

SIR GALAHAD OF THE ARMY

Never saw I a man sleep so sound or so quickly roused."

"A poor vigil, father."

"No: the best. Only a clean life could sleep so tranquilly in such a presence. For Antonina's sake I thank God from my heart."

Le Brocq flushed. "Her memory will help me to keep it clean. How late have I slept, father?"

"It is close on six, when I say matins. At seven there will be a special mass, then at eight—" he paused, a hand on Le Brocq's arm and his eyes filled. "In the child of a month ago a woman's soul has been born with sore travail. Signor—monsieur—yours is a great nation of brave men, but where women are concerned—"

"I love her with all my heart and soul," said Le Brocq simply. "If my name will shield her from lying tongues it is hers, but she need have no fear from me. Only," he added, his voice deepening, "I must be satisfied that she is not coerced."

Fra Luca's light grip on Le Brocq's arm tightened. "Be easy, my son, you shall be satisfied. By now she is in the Ladies' Garden waiting you, just you two alone. Come."

With a reverence to the altar Fra Luca turned towards the door followed by Le Brocq. His thoughts were in a whirl, his heart throbbing as it had throbbed in the first consciousness of self-revelation, every nerve tingled, his very joints seemed loosened and out of control. What corridors, what galleries they passed through, what stairs they descended, he could not have told, it was only vaguely that he recognized the open court they had crossed the night before. If Fra Luca spoke, the words passed him by meaningless until his ear caught Adorno's name.

"Adorno?"

Fra Luca halted. "Yes, your—" he paused, searching for a word without offence, "your host of the Hermitage, as I was telling you, he is dead."