The Lost Garden

A beautiful story of a phantom love

by Max Brand, 1892-1944

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HENRY ARSIGNY, a young American, rich, with the world at his feet, gave up that world and surrendered his life to the care of a garden in a little, obscure village not far from Bordeaux. To those who knew him, it seemed a sad miracle at first, and the buzz and whisper about it went far and wide, but when he grew old and died at length he was forgotten, I think, by all except the villagers. Even to them he was hardly more than a dim legend. This is the truth which lay behind the miracle.

CONSIDER the garden first. It lay partially enclosed by the old château, which was built with the wings circling back as if it had been originally planned that the structure should completely surround the court. The scheme proved

too extensive, for the dream of the architect was scarcely more than a third realized and a stone wall finished the circle about the garden.

Both building and wall were of a most tottering antiquity. The edges of the stones were slightly rounded by much weathering, so that the climbing vines found a foothold in the crevices and twisted leisurely over the stones, a green veil in spring and summer and a black network in winter. A few slender tentacles of green extended even across the gate, proving how seldom it was opened, and never in haste.

It seemed that surely every one who made out through the bars of the gate and the mist of leaves the garden within must try to vault the barrier or else break it down; but though I have seen many people stop and peer wistfully inside, I have never known one who tried either by request or force to enter.

Perhaps they were a little chilled by the strangeness of the garden, though it is true that none could define that strangeness. In blossom-time the garden was wonderfully bright, a whirlpool of color that circled about the central fountain and washed against the ancient walls, yet even in that glad season it was a melancholy sight. I cannot explain any more than I can make it clear why flowers sometimes suggest a thought of burial.

Perhaps people could not forget the background of that garden, the time-crumbled walls of the château, looming with the sad, solemn wisdom of centuries above the flowers, until they seem things of a moment only, which might vanish away like a brilliant vapor. Yet none knew the evanescent beauty of the garden unless they stood there on a moonlight night when the colors grew pallid and whispers passed from the lilies by the fountain to the mignonette on the wall. It was like standing before the ghost of a garden that died many years ago, just as the name and fame of the builder of the château have died; just as the love of life died in Henry Arsigny.

After all, the ancient gray walls and the melancholy beauty of the garden were only the setting for Henry Arsigny. He was tall, erect, very slender, with a mist of white hair and eyes amazingly bright, and black and young. Even to the end, his mind remained clear and keen, and in spite of his age I used to be sure that he could come back to the world and make a name for himself and a place, if he had cared to try.

But I knew that he would never leave that garden, nor the boundary of the time-rusted walls. Across the gate the climbing vine each season ran another shoot, and every year the soul of Henry Arsigny was locked a little more surely in that narrow space.

As for the village, after the first few years it accepted Arsigny as one of those mysteries which one must not attempt to explain too closely. By his own people in New Orleans he had long been numbered among the living dead. No one but myself, I am sure, can tell the story of how the rich young American came to shut himself up in a French château and spend the rest of his life tending a garden.

I will repeat that story exactly as he told it to me. When you have heard it you will say that time and brooding had filled the old man's mind with fancies. Perhaps so; but certainly his voice was clear and his eye level as he told it to me.

OUR intimacy had grown slowly during my stay at the village, and finally Arsigny began to invite me to dine with him at the château, and afterward we would sit through the long twilight while he told me his troubles with the flowers. He talked of them seriously, you see, as one might speak of refractory children. Often he led me around and pointed out through the evening gloom the places where he had attacked the weeds during the day, enlarging upon the vicious qualities of each species.

Sometimes he grew warm with indignation, yet I could not feel that he was falling into his dotage. There was too much reason in him, too much restraint, too much pleasant courtesy, and I came to look forward eagerly to our evenings together. It was on one of these nights that I at last heard the story of the lost garden.

When I came into the château that evening the servant was strangely unwilling to admit me. Even when I insisted that I could not have made a mistake—that this was certainly the date which his master had set for our meeting—the fellow shook his head and muttered.

"It is strange," he said over and over again, "for this is the one night that monsieur must be always alone."

I tipped him so liberally that he sighed and glanced behind him.

