

Christine de Pisan

The Book of the Duke of True Lovers



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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The only two known MSS., both early fifteenth century French, of the love-story here rendered into English prose, are the one in the Bibliothèque Nationale (836), and that in the British Museum (Harley, 4431).

The MS. in the Bibliothèque Nationale forms one of the treasures of the famous collection of MSS. made by Jean, Duc de Berry, the Mecænas of illuminated MSS. At his death it passed into the possession of his daughter Marie, who, by marriage, had become Duchesse de Bourbon. When, in the reign of François I., the Connétable de Bourbon, to whom it had descended, was disgraced, the king seized his books and MSS., and carried them off to Fontainebleau, well pleased to add by any means, righteous or unrighteous, to the treasures of the royal library. Here this MS. and others remained until the reign of Charles IX., when they were removed to Paris, and placed in the Bibliothèque du Roi, now the world-famous Bibliothèque Nationale.

The MS. in the British Museum has also had an interesting and chequered career. It was originally presented by Christine de Pisan to Isabelle of Bavaria, the queen of Charles VI. of France, whose books and MSS. were, in 1425, acquired by John, Duke of Bedford, Regent of France. It is more than probable that this MS. was amongst these and was brought to England, for the various signatures on the enclosing parchment would certainly seem to indicate that this was the case. Late in the fifteenth century the MS. was sold to one of the most celebrated bibliophiles of the day, Louis of Bruges. After this, there is a blank in its history, until, in the seventeenth century, we find it once more in England, in the possession of Henry, Duke of Newcastle, whose grand-daughter married Edward Harley, Earl of Oxford, the founder of the splendid collection of MSS. and books purchased in 1754 for the British Museum, and now known as the Harleian Collection.

The writer of the story, Christine de Pisan, was one of the world's many famous women, and one who, by her life and work, created an ideal for womankind – that of sweetness and strength. Born in Venice in 1363, she was, when five years of age, taken by her mother to Paris, to join her father, Thomas de Pisan, who had been summoned thither by the king, Charles V., to serve as his astrologer, in which service he remained until the king's death. The Court of Charles V. was, in spite of the constant warfare that troubled his kingdom, at once most cultured and refined, and it was in such surroundings that Christine was brought up. At the age of fifteen she was married to the king's notary and secretary, Etienne de Castel, a gentleman of Picardy, who, however, died some ten years later, leaving her with three children to provide for. Like many another, she turned to letters as both a material and a mental support. She wrote not only purely lyrical poetry, of extraordinary variety and abundance considering that the subject is almost invariably the joys and sorrows of love, sometimes, as she tells us, expressing her own sentiments, sometimes those of others at whose request she wrote, but she also wrote sacred and scientific poems, and moral and political prose works, and a kind of romantic fiction, of which the story of The Duke of True Lovers is an example, although it is quite possible, and indeed probable, that it has some historic basis.

Christine begins her story by saying that it had been confided to her by a young prince who did not wish his name to be divulged, and who desired only to be known as The Duke of True Lovers. It has been suggested, with much likelihood, that this is the love story of Jean, Duc de Bourbon, and Marie, Duchesse de Berry, who has already been alluded to as the daughter of the famous Jean, Duc de Berry, and the inheritor of his MSS. This Marie had been married, when quite a child, to Louis III. de Chatillon, Comte de Dunois, and afterwards to Philippe d'Artois, Comte d'Eu, Constable of

France, whose wife she was at the time when the incidents which have been woven into this story are supposed to have taken place. Philippe d'Artois only survived the marriage three or four years, and after three years of widowhood, the already much-married Marie wedded (1400) our hero, Jean, Duc de Bourbon.

