

Yvain, ou le chevalier au lion

by Chrétien de Troyes, c. 1180

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But all that week his knights sought
By argument and subtle thought,
Requests, and prayers, and demands,
And all the wit at their command,
To urge Yvain to return with them.
'Will you prove one of those men,'
He was asked by my Lord Gawain,
'Who with his wife must remain?
For cursed be they, by Saint Mary,
Who lose all worth when they marry.
She should enhance a man's life
A fair lady, as his lover or wife;
And tis not right that she love on,
If worth and reputation are gone.
Surely you would regret her love
If you a lesser man should prove.
A woman will soon cease to prize,
Rightly, a man she doth despise,
Who, though become the lord of all,
Through his love into sloth doth fall.
Now your fame should see increase.
Throw off the rein, break the leash,
Come to the tournament with me,
So none accuse you of jealousy.
Now you should not hold back,
But upon the tourney make attack,
And in the lists the brave accost,
Whatever to you may be the cost.
He's lost in dream who will not stir.
You must come, indeed, dear sir,
And not another word from me.
Fair companion, think carefully,
Let not a friendship fail in you,
That in my heart is ever true.
A wonder it is how in nature
What is deferred sinks deeper.
Pleasure is sweeter through delay,
And a little goodness, any day,
Tastes richer if tis waited for,
Than lost in devouring more.
The joy in honour slow to arrive
Is like green wood, better dried,
Burning then with greater force,
If to patience one has recourse,
And yielding greater heat within.
One may grow so used to things
Tis less painful to yield than not,

And wishing to alter, one cannot.
And lest you mistake me, true,
If I had as lovely a lady, as you,
My dear companion, do possess,
Let God and his saints bear witness,
I too would find it hard to leave,
I too to her, in truth, would cleave.
Yet a man may advise someone
To do what he himself would shun.
Just as we see with the preachers,
Who are such deceitful creatures,
They proclaim what tis right to do,
But naught of what they say pursue!
LORD Gawain spoke at such length,
Indeed with such force and strength,
That Yvain promised he would speak
To his wife, and her leave would seek
To accompany him, in some wise,
And whether it be foolish or wise,
Would not fail to seek permission
To return with Gawain to Britain.
She knew naught of what he sought
When with her he shared his thought,
Saying: 'My lady, my life's goal,
You who are my heart and soul,
My health, my joy, my happiness,
A favour I ask of you, no less,
For your honour, and for mine.'
The lady did her head incline
Though she knew naught of his wish,
Saying: 'Fair sir, command me in this,
Whatever your request might be.'
Then my Lord Yvain asks her leave
To follow the king, and her consent
To attend the royal tournament:
'That none there may think me idle.'
She replied: 'Your leave I will
So grant, until a certain date,
But then my love will turn to hate,
That I bear you, you may be sure
If you should remain on that shore
Beyond the time that I shall set,
And I will keep my word yet;
Though you break yours, I will not.
So if for my love you care a jot,
If, above all, you hold me dear,
Think you to be once more here

Within a year from this very day,
A week after Saint John's, I say,
For this is the eighth day since then.
And if you are not back again,
Restored to me, then by all above,
You can offer a mass for our love!
MY Lord Yvain now weeps and sighs
So bitterly that he scarce replies:
'That, lady, is too long a wait.
If I could be with you, my fate,
Whene'er I wish your face to view,
Then I'd nigh always be with you.
And I pray God, if he so please
Not to detain me at his ease.
Yet we think to return often,
Ignorant of what will happen,
And I know not what may occur
That may act to keep me there,
Imprisonment perhaps or sickness.
You do me an injustice, no less,
In not granting exemption for
Some obstacle I cannot ignore.'
'My lord', she said, 'I will so do.
Nevertheless, I now promise you,
That, if God spare you from death,
And you recall me at every breath,
No obstacle will block your way.
This my ring, I give you, pray,
Wear it always on your finger,
And I ask you now, remember
All regarding the gem there set,
For no prison will hold you yet
If you love loyally and are true,
Nor will any harm come to you,
No wounds, and no bloodshed,
If you've heard what I've said;
Wear it ever, and hold it dear,
And remember your lady here.
Then it will protect you like steel,
To you it will be mail and shield;
Nor have I trusted this ring ever
To any knight before, however,
I lend it you now, out of love.'
Now Yvain has leave to remove,
But he weeps greatly at parting.
The king would not, for anything,
Brook delay, rather he sought
To have all the palfreys brought,
And all saddled and equipped,
And would not stop for a quip;
For as he wished so it was done.
The steeds were led forth at once,

Thus it only remained to mount.
I know not if I should recount
My Lord Yvain's leave-taking,
Or the kisses bestowed on him,
Which were mingled so with tears,
Bathed in sweetness it appears.
And what shall I say of the king,
How the lady took leave of him,
Accompanied by her ladies all,
And the knight, her Seneschal?
Far too long would we tarry here.
Seeing the lady bathed in tears,
He begged her to return amain,
And in her castle there remain,
And he begged her so urgently,
She returned with her company.
MY Lord Yvain is now so greatly
Distressed at parting from his lady,
His heart it can do naught but stay.
The king may lead the body away,
But not the heart, for she so chains
And binds his heart, she who remains,
Not even the king has the power
To draw it away for even an hour.
And if the body lacks its heart
How shall it live when they're apart?
Lacking its heart, a living body
Is a marvel no man e'er did see.
Yet this marvel has come about,
For he is still living, yet without
His heart, which once beat within,
And now no longer follows him.
In a fine place the heart doth dwell,
The body lives in hope, as well,
Of returning to the heart it left.
It fashions a heart, though bereft,
Out of hope, in a strange manner,
Hope that proves false traitor ever.
He will not be aware till later
Of the hour hope plays the traitor,
For if by a single day he exceed
The term of leave that he agreed,
It will be hard for him to win
His lady's pardon ever again.
And yet I think he'll not return,
For my Lord Gawain doth yearn
To retain him in his company,
And go together to the tourney
Wherever the joust holds sway.
And as the year now slipped away,
Such success had my Lord Yvain,
Everywhere, that my Lord Gawain