"If monsieur will enter," he compromised at length, "I will inquire. But I am sure that there is some mistake."

While he was gone I looked out through a casement at the gardenlike smoothness of the countryside with the moon over it. All awe of the old world was in it. The silence of centuries lay on those lines of hedge and round-topped trees, and far away, an exquisite touch of the medieval, I made out the spires of St. Martin's etched in thin touches of silver by the moonlight, like dew upon spider-threads.

The servant returned with one of his fellows and together they began to assure me that it was useless, it was painful, for me to insist on speaking with M. Arsigny, upon that night of all nights. I grew impatient at last and was about to brush them aside and go in search of the master of the house, for I began to scent a mystery. They clung to my arms as I stepped forward.

"If you will permit," said one, "and promise to go thereafter, I will give monsieur a glimpse of the master."

He spoke it as I might say to a child: "If you aren't quiet I'll show you a ghost." Then he led me into a wing of the château which, so far as I knew, Arsigny had hitherto constantly kept sealed. On tiptoe we advanced to a tall oaken door which stood slightly ajar.

Through the aperture came a fluctuating yellow light, like that thrown by a wood-fire. With a gesture imploring caution, one of my guides indicated that I might look inside.

It was the dining-hall, high and gloomy of ceiling, and wildly illumined by half a dozen huge torches, placed in niches along the wall. Their flames, shaken by the draft, wavered, and splashed light across polished steel armor which hung along the wall—triangular shields such as knights once hung from their necks, cuirasses, hauberks of chain mail, glittering as though they were shirts of diamonds. Here was a ponderous halberd, and there one of those hammers used to break up coats of mail, and beside it a mighty two-handed sword which a foot-soldier might have swayed against a mounted cavalier.

With weapons like that one the Swiss peasants beat down the chivalry of Austria and Burgundy. These things I half saw and half guessed in that first glance. Afterward I had eyes for the master of the house alone.

He sat with his back toward me at the table. On his white hair was a crimson cap; over his shoulders swept a mantle of rich blue velvet. From the back of his chair hung a belted sword, and as he moved in his chair I saw that he was girt with a long dagger.

I caught my breath and turned upon the servants for an explanation, but their faces were grave, and they stared past me at the picture. So I looked again.

On either side of Arsigny's plate stood a tall candle, and there were two other pairs set in a similar manner beside plates of silver. What mighty plates they were; what noble goblets of silver chased with gold stood ready at hand, and, above all, what goodly garniture of food was on that table!

An entire roasted boar—kingly dish—was the central feature. Besides, there were pheasants roasted with their feathers on, and even a gorgeous peacock with tail spread. There was a chicken steamed in a bottle and dainties and delicacies of all sorts grouped further down the board to the place where a mighty pasty rose, a brown masterpiece of the baker's art. In the midst of my joy at beholding such a feast the truth gradually dawned on me that of the three people for whom that banquet was spread two would never touch the meat nor taste the pleasant wine.

Behind each chair stood a servant dressed in an antique short coat, long, silken hose, and pointed shoes. Noiselessly, solemnly, they served Henry Arsigny and his two fantom guests.

The portions they placed upon the master's plate he merely tasted, and at his gesture they removed the dish and brought another. This again was served to all three, and yet once more the untouched food was carried away. The servitors exchanged no glances of mockery behind the master's back. Very seriously they carved the food and poured the fine wine for the living and the dead.

I turned once more to the servants behind me. They saw me not, they heard me not, they were lost in the strange dumb show which was enacted before them. One of them absently tried to brush away my hand before he recalled himself and answered my question: "You see—yes—once a year it is done this way. Once a year he dines alone with the two empty chairs. You see how it is."

He stopped and brushed a hand across his forehead, and I saw that he was white with fear. I, also, was shaken; until it came to me that even though Henry Arsigny were mad his madness was surely most harmless. I started forward into the room. Instantly the two servitors were clinging to my arms and tugging back while they whispered: "If he sees you he will kill you! Come back!"

It was too late to retreat. Arsigny, roused from his dreams by the noise, started up and whirled with the dagger half' drawn beneath his hand. How the light on that naked steel dazzled me!

