



Illustration for "The Sestina"

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A NEAT AND SHRIVELLED GENTLEMAN SAT AT A DESK

The Sestina

RETOLD FROM THE FRENCH OF NICOLAS DE CAEN

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

HERE we have to do with the opening tale of the Dizain of Queens. I abridge at discretion; the initial account of the Barons' War, among other superfluities, I amputate as more remarkable for veracity than interest; and the result is that to the Norman cleric appertains whatever the tale may have of merit, whereas what you find distasteful in it you must impute to my delinquencies in skill rather than in volition.

Within the half-hour after de Giars's death (here one overtakes Nicolas mid-course in narrative), Dame Alianora thus stood alone in the corridor of a strange house. Beyond the arras the steward and his lord were at irritable converse.

First, "If the woman be hungry," spoke a high and peevish voice, "feed her. If she need money, give it to her. But do not annoy me."

"This woman demands to see the master of the house," the steward then retorted.

"O incredible Bœotian, inform her that the master of the house has no time to waste upon vagabonds who select the middle of the night as an eligible time to pop out of nowhere. Why did you not do so in the beginning, you dolt?" He got for answer only a deferential cough, and very shortly continued: "This is remarkably vexatious. *Vox et præterea nihil*,—which signifies, Yeck, that to converse with women is always delightful. Admit her." This was done, and Dame Alianora came into an apartment all littered with papers, where a neat and shrivelled gentleman of fifty odd sat at a desk and scowled.

He presently said, "You may go, Yeck." He had risen, the magisterial attitude with which he had awaited her advent cast aside. "O God!" he said; "you, madame!" His thin hands, scholarly hands, were plucking at the air.

Dame Alianora had paused, greatly

astonished, and there was an interval before she said, "I do not recognize you, messire."

"And yet, madame, I recall very clearly that some thirty years ago Count Bérenger, then reigning in Provence, had about his court four daughters, each one of whom was afterward wedded to a king. First, Margaret, the eldest, now regnant in France; then Alianora, the second and most beautiful of these daughters, whom troubadours hymned as *La Belle*. She was married a long while ago, madame, to the King of England, Lord Henry, third of that name to reign in these islands."

Dame Alianora's eyes were narrowing. "There is something in your voice," she said, "that I recall."

He answered: "Madame and Queen, that is very likely, for it is a voice that sang a deal in Provence when both of us were younger. I concede with the Roman that I have somewhat deteriorated since the reign of good Cynara. Yet have you quite forgotten the Englishman who made so many songs of you? They called him Osmund Heleigh."

"He made the Sestina of Spring that my father envied," the Queen said; and then, with a new eagerness: "Messire, can it be that you are Osmund Heleigh?" He shrugged assent. She looked at him for a long time, rather sadly, and afterward demanded if he were King's man or of the baron's party. The nervous hands were raised in deprecation.

"I have no politics," he began, and altered it, gallantly enough, to, "I am the Queen's man, madame."

"Then aid me, Osmund," she said; and he answered with a gravity that singularly became him:

"You have reason to understand that to my fullest power I will aid you."

"You know that at Lewes these swine overcame us." He nodded assent. "And

now they hold the King my husband captive at Kenilworth. I am content that he remain there, for he is of all the King's enemies the most dangerous. But, at Wallingford, Leicester has imprisoned my son, Prince Edward. The Prince must be freed, my Osmund. Warren de Basingbourne commands what is left of the royal army, now entrenched at Bristol, and it is he who must liberate him. Get me to Bristol, then. Afterward we will take Wallingford." The Queen issued these orders in cheery, practical fashion, and did not admit opposition into the account, for she was a capable woman.

"But you, madame?" he stammered. "You came alone?"

