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# The People's Edition

## Idylls of the King

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The  
Poetical Works  
of  
ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

Idylls of the King  
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**SECTION.**

# IDYLLS OF THE KING

*(Continued)*

## PELLEAS AND ETTARRE

KING ARTHUR made new knights to fill the gap  
Left by the Holy Quest; and as he sat  
In hall at old Caerleon, the high doors  
Were softly sunder'd, and thro' these a youth,  
Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields  
Past, and the sunshine came along with him.

‘Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,  
All that belongs to knighthood, and I love.’  
Such was his cry: for having heard the King  
Had let proclaim a tournament—the prize  
A golden circlet and a knightly sword,  
Full fain had Pelleas for his lady won  
The golden circlet, for himself the sword:

And there were those who knew him near the King,  
And promised for him: and Arthur made him knight.

And this new knight, Sir Pelleas of the isles—  
But lately come to his inheritance,  
And lord of many a barren isle was he—  
Riding at noon, a day or twain before,  
Across the forest call'd of Dean, to find  
Caerleon and the King, had felt the sun  
Beat like a strong knight on his helm, and reel'd  
Almost to falling from his horse; but saw  
Near him a mound of even-sloping side,  
Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,  
And here and there great hollies under them;  
But for a mile all round was open space,  
And fern and heath: and slowly Pelleas drew  
To that dim day, then binding his good horse  
To a tree, cast himself down; and as he lay  
At random looking over the brown earth  
Thro' that green-glooming twilight of the grove,  
It seem'd to Pelleas that the fern without  
Burnt as a living fire of emeralds,  
So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it.  
Then o'er it crost the dimness of a cloud  
Floating, and once the shadow of a bird

Flying, and then a fawn; and his eyes closed.  
And since he loved all maidens, but no maid  
In special, half-awake he whisper'd, 'Where?  
O where? I love thee, tho' I know thee not.  
For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,  
And I will make thee with my spear and sword  
As famous—O my Queen, my Guinevere,  
For I will be thine Arthur when we meet.'

Suddenly waken'd with a sound of talk  
And laughter at the limit of the wood,  
And glancing thro' the hoary boles, he saw,  
Strange as to some old prophet might have seem'd  
A vision hovering on a sea of fire,  
Damsels in divers colours like the cloud  
Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them  
On horses, and the horses richly trapt  
Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood:  
And all the damsels talk'd confusedly,  
And one was pointing this way, and one that,  
Because the way was lost.

And Pelleas rose,  
And loosed his horse, and led him to the light.  
There she that seem'd the chief among them said,

'In happy time behold our pilot-star !  
Youth, we are damsels-errant, and we ride,  
Arm'd as ye see, to tilt against the knights  
There at Caerleon, but have lost our way:  
To right ? to left ? straight forward ? back again ?  
Which ? tell us quickly.'

Pelleas gazing thought,  
'Is Guinevere herself so beautiful ?'  
For large her violet eyes look'd, and her bloom  
A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens,  
And round her limbs, mature in womanhood;  
And slender was her hand and small her shape;  
And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,  
She might have seem'd a toy to trifle with,  
And pass and care no more. But while he gazed  
The beauty of her flesh abash'd the boy,  
As tho' it were the beauty of her soul:  
For as the base man, judging of the good,  
Puts his own baseness in him by default  
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend  
All the young beauty of his own soul to hers,  
Believing her; and when she spake to him,  
Stammer'd, and could not make her a reply.  
For out of the waste islands had he come,

Where saving his own sisters he had known  
Scarce any but the women of his isles,  
Rough wives, that laugh'd and scream'd against the  
gulls,  
Makers of nets, and living from the sea.

Then with a slow smile turn'd the lady round  
And look'd upon her people; and as when  
A stone is flung into some sleeping tarn,  
The circle widens till it lip the marge,  
Spread the slow smile thro' all her company.  
Three knights were thereamong; and they too smiled,  
Scorning him; for the lady was Ettarre,  
And she was a great lady in her land.

Again she said, 'O wild and of the woods,  
Knowest thou not the fashion of our speech?  
Or have the Heavens but given thee a fair face,  
Lacking a tongue?'

'O damsel,' answer'd he,  
'I woke from dreams; and coming out of gloom  
Was dazzled by the sudden light, and crave  
Pardon: but will ye to Caerleon? I  
Go likewise: shall I lead you to the King?'

‘Lead then,’ she said ; and thro’ the woods they  
went.

And while they rode, the meaning in his eyes,  
His tenderness of manner, and chaste awe,  
His broken utterances and bashfulness,  
Were all a burthen to her, and in her heart  
She mutter’d, ‘I have lighted on a fool,  
Raw, yet so stale!’ But since her mind was  
bent

On hearing, after trumpet blown, her name  
And title, ‘Queen of Beauty,’ in the lists  
Cried—and beholding him so strong, she thought  
That peradventure he will fight for me,  
And win the circlet: therefore flatter’d him,  
Being so gracious, that he wellnigh deem’d  
His wish by hers was echo’d; and her knights  
And all her damsels too were gracious to him,  
For she was a great lady.

And when they reach’d  
Caerleon, ere they past to lodging, she,  
Taking his hand, ‘O the strong hand,’ she said,  
‘See! look at mine! but wilt thou fight for me,  
And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas,  
That I may love thee?’

Then his helpless heart  
Leapt, and he cried, 'Ay! wilt thou if I win?'  
'Ay, that will I,' she answer'd, and she laugh'd,  
And straitly nipt the hand, and flung it from her;  
Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers,  
Till all her ladies laugh'd along with her.

'O happy world,' thought Pelleas, 'all, meseems,  
Are happy; I the happiest of them all.'  
Nor slept that night for pleasure in his blood,  
And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves;  
Then being on the morrow knighted, sware  
To love one only. And as he came away,  
The men who met him rounded on their heels  
And wonder'd after him, because his face  
Shone like the countenance of a priest of old  
Against the flame about a sacrifice  
Kindled by fire from heaven: so glad was he.

Then Arthur made vast banquets, and strange  
knights  
From the four winds came in: and each one sat,  
Tho' served with choice from air, land, stream, and  
sea,  
Oft in mid-banquet measuring with his eyes



His neighbour's make and might: and Pelleas look'd  
Noble among the noble, for he dream'd  
His lady loved him, and he knew himself  
Loved of the King: and him his new-made knight  
Worshipt, whose lightest whisper moved him more  
Than all the ranged reasons of the world.

Then blush'd and brake the morning of the jousts,  
And this was call'd 'The Tournament of Youth:'  
For Arthur, loving his young knight, withheld  
His older and his mightier from the lists,  
That Pelleas might obtain his lady's love,  
According to her promise, and remain  
Lord of the tourney. And Arthur had the jousts  
Down in the flat field by the shore of Usk  
Holden: the gilded parapets were crown'd  
With faces, and the great tower fill'd with eyes  
Up to the summit, and the trumpets blew.  
There all day long Sir Pelleas kept the field  
With honour: so by that strong hand of his  
The sword and golden circlet were achieved.

Then rang the shout his lady loved: the heat  
Of pride and glory fired her face; her eye  
Sparkled; she caught the circlet from his lance,

And there before the people crown'd herself:  
So for the last time she was gracious to him.

