

BELHS CAVALIERS

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

"For this RAIMBAUT DE VAQUIERAS lived at a time when prolonged habits of extramundane contemplation, combined with the decay of real knowledge, were apt to volatilize the thoughts and aspirations of the best and wisest into dreamy unrealities, and to lend a false air of mysticism to love. . . . It is as if the intellect and the will had become used to moving paralytically among visions, dreams and mystic terrors, weighed down with torpor."

YOU may read elsewhere of the long feud that was between Guillaume de Baux, afterward Prince of Orange, and his kinsman Raimbaut de Vaquieras. They were not reconciled until their youth was dead. Then, when Messire Raimbaut returned from battling against the Turks and the Bulgarians, in the 1,210th year from man's salvation, the Archbishop of Rheims made peace between the two cousins; and, attended by Makrisi, a converted Saracen who had followed the knight's fortunes for well-nigh a quarter of a century, the Sire de Vaquieras rode homeward.

Many slain men were scattered along the highway when he came again into Venaissin, in April, after an absence of thirty years. The crows whom his passing disturbed were too sluggish for long flights and many of them did not heed him at all. Guillaume de Baux was now undisputed master of these parts, although, as this host of mute, hacked and partially devoured witnesses attested, the contest had been dubious for a while: but now Lovain of the Great-Tooth, Prince Guillaume's last competitor, was captured; the forces of Lovain were scattered; and of Lovain's lieutenants only Mahi de Vernoi was unsubdued.

Prince Guillaume laughed a little when he told his kinsman of the posture of affairs, as more loudly did Guillaume's gross son, Sire Phil-

bert. But Madona Biatritz did not laugh at all. She was the widow of Guillaume's dead brother—Prince Conrat, whom Guillaume succeeded—and it was in her honor that Raimbaut had made those songs which won him eminence as a practitioner of the Gay Science.

Biatritz said, "It is a long while since we two met."

He that had been her lover all his life said, "Yes."

She was no longer the most beautiful of women, no longer his be-hymned Belhs Cavaliers—you may read elsewhere how he came to call her that in all his canzons—but only a fine and gracious stranger. It was uniformly gray, that soft and plentiful hair, where once such gold had flamed as dizzied him to think of even now; there was no crimson in these thinner lips; and candor would have found her eyes less wonderful than those Raimbaut had dreamed of very often among an alien and hostile people. But he lamented nothing, and to him she was as ever Heaven's most splendid miracle.

"Yes," said this old Raimbaut—"and even to-day we have not reclaimed the Sepulcher as yet. Oh, I doubt if we shall ever win it, now that your brother and my most dear lord is dead." Both thought a while of Boniface de Montferrat, their playmate once, who yesterday was King of Thessalonica and now was so much dust.

She said: "This week the Prince sent envoys to my nephew . . . And so you have come home again—" Color had surged into her timeworn face, and as she thought of things done long ago this woman's eyes were like the eyes of his young Biatritz. She said: "You never married?"

He answered: "No, I have left Love alone. For Love prefers to take rather than to give; against a single happy hour he balances a hundred miseries, and he appraises one pleasure to be worth a thousand pangs. Pardieu, let this immortal usurer contrive as may seem well to him, for I desire no more of his bounty or of his penalties."

"No, we wish nothing either good or bad," said Dona Biatritz—"we who have done with loving."

They sat in silence, musing over ancient happenings, and not looking at each other, until the Prince came with his guests.

Guillaume's frail arm was about his kinsman, and Guillaume chuckled over jests and by-words that had been between the cousins as children. Raimbaut found them no food for laughter now. Guillaume told all of Raimbaut's oath of fealty, and of how these two were friends and their unnatural feud was forgotten. "For we grow old—eh, maker of songs?" he said; "and it is time we made our peace with Heaven, since we are not long for this world."

"Yes," said the knight; "oh yes, we both grow old." He thought of another April evening, so long ago, when this Guillaume de Baux had stabbed him in a hedged field near Calais, and had left him under a hawthorn bush for dead, and Raimbaut wondered that there was no anger in his heart. "We are friends now," he said. Biatritz, whom these two had loved, sat close to them, and hardly seemed to listen.