"I come from France, where I have been entreating—and vainly entreating—succor from that other monkish king, the pious Lewis of that realm. Eh, what is God about when He enthrones these cowards, Osmund? Were I a king, were I even a man, I would drive these smug English out of their foggy isle in three days' space! I would leave alive not one of these curs that dare yelp at me! I would—" She paused, the sudden anger veering into amusement. "See how I enrage myself when I think of what your people have made me suffer," the Queen said, and shrugged her shoulders. "In effect, I skulked back to this detestable island in disguise, accompanied by Avenel de Giars and Hubert Fitz-Herveis. Tonight some half-dozen fellows—robbers, thorough knaves, like all you English,—suddenly attacked us on the common yonder and slew the men of our party. While they were cutting de Giars's throat I slipped away in the dark and tumbled through many ditches till I spied your light. There you have my story. Now get me an escort to Bristol."

It was a long while before Messire Heleigh spoke. Then, "These men," he said—"this de Giars and this Fitz-Herveis—they gave their lives for yours, as I understand it,—*pro caris amicis*. And yet you do not grieve for them."

"I shall regret de Giars," the Queen said, "for he made excellent songs. But Fitz-Herveis?—foh! the man had a face like a horse." Then again her mood changed. "Many men have died for me, my friend. At first I wept for them, but now I am dry of tears."

He shook his head. "Cato very wisely says, 'If thou hast need of help, ask it of thy friends.' But the sweet friend that I remember was a clean-eyed girl, joyous and exceedingly beautiful. Now you appear to me one of those ladies of remoter times—Faustina, or Jael, or Artemis, the king's wife of Tauris,—they that slew men, laughing. I am somewhat afraid of you, madame."

She was angry at first; then her face softened. "You English!" she said, only half mirthful. "Eh, my God! you remember me when I was happy. Now you behold me in my misery. Yet even now I am your Queen, messire, and it is not yours to pass judgment upon me."

"I do not judge you," he hastily returned. "Rather I cry with him of old, *Omnia incerta ratiōne!* and I cry with Salomon that he who meddles with the strife of another man is like to him that takes a hound by the ears. Yet listen, madame and Queen. I cannot afford you an escort to Bristol. This house, of which I am in temporary charge, is Longaville, my brother's manor. And Lord Brudenel, as you doubtless know, is of the baron's party and—scant cause for grief—with Leicester at this moment. I can trust none of his people, for I believe them to be of much the same opinion as those Londoners who not long ago stoned you and would have sunk your barge in Thames River. Oh, let us not blink the fact that you are not overbeloved in England. So an escort is out of the question. Yet I, madame, if you so elect, will see you safe to Bristol."

"You? singly?" the Queen demanded.

"My plan is this: Singing folk alone go whither they will. We will go as jongleurs, then. I can yet manage a song to the viol, I dare affirm. And you must pass as my wife."

He said this with a very curious simplicity. The plan seemed unreasonable, and at first Dame Alianora waved it aside. Out of the question! But reflection suggested nothing better; it was impossible to remain at Longaville, and the man spoke sober truth when he said that any escort save himself was unprocurable. Besides, the lunar madness of the scheme was its strength; that the Queen should venture to cross half England unprotected—and Messire Heleigh on the face of



THEY WERE OVERTAKEN BY FALMOUTH HIMSELF

him was a pasteboard buckler—was an event that Leicester would neither anticipate nor on report credit. There you were! these English had no imagination. The Queen snapped her fingers and said: "Very willingly will I be your wife, my Osmund. But how do I know that I can trust you? Leicester would give a deal for me—any price in reason for the Sorceress of Provence. And you are not wealthy, I suspect."

"You may trust me, *mon bel esper*"—his eyes here were those of a beaten child,—"since my memory is better than yours." Messire Osmund Heleigh gathered his papers into a neat pile. "The room is mine. To-night I keep guard in the corridor, madame. We will start at dawn."

When he had gone, Dame Alianora laughed contentedly. "*Mon bel esper!* my fairest hope! The man called me that in his verses—thirty years ago! Yes, I may trust you, my poor Osmund."

