

To Save the Lost



I - Fall

R. M. Moss

To Save the Lost

written, illustrated and with music by

R. M. Moss

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Certain original medieval sources have been adapted to the language and style adopted for the narration: in this, Volume I, *There is no Rose of such Virtue* is a well known medieval devotional poem. The story *Of Gawain and his Lady* appears not only in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* but various other sources: it is freely adapted to the purposes of its narrator, using the medieval stylistic traditions of alliteration and the use of the present tense at moments of great emotion or significance. *The Riddle Song* is closely modelled on a 15th century song; *Maiden in the Moor Lay* is also of that period. *The Lyke Wake Dirge* is a traditional Yorkshire song and appears in several versions. The music for all these are the compositions of the author. The geste, *The Knight of Courtesy*, is from an early source but has been much reduced in length. The geste, *The Snow Babe*, (as its narrator suggests) does indeed come from a medieval Latin source but in this case has been much embroidered and expanded although its "politically incorrect" core is true to the original. The story, *Alison and the Faery Gold* and its accompanying music and songs are entirely original. *Now is the time of Christemas* is, again adapted from a medieval source and the music that of the author. *The Yule Play* is entirely original, but incorporates typical ideas of death and resurrection and the bawdy humour much loved by our forebears. The opening verse and melody of *Robin m'aime* may or may not be correctly remembered from a recording heard many years ago. The other words are all original. (My thanks to Laurence Stracquadanio who checked my French.)

R. M. Moss

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I dedicate this book to

Ralph

Basil

Simon

Laura

and

Catherine

and to you, dear reader

Apologia

The action of this story is set in Yorkshire in the early 15th century when people of all social classes spoke with a strong regional accent. I have indicated pronunciation in the speech of the 'common folk' to help you to imagine the characteristic vowel sounds of the educated characters without making the manuscript too heavy reading but be aware that when Robin writes 'naught' (nothing), he would pronounce it 'nowt' but probably sound the 'gh' (as in the Scottish word 'loch') which gave the word its spelling. Everybody uses 'thee', 'thou' and 'thine': correct for both period and dialect, it also creates a sense of intimacy and hierarchy without need of further explanation. 'You' is used to strangers, elders, those of higher rank or simply to convey respect; 'thee' is reserved for one's closest intimates, those of lower rank or to claim superiority. Notice the points at which the form of address changes from 'you' to 'thee' or vice versa, revealing subtleties which I do not explain. To reinforce the sense of time and place, I have attempted to limit my vocabulary to words familiar in the 15th or, at latest, 16th centuries. Doubtless certain analytical souls will discern words and expressions which have escaped my vigilance but I hope they will derive enjoyment from studying the original meaning of the words I have used: they often express my purpose far more succinctly than do later nuances. This self-imposed limitation is balanced by the liberal use of many dialect words, most of which are from old English. For example: a 'rode' means a day's journey on horseback; what we call a road is a 'gate'; 'agate' means on a journey; our notion of a gate or gateway was a 'yat' or 'yatstead' - origin of the surname Yates or Yateman, meaning gatekeeper. Another name for a road or track is a 'gang'; i.e. a going; similarly a path is a 'trod'. Please be aware that Yorkshire folk would generally say, 'Peter horse' rather than 'Peter's horse.' Our narrator uses the possessive apostrophe but several other characters omit it.

I hope you will share my enjoyment of our rich and diverse language and that the story itself will quickly make it comfortable. I use modern punctuation. Glosses in smaller, fainter type appear immediately after unfamiliar words and expressions until, by recurring, they become familiar. If you forget any, use the Glossary at the end of Book III. Here you will also find more detailed explanations for many words. Footnotes explain terms which need more detail and an asterisk in the text shows that this word is included in the previous footnote. Dates and additional historical information are also to be found in the footnotes.

As to place, it must be remembered that this is a work of fiction. Those familiar with Swaledale will find that I have altered its topography, using features characteristic of the local landscape, and renamed those places and villages which I have modified under literary licence and in which the action of my story takes place. I do so to prevent any confusion with the actual history of the area but, reverting to older forms have retained the name Swale - as River Swalle and Swalldale - to account for its position and proximity to Richemund, and neighbouring Yuredale, where we find Wendeslegh and Bolton. Apart from royalty, Lord Scrope of Bolton and Abbott Peter Snape of Jervax - now known as Jervaulx Abbey - who play minor roles, all the people I write about are fictional and are not intended to resemble historical characters. However, I have tried to be as historically accurate as I am able and beg my learned reader's forgiveness where I fall short. Happily a work of fiction allows for vagaries of custom and attitude: a leeway denied the historian.

The plays, stories and songs may be treated as a performance resource and contact details for performing rights are on the reverse of the title page. My original music is in the Appendix of Book III. Also in the Appendix is a bibliography of some volumes which have been particularly useful to me for those whose appetite for more detailed knowledge is whetted.

You will find a wealth of supplementary visual and written information on the Res Miranda website: www.resmiranda.co.uk

But do not look for any biography of the author: if you do not meet me within this narrative, I have failed in my endeavour.

R. M. Moss

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I

Fall

Prologue

My Dear Son, Thomas,

To watch thee, now, a-laiking[playing], is to be given a window onto mine own infancy, a polished mirror reflecting bright glimpses of my youth.

To feel myself riven betwain fatherly duty and indulgent love is to comprehend, at last, mine own father, punishing my misdeeds whilst, inwardly, his heart bled with compassion.

Had he been able to share with me the trials of his own youth, I might sooner have come to the profound love which grows from true perception. As it fell out, the years of our greatest fellowship were cutten short by the cold grave gaping. Our mortal span is so brief, and thou, Thomas - bearer of his name - art yet too young to share my secrets, wherefore I will pen for thee the adventures which shaped me. Should I die too soon, ere[before] thou attainest manhood, happen thou mayest come to know me through this record in which I bequeath unto thee such wisdom as I have gained.

