

# The Conspiracy of Arnaye

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

## I

“AND so,” said the Sieur d’Arnaye, as he laid down the letter, “we may look for the coming of Monsieur de Puyange to-morrow.”

The Demoiselle Matthiette contorted her dainty features in a comic expression of disapproval. “So soon!” said she. “I had thought—”

“Eh, my dear niece, Love rides with a bloody spur, and curbs his fantasies no more than in the day when Mars was taken in a net and amorous Jove bel-lowed in Europa’s kail-yard. My faith! if he distemper thus the thin, spectral ichor of the gods, what wonder that the blood of man leap somewhat strangely at his bidding? It were the least of his miracles that a lusty bridegroom of some twenty-and-odd outstrip the dial by a scant week. For love—I might tell you such tales—”

Sieur Raymond crossed his white, dimpled hands over a well-rounded paunch and chuckled reminiscently; then, remembering to whom he spoke, his lean face suddenly took on an expression of placid sanctity, and the somewhat unholy flame died out of his green eyes. He resembled nothing so much as a plethoric, well-fed cat purring over the follies of kittenhood. One could have taken oath that a cultured taste for good living was the chief of his offences, and that this benevolent gentleman had some sixty well-spent years to his credit. True, his late Majesty, King Louis XI., had sworn *Pacque Dieu!* that d’Arnaye conspired with his gardener concerning the planting of cabbages, and within a week after his death would head an uprising against Lucifer; but kings are not always infallible, as his Majesty himself had proved at Peronne.

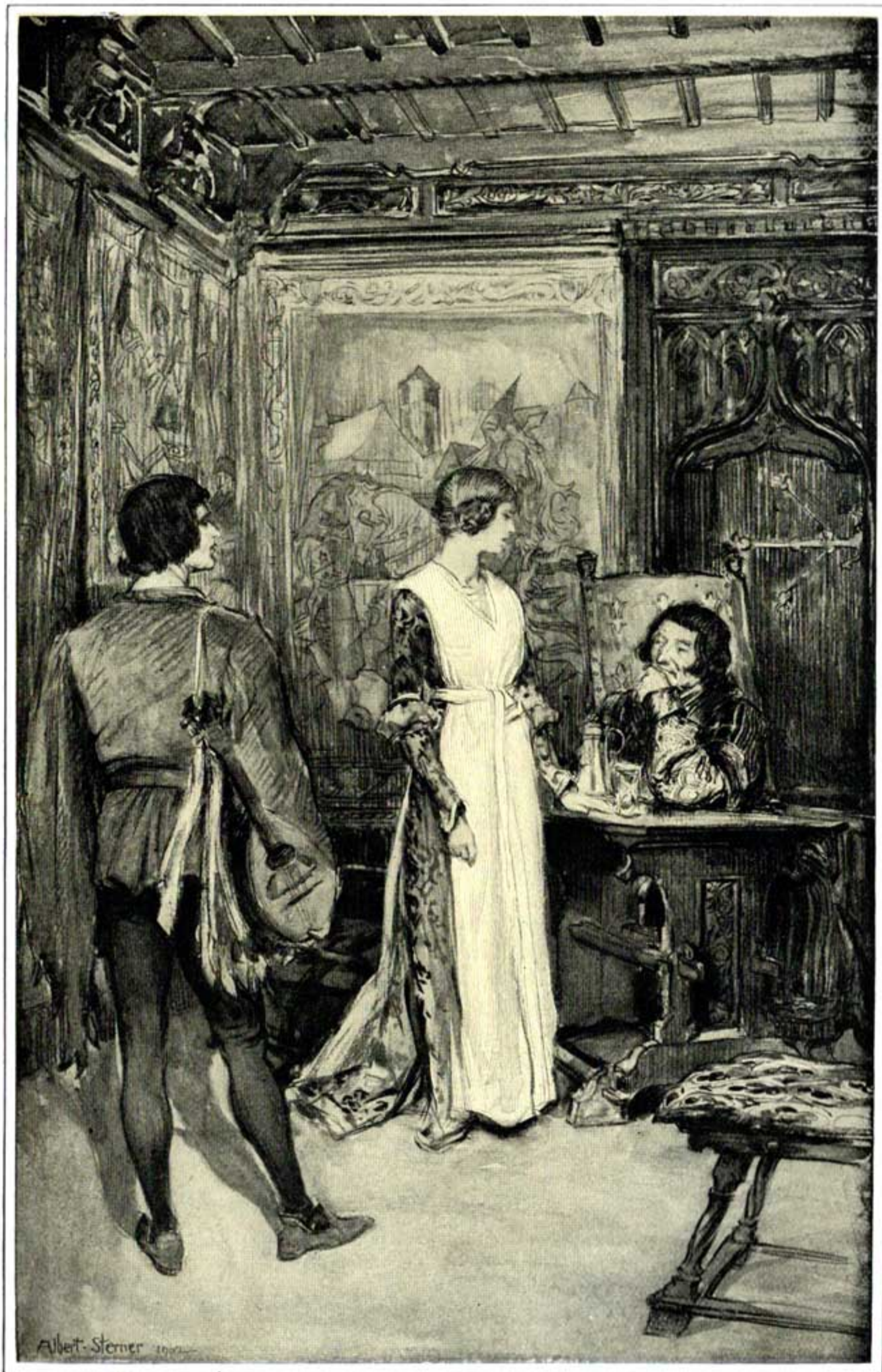
“For,” said the Sieur d’Arnaye, “man’s flesh is frail, and the devil is very cunning to avail himself of the weakness of lovers.”

