

THE FOOL

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The fool by H. C. Bailey

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H. C. BAILEY

THE FOOL

THE FOOL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE SEA CAPTAIN
THE GENTLEMAN ADVENTURER
THE HIGHWAYMAN
THE GAMESTERS
THE YOUNG LOVERS
THE PILLAR OF FIRE
BARRY LEROY
CALL MR. FORTUNE
HIS SERENE HIGHNESS

THE FOOL

encl Christopher
BY
H. C. BAILEY

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THE FOOL

CHAPTER I

PLAYING KNUCKLE-BONES

THERE were dead in the courtyard and a noise. Across the morning twilight men shouted from tower to tower and blade clashed on mail where the last of the garrison sold blood for blood, and from the bowels of the castle came already the yells and crash of plundering. And the bells of the Abbey beyond the wall were ringing to matins.

Only one man was alive among the dead in the courtyard, and he sat on his heels in a corner and played knuckle-bones. He flared in the greyness, one lean thigh scarlet and one grass-green, his doublet a patchwork in all colours, about his neck and his big head a hood like a monk's cowl, but yellow, and the crest of it was red and fashioned as a cock's comb, and out of the sides came the grey rough ears of an ass. While his big hands tossed and snatched the bones he was singing a Latin hymn. From the battlements a man was thrown and fell beside him and lay with blood oozing through the rings of the hauberk. But he did not move or look; he tossed the bones still and still sang.

The storming party mustered again, a sturdy, swaggering company, begrimed and with many a gap hewn in their mail coats. For their armour was rings or little scraps of steel, like a fish's scales sewn upon cloth—that a man could wear steel plates no