

## CHAPTER XIX

When the little, grim, gray man had set the object covered with a cloth upon the table in the center of the room and left the apartment, he did not return to camp as Norman of Torn had ordered.

Instead, he halted immediately without the little door, which he left a trifle ajar, and there he waited, listening to all that passed between Bertrade de Montfort and Norman of Torn.

As he heard the proud daughter of Simon de Montfort declare her love for the Devil of Torn, a cruel smile curled his lip.

"It will be better than I had hoped," he muttered, "and easier. 'S blood! How much easier now that Leicester, too, may have his whole proud heart in the hanging of Norman of Torn. Ah, what a sublime revenge! I have waited long, thou cur of a King, to return the blow thou struck that day, but the return shall be an hundred-fold increased by long accumulated interest."

Quickly, the wiry figure hastened through the passageways and corridors, until he came to the great hall where sat De Montfort and the King, with Philip of France and many others, gentlemen and nobles.

Before the guard at the door could halt him, he had broken into the room and, addressing the King, cried:

"Wouldst take the Devil of Torn, My Lord King? He be now alone where a few men may seize him."

"What now! What now!" ejaculated Henry. "What madman be this?"

"I be no madman, Your Majesty. Never did brain work more clearly or to more certain ends," replied the man.

"It may doubtless be some ruse of the cut-throat himself," cried De Montfort.

"Where be the knave?" asked Henry.

"He stands now within this palace and in his arms be Bertrade, daughter of My Lord Earl of Leicester. Even now she did but tell him that she loved him."

"Hold," cried De Montfort. "Hold fast thy foul tongue. What meanest thou by uttering such lies, and to my very face?"

"They be no lies, Simon de Montfort. An I tell thee that Roger de Conde and Norman of Torn be one and the same, thou wilt know that I speak no lie."

De Montfort paled.

"Where be the craven wretch?" he demanded.

"Come," said the little, old man. And turning, he led from the hall, closely followed by De Montfort, the King, Prince Philip and the others.

"Thou hadst better bring twenty fighting men--thou'lt need them all to take Norman of Torn," he advised De Montfort. And so as they passed the guard room, the party was increased by twenty men-at-arms.

Scarcely had Bertrade de Montfort left him ere Norman of Torn heard the tramping of many feet. They seemed approaching up the dim corridor that led to the little door of the apartment where he stood.

Quickly, he moved to the opposite door and, standing with his hand upon the latch, waited. Yes, they were coming that way, many of them and quickly and, as he heard them pause without, he drew aside the arras and pushed open the door behind him; backing into the other apartment just as Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, burst into the room from the opposite side.

At the same instant, a scream rang out behind Norman of Torn, and, turning, he faced a brightly lighted room in which sat Eleanor, Queen of England and another Eleanor, wife of Simon de Montfort, with their ladies.

There was no hiding now, and no escape; for run he would not, even had there been where to run. Slowly, he backed away from the door toward a corner where, with his back against a wall and a table at his right, he might die as he had lived, fighting; for Norman of Torn knew that he could hope for no quarter from the men who had him cornered there like a great bear in a trap.

With an army at their call, it were an easy thing to take a lone man, even though that man were the Devil of Torn.

The King and De Montfort had now crossed the smaller apartment and were within the room where the outlaw stood at bay.

At the far side, the group of royal and noble women stood huddled together, while behind De Montfort and the King pushed twenty gentlemen and as many men-at-arms.

"What dost thou here, Norman of Torn?" cried De Montfort, angrily. "Where be my daughter, Bertrade?"

"I be here, My Lord Earl, to attend to mine own affairs," replied Norman of Torn, "which be the affair of no other man. As to your daughter: I know nothing of her whereabouts. What should she have to do with the Devil of Torn, My Lord?"

De Montfort turned toward the little gray man.

"He lies," shouted he. "Her kisses be yet wet upon his lips."

Norman of Torn looked at the speaker and, beneath the visor that was now partly raised, he saw the features of the man whom, for twenty years, he had called father.

