

The
RED KEEP



ALLEN FRENCH
Illustrated by
ANDREW WYETH

THE RED KEEP

By Allen French

Illustrated by Andrew Wyeth

Also by Allen French

The Story of Rolf and the Viking Bow

The Lost Baron

Sir Marrok

Heroes of Iceland

The Story of Grettir the Strong

The Colonials

Non-Fiction

The Siege of Boston

First Year of the American Revolution

General Gage's Informers

Historic Concord and the Lexington Fight

The RED KEEP

A story of Burgundy in year 1165

by Allen French



Illustrated by Andrew Wyeth

BETHLEHEM BOOKS • IGNATIUS PRESS
Bathgate San Francisco

©1939 Allen French
© renewed 1967, Ellen Spalt

Cover artwork: The Red Keep, 1938 by N.C. Wyeth, photograph
courtesy of Wyeth Collection

Interior artwork: 1938, Andrew Wyeth
All artwork © 1997, Andrew Wyeth
Cover design: Davin Carlson

First Bethlehem Books Printing 1997
All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-932350-53-1

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press
10194 Garfield Street S.
Bathgate, North Dakota 58216
www.bethlehembooks.com

*To Katherine,
who demanded another story*

Table Of Contents

1. A Raid	1
2. The Prior Brings Bad News	9
3. Evil Tidings	17
4. Anne's Plans, and Others'	23
5. Ralph the Robber	34
6. A Bit of Folly	41
7. The Trap of the Dark Passage	49
8. Escape	59
9. A New Life	67
10. The Abbot's Scheme	75
11. The Country Knight	81
12. Red Ralph Again	88
13. Paid Murder	97
14. Rebuilding the Red Keep	102
15. Friends and Enemies	110
16. Peasants and Outlaws	116
17. Sturdy Peasants	123
18. Conan Is Not Dead	135
19. Anne Will Go	141
20. Strange Visitors	150
21. The Captured Keep	159
22. The Fight in the Courtyard	172
23. Secret Entrance	179
24. Surprise and Flight	189
25. Peace at the Castle	201
26. Ralph Refuses	209
27. Judgment of God	216
28. Judgment of the Duke	225
Glossary	229
About the Author	231
About the Artist	233

1. A Raid

CONAN, very proud, was wearing his chain mail. Few boys of fifteen had such a thing in the country districts of Burgundy nearly eight hundred years ago. His father had lately sent it to him, having found it in a storeroom, part of the forgotten plunder brought home from the Second Crusade. Now anyone knew what a few years of damp would do to a shirt of mail. Parts as wide as Conan's hand had rusted away, and in many lesser places the rings were gone. Weeks of work the boy had put into mending it, with the assistance of the armorer. The fine original Turkish mesh they had not hoped to reproduce; but by cutting off all the skirts of the garment, and by using them as patches by means of coarse rings laboriously forged by Conan himself, they had made a shirt that just cleared the hips and was a good protection as far as it went. Sir Roger had been pleased with the boy's persistence and skill, for the use of the armorer's hammer was too often neglected in a knight's education. As for Conan, he declared that he wanted no long hauberk, which would limit his freedom too much. And this he maintained even though, as he it his horse, his legs were protected merely by leather leggings.

Sir Roger, watching the boy as their horses trotted side by side, chuckled to himself. Conan was the son of a baron living some forty miles away. Sir Roger had taken the lad into his own castle, as was the custom, to bring him up to knighthood. Conan, lanky, light-haired, and frank of face, was still but a page or varlet; but he was coming on, and the easygoing knight was fond of him. The lad was all bone; he was growing rapidly, and in a year it would be difficult to put the mail-shirt on. Meanwhile, let him enjoy it.

"I don't suppose," said Conan happily, "that young d'Arcy, at the Red Keep, has such a hauberk as mine."

"Ah, but he has," replied his lord. "A very good one, bought by his father at the Vézelay fair, not a year since. A small one, of Italian make, that fits him not badly."

Conan did not care. "Well, he will outgrow his, too. But to buy a new one too small!"

"Baron Ives said," explained Sir Roger, "that his daughter would grow to it."

“Anne?” asked the varlet. “Is she a tomboy, then? When I stopped at the Keep, on my way from my home, she was rolling hoops.”

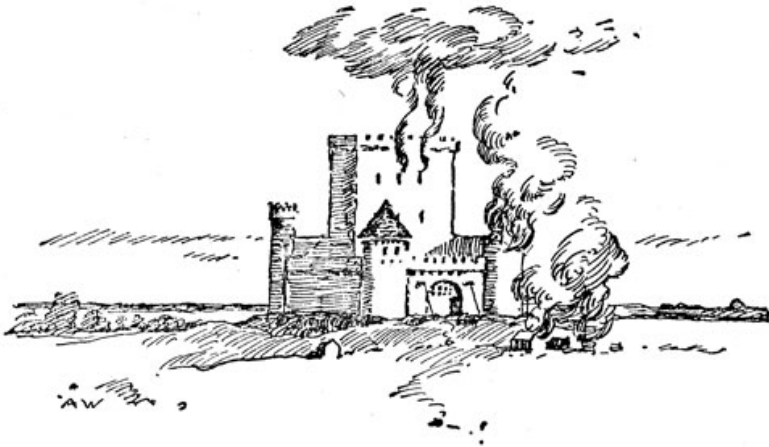
“And now,” replied the knight, “she goes to hunt with her father and brother. If she puts on armor, she will not be the first girl that has done so in these parts. And at need!”