The principal facts which seem to afford strong evidence in favour of connecting this love story with the two princely houses of Bourbon and Berry are (1) that the MS. originally formed part of the library of the Duc de Berry, and subsequently passed on marriage to that of the Duc de Bourbon; (2) that although Christine's MSS. generally were so copied and multiplied during her lifetime that they number even now at least two hundred, there is only one other copy – the one already referred to as being in the British Museum – known of this particular MS., this alone seeming to indicate that its contents were regarded as of a private family nature; and (3) that to add to the mystery, and to ensure secrecy, there is no definite ending to the romance. The story merely tells us that the ducal lover, harassed by mischief-makers, and unable to bear the pain of a separation in his own country which her position and his own gallantry alike demanded, departs with the army for an expedition in Spain. For ten years the lovers meet from time to time during the intervals between journeying and war, and further solace each other with short love-poems, expressive of pensive longing, and with these the story ends vaguely. But if we accept the story as being founded on real life, history supplies a more definite ending. As already stated, soon after the death of Marie's second husband, Philippe, the lovers are married, and spend a few happy years in their castle at Moulins, the chief town of the Duke's domains, surrounded by and enjoying rare works of art and literature, their happiness only marred by the unsettled state of France, and by consequent calls on the Duke to fight for his country. It was on one of such occasions – the memorable and decisive battle of Agincourt (1415) – that the Duke was made prisoner, and taken to London, where he died in captivity, and Marie, his Duchess, was left to mourn, and this time in real sorrow.

Thus ends the story, which Christine has told with her wonderful gift as painter-poet. Besides making the lovers, and that noxious growth of civilisation, the inevitable scandal-monger, intensely living through her womanly sympathy and psychological insight, and introducing, in the form of a letter, a most comprehensive and remarkable treatise on feminine morality, the dangers of illicit love, and the satisfaction of simple wifely duty, she takes us in imagination to a royal castle of the fifteenth century. There we seem to live the daily life of its courtly circle, and, through the vivid description of the sumptuous pageant, to take part in the three days' tournament, and in the merry revels which bring each day to a close. As we read, we realise the extraordinary power of this woman, who seems in description to use the exact and detailed brush of a Meissonier, whilst in her outlook on life she possesses the broader and freer touch of a Puvis de Chavannes. Truly is it a master-mind indeed which can see life largely, and see it well!

Much might be written about the interesting and talented Christine, but we must bid her farewell now and here. Still she must ever be held in remembrance for her untiring championship of two things very near to her heart – a patriotic love for the land of her adoption, and an ardent devotion to the cause of womankind. She had the happiness before her death, which occurred about 1430 in the Convent of Poissy, near Paris, to which she had retired, of seeing France aroused to patriotism, and that, too, by a woman – Joan of Arc.

THE BOOK OF THE DUKE OF TRUE LOVERS

Here begins the Book of The Duke of True Lovers. Although I might have no desire or intent at the present time to discourse of love, since all my mind is occupied with other matter the which is more pleasing to me, I am willing, for the sake of others, now to commence a wondrous story, for to this I am besought by one who, instead of making request, has the right to give command to one even more worthy than I. And this is a lord whom it behoves one duly to obey, and who of his grace has desired me to make known the trouble which, whether he has been wise, or whether he has been foolish, he has, during many winters and summers, long been in by reason of love to the which his heart is still in bondage. But he would not that I should make known his name. It contents him who tells this story for their sake, to be called the Duke of True Lovers. And it is his pleasure that I recount, even as he has told them unto me, the grievous distresses, the joys, and the strange adventures, through the which, during many bygone years, he has passed. And he would that to this rehearsal I should at the same time add other matter, the which I grant him, for I know him to be of such disposition, and of such good sense, that his humility will take in good part the imperfection of my little poem, and, with his consent, I will relate on his behalf the facts even as he has set them forth.