He said in a terrible voice: "What's here? You dogs, have you forgotten—"

Then he saw me and knew me, for his hand fell to his side and the dagger dropped home in the sheath with a little clang, yet still I wished myself far from that room.

"This is the night you named for me to come," I said. "I see, however, that it will inconvenience you, and I shall only stay, Mr. Arsigny, to bid you good evening."

He answered: "This is the night. I had forgotten." And to the servants: "Lay another place."

It was instantly prepared, and I sat down opposite my host with as much of a tremor as if he had truly been a medieval baron, and I the meanest of serfs. At first I cast about frantically for some means of opening the talk, but Arsigny, once more seated, stared with bent head at the board and paid me no heed.

THE meal went on. The seemingly endless courses appeared and were removed. I could not taste the food nor move my eyes a single instant from the face of the master of the house. Chance brought the opening which I could not make.

It was a festival time in the village, and as we sat at the table a procession passed down the street outside, a riotous crowd of happy peasants. Their laughter ran into that gloomy room and filled every corner of it as if with sunshine and the happiness of life.

Arsigny raised his head slowly and his eyes quickened. The procession passed on and last of all we heard the chorus of singing girls. After that the noise of the carnival died away as quickly as it had begun, but Arsigny with his gentle smile leaned toward me.

He said: "You are a lover of flowers, my friend, and therefore you may understand what I may tell you."

He touched his crimson cap and velvet mantle.

"Of course you are curious at seeing me in such ceremonial robes, are you not? I had intended that no one should ever see them—no one but my servants, and their silence can be purchased. Since you are here you shall know. After all, why not? There is no harm in it."

He looked before him gravely for a moment and then added softly to himself: "There is no harm."

"Will you take a cigarette?" I asked, seeing that the story was about to commence, and knowing that he was an inveterate smoker.

He raised the open case I passed him and examined the contents with, idle curiosity. For that moment, at least, they had no meaning to him. That little incident made me more ill at ease than anything which had happened before. As he pushed the case back at me he began:

"When I was a boy in New Orleans I loved Marie Vivrain, and she loved me, and it was always planned from our childhood that we should marry. You see that I talk glibly of love, but that is the privilege of old age, is it not?

"In fact, there was no mystery about love for us two, and we had taken it for granted since childhood, that we would go through life hand in hand, just as we walked every day to school. It was a happy match, everyone said, for we were both rich, and we were a fine couple to watch at a dance—on horseback—it made no difference where.

"You see, I was not a clown, sir, and Marie was beautiful. All New Orleans waited for the announcement of the date of our wedding, and all New Orleans was at the ball at which it was to be told."

He paused and drank from his goblet in the way that fine wine should be drunk—first with a little bow to me, and then a long, slow draft. He set it down with the same slow motion, and those unusually black young eyes were staring into the past with a glance of fire. In them I saw the splendor of that ball, heard

the hum of voices broken many times with golden laughter, saw the swirl of the dance. By canting my ear I could almost catch the trembling complaint of the violin.

"Wherever we danced, wherever we walked, we were the center from which laughter and happiness radiated. How gay we were; how gay! Then the great moment came, and we stood hand in hand halfway up the great staircase, and the father of Marie was below us and spoke to the crowd of young, upturned faces.

"Out of them all I chose one pair of eyes. I suppose it was because he was so tall and loomed above the rest. Also, he was yellow-haired, and all the rest were of the Southern darkness.

"Still, it was more than a matter of height or the color of his hair. It was the hunger of his eyes as they fell upon Marie. It made the hot blood run to my face at first, and then I turned to Marie, and for the first time I knew how I loved her. Her father finished speaking; there was cheering and clapping of hands, and Marie was on the step below me blushing and laughing up to me and drawing me down so that we could lose ourselves in the crowd. Down we ran through a shower of roses and came at the foot of the stairs into a swirl of people, a score reaching for my hand at the same moment.

"That was how I lost Marie. The numbers swept her away, and when the confusion and excitement died down she was not near me. I broke from the circle and started to find her, and the moment I began to search a deep uneasiness came over me and grew as I went from room to room through the big mansion. Still there was no trace of her until I came to a little alcove away from the noise of the ballroom. The moment I crossed the threshold I saw Marie standing close to that fellow with the yellow hair and the unbearably bright eyes.

