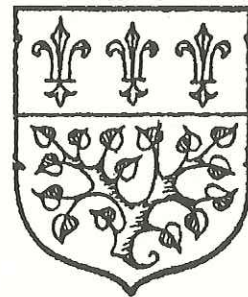


CITY OF REIMS

# THE BOY KNIGHT OF REIMS



CITY OF REIMS



BY  
ELOISE  
LOWNSBERY



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TO  
JAMES INCREASE MATHER, JR.  
TO  
ELAINE AND SYLVIA, GORDON, AND MARGARITA  
DENNY, JUDY, JEAN, AND FRANCES  
BARBARA, ROBERT, AND ISABEL JANE  
AND TO ALL CHILDREN, ALL SAINTS, ALL ANGELS



*For who can grasp in the easiest way the  
vital power of art?—the simple people and  
the children, the people of nature.*

NICHOLAS K. ROERICH

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## THE BOY KNIGHT OF REIMS

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### CHAPTER I

#### A MOMENTOUS DECISION

JEAN D'ORBAIS was wakened by the early ringing of bells, a joyous klinkety-klang that meant a fête day. Sure enough, it was the fête of Sainte-Anne. Her day must be celebrated because if there had been no Sainte-Anne there could have been no Blessed Virgin, and if there had been no Blessed Virgin there could have been no Christ Child, and without a Christ Child there would have been no Reims Cathedral! So Jean hopped out of bed and into his long trousers and blue linen tunic before the bells had quite ceased ringing.

Then he ran to open the window; not a window

with a smooth pane of clear glass, but one made of thick round chunks of greenish brown glass, rather like the bottoms of bottles, held together by curved lead strips. Yet it opened for all that, and every morning he flung it wide to see what the day was like.

To-day the air was sweet with summer fragrances and was still singing with the lingering sound from the bells. Long ago Jean had discovered that every bell has overtones and undertones. The undertones disappear first, but the overtones hang on the air, humming and singing to themselves. Then what becomes of the sound at last? Where does it go? 'Probably up to heaven,' he thought, 'to tell Clovis and Saint-Remi and the first Jean d'Orbais that this is July 26, 1424.'

Jean climbed up onto the window-seat and leaned out.

'Good day to you all,' he cried, waving to the statues across the way. For this upper oriel window hung out over the narrow lane beneath, nearly opposite to the north doorway of the cathedral. Every stone was carved into a story, and they were all there, Jean's special angels and saints and heroes.

Mother was soon bustling about the room, humming a song, taking from the big cupboard her best dress, wrapped carefully in an old linen cloth.

Jean tended first to the fire. The back-log was always smothered in ashes at night, so that the fire never went out, summer or winter. The

blackened chimney was so wide and high that Jean could easily stand up in it. He loved tending the fire better than any other task he had to do. Gran'père helped him roll on the new back-log for the day, and then he ran down to feed the chickens and the gray and white rabbits.

By that time Julie and Gaston had come down from their small rooms in the loft to wash their faces and hands at the well in the courtyard. Julie was sixteen and helped Jean's mother in her embroidery shop, while Gaston was nearly twenty-two and had been apprenticed to Master Jean, Jean's father, since he was ten. So they were like a big brother and sister to Jean, who had known them all his life.

Gaston was a tall chap who loved to tease. He pulled Julie's fair curls and called her a daffodil. She spattered water at him, and he back at her. Then she threw a whole bucketful and ran up the stairs, with Gaston and Jean racing after.

Mother, Father, and Gran'père were already seated at the long oak table. From a huge round crusty loaf of bread, Father cut big chunks with his knife, giving them each their portions. They all ate heartily, washing it down with sweet wine and a great deal of laughter and chatting. It was good to have a summer holiday.

Julie helped Jean with his daily tasks so they were done in a twinkling. Then Jean helped them all into their festal robes for the great procession.

Father as master sculptor wore a robe of black silk with bands of bright orange. Gaston, who had finished his apprenticeship and was now called companion, wore black cotton cloth with narrower bands of orange. Gran'père, in blue-and-gold, showed that he was a master goldsmith. Mother was in scarlet. Although her dark curly hair must be hidden away beneath her white veil, yet her laughing eyes and bright cheeks were never more beautiful. In fact, Jean thought her the most beautiful lady he had ever seen, lovely as any Queen. Mother gave Jean a clean blue tunic to wear, and his hair an extra combing. Julie put on her scarlet basque and a fresh white veil, and Gaston donned his black-and-orange cap, and they were all ready.

Out in the wide square in front of the cathedral they separated to join gay, chattering groups; Father and Gaston their masons' guild, Mother and Julie the embroidery men and women, Jean and Gran'père the goldsmiths. Jean kept tight hold of his grandfather's hand, for he had given his eyesight along with all the beautiful and rare things he had made for the cathedral all the years of his work. But he gave them gladly, and was happy in spite of his blindness, and Jean was proud to be his guide. Who wouldn't be glad to be allowed to join in the great procession?

Every one was greeting Gran'père, and shaking his hand or clapping him on the back. His face shone with his genial friendliness.

'Have the banners arrived yet, lad?' Gran'père saw it all through Jean's eyes.

'Aye, that they have, Gran'père, dozens of them, all blowing in the breeze. I love ours, blue, and a cross of silver, with two kings' crowns and two golden chalices.'