THE DUKE OF TRUE LOVERS

I was a mere lad when I first experienced a great desire to become a lover. And for that I heard it maintained that a lover is courteous above other folk, and better esteemed amongst men, I desired to be one. To this end I resorted thither where I might choose a lady whom I might serve, but ne'ertheless I was longwhile without one, for, on my soul, I had not the understanding to make choice, and although I had enough of leisure, I ne'ertheless understood not how to discover the way to this. And because of my desire, I frequented much fair company of dames and maidens, and saw many very fair damsels, but youth still kept possession of me, so that in nowise did I know how to determine whom to choose. Thus I was longwhile happy, content with this gay and pleasing life. But when the time dured too long for me, in this manner did I make sore plaint to love: —

Very God of Love, who art of lovers Lord,
And Venus, thou, Love's Lady and Goddess,
Since in love only is set my happiness,
Vouchsafe to turn my heart soon thitherward.

Vouchsafe, that I be with right courage stored,
Soon to bring unto me my heart's mistress,
Very God of Love, who art of lovers Lord.

And may I choose, if thou the grace accord,
One that shall pardon me the simpleness
Of youth, and honour on my days impress;
Out of a great desire have I implored,
Very God of Love, who art of lovers Lord.

And because of the desire which I had in view, oft did I discourse thus until that true love heard me, and gratified my longing. And I will rehearse unto you in what manner love first took possession of my heart and made it captive, and never after set it free.

On a day, for my diversion, with one of my kinsfolk and four others of my gentlemen, we mounted on to our horses. A longing for the chase took possession of me, and, to ensure success, I caused the huntsmen to take greyhounds and ferrets. Then, without ado, we entered on a path the which I had oftentimes followed, but not far had we gone when a wide beaten track led us whither I knew there were many rabbits. And near by, I assure you, there was a strong and very goodly castle, but its name I will not make known.

At that time there was come to this place a Princess who was held of every one as so good and beautiful, and of so great worth, that she was had in honour of all. In nowise did we know that she was there, since we came thither by chance. Here and there, without the castle, her attendants amused themselves, some singing, some casting the weight, and others, afoot, exercising with the bar. And as they remained there, we turned our steps toward them. Then they all turned them toward us, and when they perceived us, and recognised who we were, the chief amongst them at once rose up. And when they had saluted us, they tarried not, but, as it seemed to me, by twos and by threes repaired them to their mistress. And methinks they did not hide from her that we were come there, for as soon as we were come quite nigh unto the castle, we saw a goodly company of ladies coming forth to meet us. And these gave us welcome with gracious bearing.

And we straightway turned toward them, and saluted them on bended knee. And there was amongst them both a lady and a maiden who were kinsfolk of her who was mistress of them all. And

without giving affront, and without rebuke, I kissed the maiden with fair tresses, as well as the lady. And my cousin and I escorted the maiden, who was high-born, and the noble lady, and in suchwise entered the castle.

And the Lady, of whom every one spake well, had already come forth from out her chamber, and stood there with noble mien, neither proudly, nor haughtily, but in such manner as befitted her noble estate and royal person. And as soon as we saw her, we duly saluted her, and, in a little space, she came forward, and took me with ungloved hand, and kissed me, and said, "I knew not of your coming, fair cousin. You are right welcome, but what brings you here now?"

Then said my cousin, "Certes, my Lady, we set out for amusement, and knew not that you were here. Chance brought us hither, but praised be God who has so favoured us that we have found at your hands so warm a welcome."

And the good and gracious lady laughed at this, and made answer, "Then let us go amuse ourselves."

So we descended down into a green meadow, and then, accompanying us, she went to a very fair place, and drew me to her right side to sit down beside her. And without more ado, large cushions of gold and of silk were brought to her, under the shade of a willow, where, beneath the trees, the waters of a spring ran fair and clear along a straight channel fashioned and cut with skill through the green and tender herbage.

And no longer did she remain standing, but she seated herself with me beside her, and then the others withdrew them to a distance from us, and sat them down, here and there, beside the stream. Then she began to question me, for I confess that I knew not at that time how to converse with her or with others, for I was still somewhat young.

And she began her discourse by making enquiry of me concerning a journey from the which I was newly come, and, in especial, of the demeanour and the appearance of the ladies, and, further, in what manner the Court, the which the King and Queen held, was ordered. And I made her answer according to my knowledge. And I remember me that we discoursed together there of many things.

