



E.R. EDDISON

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*The Worm Ouroboros*

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To W.G.E. and to my friends K.H. and G.C.L.M.  
I dedicate this book  
It is neither allegory nor fable but a Story to be read for its own sake.

*The proper names I have tried to spell simply. The e in Carcë is long, like that in Phryne, the o in Krothering short and the accent on that syllable: Corund is accented on the first syllable, Prezmyra on the second, Brandoch Daha on the first and fourth, Gorice on the last syllable, rhyming with thrice: Corinius rhymes with Flaminius, Galing with sailing, La Fireez with desire ease: ch is always guttural, as in loch.*

E.R.E.

**9th January 1922**

## THE INDUCTION

THERE was a man named Lessingham dwelt in an old low house in Wasdale, set in a gray old garden where yew-trees flourished that had seen Vikings in Copeland in their seedling time. Lily and rose and larkspur bloomed in the borders, and begonias with blossoms big as saucers, red and white and pink and lemon-colour, in the beds before the porch. Climbing roses, honeysuckle, clematis, and the scarlet flame-flower scrambled up the walls. Thick woods were on every side without the garden, with a gap north-eastward opening on the desolate lake and the great fells beyond it: Gable rearing his crag-bound head against the sky from behind the straight clean outline of the Screes.

Cool long shadows stole across the tennis lawn. The air was golden. Doves murmured in the trees; two chaffinches played on the near post of the net; a little water-wagtail scurried along the path. A French window stood open to the garden, showing darkly a dining-room panelled with old oak, its Jacobean table bright with flowers and silver and cut glass and Wedgwood dishes heaped with fruit: greengages, peaches, and green muscat grapes. Lessingham lay back in a hammock-chair watching through the blue smoke of an after-dinner cigar the warm light on the Gloire de Dijon roses that clustered about the bedroom window overhead. He had her hand in his. This was their House.

"Should we finish that chapter of Njal?" she said.

She took the heavy volume with its faded green cover, and read: "He went out on the night of the Lord's day, when nine weeks were still to winter; he heard a great crash, so that he thought both heaven and earth shook. Then he looked into the west airt, and he thought he saw thereabouts a ring of fiery hue, and within the ring a man on a gray horse. He passed quickly by him, and rode hard. He had a flaming firebrand in his hand, and

he rode so close to him that he could see him plainly. He was black as pitch, and he sung this song with a mighty voice--"

Here I ride swift steed.  
His flank flecked with rime.  
Rain from his mane drips.  
Horse mighty for harm;  
Flames flare at each end.  
Gall glows in the midst.  
So fares it with Flosi's reds  
As this flaming brand flies;  
And so fares it with Flosi's reds  
As this flaming brand flies.

"Then he thought he hurled the firebrand east towards the fells before him, and such a blaze of fire leapt up to meet it that he could not see the fells for the blaze. It seemed as though that man rode east among the flames and vanished there.

"After that he went to his bed, and was senseless for a long time, but at last he came to himself. He bore in mind all that had happened, and told his father, but he bade him tell it to Hjalldi Skeggi's son. So he went and told Hjalldi, but he said he had seen "the Wolf's Ride, and that comes ever before great tidings.""

They were silent awhile; then Lessingham said suddenly, "Do you mind if we sleep in the east wing to-night?"

"What, in the Lotus Room?"

"Yes."

"I'm too much of a lazy-bones to-night, dear," she answered.

"Do you mind if I go alone, then? I shall be back to breakfast. I like my lady with me; still, we can go again when next moon wanes. My pet is not frightened, is she?"

"No!" she said, laughing. But her eyes were a little big. Her fingers played with his watch-chain. "I'd rather," she said presently, "you went later on and took me. All this is so odd still: the House, and that; and I love it so.



And after all, it is a long way and several years too, sometimes, in the Lotus Room, even though it is all over next morning. I'd rather we went together. If anything happened then, well, we'd both be done in, and it wouldn't matter so much, would it?"

"Both be what?" said Lessingham. "I'm afraid your language is not all that might be wished."

"Well, you taught me!" said she; and they laughed.

They sat there till the shadows crept over the lawn and up the trees, and the high rocks of the mountain shoulder beyond burned red in the evening rays. He said, "If you like to stroll a bit of way up the fell-side, Mercury is visible to-night. We might get a glimpse of him just after sunset."

A little later, standing on the open hillside below the hawking bats, they watched for the dim planet that showed at last low down in the west between the sunset and the dark.

He said, "It is as if Mercury had a finger on me tonight, Mary. It's no good my trying to sleep to-night except in the Lotus Room."

Her arm tightened in his. "Mercury?" she said. "It is another world. It is too far."

But he laughed and said, "Nothing is too far."

They turned back as the shadows deepened. As they stood in the dark of the arched gate leading from the open fell into the garden, the soft clear notes of a spinet sounded from the house. She put up a finger. "Hark," she said. "Your daughter playing *Les Barricades*."

They stood listening. "She loves playing," he whispered. "I'm glad we taught her to play." Presently he whispered again, "*Les Barricades Mysterieuses*. What inspired Couperin with that enchanted name? And only you and I know what it really means. *Les Barricades Mysterieuses*."

That night Lessingham lay alone in the Lotus Room. Its casements opened eastward on the sleeping woods and the sleeping bare slopes of Illgill Head. He slept soft and deep; for that was the House of Postmeridian, and the House of Peace.

In the deep and dead time of the night, when the waning moon peered over the mountain shoulder, he woke suddenly. The silver beams shone through the open window on a form perched at the foot of the bed: a little

bird, black, round-headed, short-beaked, with long sharp wings, and eyes like two stars shining. It spoke and said, "Time is."

So Lessingham got up and muffled himself in a great cloak that lay on a chair beside the bed. He said, "I am ready, my little martlet." For that was the House of Heart's Desire.

Surely the martlet's eyes filled all the room with starlight. It was an old room with lotuses carved on the panels and on the bed and chairs and roof-beams; and in the glamour the carved flowers swayed like waterlilies in a lazy stream. He went to the window, and the little martlet sat on his shoulder. A chariot coloured like the halo about the moon waited by the window, poised in air, harnessed to a strange steed. A horse it seemed, but winged like an eagle, and its fore-legs feathered and armed with eagle's claws instead of hooves. He entered the chariot, and that little martlet sat on his knee.

With a whirr of wings the wild courser sprang skyward. The night about them was like the tumult of bubbles about a diver's ears diving in a deep pool under a smooth steep rock in a mountain cataract. Time was swallowed up in speed; the world reeled; and it was but as the space between two deep breaths till that strange courser spread wide his rainbow wings and slanted down the night over a great island that slumbered on a slumbering sea, with lesser isles about it: a country of rock mountains and hill pastures and many waters, all a-glimmer in the moonshine.

They landed within a gate crowned with golden lions. Lessingham came down from the chariot, and the little black martlet circled about his head, showing him a yew avenue leading from the gates. As in a dream, he followed her.

## I - THE CASTLE OF LORD JUSS

*Of the rarities that were in the lofty presence chamber, fair and lovely to behold, and of the qualities and conditions of the lords of Demonland: and of the embassy sent unto them by King Gorice XI., and of the answer thereto.*

THE eastern stars were paling to the dawn as Lessingham followed his conductor along the grass walk between the shadowy ranks of Irish yews, that stood like soldiers mysterious and expectant in the darkness. The grass was bathed in night-dew, and great white lilies sleeping in the shadows of the yews loaded the air of that garden with fragrance. Lessingham felt no touch of the ground beneath his feet, and when he stretched out his hand to touch a tree his hand passed through branch and leaves as though they were unsubstantial as a moonbeam.

The little martlet, alighting on his shoulder, laughed in his ear. "Child of earth," she said, "dost think we are here in dreamland?"

He answered nothing, and she said, "This is no dream. Thou, first of the children of men, art come to Mercury, where thou and I will journey up and down for a season to show thee the lands and oceans, the forests, plains, and ancient mountains, cities and palaces of this world, Mercury, and the doings of them that dwell therein. But here thou canst not handle aught, neither make the folk ware of thee, not though thou shout thy throat hoarse. For thou and I walk here impalpable and invisible, as it were two dreams walking."

They were now on the marble steps which led from the yew walk to the terrace opposite the great gate of the castle. "No need to unbar gates to thee and me," said the martlet, as they passed beneath the darkness of that ancient portal, carved with strange devices, and clean through the massy timbers of the bolted gate thickly riveted with silver, into the inner court.

"Go we into the lofty presence chamber and there tarry awhile. Morning is kindling the upper air, and folk will soon be stirring in the castle, for they lie not long abed when day begins in Demonland. For be it known to thee, O earthborn, that this land is Demonland, and this castle the castle of Lord Juss, and this day now dawning his birthday, when the Demons hold high festival in Juss's castle to do honour unto him and to his brethren, Spitfire and Goldry Bluszco; and these and their fathers before them bear rule from time immemorial in Demonland, and have the lordship over all the Demons."

She spoke, and the first low beams of the sun smote javelinlike through the eastern windows, and the freshness of morning breathed and shimmered in that lofty chamber, chasing the blue and dusky shades of departed night to the corners and recesses, and to the rafters of the vaulted roof. Surely no potentate of earth, not Croesus, not the great King, not Minos in his royal palace in Crete, not all the Pharaohs, not Queen Semiramis, nor all the Kings of Babylon and Nineveh had ever a throne room to compare in glory with that high presence chamber of the lords of Demonland. Its walls and pillars were of snow-white marble, every vein whereof was set with small gems: rubies, corals, garnets, and pink topaz. Seven pillars on either side bore up the shadowy vault of the roof; the roof-tree and the beams were of gold, curiously carved, the roof itself of mother-of-pearl. A side aisle ran behind each row of pillars, and seven paintings on the western side faced seven spacious windows on the east. At the end of the hall upon a dais stood three high seats, the arms of each composed of two hippogriffs wrought in gold, with wings spread, and the legs of the seats the legs of the hippogriffs; but the body of each high seat was a single jewel of monstrous size: the lefthand seat a black opal, asparkle with steel-blue fire, the next a fire-opal, as it were a burning coal, the third seat an alexandrite, purple like wine by night but deep sea-green by day. Ten more pillars stood in semicircle behind the high seats, bearing up above them and the dais a canopy of gold. The benches that ran from end to end of the lofty chamber were of cedar, inlaid with coral and ivory, and so were the tables that stood before the benches. The floor of the chamber was tessellated, of marble and green tourmaline, and on every square of tourmaline was carven the image



of a fish: as the dolphin, the conger, the cat-fish, the salmon, the tunny, the squid, and other wonders of the deep. Hangings of tapestry were behind the high seats, worked with flowers, snake's-head, snapdragon, dragonmouth, and their kind; and on the dado below the windows were sculptures of birds and beasts and creeping things.

But a great wonder of this chamber, and a marvel to behold, was how the capital of every one of the four-and-twenty pillars was hewn from a single precious stone, carved by the hand of some sculptor of long ago into the living form of a monster: here was a harpy with screaming mouth, so wondrously cut in ochre-tinted jade it was a marvel to hear no scream from her: here in wine-yellow topaz a flying fire-drake: there a cockatrice made of a single ruby: there a star sapphire the colour of moonlight, cut for a cyclops, so that the rays of the star trembled from his single eye: salamanders, mermaids, chimaeras, wild men o' the woods, leviathans, all hewn from faultless gems, thrice the bulk of a big man's body, velvet-dark sapphires, chrysolite, beryl, amethyst, and the yellow zircon that is like transparent gold.

To give light to the presence chamber were seven escarbuncles, great as pumpkins, hung in order down the length of it, and nine fair moonstones standing in order on silver pedestals between the pillars on the dais. These jewels, drinking in the sunshine by day, gave it forth during the hours of darkness in a radiance of pink light and a soft effulgence as of moonbeams. And yet another marvel, the nether side of the canopy over the high seats was encrusted with lapis lazuli, and in that feigned dome of heaven burned the twelve signs of the zodiac, every star a diamond that shone with its own light.

Folk now began to be astir in the castle, and there came a score of serving men into the presence chamber with brooms and brushes, cloths and leathers, to sweep and garnish it, and burnish the gold and jewels of the chamber. Lissome they were and sprightly of gait, of fresh complexion and fair-haired. Horns grew on their heads. When their tasks were accomplished they departed, and the presence began to fill with guests. A joy it was to see such a shifting maze of velvets, furs, curious needleworks and cloth of tissue, tiffanies, laces, ruffs, goodly chains and carcanets of gold: such

glitter of jewels and weapons: such nodding of the plumes the Demons wore in their hair, half veiling the horns that grew upon their heads. Some were sitting on the benches or leaning on the polished tables, some walking forth and back upon the shining floor. Here and there were women among them, women so fair one had said: it is surely white-armed Helen this one; this, Arcadian Atalanta; this, Phryne that stood to Praxiteles for Aphrodite's picture; this, Thals, for whom great Alexander to pleasure her fantasy did burn Persepolis like a candle; this, she that was rapt by the Dark God from the flowering fields of Enna, to be Queen for ever among the dead that be departed.

Now came a stir near the stately doorway, and Lessingham beheld a Demon of burly frame and noble port, richly attired. His face was ruddy and somewhat freckled, his forehead wide, his eyes calm and blue like the sea. His beard, thick and tawny, was parted and brushed back and upwards on either side.

"Tell me, my little martlet," said Lessingham, "is this Lord Juss?"

"This is not Lord Juss," answered the martlet, "nor aught so worshipful as he. The lord thou seest is Volle, who dwelleth under Kartadza, by the salt sea. A great sea-captain is he, and one that did service to the cause of Demonland, and of the whole world besides, in the late wars against the Ghouls.

"But cast thine eyes again towards the door, where one standeth amid a knot of friends, tall and somewhat stooping, in a corselet of silver, and a cloak of old brocaded silk coloured like tarnished gold; something like to Volle in feature, but swarthy, and with bristling black moustachios."

"I see him," said Lessingham. "This then is Lord Juss!"

"Not so," said martlet. "'Tis but Vizz, brother to Volle. He is wealthiest in goods of all the Demons, save the three brethren only and Lord Brandoch Daha."

"And who is this?" asked Lessingham, pointing to one of light and brisk step and humorous eye, who in that moment met Volle and engaged him in converse apart. Handsome of face he was, albeit somewhat long-nosed and sharp-nosed: keen and hard and filled with life and the joy of it.

"Here thou beholdest," answered she, "Lord Zigg, the farfamed tamer of horses. Well loved is he among the Demons, for he is merry of mood, and a mighty man of his hands withal when he leadeth his horsemen against the enemy."

Volle threw up his beard and laughed a great laugh at some jest that Zigg whispered in his ear, and Lessingham leaned forward into the hail if haply he might catch what was said. The hum of talk drowned the words, but leaning forward Lessingham saw where the arras curtains behind the dais parted for a moment, and one of princely bearing advanced past the high seats down the body of the hall. His gait was delicate, as of some lithe beast of prey newly wakened out of slumber, and he greeted with lazy grace the many friends who hailed his entrance. Very tall was that lord, and slender of build, like a girl. His tunic was of silk coloured like the wild rose, and embroidered in gold with representations of flowers and thunderbolts. Jewels glittered on his left hand and on the golden bracelets on his arms, and on the fillet twined among the golden curls of his hair, set with plumes of the king-bird of Paradise. His horns were dyed with saffron, and inlaid with filigree work of gold. His buskins were laced with gold, and from his belt hung a sword, narrow of blade and keen, the hilt rough with beryls and black diamonds. Strangely light and delicate was his frame and seeming, yet with a sense of slumbering power beneath, as the delicate peak of a snow mountain seen afar in the low red rays of morning. His face was beautiful to look upon, and softly coloured like a girl's face, and his expression one of gentle melancholy, mixed with some disdain; but fiery glints awoke at intervals in his eyes, and the lines of swift determination hovered round the mouth below his curled moustachios.

"At last," murmured Lessingham, "at last, Lord Juss!"

"Little art thou to blame," said the martlet, "for this misprision, for scarce could a lordlier sight have joyed thine eyes. Yet is this not Juss, but Lord Brandoch Daha, to whom all Demonland west of Shalgreth and Stropardon oweth allegiance: the rich vineyards of Krothering, the broad pasture lands of Failze, and all the western islands and their cragbound fastnesses. Think not, because he affecteth silks and jewels like a queen, and carrieth himself light and dainty as a silver birch tree on the mountain,

that his hand is light or his courage doubtful in war. For years was he held for the third best man-at-arms in all Mercury, along with these, Goldry Bluszco and Gorice X. of Witchland. And Gorice he slew, nine summers back, in single combat, when the Witches harried in Goblinland and Brandoch Daha led five hundred and fourscore Demons to succour Gaslark, the king of that country. And now can none surpass Lord Brandoch Daha in feats of arms, save perchance Goldry alone.

"Yet, ho," she said, as a sweet and wild music stole on the ear, and the guests turned towards the dais, and the hangings parted, "at last, the triple lordship of Demonland! Strike softly, music: smile, Fates, on this festal day! Joy and safe days shine for this world and Demonland! Turn thy gaze first on him who walks in majesty in the midst, his tunic of olive-green velvet ornamented with devices of hidden meaning in thread of gold and beads of chrysolite. Mark how the buskins, clasping his stalwart calves, glitter with gold and amber. Mark the dusky cloak streamed with gold and lined with blood-red silk: a charmed cloak, made by the sylphs in forgotten days, bringing good hap to the wearer, so he be true of heart and no dastard. Mark him that weareth it, his sweet dark countenance, the violet fire in his eyes, the sombre warmth of his smile, like autumn woods in late sunshine. This is Lord Juss, lord of this age-remembering castle, than whom none hath more worship in wide Demonland. Somewhat he knoweth of art magical, yet useth not that art; for it sappeth the life and strength, nor is it held worthy that a Demon should put trust in that art, but rather in his own might and main.

"Now turn thine eyes to him that leaneth on Juss's left arm, shorter but mayhap sturdier than he, apparelled in black silk that shimmers with gold as he moveth, and crowned with black eagle's feathers among his horns and yellow hair. His face is wild and keen like a sea-eagle's, and from his bristling brows the eyes dart glances sharp as a glancing spear. A faint flame, pallid like the fire of a Will-o'-the-Wisp, breathes ever and anon from his distended nostrils. This is Lord Spitfire, impetuous in war.

"Last, behold on Juss's right hand, yon lord that bulks mighty as Hercules yet steppeth lightly as a heifer. The thews and sinews of his great limbs ripple as he moves beneath a skin whiter than ivory; his cloak of cloth



of gold is heavy with jewels, his tunic of black sendaline hath great hearts worked thereon in rubies and red silk thread. Slung from his shoulders clanks a two-handed sword, the pommel a huge star-ruby carven in the image of a heart, for the heart is his sign and symbol. This is that sword forged by the elves, wherewith he slew the sea-monster, as thou mayest see in the painting on the wall. Noble is he of countenance, most like to his brother Juss, but darker brown of hair and ruddier of hue and bigger of cheekbone. Look well on him, for never shall thine eyes behold a greater champion than the Lord Goldry Bluszco, captain of the hosts of Demonland."

Now when the greetings were done and the strains of the lutes and recorders sighed and lost themselves in the shadowy vault of the roof, the cup-bearers did fill great gems made in form of cups with ancient wine, and the Demons caroused to Lord Juss deep draughts in honour of this day of his nativity. And now they were ready to set forth by twos and threes into the parks and pleasaunces, some to take their pleasure about the fair gardens and fishponds, some to hunt wild game among the wooded hills, some to disport themselves at quoits or tennis or riding at the ring or martial exercises; that so they might spend the livelong day as befitteth high holiday, in pleasure and action without care, and thereafter revel in the lofty presence chamber till night grew old with eating and drinking and all delight.

But as they were upon going forth, a trumpet was sounded without, three strident blasts.

"What kill-joy have we here?" said Spitfire. "The trumpet soundeth only for travellers from the outlands. I feel it in my bones some rascal is come to Galing, one that bringeth ill hap in his pocket and a shadow athwart the sun on this our day of festival."

"Speak no word of ill omen," answered Juss. "Whosoe'er it be, we will straight dispatch his business and so fall to pleasure indeed. Some, run to the gate and bring him in."

The serving man hastened and returned, saying, "Lord, it is an Ambassador from Witchland and his train. Their ship made land at

Lookinghaven-ness at nightfall. They slept on board, and your soldiers gave them escort to Galing at break of day. He craveth present audience."

"From Witchland, ha?" said Juss. "Such smokes use ever to go before the fire."

"Shall's bid the fellow," said Spitfire, "wait on our pleasure? It is pity such should poison our gladness."

Goldry laughed and said, "Whom hath he sent us? Laxus, think you? to make his peace with us again for that vile part of his practised against us off Kartadza, detestably falsifying his word he had given us?"

Juss said to the serving man, "Thou sawest the Ambassador. Who is he?"

"Lord," answered he, "His face was strange to me. He is little of stature and, by your highness' leave, the most unlike to a great lord of Witchland that ever I saw. And, by your leave, for all the marvellous rich and sumptuous coat a weareth, he is very like a false jewel in a rich casing."

"Well," said Juss, "a sour draught sweetens not in the waiting. Call we in the Ambassador."

Lord Juss sat in the high seat midmost of the dais, with Goldry on his right in the seat of black opal, and on his left Spitfire, throned on the alexandrite. On the dais sat likewise those other lords of Demonland, and the guests of lower degree thronged the benches and the polished tables as the wide doors opened on their silver hinges, and the Ambassador with pomp and ceremony paced up the shining floor of marble and green tourmaline.

"Why, what a beastly fellow is this?" said Lord Goldry in his brother's ear. "His hairy hands reach down to his knees. A shuffleth in his walk like a hobbled jackass."

