

THE SWORD OF JUSTICE
A PLAY

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*

EVA GORE-BOOTH

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THE SWORD
OF JUSTICE

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Sword of
Justice*

A Play



By
EVA GORE-BOOTH
Author of
"The One and the Many," "The Sorrowful
Princess," etc.

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Thursday morning

Dear Mrs Pierrotti,

Will you please me
by acceptg this copy of
Miss Gore Booths new little
play. I like it so much
myself. and know that it
is not likely to be ~~in~~ many
bookshops!

With very kind
greetings to you all,
I, Thos Wedgwood,

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PREFACE

THOSE who believe in goodwill and forgiveness as the only really powerful way of combating evil are often told that the logic of events is against them, and that the results of applying their theories to life would be disastrous. Although these fears seem to be rather foolish when one thinks of the result on human life of the carrying out of the present system of organised violence, on which society rests, I have for once assumed them to be justified in some sort by events. In fact, in these pages, I have tried hard to give the devil more than his due, and his advocate a very favourable hearing. Forgiveness has not improved the murderer, it has merely increased his opportunities for evil. Everything has turned out for the worst in a way that might have been foreseen by the most bigoted of military tribunals. "Once in my life I obeyed the voice of God, and all this evil has happened because of it," complains Gualberto. And I have imagined such an extreme case, because I do not think any truth is really true unless it will stand the test in our minds, of any event that might possibly happen. I question if even Christ could answer,

to the satisfaction of a materialist, the question, in its many forms, of using violence to save a child from the power of a villain; but that is because the materialist seeks no meaning behind the happenings of life, believing only in events as the fulfilment or frustration of desire.

Now we, who are not materialists, think that if it is possible for outward events to seem to contradict the truth as we know it, then either our "truth" is not true, or that we do not understand outward events and forces working through them, those great waves of cause and effect that are the will of God eternally producing them. And this little play is an attempt to show how life is for ever pushing and driving us on, with paradoxes and puzzles and hints and suggestions, till at last we begin sorrowfully to probe a little way below the surface of things, into that region where is to be found the justification of our truest and most beautiful thoughts.

E. G. B.

April 28, 1918.

PERSONS

MARIA	<i>A Country Woman</i>
GIOVANNI GUALBERTO	<i>The Merciful Knight</i>
BROTHER LORENZO	<i>From the Vallombrosa Monastery</i>
MALVOLIO	<i>The Murderer of Gualberto's Brother</i>
CAPTAIN } SOLDIERS }	<i>In the Pope's Army</i>

The
Sword of Justice

C Outside a hut in the Forest of Vallombrosa. In the background is the door of a little Chapel. There is a basket of melons on the ground, a gift from the Monastery. A Crucifix is hung over the door of the hut. GUALBERTO eats a melon as he talks to BROTHER LORENZO.

GUALBERTO. I don't know how it is that you grow so much better melons up at the monastery, brother, than I can in this sheltered valley.

LORENZO (*pompously*). Doubtless God's sun shines clearer on the heights, brother.

GUALBERTO. Oh, yes, I know you are very near heaven up there, but one must always beware of pride.

LORENZO. The monk is never proud. He is always very humble. Yet he cannot but know that his oblation of himself is very precious in the sight of God.

GUALBERTO. So is, doubtless, this melon; therefore, brother, give me some of the seed

and I will prove to you beyond all doubt that God's sun ripens fruit just as well in the valley.

LORENZO. You are a great gardener, brother, and doubtless a great saint, as may be known to all men by your wonderful gift of healing.

GUALBERTO. Gift of healing! I know the property of a few herbs perhaps . . .

LORENZO. Nay, nay, brother; you under-value yourself; and worse than that, you make light of the gift of God. We who have profited by your powers long to see you dedicate them to His service.

GUALBERTO. I do not understand you. Is not my poor skill always at your service and at the service of all the brothers?

LORENZO. It was not that I meant; it was more than that. You know that it is the desire of my heart, and all of our hearts, to see you a member of our community. Leave the valley behind you; come up with us to the heights.

GUALBERTO. Nay, nay, brother; your melons are certainly better up

there, but even for that I would not forsake this damp lonely hut strangely dear to my heart.

LORENZO. In the monastery your life would be far more useful, your sphere of work wider.

GUALBERTO. Here, too, I have my work, and it is enough for my small powers. The country people all come to me when they are in trouble, or ill.