Then at Caerleon for a space—her look  
Bright for all others, cloudier on her knight—  
Linger'd Ettarre: and seeing Pelleas droop,  
Said Guinevere, 'We marvel at thee much,  
O damsel, wearing this unsunny face  
To him who won thee glory!' And she said,  
'Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower,  
My Queen, he had not won.' Whereat the Queen,  
As one whose foot is bitten by an ant,  
Glanced down upon her, turn'd and went her way.

But after, when her damsels, and herself,  
And those three knights all set their faces home,  
Sir Pelleas follow'd. She that saw him cried,  
'Damsels—and yet I should be shamed to say it—  
I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back  
Among yourselves. Would rather that we had  
Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way,  
Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to ride  
And jest with: take him to you, keep him off,  
And pamper him with papmeat, if ye will,  
Old milky fables of the wolf and sheep,

Such as the wholesome mothers tell their boys.  
Nay, should ye try him with a merry one  
To find his mettle, good: and if he fly us,  
Small matter ! let him.' This her damsels heard,  
And mindful of her small and cruel hand,  
They, closing round him thro' the journey home,  
Acted her hest, and always from her side  
Restrain'd him with all manner of device,  
So that he could not come to speech with her.  
And when she gain'd her castle, upsprang the bridge,  
Down rang the grate of iron thro' the groove,  
And he was left alone in open field.

'These be the ways of ladies,' Pelleas thought,  
'To those who love them, trials of our faith.  
Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,  
For loyal to the uttermost am I.'  
So made his moan; and, darkness falling, sought  
A priory not far off, there lodged, but rose  
With morning every day, and, moist or dry,  
Full-arm'd upon his charger all day long  
Sat by the walls, and no one open'd to him.

And this persistence turn'd her scorn to wrath.  
Then calling her three knights, she charged them,  
'Out !

And drive him from the walls.' And out they came,  
But Pelleas overthrew them as they dash'd  
Against him one by one; and these return'd,  
But still he kept his watch beneath the wall.

Thereon her wrath became a hate; and once,  
A week beyond, while walking on the walls  
With her three knights, she pointed downward,  
    'Look,  
He haunts me—I cannot breathe—besieges me;  
Down! strike him! put my hate into your strokes,  
And drive him from my walls.' And down they  
    went,  
And Pelleas overthrew them one by one;  
And from the tower above him cried Ettarre,  
'Bind him, and bring him in.'

He heard her voice;  
Then let the strong hand, which had overthrown  
Her minion-knights, by those he overthrew  
Be bounden straight, and so they brought him in.

Then when he came before Ettarre, the sight  
Of her rich beauty made him at one glance  
More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds.  
Yet with good cheer he spake, 'Behold me, Lady,

A prisoner, and the vassal of thy will;  
And if thou keep me in thy donjon here,  
Content am I so that I see thy face  
But once a day: for I have sworn my vows,  
And thou hast given thy promise, and I know  
That all these pains are trials of my faith,  
And that thyself, when thou hast seen me strain'd  
And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length  
Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight.'

Then she began to rail so bitterly,  
With all her damsels, he was stricken mute;  
But when she mock'd his vows and the great King,  
Lighted on words: 'For pity of thine own self,  
Peace, Lady, peace: is he not thine and mine?'  
'Thou fool,' she said, 'I never heard his voice  
But long'd to break away. Unbind him now,  
And thrust him out of doors; for save he be  
Fool to the midmost marrow of his bones,  
He will return no more.' And those, her three,  
Laugh'd, and unbound, and thrust him from the  
gate.

And after this, a week beyond, again  
She call'd them, saying, 'There he watches yet,  
There like a dog before his master's door !

Kick'd, he returns: do ye not hate him, ye?  
Ye know yourselves: how can ye bide at peace,  
Affronted with his fulsome innocence?  
Are ye but creatures of the board and bed,  
No men to strike? Fall on him all at once,  
And if ye slay him I reckon not: if ye fail,  
Give ye the slave mine order to be bound,  
Bind him as heretofore, and bring him in:  
It may be ye shall slay him in his bonds.'

She spake; and at her will they couch'd their spears,  
Three against one: and Gawain passing by,  
Bound upon solitary adventure, saw  
Low down beneath the shadow of those towers  
A villainy, three to one: and thro' his heart  
The fire of honour and all noble deeds  
Flash'd, and he call'd, 'I strike upon thy side—  
The caitiffs!' 'Nay,' said Pelleas, 'but forbear;  
He needs no aid who doth his lady's will.'

So Gawain, looking at the villainy done,  
Forbore, but in his heat and eagerness  
Trembled and quiver'd, as the dog, withheld  
A moment from the vermin that he sees  
Before him, shivers, ere he springs and kills.

And Pelleas overthrew them, one to three;  
And they rose up, and bound, and brought him in.  
Then first her anger, leaving Pelleas, burn'd  
Full on her knights in many an evil name  
Of craven, weakling, and thrice-beaten hound:  
'Yet, take him, ye that scarce are fit to touch,  
Far less to bind, your victor, and thrust him out,  
And let who will release him from his bonds.  
And if he comes again'—there she brake short;  
And Pelleas answer'd, 'Lady, for indeed  
I loved you and I deem'd you beautiful,  
I cannot brook to see your beauty marr'd  
Thro' evil spite: and if ye love me not,  
I cannot bear to dream you so forsworn:  
I had liefer ye were worthy of my love,  
Than to be loved again of you—farewell;  
And tho' ye kill my hope, not yet my love,  
Vex not yourself: ye will not see me more.'

While thus he spake, she gazed upon the man  
Of princely bearing, tho' in bonds, and thought,  
'Why have I push'd him from me? this man  
loves,  
If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why?  
I deem'd him fool? yea, so? or that in him

A something—was it nobler than myself?—  
Seem'd my reproach? He is not of my kind.  
He could not love me, did he know me well.  
Nay, let him go—and quickly.' And her knights  
Laugh'd not, but thrust him bounden out of door.

Forth sprang Gawain, and loosed him from his  
bonds,  
And flung them o'er the walls; and afterward,  
Shaking his hands, as from a lazar's rag,  
'Faith of my body,' he said, 'and art thou not—  
Yea thou art he, whom late our Arthur made  
Knight of his table; yea and he that won  
The circlet? wherefore hast thou so defamed  
Thy brotherhood in me and all the rest,  
As let these caitiffs on thee work their will?'

And Pelleas answer'd, 'O, their wills are hers  
For whom I won the circlet; and mine, hers,  
Thus to be bounden, so to see her face,  
Marr'd tho' it be with spite and mockery now,  
Other than when I found her in the woods;  
And tho' she hath me bounden but in spite,  
And all to flout me, when they bring me in,  
Let me be bounden, I shall see her face;  
Else must I die thro' mine unhappiness.'



And Gawain answer'd kindly tho' in scorn,  
'Why, let my lady bind me if she will,  
And let my lady beat me if she will:  
But an she send her delegate to thrall  
These fighting hands of mine—Christ kill me then  
But I will slice him handless by the wrist,  
And let my lady sear the stump for him,  
Howl as he may. But hold me for your friend:  
Come, ye know nothing: here I pledge my troth,  
Yea, by the honour of the Table Round,  
I will be leal to thee and work thy work,  
And tame thy jailing princess to thine hand.  
Lend me thine horse and arms, and I will say  
That I have slain thee. She will let me in  
To hear the manner of thy fight and fall;  
Then, when I come within her counsels, then  
From prime to vespers will I chant thy praise  
As prowtest knight and truest lover, more  
Than any have sung thee living, till she long  
To have thee back in lusty life again,  
Not to be bound, save by white bonds and warm,  
Dearer than freedom. Wherefore now thy horse  
And armour: let me go: be comforted:  
Give me three days to melt her fancy, and hope  
The third night hence will bring thee news of gold.'