"I like not the dirty face of the Ambassador," said Lord Zigg. "His nose sitteth flat on the face of him as it were a dab of clay, and I can see pat up his nostrils a summer day's journey into his head. If's upper lip bespeak him not a rare spouter of rank fustian, perdition catch me. Were it a finger's breadth longer, a might tuck it into his collar to keep his chin warm of a winter's night."

"I like not the smell of the Ambassador," said Lord Brandoch Daha. And he called for censers and sprinklers of lavender and rose water to purify the

chamber, and let open the crystal windows that the breezes of heaven might enter and make all sweet.

So the Ambassador walked up the shining floor and stood before the lords of Demonland that sat upon the high seats between the golden hippogriffs. He was robed in a long mantle of scarlet lined with ermine, with crabs, woodlice, and centipedes worked thereon in golden thread. His head was covered with a black velvet cap with a peacock's feather fastened with a brooch of silver. Supported by his trainbearers and attendants, and leaning on his golden staff, he with raucous accent delivered his mission:

"Juss, Goldry, and Spitfire, and ye other Demons, I come before you as the Ambassador of Gorice XI., most glorious King of Witchland, Lord and great Duke of Buteny and Estremerine, Commander of Shulan, Thramnë, Mingos, and Permio, and High Warden of the Esamocian Marches, Great Duke of Trace, King Paramount of Beshtria and Nevria and Prince of Ar, Great Lord over the country of Ojedia, Maltraeny, and of Baltary and Toribia, and Lord of many other countries, most glorious and most great, whose power and glory is over all the world and whose name shall endure for all generations. And first I bid you be bound by that reverence for my sacred office of envoy from the King, which is accorded by all people and potentates, save such as be utterly barbarous, to ambassadors and envoys."

"Speak and fear not," answered Juss. "Thou hast mine oath. And that hath never been forsworn, to Witch or other barbarian."

The Ambassador shot out his lips in an O, and threatened with his head; then grinned, laying bare his sharp and misshapen teeth, and proceeded:

"Thus saith King Gorice, great and glorious, and he chargeth me to deliver it to you, neither adding any word nor taking away: 'I have it in mind that no ceremony of homage or fealty hath been performed before me by the dwellers in my province of Demonland---'"

As the rustling of dry leaves strewn in a flagged court when a sudden wind striketh them, there went a stir among the guests. Nor might the Lord Spitfire contain his wrath, but springing up and clapping hand to swordhilt, as minded to do a hurt to the Ambassador, "Province?" he cried. "Are not the Demons a free people? And is it to be endured that Witchland should

commission this slave to cast insults in our teeth, and this in our own castle?"

A murmur went about the hall, and here and there folk rose from their seats. The Ambassador drew down his head between his shoulders like a tortoise, baring his teeth and blinking with his small eyes. But Lord Brandoch Daha, lightly laying his hand on Spitfire's arm, said: "The Ambassador hath not ended his message, cousin, and thou hast frightened him. Have patience and spoil not the comedy. We shall not lack words to answer King Gorice: no, nor swords, if he must have them. But it shall not be said of us of Demonland that it needeth but a boorish message to turn us from our ancient courtesy toward ambassadors and heralds."

So spake Lord Brandoch Daha, in lazy half-mocking tone, as one who but idly returneth the ball of conversation; yet clearly, so that all might hear. And therewith the murmurs died down, and Spitfire said, "I am tame. Say thine errand freely, and imagine not that we shall hold thee answerable for aught thou sayest, but him that sent thee."

"Whose humble mouthpiece I only am," said the Ambassador, somewhat gathering courage; "and who, saving your reverence, lacketh not the will nor the power to take revenge for any outrage done upon his servants. Thus saith the King: 'I therefore summon and command you, Juss, Spitfire, and Goldry Bluszco, to make haste and come to me in Witchland in my fortress of Carcë, and there dutifully kiss my toe, in witness before all the world that I am your Lord and King, and rightful overlord of all Demonland.'"

Gravely and without gesture Lord Juss harkened to the Ambassador, leaning back in his high seat with either arm thrown athwart the arched neck of the hippogriff. Goldry, smiling scornfully, toyed with the hilt of his great sword. Spitfire sat strained and glowering, the sparks crackling at his nostrils.

"Thou hast delivered all?" said Juss.

"All," answered the Ambassador.

"Thou shalt have thine answer," said Juss. "While we take rede thereon, eat and drink"; and he beckoned the cupbearer to pour out bright wine for the Ambassador. But the Ambassador excused himself, saying that he was



not athirst, and that he had store of food and wine aboard of his ship, which should suffice his needs and those of his following.

Then said Lord Spitfire, "No marvel though the spawn of Witchland fear venom in the cup. They who work commonly such villany against their enemies, as witness Recedor of Goblinland whom Corsus murdered with a poisonous draught, shake still in the knees lest themselves be so entertained to their destruction;" and snatching the cup he quaffed it to the dregs, and dashed it on the marble floor before the Ambassador, so that it was shivered into pieces.

And the lords of Demonland rose up and withdrew behind the flowery hangings into a chamber apart, to determine of their answer to the message sent unto them by King Gorice of Witchland.

When they were private together, Spitfire spake and said, "Is it to be borne that the King should put such shame and mockery upon us? Could a not at the least have made a son of Corund or of Corsus his Ambassador to bring us his defiance, 'stead of this filthiest of his domestics, a gibbering dwarf fit only to make them gab and game at their tipping bouts when they be three parts senseless with boosing?"

Lord Juss smiled somewhat scornfully. "With wisdom," he said, "and with foresight bath Witchland made choice of his time to move against us, knowing that thirty and three of our well-built ships are sunken in Kartadza Sound in the battle with the Ghouls, and but fourteen remain to us. Now that the Ghouls are slain, every soul, and utterly abolished from this world, and so the great curse and peril of all this world ended by the sword and great valour of Demonland alone, now seemeth the happy moment unto these late mouth-friends to fall upon us. For have not the Witches a strong fleet of ships, since their whole fleet fled at the beginning of their fight with us against the Ghouls, leaving us to bear the burden? And now are they minded for this new treason, to set upon us traitorously and suddenly in this disadvantage. For the King well judgeth we can carry no army to Witchland nor do aught in his despite, but must be long months a- shipbuilding. And doubt not he holdeth an armament ready aboard at Tenemos to sail hither if he get the answer he knoweth we shall send him."

"Sit we at ease then," said Goldry, "sharpening our swords; and let him ship his armies across the salt sea. Not a Witch shall land in Demonland but shall leave here his blood and bones to make fat our cornfields and our vineyards."

"Rather," said Spitfire, "apprehend this rascal, and put to sea to-day with the fourteen ships left us. We can surprise Witchland in his strong place of Carcë, sack it, and give him to the crows to peck at, or ever he is well awake to the swiftness of our answer. That is my counsel."

"Nay," said Juss, "we shall not take him sleeping. Be certain that his ships are ready and watching in the Witchiand seas, prepared against any rash onset. It were folly to set our neck in the noose; and little glory to Demonland to await his coming. This, then, is my rede: I will bid Gorice to the duello, and make offer to him to let lie on the fortune thereof the decision of this quarrel."

"A good rede, if it might be fulfilled," said Goldry. "But never will he dare to stand with weapons in single combat 'gainst thee or 'gainst any of us. Nevertheless the thing shall be brought about. Is not Gorice a mighty wrestler, and hath he not in his palace in Carcë the skulls and bones of ninety and nine great champions whom he hath vanquished and slain in that exercise? Puffed up beyond measure is he in his own conceit, and folk say it is a grief to him that none hath been found this long while that durst wrestle with him, and wofully he pineth for the hundredth. He shall wrestle a fall with me!"

Now this seemed good to them all. So when they had talked on it awhile and concluded what they would do, glad of heart the lords of Demonland turned them back to the lofty presence chamber. And there Lord Juss spake and said: "Demons, ye have heard the words which the King of Witchland in the overweening pride and shamelessness of his heart hath spoken unto us by the mouth of this Ambassador. Now this is our answer which my brother shall give, the Lord Goldry Bluszco; and we charge thee, O Ambassador, to deliver it truly, neither adding any word nor taking away."

And the Lord Goldry spake: "We, the lords of Demonland, do utterly scorn thee, Gorice XI., for the greatest of dastards, in that thou basely fleddest and forsookest us, thy sworn confederates, in the sea battle against

the Ghouls. Our swords, which in that battle ended so great a curse and peril to all this world, are not bent nor broken. They shall be sheathed in the bowels of thee and thy minions, Corsus to wit, and Corund, and their sons, and Corinius, and what other evildoers harbour in waterish Witchland, sooner than one little sea-pink growing on the cliffs of Demonland shall do thee obeisance. But, that thou mayest, if so thou wilt, feel our power somewhat, I, Lord Goldry Bluszco, make thee this offer: that thou and I do match ourselves singly each against other to wrestle three falls at the court of the Red Foliot, who inclineth neither to our side nor to thine in this quarrel. And we will bind ourselves by mighty oaths to these conditions, that if I overcome thee, the Demons shall leave you of Witchland in peace, and ye them, and the Witches shall forswear for ever their impudent claims on Demonland. But if thou, Gorice, win the day, then hast thou the glory of that victory, and withal full liberty to thrust thy claims upon us with the sword."

So spake the Lord Goldry Bluszco, standing in great pride and splendour beneath the starry canopy, and scowling terribly on the Ambassador from Witchland, so that the Ambassador was abashed and his knees smote together. And Goldry called his scribe and made him write the message for Gorice the King in great characters on a roll of parchment, and the lords of Demonland sealed it with their seals, and gave it to the Ambassador.

The Ambassador took it and made haste to depart; but when he was come to the stately doorway of the presence chamber, being near the door and amongst his attendants, and away from the lords of Demonland, he plucked up heart a little and turned and said: "Rashly and to thy certain undoing, O Goldry Bluszco, hast thou bidden our Lord the King to contend with thee in wrestling. For be thou never so mighty of limb, yet hath he overthrown as mighty. And he wrestleth not for sport, but will surely work thy life's decay, and keep the dead bones of thee with the bones of the ninety and nine champions whom he hath heretofore laid low in that exercise."

Therewith, because Goldry and the other lords scowled upon him terribly, and the guests near the door fell to hooting and reviling of the Witches, the Ambassador went forth hastily and hastily down the shining

stairs and across the court, as one who fleeth along a lane on a dark and windy night, daring not to turn his head lest his eye behold some fearsome thing prepared to clasp him. So speeding, he was fain to catch up about his knees the folds of his velvet cloak richly worked with crabs and creeping things; and huge whooping and laughter went up among the common lag of people without, to behold his long and nerveless tail thus bared to their unfriendly gaze. Insomuch that they fell to shouting with one accord, "Though his mouth be foul he hath a fair tail! Saw ye not his tail? Hurrah for Gorice who hath sent us a monkey for his Ambassador!"

And with jibe and unmannerly yell the crowd hung lovingly upon the Ambassador and his train all the way down from Galing castle to the quays. So that it was like a sweet homecoming to him to come on board his wellbuilt ship and have her rowed amain out of Lookinghaven. So when they had rounded Lookinghaven-ness and were free of the land, they hoisted sail and voyaged before a favouring breeze eastward over the teeming deep to Witchland.



## II THE WRASTLING FOR DEMONLAND

*Of the prognosticks which troubled Lord Gro concerning the meeting between the king of Witchland and the Lord Goldry Bluszco; and how they met, and of the issue of that wrastling.*

"How could I have fallen asleep?" cried Lessingham. "Where is the castle of the Demons, and how did we leave the great presence chamber where they saw the Ambassador?" For he stood on rolling uplands that leaned to the sea, treeless on every side as far as the eye might reach; and on three sides shimmered the sea, kissed by the sun and roughened by the salt glad wind that charged over the downs, charioting clouds without number through the illimitable heights of air.

The little black martlet answered him, "My hippogriff travelleth as well in time as in space. Days and weeks have been left behind by us, in what seemeth to thee but the twinkling of an eye, and thou standest in the Foliot Isles, a land happy under the mild regiment of a peaceful prince, on the day appointed by King Gorice to wrastle with Lord Goldry Bluszco. Terrible must be the wrastling betwixt two such champions, and dark the issue thereof. And my heart is afraid for Goldry Bluszco, big and strong though he be and unconquered in war; for there hath not arisen in all the ages such a wrastler as this Gorice, and strong he is, and hard and unwearying, and skilled in every art of attack and defence, and subtle withal, and cruel and fell like a serpent."

Where they stood the down was cut by a combe that descended to the sea, and overhanging the combe was the palace of the Red Foliot, rambling and low, with many little towers and battlements, built of stones hewn from the wall of the combe, so that it was hard from a distance to discern what was palace and what native rock. Behind the palace stretched a meadow,

flat and smooth, carpeted with the close wiry turf of the downs. At either end of the meadow were booths set up, to the north the booths of them of Witchland, and to the south the booths of the Demons. In the midst of the meadow was a space marked out with withies sixty paces either way for the wrastling ground.

Only the birds of the air and the sea-wind were abroad as then, save those that walked armed before the Witches' booths, six in company, harnessed as for battle in byrnies of shining bronze, with greaves and shields of bronze and helms that glanced in the sun. Five were proper slender youths, the eldest of whom had not yet beard full grown, black-browed and great of jaw; the sixth, huge as a neat, topped them by half a head. Age had flecked with gray the beard that spread over his big chest to his belt stiffened with studs of iron, but the vigour of youth was in his glance and in his voice, and in the tread of his foot, and in his fist so lightly handling his burly spear.

"Behold, wonder, and lament," said the martlet, "that the innocent eye of day should be enforced still to look upon the children of night everlasting. Corund of Witchland and his cursed Sons."

Lessingham thought, "A most fiery politician is my little martlet: damned fiends and angels and nothing betwixt for her. But I'll dance to none of their tunes, but wait for these things' unfolding."

So walked those back and forth as caged lions before the Witches' booths, until Corund halted and leaning on his spear said to one of his sons, "Go in and seek out Gro that I may speak with him." And the son of Corund went, and returned anon with Lord Gro, that came with furtive step yet goodly and fair to behold. The nose of him was hooked like a sickle and his eyes great and fair like the eyes of an ox, inscrutable as they. Lean and spare was his frame. Pale was his face and pale his delicate hands, and his long black beard was tightly curled and bright as the coat of a black retriever.

Corund said, "How is it with the King?"

Gro answered him, "He chafeth to be at it; and to pass away the time he playeth at dice with Corinius, and the luck goeth against the King."

"What makest thou of that?" asked Corund.

And Gro said, "The fortune of the dice jumpeth not commonly with the fortune of war."

Corund grunted in his beard, and laying his large hand on Lord Gro's shoulder, "Speak to me a little apart," he said; and when they were private, "Darken not counsel," said Corund, "to me and my sons. Have I not these four years past been as a brother unto thee, and wilt thou still be secret toward us?"

But Gro smiled a sad smile and said, "Why should we by words of ill omen strike yet another blow where the tree tottereth?"

Corund groaned. "Omens," said he, "increase upon us from that time forth when the King accepted the challenge, evilly, and flatly against thy counsel and mine and the counsel of all the great ones in the land. Surely the Gods have made him fey, having ordained his destruction and our humbling before these Demons." And he said, "Omens thicken upon us, O Gro. First, the night raven that went widdershins round about the palace of Carcë, that night when the King accepted this challenge, and we were all drunken with wine after our great feasting and surfeiting in his halls. Next, the stumbling of the King whenas he went upon the poop of the long ship which bare us on this voyage to these islands. Next, the squint-eyed cup-bearer that poured out unto us yesternight. And throughout, the devilish pride and bragging humour of the King. No more: he is fey. And the dice fall against him."

Gro spake and said, "O Corund, I will not hide it from thee that my heart is heavy as thy heart under shadow of ill to be. For as I lay sleeping betwixt the strokes of night, a dream of the night stood by my bed and beheld me with a glance so fell that I was all adrad and quaking with fear. And it seemed to me that the dream smote the roof above my bed, and the roof opened and disclosed the outer dark, and in the dark travelled a bearded star, and the night was quick with fiery signs. And blood was on the roof, and great gouts of blood on the walls and on the cornice of my bed. And the dream screeched like the screech-owl, and cried, *Witchland from thy hand, O King!* And methought the whole world was lighted in a lowe, and with a great cry I awoke out of the dream."

"Thou art wise," said Corund; "and belike the dream was a true dream, sent thee through the gate of horn, and belike it forebodeth events great and evil for the King and for Witchland."

Gro said, "Disclose it not to the others, for none can strive with Fate and gain the victory, and it would but cast down their hearts. But it is fitting we be ready against evil hap. If (which yet may the Gods forbend) ill come of this wrastling bout, fail not every one of you ere you act on any enterprise to take counsel of me. 'Bare is back without brother behind it.' Together must we do that we do."

"Thou hast my firm assurance on't," said Corund.

Now began a great company to come forth from the palace and take their stand on either side of the wrastling ground. The Red Foliot sate in his car of polished ebony, drawn by six black horses with flowing manes and tails; before him went his musicians, pipers and minstrels doing their craft, and behind him fifty spearmen, weighed down with armour and ponderous shields that covered them from chin to toe. Their armour was stained with madder, in such wise that they seemed bathed in blood. Mild to look on was the Red Foliot, yet kingly. His skin was scarlet like the head of the green woodpecker. He wore a diadem of silver, and robes of scarlet trimmed with black fur.

So when the Foliots were assembled, one stood forth with a horn at the command of the Red Foliot and blew three blasts. Therewith came forth from their booths the lords of Demonland and their men-at-arms, Juss, Goldry, Spitfire, and Brandoch Daha, all armed as for battle save Goldry, who was muffled in a cloak of cloth of gold with great hearts worked thereon in red silk thread. And from their booths in turn came the lords of Witchland all armed, and their fighting men, and little love there was in the glances they and the Demons cast upon each other. In the midst stalked the King, his great limbs muffled, like Goldry's, in a cloak: and it was of black silk lined with black bearskin, and ornamented with crabs worked in diamonds. The crown of Witchland, fashioned like a hideous crab and encrusted with jewels so thickly that none might discern the iron whereof it was framed, weighed on his beetling brow. His beard was black and bristly, spade-shaped and thick: his hair close cropped. His upper lip was shaved,

displaying his sneering mouth, and from the darkness below his eyebrows looked forth eyes that showed a green light, like those of a wolf. Corund walked at the King's left elbow, his giant frame an inch less in stature than the King. Corinius went on the right, wearing a rich cloak of skyblue tissue over his shining armour. Tall and soldierlike was Corinius, and young and goodly to look upon, with swaggering gait and insolent eye, thick-lipped withal and somewhat heavy of feature, and the sun shone brightly on his shaven jowl.

Now the Red Foliot let sound the horn again, and standing in his ebony car he read out the conditions, as thus:

"O Gorice XI., most glorious King of Witchland, and O Lord Goldry Bluszco, captain of the hosts of Demonland, it is compact betwixt you, and made fast by mighty oaths whereof I, the Red Foliot, am keeper, that ye shall wrestle three falls together on these conditions, namely, that if Gorice the King be victorious, then hath he that glory and withal full liberty to enforce with the sword his claims of lordship over many-mountained Demonland: but if victory fall to the Lord Goldry Bluszco, then shall the Demons let the Witches abide in peace, and they them, and the Witches shall forswear for ever their claims of lordship over the Demons. And you, O King, and you, O Goldry Bluszco, are likewise bound by oath to wrestle fairly and to abide by the ruling of me, the Red Foliot, whom ye are content to choose as your umpire. And I do swear to judge justly between you. And the laws of your wrestling are that neither shall strangle his adversary with his hands, nor bite him, nor claw nor scratch his flesh, nor poach out his eyes, nor smite him with his fists, nor do any other unfair thing against him, but in all other respects ye shall wrestle freely together. And he that shall be brought to earth with hip or shoulder shall be accounted fallen."

The Red Foliot said, "Have I spoken well, O King, and do you swear to these conditions?"

The King said, "I swear."

The Red Foliot asked in like manner, "Dost thou swear to these conditions, O Lord Goldry Buszco?"

And Goldry answered him, "I swear."

Without more ado the King stepped into the wrastling ground on his side, and Goldry Bluszco on his, and they cast aside their rich mantles and stood forth naked for the wrastling. And folk stood silent for admiration of the thews and sinews of those twain, doubting which were mightier of build and likelier to gain the victory. The King stood taller by a little, and was longer in the arm than Goldry. But the great frame of Goldry showed excellent proportions, each part wedded to each as in the body of a God, and if either were brawnier of chest it was he, and he was thicker of neck than the King.

Now the King mocked Goldry, saying, "Rebellious hound, it is fit that I make demonstration unto thee, and unto these Foliots and Demons that witness our meeting, that I am thy King and Lord not by virtue only of this my crown of Witchland, which I thus put by for an hour, but even by the power of my body over thine and by my might and main. Be satisfied that I will not have done with thee until I have taken away thy life, and sent thy soul squealing bodiless into the unknown. And thy skull and thy marrow-bones will I have away to Carcë, to my palace, to be a token unto all the world that I have been the bane of an hundredth great champion by my wrastling, and thou not least among them that I have slain in that exercise. Thereafter, when I have eaten and drunken and made merry in my royal palace at Carcë, I will sail with my armies over the teeming deep to many-mountained Demonland. And it shall be my footstool, and these other Demons the slaves of me, yea, and the slaves of my slaves."

But the Lord Goldry Bluszco laughed lightly and said to the Red Foliot, "O Red Foliot; I am not come hither to contend with the King of Witchland in windy railing, but to match my strength against his, sinew against sinew."

Now they stood ready, and the Red Foliot made a sign with his hand, and the cymbals clashed for the first bout.

