I'm a Gaul and it was for Gaul they were fighting, though we didn't know at first. By good luck and because I'm big and strong, they took me; others who offered weren't taken, and it was bad for them later on. I'm coming to that. When it seemed that Caesar's lines would hold and the siege must go on, most of the cavalry were sent out by night, secretly, to get help. I saw the chiefs riding down, whispering to one another, with the trappings taken off their harness in case it rattled. That same night I saw the Arvernian General, a head taller than the others, though they were helmeted and he had only a cloak's hood over his hair. He'd said we could hold out thirty days; I didn't think even that — till I saw the way he set to work. He didn't leave a single man with any corn for himself; it all had to be brought

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

to him. I had an uncle who kept a chestful hidden; when it was found they drove a stake through him in the market-place; no one else hoarded theirs. I didn't know much about fighting, but I'm strong and I can learn things, and the better one fought the better rations one got; I fed Taissa out of mine. We had fighting most days, trying to break Caesar's lines and wear him out — they were hungry too; and I knew the country like the inside of my hand; there wasn't a path Taissa and I hadn't taken one time. So they found me useful; and after a few days of it I was as keen as anyone; and I got like them in thinking there was no one to touch the General.

"But the thirty days were up and no one came to relieve us. Some say it was treachery, that the other states, and our own over-lords most of all, were jealous of the Arvernians; I don't know. But they'd eaten all the cattle and grain they'd brought in, and ours too. We had good rations at first, but by the end we were hungry two hours after eating, and that's not good to fight on. I told Taissa I had plenty and made her share with me, but she found out very soon and then she wouldn't take more than the littlest bit. I knew if I was killed she'd have no one to look after her, and that was bad for my fighting too. One day she snared a bird on the roof with a loop of her own hair, and we ate it together. But mostly the women sat indoors, talking low and mending things for their men-folk; they hadn't the strength to weave or spin, and they got whiter and thinner and lost their looks. The ones with babies

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

hadn't any milk for them, so the babies died. And still the army of relief didn't come.

"Then we soldiers saw our chiefs and captains going up one morning to the council house, and we wondered what they were doing. It was clear things couldn't go on, yet there weren't many for surrendering; it would have meant the end of everything, and all that had gone before wasted, and besides every one knew it would be death for Vercingetorix. Not that a man thinks clearly when he's as hungry as we were. There were bound to be some killed and badly wounded every day; that was one way of getting food; but it couldn't be faced-yet. But what they did was as bad: they drove all the women and children, and all of us townsfolk who couldn't bear arms, out of the city,

"There was no saving Taissa, no appeal, nothing. She'd one chance: to go down to the Roman lines and get them to take her as a slave. I told her to do it, I said she must, that when the relieving army came we'd smash the Romans and have her out; I told her it wouldn't be as bad as she thought; but all the time I was thinking of her in their arms, my sweetheart. And she clung to me, and her tears were hot on my neck, and at every tear I put my curse on Vercingetorix; for all I knew he was right! He got more than my curses on him, afterwards. But I'd been there by Taissa all her life, to protect her and stop things harming her; and now I had to let her go alone. Nothing that's done to me now can ever hurt like that.

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

We watched them go straggling off down the hill towards the Roman camps. Sometimes we lost them among the trees, but they came out again, and they got to the great ditch across. It was too far to hear anything, but we could see them moving about, holding up their arms; I thought I knew which was her. But the Romans didn't take them; food was as short with them as with us. They came up again, up under the city walls; they cried to be taken back. Then the General sent all of us from the town up into the market-place, and there we must stay till we were needed, with the others guarding the walls. We could hear nothing and see nothing; we only knew. And then the army of rescue was sighted and we could fight our way out of the trap. We fought a whole day, but we couldn't break them. At evening we dragged ourselves up again. One didn't stop to look at dead bodies in the path, but I saw something under a rock and went over: that was my girl, dead two days. She'd drawn up bracken over herself, and she'd made a pillow of it. She was curled up with her face to the rock; she always slept curled up. I think we had seven days' fighting: three battles and the times between, counting that battle. Only it's like all one time, now. And no one killed me, though I didn't try to shield myself. And we were beaten. "They had to surrender, to give up Alesia and the General. It was nothing to me; Taissa was dead; life was dead. I was just a thing, tossed about. I saw Vercingetorix go down to his surrender and his death; the men round me were crying. The next

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

thing was our piling arms and being given food by the Romans; still I was like a dumb beast. The Hæduans and Arvernians were given back; but we men of Alesia who were not of either folk were given to the soldiers for their own. That way I was chained and bought and sold, but I can't remember any faces for a year after the siege. I don't know how I got down south as far as this; only there were days hotter than I'd ever known, and burning my hand on an iron bar in the sun. And then the sea. And then for a year working in a tanner's yard, and bit by bit coming alive again. Everything gone: home and freedom and my own stars; I hadn't even my name; they called me Mogh, which means slave in our tongue; that's why you aren't to say it. Only I thought of my town and talked of it; so they call me the man from Alesia too, and I like that better. At the end of that year I fought with a man and knocked him into the tan-pit, so that he nearly died. Then, as there was still some work in me, I was sold, and they bought me for this place. I've been here since then; nobody liked me, and I like nobody except you. That's my story, Tyndarus."

Tyndarus had been thinking of himself half the time; it meant so little—this strange town and strange war and the dead girl whom he'd never seen; the story was all of a piece with the dark and the tiredness and the rough floor of the cave. But at the end he woke up fully. "And now—now? You wanted me—for something. Tell me that."

"I want my revenge. I want to kill some people -

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

every one who hurt me. But I must get free first, and that's easier to do together. You want to get free too."

"When?"

"Til tell you when the time comes, Tyndarus; it will, never fear. Do you trust me now?"

"I think so. But you're so queer. Were you kind to me so as to buy my help or because - well, because you just wanted to be?"

"I don't know why I do things. But I'll help you back to your girl. If you like I'll swear faith, but my gods are all dead now,"

<sup>4</sup>\*Oaths are only made to be broken; I'll take the help you give me and be grateful." A great cloud swept over the stars; Tyndarus shivered. "There'll be rain to-morrow. Do we have to go on just the same?"

"Of course. Are you cold already? You ought to see one of our winters up north. They may give us some more straw to-morrow night if it rains hard. Get it up between you and the open, Tyndarus! Here, take some of mine; I don't call it cold." As he went to sleep, Tyndarus heard the first heavy rain-drops and dreamed of sheep's feet pattering.

Terracing, quarrying, digging round the olive trees, rain every day for a week, then less rain, then bright March sunshine; now and then a glimpse of the skilled men who worked on the same land, but looked down on them too much to have any dealings. Tyndarus crushing his foot under a falling tree and going lame for a week; Mogh branded on the face for throwing an edged stone at the overseer; work



## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

and punishment and a little food and sleep. So the months went on, and the two were friends and helped each other; it was the Gaul who lifted the tree-trunk off Tyndarus' foot, and, later, when he himself lay twisting and yelling with pain after the brand, it was Tyndarus who brought him water and bandaged his head and stayed awake all night with him. This brand was against their getting away safely; anyone could have told the bearer of it was a runaway. But they planned to go up first into the wild country to the north-east and make a wide half-circle round through it and so back and down to the coast; and while they were alone there, said Mogh, "You can cut right across the brand mark, cut it all down level, and then when it's healed again it will look like a wound." Besides, his long hair half hid it.

Summer was hot that year, shrivelling the ground into cracks, drying up all the springs; the air in the cave seemed never to change, thicker and heavier every night. There was always a tussle for who was to be nearest the grating, only they all left the Gaul his place. But yet never a chance of escape. Tyndarus had almost stopped hoping; Cleariste and the island shone dimly, like a dream of another world. And sometimes for days they hardly spoke to one another at all; when each had told of his own life — so different the other could hardly picture it — and then of what he meant to do if he did get back, and when they both knew just what the plan was when — if ever — the time they hoped for came, there was little left for them to talk about. Even their gods had

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

strange names and powers and sacrifices. But they had the one idea of escape together, and that was much.

Then it was the beginning of the vintage and every one was put on to that; the vineyards stretched away from hill to hill across a sweep of valley, separated from one another by raised paths or low fences. The earliest to ripen were in the valley on the south slope, little green wine-grapes that tasted sourish. The slaves worked along the rows, hidden from one another by the mass of leaves swinging between the standards. At midday the overseer let them stop to rest and drink; and saw that the Gaul and the islander were missing. None of the others knew anything, or if they did pretended not to; he shouted for the skilled men, who were summer-pruning farther up the hills where the grapes were still hard; then hurried off for dogs and trackers and all the shepherds who could be spared to help him. There was nothing to be seen, but by this time the two could have crept up through the other vineyards, across the olive-terraces and into the wild hills. And the heat on the rocks made it hard to see anything clearly. The dogs picked up the track, but it was slow and difficult to follow once they got on to stones; so after a time they were sent back; but they had pointed out the path the runaways must have followed.

They had run steadily till they were well among the rocks; by that time they were aching all up their legs and backs, dripping with sweat, and feeling the

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

blood thumping like drums at their ears and tern pies. A minute or two of lying flat in the shade put them right again, but all the heat of the sun gathered itself at the back of their necks as they went on; the vine leaves they had worn at the picking to protect themselves had fallen off, so they gathered what leaves they could from wild vine and clematis, but carefully or it would show. They followed the dry bed of a burn for nearly an hour; some path they must have: the hills were a long series of stone ridges, hard and sharp and barren, with great jags of rock sticking out of them, almost impossible to cross. Even as it was they cut their feet and hands from time to time. Both had eaten as many grapes as they could and they were used to going hungry, but when they nassed a wild pear tree they stopped to pick up a handful each or hard little pears; the grubs in them were all so much food. When the watercourse came to an end they had some hard climbing; eagles were crying above them, so they knew they must be well up. Tyndarus, the shepherd, was good at picking out ways among the rocks, and the Gaul was more enduring, though less used to that kind of country. Earlier in the day they had heard the dogs after them in the valley, and knew the pursuit had begun. But they had two hours' start, and a better will to escape than even the overseer had to catch them. Only they were both troubled by the way their direction had been found,

In the evening, when the hill-tops were still in gentle sunlight, but the valleys were darkening

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

they got out on to a ridge from where they could see right down to the vineyards; the mouth of their old cave-prison was a tiny black speck at the far side. The trackers were spread out after them; they had thought they could turn north along the crest of the hill, but now it seemed as if they might be cut off that way; they had better go down across the next valley and not turn till they were on the far side of it. There would be no moon, but they could see well enough by star-light. Everything would come right yet. They crossed the watershed, taking care not to show themselves against the sunset, and then plunged quickly down among the rocks at the other side. As they went they kept their eyes open and picked up whatever seemed eatable as they passed it: snails, berries, and a few half-ripe wild pomegranates; they stuffed them into their belts and hurried on all they could; but whenever one of them caught a locust he bit its head off\* and ate it as he walked. Soon it was night; they took four hours getting across the valley in the dark; at the far side each slept another two hours while the other watched; they hardly spoke at all. Both were tired when they started again, turning north along the crest; they stumbled and cursed each other, and anxiously watched the dawn spreading over the sky to their right.

Then Tyndarus slipped; he jammed his foot between two rocks and could not get it out. He called softly, and the Gaul came back and tried to pull him out by main force; then, finding that no good, and

## *'Vercingetorix and the Others*

afraid of twisting the ankle, managed to shove the stones apart; Tyndarus went on, limping and silent; at last he said, "I can't. It's no use. It's the foot I hurt before: look, it's swollen already," Mogh helped him on a few yards, but it was no good on that ground; and they'd be in full sunlight in a few minutes. They looked at each other. "Go!" said Tyndarus. "Do go! There's a chance for me if I hide. But-oh, you must go!"

"I'm not going," the Gaul answered. "Curse your fool of a foot, though! If we were a bit farther" — he looked back along the crest — "You've got to get on till we come to a good rock. Here, let me get my arm round behind you. Now, don't try and walk with that foot, but go on. Do what I tell you, Tyndarus!"

They managed half a mile that way, with gasps and now and then a cry from Tyndarus. There was a crack between two rocks farther on that looked hopeful; they aimed for that. But the Gaul kept looking uneasily over his shoulder; at last he picked Tyndarus up and carried him on his back the rest of the way.

"You're no weight like this," he said. "Nothing to a hide of stones. Keep still; we shan't be long." He got to the crack, and Tyndarus slipped down. "Quick!" he said. "In with you!" and pushed in himself. "There! Now Tyndarus, still! I think I saw someone. They must have found the place where we slept. Our luck."

Tyndarus lay full length along the crack> which

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

was broadest at the bottom and full of dry leaves; Mogh crouched over him; but there wasn't room for two. They waited the longest minutes of their lives; then they heard voices, drawing nearer. Tyndarus had his face to the ground and could see nothing, but Mogh looked out. The voices were far off still, but coming near and coming straight. Suddenly the Gaul spoke, in a whisper that Tyndarus could only just hear: "Listen: they can see me here."

"Lie down — on the top of me," the Greek whispered back.

"They'd see me that way too; Tyndarus, I'm going to creep out and be found in some other rocks. Then I shall say you went along the first range. You can stay here and get away later."

"No!"

"Yes! You can't stop me."

"They won't believe you!"

"They'll only get it out of me after a long time; then they'll believe."

"Oh, God, what'll they do to you?"

"It doesn't matter. I'll not give you away."

"You shan't go! We must stay together!"

"Oh no, we mustn't. You'll get back to your girl, Tyndarus; you think of that. I'm going to save you, like — like the Arvernian saved my city. I've got to be quick. Good luck, Tyndarus. Let go!"

"Oh don't, don't —" Tyndarus half struggled up, but felt the Gaul's weight on his shoulders, shoving him down. And then it was no use doing anything. He lay close, pressing into the earth like a root, his

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hands over his ears. He knew what he would hear but he didn't want to hear it. «

He was listening again when it did come: the shouts, the clatter of stones. Mogh defending himself perhaps. Then, as they closed, one great yell from the Gaul; he would have given anything to look, but dared not risk it. A din of voices, rising and falling—one was the overseer's; he could not hear the words, A moment's silence, then dull, repeated sounds, and then a cry from his friend that almost made him cry himself. That came again, three times—once more—five times—Tyndarus bit on the dry leaves, shivering all over. How long was it going on? and what was it? He felt he must stop it, he must get up and run - a twinge in his foot laid him flat again. He listened still. All at once the clatter of voices started like it had been before and Tyndarus thought: He's spoken! True or lie? He tried not to breathe, he felt as if anyone must hear his heart. But while he waited the voices got farther away. He did not lift his head till they were almost out of hearing. He could see them a long way off, all bunched together - and something in the middle.

It was lonely in the crack that day, lonely to lie there with an aching foot and eat snails, and watch the rocks in front of you, and know what must be happening to your friend. And lonely the next night, full of bad dreams, full of the thought that it was your fault, you should have stopped him, you might both be safe now. And lonely again the set-

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

ting out next morning, no arm to help you, no one to plan with, and feel you had something friendly near you; only the rocks and the noise of the grasshoppers dinning in your ears, and the sun straight overhead; no one to share your troubles with. . . .

Days and days on the hills: till Tyndarus lost count; only some days the foot was worse and some days better; after a time it got nearly well. And gradually the hills began to change. He did not take the half circle, but went east, as straight as he could by the sun. He saw wolves and bears, and once a mountain cat; he saw valleys below him with houses and gardens, and crossed them at night. Sometimes he saw sheep or goats, and once he caught and killed a lamb; he ate part of it raw, and dried strips of the rest in the sun. Sometimes the turns of the ranges drove him north or south out of his way, for he tried always to keep in the wild country; sometimes he lost his bearings in thick woods, and twice he had to skirt all round the head waters of a big river, and lost days. But at last he saw a sparkle in front of him and could not be sure; the next day it spread and spread; it was the sea. He stole a cloak in one village, shoes in another; he put in a week's harvesting

it was so queer talking to other men again, free men! — and earned a little money. He found a coast town, and a ship ready to sail.

Autumn in the island; the dusky-haired Cleariste sat combing wool in her father's house. She never sang at her work now; all the young men knew her, the sad one, and how dead Tyndarus stood between



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them and her. She combed and combed; and her thoughts went back to the evening when Chremes had burst in on the elders with his news; she remembered how she had run with the men, but when they got to the cliff edge the galley was far out already. . . . She rose with the carded wool in her arms, to lay it in the chest. She heard them shouting outside, but did not heed till her father was suddenly there with his hands spread, his mouth all twisted with some great news: "Daughter, daughter!" She let the wool slip out of her arms; she was trembling from head to foot. And the shouts were at the door; and Tyndarus came in.

Later she said: "And your friend who escaped with you, who gave his life for yours? We should set up a stone for him, with his name on it and your thanks — and my thanks too. What was his name?"

He never told me his name. He said it was to wait till he was free; and I never thought of asking it at the end. We used to call him the Man from Alesia; that was his town where they had a battle. He told me about it once. But I've forgotten,"

## *Got to put up with it now*

**H** STILIUS got up, yawning; he seemed to fill half the room. I folded the wet cloth over my clay and went on with our talk: "Can one see him?" "I don't see why not; at any rate I can ask the Quaestor. How often will you want?"

"It all depends; I might get it at a glance. A very definite head, I believe?"

"How do I know what you mean by that? Definite! I only saw him once: after Alesia. All barbarians are alike."

"But anyhow it should be curious to see him."

"Curious? Well, maybe; my tastes aren't that way. I'll let you know to-morrow. Are you coming down to the Forum? No? Put my cloak straight, will you, then?" - he turned in the doorway on his way out - "That bust: be sure to have it finished by the end of the month. I'll send along for it." He clattered off down my wooden staircase, and I went back to the clay smoothing. How I did admire him sometimes, that great bull of a man! Not a care in the world, money, power, health, aye and being a Roman, knowing there was nothing could touch him and his security! And he'd got taste of a sort, he cared for the arts in his way; it wasn't my way of course, but at least it kept the Muses from starving on nothing but Casta-Han bucketSTfull. Ten years he was my patron, all the time I was in Rome, that is. But may I never see Rome again!

I had the idea of the designs I was to make for their

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

coins, and I had the mourning head — Gallia — sketched out roughly. He lent me one of his northern slave-girls to use as my model: not that I couldn't have done it as well out of my head, but he never could realize that. At least I gave her a good time for a week, poor thing, and she me, if it comes to that; fine, soft hair she had, all up her arms . . . , But as to the coins: a chariot and horses is always easy to do, but the other side was just the one thing I couldn't manage on my own — not if it was to be worth doing, at least, I had to see Vercingetorix. So when Hostilius came for his portrait that day I asked him; and the next day he sent round for me: he never lost time, even when it was a thing he rather despised, like this.

That great door slammed to behind us with a clang that made me jump; but he seemed not to have heard it. The gaoler lighted a torch and we followed him down the steps; one felt all the time that there had never been any wind there to lift the dust. Then there were arches and arches, a long passage; how many prisoners, I thought, had fate not driven here, hopeless of escape; already I was hankering after the free winds outside! Soon we came to a long row of doors at one side; the passage was lighter here, because there was a barred window at the far end. Everything was horribly quiet, and the gaoler plodded on ahead, not even jangling his keys. I never thought of there being anything behind those doors, till suddenly I heard a noise from behind one of them, the sharp sound of chains; I had to ask him

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

then; he looked over his shoulder and said surlily. "That? Lucterius." My patron added, "One of the chiefs of the southern Gauls: a rebel if ever there was one. Most of them weren't worth keeping, but he was; they'll have him out for the Triumph." But for himself he did not give one glance towards that row of ominous doors: what a nation!

By now we'd come to the last one, and the gaoler stopped; I had my tablets ready. He pushed back the bar and flung open the door; inside there was a great clatter of metal as the man sprang to his feet and stood panting, one arm half-raised across his face. Tall I knew he would be, but not this height and thinness together, topped with blue eyes and a tangle of grey-streaked hair; all that thick, solid, barbarian look must have worn out of his face, leaving him to stare at us, like he did then, with little flesh and bone between us and his naked soul. For a moment he looked like fear itself, fixed by some Gorgon's head, and I wondered if this were really the King they had spoken of; then, as we did not move, his narrowed eyes opened a little, his muscles came to rest, and he let his arm fall. Wrists and ankles were all chained to a belt, and his tunic was soiled and worn; I saw the scar of some great wound running from elbow to shoulder. "There you are," said Hostilius, mocking my stare a little, and I started my sketch at once. Then the Arvernian spoke, in his odd, quick accent, "What have you come for?" and then again when nobody answered, "What are you going to do to me?" The gaoler spat on the floor; Hostilius was interested in

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

the keying of the arches, and did not seem to hear; so I answered, "I am going to put your head on to a coin." The light was bad in the cell, so I asked the gaoler to have him led out; there was a sharp snapped order which the prisoner obeyed at once. He stood in the light of the passage, but turned his head away all the time, and so I made him on one of the coins, and so he will go down to time — facing away, I could see the detail of the head now: the bones all showed clearly, high under the eyes and a straight, clear line of jawbone: the brow sloped down to heavy eyebrows, and the eyes themselves were very deep-set, lined all round, and the only colour about him; everything else had faded, brown skin to pale, brown hair to grey and mouse colour, even the blood in his lips had thinned down and lost its red; his beard was matted like hay, and I could see plainly the throb of the pulse under his ears. But alive, my God, he was alive then!

He said nothing all the time, but his hands twitched every now and then; I was busy with my tablets. But after a time Hostilius said we must go. The gaoler drove him in and barred the door, and we came out into the open air and sunshine again. "Well, have you done what you wanted?"

"Most of it," I said. "But it would be better if I could see him again."

"I'll arrange it; but you must go by yourself next time."

"Certainly. I think I shall get the look. Nearly six years: it's a pitiable sight."

## *Vercingetorix and the Others*

"Oh, you Greeks! YouVe always got enough pity to throw about! He killed too many of our soldiers for anyone but a clay-merchant to pity him. He's got to put up with what he's given now." And off my patron went, without even a glance at my sketches; but I had to put up with what I got too — like anyone but a Roman!

The next morning I went round to my patron's house to ask whether I should go to the prison that day, and was told no, because Vercingetorix was sick. For three days the same story, till at last I was told he was still sick, but I might go. By that time I'd done the chariot, and the bust was almost finished too, though it was giving me some trouble — I wanted to get that look of his, hiding all he thought because one was nothing but a Greek, despising one, and the thick skin like a beast's hide, but so well tended!

I took my tablets again and went to the prison, but this time we went up instead of down, and into the light. "He's not in his old place, then?" I asked; the man answered, "No, we've got to keep him alive for the Triumph. He's been sick, and now he won't eat, curse him! If you can do anything, Greek — he might listen to you — there's food in the room." "What was wrong with him?" "I don't know-or care. Fever maybe; I wish he'd die of it for my own part!"-then, as if to explain — "I had a brother killed at Alesia." But I expect they must get to hate all their prisoners, anyway.

There was a room with barred windows, facing north; I was taken in. It was bare enough: a rough

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table with bread, wine and a salad on it, two stools, and across one side a low bed, and here the Arvernian lay asleep, unchained, and with his right arm flung back behind his head. His cheeks had been shaved now, in the Gallic way, and his hair combed back. I sat down and began sketching at once; a man sleeping is like a child: he puts nothing between himself and your work.

He woke with a start like an animal: one moment he was fast asleep, the next he was sitting up, wide awake. He stretched his arms — perhaps he couldn't do that when the chains were on — and looked all round; he sat on the couch in a curious way, one leg drawn up, the other out in front of him: and so I have him on one of the coins. At last he spoke: "Are you alone this time?" I nodded. "You're a Greek, aren't you? I used to have Greeks working for me in my own city — and their friends came after them. Will you show me what you've done?" I am always glad for people to see my work; it often helps very much: so I handed over the sketches. He looked at them intently, holding them close up as if his sight had gone a little. Then he handed them back to me: "So I'm like that now, am I. No wonder, though. And to be on a coin again! Did you ever see any of my gold staters?"

"Yes," I said, "I have: a good, even weight and size."

"What else did you think of them?" he asked eagerly.

"Well, I may be wrong, but it seemed to me they were neither one thing nor the other, neither Greek

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nor Gaul, neither Apollo nor you, not alive like a man, but yet not divine like a God. There was a galloping horse, though: that was right: it was a real horse, really moving: and a good design too."

"But that's what I thought! In another year I should have got them right — a year of peace, that is; I had no time for coins. And yet I shall be known by them."

"You'll be known by more than that," I said: and why shouldn't I have said it? We were alone,

He sat up straight, his eyes bright with a little fever: "Do you mean that? Oh, do you mean it? Surely I'm forgotten now — the conquered is always forgotten!"

I did not think I could say much more. I answered, "I'm neither Roman nor Gaul; I can't tell. But while Caesar's book is read at least you will be spoken of."

"Caesar! Aye, he was an honest dealer. But he never forgave me because I put my country before his friendship. But what else was I to do? Judge me, Greek, what else was I to do?"

"How should I know the rights and wrongs of it? It is long ago. Eat and drink and we can talk more."

I brought him food and wine; he ate without noticing what he did, muttering all the time: "Long ago — yes, it is long ago! Five years last autumn, and one month, two, three — New Year — four, five, six, seven, eight — that's six years since I drove him *off* Gergovia — apple-trees in flower under the city wall — it's ten days over the month too, unless I lost count somewhere. . . . Think of that, Greek, not a sight of



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a woman all the time, never a friend even, but chains and darkness and four blank walls!" He stopped suddenly, and then went on again: "Talk to me, tell me something!"

"But what?"

"Anything from outside, anything. Only don't let them see you've told. And quick, or they'll come back!"

"You aren't afraid of them?"

"Afraid - who says I'm afraid? But - but if I was - they come into my dreams now. O Gods above, haven't I been hurt enough yet?" He threw himself back with a quick, violent movement on to the cushions, then sat up again: "They never tell me anything. Though I've gone down on my knees to them. The first year it was worst — I did want to know so terribly. But after that there was no hope, Now you tell me: what came to Gaul after Alesia?"

"There was fighting for a year; much at first, then less and less; then none. Gaul is a province — like my Hellas: and happy, and prosperous: under a Roman governor. They say the harvests are good."

"Caesar can do anything; Caesar is a God; I told him so. Go on."

"But I know so little; I was at home during the Gallic wars; I've never even been there."

"Do you not know of the others - what's been done to them? Comm, Surr, the Haeduans, Dumnac?" I shook my head. "And my friend, my best friend, Lucter?"

I heard the pain in his voice; I wanted so much to

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quiet him; then suddenly I remembered the name: "Lucter — Lucterius! Yes, he's in the fourth cell from yours,"

"Lucter so near! O my God, they know how to torture one! We said good-bye that night at Alesia, we kissed each other, and he rode off to get help for me — and now never to see him again!"

"You will see him/" I said. "At least, I think you will."

"How then?"

"In Caesar's Triumph,"

"I didn't know. I didn't know. So that's what it all leads up to: the streets of Rome. I wondered then, but since I've thought I'd gone out of sight and out of mind. The Triumph! You don't know how hard it'll be facing the open! And afterwards, Greek, afterwards?"

"I can't be sure, but they say wherever I go — well, you know what comes after a Triumph."

"Yes; I might have been sure. It's better than this." He sat for a moment with his head in his hands, then suddenly leapt to his feet, throwing out his arms: "But I don't want to die! Why should I? I want my own hills — the sun on Gergovia, the blazing sun and then the wind to blow you cool again! I want to stand on my black wall and look east at sunrise and see that whole great valley spread out, house and field and forest, and hear the horses whinnying and the boar spears clashing behind me! And snow in winter and hundreds of waterfalls among the pine trees! And making people do things, waking them up — the

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forges where I took the hammer myself! Oh, why need they kill me, why need they, Greek, why need they?" He fell back panting, with the fever hot in his cheeks. "Do you know how old I am? Not much over thirty yet; I look older, but I'm not! Oh, if they'd only let me out I could still write poems, still talk, and everyone would listen, still make love to a woman — oh, how I could! The best years in any man's life come now, and they're going to kill me!" I had the head right at last, the head of the man who wanted to go on living, but who was going to die; I looked down at my sketch for a moment, and suddenly he had jumped up again and was shaking my shoulders: "Can't you tell them, Greek, tell them they mustn't kill me? Let me go and let Lucter go, let us go north on foot, tell them we'll promise anything! Oh, I must see my hills again!"

As we stood like this, all at once the door opened and one of the gaolers came in. "Here's a change!" he said, and then, running back to the passage, he called to another, "The chains, quick!" And then it seemed to me as if the Arvernian had woke up a second time; he dropped his hands off me. "They're coming back!" he said. "I wasn't thinking. . . . They're coming back. What have I been saying? You can't do anything, Greek, I know; except — don't remember, don't let people think of me like this! I was a King. I am a King still."

"I wish I could help you!" I said. "Oh, I wish I could!"

"You have already. When will the Triumph be?"<sup>1</sup>

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"This summer, I think: in a month or two/<sup>1</sup>

"Not so long, then. If only I could see Lucter! But if he's there too — and dying too —" The gaolers came back with the chains; whitely he faced them. Said one to me, "So you've got some food into him!" The Arvernian looked at me sadly: "Then you were their tool for that!"

But this I couldn't stand. "No!" I cried. "No, I was not! Don't believe them, King!"

"Very well, I'll not," he said, but so unhappily that I caught his arm:

"Oh, it can't be as bad as that!"

"Can't it?" he said, and held out his scarred wrists for the chains, "But you see, you see! Only make me a King again — once more."

And that was the last I saw of him - till the Triumph; then he looked no more alive than his own armour. As to the coin, I think I did make him a King — if you choose to see it. But a Roman would not choose.



# *'The Triumph of Faith*



## *The Triumph of Faith*

### PART ONE

**P**AUL, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy  
our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved  
and fellow-labourer,

"And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our  
fellow-soldier, and to the church in thy house,

"Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

"... I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I  
have begotten in my bonds:

"Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but  
now profitable to thee and to me:

"Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive  
him, that is, mine own bowels:

"Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy  
stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds  
of the gospel:

"But without thy mind would I do nothing; that  
thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity,  
but willingly.

"For perhaps he therefore departed for a season,  
that thou shouldst receive him for ever;

"Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother  
beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto  
thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

"If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him  
as myself,

"If he hath wronged thee or oweth thee ought, put  
that on mine account;



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" I Paul have written it with mine own hands, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. . . .

". . . , There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers.

" The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

*(The Epistle of Paul to Philemon.)*

### I. BALAS TELLS WHO *THE* PEOPLE ARE

I am Balas; I'm a Cappadocian, from beyond Zoana, among the low hills. Never mind how I got here; my brother shall do the minding if ever I get back! My father was Phanus, and my mother was Atossa; my grandfather was Oxathres, and he came from farther east. My brother had the land, but I had the religion.

It has been a hard Journey to the Cave, this life of mine, but yet in the end there has been green grass and running water and a path among the rocks. I was a boy when my father led me to the temple, but never have I looked back, never been less than a faithful follower and soldier of the Unconquered Mithras; I have served him for thirty years, and he has repaid my service. So that I hope some day to see our village and my father's house again.

We grew barley at home, and, higher up, millet; and vines and fruit trees, and crops of our own that no one grows down here at Colossae. All my boyhood I had watched the years rolling over me, with the

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stars above and the corn below. I had never left home till my father's death and my brother's treachery; I had never even seen the towers of Zoana rising up in the midst of the barley-white fields. I had never known how hard it is to work for another, when the full wheat ear is no pleasure and the piled stack is no more than labour past and more labour to come.

The worst time of all was once when I was far from any temple, far from any man of my own faith. I was initiate, one of the order of Lions, but I had neither robes nor vessels nor any place to worship; bread and a little gourd of wine was almost all I had. Morning and evening my prayers were mocked at by the others; so at midnight I woke to pray, kneeling by the bare wall and staring up to where, through a crack in the roof, one star shone. But as I prayed a light shot out and down from the star, as it were a long arm, and all round me began a murmur of singing and a sweet scent. Then I put out my hands gropingly towards the bread and the wine, and past my side came other hands touching mine, and as I ate with bowed head I felt the Bull Slayer on my right hand and the Sun on my left.

But here at Colossae there are a few brothers; we have made ourselves a place, and on Sunday we meet there and hold the Love-feast. All of us give what we can, and the altar, that is of carved stone, was my gift. Though we are no more than twelve or fourteen, and those for the most part poor, and not — in the world's eyes — free, yet the favour of the God is with us. Only we wish there were more to join us;

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perhaps that will come in time. But the people here have their own Gods, and the chief of them is Cybele, the Great Mother, who has many high and strange dwelling-places. The Gods of Olympus have more beautiful temples, but fewer worshippers.

Now I must tell about the others. Only first one more thing about me, Balas. I am free, not only through the New Birth of the Mysteries, but free by law. I am steward to Menarchus, who owns half the valley, and has a great house in Colossae too; he trusts me and I am proud of it. As for him, he is nearly twenty years younger than I am, and very tall and soldier-like. Often I have wished he would listen to me and take Mithras for his God. But he reads too many books, so that he laughs at me and all I believe in. His land marches with Philemon's from the river to the hill; but our side of the stone is the better ground, and, for all I say it myself, the better tilled as well. Philemon is an old man and bad at affairs, so he is in debt to my master. Five years ago things were going well with him; but his steward Onesimus, who was always a good friend of mine, ran away, taking with him all he could lay hands on in gold and silver. Menarchus need never be afraid of that with me. But Onesimus was a slave: and a Greek: and Archippus was often hard on him.

Things have changed much in the five years since Onesimus went, and one thing is that Philemon and his household have found a new God, who is neither Cybele nor Attis nor Sabazius. This God is called Christ, and is a mediator between them and What-

## *The Triumph of Faith*

has-always-been, as my God is for me. It is something of the same nature as the religion of the Jews, but I am not certain about it. Philemon's son Archippus is priest of this God in the fine new church they have here; whenever he and Menarchus meet they quarrel. Partly this is because they are very unlike each other and hard in different ways, and partly because it is Archippus who spends all his father's money on being a priest and makes Philemon borrow more from Menarchus. He is an uncivil man, and neither corn nor vine grow well under his eye.

Artamo has been with them all his life; I remember him when I first came here, a big, handsome boy, beginning to make love to every girl he saw. He is slave-born, and I, who have lived free, can see the mark it has left on him; he never does things for himself: he waits to be told; and he is fond of corners and back passages. I like him, but I know<sup>r</sup> he is not very good at anything, for all his fine looks, and I think he's a coward. When all Philemon's household were baptized into the service of the new God, he made belief to be much moved; but it didn't last. Artamo was never one to worship what he couldn't see.

I won't talk much about Charope, because Artamo loves her, and she loves Artamo. So there's nothing for me to do. Besides, women only draw one away from the right life; or so they say; but they've never seen Charope. She is maid to Philemon's two daughters, the brown-haired brave one that the dog nearly bit, and her young s'ster; they have had her since she

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was a child. Now she is grown up beautiful and tall and deep-bosomed like a statue of Fortune, with big eyes and a little mouth and a great crown of hair. That's Charope. But I do like Artamo: I've said so,

Only I like Chet better; Chet is a Scythian from far north where they worship strange Gods. He came one winter morning three years ago, with rope marks on his wrists and fresh wound scars about his face; he could speak hardly any Greek, and he still wore the great barbarian bracelets of twisted bronze that they couldn't get off him. About a week afterwards he strayed on to our land by mistake, and I showed him his way; after that we saw one another every now and then, and I wanted him to join us and follow Mithras. But he had his own Gods. All the same they had him baptized a Christian; he couldn't refuse his master, though he could me.

Yesterday evening as I was coming home along the road, I ran into Chet driving back their goats. He stopped to get a thorn out of his foot, and I asked him what his news was. He told me first that his master was short of money; I knew that well already, because Menarchus and I had been looking over the bonds only the day before, and Menarchus wanted to call them in. Then he went on, "And they say he wants to sell Charope." I just stood there for a moment, seeing the goats' hoof-marks in the dust; he didn't know I'd ever cared for her. I asked him what exactly he knew, but he'd just heard rumours that Archippus had been talking with a slave dealer, and that they'd seen Charope. She and Artamo were

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both a little frightened. He couldn't tell me much more, and was afraid of being late with the goats.

