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"Sweet Adelais"

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

I was on a clear September day that the Marquis of Falmouth set out for France. John of Bedford had sent for him post-haste when Henry V. was stricken at Senlis with what bid fair to prove a mortal distemper; for the Marquis was Bedford's comrade in arms, a proven soldier, and the Duke Regent suspected that to hold France in case of the King's death he would presently need all the help he could muster.

"And I, too, look for warm work," the Marquis conceded to Mistress Adelais Vernon at parting. "But, God willing, my sweet, we shall be wed at Christmas for all that. The Channel is not very wide. At a pinch I might swim it, I think, to come to you."

Then he kissed her and rode away with his men. Adelais stared after them, striving to picture her betrothed rivalling Leander in this fashion, and subsequently laughed. The Marquis was a great lord and a brave captain, but long past his first youth; his blood ran somewhat too sluggishly ever to be roused to the high lunacies of the Sestian amorist. But a moment later, recollecting the man's cold desire for her, Adelais shuddered.

This was in the courtyard at Winstead. Roger Darke, of Yaxham, her cousin, standing beside her, noted the gesture and snarled.

"Think twice of it, Adelais," said he.
Whereupon Mistress Vernon flushed
like a peony. "I honor him," she said,
with some irrelevance, "and he loves me."

"Love! love!" Roger scoffed. "O you piece of ice! you graystone saint! what do you know of love?" On a sudden Master Darke caught both her hands in his. "I love you!" he said, between his teeth, his eyes flaming. "O God in heaven! how I love you! And you mean to marry this man for his title! Do you not believe that I love you, Adelais?"

Gently she disengaged herself. This was of a pattern with Roger's behavior any time during the past two years. "I suppose you do," Adelais conceded, with the tiniest possible shrug. "Perhaps that is why I find you so insufferable."

Afterward Mistress Vernon turned on her heel and left Master Darke volubly blaspheming Fortune.

Adelais came slowly into the walled garden of Winstead, aflame now with autumnal scarlet and gold. There she seated herself upon a semicircular marble bench, and laughed for no apparent reason, and contentedly waited what Dame Luck might send.

She was very beautiful. Against the garden's hurly-burly of color her green gown glowed like an emerald; her eyes, too, were emeralds, vivid, unfathomable, quite untinged with either blue or gray. The long oval of her face was a uniform ivory-white, but her petulant lips burned crimson; and her hair mimicked the pale autumn sunlight and shamed it. All in all, the beauty of Adelais Vernon was somewhat elfin—say, the beauty of a young witch shrewd at love-potions, but ignorant of their flavor; yet before this it had stirred men's hearts to madness, and the county boasted it.

Presently Adelais lifted her imperious little head alertly, and then again she smiled, for out of the depths of the garden, with an embellishment of divers trills and roulades, there came a man's voice that carolled blithely.

Sang the voice:

- "Had you lived when earth was new, What had bards of old to do Save to sing the song of you?
- "Had you lived in ancient days,
 Adelais, sweet Adelais,
 You had all the ancients' praise—
 You whose beauty might have won
 Canticles of Solomon,

Had the old Judean king E'er beheld the goodliest thing Earth of heaven's grace hath got.

"Had you gladdened Greece, were not All the nymphs of Greece forgot?

Had you trod Sicilian ways,
Adelais, sweet Adelais,
You had pilfered all their praise:
Bion and Theocritus
Had transmitted unto us
Honeyed sounds and songs to tell
Of your beauty's miracle,
Delicate, desirable,
And their singing skill were bent
You alone to praise, content,
While the world slipped by, to gaze
On the grace of you and praise
Sweet Adelais."

Then the song ended, and a man, wheeling about the hedge, paused and regarded her with adoring eyes. Adelais looked up at him, incredibly surprised by his coming.

This was the young Sieur d'Arnaye, Hugh Vernon's prisoner, taken at Agincourt seven years earlier, and held since then, by the King's command, without ransom; for it was Henry's policy to release none of the important French Even on his death-bed he prisoners. found time to admonish his brother, John of Bedford, that four of these—Charles d'Orléans and Jehan de Bourbon and Arthur de Rougemont and Fulke d'Arnaye—should never be set at liberty. "Lest," as he said, "more fire be kindled in one day than may be quenched in three."