At the clash the two champions advanced and clasped one another with their strong arms, each with his right arm below and left arm above the other's shoulder, until the flesh shrank beneath the might of their arms that were as brazen bands. They swayed a little this way and that, as great trees swaying in a storm, their legs planted firmly so that they seemed to grow out of the ground like the trunks of oak trees. Nor did either yield ground to



other, nor might either win a master hold upon his enemy. So swayed they back and forth for a long time, breathing heavily. And now Goldry, gathering his strength, gat the King lifted a little from the ground, and was minded to swing him round and so dash him to earth. But the King, in that moment when he found himself lifted, leaned forward mightily and smote his heel swiftly round Goldry's leg on the outside, striking him behind and a little above the ankle, in such wise that Goldry was fain to loosen his hold on the King; and greatly folk marvelled that he was able in that plight to save himself from being thrown backward by the King. So they gripped again until red wheals rose on their backs and shoulders by reason of the grievous clasping of their arms. And the King on a sudden twisted his body sideways, with his left side turned from Goldry; and catching with his leg Goldry's leg on the inside below the great muscle of the calf, and hugging him yet closer, he lurched mightily against him, striving to pull Goldry backward and so fall upon him and crush him as they fell to earth. But Goldry leaned violently forward, ever tightening his hold on the King, and so violently bare he forward in his strength that the King was baulked of his design; and clutched together they fell both to earth side by side with a heavy crash, and lay bemused while one might count half a score.

The Red Foliot proclaimed them even in this bout, and each returned to his fellows to take breath and rest for a space.

Now while they rested, a flittermouse flew forth from the Witchland booths and went widdershins round the wrastling ground and so returned silently whence she came. Lord Gro saw her, and his heart waxed heavy within him. He spake to Corund and said, "Needs must that I make trial even at this late hour if there be not any means to turn the King from further adventuring of himself, ere all be lost."

Corund said, "Be it as thou wilt, but it will be in vain."

So Gro stood by the King and said, "Lord, give over this wrastling. Great of growth and mightier of limb than any that you did overcome aforetime is this Demon, yet have you vanquished him. For you did throw him, as we plainly saw, and wrongfully hath the Red Foliot adjudged you evenly matched because in the throwing of him your majesty's self did fall to earth. Tempt not the fates by another bout. Yours is the victory in this

wrestling: and now we, your servants, wait but your nod to make a sudden onslaught on these Demons and slay them, as we may lightly overcome them taken at unawares. And for the Foliots, they be peaceful and sheeplike folk, and will be held in awe when we have smitten the Demons with the edge of the sword. So may you depart, O King, with pleasure and great honour, and afterward fare to Demonland and bring it into subjection."

The King looked sourly upon Lord Gro, and said, "Thy counsel is unacceptable and unseasonable. What lieth behind it?"

Gro answered, "There have been omens, O King."

And the King said, "What omens?"

Gro answered and said, "I will not hide it from you, O my Lord the King, that in my sleep about the darkest hour a dream of the night came to my bed and beheld me with a glance so fell that the hairs of my head stood up and pale terror gat hold upon me. And methought the dream smote up the roof above my bed, and the roof yawned to the naked air of the midnight, that laboured with fiery signs, and a bearded star travelling in the houseless dark. And I beheld the roof and the walls one gore of blood. And the dream screeched like the screech-owl, crying, *Witchland from thy hand, O King!* And therewith the whole world seemed lighted in one flame, and with a shout I awoke sweating from the dream."

But the King rolled his eyes in anger upon Lord Gro and said, "Well am I served and faithfully by such false scheming foxes as thou. It ill fits your turn that I should carry this deed to the end with mine own hand only, and in the blindness of your impudent folly ye come to me with tales made for scaring of babes, praying me gently to forgo my glory that thou and thy fellows may make yourselves big in the world's eyes by deeds of arms."

Gro said, "Lord, it is not so."

But the King would not hear him, but said, "Methinks it is for loyal subjects to seek greatness in the greatness of their King, nor desire to shine of their own brightness. As for this Demon, when thou sayest that I have overcome him thou speakest a gross and impudent lie. In this bout I did but measure myself with him. But thereby know I of a surety that when I put forth my might he will not be able to withstand me; and all ye shall shortly behold how, as one shattereth a stalk of angelica, I will break and shatter the

limbs of this Goldry Bluszco. As for thee, false friend, subtle fox, unfaithful servant, this long time am I grown weary of thee slinking up and down my palace devising darkly things I know not: thou, that art nought akin to Witchland, but an outlander, a Goblin exile, a serpent warmed in my bosom to my hurt. But these things shall have an end. When I have put down this Goldry Bluszco, then shall I have leisure to put down thee also."

And Gro bowed in sorrow of heart before the anger of the King, and held his peace.

Now was the horn blown for the second bout, and they stepped into the wrestling ground. At the clashing of the cymbals the King sprang at Goldry as the panther springeth, and with the rush bare him backward and well nigh forth of the wrestling ground. But when they were carried almost among the Demons where they stood to behold the contest, Goldry swung to the left and strove as before to get the King lifted off his feet; but the King foiled him and bent his ponderous weight upon him, so that Goldry's spine was like to have been crushed beneath the murdering violence of the King's arms. Then did the Lord Goldry Bluszco show forth his great power as a wrestler, for, even under the murdering clasp of the King, he by the might that was in the muscles of his brawny chest shook the King first to the right and then to the left; and the King's hold was loosened, and all his skill and mastery but narrowly saved him from a grievous fall. Nor did Goldry delay nor ponder how next to make trial of the King, but sudden as the lightning he slackened his hold and turned, and with his back under the King's belly gave a mighty lift; and they that witnessed it stood amazed in expectancy to see the King thrown over Goldry's head. Yet for all his striving might not Goldry get the King lifted clean off the ground. Twice and three times he strove, and at each trial he seemed further from his aim, and the King bettered his hold. And at the fourth essay that Goldry made to lift the King over his back and fling him headlong, the King thrust him forward and tripped him from behind, so that Goldry was crawled on his hands and knees. And the King clung to him from behind and passed his arms round his body beneath the armpits and so back over the shoulders, being minded to clasp his two hands at the back of Goldry's neck.

Then said Corund, "The Demon is sped already. By this hold hath the King brought to their bane more than three score famous champions. He delayeth only till his fingers be knit together behind the neck of the accursed Demon to draw the head of him forward until the bones of the neck or the breastbone be bursten asunder."

"He delayeth over long for my peace," said Gro.

The King's breath came out of him in great puffs and grunts as he strained to bring his fingers to meet behind Goldry's neck. Nor was it aught else than the hugeness of his neck and burly chest that saved the Lord Goldry Bluszco in that hour from utter destruction. Crawled on his hands and knees he could nowise escape from the hold of the King, neither lay hold on him in turn; howbeit because of the bigness of Goldry's neck and chest it was impossible for the King to fasten that hold upon him, for all his striving.

When the King perceived that this was so, and that he but wasted his strength, he said, "I will loose my hold on thee and let thee up, and we will stand again face to face. For I deem it unworthy to grapple on the ground like dogs."

So they stood up, and wrestled another while in silence. Soon the King made trial once again of the fall whereby he had sought to throw him in the first bout, twisting suddenly his right side against Goldry, and catching with his leg Goldry's leg, and therewith leaning against him with main force. And when, as before, Goldry bare forward with great violence, tightening his grip, the King lurched mightily against him, and, being still ill content to have missed his hold that never heretofore had failed him, he thrust his fingers up Goldry's nose in his cruel anger, scratching and clawing at the delicate inner parts of the nostrils in such wise that Goldry was fain to draw back his head. Therewith the King, lurching against him yet more heavily, gat him thrown a grievous fall on his back, and himself fell atop of him, crushing him and stunning him on the earth.

And the Red Foliot proclaimed Gorice the King victorious in this bout.

Therewithal the King turned him back to his Witches, that loudly acclaimed his mastery over Goldry. He said unto Lord Gro, "It is as I have spoken: the testing first, next the bruising, and in the last bout the breaking

and killing." And the King looked evilly on Gro. Gro answered him not a word, for his soul was grieved to see blood on the nails and fingers of the King's left hand, and he thought he knew that the King must have been sore bested in this bout, seeing that he must do this beastly deed or ever he might overcome the might of his adversary.

But the Lord Goldry Bluszco when he was come to his senses and had gotten him up from that great fall, spake to the Red Foliot in mickle wrath, saying, "This devil hath overcome me by craft, doing that which it is a shame to do, in that he clawed me with his fingers up my nose."

The sons of Corund raised an uproar at the words of Goldry, loudly crying that he was the greatest liar and dastard; and all they of Witchland shouted and cursed in like manner. But Goldry shouted in a voice like a brazen trumpet that was plain to hear above the clamour of the Witches, "O Red Foliot, judge now fairly betwixt me and King Gorice, as thou art sworn to do. Let him show his finger nails, if there be not blood on them. This fall is void, and I claim that we wrestle it anew." And the lords of Demonland in like manner shouted that this fall should be wrestled anew.

Now the Red Foliot had seen somewhat of what was done, and well was he minded to call the bout void. Yet had he forborne to do this out of fear of King Gorice that had looked upon him with a basilisk's eye, threatening him. And now, while the Red Foliot was troubled in his mind, uncertain between the angry shouts of the Witches and the Demons whether safety lay rather with his honour or with truckling to King Gorice, the King spake a word to Corinius, who went straightway and standing by the Red Foliot spake privily in his ear. And Corinius menaced the Red Foliot, and said, "Beware lest thy mind be swayed by the brow-beating of the Demons. Rightfully hast thou adjudged the victory in this bout unto our Lord the King, and this talk of thrusting of fingers in the nose is but a pretext and a vile imagination of this Goldry Bluszco, who, being thrown fairly before thine eyes and before us all, and perceiving himself unable to stand against the King, now thinketh with his swaggering he can bear it away, and thinketh by cheats and subtleties to avoid defeat. If, against thine own beholding and the witness of us and the plighted word of the King, thou art so hardy as to harken to the guileful persuading of these Demons, yet

bethink thee that the King hath overborne ninety and nine great champions in this exercise, and this shall be the hundredth; and bethink thee, too, that Witchland lieth nearer to thine Isles than Demonland by many days' sailing. Hard shall it be for thee to abide the avenging sword of Witchland if thou do him despite, and against thy sworn oath as umpire incline wrongfully to his enemies in this dispute."

So spake Corinius; and the Red Foliot was cowed. Albeit he believed in his heart that the King had done what thereof Goldry accused him, yet for terror of the King and of Corinius that stood by and threatened him he durst not speak his thought, but in sore perplexity gave order for the horn to be blown for the third bout.

And it came to pass at the blowing of the horn that the flittermouse fared forth again from the booths of the Witches, and going widdershins round about the wrastling ground returned on silent wing whence she came.

When the Lord Goldry Bluszco understood that the Red Foliot would pay no heed to his accusation, he grew red as blood. A fearsome sight it was to behold how he swelled in his wrath, and his eyes blazed like disastrous stars at midnight, and being wood with anger he gnashed his teeth till the froth stood at his lips and slavered down his chin. Now the cymbals clashed for the onset. Therewith ran Goldry upon the King as one straight of his wits, bellowing as he ran, and gripped him by the right arm with both his hands, one at the wrist and one near the shoulder. And so it was that, before the King might move, Goldry spun round with his back to the King and by his mickle strength and the strength of the anger that was in him he heaved the King over his head, hurling him as one hurleth a ponderous spear, head-foremost to the earth. And the King smote the ground with his head, and the bones of his head and his spine were driven together and smashed, and blood flowed from his ears and nose. With the might of that throw Goldry's wrath departed from him and left him strengthless, in such sort that he reeled as he went from the wrastling ground. His brethren, Juss and Spitfire, bare him up on either side, and put his cloak of cloth of gold worked with red hearts about his mighty limbs.

Meanwhile dismay was fallen upon the Witches to behold their King so caught up on a sudden and dashed upon the ground, where he lay crumpled

in an heap, shattered like the stalk of an hemlock that one breaketh and shattereth. In great agitation the Red Foliot came down from his car of ebony and made haste thither where the King was fallen; and the lords of Witchland came likewise thither stricken at heart, and Corund lifted the King in his burly arms. But the King was stone dead. So those sons of Corund made a litter with their spears and laid the King on the litter, and spread over him his royal mantle of black silk lined with bearskin, and set the crown of Witchland on his head, and without word spoken bare him away to the Witches' booths. And the other lords of Witchland without word spoken followed after.

### III - THE RED FOLIOT

*Of the entertainment of the witches in the palace of the Red Foliot; and of the wiles and subtleties of Lord Gro; and how the witches departed by night out of the Foliot Isles.*

THE Red Foliot gat him back into his palace and sat in his high seat. And he sent unto the lords of Witchland and of Demonland that they should come and see him. Nor did they delay, but came straightway and sat on the long benches, the Witches on the eastern side of the hall and the Demons on the west; and their fighting men stood in order on either side behind them. So sat they in the shadowy hall, and the sun declining to the western ocean shone through the high windows of the hall on the polished armour and weapons of the Witches.

The Red Foliot spake among them and said, "A great champion hath been strook to earth this day in fair and equal combat. And according to the solemn oaths whereby ye are bound, and whereof I am the keeper, there is here an end to all unpeace betwixt Witchland and Demonland, and ye of Witchland are to forswear for ever your claims of lordship over the Demons. Now for a sealing and making fast of this solemn covenant between you I see no likelier rede than that ye all join with me here this day in good friendship to forget your quarrels in drinking of the arvale of King Gorice XI., than whom hath reigned none mightier nor more worshipful in all this world, and thereafter depart in peace to your native lands."

So spake the Red Foliot, and the lords of Witchland assented thereto.

But Lord Juss answered and said, "O Red Foliot, as to the oaths sworn between us and the King of Witchland, thou hast spoken well; nor shall we depart one tittle from the article of our oaths, and the Witches may abide in peace for ever as for us if, as is clean against their use and nature, they forbear to devise evil against us. For the nature of Witchland was ever as a



flea, that attacketh a man in the dark. But we will not eat nor drink with the lords of Witchland, who bewrayed and forsook us their sworn confederates at the sea-fight against the Ghouls. Nor we will not drink the arvale of King Gorice XI., who worked a shameful and unlawful sleight against my kinsman this day when they wrastied together."

So spake Lord Juss, and Corund whispered Gro in the ear, saying, "Were't not for the privilege of this respected company, now were the time to set upon them." But Gro said, "I prithee yet have patience. This were over hazardous, for the luck goeth against Witchland. Let us rather take them in their beds to-night."

Fain would the Red Foliot turn the Demons from their resolve, but without avail; they courteously thanking him for his hospitality which they said they would enjoy that night in their booths, being minded on the morrow to take to their beaked ship and fare over the unvintaged sea to Demonland.

Therewith stood up Lord Juss, and with him the Lord Goldry Bluszco, that went in all his war gear, his horned helm of gold and his golden byrny set with ruby hearts, and bare his two-handed sword forged by the elves wherewith he slew the beast out of the sea in days gone by; and Lord Spitfire that glared upon the lords of Witchland as a falcon glareth, hungering for her prey; and the Lord Brandoch Daha that looked on them, and chiefly on Corinius, with the eye of contemptuous amusement, playing idly with the jewelled hilt of his sword, until Corinius grew ill at ease beneath his gaze and shifted this way and that in his seat, scowling back defiance. For all the rich array and goodly port and countenance of Corinius, he seemed but a very boor beside the Lord Brandoch Daha, and dearly did each hate the other. So the lords of Demonland with their fighting men went forth from the hall.

The Red Foliot sent after them and made them in their own booths to be served of great plenty of wine and good and delicate meats, and sent them musicians and a minstrel to gladden them with songs and stories of old time, that they might lack nought of entertainment. But for his other guests he let bear in the massy cups of silver, and the great eared wine jars holding two firkins apiece, and he let pour forth to the Witches and the Foliots, and

they drank the cup of memory unto King Gorice XI., slain that day by the hand of Goldry Bluszco. Thereafter when their cups were brimmed anew with foaming wine the Red Foliot spake among them and said, "O ye lords of Witchland, will you that I speak a dirge in honour of Gorice the King that the dark reaper hath this day gathered?" So when they said yea to this, he called to him his player on the theorbo and his player on the hautboy, and commanded them saying, "Play me a solemn music." And they played softly in the Aeolian mode a music that was like the wailing of wind through bare branches on a moonless night, and the Red Foliot leaned forth from his high seat and recited this lamentation:

I that in heill was and gladness  
Am trublit now with great sickness  
And feblit with infirmitie:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
Our plesance here is all vain glory.  
This fals world is but transitory.  
The flesh is bruckle, the Feynd is slee:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
The state of man does change and vary.  
Now sound, now sick, now blyth, now sary.  
Now dansand mirry, now like to die:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
No state in Erd here standis sicker;  
As with the wynd wavis the wicker.  
So wannis this world's vanitie:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
Unto the Death gois all Estatis.  
Princis, Prelattis, and Potestatis.  
Baith rich and poor of all degree:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
He takis the knichtis in to field  
Enarmit under helm and scheild;  
Victor he is at all mellie:--

Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
That strong unmerciful tyrand  
Takis, on the motheris breast sowkand.  
The babe full of benignitie:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
He takis the campion in the stour.  
The captain closit in the tour.  
The lady in bour full of bewtie:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
He spairis no lord for his piscence.  
Na clerk for his intelligence;  
His awful straik may no man flee:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
Art-magicianis and astrologis.  
Rethoris, logicianis, theologis.  
Them help is no conclusions slee:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.  
In medecine the most practicianis.  
Leechis, surriganis, and physicianis.  
Themself from Death may nocht supplee:--  
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

When the Red Foliot had spoken thus far his dirge, he was interrupted by an unseemly brawling betwixt Corinius and one of the sons of Corund. For Corinius, who gave not a fig for music or dirges, but liked well of carding and dicing, had brought forth his dice box to play with the son of Corund. They played awhile to Corinius's great content, for at every throw he won and the other's purse waxed light. But at this eleventh stanza the son of Corund cried out that the dice of Corinius were loaded. And he smote Corinius on his shaven jowl with the dice box, calling him cheat and mangy rascal, whereupon Corinius drew forth a bodkin to smite him in the neck withal; but some went betwixt them, and with much ado and much struggling and cursing they were parted, and it being shown that the dice

were not loaded, the son of Corund was fain to make amends to Corinius, and so were they set at one again.

Now was the wine poured forth yet again to the lords of Witchland, and the Red Foliot drank deep unto the glory of that land and the rulers thereof. And he issued command saying, "Let my Kagu come and dance before us, and thereafter my other dancers. For there is no pleasure whereon the Foliots do more dearly dote than this pleasure of the dance, and sweet to us it is to behold delightful dancing, be it the stately splendour of the Pavane which progresseth as large clouds at sun-down that pass by in splendour; or the graceful Allemande; or the Fandango, which goeth by degrees from languorous beauty to the swiftness and passion of Bacchanals dancing on the high lawns under a summer moon that hangeth in the pine trees; or the joyous maze of the Galliard; or the Gigue, dear to the Foliots. Therefore delay not, but let my Kagu come, that she may dance before us."

Therewith hastened the Kagu into the shadowy hall, moving softly and rolling a little in her gait, with her head thrust forward; and a little flurried was she in her bearing as she darted this way and that her large and beautiful eyes, mild and timid, that were like liquid gold heated to redness. Somewhat like a heron she was, but stouter, and shorter of leg, and her beak shorter and thicker than the heron's; and so long and delicate was her pale gray plumage that hard it was to say whether it were hair or feathers. So the wind instruments and the lutes and dulcimers played a Coranto, and the Kagu tripped up the hall betwixt the long tables, jumping a little and bowing a little in her step and keeping excellent time to the music; and when she came near to the dais where the Red Foliot sat ravished with delight at her dancing, the Kagu lengthened her step and glided smoothly and slowly forward toward the Red Foliot; and so gliding she drew herself up in stately wise and opened her mouth and drew back her head till her beak lay tight against her breast, flouncing out her feathers so that they showed like a widecut skirt with a crinoline, and the crest that was on her head rose up erect half again her own height from the ground, and she sailed majestically toward the Red Foliot. On this wise did the Kagu at every turn that she took in the Coranto, forth and back along the length of the Foliots' hall. And they all laughed sweetly at her, being overjoyed at her

dancing. When the dance was done, the Red Foliot called the Kagu to him and made her sit on the bench beside him, and stroked her soft gray feathers and made much of her. All bashfully she sat beside the Red Foliot, casting her ruby eyes in wonder upon the Witches and their company.

Next the Red Foliot called for his Cat-bears, that stood before him foxy-red above but with black bellies, round furry faces, and innocent amber eyes, and soft great paws, and tails barred alternately with ruddy rings and creamy; and he said, "O Cat-bears, dance before us, since dearly we delight in your dancing."

They asked, "Lord, will you that we perform the Gigue?"

And he answered them, "The Gigue, and ye love me."

So the stringed instruments began a swift movement, and the tambourines and triangles entered on the beat, and swiftly twinkled the feet of the Cat-bears in the joyous dance. The music rippled and ran and the dancers danced till the hall was awl with the rhythm of their dancing, and the Witches roared applause. On a sudden the music ceased, and the dancers were still, and standing side by side, paw in furry paw, they bowed shyly to the company, and the Red Foliot called them to him and kissed them on the mouth and sent them to their seats, that they might rest and view the dances that were to follow.

Next the Red Foliot called for his white Peacocks, coloured like moonlight, that they might lead the Pavane before the lords of Witchland. In glorious wise did they spread their tails for the stately dance, and a fair and lovely sight it was to see their grace and the grandeur of their carriage as they moved to the music chaste and noble. With them were joined the Golden Pheasants, who spread wide their collars of gold, and the Silver Pheasants, and the Peacock Pheasants, and the Estridges, and the Bustards, footing it in pomp, pointing the toes, and bowing and retiring in due time to the solemn strains of the Pavane. Every instrument took part in the stately Pavane: the lutes and the dulcimers, and the theorbos, and the sackbuts, and the hautboys; the flutes sweetly warbling as birds in the upper air, and the silver trumpets, and the horns that breathed deep melodies trembling with mystery and tenderness that shakes the heart; and the drum that beateth to battle, and the wild throb of the harp, and the cymbals clashing as the clash

of armies. And a nightingale sitting by the Red Foliot sang the Pavane in passionate tones that dissolved the soul in their sweet, mournful beauty.