“Love!” cried Matthiette. “There can be no pretence of love ’twixt Monsieur de Puyange and me! A man that I have never seen, that is to wed me of pure policy, may look for no Alcestis in his wife.”

“Tut!” quoth Sieur Raymond, complacently. “So that he find her no Guinevere or Semiramis or other loose-minded trollop of history, I dare say Monsieur de Puyange will hold to his bargain with indifferent content. Look you, niece, he buys—the saying is somewhat rustic—a pig in a poke as well as you.”

Matthiette glanced quickly toward the mirror which hung in her apartment. It reflected features that went to make up a beauty already famous in that part of France; and if her green gown was some months behind the last Italian fashion, it undeniably clad one who needed few adventitious aids. The Demoiselle Matthiette at nineteen was very tall and somewhat too slender for perfection of form, but her honey-colored hair hung heavily about the perfect oval of a face whose nose alone left something to be desired; for this feature, though well formed, was unduly diminutive. For the rest, her mouth curved in an irreproachable bow, her complexion was mingled milk and roses, and her blue eyes brooded in a provoking calm; and altogether, the smile that followed her inspection of the mirror’s depths was not unwarranted.

Sieur Raymond laughed wheezily, as one discovering a fault in his companion of which he disapproves theoretically, but yet finds flattering to his vanity. “Eh,” said he, “I grant you, he drives a good bargain. Were Cleopatra thus featured, the Roman lost the world very worthily. Yet, such is the mad humor of man that I doubt not he looks forward to the joys of to-morrow with much the same calm self-restraint that you now exercise; for the lad is young, and, as rumor says, has been guilty of divers verses—ay, he has



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THE YOUNG MAN HESITATED FOR AN INSTANT

bearded common sense in the next periods of many a wailing rhyme. But, I warrant you, niece, he, like any man, keeps these whimsies of loves and doves laid away in lavender for feast-days and the like; they are somewhat fine for every-day wear."

Matthiette stirred uneasily. "Is love, then, nothing?" she murmured.

"Love!" Sieur Raymond barked like a kicked dog. "It is very discreetly fabled that love was born of the mists at Cytherea. Thus, look you, even ballad-mongers admit it comes of a short-lived family, that fade as time wears on. I may have a passion for fogs, and, doubtless, the morning mist is very beautiful; but if I give rein to my admiration, breakfast is like to grow cold. And thus—bah! have done with this mooning after mists and look to your frying-pan! A niece of mine prating of love!" The idea of such an occurrence, combined with a fit of coughing which now came upon him, drew tears to the Sieur d'Arnaye's eyes. "Pardon me," said he, when he had recovered his breath, "if I speak somewhat brutally to maiden ears."

Matthiette sighed. "Indeed," said she, "you have spoken very brutally!" She rose from her seat, and went suddenly to the Sieur d'Arnaye. "Dear uncle," said she, with her arms about his neck, and her soft cheek brushing his withered countenance, "are you come to my apartment to-night to tell me that love is nothing—you who have fed me on love since I can remember—you who have shown me that even the roughest, most grizzled bear in all the world has a heart all made for love and tender as a woman's?"

