

For he, the moment that the king's body left him free, had sprung into the air, caught at a bough of the great oak, and torn away a branch. With this trophy he had run madly through the darkness to the temple.

The king was on his feet in a flash; he picked up his sword and dashed in pursuit. But the shock had been great; and fear clutched at his heart. He stumbled as he ran, and fell once more. This time he knew pursuit was useless; he raised his sword, and cried aloud upon Diana.

Then, with drooping weapon, he went slowly and tragically towards the temple.

## V.

Nine days had passed. The weather was brilliantly cold and clear. Snow still lay on the ground, but the sun, already rejoicing to run his new race through the heavens, laughed gladly upon the terrace of the temple.

There was a great crowd of persons of all ranks; Rome had turned out in force to witness the event of the day.

On the steps of the temple stood a high official, surrounded by many patricians; by his side was the King of the Wood; alone, as one awaiting judgement, a few yards in front of him, stood the hero of the recent adventure.

"Romans!" proclaimed the official, turning from the little altar where he had inaugurated the proceedings by offering sacrifice to Diana. "Romans! we are here to investigate the claim made nine days ago by the slave Titus now here present before us to succeed to the honor, rank, and dignity of Priest to Diana our Lady, and King of the Wood. The conditions of succession are too familiar to all of you for me to weary you by repeating them. It is necessary that the claimant should be a runaway slave. Can this be testified?"

The husband of the Lady Clodia stepped forward. "The rascal is my slave," said he.

"And you did not sell him, or free him?" "The rogue ran away two days before I came back from victory. He had been insolent to the Lady of my house, and deserved a cudgelling. We shall soon know whether he did wisely."

"Good," replied the orator. "The second essential is that unarmed he should have surprised the vigilance of the King of the Wood, and plucked a bough from the sacred oak of Diana. I have personally compared this bough, presented by the slave Titus, with the holy tree; and it was certainly torn thence by him in the approved manner. The King admits that Titus had no weapon, as by his oath before Diana he was bound. The third condition is that the slave should conquer the King in single combat. Are you ready for the battle?"

"With no less ambition would I have left so noble, kind, and excellent a master," replied Titus firmly, lifting the sword that Clodia had given him.

"That's truth enough," laughed her husband, "for there's my missing sword! Well, be fortunate as you are brave!" he added kindly. Clodia took the opportunity; she gave a sidelong smile. The youth's heart leapt higher than ever; from that moment he knew he could not fail.

"Let us proceed!" exclaimed the official, and led the way to the sacred oak.

The battle was not of long duration. The elder man had lost his nerve; the nine days of preparation for the fight, so far from strengthening him, had weakened him. The omens had been continuously evil. He had never fought an armed man since the

day he had won for himself the fatal office; and his predecessor had been an old gray man with feeble arm and failing sight. He knew no cunning of sword play; and Titus had taken care to boast that for three months he had been trained by the first masters in Rome. He could only hope to win by length of reach and speed of foot. The first blow would settle all, with deadly Roman swords and no defensive armour.

So he leapt madly at Titus, who with quick eye caught the blade on his own, and, thrusting himself under the King's leap that lost him balance, he plunged his sword hilt-deep into the breast of his opponent, who fell dead without a word.

Instantly the populace broke into cries of joy. Titus, his bloody sword held high, was carried in triumph to the temple. "Hail, Priest of Diana!" they cried, "Hail, King of the Wood of Nemi!" The Roman ladies vied in their excitement to touch the sword; but Clodia conquered. Willingly the new King lowered the blade, and let her slake her mouth on its red stain.

They brought the King finally to the shrine. There he offered his sword to Diana, and there he took before the people the vows of priest and king.

A month later Clodia's husband died, and, inconsolable, she became the devotee of Diana, making pilgrimages almost daily to the shrine.

So Titus lived, and so she lived, in that base imitation of true happiness which sin sometimes vouchsafes to those who do not understand that a pure and noble life is the sole key to felicity. So they lived, many a year, until — Until? That happened which always happened on the fair land that lies about

"The still glassy lake that lies  
Beneath Aricia's trees —  
Those trees in whose dim shadow  
The ghastly priest doth reign,  
The priest who slew the slayer,  
And shall himself be slain."

Indeed, their love was sealed a second time in blood.

(Author's note. In writing this story, I have borrowed a few epithets and even phrases from Dr. J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough*. My story obliged me to describe the scene of the tragedy, and it would have been presumptuous, and have exposed me to ridicule, had I attempted to rival his magical prose. To borrow seemed the lesser crime.)

## LE SACRAMENT

By JEANNE LA GOULLE

Sacrons l'amour, o fille d'Aphrodite.

La nuit engloutisse l'astre du jour,

Dresse le tabernacle de nos rites: —

Sacrons l'amour!

Le feu subtil dévore cour et tour;

Le temple brule. Dieu l'hermaphrodite

Dégage ses ailes; son âme court

Aux cieux flamboyants; que ma bouche excite

Le dernier spasme, Jehane, très-lourd,

Très-long — versons, o versons l'eau bénite —

Sacrons l'amour!