I could liken my struggle to a game of chess wherein the challenge became reversed. At the outset I stood vulnerable and alone, defenceless and held in check by the opposing queen. By slow degrees I found or forged each missing piece and cast them into the [battle]field. Only mine own queen, the last to be restored, had power to halt the battle in my breast and call my wayward army into ordered ranks.

As I hope my story will allow thee to know me, her own story unfurled for me the many blows by which her staunch courage had been forged. I will never forget the first time I read it by the dawning light of St John's Day¹, its preamble faithfully recorded in my sister's small and careful script:

I'm up on a bay mare, astride her withers. Ahint[behind] me, on the saddle, Master Peter holds the reins. My small arms lig[lie] o'er his, they steady me. His hands smell salt and good and I'm glad of the clean druft[breeze] and warm sun. Another man rides anent[beside] us. I heed not their speech for I'm watching the mare lugs[ears]: they've pricked, swivelling to listen at some sound. I feel her gathering under my legs. She snorts, scenting the air. Our way is blocked for a jumble of rocks has tumbled from the haughside aboon[hillside above] us and, on the other side of the gate[road], the cam[slope] drops on down, brant[steep] and bushy. Somewhere below a river runs.

Tway[two] men leap out from ahint the rocks. Sunshine sparks on their weapons. Yan[one] man catches our bridle. Peter can't draw sword for I balk him.

¹ June 24th, taken then to be Midsummer's Day: in fact the calendar was becoming inaccurate, Gregorian reform, first mooted by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 was adopted in Britain in 1752, by then 11 days out of kilter.

He kicks the man instead, who falls back, spitting blood. But the other's pulling our companion from his steed. I see an axe flash and bite deep into his skull as we wheel away. 'Hold on!' I'm told. I clutch the mane. The mare bounds forward. Peter hath the reins again. But another man comes at us, on a black horse. He must have been hiding himself in the bushes below the gate, waiting to attack us from the rear. Pike in hand, he comes, teeth bared. Peter yarks[jerks] the rein. 'Lean forrard!' he roars and I lig on the mare's neck as he spurs her up the haugh away from gate and river. A nieve[fist]-sized, jagged rock whistles past us and thuds into the grass ahead. I twist my fingers in the mane for my legs can scarcely grasp. The smell of dread is strong on Peter and the mare, both, with the drumming hooves ahint us. We're on a long, grassy cam now and the mare hooves keep slaaping[slipping]. Yet he spurs her on. Aboon us are trees. Ahint us a cry, then a thud. We slacken a little and Peter twists round. 'That'll slow him!' Then we're pounding on.

Cold sweat trickles down my neck, my legs are wockery[weak] from trying to grip. We're in the trees, slowing down to dodge the branches but yan whips mine eye. 'Tis tenging[stinging] and my tailbone's jarring on the mare withers for the rolled blanket on which I sat has fallen off. It gives me sich jip[pain], I sob. 'Wisht[hush]!' whispers Peter, 'Keep' thoo mum!

The trees are that close and taffled[tangled] we're a-gang[going] more slowly. The mare snorts, yarking at the rein for we can hear our sly foe creeping after us. All this time we're climbing higher. 'I want Mother,' I whisper.

'Wisht, my lambkin, we mus' lead him from her. Pray God he'll not 'scry [notice] her on the gate ahint us.'

We push on through the thick forest, ever listening for sounds of our hunter. At last we come upon an arridge[edge] where the ground drops down, brant as an house-side. We pause here and glimpse a beck[stream] beneath. Peter dunches[nudges] the mare forrard, laiting[seeking] a way down and we startle an hind close below us. She darts away, down to the dene-arse[valley-bottom].

I tremble and feel Peter arms tighten about my showthers[shoulders]. He turns the mare and makes her creep further up the haugh close to the arridge of the scar. Now and then we tarry, listening. The forest is right quiet. 'I reckon he's lost our track,' Peter whispers. The trees grow scarce, twisted, cloaked in fern. We're coming out from the woods. Ere gang forth from the trees, Peter pauses again in a slack[hollow], listening, watching the empty, grassy haughside ahead. 'Tis sunny here. A bullace tree is dropping rotten fruit and there's a bright wiggin[rowan], too. Peter wipes his brow on his sleeve. A soft humming sounds. The mare sweats, reeking of fear. She shifts her feet and shudders, then suddenly kicks her belly and stamps. The humming becomes an angry buzz. She bolts again, unchecked, for there are wossups[wasps] everywhere. They're in mine hair. I let go the mane, first with yan hand, then with both; waving mine arms about, trying to brush the wossups from my face and hair. Peter tries to set her at the haugh, but I knap[knock] a rein from his hand and she wheels about.

Now all I can see is sky for the mare is tilting. She shrikes[shrieks] as her hooves begin to slaap and falls to her knees. I'm thrown off, falling as though I were a stone, into nowhere. Something catches me, tearing me with sharp claws. My gown's pulled tight against my breast and I'm halted, swinging same as an arran[spider], arms and legs flailing. Something huge crashes past me.

After a time, I begin to see a little: a strange world, red and blurry. I rub mine een[eyes]; mine hand is bloody. I'm hanging on the face of a scar. Far below the frantic mare is liggig, kicking her hooves. Peter's trapped, half under her. His head is agee[askew] and he whimpers, as doth a skelped tyke[beaten dog]. They have come to rest aboon a scree. When the loose stones settle it goes quiet but for a wossup struggling in mine hair and the sound of watter running. My lip is swelling from a teng but I feel myself numb.

Now I harken to what I dread, the scrape of hooves. I pull mine head up, twisting to see whence comes the sound. First I see the beck and then the other bank of the clough[narrow valley] which is not as rocky. A man is following a wee trod[path], halfway up. He's leading a black horse with a bundle thrown o'er the saddle. I quake when he sees me.