Perhaps I can persuade Menarchus to hold his hand. Apart from anything else it would be better business for him to get a fresh mortgage on the standing crops and let it run on; Philemon may always have a good year again. But Menarchus does hate him so, and wants to get his land; that's partly because Menarchus and his folk have been here for always, since the old Greek settlement, but Philemon comes from nobody knows where, and bought the land himself, but sets up now to be as good as anyone in the place. And besides, his being a Christian: Menarchus doesn't like these new religions; and perhaps he's right — Mithras at least was not born within any man's memory! But he likes Christians less than any; maybe it's because he's proud — with a good right to his pride, I say — and master in his own house; and Philemon, for all I've just said about him, he's not proud at home, and talks to his slaves and lets them eat with him, which seems to be the way of these Christians, But it is a bad example to our slaves; not that his aren't good workers all the same, most of them; but Archippus keeps them hard at it whatever his father does, I know what he did to Chet that winter he first came, and wouldn't do what he was told or answer when he was spoken to, or anything. For that matter, I believe he rather hates Chet still; and that's not fair; if the man belonged to us I could get twice the work out of him, but not that way. A willing hand makes a double sheaf.

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Chet promised to tell if he heard anything more about what was going to happen; I hope he will. In the meantime I wait, and pray. The Unconquered One has never failed me. Yet Charope is nothing but a woman. And it's all the world to me that she is! I don't know what there is about it. I don't know what I want. I'll try not to think about her now.

### II. ONESIMUS EXPLAINS HOW HE CAME BACK.

I hardly dare tell all he said to me before we went: nobody'd believe it. I mean — well, he standing there, he Paul of Tarsus, Paul! And me a runaway slave! That's all I was: I must remember it all the time and be humble. Epaphras was there, standing by Paul in his old sheepskin coat; I think he rather envied me going back to Colossae; Tychicus had the letters and he knelt for the blessing. Then I knelt too. And Paul must have known how I was feeling: having to leave him and go back to my master. I knew it would be all right after the letter, but still — oh, I didn't want to! Paul knew all that; he always does. He called me son — dear son — and kissed me\*. I felt his blessings follow the ship the whole way from Italy, like a flock of doves, and I felt him behind me on the road, and then getting within sight of the house again. Tychicus was very kind — oh, yes! — but I knew I wasn't his equal, nor ever could be: not on earth, I mean. Five years I'd been gone, and it might have been a lifetime: life and death, and being born again another man — and I do trust a better one, Tychicus came with me to the house; I remembered

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so dreadfully well how I'd seen it that last time, slinking out at night with the money in my bag, and starting at my own shadow against the wall in the moonlight. I had to drag myself every step back, calling on the dear Lord to help me. It may seem a small thing to ask His help about, but not to anyone who's been a slave and a thief, like I have. Of course Tychicus didn't understand — not really, not like Paul would have; he couldn't make out why I was going so slow.

At the end it was all a sort of whirl. Philemon came hurrying out, and it was all very well for me to say to myself that he was my brother, but I couldn't stand and face him thinking of everything that had gone before! So when he ran forward to greet Tychicus I fell on the ground with my hands clasped, and kissed the hem of his mantle. I stayed so, very fearfully, for some little time, hearing Tychicus explaining about me over my head, and trembling at my old master's voice. But then I was bidden to rise, and I did so, and gave the letter from Paul that had never been away from me all the voyage. Philemon read it and smiled and frowned, and ran his fingers through his white beard; at last he clapped me on the shoulder and said, "Well, well, so you've come back," and then to Tychicus, "The ways of the Lord are strange," and fell to reading the letter again. I knelt and asked his pardon for my wrong-doing, and promised him I would make it up now if it was any way possible, in good work and good will. For a little he looked very downcast, and I was afraid he could not



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forgive me yet, but at last he gave a great sigh, saying, "Yes, I do forgive you. But it's a bigger forgiveness than you think, Onesimus." He looked at the letter ruefully. "You've been unprofitable to me, indeed! He says he will repay: I trust so. If it's not too late. Well, well, come in and make amends; and tell me about Paul, how he is and all he said to you at Rome."

So I followed him in; it was all better than I'd thought it would be. But I was still afraid because Archippus hadn't seen me yet. When he came home I asked his forgiveness too, and showed that I was not proud nor forgetful of my station in life, even though Paul had baptized me himself. He forgave me grudgingly and took the letter; he frowned across it at me: "If Paul led you to think you were going to be freed, he was wrong. No, father," — for Philemon was interrupting him — "please let me finish. You shall stay as you were and obey your lawful masters. Now, are you clear about that?" I bowed my head: "Yes, master." It's no use denying I had hoped otherwise; but of course one never could tell. "Very well," said Archippus, a little pleased, I think, at me taking it like that, "now, listen: this is how things stand to-day," and he and his father told me everything. But before I go on to what he did tell I must say this: that I do honour and look up to Archippus, and I do try to obey him everyway; and if any time I don't seem to love him as I should it's my own fault. Only he is different from Paul.

It all distressed me so much, what I came back to,

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and I know I must work hard, I'm so afraid it's due to me, because things weren't at all bad when I went, but now really and truly I don't know what's to be done. In some ways it makes things much simpler to be just a poor man like me, or — or Paul, I was going to say; money has such a terrible way of tangling itself up with everything else — like poor Charope, for instance. And I can't help thinking that Archippus wasn't always very wise; he might have borrowed money from one of the Brothers — it's nothing to be ashamed of, after all — instead of from the heathen Menarchus. Let alone that it's just as easy to praise the Lord and sing hymns in a little bare room, like we all did in Rome, as in a fine marble church. But of course I didn't say so. The long and short of it was we had to find some money at once. If only I could have brought back what I'd taken! I'd never felt it so before. But I did think he could have found a better way than selling Charope.

I was surprised at the price Archippus said she would fetch — till I saw her. Five years ago she'd just been a little gawk of a girl, all legs and arms; but now — really it looked as if she must have had some special blessing; I should never have known her. I didn't wonder any more at the price. But it was cruel; and I'd say it was downright wicked too, if that didn't mean setting myself up as a judge. For one thing she and Artamo were deep in love, as anyone with a heart could see; and for the other wasn't it most likely selling her into a life of sin and shame — her a lovely, living soul inside her body? Archippus

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tells me she won't be baptized, and shuts her heart to all he tells her; but what I say is she's still nothing but a child for all her looks, and he's been rough with her and got her frightened, so that she won't do anything. It's like sometimes the gentlest cow in the herd, if there's a new milker with a hard hand, she fidgets and kicks, and won't let down a drop. Anyway I'm going to do my best to stop him selling her, and I'm going to talk to her myself; I can't help thinking the Lord will soften her hard little spirit, and she'll be another lamb for the fold.

Most of them were so nice, and welcomed me back as if they really liked seeing me again; I can't tell how touched and pleased I was. It almost made up for losing my freedom again. But some have gone since the old days—sold, I'm afraid, and perhaps most of them out of reach of Grace for ever; there were one or two fresh faces as well, and one I liked as soon as I saw him. That's Chet; I can't help thinking of what I wrote out for Paul one time about there being neither Greek nor Scythian, bond nor free. He's got a sad sort of face, and isn't always playing tricks like some of them. They say he's a Christian, but it almost seems to me that he might have been converted too quick; it's clear the knowledge of Christ is not with him yet. He came in late, and Charope laughed at him: "So you've been taking more messages for Phoebe Martha!" But he didn't answer.

And that reminds me I've never said how Phoebe Martha came running in and took my hands. "I

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knew something was going to happen!" she said, "because I've been praying." "Oh, mistress, how you've grown!" I said, and knelt to her too; for she's grown up such a fine little lady, with her pretty brown hair curling out under her snood, and her face all smiles! She was dressed very neatly, too, with just one necklace; and I remembered her such a helter-skelter of a child five years back! She pulled me away into a corner and began talking so quick I was hard put to it to follow, first of all about Charope and what a shame it was, which I quite agreed with, and then about her brother Archippus, and I know I oughtn't to have agreed with that, but I'm afraid I did; and at the end she said, "And one more thing, Onesimus, have you seen Chet? And do you like him?" I nodded, and she went on: "Oh, I am so glad! Will you be kind to him? Nobody is here, so I try to be, but really it is hard on him, poor thing, hundreds of miles away from his own country — and — and everything. I mean, we're all brothers, aren't we?" "That's just what Paul would have said!" I answered her, for I do like it when people say that. "I'll do all I can for Chet, and the other thing too. It always comes out right in the long run: the Lord sees to it." "Well, I hope so," said she, "I'm going to pray again." She was half-way out when she ran back and held my hand again and looked up at me, very seriously: "Onesimus, will you help *me*, too? It's this. I don't want to marry John Mark." "But I'm sure nobody'd think of forcing you to marry. Paul always said virginity—" "Oh, it's not that!

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**But** you'll see soon." This time she really did go out; but I wonder what she meant.

I have been working out the accounts all to-day and they puzzle me; I can't make out quite what Archippus has been doing; I'm afraid he's very reckless with figures. While I was getting them into order my mistress Apphia came in; she wanted to talk them over separate from the others; she seemed to think I could make the sums come out different by adding them up the other way round. "And if Charope goes, we'll only have to get another maid/" she said. "Really, it's too bad! We dress on nothing a year now, simply nothing, I'm sure you can do something, Onesimus." "I'll do all I possibly can, my lady," I said. "Be sure I won't spare myself— now." She walked round the room, fingering the ends of the books; she had something more to say, but somehow she couldn't get it out, and then Dorcas came in with, "Mother, it's time for prayers; we're waiting for you." Five years ago she'd been little more than a baby, playing with dolls on the floor; now she was old enough to — well, to look down on me very much like her brother had, even though she didn't come up to my shoulder! But I know I deserve it aH. I followed them in and knelt at the bottom of the line, next Chet; I didn't hear him pray at all. But I did give thanks myself that I'd been brought to see the Lord: when I think of the life I've led! I do trust I shall keep good now; I know how easy it is just to stumble over the edge into sin,

Philemon offered up a special prayer for me, which

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I did most heartily join in; and then Archippus took it up, referring to all that had gone before which I suppose was quite right, but I don't know why he need have. I saw Charope in front of me bend her head lower and giggle; really I'm glad she can still laugh at anything with what's hanging over her; but very likely the reason she does is just that she's all on edge and waiting for it. Archippus went on about my sins, and I repented of them again, as, the Lord knows, I've done already a hundred times, Chet, still kneeling, reached out his hand and took mine. "Never mind!" he whispered, "you'll be even with him one day!" But I shook my head.

Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, all-powerful, all-enduring, help me to keep up to what I hoped to be and what I mean to be still. Let your Light shine on me now, and I will not care what Archippus says, or anything. When I am tempted to be proud and self-righteous, make me to think of you, dear Lord, and of Paul who is the best man I have ever seen. And your grace be with every one of us, and most of all with Chet, and Phoebe Martha and Charope, and all who are helpless and easy to hurt; and may it stay with Paul, like it always does. And give us good rest to-night. For Jesus Christ's sake.

### III. PHCEBE MARTHA SAYS WHAT SHE WANTS TO DO

Father will keep waving his hands and saying it's the Lord's will, and mother isn't any good — besides, she's never got really used to being a Christian, and Dorcas is a little cat! And as to Archippus, he used

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to be quite horrid enough when he was a boy, and put mice down the back of my neck, but now that he's grown up, and thinks every one ought to do just what he likes, I simply can't bear being in the same room! I wonder if there are more nice people in the world, or nasty. I'll count up the nice ones, because I think it'll be easier. There's Epaphras, who's always been so nice to me, but now he's gone to Rome, and there's Aunt Staphyla who worships Cybele, so we aren't allowed even to say her name now, and there's Onesimus, and there's Chet, and I think Charope is nice, but I'm not sure, and there's Balas the Cappadocian, who killed the dog that was going to bite me, and there's Menarchus, I can't help liking Menarchus, I do like Menarchus, and I will go on liking him, whatever anyone says! But I think John Mark's a nasty greasy Jew, and I wish he'd never seen me! I don't care how much Archipus says it's an honour for me to be wanted by him, I can't stand him, and I won't marry him, and I wish he may never come back from Rome or wherever he is! So there.

And *now* I want to know what's the good of prayers? Because I prayed hard for a week running after father said Charope was to go; I prayed and prayed for money, and I thought something was sure to happen. Well, so it did: Onesimus came back. I thought that was the answer, and I was so glad, because it was going to be all right and we could keep Charope. But now father says it isn't, and he's still going to sell her! And I don't believe it's any use praying again.

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I wish I could do something for Charope and Artamo; it's so dreadful. Yesterday, for instance, Dorcas and I were sewing out in the garden, and Charope was pegging out the washing in the sun. All of a sudden I saw her lean up against one of the drying poles and cover her face with her hands; then, a minute afterwards, I saw her tears come splashing down on to the dry stone at her feet. So I jumped up to go to her. Of course Dorcas said, "You know Archippus told us not to talk to her more than was necessary; I don't think he'd want you to know." But I said, "You little horror, Dorcas, go and tell him if you like!" and I pricked her with my needle in the fat part of her arm. But poor Charope was terribly unhappy. I pulled her hands away and kissed her, but she just went on sobbing; at last she said, "Oh, wouldn't you tell the master I want to be baptized a Christian now? Then perhaps I could stay," I said of course I would.

So I went straight to the house and found father and Archippus in the library and told them; and the first thing was they both scolded me for talking to her! Archippus glared and said, "I know her heart and I know there is nothing but a wicked pretence to cheat me. The sooner she is out of the house the better for us all; a snare and a delusion, a piece of flesh put there by Satan to tempt us! The dealer comes again in two days." But I was angry. "How can you let him speak like that, father? She's good, I know she is, even if she does like dancing and flowers and all! And how can she be there to tempt people when she's



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in love with Artamo and he with her?" Father began again about God's hand being heavy on him, but Archippus interrupted and turned me out of the room as if I'd been a child still! But I know what it is: I saw how he looked when I said she and Artamo were in love; it's he who wants her, the horrid, nasty thing, but of course she won't let him, because of Artamo, and I do wonder what I can possibly do.

I simply couldn't go back to Dorcas after that; she'd just have crowed over me; so I went down to the cottage and found Nurse. When you talk a thing out with someone else, it often makes it come much clearer, so when I'd got to the end of the story it suddenly came to me in a flash, and I said, "Nurse, if she's sold, the only thing is for her to poison herself!" "Poison?" said Nurse, wagging her eyebrows, "Poison? and why that all of a sudden?" "Oh, Nurse, don't you see?" I said. "Look what she's going to be sold for, anyone as pretty as she is! I don't know much about the world, but I do know that. And I can't stand by and have that happening to her, can I?" "It's her look-out," Nurse answered, "for her and that young man of hers," "But they won't think of it till it's too late! It's what the princesses always did in the stories you used to tell us when we were little! Nurse, do give me a poison for her!" I knew Nurse could make poisons and charms and all sorts of things, but of course I'd never wanted one before. She put me off for ever so long, and tried to make me take a love-charm — she's so horribly clever at guessing: I never told her about Menarchus! — but at last

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I made her promise, and she said she'd get the herbs to-night. I'm quite sure that's what Charope ought to do; she's just as beautiful as any of the virgins in those stories. But perhaps I ought to try and pray just once more.

I've been able to understand people so much better lately, just this last year or so; and I can't help thinking I've been a little nicer too. I know that seems a horrid thing to say about oneself, but really I believe it's true. The point is that I don't see why every one shouldn't be happy, or at least much, much happier than they are; and I don't mean in heaven or anything, but here and now. And I can't help it if it doesn't sound Christian; I'm almost sure it's right. The funny thing is that when you're nice to anyone, you almost always begin to like them. Or perhaps it is that you're only nice to people you want to like; that wouldn't be so good. I started with Chet because he was being unhappier than anyone else I ever came across, and now I like him: I like his funny, bony face, and the way he always wants to do whatever I tell him, and I like his eyes, and I do think he's less unhappy now. He's very useful too; Nurse wanted some house-leek gathered off the roof at midnight, and he's going to do it.

But I do wish I could find any way to be nice to Menarchus! No, I don't; I wish he would find a way to be nice to me. It was so much easier in the old days, when we were still heathens: then I used to see him often, at the processions, or a sacrifice, or something; but now of course there's nothing like that,

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and I hardly get a glimpse of him from one week to the next, even though he's a neighbour. And I do want to see him so much more now than when I was a little girl!

I don't remember when I saw him first, but he's just about the same age as Archippus; they were at school together as boys, and they always used to fight and give one another black eyes; then Menarchus went off to study rhetoric and philosophy in Heraclia. But his father died and he came back; of course we all wondered what he was like now, and one day I ran off along the river path to peep into his garden and see. I was quite little then, in fact I took my new doll along with me. Well, I'd run nearly all the way, hop-skip-and-jumping, and quite out of breath, when I came to a barred gap in the bank by the path; I thought I'd go through and take a short cut; but as I squeezed in under the bar an enormous yellow dog rushed out at me from underneath a cart, growling and showing his teeth. I dodged back into the path, clutching my doll — it makes me quite frightened thinking of it, even now! — but the savage great dog followed me instead of staying in his own ground, and all of a sudden made a snap and caught my dress. I scrambled up the bank, screaming, and he was left with a torn piece of stuff and just going to spring again. I held on to a branch at the top of the bank and went on screaming, when I heard a shout and saw the dog knocked flat with a big stone. I slipped down the bank all trembling, and the man who'd thrown the stone ran up and asked me who I was,

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I told him, and he said, "I'm Balas, Menarchui steward; come along with me and we'll send you home a safer way."

So I went off with him and my doll, and round a corner I saw a man riding towards us on a bay horse. "That's Menarchus," said Balas, and explained to him what had happened. The end of it was Menarchus put me up on the horse in front of him and set off for home. I wasn't a bit shy in those days, and chattered away and asked him all sorts of questions. He was much shyer than me really, but he talked to me and I did enjoy it, because he spoke all the time as if I'd been a grown-up lady instead of a little girl. At last I asked him why he wore a beard; I know I frowned at him and shook my finger and said, "It's most unbecoming." He said, "That's because I'm a philosopher." So I went on: "Do all philosophers have to have beards?" "No," he answered, "only some sorts." And I said, "Then why don't you be the sort that shaves?" But we'd got home by then, and mother began scolding me for going off by myself: Menarchus said good-bye and kissed my hand—the first time anyone had ever done that!—and handed me down my doll. And that was all. But two days afterwards I overheard Archippus telling father that Menarchus had just cut off his new philosophical beard, and was shaving like every one else. But of course I never told anyone I'd had anything to do with it. I wonder if he'd grow it again now if I wanted him to!

I haven't seen him alone since, nor even spoken

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more than a few words to him. And now of course he's a heathen, so we don't get a chance, except when he comes to the house to see father on business, and then Dorcas and I are supposed to run away and hide. I always nod to Balas when I see him, and once or twice he's given me wild birds' eggs or nuts or something. But I wish Menarchus would come again on his bay horse and lift me up in front of him and ride away with me, miles and miles, to somewhere over the hills where there wouldn't be any Archippus or father or anyone to interfere, and then . . . Oh, why can't I go and ask him to! I believe he would.

### IV. CHET AND THE GODS

What is the use of saying there is only one God when every one knows there are more? If they make me worship their Christ-God, I will worship their Christ-God — it's not the only thing I'm made to do — but why won't they let me have my own Gods as well?

Our Gods in Scythia are as good as theirs: there are Wind and Scimeter, Gods of Life and Death, most worthy of worship; there are Gods of the corn and the horses, the Year-God and the Rain-God, and there are the Coraci, the spirits of friendship, that here they call Orestes and Pylades. And there are all the little Gods that I used to work magic with, my very own Other Gods that used to hang round my cart. I could work magic with them still if once I could call them to me out of Scythia, but they will only come for blood, and where am I to get a white ox

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and a black ram? If I could make a blood sacrifice and a smoke sacrifice, I might be able to do all sorts of magics; I might be able to kill Philemon and Archippus, and put the blame on someone else; I might be able to find jewels under the earth and give them to Phoebe Martha; I might call the north-east wind to freeze the crops, or the south-west wind to make them grow; I might do anything. But I can't get the Gods to come.

Woe on me, woe on me, for the summer of high grass and wide pastures, the summer of four years back. All went well with us that summer, there was rain enough and then sun enough, and the brown brood-mares grazed beside the carts with their foals nuzzling under them; we traded horses and hides for gold cups from the south and southern wine to drink in them. And because of all that the Alans came down on us with ten thousand men. That summer I had taken the blood-oath with my friend Belitta, and we went to battle together with spear and axe and throwing-stones. My friend was taken prisoner, so I went over to the Alans, crying Zirin for a ransom-bearer; they asked all I had, my horses and my cups and my silver bridle, knowing Belitta was my friend and I would give anything for him, I sent the ransom across, and they let him go; when I saw him come back I knew it was not too much to give. But we fought again, and again they outnumbered us. This time it was I who was taken prisoner; but I had no goods of my own left for the ransom, and Belitta was killed, so he could not ransom me. The end of it was

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the Alans carrying me off with my hands fast at the cart-tail. By and by they came south to the sea, to a place called Marob, and about the time of the apples I was shipped over to Amisus, and from there we were driven into the hills, and over on to the grass-land, and up and down till we came to Caesarea; and from there past a great mountain, on the road across the plain, in bitter days of winter, till we came to Iconium, and through many cities and valleys full of fruit trees, to Colossae; and here I was sold and here I live, slave to Philemon. And woe on me, woe on me, I shall never see the horses and the great carts or my friend Belitta again!

If I ran away from here, every one would know me for a Scythian, and I should be brought back and beaten to death. But if I was a Greek I would run away and start my life fresh somewhere, and no one would know me; if I was a Greek and my girl were going to be sold I would take her away with me to the other end of the world where her children would be born free. Besides, Artamo has some money, and Charope, even, has a little; between them surely they could hire a horse and ride up into the hills. But Artamo is afraid and won't, and Charope is afraid too — more afraid of that than slavery! And nobody cares what I say. I have told Balas the thing is certain; he may be able to do something; perhaps his master will buy Charope; perhaps he can help them to escape some way I don't know of; perhaps his God will give him counsel.

I can't understand the people who worship the

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Christ-God. Why did Onesimus come back? Why does he sing songs to his God as if he was glad? And for that matter why is he trusted again after what he did? But perhaps it's not true; only he didn't deny it himself. When I'm kneeling to the Christ-God and Archippus is praying aloud, I never mutter after him like the others do, but down in my heart I pray for a beam to fall out of the roof on to Archippus; if I pray long enough, most likely it will some day, and then his head will break open like an egg, and he will be dead, and the worms will eat him all up.

Balas has a God too, but he doesn't pretend his is the only one. I would like to make a good magic for Balas, because, the winter I came, when I was going to hang myself on one of the willows along by the river, Balas came and talked to me, and took me into his master's house and gave me a good dinner; so that I didn't hang myself after all, and the next week Phoebe Martha began to be kind to me. I can bear being a slave because of Phcebe Martha; if I were at home in Scythia with my cart and my horses and Belitta alive again, I would have her for my wife, instead of taking a letter from her to Menarchus. But if anyone is to marry her I would rather it was Menarchus than one of her brother's friends; so I'll take her letters and risk being caught and beaten. And I'll get the herbs for her nurse and I'll do anything she likes; because when she asks me like she does, and smiles like she does, she makes my heart turn in my breast like a salmon in still water.

This evening Balas came over to see Onesimus,



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because they'd been friends before; they'd hardly finished their greetings before each was trying to persuade the other that his God was the only true one: that's not the way I would talk to my friend after five years. Then Onesimus, who had just heard, told Balas that the dealer was coming for Charope to-morrow. Balas went very red and swore by the Light of the Sun, which is a great oath with him, that he would stop it some way; but he would not say how. He went off quickly, muttering to himself, and his eyes were half shut like a man who is thinking hard.

Phoebe Martha has a necklace of silver coins; she pulled one off and gave it to me. She said, "I don't know what I'd do without you, Chet," and smiled and touched my arm. So I said, "By Wind and Scimetar, mistress, if you tell me to cut off my right hand, I'll do it for you!" But she shook her head, laughing a little, and bade me buy what I liked with the coin. As if I was ever going to take it off my neck now.

### V. MENARCHUS IN THE GARDEN

Why have I changed so much in the last half-year? Is it only growing up, as Timocrates told me in his letter? But growing up: would that make all this amount of difference if I was truly a philosopher? There is no one to talk with here, I am all alone; how far away Heracleia seems now, beautiful Heracleia, where I lived so happily! Why am I always talking about happy and unhappy? Why do I find myself

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always dreaming, instead of studying as I should? Now more and more often the times come when ideas mean nothing, when, try as I may, I cannot think that the world is illusion or a girl's brown hair less than reality itself. What shall I do, who shall I go to? Where among all my books shall I find calm and freedom again?

Yesterday I came on a tablet by my bedside, which said: do you ever ride your bay horse now? And all the signature was a phi. And I think this phi must be the little girl with the doll, grown up — like me. Why should I care what a little girl with a doll writes to me?

If I were otherwise than I am I would be praying for guidance. If I were Balas I should put on a lion's skin and drench myself in bull's blood. If I were Philemon I should leap about among my slaves, confessing sins that I'd never sinned. If I were either I should speak words over bread and wine, and say that by eating them I was saved and born again. But what is a man for except to save his soul by his own deeds without any Gods or magics to help him!

I wish I knew why Balas wanted me to buy that slave-girl, Charope. He won't say, and surely Balas, fat old Balas who was with my father before me — he can't be in love with her! Yet he was strangely eager for it. If I thought he wanted the girl for himself, I think I would buy her, because he's served me well and I'm grateful; but I can't think so, and, apart from that, I will not have a young, pretty girl hanging

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about my house. Body is none the less flesh and blood for having a mind in it, and I do not choose to be fretted with this wasp-sting of passion. Besides, I know what Philemon and all those pure-minded Christians would say! Let the girl go: she's no better than a hundred others, and no concern of mine. Let alone that I know she's being sold to pay their debts to me, and the laugh would be on their side if I bought her! Balas says she's maid to the two girls, and a great favourite: I don't care. If their brother builds a new church with money he hasn't got, they must suffer. The little girl must learn to do without her doll — a good Stoic lesson!

Not that selling the maid will get them free of me. Archippus won't stop spending all of a sudden. The land will begin to go and I shall buy it in, till it is all mine again as it should be; and when the land is gone I shall see to it that they go too, back to the gutter they came from! And after them, if I can, the rest of the Christians in Colossae! Then I shall buy their church and make it into a school, and I will write to Timocrates and see if he will not come over from Heracleia and teach in it: and then Colossae will be fit to live in again. But I wish I could turn out the rest of these Gods along with the Christians! Yes, neck and crop, the whole dirty lot: Jew, Persian, Cappadocian, with their priests and dancing-girls and filthy love stories, and all this mess of prophecies and blood and sacraments and baptisms, all these redeemers and mediators, only fit for slaves

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and cowards who daren't stand up and face the last God, the thing beyond, the final Truth!

I'm getting angry. Calm: peace. Little soul, you dim your eyes with anger, you twist yourself. There is nothing to be angry about, nothing. What are these Christians to me, after all? It is no matter, no matter at all, if the little girl with the doll is a Christian. And let old Balas keep his lion mask and his Mithras; he would be a worse steward without. Little soul, you are quiet again; everything is well. Let us go in to the library. Let us find our book. Something that will not make me think about the Christians. Here is the Republic . . . but how would Plato have dealt with them?

### VI. EPAPHRAS MAKES HIS POINT

Well, I suppose the next thing will be the *Ædiles* having me up for not spending the Brothers' money on building a new house! There's nothing wrong with this house, barring that one crack, and even if it all fell down — why, I shouldn't care the least. I mean, I can't imagine thinking it could possibly matter. Can you? After all, the End is so very likely to come before winter, and the crack won't get worse till there's a frost. But the fuss they make! You'd think Rome was something eternal to hear them. A fine place? Oh, very likely; I confess I haven't noticed much. I've been so little away from our own quarter; you won't find any Brothers on Mount Palatine! And besides, I can't bear to see all those temples: it's all I can do to keep my hands off

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the images. But I know if I did anything it's Paul they'd come down on.

Funny it will be to see all those temples-full go down screeching into the pit on the last day. Yes, funny, that's the word I mean: it just will be. Rome: it makes me laugh! All those great proud men with their households and their horses and their slaves and their three meals a day. Then: snap! And where's it all gone?

I'm not sorry—not for those ones. You haven't been here as long as I have, you haven't seen them in the streets with a pack of stinking favourites running in front of them to knock poor folk into the gutter! You haven't had one look at you as if you were vermin! And all their fine ladies with enough gold on their necks to buy a hundred souls! Oh, they're asking for it. And you don't know what they do when they're out of sight in their soft rooms all hung with purple and silk: oh, horrible things, abominations, things to make your blood run cold: but I've heard . . . Yes, once I was inside one of those big houses; I didn't see much myself, not beyond what one's bound to find anywhere, but then I was only in the back part: it was one of our deacons, yes, a slave, one of the under cooks as a matter of fact, a dear boy he was; he got his hand poisoned and died. He came from my part of the world, not Colossas exactly, but a village a little way off, a place I used to go when I was a boy—father was a wool merchant, you know . . . Well, well, I sometimes think I should like to get back there

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some day, but it hardly seems worth while with the End so near and as many souls to save in Rome as there: one's just waiting like a bird ready to fly — don't you think? But all the same I did just a little envy Tychicus and Onesimus going back. Perhaps some day I shall be Bishop there again, if we have to wait very long and Paul doesn't need me here. Sometimes I think I might be more use there than here, considering there's no one left to do my work but Archippus.

Archippus? Oh, I thought you knew him; I've known him since he was a boy; and — how to put it? Suppose, now, you have two lamps, one full of oil and the other half empty, and they both burn all night — they have to. Then pity the poor half-filled lamp as it feels its flame dwindle, pressing its sides together, aching, yearning! But unless it can be filled again from the great Oil Jar it's all to no purpose: the light droops, wanes, the wick smoulders and smokes . . . Well, what I mean to say is this: Archippus is that poor drained lamp. Only we've prayed, Paul and I, and we wrote to him: that ought to help. Dare I say that I am the filled lamp? It is no virtue of the lamp's to be full, it is made of no finer clay, but oh, what joy for it! Sometimes I'm all amazed that everything should be so right for me; I can scarcely walk on plain ground for the wonder of it. Why, you know yourself how Demas laughed at me for going about in the streets grinning so that every one turns round and stares at me as if I was a pretty girl! Archippus doesn't feel that; he doesn't

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feel he can't keep it in, that the wonder must burst out of him somehow, so that he must shout it to the first man he sees! No, he has to hoard it all up for himself and even so there's not enough; besides, it seems somehow to go bad like that. It's an odd thing, Grace. Then he tries to find some way to get what he hasn't got; and, you know, he doesn't get the joy you and I do out of the others, when we're all thinking and feeling and singing the same. He's not the sort of man one takes to naturally, not even when he was a boy — his father Philemon, now, that's different, we all loved him. But Archippus, he gets more out of things than people.

Even when I was there he was beginning — this is only what I've heard, mind, but I think it's true — and now he's spending all his time and money on building a church, all white marble too, like a heathen temple! I don't deny we mightn't all choose to glorify God that way if there was time, but what can the good of it be with the End coming so soon? Much we shall think of our fine cities when we see that One with its walls of fire and flowers and rainbows! And Rome . . . crumbling. No. if the Ædiles come again, I shall tell them straight out what I think of them and their drains and their stucco and their rotten Empire 1

## PART TWO

"God's word was a hopeful beginning,  
But man spoiled his chances by sinning.  
We trust the whole story  
Will end in God's glory,  
But at present the other side's winning."

### I. MENARCHUS IN THE LIBRARY

I have let Balas persuade me; I have bought the girl. She is sitting in the kitchen, looking at the fire; she has a beautiful face and her hair has slipped loose all down her back; she has not spoken since she came here, and she looks like a man I once saw who fell off a hayrick on to his head: he got up and walked about afterwards, but the next day he died. This girl's eyes look like his did: I wonder why. Balas is with her; I don't yet know whether he loves her or what it is. But he wanted it very much; so I went and let the dealer make his dirtyjokes, and now she is mine.

I did not buy her direct from Philemon, because he is not to know — not yet; and for that same reason I forbade Balas to tell them I would buy her. Let the Christians pray to their God! Some day — some day soon — I shall give the little girl back her doll; I shall ride over on the bay horse and find her again. But ought I to answer the letter first? I might go down along the river path; I might take a bunch of roses with me. I wonder what she would say then. Perhaps she'd think I was the right kind of philosopher now! But she's a Christian. Or I might send



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Balas with the roses; but I'd rather go myself. After all, it commits me to nothing; it is only a fair return for the letter. If it was her letter? But it must have been. Phi stands for Phoebe — little light-girl; they only called her Martha lately, and I shall think of her as Phoebe: that doesn't sound so Christian. Phoebe, Phoebe. How can I be falling in love with a girl I hardly ever see!

Timocrates never said that the contemplation of beauty was good, but surely I may go as far as the Academy for that! But I'm not thinking of her as beauty alone. No, it is not beauty, it is life, the thing in us all, the brotherhood; she was the child, the child one always thinks of, speaking freely and bravely, not bound by any false fears or shames; and all the world makes the child welcome and greets her as little sister. I wonder whether she can still be brave and free, now that she is no longer the child, whether she can shake herself loose from this bondage of Gods and darkness, and come out and stand full in the light of knowledge - with me!

I had a dream last night: it seemed to me as if there was a book locked up inside an iron chest, and this book I had to have; it was no use saying to myself that it was nothing, I could do without it; it was no use bidding my soul be still and not hamper itself with possessions; I was drawn all the time towards this book, though what was in it I did not know. All my dream-time I was trying to unlock the box, with one key after another, and I woke tired-out as if I had not slept. I wish I could take that dream to

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Timocrates and ask him what its meaning is; could it be Phoebe locked up in iron of her superstition, and if it is that what could the keys mean? If they were thought and rhetoric and logic, why did they fail? Or should the lock be broken?

Philemon will be coming soon to pay me back my money; he will wrap it round with talk about his Gods, and I shall take it with calm and dignity as if I could scarcely tear my thoughts from my books: how we play with each other! If I spoke of his daughter he would look at me as if I was an outer barbarian, and I do not choose that even a Christian should try and insult me in my own house. I think I shall send the roses after all; perhaps the lock will open to a flower where it stayed shut to all my keys. But I shall not warn Philemon of a robber in his house!

### **II. PHCEBE MARTHA MAKES UP OTHER PEOPLED MINDS FOR THEM**

I am so miserable to-day; and so is every one. In spite of my having prayed very hard and Onesimus doing his best - I know he did. And I thought I was quite right about the poison, but now I'm not sure. I made up my mind I was going to do it, and then I wouldn't change, but I believe I'm all wrong, and now it's done and I've killed her. Oh, I wish I'd thought!

It was all like this: nothing would make Archippus alter his mind, and the time was coming nearer and nearer. Nurse brought me over the poison; nobody

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knew but her and me and Chet, and I locked it up with my corals and the silver brooch aunt Staphyla gave me when I was little. And I went on praying; only perhaps the poison being there interfered somehow. The next morning Dorcas came into my room: "The dealer's here/" she said. "He's in the garden room with father and Archippus." I rushed down to see, but they'd drawn the curtain over the door; well, I couldn't help it, I pulled it away and peeped; none of them noticed. The dealer was there, actually paying out the money; he was a perfectly horrid man with a stubby beard and his finger nails filthy; he counted out the gold pieces one by one on to the table, with my father and brother watching him. After a bit I dropped the curtain — I was afraid of getting so angry that I'd burst in — and turned, and there was mother standing behind me with her hands clasped.