So they set out at cockerow. He had procured a viol and a long falchion for himself, and had somewhere got suitable clothes for the Queen; and in their aging but decent garb the two approached near enough to the similitude of what they desired to be esteemed. In the courtyard a knot of servants gaped, nudged one another, but openly said nothing. Messire Heleigh, as they interpreted it, was brazening out an affair of gallantry before the countryside; and they appeared to consider his casual observation that they would find a couple of dead men on the common exceedingly diverting.

When the Queen asked him that morning, "And what will you sing, my Osmund? Shall we begin with the Sestina of Spring?" Osmund Heleigh grunted.

"I have forgotten that rubbish long ago. *Omnis amans, amens*, saith the satirist of Rome town, and with some show of reason."

Followed silence.

One sees them thus trudging the brown, naked plains under a sky of steel. In a pageant the woman, full-veined and comely, her russet gown girded up like a harvester's, might not inaptly have pre-figured October; and for less comfortable November you could nowhere have found a symbol more precise than her lank

companion, humorously peevish under his white thatch of hair, and so constantly fretted by the sword tapping at his ankles.

They made Hurlburt prosperously and found it vacant, for the news of Falmouth's advance had driven the villagers hillward. There was in this place a child, a naked boy of some two years, lying on a door-step, overlooked in their gross terror. As the Queen with a sob lifted it the child died.

"Starved!" said Osmund Heleigh,— "and within a stone's throw of my snug home!"

The Queen laid down the tiny corpse, and stooping, lightly caressed its sparse flaxen hair. She answered nothing, though her lips moved.

Past Vachel, scene of a recent skirmish, with many dead in the gutters, they were overtaken by Falmouth himself, and stood at the roadside to afford his troop passage. The Marquis, as he went by, flung the Queen a coin, with a jest sufficiently high-flavored. She knew the man her inveterate enemy, knew that on recognition he would have killed her as he would a wolf; she smiled at him and dropped a courtesy.

"That is very remarkable," Messire Heleigh observed. "I was hideously afraid, and am yet shaking. But you, madame, laughed."

The Queen replied: "I laughed because I know that some day I shall have that man's head. It will be very sweet to see it roll in the dust, my Osmund."

Messire Heleigh somewhat dryly observed that tastes differed.

At Jessop Minor a more threatening adventure befell. Seeking food at the Cat and Hautbois in that village, they blundered upon the same troop at dinner in the square about the inn. Falmouth and his lieutenants were somewhere within the house. The men greeted them with a shout, and one of them—a swarthy rascal with his head tied in a napkin—demanded that the jongleurs grace their meal with a song.

At first Osmund put him off with a tale of a broken viol.

But, "Haro!" the fellow blustered; "by blood and by nails! you will sing more sweetly with a broken viol than with a broken head. I would have you

understand, you hedge-thief, that we gentlemen of the sword are not partial to wordy argument." Messire Heleigh fluttered inefficient hands as the men-at-arms gathered about them, scenting some genial piece of cruelty. "Oh, you rabbit!" the trooper jeered, and caught him by the throat, shaking him. In the act he tore open Messire Heleigh's tunic, disclosing a thin chain about his neck and a small locket, which he wrested from its fastening. "Ahoi!" he continued. "Ahoi! my comrades, what species of minstrel is this, who goes about England all hung with gold like a Cathedral Virgin? He and his sweetheart"—the actual word was grosser—"will be none the worse for an interview with the Marquis."

The situation was awkward, for Lord Falmouth was familiar with the Queen, and to be brought specifically to his attention meant death for the two of them. Hastily Osmund Heleigh said:

"Messire, the locket contains the portrait of a lady whom in youth I loved very greatly. Save to me, it is valueless. I pray you, do not rob me of it."

But the trooper shook his head with drunken solemnity. "I do not like the looks of this. Yet I will sell it to you, as the saying is, for a song."

"It shall be the king of songs," said Osmund,— "the song that Arnaut Daniel first made. I will sing for you a Sestina, messieurs,—a Sestina in salutation of Spring."