He had never expected love from this hard old man, but treachery and harm from him? No, he could not believe it. One of them must have gone mad. But why Flory's armor and where was the faithful Flory?

"Father!" he ejaculated, "leadest thou the hated English King against thine own son?"

"Thou be no son of mine, Norman of Torn," retorted the old man. "Thy days of usefulness to me be past. Tonight thou serve me best swinging from a wooden gibbet. Take him, My Lord Earl; they say there be a good strong gibbet in the courtyard below."

"Wilt surrender, Norman of Torn?" cried De Montfort.

"Yes," was the reply, "when this floor be ankle deep in English blood and my heart has ceased to beat, then will I surrender."

"Come, come," cried the King. "Let your men take the dog, De Montfort!"

"Have at him, then," ordered the Earl, turning toward the waiting men-at-arms, none of whom seemed overly anxious to advance upon the doomed outlaw.

But an officer of the guard set them the example, and so they pushed forward in a body toward Norman of Torn; twenty blades bared against one.

There was no play now for the Outlaw of Torn. It was grim battle and his only hope that he might take a fearful toll of his enemies before he himself went down.

And so he fought as he never fought before, to kill as many and as quickly as he might. And to those who watched, it was as though the young officer of the Guard had not come within reach of that terrible blade ere he lay dead upon the floor, and then the point of death passed into the lungs of one of the men-at-arms, scarcely pausing ere it pierced the heart of a third.

The soldiers fell back momentarily, awed by the frightful havoc of that mighty arm. Before De Montfort could urge them on to renew the attack, a girlish figure, clothed in a long riding cloak, burst through the little knot of men as they stood facing their lone antagonist.

With a low cry of mingled rage and indignation, Bertrade de Montfort threw herself before the Devil of Torn, and facing the astonished company of king, prince, nobles and soldiers, drew herself to her full height, and with all the pride of race and blood that was her right of heritage from a French king on her father's side and an English king on her mother's, she flashed her defiance and contempt in the single word:

"Cowards!"

"What means this, girl?" demanded De Montfort, "Art gone stark mad? Know thou that this fellow be the Outlaw of Torn?"

"If I had not before known it, My Lord," she replied haughtily, "it would be plain to me now as I see forty cowards hesitating to attack a lone man. What other man in all England could stand thus against forty? A lion at bay with forty jackals yelping at his feet."

"Enough, girl," cried the King, "what be this knave to thee?"

"He loves me, Your Majesty," she replied proudly, "and I, him."

"Thou lov'st this low-born cut-throat, Bertrade," cried Henry. "Thou, a De Montfort, the daughter of my sister; who have seen this murderer's accursed mark upon the foreheads of thy kin; thou have seen him flaunt his defiance in the King's, thy uncle's, face, and bend his whole life to preying upon thy people; thou lov'st this monster?"

"I love him, My Lord King."

"Thou lov'st him, Bertrade?" asked Philip of France in a low tone, pressing nearer to the girl.

"Yes, Philip," she said, a little note of sadness and finality in her voice; but her eyes met his squarely and bravely.

Instantly, the sword of the young Prince leaped from its scabbard, and facing De Montfort and the others, he backed to the side of Norman of Torn.

"That she loves him be enough for me to know, my gentlemen," he said. "Who takes the man Bertrade de Montfort loves must take Philip of France as well."

Norman of Torn laid his left hand upon the other's shoulder.

"No, thou must not do this thing, my friend," he said. "It be my fight and I will fight it alone. Go, I beg of thee, and take her with thee, out of harm's way."

As they argued, Simon de Montfort and the King had spoken together, and, at a word from the former, the soldiers rushed suddenly to the attack again. It was a cowardly strategem, for they knew that the two could not fight with the girl between them and their adversaries. And thus, by weight of numbers, they took Bertrade de Montfort and the Prince away from Norman of Torn without a blow being struck, and then the little, grim, gray, old man stepped forward.