“Let her use her brother’s, then,” said Conan. “Sir Roger, I have thought how I can enlarge mine. With the old scraps which I have laid away I can widen out the front and back. I have almost enough. The sleeves I can slit on the inside and widen with leather.”

“Well, well,” said the baron. “But when you are grown, the shirt will hardly come to your waist.”

Conan sighed. “I never could make myself one wholly new.”

The two were riding at the head of a string of horsemen, straggling at gentle pace through forest ways. The followers, roughly and variously protected by leather, with nondescript arms, rode shaggy horses. That they were all fighting-men was usual in an uncouth time when commonly only the priest and the monk journeyed without arms.



But these were on no errand of war; they were going on a friendly visit to the Red Keep, which, after a half day’s travel, lay close ahead. From a little knoll in the forest, stony and bare of trees, the castle could be seen. On climbing the knoll Sir Roger drew rein, intending to stop for a view of the castle standing peaceful in its

lands. The moment he looked, he shouted in astonishment. Conan repeated the shout, as did others who hurried to the spot.

The Red Keep stood a half mile away, the square block of its heavy tower dominating the lesser buildings. Above it hung a pall of smoke, fed by black wreaths that curled upward from the narrow windows. Not far outside the gate a huddle of huts was burning furiously. In all the scene there were no men, unless some few were unseen among a score or more of horses standing grouped close to the drawbridge of the castle. The horses and the double fire made it very clear that this was a raid, a surprise, a fight as yet unfinished.

Sir Roger shouted "Rescue!" and drew his sword. Conan, in a voice that cracked as he raised it, repeated the word and the action. "Blow trumpet!" cried Sir Roger, to hasten the laggards. "Forward!" From the knoll the horsemen furiously spurred to save their friends.

In answer to the trumpet in the woods, at the castle gate a warning bugle blew. The call was repeated from within. There were shouts and trampling; armed men, rushing through the gate, began mounting their horses. Nervously they looked, now at the forest, now within the castle. All had been fighting; and some, with streaming eyes and still coughing, had been in the smoke. "The barons—why do they not come?" There appeared at length, running, a group conducting a little clumsy figure, crooked, heavy-backed, which the men hoisted to its saddle. Next, alone, strode a tower of a man, who paused in the gate to send one rallying cry back into the castle.

"Curse you, Aymar, hurry!" cried the crookback. "Who blew the alarm?"

"I, Lord Odo," answered one. "I heard a trumpet in the wood, and horses galloping."

"And none can come who is not our enemy. Aymar, speed you!" The huge man, reaching his horse's side, gathered the reins and set foot in the stirrup. "Are you sure," demanded the dwarf, "that you stabbed everyone?"

"How could I be, in that hurly-burly in the dark? I know only that none followed me out of the smoke. I am lucky not to have smothered there myself." He heaved himself to the saddle. "Why the alarm?"

“Enemies in the forest. Away everyone—keep close to me and make for home!” Odo rode first, but not so fast that his bodyguard could not protect him. The big man rode back across the drawbridge and bellowed twice within the archway. Then growling, “Plunderers take their own risk,” he spurred his great horse after the others.

The last of the fleeing band was seen by the rescuers. Pursuit seemed hopeless. “Their horses are fresh, ours are tired. Let us make what rescue we can within the castle.”

Conan, at Sir Roger’s side, asked, “Who are they? Who would—could?”

But he knew the answer. “The Sauval. Never to be trusted.” That treacherous, bloodthirsty pair of brothers, with their band of ruffians. The plague of the whole region, always from their castle stronghold robbing and raiding.

The courtyard of the Red Keep, when the rescuers clattered into it and drew rein, seemed peaceful. The people of the castle had been getting in wood, for a wagon still stood with its horses harnessed. Conan looked twice before he saw bodies lying, and noticed trickles of blood. It had been a complete surprise.

Into sight staggered two plunderers, their arms full of loot, their heads already swimming with wine. They were speedily cut down. Conan, watching that swift slaying, stared with wide eyes, and felt his heart quiver.

Sir Roger measured with his eye the smoke coming from the keep itself, the great square donjon-tower which by the color of its red stone gave the castle its name. Such a tower was, to every castle, its citadel, its last stronghold. “The fire is dying out. Into the castle, now, and save every friend. Kill any Sauval. You six behind there, guard the gate.”

He strode across the courtyard and into the keep. Conan kept at his shoulder, all limbs and neck and awkward joints, with startled, eager eyes. “Keep behind me, boy! We may meet more of those lingerers. There, they have found another. Hear him shriek. Behind me, Conan, I tell you!” For the boy was pressing on.

The baron sent some of his men down into the cellars, then led others up the stairs. In the great hall were evidences of the surprise—a woman’s tapestry frame still standing by the fire, its skeins of wool on the floor. The tables stood covered with food.