

*igenis  
kritis*

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THE TWO BLOOD  
BORDER LORD



*The Grottaferrata Version*

*Translated with  
an Introduction  
and Notes by*

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## FOURTH BOOK

### [*Of the Border Lord's Marriage*]

*[Encomium and recapitulation. Basil's education and first hunt. He sees, woos and runs off with the General's daughter, pursued by all the household. He kills all but the General and his sons, and begs the General to accept him as son-in-law. The wedding. Afterwards he lives on the border where the Emperor comes to see him and honor him.]*

G-iv

The exploits of the Border Lord start here:  
Both how he carried off that lovely maiden,  
And all about his wedding, in this Fourth Book.

At once I shall remind you of Desire,  
For it's the root and origin of Love  
From which is born Affection and then Passion,  
Which, growing bit by bit, brings forth such fruits  
As constant cares, anxieties and worries,  
Immediate pressing dangers, parting from parents.  
For youth when in full bloom tears at our hearts,  
Then recklessly attacks things unattempted:  
To reach the sea, be undismayed by fire.  
Dragons and lions and all other beasts  
A steadfast passion reckons naught at all,  
Considers even daring thieves as nothing,  
Thinks nights are days, and mountain passes plains,  
That wakefulness is rest, and far things near;  
And many men deny their faith for passion.  
Let none of you think this incredible;  
I'll set a laudable witness in your midst,  
The noble Emir, the prince of Syria,

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So charming, handsome, with such savage daring,  
 Of most amazing size and well-bred strength,  
 And rather thought to be a second Samson.  
 For Samson rent a lion with his hands,  
 While the Emir slew countless hordes of lions.

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Record not Homer; nor Achilles' tales,  
 Nor Hector's; they are false. And Alexander  
 The Macedonian, mighty in purpose,  
 Was master of the world with God's assistance.  
 For with firm purpose he acknowledged God  
 From whom he had his valor and his daring.  
 But of old Philopappos, Ioannakes,  
 Or Kinnamos there's nothing worth the telling,  
 For they just boasted, but accomplished nothing.  
 But this man's deeds are true and well attested:  
 Ambron his grandsire, Karoës his uncle.  
 They gave three thousand chosen lancers to him;  
 He quelled all Syria and captured Kufah,  
 Then came to places in Romania,  
 Seized castles in the land of Heracles,  
 And plundered Charizané and Cappadocia.  
 He carried off the Ducas' charming daughter  
 Because of her great beauty and fine figure,  
 Denying everything, both faith and fame,  
 Becoming Orthodox, a Christian, for her;  
 The one-time foe appeared the slave of Romans.  
 To them a really lovely child was born  
 Who was named Basil from his very birth  
 And also Two-Blood from his parentage,  
 A pagan father and a Roman mother.  
 He became fearsome, as this tale will show,  
 And was named Border Lord from conquering borders  
 Antakinos, one of the Kinnamades,  
 His grandsire, died, exiled by the Emperor,  
 Basil the Blesséd, mighty Border Lord.  
 His future had been bright, his fame immense;  
 All thought he was an excellent general.

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His grandam was the General's wife, a Ducas;  
 His uncles were his mother's wondrous brothers  
 Who fought in single combat for their sister  
 Against the marvelous Emir, his father.  
 Thus he sprang from a race of noble Romans,  
 And was admired for his bravery.

So let us now begin to tell his deeds. 65  
 This Basil, then, the wonderful Border Lord,  
 Was given by his father to a teacher  
 In childhood, spending three whole years in lessons,  
 And, with his sharp mind he acquired much learning.  
 Then, wanting horsemanship and also hunting, 70  
 He spent each day on these things with his father.

And so one day he said this to his father:  
 "The wish, master and father, is in my soul  
 To test myself in warring with the beasts.  
 So, if you really love Basil, your son,  
 Let us go out some place where there are beasts,  
 And you'll quite see the thought that's troubling me."

Hearing such words from his belovéd son,  
 The father was exalted, cheered to hear it,  
 And with much pleasure covered him with kisses. 80  
 "O best belovéd son, O soul and heart,  
 Your words are wonderful, your wish is sweet,  
 Although it's not yet time for fighting beasts.  
 For war on beasts is very terrible,  
 And you're a boy of twelve, one dozen years,  
 Entirely unfit for fighting beasts. 85

Do not, my sweetest son, have this in mind,  
 Nor pick your lovely rose before its time.  
 But when, God willing, you're a full grown man,  
 Why, then, without a word, you may fight beasts." 90  
 And when the noble lad had heard these words,  
 He grieved a great deal, and his heart was wounded,  
 And with tears in his eye, said to his father:  
 "If I do noble deeds after I'm grown,  
 What use is it to me? All men do that. 95

I want fame now to make my lineage shine.  
 I'll satisfy you too, my benefactor,  
 That you will have a big, brave servant in me  
 To be your succor and your aid in war."  
 His father assented to the young man's zeal,  
 For nobleness of nature shows from childhood.

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The next morning he took his brother-in-law,  
 The one born latest, golden Constantine.  
 And took his son, the noble Border Lord,  
 And certain horsemen too from his Companions,  
 And went straight from the marsh up to the woods  
 Where from afar they saw ferocious bears;  
 There were a male, a female and two cubs.  
 His uncle cried, "Now Basil, let me watch you!  
 Take nothing but your club; carry no sword,  
 For fighting bears with swords is not commended."  
 It was a strange and awesome sight to see,  
 For when he heard his uncle's voice, the boy  
 Dismounted right away, loosened his belt,  
 Took off his tunic, for the heart was great,  
 Fastened his skirts up firmly to his belt,  
 Put a camel's hair cap upon his head,  
 And then like lightning jumped out of his cuirass,  
 Carrying nothing but a simple staff.