The men disposed themselves about the grass, and presently he sang.

Sang Messire Heleigh:

"Awaken! for the servitors of Spring
 Marshal his triumph! ah, make haste
 to see
 With what tempestuous pageantry they
 bring
 Mirth back to earth! hasten, for this
 is he
 That cast out Winter and the woes that
 cling
 To Winter's garments, and bade April
 be!

"And now that Spring is master, let us be
 Content and laugh,—as anciently in
 Spring
 The battle-wearied Tristran laughed, when
 he
 Was come again to Tintagel—to bring

Glad news of Arthur's victory and see
 Ysoude, with parted lips, that waver,
 and cling.

"Anon in Brittany must Tristran cling
 To this or that sad memory, and be
 Alone, as she at Tintagel;—in Spring
 Love soweth thus what lovers reap, but
 he
 Is blind, and scatters baleful seed that
 bring
 Such fruitage as blind Love lacks eyes
 to see."

He paused here for an appreciable interval, staring at the Queen. You saw his flabby throat aquiver, his eyes melting, saw his cheeks kindle and youth ebb back into the lean man like water over a crumbling dam. His voice was now big and desirous.

Sang Messire Heleigh:

"Love sows, and lovers reap; and ye will
 see
 The loved eyes lighten, feel the loved
 lips cling,
 Never again when in the grave ye be
 Incurious of your happiness in Spring,
 And yet no grace of Love there, whither
 he
 That bartered life for love no love may
 bring.

"Here Death is;—and no Heracles may
 bring
 Alcestis hence, nor here may Roland see
 The eyes of Aude, nor here the wakening
 Spring
 Vex any man with memory, for there be
 No memories that cling as cerements cling,
 No love that baffles Death, more strong
 than he.

"Us hath he noted, and for us hath he
 An hour appointed, and that hour will
 bring
 Oblivion.—Then, laugh! Laugh, love, and
 see
 The tyrant mocked, what time our bosoms
 cling,
 What time our lips are red, what time
 we be
 Exultant in our little hour of Spring!

"Thus in the Spring we mock at Death,
 though he
 Will see our children perish and will
 bring
 Asunder all that cling while love may be."

He put the viol aside and sat quite silent. The soldiery judged, and with

cordial frankness stated, that the difficulty of his rhyming scheme did not atone for his lack of indecency, but when the Queen of England went among them with Messire Heleigh's hat she found them liberal. Even the fellow with the broken head admitted that a bargain was proverbially a bargain, and returned the locket with the addition of a coin. So for the present these two went safe, and quitted the Cat and Hautbois both fed and unmolested.

"My Osmund," Dame Alianora said presently, "your memory is better than I had thought."

"I remembered a boy and a girl," he returned. "And I grieved that they were dead."

Afterward they plodded on toward Bowater, and that night rested in Chantrell Wood. They had the good fortune there to encounter dry and windless weather and a sufficiency of brushwood, with which Osmund constructed an agreeable fire. In its glow these two sat, eating bread and cheese.

But talk languished at the outset. The Queen had complained of an ague, and Messire Heleigh was sedately suggesting three spiders hung about the neck as an infallible corrective for this ailment, when Dame Alianora rose to her feet.

"Eh, my God!" she said; "I am wearied of such ungracious aid! Not an inch of the way but you have been thinking of your filthy books and longing to be back at them! No; I except the moments when you were frightened into forgetfulness—first by Falmouth, then by the trooper. O Eternal Father! afraid of a single dirty soldier!"

"Indeed, I was very much afraid," said Messire Heleigh, with perfect simplicity,—"*timidus perire*, madame."

"You have not even the grace to be ashamed! Yet I am shamed, messire, that Osmund Heleigh should have become the book-muddled pedant you are. For I loved him—do you understand?—I loved young Osmund Heleigh."