Greatly wished to do him honour,
And so caused him to malingering
That whole year was past and gone,
And sufficient part of another one
That the middle of August arrived
When the king at Chester did abide;
Having returned the previous eve,
From a tournament, I do believe,
At which my Lord Yvain made one,
And every single prize had won.
And, it seems, the tale tells how,
The two companions both did vow
Not to lodge there within the town,
But pitched their tents on level ground
Outside the walls, and there held court.
They went not to the king's own court,
But the king, instead, he went to them,
For his best knights were with them,
And were there in greatest number.
Among them all, sat King Arthur,
And it was then Yvain remembered
That he'd exceeded the time stated
His lady had given permission for,
And no thought surprised him more
Than this awareness of his delay,
The breaking of the pledge he'd made,
Regarding the promised day and year.
He could scarcely forgo his tears,
But held them back, for very shame.
He was thinking on it, all the same,
When he saw a maid approaching,
Towards him at speed, and riding
A piebald palfrey; before his tent,
None ran to assist in her descent,
Though she dismounted, in due course,
Nor did they come take her horse.
Seeing the king among them all,
She then allowed her mantle to fall,
And thus attired, and thus arrayed,
Entered Yvain's tent right away.
And came and stood before the king,
Saying her mistress gave greeting
To the king, and my Lord Gawain,
And all the others, except Yvain,
That disloyal knight, that traitor,
That foul liar, and oath-breaker,
Who'd deserted and deceived her.
Now she saw how he treated her,
Pretending that he loved her true,
Yet disloyal, through and through.
'My lady doth give witness here,
That no mischief did she fear,

For it never occurred to her
That he would prove a robber.
Lovers may steal a lady's heart,
But there are others, a race apart,
Thieves, that empty vessels prove,
Who, with deceit, go making love.
They are robbers and hypocrites,
Traitors who, caring not a whit,
Steal hearts that to them mean naught;
True lovers to hold them dear are taught,
And then restore them faithfully.
But Yvain has nigh killed my lady,
Telling her that he would guard her
Heart, and then would return it her
Before the promised year was out.
Forgetful of you, Yvain, to flout
Your pledge, clearly unconcerned
That you ought to have returned,
To my lady within that year gone.
For until the feast of Saint John
My mistress had granted you leave;
Yet you so lightly did conceive
Your pledge, you failed to remember.
While every night, within her chamber,
My lady counted the months and days;
For when one loves, one frets always,
And never a restful sleep did earn,
And all night long tossed and turned.
Through all the days that come and go
What doth the lover? Doth thou know?
Counts the months, tells the seasons,
I am not here without good reason,
Who disturb you making holiday,
Nor to complain from vain display,
But simply to say, we are betrayed,
By you whom my lady wed that day.
Yvain, my lady for you doth care
No longer, and her message I bear
Never return, and one further thing,
Do not seek to retain her ring.
I whom you now see before you
She demands you render it to;
Render it now, for so you must.'
YVAIN, his tongue as dry as dust,
Was stunned, and unable to reply,
While the maid approached him nigh,
And from his finger took the ring,
Then to God commended the king
And, but for Yvain, all the rest,
Leaving that lord in great distress.
And his sorrow is ever increasing,
And all that he sees torments him.

He would rather be exiled alone,
In deep seclusion, and all unknown,
Banished to some savage place,
Where none would ever see his face,
No man or woman of his country
Knowing more where he might be,
Than if he'd plunged in the abyss.
For he hates most the thing he is,
And knows not where to find relief
From himself who's his own grief.
He'd be a madman not to take
Vengeance now, for his dire mistake,
Upon himself, who his joy hath lost.
He removes himself from the host,
Fearing madness, if he remain,
And they ignore him, for it is plain,
As they watch him go on his way,
That he cares naught for aught they say,
Nor hath need of their company;
While he goes wandering, till he
Is far from tents and pavilions.
Then such a made tempest rages on
Inside his head that all sense is lost,
He tears his flesh, and naked almost,
Flees through the fields and valleys,
And leaves his folk in perplexity,
As to where he might be found.
They search all the country round,
In among the knights' lodgings,
Gardens, hedges, and surroundings,
Seeking where he is no longer.
While he flees, further and further,
Till he comes upon, beside a park,
A lad with a bow, and doth mark
His quiver, with many an arrow,
Broad, sharp, and barbed also.
Sense enough, as yet, he had
To seize the bow from the lad,
And the arrows in their quiver,
And yet he would not remember
A single thing that he had done;
And in this way he wandered on.
He killed the deer, and then he ate
The venison in its raw state.
So he dwelt among the trees,
As madmen do or savages;
Till he came upon, one day,
A hermit's hut, beside the way,
And the hermit working near,
Who saw a naked man appear,
And thinking that perhaps he had
Thus to deal with a man run mad,

Soon ascertained that it was so;
Fearful and surprised, although
He entered his humble hut, he set
At the window, a little bread.
And there Yvain came in need
And on that morsel did feed.
He took the bread and of it ate,
And I doubt not that such bait,
So hard, he'd never had before,
The grain within not worth more
Than twenty sous, all bitter, sour
As yeast, made of a kind of flour,
Barley mixed with oaten straw,
So that the bread tasted more
Like bark, stale, dull with blight.
Yet hunger whets the appetite,
So the bread to him was sweet,
For hunger doth dress any meat,
Like to a sauce, mixed with art.
My Lord Yvain played his part,
Ate the bread, and found it good,
Drank cold water with his food,
Then was minded to disappear,
Into the woods, to seek the deer;
While the holy man, concerned,
Prayed to God, that if he returned,
His own self he'd protect alway,
And so preserve him on that day.
Nevertheless, whate'er may be,
A man will return, and willingly,
To a place where he's treated well.
Not a day passed, but to his cell,
In his wild fit, the madman came,
Bringing the hermit wild game,
Thus to repay him for the bread.
This was the life that Yvain led.
And thus the holy man within
Would the wild creatures skin,
And cook the venison, and ever
He would set the bread and water
At the window, so the madman
Might eat a meal, as others can;
With cooked meat, cold drink,
Water from the stream's brink,
Venison without salt or pepper;
And the hermit, so as the better
To provide bread, sold the hides,
And bought barley loaves besides,
So, Lord Yvain, from that time on,
Had bread aplenty and venison,
And this sufficed in every way.