"He held her hands and leaned above her, and she looked up, partly fascinated and partly terrified. I could not hear the words, but the deep, impassioned murmur of his voice was enough.

"I AM of French descent, sir, and like that people, my temper rises quickly. There was a devil in me when I stepped before them, a devil that made Marie shrink away and that turned the man pale when he faced me. Yet he was cool.

"I said, 'Marie, I have not been presented to your friend.'

"And her small voice answered me: 'This is Mr. James Baron. Mr. Baron, this is Mr. Arsigny.'

"We bowed. Those were days when duels were still fought, sir. I was choosing the place where I would plant my bullet when James Baron broke in: 'I hope to see you alone, Mr. Arsigny.'

"'Sir,' I said, 'there is nothing on earth that I desire more. Marie, do you mind? May we be alone for a moment?'

"I had been blinded with anger the moment before, but now I saw that she was like one walking in her sleep. There was no understanding in her eyes. She turned and left the room without a word.

"You could never know what a pang of pity and fear and sorrow that sent through me. I was sick at heart when I presented my card to James Baron. He slipped it into his pocket.

"'And yours?' I asked.

"He shook his head and smiled at me with a certain grim tolerance that made me writhe.

"'No,' he said, 'the temptation, is great—God, how great!—but in my part of the country we don't do things in this way.'

"I was cut to the quick. The wounds of the Civil War were still fresh in the South, and the comparison spurred me on.

"'No,' I answered, 'there are many things which you of the North do not understand—many little things which a Southern gentleman, sir, considers part of the code of honor.'

"He had been pale the moment before, you understand. He grew whiter still at that, and a scar stood out on his temple, a jagged, ugly thing. There was that intolerable brightness in his eyes, and I understood for the first time the meaning of a Berserker rage.

"I was afraid, sir, and I admit it without shame. I was afraid, but I was so tortured by the thought of Marie as she had run laughing through the shower of roses and again by contrast as she had looked when she left the alcove, that I cried out: 'You shall meet me, sir, or I will publish you through the streets of New Orleans.'

"His steady, deep voice replied: 'What would you publish? Arsigny, I know what you fear as well as if I could read your mind. You are wrong. As we stood here I told her that I loved her, and for a reply she merely stared at me, too terrified to understand.'

"'You have nothing further to fear, from me. In the first moment I was swept from my reason. I had to speak to her. Now I shall go away to the ends of the earth; you will never see me after this night. Are you satisfied?'

"Who would have been satisfied with that? I muttered through set teeth: 'How long has she known you and hidden you from me?'

"He said: 'I have never seen her before.'

I laughed in his face.

"'Mr. Baron,' I answered, 'I saw your eyes when you were watching her as she stood on the staircase.'

"He made a little gesture of despair, resignation.

"'Then I will tell you everything,' he said, 'because it is for her happiness.'

"I bowed. When I straightened I saw him measuring me as a duelist measures, his man. I knew that glance too well."

HERE Arsigny stopped for another taste of wine, and in the little interim I strove to conjure up the figure of James Baron, tall, massive, blond, with the unbearably bright eyes. But I could not see him. It seemed impossible that this Henry Arsigny could have ever quailed before any man.

He spoke again: "I knew the glance, and I was afraid, as I said before. Yet it was the sort of fear which makes a man fight to the last drop of his blood. Then that great Viking said:

"'What I am going to tell you has to do with dreams of a garden and a woman. The garden is a lost garden, I fear. The woman I have seen tonight for the first time.'

"I began to interrupt with some cynical comment, but he silenced me with a short gesture of command.

"He said: 'Listen to me closely. I may not keep you away from the crowd for long, but I must set your doubts of her at rest. Arsigny, when I was a young fellow, younger by some years than you are now, I dreamed one night that I was living five hundred years ago. I was walking down a narrow staircase with a heavy lantern of that square, medieval sort which you may have seen in pictures. My dress was a long, white robe, loosely girt with a belt, and I had on red, pointed shoes, and I wore a short beard. A short beard, mind you, but a longer one than this.'

