

mass. For the Count was a bluff old feudal Christian of the oldest and bluffest school. Then he had been busy among his peasants to-day. In good sooth he had hanged two of them this morning. Insolent churls they were, and in arrears with their feudal dues. So the Count and his fifty bold retainers had hanged the two of them. For Count Harsberg in his bluff feudal way was a man of unbending justice. Then in the afternoon the Count and that roistering neighbor of his, Count Hugo, had chased the fallow deer through mead and fell; chased it and caught it, too, had the Count and his fifty bold retainers and his roistering neighbor, caught it as it crossed the mead on its way to the fell; a small one, but a fallow deer none the less.

They had been busy with a witch too, had the Count and his fifty bold retainers; for the stern feudal baron upheld the church. So they had tried her in their bluff feudal way, flung her in the water as a test of guilt and she swam. So that roistering Count Hugo waggishly poked her down with his halberd till she swam no more. Then evening vespers, for the Count was unflagging in such matters.

Oh, a right busy day, withal, and a profitable. And now the stern lord was solacing his mind amid the fumes of the wassail bowl and the ringing of the rafters. The long hall was ablaze with light. The baronial board groaned under sirloins and hogshead. For it was not every day that they killed a fallow deer and were not the men to let the opportunity slip. Nay, the roistering Count Hugo had sent a boat privily up the river to his own castle, for a long, slim keg of Burgundy that his grandsire, Count Otto, had brought home from the wars in Provence, and that had lain in the cellar these fifty good years; all covered with dust and cobwebs in a way that made one's mouth water to look at it. And now it lay there in the boat at the foot of the castle with a sail to cover it up and a halberdier to watch it. Or, at least, he should have been watching it, but, zounds, watching a cask of Burgundy is but slow work when there are pert wenches in the castle kitchen, and a tall flagon of beer in the castle buttery. The roistering Count Hugo will have it fetched up when the evening is ripe, and meantime, how the thought of that cask of old French wine does warm one's heart. So wassail reigns in the hall. The bowl is passed merrily round, and the stern Count becomes less and less stern, and the fifty bold retainers more and more bold. And that roistering neighbor too, Count Hugo, is full of his fun. Such jokes about those two obstinate churls and their feudal dues, and so many good things to say about that bedridden hag, now in perdition. Till even the terrible Count of Harsberg unbends and the walls resound to his laughter. And over the sleeping river the dim moon is slowly rising, and up the sleeping river Knight Edwin—speed him, Our Lady—is rowing his staunch little skiff; and in her bower, overlooking the sleeping river, the lady Imogene has risen from her brief slumber and is packing her portmanteau.

The Knight has made his way from the river bank and through the castle garden, and stands before his lady's bower. He scours the grim walls with his eye and sees the dim light that marks the fair one's chamber. He draws his good rapier and sets it firmly in the ground beside him. Ill were it for any wandering reveller that

might chance that way; and well for the halberdier that he stays with his pert wenches and his flagon of beer, and wanders not around the castle. Softly, as he stands below fair Imogene's bower, the voice of the wooing knight sounds on the evening air.

Fair is the summer night,  
Heavenly stars are bright;  
Over the river  
The moonbeams quiver.  
Flee with thine own true knight,  
Flee with me, sweet, my own.

Scarce has he finished when the casement opens. The lovely Imogene, robed in white, beams like a silver star upon her Edwin. She drops a silken ladder to the ground. The courteous knight converses with his own soul while the lady descends. In a moment she is at his side; in two she is in his arms. He bears her fondly in his firm clasp down the garden paths and to the water's edge and lays her in the skiff. He is about to unmoor the little bark when he bethinks him of his trusty rapier.

"Rest but a moment, fair one," cries Knight Edwin, "I go but to seek my blade."

He reascends the bank and passes through the gravel walks. But, alack, the light no longer burns in the casement, and Edwin in dismay wanders in vain in search of the spot from which he came. For the castle walks are many and the castle walls are long, and there are a many casements in the castle wall, and the marks where he had scoured it have already become obliterated, perchance by the evening air. Ill were it to lose his staunch blade, for it is all his knightly fortune and by it he must cut his way to that little cot of happiness in merry France. But at length the knight, having circled around the castle walls and through the walks, returns baffled to the shore. There at least he is consoled by the sight of his little skiff and that white burden lying in it, the lady of his love, covered up with her white robes, under the faint beams of the rising moon.

"Sleep'st thou, fair one?" says Edwin softly as he approaches, and, receiving no response, he takes off his long mantle and lays it at full length over the sleeping maid. Then the little skiff drops gently down the moonlit river. Up in the castle yonder the feast is at its height; the bluff feudal baron and his fifty bold retainers roar at the merry sallies of that roistering neighbor of theirs. The halberdier in the buttery sits over his tall flagon of ale, and vaunts to the gaping kitchen wenches of his deeds in the Spanish wars; and the noise of the revellers comes fainter and fainter to Knight Edwin as he rows his slumbering bride down the moonlit river.

"Wake, fair one, wake from thy slumber," cries the knight. "See, the dawn is brightening in the east. I have rowed thee well, sweetest, and thou may'st already hear the billows breaking on the coast." The fair one answered not. The knight calls again; yet no answering voice. In dismay Knight Edwin moves from his seat, lifts the mantle from his sleeping bride, and sees—Ave, Maria sanctissima!—a long, slim keg of Burgundy, covered with a white sail, and so dusted and cobwebbed that it would make one's mouth water to look at it.

STEPHEN B. LEACOCK.