The Sieur d'Arnaye snorted violently. "Her mother all over again!" said he, inconsequently. Then recovered himself. "Bah! I have sighed to every eyebrow at court, and I tell you this moonshine is—moonshine. I love you—you baggage!—too dearly to deceive you. We of gentle quality may not yield to each leaping pulse. I love you better than my heart's blood; but I love Arnaye as well. Arnaye and Puy-sange together may withstand the Armagnacs; Arnaye alone may not. Is it of greater import that a girl have her callow heart's desire than that a people go free of Monsieur War and Madame Rapine? Death yawps at the

frontier; will you, a d'Arnaye, bid him enter and surfeit his maw? An alliance with Puy-sange alone may save us. 'Tis, doubtless, pitiful that a maid may not wait and wed her chosen paladin, but our vassals demand these sacrifices. Think you I wedded my late wife in a Roland's humor? I had not seen her before our marriage morn; yet we lived much as most couples do for some ten years afterwards, thereby demonstrating—"

He smiled, evilly; Matthiette sighed.

"So," said he, "remember that Pierre must have his bread and cheese; that the cows must calve undisturbed; that the pigs—you have not seen the sow I had today from Harfleur?—black as ebony and a snout like a rose-leaf!—must be stied in comfort; and that these things may not be, without an alliance with Puy-sange. Besides, dear niece, it is something to be the wife of a great lord."

A certain excitement awoke in Matthiette's eyes. "It must be very beautiful at court," said she, softly. "Masques, fêtes, tourneys every day; and—and they say the King is very gallant—"

Sieur Raymond caught her roughly by the chin, and turned her face toward his for a moment. "I warn you," said he, hoarsely, "you are a d'Arnaye; and King or not—"

He paused suddenly as the voice of one singing without in the moonlit gardens stole through the open window.

"Eh?" said the Sieur d'Arnaye.

Sang the voice:

"When you are very old, and I am gone  
Out of your life, it may be you will  
say—  
Hearing my name and holding me as one  
Long dead to you—in some half-jesting  
way  
Of speech, sweet as the first, faint  
sound of May  
That wakens in the woods when throstles  
sing—  
*He loved me once.* And straightway mur-  
muring  
My half-forgotten rhymes, you will re-  
gret  
The vanished days when I was wont to  
sing,  
*Sweetheart, my sweet, we may be happy  
yet.*"

"Really," said the Sieur d'Arnaye, "one would think that the voice of Raoul, my new page."

"Hush" whispered Matthiette, softly.  
 "He woos my maid, Alys. He often  
 sings under the window, and—and I wink  
 at it."

Sang the voice:

"I shall not heed you then. My course be-  
 ing run  
 For good or ill, I shall have passed  
 away,  
 And know you, love, no longer—nor the  
 sun,  
 Perchance, nor any light of earthly day,  
 Nor any joy nor sorrow—while for aye  
 The world speeds on its course, unreckon-  
 ing  
 Our coming or our going. Lips will cling,  
 Forswear, and be forsaken, and men for-  
 get  
 Our names and places, and our children  
 sing,  
*Sweetheart, my sweet, we may be happy  
 yet.*

"We shall know better then. We shall have  
 done  
 With all the toil and turmoil of the  
 day;  
 And yet what profits it that we have won  
 The Secret of All Secrets, when we stray  
 No more together? Will this wisdom  
 lay  
 The ghost of any sweet familiar thing  
 Come haggard from the Past, or ever bring  
 Forgetfulness of those two lovers met  
 Within the springtide, nor too wise to  
 sing,  
*Sweetheart, my sweet, we may be happy  
 yet?*

"Yea, though the years of vain remembering  
 Draw nigh, and age be drear, yet in the  
 Spring  
 We meet and kiss. Ah, Lady Matthiette,  
 Dear love, there is yet time for garnering!  
*Sweetheart, my sweet, we may be happy  
 yet!"*

"Eh?" said the Sieur d'Arnaye, softly.  
 "You mentioned your maid's name?"  
 "Alys," said Matthiette, with un-  
 wonted humbleness.

"Tut, tut! Beyond doubt, the gallant  
 beneath has made some unfortunate er-  
 ror. Captain Gotiard," he called, loud-  
 ly, "will you ascertain who it is that  
 warbles in the gardens?"