And now it is time that I tell of how the grievous malady began the which has made me to suffer right cruelly for love's sake. Truly it is a marvel to understand how it came to pass that love of her whom I had oftentimes seen, but whom I had never before thought on, took possession of my heart. It is like unto one who passes over the sea, exploring many lands to discover that which he might find close at hand, but the which he perceives not until another makes it known unto him. Thus in truth did it befall me, for, by reason of my want of understanding, in nowise did I perceive the grace of my precious lady until love put me in the way, and I had but desired to see such an one in order to yield my heart to her. For long had I seen her oft, but, until that day, no thought had I given to her. Thus I had ready to my hand that which I went elsewhere to seek. But, in order to allay my passion, love at length willed to release my heart from this strife. And now, when this perfect one, who has caused me sore trouble, spake to me, her speech and her gentle and gracious bearing pleased me more than ever aforetime, and made me wholly dumb. Intently did I observe her, and right well did I contemplate her beauty, since she seemed to me to be more distinguished, and to have much more of grace and sweetness, than I had ever before observed.

Then love, the playful archer, who saw my silent demeanour, and that I was inclined unto love, took the arrow with the which it is his wont to surprise lovers, and bent his bow, and drew it silently. But I heeded it not. The arrow of a tender glance, the which is so pleasing and so powerful, pierced me to the heart. Then was I sore bewildered. Verily did I think myself to be lost when I felt the loving blow, but my heart yielded itself to the amorous wound. In nowise was the wound mortal, for it came to pass that the sting pierced me again and again.

Then her gentle, laughing eyes, all fraught with loving fetters, so stirred my heart, that I knew not how to make answer unto her. Truly must she have thought my look and my manner to be foolish, since I moved neither hand nor foot, and I so oftentimes changed colour at her glance, that it might have

been thought that my heart trembled with fear. How shall I set the matter forth briefly? If I longed to be made captive, then in this I failed not.

Thus ended the life of my early youth. How to live otherwise, true love now taught me. In this manner was I made captive from that hour.

Longwhiles did I remain there, and I discoursed in a simple manner, like unto a child, and, without ceasing, I kindled the burning fire-brand in my heart. When I gazed on her beauty, I was caught as is the moth in the candle, or the bird in the lime, and no heed did I take of it.

And when I had tarried in this place nigh unto the third of a summer's day, my cousin no longer remained in meditation, but said to me, "Take your leave now, for, on my soul, methinks you have detained my Lady too long here, and it is the time to sup."

Then the noble and courteous one, who is called fair and good, besought me much to sup with her, but I excused me. For but a short while longer did I linger there, and then I arose, and would have taken my leave, but it behoved us first to take wine, and so we drank. And when we had drunken and eaten, I besought her that of her grace it might please her that I should escort her to her dwelling, but the fair one consented not. So, without tarrying, I took leave of her and of them all.

Then love, the more to pierce my tender heart, caused me of a sudden to receive a loving glance from her, the which came to me like a tender greeting as I left the place, for, whiles I was departing, I turned towards her, and, as I turned me away, the tender, fervent look from her fair, loving eyes, fell upon me in such wise that never, since love lodged there, has it faded away. And thus I departed with love's arrow.

