

The Orchid and the Cross

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FADE IN

EXT. OPEN SKY- DAY

The SOUND OF THE WIND blows ceaselessly across a slate-gray sky. Letters, as if from a medieval manuscript, appear. They read:

A legend from the Middle Ages tells the story of a woman who became Pope. For centuries the Church has denied her existence. But all legends grow from some seed of truth.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

EXT. RURAL VALLEY - DAY

A few acres of crops grow in a field where peasants labor. On the hill beyond stands a fortified manor house, an impressive dwelling but not quite a castle.

The manuscript letters FADE IN reading:

Germany 827 A. D.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

A peasant, GUILLIAM SAXON, works rows of crops, hoeing weeds and throwing them into a barrow. His children labor beside him:

ALIS is sixteen, with blonde hair and angelic blue eyes. Her tattered rags do little to hide her blossoming woman's body.

PETER, aged eight, has darker hair than his sister. A miserable youth, dirt and pimples fight to be master of his face.

JOAN is a precocious girl of six. A miniature of her brother, her soiled hands full of stones, she totters toward the barrow and dumps them in.

The SOUND OF HORSES HOOVES fills the air. Gulliam looks up, spots the unseen horsemen and cries:

GUILLAM

Soldiers!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD

Six Soldiers on horseback, dressed in mail and leather, gallop toward the field.

Alis hits the dirt, throwing her arms over her golden hair to hide it.

Joan watches the soldiers, fascinated. Peter quickly pulls her to the ground and shields her with his body.

JOAN

Ow!

PETER

Sh!

Guillam tightens his grip on his hoe, his face scowling. The soldiers ride on without seeing them.

GUILLIAM

All's well. They've passed.

Guilliam relaxes. The children rise, brushing dirt from their clothes.

INT PEASANT HOVEL NIGHT

It's a simple shack, with only an old blanket covering an opening in the wall that serves as an entrance.

Alis and Joan chop vegetables on a rough-hewn table. Their mother, KAT, kneads bread. Older and tarnished with hard labor, Kat has the same angelic eyes as her daughter Alis.

Guillam enters followed by Peter, each carrying buckets of water. Guillam kisses Kat tenderly, the picture of a loving family.

VOICE (O. C.)

Hello within!

The family freezes in fear. Guillam hushes his wife, then lights a torch in the fire.

Joan and Alis scramble to hide in a corner of the hovel. Peter covers them with blankets and sacks of grain.

EXT PEASANT HOVEL NIGHT

Guillam emerges from the hovel, holding the torch. Beyond him stands a paddock with a few hogs. Chickens nest in the yard.

Two hooded figures stand beside a packhorse. The men throw back their hoods. One has fair hair, the other dark with piercing eyes. Both have their hair shaven in tonsures, and golden crosses at their waists glitter in the torchlight.

The fair one, BROTHER PATRICK, speaks:

PATRICK

The blessing of Christ upon you.

INT. HOVEL

Guillam enters to see Kat and Peter standing behind the table. He throws back the blanket covering the doorway.

GUILIAM

Mendicants. Their horse went lame.

Kat

They're still men.

GUILLAM

These two will be no trouble.

INT HOVEL – LATER

Guillam's family and the two monks dine on brown bread and stew in wooden bowls. Joan watches the brothers eat, fascinated by the strangers. They move with delicate, feminine gestures. Occasional glances between them indicate they may be lovers.

PATRICK

Brother Segovius came with the Spanish Ambassador to Ireland. We now make our pilgrimage together, to the City of Rome.

JOAN

What is "Rome?"

KAT

Hush. I try to teach her better, but she has a quick tongue.

Brother Patrick brushes the apology aside and leans toward Joan.

PATRICK

Many weeks' walk, south through the mountains.

JOAN

I did not know the world was so wide.

PATRICK

We have only a little way to go in it. Beyond Rome lies Greece, and Byzantium and the heathen land of Persia.

GUILLAM

Enough. Fetch water. We'll need it for morning.

The children leave the table. Joan can't take her eyes off the monks as Peter pulls her away.

GUILLAM (cont)

You will be on your way tomorrow.

PATRICK

To the manor. Perhaps we can trade our horse for a healthy mount.

GUILLAM

Don't expect much from our Lord Hasfal. He cannot command even his own soldiers.

Guillam rises and throws back a blanket covering an inner space containing a small bed.

GUILLAM (cont)

Use our bed tonight. Take care in it. We have children in this house.

INT HOVEL – LATER

The Spanish monk, Brother Segovius, sits alone reading by the fire. Beyond him, in the inner space, Kat and Alis prepare the bed for the guests by stuffing the mattress with fresh straw.