"There be but one sword in all England, nay in all the world that can, alone, take Norman of Torn," he said, addressing the King, "and that sword be mine. Keep thy cattle back, out of my way." And, without waiting for a reply, the grim, gray man sprang in to engage him whom for twenty years he had called son.

Norman of Torn came out of his corner to meet his new-found enemy, and there, in the apartment of the Queen of England in the castle of Battel, was fought such a duel as no man there had ever seen before, nor is it credible that its like was ever fought before or since.

The world's two greatest swordsmen: teacher and pupil--the one with the strength of a young bull, the other with the cunning of an old gray fox, and both with a lifetime of training behind them, and the lust of blood and hate before them--thrust and parried and cut until those that gazed awestricken upon the marvellous swordplay scarcely breathed in the tensivity of their wonder.

Back and forth about the room they moved, while those who had come to kill pressed back to make room for the contestants. Now was the young man forcing his older foeman more and more upon the defensive. Slowly, but as sure as death, he was winning ever nearer and nearer to victory. The old man saw it too. He had devoted years of his life to training that mighty

sword arm that it might deal out death to others, and now--ah! The grim justice of the retribution he, at last, was to fall before its diabolical cunning.

He could not win in fair fight against Norman of Torn; that the wily Frenchman saw; but now that death was so close upon him that he felt its cold breath condensing on his brow, he had no stomach to die, and so he cast about for any means whereby he might escape the result of his rash venture.

Presently he saw his opportunity. Norman of Torn stood beside the body of one of his earlier antagonists. Slowly the old man worked around until the body lay directly behind the outlaw, and then with a final rally and one great last burst of supreme swordsmanship, he rushed Norman of Torn back for a bare step--it was enough. The outlaw's foot struck the prostrate corpse; he staggered, and for one brief instant his sword arm rose, ever so little, as he strove to retain his equilibrium; but that little was enough. It was what the gray old snake had expected, and he was ready. Like lightning, his sword shot through the opening, and, for the first time in his life of continual combat and death, Norman of Torn felt cold steel tear his flesh. But ere he fell, his sword responded to the last fierce command of that iron will, and as his body sank limply to the floor, rolling with outstretched arms, upon its back, the little, grim, gray man went down also, clutching frantically at a gleaming blade buried in his chest.

For an instant, the watchers stood as though petrified, and then Bertrade de Montfort, tearing herself from the restraining hand of her father, rushed to the side of the lifeless body of the man she loved. Kneeling there beside him she called his name aloud, as she unlaced his helm. Tearing the steel headgear from him, she caressed his face, kissing the white forehead and the still lips.

"Oh God! Oh God!" she murmured. "Why hast thou taken him? Outlaw though he was, in his little finger was more of honor, of chivalry, of true manhood than courses through the veins of all the nobles of England.

"I do not wonder that he preyed upon you," she cried, turning upon the knights behind her. "His life was clean, thine be rotten; he was loyal to his friends and to the downtrodden, ye be traitors at heart, all; and ever be ye trampling upon those who be down that they may sink deeper into the mud. Mon Dieu! How I hate you," she finished. And as she spoke the words, Bertrade de Montfort looked straight into the eyes of her father.

The old Earl turned his head, for at heart he was a brave, broad, kindly man, and he regretted what he had done in the haste and heat of anger.

"Come, child," said the King, "thou art distraught; thou sayest what thou mean not. The world is better that this man be dead. He was an enemy of organized society, he preyed ever upon his fellows. Life in England will be safer after this day. Do not weep over the clay of a nameless adventurer who knew not his own father."

Someone had lifted the little, grim, gray, old man to a sitting posture. He was not dead. Occasionally he coughed, and when he did, his frame was racked with suffering, and blood flowed from his mouth and nostrils.

At last they saw that he was trying to speak. Weakly he motioned toward the King. Henry came toward him.

"Thou hast won thy sovereign's gratitude, my man," said the King, kindly. "What be thy name?"

The old fellow tried to speak, but the effort brought on another paroxysm of coughing. At last he managed to whisper.