Presently the Sieur d'Arnaye sighed, with a certain ostentation; and Adelais laughed and demanded the cause of his grief.

"Mademoiselle," he said—his English had but a trace of accent—"I am afflicted with a very grave malady."

"And its name?" said she.

"They call it love, mademoiselle."

Adelais laughed yet again, and doubted if the disease were incurable. But Fulke d'Arnaye seated himself beside her and demonstrated that in his case it might never be healed.

"For it is true," he observed, "that the ancient Scythians, who lived before the moon was made, were wont to cure this malady by bloodletting under the

ears; but your brother, mademoiselle, denies me access to all knives. And the leech Ælian avers that it may be cured by the herb agnea; but your brother, mademoiselle, will not permit that I go into the fields in search of this herb. And in Greece — $h\acute{e}!$ mademoiselle, I might easily be healed of my malady in For there is the rock Leucata Petra, from which a lover may leap and be cured; and the well of the Cyziceni, from which a lover may drink and be cured; and the river Selemnus, in which a lover may bathe and be cured: and your brother will not permit that I go to Greece. You have a very cruel brother, mademoiselle; seven long years, no less, he has penned me here like a starling in a cage." And Fulke d'Arnaye shook his head at her reproachfully.

Afterward he laughed. Always this Frenchman found something at which to laugh; Adelais could not remember in all the seven years a time when she had seen him downcast. But now, as his lips jested of his imprisonment, his eyes stared at her mirthlessly, like a dog at his master, and her eyes fell before the candor of the passion she saw in them.

"My lord," said Adelais, "why will you not give your parole? Then might you be free to come and go as you would." A little she bent toward him, a faint red showing in her cheeks. "To-night the Earl of Brudenel holds the Michaelmas feast at Halvergate. Give your parole, my lord, and come with us. There will be fair ladies there who may perhaps heal your malady."

But the Sieur d'Arnaye only laughed. "I cannot give my parole," he said, "since I mean to escape, for all your brother's care." Then he fell to pacing up and down before her. "God on the cross!" he cried, "I shall never give up hoping. Listen, mademoiselle," he went on, more calmly, and gave a nervous gesture toward the east, "yonder is France, sacked, pillaged, ruinous, prostrate, naked to her enemy. But at Vincennes, men say, the butcher of Agincourt is dying. With him dies the English power in France. Can his son hold that fair realm, think you? Are those tiny hands with which he may not yet feed himself capable to wield a sceptre? Can he who is yet beholden to nurses for



Half-tone plate engraved by F. A. Pettit

justice of a nation? Hé! I think not, mademoiselle. France will have need of Therefore I cannot give me shortly. my parole."

"Then must my brother still lose his sleep, lord, for always your safe-keeping is in his mind. Only to-day he set out for the coast at dawn to examine those Frenchmen who landed yesterday."

At this he wheeled about. "Frenchmen!"

"Only Norman fishermen, lord, whom the storm drove to seek shelter in England. But he feared they had come to rescue you."

Fulke d'Arnaye shrugged his shoulders. "That was my thought, too," he said, with a laugh. "Always I dream of escape, mademoiselle. Eh, I shall escape yet, it may be."

"But I will not have you escape," said Adelais, and tossed her glittering little head. "Winstead would not be Winstead without you. Why, I was but a child, my lord, when you came. Have you forgotten, then, the lank, awkward child who used to stare at you so gravely?"

"Mademoiselle," he returned, and now his voice trembled, and still the hunger in his eyes grew more great, "I think that in all these years I have forgotten nothing-not even the most trivial happening, mademoiselle-wherein you had a part. You were a very beautiful child. Look you, I remember as if it it. So I pray you pardon me, mademwere yesterday that you never wept when your good lady mother—whose soul may Christ have in His keeping—was forced to punish you for some little misdeed. No, you never wept; but your eyes would grow wistful, and you would come to me here in the garden, and sit with me for a long time in silence. 'Fulke,' you would say, quite suddenly, 'I love you better than my mother.' And I told you that it was wrong to say that,-did I not, mademoiselle? My faith, yes! but I may confess now that I liked it," Fulke d'Arnaye ended, with a faint chuckle.