Then Pelleas lent his horse and all his arms,  
Saving the goodly sword, his prize, and took  
Gawain's, and said, 'Betray me not, but help—  
Art thou not he whom men call light-of-love?'

'Ay,' said Gawain, 'for women be so light.'  
Then bounded forward to the castle walls,  
And raised a bugle hanging from his neck,  
And winded it, and that so musically  
That all the old echoes hidden in the wall  
Rang out like hollow woods at hunting-tide.

Up ran a score of damsels to the tower;  
'Avaunt,' they cried, 'our lady loves thee not.'  
But Gawain lifting up his vizor said,  
'Gawain am I, Gawain of Arthur's court,  
And I have slain this Pelleas whom ye hate:  
Behold his horse and armour. Open gates,  
And I will make you merry.'

And down they ran,  
Her damsels, crying to their lady, 'Lo!  
Pelleas is dead—he told us—he that hath  
His horse and armour: will ye let him in?  
He slew him! Gawain, Gawain of the court,

Sir Gawain—there he waits below the wall,  
Blowing his bugle as who should say him nay.'

And so, leave given, straight on thro' open door  
Rode Gawain, whom she greeted courteously.  
'Dead, is it so?' she ask'd. 'Ay, ay,' said he,  
'And oft in dying cried upon your name.'  
'Pity on him,' she answer'd, 'a good knight,  
But never let me bide one hour at peace.'  
'Ay,' thought Gawain, 'and you be fair enow:  
But I to your dead man have given my troth,  
That whom ye loathe, him will I make you love.'

So those three days, aimless about the land,  
Lost in a doubt, Pelleas wandering  
Waited, until the third night brought a moon  
With promise of large light on woods and ways.

Hot was the night and silent; but a sound  
Of Gawain ever coming, and this lay—  
Which Pelleas had heard sung before the Queen,  
And seen her sadden listening—vext his heart,  
And marr'd his rest—'A worm within the rose.'

'A rose, but one, none other rose had I,  
A rose, one rose, and this was wondrous fair,

One rose, a rose that gladden'd earth and sky,  
One rose, my rose, that sweeten'd all mine air—  
I cared not for the thorns; the thorns were there.

‘One rose, a rose to gather by and by,  
One rose, a rose, to gather and to wear,  
No rose but one—what other rose had I?  
One rose, my rose; a rose that will not die,—  
He dies who loves it,—if the worm be there.’

This tender rhyme, and evermore the doubt,  
‘Why lingers Gawain with his golden news?’  
So shook him that he could not rest, but rode  
Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his horse  
Hard by the gates. Wide open were the gates,  
And no watch kept; and in thro’ these he past,  
And heard but his own steps, and his own heart  
Beating, for nothing moved but his own self,  
And his own shadow. Then he crost the court,  
And spied not any light in hall or bower,  
But saw the postern portal also wide  
Yawning; and up a slope of garden, all  
Of roses white and red, and brambles mixt  
And overgrowing them, went on, and found,  
Here too, all hush’d below the mellow moon,

Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave  
Came lightening downward, and so spilt itself  
Among the roses, and was lost again.

Then was he ware of three pavilions rear'd  
Above the bushes, gilden-peakt: in one,  
Red after revel, droned her lurdane knights  
Slumbering, and their three squires across their  
feet:

In one, their malice on the placid lip  
Froz'n by sweet sleep, four of her damsels lay:  
And in the third, the circlet of the jousts  
Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre.

Back, as a hand that pushes thro' the leaf  
To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew:  
Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears  
To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound  
Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame  
Creep with his shadow thro' the court again,  
Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood  
There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought,  
'I will go back, and slay them where they lie.'

And so went back, and seeing them yet in sleep  
Said, 'Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep,

Your sleep is death,' and drew the sword, and  
thought,

'What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath  
bound

And sworn me to this brotherhood;' again,

'Alas that ever a knight should be so false.'

Then turn'd, and so return'd, and groaning laid

The naked sword athwart their naked throats,

There left it, and them sleeping; and she lay,

The circlet of the tourney round her brows,

And the sword of the tourney across her throat.

And forth he past, and mounting on his horse  
Stared at her towers that, larger than themselves

In their own darkness, throng'd into the moon.

Then crush'd the saddle with his thighs, and  
clench'd

His hands, and madden'd with himself and moan'd:

'Would they have risen against me in their blood  
At the last day? I might have answer'd them

Even before high God. O towers so strong,

Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze

The crack of earthquake shivering to your base

Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs

Bellowing, and charr'd you thro' and thro' within,

Black as the harlot's heart—hollow as a skull !  
Let the fierce east scream thro' your eyelet-holes,  
And whirl the dust of harlots round and round  
In dung and nettles ! hiss, snake—I saw him there—  
Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells  
Here in the still sweet summer night, but I—  
I, the poor Pelleas whom she call'd her fool ?  
Fool, beast—he, she, or I ? myself most fool ;  
Beast too, as lacking human wit—disgraced,  
Dishonour'd all for trial of true love—  
Love?—we be all alike: only the King  
Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows!  
O great and sane and simple race of brutes  
That own no lust because they have no law!  
For why should I have loved her to my shame ?  
I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.  
I never loved her, I but lusted for her—  
Away—'

He dash'd the rowel into his horse,  
And bounded forth and vanish'd thro' the night.

Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat,  
Awaking knew the sword, and turn'd herself  
To Gawain: 'Liar, for thou hast not slain  
This Pelleas ! here he stood, and might have slain

Me and thyself.' And he that tells the tale  
Says that her ever-veering fancy turn'd  
To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,  
And only lover; and thro' her love her life  
Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.

But he by wild and way, for half the night,  
And over hard and soft, striking the sod  
From out the soft, the spark from off the hard,  
Rode till the star above the wakening sun,  
Beside that tower where Percivale was cowl'd,  
Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn.  
For so the words were flash'd into his heart  
He knew not whence or wherefore: 'O sweet star,  
Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn!'  
And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes  
Harder and drier than a fountain bed  
In summer: thither came the village girls  
And linger'd talking, and they come no more  
Till the sweet heavens have fill'd it from the heights  
Again with living waters in the change  
Of seasons: hard his eyes; harder his heart  
Seem'd; but so weary were his limbs, that he,  
Gasping, 'Of Arthur's hall am I, but here,  
Here let me rest and die,' cast himself down,



And gulf'd his grief in inmost sleep; so lay,  
Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired  
The hall of Merlin, and the morning star  
Reel'd in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.

He woke, and being ware of some one nigh,  
Sent hands upon him, as to tear him, crying,  
'False! and I held thee pure as Guinevere.'

But Percivale stood near him and replied,  
'Am I but false as Guinevere is pure?  
Or art thou mazed with dreams? or being one  
Of our free-spoken Table hast not heard  
That Lancelot'—there he check'd himself and  
paused.

Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one  
Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword  
That made it plunges thro' the wound again,  
And pricks it deeper: and he shrank and wail'd,  
'Is the Queen false?' and Percivale was mute.  
'Have any of our Round Table held their vows?'  
And Percivale made answer not a word.  
'Is the King true?' 'The King!' said Percivale.  
'Why then let men couple at once with wolves.  
What! art thou mad?'