LORENZO. That is just it. It is to the monastery they ought to go. Neither the Holy Abbot nor his Grace the Bishop of Fiesole approve of hermits. They divert the blessed stream of pilgrims from the appointed goal of Holy Church, and their isolation savours of spiritual pride.

GUALBERTO. These be hard words. Did the Holy Abbot . . .

LORENZO. Nay, the Holy Abbot is kindness and gentleness itself. If you would only come and talk to him you would see.

GUALBERTO. If he was as sweet as his own melons he could not persuade me.

LORENZO. But you live already almost the life of a religious, yet without the real

merit. Why do you shrink from the vows?

GUALBERTO. I can not give up my will.

LORENZO. Ah, that is the real test. It is very hard, and yet the only true happiness is to be found in the surrender of the will.

GUALBERTO. I do not think it is exactly happiness I seek, and I must always be free to follow the voice of God whenever I hear it.

LORENZO. The voice of God speaks through Holy Church and the wise counsel and commands of the Blessed Abbot.

GUALBERTO. Yes, truly; and through the rabbits, and the squirrels, and the little birds, and the grasshoppers, and the great rustling trees, and the wind and the rain and the children out of the village, and the men and women who labour in the fields.

LORENZO (*shocked*). Hush! hush! This is rank blasphemy and heresy—I may not listen to such words. Giovanni, I am your friend; do not force me to be your enemy by becoming the enemy of God. I will go back to the monastery and pray for you that your hard heart may be softened—God is very merciful. But, Giovanni—one word.

Do not let any of the others hear you say things like that. They are none of them as weak as I am . . .

GUALBERTO. You are a good fellow, Brother Lorenzo, though indeed you try hard not to be—but God is too strong for you. He is even, in the end, too strong for the Holy Abbot and the whole blessed community.

LORENZO. Hush! hush! Do not rail against the Holy Abbot and the brethren. Adieu Giovanni, adieu. Do not forget to pray that Satan may not overcome you, and may God soften your heart and keep you from heresy and blasphemy.

GUALBERTO. Here, you are forgetting your basket. (*He rolls out the melons and hands the basket to LORENZO.*)

LORENZO. Alas! alas! Giovanni; I fear you have a rebellious and hard heart. I would give much to convince you of your terrible error. (*He takes the basket.*)

GUALBERTO. Nay, brother; if you waited here awhile you would see it is no error; but God is here among the high trees . . .

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LORENZO. God has afflicted you, brother; solitude is not good for men. (*He turns away with a sigh. GUALBERTO calls after him.*)

GUALBERTO. Brother Lorenzo, Brother Lorenzo, if you have any love left for such a miserable sinner, do not forget the melon seed.

LORENZO (*turning*). You shall have it, my friend; you shall have it. That is, if the Holy Abbot . . .

GUALBERTO (*quickly*). The Holy Abbot cannot possibly know. He is very great and wise, but even he has not counted the seeds of the melons.

LORENZO. Ah, you are laughing at me—you have a hard heart, a hard heart. (*He goes away still sighing. GUALBERTO takes a rough earthenware jug from the table and goes down to the spring with it, calling to LORENZO as he goes.*)

GUALBERTO. They shall not be wasted; I will sow them in the sunniest corner on the south side, well out of the shadow of the high trees.

BROTHER LORENZO *disappears up the path to the monastery. As the water flows*

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into the jug there is a rustle among the bushes, and a man crawls out, more dead than alive, covered with blood, and travel-stained and dishevelled. He falls forward on the grass, crying out in a weak voice:

MAN. Sanctuary, sanctuary! They are hunting me through the wood. They are all after me. Hide me, holy hermit! For the love of God hide me, save me!

GUALBERTO. Friend, be calm. Here you are safe, whatever you have done. (*He goes towards him and begins to raise him up. He suddenly stops as he sees his face.*)

GUALBERTO (*in a tone of horror*). Malvolio!

MALVOLIO. Gualberto . . . Again . . .

GUALBERTO. Murderer . . . my brother's murderer . . .

MALVOLIO. You could have killed me before. You said I was safe whatever I had done.

GUALBERTO. I did not know . . . How dare you come here?

MALVOLIO. I did not know it was you. Oh, I am done for—destroyed. If I had only kept to the village—one can burn villages, it is quite safe, nobody minds,

and the farmers have great stores. But now I have sinned an unpardonable sin, and they are hunting me to kill me.