The Lord Gro covered his face with his mantle and wept to hear and behold the divine Pavane; for as ghosts rearisen it raised up for him old happy half-forgotten days in Goblinland, before he had conspired against King Gaslark and been driven forth from his dear native land, an exile in waterish Witchland.

Thereafter let the Red Foliot give order for the Galliard. Joyously swept forth the melody from the stringed instruments, and two dormice, fat as butter, spun into the hall. Wilder whirled the music, and the dormice capered ever higher till they bounded from the floor up to the beams of the vaulted roof, and down again, and up again to the roof-beams in the joyful dance. And the Foliots joined in the Galliard, spinning and capering in mad delight of the dance. And into the hall twirled six capripeds, footing it lightly as the music swept ever faster, and a one-footer that leaped hither and thither about and about, as the flea hoppeth, till the Witches grew hoarse with singing and shouting and hounding of him on. Yet ever capered the dormice higher and wilder than any else, and so swiftly flashed their little feet to the galloping music that no eye might follow their motion.

But little enow was Lord Gro gladdened by the merry dance. Sad melancholy sat with him for his companion, darkening his thoughts and making joy hateful to him as sunshine to owls of the night. So that he was well pleased to mark the Red Foliot go softly from his seat on the dais and forth from the hall by a door behind the arras, and seeing this, himself departed softly amid the full tide of the Galliard, forth of that hall of swift movement and gleeful laughter, forth into the quiet evening, where above the smooth downs the wind was lulled to sleep in the vast silent spaces of the sky, and the west was a bower of orange light fading to purple and unfathomable blue in the upper heaven, and nought was heard save the murmur of the sleepless sea, and nought seen save a flight of wildfowl flying against the sunset. In this quietness Gro walked westward above the combe until he came to the land's edge and stood on the lip of a chalk cliff falling to the sea, and was ware of the Red Foliot, alone on that high western cliff, gazing in a study at the dying colours in the west.

When they had stood for a while without speech, gazing over the sea, Gro spake and said, "Consider how as day now dieth in yonder chambers of the west, so hath the glory departed from Witchland."

But the Red Foliot answered him not, being in a study.

Then Gro said, "Though Demonland lieth where thou sawest the sun descend, yet eastward out of Witchland must thou look for the morning splendour. Not more surely shalt thou behold the sun go up thence tomorrow than thou shalt see shine forth in short season the glory and honour and power of Witchland, and beneath her destructive sword her enemies shall be as grass before the sickle."

The Red Foliot said, "I am in love with peace and the soft influence of the evening air. Leave me; or if thou wilt stay, break not the charm."

"O Red Foliot," said Gro, "art thou in love with peace indeed? So should the rising again of Witchland tune sweet music to thy thought, since we of Witchland love peace, nor are we stirrers up of strife, but the Demons only. The war against the Ghouls, whereby the four corners of the earth were shaken, was hatched by Demonland---"

"Thou speakest," said the Red Foliot, "clean against thine intention, a great praise of them. For who ever saw the like of these man-eating Ghouls for corruption of manners, inhuman degeneration, and deluge of iniquities? Who every fifth year from time immemorial have had their grand climacterical year, and but last year brake forth in never-imagined ferocity. But if they sail now, 'tis on the dark lake they sail, grieving no earthly seas nor rivers. Praise Demonland, therefore, who did put them down for ever."

"I make no question of that," answered Lord Gro. "But foul water, as soon as fair, will quench hot fire. Sore against our will did we of Witchland join with the Demons in that war, forseeing (as hath been bloodily approved) that the issue must be but the puffing up of the Demons, who desire no other thing than to be lords and tyrants of all the world."

"Thou," said the Red Foliot, "wast in thy young days King Gaslark's man: a Goblin born and bred: his very foster-brother, nourished at the same breast. Why must I observe thee, a plain traitor against so good a king? Whose perfidy the common people then did openly reprove (as I did well perceive even so lately as last autumn, when I was in the city of Zajë

Zaculo at the time of their festivities for the betrothal of the king's cousin german the Princess Armelline unto the Lord Goldry Bluszco), they carrying filthy pictures of thee in the street, singing of thee thus:

It was pittie  
One so wittie  
Malcontent:  
Leaving reason  
Should to treason  
So be bent.  
But his gifts  
Were but shifts  
Void of grace:  
And his braverie  
Was but knaverie  
Vile and base."

Said Gro, wincing a little, "The art of it agreeth well with the sentiment, and with the condition of those who invented it. I will not think so noble a prince as thou art will set thy sails to the wind of the rabble's most partial hates and envies. For the vile addition of traitor, I do reject and spit upon it. But true it is that, regarding not the god of fools and women, nice opinion, I do steer by mine own lode-star still. Howbeit, I came not to discourse to thee on so small a matter as myself. This I would say unto thee with most sad and serious entertain: Be not lulled to think the Demons will leave the world at peace: that is farthest from their intent. They would not listen to thy comfortable words nor sit at meat with us, so set be they to imagine mischief against us. What said Juss? 'Witchland was ever as a flea': ay, as a flea which he itcheth to crush betwixt his finger-nails. O, if thou be in love with peace, a short way lieth open to thy heart's desire."

Nought spake the Red Foliot, gazing still into the dim reflections of the sunset which lingered below a darkening sky where stars were born. Gro said softly, as a cat purring, "Where softening unctions failed, sharp surgery bringeth speediest ease. Wilt thou not leave it to me?"



But the Red Foliot looked angrily upon him, saying, "What have I to do with your enmities? You are sworn to keep the peace, and I will not abide your violence nor your breaking of oaths in my quiet kingdom."

Gro said, "Oaths be of the heart, and he that breaketh them in open fact is oft, as now, no breaker in truth, for already were they scorned and trampled on by his opposites."

But the Red Foliot said again, "What have I to do with your enmities that set you by the ears like fighting dogs? I am yet to learn that he that hath a righteous heart, and clean hands, and hateth none, must needs be drawn into the brawls and manslayings of such as you and the Demons."

Lord Gro looked narrowly upon him, saying, "Thinkest thou that the strait path of him that affecteth neither side lieth still open for thee? If that were thine aim, thou shouldst have bethought thee ere thou gayest thy judgement on the second bout. For clear as day it was to us and to thine own people, and most of all to the Demons, that the King played foul in that bout, and when thou calledst him victorious thou didst loudly by that word trumpet thyself his friend, and unfriends to Demonland. Markedst thou not, when they left the hall, with what a snake's eye Lord Juss beheld thee? Not with us only but with thee he refused to eat and drink, that so his superstitious scruples may be unhurt when he proceeds to thy destruction. For on this are they determined. Nothing is more certain."

The Red Foliot sank his chin upon his breast, and stood silent for a space. The hues of death and silence spread themselves where late the fires of sunset glowed, and large stars opened like flowers on the illimitable fields of the night sky: Arcturus, Spica, Gemini, and the Little Dog, and Capella and her Kids.

The Red Foliot said, "Witchland lieth at my door. And Demonland: how stand I with Demonland?"

And Gro said, "Also to-morrow's sun goeth up out of Witchland."

For a while they spoke not. Then Lord Gro took forth a scroll from his bosom, and said, "The harvest of this world is to the resolute, and he that is infirm of purpose is ground betwixt the upper and the nether millstone. Thou canst not turn back: so would they scorn and spurn thee, and we Witches likewise. And now by these means only may lasting peace be

brought about, namely, by the setting of Gorice of Witchland on the throne of Demonland, and the utter humbling of that brood beneath the heel of the Witches."

The Red Foliot said, "Is not Gorice slain, and drank we not but now his arvale, slain by a Demon? and is he not the second in order of that line who hath so died by a Demon?"

"A twelfth Gorice," said Gro, "at this moment of time sitteth King in Carcë. O Red Foliot, know thou that I am a reader of the planets of the night and of those hidden powers that work out the web of destiny. Whereby I know that this twelfth King of the house of Gorice in Carcë shall be a most crafty warlock, full of guiles and wiles, who by the might of his egromancy and the sword of Witchland shall exceed all earthly powers that be. And ineluctable as the levin-bolt of heaven goeth out his wrath against his enemies." So saying, Gro stooped and took a glowworm from the grass, saying kindly to it, "Sweeting, thy lamp for a moment," and breathed upon it, and held it to the parchment, saying, "Sign now thy royal name to these articles, which require thee not at all to go to war, but only (in case war shall arise) to be of our party, and against these Demons that do privily pursue thy life."

But the Red Foliot said, "Wherein am I certified that thou speakest not a lie?"

Then took Gro a writing from his purse and showed thereon a seal like the seal of Lord Juss; and there was written: "Unto Voll al love and truste: and fayll nat whenas thow saylest upon Wychlande to caste of iii or iv shippes for the Folyott Isles to putt downe those and brenne the Redd Folyott in hys hous. For if wee get nat the lyfe of these wormes chirted owt of them the shame will stikk on us for ever." And Gro said, "My servant stole this from them while they spoke with thee in thine hall to-night."

Which the Red Foliot believed, and took from his belt his inkhorn and his pen, and signed his royal name to the articles of the treaty proposed to him.

Therewith Lord Gro put up the parchment in his bosom and said, "Swift surgery. Needs must that we take them in their beds tonight; so shall to-

morrow's dawn bring glory and triumph to Witchland, now fixed in an eclipse, and to the whole world peace and soft contentment."

But the Red Foliot answered him, "My Lord Gro, I have signed these articles, and thereby stand I bound in enmity to Demonland. But I will not bewray my guests that have eaten my salt, be they never so deeply pledged mine enemies. Be it known to thee, I have set guards on your booths this night and on the booths of them of Demonland, that no unpeaceful deeds may be done betwixt you. This which I have done, by this will I stand, and ye shall both depart to-morrow in peace, even as ye came. Because I am your friend and sworn to your party, I and my Foliots will be on your side when war is between Witchland and Demonland. But I will not suffer night-slayings nor murders in my Isles."

Now with these words of the Red Foliot, Lord Gro was as one that walketh along a flowery path to his rest, and in the last steps a gulf yawneth suddenly athwart the path, and he standeth a-gape and disappointed at the hither side. Yet in his subtlety he made no sign, but straight replied, "Righteously hast thou decreed and wisely, O Red Foliot, for it was truly said:

Let worthy minds ne'er stagger in distrust  
To suffer death or shame for what is just.

and that which we sow in darkness must unfold in the open light of day, lest it be found withered in the very hour of maturity. Nor would I have urged thee otherwise, but that I do thoroughly fear these Demons, and all my mind was to take their plotting in reverse. Do then one thing only for us. If we set sail homeward and they on our heels, they will fall upon us at a disadvantage, for they have the swifter ship; or if they get to sea before us, they will lie in wait for us on the high seas. Suffer us then to sail to-night, and do thou on some pretext delay them here for three days only, that we may get us home or ever they leave the Foliot Isles."

"I will not gainsay thee in this," answered the Red Foliot, "for here is nought but what is fair and just and lieth with mine honour. I will come to your booths at midnight and bring you down to your ship."

When Gro came to the Witches' booths he found them guarded even as the Red Foliot had said, and the booths of them of Demonland in like manner. So went he into the royal booth where the King lay in state on a bier of spear-shafts, robed in his kingly robes over his armour that was painted black and inlaid with gold, and the crown of Witchland on his head. Two candles burned at the head of King Gorice and two at his feet; and the night wind blowing through the crannies of the booth made them flare and flicker, so that shadows danced unceasingly on the wall and roof and floor. On the benches round the walls sat the lords of Witchland sullen of countenance, for the wine was dead in them. Balefully they eyed Lord Gro at his coming in, and Corinius sate upright in his seat and said, "Here is the Goblin, father and fosterer of our misfortunes. Come, let us slay him."

Gro stood among them with head erect and held Corinius with his eye, saying, "We of Witchland are not run lunatic, my Lord Corinius, that we should do this gladness to the Demons, to bite each at the other's throat like wolves. Methinks if Witchland be the land of my adoption only, yet have I not done least among you to ward off sheer destruction from her in this pass we stand in. If ye have aught against me, let me hear it and answer it."

Corinius laughed a bitter laugh. "Harken to the fool! Are we babies and milksops, thinkest thou, and is it not clear as day thou stoodest in the way of our falling on the Demons when we might have done so, urging what silly counsels I know not in favour of doing it by night? And now is night come, and we close prisoned in our booths, and no chance to come at them unless we would bring an hornets' nest of Foliots about our ears and give warning of our intent to the Demons and every living soul in this island. And all this has come about since thy slinking off and plotting with the Red Foliot. But now hath thy guile overreached itself, and now we will kill thee, and so an end of thee and thy plotting."

With that Corinius sprang up and drew his sword, and the other Witches with him. But Lord Gro moved not an eyelid, only he said, "Hear mine answer first. All night lieth before us, and 'tis but a moment's task to murder me."

Therewith stood forth the Lord Corund with his huge bulk betwixt Gro and Corinius, saying in a great voice, "Whoso shall point weapon 'gainst

him shall first have to do with me, though it were one of my sons. We will hear him. If he clear not himself, then will we hew him in pieces."

They sat down, muttering. And Gro spake and said, "First behold this parchment, which is the articles of a solemn covenant and alliance, and behold where the Red Foliot hath set his sign manual thereto. True, his is a country of no might in arms, and we might tread him down and ne'er feel the leavings stick to our boot, and little avail can their weak help be unto us in the day of battle. But there is in these Isles a meetly good road and riding-place for ships, which if our enemies should occupy, their fleet were most aptly placed to do us all the ill imaginable. Is then this treaty a light benefit where now we stand? Next, know that when I counselled you take the Demons in their beds 'stead of fall upon them in the Foliots' hall, I did so being advertised that the Red Foliot had commanded his soldiers to turn against us or against the Demons, whichever first should draw sword upon the other. And when I went forth from the hall it was, as Corinius hath so deeply divined, to plot with the Red Foliot; but the aim of my plotting I have shown you, on these articles of alliance. And indeed, had I as Corinius vilely accuseth me practised with the Red Foliot against Witchland, I had hardly been so simple as return into the mouth of destruction when I might have bided safely in his palace."

Now when Gro perceived that the anger of the Witches against him was appeased by his defence, wherein he spake cunningly both true words and lies, he spake again among them saying, "Little gain have I of all my pains and thought expended by me for Witchland. And better it were for Witchland if my counsel were better heeded. Corund knoweth how, to mine own peril, I counselled the King to wrastle no more after the first bout, and if he had ta'en my rede, rather than suspect me and threaten me with death, we should not be now to bear him home dead to the royal catacombs in Carcë."

Corund said, "Truly hast thou spoken."

"In one thing only have I failed," said Gro; "and it can shortly be amended. The Red Foliot, albeit of our party, will not be won to attack the Demons by fraud, nor will he suffer us smite them in these Isles. Some fond simple scruples hang like cobwebs in his mind, and he is stubborn as

touching this. But I have prevailed upon him to make them tarry here for three days' space, while we put to sea this very night, telling him, which he most innocently believeth, that we fear the Demons, and would flee home ere they be let loose to take us at a disadvantage on the high seas. And home we will indeed ere they set sail, yet not for fear of them, but rather that we may devise a deadly blow against them or ever they win home to Demonland."

"What blow, Goblin?" said Corinius.

And Gro answered and said, "One that I will devise upon with our Lord the King, Gorice XII., who now awaiteth us in Carcë. And I will not blab it to a wine-bibber and a dicer who hath but now drawn sword against a true lover of Witchland." Whereupon Corinius leaped up in mickle wrath to thrust his sword into Gro. But Corund and his sons restrained him.

In due time the stars revolved to midnight, and the Red Foliot came secretly with his guards to the Witches' booths. The lords of Witchland took their weapons and the men-at-arms bare the goods, and the King went in the midst on his bier of spearshafts. So went they picking their way in the moonless night round the palace and down the winding path that led to the bed of the combe, and so by the stream westward toward the sea. Here they deemed it safe to light a torch to show them the way. Desolate and bleak showed the sides of the combe in the wind-blown flare; and the flare was thrown back from the jewels of the royal crown of Witchland, and from the armoured buskins on the King's feet showing stark with toes pointing upward from below his bear-skin mantle, and from the armour and the weapons of them that bare him and walked beside him, and from the black cold surface of the little river hurrying for ever over its bed of boulders to the sea. The path was rugged and stony, and they fared slowly, lest they should stumble and drop the King.

## IV - CONJURING IN THE IRON TOWER

*Of the hold of Carce; and of the midnight practices of King Gorice XII. in the ancient chamber, preparing dole and doom for the lords of Demonland.*

WHEN the Witches were come aboard of their ship and all stowed, and the rowers set in order on the benches, they bade farewell to the Red Foliot and rowed out to the deep, and there hoisted sail and put up their helm and sailed eastward along the land. The stars wheeled overhead, and the east grew pale, and the sun came out of the sea on the larboard bow. Still sailed they two days and two nights, and on the third day there was land ahead, and morning rose abated by mist and cloud, and the sun was as a ball of red fire over Witchland in the east. So they hung awhile off Tenemos waiting for the tide, and at high water sailed over the bar and up the Druima past the dunes and mud-flats and the Ergaspian mere, till they reached the bend of the river below Carcë. Solitary marsh-land stretched on either side as far as the eye might reach, with clumps of willow and rare homesteads showing above the flats. Northward above the bend a bluff of land fell sharply to the elbow of the river, and on the other side sloped gently away for a few miles till it lost itself in the dead level of the marshes. On the southern face of the bluff, monstrous as a mountain in those low sedge-lands, hung square and black the fortress of Carcë. It was built of black marble, roughhewn and unpolished, the outworks enclosing many acres. An inner wall with a tower at each corner formed the main stronghold, in the south-west corner of which was the palace, overhanging the river. And on the south-west corner of the palace, towering sheer from the water's edge seventy cubits and more to the battlements, stood the keep, a round tower lined with iron, bearing on the corbel table beneath its parapet in varying form and untold repetition the sculptured figure of the crab of Witchland. The outer ward of the fortress

was dark with cypress trees: black flames burning changelessly to heaven from a billowy sea of gloom. East of the keep was the water-gate, and beside it a bridge and bridgehouse across the river, strongly fortified with turrets and machicolations and commanded from on high by the battlements of the keep. Dismal and fearsome to view was this strong place of Carcë, most like to the embodied soul of dreadful night brooding on the waters of that sluggish river: by day a shadow in broad sunshine, the likeness of pitiless violence sitting in the place of power, darkening the desolation of the mournful fen, by night, a blackness more black than night herself.

Now was the ship made fast near the water-gate, and the lords of Witchland landed and their fighting men, and the gate opened to them, and mournfully they entered in and climbed the steep ascent to the palace, bearing with them their sad burden of the King. And in the great hall in Carcë was Gorice XI. laid in state for that night; and the day wore to its close. Nor was any word from King Gorice XII.

But when the shades of night were falling, there came a chamberlain to Lord Gro as he walked upon the terrace without the western wall of the palace; and the chamberlain said, "My lord, the King bids you attend him in the Iron Tower, and he chargeth you bring unto him the royal crown of Witchland."

Gro made haste to fulfil the bidding of the King, and betook himself to the great banqueting hall, and all reverently he lifted the iron crown of Witchland set thick with priceless gems, and went by a winding stair to the tower, and the chamberlain went before him. When they were come to the first landing, the chamberlain knocked on a massive door that was forthwith opened by a guard; and the chamberlain said, "My lord, it is the King's will that you attend his majesty in his secret chamber at the top of the tower." And Gro marvelled, for none had entered that chamber for many years. Long ago had Gorice VII. practised forbidden arts therein, and folk said that in that chamber he raised up those spirits whereby he gat his bane. Sithence was the chamber sealed, nor had the late Kings need of it, since little faith they placed in art magical, relying rather on the might of their hands and the sword of Witchland. But Gro was glad at heart, for the opening of this chamber by the King met his designs half way. Fearlessly he mounted the



winding stairs that were dusky with the shadows of approaching night and hung with cobwebs and strewn with the dust of neglect, until he came to the small low door of that chamber, and pausing knocked thereon and harkened for the answer.

And one said from within, "Who knocketh?" and Gro answered, "Lord, it is I, Gro." And the bolts were drawn and the door opened, and the King said, "Enter." And Gro entered and stood in the presence of the King.

Now the fashion of the chamber was that it was round, filling the whole space of the loftiest floor of the round donjon keep. It was now gathering dusk, and weak twilight only entered through the deep embrasures of the windows that pierced the walls of the tower, looking to the four quarters of the heavens. A furnace glowing in the big hearth threw fitful gleams into the recesses of the chamber, lighting up strange shapes of glass and earthenware, flasks and retorts, balances, hour-glasses, crucibles and astrolabes, a monstrous three-necked alembic of phosphorescent glass supported on a bain-marie, and other instruments of doubtful and unlawful aspect. Under the northern window over against the doorway was a massive table blackened with age, whereon lay great books bound in black leather with iron guards and heavy padlocks. And in a mighty chair beside this table was King Gorice XII., robed in his conjuring robe of black and gold, resting his cheek on his hand that was lean as an eagle's claw. The low light, mother of shade and secrecy, that hovered in that chamber moved about the still figure of the King, his nose hooked as the eagle's beak, his cropped hair, his thick close-cut beard and shaven upper lip, his high cheek-bones and cruel heavy jaw, and the dark eaves of his brows whence the glint of green eyes showed as no friendly lamp to them without. The door shut noiselessly, and Gro stood before the King. The dusk deepened, and the firelight pulsed and blinked in that dread chamber, and the King leaned without motion on his hand, bending his brow on Gro; and there was utter silence save for the faint purr of the furnace.