Adelais sat motionless; but she trem-Strange how the sound bled a little. of this man's voice had power to move her.

"And now the child is a woman-a woman who will presently be Marchioness

milk distribute sustenance to the law and of Falmouth. Look you, when I get free of my prison-and I shall get free, never fear, mademoiselle-I shall often think of that great lady, in France yonder. For only God may curb a man's dreams, and God is very pitiful. So I hope to dream nightly of a gracious lady whose hair is gold, and whose eyes are colored like the summer sea, and whose voice is high and delicate and very wonderfully sweet. Nightly, I think, the vision of that dear enemy will hearten me to fight for France by day. In effect, mademoiselle, your traitor beauty will yet aid me to destroy your country." The Sieur d'Arnaye laughed, somewhat cheerlessly, as he lifted her hand to his lips.

Strange how his least touch set her pulses drumming. Adelais drew away from him, half in fear. "No,-ah, no!" she panted; "remember, lord, I am not free."

"Indeed. we tread on dangerous ground," the Frenchman assented, with a sad little smile. "Pardon me, mademoiselle. For even were you free of your troth-plight-even were I free of my prison, most beautiful lady - I have naught to offer you even in the dear land of France. They tell me that the owl and the wolf hunt undisturbed o' nights where Arnaye once stood. My château is carpeted with furze and roofed with God's heaven. That gives me a large estate yonder-does it not?-but I may not reasonably ask a woman to share oiselle, and I pray that the Marchioness of Falmouth may be very happy."

And with that he vanished into the autumn-fired recesses of the garden, singing, his head borne stiff. Ah, the brave man who esteemed misfortune so lightly! thought Adelais. She remembered that the Marquis of Falmouth rarely smiled; and only once—at a bull-baiting -had she heard him laugh. It needed bloodshed, then, to amuse him. Adelais shuddered.

But through the scarlet coppiess of the garden, growing fainter and yet more faint, rang the singing of Fulke d'Arnaye:

"Had you lived in Roman times, No Catullus in his rhymes Had lamented Lesbig's sparrow: He had praised your forehead, narrow As the slender crescent moon, White as apple-trees in June; He had made some amorous tune Of the laughing light Eros Snared as Psycheward he goes By your beauty—by your slim, White, perfect beauty.

"After him,
Horace, finding in your eyes
Horace throned in Paradise,
Would have made you melodies
Fittingly to hymn your praise,
Sweet Adelais."

Into the midst of the Michaelmas festivities at Halvergate that night there burst a mud-splattered fellow in search of Sir Hugh Vernon. Roger Darke brought him to the knight. He came, he said, from Simeon de Beck, the master of Castle Rising, with tidings that a strange boat, French rigged, was hovering about the north coast. Let Sir Hugh have a care of his prisoner.

Vernon swore roundly. "I must look into this," he said. "But what shall I do with Adelais?"

"Will you trust her to me?" Roger asked. "If so, cousin, I will very willingly be her escort to Winstead. Let the girl dance her fill while she may, Hugh. She will have little heart for dancing after a month or so of Falmouth's company."

"That is true," Vernon assented; "but the match is a good one, and she is bent upon it."

So presently he rode with his men to the north coast. An hour later, Roger and Adelais set out for Winstead, in spite of all Lady Brudenel's protestations that Mistress Vernon had best lie with her that night at Halvergate.

It was a moonlit night, cloudless, neither warm nor chill, but fine late September weather. About them the air was heavy with the damp odors of decaying leaves, for the road they followed was shut in by the autumn woods, that now arched the way with sere foliage, rustling and whirring and thinly complaining overhead, and now left it open to broad splashes of moonlight, where fallen leaves scuttled about before the wind. Adelais, elate with dancing, chattered of this and that as her gray mare ambled lazily homeward, but Roger was somewhat moody.

Past Upton the road branched in three directions; and here on a sudden Master Darke caught the gray mare's bridle and turned both horses to the left.

"Roger!" the girl cried—"Roger, this is not the road to Winstead!"

He grinned evilly over his shoulder. "It is the road to Yaxham, Adelais, where my chaplain expects us."

In a flash she saw it all as her eyes swept the desolate woods about them. "You will not dare!"