At first I thought she was going to scold me, but she didn't — she doesn't much nowadays; instead she whispered, "Is he there? Oh, I had hoped something would happen at the last moment. It's all these wretched, wretched accounts! It is unreasonable of them!" I said yes, and told her how nasty the man looked; poor mother, she didn't know what to do. At last she put her mouth close to my ear and whispered again, "Things like this usen't to happen in the old days, before — you know. If only your dear brother hadn't been so violent." And she made a little sign with her hand; I understood; it was the sign we used to make at the temple of Her: the Great

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Mother. But suddenly Dorcas came up, looking fat and pleased with herself, and made a virtuous face and said, "Oh, Martha!"<sup>1</sup> —she knows how I hate being called Martha alone — "You haven't been listening!" She looked as if she meant mother too. I took her and shook her: "Tell-tale-tit, I'll put spiders in your bed to-night if you say anything!" Then I ran off, because I knew she wouldn't dare to be goody-goody to mother alone — not after stealing honey out of the store cupboard!

I found all the servants together in the kitchen, all with their mouths open, staring at poor Charope; she was quite white — skim-milk colour — and not crying; but every now and then she caught her breath and choked and began shivering and shaking all over. Artamo was beside her, kissing her arms and trying to talk, but he was crying hard and she didn't listen. Chet turned and looked at me, and it was as if I'd heard a voice from somewhere saying it was time. My own voice dropped like a stone into the room; I told Charope and Artamo to come with me — first. They came, holding on to each other; I unlocked the poison and told Charope what it was; she trembled still more and said, "I can't." But I said, "Charope, you must; it's your duty to your own virginity!" I didn't notice it at the time, but now I've remembered that what she said was, "But I'm not: Artamo—" I suppose it would have made a difference if I'd attended, but I didn't; I went on, "Think what you'll be sold for, Charope, the men let loose on you!" and all of a sudden Artamo flushed dark red

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and said, "Take it! I'd rather see you dead than that!" But still she quivered and muttered, "I don't want to!" "It's slow and painless," I said. "You'll only go to sleep. Oh, how much better than any life you'll have now! I know it's right; I know you must. You mayn't be able to later. Think, Charope, you'll be far away, you'll never see Artamo again! The man is here; he's a horrible man; his^hands are like cuttle-fish!" I poured the poison out; it was brownish and smelt funny; I pushed it towards her; she was on her knees now and whimpering, but I felt so sure. Artamo whispered something to her; all I heard was "no one but me"; and she snatched the cup and drank it all off at once, spilling a little down her dress.

She stood up, her teeth chattering and her eyes wide open, I took back the empty cup, and they went down again, and it was done. And from that minute I've got less and less sure of whether I was right about it.

I saw the dealer coming out of the garden room with father: I stood on the step above him and cursed him; I cursed him by all the powers I know of, by our Lord Christ and His Justice and anger, and by the all-seeing Father: and then by old curses, curses I must have heard once and stored up in my memory: by Ma and Attis and the Pine-tree, by Anahita and Mên and Dionysus Sabazius, by the lightning on the hills and the curse of the branded Goat! He simply gaped at me, and so did father, but Archippus rushed across and put his hand on

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my mouth and nearly knocked me over. Then mother pulled me back, and I didn't see Charope go, because I was struggling with her and Dorcas.

Going to my room again, I ran into Onesimus in the passage, — crying himself — I like him for that. He said, "It's all my fault, mistress; I wish I was dead and the money I took back in its place!" But I said, "It's not your fault, it's Archippus", and /wish *he* was dead!" Of course Onesimus looked shocked, and suddenly I thought how much more shocked he'd look if he knew what I'd just done. And then it all came to me that I'm a baptized Christian, and I've done a terrible sin, and if it's all true perhaps I shall never, never be forgiven! And it's too late to repent now — a sin like that.

Then Artamo came to me, looking like nothing but a light put out; he said, "Mistress, have you some more or the poison?" But I hadn't. "Never mind," he said, "I'll find a way. I'm not going to live after her." So now every minute I'm expecting to hear that he's jumped down the well or something. And I don't see how I can possibly stop him. So I shall have two deaths to my account when we are all raised up again and judged.

Then on the top of it all I was called down for Archippus to tell me John Mark was back from Rome! I stood in front of him and father, and I thought of John Mark's horrid smooth hair and his thin fingers with silver rings sliding on them, and his sore eyes and the way he shrugs his shoulders;

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and I said, "I won't 1" Archippus looked at me, bristling — I really almost thought he was going to bite — and snarled, "We've had quite enough won'ts from you lately 1" I knew better than to answer back, but I suppose I looked it, because father, who really is rather nice to me sometimes, came over and patted my arm and said, "There, there, my dear, but you know you're a Christian now, and we're all brothers together — Jews and Greeks — all brothers together." "Oh, father," I said, "he is so dreadfully ugly!" But father shook his head. "The outer man is nothing; we have to look to the eternal soul. You will see him in heaven sitting at the feet of our God. He will take you with him. Now that's right, isn't it, childie, and we'll forget those terrible words of yours just now, and ask the dear Lord to forget them too; I know you'll never use them again. And don't look cross at your old father. Remember, time was not so long ago when he, as a Jew, would never have married a Gentile." "Yes," I said, "and you, as a Greek, you wouldn't have let me marry a barbarian Jew, father!" But that made father angry; he frowned at me; "Phoebe Martha, you are not to speak to me like this! The marriage is settled. Go to your room." So I went.

I looked out of the window and saw Chet in the yard, cutting wood; I whistled and he looked up; then I beckoned him to come. While he was coming I thought so hard I could scarcely breathe; I think what made up my mind at last was father saying about John Mark taking me to heaven with him: it

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would be bad enough for forty years or so on earth, but to have him always! Only perhaps I won't go to heaven now. But anyway I wrote my letter, and Chet waited at the other end of the room till I'd finished. It said: "Phoebe Martha to Menarchus: greeting, I trust you because you look as if I could. My father wants me to marry John Mark; I hate him. Can you help me? I think you must be kind. If this letter does not please you, send it back untouched; and forgive me. I will understand. My slave will wait for an answer." I thought that wasn't very forward, but I knew I couldn't be really maidenly and modest if I was going to get anything done.

I gave it to Chet and told him to take it to Menarchus and wait till he was given the answer. "If when you come back they see you've been gone, and blame you, tell them — tell them —" But Chet interrupted, "No need for you to take thought, little mistress, that's my affair." "Oh, Chet," I said, "I am working you hard!" But he shook his head. Then all of a sudden it was like something inside me giving way, and I said, "It's so hard being a girl! Here I am, just the same as a man really, and no worse than my brother anyway — I've got all the same eyes and hands and ears and everything that matters! But just because of two or three silly little differences I have to be treated as if I was an animal, ordered about, not allowed to decide anything for myself! I'm shut up, I'm watched, I have to do what men tell me — nothing's my own, money or



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husband or religion — I have to take what they give me and say thank you! Oh, it is unfair - haven't I got a soul every bit as good as theirs? Aren't I redeemed too? But I can't even choose who I'm to go to heaven with! Oh, I can't bear being a woman!" I stopped there, panting and thinking how silly I was to say all this to Chet; he looked at me once - his eyes seemed to snap open and shut — and he said, "Yes, I understand." And then it came to me that perhaps he did understand, perhaps he felt a little like that too, and oh, I was sorry for him! I said, "Chet, there's one thing about being a Christian that I really do believe in, and that's being brothers — not with Jews who want to marry me, I mean, but you and Onesimus and every one I like! You are my brother, Chet." But Chet didn't answer; he took the letter and kissed my hand and went out.

But it's all their fault, the men — it's on their heads if Charope is dead now! And I won't stand it, and if I want to I will marry Menarchus!

O dear Lord Christ, I want to pray now, I want to pray about my letter, but I can't. I'm all up and down, I feel like a pot boiling and bubbling. I wish Chet were back, I do want the answer to my message! And then — then — oh, she was so beautiful, her face was so soft and lovely, and perhaps she's dying this moment, and it was me, me, me who did it!

### III. BALAS VISITS THE NEIGHBOURS

1 was with her; we were alone — no Artamo, I took

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her hand; she let me. But; she hardly seemed to know where she was or who I was; she was like someone going to sleep. I brought her curds and honey and almond-cakes, but she only looked at them and then looked away. But I was so glad — so glad; she was in the same house with me at last; I had saved her where her lover had done nothing; to-morrow she would be grateful!

Then one of the boys ran in and said I was wanted; I went out to the yard and found Chet with a letter; I asked him what it was. "For your master," he said, "from my mistress." "From Apphia?" — I thought it might be about the bonds. "No! From Phoebe Martha. Will you take it? I'm to wait for the answer/" I did take it, wondering what Phoebe Martha could be writing to Menarchus about; I couldn't find him anywhere at first, but at last, of all places, I came on him in the garden, tying up a bunch of roses. He snatched the tablets out of my hand, and as he read them he went white and then scarlet; at the end he kissed them and looked up at me bright-eyed, saying, "Balas, how soon can we make the house ready for its mistress?" "Not Phoebe Martha, sir!" I said, "A Christian and Philemon's daughter!" He smiled at me: "You'll have to get used to it, Balas," and wrote quickly on the other side of the tablets, then, "I've picked the roses just in time!"

I followed him up to the house and called Chet, who came in after a moment, white and with his eyes staring. "What is it, man?" I said, "Have you seen

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a ghost?" He hardly more than whispered, "Yes, I have—Charope." Menarchus said, half laughing, "We can tell him now!" and explained how he had stopped the dealer and bought her. Then Chet brought his hand down hard on the table and looked straight at me: "Oh, Gods and Devils, Balas, why couldn't you tell us first? For now she's poisoned!" Then I leant against the wall, holding on to it, for Chet and Menarchus and the edge of the door and the trees outside were all blurred and swaying like the end of a dream, and I heard myself whispering her name over and over again. It cleared again, and I was standing by the table; Chet told us how it was, and all the time I was shaking his arm to get the words out of him faster.

We went back to Charope; I saw how it was — now. She knew me this time, and as I bent over her she whispered, "Go and fetch Artamo; tell him I want him; oh, go now!" and then, "I should laugh if it weren't me!" She was shivering then, and there was a little blue shadow all across her face. I left her with Menarchus and the women, and turned and ran down the garden and pushed through the myrtle hedge on to the river path, and was off down it to Philemon's house. I'm not used to running nowadays, my heart was bumping and choking me all the time; but I only thought of her and what had happened; at first I was cursing them all, the Christians who sold her, the girl who poisoned her, Chet who hadn't told me, and my master who wanted his secret! But I saw how no one had meant to do harm,

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how the Power of Darkness had somehow got into it through no fault of theirs, and I began to call upon Mithras, my God, whom I had forgotten for a little. I cried his name aloud, gasping as I ran, and stumbling against the stones of the path. And after a time there came new strength into me, so that my breath came easily, my eyes were cool again, and my whole body glowed with life as I ran steadily and fast. It was only then I thought I might have taken a horse, but I was more than half-way and it was quicker to run still than to go back.

Then I found Chet was running at my side; he had started after me with the tablets and the roses in one hand, and now I went faster, to keep up with him. Neither of us spoke till we came to Philemon's house, and I know I thought very little, but only ran. The first person we saw was Onesimus, but as Chet was tumbling the story out to him and I was asking for Artamo, the girl Phoebe Martha ran out of the house, crying, "Oh, Chet, my letter!" He gave it to her, saying what had happened, and she fell back a pace, clutching the tablets to her, while half the roses slipped down her dress to the ground. She called towards the house, "Nurse! Nurse!" and her voice was sharp and trembling.

After that it seemed to me that the yard was full of people, all stamping and hot and shouting at each other. I saw Onesimus — his face, close to mine, white and sweating, and he was saying, "Pray! Have faith! Faith can do anything!" I saw the old nurse hobble down and, when we clamoured at her,

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shake her head, saying, "No remedy/" and turn again like an old toad. I saw Phoebe Martha throw herself down by the step and beat her head on the marble, and Chet beside her lifting his arms and crying strange, fierce words. I saw Archippus come out and stand on the steps, frowning and furious, and shout for silence. And all the time I was wild and cursing them, because no one could find Artamo.

But at last, when I was almost too angry to speak, one of them brought him out, and for a moment I did not see that there was a noose and a cut rope-end around his neck. He stared at me, dazed, a minute, while I told him, then said, "I go to her," and pulled off the noose. But suddenly Archippus shouted at him, "Stop!" and he stopped like a clubbed ox. Archippus was dark with anger, and his eyes stood out: he held Phoebe Martha by the wrists, shaking her, and on pain of chains and brand forbade Artamo to leave the place. For that he has a curse on him still: I could almost see the demons swarming behind his eyes. Artamo stood and trembled, looking from side to side, and none of the other slaves under his fierce eyes dared say a word; even to me he brought back old, bad memories, but I, who am a free man and a Lion of Mithras, stood my ground and shouted up to him, "By the Sun of Justice, I say you have no right to do this! Charope is dying: let him go to her!" And Chet, from the steps behind, cried, "Artamo, quick! Before she dies!" So Artamo turned with a cry, and ran, and no one stopped him in time.

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Then Archippus said, "Chet, come here!" He did not speak with such anger as he had, but his voice was not red now, but black, and I was afraid for the Scythian. Chet fell on his face before his master, who spoke so low I scarcely heard him, only that he started with a hiss: "If I were not a Christian and a Minister of the Church—" I don't know what punishment he was giving Chet, only Phoebe Martha was protesting against it, and her face was wet with tears; she'd been struggling all the time, and now she bit his hand, so that he let her go, and she ran too, calling after her for Chet to follow. He did; he scrambled up, slipped through and bolted; I kept back a man who tried to hold him. I looked through the gate and saw that Phoebe Martha had thrown off her mantle and pulled up her dress and was running like a boy; and Chet was catching her up.

When I turned back, Onesimus was talking fast and earnestly to Archippus, and Philemon had come out too, and was trying to make either of them tell him what had happened, Archippus raised his hand to strike Onesimus, but dropped it again, and sat down suddenly on the coping of the\*steps. Philemon ran his fingers through his beard and looked at his son, then down at us in the yard; and Onesimus said very clearly, "I think I'd better go, sir," and then low to Archippus, so that I only just heard it, "Oh, sir, I trust you'll remember Christ's words before it's too late!" As he went out, Philemon came fussing down the steps, with, "Really, I must go and see

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for myself what's happening. My cloak, someone V<sup>9</sup>  
One man ran for the cloak and the others all cleared out of the yard. Phoebe Martha had dropped the tablets and I went to pick them up, because they had my master's writing on them. Archippus saw me. "You!" he said, "You worshipper of demons, perverter of the true faith! Out of my house, you heathen, and may your name be blotted out of the Book of Life for ever!" I put the tablets carefully into my belt. "I go gladly," I said, "and my God would never take a man like you among his worshippers." So I went too.

Mithras my God, my Saviour, Light Unconquered, you know what happened afterwards 1

### IV. ONESIMUS PRAYS

I hope I have done the right thing always since coming back; I hope I have not taken too much upon myself. If I had known how difficult it was going to be, I am afraid I would never have dared to leave Rome. But as I was here I had to do something; so terribly much responsibility seemed to be resting on me all at once; I had to be worthy of it.

I know I ought to blame my young mistress Phoebe Martha more than I do; but all things will be judged in their own place and time, and what am I to forestall judgment? I can't help thinking there will be mercy for her in spite of all the appearances. Besides, it was all my fault at the beginning, so I ought to bear most of it myself; and then I should have seen what was happening: oh, I can't feel she was

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guiltier than me! Archippus will be judged too; if he had struck me then I would have turned the other cheek, but God's hand checked him in time and he, a Minister, was spared that little sin at least. And perhaps it will have taught him a lesson; when I came home afterwards he asked me to forgive him: he would never have done that before. And I do forgive him, fully and freely - for this anyhow! No, I don't mean it that way: I forgive him for everything; only sometimes it is very difficult: but I do.

There must be a meaning in everything; Christ's blood has not bought us in vain. I thought of that as I hurried along by the river, and I was sure there was a purpose, if only my eyes had been open to see it. Every here and there were red rose petals, shaken loose from Phoebe Martha's flowers: they reminded me of trailing a wounded deer like I've done as a boy. Balas overtook me: it made me so unhappy to hear him calling on his false heathen God. I have always had a great respect and liking for him, and I would give very much to be able to save him from the burning.

We and Chet and my little mistress, all blown about and out of breath, came to the house almost together. We were let in and through to the room where Charope lay. And oh, what a sight it was, enough to move a stone to tears and pity! She was there in the middle, flat out on a couch, with her hair drawn over her shoulders at each side; she could only just move her eyes now, and it was clear she was dying. Artamo, poor boy, had his arms across



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her and his head on her breast: that was all the noise in the room - his crying.

Then Balas tip-toed across and knelt at her cold, bare feet and rubbed them between his hands, Chet stood still, muttering to himself, and there was splash, splash, from Phoebe Martha's tears falling on the floor. We stayed so for a little, watching, and Menarchus came in, very troubled-looking; he laid a hand on Balas' shoulder, but Balas did not look round. He came across to us, he put both arms round Phoebe Martha and drew her towards him and kissed her wet face; she smiled at him then and he let her go and stood beside her. But all that seemed so little in the presence of death. For every minute it came nearer; her eyes were almost shut now and her breath came only every now and then. Between each breath I thought she was dead and counted. It is a strange thing, but I had never seen anyone die before: it seemed to me that all of us, and all of the parts of the room, were with Charope, following every movement, every flutter of her escaping soul. I only thought, at each moment: is this the last? Till there came a light breath and I counted one, two, three, slowly up to ten, and then to twenty, and there was no stir. Then Balas stood up on his feet and raised his arms with a deep, bitter cry, and Artamo looked up and read in the faces of us all that she was dead, and fell forward again, kissing her neck and cheeks and forehead and her still half-open lips.

As we were all like this - and I'm not ashamed to

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say I was crying myself— my master Philemon came in and Archippus beside him. Said my master, "Is she dead? The ways of the Lord are too hard for an old man like me to follow them. I wish Epaphras were here to give me counsel." He went and sat down on a bench and bowed his head on his hands. But Archippus looked at dead Charope and his voice was hard: "Dead she is, the stubborn-hearted, who would not listen to me and the Gospel! Yes, dead, and the earth and corruption shall take her, and at the judgment she shall perish altogether!" But when he said that I could not keep silence: "Let me be baptized for her!" I said. "I will keep the Law for both of us and she shall be redeemed and saved in the end!" and Phoebe Martha caught my sleeve, crying, "Oh, do that, Onesimus, and I'll love you for ever!" But Archippus bade me be silent, and turned to his sister: "And you," he said, "think of your judgment, girl! If she is damned and her soul at the last shrivel up to nothing, she who has never felt the waters of baptism, how much worse will it be for you who are a Christian, but have sinned a most deadly sin and taken life! Within the Law you have sinned, and by the Law you shall be judged, and hell-fire shall be your judgment!" She trembled then like a leaf at the branch's end, her eyes wide with fear of her brother and of hell-fire; I thought she would fall if he came near her. But Menarchus suddenly started forward and stood in front of him with fists clenched, ready to strike. "Go!" he said, "Go, you dog! And never set foot in my house again!"

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"So," said Archippus, "the heathen lays hands on me now — but let him rage: it shall come down as flames on his own head. Come, father: we shall shake the dust off our feet against him *I*" But Philemon did not stir, and all the time Menarchus was threatening and Archippus was backing away. "Phoebe Martha, follow me!" he said sternly, but she stayed still as if she had lost the power to move, and now he was almost at the door. His voice was beginning to shake a little too, but he called us all to come, Chet and Artamo and me: but Artamo did not hear, and Chet said, "No!" and I felt that I could not leave Philemon and my little mistress, so I disobeyed him as well. I heard him stumble down the steps at the door, and then Menarchus came back, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand, and went straight to Phoebe Martha. "Dear," he said, "don't think of your brother's words! They are nothing but the ravings of a madman: he is mad through superstition. Do not listen to it, listen to me and let your sweet mind grow calm again." He kissed her once more and whispered to her; her father said nothing, so what was I to say? She stood so white and sad in his arms, the little maid, but she was happy there, and I couldn't bear seeing her miserable like she was before. Chet looked at them too, but he looked away at once and leant his head down against the wall.

Then Artamo stood up slowly; his lip trembled and he looked at me: he whispered across the still room, "Oh, is she really dead?" and Balas answered, "Yes."

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But a great thought had come to me, and I cried, "There's nothing too much for faith! Let us pray!" Artamo stood staring; he dropped her hand, which he had been holding all the time, and came a step forward; he spoke low as if he was afraid of angering something: "But can you make her alive?" I answered him, "The Lord alone can do that if He wills it; but if we have faith in Him, He will. It is nothing for Him to pour back the breath of life into her."

At that I lifted my arms, and all at once my soul was full of strength and courage. Then Philemon rose up from his bench, saying, "I remember Paul," and I answered, "Paul would have done it." He came beside me and his faith was added to mine. We stood together, facing towards Charope, Artamo was at her other side, and all our prayers went up as one. Dimly I saw the others round us: Balas and Chet were both of them praying, but Balas cried to his Bull-God, and Chet had forgotten all he had been taught and was calling on the names of his old heathen Gods. But I, I cried on my Lord Christ, saying that I was no more than a poor, sinful slave, but yet I had faith and I knew He could show His power on Charope. I prayed Him to give back the life that had but just left her. I fixed my eyes on her and my thoughts on the Lord in heaven, so that through me they should be brought together. After a time of praying I could feel the sweat pouring off my face, and my whole body stiff and aching as though I was in the midst of a fight, a great wrestling-match with

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something very strong. And I knew it was Death I held in my grip, and I knew that our God Jesus Christ was putting strength into me, and that I must use it all and never loose my enemy. I knew it was in my power now to fight and wrestle for as long as need be, and in the end Death would be conquered!

### V. CHET PRAYS TOO

I'm going to be beaten now, but it doesn't matter. They've put me in the threshing-shed and tied me to the post in the middle, so that I can't move my arms; but I've got all the rest to remember, so I don't mind—much.

At first for a minute or two I couldn't bear seeing her kiss Menarchus; I only thought about that. But I told myself I was a fool and I looked round again. There was Onesimus and my master and Artamo all standing together, all praying to the Christ-God. But Charope was dead. I was thinking that Phoebe Martha was going to be happy now, that she'd got her wish and her love and everything anyone wants, and I didn't like it. But then I thought that after all she wouldn't be, because of Charope, and even if every one wasn't always blaming her, she'd be blaming herself; just for a little I was glad that Menarchus couldn't make her quite happy after all, but then I remembered how she'd said I was her brother, and so I thought I would be.

Those three were praying hard, when suddenly Balas went over to Charope's head and threw his arms out and started praying too; he wanted her to

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come alive, but for all his praying, if she did she would still love Artamo, not him. Just as whatever I do for Phoebe Martha, she'll always be wife to Menarchus, not to me. And I thought, if Charope stops being dead, *she* II forget about the poison and everything and live happily ever after. So I prayed too.

I threw myself down with my hands over my head, for that way we go to worship Wind and Scimeter, and that way we make the Other Gods favourable and do magic with them. I never once thought of praying with my master to the Christ-God. I shut my eyes tight and I thought myself back and back till I could see the sides of my cart to right and left, and the round painted tent-roof above me. Then in my thought I took the Other Gods down out of my cart and brought them away over to Colossae. And then, to keep them and to get them to help me, I began promising them all sorts of sacrifices. By and by they seemed to be all round me and favourable, so I started my magic, whispering the words and making the movements with my fingers. The magic was thin at first, but it got thicker and thicker, and I sent it off to find Charope's spirit before the doors were shut for ever. The magic was a magic of hands and wings, to go quickly and catch and hold; it was a magic belonging to Wind, and as it went away on its seeking I felt cold air on my neck and cheeks. I waited and helped the magic from behind, and after a long time it began coming back. The Other Gods watched it and welcomed it, and my Name-God called

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it to give up what it had. I made it hover and settle over Charope and press down into her whatever it held in its hands. It did that and stayed all round me. Then I began to slip out from among the magic and gather myself up. The Other Gods stood at each side of me, bidding me keep my promises. The magic cleared again, so that I could move my hands and then my arms and then my whole body; at last I could open my eyes. There was no magic left, the sides of my cart fell away, the Other Gods were gone. There was only the quiet room, with sunlight flat and hot on the stone floor.

The rest were praying still. Balas held his arms up into the light, facing straight at the sun, so that his eyes were swimming; he spoke hoarsely, calling on the many names of his God. My master prayed with his hands over his face, and Artamo knelt with his head buried in Charope's dress. Onesimus stood with his hands clasped, and he was looking up: there was sweat standing out all over his face; he prayed in a thick whisper, very fast, and he must have bitten his lip, for it was bleeding. But it was at Charope that I looked hardest.

It was so faint at first I could not be certain, but it came again — the flicker of the eyelid. Then, as I watched, she opened her eyes wide and moved one arm a little. I said, "Look! look 1" and again, "Look! She is coming back 1" for those who were praying did not hear at once. The colour came with a rush into her cheeks, and in a moment she was sitting half up, rubbing her eyes. Artamo lifted his head first, he

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saw, he cried her name and flung his arms round her neck. And then I heard a low cry from Phoebe Martha and Menarchus muttering an oath. Then Balas and Onesimus were both beside her, shaking her and calling her to speak, and she looked bewildered from one to the other; Onesimus was half laughing, half crying, now: "Oh, praise the Lord!" he said, "He has given us the victory!" But Balas glared at him across the couch and said, "My God!" and they'd almost have killed each other then and there, only Menarchus came between them and stopped them; then he sent *off* a boy to get a doctor to come quick and make sure.

But there wasn't any need for a doctor; she was alive, her spirit had been brought back to her; she didn't even know at first that she'd been dead; she couldn't understand what it was all about. Onesimus and Balas each tried to make her say that his God had come to her as a vision, but she didn't want to have an enemy in either, so she said nothing. Besides, how could she? The spirit would not know of its flight, or how it was caught and brought back.

It was no use my saying anything to either of them; but I told Artamo and he said, "How can I tell who did it? Christ is my master's God, so I believe it was Him." But he promised to get me a kid to sacrifice if I was careful and secret about it. After that I told Phoebe Martha it was my magic; she said, "I expect all the Gods did it together; but I know you'd help if you could, Chet," That was better than nothing; I said to her, "Then if you do think it was my Gods,



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partly at least, will you please help me to get them the sacrifices I promised?" Menarchus, who was with her, laughed and said, "Of course you shall sacrifice on our wedding day! Your Gods aren't any worse than the others."

So I hope I shall be able; I've promised them the ox and the ram and the kid, and the wine to pour over the flame and make a smoke, and I promised them a young dog; I wonder if Menarchus will give me all that. It is not good to cheat Wind and the magics belonging to Wind; it is not good to cheat the Other Gods; even when they are really so far away. But if I do get the beasts my master won't let me sacrifice them; the Christ-God hates one to worship any Gods beside Himself. I must do it somehow all the same; perhaps at night, but I can't often get out. Only he might catch me even so, or hear about it, and I don't want to be beaten again; this will be bad enough. I wish Menarchus would buy me too; Balas wouldn't mind what I did about sacrificing.

Nobody's getting punished but me; Artamo was let *off* at once; he almost always is. But as soon as I got back Archippus had me tied up and taken off here, and here I've been ever since. I wish they'd come quick and get it over; besides, I'm hungry. All the same it's not going to be as bad as he promised me before; I expect Onesimus saw to that: because he is kind, and he has been good to me, in spite of his serving the Christ-God and saying it was his doing this time about Charope. I like Balas better, though; I think he'd have been a good fighter; I'd

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work for him if Menarchus would buy me. Perhaps Phoebe Martha will ask him to.

There's another thing I'm thinking: if my magic can bring life to Charope it ought to be able to bring death to Archippus: Wind and Scimeter are Gods who go together. Surely a magic could go up and loosen that beam, or his spirit might be hooked out of his mouth while he was asleep and taken and hidden away; or he might get pains all over him and die that way. If they don't believe it was me who made Charope alive again, they won't believe it was me who killed Archippus; so perhaps it's a good thing the other two both think it was their God who did the raising. Anyhow I shall try. But first I must make the sacrifice. Nobody knows how much I can hate. But I shall tell my Name-God.

My arms are hurting me so that I can't think; why can't they come and get it done with!

### VI. PHOEBE MARTHA LIVES HAPPILY EVER AFTER

I've got such a lot to tell! For first of all it was so terrible watching her die and knowing it was all my own doing. I understand now that one ought never to try to make up other people's minds, only one's own; it was just as bad my interfering with her as my brother interfering with me: I felt it was a judgment and I was sure I'd never be happy again so long as I lived. Even when he came and kissed me. Somehow that only felt natural. I'd always thought my first kiss would be wonderfully new and exciting; but he was just like — like — well, like a brother ought to be

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but isn't, I felt that all the more when he saved me from my real brother; he was so strong and quiet; but it would be awful if he ever got angry with me; he drove Archippus out of the room by just looking at him.

He kissed me again after he'd done it: that was the second time. He talked about peace and calm and governing oneself, and about opening locks and a book, and I leant up against him, so that when he moved his arm I could feel his whole body moving with it all down his side. Oh, I do trust him, I do believe in him, there's nobody like him in the world I" I've been wondering how he can possibly love me; I must be just like hundreds of other girls, and he's himself, oh, so different from every one else! But he does love me, and that's wonderful.

We stood there watching together the others; I wanted to pray too, but I felt I couldn't. I whispered that to him and he nodded and said, "You're rising above it"; and I wasn't sure. Only it's no good trying to pray when you can't. He kissed my forehead and along the edge of my hair, and we watched them all from outside. We were so sorry for Artamo, we knew now what he must be feeling, and I'd have given anything—anything—not to have done it; I began crying again. I don't know how long we waited; sometimes I think it was hours, sometimes only a minute or two. But I saw Chet untangle himself—he was praying all bunched up like something broken—and look at Charope; I heard him speak, and then, when she really did move, I simply screamed,

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and I believe I should have fainted or something if Menarchus hadn't caught me.

But oh, I was glad! I couldn't believe it at first, it seemed too good to be true; then, when it was really quite certain, I didn't know what to think. Of course I oughtn't to have had any doubts about it's being father and Onesimus who did it with their prayers; but Balas was just as sure that it was his God, and he'd been praying quite as hard. And then Chet came and said it was his magic! How was I to tell? If it was God — our God — He ought to have given a sign. Of course Onesimus says I've no right to doubt it, so I don't to him or father or anyone; but Balas said his God Mithras had sent down a messenger in a great flame, carrying the life with him, and he looked as if he was speaking the truth; so did Chet for that matter. Menarchus says there is no way of telling, and all Gods are equally worthy of respect — which means that he doesn't respect any of them! But what I'm wondering is this: did Nurse give me a real poison? It would be just like her not to have! She wasn't nearly as surprised as anyone else when she heard. But all the same I did think Charope was dead, and so did all the others. And of course Nurse won't tell me anything. So I simply don't know.

But it's no good thinking about it too much; there are so many other things! Menarchus spoke to father before we left the house; father wouldn't hear of it at first; he wanted to send for Archippus to advise him, but Menarchus told him that he, not my brother, was my guardian, and he must let us have an

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answer. Poor old father, he didn't know what to do. He would have liked to please everybody, but he couldn't of course; he even tried to persuade me that I wanted to marry John Mark and not my Menarchus, but that wasn't any use. But he's no good at arguing and Menarchus is; they went away into a corner and talked business; I was supposed not to know, but I did: I was being exchanged for the mortgage on father's land! I don't mind, though.

We got a sort of half-consent out of father, and then we said good-bye — only for a little, but it was bad enough — and father and I and the servants went home. I felt just a bit as if I'd been caught stealing apples or something; but I've got the apples! Archippus was raging still at having been turned out, but he wasn't quite as bad as he'd been before. The first thing he did was to have Chet taken off to be whipped; and I couldn't say anything about it because of my own affairs; only Onesimus whispered to me that he'd see it wasn't too bad; Onesimus is a dear! I went in, feeling frightfully small, and when I saw John Mark and Tychicus standing in the hall — well, I ran! I found mother in her room and told her all about it, and she was really pleased, besides being glad about Charope, and about the money and so on being settled. But of course Dorcas said, "Oh, Martha, how can you!" I was so angry with her! I said, "You wait till it's time for you to be married, Dorcas! You won't get a husband at all if you stay so fat, and you won't ever get anyone a quarter as nice as Menarchus!"

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Then father sent for me, and I had to go down and stand there in front of the men while Archippus lectured me, and listen to John Mark saying, "I am sorry, Archippus, but I see she is scarcely the sort of wife I would have chosen/\* He went away after that, and it was all I could do not to put out my tongue at him. Tychicus was much more interested in the miracle than in me; he went out and questioned every one who might know anything about it, and he and Onesimus put their heads together and sent it all in a letter to Paul. But the end of it was that Archippus said I was a good riddance — or something of the sort — and that he trusted I would repent some day and be brought back to the fold, but it wasn't likely. So I was sent off to my room in disgrace, and here I am now; but I'm glad — glad — glad, everything's all right again, and Menarchus will be coming soon, and we're going to live happily ever after!

I'm wondering about my wedding; I don't expect Menarchus will mind how we're married; I believe I could have got Epaphras to give us the blessing even if I am a black sheep, only I can't wait till he comes back, and I know Archippus won't. But the dreadful thing is that I really don't care a bit what happens; I feel as if we were blessed already. Somehow I don't think I'll ever care for all that again. I'll ask Aunt Staphyla to come to the wedding anyhow; I know mother would be glad to see her.

Every one's glad except John Mark; even Archippus will have plenty of money for the church, and I suppose Dorcas will get a dowry and be married her-

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self. Artamo is almost as glad as me; I heard him just now go past singing the harvest song:

Oh, I have swept the threshing-floor  
And gathered up the grain,  
With some for mill and some for store  
And some to sow again 1

Father called to him to stop then, for of course he oughtn't to say it yet; even now father can't afford to have another poor harvest this year!

Well, I was sitting there on my stool, and brimming over with the most wonderful feeling; I'd make something happen, for the first time in my life, that was quite my own, and now I was free; I wasn't just a little girl any longer, I was a person with a mind of my own. But I'd nearly killed Charope all the same. Then I thought of Menarchus; I thought of his hands, his strong, fine hands. I remembered how when I was crying and he'd put his arms round me, one hand had gone a little down my neck; that made me shiver all over, thinking of the feel of the tip of each of his fingers like a hundred kisses in one, and I wanted to have them all over me.

I looked up just then and saw Chet standing in the doorway; I'd forgotten all about him. He'd had his beating, and he'd got that queer half-dazed, half-angry look that he always gets. He had a bruise under one eye that was bleeding a little, and he put his hand up to it. I didn't say anything: I was too happy to move. He came over, hesitating and watch-

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ing my face. Suddenly he slid on to his knees in front of me and took my dress in his hands and said, "When you marry Menarchus, will you take me with you?" I nodded; he'd made it all even realler by saying that, and I knew Menarchus would buy him from father. He whispered to himself, "Then I can sacrifice." I don't know what he meant. But then he put his head down on my knee and cried and cried; I expect he'd been whipped more than he could stand; Onesimus would have let him *off* with a scolding, I know, but I'd seen my brother look like murder. Only perhaps it wasn't that, because Chet isn't used to cry for pain; it might have been his soul that was hurting him, like one's soul does sometimes. But I was sorry for him; so I've let him stay so, poor thing.