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He had great strength, and speed to go with it.  
 Now when they had approached close to the bears,  
 The female, jealous of her cubs, met him,  
 And loudly bellowing, came out towards him,  
 He inexperienced in fighting beasts,  
 Did not swing back so he could use his club,  
 But attacked quickly, caught her by the middle,  
 And squeezing with his arms, he strangled her  
 So that her entrails all came out of her mouth.  
 The male ran out again into the marsh.  
 His uncle called, "Don't let him get away, son!"  
 In his great hurry he had dropped his club,  
 So, flying like an eagle, he caught the beast.

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The bear turned on him, opened its mouth wide,  
And rushed to gobble down the youngster's head.  
But the boy quickly seized it by the jowl,  
Shook the beast, killed it, threw it on the ground,  
Twisting its neck so that he broke its spine,  
And straightway it expired in the young man's hands.

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Stirred by the bears' roars and their pounding feet,  
A hind jumped up out of the covert's midst.  
The Emir remarked, "Look, son, what is before you!"  
He heard his father, went off like a panther,  
And in a few strides caught up with the hind,  
And grasping hold of it by the hind legs,  
Shook it apart and tore it in two pieces.

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Who would not marvel at God's mighty gifts,  
Extolling his incomparable might?  
Truly, it was a strange, astounding deed  
For a boy without a horse to catch a hind,  
And kill the bears with nothing in his hands;  
Truly, a gift from God, from his right hand.  
O lovely feet that are a match for wings,  
That strangely beat the speed of a gazelle,  
And overcame the might of fearsome beasts!

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Those who were there then, and who saw this marvel,  
Said in astonishment to one another:  
"Mother of God, this youth is quite a sight!  
He is no human being from this earth;  
God sent him forth for all the valorous  
To see how he takes pleasure, fights and runs."  
While his father and uncles talked together,  
A mighty lion came up from the reed bed,  
And then turned quickly around to watch the boy,  
And saw him in the marsh, dragging the beasts.  
With his right hand he dragged the bears he'd killed,  
And with his left hand he was dragging the hind.  
His uncle said to him, "Come hither, son,  
And leave the dead behind; we've others living  
On which even the nobles' sons are tested."

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The boy replied to him, saying as follows:  
 "If God, who approves all things, so wills, and if  
 I have my father's and my mother's prayer,  
 You'll see him dead, just as you see the bears."  
 And with no sword he rushed to attack the lion.  
 Then his uncle said to him, "Take your sword.  
 This is no hind that you can tear apart."  
 And the young man at once spoke to him thus:  
 "Uncle and master, God is surely able  
 To put him in my hands just like the other."  
 Grasping his sword, he turned toward the beast.  
 And when he had come near, the lion sprang,  
 Lashing his tail, and beating his sides with it,  
 And roaring loudly at the youth, attacked.  
 The boy, however, raising his sword up high,  
 Struck him upon the head, full to the middle.  
 His head was split right to the shoulders below.  
 Then the Two-Blood spoke to his uncle thus:  
 "You see, my golden master, how great God is!  
 Lies he not silent, dead like the two bears?"  
 And then his father and his uncle kissed him  
 Upon his hands and arms, his eyes and chest,  
 And both rejoicing, spoke to him as follows:  
 "All who observe your handsome form and beauty,  
 O most desired boy, shall never doubt,  
 But truly will accept your daring feats."

Indeed the young man was a handsome figure:  
 Blond hair a little curly, great big eyes,  
 A white and rosy face, and jet black eyebrows,  
 A breast like crystal, a full fathom wide.  
 His father looked at him exulting much,  
 And said to him with pleasure and delight:  
 "The heat is great, and it is midday now.  
 Even the beasts are hiding in the marsh.  
 So come, let us depart to the cool water,  
 And you shall wash the sweat off of your face,  
 And change your clothing too, for it is dirty

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From the beasts' foaming and the lion's blood.  
 I am thrice-blest in having such a son,  
 So I shall wash your feet with my own hands.  
 Henceforth I can relieve my soul of care,  
 And so not worry about where I send you,  
 Whether on raids or enemy outposts."

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And so they all went to the spring at once.  
 Its water was astounding, cold as snow.  
 They sat in a circle while some washed his hands,  
 And some his face, and likewise some his feet.  
 The spring ran over; they drank thirstily,  
 That they might thus become as brave as he.  
 And then the young man changed his clothing too,  
 And donned some scanty garments to be cool.

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The upper one was red with golden hems  
 The hems were decorated with fine pearls;  
 The neck was stuffed with lavender and musk.  
 It had enormous pearls instead of buttons;  
 The buttonholes were braided from pure gold.  
 He wore fine leggins, griffin ornamented;  
 His spurs were twined about with precious stones,  
 And on the gold work he had rubies too.

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The noble youth was full of eagerness  
 To go to his mother lest she grieve for him,  
 And was compelling everyone to mount.

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He saddled up a horse white as a dove,  
 Its forelock interlaced with precious stones  
 With little bells of gold amidst the stones,  
 So many little bells they made a noise  
 That was delightful and astounded all.  
 A green and red silk sheet upon its quarters  
 Covered the saddle, keeping dust away.  
 Its gear was braided with gold ornaments,  
 And all the saddlery was decked with pearls.  
 His horse was spirited and bold in play,  
 And yet the boy was clever riding it.  
 Whoever saw him marveled at the youth,

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And how his horse played at the young man's will,  
How like an apple on a tree he sat.

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And then they hurried to go home again.  
In front went the Companions all in order,  
Behind him were his uncle and his father,  
The youth between, all flashing like the sun,  
And brandishing his lance in his right hand,

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A green Arabian lance with golden pennon.  
He was a lovely sight, pleasant to meet,  
Musk to the senses, fragrant to the scent.

Upon the way was the great General's house,  
And when he had come near it, he called out:  
"When a young man adores a lovely maiden,  
And sees her beauty just as he is leaving,  
His heart is tamed, he cares no more to live."