Though I watch what's afoot, everything seems to belong to some other life, not mine. The man tethers the horse and climbs down into the clough, pawsing[kicking] footholds in the turf where 'tis brant. He steps from rock to rock o'er the beck then clambers up betwixt the screes and picks his way across the foot of the scar. Now he's reached Peter and the mare, stands looking down on them. He proddles[pokes] Peter wry head with his foot, but gently. The mare ligs still now, agape, tongue lolling. Peter groans yet. The man draws the sword from Peter sheath. He aims with care, then drives it through Peter thropple[throat]. Blood spouts forth, he gurgles and goes wisht. The wossup is yet feyting[fighting] in mine hair. I feel it teng my scalp and nither[shiver], icy.

Beneath me the man has dropped the sword. He unclasps Peter belt, looks in the pouch hanging there and puts on the belt. He takes up the sword, wipes the blade and sheathes it. He unties the cloak, yarks it from under him and spreads it on the ground anent him. Now he takes Peter by the showthers and hefts him, shoving the dead mare away with his foot, drawing him out a little. He puts off Peter tunic and pourpoint², and rather than untie or sever the points[laces], cuts them out of the threadbare hosen with a sharp knife drawn from his own belt. He even takes Peter shirt, piling the bloodied garments on his cloak. Now he takes off the mare bridle and tries to loosen the saddle but she begins to slaap down the scree, dragging Peter with her. As they roll o'er there's a muffled crack. The man shrews[curses] softly. He looks up at me, then turns away and picks up the bridle. He loops it o'er his showther, takes up the

² **pourpoint** a waist-length garment, worn as an alternative to a doublet, with six pairs of eyelets around the lower edge to which the hose are secured with **points**, ie laces at either end of which is a metal **aiglette** used to push the end of the lace through the eyelets. The two ends are caught up into a single loop.

bundle of raiment and begins to go back the way he came, holding the bundle in his teeth to climb where the cam is most brant. He unties the black horse and leads him away up the trod. When he rounds a corner, he's lost to sight. My neck aches me and I drop mine head till all I can see is the half-naked man, the mare, the stones wet with crimson blood. I shut mine eyeen. I'm yannerly[alone] and that clagged[thirsty] my tongue cleaves to my mouth. My feet and fingers prickle and mine head floats in umbrage. My yan comfort is the sun heat.

I'm yarked awake as my gown rives[tears] a little. Terror makes my breast gallop and I expect to fall, but don't. A deep pool of shade has filled the clough and is creeping up the rock toward me. I nither.

A trickle of wee stones comes bouncing past me. I harken a deep, thump, thump, thump same as a big drum. After a while something falls down past me. It writhes as though it were a snake, catching my cheek. When it ceases moving I can see it for a stout band[rope]. It starts to move again and more stones tumble by. Presently a foot appears, searching for a toe-ledge, then another. Then an hand reaches out for me. A gurt[big] hand it is, besmeared with dark blood.

When I see the gurt blade betwixt the man teeth, I'm sure he means to slay me, and struggle but my gown begins to rive again. I'm so flayed[afraid] of falling, I let him cleak[grasp] hold of me, cling to him as he slashes away the claws grasping me. I feel his whiskers rasp my neck when he puts me o'er his showther. He climbs up, grunting with effort, holding my legs with yan hand and pulling himself up the band with the other, pawing to find toe-holes in the rock and earth. With mine head hanging o'er his back I can see the clawed beast which saved me for a stunted thorn bush rooted in a gryke[fissure]. But a glimpse of the bodies below makes me shut mine eyeen tightly. At the brink of the scar the man rests, and I feel his knees coming up as he bunches himself together and then flings me onto the grass. As wokkery as a wurrum[worm], I drag myself away from the cliff toward the stake where the band is tied. Then I see the band slacken and feel myself raised up. I want to run away but my legs fold up under me. He picks me up and throws me o'er his showther again.

Having completed mine history, I feel compelled to add, in my defence:

Hinc ergo narrationem incipiemus:

Stultum etenim est ante historiam effluere, in ipsa autem historia succingi. II Maccabees, II xxxij³

³ "Here, then, we begin our narrative: it is foolish, indeed, to make an issue of the prologue and curtail the history, itself."

I - Of tway lads and the bairn of a devil

After months of inner tumult, the unexpected possession of this momentous document whelmed me with a flood of compassion and relief. I read the first pages swiftly, whispering each curt phrase, ere both the script and mode of utterance changed abruptly, leading me into wilderness, warning me to savour these revelations slowly and heedfully, to appreciate their deep significance. I have read them many times since and now, laying down the well-thumbed manuscript, I begin to reflect on the many incidents: painful, dreamlike, right daft, uplifting or tormenting to remember, through which our lives became interwoven. Now thou, Thomas, givest me cause to record these adventures (and by so doing, to distract myself from our present grief) but to fully comprehend them, do thou know me from my beginning.

My mother's birth pangs began during Mass on St Anthony of Padua's Day⁴ in the year of our Lord yan thousand four hundred and seven - an holiday which allowed her no cessation of labour but which ensured my subsequent birthdays were red-letter days*. Ere the sun went down I had exchanged the womb for the cradle; my parents' agitation for solace and the joy of a long-awaited, living son and heir for Sir Thomas Wynmer and Dame Agnes.

For me, the world began here, in the safety of the solar, where my mother or nurse, Margery, would laik^[play] with me and rock me in the little wooden cradle at their feet. As soon as I could toddle, I fought to elude their vigilance and was constantly repulsed from the hearth, screaming with frustration and fury. I delighted in climbing anything I could grasp so furs and blankets were spread on the stage to cushion my many falls: wearied, I had but to crawl amongst them to rest. On a glorious day the sneck^[latch] failing to catch gave me liberty to discover the gressins^[stairs] which lead down to the hall. My small fingers felt the carven, honey-coloured balusters, my nose smelled the rich woody odour. I was considering how best to scale the shiny, winding gressins when Margery caught me up and huggered^[carried] me back, protesting shrilly. Time passed; I learned how to climb safely up and down and gained freedom to range abroad.