PENSIVELY, he took his way,
Until he came to a deep glade.
Among the trees, as he drew nigh,
He heard a loud and dismal cry,
And turned then towards the same,
To seek the spot from which it came,
And when he reached the very place
He saw a lion, in that open space,
And a serpent gripped it by the tail,
Striking its rear, like a fiery flail,
Scorching the beast with hot flame.
He spent no time, my Lord Yvain,
Watching this marvel rather took
Counsel with himself, at a look,
As to which of the two to aid.
The lion best deserved his aid,
For a venomous and treacherous
Creature should be slain by us,
And the serpent was venomous,
For from its throat fire burst,
So full it was of poisonous bane.
Thinking thus, my Lord Yvain
Chose to kill the serpent first,
Drew his sword, and then he durst
Advance, his shield before his face,
So as to bar the flames' embrace;
Foe from its throat the flames start,
A throat as wide as some great jar.
If the lion should then attack
It would ne'er an answer lack,
But, whatever might occur,
He would aid the lion first,
For pity urged him so to do,
To bring aid and succour to
A beast so grand and noble.
With a sharp and powerful
Blow of his blade, he first
Strikes the snake to the earth,
Then cuts it into separate parts,
Striking and slicing it apart,
Destroying it, piece by piece.
Yet, so that he might release
The lion, he is forced to cut
From its tail at least a foot,
Which the treacherous serpent's head
Has engulfed and on it fed;
Yet he cuts only what he must.
When the lion was freed at last,
He thought he would need to fight
And that it would attack outright,
Yet found it was not minded to.
Hear what the lion chose to do:

It acted nobly, for it bowed low,
And now began to act as though
It wished to surrender itself to him,
Extending its front paws towards him,
And lowering its head to the ground,
Kneeling, and fawning like a hound,
Hind legs raised; Yvain drew near,
To find its mask all wet with tears,
Moistened so, in humility.
My Lord Yvain, of a verity,
Knew the lion was thanking him,
Humbling itself there before him,
Because of the snake he had slain,
Delivering it from death, and pain.
He was pleased with his adventure,
He cleaned his sword of the ordure
And venom the snake left, and then
Sheathed his sword, now bright again,
And set off, to continue his ride,
With the lion walking by his side,
Unwilling to part from him ever,
Wishing to be his friend forever,
Eager now to serve and protect.
The lion walks on till it detects,
On the wind, the scent of prey.
Somewhere ahead, along the way,
A herd of wild deer are feeding,
And its nature then and breeding
Prompt the lion to seek its kill,
And secure itself food, at will;
Such is the nature of the beast.
It runs ahead, some way at least,
To show its master it has found
Spoor and scent upon the ground,
And halting, on encountering this,
Looks to its master, for its wish
Is to serve him in every way,
And not to wittingly disobey
His will, in any way whatever.
And Yvain sees from its manner
The lion awaits his command.
Yvain perceives and understands
That if he withdraws, it will too,
And if he follows it will pursue
The deer that it scented ahead.
So he cried out, and onward sped,
As if he were urging on a hound,
And then the lion, at the sound,
Set its nose to the deer's scent;
Nor did it err in its intent,
For within a bow-shot, in a vale,
It found its quarry without fail;

A deer was there feeding alone.
This the lion took, on its own,
Killing the deer at the first leap,
And of the hot blood drank deep.
Once it was dead, the lion laid
It on his back, and so conveyed
The warm carcase to his master,
Setting it down before him there.
Yvain now held him in deep affection,
For this display of true devotion.
Darkness fell, and it seemed good
To spend the night there in the wood,
And strip the deer of its venison,
Or of enough fine meat for one.
A cut along the rib he did make,
And from the loin carved a steak,
And striking a spark from his flint,
From dry brushwood flame did win,
Roasting his steak till it was done.
Yet the meal was a scanty one,
For he had neither salt nor bread
Nor knife nor cloth; yet he was fed.
While he was eating, the lion lay
By him, not stirring in any way,
But watched him steadily, as he
Took what he wished of the meat,
And ate till he could eat no more.
The lion the rest did then devour,
All the carcase down to the bone;
Then while Yvain slept all alone,
His head resting on his shield,
To win what rest that doth yield,
The lion showed his intelligence,
Lying awake, with every sense
Alert, guarding Yvain's steed,
That on the scanty grass did feed.
At dawn they both left together,
And that life lived every other
Single day of the next fortnight,
Till chance led them to alight
Upon the fount beneath the pine.
There, nearing it a second time,
Remembering all, my Lord Yvain
Nigh on lost his wits again,
On seeing the chapel and the stone.
A thousand times he made moan,
Then, grieving, fell into a swoon,
And as he stumbled there, eftsoon
His sword tumbled from its sheath,
Striking the chain mail beneath
The jaw, then entering his neck.
The links split; naught could check

The point which pierced, like a nail,
The flesh beneath the shining mail,
So that it caused hot blood to flow.
The lion imagined that the blow
Had killed its dear friend and master.
You can ne'er have heard greater
Grief e'er written of or narrated,
Than that creature demonstrated.
He pawed the ground, and groaned,
Conceiving the wish, as he moaned,
Of pinning himself upon the sword
Which he thought had slain his lord.
Carrying the blade in his jaws, he
Lodged it against a fallen tree,
Pressed it against the trunk behind;
Thus it was firm and well-aligned,
To pierce him through the chest;
And so was nigh put to the test,
But Yvain emerged from his swoon,
And thus the lion escaped its doom,
When on the point of rushing upon
The blade as a wild boar has done,
Many a time, heedless of dying.
There my Lord Yvain was lying
Half in a swoon beside the stone.
Recovering, he made violent moan,
Blaming himself for returning late,
And thus incurring his lady's hate,
Crying: 'Why does he not choose
To die, who thus his joy doth lose?
Alas, for death should he not strive?
How then should I linger here, alive,
Viewing all this that my lady owns?
Why does a soul cling to these bones?
What does that soul do, dwelling here
In this sad flesh? Let it disappear,
And so be done with all its pain.
And so I should despise and blame
Myself, and tis true, for so I do.
Who loses all joy and comfort too
Through his own fault, he rightly
Should hate himself, and mortally.
He ought to hate himself and die.
Since none looks on, why should I
Spare myself, and not die today?
For, have I not seen this lion prey
To such grief, for me, that it tried
To kill itself, and well-nigh died
By hurling itself upon my sword?
Should I escape such death the more
Who have turned delight to sorrow?
Delight is far distant from me now.