In a while the King said, "I sent for thee, because thou alone wast so hardy as to urge to the uttermost thy counsel upon the King that is now dead, Gorice XI. of memory ever glorious. And because thy counsel was good. Marvellest thou that I wist of thy counsel?"

Gro said, "O my Lord the King, I marvel not of this. For it is known to me that the soul endureth, albeit the body perish."

"Keep thou thy lips from overspeech," said the King. "These be mysteries whereon but to think may snatch thee into peril, and whoso speaketh of them, though in so secret a place as this, and with me only, yet at his most bitter peril speaketh he."

Gro answered, "O King, I spake not lightly; moreover, you did tempt me by your questioning. Nevertheless I am utterly obedient to your majesty's admonition."

The King rose from his chair and walked towards Gro, slowly. He was exceeding tall, and lean as a starved cormorant. Laying his hands upon the shoulders of Gro, and bending his face to Gro's, "Art not afeared," he asked, "to abide me in this chamber, at the close of day? Or hast not thought on't, and on these instruments thou seest, their use and purpose, and the ancient use of this chamber?"

Gro blenched never a whit, but stoutly said, "I am not afeared, O my Lord the King, but rather rejoiced I at your summons. For it jumpeth with mine own designs, when I took counsel secretly in my heart after the woes that the Fates fulfilled for Witchland in the Foliot Isles. For in that day, O King, when I beheld the light of Witchland darkened and her might abated in the fall of King Gorice XI. of glorious memory, I thought on you, Lord, the twelfth Gorice raised up King in Carcë; and there was present to my mind the word of the soothsayer of old, where he singeth:

Ten, eleven, tweif I see  
In sequent varietie  
Of puissaunce and maistrye  
With swerd, sinwes, and grammarie.  
In the holde of Carcë  
Lordinge it royally.

And being minded that he singeth out you, the twelfth, as potent in grammarie, all my care was that these Demons should be detained within reach of your spells until we should have time to win home to you and to

apprise you of their farings, that so you might put forth your power and destroy them by art magic or ever they come safe again to many-mountained Demonland."

The King took Gro to his bosom and kissed him, saying, "Art thou not a very jewel of wisdom and discretion? Let me embrace thee and love thee for ever."

Then the King stood back from him, keeping his hands on Gro's shoulders, and gazed piercingly upon him for a space in silence. Then kindled he a taper that stood in an iron candlestick by the table where the books lay, and held it to Gro's face. And the King said, "Ay, wise thou art and of good discretion, and some courage hast thou. But if thou be to serve me this night, needs must I try thee first with terrors till thou be inured to them, as tried gold runneth in the crucible; or if thou be base metal only, till that thou be eaten up by them."

Gro said unto the King, "For many years, Lord, or ever I came to Carcë, I fared up and down the world, and I am acquainted with objects of terror as a child with his toys. I have seen in the southern seas, by the light of Achernar and Canopus, giant sea-horses battling with eight-legged cuttlefishes in the whirlpools of the Korsh. Yet was I unafraid. I was in the isle Ciona when the first of the pit brast forth in that isle and split it as a man's skull is split with an axe, and the green gulfs of the sea swallowed that isle, and the stench and the steam hung in the air for days where the burning rock and earth had sizzled in the ocean. Yet was I unafraid. Also was I with Gaslark in the flight out of Zajë Zaculo, when the Ghouls took the palace over our heads, and portents walked in his halls in broad daylight, and the Ghouls conjured the sun out of heaven. Yet was I unafraid. And for thirty days and thirty nights wandered I alone on the face of the Moruna in Upper Impland, where scarce a living soul hath been: and there the evil wights that people the air of that desert dogged my steps and gibbered at me in darkness. Yet was I unafraid; and came in due time to Morna Moruna, and thence, standing on the lip of the escarpment as it were on the edge of the world, looked southaway where never mortal eye had gazed aforetime, across the untrodden forests of the Bhavinan. And in that skyey distance, pre-eminent beyond range on range of ice-robed mountains, I beheld two

peaks throned for ever between firm land and heaven in unearthly loveliness: the spires and airy ridges of Koshtra Pivrarcha, and the wild precipices that soar upward from the abysses to the queenly silent snowdome of Koshtra Belorn."

When Gro had ended, the King turned him away and, taking from a shelf a retort filled with a dark blue fluid, set it on a bainmarie, and a lamp thereunder. Fumes of a faint purple hue came forth from the neck of the retort, and the King gathered them in a flask. He made signs over the flask and shook forth into his hand therefrom a fine powder. Then said he unto Gro, holding out the powder in the open palm of his hand, "Look narrowly at this powder." And Gro looked. The King muttered an incantation, and the powder moved and heaved, and was like a crawling mass of cheesemites in an overripe cheese. It increased in volume in the King's hand, and Gro perceived that each particular grain had legs. The grains grew before his eyes, and became the size of mustard seeds, and then of barleycorns, swiftly crawling each over other. And even as he marvelled, they waxed great as kidney beans, and now was their shape and seeming clear to him, so that he beheld that they were small frogs and paddocks; and they overflowed from the King's hand as they waxed swiftly in size, pouring on to the floor. And they ceased not to increase and grow; and now were they large as little dogs, nor might the King retain more than a single one, holding his hand under its belly while it waved its legs in the air; and they were walking on the tables and jostling on the floor. Pallid they were, and permeable to light like thin horn, and their hue a faint purple, even as the hue of the vapour whence they were engendered. And now was the room filled with them so that they mounted perforce one on another's shoulders, and they were of the bigness of well fatted hogs; and they goggled their eyes at Gro and croaked. The King looked narrowly on Gro, who stood in the presence of that spectacle, the crown of Witchland in his hands; and the King marked that the crown trembled not a whit in Gro's hands that held it. So he said a certain word, and the paddocks and the frogs grew small again, shrinking more swiftly than they had grown, and so vanished.

The King now took from the shelf a ball the size of the egg of an estridge, of dark green glass. He said unto Gro, "Look well at this glass and

tell me what thou seest." Gro answered him, "I see a shifting shadow within." The King commanded him saying, "Dash it down with all thy strength upon the floor." The Lord Gro lifted the ball with both hands above his head, and it was ponderous as a ball of lead, and according to the command of Gorice the King he hurled it on the floor, so that it was pashed in pieces. And, behold, a puff of thick smoke burst forth from the fragments of the ball and took the form of one of human shape and dreadful aspect, whose two legs were two writhing snakes; and it stood in the chamber so tall that the head of it touched the vaulted ceiling, viewing the King and Gro malevolently and menacing them. The King caught down a sword that hung against the wall, and put it in Gro's hand, shouting, "Smite off the legs of it! and delay not, or thou art but dead!" Gro smote and cut off the left leg of the evil wight, easily, as it were cutting of butter. But from the stump came forth two fresh snakes awrithing; and so it fared likewise with the right leg, but the King shouted, "Smite and cease not, or thou art but a dead dog!" and ever as Gro hewed a snake in twain forth came two more from the wound, till the chamber was a maze of their wriggling forms. And still Gro hewed with a will, until the sweat stood on his brow, and he said, panting between the strokes, "O King, I have made him many-legged as a centipede: must I make him a myriapod ere night's decline?" And the King smiled, and spake a word of hidden meaning; and therewith the turmoil was gone as a gust of wind departeth, and nought left save the shivered splinters of the green ball on the chamber floor.

"Wast not afeared?" asked the King, and when Gro said nay, "Methinks these sights of terror should much afflict thee," said the King, "since well I know thou art not skilled in art magical."

"Yet am I a philosopher," answered Lord Gro; "and somewhat know I of alchymy and the hidden properties of this material world: the virtues of herbs, plants, stones, and minerals, the ways of the stars in their courses, and the influences of those heavenly bodies. And I have held converse with birds and fishes in their degree, and that generation which creepeth on the earth is not held in scorn by me, but oft talk I in sweet companionship with the eft of the pond, and the glowworm, and the lady-bird, and the pismire, and their kind, making them my little gossips. So have I a certain lore

which lighteth me in the outer court of the secret temple of grammarie and art forbid, albeit I have not peered within that temple. And by my philosophy, O King, I am certified concerning these apparitions which you have raised for me, that they be illusions and phantasms only, able to terrify the soul indeed of him that knoweth not divine philosophy, but without bodily power or essence. Nor is aught to fear in such, save the fear itself wherewith they strike the simple."

Then said the King, "By what token knowest thou this?"

And the Lord Gro made answer unto him, "O King, as a child weaveth a daisy-chain, thus easily did you conjure up these shapes of terror. Not in such wise fareth he that calleth out of the deep the deadly terror indeed; but with toil and sweat and with straining of thought, will, heart, and sinew fareth he."

The King smiled. "Thou sayest true. Now, therefore, since phantasmagoria maketh not thy heart to quail, I present thee a more material horror."

And he lighted the candles in the great candlesticks of iron and opened a little secret door in the wall of the chamber near the floor; and Gro beheld iron bars within the little door, and heard a hissing from behind the bars. The King took a key of silver of delicate construction, the handle slender and three spans in length, and opened the iron grated door. And the King said, "Behold and see, that which sprung from the egg of a cock, hatched by the deaf adder. The glance of its eye sufficeth to turn to stone any living thing that standeth before it. Were I but for one instant to loose my spells whereby I hold it in subjection, in that moment would end my life days and thine. So strong in properties of ill is this serpent which the ancient Enemy that dwelleth in darkness hath placed upon this earth, to be a bane unto the children of men, but an instrument of might in the hand of enchanter and sorcerers.

Therewith came forth that offspring of perdition from its hole, strutting erect on its two legs that were the legs of a cock; and a cock's head it had, with rosy comb and wattles, but the face of it like no fowl's face of middle-earth but rather a gorgon's out of Hell. Black shining feathers grew on its neck, but the body of it was the body of a dragon with scales that glittered

in the rays of the candles, and a scaly crest stood on its back; and its wings were like bats' wings, and its tail the tail of an asp with a sting in the end thereof, and from its beak its forked tongue flickered venomously. And the stature of the thing was a little above a cubit. Now because of the spells of King Gorice whereby he held it ensorcelled it might not cast its baneful glance upon him, nor upon Gro, but it walked back and forth in the candle light, averting its eyes from them. The feathers on its neck were fluffed up with anger and wondrously swiftly twirled its scaly tail, and it hissed ever more fiercely, irked by the bonds of the King's enchantment; and the breath of it was noisome, and hung in sluggish wreaths about the chamber. So for a while it walked before them, and as it looked sidelong past him Gro beheld the light of its eyes that were as sick moons burning poisonously through a mist of greenish yellow in the dusk of night. And strong loathing seized him, so that his gorge rose to behold the thing, and his brow and the palms of his hands became clammy, and he said, "My Lord the King, I have looked steadfastly on this cockatrice and it affrighteth me no whit, but it is loathly in my sight, so that my gorge riseth because of it," and with that he fell a-vomiting. And the King commanded that serpent back into its hole, whither it returned, hissing wrathfully.

Now the King poured forth wine, speaking a charm over the cup, and when the bright wine had revived Lord Gro, the King spake saying, "It is well, O Gro, that thou hast shown thyself a philosopher indeed, and of heart intrepid. Yet even as no blade is utterly tried until one try it in very battle, where if it snap woe and doom wait on the hand that wields it, so must thou in this midnight suffer a yet fiercer furnace-heat of terror, wherein if thou be reduced we are both lost eternally, and this Carcë and all Witchland blasted with us for ever in ruin and oblivion. Durst abide this trial?"

Gro answered, "I am hot to obey your word, O King. For well know I that it is idle to hope by phantoms and illusions to appal the Demons, and that against the Demons the deadly eye of thy cockatrice were turned in vain. Stout of heart are they, and instructed in all lore, and Juss a sorcerer of ancient power, who hath charms to blunt the glance of basilisk or cockatrice. He that would strike down the Demons must conjure indeed."

"Great," said the King, "is the strength and cunning of the seed of Demonland. By main strength have they now shown mastery over us, as sadly witnesseth the overthrow of Gorice XI., 'gainst whom no mortal could stand up and wrestle and not die, till cursed Goldry, drunk with spleen and envy, slew him in the Foliot Isles. Nor was there any aforetime to outdo us in feats of arms, and Gorice X., victorious in single combats without number, made our name glorious over all the world. Yet at the last he gat his death, out of all expectation and by what treacherous sleight I know not, standing in single combat against the curled step-dancer from Krothering. But I, that am skilled in grammarie, do bear a mightier engine against the Demons than brawny sinews or the sword that smiteth asunder. Yet is mine engine perilous to him that useth it."

Therewith the King unlocked the greatest of those books that lay by on the massive table, saying in Gro's ear, as one who would not be overheard, "This is that awful book of grammarie wherewith in this same chamber, on such a night, Gorice VII. stirred the vasty deep. And know that from this circumstance alone ensued the ruin of King Gorice VII., in that, having by his hellish science conjured up somewhat from the primaeval dark, and being utterly fordone with the sweat and stress of his conjuring, his mind was clouded for a moment, in such sort that either he forgot the words writ in this grammarie, or the page whereon they were writ, or speech failed him to speak those words that must be spoken, or might to do those things which must be done to complete the charm. Wherefore he kept not his power over that which he had called out of the deep, but it turned upon him and tare him limb from limb. Such like doom will I avoid, renewing in these latter days those self-same spells, if thou durst stand by me undismayed the while I utter my incantations. And shouldst thou mark me fail or waver ere all be accomplished, then shalt thyself lay hand on book and crucible and fulfil whatsoever is needful, as I shall first show thee. Or quailest thou at this?"

Gro said, "Lord, show me my task. And I will carry it, though all the Furies of the pit flock to this chamber to say me nay."

So the King instructed Gro, rehearsing to him those acts that were needful, and making known unto him the divers pages of the grammarie whereon were writ those words which must be spoken each in its due time



and sequence. But the King pronounced not yet those words, pointing only to them in the book, for whoso speaketh those words in vain and out of season is lost. And now when the retorts and beakers with their several necks and tubes and the appurtenances thereof were set in order, and the unhallowed processes of fixation, conjunction, deflagration, putrefaction, and rubefication were nearing maturity, and the baleful star Antares standing by the astrolabe within a little of the meridian signified the instant approach of midnight, the King described on the floor with his conjuring rod three pentacles inclosed within a seven-pointed star, with the signs of Cancer and of Scorpio joined by certain runes. And in the midst of the star he limned the image of a green crab eating of the sun. And turning to the seventy-third page of his great black grammarie the King recited in a mighty voice words of hidden meaning, calling on the name that it is a sin to utter.

Now when he had spoken the first spell and was silent, there was a deadly quiet in that chamber, and a chill in the air as of winter. And in the quiet Gro heard the King's breath coming and going, as of one who bath rowed a course. Now the blood rushed back to Gro's heart and his hands and feet became cold and a cold sweat brake forth on his brow. But for all that, he held yet his courage firm and his brain ready. The King motioned to Gro to break off the tail of a certain drop of black glass that lay on the table; and with the snapping of its tail the whole drop fell in pieces in a coarse black powder. Gro by the King's direction gathered that powder and dropped it in the great alembic wherein a green fluid seethed and bubbled above the flame of a lamp; and the fluid became red as blood, and the body of the alembic filled with a tawny smoke, and sparks of sun-like brilliance flashed and crackled through the smoke. Thereupon distilled from the neck of the alembic a white oil incombustible, and the King dipped his rod in that oil and described round the seven-pointed star on the floor the figure of the worm Ouroboros, that eateth his own tail. And he wrote the formula of the crab below the circle, and spake his second spell.

When that was done, yet more biting seemed the night air and yet more like the grave the stillness of the chamber. The King's hand shook as with an ague as he turned the pages of the mighty book. Gro's teeth chattered in

his head. He gritted them together and waited. And now through every window came a light into the chamber as of skies paling to the dawn. Yet not wholly so; for never yet came dawn at midnight, nor from all four quarters of the sky at once, nor with such swift strides of increasing light, nor with a light so ghastly. The candle flames burned filmy as the glare waxed strong from without: an evil pallid light of bale and corruption, wherein the hands and faces of the King Gorice and his disciple showed death-pale, and their lips black as the dark skin of a grape where the bloom has been rubbed off from it. The King cried terribly, "The hour approacheth!" And he took a phial of crystal containing a decoction of wolf's jelly and salamander's blood, and dropped seven drops from the alembic into the phial and poured forth that liquor on the figure of the crab drawn on the floor. Gro leaned against the wall, weak in body but with will unbowed. So bitter was the cold that his hands and feet were benumbed, and the liquor from the phial congealed where it fell. Yet the sweat stood in beads on the forehead of the King by reason of the mighty striving that was his, and in the overpowering glare of that light from the underskies he stood stiff and erect, hands clenched and arms outstretched, and spake the words LURO VOPO VIR VOARCHADUMIA.

Now with those words spoken the vivid light departed as a blown-out lamp, and the midnight closed down again without. Nor was any sound heard save the thick panting of the King; but it was as if the night held its breath in expectation of that which was to come. And the candles sputtered and burned blue. The King swayed and clutched the table with his left hand; and again the King pronounced terribly the word VOARCHADUMIA.

Thereafter for the space of ten heart-beats silence hung like a kestrel poised in the listening night. Then went a crash through earth and heaven, and a blinding wildfire through the chamber as it had been a thunderbolt. All Carcë quaked, and the chamber was filled with a beating of wings, like the wings of some monstrous bird. The air that was wintry cold waxed on a sudden hot as the breath of a burning mountain, and Gro was near choking with the smell of soot and the smell of brimstone. And the chamber rocked as a ship riding in a swell with the wind against the tide. But the King, steadying himself against the table and clutching the edge of it till the veins

on his lean hand seemed nigh to bursting, cried in short breaths and with an altered voice, "By these figures drawn and by these spells enchanted, by the unktion of wolf and salamander, by the unblest sign of Cancer now leaning to the sun, and by the fiery heart of Scorpio that flameth in this hour on night's meridian, thou art my thrall and instrument. Abase thee and serve me, worm of the pit. Else will I by and by summon out of ancient night intelligences and dominations mightier far than thou, and they shall serve mine ends, and thee shall they chain with chains of quenchless fire and drag thee from torment to torment through the deep."

Therewith the earthquake was stilled, and there remained but a quivering of the walls and floor and the wind of those unseen wings and the hot smell of soot and brimstone burning. And speech came out of the teeming air of that chamber, strangely sweet, saying, "Accursed wretch that troublest our quiet, what is thy will?" The terror of that speech made the throat of Gro dry, and the hairs on his scalp stood up.

The King trembled in all his members like a frightened horse, yet was his voice level and his countenance unruffled as he said hoarsely, "Mine enemies sail at day-break from the Foliot Isles. I loose thee against them as a falcon from my wrist. I give thee them. Turn them to thy will: how or where it skills not, so thou do but break and destroy them off the face of the world. Away!"

But now was the King's endurance clean spent, so that his knees failed him and he sank like a sick man into his mighty chair. But the room was filled with a tumult as of rushing waters, and a laughter above the tumult like to the laughter of souls condemned. And the King was reminded that he had left unspoken that word which should dismiss his sending. But to such weariness was he now come and so utterly was his strength gone out from him in the exercise of his spells, that his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, so that he might not speak the word; and horribly he rolled up the whites of his eyes beckoning to Gro, the while his nerveless fingers sought to turn the heavy pages of the grammarie. Then sprang Gro forth to the table, and against it sprawling, for now was the great keep of Carcë shaken anew as one shaketh a dice box, and lightnings opened the heavens, and the thunder roared unceasingly, and the sound of waters stunned the ear in that

chamber, and still that laughter pealed above the turmoil. And Gro knew that it was now with the King even as it had been with Gorice VII. in years gone by, when his strength gave forth and the spirit tare him and plastered those chamber-walls with his blood. Yet was Gro mindful, even in that hideous storm of terror, of the ninety-seventh page whereon the King had shown him the word of dismissal, and he wrenched the book from the King's palsied grasp and turned to the page. Scarce had his eye found the word, when a whirlwind of hail and sleet swept into the chamber, and the candles were blown out and the tables upset. And in the plunging darkness beneath the crashing of the thunder Gro pitching headlong felt claws clasp his head and body. He cried in his agony the word, that was the word TRIPSARECOPSEM, and so fell a-swooning.

It was high noon when the Lord Gro came to his senses in that chamber. The strong spring sunshine poured through the southern window, lighting up the wreckage of the night. The tables were cast down and the floor strewn and splashed with costly essences and earths spilt from shattered phials and jars and caskets: aphroselmia, shell of gold, saffron of gold, asem, amianth, stypteria of Melos, confounded with mandragora, vinum ardens, sal armoniack, devouring aqua regia, little pools and scattered globules of quicksilver, poisonous decoctions of toadstools and of yewberries, monkshood, thorn-apple, wolf's bane and black hellebore, quintessences of dragon's blood and serpent's bile; and with these, splashed together and wasted, elixirs that wise men have died a-dreaming of: spiritus mundi, and that sovereign alkahest which dissolveth every substance dipped therein, and that aurum potable which being itself perfect induceth perfection in the living frame. And in this welter of spoiled treasure were the great conjuring books hurled amid the ruin of retorts and aludels of glass and lead and silver, sand-baths, matrasses, spatulae, athanors, and other instruments innumerable of rare design, tossed and broken on the chamber floor. The King's chair was thrown against the furnace, and huddled against the table lay the King, his head thrown back, his black beard pointing skyward, showing his sinewy hairy throat. Gro looked narrowly at him; saw that he seemed unhurt and slept deep; and so,

knowing well that sleep is a present remedy for every ill, watched by the King in silence all day till supper time, for all he was sore an-hungered.

When at length the King awoke, he looked about him in amaze.

"Methought I tripped at the last step of last night's journey," he said. "And truly strange riot hath left its footprints in my chamber."

Gro answered, "Lord, sorely was I tried; yet fulfilled I your behest."

The King laughed as one whose soul is at ease, and standing upon his feet said unto Gro, "Take up the crown of Witchland and crown me. And that high honour shalt thou have, because I do love thee for this night gone by."