"Will I not?" said Roger. "Faith, for my part, I think you have mocked me for the last time, Adelais, since it is the wife's part, as Paul very justly says, to obey."

Swiftly she slipped from the mare. But he followed her. "O God! O God!" the girl cried. "You have planned this, you coward!"

"Yes, I planned it," said Roger Darke.

"But I take no great credit therefor, for it was simple enough. I had but to send a mock-message to your blockhead brother. Eh, yes, I planned it, Adelais, and I planned it well. To-morrow you will be Mistress Darke, never fear."

And with that he grasped at her cloak as she shrank from him. The garment fell, leaving the girl free, her festival jewels shimmering in the moonlight, her bared shoulders glistening like silver. Darke, staring at her, giggled horribly. A moment later Adelais fell upon her knees, sobbing, the dead leaves under her crackling sharply in the silence.

"Sweet Christ, have pity upon Thy handmaiden! Do not forsake me, sweet Christ, in my extremity! Save me from this man!" she prayed, with an entire faith.

"My lady wife," said Darke, and his hot, wet hand fell heavily upon her shoulder, "you had best finish your prayer before my chaplain, I think, for he knows more of such matters than I."

"A miracle, dear Lord Christ!" the girl wailed. "O sweet Christ, a miracle!"

"Faith of God!" cried Roger, in a flattish voice, "what was that?"

For faintly there came the sound of one singing:

"Beatrice were unknown On her starlit heavenly throne Were sweet Adelais but seen By the youthful Florentine. "Ah, had he but seen your face, Adelais, sweet Adelais, High exalted in her place, You had heard your praises sung In the fair Italian tongue, Angels carolling your praise, Sweet Adelais."

Adelais sprang to her feet. "A miracle!" she cried, her voice shaking. "Fulke! Fulke! to me, Fulke!"

Master Darke hurried her, struggling, toward his horse, muttering curses in his beard, for there was now the beat of hoofs in the road yonder that led to Winstead.

"Fulke, Fulke!" the girl sobbed.

Then presently as Roger put foot to stirrup two horsemen wheeled about the bend in the road, and one of them leaped to the ground.

"Mademoiselle," said Fulke d'Arnaye, "am I, indeed, so fortunate as to be of any service to you?"

"Ho!" cried Roger, with a gulp of relief, "'tis only the French dancingmaster taking French leave of poor Cousin Hugh! Man, but you startled me!"

Now Adelais ran to the Frenchman, clinging to him in a sort of frenzy, sobbing out the whole foul story. His face set masklike.

"Monsieur," he said, when she had ended, "you have wronged a sweet and innocent lady. As God lives, you shall answer to me for this."

"Look you," Roger pointed out, "this is none of your affair, Monsieur Jackanapes. You are bound for the coast, I take it. Very well—ka me and I'll ka thee. Do you go your way in peace, and let us do the same."

Fulke d'Arnaye put the girl aside and spoke rapidly in French to his companion. Then he stepped nimbly toward Master Darke.

Roger blustered. "You grinning fool!" said he, "what do you mean?"

"This!" said the Frenchman, and struck him lightly in the face.

"Very well!" said Master Darke, strangely quiet. And with that they both drew.

The Frenchman laughed, high and came to tell me that Henry of Monmouth, shrill, as they closed, and afterward began to pour forth a voluble flow of discourse. Battle was wine to the man. Sattle will soon be free of you English. France rises in her hé! no!—have I held sword in hand. Might now." His nostrils dilated for a

It is a good sword this—a sharp sword, eh? Ah, the poor arm—but see, your blood is quite red, monsieur, and I had thought cowards had paler blood than brave men possess. We live and learn, do we not? Observe, I play with you like a child—as I played with your King at Agincourt, when I cut away the coronet from his helmet. I did not kill himno!—but I wounded him, eh? Presently I shall wound you, too, monsieur. My compliments—you have grazed my hand. But I shall not kill you, because you are the kinsman of the fairest lady earth may boast, and I would not willingly shed the least drop of any blood that is partly hers. Ah, no! Yet since I needs must do this ungallant thing-why, see, monsieur, how easy it is!"