"Look--at--me. Dost thou--not--remember me? The--foils--the--blow--twenty-long-years. Thou--spat--upon--me."

Henry knelt and peered into the dying face.

"De Vac!" he exclaimed.

The old man nodded. Then he pointed to where lay Norman of Torn.

"Outlaw--highwayman--scourge--of--England. Look--upon--his--face. Open--his tunic--left--breast."

He stopped from very weakness, and then in another moment, with a final effort: "De--Vac's--revenge. God--damn--the--English," and slipped forward upon the rushes, dead.

The King had heard, and De Montfort and the Queen. They stood looking into each other's eyes with a strange fixity, for what seemed an eternity, before any dared to move; and then, as though they feared what they should see, they bent over the form of the Outlaw of Torn for the first time.

The Queen gave a little cry as she saw the still, quiet face turned up to hers.

"Edward!" she whispered.

"Not Edward, Madame," said De Montfort, "but--"

The King knelt beside the still form, across the breast of which lay the unconscious body of Bertrade de Montfort. Gently, he lifted her to the waiting arms of Philip of France, and then the King, with his own hands, tore off the shirt of mail, and with trembling fingers ripped wide the tunic where it covered the left breast of the Devil of Torn.

"Oh God!" he cried, and buried his head in his arms.

The Queen had seen also, and with a little moan she sank beside the body of her second born, crying out:

"Oh Richard, my boy, my boy!" And as she bent still lower to kiss the lily mark upon the left breast of the son she had not seen to know for over twenty years, she paused, and with frantic haste she pressed her ear to his breast.

"He lives!" she almost shrieked. "Quick, Henry, our son lives!"

Bertrade de Montfort had regained consciousness almost before Philip of France had raised her from the floor, and she stood now, leaning on his arm, watching with wide, questioning eyes the strange scene being enacted at her feet.

Slowly, the lids of Norman of Torn lifted with returning consciousness. Before him, on her knees in the blood spattered rushes of the floor, knelt Eleanor, Queen of England, alternately chafing and kissing his hands.

A sore wound indeed to have brought on such a wild delirium, thought the Outlaw of Torn.

He felt his body, in a half sitting, half reclining position, resting against one who knelt behind him, and as he lifted his head to see whom it might be supporting him, he looked into the eyes of the King, upon whose breast his head rested.

Strange vagaries of a disordered brain! Yes it must have been a very terrible wound that the little old man of Torn had given him; but why could he not dream that Bertrade de Montfort held him? And then his eyes wandered about among the throng of ladies, nobles and soldiers standing uncovered and with bowed heads about him. Presently he found her.

"Bertrade!" he whispered.

The girl came and knelt beside him, opposite the Queen.



"Bertrade, tell me thou art real; that thou at least be no dream."

"I be very real, dear heart," she answered, "and these others be real, also. When thou art stronger, thou shalt understand the strange thing that has happened. These who wert thine enemies, Norman of Torn, be thy best friends now--that thou should know, so that thou may rest in peace until thou be better."

He groped for her hand, and, finding it, closed his eyes with a faint sigh.

They bore him to a cot in an apartment next the Queen's, and all that night the mother and the promised wife of the Outlaw of Torn sat bathing his fevered forehead. The King's chirurgeon was there also, while the King and De Montfort paced the corridor without.

And it is ever thus; whether in hovel or palace; in the days of Moses, or in the days that be ours; the lamb that has been lost and is found again be always the best beloved.

Toward morning, Norman of Torn fell into a quiet and natural sleep; the fever and delirium had succumbed before his perfect health and iron constitution. The chirurgeon turned to the Queen and Bertrade de Montfort.

"You had best retire, ladies," he said, "and rest. The Prince will live."

Late that afternoon he awoke, and no amount of persuasion or commands on the part of the King's chirurgeon could restrain him from arising.

"I beseech thee to lie quiet, My Lord Prince," urged the chirurgeon.

"Why call thou me prince?" asked Norman of Torn.