Now without were the lords of Witchland assembled in the courtyard, being bound for the great banqueting hall to eat and drink, unto whom the King came forth from the gate below the keep, robed in his conjuring robe. Wondrous bright sparkled the gems of the iron crown of Witchland above the heavy brow and cheekbones and the fierce disdainful lip of the King, as he stood there in his majesty, and Gro with the guard of honour stood in the shadow of the gate. And the King said, "My lords Corund and Corsus and Corinius and Gallandus, and ye sons of Corsus and of Corund, and ye other Witches, behold your King, the twelfth Gorice, crowned with this crown in Carcë to be King of Witchland and of Demonland. And all countries of the world and the rulers thereof, so many as the sun doth spread his beams over, shall do me obeisance, and call me King and Lord."

All they shouted assent, praising the King and bowing down before him.

Then said the King, "Imagine not that oaths sworn unto the Demons by Gorice XI. of memory ever glorious bind me any whit. I will not be at peace with this Juss and his brethren, but do account them all mine enemies. And this night have I made a sending to take them on the waste of waters as they sail homeward to manymountained Demonland."

Corund said, "Lord, your words are as wine unto us. And well we guessed that the principalities of darkness were afoot last night, seeing all Carcë rocked and the foundations thereof rose and fell as the breast of the large earth a-breathing."

When they were come into the banqueting hall, the King said, "Gro shall sit at my right hand this night, since manfully hath he served me." And

when they scowled at this, and spake each in the other's ear, the King said, "Whoso among you shall so serve me and so water the growth of this Witchland as hath Gro in this night gone by, unto him will I do like honour." But unto Gro he said, "I will bring thee home to Goblinland in triumph, that wentest forth an exile. I will pluck Gaslark from his throne, and make thee king in Zaje Zaculo, and all Goblinland shalt thou hold for me in fee, exercising dominion over it."

## V - KING GORICE'S SENDING

*Of King Gaslark, and of the coming of the sending upon the demons on the high seas; with how the Lord Juss by the egging on of his companions was persuaded to an unadvised rashness.*

THE next morning following that night when King Gorice XII. sat crowned in Carcë as is aforesaid, was Gaslark a-sailing on the middle sea, homeward from the east. Seven ships of war he had, and they steered in column south-westward close hauled on the starboard tack. Greatest and fairest among them was she who led the line, a great dragon of war painted azure of the summer sea with towering head of a worm, plated with gold and wrought with overlapping scales, gaping defiance from her bows, and a worm's tail erect at the poop. Seventy and five picked men of Goblinland sailed on that ship, clad in gay kirtles and byrnies of mail and armed with axes, spears, and swords. Their shields, each with his device, hung at the bulwarks. On the high poop sat King Gaslark, his sturdy hands grasping the great steering paddle. Goodly of mien and well knit were all they of Goblinland that went on that great ship, yet did Gaslark outdo them all in goodliness and strength and all kingliness. He wore a silken kirtle of Tyrian purple. Broad wristlets of woven gold were on his wrists. Darkskinned was he as one that hath lived all his days in the hot sunshine: clean-cut of feature, somewhat hookynosed, with great eyes and white teeth and tightcurled black moustachios. Nought restful was there in his presence and bearing, but rashness and impetuous fire; and he was wild to look on, swift and beautiful as a stag in autumn.

Teshmar, that was the skipper of his ship, stood at his elbow. Gaslark said to him, "Is it not one of the three gallant spectacles of the world, a good

ship treading the hastening furrows of the sea like a queen in grace and beauty, scattering up the wave-crests before her stem in a glittering rain?"

"Yea, Lord," answered he; "and what be the other two?"

"One that I most unhappily did miss, whereof but yesterday we had tidings: to behold such a battling of great champions and such a victory as Lord Goldry obtained upon yonder vaunting tyrant."

"The third shall be seen, I think," said Teshmar, "when the Lord Goldry Bluszco shall in your royal palace of Zajë Zaculo, amid pomp and high rejoicing, wed the young princess your cousin: most fortunate lord, that must be lord of her whom all just censure doth acknowledge the ornament of earth, the model of heaven, the queen of beauty."

"Kind Gods hasten the day," said Gaslark. "For truly 'tis a most sweet lass, and those kinsmen of Demonland my dearest friends. But for whose great upholding time and again, Teshmar, in days gone by, where were I today and my kingdom, and where thou and all of you?" The king's brow darkened a little with thought. After a time he began to say, "I must have more great action: these trivial harryings, spoils of Nevria, chasing of Esamocian black-a-moors, be toys not worthy of our great name and renown among the nations. Something I would enact that shall embroil and astonish the world, even as the Demons when they purged earth of the Ghouls, ere I go down into silence."

Teshmar was staring toward the southern bourne. He pointed with his hand: "There rideth a great ship, O king. And methinks she hath a strange look."

Gaslark gazed earnestly at her for an instant, then straightway shifted his helm and steered towards her. He spake no more, staring ever as he sailed, marking ever as the distance lessened more and more particulars of that ship. Her silken sail fluttered in tatters from the yard; she rowed feebly, as one groping in darkness, with barely strength to stay her from drifting stern-foremost before the wind. So hung she on the sea, as one struck stupid by some blow, doubting which way her harbour lay or which way her course. As a thing which hath been held in the flame of a monstrous candle, so seemed she, singed and besmirched with soot. Smashed was her proud figure-head, and smashed was her high forecastle, and burned and shattered



the carved timbers of the poop and the fair seats that were thereon. She leaked, so that a score of her crew must be still a-baling to keep her afloat. Of her fifty oars, half were broken or gone adrift, and many of the ship's company lay wounded and some slain under her thwarts.

And now was King Gaslark ware as he drew near that here was the Lord Juss on her ruined poop a-steering, and by him Spitfire and Brandoch Daha. Their jewelled arms and gear and rich attire were black with most stinking soot, and it was as though admiration and grief and anger were so locked and twined within them that none of these passions might win forth to outward showing on their frozen countenances.

When they were within hailing distance, Gaslark hailed them. They answered him not, only beholding him with alien eyes. But they stopped the ship, and Gaslark lay aboard of her and came on board and went up on the poop and greeted them. And he said, "Well met in an ill hour. What's the matter?"

The Lord Juss made as if to speak, but no word came. Only he took Gaslark by both hands and sat down with a great groan on the poop, averting his face. Gaslark said, "O Juss, for so many a time as thou hast borne part in my evils and succoured me, surely right requireth I have part of thine?"

But Juss answered in a thick, strange voice all unlike himself, "Mine, sayest thou, O Gaslark? What in the stablished world is mine, that am thus in a moment reived of him that was mine own heartstring, my brother, the might of mine arm, the chiefest citadel of my dominion?" And he burst into a great passion of weeping.

King Gaslark's rings were driven into the flesh of his fingers by the grip of Juss's strong hands on his. But he scarce wist of the pain, such agony of mind was in him for the loss of his friend, and for the bitterness and wonder that it was to behold these three great lords of Demonland weep like frightened women, and all their ship's company of tried men of war weeping and wailing besides. And Gaslark saw well that their lordly souls were unseated for a season because of some dreadful fact, the havoc whereof his eyes most woefully beheld, while its particulars were yet dark to him, yet with a terror in darkness that might well make his heart to quail.

By much questioning he was at last well advertised of what had befallen: how they the day before, in broad noon, on such a summer sea, had heard a noise like the flapping of wings outstretched from one edge of the sky to another, and in a moment the calm sea was lifted up and fell again and the whole sea clashed together and roared, yet was the ship not sunken. And there was a tumult about them of thunder and raging waters and black night and wildfire in the night; which presently passing away and the darkness lifting, the sea lay solitary as far as eye might reach. "And nothing is more certain," said Juss, "than that this is a sending of King Gorice XII. spoken of by the prophets as a great clerk of necromancy beyond all other this world hath seen. And this is his vengeance for the woes we wrought for Witchland in the Foliot Isles. Against such a peril I had provided certain amulets made of the stone alectorian, which groweth in the gizzard of a cock hatched on a moonless night when Saturn burneth in a human sign and the lord of the third house is in the ascendant. These saved us, albeit sorely buffeted, from destruction: all save Goldry alone. He, by some cursed chance, whether he neglected to wear the charm I gave him, or the chain of it was broken in the plunging of the ship, or by some other means 'twas lost: when daylight came again, we stood but three on this poop where four had stood. More I know not."

"O Gaslark," said Spitfire, "our brother that is stolen from us, with us it surely lieth to find him and set him free."

But Juss groaned and said, "In which star of the unclimbed sky wilt thou begin our search? Or in which of the secret streams of ocean where the last green rays are quenched in oozy darkness?"

Gaslark was silent for a while. Then he said, "I think nought likelier than this, that Gorice hath caught away Goldry Bluszco into Carcë, where he holdeth him in duress. And thither must we straightway to deliver him."

Juss answered no word. But Gaslark seized his hand, saying, "Our ancient love and your oft succouring of Goblinland in days gone by make this my quarrel. Hear now my rede. As I fared from the east through the Straits of Rinath I beheld a mighty company of forty sail, bound eastward to the Beshtrian sea. Well it was they marked us not as we lay under the isles of Ellien in the dusk of evening. For touching later at Norvasp in Pixyland

we learned that there sailed Laxus with the whole Witchland fleet, being minded to work evil deeds among the peaceful cities of the Beshtrian seaboard. And as well met were an antelope with a devouring lion, as I and my seven ships with those ill-doers in such strength on the high seas. But now, behold how wide standeth the door to our wishes. Laxus and that great armament are safe harrying eastward-ho. I make question whether at this moment more than nine score or ten score fighting men be left in Carcë. I have here of mine own nigh on five hundred. Never was fairer chance to take Witchland with his claws beneath the table, and royally may we scratch his face ere he get them forth again." And Gaslark laughed for joy of battle, and cried, "O Juss, smiles it not to thee, this rede of mine?"

"Gaslark," said Lord Juss, "nobly and with that open hand and heart that I have loved in thee from of old hast thou made this offer. Yet not so is Witchland to be overcome, but after long days of labour only, and laying of schemes and building of ships and gathering of hosts answerable to the strength we bare of late against the Ghouls when we destroyed them."

Nor for all his urging might Gaslark move him any whit.

But Spitfire sat by his brother and spake privately to him: "Kinsman, what ails thee? Is all high heart and swiftness to action crushed out of Demonland, and doth but the unserviceable juiceless skin remain to us? Thou art clean unlike that thou hast ever been, and could Witchland behold us now well might hejudge that base fear had ta'en hold upon us, seeing that with the odds of strength so fortunately of our side we shrink from striking at him."

Juss said in Spitfire's ear, "This it is, that I do misdoubt me of the steadfastness of the Goblins. Too like to fire among dead leaves is the sudden flame of their valour, a poor thing to rely on if once they be checked. So do I count it folly trusting in them for our main strength to go up against Carcë. Also it is but a wild fancy that Goldry hath been transported into Carcë."

But Spitfire leaped up a-cursing, and cried out, "O Gaslark, thou wert best fare home to Goblinland. But we will sail openly to Carcë and crave audience of the great King, entreating him suffer us to kiss his toe, and acknowledging him to be our King and us his ill-conditioned, disobedient

children. So may he haply restore unto us our brother, when he hath chastised us, and haply of his mercy send us home to Demonland, there to fawn upon Corsus or vile Corinius, or whomsoever he shall set up in Galing for his Viceroy. For with Goldry hath all manliness departed out of Demonland, and we be milksops that remain, and objects of scorn and spitting."

Now while Spitfire spake thus in wrath and sorrow of heart, the Lord Brandoch Daha fared fore and aft on the gangway about and about, as a caged panther fareth when feeding time is long overdue. And at whiles he clapped hand to the hilt of his long and glittering sword and rattled it in the scabbard. At length, standing over against Gaslark, and eyeing him with a mocking glance, "O Gaslark," he said, "this that hath befallen breedeth in me a cruel perturbation which carries my spirits outwards, stirring up a tempest in my mind and preparing my body to melancholy, and madness itself. The cure of this is only fighting. Wherefore if thou love me, Gaslark, out with thy sword and ward thyself. Fight I must, or this passion will kill me quite out. 'Tis pity to draw upon my friend, but sith we be banned from fighting with our enemies, what choice remaineth?"

Gaslark laughed and seized him playfully by the arms, saying, "I will not fight with thee, how prettily soe'er thou ask it, Brandoch Daha, that savedst Goblinland from the Witches"; but straight grew grave again and said to Juss, "O Juss, be ruled. Thou seest what temper thy friends are in. All we be as hounds tugging against the leash to be loosed against Carcë in this happy hour, that likely cometh not again."

Now when Lord Juss perceived them all against him, and hot-mouthed for that attempt, he smiled scornfully and said, "O my brother and my friends, what echoes and quailpipes are you become who seem to catch wisdom by imitating her voice? But ye be mad like March hares, every man of you, and myself too. Break ice in one place, 'twill crack in more. And truly I care not greatly for my life now that Goldry is gone from me. Cast we lots, then, which of us three shall fare home to Demonland with this our ship, that is but a lame duck since this sending. And he on whom the lot shall fall must fare home to concert the raising of a mighty fleet and armament to carry on our war against the Witches."

So spake Lord Juss, and all they who had but a short hour ago felt themselves in such point that there was in them no hope of convalescence nor of life, had now their spirits raised in a seeming drunkenness, and thought only on the gladness of battle.

The lords of Demonland marked each his lot and cast it in the helm of Gaslark, and Gaslark shook the helm, and there leapt forth the lot of the Lord Spitfire. Right wrathful was he. So the lords of Demonland did off their armour and their costly apparel that was black with soot, and let cleanse it. Sixty of their fighting men that were unscathed by the sending went aboard one of Gaslark's ships, and the crew of that ship manned the ship of Demonland, and Spitfire took the steering paddle, and the Demons that were hurt lay in the hold of the hollow ship. They brought forth a spare sail and hoisted it in place of that that was destroyed; so in sore discontent, yet with a cheerful countenance, the Lord Spitfire set sail for the west. And Gaslark the king sat by the steering paddle of his fair dragon of war, and by him the Lord Juss and the Lord Brandoch Daha, who was like a war-horse impatient for battle. Her prow swung north and so round eastaway, and her sail broidered with flower-de-luces smote the mast and filled to the northwest wind, and those other six fared after her in line ahead with white sails unfurled, striding majestic over the full broad billows.

## VI - THE CLAWS OF WITCHLAND

*Of King Gaslark's leading in the attempt on Carce in the dark, and how he prospered therein, and of the great stand of Lord Juss and Lord Brandoch Daha.*

ON the evening of the third day, whenas they drew near to within sight of the Witchland coast, they brailed up their sails and waited for the night, that so they might make the landfall after dark; for little to their mind it was that the King should have news of their farings. This was their plan, to beach their ships on the lonely shore some two leagues north of Tenemos, whence it was but two hours' march across the fen to Carcë. So when the sun set and all the ways were darkened they muffled their oars and rowed silently to the low shore that showed strangely near in the darkness, yet ever seemed to flee and keep its distance as they rowed toward it. Coming at length ashore, they drew their ships up on the beach. Some fifty men of the Goblins they left to guard the ships, while the rest took their weapons. And when they were marshalled they marched inland over the sanddunes and so on to the open fen; and seeing that the most of them by far were of Goblinland, it was agreed between those three, Juss, Brandoch Daha, and Gaslark, that Gaslark should have command of this emprise. So fared they silently across the marshes, that were firm enough for marching so it were done circumspectly, rounding the worst moss-hags and the small lochs that were scattered here and there. For the weather had been fine for a season, and little new water stood on the marsh. But as they drew near to Carcë the weather worsened and fine rain began to fall. And albeit there was little comfort marching through the drizzling murk of night towards that fortress of evil name, yet was Lord Juss glad at the rain, since it favoured surprise, and on surprise hung all their hopes.

About the middle night they halted within four hundred paces of the outer walls of Carcë, that loomed ghostly through the watery curtain, silent as it had been a tomb where Witchland lay in death, rather than the mailed shell wherein so great a power sat waiting. The sight of that vast bulk couched shadowy in the rain lighted the fire of battle in the breast of Gaslark, nor would aught please him save that they should go forthwith up to the walls with all their force, and so march round them seeking where they might break suddenly in and seize the place. Nor would he listen to the counsel of Lord Juss, who would send forth detachments to select a spot for assault and bring back word before the whole force advanced. "Be sure," said Gaslark, "that they within are all foxed and cup-shotten the third night with swilling of wine, in honour of such triumph as he hath gotten by his sending, and but a sorry watch is kept on such night. For who, say they, shall come up against Carcë now that the power of Demonland is stricken in pieces? The scorned Goblins, ha? A motion for laughter and derision. But thine advance guard might give them warning or ever our main force could seize the occasion. Nay, but as the Ghouls in an evil day coming suddenly upon me in Zajë Zaculo gat my palace taken ere we were well ware of their coming, so must we take this hold of Carcë. And if thou fearest a sally, right hotly do I desire it. For if they open the gate we are enough to force an entry in despite of any numbers they are like to have within."

Now Juss thought ill of this counsel, yet, for a strange languor that still hung about his wits, he would not gainsay Gaslark. So crept they in stealth near to the great walls of Carcë. Softly ever fell the rain, and breathless stood the cypresses within the outer ward, and blank and dumb and untenanted frowned the black marble walls of that sleeping castle. And dour midnight waited over all.

Now Gaslark issued command, bidding them march warily round the walls northward, for no way was betwixt the lofty walls and the river on the south and east, but to the north-east was he hopeful to find a likely place to win into the hold. In such order went they that Gaslark with an hundred of his ablest men led the van, and after him came the Demons. The main strength of the Goblins followed after, with Teshmar for their captain. Warily they marched, and now were they on the rising ground that ran back

north and west from the bluff of Carcë to the fen. Full eager were they of Goblinland and flown with the intoxication of impending battle, and they of the vanguard fared apace, outstripping the Demons, so that Juss was fain to hasten after them lest they should lose touch and fall to confusion. But Teshmar's men feared greatly to be left behind, nor might he hold them back, but they must run betwixt the Demons and the walls, meaning to join with Gaslark. Juss swore under his breath, saying, "See the unruly rabble of Goblinland. And they will yet be our undoing."

In such case stood they, nor were Teshmar's folk more than twenty paces from the walls, when, sudden as nightlightning, flares were kindled along the walls, dazzling the Goblins and the Demons and brightly lighting them for those that manned the walls, who fell a-shooting at them with spears and arrows and a-slinging of stones. In the same moment opened a postern gate, whence sallied forth the Lord Corinius with an hundred and fifty stout lads of Witchland, shouting, "He that would sup of the crab of Witchland must deal with the nippers ere he essay the shell"; and charging Gaslark's army in the flank he cut them clean in two. As one wood fared forth Corinius, smiting on either hand with a two-edged axe with heft lapped with bronze; and greatly though the folk of Gaslark outnumbered him, yet were they so taken at unawares and confounded by the sudden onslaught of Corinius that they might not abide him but everywhere gave ground before his onslaught. And many were wounded and some were slain; and with these Teshmar of Goblinland, the master of Gaslark's ship. For smiting at Corinius and missing of his aim he louted forward with the blow, and Corinius hewed at him with his axe and the blow came on Teshmar's neck and so hewed off his head. Now Gaslark with the best of his fighting men was come some way past the postern, but whenas they fell to fighting he turned back straightway to meet Corinius, calling loudly on his men to rally against the Witches and drive them back within the walls. So when Gaslark was gotten through the press to within reach of Corinius, he thrust at Corinius with a spear, wounding him in the arm. But Corinius smote the spear-shaft asunder with his axe, and leapt upon Gaslark, giving him a great wound on the shoulder. And Gaslark took to his sword, and many blows they bandied that made either stagger, till Corinius struck Gaslark on the helm a great down-



stroke of his axe, as one driveth a pile with a wooden mallet. And because of the good helm he wore, given by Lord Juss in days gone by as a gift of love and friendship, was Gaslark saved and his head not cloven asunder; for on that helm Corinius's axe might not bite. Yet with that great stroke were Gaslark's senses driven forth of him for a season, so that he fell senseless to the earth. And with his fall came dismay upon them of Goblinland.

All this befell in the first brunt of the battle, nor were the lords of Demonland yet fully joined in the mellay, for the great press of Gaslark's men were between them and the Witches; but now Juss and Brandoch Daha went forth mightily with their following, and took up Gaslark that lay like one dead, and Juss bade a company of the Goblins bear him to the ships, and there was he bestowed safe and sound. But the Witches shouted loudly that King Gaslark was slain; and at this chosen time Corund, that was come privily forth of a hidden door on the western side of Carcë with fifty men, took the Goblins mightily in the rear. So they, still falling back before Corinius and Corund, and their hearts sick at the supposed slaying of Gaslark, waxed full of doubt and dejection; for in the watery darkness they might nowise perceive by how much they outwent in numbers the men of Witchland. And panic took them, so that they broke and fled before the Witches, that came after them resolute, as a stoat holdeth by a rabbit, and slew them by scores and by fifties as they fled from Carcë. Scarce three score men of that brave company of Goblinland that went up with Gaslark against Carcë won away into the marshes and came to their ships, escaping pitiless destruction.

But Corund and Corinius and their main force turned without more ado against the Demons, and bitter was the battle that befell betwixt them, and great the clatter of their blows. And now were the odds clean changed about with the putting of the Goblins out of the battle, since but few of Witchland were fallen, and they were as four to one against the Demons, hemming them in and having at them from every side. And some shot at them from the wall, until a chance shot came that was like to have stove in Corund's helm, who straightway sent word that when the rout was ended he would make lark-pies of the cow-headed doddipole whosoever he might be that

had set them thus a-shooting, spoiling sport for their comrades and endangering their lives. Therewith ceased the shooting from the wall.