GUALBERTO. What new outrage have you done that the world has at last turned against your wickedness?

MALVOLIO (*whispering*). The worst of all crimes—a sacrilege. And it seems but a little matter—the theft of a few horses. How could I know they belonged to His Holiness? It was at the public inn in Orvieto—they should not have left them unguarded . . . Oh, have pity on me, Gualberto. Hide me, hide me!

GUALBERTO. How can you ask such a thing of me?

MALVOLIO. You saved me once. Was it only for this?

GUALBERTO. I saved you from myself. It does not follow that I should save you from other people. I have heard terrible stories of your deeds; you have burned villages and murdered men and women and children.

MALVOLIO. Oh, what does it matter now? For mercy's sake, hide me! The enemy are very close to us!

GUALBERTO. My brother's blood is on your hands.

MALVOLIO. That is an old story. It was settled long ago. Is it a reason why you should stain your hands with mine? Oh, hide me, hide me, they are searching the wood for me! I can almost hear the horses breaking through the underwood. They will be here in a minute. I dared not come out while the monk was here. Be quick, be quick! They will be here in a moment . . . they will kill me before your eyes!

GUALBERTO. I will hide you in the chapel behind the altar. Come with me. (*He helps him up and supports him.*) Try to hold up. I will get you into safety first and then come back for the water to bathe your wounds.

MALVOLIO. Make haste . . . make haste. . . . Oh, I am dying, I am dying.

GUALBERTO *drags him, half-fainting, into the chapel and shuts the door. A sound of horses trampling is heard in the distance. A troop of horsemen ride up the path.*

CAPTAIN (*shouting*). Hullo, hermit—revere-
rend father—where are you hiding?

SOLDIER (*officiously*). Look, captain! Look,

there's blood on the grass. He must have passed this way.

CAPTAIN (*grimly*). There'll be more blood on the grass presently if you don't shut your mouth. Do you think I'm blind? Take that sword you stole.

SOLDIER (*interrupting*). This one wasn't stolen, my lord; its owner was dead . . .

CAPTAIN. How dare you answer me. Take that sword you stole from the man you murdered, and knock at the door.

The SOLDIER dismounts and hammers at the door with such force that the Crucifix jumps off its nail and falls to the ground.

The CAPTAIN starts, and crosses himself.

CAPTAIN. The sacred rood itself! The worker of miracles . . . Clumsy fool! If the hermit is as great a saint as they say, you will fry in hell for that.

GUALBERTO comes out of the Chapel and sees the Crucifix lying on the ground.

GUALBERTO. Whence all this noise and tumult? What child of Satan among you has cast down the Blessed Crucifix?

CAPTAIN (*to SOLDIER*). Now fool, didn't I tell you?

SOLDIER in an agony of terror throws himself at GUALBERTO's feet.

SOLDIER. Holy saint, forgive me! I did not mean a sacrilege. It was only an accident. Do not send me to hell for this.

GUALBERTO. Hush, hush! Do not be foolish. It is only the devil who wants people to go to hell. I suppose he is lonely, poor fellow.

SOLDIER. Then you do not curse me?

GUALBERTO. Why, in Heaven's name, should I curse you because the nail gave way? (*He picks up the Crucifix.*)

CAPTAIN. Get on to your horse, you blockhead, and don't stand there gibbering and wasting our time. Nobody's dreaming of cursing you. It would be waste of time; you'll go to hell soon enough, without anyone's help.

GUALBERTO. Captain, this is the little house of peace in the forest. Why have you come here with tumult and swords and railing?

CAPTAIN. I seek a fugitive from justice—an unscrupulous villain of the worst kind.

GUALBERTO. What is his crime?

CAPTAIN. He is an outlaw and a sacrilegious scoundrel. He stole two of our Lord the Pope's horses from the inn at Orvieto. Arabs of a rare and delicate breed they were, and very beautiful: a present from the Sultan—most precious to our Lord.

GUALBERTO. And for this robbery alone do you seek his life?

CAPTAIN. Is it not enough? But even if it were not so, he has done many another lesser sacrilege and sin: robbing the treasures of churches, and slaying men and women and laying waste their dwellings all over Tuscany. He has been for years the terror of the countryside. Now his robber band is scattered and he is himself an outlaw and a vagabond. He is the enemy of God, and he who gives him shelter must suffer the wrath of the Lord and of Holy Church. His Holiness himself has sworn to lay him by the heels. Holy hermit, if you are sheltering Malvolio, I demand in the name of God that you bring him forth.