But of that I say naught: for, nay,
 There is, now, but naught to say.
 And all is but a foolish question.
 That joy I had in my possession
 Proved the greatest joy of mine,
 And yet endured such little time;
 Who ends his joy by his own hand,
 Good fortune should ne'er command.'
 WHILE Yvain bemoaned his fate
 Our poor Lunete, in wretched state,
 Imprisoned in the chapel there,
 Heard, and saw this whole affair,
 Through a crevice in the wall.
 And as soon as Yvain was all
 Recovered from his swoon, she cried:
 'Now tell me, who is this outside?
 Who is it who complaineth so?'
 He said: 'Who is it who would know?'
 'I am,' she said, 'a wretched thing,
 For I'm the saddest person living.'
 And he replied: 'Ah, fool, be silent!
 Your grief is joy, your ill content.
 Those who by great joy are won,
 Are more saddened and more stunned
 By grief than others, when it comes;
 The weaker one, by use and custom,
 May bear more weight than can another,
 Though of greater strength, moreover,
 Despite all that the latter would do.'
 'By my faith,' she said, 'tis true,
 These words you utter I believe,
 Yet tis no reason to conceive
 That your ills are worse than mine,
 And as for that, though you repine,
 It seems to me that you are free
 To go where'er you wish to be,
 While I remain imprisoned here;
 Such is my fate, it would appear,
 Thus I shall be seized tomorrow,
 And must to mortal justice bow.'
 'My God,' said he, 'for what misdeed?
 'Sir knight,' she said, 'let God indeed
 Ne'er have mercy on my poor soul
 If I have ever deserved such woe!
 Nonetheless I'll explain to you,
 And every word I speak is true,
 Why it should be I lie in prison:
 I am here, then, accused of treason,
 And to defend me can find none;
 Tomorrow, I'll be burned or hung.'
 'Well then,' he replied, 'I still say,
 That my grief and sorrow outweigh

This grief and woe of yours, for you
 Might be delivered by one who knew
 Of the danger in which you lay.
 Might that be so?' 'Why yes, I say!
 But who that might be I know not,
 There are only two men, God wot,
 Who would dare to so defend me,
 By warring against three enemies.'
 'What,' said he, 'then there are three?'
 'Yes, sir knight, 'by my faith, there be
 Three who call me a traitor, I know'
 'Who are the two who love you so,
 That either would be daring enough
 To go against these three, for love,
 And save and protect you, say I?'
 'I will tell you, and speak no lie,
 For the one is my Lord Gawain,
 And the other is my Lord Yvain,
 Through whom, unjustly, I shall be
 Martyred tomorrow; tis death to me.'
 'Through whom? What say you?' said he,
 'Sire,' she said, 'May God defend me,
 Through the son of King Urien.'
 'And now,' he said, 'I comprehend!
 You'll not die except he dies too,
 For I am Yvain, through whom you
 Are now prisoned, in deep distress.
 And you indeed must be, no less,
 Than that Lunete who, most bravely,
 Guarded and preserved my body
 And life, twixt those portcullises,
 When I was troubled and in distress,
 Well-dismayed at being so caught.
 I should have been killed for sport
 Or taken then, if not for your aid.
 So tell me then, my sweet maid,
 Who is it accuses you of treason,
 And keeps you here in this prison,
 In such secluded confines too?'
 'Sire,' she said, 'I'll hide naught from you,
 Since you would have me tell you all;
 Nor was I slow, as I recall,
 To assist you in all good faith;
 Twas upon my advice i' faith,
 My lady took you as her sire,
 And by my counsel did so desire;
 And, by the sacred Paternoster,
 I believed it was for her, rather
 Than you, indeed, that I did so;
 In all of this I'd have you know.
 It was her honour and your desire
 I served; God knows I am no liar.

But when it came about that you
Had not returned when you were due,
Within the year that you agreed,
My lady was furious with me,
And said that she had been deceived
By all I'd said, that she'd believed.
And once she'd told her Seneschal,
A cunning and a faithless rascal,
Who towards me bore great envy;
For on many a matter, you see,
She trusted him far less than me.
He knew to pursue his enmity
Against me, and claimed ere long,
In open court, all looking on,
I treacherously favoured you;
Nor had I aid or counsel true,
Except mine own, and yet I knew
Never had I sought to pursue
Treachery in deed, or thought.
So I answered, before the court,
Without taking counsel myself,
That I would be defended well,
By one who'd battle any three.
He was so lacking in courtesy
That he disdained to refuse,
Nor could I retreat, or excuse
Myself whate'er might happen.
At my word had I been taken;
So I was forced to furnish bail,
And in forty days, without fail,
Must find a knight to battle three.
Many courts I journeyed to see;
I travelled to King Arthur's court,
But found no aid, nor what I sought,
Nor were there any there who could
Tell aught of you, for ill or good,
For of yourself they had no news.'
'Where then was that kind and true,
And honest knight, my Lord Gawain?
Any maid that to him complained
On approaching him, her distress
He'd ne'er fail thus to address.'
'If I had found Gawain at court,
Whatever it was that I now sought
He would ne'er have denied it me,
But some knight, so they told me,
Had lately carried off the Queen,
The King having, quite foolishly,
Let her abroad, in his company;
The King, I believe, sent Gawain
After the knight, and he was fain
To seek her, in his great distress.

Nor will he know a moment's rest,
Until he again restores the lady.
Now have I, and in verity,
Told the whole of my adventure.
Yet tomorrow I'll live no longer,
For a shameful death, I'll meet,
All through you and your deceit.'
'May God forbid,' Yvain replied,
'That e'er, for me, you should die!'
Nor shall you yet, while I am here.
Tomorrow, then, will I appear,
Prepared, with all my strength,
To employ my body, at length,
For your deliverance, as I ought.
Take care, if my name is sought,
To tell all those present naught!
And when the battle has been fought,
Still utter not a word of me.'
'There's no torment, of a certainty,
Would make me reveal your name,
Since you charge me with the same;
Sire, I would rather suffer death.
Yet I pray that you, nonetheless,
Do not battle thus for my sake.
I would not have you undertake
Such a desperate fight as this.
I thank you too for your promise
That you would willingly do so;
Think yourself free of it, though,
For better it is that I die alone
Than witness the pleasure shown
At your fate, as well as mine;
For to death they'll me consign
Once they have seen you killed;
Tis better that you live on still,
Than that both encounter death.'
'Now' said Yvain, 'I feel the breath
Of your despair, my dear friend;
I fear that either you intend
To seek death and not be saved,
Or do despise the willing aid
I bring to your deliverance.
Cease such pleas to advance,
For you have wrought so much for me
I shall not fail, of a surety,
To bring you aid, come what may.
Though I witness your dismay;
If it please God, in whom I trust
All three shall lie there in the dust.
Now no more, for now I should
Seek some shelter in that wood,
Since there can be no lodging here.'