Onesimus is singing a hymn in the passage; he does enjoy singing, and he sings so badly 1 But I like him, and I think he's still going to like me, which is really rather odd. I've been sitting, listening to him buzzing away at the hymn like a great blue-bottle for nearly half an hour; I'm waiting for the horse-hoofs, for Menarchus to come. And Chet, poor Chet, he's still kneeling at my feet, with his head in my lap and his tunic sticking hard into the sore places on his back; perhaps they are right to say there is one life for the free and another life for the slave, but I think the other thing is true, and somehow — somewhere in us — we're all equals together. From here I can watch the sun come creeping towards me over the floor, and smell the pot-lilies outside getting warmeier;



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and warmer, and I'm wondering about Balas and his Mithras.

But so long as I have Menarchus I don't need to have any Gods.

# *When the 'Bough "Breads*

*to*

SONJA CARSTENSEN, MY FRIEND,  
HOPING SHE WILL WIN HER BET

## *When the Though Breaks*

### PART ONE

Tells how:

Southward faring,  
Samund's daughter,  
Bear-pelt burdened,  
Carries the cold  
Sun-hued sea stones  
And Bodvar's sword  
The bright-swinging,  
The battle-sung;  
Gersemi goes  
To Gothland forth.

**A**OUT harvest-tide there was fighting at the Ford, and there men killed Samund Bigmouth, and with him the Easterling Bodvar, who was betrothed to his daughter Gersemi. Now at the end of the day Gersemi found them both and wailed for them, and they were brought home to Samund's new steading. Bodvar had a great iron sword with a hilt of sea ivory; when he died it was fast in his hand and the blade through a man's throat. Gersemi took it for her own, and all winter she had it laid beside her in bed; but Samund's sword went to her eldest brother, Kol.

She was a big, light-haired girl, with a deep voice and old enough to have her own mind about things; she was red-cheeked, and her hands were rough from haymaking and tending of beasts; she was

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quick at learning any new craft and clever with words; SSmund had given her land and gear of her own. Kol and the rest of the brothers would have had her marry some friend of theirs now Bodvar was dead, but she would have none of it. Woosers came cold over ice and snow to the steading, but she sent them away with no comfort, and soon enough it was spring and Gersemi set out across the wet pastures.

She combed and tied her hair back like a man; she put on breeches of grey stuff; her shoes were of strong ox-hide, and her gloves were sealskin, well sewn; her coat was woollen and thick: over it she had ring-mail, good against sword or axe. Her cloak was made of a great white bear-pelt from the north, a fairy bear that once had strange dealings with the Finn wizards; its claws met over her breast, the head fell behind, and on the under-side were written runes of great power. This cloak had been part of her mother's dower, and never did the fur wear thin. Her little horse was shag-haired and straight-backed like the wild horses, but he answered well enough to the bridle. She made fast a pack to the saddle; in it were strings of polished amber and some few coloured stones and beads of coral, things that have their price all the world over. She carried a little bow and hunting arrows; but her strength was in her axe and Bodvar's sword: this way she looked as good a fighter as any man south of the Ford. So she set out,

Now at first she went east, riding along by the sea-

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coast, because she feared to turn south and inland among the strange forests. She swum her horse across two great rivers, near the mouth, and came at last to a salt marsh, very wide and full of small willows; the people, too, were not friendly, so then she must needs face south, following up small valleys in a country for the most part low-lying and full of lakes and swamps, with but few men in it from one week's end to the next. As it got to be summer she found the bear-pelt hot and heavy, but would not leave it *off* because of the runes on it. Sometimes she bathed and washed her clothes, but she was afraid of being a naked woman alone, with the chance of wild men or wandering gods and devils seeing her. She shot deer and rabbits and birds, or what she could, and ate them with roots and the uncoiling fern ends, and when she came on a hut or a wagon she got milk and often bread; the folk hereabouts were mostly small and ugly, and feared her; she could not speak their tongue, and she was very far from home.

One night she and her horse rested among low trees by the edge of a stream; a mist rose up round them and she slept ill, seeming to hear voices from across the stream speaking words that were near to her own. The horse too started, as more than once a mare whinnied to him, close by yet out of sight or smell. In the morning the mist was still high, so she waited till it cleared, but with the mist the voices died away, and call or search as she might, there was no one at either side of the river.

## *When the ^Bough \*BreaJ(s*

Towards midsummer she came to a great wall of mountains, pine and rock going right up into the sky; skirting about them for days, and following up a river, she came to a pass still under light snow, where the wind cut through her bear-skin and the little horse stumbled and shivered. Each side of her great peaks jagged high and harsh towards the bright, cold sun, and she prayed aloud to whatever Gods lived there, and to her own Gods, Odin and Thor and Vidar, and to Skade, Goddess of the snow mountains in the north. So in the end she came over the pass and down into a great tangle of valleys. More than once men passed her, traders with mules for the most part, and often she stayed the night in a hut and got food and fodder there. Not once was she taken for anything but a young man, and she was ever thought well of for the sake of her sword and her gold bracelets. The people here were beginning to be different; many were tall and fair and handsome like her own brothers, and their tongue was near enough to hers for her to learn it quickly and gladly.

When the pine-woods came to an end and the southward-facing ridges flattened out to a warm, green plain, she saw a walled town before her and rode very cautiously; yet she had heard tell of cities and how in strange countries many men would build their steadings together and live, as it were, all in one huge hall that no enemy could break into. Slower and slower she went as she came near, but it seemed all man-made, and there were children

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playing by the gates of the wall, so she took courage. She watched others riding in, and at last rode in herself, over the boat-bridge and between the towers of the gate, a little pale, and breathing quickly as she looked from side to side. At first the noise was terrible—all those voices: her little horse shied at them and so did she. Every moment she would think they were speaking to her, and it all went too quick for her to make out the words. But soon she found she was only one among many and no one noticed her. At this she suddenly felt it was all wrong, that here was she, daughter of Simund Big-mouth, who had owned all the land from the Ford to Vig's Bay, but none of these Southerlings knew! She wanted to shout, to draw that sword of hers, to make the shaggy horse plunge in and scatter the sweet-sellers and ride them down! Oh, then they'd look at her! But there were walls all round and a narrow gate behind: so she did nothing.

By and by she came to a shop at the corner of a street; the floor of it was on a level with her foot, and all over it - piles and rolls and shining coils - there was stuff she had never seen before, gleaming, soft, all-coloured like hill-sides in May. She stopped and stared: there was a little man sitting inside the shop, a brown, blackbearded man with rings on his fingers. He spoke—he spoke to her! She shook her head, not understanding, and gave him greeting in the Goth tongue. At once he changed his speech and went on in words she knew. He took up a piece of the stuff and passed it through his fingers,



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"You must have strange sheep down here!" said Gersemi.

"Sheep!" cried the little dark man, waving his arms.

"Never a sheep went near this!"

Gersemi settled herself to listen while he explained; she nodded "Yes, yes," but as to believing this fine, wonderful cloth was made of little worms that lived on leaves — not she!

She dismounted, looking at piece after piece; it felt as tender as it looked: such webs must Freya weave on her golden loom. There were beautiful dresses, the same stuff, but embroidered with stiff gold: she must remember she was a man. But there were coats of it too, short-sleeved and long-sleeved, scarlet and green and blue: oh, she had to! But surely they were worth a Queen's ransom! She daren't. She backed a step towards the saddle again; the merchant brought out still more. After all, this could only be one town of many; what was its name? — Vindobona. Not even Rome-burg, where the great king Caesar lived! There was one coat she liked best of all: bright, bright red, with little pieces of shining hard stuff round the neck and hem. She picked it up:

"What will you take for this?"

The merchant named a price, but she looked blank at it:

"What is an aureus?"

He <sup>it</sup>tumbled in a box at the back of the booth and showed her the funny little gold piece, not much more than a finger's width, with the long, narrow

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head looking half-scornfully down its nose on the one side, and on the other the proud trampling little man, stick in one hand, victory in the other.

She had seen stamped gold before, but only as ear-rings or brooches; she had no idea what it was worth. She took *off* one of her amber necklaces and held it out; the merchant rubbed one of the beads and peered at it.

"Another string of these and the coat is yours."

She loosened the second necklace; it was a big price to pay, but the coat — oh, the coat brighter than coral!

Suddenly there was a hand on her arm and she jumped round, feeling for her dagger. But it was a friendly hand and a friendly, bearded face.

"You are a stranger here?"

She hesitated a moment, but this was a fair, blue-eyed man, he might have the truth.

"I've never seen a walled city before."

He laughed:

"You look it! Now, what do you want? This? Very well."

He picked up the necklace, glared at the merchant, and began shouting abuse at him; the poor, little, brown man was bowing, trembling, flourishing his hands, appealing to Gersemi! But she let her new friend have his way. In the end she got her necklace back with less than half of the beads gone, and the silk coat as well. Oh, Gersemi was happy!

She went on beside the man, answering his questions.

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"Yes, I've come across the pass, right over from the other side."

"And before that?"

"I came from the north, far and far, forests and rivers and plains and swamps between here and there; I've been riding south since before the spring sowing."

"Are you Goth?"

"No, not Goth."

"What, then?"

"The Gods of Asgard are my Gods; Samund Bigmouth was my father; I am called Gersemi."

"You are not very old to have come so far; you have not even the beginnings of a beard yet."

"No. What do they call you, friend?"

"I'm Avilf; I'm going off to the Assembly now, with my men. Will you come?"

"Where? What Assembly?"

"In Illyricum, up among the hills. We are going to make Alaric king."

"Is he a great chief?"

"You've never heard of Alaric! Come with me, and you shall have fighting and gold and women and anything else you choose out of the Greek cities! Will you be my battle-friend?"

"Yes!" cried Gersemi, thinking of nothing but adventures, and they shook hands on it. Then Avilf took off his middle-finger ring which was of silver, set cross-wise with garnets and blue glass, and gave it to Gersemi. She gave him in exchange one of her

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bracelets of soft, twisted gold; they looked well at one another's faces, and were friends.

Avilf had a cousin of some sort in Vindobona; he and Gersemi stayed in the house, and his men lived casually among the out-buildings. One day Gersemi was telling them about her riding, and of the night when she had heard the voices in the mist. Avilf and his cousin nodded at each other, and told her how long and long ago the Goths had journeyed from one land to another, pressed by hunger for new homes and more sunshine, and how at a certain river the bridge had broken under the feet of the great host, and half of them with their horses and cattle had been left behind; and still they were there, man or spirit or echo, and more than once travellers had come on their voices at night. Avilf ended: "That was a lucky sign for you; we will tell Alaric, and you shall have honour for it." And he taught Gersemi much swordcraft that she did not know, and she showed him the battle strokes of the northern axe. She got herself a silk cloak too, red like the coat, with gold cords and a heavy silver buckle, and only used the bear-skin for her bed; it was far too hot now, and here she felt safe enough without the runes.

Avilf showed her all the sights of the town, and by and by she stopped looking surprised at everything. He explained the church with some pride, saying, "You ought to be baptized."

Gersemi looked cautiously round at the bright-coloured ikons.

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"Do your Gods ask it of strangers?"

"Of course," said Avilf cheerfully. "If you're not baptized you'll die and be burnt in hell."

"Isn't there a sacrifice I can make instead, Avilf?"

So he began explaining all over again. But Gersemi was still very much puzzled about everything except that among the followers of these same Gods of his some were bad men who had been led astray by a rival Codling, one Athanasius, and some were good men and followers of Ulphilas: you could tell them because they said the Son — (and he, thought Gersemi, was Balder the Beautiful who died and went to Hel, but will come back after Ragnarok) — was "like the Father in such manner as the Holy Scriptures declare." What were the Holy Scriptures? A book of runes? Then Avilf could read! It was all very wonderful, but one way and another she put off being baptized, and then the time came for them to start for the plains of Illyricum and the Assembly of the Goths.

They left Vindobona and its swarming lanes behind, their horse-hoofs echoed under the gate arch, they were past the crops, they were on the sandy forest road, Avilf and Gersemi, and a hundred armed men behind them, with slaves and pack-horses and light carts full of food and wine skins. For a little they went east, then almost due south on the flat, monotonous plain, burning in the sun, breathless under the trees. Then eastwards again, passing the end of a long lake, blue and level, with dried beds of rushes stretching far out from it at every side.

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Still it was flat and dull, with only a grey shadow of mountains far away to the south; the road led them through low forest, grass, crops, and small, huddled towns - a fort, a market, and a jumble of wooden houses inside a wall and a ditch. By now they had begun to meet others on the same errand, and all the talk was of Alaric, Alaric - Alaric the Bait, the all-ruler, who feared neither Hun nor Roman, Alaric who had fought under Theodosius in the days when there was still an emperor worth serving, Alaric whom they loved and trusted, Alaric the King!

Gersemi listened and wondered; it was all so big, more than she could understand at first. She remembered that she had thought it a great army when her father and Bodvar went out with the men from south of the Ford, but this — she had seen more folk in a month than in all her life before! She had to be careful, to bathe or change her clothes hastily and in the dark, to sleep alone if she could; she might not let herself be challenged to swim or wrestle, nor would she willingly go among other women, where a sudden look, wrongly answered, might pierce all her disguise. But anything strange she did was put down to her being a northerner, and she was too solid and straight-faced for any old fighter to make love to her as a boy.

One evening at dusk they saw distant, tiny fires starring the horizon; the next day they rode into the great ring of wagons and chose themselves a place, Avilf seemed to have hundreds of friends

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here; he was hardly a moment alone, and always he and Gersemi were reasting or being feasted. Torches and bonfires flared, men shouted and sang, and danced in linked, swaying circles, horses whinnied, oxen bellowed, women and children screamed across the camping-grounds; there were horns and trumpets and a thud of drums, all the armour was polished, all the cloaks were new and coloured, all the jewels were flashing, the tents were scarlet and white, the wagons were striped with fresh paint, and either the sky was blue at noon, or streaky orange at sunset, or at night soft black, swarming with thousands of stars. Here, when all had come, they held the Assembly with shouting and clashing, and they lifted high on the shield Alaric, the yellow-haired King!

Gersemi was there with the others: why not? She was Avil's friend, so she was the friend of any Goth; she would fight for them, so she was one of them. Dim and far was the Ford and the windy steading of Samund; long ago it was she had watched the grey waves beating on the reef across Vig's Bay; longer ago still when she had walked in blue, trailing robes and given kiss for kiss to Bodvar the Easterling. Now she was Alaric's man, she was making ready to follow him south for a sacking of cities and a vengeance on the Emperors who had despised him!

She found it all very simple. But it was not so simple to Alaric and his nobles, who knew somehow that they had the light and the hope now, when Rome was sinking down into the pit she had

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digged, when Arcadius was no more than a name behind Rufinus, and the child Honorius almost less than a name behind Stilicho who was himself a Vandal.

When they moved, they moved quickly, a long glittering line of shields and lances. Again Gersemi rode beside Avilf, her scarlet coat and cloak a little stained perhaps, but bright enough yet; the bear-skin and her sewn-up pack of beads and jewels were safe in a wagon behind. She sang songs to herself and laughed at the scattering peasants and taught her little horse to do tricks like the Goth horses. Almost at once they got into hills, splashing and clattering up old water-courses, stumbling and slipping on stones and dry grass. It was up one cliff and down another to get into Thessaly, passes where they could scarcely go two abreast, a hot, strong scent of mountain herbs, and on the knotted wild vines the first grapes Gersemi had ever tasted. In the middle of the mountains were great fertile tablelands where they raided cattle and horses or burst in on the middle of the harvesting; then up and up again and over and down, and below to the left a blue glitter of sea. Between the waves and the cliffs they filled the narrow strip of plain with their army; here they had gone cautiously, but none had barred the way. Gersemi, riding on the sand and looking up across the spears at the towering hill-side, asked where they were,

"Thermopylæ," said Avilf, "a good place for an attack if these Greeks had been men enough to face us!"<sup>1</sup>



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For a time they went on by the sea, and then it was inland and climbing again, the green plain of a river, a great bright lake and the shut gates of Thebes seen from a mile away. But soon they came out on to a city, a bigger city than they had come to yet, a city light and strong and facing them; and all that day they prepared for the attack.

It meant nothing to Gersemi when Avilf told her, a little awed himself even, that this was Athens. She lay down on the bear-skin and slept soundly, not afraid of to-morrow; but she woke a little before dawn when the stars were paling but still bright in the west. There was a cold wind, so she took the skin to wrap about her when she got up; she could just see the black rune-marks on the inside, and ran her finger up and down them, wondering what they meant and what the fairy bear had really done and whether it spoke their own language to the Finns. She went to the top of a mound so as to see the whole city; every moment it got clearer, till high up she could see the outline of a great temple and a statue beside it. She left her mound and went quietly nearer and nearer: Athens — what did Avilf mean by saying it like that?

There was some one moving on the walls. Very likely. Some one — tall. She rubbed her eyes; was it this growing light that seemed to make the some one grow with it? Now there were two of them, a man and a woman; and big, and shining! Who were they? She called low to Avilf, who started up and ran to her with :

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"What is it? What have you seen? Why are you looking like that?"

She pointed. "Avilf, can't you see them?"

He shook his head,

"But can't you? Oh, you must! Look — straight ahead, standing on the wall!"

"Who? What are they like?"

She hesitated.

"I thought just now they were a man and a woman. But they're not; they're Gods. She - She's a Valkyr: or more than that. Her hair's like flame under her helmet. She's holding a long spear, and Her armour's all gold. And there's a great snake — Oh, Avilf, She's pointing down at us! There. She's gone on; She's like a statue moving. And He — angry! He's like a Roman soldier, only so tall, so strong: a God, but not one of my Gods. Oh, His face!"

Avilf was shivering too, and staring where she pointed:

"I see nothing. You must be dreaming still. They'll go with the light."

"But it was with the light they came."

Avilf looked from Gersemi to the city, frowning: "Athens — she'd have Guardians if any city has. Oh, I'm cold!"

Gersemi threw half her cloak round him — she wasn't thinking of cold now. He pulled the white bear-skin across his back, then suddenly gave a sharp cry:

"Oh, Christ, I see them too!"

"Who are they, Avilf?"

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"I don't know. Gods. Come back, Gersemi, They're looking at us!" He pulled at her arm. "Come back, lad, we must warn the others!"

So back into the sleepy camp they ran, looking fearfully over their shoulders at those two great figures with the dawn now gold on their spear tips. They told the guards, they woke the nobles, every one crowded and whispered and looked. Some saw at once, others only when they touched the rune-marked bear-skin. Alaric the King, he saw. But when the sun was fully risen, that armed Athene and that fierce and guardian Achilles were vanished into the wind. Nevertheless, Alaric made a treaty with Athens, and there was no fighting there.

But after that they went to the Peloponnese, over the old hills where fennel and wild parsley yet grew; but Pan fled before them. And when they came to the cliff-walled plain of Sparta neither Castor nor Pollux came to stay the sacking of their city. Corinth, Argos, Sparta, all in flames, all in ruins, and everywhere the barbarian Goths.

It was all over long ago; the flame is less than ash, the walls are dust, and would still be dust if all that had never happened; death has been over the same ground many times since then: nobody cares. But in that winter it was real enough: all the breaking in of savagery — men half-beasts again — on the old, poised wonder of Greece: terror and death, men flying and stabbed in the back as they ran, the yells of the Goth spearmen across the breaking walls, women and boys from gentle homes, flowers and books and

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music, torn screaming away to serve barbarian masters, and never again, not once, to see the old peace and happiness, their old, sweet houses again.

There was seldom any standing-out against the Goths; few were killed and not many even wounded. Avilf had his helmet broken in and his scalp cut by a tile thrown off a roof, but Gersemi was unhurt. She had started wearing the bear-skin again when the cold days came, and that had been a good protection; let alone that her mail shirt would turn most blows. She had plenty of confidence and she loved the rushing and yelling and all the things they did together in a great blood-mad crowd. It was splendid to feel that these white god-built cities were nothing against their strength, they, the masters of the world! She loved to handle the spoil afterwards, heavy gold of the gem-set cups, bright gold topping the ivory of the statues of goddesses, and most of all the women's things, necklaces and ear-rings, hair-pins, bracelets, girdles, and all the marvellous frail tissues, silk enough to pull and trample and tear to pieces with hands and teeth if that was the mood! Many times the scarlet cloak had been replaced already, and the little horse had gold and silver bells on his bridle and tassels of cut crystal plaited into his mane.

When it was her turn for the other loot — the black-haired, dark-eyed Greek maidens — she would always say she had sworn an oath to touch no woman until she was twenty; and this seemed reasonable enough to the others, who wondered sometimes to find such

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a boy so fierce. She had very little fellow-feeling for these poor women, they seemed another kind from herself, and besides — what else had ever happened to women in war? She thanked all her Gods that she herself had got away from it and was almost the equal of a man. She could do anything else — anything! Oh, it was a good life.

## PART TWO

Tells how;

A city flaming  
In a light lowe,  
Holds a jewel.  
Gersemi reaches  
Her hand forth  
To save the jewel:  
Good be her guerdon!

But her day came. It was a big village, rather out of their march, but worth plundering. A hundred of them went off, with carts and pack-horses for anything they got; they were to join the others farther on. They burst in among the cottages, caught the squawking ducks and geese by the neck, drove the cattle with sticks and yells, and hunted down the villagers — most of them were out in the fields — while others threw torches of blazing straw into the roofs. Sometimes there'd be two or three together after a girl, round one corner, past another, through a yard and a shed and an orchard, till at last they got her. Gersemi had a sack of corn across her saddle, and a man's necklace (brass, but she thought it gold) twisted into her belt. She was *off* to the middle of the village where there were some bigger houses, stone and timber, and just a glimpse of marble that promised well. The cottages were all on fire behind her, and twice she had to shake sparks *off* her sleeve.

The others had got there first; she shouted "What

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luck?" and saw the timber smoking already. They were bringing things out and she dismounted in a hurry to help, and almost at once came on a little casket, locked, but heavy. The flames were getting too high for her to look about much, so she brought it out to where the others were quarrelling over the gold plate and the prisoners. There were three or four old men, servants of the house, dazed and bleeding, a few maids shrieking at the tops of their voices as they were pulled about from one man to another, an old, white-haired lady with her dress torn and her eyes shut, moaning and rocking herself to and fro or crying on the names of the saints, and then in the middle the real prize: pale and young and flower-faced, her hands crossed on her breast and her blue mantle hanging straight to her feet ; she said nothing and her eyes seemed fixed. As Gersemi joined the group and the quarrel she swayed over fainting, and fell as limp and heavy as death into Gersemi's arms, who looked down at her dark-lashed, shut eyes and round throat, and, on the impulse of the look, said:

"I'll buy her off you!"

They all clamoured round:

"What will you pay? She's worth hundreds! We don't take less! My share 1" and one shouted, "Is it your birthday to-day?"

Gersemi held the girl on one arm and the casket on the other: there was no key, so she smashed it down on the stone step. Out of it came rubies, emeralds, a cut sardonyx, a string of amethysts — the bargain

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was made before the girl had opened her eyes again, and the others rushed off with their spoils, dragging the prisoners after them.

The sun had gone in under a grey cloud, and now and then there was a spatter of cold rain; but the fire leaping on two sides was warm enough and light enough for Gersemi, who watched her prisoner recover with a little quick sigh and shiver away from her. She puzzled a minute over the Greek words, then:

"What is your name?"

"Innocentia," answered the girl in a low, sweet voice that trembled with her breath, "and my husband is Probinus, Governor of Venetia and Istria!" Gersemi looked at her surprised. "Yes," said Innocentia, gathering courage, "and I am a Roman!"

"A Roman!" — Gersemi had never seen a Roman woman: more matter for staring. But Roman or no, she was tied by one wrist to the pommel of the saddle and made to follow. The Goths had taken all they could lay hands on and fired the rest; now they were clearing out in case any soldiers were coming to take vengeance for it. Off they went into the falling evening, and never stopped till they came to a thick wood where they camped with their carts all round them, huddling close because of the touch of frost in the air.

Gersemi went over to the cart where her prisoner had been tied for ten miles; she had a bundle of hay for her to lie on and a cloak to wrap round her. The girl seemed whiter and smaller than ever in the star-



## *When the Bough Breaks Breaks*

light, and the touch of her ice-cold hands startled the other, used as she was to harder winters than this. She heaped the hay over her and brought her a bowl of hot stew; but Innocentia had her hands clasped now and was looking up and talking to herself.

"What is she doing?" Gersemi asked one of the men.

He laughed. "Praying, you heathen, praying! Let her be till she's done with it."

"Will you ask her some questions for me?"

The man didn't want to much, but he was afraid of this savage young fighter from the snow-land, so he said he would.

"Ask her if I have her name and her husband's right, and what her husband does."

The man translated into bad Latin — but better than Gersemi's Greek; the girl explained eagerly.

"What does she say?"

"He's Governor of a Province," said the man; "no, not a soldier, but powerful, a counsel-giver and ruler. She says he will give any ransom for her."

Gersemi thought this over.

"How much ransom?"

"As much gold as you can carry away, she says; you could ask anything you liked from a man like that."

"I see. Where is this land of her husband's? Is it near Rome-burg?"

"It's north from Rome and farther north from here: in Italy, at the head of the Long Sea."

Again Gersemi considered, feeling Innocentia's big, dark eyes fixed on her all the time.

"Ask her if she likes me."

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The man, grinning, repeated the question, and the girl shuddered down among the hay, with no answer but a cry and her face hidden in her hands.

Gersemi nodded and went back to her place to sleep, but Innocentia hardly slept at all, terrified at the thought of this great strong barbarian who might come back after all: that last question — oh, Mary, and ten thousand virgins! All night she prayed confusedly in the cold and dark among the swaying boughs and shifting noises till dawn came again and the camp woke to life and clamour. Gersemi rode for a little beside the cart, looking at her prisoner and trying to talk. By evening she had decided: she was tired of burning towns, tired of the gold and silk and twisted bodies in the streets; she was afraid Avilf would find her out some day, and if he did — she remembered him saying once how gladly he'd marry her sister, and if ever he came to know that her sister was herself, then that would be the end of everything: she saw herself among the Goth women, cooking his dinner with a squawking baby on her back! But all the same she felt she'd like to stop pretending for a little; it would be good to talk to another girl about - oh, all sorts of things. And then there was always the ransom: how fine it would be to ride back home with great bags of gold and jewels and perhaps a troop of fighting men to follow her, one with a trumpet, and all with long swords and spears, and a great scarlet banner with a white bear on it! Kol would be proud of her then, and she could be a queen and build a long hall at the head of Vig's Bay, and have

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her own ships going out on her own errands when the ice breaks in spring, and coming back in autumn with news and tribute for her from all over the world.

That night she waited till all the camp was asleep, then quietly she went over to where her prisoner lay huddled among the hay. Innocentia, half-dreaming, felt something move beside her and started up. Oh, he was coming, God had deserted her after all! The terrible man frowned at her, one finger on his lips; she obeyed, cowering back like a bird. But he looked somehow — what was it? — no, surely not like a man after a woman: his eyes and face were steady, his mouth shut, his colour no higher, and the hand did not press hotly into her arm; the whispering voice was eager, but not with passion: perhaps this was the Goth way. . . . What did he want? He cut the binding rope and pulled her out of the cart, her feet sunk into the mud; where was he taking her? Suddenly she was afraid again, she would not go! She tried to snatch her arm from his and saw him lift an angry fist over her head. He was whispering again: "Come! Come!" and then something about a woman, something she could not quite understand. All at once he took her hand roughly and pushed it down his neck under the mail shirt; for a moment still she did not know, then she felt the soft, pointed breasts under her fingers; she looked up at the face, the lips, the eyes, the cheeks, and all in a moment threw herself into her enemy's arms and kissed her, kissed her, sobbing out thanks to her and God and the saints and every one!

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But Gersemi was blushing to the ears; she never thought the girl could be so silly! She drew up and frowned and felt the torrent of little kisses slide along her neck; she put one arm awkwardly round the Roman — what a child she was, as thin as a birch sapling! Now her hand was being held: what was she to do? She was angry, but she wanted to laugh too, and she wanted to be kind. She stroked the dark head with her free hand, and the warm fluffy hair tangled itself in her fingers.

"Come!" she said, "quick, quick!" and plunged under the boughs to where her own horse and another were waiting. She swung the girl up and put the bridle into her hand, and then they were heading north by the pole star, and the wood was past and the end of a valley, and they were stumbling up a hill path with a tinkle of water at one side.

Innocentia gasped with cold in the hill air, for all she had the bear-skin wrapped round her. But for this tingling cold it would have been like a dream; most of all the whitening dawn incredibly large from their hill-tops, first at their right and behind them, then spreading round in front with streaks of purple and grey, till a mountain hare rose under their feet and on every side veils were dropping, and then ahead of them was the sea, just ruffled and shining a little under the new-risen sun. A main road and a town showed round a bend in their path; Innocentia pointed to it, but Gersemi shook her head and held on and down till by midday they were almost at the coast. She stopped at a lonely cottage where a woman

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brought her out food, begging to be spared by the Goths; they and their horses ate, and Innocentia warmed her cold hands and feet at the hearth fire, and would have spoken to the woman only Gersemi forbade it. There was little wind down here, and the gulf was not really rough; between threats and bribes a man was got to put them across and bring them to a hut belonging to a friend of his who would take them in and say nothing if he was well paid, Gersemi barred the doors, and they slept long and heavily, and did not start till late the next morning after a good breakfast of porridge and goat's milk,

Once they were in the hills again Gersemi began to try and learn Latin; she had nothing else to do except to hold her course northwards, and she had done too much journeying to find that hard. Very soon she made Innocentia understand that she was being taken back to her husband—and her ransom—and after that it was questions, questions: what was she doing in the little town? why had she left her husband? and so on. It was a story with a moral, and Innocentia was willing enough to tell it.

They went up through Ætolia, not very far each day: the roads were bad and the horses kept on getting stones in their feet. These roads were always apt to turn west towards the towns and cultivation nearer the coast, but Gersemi kept relentlessly on, and during the first week they had a difficult and snowy pass to cross. After that they went down along a river, flooded and foaming and tearing at the rocks under their path. They almost always found shelter

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at night in some cottage, for Innocentia was too tired at the day's end to do more than drop, half-fainting, into Gersemi's arms, and then be carried in and made much of by peasant women. But supper over the fire would warm and comfort her, and it was she who did all the talking, while Gersemi listened and wondered and understood perhaps half.

It all began two years before when Innocentia was fourteen; she had a friend called Rufina, a little older than herself, and on a day this friend had suddenly fled away from home and parents and a betrothal coming, to that old beautiful house on Mount Aventine, where still Jerome's white flock of virgins clustered together, serenely waiting for their bridegroom. In vain she was called back; the world was nothing to her now but a bubble ready to break; they let her stay there under care of the aged and saintly patrician Marcella, and her betrothal dresses mouldered away in locked chests. One day Innocentia had been to see her, had knocked at the door of the little cool cell whose windows looked out on to bird-haunted green boughs of the Roman garden. How changed her old friend was! How strange and far-off looked her unpainted face and the long dress of brown wool, high and hard round the neck and tight about the wrists! How unlovely! — and yet Innocentia came again. There was something about it, a sort of cold glow (Gersemi could never understand — oh no, impossible!), but there it was: life steadily swift like an easily winning runner all intent on the goal — Christ white and shining, and ever filling more minutes in

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every hour. While she was there Innocentia had felt that this was the only way, that she too must rush out of her world to find the diamond of simplicity that sparkled through all the house. Eagerly she had spoken to Marcella, who had looked out at her from under her hood like another Saint Elizabeth, and told of Jerome, writing and writing far away in Jerusalem, but still a living and present father to them; and Innocentia had thrilled to it all. Her litter carried her smoothly down the hill, and she lay back thinking how she as well was to live at peace henceforth. But she came home, and there was her father and her mother, and with them Probinus talking of the wedding day, and of course she could say nothing then.

And afterwards, somehow, she hadn't wanted it quite so much, and besides, no one should disobey their parents. They went to the country for the summer, and there was so much to do, and time slipped by, and all at once they were coming back to Rome for the wedding. So nothing happened; but all the same, Innocentia never quite forgot.

Well, then, she went with her husband to his Province, and sometimes they were at Verona, and sometimes they were travelling about, and sometimes they were at their big villa in Colonia Julia, such a nice place with a race-course and a big amphitheatre (but of course she only went there herself when she had to *officially*) and a beautiful new church which was just having the mosaics put in round the walls. They'd been married a year and more, and still no children — not a sign of one — but Probinus was a man getting

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on in years, a widower when he married her; and then one evening when she was looking out over the harbour she saw the galley come in with letters and news from Rome. There was a letter for her from Rufina; she read it then and there before the sunset had quite faded away. Rufina had left Mount Aventine and the calm house, she was away to the fountain head, to Jerome and Paula, to Bethlehem and the Convent of the Manger; she would go by way of Egypt and the monasteries up the great mysterious river: it would make a whole year of fresh prayers and almsgivings. So the sun set in an orange haze over the sea, and Innocentia said to her husband, "I must go on pilgrimage too."

At first he would not hear of it, and Flavius Nicetus, her brother, who was an officer serving under Stilicho, wrote to her not to be a fool. "But then/\* said Innocentia, "although I'm quite dreadfully fond of Flavius, I'm afraid he's not a very good Christian; but of course it's so difficult for officers." So it went on for a time, but she was firm that she must make a year's pilgrimage, and when she came back perhaps their prayers would be answered: if it was a son, Probinus certainly knew best, but if it was a daughter might she not be promised as a bride to Christ? So in the end she was allowed to go.

But by that time it was autumn, so there were no ships sailing for Egypt or Palestine. Only, as she was very anxious to start and afraid that Probinus might have changed his mind by spring, it was arranged that she should spend the winter with her



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mother's sister in Greece; nobody thought it possible then that the Goths should ever be allowed to come south of the Gulf of Corinth. So she went to stay with her aunt, who was very devout and encouraging, and they prayed and gave alms and visited the sick, and neither of them realized how near the invasion was till it was almost on them and there was no time to do anything: Gersemi knew the rest. It was all a judgment on her; but how to interpret it? Was the sin that was being punished now her neglect of the first call towards the holy life? Or was it perhaps that she had deserted her husband when her true duty was with him? And this Heaven-sent lightening of the scourge — Gersemi's marvellous girlhood — was that vouchsafed to her, because after all she had not turned away utterly? And what did God mean her to do next? At any rate, this point of view made her an easy captive to deal with: she followed wherever Gersemi went, convinced that it was all under heavenly guidance.

All the same, Gersemi kept clear of towns whenever she could; the winding road beside the river Achelous was good for a week's travel, but at the end they came to another pass, not quite as difficult as the last, because the days were longer and not so cold. After that, river and road again, till gradually the hills fell back and they came north-west on to the sea-ward facing plain, already a little green and flowery. By now Gersemi was used to the noise in her ears all day of one or another brown and foaming torrent; she was used to the second horse beside hers, and the

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little pale profile of Innocentia, the puckered forehead and the small drooping mouth, with a wisp of hair blown back across the hood and the white bear-skin wrapped warmly round and pinned with a great iron brooch. She was used to rubbing Innocentia's chilled hands in hers and helping her across fords and rough places; it was like having a little sister — or a doll — or a child. And sometimes she would try and tell things too, speaking in her funny, stumbling Latin of the new steading and her father and brothers and how happy she had been with Bodvar till that evening she had found him cold and dead and frowning by the Ford, and how she had cried all night for weeks after that. Only it was all over now: Bodvar was drinking golden mead in Valhalla among the heroes, and she had borne his sword worthily, and never turned her back on an enemy, and Innocentia would be her friend — wouldn't she? But Innocentia, though she'd kiss Gersemi and ask her for anything she wanted, and though in her turn she'd comb out the Northerner's long, light hair and sing to her, yet she didn't always quite understand. Only Gersemi couldn't make herself any clearer.

The road led them straight to Antigonía, and then on to Bylis, which was warm and full of people holiday-making on some local festival. But here Gersemi got suddenly frightened — she had seen soldiers — and turned off the road, due north again, Innocentia begged her to go on to Dyrrachium or some port, and take ship for Istria, but Gersemi had her own ideas; however much she was growing fond of her prisoner,

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she didn't let it turn her mind from the main idea of the ransom. Innocentia had told her that Probinus would probably be at Colonia Julia, and her plan was to go up into the wild country inland from the town: there she would leave Innocentia, probably under the care of some peasants — she had thought already of the threats she would use on them! — and go down herself to the town and demand the ransom; she had very large ideas about that ransom now. It would be sad to say good-bye to Innocentia after that, but then, nothing lasted for ever.