And when we were without the walls, we straightway mounted on to our horses, and made all haste to set forth because of the night, the which was already come. And by the way, my cousin made great endeavour to be merry, but as for me, certes I spake not a word, but kept silence, and bowed my head in a very pensive way, for the burning and living flame with the which the tender glance had pierced and wholly taken possession of my heart, left me not, and I so thought without ceasing on the beauty of the gentle countenance where I had left my heart in pledge, and on her fair and faultless body and her winning eyes, that all came up before me. Thus I rode forward in pensive mood. And my cousin conversed much with me by the way, and spake with much good sense, but since I was wrapped in thought, I listened not to him until he said to me, "Fair Sir, what do you thus think on in silence, and what is the cause of this? Have you not had great joy there from whence you come, that you bear yourself so pensively? Certes, it seems to me, so help me God, that whoso desires a lady, could not have one fairer and more perfect than, without doubt, is the one from whom you but now come. What say you to this? Do I not speak truly? Is she not courteous and kind? Have you ever in your life seen a lady in every way more perfect? To my thinking, she is beautiful to look on, and excels all others in discretion, in honour, in grace, and in nobility, and, in fine, never on my soul have I seen her like, save only the lady who is mistress of mine own heart, for her pure heart displays such surpassing virtue that there is none other to be compared to her, save only her of whom I have spoken, and this God would allow."

And when I heard another praised more than her whom I thought on, although before I had held my peace, no longer for all the gold in the world could I remain silent, and therefore, pondering deeply, I sighed and said, "Certes, I will say what I think, if it be only that I believe it certain that, if God would choose an earthly mistress and friend, none other could he desire if he would possess the one in the world the most beyond compare, and in pledge of this I offer my body in combat. If you take not up this gage, then you love not this same lady of yours who is without equal in the world, and once again do I avouch that all other ladies are, to this one, only as are the small sparks from a candle to the brightness of the stars."

And when he heard me speak thus, he began to smile, and verily do I believe that he perceived my heart to be already gone out to her.

And then he went on in front, and we, riding in all haste, came in a short space to the place where I dwelt, and the night had already closed in. And at the time, my father was looking out into the court, and he sternly made enquiry where I had been all the day long, and I, who had made great haste for that I feared and dreaded his anger, saw him at a window, and much did I wish that he had been elsewhere. Howsoever I dismounted, and then, without waiting, I knelt to greet him. Then said he, turning his head, “Whence come you, fair Sir? Is it the time to return home when the night is already come? But all is well with him who returns.”

And I said not a word to him, and he left me, and I departed to my chamber. And there I supped, pensive and sad, albeit there were many youths there who were at great pains to divert me, and who related many tales to me, but know that without ceasing my thoughts were elsewhere, for it ever seemed to me that I saw, face to face, her who knew not how she had made captive my heart. And when the time to retire to rest was come, I laid me down in a well-prepared and comfortable bed, but I believe not that I slept one hour and a half, and if there was one thing which disquieted me more than another, it was that I was fearful lest perchance she for whom I felt such sweet, joyous longing, might not look upon this as I desired, for, as it seemed to me, nowhere could I obtain solace which could give me so much pleasure, and from the which my heart could derive such happiness, and, in this mood, I pondered, and said: —

BALLAD

Verily, Love, I have no language, none
Of thanksgiving sufficient for thy grace
That moved me unto love, and such an one
Gave me for mistress as doth all abase
Beside her, queen of beauty and of grace
And precious worth; O, when on her I muse,
Truly my speech with my thought keeps no pace.
Thanks be to thee, who mad'st me her to choose.

Now all that I desired so dear is won,
Having a lady to serve all my days,
Who holds my heart in joy to think upon
Her beauty, and in every hour and place
Makes my heart high and glad, so to embrace
Her soul with mine, joy that I may not lose.
Mine was the choice, but thine shall be the praise.
Thanks be to thee who mad'st me her to choose.

O now, Love, into whose dominion
I yield my heart, vouchsafe my service space
That to my lady I suffice alone,
Being all hers, and that her beauteous face
And her regard that doth all pain erase,
Bend pitying on me and not refuse
Her tender eyes; I ask no other grace.
Thanks be to thee, who mad'st me her to choose.

Ah, God of Love, ere that I run my race,

Vouchsafe I may alone content her, whose
I am always, in good and evil case.
Thanks be to thee, who mad'st me her to choose.