'She replied, 'May God, my dear,
Give you good shelter and good night,
And, as I wish, keep you outright
From every danger there might be!
My Lord Yvain, went guardedly
On his way, and the lion after.
They went on, a little further,
Reaching the castle of a baron,
Both well-fortified and strong,
Its walls high, with nary a fault;
Thus the castle feared no assault,
From catapult or mangonel,
Nor could it be stormed at will;
And outside the walls the ground
Had been cleared all around,
With never a hut or dwelling.
And you may hear at some fitting
Time the reason why that was so.
Now, my Lord Yvain did go
The shortest way to the castle,
And seven pages forth did amble,
Once the bridge had been lowered,
To meet him, and yet they cowered
When they had sight of the lion,
All being most afeared of him;
So they asked him, if he pleased,
Whether the lion, for their ease,
Might wait outside, before the gate.
Yvain replied: 'No more! I state
That I'll not enter without him;
Either we find lodgings within,
Or I'll remain outside, myself,
For he is as dear as my own self.
Nonetheless you need fear him not,
For I will keep him close, God wot,
So all of you may be reassured.'
They answered: 'Be it so, my lord!
Then the castle they do enter,
And pass on till they encounter
Many a knight and fair lady,
Many a maid of high degree,
Who salute him with honour,
Helping him remove his armour,
Saying: 'Welcome be yours, fair sir,
Who enter now among us here,
And God grant that you may stay
Until you leave us, on a day,
Rich in honour, and content.'
This, high and low, is their intent;
Their pleasure in him to display,
As they to the castle lead away.
But when their first joy is over,

A deep sadness they remember,
Which makes them forget their joy;
Tears and cries they now employ,
And begin themselves to cudgel.
Thus for a long while they mingle
Tears with joy, joy with sadness;
Joy still in honouring their guest,
Yet their thoughts are elsewhere,
For an event fills them with care
That they expect on the morrow,
Certain they are that it will follow;
Happening, indeed, before midday.
My Lord Yvain was so amazed
At all these frequent changes of tack,
From joyousness to grief, and back,
That he advanced that very question,
Asking the castle's lord the reason:
'Fair, dear and gentle sir,' said he,
'By God in heaven, please tell me
Why you all have honoured me so,
And thus mix your joy with sorrow?'
'Yes, if such should be your pleasure,
Yet to know naught of the matter,
Would yet prove far wiser a wish;
To sadden you by speaking of this,
Is what I would ne'er seek to do,
For it can only bring grief to you.'
'I must not do naught, leave all be,
And fail to hear the truth,' said he,
'For I wish greatly now to know,
What trial tis I must undergo.'
'Well then, I'll seek to tell you all.
A giant doth this realm appal,
By seeking after my daughter,
Who is more lovely, and by far,
Than any maiden to be found.
This fell giant, whom God confound,
Is named Harpin of the Mountain,
Who, every day, doth cause me pain,
By seizing, from me, all he can.
Better right than I hath no man
To complain, lament, and grieve;
I shall go mad, ah, I do believe,
For had not I six knightly sons,
In all the world the fairest ones,
And the giant has seized all six;
Before my eyes, two he picked
To kill, and the rest, tomorrow,
He will slay, to my great sorrow,
Except I can find one who might
For the lives of my four sons fight,
Or surrender my daughter to him,

Whom he says that he will ruin,
 And give to the vilest of his court
 The basest fellows, for their sport,
 Since he himself loves her no longer.
 Such the grief tomorrow offers,
 If you or God deny me aid.
 So tis not any wonder today
 Fair sir, that we are full of sorrow;
 Yet, for you, we try to borrow,
 For a moment, a cheerful face,
 And honour you in this place.
 For he's a fool who has as guest
 A nobleman, and fails of his best,
 And a noble man you seem to be.
 Now have I explained wholly,
 The whole cause of our distress;
 For in neither town nor fortress
 Has this giant left for us aught
 Except all that here we brought.
 If you have taken a look around,
 Then indeed you'll have found
 He has scarce left an egg or two,
 But for the walls which are new;
 For he has almost razed the place.
 When he has taken or defaced
 All he wishes, the rest he fires,
 And torments me as he desires.'
 MY Lord Yvain attention paid
 To all that his host had to say;
 When he had heard everything,
 He was pleased to answer him:
 'Sire,' said he, 'your unhappiness
 Yields me much sorrow and distress,
 And yet to me it seems a marvel,
 That you have ne'er sought counsel
 At the court of good King Arthur,
 For there's no man of such power
 That at his court he could not find
 Many a knight who'd feel inclined
 To prove themselves against him.'
 Then this man of wealth tells him
 That, at the court, indeed, he would
 Have found true aid if any could
 Have told him where to find Gawain.
 'Nor would I have asked in vain,
 For my wife is his cousin germain:
 But a foreign knight had been fain
 To lead away the wife of the king,
 Whom at the court he'd gone seeking,
 Nor would he have succeeded too,
 Not by any means that he knew,
 Had not Kay beguiled King Arthur

Such that the king had placed her
 In the man's charge, in all innocence;
 He a fool, she lacking prudence.
 Great the harm and great the loss,
 And great the both to me because
 Tis certain that my Lord Gawain
 Would have hastened here again
 For his niece and for his nephews,
 If of this matter he'd heard news;
 But he knows naught, and so I grieve,
 Enough to break one's heart, I believe;
 For he's gone chasing after that same
 Knight, to whom may God grant shame
 And woe, for leading the Queen away.'
 Hearing all this, my Lord Yvain
 Doth frequently yield up a sigh,
 And, driven by pity, doth reply:
 'Fair noble sir, right willingly
 Will I, instead, take upon me,
 This adventure, and its peril,
 If the giant and your sons will
 Only arrive tomorrow in time,
 Delaying me but little, for I'm
 Bound to be away, and soon;
 Tomorrow at the hour of noon,
 A promise I uttered I must keep.'
 'Fair sir, my thanks you shall reap,
 A hundred thousand times indeed,'
 Said the nobleman, 'for this deed.'
 And all the good folk in his castle,
 They thank my Lord Yvain as well.
 THEN came forth from her chamber,
 A lovely maiden, his fair daughter,
 Her form graceful, her face pleasing.
 She was simple, quiet, and grieving,
 For her sorrow appeared endless;
 Her head was inclined, in sadness.
 And then her mother entered too,
 For the host had summoned the two
 To come to him, and meet his guest;
 Both held their mantles to their heads
 In order to conceal their tears,
 But he urged them to calm their fears,
 And uncover their faces straight,
 Saying: 'You should not hesitate,
 To do as I now command you to;
 God and good fortune have, today,
 Brought you this noble man, I say,
 And he will fight the giant for us.
 Now give thanks to the courageous,
 And throw yourselves at his feet!'
 'May God forbid, it is not meet;