Thus the evening passed and everyone was merry, because the Prince had overcome Lovain of the Great-Tooth, and was to punish the upstart on the morrow. But Raimbaut de Vaquieras, a spent fellow, a derelict, barren of aim now that the Holy Wars were over, sat in this unfamiliar place—where when he was young he had laughed as a cock crows!—and thought how at the last he had crept home to die as a dependant on his cousin's bounty.

Thus the evening passed, and at its end Makrisi followed the troubadour to his regranted fief of Vaquieras. This was a chill and brilliant night, swayed by a frozen moon so powerful that no stars shone in the unclouded heavens, and everywhere the bogs were curdled with thin ice. An obdurate wind swept like a knife-blade across a world which even in its spring seemed very old.

"This night is bleak and evil," Makrisi said. He rode a coffin's length behind his master. "It is like Prince Guillaume, I think. What man will sorrow when dawn comes?"

Raimbaut de Vaquieras replied: "Always dawn comes at last, Makrisi."

"It comes the more quickly, mes-sire, when it is prompted."

The troubadour only smiled at this quip. He did not smile when later in the night Makrisi brought Mahi de Vernoil, disguised as a Franciscan. This outlaw pleaded with Sire Raimbaut to head the tatters of Lovain's army, and showed Raimbaut how easy it would be to wrest Venaissin from Prince Guillaume. "We cannot save Lovain," de Vernoil said, "for Guillaume has him fast. But Venaissin is very proud of you, my *très beau sire*. Ho, maker of world-famous songs! stout champion of the faith! my men and I will now make you Prince of Orange in place

of the fiend that rules us. You may then at your convenience wed Madonna Biatritz, that most amiable lady whom you have loved so long. And by the Cross! you may do this before the week is out."

The old knight answered: "It is true that I have always served Madonna Biatritz, who is of matchless worth. I might not, therefore, presume to call myself any longer her servant were my honor stained in any particular. Oh no, Messire de Vernoil, an oath is an oath. I have this day sworn fealty to Guillaume de Baux."

Then after other talk Raimbaut dismissed the fierce-eyed little man. The freebooter growled curses as he went. On a sudden he whistled, like a person considering, and he began to chuckle.

Raimbaut said, more lately: "Zoraida left no wholesome legacy in you, Makrisi." This Zoraida was a woman the knight had known in Constantinople—a comely outlander who had killed herself because of Sire Raimbaut's aversion to all women except the mistress of his youth.

"Nay, save only in loving you too well, messire, was Zoraida a wise woman, notably . . . But this is musty. As matters were, you did not love Zoraida. So Zoraida died. Such is the custom in my country."

"You trouble me, Makrisi. Your eyes are like blown coals . . . Yet you have served me long and faithfully. You know that mine was ever the vocation of dealing honorably in battle among emperors, and of spreading broadcast the rumor of my valor, and of achieving good by my sword's labors. I have lived by warfare. Long, long ago, since I derived no benefit from love, I cried farewell to it."

"Ay," said Makrisi. "Love makes a demi-god of all—just for an hour. Such hours as follow we devote to

the concoction of sleeping-draughts." He laughed, and very harshly.

And Raimbaut did not sleep that night because this life of ours seemed such a piece of tanglework as he had not the skill to unravel. So he devoted the wakeful hours to composition of a *planh*, lamenting vanished youth and that Biatritz whom the years had stolen.

Then on the ensuing morning, after some talk about the new campaign, Prince Guillaume de Baux leaned back in his high chair and said, abruptly:

"In perfect candor, you puzzle your liege-lord. For you loathe me and you still worship my sister-in-law, an unattainable princess. In these two particulars you display such wisdom as would inevitably prompt you to make an end of me. Yet, what the devil! you, a penniless fellow, decline happiness and a kingdom to boot because of yesterday's mummerly in the cathedral! because of a mere promise given! Yes, I have my spies in every rat-hole. I am aware that my barons hate me, and hate Philibert almost as bitterly—and that, in fine, a majority of my barons would prefer to see you Prince in my unstable place on account of your praiseworthy molestations of heathenry. Oh, yes, I understand my barons perfectly. I flatter myself I understand everybody in Venaissin save you."