When those within the house heard his sweet song,  
They were bemused as was Odysseus once  
When on his ship he heard the Sirens' song.  
Nor did the girl stay heedless of the youth,  
That beautiful, renowned and famous maiden

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Of dazzling beauty and distinguished family  
With substance and with lands and other wealth  
Impossible to reckon or imagine.

Her house alone was quite beyond all praise,  
For it was gold and marble, all mosaic.

The separate chamber where the maiden lived  
Was gold outside and covered with mosaic,  
And also it was named the Maiden's Chamber.

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Accordingly, this wealthy, lovely maiden  
Beheld the youth, and just as I was saying,  
Her heart was burned, she cared no more to live.  
A pain was kindled in her, as was normal,  
For beauty is so sharp its arrow wounds,  
And through the eyes themselves, reaches the soul.  
She wished that she could tear her eyes away,  
But couldn't bear to let his beauty go:  
He drew her eyes, and they were plainly beaten.

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And so she whispered to her lady's maid,  
"Peek out, dear maid, and see the lovely youth;  
Observe his beauty and unusual stature.  
If my lord took him as his son-in-law,  
Believe me, he'd have one like no one else!"  
She stayed, and from the window watched the boy,  
And the young man, not knowing this, inquired,  
"Whose is this great and most impressive house?  
Is this the General's whose fame they tell,  
Whose daughter, widely praised, resides within?"  
"Yes, my dear boy," his father answered him,  
"And many noble Romans have perished for her."  
"How did they perish, Father?" asked the boy  
"They wished to carry off the girl, my son,  
Because of her great beauty, so they say.  
The General, the maiden's father, knew this,  
Set traps for them, and captured every one.  
Some he beheaded, others still he blinded;  
He has great power and glory in the land."  
The Two-Blood sighed, and to his father said,  
"Pray, Father, that I do not think to steal her,  
For I have never been alarmed by traps.  
No, this alone I pray, if you approve it:  
Tell the General you are for our marriage  
If he'd be pleased with me as a son-in-law,  
And be my father-in-law of his own will.  
If not, then let him know what will ensue!"  
"I have informed him often, my dear son,  
But he's not quite persuaded to consent."  
Now while his father spoke thus to his son,  
The young man spied the maiden through the window.  
When he had looked at her, he stepped no closer,  
But stood amazed, his heart all quivering.  
He spurred his charger, and approached the girl,  
And quietly he spoke to her as follows,  
"Inform me, maid, if you have me in mind,  
And if you'd like me to take you as my wife;

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For if your mind's elsewhere, I will not press you."

And then the girl turned to her maid, and asked,  
 "Go down, good maid, and say to the young man,  
 'I tell you in God's name, you fill my heart,  
 But I don't know your family, young man.  
 If you are Basil, the Two-Blood Border Lord,  
 You come from very wealthy noble people,  
 And kinsmen of ours through the Ducases.  
 And yet my father has set watch on you,  
 For he has often heard of your exploits.  
 Beware, young man, lest you're imperiled through me,  
 And are deprived of your attractive youth,  
 For my unmerciful father will not spare you."  
 At once the youth responded to the girl,  
 "Lean out, my darling; let me see your beauty,  
 And let vast love for you enter my heart.  
 I'm young, you see; I don't know what desire is,  
 Nor understand about the ways of love.  
 But if desire for you comes to my soul,  
 The General, your father, and his kinsmen,  
 And all those with him, even were they arrows  
 And swords of flashing lightning, cannot harm me."

There was no end in sight to all their talk.

Then passion urged them to ignoble things,  
 For passion is master and enslaves the mind,  
 Subdues the sense as charioteers do horses;  
 And thus the lover has no self-restraint,  
 And no embarrassment before his neighbors,  
 But, as a slave of love, is wholly shameless.  
 Even the well-bred girl felt this way then,  
 And leaned part way out of the golden window.  
 The beauty of her face hindered his vision;  
 He couldn't see the sun-born maiden well,  
 For rays of light rose up out of her face  
 Which truly looked just like a painted picture,  
 With bright glad eye and yellow curly hair,  
 Her brows were black, their darkness unrelieved,

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Her face like snow, and in the middle tinted  
As if with the fine purple emperors honor.  
Seeing her thus, that marvelous young man,  
Was smitten to the soul, and hurt in heart.  
He felt unending pain, and stood distressed;  
Now when the noble maiden saw him thus,  
She didn't let him stay in misery long;  
But very quickly sent her love to him,  
Filling him with much joy mingled with pleasure;  
And giving him her ring, she said to him:  
"Depart rejoicing, lad, and don't forget me!"  
Hiding it in the bosom of his robe,  
He answered quickly, "Wait for me tomorrow!"  
Then, filled with joy, he left with all his men.  
When he reached home, he straightway became worried,  
And he entreated God with all his heart:  
"O God and Master, listen to my prayer.  
Make the sun set for me, and make the moon rise,  
That it may be my helper in this task,  
Because I wish to go ahead alone."  
And privately he spoke to his stud groom:  
"Unsaddle my charger; saddle up the black  
With double girths and double martingales;  
And hang my fine sword-club upon my saddle;  
And use a heavy bit for turning quickly."

When called to dinner, he could eat no food,  
Nor would he have a taste of drink at all.  
The girl was on his mind; he saw her beauty.  
At times hopeless, he had no wish for her,  
But thought at other times his chances good.  
He seemed to all like one who watched a dream.  
His mother even halted him, and wondered,  
"What's happened to you, child? You grieve my soul.  
Has some beast bothered you? some fear disturbed?  
Some fiend, seeing your bravery, bewitched you?  
Tell me at once, and don't distress my soul,  
For he who hides disease is ruined by it."

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"No beast has bothered me," the young man answered,  
 "No turmoil either has disturbed my soul.

If someone has bewitched me, I won't curse her  
 Who did no wrong, but I myself am well."

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Then standing up, he mounted to his chamber,  
 Taking his boots with him, and got his lute.