He also had risen in the firelight, and now its convulsive shadows marred two dogged faces. "I think it best not to recall that boy and girl who are so long dead. And frankly, madame and Queen, the merit of the business I have in hand is questionable. It is you who have set

all England by the ears, and I am guiding you toward opportunities for further mischief. I must serve you. Understand, madame, that ancient folly in Provence yonder has nothing to do with the affair. Remember that I cry *nihil ad Andromachen!* I must serve you because you are a woman and helpless; yet I cannot forget that he who spares the wolf is the sheep's murderer. It would be better for all England if you were dead. Hey, your gorgeous follies, madame! Silver peacocks set with sapphires! Cloth of fine gold—"

"Would you have me go unclothed?" Dame Alianora demanded, pettishly.

"Not so," Osmund retorted; "again I say to you with Tertullian, 'Let women paint their eyes with the tints of chastity, insert into their ears the Word of God, tie the yoke of Christ about their necks, and adorn their whole person with the silk of sanctity and the damask of devotion.' And I say to you—"

But Dame Alianora was yawning quite frankly. "You will say to me that I brought foreigners into England, that I misguided the King, that I stirred up strife between the King and his barons. Eh, my God! I am sufficiently familiar with the harangue. Yet listen, my Osmund: They sold me like a bullock to a man I had never seen. I found him a man of wax and I remoulded him. They gave me England as a toy; I played with it. I was the Queen, the source of honor, the source of wealth,—the trough, in effect, about which swine gathered. Never in all my English life, Osmund, has man or woman loved me; never in all my English life have I loved man or woman. Do you understand, my Osmund?—the Queen has many flatterers, but no friends. Not a friend in the world, my Osmund! And so the Queen makes the best of it and amuses herself."

Somewhat he seemed to understand, for he answered without asperity:

"*Mon bel esper*, I do not find it anywhere in Holy Writ that God requires it of us to amuse ourselves; but upon many occasions we have been commanded to live righteously. We are tempted in divers and insidious ways. And we cry with the psalmist, My strength is dried up like a potsherd. But God intends this, since until we have here demonstrated

our valor upon Satan, we are manifestly unworthy to be enregistered in His army. The great Captain must be served by proven soldiers. We may be tempted, but we may not yield. O daughter of the South! we may not yield!" he cried, with an unheralded, odd wildness.

"Again you preach," Dame Alianora said. "That is a venerable truism."

"Ho, madame," he returned, "is it on that account the less true?"

Pensively the Queen considered this. "You are a good man, my Osmund," she said at last, with a fine irrelevance, "though you are very droll. *Ohimè!* it is a great pity that I was born a princess! Had it been possible for me to be your wife, I should have been a better woman. I shall sleep now and dream of that good and stupid and contented woman I might have been." So presently these two slept in Chantrell Wood.

Followed four days of journeying. As Messer Dante had not yet surveyed Malebolge, they lacked a parallel for that which they encountered; their traverse discovered England razed, charred, and depopulate,—picked bones of an island, a vast and absolute ruin about which passion-wasted men skulked like rats. They went without molestation; malice and death had journeyed on their road aforetime, as heralds, and had swept it clear.

At every trace of these hideous predecessors Osmund Heleigh would say, "By a day's ride I might have prevented this." Or, "By a day's ride I might have saved this woman." Or, "By two days' riding I might have fed this child."

The Queen kept Spartan silence, but daily you saw the fine woman age. In their slow advance every inch of misery was thrust before her as for inspection; meticulously she observed and appraised her handiwork.

Bastling the royal army had recently sacked. There remained of this village the skeletons of two houses, and for the rest a jumble of bricks, rafters half burned, many calcined fragments of humanity, and ashes. At Bastling, Messire Heleigh turned to the Queen toiling behind.

"Oh, madame!" he said, in a dry whisper, "this was the home of so many men!"

"I burned it," Dame Alianora replied. "That man we passed just now I killed.

Those other men and women—I killed them all. And little children, my Osmund! The hair like corn floss, blood-dabbled!"

"Oh, madame—!" he wailed, in the extremity of his pity.