Joan looks through the door into the yard. Outside, Brother Patrick holds the torch while Guillam and Peter bind the horse's lame leg. The horse kicks and they struggle with it.

Joan turns to Segovius, looks at him intently. Sensing her eyes on him, he glances up from his book.

JOAN

What do you there?

SEGOVIUS

Reading.

JOAN

What is "reading?"

SEGOVIUS

I look at the words and they speak to me.

JOAN

Witchcraft.

SEGOVIUS

No. Learning. Come.

Frightened of him, but her curiosity overwhelms her. She walks to his side.

Segovius points to the brown vellum pages covered with black Greek letters.

SEGOVIUS (cont)

These are called “words.” I look at them and take meaning from them. This learning has passed through the years from a great teacher, Aristotle.

JOAN

I want “learning.”

SEGOVIUS

Only holy men know how to read. When you go to church the father reads to you. In this way you learn.

JOAN

We don’t go to church.

Kat looks up from the alcove, notices Joan and Segovius.

KAT

Joan!

Joan scampers away. Kat and Segovius lock eyes for a moment. He goes back to his reading and Kat turns away.

Guillam, Peter and Brother Patrick enter from outside.

GUILLAM

Go, make your beds in the stable.

Alis, Peter and Joan scurry outside. Segovius rises to confront Guillam.

SEGOVIUS

Your children do not attend Mass.

GUILLAM

The Church neither feeds us nor protects us from harm. I have little use for it.

Concerned, Patrick steps in beside Segovius.

SEGOVIUS

And what of your soul?

GUILLAM

You travel to Rome to find a peace that you cannot find here.

SEGOVIUS

We travel to study rhetoric with the learned, like Augustine before us.

GUILLAM

I saw at once the sort of men you are. In the city of Rome, such things may go unnoticed. You may even find others of your kind.

PATRICK

You do not judge us. Thank you for your good graces.

GUILLAM

“Judge not lest ye be judged.” Thus spoke Jesu.

SEGOVIUS

Then you have been to church. Why not take your children?

Patrick pulls gently on Segovius’ arm.

PATRICK

Our host has been most gracious. Let us to bed and leave him be.

The two monks move into the inner space. Guillam pulls down the blanket, covering them from view.

EXT. STABLE – NIGHT

The full moon illuminates the farmyard. To call the structure there a “stable” is generous; it’s no more than a lean-to shelter for a lonely cow. Peter and Alis sleep buried in the straw.

Joan, too excited to sleep. Lies staring up at the sky. She rises and totters toward the hovel.

INT. HOVEL

Joan enters the main room. Guillam and Kat sleep huddled together in front of the dying fire. Joan tiptoes past them and pulls back a corner of the blanket to peer at the sleeping guests.

Joan sees them through the opening between the blanket and the wall. Patrick and Segovius lie awake, staring into each other's eyes.

SEGOVIUS

To be so near you and yet not touch.

PATRICK

Consider our host.

SEGOVIUS

I would take you as I take the Host.

Segovius's hand moves under the blanket.

PATRICK

No, my sweet. We dare not.

Patrick moves away, turning his back on his lover.

PATRICK (cont)

Wait until we are alone in the forest.

EXT. STABLE

Joan hurries across the moonlit farmyard. She enters the stable and shakes her brother.

JOAN

Peter! Peter! Wake up

PETER

What?

JOAN

The Brothers. I saw them. They touched and
Made sounds like mother and father.

PETER

You dreamed it. Go back to sleep.

Peter rolls over, putting his arm over his head. Joan sits frustrated, excited, wide awake in the moonlight, trying to make sense of the wonders she's seen tonight.

EXT. FIELD DAY

The sun beats down out of a clear sky. Guillam works a plow through the earth, digging a furrow. Alis and Peter pull the plow as if they were horses. Joan follows behind, pulling rocks from the furrow.

The SOUND OF GALLOPING HORSES catches their attention. Several SOLDIERS ON HORSEBACK gallop along the road. Guillam looks around, but the open field offers no place to hide.

One of the soldiers turns off the road and gallops across the field toward them. Guillam gathers his children around him. The soldier gallops closer, dust rising from his horse's hooves. He pulls up, and the horse rears and whinnies.

SOLDIER ON HORSEBACK

Norsemen have landed. They come burning and sacking.
Take your family to the manor and prepare to defend it.

The soldier goads his horse, turns and gallops away.

INT. HOVEL

Kat and the children frantically pack their meager belongings into bundles.

KAT

Food and clothes. Hurry. Not more than you
you can carry and run.

Guillam enters holding a heavy iron pitchfork.

GUILLAM

Take the girls deep into the forest.

KAT

No. We will go with you.

GUILLAM

Wife, do as I say.