At first he touched the strings with his bare hands  
 (He was well taught on instruments of music),

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And having tuned it, struck it, softly singing:  
 "Who loves a lass nearby does not lose sleep,

But he whose love's far off must not waste nights.

My love is far away, so let us hasten,  
 And not grieve her who lies awake for me."

Now when the sun had set, and the moon took over  
 He rode alone, but carrying his lute.

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His horse was fiery, and the moon like day.

At dawn he came up to the maiden's chamber.

She'd waited for him, wakeful all the night,  
 But at the dawn relaxed and fell asleep.

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So when the noble young man failed to see her,  
 He was sorely distressed and greatly troubled,  
 And grievous thoughts were hammering his heart;  
 He had intolerable woe and pain.

And to himself he said, "Has she repented?  
 Is she afraid perchance her parents notice?

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What shall I plan for that? How learn the truth?

My mind's in doubt. There's nothing I can do.

For if I speak, and others hear me calling,

Then those on guard here will suspect and strike.

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Caught in the act, I should not meet my dearest;

Just seeing my belovéd would be hard.

What use is there to live a life like that?"

So saying to himself, and much bewildered,

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He thought it would be best to strike his lute,

And make a trial of the things he feared.

"For safety's sake," he said, "I'll test the girl,

Putting this lute between us as my helper,

And then the will of God must come to pass."  
 He turned it, and he struck it with his plectrum,  
 Produced a pleasing tune, and softly sang  
 "How could you disregard, dear, our young love,  
 And fall sweetly asleep so unconcerned?  
 Arise, my lovely rose, my scented apple,  
 The morning star has risen. Come, let's go."

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Now when the maiden heard the lute's sweet sound,  
 She jumped out of her bed, tightened her girdle,  
 And leaning far outside, said to the boy:

"I punished you, dear heart, for being late,  
 As I shall always do when you are careless.  
 And playing the lute! Don't you know where you are?  
 My dear, if Father knew, and injured you,  
 And you should die for me, oh what a crime!  
 For God, Who knows all secrets, understands  
 That love for you is rooted in my heart;  
 Your failure I consider my disaster,  
 So save yourself, my soul, before the light comes,  
 And always think of her who loves you best.  
 Because, my dear, I will not come with you:  
 I know desire, that strange delight, inflames you;

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Reason is urging you to die for me.  
 But if you led me astray, and I came with you,  
 And if my brothers and my kin should know it,  
 And if my father and my people caught you,  
 How could you get me out, and save your life?"

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Much grieved, the wondrous boy answered the girl:

"That you're upset, my lady, I commend,  
 And that you recognize just what will happen.  
 You judge the future well, reasoning clearly.  
 But still you do not know a thing about me,  
 For if you knew the deeds that I have done,  
 You would not say your brothers and your kinsmen  
 Would catch and hurl me down, and that you'd grieve.  
 So be this known to you, my soul, as certain,  
 That I alone expect to beat their troops,

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Defeat their ranks, and overcome their power.  
 As for your father and all his Companions,  
 Likewise your brothers and your kinsmen too,  
 I reckon them mere infants, nothing at all.  
 I seek to learn just one thing from your lips:  
 Whether you are eager to go with me,  
 So we may leave the byways before daylight.  
 Brave men are killed in lanes and narrow places,  
 And cowards are made bold in open fields.  
 But if you've changed your mind, and choose another,  
 And therefore make excuses of that sort,  
 Then, by Saints Theodore, Christ's witnesses,  
 No other, while I live, shall be your husband!"  
 At once the radiant girl said to the youth:  
 "You, dearest, inexperienced at first,  
 But made of love and affection, as you said,  
 Suffer right now for me. Perhaps that's true;  
 For even I myself can likewise guess it.  
 And, though I shouldn't talk about myself,  
 Still, as desire enslaves me, I'll tell all.  
 Many great men and many well-born nobles,  
 Both kinsmen and the sons of kings, have sought me,  
 Men who have royal rank as well as raiment,  
 And who longed greatly to observe my features,  
 Have frequently approached close to my home,  
 But none at all would satisfy my father;  
 None were thought good enough to see my shadow,  
 None heard my voice at all, my conversation,  
 My laughter when I smiled, nor sound of footsteps.  
 I never put my head out of the window,  
 But kept myself invisible to strangers,  
 Except to kinsmen and my own close friends.  
 None ever saw the features of my face;  
 I kept the strictness that becomes us maidens.  
 Now I'm outside; I've gone beyond the limits,  
 And have become shameless for love of you.  
 And I, whom no strange man has ever seen,

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Am now exchanging words quite shamelessly,  
 And the free spirit of virginity  
 Is now a slave, I see, suddenly shameless.  
 For from the hour I saw your face, young man,  
 It burned my prudent soul, as would the fire.  
 It changed my reason and likewise my judgment,  
 Made me immodest, and enslaved my spirit  
 To you alone, and to your love belovéd  
 Now I obey, and wish to go with you,  
 Deny my kin, become bereft of parents,  
 Estranged from brothers and from boundless wealth,  
 And go with you wherever you may bid,  
 Having God, Helper of us all, as witness  
 And best avenger should you lead me astray.  
 Love burns you, and desire is spurring you,  
 Reason persuades you you should die for me,  
 A thing I pray I'll never see or hear of."

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While she spoke thus, the lovely maiden's eyes  
 Brimmed over with her tears; she deeply sighed,  
 And blamed herself for being very shameless.  
 But, though she greatly wished to change her mind,  
 The boundless passion in her would not let her.  
 There's power in passion, in desire and love.  
 These keep their proper order most precisely.  
 A man is temperate; desire attacks him;  
 And then this lover has no self-restraint,  
 No shame before his kin, no fear of neighbors,  
 But is all shameless and the slave of love.  
 Thus too these fair young folks were suffering.  
 The marvelous youth observed the maid was weeping,  
 And said to her in turn, himself in tears:  
 "Fair maiden, I myself know all about you,  
 The boundless wealth your father has acquired,  
 For which so many nobles longed to take you.  
 So I have sought to know the facts precisely,  
 For I, my dearest, am not seeking wealth.  
 I wish no property, and want no glory,

Count all as dross, delighting in your beauty.  
 For from the hour, dark-eyes, we saw each other;  
 You were not absent from my soul one second,  
 Rooted within, and intertwined with it.