So they went on, sometimes across-country, sometimes striking the road again for a few miles. But every time this happened Gersemi grew more cautious, till at last she would have none of it, but shied right away from the coast into the wild barren mountains that piled themselves up and up towards the east. By now the sheltered valleys and foot-hills were brilliantly spring-like, but farther up the flowers were scarce and the wild vines were hardly budding yet among the lime-stone boulders. Innocentia hated it; she was always dragging back and crying and asking why they need go this way? — why? — why? — when there was a good road so close that would take them to a harbour and a ship and home by the end of the month: the ransom should be anything if only they could go straight back! But Gersemi petted her and happed her up and bade her not cry, and led her horse and steadied her in the saddle, and went always up into wilder and lonelier country till she felt safe again.

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**One** day Innocentia was whimpering more than ever; her head was aching, her bones were aching, she rocked in the saddle and clung to the horse's mane so that Gersemi had to walk beside her all the time. By evening, luckily, they came on a little village in a hollow, a few huts, a spring in the side of the hill, fruit-trees in bud, and some goats tethered here and there. For a few minutes Innocentia seemed better; she crouched over the fire while Gersemi hunted through the village for blankets and wine and the best food they had. But when the supper was ready Innocentia would not look at it; she should have been warm by now, but she began to shiver; she lay on the floor, shivering, shivering, her teeth chattered, she was stiff and speechless. After a time this stopped, and she lay quiet, but her cheeks were hotly flushed and her breathing was uneasy; she could not say what ailed her, only that she was aching all over and the light hurt her eyes. She did not sleep at all that night, but held tight to Gersemi's hands and tossed about and asked for water, and later a sharp pain grew under her breast that cut her every breath she took. The next day was the same, but she slept a little and coughed, and her breathing was just a hot, quick flutter in throat and nostrils; her skin was burning to touch, and towards evening a little rash came out round her lips.

The room was low and dark, and two or three old women squatted round the fire, making a brew of house-leek, currant, camomile and verbena, and whispering to one another. In the corner on a heap

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of blankets Innocentia was all bent over towards the pain-point in her side; every time she coughed it hurt her more, she could hardly swallow because of it. Gersemi knelt beside her, tense with sleeplessness and fear, wiping her lips or sponging her forehead where the hair fell back heavy and damp. Another old woman came in with goat's milk in a bowl; she went over to her friends and they shook their heads interminably together; for a time Innocentia watched their shadows wagging among the rafters; Gersemi lifted her head and slipped a fresh fold of linen under it. She tried to find Gersemi's hand, but there seemed to be a great space between her and everything else; she was alone in a glass box with a devil stabbing her side with a sharp knife, Gersemi was outside the box, God was outside the box, she could see the angels beating with their wings above her; for a moment her mind cleared and she knew them for shadows. She whispered to Gersemi, "Am I going to die?"

"No!" said Gersemi stoutly, and kissed her.

"If I die you won't get the ransom."

"I don't care two straws about the ransom! By the Hammer of Thor, little one, I've not thought about it once since we've been here."

"Oh yes, you have. I can hear you thinking: listen."

"That's only the fire. I'm not thinking of anything but you, dear."

"I can hear the gold of the ransom scraping about inside your head; it makes a noise like little bells. Stop, Gersemi, I can't bear it!"

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"Oh, don't! You mustn't think that! I'll swear you a great, great oath — by the Horse's Head, by your own Christ— I'll not so much as ask to see the ransom, I'll go as I came! You be my witness, I've sworn it!"

Innocentia was silent for a little, and one of the women brought over the warm, herb-smelling milk; she drank with an effort and said, "That's gentle of you, Gersemi. But I shan't live. I can see Death standing behind you. Don't look round! If we keep still, quite still . . . oh, won't it ever be morning!" She began to cry, but very quietly so as not to rouse that devil of pain to stab her again. The box was closing round her, she fell through the bottom of it, she was falling, falling, she was sliding down to hell along a black trough; the lid of the trough was Gersemi's face looking at her upside down . . . it had gone on for years already; there was a glow beginning at the bottom of the slope, hell-gates, hell-gates — oh, if only she could tell Rufina - Rufina would pray for her! There was a devil with a red face like her brother when he was drunk. Perhaps he was in hell too. The glare was spreading, growing, the trough would come to an end and shoot her out! Oh pain . . . she found herself staring at the window of the hut with dawn yellow and bright behind it.

During the day it was easier to be sensible, easier to let Gersemi go out and sleep for an hour, but night was always full of terrible dreams and it was harder to breathe in the dark. Her eyes grew very sore, and for minutes at a time she would try to count the blood-

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beats in her ears; sometimes it was a tune played a long way off, something she knew but couldn't quite remember; she worried and struggled with this till the sound changed to horses galloping round and round in a race that never came to an end, or somebody waiting to get in, tapping at the door, faster and faster. She tried to count the days, the first day, the second day, the day she was so sick, the day Gersemi brought in the almond boughs — she couldn't think of them all. And somehow there seemed to be more nights than days.

She had been half-asleep since dusk; after a time of wandering and hurry in an immense wood full of deep, glittering ponds, she suddenly came quite awake and found she was dripping with sweat. It was like the baths; she rested a moment, enjoying it, and they piled on more blankets. "Gersemi!" she said — she said it quite loud and the pain snapped at her side but loosed its hold and fell away — "Gersemi, I don't think I'm going to die! Gersemi, don't cry! Give me a big drink of milk!"

By morning her breathing was much easier and she could eat an egg; later she asked to have her hair combed out, and early in the evening she fell asleep, Gersemi watched her for an hour, but everything was so quiet that she slept too, lightly at first, but then so sound that she could hardly wake the next day. But Innocentia was better. Soon it was difficult to make her stay indoors; soon she was urging Gersemi to start.

Gersemi had sworn by the Horse's Head; that

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beautiful ransom had floated away like flowers thrown on a mill-stream, Innocentia said, "No, no, you must take it!" but oaths have to be kept. Gersemi would go back and join the Goths after she had given up her prisoner; another chance would come. She paid the village people well, and some of the children must needs make wreaths of pomegranate flowers and crown the lovers!

Innocentia laughed as they rode off.

"Every one thinks that! I wonder what Probinus will say when he sees you!"

"But you mustn't tell — not even him! Promise you won't!"

"Oh, I expect he'll think you were too young. But we mustn't kiss each other when he's looking!"

This time Gersemi went straight for the coast; there was nothing to gain and only time to be wasted by keeping inland now. They got a guide from the village who took them by a mountain path, all turns and twists, up over the crest of a ridge, and then below them they could see an arm of the sea nestling its blue way inland between the hills, and the town of Ascrivium spread out along the edge of the innermost bay. Here they had their choice of ships going north, and sailed the next day in a trader with a mixed cargo - hides, wine, cheese, dried fish, and a few slaves. Gersemi saw to her own little horse being carefully put aboard, but she sold the other: if she wasn't going to get the ransom she could have the horse's price, at any rate.

The highest mountain of all towered to the south,



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from the town to the top of the sky; for a time their ship moved in its shadow. They could hardly believe the open sea was beyond them, there were so many folds of rock before they got there; they could hear sheep-bells from either side over the calm water, and nearer, the shouts and laughter from the red-sailed fishing boats. The sea was marvellously calm and deep blue when they got out to it; they looked north and ahead, leaning against a big bale that kept the sun from scorching them. They went on gently under full sail past barren, stony hills with caves at the water's edge, that stretched for miles and miles on their right, till late in the day they put in at Epidaurus, a small town, where they stayed the night, moored against the harbour wall.

North of Epidaurus the coast broke up into valleys and bays and little, beautiful islands with steep sides where goats grazed and ridges crowned with cypress. The wind freshened, but sometimes they would get into the lee of an island and the crew would set to their oars. The two girls had made themselves a nest between the rail and a wine barrel and a bundle of cheeses done up in sacking; here they put the bear-skin to lie on, and ate the food they had brought and guessed how far they'd gone each day. Sometimes Gersemi would go aft and feed her horse and grumble to him about the ransom. The second night they lay in a little harbour on the coastward-facing side of an island, the third night they got to Salona and left the ship to walk for an hour round the great walls of Diocletian's palace; the next night it was an island

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again, then the calm bay of Jadera where they did a good trade. The day after that they nosed outward through the islands and anchored at Apsorus; here three of the sailors slipped away and got drunk, so they were late getting *off* the next morning, and, though the wind was fair and there were no more islands to tangle them, they were still two hours away from Colonia Julia at sunset.

Innocentia stood up with her hands clasped and her hair blowing back; Gersemi threw the bear-skin round her, for the night was cold, and began putting their things together. First there was just a sparkle, low on the water, then it lengthened out, the lights separated into torches or tavern windows all along the harbour. The sailors' naked feet ran up and down the deck; the sail came down with soft thuds along the whole length of the ship; they heard voices from the shore. Ahead of them, white in the moonlight, was the great solid mass of the amphitheatre. Gersemi picked up the packs and led her horse up the planks off the ship; she looked about her: old pools of rain-water reflected the stars; a beggar offered to carry the packs and lead the horse; she shook him off. She shivered and yawned and stretched herself, thinking that this adventure was near its end, and wondering what the next would be. Innocentia slipped a hand through her arm: "Come, Gersemi!"

They went along by the harbour for a little, Innocentia leading the way, then turned straight up through the toll-gate and into the town, across the

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forum with the new church at one side and the old temple at the other, round by the right and uphill, through the dark and nearly empty streets. Every now and then Gersemi would see the amphitheatre eyeing them across the house roofs from all its rows of dark openings. Suddenly Innocentia stopped and whispered, "Here!" The great door in front of them had an iron knocker in the middle; blank walls stretched at either side. Innocentia covered her face with her hands; Gersemi reached up and knocked hard three times.

### PART THREE

Tells how:

Gersemi finds  
One thing:  
If it is good  
No man knows,  
If it is bad  
Who will help her?  
Gersemi finds  
Another thing:  
If it is sweet  
Sweet is short,  
If it is bitter  
That lasts long.

Probinus was playing dice with his brother-in-law, Flavius Nicetus; he found it eased his mind a little, which was more than prayers did. All the same, between throws he kept on darting back with a sharp pain to his lost wife . . . if she *was* lost; the old aunt had paid her ransom and gone home to her ruined house—why could she not have kept Innocentia with her! She might have promised anything and he would have paid it. "Your throw," said Flavius; he picked up the dice. Suddenly the knocker on the outer gate clanged through the house.

They sat listening; who could it be so late — news? — the Goths? The captain of his guard swept the curtain aside: "Sir! Sir!" He jumped up, some one was coming along the hall towards them — lights! Why were there no lights? A young Goth, and with

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him, with him — almost he broke down before his own servants and the Goth! She was so fresh, so sweet, so unchanged; he had been faithful to her for nearly seven months.

In the meantime Flavius Nicetus was talking to the Goth, who was not very communicative and kept looking at his sister all the time; not unnaturally he was considering the probabilities of his sister and this young man — but certainly the barbarian was very young even if his sister was very pretty.

Probinus began, "What reward —"

But the Goth, fidgeting with his sword-hilt, cut him short:

"None. Nothing. Take her. I want my horse seen to. Then I can go to-morrow/'

Innocentia, sitting bright-eyed on the edge of the table, shook her head.

"Gersemi — no! I won't have it! Make him stop!"

But that evening Gersemi thought anything was better than staying.

Innocentia found it quite easy to convince her husband, and not too difficult to convince her brother, that there had been nothing between her and the Goth. He had been moved, she said, and left them to infer the angel's interposition. And at any rate here she was safe and sound and weren't they glad to see her? And could she have a bath at once? And where were all the maids and had they been properly looked after while she was away? And so on. Then all the household came in and kissed her hand and the old steward cried and her own particular maid

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cried too and was really distressed at the sight of her clothes, which Probinus, to do him justice, hadn't noticed. But Gersemi had gone out and cursed the stable-boy for not grooming the horse better, and then she was quite extraordinarily tired, so she went to the room they'd given her and didn't even wash her face, but just kicked *off* her shoes, curled up on the sheets and went fast asleep.

She woke late the next morning, but Probinus and Innocentia were later still; Gersemi was waiting in the hall, a little anxiously, when they came down. "Innocentia!" she said, "I've only just seen -did you have it, my bear-skin?"

Innocentia answered at once, "No! Didn't you take it with the rest of the things?"

"But I put it on you — when you were standing on deck: you were cold — oh, you haven't lost my bear-skin!"

"I — I took it off and left it in our place, by the big barrel, I thought you wanted it to wrap the things. We must send down to the harbour, the ship won't be gone yet!"

"I'll go myself!" said Gersemi, and hurried off. But the ship had sailed. They said at the harbour that she might be back in a month or so; she was a regular trader up and down that coast. Gersemi said, "I shall stay till she comes back," so when Innocentia, backed by Probinus, bade her stay longer with them, she accepted. But she had bad dreams for a week afterwards.

It was not very easy for the two girls to see much

## *When the Bough Breaks*

of one another now; sometimes Innocentia grew quite angry with her husband for being always there! It was nearly a week later before they had a chance of strolling together across the orchard behind the house. Innocentia, of course, wanted to know what Gersemi thought of everything.

"Do tell me how you like my husband 1"

"Isn't he rather old?"

"He wouldn't be Governor of Venetia and Istria if he were a boy!" said Innocentia, a little hurt.

"Yes. Your brother's younger."

"Oh, Flavius, yes. I don't quite know what's brought him down here: something Stilicho set him to do. But my husband doesn't think very well of the Vandal. Oh, isn't it luck, Flavius being here now! I don't see much of him usually."

"If you'd gone on your pilgrimage you'd have missed him."

"Oh, hush, Gersemi! But what do you think of him?"

"Oh, I'd sooner be his friend than his enemy."

"He likes you."

"Does he? Well, you can tell him I take his liking with both hands and give him back more."

"That I will. Gersemi, we were all talking about it: we think you should be baptized."

"There's no call for you all to be talking about me!"

"Well, but won't you?"

"There's no need."

"Oh, but there is! It would be terrible for me if

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you got no good for all those months we spent together. I've told you about it all; don't harden your heart, Gersemi. You shall be baptized in the new church; the Bishop is here now and my husband says he will sponsor you himself! Now, you shall have three days to think it over, and we'll have everything ready for when you say yes."

Gersemi shrugged her shoulders and walked away. But what did it matter after all if she did take oath to this new faith? Her own Gods were a two-seasons' journey away, so there was no need for them to hear or trouble, and anyhow Gods weren't her affair, either way: she was no priest! There was very little to be said against Innocentia's God; after all, half the people down here were Christians. Alaric and the Goths were Christians, Avilf was one: oh no, they were the wrong sort! At least Innocentia said so. But she couldn't follow all that. Very well, it pleased Innocentia and did her no harm herself: she would be baptized anywhere they chose.

Ifanocentia enjoyed herself tremendously: this was her catch! She had a specially suitable dress made for the occasion; it was silver tissue, finely embroidered from waist to hem with figures of all the chief virtues in blue and rose colour, holding garlands between them. Her veil was blue with a border of silver crosses, and she had taken some trouble to have her slippers dyed the exact shade. Probinus had given her a new string of pearls; she wore beryls, opals and pale rubies as well. Vanity, as she told Gersemi, had never been her weakness, but still,



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after the terrible time she had gone through, she thought she might be allowed just a little; and all in Gersemi's honour. "We should be ashamed not to wear fine clothes at a marriage, but how much finer they ought to be when we are celebrating the feast-day of a soul!" Gersemi got herself shirt and breeches of white linen, and new, soft shoes of buckskin; then she washed her hair and was ready for church.

It was not till the actual words were being said by the Bishop that Innocentia had that dreadful doubt: Gersemi was being baptized as a *man*. And — and — God is not mocked: the day of judgment would come and then — she almost jumped from her place to stop the baptism! But what would every one say and what would Gersemi do? But afterwards she could think of nothing else. If only there was some one she could consult! It was dreadful to have to keep secrets for longer than a week! Should she tell the Bishop? Or her husband? Only if Gersemi found that she'd been betrayed she'd never consent to be baptized again. And what a scandal! Poor Innocentia, she was very unhappy; she spent nearly all her spare time praying for guidance, but it never came.

Colonia Julia was steadily warming up with the summer; Gersemi sweated in her thick linen and wished she could wear transparent silk that waved in the softest wind, like other women did. It took her a little time to learn to sleep in the middle of the day and keep out of the sun: in the north the sun

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had been a kind and gentle goddess, ever welcome and ever shy!

All along the steep coast were delicious bays, where the light went clear down for twenty feet through cool, swaying water, faintly green, to a dappled floor of rock. Whenever she could, Gersemi would slip away and bathe; she would swim out, dipping her head from time to time, to where the deep water thickened the heavy jewel-colour of the sky. Sometimes she would swim till evening, and the paths of setting sun and rising moon would join and dance where her brown hands splashed the water up; then she would hurry back, always a little afraid of being caught by the sudden, southern darkness. But she had to be so careful; once or twice she had been nearly seen! Fortunately the one who mattered most, Flavius Nicetus, had learned with Stilicho and the auxiliaries to respect the quite ridiculous modesty of the barbarian; but all the same it was never safe. And nowhere else was cool! Almost every day after supper she would go down to the harbour, but the right ship was still waited for. She got to know the town, and once Flavius took her to see a sham sea-fight in the amphitheatre, which astonished and even alarmed her, beyond measure.

By and by the terrible secret grew too much for Innocentia; she found Gersemi alone and burst out with it — she was not truly baptized!

"Well," said Gersemi, soothingly, "If I don't care, there's no need for you to."

"But it's awful! Supposing you died — like this!"

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"Supposing I did: couldn't I go to heaven in breeches?"

"Gersemi, you mustn't! Oh, we ought to do something! Come with me to the Bishop, you can tell him under seal of secrecy —"

"Nothing of the sort. I got baptized to please you and I won't have it altered now."

Innocentia burst into tears. "Oh, it was all my fault! Oh God, help me, it was all my fault!"

Gersemi put both arms round her and began petting her, just as if they'd been on the mountains still; after a minute or so Innocentia yielded and laid her head on her friend's strong breast, feeling the comfortable firmness of hands and voice, and the kind lips laid on her hot forehead. Suddenly Gersemi looked up with a great start and shook her loose; but Flavius Nicetus had seen enough already; he stood in front of them with his eyebrows up and his mouth a little twisted. Innocentia fell at his feet, looking anything but innocent, and implored him not to tell her husband; Gersemi stood firm and said nothing: her teeth were shut on a solid mouthful of curses.

"My very unwise sister," said Flavius, "get up. Now, what have you to say for yourself? I assure you I saw everything, and though I can be moderately blind to anything in reason, this is a little too much."

Innocentia sobbed incoherently: "It's not what you think—don't believe it—oh, dear, dear Flavius, if only you knew!"

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"Unfortunately I know quite enough. When it comes to you cheating your husband with a Goth —" "But I wasn't—I'm not—" She sprang at Gersemi and shook her.

"Speak, tell him! Save me!"

Gersemi, rather white, made an effort to speak, but before she could say anything Innocentia rushed into the silence with, "Then I must! Flavius, he's a woman!"

Flavius was not impressed. "I am really sorry, Innocentia, but such a likely story!" He shrugged his shoulders, while Innocentia panted, looking from one to the other.

Gersemi still stood, and felt tears running down her face; all in a breath she said, "But I am," and swayed a little. Flavius looked keenly at her, then went over in two strides and held her up as her knees shook; he kept her pressed against him for a moment till he was sure, then let her go gently. She sat down with her head in her hands and heard him say, "I understand. This shall be secret." When she looked up again he and his sister were gone and it all might never have happened.

She went down to the stables, the little horse had been clipped against the heat; he half-turned his head and whinnied; she fed him a handful of oats, wondering vaguely what to do. She thought she would ride out of the town and think it over, but the horse was in a bad temper and nipped her as she tightened the girth; then she noticed that the rims of his eyes were sticky and he was snuffling;

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she didn't take him out after all, but leant against a hay bale, rubbing the dry, black clover flowers between her hands. What difference did it make? The same question as the baptism. Two people knew instead of one. Innocentia, the child, the little silver birch-tree: and Flavius Nicetus. But what was he? She knew she liked him, he was friendly, he didn't talk down to her like Probinus did, and he was young and clean-looking; he had told her stories about his fighting her friends the Goths, but she thought no worse of him; he was always a good companion, riding or talking or drinking. But now? Avilf had been all that, yet she had always been afraid of his finding out. Well, at least the Roman wouldn't want to marry her! She would see what happened. But why need Innocentia have told like that, anyhow! Silly baby, to beat about like a trapped bird! If only she hadn't started fidgeting over that **relish** of hers . . . "Thor, help me!" sighed Gersemi, getting up and stretching herself. "But I wish I knew what was wrong with my little horse."

Supper was always an annoying meal; there was all the gold plate out, and Innocentia covered with necklaces and bracelets, and Probinus with his great carved emerald rings: and it all might have gone into ransom! This was bad enough at the best of times, but that evening Innocentia was fidgeting and eating nothing till her husband asked her if she was feeling the heat, and Flavius was smiling and staring and looking mysterious; Gersemi, in desperation, drank

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a good deal and did most of the talking, while Probinus looked on and seemed slightly surprised. There were no guests, so, as often happened, Gersemi and Flavius were left together over the wine at the end of supper. Flavius dismissed the slaves, and for a minute said nothing; then he leant across the table, with, "Now I shan't be able to tell you any more amusing stories/

"Oh, why not?" said Gersemi, who used to enjoy them, "I don't care!"

Flavius laughed. "No, but think of me. I wanted to tell you how I seduced my General's wife — not Stilicho, by God! Madam Serena'd be a tough nut to crack! - but how can I now?"

"I've heard worse!"

"Yes, but I couldn't go into details and they're what make the story. No, I must leave it. And you know, Gersemi, I'd hoped that contemplation of these and similar delights might have induced you to come back with me next month and join the auxiliaries."

"Oh, I'd like that!"

"Well, you can't now. No, it's no use, I won't take you. Some one would find out and there'd be an end of you. You just can't do it."

"I can always go back to Alaric!"

"You'll get found out there sooner or later. Why don't you go home?"

"So I will some time."

"It may be too late unless you go quickly. Gersemi, now that I can really see you, you look a very passable woman."

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"Don't really see me, then! Tell me about your General's wife."

"It wouldn't be decent, my dear lady!"

"Well, if you won't talk sense I'm going to bed!" And off she went, very cross with the smiling Roman.

Once having told her brother, Innocentia seemed to think she could tell her husband as well: that led to rather a stormy interview, in which Flavius took Gersemi's side and persuaded her to stay on, anyhow till the ship came back. Flavius was always annoying her and laughing at her, but still they managed to keep better friends than she'd ever hoped they could. Probinus was shocked, and blamed his wife and brother-in-law for not telling him at once; he tried to make Gersemi wear women's clothes, but of course she wouldn't. He disapproved of her and Flavius being much alone together, so naturally they both tried to see one another as often as possible.

The little horse didn't get any better; his coat was staring and fell out in handfuls, and he grew thin. Soon he could hardly stand; Gersemi grew anxious, took advice and gave him medicines; but none of them did any good. Whenever she came in he looked round at her as if he thought she must be able to help, and that made it all the worse. Then at last she heard that the ship had put in again, and she hurried down to the harbour to find the captain. She asked him about her bear-skin and her voice trembled a little: she cared a good deal. At first he scratched his head and couldn't remember it, but then one of

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the sailors reminded him. "Oh yes," he said, "we found it lying about on deck and no one claiming it. Well, I sold it — up north, two days out from here — to a barbarian who took a fancy to it. No, I don't know his name nor anything about it. If you'd wanted it back you shouldn't have left it there." He spat into the harbour and turned his back on Gersemi. She went back to the house, feeling cold and grey; it had been her luck, it would have made her horse well: now it was gone. Innocentia wanted to give her another cloak, any fur she chose, but that only showed how little Innocentia understood; nobody did understand, even Flavius made jokes about it; and for once it was something that really mattered.

It was a hot evening, the hottest they'd had yet. There was a stone well at the back of the orchard; ripe plums had fallen round it, and already the early pears were beginning to soften. Gersemi sat on the kerb of the well, eating yellow and purple plums and thinking very bitterly about Innocentia. Flavius came up and sat down beside her, taking a handful of her fruit.

"Still unhappy?" he asked.

She nodded.

"I know a way to cure all that."

"Show me."

"Shall I?"

"Yes." .

He suddenly caught hold of her and kissed her with all his might.



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She said nothing, but fought him; for a moment they swayed perilously over the well. Then she got free, pushed him away and stood panting and hot among the fallen plums. "Don't 1" she said.

"I'm not."

"Well then, you aren't to begin again!"

"Why not?"

"Because — because I say!"

"Why should I do what you say- Goth?"

"But you are to!"

"Why?"

"Because — by the Hammer of Thor, Flavius, I'm armed and I'll stick my dagger through your ribs!"

"Aha! that's talking. Put your dagger down on the well-kerb, Gersemi. Look, there's mine,"

He put his down, hilt pointing away; after a moment she unsheathed hers, came slowly over, and put it down too. She looked at Flavius, he was smiling still: she could go now if she wanted, he could never catch her if she ran for the house: let alone that she could fight him! She was free to choose. Flavius sat quiet, hands clasped round one bare knee: the full moon poured light into the orchard, the plums were deep black or palest gold. She stretched her arms above her head and broke a twig; she felt she could pull the tree up by its roots if only she had cared to. What was the use of being a fighter if she ran away from one man, she was Samund's daughter and a match for any Southerling !

Flavius spoke again:

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"You think you're very strong, Gersemi, but you're not."

"And who told you that?"

"I know. If I wanted to kiss you —"

"You couldn't!"

"Do you dare me?"

"No. But don't."

She sat down again on the well-kerb, with the two daggers between her and the Roman: she looked up through the branches and sighed a little; he spoke softly:

"Poor dear! Are you still unhappy about the bear-skin?"

"Yes. But I did forget for a moment."

"And you could again. Gersemi, tell me, what do you think about things?"

"What things?"

"Oh, you and me, the moon and stars, the whole world."

"I don't know. My little horse is very sick."

"I'm sorry. Did my groom help you? I told him to. Between that and the bear-skin! I wish you'd let me do something." He leant over and took her hand. Abruptly she began to cry, and that brought him to her feet; he knelt beside her, looking up\* There was no sound from the house, only his voice murmuring, "Gersemi, don't be unhappy, don't be lonely: I'm here, I love you, I can make everything right if only you'll love me back. Dear, sweetheart, say you love me!"

She tried faintly to draw her hand away, she tried

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to remember Bodvar's wooing by the hearth-fire of her father's steading; but her heart was cold to Bodvar and the stars swam in front of her eyes, lighting and dizzying and driving away the half-remembered flames of those winter pine-logs. She slipped down off the low wall on to the grass beside the Roman; she let him take both hands and kiss them; she let him whisper, and by and by she shivered and moved closer to him. His arms were round her now and he was pulling at the neck of her coat; it tore away from the brooch and he had her shoulder bare and white in the moonlight. She sat quite still, a little curled up against him, with her hands loose on the grass; she felt a round plum beside her right hand and began rolling it up and down under her palm. Her eyes were half-shut and she looked up into the branches; it was an effort even to answer him; he was saying:

"Gersemi - boy — girl - honey-love — will you come to me — to-night, now? Do you want me?"

She sighed "Yes," and threw her head back against the stone to let him kiss all round her shoulders and the base of her throat. He pulled her over across his knees; he was shaking a little as he held her. She slid an arm up and behind his neck and fingered his soft, close-cropped hair; she smiled at him, because nothing mattered now except for this to go on. He spoke very low and achinglly:

"Gersemi, if you do love me — I want you so — come, come!"

She answered under her breath, "Loose my belt,"

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and felt his hands fumbling with the buckle. And after that both of them forgot the trees and the moonlight and the dewy grass.

It ended, as such times should, with both deep asleep in each other's arms. Gersemi was the first to wake; she lay on her back looking through the leaves at the stars and hearing now and then the rustle and drop of a ripe plum. Her lover lay beside her, breathing as softly as a child; she slept again. When she woke next it was to see the colour of the orchard changing with the dawn; she bent over Flavius and kissed him awake, then slipped out of his arms before he had well hold of her, saying:

"Look! It's morning— I must go!"

"Not yet!"<sup>1</sup> he pleaded. "Not yet!" But she was feeling for her clothes among the damp grass. "Tomorrow night, then. Oh, Gersemi, you lovely Goth!"

She smiled down at him: "I'm not a Goth — but I'm your girl and I'll come."

He watched her fastening shoes and belt, jumping for a high plum and biting it, and then running noiselessly up towards the house; when she was out of sight he too shook the dew off his hair and found his clothes. She had forgotten her dagger on the well-kerb; he picked it up and brought it in with his own.

The next day was all a dream to Gersemi; she never woke up enough to think. Only before supper she washed and put on the best of her silk coats and all her bracelets of twisted gold; it was then she noticed that she hadn't got her dagger. After supper,

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Innocentia and Probinus wouldn't go away! They wanted her to play dice! But at last it was dusk and the orchard again; when she wanted her dagger back from Flavius he asked her to let him keep it, but she wouldn't because of the bad luck.

"I'll give you something else."

He was playing with her hand.

"Give me your ring."

"No, that's Avilf's ring."

"Who's Avilf?"

"A Goth. He never found me out. I won't give you that; take the brooch out of my coat."

"I will. And if I give you a ring, will you keep it as safe as that man's?"

"Safer. But I'll wear it round my neck for now."

He gave her a gold-set sardonyx with Eros carrying roses; it had been given him by a lady at Ravenna, but no matter.

Again Gersemi was the first to wake, but this time, instead of letting herself drift with the sweet current of things, she began to think. And it was not very pleasant thinking. She remembered how he had said he was the stronger, and, lying there in the grass, she grew hot and ashamed and angry, and bit her arms because she had yielded to the Roman! She almost stabbed him while he slept, but then she wouldn't, and only went away. When Flavius woke there was no fair girl beside him, and when he called softly through the orchard there was no answer. He hunted the garden and the colonnades, he went into the house and stumbled and cursed in the dark

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rooms; he went into hers, but she was not there; only he found some of her clothes and pressed his face into them and thought of her warm skin. At last towards morning he did find her; she was in the stables; she was lying face-down on the straw where she had cried herself to sleep beside her horse; and the horse was dead.

## PART FOUR

Tells how:

Gersemi gets  
For her singing  
A new song:  
"Sdrindulaile,  
Sdrindulaile  
Che' bambinute  
Che si torni,  
Che si torni  
A indurmidi.  
Je' levade,  
Je' levade  
La biele stele.  
Son tre oris,  
Son tre oris  
Devant di."

Twelve days later came a runner with a letter recalling Flavius Nicetus to the army; he set about his preparations for the next day, and Gersemi helped him silently. Then came the last night in the orchard with tears from both wetting their kisses.

"You're all I have," said Gersemi. "My fairy bear-skin is lost and my little horse is dead and I think I shall never see my home or my brothers again."

Then he said: "Sweetheart, we've had this time anyhow. And some day . . . but it's little help to say that now."

Then they fell to staring at one another in the

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moonlight so as to have some very sure memory for ever afterwards.

They slept little that night, but yet the darkness sped away like a dream, and morning came again, the last love-making, the last time close, close together, the last whispers and sobs and caresses, the desperate last kiss before they had to go in and be Roman and Goth again. The saddle-bags were strapped and the packs were corded up; then there was coming and going of grooms and servants, and Probinus hurrying up and down and scolding every one. Then clitter-clatter in the street as the horses were led round, loading up the pack-ponies, shifting girths or easing saddles, and Flavius coming to the door, very soldier-like and different in his armour and helmet. Gersemi could have little part in the leave-taking, only look long and palely and meet his eyes as hungry as her own — and see Innocentia take the final kiss of all 1

After that the days were hot and empty, the nights lonely and terribly long. What was the use of staying on in the Roman city? Nobody knew when he would come back; and besides, would they ever begin again? Things were always coming to an end: this was one of them. Gersemi set about getting another horse, but was not easily satisfied and had to wait some little time before she got one which looked hardy enough to take her away over the hills to new adventures or her old home. And Innocentia began worrying her again about that baptism; at last in despair she allowed a letter to be written under pro-



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mise of secrecy to Jerome's old monastery at Aquileia where Innocentia's favourite advisers were to be found. The answer came back four weeks later; very sensibly, they bade Innocentia let ill alone, and counselled prayer and fasting.

By now it was the turn for brown pears to fall in the orchard, and figs were splitting in the sun against the house wall. Very soon Probinus was going to make a tour of his Province, ending up perhaps in Verona or Mantua; Gersemi thought that then she would say good-bye and strike inland for herself. She knew that Stilicho with his Western army was driving Alaric out of Greece; she knew that he was only partly successful, that the Goths had slipped past him and were up again in their old hills where no one dared attack them. She knew vaguely that Flavius had been sent for on account of this ill success, but she only heard of him through one or two letters to Probinus. She wished now that she'd learnt to read and write, and even began trying to copy words and letters, but she never got very far.

She had spent most of her money on the new horse and some new harness, and clothes for herself, but she had everything she needed and was ready to go. Then, uneasily, she began to wonder if she was ill; she was having a queer new feeling of tiredness and sickness, and from time to time unaccountable pains. She would not admit it at first, but soon it was plain enough what was the matter. And that altered her plans completely; she could not, dared not, ride out with this ahead of her! In a few weeks she must let

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her disguise go, there would be no hiding that she was a woman. And if she was by herself terrible things might happen; the baby might come when she was all alone among the mountains: she would cry with pain as her brother Kol's wife had cried, and nothing would answer but the fierce eagles: she and the baby would freeze and bleed and starve and die together, and no one might find their bones to bury them for ever and ever. She could face death in battle ten times over, but not this death!

One day another letter came for Probinus: she wondered if it was news from Flavius; she could imagine him writing in his tent, perhaps her brooch was in his cloak, perhaps he thought of her. She tried to find Innocentia, but couldn't at first; when she did she was on a couch with her hair loose and tears streaking her face; half the household were round her, offering wine or scent or fanning her or kneeling beside her.

"What's the matter?" asked Gersemi, and was answered with a torrent of sobs and "Flavius — he's dead — they've killed him!"

Gersemi clutched at a curtain with her heart thumping. "Are you sure?"

"He's killed — my brother, my dear, dear Flavius!"

"Who killed him?"

"Your people — you Goth!"

Gersemi dropped the curtain and pressed her hands against her head: "I'm not a Goth — but I'm going to have his baby!"

After that there was no concealing from anyone

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that she was a woman. Innocentia asked her hundreds of questions, the sort of questions she couldn't bear to answer; Probinus was told and looked very grave about it. It was decided that she must go with them to Verona; she let them have their way, not seeing any other. They set off by road from Colonia Julia towards the end of the vintage; for an hour before they went she cried by the well in the orchard; there was little fruit left on the trees by now. She thought of Flavius dead like Bodvar was dead, and again she cursed the loser of her bear-skin.

They went solemnly along by the coast, and at every town Probinus held a reception of the notables, and at every monastery his wife was received with delighted welcomes and gave alms. It hurt Gersemi to see how quickly Innocentia seemed to forget all about her brother and took to religion with still greater fervour, bidding Gersemi pray and reading her little books which gave her no consolation. But most of the time Gersemi just lived dumbly from day to day, and would not talk to anyone. She hated having to wear women's clothes again, but the Romans insisted and she could do nothing. A kind of mental helplessness came over her, as if she were going slowly towards a dark wall, eight months away, then seven, soon six, getting higher and darker and more and more hard to see past. Innocentia was always wanting her to tell about those nights in the orchard, and at last grew angry with her because she wouldn't, and began to treat her less and less as a friend and more as a dependent.