"His chin, I should have told you, was covered with a short-cropped yellow beard. Perhaps it was this which gave him his air of distinction.

"'I went down those stairs and turned to the right out upon a balcony which overlooked a garden,' went on James Baron. 'Ah, what a garden that is, Arsigny, that place of dead beauty. There is a fountain in the center of it, and the moon has just cleared the garden wall and turns the nodding top of the fountain to silver spray. Down in the gloomy shadow of the wall there are flowers of every exquisite variety. Except the glimmer of the lilies by the fountain and the little mignonette on the wall, I cannot see them, but their fragrance rises through the dark.

Illustration

"Ah, what a garden it is—that place of dead beauty!
Often have I prayed that I may never wake up until the dream
is finished and the tryst that is never kept is at last fulfilled...."

"'I stand on the balcony looking down the winding stairs which lead into the heart of my lost garden, and waiting, for I know that someone else is coming to the tryst. I raise my lantern and look across the space of the enclosed court to an opposite balcony with steps winding down just as they do from mine—'"

I cried out, bewildered: "Why, Arsigny, he was describing your own garden here just as I've seen it ofttimes by the moonlight."

"Hush," said Arsigny, "for God's sake, hush."

And he went on with Baron's tale:

"'And as I stand there waiting, with the lantern high above my head, the door of the other balcony opens and a white figure steps out and the moon strikes across her face. She is lovely; how very beautiful she is! For her face is that of Marie—Marie Vivrain.

"'She stretches her arm to me and cries: "Amor vincit!" love conquers— and we turn to run down those winding steps to our lost garden below. But just as we turn to descend, the dream goes out, and our tryst in the garden is never fulfilled.'

"Here Baron stopped, but he went on bravely again, though in a lower voice: 'For you see, I have had this same dream many times, Arsigny. I have had it many times, and always it is the same in every detail, and always it goes out at the moment when she and I turn to run down the steps into the garden.

"'I have prayed that I might never wake until that dream is finished. Now I see that it will be better for me if I never dream again. All my life I have looked for the garden and the lady of my dream. Tonight I found the lady. My heart stopped when I stood there in the crowd and looked up to her, and when she came down to the mob I followed her. I could not help it. I had stopped

thinking; I was only desiring a single word with her, and it seemed that I had rather hear her speak once than to listen to all the music in the world.

"'I overtook her, as you know, here in this room. Here I caught her hands, and told her my name and how long I had loved the thought of her. But you saw. She was too frightened to understand. Do you believe me, Arsigny?'

"In those bright eyes there was a devil begging me not to believe, but I nodded my head. Then he stared at the floor a moment and answered: 'Of course, this is the only way. I shall leave New Orleans tomorrow on an extended trip around the world. We shall never meet again.'

"I took his hand as I replied: 'Mr. Baron, I hope to God that we never do.'

"And that was how I left James Baron at our first meeting. When I bade good night to Marie, after the ball, it seemed to me that in her eyes there was still a trace of blankness—the same empty, startled look which had been in them since she stared up into the face of Baron. It worried me a little, but I ascribed it at first to the shock of that strange meeting.

"It was not hard to understand, on those grounds. Besides, I was too happy to be inquisitive or suspicious, yet when day after day passed and the time of our wedding was at hand, it grew on me that a deep change had come over Marie. I could not explain it to myself at the time. All that would have any meaning for you is that when I sat talking to her I continually grew uneasy and would take to glancing over my shoulder. For it always seemed, do you see, that Marie was aware of someone behind me."

Here Arsigny moved in his chair and looked quickly behind him. As for me, I resorted to the wine, and took a deep draft of that old vintage, for my nerves were commencing to grow unsteady.

He continued: "I spoke of it to her parents, not openly and directly, but through hints. They could see nothing, and were only amused. Then I bent all my energies on hurrying forward the wedding. Once past the goal everything seemed safe.

"The days went slowly, slowly. They dragged as your feet do in a nightmare when you flee from some nameless terror. So it was with me, and even on the morning of the wedding I was cold with dread of something to come. Yet all went smoothly. Half New Orleans was there, and half New Orleans said that there had never been a gayer wedding.