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I dream and see you when you are not here.

I've never fallen in love with any beauty,  
 Nor have I known the ways of love at all.

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Come, my sweet light, accompany your lover,  
 Reveal the love you have concealed within you,  
 For the clear proof of it consists in deeds,  
 And with God's will we'll live in joy together.

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Your parents too will be delighted by this  
 When they know what a son-in-law they've met with,  
 And none will blame you, but will call you blessed." "  
 This and much else besides the young man said.

"In you is my beginning and my end;  
 Begun with God, until my death," he said,  
 "And should I ever wish, my soul, to grieve you,  
 And not preserve your love for me untarnished—  
 A most pure passion—up until my death,  
 May I not die a Christian, not succeed,  
 May I not earn the prayers of my own parents.  
 And you, most noble maid, keep like resolve!"

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With these words ringing in her ears, the maid said:  
 "Even if surrendering myself was wrong  
 (Indeed, good order is called nobility,  
 Which I have breached, I don't know why I did it),  
 Yet my pure passion and sure love for you  
 Persuaded me your love was preferable."

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Thus, with a vow of love, the maiden spoke:  
 "I've left my home, my parents and my brothers  
 And with God's help, I trust myself to you, lad.  
 Take Him for witness that you will not grieve me,  
 But make me a lawful wife until the end.  
 For truly many lovers break their word,  
 Though first they seem to love those they desire."  
 Surprised when he heard this, the boy admired

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575

The virgin's sense; but just the same he vowed,  
 "By Father, Son, and by the Holy Spirit,  
 I will not grieve you ever, noble maid,  
 But make you my own lady and my mistress,  
 Both wife and house companion till life's end,  
 If you will keep your passion for me pure,  
 Just as I said before, my dearest soul."

580

When they'd confirmed each other in their vows,  
 The maiden leaned out of her golden window,  
 And rising on his horse, the young man took her;  
 The partridge flew away; the falcon caught her.  
 They kissed each other with delight, of course,  
 Unutterably happy and both weeping,  
 For they had found a moment of great joy,  
 And ardently were shedding tears of pleasure.  
 Indeed, the boy, stirred up by joy and courage,  
 Stood opposite the house, and loudly cried:  
 "Pray, father-in-law, for me and for your daughter,  
 And thank God you have such a son-in-law."

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Now when the General's sentries heard this cry,  
 They loudly gave the call for all to mount.  
 Suddenly hearing this, the General,  
 Beside himself, not knowing what to do,  
 Cried out in anguish, "I have lost my light!  
 My only daughter's gone out of my sight!"  
 And when the General's wife heard this, she cried,  
 "My only daughter's carried off, and gone!"  
 Her brothers, who were elsewhere, mourned and cried,  
 "Who can have dared to do this lawless thing?  
 Who took our sister suddenly from us?"  
 The housemaids wept and cried aloud and wailed.  
 The place was filled with unrestrained laments.  
 A mighty force in arms pursued the youth;  
 The General rode behind with his two sons.  
 Nor was the General's wife left in the house.  
 She couldn't bear to part from her own daughter;  
 In fact she took a crowd of housemaids with her,

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And followed weeping, hair unbound, on foot.

"Dear soul," she cried, "I don't know where you're going!"

615

And no one, either old or young, remained

Who did not ride in pursuit of the young man,

All sorely grieving at the maid's abduction.

There were so many none could count exactly.

Just as the light of day was growing bright,  
They overtook them down in the dark plains.

620

The lovely maiden saw them from afar,

For she was looking back, and watching keenly

While held close in the arms of her belovéd,

And spoke these words to him, clutching him tightly:

625

"Exert yourself, dear, lest they separate us;

And whip the black horse on with all your strength.

Look, our pursuers are about to catch us!"

When he heard this, that marvelous young man

Was filled with courage, and turning from the road,

630

He found a double tree which had two branches,

And set the girl down in between the branches.

"Sit there, my lovely one, and watch your darling,"

And then straightway he armed himself completely.

Then said the sun-born maiden to the boy,

635

"Take care you do no injury to my brothers!"

Then a strange thing was shown to those there present:

All by himself he dared encounter thousands,

And in a short time slaughtered countless soldiers,

All fully armed and mounted, trained for war.

640

He first advised them to turn back again,

And not to undertake to test his valor,

But they, ashamed to have one man defeat them,

Preferred to die instead of being shamed.

He started forward, drawing out his sword-club,

645

And, ere the General came, not one was left.

Then, finally finished with his war, the boy

Came back, a victor, to the girl, rejoicing,

Got off his horse, and kissed her countless times:

"Delightful girl, you've proof of deeds in me."

650

The maid herself admiring him still more,  
 Accepted with delight his noisy kisses,  
 And spoke to the boy quietly as follows:  
 "Don't injure my own brothers, dearest soul;  
 For those whom you see coming towards us now  
 I judge to be my brothers, from their horses;  
 The third man who is with them is my father.  
 Return them to me safe; keep them unharmed."

"It shall be as you wish," he told the girl,  
 "Unless some unexpected thing occurs,  
 For he who spares his foes in time of war  
 Is often slain unfeelingly by them."

Saying these words he leaped upon his horse,  
 And fell on those around the General.

The brothers of the maiden, filled with zeal,  
 Told their companions that they should destroy him,  
 Planning that other hands should murder him.

The boy observed his dearest one's behest,  
 Attacked with skill, and wisely killed them all.

The brothers charged down on him furiously.  
 He circled them, and threw them from their horses  
 So neatly that he did not harm nor wound them.  
 Then turning toward the General, he dismounted,  
 Clasped his hands tight, and bowing low to him,  
 Began to speak to him with a bold look:

"Forgive me, master. Do not censure me.  
 Your troops are clods the way they strike and parry,  
 And therefore most of them have gone to Hell.