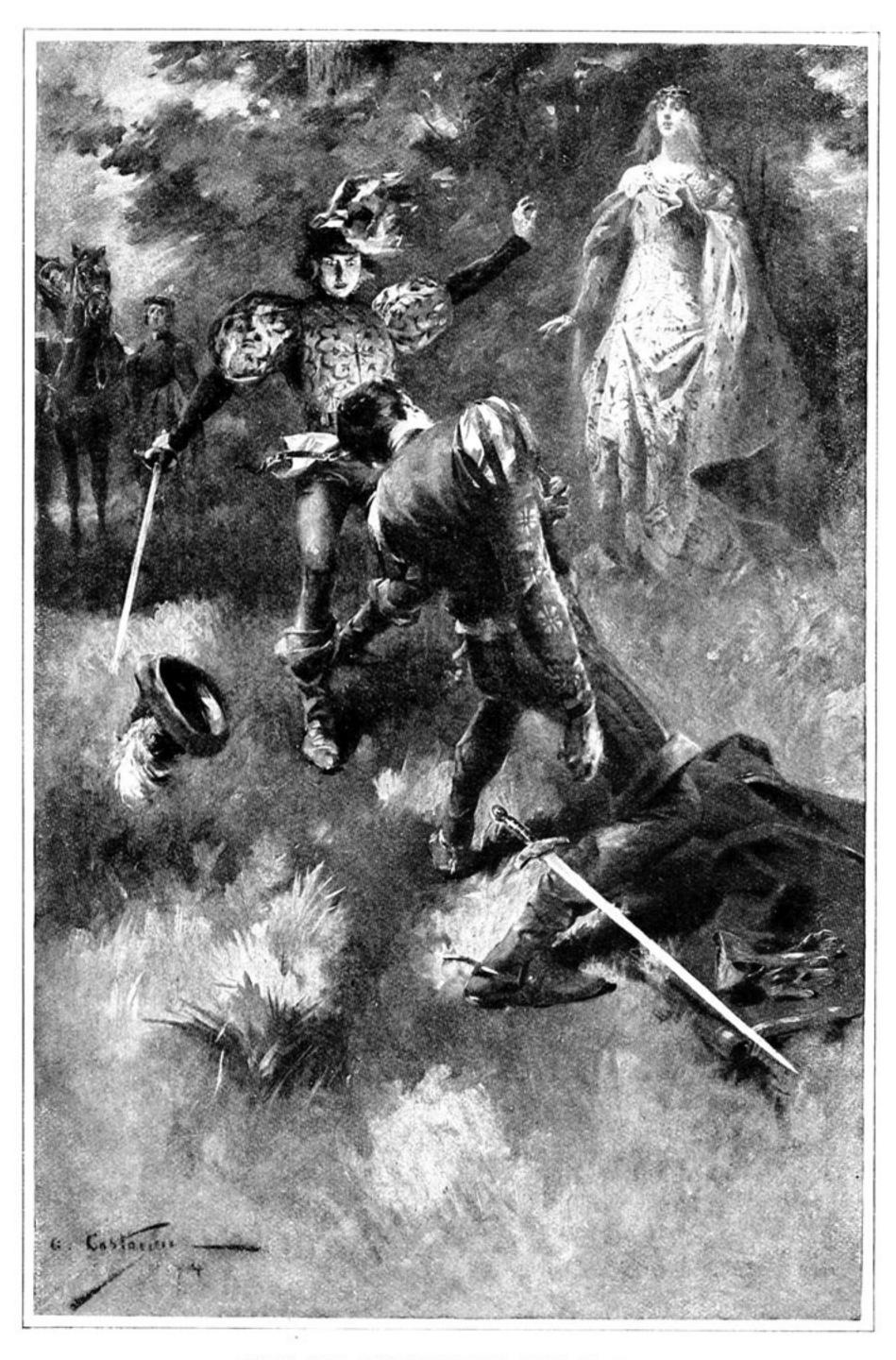
At that he cut Roger down at a blow, and composedly set to wiping his sword on the grass. The Englishman lay like a log where he had fallen.

"Lord," Adelais quavered—"lord, have you killed him, then?"

Fulke d'Arnaye sighed. "Hélas! no!" said he, "since I knew that you did not wish it. See, mademoiselle—I but struck him with the flat of my blade, this coward. He will recover in a half-hour."