But Pelleas, leaping up,  
Ran thro' the doors and vaulted on his horse  
And fled: small pity upon his horse had he,  
Or on himself, or any, and when he met  
A cripple, one that held a hand for alms—  
Hunch'd as he was, and like an old dwarf-elm  
That turns its back on the salt blast, the boy  
Paused not, but overrode him, shouting, 'False,  
And false with Gawain!' and so left him bruised  
And batter'd, and fled on, and hill and wood  
Went ever streaming by him till the gloom,  
That follows on the turning of the world,  
Darken'd the common path: he twitch'd the reins,  
And made his beast that better knew it, swerve  
Now off it and now on; but when he saw  
High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built,  
Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even,  
'Black nest of rats,' he groan'd, 'ye build too high.'

Not long thereafter from the city gates  
Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily,  
Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen,  
Peace at his heart, and gazing at a star  
And marvelling what it was: on whom the boy,  
Across the silent seeded meadow-grass

Borne, clash'd: and Lancelot, saying, 'What name  
hast thou

That ridest here so blindly and so hard?'

'No name, no name,' he shouted, 'a scourge am I  
To lash the treasons of the Table Round.'

'Yea, but thy name?' 'I have many names,' he cried:

'I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,

And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast

And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen.'

'First over me,' said Lancelot, 'shalt thou pass.'

'Fight therefore,' yell'd the youth, and either knight

Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once

The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung

His rider, who call'd out from the dark field,

'Thou art false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword.'

Then Lancelot, 'Yea, between thy lips—and sharp;

But here will I disedge it by thy death.'

'Slay then,' he shriek'd, 'my will is to be slain,'

And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fall'n,

Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake:

'Rise, weakling; I am Lancelot; say thy say.'

And Lancelot slowly rode his warhorse back  
To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while  
Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field,

And follow'd to the city. It chanced that both  
Brake into hall together, worn and pale.  
There with her knights and dames was Guinevere.  
Full wonderingly she gazed on Lancelot  
So soon return'd, and then on Pelleas, him  
Who had not greeted her, but cast himself  
Down on a bench, hard-breathing. 'Have ye fought?'  
She ask'd of Lancelot. 'Ay, my Queen,' he said.  
'And thou hast overthrown him?' 'Ay, my Queen.'  
Then she, turning to Pelleas, 'O young knight,  
Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee fail'd  
So far thou canst not bide, unfrowardly,  
A fall from *him*?' Then, for he answer'd not,  
'Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,  
May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me know.'  
But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce  
She quail'd; and he, hissing 'I have no sword,'  
Sprang from the door into the dark. The Queen  
Look'd hard upon her lover, he on her;  
And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:  
And all talk died, as in a grove all song  
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;  
Then a long silence came upon the hall,  
And Modred thought, 'The time is hard at hand.'

## THE LAST TOURNAMENT

DAGONET, the fool, whom Gawain in his mood  
Had made mock-knight of Arthur's Table Round,  
At Camelot, high above the yellowing woods,  
Danced like a wither'd leaf before the hall.  
And toward him from the hall, with harp in hand,  
And from the crown thereof a carcanet  
Of ruby swaying to and fro, the prize  
Of Tristram in the jousts of yesterday,  
Came Tristram, saying, 'Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?'

For Arthur and Sir Lancelot riding once  
Far down beneath a winding wall of rock  
Heard a child wail. A stump of oak half-dead,  
From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,  
Clutch'd at the crag, and started thro' mid air  
Bearing an eagle's nest: and thro' the tree  
Rush'd ever a rainy wind, and thro' the wind  
Pierced ever a child's cry: and crag and tree

Scaling, Sir Lancelot from the perilous nest,  
This ruby necklace thrice around her neck,  
And all unscarr'd from beak or talon, brought  
A maiden babe; which Arthur pitying took,  
Then gave it to his Queen to rear: the Queen  
But coldly acquiescing, in her white arms  
Received, and after loved it tenderly,  
And named it Nestling; so forgot herself  
A moment, and her cares; till that young life  
Being smitten in mid heaven with mortal cold  
Past from her; and in time the carcanet  
Vext her with plaintive memories of the child:  
So she, delivering it to Arthur, said,  
'Take thou the jewels of this dead innocence,  
And make them, an thou wilt, a tourney-prize.'

To whom the King, 'Peace to thine eagle-borne  
Dead nestling, and this honour after death,  
Following thy will ! but, O my Queen, I muse  
Why ye not wear on arm, or neck, or zone  
Those diamonds that I rescued from the tarn,  
And Lancelot won, methought, for thee to wear.'

'Would rather you had let them fall,' she cried,  
'Plunge and be lost—ill-fated as they were,  
A bitterness to me !—ye look amazed,

Not knowing they were lost as soon as given—  
Slid from my hands, when I was leaning out  
Above the river—that unhappy child  
Past in her barge: but rosier luck will go  
With these rich jewels, seeing that they came  
Not from the skeleton of a brother-slayer,  
But the sweet body of a maiden babe.  
Perchance—who knows?—the purest of thy knights  
May win them for the purest of my maids.’

She ended, and the cry of a great jousts  
With trumpet-blowings ran on all the ways  
From Camelot in among the faded fields  
To furthest towers; and everywhere the knights  
Arm’d for a day of glory before the King.

But on the hither side of that loud morn  
Into the hall stagger’d, his visage ribb’d  
From ear to ear with dogwhip-weals, his nose  
Bridge-broken, one eye out, and one hand off,  
And one with shatter’d fingers dangling lame,  
A churl, to whom indignantly the King,

‘My churl, for whom Christ died, what evil beast  
Hath drawn his claws athwart thy face? or fiend?  
Man was it who marr’d heaven’s image in thee thus?’

Then, sputtering thro' the hedge of splinter'd  
teeth,  
Yet strangers to the tongue, and with blunt stump  
Pitch-blackened sawing the air, said the maim'd  
churl,

‘He took them and he drave them to his tower—  
Some hold he was a table-knight of thine—  
A hundred goodly ones—the Red Knight, he—  
Lord, I was tending swine, and the Red Knight  
Brake in upon me and drave them to his tower;  
And when I call'd upon thy name as one  
That doest right by gentle and by churl,  
Maim'd me and maul'd, and would outright have  
slain,  
Save that he sware me to a message, saying,  
“Tell thou the King and all his liars, that I  
Have founded my Round Table in the North,  
And whatsoever his own knights have sworn  
My knights have sworn the counter to it—and say  
My tower is full of harlots, like his court,  
But mine are worthier, seeing they profess  
To be none other than themselves—and say  
My knights are all adulterers like his own,  
But mine are truer, seeing they profess



To be none other; and say his hour is come,  
The heathen are upon him, his long lance  
Broken, and his Excalibur a straw.”’

Then Arthur turn’d to Kay the seneschal,  
‘Take thou my churl, and tend him curiously  
Like a king’s heir, till all his hurts be whole.  
The heathen—but that ever-climbing wave,  
Hurl’d back again so often in empty foam,  
Hath lain for years at rest—and renegades,  
Thieves, bandits, leavings of confusion, whom  
The wholesome realm is purged of elsewhere,  
Friends, thro’ your manhood and your fēalty,—  
now

Make their last head like Satan in the North.  
My younger knights, new-made, in whom your  
flower

Waits to be solid fruit of golden deeds,  
Move with me toward their quelling, which achieved,  
The loneliest ways are safe from shore to shore.  
But thou, Sir Lancelot, sitting in my place  
Enchair’d to-morrow, arbitrate the field;  
For wherefore shouldst thou care to mingle with it,  
Only to yield my Queen her own again?  
Speak, Lancelot, thou art silent: is it well?’