But I'm not of ignoble, coward stock,  
 And so if you will bid me do you service,  
 You'll be assured about your son-in-law.  
 And if you'll test me strictly by my deeds,  
 You'll often bless yourself for your good fortune."  
 At once the General raised his hands on high,  
 And looking towards the east, gave thanks to God:  
 "Glory to Thee, God; all that profits us  
 Thou orderest with inexpressible wisdom.

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For I'm vouchsafed the son-in-law I wished,  
 Handsome and well born, temperate and brave,  
 Such as none ever found in the whole world."  
 With all his heart he thus gave thanks to God,  
 And, as was meet, he spoke thus to the boy:  
 "My son-in-law, above all else thank God  
 Who ordereth what profits well for us.

600

Accept, fair youth, her whom you longed to have.  
 Unless you'd had such boundless passion for her,  
 You'd not have dared to march alone on thousands.  
 So come, let us go back into my house;  
 And do not think you'll suffer hurt from us,  
 For it's to make arrangements for the wedding,  
 Contracts in writing in your father's presence.  
 You'll quickly be advised to come back to us,  
 And take away with you my daughter's dowry.

605

I'll make your marriage known throughout the world,  
 So you may have your dowry on that day.

700

It's twenty hundredweight of ancient coins,  
 A clothes chest valued at five hundred pounds,  
 Which long ago I specially set aside

In my belovéd's name; and silver vessels,  
 Much real estate with rents, thirty-six pieces;

705

Seventy handmaids and her mother's house  
 Which was most notable and truly precious;  
 Likewise her mother's superb jewelry,

Her world-famed crown, an admirable work  
 Assembled out of gold and precious stones;

710

And with all these the animals found there,  
 Four hundred champions and eighty grooms,  
 And fourteen cooks, and just as many bakers,  
 One hundred fifty other slaves as well.

I'll honor you above my other children,  
 Give boundless wealth and not a few estates,  
 Provide with these more things than those I've mentioned  
 Before the sacred rite occurs, my son.  
 I'll make your marriage known throughout the world.

715

720

Youths shall not say you sought illicit union,  
And carried off a girl who had no fortune,  
A shameful thing to all right-minded men.

723

These charges you can't easily escape  
Unless you come back home with us right now.  
Thus too my wife may have some consolation—  
She doesn't know what sort you are at all—  
And glorify the Giver of good things.

730

So heed, good son-in-law, and come with me.”  
So spoke the General, and flattered him.

735

The youth at once answered the General:  
“To heed your counsel, which is excellent,  
Is right for me, master and father-in-law.  
I fear though there is danger in it for me,  
That from your shame I'll owe a pitiful death  
As foe, a treacherous former foe, of yours.  
Conscience persuades me to the opposite,  
And I should blush to see your lady's face.  
My lord and father-in-law, it was my wish  
To take your daughter for her beauty's sake,  
And not because of wealth or her estates.

740

All these things I present to my wife's brothers.  
Her beauty satisfies me more than dowries,  
For God provides both wealth and poverty,  
Both humbles and exalts, brings down and raises.

745

As for returning, I'll not disobey you,  
But let me go back to my mother first,  
So that my father may see the bride-to-be,  
And glorify the Lord. I'll come back quickly.  
But don't regret this; give your blessing rather,  
For we're your children, servants of your soul.”

55

The General admired the youth's good sense.  
“May God,” he said, “give you His blessing, son,  
And grant you to enjoy your years of life.”  
He embraced the youth, and mounted on his horse.  
The youth went to the girl, the General home;  
His sons, because of their fall, went back with him,

760

Marveling greatly at the young man's valor.

But now this truly marvelous young man  
Came to the place in which the maiden waited.

"Come hither, sweetest light," he called, and said,  
"Come hither, sweetest flower, fragrant rose;  
Come hither, heifer of mine, whom love has yoked.  
Let us be on our way, for no one hinders.

765

There's no one, lovely maid, who bars our passage.  
Your father and brothers are the sole survivors  
Because I had regard for your injunction."

770

The girl descended from the tree at once,  
Overflowing with pleasure and with joy,  
And quietly she walked to meet the boy.

Then, coming close to him, she asked with feeling:  
"No accidents at all befell you, darling,  
So tell me quickly all about my brothers."

775

"Don't worry, dearest soul," the boy replied,  
"None but your father's praiseworthy Companions  
Has suffered hurt at all, not even slightly."

780

He stooped and lifted her up on his horse,  
Taking her right up with him on his own horse.  
Delightedly they took their fill of kisses,  
Going upon their way with joy and pleasure.

And when his father's sentries noticed him  
Bearing the rosy maiden in his arms,  
They ran with haste to give congratulations.

785

And when his father heard of his arrival,  
He mounted horse at once, filled with great joy.  
His wife's five brothers and three thousand men  
Prepared twelve women's saddles and twelve bridles,  
And two of them with pearls were ornamented,  
The rest with animals engraved on gold.  
The saddles all were beautifully draped;  
The horses all were covered with silk sheets  
Beneath which they were hidden with much gold.  
Both bugles and bass trumpets were behind them,  
Drums and instruments played fortissimo;