Tis no way fitting for me to see
 These ladies offer such courtesies,
 Sister and niece to my Lord Gawain,
 In protest cried, my Lord Yvain.
 And may God Himself defend me
 From such pride as could ever see
 Them humbling themselves at my name,
 For I could never forget the shame.
 But I would yet give thanks if they
 Were comforted a little this day;
 And then tomorrow they will see
 If God Himself will grant them mercy.
 Yet now I have no other prayer
 But that the giant will be there,
 And in good time, that I may not
 Break my true word, for I must not
 Fail to be present at noon elsewhere
 Tomorrow, at a mighty affair,
 The worst business I must say
 I've undertaken for many a day.'
 Thus doth Yvain show unwilling
 To reassure them quite, knowing
 That if the giant fails to appear,
 In ample time, he must, he fears,
 Still rescue Lunete, the maiden,
 In the chapel as yet imprisoned.
 Nevertheless what he doth promise
 Leaves them full of hopefulness;
 And he is thanked by one and all,
 For his prowess, that men recall,
 And think him a true nobleman
 Seeing his lion, like a lamb,
 As confident in man's company
 As any creature e'er might be.
 The hope that they place in him
 Comforts and brings joy to them,
 And they lay aside their sadness.
 And when the hour arrived for rest,
 They led him to a fine chamber.
 Both the maiden and her mother
 Escorted him to a room, quite near,
 For they already held him dear,
 And a hundred thousand times more
 Would have done so, I am sure,
 If they'd known all his courtesy
 And prowess; and the lion and he
 Both lay down, and fell asleep.
 But the others all feared the beast,
 And shut the door up tight so they
 Could not emerge, come what may;
 Till the next day, when in the morn,
 The door was opened wide at dawn.

Yvain arose, and next heard Mass,
 And then, as promised, he let pass
 The hour of prime, ere summoning
 In the hearing of all, his host to him,
 Then he addressed him, with honour:
 'Sire,' he said, 'I can wait no longer,
 Let me leave, though you wish it not,
 For though I linger here, I must not.
 But I would have you know that I
 Would gladly have stayed to defy
 The giant, and I will, awhile at least,
 For the sake of the nephews and niece
 Of my Lord Gawain, whom I do love.'
 At this the maiden is sorely moved,
 Her every vein trembles in fear;
 The lady and her lord appear
 As moved, fearing he will depart,
 Wishing from the depths of their hearts
 That they might stoop there at his feet,
 Yet knowing he'd think it not meet,
 Deeming it neither well nor good.
 So then his host offered him goods,
 Either in land, or some other guise,
 Could he but agree, in any wise,
 That he with them might so remain.
 'God forbid,' cried my Lord Yvain,
 'That I should accept aught of yours!
 From the maiden the tears do pour;
 Greatly she grieves, in her dismay,
 Begging him thus that he might stay.
 A maid distraught and in distress,
 By the Queen of Heaven she begs,
 By the angels, and the Lord above,
 That he will elect not to remove,
 And for a little while might wait,
 For her and for her uncle's sake,
 Whom he doth know, love and prize.
 Then doth great pity within him rise,
 On hearing her proffer her request,
 In the name of the man he loves best,
 And in that of the Queen of Heaven,
 And God Himself, the sweet leaven,
 The honey of mercy none may deny.
 Full of anguish he heaves a sigh;
 For the kingdom of Tarsus, he
 Would not see Lunete, cruelly,
 Burned at the stake, she to whom
 He gave his promise, for his doom
 Would be death, or madness again,
 If too late to her help he came;
 Yet, on the other hand, to recall
 The great kindnesses, above all,

Of his dear friend, Lord Gawain,
Near breaks his heart in two again,
He knowing that he cannot stay.
And yet he doth not ride away,
But so delays and lingers near,
The giant doth suddenly appear,
Driving, in front of him, the knights,
And hanging there at neck-height,
He carries a stake, big and square,
Point before, spurring them there.
Nor were they clothed in aught
Worth a straw, dressed in naught
But torn shirts, filthy and soiled;
Hands and feet tied, they toiled
To stay aloft, on four tired hacks
Weak and thin, with broken backs,
That limped on, as best they could.
As they advanced, beside the wood,
A dwarf, hunchbacked and swollen,
Who'd knotted the horses' tails in one,
Beat the knights, remorselessly
With a four-tailed scourge, till he
Had marred them from head to toe,
As though some prize for doing so
Were his. He beat them till they bled,
Thus were they shamefully sped,
Betwixt the giant and the dwarf.
The giant cried out to the lord,
Before the gate there, in the plain,
That his four sons would now be slain,
If he did not produce his daughter,
So as to avoid their slaughter;
Then the daughter he would offer
To his lads, to make sport of her,
For he'd not love, or have her, ever;
She'd have a thousand lads about her,
Often enough, and repeatedly,
Naked wretches, vile and lousy,
Scullery boys, scum from the kitchen,
Who'd all grant her their attention.
At this the lord was sore dismayed,
Listening to this fellow portray
What fate his daughter would face,
Or, should he save her from disgrace,
Hearing how his four sons would die.
And such distress is his, say I,
That he would rather die than live.
Full often a deep sigh he doth give,
And weeps and bemoans the day.
Then to him Lord Yvain doth say:
'Sire, most vile, most insolent,
Boastful, indeed, is this giant.

Yet God above will ne'er suffer
Your daughter to be in his power!
So says my frank and noble Yvain.
'He insults her, and shows disdain.
Dire would be the misadventure,
If indeed so lovely a creature,
And one of such high import,
Were given to vile lads in sport.
Come, my armour, and my steed!
Lower the drawbridge now, with speed,
And let me forth, for forth I must.
One will be left here in the dust,
Whether he or I, I do not know;
Yet can I but humiliate, though,
This cruel felon at your gate
Who comes against you straight,
Such that he renders you your sons,
And, for his insults, have him come
And make amends to you, then I
May commend you to God on high,
And go about my own affairs.'
His horse was led to him there,
And a squire his armour brought,
And to arm him swiftly sought,
So that he was soon equipped.
In doing so they let naught slip,
Taking as little time as they might.
Once they had fully armed the knight,
There was naught remained but, lo,
To lower the bridge and let him go.
They lowered it and away he went
Nor was the lion, his friend, content
By any means, to remain behind;
While those who were so left, I find,
Commended him to Our Saviour,
For they greatly feared the power
Of that miscreant, their enemy,
Who'd conquered and slain so many,
On that field, before their eyes,
Anxious lest this end likewise.
So they pray God might defend
From death and save their friend,
And grant he might kill the giant.
And each man prays, as best he can,
Most silently to his God above.
For now the giant made a move,
A fierce advance, threatening too,
Crying: 'The man who hath sent you
Loves you but little, by my eyes!
And for certain he could realise
Vengeance on you in no better way.
He wreaks his revenge well, I say,