"Yes, it was very gay; but as for the happiness—well, that was different. Even when she stood there beside me at the altar and spoke her vows—even then, sir, her glance went past me. When I turned with her from the priest I half expected to look into those unbearably bright eyes of James Baron.

"He was not there, and that evening we started north on our honeymoon.

"My friend, the happiness of the next few months was enough to give happiness to a dozen lives, and therefore why should I regret some shadow, some strangeness in Marie? I closed my thought to it in time and opened my heart only to her gay moments.

"She was as charged with variety as a rare wine is filled with fragrance or a costly jewel with changing lights. Sir, she was one of those women whose least movement thrills. Sir, I would rather have risked my life than miss one gesture of those white hands or the least utterance of her voice, so low, so caressingly musical. She was not such a one that a man would ask of her many times a day: 'Do you love me more? Will you ever love me less?' No, it was sufficient to be in her presence and rejoice without question.

"You see how I had blinded myself? But one thing I could not hide from my knowledge, which was that Marie was restless, uneasy as a migratory bird when the time approaches for the long flight south.

"During our first summer we had a house in the mountains of Vermont—a sufficient distance from New Orleans, you will say, but not enough for Marie.

It was not that she wished to go in any one direction. It was only that she loved travel for its own sake. So it ended with our taking passage for Europe, and we landed at Havre in the early autumn.

"After that I surrendered myself to the fancies of Marie, and it was she who chose our route. We went to Paris first, of course, and I would gladly have spent the rest of my life in that delightful place, but Marie would not linger long. So we started again, and this time went west and south toward Bordeaux. On a day, as we drove in a carriage through the outskirts of a village, we passed a tavern of extreme age. At the first sight of it Marie cried out and clapped her hands.

"I ordered the driver to stop and then I turned to her in surprise, for I had never seen her so delighted, and yet it was a shapeless, ugly building. It had at one time been a fortified castle, but war had torn down the upper battlements, it seemed, and wrecked the outworks.

"All that remained was the central structure with two wings, which inclined somewhat back, as though the original plan intended for the château to completely surround the central court. We drove into that court, which was fenced from the street by a high stone wall."

I said: "In fact, it was the very building in which we now are sitting. Am I not right?"

But Arsigny, as I half expected, did not hear me.

"I thought the courtyard, which was paved, almost the ugliest place of its kind that I had ever seen, but Marie was charmed with everything. She was out of the carriage at once and running here and there making discoveries.

"'It was once a garden. It is a lost garden!' she cried.

"I asked: 'How can that be? Don't you see that the ground is paved?'

"'Yes, yes,' she said impatiently, 'but the pavement was laid after the château was converted into a tavern. It was made into a courtyard so that the patrons could drive their carriages in here, just as we have done. But once it was a garden. I know! Look at that ruined fountain in the center. Once it sent up a spray which the wind blew back over flowers, I am sure. And see those balconies!'

"She pointed to one on either side of the court.

"I said: 'What in the world have they to do with a garden?'

"But she answered, laughing low with excitement: 'See how they are broken off at one side without a railing? There is no barrier because once a flight of stairs wound down from each balcony—down into the garden, the lost garden.'

"It was useless to argue such things with her. Now she stopped and pressed both hands across her eyes.

"'I can almost see it! I can almost see it!'

"'See what?' I asked good-naturedly.

"'The garden, the lost garden!'

"'Come,' I said, 'I'm tired and thirsty, and it's almost the end of the day. Let's put up here for the night.'

"She consented happily and went in with me, humming a gay old French ballad, and she insisted that we take a room opening upon one of the balconies. When we were settled in it I went down to give orders that our supper be served in our room. It was while I was passing down one of the long corridors that I met James Baron for the second time."

The voice of Arsigny was as calm and even as ever, but his thin hand that rested upon the table gathered into a hard, white fist and his eyes flashed with excitement.

"Baron was marvelously changed. He had grown so thin that he was hardly more than a ghost of the man I had seen before, and his yellow hair, which was grown long, stirred about his face in the draft which blew down the corridor. As he loomed suddenly before me I shrank back against the wall, overwhelmed with awe, and as he recognized me he stopped short and the strangely bright eyes flashed upon me. He gestured past me.