She can hear the fear in his voice. They kiss passionately.

EXT. PEASANT FARM

Guillam, his pitchfork on his shoulder, grasps Peter by the arm and hurries toward the road. Peter struggles to keep up with him.

Joan watches her father and brother leave. Alis scrambles to catch a chicken. Kat pulls the cow from the crude stable.

EXT. FOREST

Alis and Joan run through the foliage, their breath coming in gasps. The chicken squawks and flaps under Alis's arm. Kat follows behind, pulling the cow by a rope.

Alis and Joan stop under a large oak tree to wait for their mother. Kat slaps the cow on the rump and it totters off into the brush. Kat arrives at the tree and looks up at it. She grabs Joan and hoists her toward the lowest branches.

KAT

Climb as high as you can. Don't come down
until I call, even if it be all night.

Joan climbs. Kat and Alis run deeper into the woods.

EXT. OAK TREE

Joan climbs into the topmost branches. She finds a place to sit and spreads the leaves aside to look across the countryside. The Manor House stands on a distant hill. Beyond it, a thick cloud of black smoke rises into the sky.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE DAY

The Manor House, or Manse, is a stone building on a hilltop surrounded by a wooden wall. The enclosure protects a chaotic crowd of men, women, cattle and chickens who have gathered there from the surrounding countryside.

HASFAL, Lord of the Manor, dressed in leather and mail and carrying a broadsword, shouts commands to soldiers and peasants:

HASFAL

Take those animals behind the manse. Get
them out of the way. You. To the wall. See
to the archers.

He gazes out through the open gate. Across the field the black cloud of smoke rises.

HASFAL (cont)

They are coming. Close the gate!

Soldiers push the heavy wooden doors closed.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD

Guillam and Peter hurry down the road toward the Manor House. They see the gates slowly start to close.

GUILLIAM

By Jesu. Hurry!

Father and son run as fast as they can.

EXT. MANOR WALL

Soldiers push the gate closed. It's heavy and they struggle, but the doors slowly move toward each other.

A GATEKEEPER on the wall looks down and sees Guillam and Peter rushing toward it.

GATEKEEPER

Hold!

Hasfal, on the ground near the gate, cries:

HASFAL

Don't hold! There's no time. Close it! Close it!

The soldiers on the gate keep pushing.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD

Gulliam and Peter run as fast as they can toward the gate, almost closed now.

EXT. MANOR WALL

The Gatekeeper looks down on them and cries, his hand cupped to his mouth:

GATEKEEPER

Hurry! Hurry!

Gulliam and Peter arrive at the gate. Guillam shoves his son in through the closing door. He then squeezes in himself, pulling his pitchfork in after him.

The soldiers push the gates closed. Other soldiers stand holding a rope, suspending a huge wooden timber in the air.

GATEKEEPER (cont)

Hold! Hold!

The gate doors close completely.

GATEKEEPER (cont)

Now!

The rope soldiers release the rope. The heavy wooden timber falls into wooden brackets across the inside of the door.

INT. MANOR YARD
 Hasfal looks at Guillam and Peter.

HASFAL
 You, hoist the pitch. Boy, attend the archers.

Guillam points to a wooden stairway leading to the top of the wall.

GUILLAM
 Go now. Keep you head down.

Peter runs toward the stairs. Above, archers wait with their bows.

Guillam joins a crowd of peasants at a huge cauldron atop a bonfire. Black pitch boils inside the cauldron. Chains attached to the top of the cauldron at three points. The chains rise into the air where they meet. A single chain rises from the joining point and passes over a beam atop the wall.

Guillam and others pull on the chain at ground level. The cauldron of boiling pitch rises slowly toward the battlements.

EXT. BATTLEMENT, ABOVE THE GATE
 Peter, his arms full of arrows, scrambles up the stairs. Archers stand ready. Peter drops his arrows beside one of them and looks out across the fields. His eyes grow wide...

EXT. BATTLEFIELD
 ...as thousands of Vikings descend on the manor. A few ride horses but most are on foot. They carry swords, pikes, axes and burning firebrands. Some wear horned helmets but most wear crude armor of leather and metal studs.

The SOUND OF THUNDERING FEET mixes with CALLS BLOWN ON HORNS and the SHOUTS OF WARRIORS.

EXT. BATTLEMENT, ABOVE THE GATE
 The Archer Captain cries out. As he does, the row of archers takes aim.

ARCHER CAPTAIN
 Eyah! Ha! Haw!

Thousands of black arrows darken the sky.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD
 The Vikings rush toward the gate. A hail of arrows descends on them, hitting the ground with a thousand tiny thwacks! Some skip off helmets, some sink into shields. Some find their mark and the victims scream as the arrows sink into living flesh.