GUALBERTO (*in confusion*). A fugitive indeed came this way some time since, but

I pitied him, for indeed he was sore wounded, and I swore to shelter his retreat . . . Would you have me betray him whom I swore to protect?

CAPTAIN (*furiously*). Would you rather betray God? Would you shelter him from the hand of God? You call yourself a hermit, a holy man; now I know what to think of your holiness.

GUALBERTO (*again confused*). No, no; certainly not; you are right. I will shelter no man from the hand of God.

CAPTAIN. Then where is Malvolio?

GUALBERTO. Indeed my sin is great. For the love of God, and not knowing his crime, I gave him my mule . . .

CAPTAIN. You gave him a mule? Do you know that for a deed less than this many a man has paid with his life?

GUALBERTO. How could I help it? He was very lame and sore wounded.

CAPTAIN. Which way did he go?

GUALBERTO. I would not let him tell me, for fear a man like you might tempt me to betray him.

CAPTAIN. Imbecile! Do you know that

if I order one of my soldiers here to cut your sheep's head off your ass's shoulders the world would hear no more of your impudence, and no questions would be asked.

GUALBERTO. I do not know why you are so angry. I have not refused to answer your questions.

CAPTAIN. Liar! You must have seen which way he went.

GUALBERTO. I went into the Chapel on purpose not to see.

The monastery bell rings in the distance.

GUALBERTO *takes his rosary in his hand and, glancing impatiently at the CAPTAIN, begins to say his beads.*

CAPTAIN (*slowly*). The monastery on the hill . . . Of course, he has taken refuge there.

GUALBERTO (*quickly and anxiously*). Ah, do not go there. The monks would never have hidden him. I know them well—they are not like that. I am sure he is not there. He would never have dreamt of hiding there.

CAPTAIN (*laughing*). Oh, that's the way

the wind blows, is it. Truly these holy men, when they begin to lie, are not much use to the devil. Malvolio deserves his fate for trusting such a transparent idiot.

GUALBERTO. Sir, sir, indeed you are but wasting your time searching the monastery for a man who is not there.

CAPTAIN (*going*). Farewell, holy hermit; we will leave you to say your beads in peace. When Malvolio is taken we will ring the monastery bell so that you may say a few masses for his soul. (*He goes.*)

GUALBERTO. God forgive me for a most terrible and consistent liar. Oh, it is terribly easy to deceive. One only has to speak the truth.

He goes towards the Chapel door. MARIA comes up the path and calls after him. She is dishevelled. Her face is white and drawn, and her eyes bright with anger. Her feet are bare, and here and there her dress is ragged and charred as by fire. In her hands is a bloodstained sword.

MARIA. Gualberto, Frate Gualberto. (*He stops and turns to her.*) Are you indeed

Gualberto, the holy man, who is wise in the secrets of the stars, and seeks herbs and simples, knowing the magic properties and healing powers hidden therein?

GUALBERTO. I am indeed Gualberto; but as to that same holiness, that is another matter, and belongeth as little to me as the healing power you speak of belongeth to the grass. For are they not both the property of the whole life-giving earth and the sun that raiseth all things from the dead?

MARIA. I do not understand you, but I know that none of your herbs and simples can raise the dead—alas, alas! that this should be so.

GUALBERTO. You are very impatient; let them rest awhile. They will rise again soon enough, God knows. Meanwhile we are here among the living. Lay your sword in the grass and rest yourself for awhile sitting under the shadow of the great tree. (MARIA sits down.) Now you must partake of this melon. It is a very sweet and juicy one, grown by the monks in the convent up yonder, and given to me in memory of some

little skill of mine in healing one of the lay brothers.

MARIA. You know how to heal the sick, then?

GUALBERTO. I gave him a healing drink made from a certain herb not known to many, but much favoured by the blessed sun. Truly, God is very good.

MARIA. You would not talk like that if you had just come home from the hills to find your house a flaming ruin and the dead bodies of your husband and children lying on the threshold. Ah, you never knew my little Annunziata.

GUALBERTO. Nay, was she not the little girl with long legs, who walked all the way up the mountain to the monastery, with the pilgrims at the Festa? She who laughed much and sang the Ave Maria in such a shrill bird-like voice that the larks and linnets joined in the chorus, and the cicadas tried in vain for a high enough note?