"'She is here?'

"'Yes.'

"Pity filled me, and with it there blended a vague and deep alarm.

"'I must go at once,' he said, more to himself than to me.

"I tempted fate, trembling at my own bravado.

"'Come with me to see her. She has not forgotten you, I know.'

"'No,' he mused, breaking in upon me with his heavy voice, 'she has not forgotten. Do you really wish me to come?'

"My throat was dry, but the very danger lured me on: 'Yes, by all means come. We shall dine together, shall we not?'

"He struggled against the temptation until I saw the tremor of his wasted body. Truly he had shrunk to a fantom leanness. His shoulders, indeed, were still broad, but his coat hung loosely about them, and those strong hands had grown almost spiritually thin. Whatever I might fear in him there certainly was no longer any physical danger—yet the man overawed me.

"He said at length: 'I shall not come. I dare not come. Tonight I am hardly well enough to take the road, but tomorrow early I shall start away. Arsigny, you need not fear. I shall start in the morning, by my honor.'

"Then, I said hotly: 'Sir, what have I to fear?'

"He smiled vaguely upon me and my heart grew small and cold within me.

"'To be sure,' he said, 'what have you to fear? Nevertheless, I shall go. But in the morning. Tonight I am indisposed.'

"He seemed, in fact, to be almost reeling with weakness. I took his arm and steadied him.

"'You are ill indeed, Baron,' I said, 'and you must not begin a journey upon our account. No, if we disturb you we shall move on early in the morning. Tonight I shall take care of you myself. Upon my word, you are a sick man. Has a doctor seen you recently?'

"'I think not.'

"I thought not. I've some experience in rough remedies. This trouble of yours is a fever.'

"For though his hand was cold his face was flushed.

"'Yes,' he said, 'it is a fever; it consumes me.'

"And he turned away to end the interview. I watched him fumble a way down the corridor, supporting himself against the wall with groping hands.

"'You will expect me?' I called.

"He returned no answer, and I stood there and watched him out of sight, saying to myself: 'Poor devil, he has not long to live.'

I GAVE the order for our dinner, and then I returned to Marie. She was walking the room in the same uneasy excitement which had held her from the moment our carriage stopped before the tavern. Seeing her beauty, and thinking of the wrecked manhood of James Baron, I could not meet her eyes, but picked up a book and commenced to fumble through its pages. When the light hand of Marie fell upon my shoulder I started guiltily.

"She said: 'Henry, what has happened?'

"She read me, I knew, as easily as I could read the book which lay open in my hands. I looked up to her, prepared to lie, but my glance dropped miserably.

"She said, and with such eagerness that I winced: 'Henry, look up to me.'

And when I obeyed, like a child, she searched me wistfully with a long glance.

"'Whom have you seen?'

"I answered feebly: 'No one.'

"It was a poor lie—a barren lie. I saw her soul come up and look at me. What were her thoughts? They were not for me to guess. She sat a little distance away with her chin buried in her cupped hands, staring into distance and humming the fragment of that ancient, gay French ballad. As we dined she was her charming, playful self again, but half her heart, I knew, was smiling past me at a shadow beyond.

"My duty should have taken me to James Baron, so wan and fever shaken, but a premonition of trouble, a vague foreboding kept me near Marie.

"Certainly there was danger. I knew it by the tingling of my blood. But my only care was to keep Marie safe. Not till she was in bed and fast asleep did I go to find Baron.

"The man was wracked with fever, the disease to gain a mortal hold upon him. One glance at that cadaverous face was a sufficient proof. I went to him now not as one goes to help the sick, but as a visitor at a death-bed.

"Down the same dark corridor I passed, and then up the winding staircase which led to the upper stories of the opposite wing. As I reached the first platform I heard a soft, descending footfall and paused to allow the other to pass, for a meeting on the narrow stairs would be awkward. A moment later James Baron came into view."

Here Arsigny straightened in his chair and clasped the hands tightly together. His glance was driving deeply into the past to see that picture.