Thereto Sir Lancelot answer'd, ' It is well:  
Yet better if the King abide, and leave  
The leading of his younger knights to me.  
Else, for the King has will'd it, it is well.'

Then Arthur rose and Lancelot follow'd him,  
And while they stood without the doors, the King  
Turn'd to him saying, ' Is it then so well?  
Or mine the blame that oft I seem as he  
Of whom was written, "A sound is in his ears"?  
The foot that loiters, bidden go,—the glance  
That only seems half-loyal to command,—  
A manner somewhat fall'n from reverence—  
Or have I dream'd the bearing of our knights  
Tells of a manhood ever less and lower?  
Or whence the fear lest this my realm, uprear'd,  
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,  
From flat confusion and brute violences,  
Reel back into the beast, and be no more?'

He spoke, and taking all his younger knights,  
Down the slope city rode, and sharply turn'd  
North by the gate. In her high bower the Queen,  
Working a tapestry, lifted up her head,  
Watch'd her lord pass, and knew not that she sigh'd.

Then ran across her memory the strange rhyme  
Of bygone Merlin, 'Where is he who knows?  
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

But when the morning of a tournament,  
By these in earnest those in mockery call'd  
The Tournament of the Dead Innocence,  
Brake with a wet wind blowing, Lancelot,  
Round whose sick head all night, like birds of prey,  
The words of Arthur flying shriek'd, arose,  
And down a streetway hung with folds of pure  
White samite, and by fountains running wine,  
Where children sat in white with cups of gold,  
Moved to the lists, and there, with slow sad steps  
Ascending, fill'd his double-dragon'd chair.

He glanced and saw the stately galleries,  
Dame, damsel, each thro' worship of their Queen  
White-robed in honour of the stainless child,  
And some with scatter'd jewels, like a bank  
Of maiden snow mingled with sparks of fire.  
He look'd but once, and vail'd his eyes again.

The sudden trumpet sounded as in a dream  
To ears but half-awaked, then one low roll

Of Autumn thunder, and the jousts began:  
And ever the wind blew, and yellowing leaf  
And gloom and gleam, and shower and shorn plume  
Went down it. Sighing weariedly, as one  
Who sits and gazes on a faded fire,  
When all the goodlier guests are past away,  
Sat their great umpire, looking o'er the lists.  
He saw the laws that ruled the tournament  
Broken, but spake not; once, a knight cast down  
Before his throne of arbitration cursed  
The dead babe and the follies of the King;  
And once the laces of a helmet crack'd,  
And show'd him, like a vermin in its hole,  
Modred, a narrow face: anon he heard  
The voice that billow'd round the barriers roar  
An ocean-sounding welcome to one knight,  
But newly-enter'd, taller than the rest,  
And armour'd all in forest green, whereon  
There tript a hundred tiny silver deer,  
And wearing but a holly-spray for crest,  
With ever-scattering berries, and on shield  
A spear, a harp, a bugle—Tristram—late  
From overseas in Brittany return'd,  
And marriage with a princess of **that** realm,  
Isolt the White—Sir Tristram of the Woods—

Whom Lancelot knew, had held sometime with pain  
His own against him, and now yearn'd to shake  
The burthen off his heart in one full shock  
With Tristram ev'n to death: his strong hands gript  
And dinted the gilt dragons right and left,  
Until he groan'd for wrath—so many of those,  
That ware their ladies' colours on the casque,  
Drew from before Sir Tristram to the bounds,  
And there with gibes and flickering mockeries  
Stood, while he mutter'd, 'Craven crests ! O shame !  
What faith have these in whom they swear to love ?  
The glory of our Round Table is no more.'

So Tristram won, and Lancelot gave, the gems,  
Not speaking other word than 'Hast thou won ?  
Art thou the purest, brother ? See, the hand  
Wherewith thou takest this, is red !' to whom  
Tristram, half plagued by Lancelot's languorous  
mood,  
Made answer, 'Ay, but wherefore toss me this  
Like a dry bone cast to some hungry hound ?  
Let be thy fair Queen's fantasy. Strength of heart  
And might of limb, but mainly use and skill,  
Are winners in this pastime of our King.  
My hand—belike the lance hath dript upon it—

No blood of mine, I trow; but O chief knight,  
Right arm of Arthur in the battlefield,  
Great brother, thou nor I have made the world;  
Be happy in thy fair Queen as I in mine.'

And Tristram round the gallery made his horse  
Caracole; then bow'd his homage, bluntly saying,  
'Fair damsels, each to him who worships each  
Sole Queen of Beauty and of love, behold  
This day my Queen of Beauty is not here.'  
And most of these were mute, some anger'd, one  
Murmuring, 'All courtesy is dead,' and one,  
'The glory of our Round Table is no more.'

Then fell thick rain, plume droopt and mantle  
clung,  
And pettish cries awoke, and the wan day  
Went glooming down in wet and weariness:  
But under her black brows a swarthy one  
Laugh'd shrilly, crying, 'Praise the patient saints,  
Our one white day of Innocence hath past,  
Tho' somewhat draggled at the skirt. So be it.  
The snowdrop only, flowering thro' the year,  
Would make the world as blank as Winter-tide.  
Come—let us gladden their sad eyes, our Queen's

And Lancelot's, at this night's solemnity  
With all the kindlier colours of the field.'

So dame and damsel glitter'd at the feast  
Variously gay: for he that tells the tale  
Liken'd them, saying, as when an hour of cold  
Falls on the mountain in midsummer snows,  
And all the purple slopes of mountain flowers  
Pass under white, till the warm hour returns  
With veer of wind, and all are flowers again;  
So dame and damsel cast the simple white,  
And glowing in all colours, the live grass,  
Rose-campion, bluebell, kingcup, poppy, glanced  
About the revels, and with mirth so loud  
Beyond all use, that, half-amazed, the Queen,  
And wroth at Tristram and the lawless jousts,  
Brake up their sports, then slowly to her bower  
Parted, and in her bosom pain was lord.

And little Dagonet on the morrow morn,  
High over all the yellowing Autumn-tide,  
Danced like a wither'd leaf before the hall.  
Then Tristram saying, 'Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?'  
Wheel'd round on either heel, Dagonet replied,  
'Belike for lack of wiser company;

Or being fool, and seeing too much wit  
Makes the world rotten, why, belike I skip  
To know myself the wisest knight of all.'  
'Ay, fool,' said Tristram, 'but 'tis eating dry  
To dance without a catch, a roundelay  
To dance to.' Then he twangled on his harp,  
And while he twangled little Dagonet stood  
Quiet as any water-sodden log  
Stay'd in the wandering warble of a brook;  
But when the twangling ended, skipt again;  
And being ask'd, 'Why skipt ye not, Sir Fool?'  
Made answer, 'I had liefer twenty years  
Skip to the broken music of my brains  
Than any broken music thou canst make.'  
Then Tristram, waiting for the quip to come,  
'Good now, what music have I broken, fool?'  
And little Dagonet, skipping, 'Arthur, the King's;  
For when thou playest that air with Queen Isolt,  
Thou makest broken music with thy bride,  
Her daintier namesake down in Brittany—  
And so thou breakest Arthur's music too.'  
'Save for that broken music in thy brains,  
Sir Fool,' said Tristram, 'I would break thy head.  
Fool, I came late, the heathen wars were o'er,  
The life had flown, we sware but by the shell—



I am but a fool to reason with a fool—  
Come, thou art crabb'd and sour: but lean me down,  
Sir Dagonet, one of thy long asses' ears,  
And harken if my music be not true.