Raimbaut answered: "You and I are not alike."

"No, praise each and every Saint!" said the Prince of Orange, heartily. "And yet, I am not sure—" He rose, for his sight had failed him so that he could not distinctly see you except when he spoke with head thrown back, as though he looked at you over a wall. "For instance, do you understand that I hold Biatritz here as a prisoner, because her dower-lands are necessary to me, and

that I intend to marry her as soon as the Pope grants me a dispensation?"

"All Venaissin knows that. Yes, you have always gained everything which you desired in this world, Guillaume. Yet it was at a price, I think."

"I am no haggler . . . But you have never comprehended me, not even in the old days when we loved each other. For instance, do you understand—slave of a spoken word!—what it must mean to me to know that at this hour to-morrow there will be alive in Venaissin no person whom I hate?"

Messire de Vaquieras reflected. His was never a rapid mind. "Why, no, I do not know anything about hatred," he said, at last. "I think I never hated any person."

Guillaume de Baux gave a half-frantic gesture. "Now, Heaven send you troubadours a clearer understanding of what sort of world we live in—!" He broke off short and growled, "And yet—sometimes I envy you, Raimbaut!"

They rode then into the Square of St. Michel to witness the death of Lovain. Guillaume took with him his two new mistresses and all his by-blows, each magnificently clothed, as if they rode to a festival. Afterward, before the doors of Lovain's burning house, a rope was fastened under Lovain's armpits, and he was gently lowered into a pot of boiling oil. His feet cooked first, and then the flesh of his legs, and so on upward, while the champion screamed. Guillaume, in a loose robe of green powdered with innumerable silver crescents, sat watching, under a canopy woven very long ago in Tarshish, and cunningly embroidered with the figures of peacocks and apes and men with eagles' heads. His hands caressed each other meditatively.

It was on the afternoon of this

day, the last of April, that Sire Raimbaut came upon Madona Biatritz about a strange employment in the Ladies' Court. There was then a well in the midst of this enclosure, with a granite ledge around it carven with lilies; and upon this she leaned, looking down into the water. In her lap was a rope of pearls, which one by one she unthreaded and dropped into the well.

Clear and warm the weather was. Without, forests were quickening, branch by branch, as though a green flame smoldered from one bough to another. Violets peeped about the roots of trees, and all the world was young again. But here was only stone beneath their feet; and about them showed the high walls and the lead-sheathed towers and the parapets and the sunk windows of Guillaume's château. There was no color anywhere save gray; and Raimbaut and Biatritz were aging people now. It seemed to him that they were the wraiths of those persons who had loved each other at Montferrat; and that the walls about them and the leaden devils who grinned from every waterspout and all those dark and narrow windows were only part of some magic picture, such as a sorceress may momentarily summon out of smoke-wreaths, as he had seen Zoraida do very long ago.

This woman might have been a wraith in verity, for she was clothed throughout in white, save for the ponderous gold girdle about her middle. A white gorget framed the face which was so pinched and shrewd and strange; and she peered into the well, smiling craftily.

"I was thinking death was like this well," said Biatritz, without any cessation of her singular employment—"so dark that we may see nothing clearly save one faint gleam which shows us, or which seems to show us, where rest is. Yes, yes, this is

that chaplet which you won in the tournament at Montferrat when we were young. Pearls are the symbol of tears, we read. But we had no time for reading then, no time for anything except to be quite happy . . . You saw this morning's work. Raimbaut, were Satan to go mad he would be such a fiend as this Guillaume de Baux who is our master!"

"Ay, the man is as cruel as my old opponent, Mourzoufle," Sire Raimbaut answered, with a patient shrug. "It is a great mystery why such persons should win all which they desire of this world. We can but recognize that it is for some sufficient reason." Then he talked with her concerning that infamous emperor of the East, against whom the old knight had fought, and of Enrico Dandolo and of King Boniface, dead brother to Madona Biatritz, and of much remote, outlandish adventuring oversea. Of Zoraida he did not speak. And Biatritz, in turn, told him of that one child which she had borne her husband, Prince Conrat—a son who died in infancy—and she spoke of this dead baby, who living would have been their monarch, with a sweet quietude that wrung the old knight's heart.