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Their slow road took them round the head of the Adriatic, through Aquileia and Concordia and a dozen other towns on the main road, all much alike to a tired traveller riding in, and at last to Verona among drifting leaves which the cold winds swirled about every doorway. Gersemi's room looked north and she could see across the river the hills rising suddenly out of the rich plain, and over these hills, farther away, the high Alps. The peaks were white with snow and she wondered whether Avilf was snowbound in his mountains too. Now that the nights were getting cold again she wanted her bear-skin, and hated the felt blankets they gave her.

One day there was a wild-beast show in the Arena, and she was to have gone with the other women, but at the last moment Innocentia decided that she had a headache, and they all had to stay behind. Gersemi, who had never seen a lion, thought she would go by herself, put on a cloak and hurried out: she had been feeling pretty well all day. She paid for a cheap place right at the top, all she could afford; but still there was a good view; the audience swept away in a great circle, down and round from where she stood, deep red and green and yellow and wine colour, dotted with hands and faces. She looked about, wishing it would start soon, and casually noticed two men standing beside her, potters perhaps or something of the sort. She wasn't used yet to looking away at the ground when a man glanced at her, but now she did, angrily, as they sniggered together. It was stuffy right up under the awning;

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she would have liked to sit down. But at last there was a blare from a hunting-horn and the show began. Every one pressed forward chattering, pointing at the beasts. Hyenas! Was that a hyena? She wanted to ask some one: if only she'd been a man still! Then, just as she was wondering, she was suddenly pulled from behind, tripped on her skirt, and before she knew what was happening was being kissed and pinched and tickled by the two potters. It was only a moment before she got away, but she was so sick with the effort and the shame she could hardly stand. And she'd lost her place in front of the crowd. An old grandmother hobbled out and helped her down the steps: she heard them cheering behind her. But she'd wasted her money, and never even seen the lion. The empty streets mocked at her slinking back; and when she got in, of course Innocentia had found out, and enjoyed scolding her.

All the same Verona was pleasant and cool, and she hoped there'd be snow soon. But after a few weeks, just as she was beginning to know her way about, Innocentia suddenly made up her mind that she was going to winter in Rome with her mother; so off they started again, Gersemi very wearily. They went by way of Ravenna, as Probinus was sending a present of rare wild birds and three bear cubs from his Province to the boy emperor Honorius. The road took them south-east through miles of flat and evil-smelling marshes to the sea coast and the great town of Ravenna, full of new buildings, hastily laid roads, and gardens half-planted. Inno-

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centia — with a new dress - of course went to pay her respects at the Court, and stayed, giving and receiving invitations, for the best part of a month. Gersemi stopped indoors in their lodgings most of the time and only heard the rumours: Gildo in Africa brewing rebellion against Rome, the latest development in the quarrel between Jerome and John of Jerusalem, how the other Emperor, Arcadius in Byzant, had made his peace with Alaric, and how their Emperor Honorius had started a craze for keeping pet chickens. But whenever she could she went out into the pine-woods and lay there, listening to the dropping cones, and pretending she was at home. Only that autumn it rained for days at a time, and then there was no one to talk to, and nothing to think of but the baby. She wanted to call him Samund after her father, or, if it was a girl, after her mother Aslaug; but "John," said Innocentia firmly, "John: such a good name. Yes, decidedly, John." Gersemi looked away and didn't answer: perhaps there should be a Goth name as well; she'd had good friends among Alaric's folk.

They started for Rome late in the year, but there was always plenty of traffic on the road from Ravenna and they got there about Christmas. It was a big town: the houses frightened Gersemi, they were so high, they might fall down, they almost shut out the light. They went through streets and streets before they came to the house — she would never be able to find her way out! But the odd thing was there were beggars everywhere and all the poor people looked

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thin and hungry: a famine beginning in Rome. And the shops! To think she had been so proud of that miserable coat she bought at Vindobona! But now she hadn't enough money to buy a finer one; even the necklaces were almost all gone, and she had to get the things for the baby,

Innocentia's mother was told in great detail about Gersemi; she was much interested, cried a little, exclaimed a great deal, and catechized her future grandson's mother till poor Gersemi was almost in tears. After that several old ladies, and three separate deacons, each more saintly than the last, came and talked to the barbarian about her soul, and still more the soul of the coming child; Gersemi was frightened and bullied, always with the best intentions, and taken the round of all the churches in Rome, and made to dream about hell every night; and nearly screamed whenever a door slammed. With all that, she was given very little real help, or money either; she did not care to ask for it, but she did grudge the gold pieces that flowed out of the house in a stream of devout almsgiving. After the first time she would not even say when she felt ill; then the household doctor, a most unpleasant little Egyptian, had come and dealt with her, and left her in some pain and sick with disgust at him and her own body. The servants took no trouble to help her: she did not either give them money as inferiors or flattery as equals.

She had a little room up a flight of wooden steps where she was always afraid of falling. It looked

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over a court-yard where they used to harness up the chariots or cut wood or exercise the lap-dogs; there was a big plane-tree in the middle and a dung-heap under her window. The plane-tree had a set of iron fetters hanging from its trunk; sometimes she saw them beating slaves there, and once or twice it was a fair head that might have been Goth,

She liked looking down into the yard; it was alive, but it let her alone, never asked questions. Often there were children playing there: a big establishment like this would be always breeding, and as the boys and girls grew up they were trained to some occupation, or occasionally sold. Among them was a boy of about eleven that Gersemi sometimes noticed; he was a brown, solid-looking creature, with curly hair, thick and sun-bleached, and a high hand over the others. Sometimes he used to get into trouble; there was one of the grooms he had a standing quarrel with, though it almost always seemed to end in a thrashing for him. He didn't care; he wriggled up and started off again, and perhaps next time the groom would get the worst of it. But whatever he did, he never hurt the man's horses; he could ride any of them, even the cross-tempered little Arab stallions, and never a nip or a kick from the worst of them. He could climb the plane-tree too, like a squirrel, and none of the boys of his own age could stand up to him. Gersemi watched him often out of the high window: her boy would be brave too.



## PART FIVE

Tells how:

Goth-land's glory  
 Grain-wise ground  
 In a strong mill.  
 The upper mill-stone:  
 Witch-born Hun-folk,  
 Devil fathered,  
 Drinkers of blood.  
 The nether mill-stone:  
 Swords and soldiers.  
 Strength of the south,  
 Cunning of Rome-burg,  
 Micklegard's might!

Sometimes Gersemi wondered who the boy was and how he had come there. That story began a long way back: twenty years before, when a chill winter had come down early all over the Empire, most of all in the north-east towards the shelterless plains of Scythia. Great slabs of ice came swinging and swirling for miles and miles down the Danube, jammed into blocks or free again and slipping quickly and silently away on the wide lonely waters. On each side the marshes were frozen hard and far; the short grey days rose and set on them, and sometimes there were wild duck, sometimes perhaps a heron: nothing bigger. By November the water had risen almost to the level of the land; ice-cold it trickled round the willow roots and over the little islands of stiff grass. From low clouds the snow fell into it

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and was carried down; the wind blew steadily from the north.

This was the boundary of the Empire; Moesia lay on the near side, with a few towns to keep the wind out and long, empty roads between them; on the hills to the south there was packed snow over the summer pastures. Now it was good to stay indoors with wife and child and the gentle beasts that warm the air with their milky breath, good to have wine stored away, and oil, and woollen stuff for thick cloaks, good to know songs and stories and games to lighten the dark hours, best to lie long in bed, securely waiting for spring and the earliest lambs.

But on the north bank of the Danube there was no shelter for the Goth folk, only the roofed wagons and some rough huts they had made of wattle and rushes, where the hard earth floors had melted into ankle-deep mud. There were more than twelve towns-full of them; over the mile-wide river one could see them for a day's journey up or down, as evening fell their fires grew countlessly bright. Fridigern was their leader, Fridigern the Judge, clever and bold and well liked by all: but yet not bold enough to turn and face the wolf-pack that was driving his nation out of its home: Scythians, Alans, and the yellow, terrible host of the Hun riders. Out of their desolate plains they had come, quickly and terribly, pressing the Goths south and west against the frontiers of the Roman Empire. The old King of the West Goths had escaped with a very few into the mountains, but the great mass of them, with women,

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children and slaves, horses and goods and gear, had been driven on till they came to the marshes and the brown waters, and now the one thing they were sure of was that safety lay ahead, once they could put the Danube between themselves and the Huns.

Fridigern asked leave to cross over and settle down as humble allies and defenders of the Empire; and after a time Valens the Emperor decided that this would add to his glory. Day after day the boatloads crossed and crossed; the great wagons, loaded on to rafts, rocked stiffly above the current; the shock-haired Goth children shouted to their friends from one boat to another. When they were all ferried over they were made to camp, hundreds of thousands of them, in the plains and low hills of Mcesia, well away from any towns, and to make matters safer their swords were taken from them — or should have been — but the officials in charge were, after all, poor men, or sufficiently so at least to take an inducement, though not always, of course, anything so crude as gold or silver.

Fridigern had a cousin called Gudamir, a strong and wealthy man, owner of horses and men. There was a tall wife and five children; but the Romans took hostages from the Goth chiefs, and Gudamir's eldest son was one of them; they took him away into Asia. So he had left a baby boy and three little girls; the youngest of them was eight years old then, her name was Thiudis. She used to play a great deal and not listen to what anyone said; she was not even

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surprised when her father gave up a whole load of their best things, carpets and linen and bedding, and bought leave to bring his sword. Her mother wrapped her up well with furs like a little bear and she never minded the cold; but by and by there was not enough to eat and she used to cry.

It was chiefly that the two governors of Thrace saw an unparalleled chance of growing rich with no trouble; perhaps they had some beautiful or magnificent ambitions only to be achieved with money. But at least Emperor Valens took no care to see whether his governors were just or unjust. And so it came that, though there was plenty of good food in the markets all round, stored grain, and meat, fresh or salt, yet there was none for the Goths—unless they chose to pay.

Gudamir sold his things, one by one, for food; the slaves went first of course, then all the furnishings of the wagons, down to his wife's loom. It was the same all over the camp. But still they must eat. One evening Gudamir came back to the wagon after he had sold the jewels out of his sword-hilt—very grim he looked. His wife cut up the sour bread into pieces for all of them, and after that she and her husband talked together a long time. The little girl, Thiudis, snuggled down under a blanket and fell asleep; it was dark outside and there would be nothing more to eat till the next day. She woke up suddenly and began to cry: it wasn't light yet. Her father had pulled the blanket off, she tried to tug it back; but they were talking to her — as if sh<sup>^</sup>d been

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as old as her big sister; she rubbed her eyes and sat up and listened. After a time she began to understand: she was the youngest girl and not betrothed yet: it was better to live in slavery than die free: it had happened among their friends already. She stared from one to the other, too dazed at first to cry or question, in the strange midnight with her sisters and the baby fast asleep, not knowing. Her mother picked her up, all soft, and rocked her in her arms and kissed her all over; and then Gudamir suddenly stood up and took oath on his sword to revenge her on the Romans. But the next morning her hair was combed and her face washed, and her father took her out, whispering her to smile, and rubbing her cheeks to get a colour into them. She held on to him at the last, they could hardly pull her away; but she was sold, and the others had food.

They treated her well enough, but for a long time she was miserable, till she began to forget and look about her. She was taken to Byzant, and there bought by Probinus, who was on an official visit, as a pretty plaything for his first wife. That same month Frigidern broke the camp and got his Goths out at last, and there was war, and they paid back on the Romans all they'd been given; but Probinus had sailed for Italy, and the child with him. One day she heard, just by accident, from a travelling pedlar who sold ribbons to the maids, that all the Goth hostages in Asia had been murdered, led together into the towns with fair words and fine promises and then shot from the house-tops: her brother

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was one of them, and she remembered it all her life.

She grew up fair and rosy, her hands soft with nothing more than needlework and garland stringing; she'd gentle manners and a merry voice, and her mistress liked to have her about all the time. Then Probinus began to notice her and give her things; he went on quickly from that. She was too young to want him or any man, but he made her, and the others all told her how lucky she was; she'd got to be willing; he had her whenever he chose, drunk or sober. By and by his wife — her mistress — found out, and that wasn't pleasant for her. Then he got her with child; she tried to stop it, but nothing she took did any good, and she was frightened. But she hated him with all her heart by that time and wanted to hurt him if she could, so she told him it wasn't his, said she'd been going with one of the Goth slaves all the time; and he believed her. It was a boy baby; she called him Fravitta, the Avenger, hoping he would be. After that Probinus wouldn't take her back — he thought it was a punishment — and she was made to work in the kitchen. When he married again he sent her off out of sight to his new wife's mother in Rome, wanting to see the last of her and the child.

At the last moment, feeling a little guilty, he freed her; but not Fravitta. The boy grew up in Rome, but his mother taught him he was all Goth. She listened to the news, and thought Alaric the Bait well named to be the All-King when his time came:

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Fridigern had been almost into Byzant - why not another Goth into Rome? And when Gersemi came into the household she asked questions, and knew all about her before anyone else.

One day Fravitta was out in the yard, and Gersemi watching him from her window: the boy was at his old feud with the groom, playing tricks on him, and this time the man was really angry and threatened to tell, Gersemi leaned out, much amused, when suddenly a woman ran out of a doorway below, pulled the boy away by the scruff of his neck, stood him up in front of her, scolded him solidly for five minutes, then knocked him over with the back of her hand. Gersemi looked hard at the tall, fair woman, then called softly in Gothic:

"Who are you?"

The woman looked up.

"I'm Thiudis. I'm Goth. I know who you are."

"Come up," called Gersemi. The woman hesitated, then nodded and roughly bade the boy go in and not-be a fool.

A moment afterwards she stood in the door of Gersemi's room; her dress was patched and short, but she had silver buckles to her sandals and silver bracelets on her right arm; her hair was grey-streaked at the temples and plaited with red ribbon down her back. She sat down on the chest at the foot of the bed and looked round her.

"You're near your time," she said, "are you frightened?"

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"Yes," said Gersemi, "I hate that man - the doctor,"

The woman laughed. "You're not the only one. I'll come if you like. Oh, I've had dozens of babies through my hands, and all thriving now if some of their mothers hadn't been fools. And I'm always glad to do what I can for a Goth."

"I'm not a Goth," said Gersemi, "but—" And she burst into tears.

"You shouldn't do that," said Thiudis, "it's only a waste of breath. What's been is gone and won't come again."

But weak as she was Gersemi cried and cried, thinking of that night in the orchard. When she stopped, tired and ashamed, Thiudis had her back turned and was looking through the pile of swaddling clothes.

"You haven't enough," she said.

"Haven't I? They do cost so much."

"I'll see what I've got. But they ought to give you the things: if it is his child. Is it? I can keep secrets. Oh, well, it would have been worse if he hadn't got killed."

Gersemi jumped up, speechless with anger,

Thiudis shrugged her shoulders.

"I know what you think, but I tell you they're all alike, these Romans! He'd never have married you. I know: my boy — There, don't get angry with me; I'm as well born as you, though I mayn't look it." Gersemi subsided with, "Don't say that, then! But are you well-born? What are you doing here?"



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"I'm kin to Fridigern, if that tells you anything: he that fought old Emperor Valens and killed him like a dog, too, for not keeping oaths. And there's many in one place that should be in another. I might ask you why you're here, for that matter/"

"I was free to come or not come, which ever I'd chosen. And I can go when I choose, too!"

"Rome's a trap and we're rats; and the bars of the trap can only be broken from outside. I'm free if it comes to that, but I don't deny I've been a slave: it wasn't my fault or my people's. That boy of mine — what do you make of him?"

"He's brave. What did you scold him so for?"

"It's the one thing I'm afraid of: if he makes a fool of himself and they tell, he may get sold; you see, he's not free. But it's not likely. I don't think he looks much of a Roman, do you? I've tried all I can to get it out of him, with a rope-end often. Well, the time's coming."

"I don't understand. Who's his father?"

"Come over to my room and I'll tell you the whole thing: you might talk to the boy some day."

Just then Gersemi was sent for — Innocentia wanted her — so she couldn't go at once, but promised the next day. That night she had a sudden idea, and before she went over to Thiudis, took out her sword, cleaned it, and brought it with her to show Fravitta. He wasn't there, but his mother called him, and asked Gersemi if she would teach him sword-fighting later on. She promised she would, and Fravitta

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sat in a corner, playing with the naked blade, while the two women talked low, warming their hands over the fire.

"How was it?" asked Gersemi at last.

"I'll tell you," said Thiudis. "Off with you, Fravitta, it's time you went to the stables." And the boy went out, with a last look at Gersemi's sword.

It was a long story as Thiudis told it: time and again she harked back to old days, things half-remembered and treasured up, and all the hearsay of twenty years about Fridigern and his victories, and how the Goths were a great people again; she wondered aloud what had happened to the baby brother and whether he was a great fighter now; she had not quite forgotten the names of the men her sisters were betrothed to, and she knew by heart part of a few songs about Goth heroes. Gersemi listened and nodded, not quite realizing where Mcesia and the great river were, still less that she had crossed it herself coming into Vindobona. At any rate, here was a friend, who talked about real things like battles and money and father and mother, and hadn't once said a word about a single saint or martyr! She liked the room too, the little glowing fire in its iron basket, the bright-coloured pieces of stuff nailed thick on the walls, the lamp shaped like a shoe with bits of coral dangling from it, the painted bed, the hides on the floor, and the slope of the roof shutting it all comfortably in; it was making her feel at home.

Just then Fravitta came back, smiling and proud of himself. "*She* sent me on a message just now - a

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very long message — and when I came back she said I was a clever boy!"

"Who's *she*?" asked his mother suspiciously. "The old mistress?"

"No!" The boy giggled.

"Oh, Innocentia!" said Gersemi, glancing at Thiudis, who looked angry. "Would you like to see my sword again?"

The last month passed slowly and heavily; before the end of it Innocentia went back to her husband at Verona; she gave Gersemi a little purse of money before she left, and kissed her quite nicely, and bade her be sure to say her prayers three times a day. Gersemi remembered how this time last year they were riding over the hills and it was she who'd given orders, and Innocentia had taken them: all the things she'd been hoping then! She didn't look forward much now. There was no one but Thiudis she cared to talk to, and she heard a great deal about Fravitta's childhood; sometimes she brought him cakes, and she let him wear her sword and dagger for a whole evening, and in return he made her a wooden box with a lid that fitted, and promised he'd look after the baby when it came.

It was late in the evening when her pains began and she sent over for Thiudis; they went on all night. She tried to think she was a soldier of Alaric's, wounded in a great victory, but that didn't last long. She tried hard not to cry out under it, and lay dumb and huddled, pulling at the rope Thiudis had tied to her bed-foot, while the sweat started out on her

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forehead. Between times she would open her eyes and see the swaddling clothes hung up in front of the fire, and basins of water and old linen on the chest, and Thiudis sitting beside her, sewing something. "Is it nearly over?" she'd ask, but Thiudis always shook her head. "Not yet. But it's all going well. Be brave, Gersemi." Then the next pain would begin and Gersemi would have to be brave. Once she had a glimpse of Thiudis at the door, arguing fiercely with some one, and then for a moment the doctor's head looking round at her, but there was a scuffle and an oath and the door slammed on him. Towards midnight the pains grew worse, and for all she could do she had to groan at them through clenched teeth. She grew frightened. "Tell me, is anything wrong?" But it was all as it should be. "You've got to be worse before you're better," said Thiudis, and gave her a drink.

The old mistress came in and prayed beside her pillow, and watched her pitifully, then whispered with Thiudis and went out again. The pains got amazingly worse, as if she were being cut in two: she heard her own moans rising to screams; when they slackened for a few minutes she fell into exhausted sleep, and every time she woke it was harder to bear. Thiudis had pulled the blankets half-off: she was cold — no, hot — no, cold, she couldn't think, she wasn't a mind at all, she was all pain! "Won't it ever be done?" she asked piteously, and this time the answer was "Very soon." She saw Thiudis moving things about, washing her hands; the steam

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from the boiling water clouded the door and the fire and the end of the room, Thiudis was bending over her; she felt the wave of pain growing, growing, breaking on her: she clutched at the rope and screamed with all her might. Before the echoes of her scream had died out of the corners of the room she heard a small, new, sharp cry, and knew it was all over.

"Oh, which is it?" She could not even lift her head to look.

"A boy," Thiudis jerked back over her shoulder; then, "A beauty, too. Here you are."

Gersemi moved an arm to make room for him, and looked and looked: this queer, pink, blood-stained thing ... it moved its hand and her heart moved with it. She bent her head over and touched its forehead: soft, soft, softer than ripe peaches, soft and warm. Suddenly it opened its eyes and stared straight in front of it: her son, her blue-eyed son, he'd come real at last!

"He's got to be washed," said Thiudis. "Then you can have him back."

How marvellously quiet and calm everything was. The grandmother came in a second time and exclaimed and rustled about and kissed Gersemi. She had the baby back again; he lay in the curve of her arm, wrapped in white linen; his hair stood out all round his head, faintly gold; sometimes he moved a little.

"Thiudis looked down at them.

Do you like him, Gersemi?"

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"Yes."

"More than I did with Fravitta-at first. And you've not had such a bad time, either/<sup>1</sup>

"Haven't I?"

Thiudis laughed.

"Morning!" — she lifted the curtains for a moment—

"Now you must sleep."

The next day her breasts began to ache. "That's the milk coming," Thiudis told her, and held the baby up to suck. His lips were funny and soft; he knew already she was his mother. She slept a great deal, or half-slept; it was over; now she could look forward again. The sun was shining outside: she could raise herself in bed; everything was going to come right. But she needn't make plans, not yet: not yet while little Samund was lying at her breast, sucking and blinking and moving about inside his swaddling clothes.

She got well very quickly: soon she could get up and watch him being bathed and dressed: then came the day she had to do it for herself. She was terrified of dropping him! Fravitta came in with his mother, very timidly, and stroked the baby's head and held him in his arms for a moment. "He's very little," said Fravitta, and was told that, on the contrary, he was very big. One day the grandmother took him away to be christened: he came back cold and crying and Gersemi was angry. She never called him John if she could help it, always Samund at first; but then it seemed as if he ought to have a Goth name too:

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she bent over him as he lay in the cradle with his great calm eyes wide open. "Sunjarith he's to be." she said, "the Word of Truth"; and more and more Sunjarith came to be his name.

## PART SIX

Tells how:

In Rome-burg  
The years pass:  
The root strikes,  
The stem buds.  
The bud blossoms  
And the babe grows!

Gersemi nursed the boy for ten months; during the hottest of summer, when the famine was worst in Rome, the grandmother took them out of the city to her villa in the hills. That was good for the baby, and Gersemi began to ride again. But she wasn't lucky now: she knew it; when her horse broke his leg in a cleft and had to be killed she felt she'd been expecting it all the time. It was the same with everything: if she'd a new cloak it would tear the first day she had it on; if she sowed seed it never came up; even if she milked a goat it would sicken from that hour. She broke things and lost things and tangled things. At last she tied the two things she was most afraid of losing round the baby's neck, and there they hung, one Goth ring and one Roman ring. For Sunjarith was lucky: nobody'd lost his bear-skin <sup>1</sup> He was strong and fat and rosy, and cut his teeth before anyone saw he was fretting. The grandmother used to have him brought to her every morning: she blessed him and gave him honey in a spoon and he waved his fists and gurgled at her, "Dear little John I" she'd think, "If only your mother



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was different!" and she'd wish he had black hair instead of gold.

When he began to walk, Gersemi took him out into the court-yard, and there he made friends with the hens and the pigs and the pigeons and the horses, and then with the grooms and the woodcutters and the blacksmith; he used to pick up handfuls of grain and shavings and bent nails and give them to anyone he saw. This way Gersemi got to know some of the other women, but she was partly shy and partly proud, and never really cared for anyone but Thiudis. She was still looking forward to the time she could go off again and win money and fame and friends, but it seemed terribly difficult with the child: let alone that her luck was gone and she might be killed in her first fight. So she waited and waited and the boy grew.

The winter before he was three, Fravitta announced that it was time he learned to ride, and took him off; he couldn't stick on by himself for a long time yet, but it taught him not to be afraid. Fravitta could drive a chariot and pair now, and was quite a good horse doctor; whenever Innocentia came to stay in Rome he used to drive for her two or three times, and then he'd be full of it for a month afterwards. She was there all that summer, for a very good reason: Alaric and the Goths were into Northern Italy, so the Province was anything but safe.

Every week the news was worse; churches and temples were crammed; everywhere was talk of omens and portents, and once or twice Rome was

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swept by a horrible panic, when people got crushed to death in the streets, and the old Gods licked their lips and had sacrifice again. Several good families embarked for Byzant or Alexandria, and their houses stood empty; Innocentia half-thought of going herself, but could not make up her mind to it. But Gersemi and Thiudis looked at one another, thinking "Now?" or else "But the children? If only Fravitta was two years older — If only Sunjarith was twelve years older — " and secretly in her room Gersemi polished her sword and put on her old mail shirt again. Fravitta had a sword of his own; he had forged it for himself, and the little old smith, who was a Phrygian and loved double dealing, chuckled into his beard and helped the boy; it was a good sword, a little heavy for him, but that would cure itself. Gersemi taught him how to use it and made him practise with her up in Thiudis' room till he was quick and skilful. She showed him how to handle a dagger then, to stab up, not down, and to go for the places he could reach; last, she taught him to shoot with the bow, but he was never good at it because there was nowhere to practise. Thiudis looked on and clapped her hands, and thought that boy of hers was all Goth after all. But that year Alaric got nowhere near Rome.

Sunjarith was a little villain; he never did what his mother told him if he could possibly do something else. He played with Ullac the Hun, who was dirty and ugly and had a hideous old Hun mother; whenever Gersemi wanted him to behave prettily and be

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nice to his grandmother, he ran away and hid, or else howled. However, he was rather afraid of Thiudis and used to be good for several hours after a smacking from her; he adored Fravitta and always wanted to do the same things, but of course Fravitta, from the heights of fifteen or so, was inclined to look down on him. As he grew older his grandmother wanted him to be with her more and more; she was getting very weak, but she liked to see him about in the room, and she liked him to be always quiet and clean and tidy, and as Roman looking as was possible for such a fair, red-cheeked, little barbarian. When he was five she started having him taught reading, writing and psalm-singing by an old priest; at first he hated it and always tried to escape, but by and by he found he knew more than his mother, which was amusing; but he liked best being out of doors and running all about the yard after Fravitta.

On Good Friday of that year Stilicho beat Alaric, and later made a treaty with him; so Gersemi put away her sword. But yet she and Thiudis looked still to the north; she hardly knew what she hoped herself, she would not have chosen the utter destruction of Rome, she would have fought to save the house where Flavius was born; only she felt that between Roman and Goth she would always turn Goth in the end, and she was sure where Fravitta's duty lay. Besides, she did want something to happen! There was so little to do; sometimes she would sit on her bed for hours, her hands clasped in her lap, looking at nothing with dilated pupils; perhaps

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her lips would move, and her fingers, but she said no word and at the end she might start up and beat her head against the bed-foot or she might run her dagger up and down the cracks in the wall, or else she might go to the window and stand there, looking out at the children and the horses and all the hurry and racket below her. From time to time she would pray hard every day for a week, but that was no use either and Thiudis laughed at it. Long, long years they were, and she grew older and nothing was done.

News came in winter that Probinus was dead; he had been hard worked as Governor of an invaded Province, and got little thanks from the Vandal; in the end he caught a cold, neglected it, and died. Thiudis made a rag doll and put it into a basket, like him in his coffin; then at night with Curtains drawn she lighted candles and danced round it and sang; she put powder into the candles that made them flare green, and she cut her arms and let them bleed over the doll. She shut out Gersemi and Fravitta until the end of her dance, when the floor was slippery with candle grease and blood, and she stood grey-faced by the fire where the doll was a heap of ashes. But Innocentia came back in deep mourning and all her friends came to visit her; she had an official letter of condolence from the Emperor's secretary and another from the monastery at Aquileia. Probinus had left her very rich, but she still stayed in her mother's house, which was more than big enough; she hated being alone except for her prayers, and then there were the angels.

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As Sunjarith grew older, he also grew a little less naughty, and when he'd been unusually wicked, at least he'd throw his arms round his mother's neck and say he was sorry as if he meant it; and sometimes instead of running off after Fravitta he'd come and sit with her and tell her all about his lessons and show her the letters on his slate. Then she'd tell him stories of the northern Gods, the wanderings of Thor and Loki and the children, the apples of Idun, the giants and the dwarfs, and about his grandfather Samund Big-mouth and how at the Ford the quarrels would begin with the snow melting and flare up through hay-tide and corn-tide to bitter blows and the laying down of lives, and new blood feuds would begin. But she bade the boy be sure to say none of all this to his grandmother or his teachers. They went together to watch the walls of Rome being rebuilt.

"Why?" asked the boy.

"You'll know some day/" said his mother.

"When?"

"When you're old enough to keep secrets." And she and Thiudis taught him to speak Gothic as well as Latin.

In the Year of the City 1 157, Stilicho and Honorius held a Triumph over the Goths. They marched through Rome with the trumpets and lictors and the dancing white horses; behind them the Goth prisoners dragged their chains as countless captives had done in ancient Triumphs. The Emperor and his General stood side by side in a golden chariot;

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Honorius, the tall handsome boy, with glowing cheeks faintly downed by the young beard, and the great collar of square-cut emeralds, more wonderful but not more gazed on than the Imperial diadem on his bright brows; and Stilicho, his father-in-law, upright and topping him by inches, with armour and cloak and the Roman sword at his side, but most of all worthy of praise for his calm and noble head, broad forehead and serene grey eyes, while the laurel wreath scarcely hid his hair, too early white with constant care and labour for Rome. And, as the chariot passed, on each side cheered and clamoured the old Roman crowd, the faces all turned one way, the tossing arms and the flung garlands. So all was rejoicing, and they went the ancient way of the returning victor through the city.

Most of the household were looking on; Innocentia and her friends flung roses from a balcony and were rewarded with a smile from the Emperor; the slaves yelled and jostled in the crowd below; but Thiudis, Gersemi and the two boys watched together from a high window. Fravitta was eighteen and still growing, though already he was taller than the two tall women; his mother thought he looked as much a Goth now as any of the prisoners, and yet there was another strain in him that had fined down hands and feet, and crisped the curls of his hair, and perhaps too had clouded with trouble his blue northern eyes; he was very silent, and seemed not much interested in the passing and passing of the procession in the street. But Sunjarith was

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wildly excited, dancing about and almost sobbing with anxiety while they waited for it to come; he was seven and all the world was fresh and fascinating. While the soldiers and banners went by he did most of the talking; Gersemi leant far over, wishing she could see their equipment in detail — there were one or two things she'd like to make sure of; Thiudis stood beside her, mouth shut and cheeks hot with hate of them; and Fravitta frowned to himself and fidgeted and could not tell whether he hated or no.

With the legionaries marched others, the barbarian auxiliaries under their own leaders. "That's where I might have been," thought Gersemi, but the other woman only thought "Traitors!" Soon the golden chariot came in sight.

"Which is the Emperor? Which is the Emperor?" clamoured Sunjarith.

"The one on this side, with all the jewels," said his mother, holding him steady on the window-sill; "but the other's Stilicho!"

The Emperor flung up his smile toward their house and the scarlet-draped balcony below them where their mistress was scattering yet another armful of white roses.

Fravitta drew his breath in sharply.

"Oh, all the devils in Hell!" He ran his knuckles into his eyes and kicked at the floor.

The little boy gave a deep sigh and leant back against his mother.

"I've seen the Emperor!" He looked round. "Is there anything eke to see?"

## *When the 'Bough Breads*

"Yes," said Thiudis, "Look!" and she pulled at her own son's tunic. "Fravitta, there are your countrymen!"

Fravitta looked out unwillingly: Innocentia was chatting to a friend, while fans waved about them; the balcony was still strewn with rose petals. Farther down, in the road, the Goth prisoners trailed by, in chains and rags, huddling together like driven cattle. His countrymen? No more than her on the balcony—her among the roses—his stepmother! Why should he feel himself more kin to these miserable barbarians than to all the beauty—all the grace—oh, he couldn't bear those two women leaning out one at each side of him! What did they want? Why did they choose it? And why, in God's name, did they make him choose it?

Sunjarith took his hand. "What a long time it's going on! I liked the Emperor best, didn't you, Fravitta?" There was a wagon-load of captured arms going by underneath. Gersemi half-turned. "Look, Fravitta, that's the long sword, that's what you ought to have!"

"And shall have!" said Thiudis.

He shook himself loose.

"I must go! I'm driving her to the Games."

"Not yet, surely!"

"I've got to get ready!"

He ran downstairs, muttering to himself; away from the street the house was deserted and quiet; he could only just hear the noise beating inwards in faint waves. In an empty passage, crouching against



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a door-post, he saw a boy crying, who looked up and then sunk back lower as he heard steps. Fravitta saw that it was Ullac the Hun, with fresh bruises on his head and arms.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Ullac muttered something and began crying again; he was very thin, so when he cried he shook all over and his feet curled up miserably.

Fravitta stopped; there was no possible hurry about the chariot and he might as well see what was the matter,

"Help me," said the little Hun, clutching at his knee with a dirty hand.

"Who's been hurting you?"

"Every one. Fravitta, do stay! I can't bear it, it's since mother's dead, there's nobody I can go to! Sunjarith's mother won't let him speak to me now, even, and he's littler than me. And — and — " He choked and snuffled; Fravitta waited, thinking about his own troubles. Ullac began again: "I can't help it if I'm dirty and ugly and all! I can't help it if I'm not strong enough! Oh, I hate them all!"

"Well, I can't do anything about it, can I?"

"No, you're just as bad, you Goth! You say I'm a louse and a bitch and whipping's too good for me! I'll show you, I'll smash you!"

Suddenly the boy was on his feet, clawing and biting like a wild beast.

Thoroughly woke up, Fravitta caught the Hun's two hands in one of his and hit him hard on the ear with the other, so that he dropped in a lump.

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He lay crumpled up and yellow-faced, with just the whites of his eyes showing; a trickle of blood came dribbling out of one nostril. Fravitta knelt beside him, frightened and feeling for his heart: at any rate the boy was alive still; but he'd hit harder than he meant! He looked up and down the passage: it was time to get the horses out; the boy was right enough — it would teach him not to do that again! He went off down to the yard, looking at the mark on his arm where the Hun had bitten him.

Later he put on a fine silk tunic and a belt of cunningly plaited leather; then drove her to the Games, where she sat among the Court ladies and enjoyed a little gossip. On the way she had noticed his arm and tapped it with her fan.

"What's that? It looks like a bite."

"One of the young hounds, my lady."

"Well, you mustn't let them!"

But he wished he hadn't hit Ullac quite so hard.

She talked about the show on her way back: the races, the gladiators: "Those dreadful Goths! Horrible creatures, you can imagine I didn't look at them!" (Why did he suddenly feel indignant when she said that? Why shouldn't the prisoners be made to kill each other, after all?) And then the sudden apparition of the monk who had thrust himself between the swords, trying to stop them, and died a martyr's death! "And the end of it all is," said Innocentia, "that there are to be no more gladiators

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and the theatre is to be purified!" She leant back against the cushions, while her maid fastened the shawl lightly about her throat, and looked at her team of creamy Arabs, wondering seriously whether it was right to go on keeping them; but Probinus during his last illness had asked her to — he was very proud of his horses. "I like to think of you driving about Rome," he had said. "Don't go into a convent, Innocentia!" No, she felt no call to the convent life now. She looked from the horses to their driver; he must be six years younger than she was: just the age she liked most . . . the sky was shadowing over for evening, a deep, luminous blue ... if one could get that colour in silk — how it showed up the boy's brown curls! What was he frowning at? It was a troubled age.

"Fravittal"

"Yes, mistress?"