He stood as in thought for a moment, concluding his meditations with a grimace. After that he began again to speak in French to his companion. The debate seemed vital. The stranger gesticulated, pleaded, swore, implored, but Fulke d'Arnaye was resolute.

"Behold, mademoiselle," he said, at length, "how my poor Oliver excites himself over a little matter. Oliver is my brother, most beautiful lady, but he speaks no English, so that I cannot present him to you. He came to rescue me, this poor Oliver, you see. Those Norman fishermen of whom you spoke today—but you English are blinded, I think, by the fogs of your cold island. Eight of the bravest gentlemen in France, mademoiselle, were those same fishermen, come to bribe my gaoler—the incorruptible Tompkins, no less. $H\acute{e}!$ yes, they came to tell me that Henry of Monmouth, by the wrath of God King of France, is dead at Vincennes yonder, mademoiselle, and that France will soon be free of you English. France rises in her



"WHY, SEE, MONSIEUR, HOW EASY IT IS!"

moment; then he shrugged his shoulders. "And poor Oliver grieves that I may not strike a blow for her—grieves that I must go back to Winstead."

D'Arnaye laughed lightly as he caught the bridle of the gray mare and turned her so that Adelais might mount. But the girl drew away from him with a faint, wondering cry.

"You will go back! You have escaped,

lord, and you will go back!"

"Why, look you," said the Frenchman, "what else may I conceivably do? We are some ten miles from your home, most beautiful lady—can you ride those ten long miles alone?—in this night so dangerous? Can I leave you here? Hé! surely not. I am desolated, mademoiselle, but I must needs burden you with my company homeward."

Adelais drew a choking breath. He had fretted out seven years of captivity. Now he was free; and for her sake he would go back to his prison, jesting. "No, no!" she cried, aloud, at the thought.

But he raised a protesting hand. "You cannot go alone. Oliver here would go with you gladly. Not one of those brave gentlemen who await me at the coast yonder but would go with you very, very gladly, for they love France, these brave gentlemen, and they think that I may serve her better than most other men. That is very flattering, is it not? But all the world conspires to flatter me, mademoiselle. Your good brother, by example, prizes my company so highly that he would infallibly hang the gentleman who rode back with you. So you see I cannot avail myself of their services. But with me it is different, hein? Ah, yes, he will merely lock me up again and guard me better for the future. Will you not mount, mademoiselle?"

His voice was quiet, and his smile never failed him. It was this steady smile that set her heart to aching. Adelais knew that no power on earth could dissuade him; he would go back with her; but she alone knew how constantly he had hoped for liberty, with what patience and fortitude he had awaited its coming; and that he should return to his prison smiling thrilled her to impotent, heart-shaking rage. It maddened her that he dared love her so infinitely.

"But, mademoiselle," Fulke d'Arnaye

went on when she had mounted, "let us return, if it please you, by way of Filby. For then we may ride a little way with this rogue Oliver. I may not hope to see Oliver again in this life, you comprehend, and Oliver is, I think, the one person who loves me in all this great wide world. Me, I am not very popular, you see. But you do not object, mademoiselle?"

"Go!" she said, in a stifled voice. "

Afterward they rode on the way to Filby, leaving Master Darke to come to his senses at his own leisure. The two Frenchmen talked vehemently as they went; and Adelais, following them, brooded on the powerful Marquis of Falmouth and the great lady she would shortly be; but her eyes strained after Fulke d'Arnaye.

Presently he fell a-singing; and the words came back to her, sweet and clear, as they rode through the autumn woods, and his voice quickened her pulses as always it had the power to quicken them, and in her soul the interminable battle went on and on.

Sang Fulke d'Arnaye:

- "Had you lived when earth was new, What had bards of old to do Save to sing the song of you?
- "They had sung of you always,
 Adelais, sweet Adelais;
 Ne'er had other name had praise,
 Ne'er had deathless memories
 Clung as love may cling to these
 Sweet, sad names of Héloïse,
 Francesca, Thisbe, Bersabe,
 Semiramis, Hesione,
 Iseult, Lucrece, Pisidice,
 Alcestis and Alcyone;
 But your name had all men's praise,
 Sweet Adelais."