Thus these spent people sat and talked for a long while, the talk veering anywhither just as chance directed. Blurred gusts of song and laughter would come to them at times from the hall where Guillaume de Baux drank with his courtiers, and these would break the tranquil flow of speech. Then, unvexedly, the gentle voice of the speaker, were it his or hers, would resume.

She said: "They laugh. We are not merry."

"No," he replied, "I am not often merry. There was a time when love and its service kept me in continuous joy, as waters invest a fish. I woke

from a high dream . . . And then, but for the fear of seeming cowardly, I would have extinguished my life as men blow out a candle. Vanity preserved me, sheer vanity!" He shrugged, spreading his hard, lean hands. "Belhs Cavaliers, I grudged my enemies the pleasure of seeing me forgetful of valor and noble enterprises. And so, since then, I have served Heaven, in default of you."

"I would not have it otherwise," she said, half as in wonder; "I would not have you be quite sane like other men. And I beseech you still to serve—I who was once your sovereign lady."

"Once!" he returned; and he laughed.

Thus the afternoon passed, and the rule of Prince Guillaume was made secure. His supper was worthily appointed, for Guillaume loved color and music and beauty of every kind, and was on this, the day of his triumph, in a prodigal humor. Many lackeys in scarlet brought in the first course, to the sound of exultant drums and pipes, with a blast of trumpets and a waving of banners, so that all hearts were uplifted, and Guillaume jested with harsh laughter.

But Raimbaut de Vaquieras was not mirthful, for he was remembering a boy whom he had known of very long ago. He was swayed by an odd fancy, as the men sat over their wine, and jongleurs sang and performed tricks for their diversion, that this boy, so frank and excellent, as yet existed somewhere, and that the Raimbaut who moved these shrivelled hands before him, on the table there, was only a sad dream of what had never been. It troubled him, too, to see how grossly these soldiers ate, for, as a person of refinement, an associate of monarchs, Sire Raimbaut picked up his meats

between the index and the middle-finger of his left hand, and esteemed it infamous manners to dip any other fingers into the gravy.

Guillaume had left the Warriors' Hall. Philibert was drunk, and half the men-at-arms were snoring among the rushes, when at the height of their festivity Makrisi came. He plucked his master by the sleeve.

A swarthy, bearded Angevin was singing. His song was one of old Sire Raimbaut's famous canzons in honor of Belhs Cavaliers. The knave was singing blithely:

*Puys mos Belhs Cavaliers gratis
E joys m'es lunhats e faidits,
Don no m' venra jamais conorts:
Fer qu' es mayer l'ira e plus forts—*

The Saracen had said nothing. He showed a jeweled dagger, and the knight arose and followed him out of that uproarious hall. Raimbaut was bitterly perturbed, though he did not know for what reason, as Makrisi led him through dark corridors to the dull-gleaming arras of Prince Guillaume's apartments. In this corridor was an iron lamp swung from the ceiling, and now, as this lamp swayed slightly and burned low, the tiny flame leaped clear of the wick and was extinguished, and darkness rose about them.

Raimbaut said: "What do you want of me? Whose blood is on that knife?"

"Have you forgotten it is Walburga's Eve?" Makrisi said. Raimbaut did not regret he could not see his servant's countenance. "Time was we named it otherwise and praised another woman than a Saxon wench, but let the new name stand. It is Walburga's Eve, that little, little hour of evil! and all over the world surges the full tide of hell's desire, and mischief is a-making now, apace, apace, apace. People moan in their

sleep, and many pillows are pricked by needles that have sewed a shroud. Cry *Eman hetan* now, messire! for there are those to-night who find the big cathedrals of your red-roofed Christian towns no more imposing than so many pimples on a butler's chin, because they ride so high, so very high, in this brave moonlight. Full-tide, full-tide!" Makrisi said, and his voice jangled like a bell as he drew aside the curtain so that the old knight saw into the room beyond.