For whatever wrong you've done.'
But Yvain, who was afraid of none,
Replied: 'Mere empty speech I find.
Now do your best and I will mine,
You weary me with words in vain.'
And thereupon my Lord Yvain,
Now anxious to be on his way,
Struck the giant, in fierce assay,
Whose breast a bear-skin covered.
Though the giant soon recovered,
And ran towards him, full pelt,
My Lord Yvain a fresh blow dealt,
On his breast, that broke the skin,
And the tip of his lance drove in,
And tasted hot blood in its course.
Yet, wielding the stake with force,
The giant forced him to bow low.
Yvain drew his sword, fierce blows
Of which he could swiftly deal,
Knowing the giant lacked a shield,
Reliant on brute force instead,
Scorning armour, helm for his head;
Thus he, who had drawn his blade,
Against the giant now made assay,
Struck the giant a trenchant blow,
Not with the flat, but slicing so
As to cut from his cheek a steak,
While the other, wielding his stake,
Dealt Yvain such a blow he fell
Over his horse's neck, as well.
At the blow, the lion, unafraid,
Rose up, to bring its master aid,
And leapt in anger, tooth and claw
Shredding the pelt the giant wore,
In its rage, like the bark of a tree.
Thus it tore away a massive piece
Of the thigh, with its layer of skin,
Flesh and sinew embedded within.
The giant fought free, with a fierce pull,
Roaring and bellowing, like a bull,
For the lion had wounded him badly.
Wielding his stake in both hands, madly,
He thought to strike the lion but failed,
For the cunning lion swift turned tail,
The giant's blow was dealt in vain,
And he fell beside my Lord Yvain,
But without either of them touching.
Now did my Lord Yvain, wielding
His sharp sword, land two great blows,
Dealt quickly, before the giant rose,
And with the trenchant edge cut free
The arm and shoulder from the body;

With his next blow he drove the rest
Through the liver, below the chest,
Driving home the whole of his blade;
The giant fell; with his life he paid.
And if a massive oak were to fall,
Twould make no greater sound at all,
Than that giant made when he fell.
All those upon the wall were well
Pleased at seeing that mighty blow.
Then were the speediest seen below,
Longing to be first at the kill,
Like hounds in the chase that will
Run till they seize upon the deer;
So the men and women ran here,
Towards the giant without delay,
Where he now, face downward, lay.
And the lord hastened there as well,
And all the nobles from the castle,
And the daughter, and her mother;
While joy reigned among the brothers,
After the woe those four had suffered.
But though their services they offered,
They saw they could no longer detain,
Despite their prayers, my Lord Yvain;
And yet they beseeched him to return,
To stay and enjoy the rest he'd earned,
As soon as he'd done with the affair
That was summoning him elsewhere.
And he replied that he did not dare
To promise them aught for, once there,
He could say naught for certain, till
He knew if fate meant him good or ill;
But this much he did ask of the lord,
That his four sons seize the dwarf,
And with his daughter ride, amain,
To the court, to my Lord Gawain,
Once they knew of that knight's return;
And all that happened, there, confirm,
And relate what he had done, alone;
For good deeds should be widely known.
The lord replied: 'Twould not be right
To hide such kindness from the light,
And,' he added 'be sure we shall do
Whatever it is you'd wish us to;
But tell me now what should we say,
Sire, when we meet with Lord Gawain;
To whom should we grant the fame,
Having no knowledge of your name?'
And he replied: 'This shall you say
When you stand afore him that day,
The Knight of the Lion is my name,
And that I told you to state the same.'

And I now make a request, that you
 Convey, from me to him, this truth:
 If he knows not then who I may be,
 Yet I know him well as he doth me.
 There is naught else I require of you,
 And thus I must bid you all adieu;
 That which doth me most dismay
 Is that too long I extend my stay;
 For ere the hour of noon is past,
 I face elsewhere an ample task,
 If I can indeed outrun the hour.’
 Then swiftly he rode from the tower,
 Though, before he went, his host
 Begged him, to the very utmost,
 To take with him his four sons,
 For of the four there was not one
 Would fail to serve him if he wished.
 It pleases him not, though they insist,
 That any should keep him company;
 Forth he goes, that place doth leave,
 And, careless of both life and limb,
 As fast as his horse can carry him,
 He now returns to the distant chapel.
 The way ran straight toward the dell,
 And he knew how to keep the road;
 Before he reached the chapel though
 They had dragged Lunete outside;
 Already the pyre was raised on high,
 On which she’d die in short shrift.
 And there, naked but for her shift,
 Bound before the pyre they held her,
 All those who did her guilt infer,
 Based on a plot that she denied.
 And now it was that Yvain arrived,
 Saw to what they would bring her,
 And was thus consumed by anger;
 For neither courteous nor wise
 Are any who’d think him otherwise.
 Indeed his anger proves immense,
 But he trusts in God, and hence
 That God and the right will see
 Him right, they being of his party.
 For in their company he will fight,
 And no less trusts the lion’s might.
 On the crowd he advances swiftly,
 Crying: ‘Now, let the maid go free,
 You sinful folk, as I do command!
 It is not right that she should stand
 Within the flames, though innocent.’
 And on either side they now relent,
 And part to leave him passage way,
 Neither will he brook more delay,

Until his own eyes gaze on, there,
 She whom he must aid, where’er
 She might be, with all his heart;
 So his eyes seek her, for his part,
 Until he finds her, yet restrains
 His heart, as one grasps the reins,
 And holds in check, a lively steed.
 Nonetheless, he is glad, indeed,
 To see her, and sighs so to see,
 Although he sighs not openly,
 That none might see he does so,
 Stifling all, that none might know.
 And he is seized with pity also
 When he sees, hears, and knows
 The grief of the ladies, who cry,
 With many a sad tear and sigh:
 ‘Ah God, thus, you forget us now,
 Leave us in deep despair, we trow,
 We who shall lose so dear a friend,
 Who such good counsel us did lend,
 And did intercede for us at court!
 She it was for our comfort besought
 My lady to clothe us in robes of vair;
 All altered now will be our affairs,
 For there’ll be none to speak for us.
 Cursed be he who caused our loss,
 For great is the harm he has brought.
 There will be none to say at court:
 “Dear lady, give that cloak of vair,
 That surcoat and that fine gown there,
 To such and such an honest maid,”
 For so her charity she displayed,
 “Truly, right well will you employ,
 These things with which you toy,
 For she is in need of them today.”
 Such words as these none will say,
 For none are so true and courteous;
 Rather than helping others thus,
 Each seeks their own to secure,
 Though they need nothing more.’
 THUS did they lament their fate,
 And my Lord Yvain, as I do state,
 Among them all, heard their plaint,
 Which was neither false nor faint:
 He saw Lunete there, on her knees,
 In her shift, as the law doth please;
 She had already made confession,
 Besought God’s mercy for her sins,
 And summoned up her punishment.
 Yvain, who’d loved her deeply, went
 Towards her, raised her to her feet,
 And said: ‘Dear maid, where may I meet,