## II

Gotiard was not long in returning; he  
 was followed by two men-at-arms, who

held between them the discomfited min-  
 strel. The latter was not ill-favored; his  
 close-fitting garb, wherein the brave reds  
 of autumn were judiciously mingled, at  
 once set off a well-knit form and en-  
 hanced the dark beauty of a counte-  
 nance less French than Italian in cast.  
 The young man stood silent for a mo-  
 ment, his black eyes mutely questioning  
 the Sieur d'Arnaye.

"Eh! so?" chirped Sieur Raymond.  
 "Captain, I think you are at liberty to  
 retire." He sipped his wine meditatively,  
 as the men filed out. "Monsieur Raoul,"  
 said he, sweetly, when the door was closed,  
 "I grieve to interrupt your very moving  
 and very excellently phrased ballad in  
 this fashion. But the hour is somewhat  
 late for melody, and the curiosity of old  
 age is privileged. May one inquire, there-  
 fore, why you warble my nightingales to  
 rest with this pleasing but somewhat ill-  
 timed madrigal?"

The young man hesitated for an in-  
 stant before replying. "Sir," said he at  
 length, "I confess that had I known of  
 your whereabouts, the birds had gone  
 without their lullaby. But you so rarely  
 come to this wing of the château, that  
 your presence here to-night is naturally  
 an unforeseen pleasure. Thus, since  
 chance has betrayed my secret to you, I  
 must make bold to confess it—'tis that I  
 love your niece."

"Surely," assented Sieur Raymond,  
 pleasantly. "Indeed, I think half the  
 young men hereabout are in much the  
 same predicament. But my question, if  
 I mistake not, related to your reason for  
 chanting canzonets beneath her window."

Raoul stared at him in amazement. "I  
 love her," said he.

"You mentioned that before," sug-  
 gested Sieur Raymond. "And why not?  
 She is by no means uncomely, has a low,  
 sweet voice, the walk of a Hebe, and  
 sufficient wit to deceive any man into  
 happiness. My faith, young man, you  
 show excellent taste! But, I submit, the  
 purest affection is an insufficient excuse  
 for outbaying a whole kennel of hounds  
 beneath the adored one's casement."

"Sir," said Raoul, "I believe that  
 lovers have rarely been remarkable for  
 sanity; and it has been an immemorial  
 custom among them to praise the object  
 of their love with fitting rhymes. Con-

ceive, sir, that in your youth, had you been accorded the love of so fair a lady, you had scarce done otherwise. For I doubt if your blood runs so thin as yet that you have quite forgot the young *Sieur Raymond* and the gracious ladies that he loved—I think that your heart needs yet treasure the memories of divers moonlit nights, even such as this, when there was a great silence in the world, and the nested trees were astir with desire of the dawn, and your waking dreams were vext with the glory of some woman's face. 'Tis in the name of that young *Raymond* that I appeal to you."

"H'm!" said the *Sieur d'Arnaye*. "As I understand it, you appeal on the ground that you were coerced by the trees and led astray by the nightingales; and you desire me to punish your accomplices rather than you."

"Sir,—" said *Raoul*.

"Tut, you young dog, you know that a poet lies buried in the breast of the most prosaic of us, and you make the most of the knowledge. And you know that I have a most sincere affection for your father, and have even contracted a liking for you, which emboldens you, forsooth, to keep me out of bed with this prattle of moonlight and nightingales. I am no lank wench in her first country dance, sirrah! There's not a seigneur in France save me but would hang you at the crack of that same dawn for which your lackadaisical trees are whining outside; but the quarrel will soon be *Monsieur de Puy-sange's*, and I prefer that he settle it. Meanwhile, allow me to request you to pester my niece no more."

*Raoul* spoke boldly. "She loves me," said he, standing very erect.

*Sieur Raymond* glanced at *Matthiette*, who sat with downcast head. "H'm!" said he, dryly. "She moderates her transports indifferently well. Though, again, why not? You are not an ill-looking lad. Indeed, *Monsieur Raoul*, I am quite ready to admit that my niece is breaking her heart for you. The point on which I dwell is that she weds *Monsieur de Puy-sange* to-morrow."

"Uncle," cried *Matthiette*, starting to her feet, "such a marriage is a crime! I love *Raoul*—*Raoul*; do you hear?"