How vast the hall seemed to me then! With everybody about their work after noon, my shrill voice echoed as I laiked at penk-anew^[peek-a-boo] with Margery round the screens. At the other end of the hall, beneath the solar, I disregarded the doors at either end of the raised dais, the chapel door ever open; the other, of the small chamber for the single women of the house, kept closed. Neither of these interested me at all but, beyond the screens passage, the locked doors of the pantry buttery, stillroom and sewery^{[stores for bread; beer & wine; herbal prepara-}

⁴* St Anthony of Padua: June 13th. In a devotional book such as a Book of Hours, the most important festivals and saints' days in the calendar are distinguished by the use of red ink.

tions; provisions & table linen] had me on tenterhooks of curiosity. At the north end of the screens passage the brant[steep], narrow gressins rising to the gallery and rooms for the steward and gentlemen were forbidden to me but I oft-times laiked beneath them on the stored paillasses and blankets of those who slept in the hall, regarding with longing the huge, ironbound door which gives on to the yard. Yance this was opened to me, *terra ingognita*[unknown land] unfurled as far as Carisdale's encircling moat and mellow stone walls.

I gaze on thee now, Thomas, riding thine hobby-horse in the yard beneath my window, reminding me of sunny days long gone with Margery at spinning or mending of my clothes in the porch, and I basking on the south-facing door-stone[step], picking at the scabs on my knees and surveying my realm ere beginning to beat my bounds.

From the eastern corner of the house to the stable, my way was blocked by the wall, about the height of a man's shoulders, which divides the garth[garden] from the yard. Most of the worts[vegetables] and fruit for the household are still grown here. I remember gauving[staring] through the iron yat[gate] at a forbidden paradise with tempting rows of good things to eat. Overseeing these crops, the kitchen, in the north-east corner of the high boundary wall, was used then to be joined to the house by naught but a narrow, open-sided walkway. In winter the bee skeps were kept close to the kitchen walls, drawing warmth from the great hearth within, protecting the bees from frost. It would be years ere I saw inside the bakehouse, brewhouse and dairy along the eastern wall. The garth being barred to me, I turned my attention to the nearby well, with ferny walls and echoing depths which holden a mystical attraction for me: I was used to lean over the low wall and hoot, listening for the return of my strange, disembodied voice. Margery so despaired of impressing upon me the perils of the well, she sent me at last to Father, who bassocked[thrashed] me soundly for disobeying my nurse. It was the first of many chastisements at his hands.

By following the garth wall, I would come to the stable, extending from the yathouse to the south-eastern corner. This was also forbidden to me without I was accompanied by yan of the grooms. I remember my delight on being hefted up to sit on the broad back of Father's aged destrier[war-horse], tethered in the stall. Yance, to assuage my curiosity, I was taken up the stee[ladder] to see the mewstead[hayloft] and the bower beyond it where the under-grooms and other servants slept. Their small window overlooked the garth but the mixen[dung-heap], beneath, made it a right smelly place, especially when the wind was in the north.

Will, the yatkeeper, who slept in the little chamber above the yatstead[gate-way] from which the drawbrigg[bridge] and portcullis are operated, watched me keenly to ensure I did not slip through and fall into the moat. When, glimpsing the bosomy howes[gentle hills] beyond, I persuaded him to lead me by the hand across the brigg, I was surprised to turn and perceive that yon biggins[buildings] which gaze so benignly upon the sunny yard regard the world at large from sus-

picious, narrow and defensive slits. Most of the tall, mature folk who paced purposefully about their business, such as the bailiff and constable, whose lodgings abutted the yathouse, had no time for me but Will was different. Whenever I passed by, he would call me into his little guardroom and lift me onto his sweet knee: his other duty was keeping the bees and I could have recognised him even in the dark by the odour of rick^[smoke], wax and honey which imbued his clothes. ‘Tell me a story!’ I would plead and, having scratched his whiskers, thoughtfully, he would embark on a geste⁵, a rime*, a tale of saints, faeries, jousts or battles. In vain I cried, ‘Another, another, I pray you!’ Will was ay firm, ‘Nay, yan’s eneeaf^[one’s enough], my lad, off wi’ thee, now, about thi business and leave me to mine, else what’ll thi fayther say?’

The whole western wall used to be bounded by a range of biggins and laithes^[barns], all built of wood save for the tway most northerly: the small, raised granary which served our household needs and protected the wood-store beneath it and, in the corner, a low, stone building, divided within into tway rooms of equal dimension with a stout, locked door betwixt them. Behind this was the armoury, stocked with sufficient weaponry to furnish the entire menie^[household] and most of the village. The front half housed the wain, tway carts, and our main store of precious hay. I was allowed to laik here when the weather was wet, and as I grew older, enjoyed playing out the stories of Will’s romances, taking every part in turn.

The last place I came to on my tour was Mother’s herb garden, a miniature Eden, protected by the armoury on west side, the house on the other, and by the high border wall to the north. On the south side a low railing, with a yat in its midst, keeps the animals out, but not the sunshine. Mother passed many hours tending this garden and I was oft with her. On fair days we sate on the turf benk^[bench] against the boundary wall, basking in the sun and listening to the drone of bees. See thou, she is there even now, thine own mother anenst her, like as a pair of blackbirds. In yon^[that] very place I learned to count and recite my Paternoster and Ave^[Our Father and Hail Mary]. Mine eldest sister, Agnes, twirling her spindle skilfully, was ay ready to correct me should Mother’s attention wander. Seven years older than myself, she already seemed full-grown to my childish eyen^[eyes] whereas Phillipa, her tongue protruding with the effort of keeping her thread slender and even, was more of a companion to me.

As the household revolved around the impressive figure of my father, the pivot of the yard was ever the great linden tree which even now casts the flickering shadow of its bright, heart-shaped leaves over my parchment. It pleased me that Father holden hallmote^[manor court] under its spreading boughs from early summer when bees foraged in its sweet blossom till autumn turned its leaves to pale gold. In winter, when its gaunt fingers reached dark and wet into the grey sky, it seemed naught short of a miracle could fetch forth the pale, tender leaves

⁵* geste a story poem or ballad; rime rhyme, the ‘h’ a C17th addition.

anew.