For she stood with eyes shut, all gray. The Queen demanded: "Why have they not slain me? Was there no man in England to strangle the proud wanton? Are you all cowards here?"

"Not cowards!" he cried. "Your men and Leicester's ride about the world, and draw sword and slay and die for the right as they see it. And you for the right as ye see it. But I, madame! I! I, who sat snug at home spilling ink and trimming rose-bushes! God's world, madame, and I in it afraid to speak a word for Him! God's world, and a curmudgeon in it grudging God the life He gave!" The man flung out his soft hands and snarled. "*We are tempted in divers and insidious ways.* But I, who rebuked you! behold now, with how gross a snare was I entrapped!"

"I do not understand, my Osmund."

"I was afraid, madame," he returned, dully. "Everywhere men fight and I am afraid to die."

So they stood silent in the ruins of Bastling.

"Of a piece with our lives," Dame Alianora said at last. "All ruin, my Osmund."

But Messire Heleigh threw back his head and laughed, new color in his face. "Presently men will build here, my Queen. Presently, as in legend the Arabian bird, arises from these ashes a lordlier and more spacious town."

Then they went forward. The next day Fate loosed upon them Gui Camoys, lord of Bozon, Foliot, and Thwenge, who, riding alone through Poges Copse, found there a man and a woman over their limited supper. The woman had thrown back her hood, and Camoys drew rein to stare at her.

"*Ma belle,*" said Camoys, in friendly condescension, "*n'estez vous pas jongleurs?*"

Dame Alianora smiled up at him. "*Ouais, messire; mon mary faict les chançons—*" Here she paused, with dilatory caution, for Camoys had leapt from his horse, giving a great laugh.

"A prize! ho, an imperial prize!" Camoys shouted. "A peasant woman with the Queen's face, who speaks French! And who, madame, is this? Have you by any chance brought pious Lewis from oversea? Have I bagged a brace of monarchs?"

Here was imminent danger, for Camoys had known the Queen some fifteen years. Messire Heleigh rose to his feet, his five days' beard glinting like hoar frost as his mouth twitched.

"I am Osmund Heleigh, messire, younger brother to the Earl of Brudenel."

"I have heard of you, I believe,—the fellow who spoils parchment. This is odd company, however, Messire Osmund, for Brudenel's brother."

"A gentleman must serve his Queen, messire. As Cicero very justly observes—"

"I am inclined to think that his political opinions are scarcely to our immediate purpose. This is a high matter, Messire Heleigh. To let the sorceress pass is of course out of the question; upon the other hand, I observe that you lack weapons of defence. Yet if you will have the kindness to assist me in unarming, that will place our commerce upon more equal footing."

Osmund had gone very white. "I am no swordsman, messire—"

"Now this is not handsome of you," Camoys began. "I warn you that people will speak harshly of us if we lose this opportunity of gaining honor. And besides, the woman will be burned. Plainly, you owe it to all three of us to fight."

"—but I refer my cause to God. I am quite at your service."

"No, my Osmund!" Dame Alianora then cried. "It means your death."

He spread out his hands. "That is God's affair, madame."

"Are you not afraid?" she breathed.

"Of course I am afraid," said Messire Heleigh, irritably.

After that he unarmed Camoys, and presently they faced one another in their tunics. So for the first time in the journey Osmund's long falchion saw daylight. He had thrown away his dagger, as Camoys had none.

The combat was sufficiently curious. Camoys raised his left hand. "So help me God and His saints, I have upon me

neither bone, stone, nor witchcraft where-through the power and the word of God might be diminished or the devil's power increased."

Osmund made similar oath. "Judge Thou this woman's cause!" he cried, likewise.

Then Gui Camoys cried, as a herald might have done, "*Laissez les aller, laissez les aller, laissez les aller, les bons combatants!*" and warily they moved the one toward the other.