"Are you in love?"

"No, mistress!"

But why did he blush like that?

Fravitta thought the team were going badly the next day; unaccountably they got stones in their shoes, and the off leader kicked his neighbour on the hock and cut him. The day after one of the wheelers had colic. But what really frightened him was the way their manes tangled: plain witchcraft! That night he climbed up on to one of the stable beams and lay along it, watching. It was dark and chill; the horses had mostly settled down for the night; suddenly the shutter creaked - again! Some-

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thing was coming in by the window. It had a tiny lamp in its hand; it stooped and picked up straws from the ground, knotting them and splitting them; then it began going the length of the stalls, muttering at each and laying the straws on the ground. When it was at the far end Fravitta climbed down from the beam and crept after it; it struggled and squealed as it felt his hands on its neck, but he had it tight, then picked up the lamp to see: it was Ullac the Hun.

Fravitta put the boy into the corn-bin with a weight on the lid, till he got what he wanted; he was angrier for this magic against his horses than he would have been for one against himself. He pulled Ullac out of the bin and tied his thumbs together with a thin whip-lash; then he fastened the other end of the cord to a beam and left him to hang, while he went along the stable, kicking away the charms and spitting to right and left as he did so. The boy began screeching like a hunted hare.

"Stop that," said Fravitta, "or I'll set you swinging I" Then he took the lamp and went out.

Sunjarith woke early the next morning, ran over to the window, and pushed back the shutters; it was cool and light outside and no one about; he listened, thinking he heard something; his mother was still asleep. He dressed and ran down into the empty yard; it was almost cold; he jumped about and began turning cart-wheels, but he couldn't do more than two at a time. He wished some one would come out! Even the pigs were asleep! Perhaps the horses

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were beginning to wake up. He scrambled up by way of the water-butt and wriggled in at the stable window; one of the horses got on to its legs with a great clatter, and — what was wrong? He called and some one cried his name out of the dusk.

It was none too easy to climb up and cut the cord, but he did it; Ullac fell on to the straw, and then the tie round his swollen, purple thumbs had to be cut too; he was still moaning and couldn't answer questions. Sunjarith gave him a drink of the horses' water, and he looked angry.

"Who did it? Ullac, who did it? Tell me and I'll hurt him back!"

"Fravitta."

"Then he's a beast!"

They climbed out of the window again without being seen, and Ullac ran away to hide and cry and sleep and nurse his hands in a nest he had among the stacked fodder.

Fravitta went early to the stables too; he brought a small coin with him, because he was beginning to feel guilty: the boy must have had enough and maybe too much. When he found he was gone he scratched his head. "Witchery!" he said, and looked about to see that there were no more charms. In the evening he harnessed the team up again and drove round to take his mistress out; as he was turning through the gate at a sharp trot the chariot suddenly tilted. He grabbed at the reins, but his head struck the gate-post, and the next thing he knew he was in bed and being very sick.

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In the morning he was better and fully able to be cross with his mother who was bandaging his cut head.

"What happened?" he asked.

"The pin was out of the wheel/' she answered. "I can't find out who did it."

Gersemi came in later with Sunjarith, and while she and Thiudis went out to get some fresh water, Sunjarith stood with his hands behind his back, and looked down at Fravitta who was grumbling to himself.

"I wish I knew who'd done it!"

"I did it," said Sunjarith.

Fravitta was too surprised to say much:

"You little devil! Why?"

"Because I found Ullac hanging in the stable. Because you're a beast!"

"You just wait till I'm up!" said Fravitta; but he said nothing to his mother.

Innocentia came to see him and bring him some fruit; she stroked his forehead with her little, cool hand and thought how soft it was; she talked to him for a few minutes, told Thiudis she was treating him quite wrongly, left him a flower out of her dress, and so went. She told her mother about her visit to the young slave. "Really, it's quite touching, he's so devoted, I couldn't help noticing the way his eyes followed me about the room! And when he thanked me for my rose — almost pathetic! Such an intelligent boy too." Her mother didn't pay much attention; she was going to retire to the convent on

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the Aventine soon, and end her life in prayers and peace among the green walks of Marcella's garden. Even the grandson interested her less and less; she would leave him a sum of money—"Sufficient for your wants, my dear child,"—and her blessing. Soon they would all be meeting in Heaven.

Early the next year Radagaisus, the Spear Counsellor, came marching down on Italy. Some of his folk were Goth, but most were heathen Germans, Scythians, or Huns: surely these were not the destined breakers of the bough! Stilicho set out to drive him back, as he had driven his betters, and even Thiudis wished good luck to the great Vandal that time! Again there was terror in Rome, again a stirring up of the old faith and a fresh vigour in the new, again the priests of any God had gold in their hands and power on their lips. But once more Stilicho saved Rome: Radagaisus was defeated and captured, and his army was surrounded on a barren hill and starved into surrender.

Most of this army was sold on the spot to whoever chose to buy such lean cattle, and half of them died at once; some straggled down to Rome at the tail of a slave-gang, and one was bought by Innocentia's head cook for dirty work in the kitchen and fed on scraps the others left. One day Sunjarith, climbing adventurously over the log-heap, saw him on the ground among the cabbage stalks and called to his mother:

"There's a man here. I think he's dead!"

Gersemi came round and looked at him too.

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"He isn't dead, but he will be soon if he's not dealt with." She pulled him up; he was curiously light.

"Til take him along to our room and feed him."

"I'll help!" said Sunjarith, and tried to lift him.

They got him along, half-walking and half-carried, and she put him down on the floor and brought food and hot milk. He said very little, but watched them both. Sunjarith began asking him questions; he answered in a low, tired voice:

"I'm Hildiok. I belong in the kitchen, I must go back soon. Yes, I've been a soldier. Yes, I've been wounded. Oh, you can see the marks!"

He let Sunjarith feel the scars on his arms and legs.

By and by Gersemi said, "Now, Hildiok, if you ever want a good meal you can come here. Tell them in the kitchen that Gersemi took you away."

He thanked her and went back to his work; and somehow he managed to pull through and get strong again. More than once he came to Gersemi to be fed, and as he seemed a decent, quiet sort of man she let him come and sit with them in the evenings, a little into the corner perhaps, but yet one of them.

One evening they were all together up in her room: she and Thiudis were roasting juicy little pieces of veal on skewers over the fire; Fravitta had a lapful of silver buckles and harness plates to polish, and Sunjarith was helping him. They sat on the bed, and Hildiok on the chest at the foot: he was supposed to



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be helping Fravitta too, but actually he'd fallen asleep, dead tired, in the corner between the bed and the wall.

"You are taking years, mother!" said Sunjarith, reproachfully.

Gersemi looked round, red-faced from stooping over the fire.

"You get those buckles done, kidling, then you can talk. Did you remember to tell Innocentia I'd taken that embroidery round to the convent?"

"Yes, I did, and she gave me those flowers,"

"What flowers? Where are they?"

"I let Fravitta have them. Don't kick me, Fravitta! Did you want them, mother?"

"Not a bit. Get the bread, Sunjarith."

"I can't reach" — he leaned over and pulled Hildiok's hair — "wake up and get the bread down!"

Hildiok jumped up, knocking over the jar of polish and getting cursed by Fravitta.

"Beans and garlic!" chanted Sunjarith, "*I am hungry!*"

"What are you keeping back that bread for?" said Gersemi.

Sunjarith fidgeted. "Nothing."

"What?"

"Well, it's for Ullac; and I will!"

Gersemi shrugged her shoulders and started talking to Thiudis about charms for a wart she had on her hand. They finished their supper, and Sunjarith stood at the window, throwing out the crumbs and calling the hens by their names; he used to get very

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cross with them because the right one never came. Fravitta finished the buckles and sat with his head in his hands, looking at the floor. Gersemi picked up her dagger and began playing with it as she talked; Hildiok stretched out a hand from his corner. "Can I see?" She gave it him and he stroked it with the tip of his finger. "It's a fine blade."

"I got it off a Greek in Sparta; he had some good rings too, but my friend who was with me took them."

"I'd like to have been with Alaric's folk; we'd have had better luck, maybe, if he'd tried what we did."<sup>1</sup>

"They say he's all for peace now."

Thiudis broke in: "They say lies, Gersemi! So long as there's one who remembers! He's king of the people, chosen by the people, and he cannot look for peace till the people will it!"

Sunjarith came back from the window: "Yesterday 'Old Cabbage' "- that was his tutor-"told me there was another war in Gaul."

"There's always war for the stout-hearted, somewhere!" said Thiudis. "War and revenge!" She looked at Fravitta, but he did not move.

Sunjarith went on: "Old Cabbage says to turn the other cheek; I believe he would, too. And then God does the revenging; but I don't think that's fair; and then supposing He didn't. Hildiok, did you have a dagger like this when you were a soldier?" "Yes," said Hildiok, and sighed. "Not so good as this, though. Here it is, Gersemi; and my thanks,

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I've got to go back. Shall I come again soon?"  
"Surely, When you want. Good night, Hildiok."

He went out, and a few minutes afterwards Thiu-dis. Sunjarith yawned and said he was going to say good night to the pigs and then come to bed; Gersemi put the remains of the food away, "Poor Hildiok/<sup>1</sup> she said, half to herself, "he did like my dagger!"

Fravitta was still sitting on the bed, looking very gloomy and very young.

"Why do you have him, Gersemi?" he asked.

"Why not? He's a northerner of a sort, and I don't know any harm of him. Besides, if he ever wanted to go — I could help him."

"Why should he want to go?"

"Some people do. They say Alaric's got thousands of runaways already, and they make good soldiers."

Suddenly Fravitta jumped to his feet, throwing his arms out.

"Do you suppose I don't know what you and mother think of me? God help me, isn't it hard enough without you two women glaring at me night and day! I tell you, I'm not a Goth!"

Gersemi was standing on a high stool to put the loaf away; she dumped it heavily and turned round, her hands on her hips, looking down at him.

"No, Fravitta," she said, "you aren't a Goth: you're a Roman slave!"

Fravitta gasped, with teeth showing, ready to kill her, then all at once fell back on the bed, his knuckles white as he gripped the blanket.

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"I know, I know, I know! Why don't you stop me loving her? God, I wish I was dead, and it all settled and easy!"

"She's six years older than you."

"She's six times lovelier than all the stars! She's — she's all the beauty in life; she's all that makes being her slave better than being a free Goth! You don't understand, you don't know what love is!"

"That's as may be. But I know Innocentia better than you do."

"If I was sure there was no hope—! But stranger things have been."

"Than a rich widow taking a slave lover? Yes!"

"Oh, can't you see that this is different? And I tell you, Gersemi, sometimes she makes me hope, sometimes she looks at me, says a word that might mean — oh, anything! She's let me help her from her chariot, I've held her hand, she's given me things . . ."

"Not your freedom."

"I want to be hers."

"Well, have you spoken to her ever?"

"I daren't. The risk — no, I daren't, not yet. But some day — oh, I may be a fool, but still, I think I've a chance if only I'm patient!" He sat up, smiling a little and running the buckle straps through his fingers. Sunjarith came back and he got up. "Well, it's in God's hand. Don't tell my mother all this, Gersemi."

"I expect she knows."

"Very likely. But all the same, don't. Good night."

He went out, and Gersemi put Sunjarith to bed;

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then she pulled the shutters to, unpinned her dress, and began combing her hair out; then she plaited it up and unbuckled her shoes. The boy was half-asleep already, with his bare arms crossed under his head. Somebody was singing outside in the yard, a love-song.

"Little brute !" thought Gersemi, and knelt down to say her prayers. "She always was like that. But I wonder when *he's* going to find out!"

## PART SEVEN

Tells how:

Gold and silver,  
Forged in fire,  
Dwarf or man-wrought,  
Is made for markets,  
Made to hurry  
From hand to hand.  
Long has rested  
The silver ring:  
Now it passes . . .

No more was heard of Alaric and the Goths for one year, no more for two; in Rome men were breathing easily, though it was bad in Gaul and far corners of the Empire which crumbled, crumbled, under repeated small invasions of barbarians. Then, early in the third year, once more the talk was all of Alaric in streets and markets of the Italian cities; there were strange dealings between him and Stilicho, and it began to be whispered that Stilicho was playing a double game, that it was said at the Court — that some one had heard from his cousin — at last that Stilicho was a Vandal and they were Romans: let him look to it! All of a sudden Alaric was over the passes and into Venetia, and demanding pay as an ally of Rome! The senate met to consider it: everything was in confusion, Arcadius was dead in Byzant, Honorius, safe in Ravenna, cared for nothing, Stilicho supported Alaric's claim: what could the senators say? They voted him four thousand

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pounds of gold, with thanks for his services: only one vote was cast against it. But there were no more cheers in the street for Stilicho,

In a cool, eastward-looking room, Innocentia lay alone on a couch spread with fresh green muslin, considering matters. The curtains were looped back, so that she could see the flower-filled loggia and beyond through the artfully tangled vine-tendrils a glimpse of the deep blue, glowing sky. That charming young deacon had just left her — now, what scent was it he used? So nice and sensible to make one feel the Church stood for civilization! Marcella, of course, disapproved of him, but then she was getting old and didn't realize how different things count with different people. Such a long discussion they'd had: politics to begin with! He had said some very daring things about Stilicho: could it be true that he was plotting to raise his dreadful son, whom every one knew was a pagan at heart, to the Imperial throne? Then they'd been discussing Augustine's apology to Jerome. "I've always admired Jerome ever since I was a child," said Innocentia; "but Augustine must be rather wonderful!" And after that they'd had a little talk about second marriages, that had confirmed all her old ideas: no, she would never do it! Once she had belonged to Probinus and the world; now all that was put behind her — she looked towards higher things.

On the table beside her was a jewelled casket, her old favourite milky pearls and light coloured rubies; each side of the casket was a little window framing a

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scene, the Nativity and the Crucifixion, and between them the martyrdom of the virgin Blandina, a lock of whose miraculously preserved hair had been sent to her from Gaul. Strange, strange, to die a virgin and know no embraces but those of the heavenly bridegroom! She turned the casket about in her hands, then called her maid: "Send Fravitta to me!" Where should she drive to-day? To her mother at the convent? Or over to her cousin by the Salarian Gate to show her the relic? Perhaps that would be best, Fravitta came in, and she beckoned him over to stand beside her couch. How tall and handsome he'd grown! — like the shepherd carrying off the nymph on that big cameo brooch her brother had given her ... or Saint Michael on the back of her best mirror.

"I'm just thinking where to go, Fravitta; you must wait a minute. No, go and pick me a carnation out of the loggia — a red one — and put that rose branch straight: look, over your head!" She held the flower up to her face for a moment, then gave it back to her slave. "Sweet, isn't it? Don't hold it so tight, stupid, you'll crush it! What are you thinking about?"

"I'm sorry, mistress, I didn't know you wanted it back."

"Of course I do! Do you suppose I pick my best carnations for you, you spoilt boy? There, don't look so unhappy, I'm not scolding you."

"What are the orders, mistress?"

"Oh, I must think. Fravitta, do you know, I believe



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that silly maid of mine, Zenonis, is falling in love with you. You oughtn't to encourage her/

"I don't. Do you think I ever — ever look at any woman when you're there?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Fravitta! Besides, I'm not always there. I'm afraid you've plenty of time to lead my poor Zenonis astray."

"When you're not there I'm thinking of you, mistress."

"Really, Fravitta!" She laughed and pulled off a petal. "You'll have to be cured of that!"

"Oh, Christ, I wish you would cure me!"

"And how?"

"How? You know!"

"You're not speaking very respectfully, Fravitta."

"I'm past that!" Suddenly he was down beside her, holding her, hard, strongly, kissing her face, her neck, her arms — she was out of breath - she couldn't make him — couldn't stop him - she - he — Probinus had never kissed her like this! Oh, he was going to knock over the table with the casket-at last she screamed! He let go of her, the casket was saved, the maid appeared — had she been looking on all the time, the hussy?

Innocentia sat up and smoothed her hair, very composed; Fravitta was holding on to the foot of the couch: he looked from side to side, and his breath came in short, hard gasps. She fixed her eyes on the casket:

"Go!" she said, very sternly, "I am deeply sad and distressed at your fall. You shall know my decision."

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Fravitta said nothing and went out. What a fool he'd been, what a fool! Now — it was too late to do anything. But he'd thought — that first moment when he felt her soft and lively under his kisses, surely she'd not been angry! Then afterwards: why did she change? And what would she do to him? He stood in the yard again and looked round; he caught sight of the plane tree with the fetters in its trunk: would it be that? He hadn't been beaten since he was a boy, and then — it was just like any boy who gets into mischief, not this! It hadn't ever seemed to make any difference being a slave before: he'd never been treated any worse than the best: nobody'd dared say a word to him — she'd always have upheld him against any of them! And now he'd thrown it all away; she might have him sold — sold in open market among all the filth of Rome! Oh, that was likely, very likely: she wouldn't want ever to see him again after what he'd done, she'd never keep him in the house. And then he'd be driven away, out of Rome perhaps, out of Italy, to serve a new master, a master he was bound to hate — everything would be gone, the house he'd lived in all his life, the horses he'd broken himself, all the little things he cared for, and all his friends, all the jolly days they'd had, Gersemi and little Sunjarith and his own mother - and then — her, Innocentia, her voice, her smile, her presence, the golden hope that had gleamed about her always! Oh, he'd welcome any punishment, welcome prison and hunger, welcome chains and whips, welcome the Hun stable-

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boys spitting in his face — oh, everything, if it could only all come right again afterwards! But he'd be sold, sold, he knew it, it was unbearable!

He couldn't face his mother, not yet; but some one he must see. He stumbled up to Gersemi's room and found her stitching at a little coat of Sunjarith's; she jumped up.

"Fravitta! What's happened?"

"Innocentia . . .,"

"What's she been doing to you?"

"Oh, don't look like that, Gersemi! It was all my fault. I thought she meant it too. I kissed her. But she didn't. She's angry: no wonder. She hates me. She's going to sell me." He dropped heavily on to a stool.

"Are you sure you're to be sold?" asked Gersemi, one hand on his shoulder.

"I think so. Oh, I know it!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Bear it if I can."

"Can't you fight against it?"

"How?" He looked up and met her eyes. "Gersemi! Is there time?"

"She won't make up her mind for an hour: I know her. If you take one of the horses. No one's going to stop you. You've got money, haven't you?"

"Plenty. Where shall I go? To Alaric?"

"I think so. Listen, Fravitta: you must tell them what kin you are and what weapons you can use — lucky for you I taught you! But you must be modest at first and content with what you get; your chance

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will come later. And - oh, the ring!" She leaned out of the window and called "Sunjarith! Sunjarith! Oh, where has he gone? Hildiok, run and find Sunjarith and bring him here! Now, Fravitta, you go and get your money, and a thick cloak; you can't take much else. Your mother'd better come here."

He ran down, all alive again, and Gersemi made up a little parcel of food, bread and sausage and raisins; as she did it she whistled the tune of an old Goth song that had taken them down into Greece. Sunjarith called from under the window:

"Do you want me, mother? Can Hildiok come?"

"Yes; hurry up, both of you." She had the food tied up and was counting out five of her precious gold pieces when they came in. "Now, Sunjarith," she said, "this is a secret." He nodded. "Give me the rings." He took them off his neck; she unfastened Avilf's and put it on her own finger again, then gave him back the other and went on: "Hildiok, I know you'll keep the secret too. Fravitta's going at last — to Alaric — with my ring — now. Here he is."

Thiudis was with him, her head high, bidding him remember that his grandfather was Gudamir and own cousin to Fridigern. He was armed with sword and dagger and wore riding boots. He took the food and money; then Gersemi gave him the ring.

"There may be a man called Avilf. Most likely he's dead, but if not, give him this ring and say you had it from me with my goodwill. And tell him I'm really a woman, and how you left me."

"Which horse are you taking?" broke in Sunjarith.

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"I'll saddle!"

"The grey Arab, Smoke—you know."

Sunjarith ran down, and Hildiok suddenly said:

"Let me come, Fravitta, let me be your servant!"

Fravitta shook his head. "No good, Hildiok. One's quicker than two. And what could I say you wanted a horse for?"

And Thiudis muttered, "Let alone he's no Goth!"

"One other thing, Gersemi," said Fravitta; "if you see *her*, tell her—oh, I wish I knew!—tell her I'm thinking of her always, still."

"Very well," said Gersemi, and kissed him.

He looked anxiously out of the window.

"Be quick!" said his mother, and—

"Don't be afraid," said Gersemi, "nobody knows yet."

He had the ring on his finger; the food and the money were tied to his belt. He looked all round him once, then went. Gersemi heard the horse hoofs clattering out. Then she turned to Hildiok, who was staring unhappily out of the window.

"Your turn next!" she said.

"But never a chance like that. You heard her say I wasn't a Goth."

"Well, I'm not a Goth either," said Gersemi, and sighed.

Innocentia was considering what to do with Fravitta; this was continually being interrupted by a vivid and very detailed memory of his kisses. What could she possibly do? Something, nothing—how silly of her to have screamed! But she was afraid for

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her relic. And now that Zenonis had seen! She must punish him, she must. Otherwise he might do it again. What a dreadful thought! And so soon after her conversation with the deacon! But how he had kissed — like a storm in summer! She'd never have thought he was such a man. Yes, but what was to be done? What did people do when their slaves —? She knew what Probinus would have done! But really, need she send him away? She hated breaking up the household, and besides, he was the only son or his mother and she — presumably — was a widow. And what would selling him mean? That she was afraid for her own virtue, she, a Roman matron, a widow grown old in faithful memory of her husband! (Old? Yes, sometimes she'd been afraid of that. But she hadn't felt old just now, and surely he hadn't thought so!) And then, who was to drive her? Not that dreadful, bald, old man who would talk to her about when she was a child as if it was a hundred years ago! She must think of some other punishment for Fravitta.

So it went on, till at last she sent her maid for a black dress and shawl and her big silver cross: she would talk to him herself: if he seemed really repentant she might forgive him. . . . She leant the cross against the casket with the relic and said a little prayer; then she waited. But no Fravitta came to throw himself at her feet and ask pardon; instead, half an hour later her steward and a dozen others to explain that they'd hunted for him everywhere, but he was gone.

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Then there was a great to-do in the house, and a noise and a scurrying about. Thiudis, summoned, said stoutly that she knew nothing. Some one had seen Sunjarith saddling the horse, so he was sent for next.

"Oh yes," he said cheerfully, his eyes dancing; "Fravitta went away; but I'm afraid I don't know where; perhaps he's coming back to-morrow."

His mother was even worse, because she was scarcely troubling to hide the truth.

"He's gone," she said; "you won't catch him in a hurry now. If you wanted him, why didn't you tell him so?"

"And he's stolen the best Arab in my team!"

"Well, I had two horses of mine died in your stables: it's an exchange."

"Gersemi, you're a wicked, ungrateful woman!"

"Much I've got to be grateful for! If it hadn't been for you I'd have been a captain of Alaric's by now!"

"And a horrible, heathen Arian! Why can't you tell me anything about Fravitta?"

"He said he'd think of you always. I don't expect he will."

At that Innocentia burst into tears,

"I hate you! Go away!"

And that was the last of Fravitta for a long time.

The burning days of that hot year brought with them a very midsummer madness, turned all against Stilicho. For first the Roman legionaries, hearing everywhere stories against him and angry already at his severe discipline, broke loose at Ticinum and

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murdered his best friends and supporters, while half-openly Rome looked on and applauded this patriotism! The news came to Stilicho in his camp a hundred miles away; the Goth and Vandal generals of the auxiliaries crowded to his tent, demanding to be led against the Romans, clamouring for revenge. He would not give it them. Then they turned against him too. The end came in Ravenna by the headman's sword. He was dead; his friends and servants, whom he had forbidden to defend him, stood by wretchedly, expecting their own deaths too; Serena, his wife, still waited and prayed in Rome; Honorius in his palace felt he was a man at last and prepared to divorce his wife, the dead man's daughter; and Alaric saw the road opening, clearing, getting ready for him to march south again.

One other thing those Romans did: they burst into the cities where the wives and children of the auxiliaries were living, and murdered them. That brought Alaric thirty thousand barbarian troops, picked men, with nothing left in them but hatred against Rome. So came on the time for the bough-breaking.

There was panic again in Rome before ever Alaric got near. But there had been panics before, and many people, Innocentia among them, were inclined to laugh at it. It would never come to a siege! Think, this was no common town, but — Rome! Well, then, what could the barbarians do? So said Innocentia and her friends; but her mother in Marcella's convent, perhaps did better to pray. The household were far more anxious, and there was great traffic in



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amulets and charms. Thiudis went about proudly, thinking of her son, true to his name at last, marching to victory. Gersemi was fretting about Sunjarith; she taught him now, as she had taught the other boy, the use of sword and dagger, but she had forgotten a great deal; and anyhow, he was only eleven: it was just in case — Sunjarith said very little himself; he was getting to a silent age and he liked reading: he read the story of the last time there were barbarians in front of Rome - long and long ago, Brennus and the Gauls, before ever there were great high houses with marble pillars, before there were glass cups or pictures or anything pretty, when even the Senate wore rough wool and wooden sandals, hundreds of years before Christ was born ... so that the hero Camillus must be damned for ever. It was more like a story than anything real: *væ victis!* It couldn't be going to happen again . . . but if it did? Sunjarith thought of Fravitta, waving his sword and galloping on Smoke at the head of a charge! Would there be charges? He did hope it wouldn't be all over before he saw it, like the big fire the year before.

It wasn't. Sunjarith knew all about sieges from the inside before the month was up. He saw a great deal too: he saw from a house-top the Goth camp like a second city on the other side of the walls, and he remembered how his mother had taken him to see those walls rebuilt; he saw the widow Serena, walking all in black between guards to her death; he saw the faces of the people changing and changing as

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the days went on and no relief came; he watched the new recruits drilling in the forum, and knew enough to laugh at their clumsy sword-practice; he saw the haggling at the food-shops getting always fiercer, and once he saw a dealer dragged out and stoned by a mob of women. By and by he got to know the queer feeling of being so hungry that he didn't want to play or do lessons or anything; but he used to get very angry with his mother when he caught her trying to give him more than his fair share. The pigs and goats were all gone, even his own pet kid, and Innocentia's pigeons, and most of the hens, and after a time the horses, partly eaten, partly requisitioned for the troops. But even at the worst of the siege some sort of food could always be got if you paid enough for it, and Innocentia saw to it that none of her slaves starved. All the same, Sunjarith used to manage to save a crust now and then for Ullac.

He saw the embassy going out to ask for Alaric's terms; they were all waiting to hear the answer. Thiudis had it first, and came and whispered it to them, a little awed herself.

"All the gold in Rome, all the silver, everything valuable; and all barbarian slaves."

Gersemi thought it over.

"We didn't get that for Athens/<sup>1</sup> she said. "He's grown since my time!"

Thiudis whispered again. "They asked him what he left them: he said 'Your souls.' That ought to give them a chance of showing if they're Christians! Think of *her* with nothing but a soul!"

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"I don't think some people would mind," said Sunjarith, but Thiudis laughed.

"You can't keep a soul on nothing — they're thoroughbreds: want their corn! Oh, they'd be body soon enough!"

Hildiok looked up towards the sky and stretched his arms.

"Allslaves!" he thought. "All barbarians! I shall be a soldier again!"

Some of the Goths were putting their heads together already, and one called him over and offered to let him come with them: it would be better to go all in a body. Sunjarith went and found Ullac, whose new hiding-place was in one of the empty pigsties, and told him:

"Do you think you're old enough to go, Ullac?"

Ullac shook his head.

"They wouldn't take me. I don't believe it would be better there than here."

"But you'd be free!"

"Somebody'd beat me, for all that. Where'd I get anything to eat if I was free? Let alone, Fravitta might find me."

"He wouldn't do anything to you now."

"Oh, wouldn't he! I'm not even as tall as you, Sunjarith, and they're all so big."

All the same, Sunjarith spoke to Hildiok; but Hildiok looked doubtful at once.

"Ullac! But I couldn't ask the others; they wouldn't have him. And I don't know why you've anything to do with him—a dirty Hun like that!"

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But the senate would not accept Alaric's terms. A few days afterwards Gersemi watched the solemn little procession going to consult the Sybilline Books, but she didn't hiss like half the crowd; she suddenly wondered whether perhaps it mightn't be well for her to sacrifice — just a little sacrifice: behind the stables — because Odin and Thor were surely aware of all this. Only no one dared, after all, to make the public sacrifices the Holy Books demanded. Sunjarith was disappointed, because he wanted to see them; he wanted to hear the great crash of thunder Jove would — might — send down; and he wanted to see what his tutor's face would be like.

Again they all waited to hear Alaric's second terms; they were high enough: five thousand pounds of gold, thirty thousand of silver, four thousand silken tunics, three thousand scarlet-dyed hides, and three thousand pounds of pepper. But these terms were accepted; no more about barbarian slaves, but all the same — they knew they were welcome. During the truce there was a certain limited amount of coming and going between the camps; a message got through to Thiudis from her son, saying he was well and happy, and had ten men under him; he had found Avilf; it ended: "Avilf is married; he says he wished he'd known about Gersemi." Gersemi said nothing to this, but wondered what Avilf's wife was like; for some reason she was sure the woman must be ugly.

When the official collectors came round asking for gold and silver, Gersemi and Thiudis carefully baked their little stores of coin into loaves, hid any orna-

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ments they had under the floor, and had nothing to show but a few copper pieces and one or two gilt bracelets of no value. But Gersemi at least was rather surprised to see that Innocentia too was taking nearly as much care to seem poorer than she was; however, that was the usual thing; Innocentia was no worse than most of the senate. At last Alaric went away, and very soon life was going on much as before; Innocentia got back enough of her horses to be able to drive about again and exchange experiences with every one she knew; the deacon was as well manicured as ever; fresh flowers were put in the loggia; her aunt in Greece was sending her a new relic. Sunjarith ate and ate for a week, till he was as solid and red-cheeked as he'd always been; the grooms stopped stealing the horses' bran, and there was a jolly noise again over supper in the kitchen every evening. Only about a dozen slaves disappeared, and Hildiok was one of them; Sunjarith had written a letter at Thiudis' dictation for him to give to Fravitta, but of course he couldn't be sure of ever finding him.

Innocentia's mother had been much weakened by the siege, and at the end did not get stronger. She sent for Sunjarith; he went, remembering he was John to her, and knelt beside her bed. At the far end of the room two nuns were praying; their quick whispering rose and fell; he listened while she blessed him and prayed that he would always be a true Catholic, and he promised he'd be a good boy all his life; then he began to cry, and the old lady

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drew from under her pillow a silk purse which she put into his young hands with her old, trembling ones. "Here," she said, "is money and a paper commending you to the brothers at Aquileia; they will always help you for my sake/<sup>1</sup> She paused and coughed a little, "You will find some jewels as well, a ring of mine, and a few brooches. And I have given you something else: a miniature of your dear father. Take care of it, John, and look at it sometimes." She fell back on the pillow, and Marcella laid a kindly hand on his shoulder, bidding him come away.

He took the purse down with him to a lonely place by the Tiber; here he sat down, his back against a broken column, to look at the things. First of all he put the ring on his finger and admired the deep glint of the ruby; but he didn't like it as well as the ring he still had on its silver chain round his neck. Then he opened the catch of the ivory case and stared at his father's picture; the black and red had faded a little with time, and the border of laurels was chipped here and there, but still it was something. "Father!" whispered Sunjarith, and thought he didn't look as old as most people's fathers. After a little he went down to the water's edge and looked at his own reflection, but couldn't see that he was like the picture. Then he put everything back in the purse and went home. Gersemi asked to see; he showed her the gold, the paper and the jewels, last the portrait; she held it in her hand for a long time; at last she said:

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"He wasn't like that, Sunjarith."

"What was he like, then?"

But somehow she couldn't tell him. The next day Innocentia and all the household went into mourning.

Winter and spring and another summer went by. One minister after another came into power at Ravenna, where Honorius was still living safe among his courtiers and his hens. Alaric kept a heavy hand over his army, so that they did not plunder much nor oppress the Italians, and for nearly a year he tried to get what he wanted from Honorius without fighting. But whatever else the Emperor neglected, he attended to his own dignity: Alaric was a barbarian upstart, and should get no peace from him, not a village to quarter his troops in, not a gold piece for their pay, not a loaf of bread to feed a single Goth — eternal war till the savages were exterminated<sup>1</sup> But what did his ministers think they were going to gain by it? At last it got to be too much; Alaric broke *off* negotiations and came down on Rome like a bursting storm.

Innocentia was still there; it would have been very difficult to leave Rome with Alaric between her and Ravenna, and all the shipping held up at Ostia. But this time she was really frightened; she had laid in a lot of stores, and now sent her slaves hurrying all over the city to buy more. When the household had provisions enough for a couple of months she found that after all there was no need because the senate had made a perfectly simple and satisfactory arrange-

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ment with Alaric: Rome cut loose from Ravenna and the Emperor, who never lifted a finger to help them, and created an Emperor of their own, who at once made peace and friends with the Goths! Innocentia found it rather shocking at first, but still — Attalus had been the Prefect of the City before he was Emperor, and he was a charming person as well; she got over her first feelings and paid an official call; she was received with due respect as the widow of Probinus, and found the house and furniture all in the most delightful taste: the things he had — actually, a Praxiteles! Altogether, prospects were not so bad.

But all too soon Attalus quarrelled with his friends the Goths; he refused Alaric's good advice—to secure Africa and the corn supply for Rome—and thought he could rule alone. The end of that was that the governor Heraclian held Africa for Honorius and let no corn-ships sail for Rome. So Innocentia found it was just as well that she'd laid in all that food.

When the famine got very bad — as bad as it had ever been during the first siege — the Senate met again and urged their Emperor to take Alaric's offered help and move against Heraclian: even now it was not too late. But Attalus would not use barbarian troops! Then Alaric lost patience, and had him dethroned before the Gothic army on the one hand and the Roman citizens on the other, and again began to try and make peace with the real Emperor Honorius. But again the hope was unfulfilled; this time it was a Goth general in the Imperial



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service, a man whose fathers had an old feud with the Baits, who stirred up the ministers and Honorius to send back a disdainful answer to the embassies and brought it all to nothing. And then once more, for the third time in three years, Alaric turned his back on Ravenna and marched again for the heart of things—Rome.

## PART EIGHT

Tells how:

The wind has wailed  
Over Northern forests,  
Miles of fir tops:  
High over cap  
And the snow passes:  
Leaps on the lowlands.  
Corn for cutting,  
Grapes to gather,  
Herds and houses:  
So on Rome-burg  
The North wind rushes!

Gersemi dreamt of her bear-skin and sat up in bed, broad awake and staring about her.

"Mother, mother !" whispered Sunjarith, "open the shutters!"

They looked out; there was nothing to be seen, only still moonlight and thick black shadows; Gersemi was shivering, but the boy beside her felt warm. They stayed at the window for long minutes, till suddenly she yawned and said, "This is foolery. I'm going to bed."

But Sunjarith said, "No, wait, look!" and pointed out over the roof. But was there a flicker of red light in the sky, or was it only that they'd been watching too long and their eyes were tired?

Innocentia had been dreaming too; she woke and turned over, half-laughing, half-scolding herself. The lamp by her bed was a three-headed silver swan

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carrying a wick in each beak and a cross from each neck; as she lay blinking at it, the flames began to flicker and get smaller; she called sharply for her maid, who ran in, bare-foot, from the next room: "Look at my lamp, Zenonis! You lazy hussy, what were you about last night?"

Zenonis hurried for the oil flask and filled the lamp up to the brim. "I'm sure I ask your pardon, my lady; I was all in a tremble yesterday with those terrible great Goths coming again!"

"Silly creature, you ought to be used to sieges by now. Look at me: I haven't turned a hair!"

"Oh, I'm not as brave as you, my lady."

The lamp burned up clearly; Innocentia stretched her white arms. "Now, of course, I'm broad awake. Run and see what time it is."