"Undoubtedly," purred *Sieur Ray-*

*mond*,—"unboundedly, madly, distractedly!" He sank back in his chair and smiled. "Young people," said he, "be seated, and hearken to the words of wisdom. Love is a divine insanity, in which the sufferer fancies the world mad. And this great world is made up of these madmen, who condemn and punish one another."

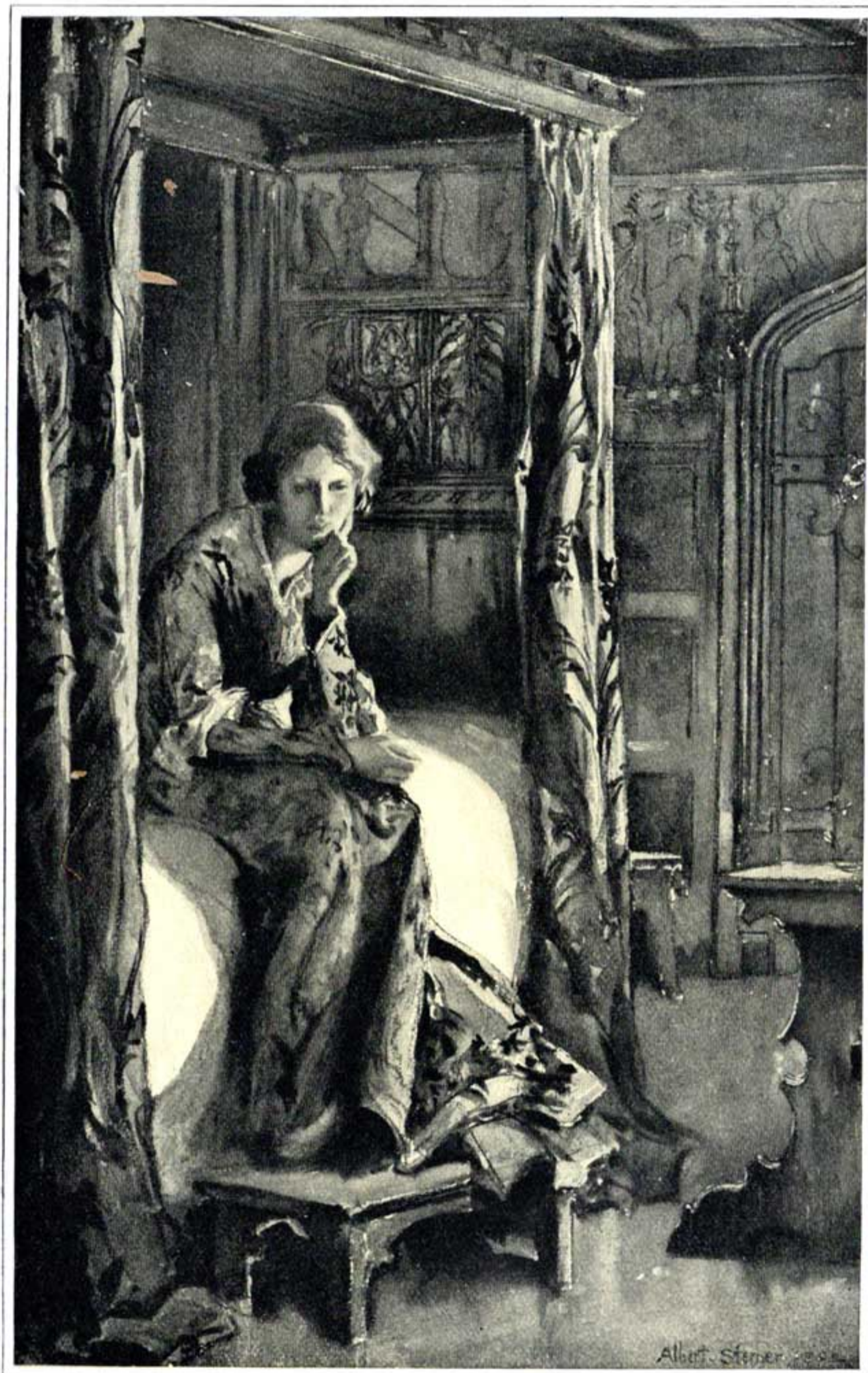
"But," cried *Matthiette*, "ours is no ordinary case!"