And now grim and woundsome grew the battle, for the Demons mightily withstood the onset of the Witches, and the Lord Brandoch Daha rushed with an onslaught ever and anon upon Corund or upon Corinius, nor might either of these great captains bear up long against him, but every time gave back before Lord Brandoch Daha; and bitterly cursed they one another as each in turn was fain to save himself amid the press of their fighting men. Nor could one hope in one night's space to behold such deeds of derring-do as were done that night by Lord Brandoch Daha, that played his sword lightly as one handleth a willow wand; yet death sat on the point thereof. In such wise that eleven stout sworders of Witchland were slain by him, and fifteen besides were sorely wounded. And at the last, Corinius, stung by Corund's taunts as by a gadfly, and well nigh bursting for grief and shame at his ill speeding, leapt upon Lord Brandoch Daha as one reft of his wits, aiming at him a great two-handed blow that was apt enough to cleave him to the brisket. But Brandoch Daha slipped from the blow lightly as a kingfisher flying above an alder-shadowed stream avoideth a branch in his flight, and ran Corinius through the right wrist with his sword. And straight was Corinius put out of the fight. Nor had they greater satisfaction that went against Lord Juss, who mowed at them with great swashing blows, beheading some and hewing some asunder in the midst, till they were fain to keep clear of his reaping. So fought the Demons in the glare and watery mist, greatly against great odds, until all were smitten to earth save those two lords alone, Juss and Brandoch Daha.

Now stood King Gorice on the outer battlements of Carcë, all armed in his black armour inlaid with gold; and he beheld those twain how they fought back to back, and how the Witches beset them on every side yet nowise might prevail against them. And the King said unto Gro that was by him on the wall, "Mine eyes dazzle in the mist and torchlight. What be these that maintain so bloody an advantage upon my kemperie-men?"

Gro answered him, "Surely, O King, these be none other than Lord Juss and Lord Brandoch Daha of Krothering."

The King said, "So by degrees cometh my sending home to me. For by my art I have intelligence, albeit not certainly, that Goldry was taken by my sending; so have I my desire on him I hold most in hate. And these, saved by their enchantments from like ruin, have been driven mad to rush into the open mouth of my vengeance." And when he had gazed awhile, the King sneered and said unto Gro, "A sweet sight, to behold an hundred of my ablest men flinch and duck before these twain. Till now methought there was a sword in Witchland, and methought Corinius and Corund not simple braggarts without power or heart, as here appeareth, since like boys well birched they do cringe from the shining swords of Juss and the vile upstart from Krothering."

But Corinius, who stood no longer in the battle but by the King, full of spleen and his wrist all bloody, cried out, "You do us wrong, O King. Juster it were to praise my great deed in ambushing this mighty company of our enemies and putting them all to the slaughter. And if I prevailed not against this Brandoch Daha your majesty needs not to marvel, since a greater than I, Gorice X. of memory ever glorious, was lightly conquered by him. Wherin methinks I am the luckier, to have but a gored wrist and not my death. As for these twain, they be stickfrees, on whom no point or edge may bite. And nought were more to be looked for, since we deal with such a sorcerer as this Juss."

"Rather," said the King, "are ye all grown milksops. But I have no further stomach for this interlude, but straight will end it."

Therewith the King called to him the old Duke Corsus, bidding him take nets and catch the Demons therein. And Corsus, faring forth with nets, by sheer weight of numbers and with the death of near a score of the Witches at length gat this performed, and Lord Juss and Lord Brandoch Daha well tangled in the nets, and lapped about as silkworms in their cocoons, and so drawn into Carcë. Soundly were they bumped along the ground, and glad enow were the Witches to have gotten those great fighters scotched at last. For utterly spent were Corund and his men, and fain to drop for very weariness.

So when they were gotten into Carcë, the King let search with torches and bring in them of Witchland that lay hurt before the walls; and any

Demons or Goblins that were happed upon in like case he let slay with the sword. And the Lord Juss and the Lord Brandoch Daha, still lapped tightly in their nets, he let fling into a corner of the inner court of the palace like two bales of damaged goods, and set a guard upon them until morning.

As the lords of Witchland were upon going to bed they beheld westward by the sea a red glow, and tongues of fire burning in the night. Corinius said unto Lord Gro, "Lo where thy Goblins burn their ships, lest we pursue them as they flee shamefully homeward in the ship they keep from the burning. One ship sufficeth, for most of them be dead."

And Corinius betook him sleepily to bed, pausing on the way to kick at the Lord Brandoch Daha, that lay safely swathed in his net powerless as then to do him harm.

## VII - GUESTS OF THE KING IN CARCE

*Of the two banquet halls that were in Carce, the old and the new, and of the entertainment given by King Gorice XII. in the one hall to Lord Juss and Lord Brandoch Daha and in the other to the Prince La Fireez; and of their leave-taking when the banquet was done.*

THE morrow of that battle dawned fair on Carcë. Folk lay long abed after their toil, and until the sun was high nought stirred before the walls. But towards noon came forth a band sent by King Gorice to bring in the spoil; and they took up the bodies of the slain and laid them in howe on the right bank of the river Druima half a mile below Carcë, Witches, Demons, and Goblins in one grave together, and raised up a great howe over them.

Now was the sun's heat strong, but the shadow of the great keep rested still on the terrace without the western wall of the palace. Cool and redolent of ease and soft repose was that terrace, paved with flagstones of red jasper, with spleenwort, assafoetida, livid toadstools, dragons' teeth, and bitter moon-seed growing in the joints. On the outer edge of the terrace were bushes of arbor vitae planted in a row, squat and round like sleeping dormice, with clumps of choke-pard aconite in the interspaces. Many hundred feet in length was the terrace from north to south, and at either end a flight of black marble steps led down to the level of the inner ward and its embattled wall.

Benches of green jasper massily built and laden with velvet cushions of many colours stood against the palace wall facing to the west, and on the bench nearest the Iron Tower a lady sat at ease, eating cream wafers and a quince tart served by her waitingwomen in dishes of pale gold for her morning meal. Tall was that lady and slender, and beauty dwelt in her as the sunshine dwells in the red floor and gray-green trunks of a beech wood in

early spring. Her tawny hair was gathered in deep folds upon her head and made fast by great silver pins, their heads set with anachite diamonds. Her gown was of cloth of silver with a knotted cordwork of black silk embroidery everywhere decked with little moonstones, and over it she wore a mantle of figured satin the colour of the woodpigeon's wing, tinselled and overcast with silver threads. White-skinned she was, and graceful as an antelope. Her eyes were green, with yellow fiery gleams. Daintily she ate the tart and wafers, sipping at whiles from a cup of amber, artificially carved, white wine cool from the cellars below Carcë, and a maiden sitting at her feet played on a seven-stringed lute, singing very sweetly this song:

Aske me no more where Jove bestowes.  
When June is past, the fading rose;  
For in your beautie's orient deepe.  
These flowers, as in their causes, sleepe.  
Aske me no more whither do stray  
The golden atomes of the day;  
For in pure love heaven did prepare  
Those powders to enrich your haire.  
Aske me no more whither doth haste  
The nightingale when May is past;  
For in your sweet dividing throat  
She winters and keepes warme her note.  
Aske me no more where those starres alight.  
That downwards fall in dead of night;  
For in your eyes they sit, and there  
Fixed become as in their sphere.  
Aske me no more if east or west  
The Phoenix builds her spicy nest;  
For unto you at last shee flies.  
And in your fragrant bosome dyes.

"No more," said the lady; "thy voice is cracked this morning. Is none abroad yet thou canst find to tell me of last night's doings? Or are all gone my

lord's gate, that I left sleeping still as though all the poppies of all earth's gardens breathed drowsiness about his head?"

"One cometh, madam," said the damosel.

The lady said, "The Lord Gro. He may resolve me. Though were he in the stour last night, that were a wonder indeed."

Therewith came Gro along the terrace from the north, clad in a mantle of dun-coloured velvet with a collar of raised work of gold upon silver purl; and his long black curly beard was perfumed with orange- flower water and angelica. When they had greeted one another and the lady had bidden her women stand apart, she said, "My lord, I thirst for tidings. Recount to me all that befell since sundown. For I slept soundly till the streaks of morning showed through my chamber windows, and then I awoke from a flying dream of sennets sounding to the onset, and torches in the night, and war's alarums. And there were torches indeed in my chamber lighting my lord to bed, that answered me no word but straightway fell asleep as in utter weariness. Some slight scratches he hath, but else unhurt. I would not wake him, for balm is in slumber; also is he ill to do with if one wake him so. But the tattle and wild surmise of the servants bloweth as ever to all points of wonder: as that a great armament of Demonland is disembarked at Tenemos, and all routed last night by my lord and by Corinius, and Goldry Bluszco slain in single combat with the King. Or that Juss hath set a charm on Laxus and all our fleet, making them sail like parricides against this land, Juss and the other Demons leading them; and all slain save Laxus and Goldry Bluszco, but these brought bound into Carcë, stark mad and frothing at the lips, and Corinius dead of his wounds after slaying of Brandoch Daha. Or, foolishly," and her green eyes lightened dangerously, "that it was my brother risen in revolt to wrest Pixyland from the overlordship of Gorice, and joined with Gaslark to that end, and their army overthrown and both ta'en prisoner."

Gro laughed and said, "Surely, O my Lady Prezmyra, truth masketh in many a strange disguise when she rideth rumour's broomstick through kings' palaces. But somewhat of herself bath she shown thee, if thou conclude that an event was brought to birth betwixt dark and sunrise to

stagger the world, and that the power of Witchland bloomed forth this night into unbeholden glory."

"Thou speakest big, my lord," said the lady. "Were the Demons in it?"

"Ay, madam," he said.

"And triumphed on? and slain?"

"All slain save Juss and Brandoch Daha, and they taken," said Gro.

"Was this my lord's doing?" she asked.

"Greatly, as I think," said Gro; "though Corinius claimeth for himself, as commonly, the main honour of it."

Prezmyra said, "He claimeth overmuch." And she said, "There were none in it save Demons?"

Gro, knowing her thought, smiled and made answer, "Madam, there were Witches."

"My Lord Gro," she cried, "thou dost ill to mock me. Thou art my friend. Thou knowest the Prince my brother proud and sudden to anger. Thou knowest it chafeth him to have Witchland over him. Thou knowest the time is many days overpast when he should bring his yearly tribute to the King."

Gro's great ox-eyes were soft as he looked upon the Lady Prezmyra, saying, "Most assuredly am I thy friend, madam. Belike, if truth were told, thou and thy lord are all the true friends I have in waterish Witchland: you two, and the King: but who sleepeth safe in the favour of kings? Ah, madam, none of Pixyland stood in the battle yesternight. Therefore let thy soul be at ease. But my task it was, standing on the battlements beside the King, to smile and smile while Corinius and our fighting men made a bloody havoc of four or five hundred of mine own kinsfolk."

Prezmyra caught her breath and was silent a moment. Then, "Gaslark?"

"The main force was his, it appeareth," answered Lord Gro. "Corinius braggeth himself his banesman, and certain it is he felled him to earth. But I am secretly advertised he was not among the dead taken up this morning."

"My lord," she said, "my desire for news drinks deep while thou art fasting. Some, bring meat and wine for my Lord Gro." And two damosels ran and returned with sparkling golden wine in a beaker, and a dish of lampreys with hippocras sauce. So Gro sat him down on the jasper bench



and, while he ate and drank, rehearsed to the Lady Prezmyra the doings of the night.

When he had ended she said, "How bath the King dealt with those twain, Lord Juss and Lord Brandoch Daha?"

Gro answered, "He bath them clapped up in the old banqueting hall in the Iron Tower." And his brow darkened, and he said, "'Tis pity thy lord lay thus long abed, and so came not to the council, where Corsus and Corinius, backed by thy step-sons and the sons of Corsus, egged on the King to use shamefully these lords of Demonland. True is that distich which admonisheth us--Know when to speak, for many times it brings Danger to give the best advice to Kings; and little for my health, and little gain withal, had it been had I then openly withstood them. Corinius is ever watchful to fling Goblin in my teeth. But Corund weigheth in their councils as his hand weigheth in battle."

Now as Gro spake came the Lord Corund on the terrace, calling for still wine to cool his throat withal. Prezmyra poured forth to him: "Thou art blamed to me for keeping thy bed, my lord, that shouldst have been devising with the King touching our enemies ta'en captive in this night gone by."

Corund sat by his lady on the bench and drank. "If that be all, madam," said he, "then have I little to charge my conscience withal. For nought lies readier than strike off their heads, and so bring all to a fit and happy ending."

"Far otherwise," said Gro, "hath the King determined. He let drag before him Lord Juss and Lord Brandoch Daha, and with many fleers and jibes, 'Welcome,' he saith, 'to Carcë. Your table shall not lack store of delicates while ye are my guests; albeit ye come unbidden.' Therewith he let drag them to the old banquet ball. And he bade his smiths drive great iron staples into the wall, whereon he let hang up the Demons by their wrists, spread-eagled against the wall, making both wrists and ankles fast to the staples with gyves of iron. And the King let dight the table before their feet as for a banquet, that the sight and the savour might torment them. And he called all us to his council thither that we might praise his conceit and mock them anew."

Said Prezmyra, "A great king should rather be a dog that killeth clean, than a cat that patteth and sporteth with his prey."

"True it is," said Corund, "that they were safer slain." He rose from his seat. "'Twere not amiss," he said, "that I had word with the King."

"Wherefore so?" asked Prezmyra.

"He that sleepeth late," said Corund, eyeing her humorously, "sometimes hath news for her that riseth betimes to sit on the western terrace. And this was I come to tell thee, that I but now beheld eastward from our chamber window, riding toward Carcë out of Pixyland down the Way of Kings---"

"La Fireez?" she said.

"Mine eyes be strong enow and clear enow," said Corund, "but thou'dst scarce require me swear to mine own brother at three miles' distance. And as for thine, I leave thee the swearing."

"Who should ride down the Way of Kings from Pixyland," cried Prezmyra, "but La Fireez?"

"That, madam, let Echo answer thee," said Corund. "And it sticketh in my mind, that the Prince my brother-in-law is one that tieth to his heartstrings the remembrance of past benefits. This too, that none did him ever a greater benefit than Juss, that saved his life six winters back in Impland the More. Wherefore, if La Fireez be to share our revels this night, needful it is that the King command these gabblers to keep silence touching our entertainment of these lords in the old banquet hall, and in general touching the share of Demonland in this fighting."

Prezmyra said, "Come, I'll go with thee."

They found the King on the topmost battlements above the water-gate with his lords about him, gazing eastaway toward the long low hills beyond which lay Pixyland. But when Corund began to open his mind to the King, the King said, "Thou growest old, O Corund, and like a good-for-nothing chapman bringest not thy wares to market ere the market be done. I have already ta'en order for this, and straitly charged my people that nought befell last night save a faring of the Goblins against Carcë, and their overthrow, and my chasing of them with a great slaughter into the sea. Whoso by speech or sign shall reveal to La Fireez that the Demons were in

it, or that these enemies of mine are thus entertained by me to their discomfort in the old banquet hall, he shall lose nothing but his life."

Corund said, "It is well, O King."

The King said, "Captain general, what is our strength?"

Corinius answered, "Seventy and three were slain, and the others for the most part hurt: I among them, that am thus onehanded for the while. I will not engage to find you, O King, fifty sound men in Carcä."

"My Lord Corund," said the King, "thine eyes pierced ever a league beyond the best among us, young or old. How many makest thou yon company?"

Corund leaned on the parapet and shaded his eyes with his hand that was broad as a smoked haddock and covered on the back with yellow hairs growing somewhat sparsely, as the hairs on the skin of a young elephant. "He rideth with three score horse, O King. One or two more I give you for good luck, but if a have a horseman fewer than sixty, never love me more."

The King muttered an imprecation. "It is the curse of chance bringeth him thus pat when I have my powers abroad and am left with too little strength to awe him if he prove irksome. One of thy sons, O Corund, shall take horse and ride south to Zorn and Permio and muster a few score fighting men from the herdsmen and farmers with what speed he may. It is commanded."

Now was the afternoon wearing to evening when the Prince La Fireez was come in with all his company, and greetings done, and the tribute safe bestowed, and sleeping room appointed for him and his. And now ere all gathered together in the great banquet hall that was built by Gorice XI., when he was first made King, in the southeast corner of the palace; and it far exceeded in greatness and magnificence the old hall where Lord Juss and Lord Brandoch Daha were held in duress. Seven equal walls it had, of dark green jasper, specked with bloody spots. In the midst of one wall was the lofty doorway, and in the walls right and left of this and in those that inclosed the angle opposite the door were great windows placed high, giving light to the banquet hall. In each of the seven angles of the wall a caryatide, cut in the likeness of a three-headed giant from ponderous blocks of black serpentine, bowed beneath the mass of a monstrous crab hewn out

of the same stone. The mighty claws of those seven crabs spreading upwards bare up the dome of the roof, that was smooth and covered all over with paintings of battles and hunting scenes and wrastling bouts in dark and smoky colours answerable to the gloomy grandeur of that chamber. On the walls beneath the windows gleamed weapons of war and of the chase, and on the two blind walls were nailed up all orderly the skulls and dead bones of those champions which had wrastled aforetime with King Gorice XI. or ever he appointed in an evil hour to wrastle with Goldry Bluszco. Across the innermost angle facing the door was a long table and a carven bench behind it, and from the two ends of that table, set square with it, two other tables yet longer and benches by them on the sides next the wall stretched to within a short space of the door. Midmost of the table to the right of the door was a high seat of old cypress wood, great and fair, with cushions of black velvet broidered with gold, and facing it at the opposite table another high seat, smaller, and the cushions of it sewn with silver. In the space betwixt the tables five iron braziers, massive and footed with claws like an eagle's, stood in a row, and behind the benches on either side were nine great stands for flamboys to light the hail by night, and seven behind the cross bench, set at equal distances and even with the walls. The floor was paved with steatite, white and creamy, with veins of rich brown and black and purples and splashes of scarlet. The tables resting on great trestles were massy slabs of a dusky polished stone, powdered with sparks of gold as small as atoms.

The women sat on the cross-bench, and midmost of them the Lady Prezmyra, who outwent the rest in beauty and queenliness as Venus the lesser planets of the night. Zenambria, wife to Duke Corsus, sat on her left, and on her right Sriva, daughter to Corsus, strangely fair for such a father. On the upper bench, to the right of the door, the lords of Witchland sat above and below the King's high seat, clad in holiday attire, and they of Pixyland had place over against them on the lower bench. The high seat on the lower bench was set apart for La Fireez. Great plates and dishes of gold and silver and painted porcelain were set in order on the tables, laden with delicacies. Harps and bagpipes struck up a barbaric music, and the guests

rose to their feet, as the shining doors swung open and Gorice the King followed by the Prince his guest entered that hall.

Like a black eagle surveying earth from some high mountain the King passed by in his majesty. His byrny was of black chain mail, its collar, sleeves, and skirt edged with plates of dull gold set with hyacinths and black opals. His hose were black, cross-gartered with bands of sealskin trimmed with diamonds. On his left thumb was his great signet ring fashioned in gold in the semblance of the worm Ouroboros that eateth his own tail: the bezel of the ring the head of the worm, made of a peach-coloured ruby of the bigness of a sparrow's egg. His cloak was woven of the skins of black cobras stitched together with gold wire, its lining of black silk sprinkled with dust of gold. The iron crown of Witchland weighed on his brow, the claws of the crab erect like horns; and the sheen of its jewels was many-coloured like the rays of Sirius on a clear night of frost and wind at Yule-tide.

The Prince La Fireez went in a mantle of black sendaline sprinkled everywhere with spangles of gold, and the tunic beneath it of rich figured silk dyed deep purple of the Pasque flower. From the golden circlet on his head two wings sprung aloft exquisitely fashioned in plates of beaten copper veneered with jewels and enamels and plated with precious metals to the semblance of the wings of the oleander hawk-moth. He was something below the common height, but stout and strong and sturdily knit, with red crisp curly hair, broad-faced and ruddy, cleanshaved, with high wide-nostrilled nose and bushy red heavy eyebrows, whence his eyes, most like his lady sister's, sea-green and fiery, shot glances like a lion's.

When the King was come into his high seat, with Corund and Corinius on his left and right in honour of their great deeds of arms, and La Fireez facing him in the high seat on the lower bench, the thralls made haste to set forth dishes of pickled grigs and oysters in the shell, and whilks, snails, and cockles fried in olive oil and swimming in red and white hippocras. And the feasters delayed not to fall to on these dainties, while the cupbearer bore round a mighty bowl of beaten gold filled with sparkling wine the hue of the yellow sapphire, and furnished with six golden ladles resting their handles in six half-moon shaped nicks in the rim of that great bowl. Each

guest when the bowl was brought to him must brim his goblet with the ladle, and drink unto the glory of Witchland and the rulers thereof.

Somewhat greenly looked Corinius on the Prince, and whispering Heming, Corund's son, in the ear, who sat next him, he said, "True it is that La Fireez is the showiest of men in all that belongeth to gear and costly array. Mark with what ridiculous excess he affecteth Demonland in the great store of jewels he flaunteth, and with what an apish insolence he sitteth at the board. Yet this lobcock liveth only by our sufferance, and I see a hath not forgot to bring with him to Witchland the price of our hand withheld from twisting of his neck."

Now were borne round dishes of carp, pilchards, and lobsters, and thereafter store enow of meats: a fat kid roasted whole and garnished with peas on a spacious silver charger, kid pasties, plates of neats' tongues and sweetbreads, sucking rabbits injellies, hedgehogs baked in their skins, hogs' haslets, carbonadoes, chitterlings, and dormouse pies. These and other luscious meats were borne round continually by thralls who moved silent on bare feet; and merry waxed the talk as the edge of hunger became blunted a little, and the cockles of men's hearts were warmed with wine.

"What news in Witchland?" asked La Fireez.