Howbeit, for the first thray years of my life, I weened[imagined] the world turned about myself, so pampered and cherished was I by my mother, nurse and sisters. In my fourth year, I discovered my folly. Tway incidents shook my self-esteem: the birth of my sister Cicely was swiftly followed by Father taking over my tutelage from Mother. This turning-point came when I could count to twenty and lisp ‘*Pater noster qui es in coelis: sanctificetur nomen tuum.*’ My delighted mother sent me to display mine achievement to our *pater familias*. Father listened in solemn silence. By and I reached, ‘*Et ne nos inducas in tentationem. Sed libera nos a malo. Amen,*’ I was gabbling the last words, fain to have minded[glad to have remembered] them all. I looked up the wall of black stuff in which Father was clad and, from aboon[above], his head bent down to mine and he hefted me high in the air and kissed me.

‘Well done, Robin,’ he said, ‘And now tell me what these words are and what they mean...’

‘Mean, sir?’ I scratched my nose, abashed. ‘Mother says it is a prayer,’ I declared, after much thought.

‘And what is a prayer?’

By now I was becoming alarmed at his serious tone, ‘Tis what I have to say at bedtime, and ere I eat my food or...or should I be naughty...’ My lip began to fluther[tremble].

Father kissed me and set me on my feet again. Sitting himself down, he drew me close, holding me firmly betwixt his legs as though afraid I would run away. ‘The Paternoster,’ he told me, ‘is the prayer of our Saviour, Jesu. “*Pater noster*” means, “Father of us all”. Jesu, the Son of God, did not wish us to respect God as though he were some distant king who values merely the services and taxes we pay him. Nay, we are to know him as our loving Father, who succours each of us, as I succour thee.’ Alas! instead of reassuring me of the accessibility and love of God, Father’s words created for me a God as terrifying and unforeseeable as he was to me. For I could never foresee whether what I said and did would obtain from him smiles and praises or bassockings and rages. His blue-grey eyes were wont to change from the mildness of summer sky to cold steel in a moment: beneath the straight nose, his wide mouth quickly puckered with disapproval. His bearing had the dignity and self-assurance of a god: despite his limp, he holden his back erect and his iron-grey head high. (Four years ere my birth he had received a crippling wound at the Battle of Shrewesbury, fighting the rebels: he won his knighthood but was obliged thereafter, to Mother’s solace, to retire from combat.) When I sate on his knee, his body felt firm and hard. His softest feature was the cleft chin which he was wont to pinch, deepening its crease. For years, when I repeated the Paternoster, the face of God was his. Even now I find it hard to imagine God speaking save with the powerful ring of Father’s voice and the broad vowels of our region.

Mother was as soft as Father was hard. Her round, brown eyes, flecked

with green, have ay been full of warmth and the curling weeks[*corners*] of her small mouth do not betray their promise of a kindly nature. She is femmer[*slight*] now and frail, but then all her features were rounded, as was her body after years of childbearing, naught but her hands were long and thin, nimble with a needle. Her auburn hair was ay neatly dressed and coifed or veiled, but at night, plaited it into a single, loose braid, it would sometimes kittle[*tickle*] me whilst I slept. When Alice cambed it out ere dressing it each morn, she looked younger and strangely vulnerable.

I was too young to have witnessed for myself her gradual transformation from a cowering bride of sixteen into the dignified woman who had learned to foil her husband's immoderate temper. Whereas Carisdale lies comfortably in the soft howes which encircle the Vale of York, her own birthplace, Felbreck, some fourteen league⁶ to the north-west, stands guard over a narrow skarth[*pass*] betwixt Yuredale and Swalldale in stark country with great haughs[*steep hills*] and perilous scars[*cliffs*]. Her parents and elder brother, Geoffrey, were devoted to her but with no other siblings, her childhood was solitary so, at seven year of age, she was sent to be schooled in a convent. Until her marriage, she lived with the nuns in the company of four or five other lasses, learning good manners, reading and sewing. She also became skilled in the use of herbs.

From the quiet docility of the nunnery, Agnes was thrown rudely into a new life with a fierce, headstrong husband, six years her senior. Father, himself, confessed to me long afterwards that her brother, Geoffrey, helpen to soothe the storms of these early years, using their mutual friendship to reason with his brother-in-law and defend his sister. But, little by little, she blossomed, becoming valued and respected. Laiking at her feet, I oft harkened at my parents talking together; not perceiving till later how much support Father got from his wife in quietly discussing household business with her. She never offered advice outright, yet had the gift of being able to throw fresh insight into each situation, to tempt Father into sharing her own opinion. This skill was extended to us, her childer, and we loved her dearly for it: by contenting herself to remain a little apart from us all, at first shy and fearful, later by choice, she developed a clear-sighted wisdom which succoured us all.

As a small lad, I clearly remember bawling into the comforting folds of her gown after I had suffered a particularly hard whipping. She finally discerned from among howls, hiccups and sobs mine indignant repetition: 'Why is Father ay so grum[*angry*] with me, why?'

Gently, she dried mine eyen, wiped my nose, tarried ere I fell quiet and said: 'Thy father's anger, even as his kindness, is a manifestation of his love for thee... I reckon he gets in an higg[*temper*] with *himself*, sometimes, for loving thee o'er much!'

This seemed utterly incomprehensible to me and, with renewed anguish, I

⁶ **league** about three miles. It is common to drop the plural 's' when speaking of distance or time.

bawled; 'But if he loves me, why is he so horrid to me? Wherefore doth he keep bassocking me? I hate him! I hate him!'

She did not waste time reasoning with me but answered me with a story. Feigning indifference, I took a length of her tapestry yarn and began to laik with it, peevishly, winding it betwixt my fingers, but was soon drawn into her narrative, such was mine hunger for tales, fantastic or true.