It was a place of many lights, and the vision of it blinded him at first. Then Raimbaut perceived Guillaume lying a-sprawl across an oaken chest. The Prince had fallen backward and lay in this posture, glaring at the intruders with horrible eyes which did not move and would not ever move again. His breast was crimson, for someone had stabbed him. A woman stood above the corpse and lighted yet another candle while Raimbaut de Vaquieras waited motionless. A hand meant only to bestow caresses brushed a lock of hair from this woman's eyes while he waited. The movements of this hand were not uncertain, but only quivered somewhat, as a taut wire shivers in the wind, while Raimbaut de Vaquieras waited motionless.

"I must have lights, I must have a host of candles to assure me past any questioning that he is dead. The man is of deep cunning. I think he is not dead even now." Lightly Biatritz touched the Prince's breast. "Strange, that this wicked heart should be so tranquil when there is murder here to make it glad! Nay, very certainly this Guillaume de Baux will rise and laugh before he speaks, and then I shall be afraid. But I am not afraid as yet. I am afraid of nothing save the dark, for one cannot be merry in the dark."

Raimbaut said: "This is Belhs Cavaliers whom I have loved my

whole life through. Therefore I do not doubt. Pardieu. I do not even doubt, who know she is of matchless worth."

"Wherein have I done wrong, Raimbaut?" She came to him with fluttering hands. "Why, but look you, the man had laid an ambush in the marsh, and he meant to kill you there to-night as you rode for Vaquieras. He told me of it, told me how it was for that end alone he lured you into Venaissin—" Again she brushed the hair back from her forehead. "Raimbaut, I spoke of God and knightly honor, and the man laughed. No, I think it was a fiend who sat so long beside the window yonder, whence one may see the marsh. There were no candles in the room. The moonlight was upon his evil face, and I could think of nothing, of nothing that has been since Adam's time, except our youth, Raimbaut. And he smiled all the while, because my misery amused him. Only, when I tried to go to you to warn you, he leaped up stiffly, making a mewling noise. He caught me by the throat so that I could not scream. Then while we struggled in the moonlight your Makrisi came and stabbed him—"

"Nay, I but fetched this knife, messire." Makrisi seemed to love that bloodied knife.

Biatritz proudly said: "The man lies, Raimbaut."

"What need to tell me that, Belhs Cavaliers?"

And the Saracen shrugged. "It is very true I lie," he said. "As among friends, I may confess I killed the Prince. But for the rest, I mean to lie intrepidly."

Raimbaut remembered how his mother had given each of two lads an apple, and he had clamored for Guillaume's, as children do, and Guillaume had changed with him. It was a trivial happening to remember

after fifty years; but Guillaume was dead, and this hacked flesh was Raimbaut's flesh in part, and the thought of Raimbaut would never trouble Guillaume de Baux any more. In addition there was a fire of juniper wood and frankincense upon the hearth, and the room smelt too cloyingly of be-drugging sweetness. Then on the walls were tapestries which depicted Merlin's Dream, so that everywhere recoiling women smiled with bold eyes; and here their wantonness seemed out of place.

"Listen," Makrisi was saying; "listen, for the hour strikes. At last, at last!" he cried, with a shrill whine of malice.

Raimbaut said, dully: "Oh, I do not understand—"

"And yet Zoraida loved you once! Loved you as people love where I was born!" The Saracen's voice had altered. His speech was like the rustle of papers. "You did not love Zoraida. And so it came about that upon Walburga's Eve, at midnight, Zoraida hanged herself beside your doorway. Thus we love where I was born. . . . And I, I cut the rope—with my left hand. I had my other arm about that frozen thing which yesterday had been Zoraida, you understand, so that it might not fall. And in the act a tear dropped from that dead woman's cheek and wetted my forehead. Ice is not so cold as that tear was . . . Ho, that tear did not fall upon my forehead but on my heart, because I loved that dancing-girl, Zoraida, as you do this princess here. I think you will understand," Makrisi said, calmly as one who states a maxim.

The Sire de Vaquieras replied, in the same tone: "I understand. You have contrived my death?"