790

795

The noise at that time could be heard for miles.  
 When they had come within three miles of the house,  
 The lovely maiden saw them from afar,  
 And trembled, for she did not recognize them,  
 And said to the young men worriedly,  
 "If they are strangers, they will separate us."  
 "Don't be afraid, sweet light," the boy replied,  
 "It is your father-in-law, who's pleased to come here."  
 In turn the sun-born maid said to the youth,  
 "I am ashamed, my soul, for I'm alone.  
 If you'd obeyed my father, and returned,  
 I'd have my maids and all my things here now;  
 Your father ought to know whose girl you've taken.  
 But you made the decision: you explain!"  
 "Don't grieve, my lady, that you are alone,  
 For they all know you, even if you are.  
 You can't be blamed at all because of that."  
 When they drew near, they greeted one another.  
 The youth got off his horse with his beloved;  
 The Emir dismounted, and embraced them both.  
 "My son," he said, "may God, to bless you both,  
 Grant many years of life in peace and plenty,  
 Admitting you as sharers in His kingdom."  
 They set the girl upon the gold wrought saddle,  
 And placed a precious wreath upon her head,  
 And each of her relations who was there  
 Pressed many truly precious gifts upon her.  
 They adorned the boy too as a young man should be,  
 Then sounded trumpets, and returned again.  
 They sounded bugle calls, and beat their drums,  
 Played instruments, and singing many songs,  
 They made all sorts of music with their lutes,  
 And quickly they returned home celebrating.  
 The joy they felt was so superlative  
 Who can interpret it, or who can tell?  
 It even seemed as if the very ground  
 They walked upon rejoiced while they were walking.

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And everyone who chanced upon their gladness  
 Became beside himself with the rejoicing.  
 The hills were leaping and the rocks were dancing,  
 The rivers gushing and the trees exulting,  
 The very air was brightened by rejoicing.

840

When they were just about to reach the house,  
 An endless crowd of women came to meet them.  
 The General's wife came out to meet the young ones,  
 The Border Lord's delightful mother with her.

845

And comely housemaids brilliantly adorned,  
 Some bearing flowers, roses, myrtle wreaths,  
 The fragrance of their smell scenting the air;  
 And others clashing cymbals while they sang  
 A very pleasant song that praised the boy,  
 The virgin with him, and their parents too.

850

The ground was strewn with myrtle and sweet bay,  
 Narcissus, roses, many fragrant flowers.  
 The mother-in-law fondly embraced the bride,  
 Presenting generously her finest work;  
 Her pleasure and delight were quite unfeigned.

855

When they came to the house, the Emir at once  
 Sent his wife's brothers and a host of troops,  
 Counting three thousand of his own Companions,  
 To tell the General to attend the wedding:  
 "I bid you, fellow father-in-law, to attend

860

This wedding God arranged, though we would not."  
 When he heard this, he left no stone unturned  
 To honor his belovéd ones, but took  
 A huge amount of gifts along with him,  
 And set out on the next day with his wife.

865

They had no word to say, no room to doubt,  
 Because they knew what sort of groom they'd found.  
 Therefore with eagerness and with great gladness  
 They went their way, and sang about the wedding,  
 And so did the girl's brothers and those with them.  
 When the boy's father heard of their arrival,  
 He went out with his people to give welcome.

870

The marvelous Emir wished to dismount;  
 The General implored, and tried to stop him.  
 When they'd embraced each other properly,  
 They hastened to the house; farther along  
 A countless host on foot came out to meet them,  
 And others came with these, a group of housemaids.  
 And now they reached the confines of the house,  
 Suitably decked with many fragrant stuffs,  
 Rosewater, and all other sorts of perfumes.  
 The lovely mother of the boy was leading.  
 What mind has quite the strength to tell what followed—  
 The wonderful reception by the Emir,  
 The lovely party given by his spouse.  
 The well-planned banquet and the right arrangements,  
 The endless spectacle of varied foods,  
 Servings of meat from countless animals,  
 The actors' changes, and the flutists' tunes,  
 The twirling dancing girls, their shifting feet,  
 The pleasure of the dances and strange music?  
 First one thing charmed, and then, in turn, another.  
 Next day the dowry contracts were completed.  
 The contents can't be set forth word for word,  
 But what they both agreed on for their children,  
 Estates that could be counted easily,  
 Are not unsuitable to list by name—  
 The number of their cattle and such things.  
 The General presented twelve black horses,  
 Twelve pleasant chargers that were beautiful,  
 Twelve choice mules with their saddles and their bridles  
 Of silver and cast gold, praiseworthy works;  
 And twelve young housemen, grooms with golden belts,  
 Twelve hunting leopards that were tried and proven,  
 A dozen snowy hawks from far Abasgia,  
 A dozen falconers and falcons also,  
 Two golden icons of Saints Theodore,  
 A gold-embroidered tent, immense and lovely,  
 With many stenciled shapes of animals;

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The ropes were silken and the stakes were silver;  
And two Arabian spears made out of dogwood,  
As well as great Chosroës' famous sword.

910

These were the gifts the General presented  
His son-in-law, the Two-Blood; and the Emir  
Gave the girl a precious bridal gift.

915

The General's wife, the Border Lord's grandmother,  
Likewise his wife's five brothers and his kin,  
Gave him a pearl of infinite size, gold, gems,  
And endless valuable purple silks.

The Two-Blood's mother-in-law likewise presented  
A green and white silk scarf and precious girdles,  
And four white turbans with gold monograms,  
A golden robe with griffins on the back.

920

His wife's first brother gave him ten young men,  
Castrated, handsome, and with lovely hair,  
All clad in Persian garments made of silk  
With fine gold sleeves that came up to their necks.

925

Her other brother gave a shield and lance,  
His other relatives gave many things,  
Although the kinds of things cannot be counted.  
It took three months before the wedding ended;

930

But popular rejoicing did not end.

After the three months' wedding was accomplished,  
The General took his relatives by marriage,  
Even the groom himself, went to his house,  
And had a wedding gayer than the first.

935

The General exulted as he noticed  
The boy's well-ordered state, his prudent valor,  
His gentle ways, and other good behavior.

The General's wife was glad to see his beauty  
And stature, which was comely and exotic.

940

His wife's own brothers visited him often,  
And always boasted of their own exploits—  
Praise to the one good which fulfills the deed,  
For in the governance of great affairs  
God enters with us, let none disbelieve it.

945

So let us sensibly send thanks to God  
Because He is the giver of all good things.