On a sudden, Osmund attacked, desperately apprehensive of his own cowardice. Camoys lightly eluded him and slashed his undefended thigh, drawing much blood. Osmund gasped. He flung away his sword, and in the instant catching Camoys under the arms, threw him to the ground. Messire Heleigh fell with his opponent, who in stumbling had lost his sword, and thus the two struggled unarmed, Osmund atop. But Camoys was the younger man, and Osmund's strength was ebbing rapidly by reason of his wound. Now Camoys's tethered horse, rearing with nervousness, tumbled his master's flat-topped helmet into the road. Osmund caught it up and with it battered Camoys in the face, dealing severe blows.

"God!" Camoys cried, his face all blood.

"Do you acknowledge my quarrel just?" said Osmund, between horrid sobs.

"What choice have I?" said Gui Camoys, very sensibly.

So Osmund rose, blind with tears and shivering. The Queen bound up their wounds as best she might, but Camoys was much dissatisfied.

"For reason of His own, madame," he observed, "and doubtless for sufficient ones, God has singularly favored your cause. I am neither a fool nor a pagan to question His decision, and you two may go your way unhampered. But I have had my head broken with my own helmet, and this I consider to be a proceeding very little conducive toward enhancing my reputation. Of your courtesy, messire, I must entreat another meeting."

Osmund shrank as from a blow. Then with a short laugh he conceded that this was Camoys's right, and they fixed upon the following Saturday, with Poges Copse as the rendezvous.

"I would prefer that the combat be *à outrance*," Gui Camoys said, "in consideration of the fact that it was my own helmet. You must be aware, Messire Osmund, that such an affront is practically without parallel."

This, too, was agreed upon, and they bade one another farewell.

Then, after asking if they needed any money, which was courteously declined, Gui Camoys rode away, and sang as he went. Osmund Heleigh remained motionless. He raised quivering hands to the sky.

"Thou hast judged!" he cried. "Thou hast judged, O Eternal Father! Now pardon! Pardon us twain! Pardon for unjust stewards of Thy gifts! Thou hast loaned this woman dominion over England, all instruments to aid Thy cause, and this trust she has abused. Thou hast loaned me life and manhood, agility and wit and strength, all instruments to aid Thy cause. Talents in a napkin, O God! Repentant we cry to Thee. Pardon for unjust stewards! Pardon for the ungirt loin, for the service shirked, for all good deeds undone! Pardon and grace, O Eternal Father!"

Thus he prayed, while Gui Camoys sang, riding deeper into the tattered, yellowing forest. By an odd chance Camoys had lighted on that song made by Thibaut of Champagne, beginning,

Signor, saciez, ki or ne s'en ira,

and this he sang with a lilt gayer than the matter of it countenanced. Faintly there now came to them the sound of his singing, and they found it, in the circumstances, ominously adapt:

"Et vos, par qui je n'oi onques aïe,
Descendez tuit en infer le parfont."

Dame Alianora shivered. "No, no!" she cried. "Is He less pitiful than we?"

They slept that night in Ousely meadow, and the next afternoon came safely to Bristol. You may learn elsewhere with what rejoicing the royal army welcomed the Queen's arrival, how courage quickened at sight of the generous virago. In the ebullition Messire Heleigh was submerged, and Dame Alianora saw nothing more of him that day. Friday there were counsels, requisitions, orders signed, a letter despatched to Pope

Urban, chief of all a letter (this in the Queen's hand throughout) privily conveyed to the Lady Maud de Mortemer,—much sowing of a seed, in fine, that eventually flowered victory. There was, however, no sign of Osmund Heleigh, though by Dame Alianora's order he was sought.

On Saturday at seven in the morning he came to her lodging in complete armor. From the open helmet his wrinkled face, showing like a wizened nut in a shell, smiled upon her questionings.

"I go to fight Gui Camoys, madame and Queen."

Dame Alianora wrung her hands. "You go to your death."

He answered: "That is very likely. Therefore I am come to bid you farewell."

The Queen stared at him for a while; on a sudden she broke into a curious fit of deep but tearless sobbing.