“Free love—free field—we love but while we may:  
The woods are hush'd, their music is no more:  
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away:  
New leaf, new life—the days of frost are o'er:  
New life, new love, to suit the newer day:  
New loves are sweet as those that went before:  
Free love—free field—we love but while we may.”

‘Ye might have moved slow-measure to my tune,  
Not stood stockstill. I made it in the woods,  
And heard it ring as true as tested gold.’

But Dagonet with one foot poised in his hand,  
‘Friend, did ye mark that fountain yesterday  
Made to run wine?—but this had run itself  
All out like a long life to a sour end—  
And them that round it sat with golden cups  
To hand the wine to whosoever came—  
The twelve small damosels white as Innocence,

In honour of poor Innocence the babe,  
Who left the gems which Innocence the Queen  
Lent to the King, and Innocence the King  
Gave for a prize—and one of those white slips  
Handed her cup and piped, the pretty one,  
“Drink, drink, Sir Fool,” and thereupon I drank,  
Spat—pish—the cup was gold, the draught was mud.’

And Tristram, ‘Was it muddier than thy gibes?  
Is all the laughter gone dead out of thee?—  
Not marking how the knighthood mock thee, fool—  
“Fear God: honour the King—his one true knight—  
Sole follower of the vows”—for here be they  
Who knew thee swine enow before I came,  
Smuttier than blasted grain: but when the King  
Had made thee fool, thy vanity so shot up  
It frightened all free fool from out thy heart;  
Which left thee less than fool, and less than swine,  
A naked aught—yet swine I hold thee still,  
For I have flung thee pearls and find thee swine.’

And little Dagonet mincing with his feet,  
‘Knight, an ye fling those rubies round my neck  
In lieu of hers, I’ll hold thou hast some touch  
Of music, since I care not for thy pearls.

Swine? I have wallow'd, I have wash'd—the world  
Is flesh and shadow—I have had my day.  
The dirty nurse, Experience, in her kind  
Hath foul'd me—an I wallow'd, then I wash'd—  
I have had my day and my philosophies—  
And thank the Lord I am King Arthur's fool.  
Swine, say ye? swine, goats, asses, rams and geese  
Troop'd round a Paynim harper once, who thrumm'd  
On such a wire as musically as thou  
Some such fine song—but never a king's fool.'

And Tristram, 'Then were swine, goats, asses,  
geese  
.The wiser fools, secing thy Paynim bard  
Had such a mastery of his mystery  
That he could harp his wife up out of hell.'

Then Dagonet, turning on the ball of his foot,  
'And whither harp'st thou thine? down! and thyself  
Down! and two more: a helpful harper thou,  
That harpest downward! Dost thou know the star  
We call the harp of Arthur up in heaven?'

And Tristram, 'Ay, Sir Fool, for when our King  
Was victor wellnigh day by day, the knights,

Glorying in each new glory, set his name  
High on all hills, and in the signs of heaven.'

And Dagonet answer'd, 'Ay, and when the land  
Was freed, and the Queen false, ye set yourself  
To babble about him, all to show your wit—  
And whether he were King by courtesy,  
Or King by right—and so went harping down  
The black king's highway, got so far, and grew  
So witty that ye play'd at ducks and drakes  
With Arthur's vows on the great lake of fire.  
Tuwhoo! do ye see it? do ye see the star?'

'Nay, fool,' said Tristram, 'not in open day.'  
And Dagonet, 'Nay, nor will: I see it and hear.  
It makes a silent music up in heaven,  
And I, and Arthur and the angels hear,  
And then we skip.' 'Lo, fool,' he said, 'ye talk  
Fool's treason: is the King thy brother fool?'  
Then little Dagonet clapt his hands and shrill'd,  
'Ay, ay, my brother fool, the king of fools!  
Conceits himself as God that he can make  
Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk  
From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,  
And men from beasts—Long live the king of fools!'

And down the city Dagonet danced away;  
But thro' the slowly-mellowing avenues  
And solitary passes of the wood  
Rode Tristram toward Lyonesse and the west.  
Before him fled the face of Queen Isolt  
With ruby-circled neck, but evermore  
Past, as a rustle or twitter in the wood  
Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye  
For all that walk'd, or crept, or perch'd, or flew.  
Anon the face, as, when a gust hath blown,  
Unruffling waters re-collect the shape  
Of one that in them sees himself, return'd;  
But at the slot or fewmets of a deer,  
Or ev'n a fall'n feather, vanish'd again.

So on for all that day from lawn to lawn  
Thro' many a league-long bower he rode. At length  
A lodge of intertwisted beechen-boughs  
Furze-cramm'd, and bracken-rooft, the which him-  
self  
Built for a summer day with Queen Isolt  
Against a shower, dark in the golden grove  
Appearing, sent his fancy back to where  
She lived a moon in that low lodge with him:  
Till Mark her lord had past, the Cornish King,

With six or seven, when Tristram was away,  
And snatch'd her thence; yet dreading worse than  
shame

Her warrior Tristram, spake not any word,  
But bode his hour, devising wretchedness.

And now that desert lodge to Tristram lookt  
So sweet, that halting, in he past, and sank  
Down on a drift of foliage random-blown;  
But could not rest for musing how to smoothe  
And sleek his marriage over to the Queen.  
Perchance in lone Tintagil far from all  
The tonguesters of the court she had not heard.  
But then what folly had sent him overseas  
After she left him lonely here? a name?  
Was it the name of one in Brittany,  
Isolt, the daughter of the King? 'Isolt  
Of the white hands' they call'd her: the sweet name  
Allured him first, and then the maid herself,  
Who served him well with those white hands of  
hers,  
And loved him well, until himself had thought  
He loved her also, wedded easily,  
But left her all as easily, and return'd.  
The black-blue Irish hair and Irish eyes

Had drawn him home—what marvel? then he laid  
His brows upon the drifted leaf and dream'd.

He seem'd to pace the strand of Brittany  
Between Isolt of Britain and his bride,  
And show'd them both the ruby-chain, and both  
Began to struggle for it, till his Queen  
Graspt it so hard, that all her hand was red.  
Then cried the Breton, 'Look, her hand is red!  
These be no rubies, this is frozen blood,  
And melts within her hand—her hand is hot  
With ill desires, but this I gave thee, look,  
Is all as cool and white as any flower.'  
Follow'd a rush of eagle's wings, and then  
A whimpering of the spirit of the child,  
Because the twain had spoil'd her carcanet.