In such wise did I commune with myself, and as yet I felt not the fierce onset of the ardent desire which assails lovers, and makes them to burn, to grow pale, to pine away, and to fret. This was not yet come. Thus I only bethought me at the time to consider how I might be blithe and gay, and possess a very fine equipment and fair raiment, and give away very freely and without stint, and behave so honourably that in all things I might everywhere be praised of gentlefolk in such sort that my lady might regard me with favour on account of my well-doing. Thus I desired to perfect my conduct, and thereafter to abandon the childish ways which until then had made me wayward, and to take heed that thoughtlessness did not overtake me, and to learn how to have a care for that which is worthy.

All these thoughts had I at that time, and thus I sought how, in my bearing and conduct, I might put all this into practice. So I much changed my ways, and now all my endeavour was to think, and to say, and to do, that which was in every way pleasing and gracious, and on no account to do aught that was discourteous.

And I was neither sad nor foolish, but was cheerful, happy, contented, and prudent, and so as to become familiar with the ways of love, I took pains to learn to sing and to dance, and also to give myself up to the pursuit of arms, for it seemed to me that it was said truly that credit of a surety results from the pursuit of love, of arms, and of valour.

Then forthwith I so importuned my father and my mother, that I came by that which I sought after, the which was that I might have gold and silver to spend freely, and that in all ways I might be richly attired; and then I chose a device and a motto, in the which was the name of my lady in such form that none could recognise it; and I commanded chargers for jousting, and caused a festival to be arranged in order to make essay at the joust, and, as I have said, other things beside did I purpose.

So the festival was prepared, to the which many a noble lady was bidden, but ere I had answer that my lady would come to it, I made request of him to whom this was due, and who was distantly related to me; and he most heartily gave consent to it, and gave me welcome to his castle. And there I saw my lady at my leisure, but how wholly I loved her and held her dear, I told not unto her, but my face, methinks, made it quite manifest, for Love which, the more to arouse my passion, taught me its devices, made me to be all silent, and to pale, and then to regain colour, but the fair one held her peace concerning it, as if she perceived it not, and so little did she take notice of it, that I bethink me she in nowise perceived the cause of all that happened to me, and that all came from love of the which she was the cause, and the one from whom flashed the loving spark which pierced my heart which made no complaint of it. Ne'ertheless I lived happily, and oftentimes did I see her, and this it was that comforted my heart, the which rejoiced, and, aside to myself, I thus addressed her whom I so loved: —

BALLAD

My lady, and my sovereign, flower most rare,
In whom honour and worth are glorified,
Fountain of all things wise, gracious, and fair;
Who art my way toward virtue, and the guide
That over all my goings dost preside;
Lady, to whom humbly is vowed my fate,
Serving in that sweet service at thy side,
All of my days to thee I dedicate.

How else, since none could with thyself compare?
Thou Beauty filled with sweetness, O provide
Ensample kindling me to do and dare,
And bring my ship in honour's port to ride!
So sweet my joy, Lady, it cannot hide;
Therefore, in my simplicity elate,
Out of my heart and body have I cried;
All of my days to thee I dedicate.

Most noble Duchess, surely the hours prepare
That time, when thou shalt well be certified
How my heart serves thee with its every prayer.
Then shall my life be brimmed and satisfied,
When thou its full devotion having tried
Know'st it all truth; O honour's path and gate!
Fame's flowering tree! O valour's starry guide!
All of my days to thee I dedicate.

Princess, who dost in power and praise abide,
Early I learnt to love thee; and love, being great,
Lifts up my heart above all thought of pride,
All my days, all, to thee I dedicate.

And now I must turn me again to the former matter.

In all haste, a great and fair festival was prepared, where many folk had much diversion. And proclamation was made of the jousts, at the which whosoe'er would combat lustily might win jewels of great worth and the prize, and that to this tournament there would come twenty knights who would joust with all comers.

And on the day appointed, the meeting was held in a fair meadow, where, well placed at the end of a lake, was a castle the which had six high towers. And in this meadow were set up large and spacious tents and scaffolds, and pavilions in great number, and all was made ready for the festival and the jousts. And without adding more of this, I tell you that when the day named was come, my sweet lady arrived before nightfall, and there met her a goodly company of noble folk, and, certes, minstrels with drums, of the which there were more than three pairs, and trumpets the which they blew so loudly that the hills and valleys resounded.