"He wore a long bathrobe of some heavy, white material, girded with a loose cord at the waist. On his feet were red bedroom slippers, and in his hand he carried one of those heavy, square lanterns of ancient make. It was unlighted, but he held it high above his head, as if to illumine his way."

"The dream," I murmured "It was the dream which he described to you. Some knight of the old days might have been dressed in just such a costume."

And Arsigny went on, his voice grown small and thin:

"I felt as if a specter were walking upon me. No, it was more terrible than that. It was as if the dead past were before me—as if I were plunged at a breath back into the lost centuries. It came upon me with the graveyard presence of the specter.

"For it was not James Baron. No, no; the white robe was not a costume. It was real. It was the robe of a belted knight, and the beard was the beard of knighthood, and the long yellow hair that blew about his face swept me back into the fantastic, beautiful days of chivalry."

He was not speaking in metaphor, but seriously, soberly; and he said in answer to my exclamation: "It is not hard to believe in the reincarnation of human souls. Then why is it so difficult to believe that that hour was the reincarnation of a moment from the past? Sir, the whole spirit of a dead age breathed about me!

"When that man who should have been James Baron came close to me I saw that the unbearably bright eyes were misted—that the man was walking in his sleep. How else explain that lifted lantern?

"I touched and stopped him with a question. The unseeing glance turned upon me. He raised the lantern higher, as if to make out my face, but to him I was no more than a bodiless fantom. He looked through me. I spoke again, and this time he muttered an answer which froze my blood.

"For the language which he spoke was fluent Latin. I knew enough to understand that much, though I could not follow the meaning. But I knew perfectly then that I was hearing the voice and the words of another James Baron, a warrior dead five hundred years before. If you will call it illusion, nevertheless it was so strong that as he turned away I listened for the click of golden spurs.

"He opened the door at his right and entered the room into which it led. I followed, but very slowly, for my feet were heavy with ghostly fear. I pursued him through that long, dim chamber. He still carried the unlighted lantern high above his head, and he walked as surely and swiftly as if he could see in the dark.

"At the end of the empty room he threw open another door and the night air rushed back to me. When I came close I found him standing on one of those two balconies that overlooked the court far below. Rain had fallen, and now the pavement glimmered like water.

"I glanced up and saw that the clouds were blown tumbling back before the face of the moon. By that light, as I looked down again, I saw a white figure step out on the opposite balcony. The silver light struck across her face, and it was Marie.

"You think that I cried out, remembering the dream of James Baron as he told it to me on that night of the ball? Or that I sprang forward with a warning shout?

"No; I could not speak, for I was numb with the horrible cold of a nightmare. Sir, what could I have done? The happenings of that night had been foredoomed five hundred years before, and what power had I against fate?

"She stepped forward to the very edge of her balcony with the moonlight running in transparent waves along her gown. She stretched out shining arms, and her voice was high and sweet and clear as she called the words of the dream: 'Amor vincit'—love conquers—and I knew that I was lost. Yet at the sound of her voice life returned to me. At the same instant she and Baron turned to run down the stairs which were not there—which had not been there for nameless generations.

"I shouted my warning then and leaned forward to seize Baron, but I could not even touch his robe. Together they dropped into the night; they were gone

to their tryst. When I looked down from the balcony I saw two white forms motionless on the glimmering stones of the courtyard."

There was no faltering in the voice of Arsigny as he finished his story. He was smiling, in fact, as if at some pleasant reminiscence. After a long silence he said: "And then I bought the châ teau and brought the lost garden back to earth. My friend, should their spirits wander back to the place of their last tryst and find only the bare, brutal stones of the courtyard?

"So I made their garden for them beautiful, as you see, from the lilies by the fountain to the mignonette upon the wall. There, on still evenings, when the light is gone and there is only the fragrance of the flowers and the shining of the stars, it is not hard to see them again. Yes, and there have been times when the murmuring of the fountain as it fell in the pool seemed to be like two voices in question and reply.

"And here in the hall, once a year, I sit down with them—with, James Baron, as he was five hundred years ago; with that Marie Vivrain, of whom the trouvères sang from the Seine to the swift Rhône. Let us drink to their happiness, my friend."

And we rose to drink the pledge.