"There be one without whose right it be to explain that to thee," replied the chirurgeon, "and when thou be clothed, if rise thou wilt, thou mayst see her, My Lord."

The chirurgeon aided him to dress and, opening the door, he spoke to a sentry who stood just without. The sentry transmitted the message to a young squire who was waiting there, and presently the door was thrown open again from without, and a voice announced:

"Her Majesty, the Queen!"

Norman of Torn looked up in unfeigned surprise, and then there came back to him the scene in the Queen's apartment the night before. It was all a sore perplexity to him; he could not fathom it, nor did he attempt to.

And now, as in a dream, he saw the Queen of England coming toward him across the small room, her arms outstretched; her beautiful face radiant with happiness and love.

"Richard, my son!" exclaimed Eleanor, coming to him and taking his face in her hands and kissing him.

"Madame!" exclaimed the surprised man. "Be all the world gone crazy?"

And then she told him the strange story of the little lost prince of England.

When she had finished, he knelt at her feet, taking her hand in his and raising it to his lips.

"I did not know, Madame," he said, "or never would my sword have been bared in other service than thine. If thou canst forgive me, Madame, never can I forgive myself."

"Take it not so hard, my son," said Eleanor of England. "It be no fault of thine, and there be nothing to forgive; only happiness and rejoicing should we feel, now that thou be found again."

"Forgiveness!" said a man's voice behind them. "Forsooth, it be we that should ask forgiveness; hunting down our own son with swords and halters."

"Any but a fool might have known that it was no base-born knave who sent the King's army back, naked, to the King, and rammed the King's message down his messenger's throat."

"By all the saints, Richard, thou be every inch a King's son, an' though we made sour faces at the time, we be all the prouder of thee now."

The Queen and the outlaw had turned at the first words to see the King standing behind them, and now Norman of Torn rose, half smiling, and greeted his father.

"They be sorry jokes, Sire," he said. "Methinks it had been better had Richard remained lost. It will do the honor of the Plantagenets but little good to acknowledge the Outlaw of Torn as a prince of the blood."

But they would not have it so, and it remained for a later King of England to wipe the great name from the pages of history--perhaps a jealous king.

Presently the King and Queen, adding their pleas to those of the surgeon, prevailed upon him to lie down once more, and when he had done so they

left him, that he might sleep again; but no sooner had the door closed behind them than he arose and left the apartment by another exit.

It was by chance that, in a deep set window, he found her for whom he was searching. She sat looking wistfully into space, an expression half sad upon her beautiful face. She did not see him as he approached, and he stood there for several moments watching her dear profile, and the rising and falling of her bosom over that true and loyal heart that had beaten so proudly against all the power of a mighty throne for the despised Outlaw of Torn.

He did not speak, but presently that strange, subtle sixth sense which warns us that we are not alone, though our eyes see not nor our ears hear, caused her to turn.

With a little cry she arose, and then, curtsying low after the manner of the court, said:

"What would My Lord Richard, Prince of England, of his poor subject?" And then, more gravely, "My Lord, I have been raised at court, and I understand that a prince does not wed rashly, and so let us forget what passed between Bertrade de Montfort and Norman of Torn."

"Prince Richard of England will in no wise disturb royal precedents," he replied, "for he will wed not rashly, but most wisely, since he will wed none but Bertrade de Montfort." And he who had been the Outlaw of Torn took the fair young girl in his arms, adding: "If she still loves me, now that I be a prince?"

She put her arms about his neck, and drew his cheek down close to hers.

"It was not the outlaw that I loved, Richard, nor be it the prince I love now; it be all the same to me, prince or highwayman--it be thee I love, dear heart--just thee."

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The following changes have been made:

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The only changes that have been made to this text by Publisher's Choice Books and its General Manager/Editor have been the removal of all word-breaking hyphenation, and the occasional addition of a comma to separate certain phrases. These changes were effected merely to increase the Reader's reading ease and enjoyment of the text.

The following spelling changes were effected within the text for reasons of clarity:

"chid" to "chide" "sword play" to "swordplay" "subtile" to "subtle"