And know that I had great joy when I saw my goddess coming toward me, and never could aught beside happen from the which I could derive such joy. So I met her in the way with a very noble retinue, and I approached her litter, and saluted her, as she did me, and then my fair lady said to me, "You take great trouble, fair cousin, for it puts you to inconvenience to come at such a time."

Thus holding, with joyful countenance, much converse with my sweet and dear lady, we came nigh unto the castle, and riding beside her litter (and, certes, it seemed to me that I had for my service sufficient recompense, since my great joy was doubled in that it appeared to me that she then looked on me more tenderly than she had ever done afore), we arrived at the castle, where we found awaiting her many fair ladies, who kneeled before her in seemly manner.

And in the courtyard she descended down from the litter, and was received there with great rejoicing; and I forthwith escorted her through the rooms to her tiring chamber. And all the house had been made ready for her whom I thought on, and at whose dwelling I had sojourned.

Then those whose duty it was brought wine and comfits, and the fair one desired that I should partake of them with her. And after this we withdrew, and retired elsewhere, so as to suffer her to have repose for a while, and I straightway withdrew me elsewhere, and dressed and attired me.

And so as to dance in the German fashion, and to the end that naught should be wanting to make the festival perfect, I had caused an hundred rich liveries to be made according to my device, and I remember me that the five-and-twenty of them the which the knights had on this occasion, were of green velvet, and of cloth of gold broidered. But on the day following the joust, the esquires and the gentlefolk, but not the waiting-men, apparelled them, whatsoe'er it cost, in satin, broidered with silver.

And when that we were dressed, we appeared before my mistress. And there we found a goodly assemblage of ladies and damsels of the country who were already come to this festival. Then, without tarrying, I saluted my lady and them all, and verily do I believe that I changed colour. Ne'ertheless I said, "My Lady, it is time to sup." And straightway I took her by the hand, and led her to the hall. Then each one descended thither. The knights led the ladies, and the minstrels blew their trumpets in such manner that everything re-echoed with the sound, and the feast gave such pleasure, that it made a goodly sight to witness.

And my lady seated herself on the large raised dais, and I think not that it was displeasing to her that next to her I placed my mother, and that, after her, four countesses, who entertained her well, seated them close by, following down the hall each one according to her rank. And the gentlewomen-in-waiting all sat them down in order of rank. And the gentlemen seated them apart. And I hope and believe that in all respects they were well served at the supper with meats and with wine.

And, without making any excuse, I tell you that, when we had supped, after taking comfits, we drank. Then the minstrels came forward, and began to sound their horns in pleasing harmony. And, in a short space, there began the dance, joyous and gay, and at it every one, because of the happy festival, made merry.

Then no longer did I tarry, but I went straightway to beseech my lady to dance. And for a little she made excuse, but at last she gave consent. So I took her by the hand, and led her to the dance, and then I escorted her back to her seat, and misdoubt not that I was so carried away by love of her, that I seemed to myself to be altogether overcome of delight to be near her. I bethink me that I conceived this to be indeed the celestial paradise, and desired naught better. And that which pleased and rejoiced me the most, was her very sweet countenance, the which, fearlessly and without frowardness, and with a gentle, tender glance, looked upon me so sweetly and so kindly, that it seemed to me that all I said and did was pleasing unto her. And I observed her very intently, and then I cried for joy, for I seemed to possess the great happiness which I desired.