"Ey, messire, would that be adequate? I could have managed that any hour within the last score of years. Oh no! for I have studied

you carefully. Oh no! instead, I have contrived this plight. For the Prince of Orange is manifestly murdered. Who killed him?—why, Madona Biatritz, and none other, for I will swear to it. I, I will swear to it, who saw it done. Afterward both you and I must be questioned upon the rack, as possibly concerned in the affair, and whether innocent or guilty we must die very horribly. Such is the custom in your Christian country when a prince is murdered. That is not the point of the jest, however. For first Sire Philibert will put this woman to the torture until she confesses her confederates, until she confesses that every baron whom Philibert distrusts was one of them. Oh yes, assuredly they will thrust a hollow cane into the mouth of your Biatritz, and they will pour water a little by a little through this cane, until she confesses what they desire. Ha, Philibert will see to this confession! And through this woman's torment he will rid himself of every dangerous foe he has in Venaisin. You must stand by and wait your turn. You must stand by and see this done—you, you, my master!—you, who love this woman as I loved that dead Zoraida who was not fair enough to please you!"

Raimbaut, trapped, impotent, cried out: "This is not possible—" And for all that, he knew the Saracen to be foretelling the inevitable.

Makrisi went on, quietly: "After the Question men will parade her, naked to the middle, through all Orange, until they reach the Market-place, where will be four horses. One of these horses they will harness to each arm and leg of your Biatritz. Then they will beat these horses. These will be strong horses. They will each run in a different direction."

This infamy also was certain. Raimbaut foresaw what he must do.

He clutched the dagger which Makrisi fondled. "Belhs Cavaliers, this fellow speaks the truth. Look now, the moon is old—Is it not strange to know it will outlive us?"

And Biatritz came close to Sire Raimbaut and said: "I understand. If I leave this room alive it will purchase a hideous suffering for my poor body, it will bring about the ruin of many brave and innocent chevaliers. I know. I would perforce confess all that the masked men bade me. I know, for in Prince Conrat's time I have seen persons who had been put to the Question—" She shuddered; and she re-began, without any agitation: "Give me the knife, Raimbaut."

"Pardieu! but I may not obey you for this once," he answered, "since we are informed by those in holy orders that all such as lay violent hands upon themselves must suffer eternally." Then, kneeling he cried, in an extremity of adoration: "Oh, I have served you all my life. You may not now deny me this last service. And while I talk they dig your grave! O blind men, making the new grave, take heed lest that grave be too narrow, for already my heart is breaking in my body. I have drunk too deep of sorrow. And yet I may not fail you, now that honor and mercy and my love for you demand I kill you before I also die—in such a fashion as this fellow speaks of."

She did not dispute this. How could she when it was an axiom in all Courts of Love that Heaven held dominion in a lover's heart only as an underling of the man's mistress?

And so she said, with a fond smile: "It is your demonstrable privilege. I would not grant it, dear, were my weak hands as clean as yours. Oh, but it is long you have loved me, and it is faithfully you have served Heaven, and my heart, too, is break-

ing in my body now that your service ends!"

And he demanded, wearily: "When we were boy and girl together what had we said if anyone had told us this would be the end?"

"We would have laughed. It is a long while since those children laughed at Montferrat . . . Not yet, not yet!" she said. "Ah, pity me, tried champion, for even now I am almost afraid to die."

She leaned against the window yonder, shuddering, staring into the night. Dawn had purged the east of stars. Day was at hand, the day whose noon she might not hope to witness. She noted this incuriously. Biatritz came to him, more proud than victory.

"See, now, Raimbaut! because I have loved you as I have loved nothing else in life, I will not be unworthy of your love. Strike and have done."

Raimbaut de Vaquieras raised an already bloodied dagger. As emotion goes, he was bankrupt. He had no longer any dread of hell, because he thought that, a little later, nothing its shrewdest overseer could plan would have the power to vex him. She, waiting, smiled. Makrisi, seated, stretched his legs, put fingertips together with the air of an attendant amateur. This was better than he had hoped. In such a posture they heard a bustle of armored men, and when all turned, saw how a sword protruded through the arras.