MARIA. That was, doubtless my little Annunziata. And now her lips, her poor scorched lips, are smothered in cinders.

There are many wounds in her body, and her eyes . . . her eyes . . .

GUALBERTO. Alas! who did this terrible deed? Could not her father protect her?

MARIA. Her father! He was lying by her side with a sword-wound in his heart—Michele was dead. Something must have frightened the murderer, or perhaps he could not bear to look at Annunziata, for he had fled in haste leaving his sword on the floor beside them.

GUALBERTO. Is that the sword, the murderer's sword?

MARIA. Nay, it is my sword now. I have sworn it shall know no scabbard till that day when it finds its sheath in the murderer's heart.

GUALBERTO. No, no; you must not say that. Give it to me to hang up in the chapel.

MARIA. When the murderer is dead, I will bring it to you to hang up in the chapel. But a sword alone is an uncertain weapon. I have come hither to ask your help.

GUALBERTO. There is only one way I can help you.

MARIA. You are wise, Gualberto. A little

drop of venom distilled from some poisonous herb—the laurel or the nightshade. A waxen image melting slowly before the fire. There are many ways by which the wise can rid themselves of their enemies.

GUALBERTO. The wise have no enemies. I will never help any man to shed blood.

MARIA. And yet they told me you were a Saint. Has God, then, no enemies?

GUALBERTO. That is a matter outside my province. Messer San Michele will doubtless see to it.

MARIA. You do not see that my revenge is a sacred, a divine duty. You have no heart, you care nothing for my little Annunziata. If you had seen her lying there in her blood.

GUALBERTO. You think I should want to see her murderer lying beside her? What good would that do to her or to you? Maria, it is easy to forgive our enemies; what we must do is to forgive the enemies of those we love.

MARIA. You are taking away my last hope, my only joy. I have nothing left to live for—the sword is my one earthly trea-

sure. If I cannot thrust it into that murderous devil's heart I will sheath it in my own. (*She is about to stab herself in her frenzy, but GUALBERTO seizes her arm and wrenches the sword out of her hand.*)

GUALBERTO. Calm yourself, calm yourself, poverina, your grief has frenzied you.

MARIA. Alas, alas! I am indeed desolate. I have nothing left now, you have robbed me even of my sword.

GUALBERTO (*looking at the sword closely and turning pale*). Whose sword is this?

MARIA. Indeed I do not know; I only know he is my enemy.

GUALBERTO. Nay, there is no doubt he is my enemy, too. I also know this sword. He is the man who killed my brother twenty years ago.

MARIA. And you did not kill him? I have heard that men do not often love their brothers.

GUALBERTO. Like you, I sought his life for years, and at last I met him riding along the cypresses on the hill up yonder.

MARIA (*fiercely*). And you did not fight him?

GUALBERTO. Yes, we fought, and the victory was mine. He was at my mercy, disarmed and helpless. I could not strike . . . I had had enough of death and sorrow. I forgave him and let him go free.

MARIA. And because of this miserable forgiveness of yours he lived to slay my dear ones. If you had loved your brother truly you would have slain the foul beast without mercy. Coward that you are, it is your fault that my home is desolate!

GUALBERTO. Alas, you think it was I that slew the child who came singing up the path?

MARIA. It is to you, with your miserable softness and cowardice, to whom all this evil is due. God gave you the opportunity and the power to kill a wild beast . . . and you . . . you refused to strike—you let him go free to slay the innocent and lay waste the dwellings of the poor.

GUALBERTO. Alas, how could I know what he was going to do? God let him live. Am I wiser than God?

MARIA. It is foolish to blame God for your own folly. He gave you the power to set

right a great wrong, to crush out an evil and mischievous serpent with poisoned fangs.

GUALBERTO. Yes, I had the power, but not the will. My will was crippled. It was because, like a fool, I thanked God for His mercy in giving my enemy into my hand; and then the desire for mercy came over me in a great furious wave, sweeping away all my thoughts . . .

MARIA. If you had killed one you would have saved Heaven knows how many lives. If you had been merciless to him, you would have been merciful to me and those I love. Now that you have forgiven him, I will never forgive you . . .

GUALBERTO. There is someone coming up the path, singing.

A pilgrim comes up the path, singing.