He dream'd; but Arthur with a hundred spears  
Rode far, till o'er the illimitable reed,  
And many a glancing splash and sallowy isle,  
The wide-wing'd sunset of the misty marsh  
Glared on a huge machicolated tower  
That stood with open doors, whereout was roll'd  
A roar of riot, as from men secure  
Amid their marshes, ruffians at their ease

Among their harlot-brides, an evil song.  
'Lo there,' said one of Arthur's youth, for there,  
High on a grim dead tree before the tower,  
A goodly brother of the Table Round  
Swung by the neck: and on the boughs a shield  
Showing a shower of blood in a field noir,  
And therebeside a horn, inflamed the knights  
At that dishonour done the gilded spur,  
Till each would clash the shield, and blow the horn.  
But Arthur waved them back. Alone he rode.  
Then at the dry harsh roar of the great horn,  
That sent the face of all the marsh aloft  
An ever upward-rushing storm and cloud  
Of shriek and plume, the Red Knight heard, and all,  
Even to tipmost lance and topmost helm,  
In blood-red armour sallying, howl'd to the King,

'The teeth of Hell flay bare and gnash thee flat!—  
Lo! art thou not that eunuch-hearted King  
Who fain had clipt free manhood from the world—  
The woman-worshipper? Yea, God's curse, and I!  
Slain was the brother of my paramour  
By a knight of thine, and I that heard her whine  
And snivel, being eunuch-hearted too,  
Sware by the scorpion-worm that twists in hell,



And stings itself to everlasting death,  
To hang whatever knight of thine I fought  
And tumbled. Art thou King?—Look to thy life!’

He ended : Arthur knew the voice; the face  
Wellnigh was helmet-hidden, and the name  
Went wandering somewhere darkling in his mind.  
And Arthur deign’d not use of word or sword,  
But let the drunkard, as he stretch’d from horse  
To strike him, overbalancing his bulk,  
Down from the causeway heavily to the swamp  
Fall, as the crest of some slow-arching wave,  
Heard in dead night along that table-shore,  
Drops flat, and after the great waters break  
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,  
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,  
From less and less to nothing; thus he fell  
Head-heavy; then the knights, who watch’d him,  
    roar’d  
And shouted and leapt down upon the fall’n;  
There trampled out his face from being known,  
And sank his head in mire, and slimed themselves:  
Nor heard the King for their own cries, but sprang  
Thro’ open doors, and swording right and left  
Men, women, on their sodden faces, hurl’d

The tables over and the wines, and slew  
Till all the rafters rang with woman-yells,  
And all the pavement stream'd with massacre:  
Then, echoing yell with yell, they fired the tower,  
Which half that autumn night, like the live North,  
Red-pulsing up thro' Alioth and Alcor,  
Made all above it, and a hundred meres  
About it, as the water Moab saw  
Come round by the East, and out beyond them  
flush'd  
The long low dune, and lazy-plunging sea.

So all the ways were safe from shore to shore,  
But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord.

Then, out of Tristram waking, the red dream  
Fled with a shout, and that low lodge return'd,  
Mid-forest, and the wind among the boughs.  
He whistled his good warhorse left to graze  
Among the forest greens, vaulted upon him,  
And rode beneath an ever-showering leaf,  
Till one lone woman, weeping near a cross,  
Stay'd him. 'Why weep ye?' 'Lord,' she said,  
'my man  
Hath left me or is dead;' whereon he thought—

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'What, if she hate me now? I would not this.  
What, if she love me still? I would not that.  
I know not what I would'—but said to her,  
'Yet weep not thou, lest, if thy mate return,  
He find thy favour changed and love thee not'—  
'Then pressing day by day thro' Lyonesse  
Last in a roky hollow, belling, heard  
The hounds of Mark, and felt the goodly hounds  
Yelp at his heart, but turning, past and gain'd  
Tintagil, half in sea, and high on land,  
A crown of towers.

Down in a casement sat,  
A low sea-sunset glorying round her hair  
And glossy-throated grace, Isolt the Queen.  
And when she heard the feet of Tristram grind  
The spiring stone that scaled about her tower,  
Flush'd, started, met him at the doors, and there  
Belted his body with her white embrace,  
Crying aloud, 'Not Mark—not Mark, my soul!  
The footstep flutter'd me at first: not he:  
Catlike thro' his own castle steals my Mark,  
But warrior-wise thou stridest thro' his halls  
Who hates thee, as I him—ev'n to the death.  
My soul, I felt my hatred for my Mark

Quicken within me, and knew that thou wert nigh.'  
To whom Sir Tristram smiling, 'I am here.  
Let be thy Mark, seeing he is not thine.'

And drawing somewhat backward she replied,  
'Can he be wrong'd who is not ev'n his own,  
But save for dread of thee had beaten me,  
Scratch'd, bitten, blinded, marr'd me somehow—  
Mark?

What rights are his that dare not strike for them?  
Not lift a hand—not, tho' he found me thus!  
But harken! have ye met him? hence he went  
To-day for three days' hunting—as he said—  
And so returns belike within an hour.  
Mark's way, my soul!—but eat not thou with Mark,  
Because he hates thee even more than fears;  
Nor drink: and when thou passest any wood  
Close vizer, lest an arrow from the bush  
Should leave me all alone with Mark and hell.  
My God, the measure of my hate for Mark  
Is as the measure of my love for thee.'

So, pluck'd one way by hate and one by love,  
Drain'd of her force, again she sat, and spake  
To Tristram, as he knelt before her, saying,

‘O hunter, and O blower of the horn,  
Harper, and thou hast been a rover too,  
For, ere I mated with my shambling king,  
Ye twain had fallen out about the bride  
Of one—his name is out of me—the prize,  
If prize she were—(what marvel—she could see)—  
Thine, friend; and ever since my craven seeks  
To wreck thee villainously: but, O Sir Knight,  
What dame or damsel have ye kneel’d to last?’

And Tristram, ‘Last to my Queen Paramount,  
Here now to my Queen Paramount of love  
And loveliness—ay, lovelier than when first  
Her light feet fell on our rough Lyonesse,  
Sailing from Ireland.’

Softly laugh’d Isolt;  
‘Flatter me not, for hath not our great Queen  
My dole of beauty trebled?’ and he said,  
‘Her beauty is her beauty, and thine thine,  
And thine is more to me—soft, gracious, kind—  
Save when thy Mark is kindled on thy lips  
Most gracious; but she, haughty, ev’n to him,  
Lancelot; for I have seen him wan enow  
To make one doubt if ever the great Queen  
Have yielded him her love.’

To whom Isolt,  
'Ah then, false hunter and false harper, thou  
Who brakest thro' the scruple of my bond,  
Calling me thy white hind, and saying to me  
That Guinevere had sinn'd against the highest,  
And I—misyoked with such a want of man—  
That I could hardly sin against the lowest.'

He answer'd, 'O my soul, be comforted !  
If this be sweet, to sin in leading-strings,  
If here be comfort, and if ours be sin,  
Crown'd warrant had we for the crowning sin  
That made us happy: but how ye greet me—fear  
And fault and doubt—no word of that fond tale—  
Thy deep heart-yearnings, thy sweet memories  
Of Tristram in that year he was away.'

And, saddening on the sudden, spake Isolt,  
'I had forgotten all in my strong joy  
To see thee—yearnings?—ay ! for, hour by hour,  
Here in the never-ended afternoon,  
O sweeter than all memories of thee,  
Deeper than any yearnings after thee  
Seem'd those far-rolling, westward-smiling seas,  
Watch'd from this tower. Isolt of Britain dash'd

Before Isolt of Brittany on the strand,  
Would that have chill'd her bride-kiss? Wedded  
her?