When they had crossed the Bure, they had come into the open country—a great marsh-land, gray in the moonlight, that descended, hillock by hillock, to the shores of the North Sea. To the right the dimpling lustre of tumbling waters stretched to a dubious sky-line, unbroken save for the sail of the French boat, moored near the ruins of the old Roman station, Garianonum, and showing very white against the unresting sea, like a curved arm; and to the left the lights of Filby flashed their unblinking, cordial radiance.

Vainly Here the brothers parted. Oliver wept and stormed before Fulke's unwavering smile; the Sieur d'Arnaye was adamantean; and presently the younger man kissed him on both cheeks and rode slowly toward the sea.

D'Arnaye stared after him. "Ah, the brave lad!" he said. "And yet how foolish! Look you, mademoiselle, that rogue is worth ten of me, and he does not even suspect it."

His composure stung her to madness.

"Now by the passion of our Lord and Saviour!" Adelais cried, wringing her hands in her impotence, "I conjure you to hear me, Fulke! You must not do this thing. Oh, you are cruel, cruel! Listen, my lord," she went on, with more restraint, when she had reined up her horse by the side of his, "yonder in France the world lies at your feet. Our great King is dead. France rises now, and France needs a brave captain. You, you! it is you that she needs. She has sent for you, my lord, that mother France whom you love. And you will go quietly back to sleep in the sun at Winstead when France has need of you. Oh, it is foul!"

But he shook his head. "France is very dear to me," he said, "but there are other men who can serve France. And there is no man save me who may serve you to-night, most beautiful lady."

"Oh, you shame me!" she cried, in a gust of passion. "You shame my worthlessness with this mad honor of yours that drags you jesting to your death! For you must die a prisoner now, without any hope. You and Orléans and Bourbon are England's only hold on France, and Bedford dare not let you go. Fetters, chains, dungeons, death, torture perhaps -that is what you must look for now."

"Hélas! you speak more truly than an oracle," he assented, gayly; but still his eyes strained after Oliver.

Adelais laid her hand upon his arm. "You love me," she breathed, quickly. "Ah, I am past shame now! God knows I am not worthy of it, but you love me. Ever since I was a child you have loved me - always, always it was you who with this great love that I have not merited. Very well,"—she paused for a single heart-beat, - "go! and take me with you."

The hand he raised shook as though palsied. "Oh, most beautiful!" the Frenchman cried, in an extreme of adoration, "you would do that! You would do that in pity to save me—unworthy me! And it is I whom you call brave—me, who annoy you so with my little troubles!" Fulke d'Arnaye slipped from his horse, and presently stood beside the gray mare, holding a long, slim hand in both of his. "I thank you," he said, simply, "but you know that it is impossible. Yes, I have loved you these seven years. And now— Ah, my heart shakes, my words tumble, I cannot speak! But you know that I may not—may not let you do this thing. Even if you loved me-" he gave a hopeless gesture. "Why, there is always our brave Marquis to be considered, mademoiselle, who will so soon make you a powerful lady. And I ?- I have nothing."

But Adelais rested her hands upon his shoulders, bending down to him till her hair brushed his. "Do you not understand?" she whispered. "Ah, my paladin, do you think I speak in pity? I wished to be a great lady—yes. Yet always, I think, I loved you, Fulke, but until tonight I had thought that love was but a plaything. See, here is Falmouth's ring." She drew it from her finger and flung it into the night. "Yes, I hungered for Falmouth's power, but you have shown me that which is above any temporal power. Ever I must crave the highest, Fulke. Ah, my lord, my lord, do not deny me!" Adelais cried, piteously. "Ah, take me with you, Fulke! I will ride with you to the wars, my lord, as your page; I will be your wife, your slave, your scullion. Ah, lord, lord, it is not the maiden's part to plead thus!"

Fulke d'Arnaye drew her warm, yielding body toward him and stood in silence, choking. Then he raised his eyes toward heaven. "Dear Lord God," he cried, in a great voice, "I entreat of Thee that if through my fault this woman ever know regret or sorrow I be cast into the nethermost pit of hell for all eternity!" Afterward he kissed her.

And presently Adelais lifted her head humored me, shielded me, protected me from his shoulder with a mocking little laugh. "Sorrow!" she echoed. "I think there is no sorrow in all the world. Mount, my lord, mount! See where Brother Oliver waits for us yonder."