SONG

FAR away in the land of palms
I sought for the tomb of the Lord,
Right willing to blot out my sin
By putting his foes to the sword,
And breaking the armed might of the
Sultan Saladin.

Here I come wearily, drearily, asking your
alms.

Far away in the land of palms
I met with a heathen maid,
And her heart was black as sin,
And her hair as the night's shade.
She was no child of God, but the daughter
of Saladin.

Here I come wearily, drearily, asking your
alms.

A princess of swords and spears,
She was my prisoner awhile,
I hated her for her sin,
But I loved her for her strange smile—
And I could not slay the child of the heathen
Saladin.

Here I come wearily, drearily, asking your
tears.

In the glory of battle arrayed,
Blood of the children of God,
Doubtless she, too, had shed,
Blood that cried out from the sod.

Yet I slew not the scorner of Christ, I did
not avenge his dead.

And now I come wearily, drearily, asking
your aid.

A forest of evil snares
Was hidden behind her smile,
She was doubtless a daughter of sin
And queen of the children of guile.
The foe of Christ the Lord and the child of
Saladin.

Here I come wearily, drearily, asking your
prayers.

Far away in the land of palms,
A saint would have slain her then,
That her heathen spirit's grace
Might bring no more sorrow to men.
But I could not bring to nought the smile
on an enemy's face.

Here I come wearily, drearily, asking your
alms.

GUALBERTO (*rising and going to meet him*).
Friend, you are my brother. I, too, could
not slay the enemy of God's children.

PILGRIM. She used to say God's children
have no enemies. But then, of course, she
was a heathen woman.

MARIA. And you left her alive to destroy
Christian men with the sword, or to corrupt
them with the vain and evil doctrine of the
heathen?

PILGRIM. God made her. Am I wiser than
He that I should destroy what he has made?

GUALBERTO. Ah, you say that, too. You
think he has done well to make the mur-
derer, the blasphemer, and the heathen.

PILGRIM. I have come to think so. That
is why I no longer wear the red cross. If
the whole earth is the house of God how
can I refuse hospitality to those who are,
after all, his invited guests?

MARIA. You are, then, such another as
Gualberto here. If all men were like you
the whole world would be overrun with
murderers. No man's life would be safe.

PILGRIM. Nay, you mistake. If all men
were like Gualberto there would be no
murderers at all.

MARIA. There is no good in talking to
you two, you cannot understand. My child

is dead—my little Annunziata—and her father, and my home is desolate because Gualberto would not slay a murderer years ago. The same man murdered his brother—he had the chance of killing him. If he had not spared him, my little Annunziata would be alive now.

GUALBERTO (*buries his face in his hands*). Pilgrim, it is true, it is all true that she says. I cannot understand it. Once in my life I obeyed the voice of God, and all this misery has happened because of it.

PILGRIM. Take courage, Gualberto, this is not the end. I know it is not the end . . .

MARIA. No, it is not the end, for the sword is in my hands now, and justice shall be done.

PILGRIM. What is justice?

MARIA. It is what you do not understand. It is the will of God . . . It sets right the balance.

PILGRIM. Why do you want balance?

MARIA. You cannot live without balance, it is the secret of life itself.

PILGRIM. That is true, Maria. The balance of one evil deed against another is the

secret of the eternal life of evil. Only by refusing vengeance can you destroy that life.

MARIA. Pilgrim, you confuse my thoughts with your words, but everything is really quite clear. . . . If I kill this man my just vengeance will wipe out his crime.

PILGRIM. Can you wipe out a bloodstain by pouring more blood on it? . . . I say you must have something different.

GUALBERTO. This balance of yours is a terrible thing, Maria. Think of it, through the ages tossing to and fro the ball of misery.

MARIA. I do not understand you. Surely you will not deny that justice is the will of God?

PILGRIM. The justice that is the will of God is the balance of mercy with mercy.

GUALBERTO. Alas, too often it seems the balance of sorrow with sorrow.

PILGRIM. Nay, Gualberto, by refusing the sword you have found the most wonderful thing in the world—the road that leads at last to the end of sorrow.

MARIA. I see nothing clearly. This villain has robbed me of all that was precious to me, therefore I hate him.

GUALBERTO. Have you ever seen him?

MARIA. No, but I should know him at once; my whole soul would rise up against him. Hatred would clear my sight.

PILGRIM. I would help you if I could. If the heathen woman was here she would explain. But it may be that nothing will make life clear to you except death.