Fought in her father's battles? wounded there?  
The King was all fulfill'd with gratefulness,  
And she, my namesake of the hands, that heal'd  
Thy hurt and heart with unguent and caress—  
Well—can I wish her any huger wrong  
Than having known thee? her too hast thou left  
To pine and waste in those sweet memories.  
O were I not my Mark's, by whom all men  
Are noble, I should hate thee more than love.'

And Tristram, fondling her light hands, replied,  
'Grace, Queen, for being loved: she loved me well.  
Did I love her? the name at least I loved.  
Isolt?—I fought his battles, for Isolt!  
The night was dark; the true star set. Isolt!  
The name was ruler of the dark——Isolt?  
Care not for her! patient, and prayerful, meek,  
Pale-blooded, she will yield herself to God.'

And Isolt answer'd, 'Yea, and why not I?  
Mine is the larger need, who am not meek,  
Pale-blooded, prayerful. Let me tell thee now.

Here one black, mute midsummer night I sat,  
Lonely, but musing on thee, wondering where,  
Murmuring a light song I had heard thee sing,  
And once or twice I spake thy name aloud.  
Then flash'd a levin-brand; and near me stood,  
In fuming sulphur blue and green, a fiend—  
Mark's way to steal behind one in the dark—  
For there was Mark: "He has wedded her," he said,  
Not said, but hiss'd it: then this crown of towers  
So shook to such a roar of all the sky,  
That here in utter dark I swoon'd away,  
And woke again in utter dark, and cried,  
"I will flee hence and give myself to God"—  
And thou wert lying in thy new leman's arms.'

Then Tristram, ever dallying with her hand,  
'May God be with thee, sweet, when old and gray,  
And past desire!' a saying that anger'd her.  
'"May God be with thee, sweet, when thou art old,  
And sweet no more to me!" I need Him now.  
For when had Lancelot utter'd aught so gross  
Ev'n to the swineherd's malkin in the mast?  
The greater man, the greater courtesy.  
Far other was the Tristram, Arthur's knight!  
But thou, thro' ever harrying thy wild beasts—



Save that to touch a harp, tilt with a lance  
Becomes thee well—art grown wild beast thyself.  
How darest thou, if lover, push me even  
In fancy from thy side, and set me far  
In the gray distance, half a life away,  
Her to be loved no more? Unsay it, unswear!  
Flatter me rather, seeing me so weak,  
Broken with Mark and hate and solitude,  
Thy marriage and mine own, that I should suck  
Lies like sweet wines: lie to me: I believe.  
Will ye not lie? not swear, as there ye kneel,  
And solemnly as when ye sware to him,  
The man of men, our King—My God, the power  
Was once in vows when men believed the King!  
They lied not then, who sware, and thro' their vows  
The King prevailing made his realm:—I say,  
Swear to me thou wilt love me ev'n when old,  
Gray-hair'd, and past desire, and in despair.'

Then Tristram, pacing moodily up and down,  
'Vows! did you keep the vow you made to Mark  
More than I mine? Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt,  
The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself—  
My knighthood taught me this—ay, being snapt—  
We run more counter to the soul thereof

Than had we never sworn. I swear no more.  
I swore to the great King, and am forsworn.  
For once—ev'n to the height—I honour'd him.  
“Man, is he man at all?” methought, when first  
I rode from our rough Lyonesse, and beheld  
That victor of the Pagan throned in hall—  
His hair, a sun that ray'd from off a brow  
Like hillsnow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,  
The golden beard that clothed his lips with light—  
Moreover, that weird legend of his birth,  
With Merlin's mystic babble about his end  
Amazed me; then, his foot was on a stool  
Shaped as a dragon; he seem'd to me no man,  
But Michaël trampling Satan; so I sware,  
Being amazed: but this went by—The vows!  
O ay—the wholesome madness of an hour—  
They served their use, their time; for every knight  
Believed himself a greater than himself,  
And every follower eyed him as a God;  
Till he, being lifted up beyond himself,  
Did mightier deeds than elsewhere he had done,  
And so the realm was made; but then their vows—  
First mainly thro' that sullyng of our Queen—  
Began to gall the knighthood, asking whence  
Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?

Dropt down from heaven? wash'd up from out the  
deep?

They fail'd to trace him thro' the flesh and blood  
Of our old kings: whence then? a doubtful lord  
To bind them by inviolable vows,  
Which flesh and blood perforce would violate:  
For feel this arm of mine—the tide within  
Red with free chase and heather-scented air,  
Pulsing full man; can Arthur make me pure  
As any maiden child? lock up my tongue  
From uttering freely what I freely hear?  
Bind me to one? 'The wide world laughs at it.  
And worldling of the world am I, and know  
The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour  
Woos his own end; we are not angels here  
Nor shall be: vows—I am woodman of the woods,  
And hear the garnet-headed yaffingale  
Mock them: my soul, we love but while we may;  
And therefore is my love so large for thee,  
Seeing it is not bounded save by love.'

Here ending, he moved toward her, and she said,  
'Good: an I turn'd away my love for thee  
To some one thrice as courteous as thyself—  
For courtesy wins woman all as well

As valour may, but he that closes both  
Is perfect, he is Lancelot—taller indeed,  
Rosier and comelier, thou—but say I loved  
This knightliest of all knights, and cast thee back  
Thine own small saw, “We love but while we may,”  
Well then, what answer?’

He that while she spake,  
Mindful of what he brought to adorn her with,  
The jewels, had let one finger lightly touch  
The warm white apple of her throat, replied,  
‘Press this a little closer, sweet, until—  
Come, I am hunger’d and half-anger’d—meat,  
Wine, wine—and I will love thee to the death,  
And out beyond into the dream to come.’

So then, when both were brought to full accord,  
She rose, and set before him all he will’d;  
And after these had comforted the blood  
With meats and wines, and satiated their hearts—  
Now talking of their woodland paradise,  
The deer, the dews, the fern, the founts, the lawns;  
Now mocking at the much ungainliness,  
And craven shifts, and long crane legs of Mark—  
Then Tristram laughing caught the harp, and sang:

‘Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bend the brier !  
A star in heaven, a star within the mere !  
Ay, ay, O ay—a star was my desire,  
And one was far apart, and one was near:  
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bow the grass !  
And one was water and one star was fire,  
And one will ever shine and one will pass.  
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that move the mere.’

Then in the light’s last glimmer Tristram show’d  
And swung the ruby carcanet. She cried,  
‘The collar of some Order, which our King  
Hath newly founded, all for thee, my soul,  
For thee, to yield thee grace beyond thy peers.’

‘Not so, my Queen,’ he said, ‘but the red fruit  
Grown on a magic oak-tree in mid-heaven,  
And won by Tristram as a tourney-prize,  
And hither brought by Tristram for his last  
Love-offering and peace-offering unto thee.’

He spoke, he turn’d, then, flinging round her neck,  
Claspt it, and cried ‘Thine Order, O my Queen !’  
But, while he bow’d to kiss the jewell’d throat,  
Out of the dark, just as the lips had touch’d,

Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek—  
'Mark's way,' said Mark, and clove him thro' the  
brain.

That night came Arthur home, and while he  
climb'd,  
All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom,  
The stairway to the hall, and look'd and saw  
The great Queen's bower was dark,—about his feet  
A voice clung sobbing till he question'd it,  
'What art thou?' and the voice about his feet  
Sent up an answer, sobbing, 'I am thy fool,  
And I shall never make thee smile again.'

THE END

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