'When thy father was a lad, he never expected to become the master of Carisdale. This manor belonged to his godfather, Master Thomas Bonamy. Master Bonamy had thray^[three] sons, but his firstborn was taken from him far too soon, snuffed out by fever in his early youth. Tway more sons were born, the youngest of whom was a year or so older nor thy father and they became firm friends. Sir Thomas has oft-times told me of how he delighted in coming hither to go a-roaming the woods and howes with young Richard. His godfather was a good-hearted man and undertook his duties right diligently. He tried to share with Thomas his own firm faith and provided for him to be taken as a page into his brother, Canon Bonamy, house. Both of them would have liked him to embrace the priesthood...' she paused and her eyen glazed with thought: 'and I'm sure that had he entered the church he would quickly have risen to a bishop, at least, for those who know of such things have oft assured me his facility in rhetoric is equal to that of any university graduate.' She glanced at me and smiled: 'Fortunately for me, 'twas not to be for, in youth, thy father was impatient, full-blooded and reckless. So, sith Richard was to be trained at arms, 'twas mooted Thomas should do likewise and he accepted the proposition readily. At Master Bonamy recommendation, Sir Robert de la Faitie - father of Sir Ralph de la Faitie - whom thou hast met - took him on as squire... such a worthy man, he was, and right well respected. Sadly, thou'lt not remember him: Sir Robert was thine own godfather, after whom thou'rt named.'

'I'm not called Robert! 'Tis Master Steward's name!' I protested.

'Indeed thou art, and 'tis on account of thy sharing it with the steward, we've ay called thee Robin so there could be no confusion.'

'I list^[want] not to be called Robert!'

'Now then, fret not thyself for I can't imagine calling thee by any name other nor Robin, now. Moreover, a bosom friend of thy father was called Robin so 'tis a name he's fond of. Now where was I? Ah yes, Thomas became Sir Robert squire and, being strong and vigorous and full of youthful zeal, he flourished. He worked hard, became skilled at arms and horsemanship and was soon renowned for his courage. His future as a man-at-arms, and then a knight in a great household, seemed assured. So when thy grandfather died, he divided his own land betwayn Clement and John, his eldest sons.'

'Would yon be mine Uncle Clement?'

'Aye.'

'I don't mind yan called John.'

‘Nay, he died long afore thou wert born, and his part reverted back to Clement. But, to return to Master Bonamy. His son, Richard, completed his own training and was knighted.’

‘Was he in a battle?’

Nay. Ye need not be in battle to be knighted. Sometimes the king or a great lord chooses to knight a squire anyway. When ’tis not a matter of being dubbed on the field, it becomes a right solemn ceremony. First the squire must bathe, after which he passes an whole night’s vigil in prayer and then, on the day following, he is knighted. Thus he became Sir Richard Bonamy and made his father a right proud man. But four year after, Sir Richard was thrown from his horse and killed. His father was heart-sluffened[heart-broken]. His sole comfort was in Edward, the remaining son, who had recently wed and had a bairn[child] on the way. But as thou, thyself, art bound to learn, the wheel of fortune topples even kings from their thrones: be ever thankful for what thou hast, but never hope ay to keep it... Fortune had even more sorrow in store for Master Bonamy.’

‘What befell him?’

‘Edward, his yan remaining son, was biding with his wife’s family at York in the year of Our Lord yan thousand thray hundred and ninety when the Great Pestilence broke out anew: he, his wife, son, babby daughter and mother-in-law all perished within the space of four day. What man would not be stricken by such news? He was that heart-sluffened, he kept his chamber for many a day, refusing all food: wherefore, no doubt, he survived for the messenger who brought this news to Master Bonamy eke[also] fetched the sickness hither. He went to bide with his cousin in the village and there fell ill and with him, his family. When they heard tell of the pestilence, all but a few of John household servants fled in terror, leaving him almost yannerly[alone]. It was an evil time and such a vast[lot] of folk died, Master Bonamy could find neither servants nor labourers. His spirit was broken and he lost interest in Carisdale. When a stranger arrived, laiting[seeking] employment, he appointed him as bailiff, even though his steward counselled him against it. At first all seemed well so Master Bonamy sent his steward to oversee his neglected lands close by York, trusting more and more to his bailiff. By and the steward returned, the bailiff had robbed Thomas Bonamy and run away, leaving his master ligging sick: the sorry man hadn’t etten[eaten] in days. His steward cared for him, bringing him back to bodily health but Master Bonamy spirit was broken and he would have naught more to do with Carisdale, leaving the faithful steward to administer his property as best he might. He did well for his master and his loyal service has been well rewarded.’

‘How?’

‘Because he is the self-same Master Robert Uttley, who is steward here to this day and thou know’st well in what deep respect thy father holds him.’

Her words gave me pause - ere then the story had seemed to belong to an-

other time entirely, for even though it concerned mine own father, was not his youth long ages ago? I saw her read my thoughts with a smile and blustered ‘But what of Master Bonamy? What happened to him?’

‘He passed his last five year as a monk, praying, contemplating and studying the scriptures and, at his death, bequeathed his estates near York to York Minster, where his brother is still canon, and left Carisdale in fee simple to his godson, thy father.’

She paused expectantly so I could ask, ‘What is fee simple?’

‘It means he not only hath the right to use and administer it however he lists during his lifetime but is at liberty, also, to bequeath it to whomsoever he wishes: there is no *entailment* by which the property could revert to Canon Bonamy or anybody else.’ She waited till I had mouthed and absorbed these new words and sith I asked no further questions, resumed: ‘Now then, sith Thomas had been trained for knighthood, he had had no experience or training in husbandry or manorial affairs, so he would not have found it an easy charge in the best of circumstances. As ’twas, for all Master Uttley’s efforts, the whole estate was in a sorry condition: the manor and cottages in disrepair and the few remaining villeins, unable to till the fields and maintain the pastures in good fettle[condition], had lost heart. Master Uttley was honest with him: “It is a large estate and the land is fecund but you must not expect to find yourself a man of means,” he told Thomas, “for you have inherited many debts and problems. Yet I know you for a good and honest man and I doubt you will shrink from the burthen but frame it mensefully[set about it decently]. With your youth and vigour and mine experience, I believe we can restore Carisdale. But you must be provident, patient and a strong master an[if] we are to succeed.” Thomas was encouraged by these words and determined to make Carisdale the cheerful and thrifty[prosperous] place of his youth.