MARIA. Why should I not punish the evil-doer? Why should I not avenge this great wrong?

PILGRIM. Alas, poor soul, you have caught the infection of Malvolio's fever. That is why you want revenge . . .

The monastery bell rings. GUALBERTO starts.

GUALBERTO. Why are they ringing the bell?

PILGRIM. It is the Angelus. It is time for me to go on my way . . .

MARIA sits down on the grass, with her head in her hands.

GUALBERTO. Pilgrim, you are very wise; you have made me see clearly the meaning of my own wild action.

PILGRIM. Nay, it is but this woman's need that has made clear to me the dream buried in my heart.

GUALBERTO. Where are you going from here?

PILGRIM. I am going to ask a night's shelter in the monastery above; to-morrow I shall start on my way. Farewell, Madonna, you long for vengeance only because you mistake it for mercy.

MARIA. Is it not mercy to rescue the world from the crimes of a scoundrel?

PILGRIM. The world does not belong to the villain, or even to the Saint, Madonna. Farewell, Gualberto.

GUALBERTO (*who is listening to a sound inside the Chapel*). Farewell, Pilgrim.

The PILGRIM disappears round the turn of the path. He is heard singing as he climbs slowly up the hill. The Chapel door opens and MALVOLIO looks out, cautiously, with a white face.

MARIA. Who is that whom you have hidden in the Chapel?

GUALBERTO. Only another wounded soul.

One in great sorrow, like yourself. You two are they who should love one another.

MALVOLIO *staggers forward out of the Chapel.*

MALVOLIO. My wound has broken out again, I shall bleed to death. I am dying—quick, quick! It is cruel—will you not help me?

MARIA (*rushing forward to support him, she drops the sword on the grass*). See, I will bind it for you. (*She tears the handkerchief off her neck. He sinks on the ground and she supports his head on her knees.*)

GUALBERTO. The soldiers were outside, I could only tie it hastily, anyhow, and then . . . I was afraid.

MARIA. Ah, be patient a minute. (MALVOLIO *winces*.) I know it's very painful. There, that's a little better.

MALVOLIO. Water, water—I am dying. . . . a very evil life . . .

GUALBERTO *fetches water from the spring while they talk.*

MARIA. All our lives are evil and full of sorrow. There was one here just now who talked much of mercy.

MALVOLIO (*eagerly*). A priest? Was he a priest?

MARIA. Nay, nay; only a pilgrim from the East.

MALVOLIO (*disappointed*). What could he know?

MARIA. I do not know; but the mercy of God seems clearer out there.

MALVOLIO *groans and shudders with pain.*

MARIA (*tending him*). There, there; lie still and try to rest. (GUALBERTO *brings the water*). Poor man, poor man, he seems so young, with such a beautiful face. Yes, yes, you shall have the water—just a moment's patience. (*She gives him water and begins to bathe his forehead.*)

GUALBERTO. How gentle you are with him.

MARIA. I would do much to ease his pain. In his weakness and suffering he has such a strange look of my dear dead Michele. There is the same drawn whiteness about his forehead . . . and his lips.

GUALBERTO. We had better get him back into the Chapel. We can tend him there,

and already I hear the voices of the soldiers seeking him through the wood.

MARIA. What has he done, poor man? Why do they seek him?

GUALBERTO. I will tell you afterwards. Come now quickly. (*Together they carry him back towards the Chapel gently.*) Make haste.

MARIA. Take care, he is moaning; hold his head a little higher—there. (*They take him into the Chapel and shut the door.*)

The SOLDIERS crowd in.

CAPTAIN. Halt! Now where has that rascally hermit hidden himself?

GUALBERTO *comes out of the Chapel shutting the door behind him.*

CAPTAIN. Ah, my friend, I want a word with you. What do you mean by sending us chasing wild asses up that preposterous mountain of yours? But you have overreached yourself. You shall not escape justice.

GUALBERTO. Sir, did I not tell you you would not find him you sought in the monastery?

CAPTAIN. Listen, all of you, to the innocence of this holy man. You thrice accursed

misleader of trusting souls, it is no use your protesting. You made us all believe he was there with your lying tricks, and in the name of His Holiness and all the saints, you shall pay for your infernal cunning. What is that sword on the ground?

GUALBERTO. It was brought here by a poor woman crazy for vengeance on him who had slain her husband.