And it was right fitting that I should now approach her joyously. And so we danced merrily a greater part of the night, and then the revel ended, for it was time to make ready to retire to rest. Then I led her who was as fair as amber to her chamber, and there many a courteous word was spoken. And when she had gazed on me with her eyes the more to inflame my passion, after partaking of comfits, I took leave of her and of all. And we laid us down, here and there, on fair beds, with rich coverlets, but all the night long I ceased not to think on her beauty, and I gave utterance to these words, the which were in my heart: —

ROUNDEL

When you are come, joy is so all complete,
The heart leaps in my breast, beholding you,
O flower of beauty, O rose fresh and new,
Whose slave I am, whose servitude is sweet.

Lady of gracious ways, whom all men greet
Most beautiful of women and most true,
When you are come, joy is so all complete.

For you the happy festival shall meet
In glee; with none else have I need to do
For my delight; from you alone I drew
The life and joy that make my heart to beat,
When you are come, joy is so all complete.

And like unto one who is consumed with love, I was impatient for the morn, when I might see my mistress. So I arose from my bed as soon as I saw that the time was fitting. And already was the house full of brave and valiant knights, and esquires who even now were jousting with foils and overthrew many an one.

And when that I was ready, and mass was said, I went out, and because I saw not my lady, I remained pensive. Then I went to meet her, and in a short space I found her. For the nonce she was at mass, but after hearing it, she hastened to make ready her attire.

And when, after she was come forth from the chapel, she had attired her fair form, the which of a truth was fair above all, I courteously made her salutation. And she said tenderly, "Welcome, fair cousin. Take good heed, for every one who would win a fair lady will appear at the joust."

Then I smiled, and took courage to say, "I would make a request of you, my Lady, and if you will grant it, right glad shall I be. It is that you give me, if so it pleases you, a sleeve from off one of your bodices, and a chaplet of periwinkle, to wear on my helm. Methinks it would not please me more, or give me greater joy, if that you gave me a kingdom!"

Then my lady pondered awhile, and at length she said, "Certes, fair cousin, it would profit you more to have agreement with some other lady for whom to adventure knightly and brave deeds. There are here many ladies of high degree, but right certain it is that you cannot have a lady here without jeopardy of your life if you would have of her, to place on your helm, a token for the which it behoves you to go forth to do deeds of chivalry. This you should receive from your mistress and friend, and not from me, but I tell you that I am by no means willing to refuse you your request, for even more would I do for you, though I would not that any one should know of it." Then she drew a knife from beneath her bed-hangings, and cut out the sleeve with the ermine from one of her bodices of cloth of gold, and gave it to me. And for this I gave her much thanks, and I likewise received from her the green chaplet, wherefore I was happy and joyous, and said that I would bear it on my helm, and would joust for love of her, but she must be willing to take all in good part, for I had still to learn how to do this.

Then my gracious lady was silent, without letting it be seen whether this was pleasing unto her, or whether it gave her displeasure, and more I dared not say. And I took my leave, for it was time to go.

And the dinner was made ready early on that summer's day. We all dined hastily in our chambers, and then repaired to the meadow where the jousts were to be held, and dismounted before the gorgeous pavilions set up around. The armour was there already, and the lances were got ready, and the chargers were examined. And there you might see high saddles with stirrups, and covered with devices, white, and red, and green, and shields of many colours, and painted lances; and already there was a great assemblage, in many rows, of the common folk, and much quarrelling and uproar.

And then I armed me, and made me ready, in my pavilion, but I tarried there awhile, for it fell not to me to sally forth to begin the joust. And there were twenty of us, apparelled alike, and all akin, and we were knights prepared to joust with all comers.

And my cousin, of whom I have before spoken, and who was very courageous, was the first in the field. To this he was well accustomed, and in such array did he enter the lists, that verily he looked like a kinsman of the king. And he had his helm laced for to tourney in proper manner; and painted

lances, and banners, and much fair company were to be seen there, and, as was fitting, many a player on the pipes was to be heard, the which gave delight to all around. But of this we will say no more.

And I had caused many pavilions to be set up there for the service of strangers, where they could lodge and refresh them. And you may be assured that before the appointed hour there came thither many valiant knights who failed us not at the joust. Others, who came to look on, remained on their horses.

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