"Come out, Guillaume!" people were shouting. "Unkennel, dog! Out, out, and die!" To such a heralding Mahi de Vernoil came into the room with mincing steps such as the man affected in an hour of peril. He first saw what a grisly burden the chest sustained. "Now, by the Face!" he cried, "if he that cheated me of quieting this filth should prove to be of gentle birth I will demand of him a duel to the death!" The

curtains were ripped from their hangings as he spoke, and behind him the candlelight was reflected by the armor of many followers.

Then de Vernoil perceived Raimbaut de Vaquieras, and the spruce little man bowed ceremoniously. All were still. Composedly, like a lieutenant before his captain, Mahi narrated how these hunted remnants of Lovain's army had, as a last cast, that night invaded the château, and had found, thanks to the festival, its men-at-arms in uniform and inefficient drunkenness. "My *très beau sire*," Messire de Vernoil ended, "will you or nill you, Venaissin is yours this morning. We have slain Philibert and his bewildered fellow-tiplers with less effort than is needed to drown as many kittens."

And his followers cried, as upon a signal: "Hail, Prince of Orange!"

It was so like the wonder-working of a dream—this sudden and heroic uproar—that old Raimbaut de Vaquieras stood reeling, almost intimate with fear for the first time. He waited thus, with both hands pressed before his eyes. He waited thus for a long while, because he was not used to find chance dealing kindly with him. Later he saw that Makrisi had vanished in the tumult, and that many people awaited his speaking.

The lord of Venaissin began: "You have done me a great service, Messire de Vernoil. As recompense, I give you what I may. I freely yield you all my right in Venaissin. Oh no, kingcraft is not for me. I daily see and hear of battles won, cities beleaguered, high towers overthrown, and ancient citadels and new walls leveled with the dust. I have conversed with many kings, the directors of these events, and they were not happy people. Yes, yes, I have witnessed divers happenings, for I am old . . . I have found

nothing which can serve me in place of honor."

He turned to Dona Biatritz. It was as if they were alone. "Belhs Cavaliers," he said, "I had sworn fealty to this Guillaume. He violated his obligations; but that did not free me of mine. An oath is an oath. I was, and am to-day, sworn to support his cause, and to profit in any fashion by its overthrow would be an abominable action. Nay, more, were any of his adherents alive it would be my manifest duty to join them against our preserver, Messire de Vernoil. This necessity is very happily spared me. I cannot, though, in honor hold any fief under the supplanter of my liege-lord. I must, therefore, relinquish Vaquieras and take eternal leave of Venaissin. I will not lose the right to call myself your servant!" he cried out—"and that which is noblest in the world must be served fittingly. And so, Belhs Cavaliers, let us touch palms and bid farewell, and never in this life speak face to face of those blithe happenings which we alone remember. For naked of lands and gear I came to you—a prince's daughter—very long ago, and as nakedly I now depart, so that I may retain the right

to say, 'All my life long I served my love of her according to my abilities, whole-heartedly and with clean hands.'"

"Yes, yes! you must depart from Venaissin," said Dona Biatritz. A capable woman, she had no sympathy with his exquisite points of honor, and yet loved him all the more because of what seemed to her his surpassing folly. She smiled, somewhat as mothers do in humoring an unreasonable boy. "We will go to my nephew's court at Montferrat," she said. "He will willingly provide for his old aunt and her husband. And you may still make verses—at Montferrat, where we lived verses, once, Raimbaut."

Now they gazed full upon each other. Thus they stayed, transfigured, neither seeming old. Each had forgotten that unhappiness existed anywhere in the whole world. The armored, blood-stained men about them were of no more importance than were those wantons in the tapestry. Without, dawn throbbed in heaven. Without, innumerable birds were raising that glad, piercing, hurried morning-song which very anciently caused Adam's primal waking, to behold his mate.

Here ends the tale of Belhs Cavaliers and Raimbaut de Vaquieras and of the love they bore one another; we shall not read of them again. But that other men have possessed that strange temper which made Raimbaut unlike his fellows we know. And it is of such an one, with heart as noble and fine as his, that we shall read next month in the second story of this series, "Judith's Creed." It is a story of a different land and a different time; of one who was great and could be small; but that he showed less wisdom in the one quality than in the other, who can say?