CAPTAIN. A likely story indeed! Another of your lying tales, I suppose. I should like to know what business a holy hermit like you has with a woman, however crazy, or a sword—and a sword covered with blood, too. Give me that woman's toy off the ground. (*A SOLDIER picks up the sword and gives it to him.*) Have you nothing better than that to say for yourself? What have you done with this miserable outlaw?

GUALBERTO. By now he will have escaped, thank God!

CAPTAIN. How dare you speak to me like that? Know this, my friend. I have ways of compelling men to speak the truth—even liars and children of Satan like you. (*To the*

SOLDIERS.) Arrest that man and search the hut yonder.

GUALBERTO. What I said was true, as once before. I cannot help your not believing it.

CAPTAIN. You shall not escape, in any case. Answer my question. Where has this man gone?

GUALBERTO. Only God knows.

CAPTAIN. And this woman—the woman with the sword? Did she go with him?

GUALBERTO (*hurriedly*). Nay, God forbid!

CAPTAIN. Then, in the name of Heaven, where have you hidden this abominable mistress of yours?

The Chapel door opens, and MARIA comes out weeping.

MARIA. He is dead—he is dead; and he lies there with his eyes shut, looking so sad, looking so like my Michele, alas! (*She looks up and sees the CAPTAIN holding her sword.*) What are you doing to my sword? How dare anyone take my sword! Give it to me at once! I will have vengeance! Nobody shall cheat me of my vengeance. Gualberto could not do it; the Pilgrim could not. To

think that a man like you—a stranger—should dare! Give me my sword. I can tell you the curse of the broken-hearted lies heavy on a man's soul. The sword, the sword!

SOLDIER. She raves, she is mad. Do not withhold the sword, lest she curse us, and some great evil happen to us.

MARIA (*to CAPTAIN*). If you do not give me the sword I will put such a curse upon you that your skin will wither and peel off your bones, and your hair and teeth shall fall out, and your eyes be turned to darkness and your flesh to corruption, and only your heart shall not cease beating.

CAPTAIN (*crossing himself*). She is mad. Give her the sword. It is no shame to fear the curse of those whom God has stricken. (*A SOLDIER gives her the sword.*) Now, hermit, where have you hidden this malefactor?

GUALBERTO. I told you it was not I who was hiding him—it is God.

CAPTAIN (*crossing himself*). Enough of this wild talk; you cannot frighten me with your mad woman and your lies. I am the

servant of His Holiness. Where is Malvolio?

GUALBERTO. Get off your horse and follow me. I will bring you to his hiding-place.

CAPTAIN (*dismounting, to SOLDIERS*). See that that woman does not escape. (*He signs to the SOLDIERS to free GUALBERTO, and follows him into the Chapel.*)

SOLDIER (*to MARIA*). Ah, Maria, I know you. Many a time have I seen you fetching water from the well. You were ever the fairest woman in the Val d'Arno.

MARIA. I do not remember you.

SOLDIER. Your good wishes should go with us. The man we seek murdered your husband—yes, and burnt your house. You have no need of that sword; after all, we are going to avenge you.

MARIA. What do you mean? That villain is not here.

SOLDIER. The holy hermit knows better. He seems to think he is in the Chapel. Your instinct has led you right.

MARIA. My instinct?

SOLDIER. You need not fear: our blessed captain is a servant of His Holiness.

Sanctuaries and shrines are nothing to him. Malvolio will have to pay his debt if he is even clinging to the Holy Altar itself.

MARIA. It was this man, then, who died in my arms?

CAPTAIN (*opening the door*). Take this carrion forth. This is he whom we sought, the villain who laid his sacrilegious hands on the horses of our Lord.

The SOLDIERS take the body of MALVOLIO and half-push and half-throw it down the Chapel steps. GUALBERTO comes out into the sunshine.

GUALBERTO. Maria, will you hang up your sword now in the Sanctuary?

MARIA goes slowly up the steps with the sword in her hand.

CAPTAIN. The hermit goes with us. He must answer for his attempt to throw dust in the eyes of the law and cheat the servants of God of His vengeance. Soldiers, take your prisoner. March!

The SOLDIERS drag GUALBERTO away in the midst of them. MARIA stands on the steps with the sword in her hand; she turns and looks after GUALBERTO.

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MARIA. But for you, my hands would be stained with blood . . . now they have ministered to the needs of Michele's murderer. Alas! we suffer blindly, blindly. (*She goes into the Chapel.*)

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