"Surely not," assented *Sieur Raymond*; "for there was never an ordinary case in all the history of this old world. I too have known this madness; I too have perceived how infinitely my own skirmishes with the blind bow-god differed utterly from all that has been or will ever be. 'Tis a sure sign of this frenzy. Surely, I have said, the world will not willingly forget the vision of *Chloris* in her wedding-garments, or the wonder of her last clinging kiss. Or, say *Phyllis* comes to-morrow: will an uninventive sun dare to rise in the old, hackneyed fashion on such a day of days? Perish the thought! There will probably be six suns, and, I dare say, a comet or two."

"Ah, sir," said *Raoul*, smiling, "I perceive that you have not forgotten the true lover's humor."

"Tut!" snapped *Sieur Raymond*. "I am of the world; and the world would be somewhat surprised at such occurrences, and suggest that *Phyllis* remain at home for the future. For whether you—or I—or any one—be in love is an affair of very little importance to the world. After all, what matters it?—and what avails reasoning with madmen? So love one another, my children, by all means: but do you, *Matthiette*, make a true and faithful wife to *Monsieur de Puy-sange*; and do you, *Raoul*, remain at *Arnaye*, and attend to my falcons more carefully than you have done of late—or, by the cross of *Saint Lo*! I'll clap the wench in a convent and hang the lad as high as *Haman*!" He smiled pleasantly, and drained his wine-cup as one considering the discussion ended.

*Raoul* sat silent for a moment. Then rose. "*Monsieur d'Arnaye*," said he, "you know me to be a gentleman of unblemished descent, and as such entitled to a hearing. I forbid you before high Heaven to wed your niece to a man she



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MATTHIETTE SAT BROODING IN HER ROOM

does not love! And I have the honor to request of you her hand in marriage."

"Which offer I decline," said *Sieur Raymond*, grinning placidly—"with all imaginable civility. Niece," he continued, "here is a gentleman who offers you a heartful of love, six months of insanity, and forty years of boredom in a leaky, wind-swept chateau. He has dreamed dreams concerning you: allow me to present you to the reality." He grasped *Matthiette's* hand and led her to the mirror. "Permit me to present the wife of *Monsieur de Puyssange*. Could he have made a worthier choice? Ah, happy lord, that shall hold within his grasp such perfect loveliness! Ah, happy lady, that shall taste every joy the age affords! Is that golden hair not made to be surmounted by a coronet? Are those wondrous eyes not fashioned to surfeit themselves upon the homage and respect accorded the wife of a great lord? Surely: and, therefore, I must differ from *Monsieur Raoul*, who would condemn this perfection to bloom and bud unnoticed in a paltry country town."

There was an interval, during which *Matthiette* gazed sadly into the mirror. "And *Arnaye*—?" said she.

"Undoubtedly," said *Sieur Raymond*,—"Arnaye must perish, unless *Puyssange* prove her friend. And, therefore, my niece conquers her natural aversion to a young and wealthy husband, and a life of comfort and flattery and gayety; relinquishes you, *Raoul*; and, like a feminine *Quintus Curtius*, sacrifices herself to her country. *Pierre* may sleep undisturbed; and the pigs will have a new sty. My faith, 'tis quite affecting!"

"And so," he continued, "you young fools may bid adieu, once for all, while I contemplate this tapestry." He strolled to the end of the room and turned his back. "Admirable!" said he; "the leopard is astonishingly lifelike!"

*Raoul* stole softly toward her. "Dear love," said he, very tenderly, "you have chosen wisely, and I bow to your decision. Farewell, my sweet—oh, brave, perfect woman that I have loved so well! And last of all, I thank you for one great thing—that you have accorded me your love for a time at least. That was such a wonderful gift that you bestowed upon me, woman of my heart, that I cannot

but think it atones for all that follows. Come what may, I shall always remember that you loved me once, and that is a thing for which one may thank God with a contented heart." He bowed over her unresponsive hand. "Ah, my love," he whispered, "be happy! For I desire that very heartily, and I pray God—though I confess without shame that there are tears even now in my eyes—that you may always be. But, ah, my dear, do not forget me utterly—keep a little place in your heart for your boy lover!"