"*Mon bel esper*," said Osmund Heleigh, very gently, "what is there in all this worthy of your sorrow? The man will kill me; granted, for he is my junior by some fifteen years, and in addition a skilled swordsman. I fail to see that this is lamentable. Back to Longaville I cannot go after recent happenings; there a rope's end awaits me. Here I must in any event shortly take to the sword, since a beleaguered army has very little need of ink-pots; and shortly I must be slain in some skirmish, dug under the ribs perhaps by a greasy fellow I have never seen. I prefer a clean death at a gentleman's hands."

"It is I who bring about your death!" she wailed. "You gave me gallant service, and I have requited you with death!"

"Indeed, the debt is on the other side. The trivial services I rendered you were such as any gentleman must render a woman in distress. Naught else have I afforded you, madame, save very anciently a Sestina. Ho, a Sestina! And in return you have given me a Sestina of fairer make—a Sestina of days, six days of life." His eyes were fervent now.

She kissed him on either cheek. "Farewell, my champion!"

"Ay, your champion. In the twilight of life old Osmund Heleigh rides forth to defend the quarrel of Alianora of Provence. Reign wisely, my Queen, that

herafter men may not say I was slain in an evil cause. Do not shame my maiden venture."

"I will not shame you," the Queen proudly said; and then with a change of voice: "O my Osmund! my Osmund!"

He caught her by each wrist. "Hush!" he bade her, roughly; and stood crushing both her hands to his lips, with fierce staring. "Wife of my King! wife of my King!" he babbled; and then flung her from him, crying with a great lift of speech: "I have not failed you! Praise God, I have not failed you!"

From her window she saw him ride away, a rich flush of glitter and color. In new armor with a smart emblazoned surcoat the lean pedant sat conspicuously erect, though by this the fear of death had gripped him to the marrow; and as he went he sang defiantly, taunting the weakness of his flesh.

Sang Osmund Heleigh:

"Love sows, and lovers reap; and ye will see
The loved eyes lighten, feel the loved lips cling
Never again when in the grave ye be
Incurious of your happiness in Spring,
And yet no grace of Love there, whither he
That bartered life for love no love may bring."

So he rode away and thus out of our history. But in the evening Gui Camoys came into Bristol under a flag of truce, and behind him a litter wherein lay Osmund Heleigh's body.

"For the man was a brave one," Camoys said to the Queen, "and in the matter of the reparation he owed me acted very handsomely. It is fitting that he should have honorable interment."

"That he shall not lack," the Queen said, and gently unclasped from Osmund's neck the thin gold chain, now locketless. "There was a portrait here," she said,— "the portrait of a woman that he loved in his youth, Messire Camoys. And all his life it lay above his heart."

Camoys answered stiffly: "I imagine that to have been the object which Messire Heleigh flung into the river shortly before we began our combat. I do not rob the dead, madame."

"That was very like him," the Queen said. "Messire Camoys, I think that this day is a festival in heaven."

Afterward she set to work on requisitions in the King's name. But Osmund Heleigh she had interred at Ambresbury, commanding it to be written on his tomb that he died in the Queen's cause.

How the same cause prospered (Nicolas concludes), how presently Dame Alianora reigned again in England and with what wisdom, and how in the end this great Queen died a nun at Ambresbury and all England wept therefor,—this you may learn elsewhere. I have chosen to record six days of a long and eventful life; and (as Messire Heleigh might have done) I say modestly with him of old, *Majores majora sonent*. Nevertheless I assert that many a forest was once a pocketful of acorns.

Song for Music

BY ROSE CARY NOBLE

LOVE is the wind: my heart is the fallen leaf;
Love is the measure: mine are the failing feet;
Yet must I dance in time with its throbbing beat,
Yet am I blown about in the woods of Grief.

Mad though the dance, unstirred and serene you move,
Wild though the wind, you flower secure and sweet—
Love is the music: mine are the failing feet,
I am the whirling leaf, for the wind is Love.