"I have heard nought newer," said the King, "than the slaying of Gaslark." And the King recounted the battle in the night, setting forth as in a frank and open honesty every particular of numbers, times, and comings and goings; save that none might have guessed from his tale that any of Demonland had part or interest in that battle.

La Fireez said, "Strange it is that he should so attack you. An enemy might smell some cause behind it."

"Our greatness," said Corinius, looking haughtily at him, "is a lamp whereat other moths than he have been burnt. I count it no strange matter at all."

Prezmyra said, "Strange indeed, were it any but Gaslark. But sure with him no wild sudden fancy were too light but it should chariot him like thistle-down to storm heaven itself."

"A bubble of the air, madam: all fine colours without and empty wind within. I have known other such," said Corinius, still resting his gaze with

studied insolence on the Prince.

Prezmyra's eye danced. "O my Lord Corinius," said she, "change first thine own fashion, I pray thee, ere thou convince gay attire of inward folly, lest beholding thee we misdoubt thy precept--or thy wisdom."

Corinius drank his cup to the drains and laughed. Somewhat reddened was his insolent handsome face about the cheeks and shaven jowl, for surely was none in that hall more richly apparelled than he. His ample chest was cased in a jerkin of untanned buckskin plated with silver scales, and he wore a collar of gold that was rough with smaragds and a long cloak of sky-blue silk brocade lined with cloth of silver. On his left wrist was a mighty ring of gold, and on his head a wreath of black bryony and sleeping nightshade. Gro whispered Corund in the ear, "He bibbeth it down apace, and the hour is yet early. This presageth trouble, since ever with him indiscretion treadeth hard on the heels of surliness as he waxeth drunken."

Corund grunted assent, saying aloud, "To all peaks of fame might Gaslark have climbed, but for this same rashness. Nought more pitiful hath been heard to tell of than his great sending into Impland, ten years ago, when, on a sudden conceit that a should lay all Impland under him and become the greatest king in all the world, he hired Zeldornius and Helteranius and Jalcanaius Fostus---"

"The three most notable captains found on earth," said La Fireez.

"Nothing is more true," said Corund. "These he hired, and brought 'em ships and soldiers and horses and such a clutter of engines of war as hath not been seen these hundred years, and sent 'em--whither? To the rich and pleasant lands of Beshtria? No. To Demonland? Not a whit. To this Witchland, where with a twentieth part the power a bath now risked all and suffered death and doom? No! but to yonder hell- besmitten wilderness of Upper Impland, treeless, waterless, not a soul to pay him tribute had he laid it under him save wandering bands of savage Imps, with more bugs on their bodies than pence in their purses, I warrant you. Or was he minded to be king among the divels of the air, ghosts, and hob-thrushes that be found in that desert?"

"Without controversy there be seventeen several sorts of divels on the Moruna," said Corsus, very loud and sudden, so that all turned to look on

him; "fiery divels, divels of the air, terrestrial divels, as you may say, and watery divels, and subterranean divels. Without controversy there be seven seen sorts, seventeen several sorts of hob- thrushes, and several sorts of divels, and if the humour took me I could name them all by rote."

Wondrous solemn was the heavy face of Corsus, his eyes, baggy underneath and somewhat bloodshed, his pendulous cheeks, thick blubber upper-lip, and bristly gray moustachios and whiskers. He had eaten, mainly to provoke thirst, pickled olives, capers, salted almonds, anchovies, fumadoes, and pilchards fried with mustard, and now awaited the salt chine of beef to be a pillow and a resting place for new potations.

The Lady Zenambria asked, "Knoweth any for certain what fate befell Jalcanaius and Helteranius and Zeldornius and their armies?"

"Heard I not," said Prezmyra, "that they were led by Will-o'-the-Wisps to the regions Hyperborean, and there made kings?"

"Told thee by the madge-howlet, I fear me, sister," said La Fireez. "Whenas I fared through Impland the More, six years ago, there was many a wild tale told me hereof, but nought within credit."

Now was the chine served in amid shallots on a great dish of gold, borne by four serving men, so weighty was the dish and its burden. Some light there glowed in the dull eye of Corsus to see it come, and Corund rose up with brimming goblet, and the Witches cried, "The song of the chine, O Corund!" Great as a neat stood Corund in his russet velvet kirtle, girt about with a broad belt of crocodile hide edged with gold. From his shoulders hung a cloak of wolf's skin with the hair inside, the outside tanned and diapered with purple silk. Daylight was nigh gone, and through a haze of savours rising from the feast the flamboys shone on his bald head set about with thick grizzled curls, and on his keen gray eyes, and his long and bushy beard. He cried, "Give me a rouse, my lords! and if any fail to bear me out in the refrain, I'll ne'er love him more." And he sang this song of the chine in a voice like the sounding of a gong; and all they roared in the refrain till the piled dishes on the service tables rang:

Bring out the Old Chyne, the Cold Chyne to me.  
And how lie charge him come and see.



Brawn tusked, Brawn well sowst and fine.  
With a precious cup of Muscadine:  
How shall I sing, how shall I look,  
In honour of the Master-Cook?  
The Pig shall turn round and answer me.  
Canst thou spare me a shoulder? a wy, a wy.  
The Duck, Goose, and Capon, good fellows all three.  
Shall dance thee an antick, so shall the Turkey:  
But O! the Cold Chyne, the Cold Chyne for me:  
How shall I sing, how shall I look,  
In honour of the Master-Cook?  
With brewis lie noynt thee from head to th' heel.  
Shal make thee run nimbler than the new oyld wheel;  
With Pye-crust wee'l make thee  
The eighth wise man to be;  
But O! the Old Chyne, the Cold Chyne for me:  
How shall I sing, how shall I look,  
In honour of the Master-Cook?

When the chine was carved and the cups replenished, the King issued command saying, "Call hither my dwarf, and let him act his antick gestures before us."

Therewith came the dwarf into the hall, mopping and mowing, clad in a sleeveless jerkin of striped yellow and red mockado. And his long and nerveless tail dragged on the floor behind him.

"Somewhat fulsome is this dwarf," said La Fireez.

"Speak within door, Prince," said Corinius. "Know'st not his quality? A hath been envoy extraordinary from King Gorice XI. of memory ever glorious unto Lord Juss in Galing and the lords of Demonland. And 'twas the greatest courtesy we could study to do them, to send 'em this looby for our ambassador."

The dwarf practised before them to the great content of the lords of Witchland and their guests, save for his japing upon Corinius and the

Prince, calling them two peacocks, so like in their bright plumage that none might tell either from other; which somewhat galled them both.

And now was the King's heart waxen glad with wine, and he pledged Gro, saying, "Be merry, Gro, and doubt not that I will fulfil my word I spake unto thee, and make thee king in Zajë Zaculo."

"Lord, I am yours for ever," answered Gro. "But methinks I am little fitted to be a king. Methinks I was ever a better steward of other men's fortunes than of mine own."

Whereat the Duke Corsus, that was sprawled on the table well nigh asleep, cried out in a great voice but husky withal, "A brace of divels broil me if thou sayest not sooth! If thine own fortunes come off but bluely, care not a rush. Give me some wine, a full weeping goblet. Ha! Ha! whip i' away! Ha! Ha! Witchland! When wear you the crown of Demonland, O King?"

"How now, Corsus," said the King, "art thou drunk?"

But La Fireez said, "Ye sware peace with the Demons in the Foliot Isles, and by mighty oaths are ye bound to put by for ever your claims of lordship over Demonland. I hoped your quarrels were ended."

"Why so they are," said the King.

Corsus chuckled weakly. "Ye say well: very well, O King, very well, La Fireez. Our quarrels are ended. No room for more. For, look you, Demonland is a ripe fruit ready to drop me thus in our mouth." Leaning back he gaped his mouth wide open, suspending by one leg above it an hortolan basted with its own dripping. The bird slipped through his fingers, and fell against his cheek, and so on to his bosom, and so on the floor, and his brazen byrny and the sleeves of his pale green kirtle were splashed with the gravy.

Whereat Corinius let fly a great peal of laughter; but La Fireez flushed with anger and said, scowling, "Drunkenness, my lord, is a jest for thralls to laugh at."

"Then sit thou mum, Prince," said Corinius, "lest thy quality be called in question. For my part I laugh at my thoughts, and they be very choice."

But Corsus wiped his face and fell a-singing:

Whene'er I bib the wine down.  
Asleepe drop all my cares.  
A fig for fret.  
A fig for sweat.  
A fig care I for cares.  
Sith death must come, though I say nay.  
Why grieve my life's days with affaires?  
Come, bib we then the wine down  
Of Bacchus faire to see;  
For alway while we bibbing be.  
Asleepe drop all our cares.

With that, Corsus sank heavily forward again on the table. And the dwarf, whose japes all else in that company had taken well even when themselves were the mark thereof, leaped up and down, crying, "Hear a wonder! This pudding singeth. When with two platters, thralls! ye have served it o' the board without a dish. One were too little to contain so vast a deal of bullock's blood and lard. Swift, and carve it ere the vapours burst the skin."

"I will carve thee, filth," said Corsus, lurching to his feet; and catching the dwarf by the wrist with one hand he gave him a great box on the ear with the other. The dwarf squealed and bit Corsus's thumb to the bone, so that he loosed his hold; and the dwarf fled from the hall, while the company laughed pleasantly.

"So flieth folly before wisdom which is in wine," said the King. "The night is young: bring me botargoes, and caviare and toast. Drink, Prince. The red Thramnian wine that is thick like honey wooeth the soul to divine philosophy. How vain a thing is ambition. This was Gaslark's bane, whose enterprises of such pitch and moment have ended thus, in a kind of nothing. Or what thinkest thou, Gro, thou which art a philosopher?"

"Alas, poor Gaslark," said Gro. "Had all grown to his mind, and had he 'gainst all expectation gotten us overthrown, even so had he been no nearer to his heart's desire than when he first set forth. For he had of old in Zajë Zaculo eating and drinking and gardens and treasure and musicians and a fair wife, all soft ease and contentment all his days. And at the last,

howsoe'er we shape our course, cometh the poppy that abideth all of us by the harbour of oblivion hard to cleanse. Dry withered leaves of laurel or of cypress tree, and a little dust. Nought else remaineth."

"With a sad brow I say it," said the King: "I hold him wise that resteth happy, even as the Red Foliot, and tempteth not the Gods by over-mounting ambition to his dejection."

La Fireez had thrown himself back in his high seat with his elbows resting on its lofty arms and his hands dangling idly on either side. With head held high and incredulous smile he harkened to the words of Gorice the King.

Gro said in Corund's ear, "The King hath found strange kindness in the cup."

"I think thou and I be clean out o' fashion," answered Corund, whispering, "that we be not yet drunken; the cause whereof is that thou drinkest within measure, which is good, and me this amethyst at my belt keepeth sober, were I never so surfeit-swelled with wine."

La Fireez said, "You are pleased to jest, O King. For my part, I had as lief have this musk-million on my shoulders as a head so blockish as to want ambition."

"If thou wert not our princely guest," said Corinius, "I had called that spoke in the right fashion of a little man. Witchland affecteth not such vaunts, but can afford to speak as our Lord the King in proud humility. Turkey cocks do strut and gobble; not so the eagle, who holdeth the world at his discretion."

"Pity on thee," cried the Prince, "if this cheap victory turn thee so giddy. Goblins!"

Corinius scowled. Corsus chuckled, saying to himself but loud enough for all to hear, "Goblins, quotha? They were small game had they been all. Ay, there it is: had they been all."

The King's brow was like a foul black cloud. The women held their breath. But Corsus, blandly insensible of these gathering thunders, beat time on the table with his cup, drowsily chanting to a most mournful air:

When birds in water deepe do lie.

And fishes in the air doe flue.  
When water burns and fire doth freeze.  
And oysters grow as fruits on trees--

A resounding hecup brought him to a full close.

The talk had died down, the lords of Witchland, ill at ease, studying to wear their faces to the bent of the King's looks. But Prezmyra spake, and the music of her voice came like a refreshing shower. "This song of my Lord Corsus," she said, "made me hopeful for an answer to a question in philosophy; but Bacchus, you see, hath ta'en his soul into Elysium for a season, and I fear me nor truth nor wisdom cometh from his mouth to-night. And this was my question, whether it be true that all animals of the land are in their kind in the sea? My Lord Corinius, or thou, my princely brother, can you resolve me?"

"Why, so it is received, madam," said La Fireez. "And inquiry will show thee many pretty instances: as the sea-frog, the sea-fox, the sea-dog, the sea-horse, the sea-lion, the sea-bear. And I have known the barbarous people of Esamocia eat of a conserve of sea-mice mashed and brayed in a mortar with the flesh of that beast named *bos marinus*, seasoned with salt and garlic."

"Foh! speak to me somewhat quickly," cried the Lady Sriva, "ere in imagination I taste such nasty meat. Prithee, yonder gold peaches and raisins of the sun as an antidote."

"Lord Gro will instruct thee better than I," said La Fireez. "For my part, albeit I think nobly of philosophy, yet have I little leisure to study it. Oft have I hunted the badger, yet never answered that question of the doctors whether he hath the legs of one side shorter than of the other. Neither know I, for all the lampreys I have eat, how many eyes the lamprey hath, whether it be nine or two."

Prezmyra smiled: "O my brother, thou art too too smooored, I fear me, in the dust of action and the field to be at accord with these nice searchings. But be there birds under the sea, my Lord Gro?"

Gro made answer, "In rivers, certainly, though it be but birds of the air sojourning for a season. As I myself have found them in Outer Impland,

asleep in winter time at the bottom of lakes and rivers, two together, mouth to mouth, wing to wing. But in the spring they revive again, and by and by are the woods full of their singing. And for the sea, there be true sea-cuckows, sea-thrushes, and sea-sparrows, and many more."

"It is passing strange," said Zenambria.

Corsus sang:

When sorcerers do leave their charme. When spiders do the fly no harme.

Prezmyra turned to Corund saying, "Was there not a merry dispute betwixt you, my lord, concerning the toad and the spider, thou maintaining that they do poisonously destroy one another, and my Lord Gro that he would show thee to the contrary?"

"'Twas even so, lady," said Corund, "and it is yet in controversy."

Corsus sang:

And when the blackbird leaves to sing.  
And likewise serpents for to sting.  
Then you may saye, and justly too.  
The old world now is turned anew:  
and so sank back into bloated silence.

"My Lord the King," cried Prezmyra, "I beseech you give order for the ending of this difference between two of your council, ere it wax to dangerous heat. Let them be given a toad, O King, and spiders without delay, that they may make experiment before this goodly company."

Therewith all fell a-laughing, and the King commanded a thrall, who shortly brought fat spiders to the number of seven and a crystal wine-cup, and inclosed with them beneath the cup a toad, and set all before the King. And all beheld them eagerly.

"I will wager two firkins of pale Permian wine to a bunch of radishes," said Corund, "that victory shall be given unto the spiders. Behold how without resistance they do sit upon his head and pass all over his body."

Gro said, "Done."

"Thou wilt lose the wager, Corund," said the King. "This toad taketh no hurt from the spiders, but sitteth quiet out of policy, tempting them to security, that upon advantage he may swallow them down."

While they watched, fruits were borne in: queen-apples, almonds, pomegranates and pistick nuts; and fresh bowls and jars of wine, and among them a crystal flagon of the peach-coloured wine of Krothering vintaged many summers ago in the vineyards that stretch southward toward the sea from below the castle of Lord Brandoch Daha.

Corinius drank deep, and cried, "'Tis a royal drink, this wine of Krothering! Folk say it will be good cheap this summer."

Whereat La Fireez shot a glance at him, and the King marking it said in Corinius's ear, "Wilt thou be prudent? Let not thy pride flatter thee to think aught shall avail thee, any more than my vilest thrall, if by thy doing this Prince smell out my secrets."

By then was the hour waxing late, and the women took their leave, lighted to the doors in great state by thralls with flamboys. In a while, when they were gone. "A plague of all spiders!" cried Corund. "Thy toad hath swallowed one already."

"Two more!" said Gro. "Thy theoretic crumbleth apace, O Corund. He hath two at a gulp, and but four remain."

The Lord Corinius, whose countenance was now aflame with furious drinking, held high his cup and catching the Prince's eye, "Mark well, La Fireez," he cried, "a sign and a prophecy. First one; next two at a mouthful; and early after that, as I think, the four that remain. Art not afeared lest thou be found a spider when the brunt shall come?"

"Hast drunk thyself horn-mad, Corinius?" said the King under his breath, his voice shaken with anger.

"He is as witty a marmalade-eater as ever I conversed with," said La Fireez, "but I cannot tell what the dickens he means."

"That," answered Corinius, "which should make thy smirking face turn serious. I mean our ancient enemies, the haskardly mongrels of Demonland. First gulp, Goldry, taken heaven knows whither by the King's sending in a deadly scud of wind---"

"The devil damn thee!" cried the King, "what drunken brabble is this?"

But the Prince La Fireez waxed red as blood, saying, "This it is then that lieth behind this hudder mudder, and ye go to war with Demonland? Think not to have my help therein."

"We shall not sleep the worse for that," said Corinius. "Our mouth is big enough for such a morsel of marchpane as thou, if thou turn irksome."

"Thy mouth is big enough to blab the secretest intelligence, as we now most laughably approve," said La Fireez. "Were I the King, I would draw lobster's whiskers on thy skin, for a tipsy and a prattling popinjay."

"An insult!" cried the Lord Corinius, leaping up. "I would not take an insult from the Gods in heaven. Reach me a sword, boy! I will make Beshtrian cutworks in his guts."

"Peace, on your lives!" said the King in a great voice, while Corund went to Corinius and Gro to the Prince to quiet them. "Corinius is wounded in the wrist and cannot fight, and belike his brain is fevered by the wound."

"Heal him, then, of this carving the Goblins gave him, and I will carve him like a capon," said the Prince.

"Goblins!" said Corinius fiercely. "Know, vile fellow, the best swordsman in the world gave me this wound. Had it been thou that stood before me, I had cut thee into steaks, that art caponed already."

But the King stood up in his majesty, saying, "Silence, on your lives!" And the King's eyes glittered with wrath, and he said, "For thee, Corinius, not thy hot youth and rebellious blood nor yet the wine thou hast swilled into that greedy belly of thine shall mitigate the rigour of my displeasure. Thy punishment I reserve unto tomorrow. And thou, La Fireez, look thou bear thyself more humbly in my halls. Over pert was the message brought me by thine herald at thy coming hither this morning, and too much it smacked of a greeting from an equal to an equal, calling thy tribute a gift, though it, and thou, and all thy principality are mine by right to deal with as seems me good. Yet did I bear with thee: unwisely, as I think, since thy pertness nourished by my forbearance springeth up yet ranker at my table, and thou insultest and brawlest in my halls. Be advised, lest my wrath forge thunderbolts against thee."

The Prince La Fireez answered and said, "Keep frowns and threats for thine offending thralls, O King, since me they aifright not, and I laugh them



to scorn. Nor am I careful to answer thine injurious words; since well thou knowest my old friendship unto thine house, O King, and unto Witchland, and by what bands of marriage I am bound in love to the Lord Corund, to whom I gave my lady sister. If it suit not my stomach to proclaim like a servile minister thy suzerainty, yet needest thou not to carp at this, since thy tribute is paid thee, ay, and in over-measure. But unto Demonland am I bound, as all the world knoweth, and sooner shalt thou prevail upon the lamps of heaven to come down and fight for thee against the Demons than upon me. And unto Corinius that so boasteth I say that Demonland hath ever been too hard for you Witches. Goldry Bluszco and Brandoch Daha have shown you this. This is my counsel unto thee, O King, to make peace with Demonland: my reasons, first that thou hast no just cause of quarrel with them, next (and this should sway thee more) that if thou persist in fighting against them it will be the ruin of thee and of all Witchland."

The King bit his fingers with signs of wonderful anger, and for a minute's time no sound was in that hall. Only Corund spake privately to the King saying, "Lord, O for all sakes swallow your royal rage. You may whip him when my son Hacmon returneth, but till then he outnumbered us, and your own party so overwhelmed with wine that, trust me, I would not adventure the price of a turnip on our chances if it come to fighting."

Troubled at heart was Corund, for well he knew how dear beyond account his lady wife held the keeping of the peace betwixt La Fireez and the Witches.

In this moment Corsus, somewhat roused in an evil hour out of lethargy by the loud talk and movement, began to sing:

When all the prisons hereabout  
Have justled all their prisoners out.  
Because indeed they have no cause  
To keepe 'em in by common laws.

Whereat Corinius, in whom wine and quarrelling and the King's rebukes had lighted a fire of reckless and outrageous malice before which all counsels of prudence or policy were dissipated like wax in a furnace,

shouted loudly, "Wilt see our prisoners, Prince, i' the old banquet hall, to prove thyself an ass?"

"What prisoners?" cried the Prince, springing to his feet. "Hell's furies! I am weary of these dark equivocations and will know the truth."

"Why wilt thou rage so beastly?" said the King. "The man is drunk. No more wild words."

"Thou canst not daff me so. I will know the truth," said La Fireez.

"So thou shalt," said Corinius. "This it is, that we Witches be better men than thou and thy hen-hearted Pixies, and better men than the accursed Demons. No need to hide it further. Two of that brood we have laid by the heels, and nailed 'em up on the wall of the old banquet hall, as farmers nail up weasels and polecats on a barn door. And there shall they bide till they be dead: Juss and Brandoch Daha."

## About *The Worm Ouroboros*

The book that set the stage for Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings', '*The Worm Ouroboros*' tells a sweeping tale of political – and mystical - battles between heroic warriors, witches on crooked mountaintops and the ocean's darkest depths. Interlaced with brewing romances and devilish trickery, The Lords of Demonland go head-to-head with the Lords of Witchland in one epic fantasy. Crafted with expert language, Eddison provides a reading experience like no other. '*The Worm Ouroboros*' is ideal for fantasy fans of 'The Lord of the Rings' and 'The Hobbit'.

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