*Sieur Raymond* ended his inspection of the tapestry, and turned with a premonitory cough. "Thus ends the comedy," said he, a little wistfully. "*Monsieur Raoul*, woman is wonderfully fashioned and far superior to ignoble man—so much so that, I confess, the extent of the superiority is not always discernible." He drew his arm through *Raoul's*. "Farewell, niece," said he, smiling; "I rejoice that you are cured of your malady. Now, in respect to gerfalcons,—"

The arras fell behind them.

### III

*Matthiette* sat brooding in her room, as the night wore on. She was pitifully frightened, and her chest seemed empty as she tried to soothe the quick, choking sob of her breathing. There was a heavy silence in the room that her voice had no power to shatter. She seemed aware of a multitude of wide, incurious, unseen eyes that watched her from every corner, where the dim panels snapped at times with sharp echoes. The night was wellnigh done when she arose.

"After all," said she, wearily, "it is my duty." She crept to the mirror and studied its depths.

"*Madame de Puyssange*," said she, without any intonation. Then threw her arms above her head. "I love him!" she cried, in a frightened, sudden voice.

*Matthiette* went hurriedly to a great chest and fumbled among its contents. She drew out a dagger in a leather case, and unsheathed it. The light shone evilly scintillant upon its blade and danced merrily before her uncertain eyes. She laughed, and hid it in the bosom of her gown, and fastened a cloak about her with impatient fingers. Then crept down

the winding stair that led to the gardens, and unlocked the narrow door.

A sudden rush of night swept toward her, big with the secrecy of dawn. The sky, washed clean of stars, sprawled heavily above,—a leaden, unalterable blank; the trees whispered thickly over the chaos of earth; to the left, a field of growing maize bristled in the uncertain slate-colored light like the upturned chin of an unshaven, slumbering Titan. Matthiette rustled into the silence.

She crept through the soft, wet grass as through the aisles of an unlit cathedral, and heard the querulous birds call sleepily above; the margin of night was thick with their petulant complaints; behind her was the great shadow of the Château d'Arnaye, and past that an angry, elemental red that spoke of day. Her grief was an atom lost in infinity: the leaves whispered comfort; each tree bole hid laughing fauns that reeled tipsily in the heavy grass. Youth awoke in the world.

Matthiette came to a misshapen hut, from whose open window came a shaft of faded golden light, spread out like a tawdry fan against the twilight. From without she peered into its one room and saw Raoul. A flickering light burned upon a table, and his shadow moved blackly upon the rough wall,—a wavering mass of head upon a hemisphere of shoulders,—as he bent over an open chest, sorting its contents, singing softly to himself, while Matthiette leaned upon the sill without, and the gardens of Arnaye took form and stirred in the heart of a chill, steady, sapphirelike radiance.

Sang Raoul:

“Lord, I have worshipped thee ever—  
Through all of these years  
I have served thee, forsaking never  
Light Love that veers  
As a boy between laughter and tears.  
Hast thou no more to accord—  
Naught save laughter and tears—  
Love, my lord?”

“I have borne thy heaviest burden,  
Nor served thee amiss:  
Now thou hast given a guerdon;  
Lo, it is this—  
A sigh, a shudder, a kiss.  
Hast thou no more to accord?  
I would have more than this,  
Love, my lord.”

“I am wearied of love that is pastime  
And gifts that it brings;  
I pray thee, O lord, at this last time  
Ineffable things.  
Ah, have the long-dead kings  
Stricken no subtler chord,  
Whereof the memory clings,  
Love, my lord?”

“But for a little we live;  
Show me thine innermost hoard!  
Hast thou no more to give,  
Love, my lord?”

#### IV

Matthiette crept noiselessly to the battered door of the hut; her little hands fell irresolutely upon its rough surface and lay still for a moment. Then with a hoarse groan the door swung inward, and the light guttered in a swirl of keen morning air, casting convulsive leaping shadows upon her upturned face, and was extinguished. She held out her arms in a gesture that was half maternal. “Raoul!” she murmured.

There was a great wonder in his face as he turned toward her. A sudden bird plunged through the twilight without with a glad mating cry that pierced like a knife through the silence that had gathered in the little room. “You! you!” cried Raoul, a sob tearing at his throat.

“Surely,” said she. There was a piteous catch in her voice. “Dear love, have you not bidden me—*be happy?*”

Raoul drew his hands impotently through the twilight about him. “Mademoiselle,” said he, dully, “I would not for the world avail myself of your tenderness of heart; that you have come of your graciousness to comfort me in my sorrow is a deed at which, I think, God’s holy angels must rejoice; but I cannot avail myself thereof.”