‘He was prepared to go short, himself, to repair the villager’s homes afore his own, and ensured nobody went hungry to pay his dues. This encouraged newcomers to apply for vassalage on the manor; paying for their tenure by service or tithes. Needless to say, there were those who bethought themselves to take advantage of his youth, goodness and generosity but thy father is a canny man and doth not wait for the truth to fall into his lap: he goes out of his way to find it. Ask after any village family and he will tell thee the fettle of their health, the yield of their harvest; what disputes they have; what debts; what grievances. It is his own vigour and vigilance which prevents idleness and dishonesty in his tenants.

‘When we wed there was mickle yet to do but, hopeful for the future, he was eager to beget a son to benefit from his efforts and take up the charge in his turn. Imagine, then, his grief when our first son was miscarried and the second died at birth... When Agnes was born he was disappointed to beget a lass - he little guessed how dear she would become to him. Our next bairn, Marget, was ay nesh[delicate] and sickly: she was born at Michaelmas and died next Lammas-

tide even as thy father, himself, ligger abed and like to die - or lose his leg - from the terrible wound he had at Shrowesbury⁷. Phillipa was born soon afterwards and then no more childer came for four year. It seemed the more I longed to give Sir Thomas the son he so desired, the more God stopped his ears to my prayers. I grew that listless and pale, Sir Thomas thought I was sick and sent for a physician. When this good man examined me, he ascribed my condition to melancholy, but was at a loss to know why the black bile had become so abundant. I asked him whether this was why I could give mine husband no son and, after questioning me closely, the good man agreed it might, indeed, be both cause and effect. The physician talked privily with Sir Thomas for a long while and when he had gone, thy father came and embraced me, "It is my self-seeking pride and ambition which is destroying thee," he wept. "Pray forgive me and torment thyself no more! Although God sees fit to deny us a son, He has blessed us with tway lovely daughters for which we must render Him thanks and praise." Eh, and such is the mystery of the good Lord, I believe thou wert planted in my womb yon very day.

'When thou wert born, and we had an heir at last, he wept, anew, for joy. But having the precious son he had longed for made him the more fearful of losing thee. Margery kept telling me: "An Sir Thomas stint not from telling me how to frame my wark[work], he can mind the babby and I'll go home and mind mine old mother!" but, thankfully, she never carried out her threat. Being, God be thanked, a strong lad and an hale, thou hast not submitted thyself to the grim reaper, wherefore Sir Thomas devises new worries for himself. Thy childish bams[tricks] seem wicked, be inattentive at thy lessons and thou'st given thyself up to Sloth; plague[tease] thy sisters and thou'st grown that wild and disrespectful thou art surely beyond correction! He has persuaded himself thou'lt either grow into a dolt or go to the devil. I keep reminding him thou'rt but a bairn and can't be expected ay to know right from wrong and that he, himself, was used to be an unruly and headstrong youth. But this rubs salt into his wounds. "What legacy have I given him?" he cries, "Mine own worst faults! For years I have fought to subdue mine anger, mine impetuosity, the immoderation of mine appetites: must I now have mine own, dear son perpetuate these same faults and evil impulses?" To which I remind him of the true adage, "young saint, old devil" - for I have oft-times seen the truth of it and many of our greatest saints were sorry sinners in their early lives.

'I know how difficult it is for thee to live up to his expectations and I hoped to make thy lot easier by giving him another son but the good Lord has given us another daughter.' She smiled and rocked the cradle at her feet. 'Happen now thou canst understand wherefore loving thee so mickle makes him such a fierce father?' I thought about it and nodded, although it was a lesson I took many years to fully apprehend. Mother nodded, also: 'Then give me back

⁷ July 21st 1403, fought between Henry IV and the rebel army of Henry "Hotspur" Percy.

my yarn, young man, ere it be too soiled to use. Away with thee, now, go a-laiking, but try to keep thyself from mischief - at least for today.' I sighed and nodded, handing back the wool. 'And Robin?'

'Aye, Mother?'

'Do thou never forget how dearly thy father loves thee. Let me nevermore listen at thee speaking of hatred for him, I pray thee.' Her eyes were bright with tears so I threw mine arms about her neck and we embraced each other with mute ardour.

On a forenoon shortly after my fifth birthday, a clatter of hooves sounded on the brigg, and Father putten down his stylus and dismissed me from my studies with a smile. I raced out eagerly to see what was afoot. It was aboon^[over] a year since I had last seen the flame-haired man on the tall courser and I holden back, shyly: 'What, wilt'ou not come and greet thine Uncle Geoffrey?' he shouted, throwing his arms wide. I miped^[sidled] up to him, rubbing my nose, and felt myself hefted onto the pommel. Then I saw a pair of small hands clasped around his ample waist and a cheeky, freckled face peered under his arm at me. Uncle's elbow dislodged the lad's hat and a mass of unruly, rusty curls framed his bright, attentive eyes. 'Meet thy Cousin Geoffrey,' smiled mine uncle, tousling the lad's rough head. 'I've fetched him here to live with ye at Carisdale. He'll wait on thy father and be a friend to thee, belike.'

Father, waiting in the porch, gave us a few moments to appraise each other ere crossing the yard and lifting my cousin down. Young Geoffrey looked up at me, sideways, and winked. As Uncle slid me from mine high perch, he heaved a sigh: 'My dear Thomas,' he said, 'I'm right glad the lad will be with ye. 'Tis no life for a motherless child in yon God-forsaken place: 'twill be far better for him here with Agnes, in a wholesome family, learning to be a gentleman, instead of pining away with his dowly^[gloomy] old recluse of a father.' His tone perplexed me, for there was regret, not relief in it. His ardent fondness for the lad now clasped to my father's bosom was manifest. Young Geoffrey did not appear to be pining^[hungry] at all but looked red cheeked and well fed. He shook himself free from Father's embrace with a laugh and ran behind the linden tree. An hand pressed to its trunk and his head thrown back to gaze longingly into its thick crown, he beckoned to me: 'Now then! Come thee here!' he called, as though to a pet dog. I looked doubtfully at Father, but he nodded and patted mine head.