Jean caught sight of the children across the square and waved. Félice and Suzanne with all the other girls were hovering about a black-robed nun, Sister Claire, while the boys were shepherded by Father Benedict. No punching or pulling of hair allowed, no lizards carefully hidden under tunics to-day. Every one must be on his best behavior for the fête day of Sainte-Anne. Yet all the same, Jean darted out to make faces at Marcel. For all he was his best friend, yet they had fought the day before, and the day before that, because Marcel had insisted that Jean's namesake and ancestor was not the first master-builder of the cathedral. Jean felt hot now when he saw Marcel's grinning freckles and fiery red hair, but just then the bells began chiming, calling them all inside.

The groups pressed closer, the guardians of each guild arranging the crafts in order; the masters first, two and two, then the companions, and after them the boy apprentices.

Now out from the bishop's palace came the choir boys in scarlet and lace, and after the cross and banner bearers, the Bishop himself in his gorgeous embroidered cope, beneath a canopy borne by four



priests. Jean craned his neck and stood on tiptoe, for his own mother had embroidered that canopy on blue damask with a stately Sainte-Anne in a red dress, holding by the hand a demure little blue-and-white Virgin Marie (Mary). He whispered it all to his grandfather excitedly.

Then the guilds fell into line, led by Master Colard, the master-builder in charge of the cathedral, followed by the masons, the sculptors, the hod-carriers, the ox-drivers, the tapestry-weavers, the embroidery-workers, the goldsmiths, the tailors and forgers, then the butchers and bakers and wax-candle-makers, and all the other crafts and trades of the city, each with a banner and symbol of the guild, each marching two by two up and down the long aisles of the great cathedral.

At the doorway each master was given a lighted candle to carry. Gran'père let Jean manage his. He kept his eyes fixed on that flickering point of light; bright blue at the base, dark at the center, tapering into a shining cone of clear gold flame. He was thrillingly conscious of the organ rolling out, and the choirs chanting, of other flickering points of light making a glow of faces, and then of dancing shadows. He kept close to Gran'père. All the people crowded in, the children pressing down as close to the altar as they could. The great nave was full.

Jean's heart was full too. 'Soon I shall be old enough to be an apprentice myself,' he thought,

'and then I shall join the procession, not only as Gran'père's guide, but as a real part of it all. I, too, could make a chalice for the altar, or, better still, a statue of a king for the towers.'

And all through the long Latin prayers and the drama of the mass, Jean was busy dreaming dreams of how great he would become; how they would call him Master Jean, as they did his grandfather and his father, and of how he would receive important commissions to do for his cathedral. He was thankful it was not yet finished.

Out in the wide square again with the bells pealing and the pigeons wheeling, the children came running up to Jean.

'We know a secret!' Suzanne and Félice looked important.

'You think you're awfully big,' scoffed Marcel, 'marching with the goldsmiths, but I'm to be apprenticed very soon.' He grinned and stuck out his tongue.

'How do you know?' Jean demanded, his brown eyes big with wonder.

'My father said so this morning!'

Jean stared at him. 'Which craft?'

'Don't know, and care less,' and Marcel turned a handspring, then strutted off with his best military stride. Marcel was always playing general.

'I wouldn't mind,' ventured Félice in her soft voice. She was fair as one of the Virgin's lilies.

'I wish I were a boy too,' cried Suzanne, tossing

her dark curls. 'I'd be a page and live in a king's court.'

Jean rumpled his hair. His face was flushed. So Marcel was going to begin! One couldn't do great things for the cathedral unless one began. Marcel was nearly a year older than he. He was silent all the way home.

Now a fête day calls for a fête dinner. Mother was busy preparing it, and Jean was met by a pungent odor of boiling leeks. Gran'père had brought one of his old friends home with him, a master goldsmith who had been working in Paris, but who had now established himself in Reims. They were over in the window-seat talking with Father. Julie and Gaston had gone off to visit friends. Jean helped his mother. He felt very close to her. He told her about Marcel. He knew she could read his thought. She stopped singing and bent over the soup pot.

'She doesn't want me to grow up so fast,' thought Jean. Being apprenticed often meant going away from home for years and years.

'Mon ami (my friend),' she called to Jean's father, 'cut me off a good piece of ham to roast.'

So Master Jean obediently reached down a year-old ham hanging from the rafters and brought her a good-sized chunk for the spit. She hung the big iron soup pot on its crane, and Jean swung it over the fire. He had to turn the roast on its spit with a

long-handled two-prong fork. It wept grease into the drip pan. His face got very hot, and shone like the bottoms of the copper pots hanging above the fire; but he was used to that, and he had much to think about.

In an hour the roast was ready to take from the spit.

'The feast is served,' called Mother. It was true. The good soup was steaming on the table. The wine was poured into the best high Gospel goblets which Gran'père had once made, and which were used only on fête days. Every one brought a holiday appetite. Every one dipped a chunk of his good white bread into the rich brown gravy and set it aside in a copper bowl for the poor who had none, but were free to wander from door to door seeking the blessed alms bowl.

The talk centered about Master Anton, Gran'père's guest, and his work in Paris. Jean listened, his eyes fixed on the man. He had already decided about him. He didn't like him, and yet something about him rather fascinated Jean too. Perhaps it was his nose which had a crook in it so that the lower part bent down toward his mouth. His chin pointed up, giving him a look like that of the eagle gargoyle on the apse of the cathedral. 'He looks as if he could bite me,' thought Jean, shivering. He had a terror of those gargoyles — they had to do with sin and evil.

Now Master Anton was asking about the cathedral.