Zenonis came back. "Just after midnight."

"Is that all? Well, you must read to me. And give me a shawl, Zenonis — no, not that, the Persian silk. There."

The maid put some more cushions behind her, drew up the heavy coverlet, and, all in unrolling the book and finding the place, wished her mistress — well, in purgatory. She read on till Innocentia was beginning to drowse off, when suddenly there were running feet, a bang at the door, and the steward rushed into the room in his night-shirt, and stood for a moment waving his arms before the words burst out of him: "The Goths, my lady, they're in!"

Zenonis gave a scream and fainted; Innocentia stayed still, thinking hard: "Which side of the city?"

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"The Salarian Gates: they've fired the houses all round!"

"We've time, then. You know what to do. Wake the maids: say I'll have anyone whipped who disobeys you. Bury the plate chests in the yard—you know where. I shall go straight to Saint Mark's and cling to the altar."

The man disappeared: the calm flames of the lamp still lighted everything as it had been.

"Zenonis! Really—these women!" She leant over and spilled some hot lamp-oil on to her neck; the maid got up, whimpering; and at once the others ran in to help dress their mistress and get the jewels together. Innocentia knew just what she wanted and had it done. In ten minutes they were ready; she had her cloak on over her best jewels, and herself carried the casket with her relics. The litter-bearers were waiting in the hall; she stood on the steps looking down on her household: they rustled and sobbed and shook like leaves; all their eyes were on her; some of the women were grey-faced even in the torch-light. Only here and there the young barbarian men-slaves—"Dogs!" she thought, and was up on to the litter with one quick movement. She leant over to the steward. "All done? Right. Then follow me—to sanctuary!"

The curtains of the litter were open at one side, but as they passed out into the street she shrank back and drew them tight, then cowered down, hands over ears to keep out the noise of the crowd. Every now and then the litter checked, and she was jolted

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from side to side: what ages it took to get to Saint Mark's! She could see a glare of torches through the thin stuff of the curtains, but it was better to hide eyes and face in the cushions and clutch the relics with both hands: and pray . . . but what a place to pray in! Could the Goths be here already? She started up, listening intently, then drew the curtains an inch: all round her own women were hurrying, silent or else crying uncontrollably; each of them had a bundle, one or two had children. All at once she saw Gersemi and the boy, in the sudden toss of a torch: Gersemi in her old clothes — even the mail shirt! But beyond? There was a terrible shrieking somewhere — faster and faster it went till it stopped on one high screech: what was happening down the side streets? The litter checked again; she felt the men stagger at the poles as something swept into them from the other side: curses, curses, a clamour of feet — voices — sticks — blows, something shattering: glass? — and among all the other cries and yells the unmistakable wail of a very young baby. Then on again, on, round a corner into a hot blast and glare — whose house on fire? — and oh, a trumpet! A hard victorious trumpet like a wild beast raging! She peered out at the other side: across the square, oh, Christ, bursting out of the streets that tumbling, shouting mass — swords! She cried down to the litter-bearers "Hurry! Hurry!" promising them any reward; then drew the curtains fast again and kissed the precious casket till her mouth bled. "Saint Peter, Saint Laurence, hear me, save me! Blessed virgin

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Blandina, hold the Goths back ! Oh, get me safe to sanctuary, keep them off me! A hundred candles, a shrine of gold, a picture—oh, praise and thanks, we're there!" She slipped out of the litter and beat on the door—she was in, and her women pressed in after her. Oh, how quiet it was, a thick rustle of prayer and that one voice in the psalm! The deacon supported her forward, and she sank down on the steps of the altar; he brought a cushion . . .

The others had mostly stayed in one street or another after loot or worse; Fravitta and his friends went on ahead—he knew what he wanted. They had all drunk, but not so deeply as to cloud their senses or dim their fierce eyes. With him it only made a blaze round the one thought of her—her to find and have and hold—her to be his: all Rome in one! They followed him down the by-streets: Hildiok ran beside him, shouting, getting clear his own thought of revenge; half of them had been slaves. Oh, there were blows to wipe out, insult and shame, long years of it to make right in one splendid night! Almost everywhere men and women rushed away from them, screeching; the soldiers were nearly all at the gates, vainly trying to break the flood of the Goth army; so there was little resistance. Once or twice they had a fight at a street corner, but the whole weight of victory was behind them; their wild skin coats, horned helmets and leather shields, the whole savage look of them, was enough to clear a way. They had blood on their hands and clothes; Hildiok, who had

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bitten through a man's throat at close quarters, had blood all over his face.

They stopped at the foot of the hill to get their breath and make their plans; Fravitta, standing on a wall, shouted to them; there was no need for that, but the last thing he could do to-night was to speak in an everyday voice! Here, outside the circle of their torches, it was dark, and almost quiet; noise all round them, most of all to the north, but nothing to be seen. They fastened the thongs of their shoes and saw to belt and cloak buckles; Hildiok had an old Roman sword and a ragged, stinking horse-hide coat; he whispered to his neighbour — all the riches of the house: gold, jewels, silk, women: here followed details of what he would do with Zenonis . . . Fravitta called them to follow, then with a yell all together they went at the house. Fravitta knew enough not to go to the main door, but round to the yard gate; a few good axe blows smashed out the bolts, and they were in! But where were the screaming women, the lights, the chase through silk-hung rooms, the spilled wine, the triumph? Where were they gone? Find some one, and make them tell!

The church of Saint Mark had never held so large a congregation, nor so fervent; their prayers must be loud enough to drown that din outside, loud enough for God and Saint Mark to hear and save them. The deacon went about among them: all his lambs were white, but some were whiter than others: Innocentia was indeed white as a lily. She was the centre of a

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group of ladies, some fully dressed, others with no more than shawls over their night-gowns. The deacon busied himself to put this right; with his own hands he shoed delicate, soft feet, or pinned a cloak over some patrician shoulder. His presence was infinitely soothing; his hand was taken, held, the embroidered hem of his robe was kissed a hundred times; his voice was balm and honey. "My dear lady—my dear lady—" Innocentia told how she had vowed a golden shrine; it should be enriched with carbuncles and pearls. "How noble! How generous! My dear lady—" The night wore on.

Once there had been a rush of Goths against the doors, but they were met by all the priests in their robes and a great burst of prayer, and they fell back, muttering. Every now and then wounded men were brought in at the small south door and laid on straw heaps at one side; they moaned and gasped or lay in strained silence with clenched fists; always their news was bad. But near the altar, where the ladies huddled together under the candle light, there was little but prayer. Innocentia clasped the relics to her and prayed for night to pass; suddenly her shoulder was shaken. "Gersemi!"

"Where's Sunjarith? Have you seen him?"

"No. Is he lost?"

"I told him to stay by me. But he's gone!"

She shook her head and began another prayer; Gersemi pushed through all the crowd, asking, calling; but nobody knew. What was one child more or



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less, this night of hell? Yet she daren't leave the church to look for him; if the boy was to come back for her, and she not there! She climbed up between a pillar and a monument, trying to see the whole place: it was possible he might still be there, but she was terribly certain he had gone out — disobeyed her again!

All at once a fresh, savage hammering on the door: it opened on a turmoil of shouting Goths. Behind them a house they'd fired crashed blazing beams across the road; they were madder than the first lot, and some of them were heathen Huns who gave no mercy to the Cross. They forced their way in, and the fervent prayers gave way to shrieking of trampled and terrified women. Their leader plunged through, hitting to right and left with the flat of his sword; he came into the light of the candles, and Gersemi saw it was Fravitta. The pillar blocked her view; she could only see the shudder going through the crowd, and hear a louder scream, then another and another, till he came in sight again. "So that's it," she thought, and watched with all her eyes. He held Innocentia tight with his left arm; her dress was torn, her hair fell loose down her back, she waved her arms, and cried shrilly as a child; then suddenly fell forward and hung limp over his shoulder. A minute afterwards Fravitta and the rest were out, the doors were shut again, and people were picking themselves up, thankful to be alive at all.

Gersemi climbed down and found an old priest to question: "Is anyone killed?"

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"No, but they've carried her off- that I should ever live to see such a day!"

A woman beside them joined in: "And her maid as well - Zenonis, that I've known all my days! Poor, dear lady, wasn't it terrible to see her struggling! Ah, it's more than that she'll be doing now, by the looks of it."

Gersemi was considering that too; it gave her a certain satisfaction; but all the same, she hoped Fravitta would keep his captive to himself and not turn her over afterwards to a pack of his friends; she also considered that Innocentia might well have done less screaming and made more of a struggle to escape, but perhaps that was only what she thought, not what happened. The deacon had been knocked over and trampled on; he got up, took the dropped casket into his own keeping, and began a prayer for one whose soul might even now be in awful torments. . . .

Sunjarith had no intention of staying in the church; he had said "Yes, mother," when she'd bidden him keep by her, because what was the good of arguing? But here he was with sword and dagger, knowing how to use them: keep in sanctuary! He wriggled along by the wall to the small door and darted out — oof, he'd been nearly squashed in there! Then he climbed up out of the struggling crowd into a dark porch; his hand closed on his sword-hilt; he looked all round him: things were happening everywhere, and he was right in the middle! He hardly knew which way to go, it was all so exciting; at last he ran down into a small street and capered about in the

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shadow under the walls, waving his sword. Then he began running hard; for nearly an hour he raced about through the night, singing and laughing and dodging through the jammed crowds. He kept away from the worst of the fighting, but whenever there seemed to be a little fight he jumped about round the edge of it, wanting to join in, but not sure how. Nobody took much notice of him; he might have been on either side, and all the time he was on the move, slipping from light to darkness, in and out of the alleys. He saw a lot of horrible things, but somehow he never noticed them; once a wounded man caught him by the leg, groaning, but he jumped away and ran on. There was a smell of blood in the air, it made him think of the meat market; only it was so splendid being out late at night like this, that he didn't mind these funny, tumbled bodies. Twice he saw a woman, naked and groaning in a gutter, and once a dead child, but he didn't want to look; he shied away and on up the street without another glance, wanting a noise and a flare and a real fight!

Quite suddenly he felt tired and stopped. In the middle of the next square there was a big fountain; he could hear it splashing. There he went and clambered up on to the back of the water-pouring Titan: he settled himself to wait, knowing that in this glorious midnight something was sure to happen soon: as it did. First he heard singing, then he saw the torches at the end of the street coming nearer; he held on tight and watched. The head of the crowd streamed by, Goths and Romans together, men,

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women and children, and the glad, solemn singing rose from them — a psalm of prayer and thanksgiving. Then came a long procession of Goth soldiers, great fair men with iron breast-plates and cloaks of wolf-skins; their swords were sheathed, and they carried high between them huge gold chalices and dishes, gem-studded crosses and altar cloths; while in the centre one supported an aged woman in black with prayer-clasped hands. He called down to a girl in the crowd: "What's on?" and was told that these were the sacred vessels of Saint Peter, and that Alaric had ordered his men to take them and the old nun in whose keeping they had been safely to sanctuary, and all who went with them were saved from the fury of the enemy and praising God.

The strange procession went by slowly; but all of a sudden just by the fountain there was a laugh, a cry, and a struggle. Sunjarith leant over the statue's bronze shoulders, trying to see; the crowd parted for a moment; two of the Goth soldiers were holding a boy between them, another hit him hard on the jaw. At this the boy's head jerked up, and by the light of a torch Sunjarith saw that it was the Hun Ullac. One of the soldiers took the torch and stuck it full into the boy's eyes, and Sunjarith remembered he was in the middle of war, and clung fast to the statue. But he wasn't ready for what followed next, when the second soldier drew his sword and struck down once. Abruptly Ullac's cries stopped, he made a blind plunge forward and fell as the soldiers propped him. The biggest of them put one foot on

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him and shouted at the crowd: "To all who mock at Alaric and Saint Peter !"

Sunjarith hardly knew what he was doing, only that he had slid off the statue and drawn his small sword. The Goths, preparing to march again, saw something jump out of the water at them — a little fierce boy and a glint of pointed steel in his hand. For a moment they backed, thinking he was perhaps the genius of the fountain. "Out!" he shouted, "out, you beasts!" and one of them felt the sword rip all up his arm. Then they saw it was only a boy, and fell on him to smash him and throw him out of the way. And Sunjarith perhaps saw it in their eyes, for before they had him he darted under an arm and was out away through the crowd and into the dark again. Then the procession went on and the dead Hun lay under the coping of the fountain.

But Sunjarith was seeing everything differently: he had looked once too often in the face of war, and he felt sick. He found a piece of woollen stuff in a gutter and wiped his sword with it. Then he went on soberly, wondering where he was: he wanted to find his mother again. He got his bearings at last and turned back, trying to keep right away from every one now, hiding in corners or behind pillars when he heard anyone coming. Then quickly the darkness began to thin away; it wasn't covering him any longer: day had come.

There wasn't noise enough to warn him, or he would have kept away; he trotted round a corner and came full on something else he didn't like.

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There was a Goth with his back against a house wall, his face was grey, his mouth was open, and he didn't seem to have any right arm; he had the stump of a sword in his left hand, and he was striking out with it feebly. Two women were yelping in front of him. As Sunjarith looked, one of them made a snatch at the gold collar round the man's neck, the other threw a handful of dirt into his eyes. Then the Goth gave a great cry, and Sunjarith hated the women and drew his sword again. He slashed at them right and left, and they turned and ran, screaming, not sure who their enemy mightn't be; then he was left looking at the Goth and he felt gentle and sorry. "What shall I do?" he asked, and the Goth answered low "My arm." Sunjarith thought: what would mother do? Mother would tie it up. So he tried to. Only it was all hanging in strips and ends above the elbow and stuck to the fur of the Goth's coat, so that when he tried to get it clear it began to bleed again; and he didn't know what to do. The Goth wasn't any help either: he sat on the ground and his head rolled on his shoulders and he made noises instead of saying anything; Sunjarith wanted very much to go away.

Then some more Goths came, and Sunjarith nearly ran, only he was tying a knot and it wouldn't stay. The wounded man called and they all came round; one of them was helping with the arm when suddenly it began bleeding fresh, all over everything, and the man fell on to his side and he was dead. Sunjarith saw and looked away; he was afraid he was

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almost crying. "Can I go?" he said, but a tall Goth picked him up, sword and all, saying, "Where do you come from?" Sunjarith didn't know what to answer; at last he said: "If you'll let me go I can find my way back."

"Where to?"

"Mother."

"Is she Roman?"

"No."

"Goth?"

"Well-nearly."

"What's your name?"

"Sunjarith."

"That's Goth enough. Come on to the Captain, sonny."

"I don't want to!"

"You'll be safer there than running about the streets to-day."

"But I am safe— I've got my sword! "

The Goth laughed. "Has it killed any one?"

"No. Wounded them, though."

"Goth or Roman?"

"Oh, do let me go!"

"Answer questions."

"Both, I think."

"Well, anyway, you were helping Cunibad; and you've a good name." He walked off down the road with Sunjarith on his shoulder.

"Put me down!"

"Promise not to run. You won't? Then you stay here." Sunjarith was held so that he couldn't draw

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his sword and they turned into a main street full of Goths, some marching and singing, some asleep under the walls. There was a lot of talk which he tried to follow, but his Gothic wasn't good enough. Then the Goth put him down in the porch of a big house and they went through into the hall, where an older man with gold bracelets was giving orders to a soldier. He had a little grey in his hair and beard, but sat very upright on the stone seat; his coat and breeches were of fine wool, and his armour had round gold bosses on it. By and by he turned to them:

"What's this?"

"A boy with a Goth name. We found him helping Cunibad, who's dead, I thought I should bring him."

"Cunibad dead. But we've got off none so heavily all the same. Who are you, boy?"

"I'm Sunjarith. Can't I go now?"

"No. Whose son are you?"

"My mother's called Gersemi."

"Then—you're that boy! Fravitta told me,"

"Oh, is Fravitta here?"

"I wish I knew where he was, the young fool. I'm a friend of your mother's, Sunjarith. Look at my ring: I'm Avilf."

"Oh, I know! So you'll let me go?"

"You must stay here, and she shall come. Where is she?"

"What do you want her for?"

"Because we're friends. In goodwill."



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"She's in sanctuary: Saint Mark's, over at the other side of the city," Avilf took off a bracelet of twisted gold and gave it to one of his men, bidding him find Gersemi, give it to her, and bring her back. Then he took Sunjarith by the hand and brought him to an inner room full of gear. "You're to sleep here," he said.

"But I don't want to sleep!"

"Do as you're told! Lie down, boy, on that cloak. Your mother's coming soon."

Sunjarith obeyed; the fur wriggled up into soft white folds all round him; he found his eyes were shutting after all.

He woke slowly out of very deep sleep; his mother was there, he could hear her voice; she was coming in. But still the sleep held him, it was all right, he needn't wake. She and Avilf were close to him, talking low.

Said Avilf: "There's your boy, Gersemi." They whispered for a little, then he went on, "Do you see what he's sleeping on?"

"Oh!" said Gersemi. "My luck! My bear-skin!"

"I bought it-years ago. You could have it back. Gersemi, my wife is dead. Shall we marry?"

"Yes."

Sunjarith opened his eyes wide and sat up.

"Mother! Are you going to?"

"She is," said Avilf, and tried to take the boy in his arms; but he wriggled away and stood up at the far side of the bear-skin.

"Why?"

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"Because we want. And now you'll be all Goth, Sunjarith."

Gersemi watched them, knowing they must have it out some time; her son grew red and frowned. "I'm not Sunjarith: I'm John! And I'm not Goth! She isn't and I am less. Look—here's my father!" He dragged out the purse from under his tunic; his fingers shook as he unwrapped the portrait and held it out. "My father, Flavius Nicetus!"

Avilf whistled. "So that's how it is! Well, you'll have to choose. She comes with me. Gersemi, here's the ring again." He took it off.

Gersemi smiled at him, then turned to the boy. "Give me the other ring, son."

He stamped. "I won't! You're not to give it to that man! It's mine!"

"It's not yours. Let me have it, Sunjarith."

Said Avilf, "Do as your mother bids you!" and made a step forward. Then Sunjarith snatched out his sword. "No! It's my father's ring!"

"Take care!" said Gersemi, holding Avilf back, "I taught him to fight!"

Suddenly a man ran in and up to Avilf. "Captain, you must come! They're going to attack!"

Gersemi cried, "I'm with you, Avilf! Oh, I've got my luck again!" He hurried off, but before she went she held out her hand to Sunjarith. "Don't hate him, son. Think it over, sleep on it." And she kissed him. Then she was gone too, and Sunjarith was left with his naked sword and his father's picture and his heart beating so fast he could hardly stand.

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The first thing he thought was that he would go out and fight with his father's folk against the Goths, and he went to the door; but his mother had bolted it. Then he sat down and cried, and then he went to sleep again. He woke as the door opened; Hildiok came in with his head bandaged; he brought food with him and put it down between himself and the boy.

"If you're as hungry as I am — " he said and bit into a flat loaf, then, "Nearly a year, isn't it?"

Sunjarith nodded. "Yes. Hildiok, this is his bread — I won't touch it!"

"Why not? Because he wants to marry your mother?"

"And because he's a Goth — and I'm not."

"Yet he's a good man for all that. Fravitta's been under him for two years, and I for half a year. He's well spoken of everywhere, and knows more than most of Alaric's mind."

"You look different, Hildiok."

"I'm a free man now, Sunjarith. Ever since I went with the Goths. Though I'm no more Goth than you."

"You're a barbarian!"

Hildiok laughed. "I am that! 'All barbarian slaves,' they said. Well, we've got Rome!"

"Don't be too sure! I can hear fighting still. How late is it, Hildiok?"

"Past noon — hours. And your mother not back yet. Sunjarith, if she's dead — it's a chance — if the Romans have killed her, which side are you?"

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"Don't! She isn't!"

"I don't say so. But it may be. Though the fighting's almost done, Alaric has Rome."

Sunjarith broke off a piece of bread and crumbled it in his fingers; he looked away before he spoke.

"It's not fair! Oh, it's not fair! Why have I got to be both? I can't be either!"

"You don't look Roman."

"I'm son to a Roman officer. Oh, you've started me thinking something's happened to mother! I wish she'd come!"

"There's one thing, Sunjarith; if she's dead, he'll be dead too. Won't you eat? There mayn't be much to get later on."

"No, I can't. Hildiok — oh, it's no use. Go away!" Hildiok left him and he waited till near dusk. He was shivering then, and so still that he could hear every sound outside. He was on his feet before the bolt shot back again; Gcrsemi came in and he ran into her arms. "Mother, I thought you were dead!"

She sat down beside him and whispered, "I didn't mean to leave you so long. But I've been fighting. My luck's back. I fought with Bodvar's sword. Bodvar was one; your father was one; Avilf is one, and he's alive. Little son, can I have the ring?"

"Must you, mother?"

"Yes. Why don't you like Avilf?"

"Oh, I don't know. I am so unhappy, mother!"

"Dearest and best, why?"

"They've killed Rome."

"Rome's killed many in her time."

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"Yes, only- I wish I'd had a Goth father."

"I wish I'd thought about you. But Avilf will be that if it's that you want."

The boy took the ring off its chain. "I won't ever call him father. Here's the ring, though."

"I'm sorry." She stroked his hand, "Did you know you were going to feel this way?"

"No: it's hurting me."

"Come and talk to Avilf. The fighting's all over and you can't stay here alone when we're happy." He followed her out; in the hall they found not only Avilf, but Fravitta and Hildiok between guards at the far end. There were Goth soldiers all round, and a few women, among them Thiudis, who whispered indignantly:

"They want to punish him for breaking sanctuary — when he took her out of the church."

"Oh," said Gersemi, "Innocentia again! Were there orders against it?"

"Yes, but what does Alaric think of his soldiers' spirits if they can't even take a woman they want in a captured city!"

There was a silence while Avilf read out Alaric's order, bidding his men respect churches and the right of sanctuary under pain of death or disgrace; the prisoners did not deny they knew of it, but said they had killed no one. Avilf sent for the witnesses against them, and a Goth led in two women, Innocentia and Zenonis. Innocentia let slip the cloak from her head and looked round the court; she saw Gersemi and stood very still with her white face and

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her great, black-shadowed eyes fixed on her; and it seemed to Gersemi that this was the child she had seen and pitied and bought for a casket of jewels in that other captured town, fourteen years ago.

Then Innocentia threw herself on her knees before Avilf, and her hair shook loose over her face; she clasped her hands and called on Christ and the saints to hear her, and most of all Saint Mark, whose sanctuary had been broken and whose power had been mocked. "I was there/" she said, and Avilf leant forward to hear her low, passionate voice, "on the very steps of the altar. I am a widow, unprotected; for ten years I have lived only on memories of my husband. I cannot tell how long I was in the church, Captain, the hours passed in prayer, and though we saw houses ablaze through every window, yet within all was peace and the Saint's mantle covered us. I was on my knees, deep in prayer; my eyes were fixed on the cross above the altar. I heard nothing; but suddenly I felt violent hands laid upon me. What is a woman in a strong man's grip? He snatched me away, screaming and beating in vain with feeble hands upon his hard ones. I saw then that he was once a slave of mine: let him deny it if he can! I clutched at the door-post; my hands were torn away. I fainted across his shoulder and he bore me out like a pigeon in a hawk's claws; I know no more till we were in a house; he threw me down and rushed on me. Shall I say more? Not once nor twice alone that night must my poor body submit to a slave's revenge. He left me in the end; my jewels were all

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gone, but I say nothing of that,- since the one jewel of chastity he forced from me was worth them all. But justice on him, justice, Captain! As you are a Christian and fear the anger of heaven, redeem the honour of the Saints and uphold the name of your King! Before Christ, it is your own justice I ask, and no more than that!"

She sank to the ground and the Goths looked almost afraid that Saint Mark might let his winged lion loose on them. Zenonis the maid took up the story; she too had been at prayer, she too had struggled vainly; all her mistress said was the truth itself: "And it's not as if Fravitta had anything to complain of when he was in the household. My lady treated him like her own son: not a sight of a whip all his life, never a hard word even! And now—now—" She burst into tears and threw herself down by her mistress, and Avilf frowned; he had no wish to punish Fravitta, who was a good soldier, but he knew that Innocentia was a lady of high birth and position, a friend of the Court at Ravenna, an owner of wide estates. And, besides, he felt the appeal to himself as a Christian and a just man. He was silent for a moment, and Thiudis watched in the crowd, white and anxious for her son.

"What is the answer to this?" said Avilf.

Fravitta went red and muttered, "She was willing enough when we got to the house."

Innocentia started up. "Shame!" she cried, "Shame! Oh, blessed virgin, what have I done to deserve this!"

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"I've no witness," said Fravitta. "It's my word against hers. I loved her when I was a slave. It's true enough I was well treated; she used me as if—as if—well, I always thought she was just ready to love me back. It was words, looks, touches—a hundred things I've no proof of. I wanted no other spoil in Rome but her. I and my friends, after we'd fought, we went straight to her house; she wasn't there, nor enough gold to swear by, either: not that I cared for that. I went to where she was like a starving man to food. I found her. Whatever she says, she didn't act as if she hated me!\*

"You took her jewels."

"To give my friends who'd found nothing in the house. I didn't keep one little pin for myself; she was all I wanted."

Innocentia cried out again, "It is lies, lies! Will you listen to him while he takes away the last shred of my honour! He says he has no witness, but may all the saints be mine that what I say is the bitter truth, and what he says is false!"

Avilf ran his fingers through his beard. "If she was taken by force, it is sacrilege," he said. "If she was willing, it is not. I have one word against another. Are there no more to come forward?"

Nobody moved for a little time; Avilf waited. Then Gersemi stepped out of the crowd.

"I know what happened," she said; Innocentia, the other woman, looked up at her, but she looked away past her to Avilf; she went on: "Fravitta speaks true when he says she made him love her at first; he was a



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boy and she is a skilful woman. She can make people do things for her. I don't know how far she went then; he may have been her lover." Innocentia half-screamed, "Gersemi, how can you tell such lies!" but Avilf stopped her; Gersemi took a deep breath. "Well then: I was in the church. I saw her carried off. True enough, she cried and waved her arms. But what of that? Trust one woman to see through another! If she didn't love him she'd no right to make him in love with her at the beginning; but I say she was willing all the time, and there was no sacrilege!"

Innocentia started speaking, but again Avilf checked her; he was still not sure which to believe, but in the end he trusted Gersemi.

"This is my judgment: I hope it will satisfy Saint Mark. The lady is to have her jewels restored; Fravitta must buy them back from his friends; if he cannot pay now he must soon: she is to go free. Hildiok shall marry the woman. You are dismissed." He turned his back on them all and walked out.

Thiudis kissed Gersemi on both cheeks. "I'm grateful!" she said. "God knows what mightn't have happened to my boy."

"I wouldn't have done it for every one," said Gersemi. "I wonder how Zenonis likes having to take Hildiok!"

"She might do worse for herself now. There's thousands and thousands of prisoners they've taken. And the spoil! Gersemi, I've found some kinsfolk,

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one even who remembers my father Gudamir. They go separate from the rest, they're not Alaric's men; I shall go with them. The trap's broken."

"And I'm marrying Avilf. He's got two young children, but I'm not too old to bear another if he's not too old to help me!" She looked round.

"Where's Sunjarith?"

"He followed Avilf out."

"Oh. I think I shall have to say good-bye to Innocentia."

Fravitta was getting back the jewels, either paying for them or promising to, and in another room Hildiok was wooing the not too reluctant Zenonis again. But Innocentia sat by herself and when Gersemi came in she leapt to her feet.

"You, you wicked, godless creature! You snake that I warmed in my own bosom! Oh, I wish I'd left you to starve in Istria! I wish I'd never seen you!"

"What's the matter?" said Gersemi. "Didn't you like him as much as you thought you would?" Then she jumped back, because Innocentia was going for her face with the nails of both hands, and she didn't want Avilf to see her scratched; but she was only just in time.

When Avilf dismissed his people they knew not to follow; but Sunjarith went after him as far as the inner room, which must have been very fine before it was ransacked by treasure-hunting Goths, the hangings torn down, the chair legs broken off, the beautiful vases smashed into little pieces that

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scrunched underfoot on the floor. Avilf flung himself down on a couch and then saw the boy standing just inside the door.

"Well," he said, "have you chosen?"

"My mother said you'd talk. But will you? I'm more than a child,"

"What's the trouble? Is it about her?"

"Partly. But that's between her and me. It's not the worst. What am I to do, half-Roman and half-barbarian, and getting no good of either?"

Avilf sat up straight, considering the boy; he answered in a rather different voice: "Which will you have — war or peace?"

"Oh, peace!" The boy shivered. "After to-day. But it's not possible."

"Alaric thinks so. I'll tell you how it is. It's as if Rome was an old, old tree, an apple tree full of blossom in spring and once a great fruit-bearer: only now there's hardly an apple on any twig in autumn. But take the young slip, the new blood from the north, and graft it on: all at once there's life again, it towers up into a fresh, strong tree, and in a few years all the branches are full of apples. That's what we mean by peace between Goth-folk and Rome-folk."

"It looks little like it now."

"You see nothing but the grafting knife and the bleeding sap. The other is to come. But we must look carefully to the binding in of the slip, and that's not work for all,"

"Is it work for me?"

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"It might be. You shall come with me to Alaric. Is that what you choose, Sunjarith?"

"It's worth living for; I was afraid there was nothing. But I can see it — big. Avilf, I let mother have that other ring for you."

"Then it's peace between us too?" The boy nodded, and then Gersemi came in with the bear-skin over her shoulder.

But it was a hard time for the old tree. All that night, in the packed church of Saint Paul, Marcella lay dying, her head on the breast of one of her nuns. The convent had been broken into and she herself had been tortured by furious Goths who would not believe that she had not somewhere concealed a more solid treasure than holiness. And soon the echoes of those terrible hours began to beat about the churches of Augustine and the cell of Jerome. Over land and sea to Byzant fled messengers who looked back over their shoulders; and even Byzant was not glad of such a fall for Rome.

But Honorius in Ravenna was doing some very successful chicken breeding; he had the true scientific spirit, and cared very little about such a distant and immaterial thing as the sack of his capital.

When she came to it again, Innocentia found her house fearfully damaged; it was like a cracked mirror: she could not bear to live in it any longer. A few of her slaves came back, and she set sail for Africa, and there got much comfort from Saint Augustine. And sometimes she wondered whether the worst thing that had happened to her was not

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perhaps that she had let Gersemi have the last word. And was it true—was it—was it? Such thoughts are unbecoming to a Christian matron.

Alaric marched south with his army. Fravitta rode with them; the best bit of spoil he got out of Rome was his old team of Arabs, and he went light-hearted with no longings unaccomplished now. Only when he heard the veterans talk he wished he had gone three years earlier, and, looking back at himself then, laughed at the boy who had clung so to the hope of a woman smiling at him! A woman six years older than he was! A woman—if only he'd known—just like any other. And all Italy lay under his hand with a thousand women more, and gold and wine and horses and sunshine! But Sunjarith was learning to look at a different Italy.

Gersemi and Avilf married and lived happily ever afterwards: with cups full, crops full, and cradle full.

## *Note on Books and ones Funny Idea of Ancient History*

**O**E probably starts with a few fixed ideas about the Romans. Earliest, I suppose, the sudden dawn of a city on seven hills — large hills, of course:

"Thine, Roman, is the pilum:  
Roman, the sword is thine,  
The even trench, the bristling mound,  
The legion's ordered line;  
And thine the wheels of triumph,  
Which with their laurelled train  
Move slowly up the shouting streets  
To Jove's eternal fane."

Because one always has to learn the Lays as soon as one goes to school. I think one is rather hazy for a few centuries after that; there are vague incidents in the Punic Wars (one wasn't allowed to read Salammbo till later), and the Greeks have to be fitted in somewhere, besides all those rather disconnected Latin proses about unlikely tyrants. And then the good old Republic, Marius on the ruins of Carthage, some easy Cicero, and Lucullus among the oysters. But Shakespeare comes and makes it look quite different. I don't expect the Gallic Wars produce any effect on anybody: one didn't get beyond the bridge over the Rhine. And the poets are such a bother to scan; besides, one never thought of it as

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poetry, only as Latin Verse. Tacitus was better, but one never got far enough.

But then, ah then, we get to Nero — and the Christians—and the lions! And several dozen cinema films. But what's happened to the stern Roman with all his virtues and broadswords? Most unaccountably he has disappeared. And the Roman Matron has definitely turned into the Christian Maiden.

Well, after that there's another gap; one has a vague idea of Vespasian and the drains, and then there's Marius the Epicurean in a green calf binding on the drawing-room table. Gibbon leaps in like Puck, and for some thousand years no man is virtuous and disinterested (except possibly the Divine Julian and Belisarius), no lady is chaste, and few are even beautiful.

But what about Pertinax and Parnesius? One must get them in. And the people in *Hypatia*: but none of the nice ones there were really Roman Romans either. All very muddling.

Not unnaturally one always used to take sides with the barbarians against Rome; one even sided with Carthage, though in real life one probably wouldn't have had any use for that particular type of commercial man. But it's the Northerner, one's possible ancestor, who is really thrilling: "Where ride Massilia's triremes, Heavy with fair-haired slaves," And that makes one interested in the Roman idea of slavery.

There are all the obvious horrors to begin with, the lamprey pond and the whips and the chains.

## Notes on Books *Books*

And the more one reads the nastier it looks, even the comic second footmen in Plautus say things that make one shiver; later on it gets more and more terribly legal and wholesale and hopeless, till one comes to Spartacus and the six thousand slaves crucified along the Appian Way. Of course, by and by there's a chance of meeting the intensely romantic Ancient Briton (like my old love Esca in "The Gladiators"), who was always a chief in his own land, a town councillor, as it were, of Mudcombe-on-Sea. I even suspect Caesar's Brittanus of having been at least a Kensington Guardian. But all the same I believe one was right to lay a good deal of emphasis on the slave base at Rome, partly, perhaps, because people with slaves don't take the trouble to invent things. It is almost incredible to think how lately windmills, spinning-wheels, and tacking a ship — to take only a few instances — were invented. Perhaps a couple of strategic railways might have saved the Roman Empire (or perhaps not); but it seems odd that a thing so entirely in the Roman taste as a railway should have remained uninvented. One has also to remember that they had no potatoes.

However, to go back to the books I used for these stories. Unfortunately I only just know the Greek alphabet, and my Latin never got beyond the standard of Higher Locals (pass); but like the ass I know my master's crib.

For "Vercingetorix and the Others" my chief books were: - *Cæsar, the Gallic Wars*; Rice Holmes, *Cæsar's Conquest of Gaul*; Camille Jullian, *Vercinge-*



## Notes on Books *Books*

torix; Dechelette, *Manuel d'Archeologie*; Holder, *Alt-Celtischer Sprachschatz*. I think one can see most of the coins mentioned in the last story in the British Museum.

For "The Triumph of Faith": the Bible; Renan's *Vie des Apôtres* and *Saint Paul*; Hogarth, *The Nearer East*; Cumont, *Mysteres de Mithra* and *Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain*; and Lucian.

For "When the Bough Breaks": - mostly Gibbon; Hodgkin, *Italy and her Invaders*; Thierry, *Vie de Saint Jerome*; Jordanes; The Eddas; and *The City of God*. I saw the name Gudimir up over a shop at Sarajevo two years ago. Gersemi's song at the beginning of Part IV is Friulian.

Of the places mentioned: Vindobona is now •Vienna; Ascrivium is Cattaro (Kotor), Epidaurus is Ragusa (Dubrovnik), Jadera is Zara (Zadar), and Colonia Julia is Pola. I think all the other towns have still got the same names.

Friedländer's *Roman Life and Manners under the Early Empire* is a delightful book too, and tells one how all the fish-wives in Nijni Novgorod have at least three pearl necklaces each. And there are a lot of other books that are fun, but I wish the Loeb translations weren't so expensive now. And besides, the British Museum is there just waiting to be looked at, only it is rather difficult ever to get to the department one wants because the others on the way are always so fascinating.