“Ah,” cried she, helplessly, “you think that I have come in—pity!”

“Matthiette,” said he, “your uncle spoke the truth. I have dreamed dreams concerning you—dreams of a foolish, golden-hearted girl, that would lose—lose gladly—all that the world may give to be one flesh and soul with me. But I have awakened, dear, to the brave reality—the valorous, pure woman, strong enough to conquer even her own heart that her people may go free. I must worship you now, for I dare no longer love.”





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RAOUL SMILED DOWN UPON HER

"Blind! blind!" cried she.

Raoul smiled down upon her piteously. "Mademoiselle," said he, very simply, "I do not doubt that you love me."

She went wearily toward the window. "I am not very wise," said she, in a tuneless voice, and looking out upon the gardens; "and I do not understand. My uncle bids me with many wise saws and pithy sayings to wed Monsieur de Puy-sange; I have not skill to combat him. For I know it is my duty; but I cannot do it. And love tugs at my heart-strings, bidding me cling to you, and forget the rest; but I cannot do it. For I love very heartily the comfort and splendor and homage you cannot give me. I am very pitiably weak. I cannot come to you with an undivided heart—but my heart, such as it is, I have given you. And I deliver my honor into your hands to preserve or trample under foot, as you will. I have come to you, Raoul; and, before God, I will never leave you unless you bid me."

He came toward her. "I bid you go," said he, "in the name of duty."

She smiled wistfully through unshed tears. "I disobey," said she,—"this once, and no more hereafter."

"And yet last night—" said Raoul.

"Last night," said she, "I was strong. Or my vanity was strong—I do not know. But in the dawn all things seem very little, saving love alone."

They looked out for a moment into the dew-washed gardens. The day was growing strong, and already clear-cut forms were passing beneath the swaying branches. A trumpet snarled shrilly in the distance.

"Dear love," said Raoul, tenderly, "do you not see that you have brought about my death? For Monsieur de Puy-sange is at the gates of Arnaye; and he or Sieur Raymond will hang me ere noon."

"I do not know," said she, in a tired voice. "I think that Monsieur de Puy-sange has some cause to thank me; and my uncle loves me very dearly, and his heart, for all his gruffness, is very tender. And—see, Raoul!" She drew the dagger from her bosom. "I shall not survive you long, O man of all the world!"

Perplexed, uncertain joy flushed through his countenance. "You will do this—for me?" he cried.

"Dear heart," said she, "I love you."

He bent eagerly over her drawn face, that turned quickly from his lips.

"Not here," said she,—"before all men, if they try to take you from me."

Hand in hand they went forth into the daylight. The kindly, familiar place seemed in Matthiette's eyes oppressed and transformed by the austerity of dawn; the world wore an alien aspect. The cool recesses of the woods, now vibrant with multitudinous shrill pipings, the purple shadows creeping eastward on the dimpling lawns, the intricate and broken traceries of the dial, where they had met yesterday, the blurred windings of their path, above which brooded the peaked roof and gables and slender clerestories of Arnaye, the broad river lapsing silently through deserted sunlit fields—these things lay before them scarce heeded, stript of all perspective, flat as an open scroll. She and Raoul were alone, despite the men of Arnaye, hurrying toward the court-yard, who stared at them curiously, and muttered in their beards. A faint morning wind stirred in the tree tops, scattering riotous apple-blossoms over the lush grass. Raoul brushed tenderly a flushed petal from the gold of Matthiette's hair.

"Before all men?" said he.

"Before God Himself," said Matthiette.

They came into the crowded courtyard as the drawbridge fell. A troop of horse clattered into Arnaye, and the leader, a young man of frank countenance, dismounted and looked inquiringly about him. Then came toward them.

"Monseigneur," said he, "you see that we ride early in honor of your nuptials."

Some one chuckled wheezily behind them. "Love one another, young people," said Sieur Raymond; "but do you, Matthiette, make a true and faithful wife to Monsieur de Puy-sange."

She stared wonderingly into Raoul's laughing face; there was a hint of anger in her bewilderment.

"Eh!" chuckled the Sieur d'Arnaye, "thus my last conspiracy succeeds; for I have taken Love into the plot. Jack has his Jill, and all ends merrily, like an old song; and I'll begin on my pigsties after breakfast."