'I give thee leave to go a-laiking with thy cousin but fetch him to thy mother ere long for she yearns to see him.'

Despite the lad's merry smile, I felt suddenly blate^[bashful] and could think of naught to say: 'Nobody told me of your coming.' I admitted at last: 'Shall I show you the laithes^[barns]?'

'Aye, ivvery yan!' he responded, shaking the dust from his hat ere pushing

it over his curls again, ‘an’ Ah’ll tek neea “you-in” fra thee. Seave that fer thi feyther.’ I marched stiffly towards the northernmost biggin[building] with him nimming[skipping] anenst me. There we clamb onto the wain and I watched, open-mouthed, whilst he clambered all over it, as agile as a cat. How happy[lucky] he was to be in men’s hosen, his strong limbs unencumbered! I plucked at my womanish gown, aware of mine attire for the first time. When he sat himself on the guard rail, and suddenly letten his body drop backwards, out of sight, I found the courage to ask:

‘Is it true thou hast no mother?’

He grasped the rail of the cart and, red-faced, pulled himself up again: ‘Aye: she’s deed.’

He said it so lightly, I was shocked and said, solemnly: ‘Dost thou not miss her?’

‘Nut really. Ah dooan’t bethink missel’ on ’er[I don’t remember her]. She deed after booarning Robert.’

‘My name’s rightly Robert though I’ll not thank thee to call me so. Is he another?’

‘Mi brother.’ He swung himself down and went to inspect the wain.

‘And is Robert-thy-brother to bide in yon God-for-Satan place with thy dowly reck-loose father?’ I persisted, obstinately.

‘Nay - ’e’s nivver bided wi’ us, sitha[see thou]. Ee, lewk: a nest o’ babby meece[mice]!’

‘But where is he? Is he dead, an’ all?’

‘Noooo, ’e lives wi’ mine Uncle Maurice and Aunt Emma. Why dost ’a think their een[eyes]’re all bulgy and blue?’

‘I don’t know. Kittlins[kittens] are the same, when they’re new born. What manner of lad is Robert? I wish I had a brother.’

‘Ah’ve onny seen ’im tuthri[two or three] times. Ah’ve no likin’ for ’im. Be there onny[any] kittlins now?’ But ere I had time to reply, he had darted over to the locked door of the armoury and was shaking it vigorously, demanding: ‘What’s ’ere? Why’s it barred?’ I had scarcely begun to explain ere he cried, ‘Is there owt[ought/anything] else to seea? By! I yearn ti see ivvery last thing!’ He flitted about like as a butterfly whilst I followed, dazed, at his heels, mumbling, ‘Should we not go in now? Mother awaits thee and I’d hate to put Father in an higg[rage],’ and wondering wherefore mine unease made him laugh.

Henceforth, Geoffrey and I became like as brothers. He plagued me, fought me and bragged constantly, but I worshipped him and followed him everywhere. It was as though the sun had broken through an heavy harr[fog]: our wontedly sober home rungen with our laughter. Father said we were as giddy as kittlins and feigned headache at our noise, but chastised us with twinkling eyen. With hind-sight, I ween he was fain to see his erstwhile solitary, listless child running

about, red cheeked and laughing. Now I had a friend, it no longer maddened me to see my sister, Agnes, so serene and Phillipa so canty[cheerful]. I had better things to do than hide their needles and stamp on their sewing. As for Cicely, I was naught but glad were mother engrossed with her: she was less likely to remark the mischief we were about. The jealous higg which had yance made me bite her foot because Mother had been a-laiking with her all afternoon was now a thing of the past. My sole grumble now was to be rid of mine infant clothes and don man's attire. To this end I had to prove to my mother not only that I could tie and untie points by myself but eke could be trusted to go to the privy in good time and not soil my clothes. After many weeks of practice, of untying and retying Geoffrey's points a dozen times every day - oft-times leaving him that taffled[knotted] he had to laik Margery's help - I was finally given my first pourpoint, tunic and hosen and strutted out, proud as the cock of the roost, bounding and leaping for joy.

In the company of my cousin, my territory expanded to include the near demesne and occasional, stealthy, sorties to the village. Geoffrey taught me to climb trees, ride an heifer and laik at knucklebones, quoits⁸, merells* and wallops*. We passed many an hour at the river trying, in vain, to kittle[tickle] trout - which might have been foreseen, considering our utter inability to bide still or silent. It was Geoffrey's notion to fix a long band[rope] over a beam in the carthouse and take turns at swinging from the wain and dropping into the mew[stacked hay]. But Father discovered what we had been doing when I misjudged my landing and jarred mine ankle badly. Furious, he ordered us to sweep up all the damaged, dusty hay, stack it neatly and muck the stables out for a week in penance; no allowance being made for mine injury. Howbeit, penance done, he then had the band fixed to the branch of a stout elm, with a great knot in the end to hang on to. We were allowed to laik there on the understanding we would earn scant compassion for any further injuries we might inflict on ourselves thereby.

Having passed his early years now pampered and now neglected by his own father, Geoffrey at first derided me for my cringing respect of Sir Thomas. But having experienced for himself yan of Father's most fearsome outbursts, he changed his tune. It was the consequence of our trying to best each other. Geoffrey loved climbing, and with him I rediscovered mine infant joy in the sport. On an afternoon we were sitting astride the garth wall when Geoffrey, his back to the adjoining stable, pushed himself to his feet. 'Ah'll lay thoo dursna[daren't] deea this, Robin!' he crowed, taking several steps along the top of the wall ere jumping down into the yard. Determined not to be outshone, I hutched[moved] myself up to the stable, and followed his example. Meanwhile, Geoffrey scrambled back onto the wall to lie in wait for me whilst, crammely[unsteady], I tottered

⁸* **quoits** throwing rope loops over a post; **merrels** nine men's morris; **wallops** kayles - ie ninepins knocked down with sticks rather than balls