So, after staying there for several days,  
The Emir returned again to his own home,  
And with him went the Two-Blood and his darling,  
And once again there was a grand arrival.  
Then, since the youth had shown that he was worthy,  
And had become renowned for his exploits,  
For he'd made good in almost all the world,  
He chose to live alone upon the border,  
And took his girl and his own servants with him.

He had an endless longing to live alone,  
And walk around alone with no one with him.  
In fact, where he had gone he had his own tent  
In which he and the girl lived all alone.  
Her two maidservants had another tent,  
The Border Lord's Companions still another,  
And each was a great distance from the others.

Now many of the outlaws heard about this,  
And hatched a plot to carry off the girl.  
He overcame them, and he slew them all  
Just as he conquered all of Babylon,  
Tarsus, Baghdad, the Mavrochionites,  
And other parts of the dread Ethiops' land.

On hearing of these deeds, the Emperor  
Who at that time was governing the Romans,  
Basil the Blessed, the great trophy winner,  
Whose imperial fame was buried with him,  
Chanced to be on campaign against the Persians  
In those same places where the boy was living,  
And when he heard about it was amazed.  
So wishing greatly he might see the youth,  
He sent a letter to him with these words:  
"We've learned the stories of your many exploits,  
My son, and we have much rejoiced in them,  
And offered thanks to God who works with you.  
Our purpose is to see you with our own eyes,

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And give requital worthy of your deeds.

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Come to us gladly, without hesitation,  
And don't suspect you'll suffer hurt from us."

When he received this, he returned an answer:

"I am your majesty's most abject slave;  
Indeed, I have no right to your good things.

990

Master, what deed of mine do you admire,  
Who am so humble, base, and quite undaring?  
Still, he who trusts in God can do all things.

Therefore, since you desire to see your servant,  
Be by the Euphrates after a little while.

995

You'll see me all you wish, my sacred master.

Don't think that I refuse to come before you,

But you have certain inexperienced soldiers,

And if perhaps they say something they shouldn't,  
I certainly would deprive you of such men,

For such things, master, happen to the young."

1000

The Emperor read his letter word by word,  
Admired the humbleness of the boy's statement,  
And understood with pleasure his high courage.

Since he wished strongly to behold the youth,  
He took along with him a hundred soldiers,  
Some spearmen too, and went to the Euphrates,  
Ordering all on no account to utter

1005

A word offensive to the Border Lord.

Those posted to keep watch on his account

1010

Shortly announced the Emperor's arrival

To the marvelous Two-Blood Border Lord.

The Two-Blood came out all alone to meet him,  
And bowed his head down to the ground, and said,  
"Hail, you who take imperial power from God,  
And rule us all because of the heathen's sins.

1015

Why has it happened that the whole world's master  
Comes before me, who am of no account?"

The Emperor, astonished when he saw him,

Forgot the burden of his majesty,

Advanced a little from his throne, embraced him,

1020

Joyfully kissed him, and admired his stature,  
 And the great promise of his well-formed beauty.  
 "My son," he said, "you've proof of all your deeds;  
 The way you're put together shows your courage.  
 Would that Romania had four such men!"

1025

So speak, my son, freely and openly,  
 And then take anything you wish from us."

"Keep everything, my lord," the boy replied,  
 "Because your love alone is enough for me."

It's not more blessed to receive than give;  
 You have immense expenses in your army.

1030

So I beseech your glorious majesty:  
 Love him who is obedient, pity the poor,

Deliver the oppressed from malefactors,  
 Forgive those who unwittingly make blunders,

1035

And heed no slanders, nor accept injustice,  
 Sweep heretics out, confirm the orthodox.

These, master, are the arms of righteousness  
 With which you can prevail over all foes.

To rule and reign are not part of that power  
 Which God and His right hand alone can give.

1040

Vile as I am, I grant your majesty  
 To take what you once gave Iconium  
 As tribute, and as much again, from them.

Master, I'll make you carefree about this  
 Until my soul shakes off this mortal coil."

1045

The Emperor was delighted at these words.

"O marvelous and excellent young man,"

He said, "we name you a patrician now,  
 And grant you all your grandfather's estates;  
 We give to you the power to rule the borders,  
 And will confirm this with a golden bull,  
 And furnish you with rich imperial raiment."

1050

So spoke the Emperor. The youth at once  
 Ordered one of his wild, unbroken horses  
 Brought before them, hobbled in iron chains.  
 He told his boys to release it: "Let it run!"

1055

Fastened his skirts up firmly to his belt,  
 Then started running after it to catch it,  
 And in a little space he grasped its mane,  
 And turned the big, wild beast around backwards,  
 Kicking and plunging, trying to escape.  
 When the boy came before the Emperor,  
 He threw it down, spread flat upon the ground.  
 All were astonished at the marvelous sight.  
 He wished to leave. A lion from the grove  
 Came out, and startled those there present with him  
 (For there were many lions in that place),  
 And even the Emperor had turned to flee.  
 The boy ran up at once toward the lion,  
 And seizing it by one of its hind legs,  
 He shook it hard, and dashed it to the ground,  
 Displaying it quite dead while all were watching.  
 Then in his hand, held like a hare, he brought it  
 Before the Emperor, and said, "Accept  
 The game your servant hunted for you, master."  
 All were astonished and began to tremble;  
 They recognized his strength was superhuman.  
 The Emperor, with his hands stretched toward heaven,  
 Said, "Glory to Thee, Master, Maker of all things,  
 Who made me worthy to see such a man,  
 Strong above all the present generation!"  
 He ordered the lion's skin to be picked up,  
 And made the boy a lot of promises.  
 They embraced each other, and at once withdrew,  
 One to his troops, the other to his girl.  
 Thenceforth the story was confirmed by all:  
 The boy was called Basil the Border Lord  
 From the gold bull that he should rule the borders.  
 But at this point we're going to end the book,  
 And keep what follows for another session.  
 A glut of talk, my theologian says,  
 Is always very hostile to good hearing.

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