Those who've accused you from afar?
 Let them come from where'er they are,
 And, here and now, do battle with me.'
 And she who'd neither sought to see,
 Nor look at, him said: 'Sire, indeed,
 You come now in my hour of need,
 On God's behalf, for so it must be!
 Those who bore false testimony,
 They stand all about me here.
 If you'd arrived much later, I fear,
 I'd have been but ash and cinder.
 But you are here, as my defender,
 And may God grant you strength,
 In accord with my innocence,
 As regards the charge against me.'
 The Seneschal listened to this speech,
 With his two brothers by his side,
 'Ah, woman, truth averse,' they cried,
 'But full ready with many a lie!
 That knight's a fool who seeks to die,
 On your account, in this affair.
 That knight is a sad rascal there,
 Who comes now to challenge me,
 When he is one, and we are three.
 My advice to him is: retreat,
 Before your downfall proves complete.'
 Yvain replied, now angered quite:
 'Let those flee who fear, sir knight!
 I'm not so scared of your three shields,
 That without a blow I'd yield.
 I would prove a rascal indeed,
 Did I the field to you concede,
 Body intact, without a wound!
 As long as I am whole and sound,
 I'll not flee for all your threats.
 But I'd advise you to forget
 Your claim now, and free this maid,
 Whom you unjustly have waylaid;
 She has said, and I believe her,
 For on her faith she doth swear,
 On peril of her soul, that she
 Hath never committed treachery
 Against her lady, in word or deed,
 Or thought; to all that I accede,
 Thus I'll defend her as best I can,
 For innocence will aid a man.
 Hear, if you would, the truth, sir knight,
 God ever holds to what is right.
 For God and Justice they are friends,
 And if to me their aid they send,
 Then I am in worthy company,
 And worthier aid is granted me.'

Then the other foolishly replies
 That he may try him in any wise,
 As he should please, or as he can,
 So long as the lion is banned.
 And Yvain replies that the lion
 Will not fight as his companion,
 And that he needs no other there.
 But should the lion attack, beware,
 Let him defend himself full well,
 For more than that he cannot tell.
 'Whate'er you say,' said the Seneschal,
 'If your lion you will not call,
 And keep it quiet on one side,
 You shall no longer here abide.
 Be gone at once, and be wise,
 For, in this country, all realise
 How this girl betrayed her lady;
 Tis right that she suffer swiftly
 The punishment she doth merit.'
 'Not so, by the Holy Spirit,'
 Cried Yvain, who knew the truth.
 'Let God deny me joy, forsooth,
 If I should fail to deliver her!'
 Then he told the lion to defer,
 Retreat, and lie down silently,
 And as requested, so did he.
 THE lion withdrew completely;
 And the dispute and the parley
 Being ended both retreated;
 Then all three Yvain greeted,
 As he rode towards them slowly,
 Not wishing to be beaten wholly,
 Or toppled at the very first blow.
 Thus keeping his own lance whole
 He let the three their lances wield,
 Making a target of his shield,
 Against which each man broke his lance;
 Yvain withdrew, better to advance,
 And halted eighty yards away,
 But then, not wishing to delay,
 Returned to confront them all.
 Attacking, he met the Seneschal
 Before he ever reached his kin,
 Splintering a lance upon him,
 Despite the shield, laying him low,
 Giving him such a mighty blow,
 Long he lay stunned, disarmed,
 Without the means to work harm.
 And then the two brothers attacked;
 With bare blades, they dealt no lack
 Of mighty blows, both together,
 But greater blows he doth deliver,

For every one of his compares
In power to any two of theirs.
Thus he defends himself so well
They fail to make their strength tell,
Until the Seneschal now recovered
Adds his weight to his two brothers';
And all three then make their stand,
Thus slowly gaining the upper hand.
The lion, watching Yvain defend,
No longer waits to aid his friend;
Yvain needs him, now or never;
While the ladies, gathered together,
Who are all devoted to Lunete,
Call upon God to help him yet,
Begging Him, most earnestly,
Not to grant those three victory,
Nor let Yvain be killed that day,
Who for her doth enter the fray.
The ladies aid him with their prayers,
The only weapons that are theirs.
And the lion assists also
Such that with its very first blow
It strikes so at the Seneschal,
Who has risen after his fall,
That links fly from his chain mail
Like loose straw blown in a gale;
With such force it bowls him over,
Tearing the flesh from his shoulder,
And all down his left flank beside.
Whatever it touches it tears aside,
So that his innards are laid bare;
While his brothers, vengeance dare.
NOW their numbers are both equal,
For the Seneschal's wound is mortal,
As he twists, and writhes, and claws
Through a wave of blood that pours,
In a crimson stream, from his body.
While he thus did suffer greatly,
The lion now attacked the brothers.
Though Yvain, to deter the creature,
Menaced it with threats and blows,
He failed to drive it backwards so.
And the lion doubtless knew,
Its master set no slight value
On its aid, but loved it the more;
So it attacked with greater force,
Till the brothers bent to its blows,
And it was wounded by its foes.
Yvain seeing the lion wounded,
Is pained to the heart, angered
By its treatment, and rightly so;
And in revenge strikes such blows

And presses them so hard that they
Are beaten back, and held at bay;
Till they are so weak defensively,
They throw themselves on his mercy;
Due most to the lion's fierce attack,
Which had taken them so aback,
Though the beast was sore dismayed,
Wounded all over, by their blades.
Nor for his part was my Lord Yvain
In any the less distress and pain,
With many a wound to his body.
Though for his own self his worry
Is less than for the wounded lion.
And now has he deliverance won
For the maiden, as he has wished,
And the lady has now dismissed
The charge against her, of her grace.
And those are burned in her place,
Who for her had built the pyre.
For tis right and just we require
Those who accuse the innocent
To receive the very punishment
That they themselves pronounce.
Now her joy doth Lunete announce,
Being reconciled with her mistress;
And they enjoy such happiness
As never did any two such before.
And all now offered to their lord,
While they lived, loyal service,
Without recognising him, that is.
Even the lady, she who had got
His heart, and yet knew him not,
Begged him to stay if he pleased
Until he was once more at ease,
And he and his lion recovered.
He replied: 'Lady, I could never
Remain a moment in this place,
Until I am no more in disgrace
And my lady free of her anger;
That alone can end my labour.'
'Indeed,' she said, 'that troubles me.
That lady must fail in courtesy,
Who shows anger toward you.
She should not close her door to
A knight who is so valorous,
Unless he has proven traitorous.'
'Lady' he said, 'though it hurts me,
What e'er she wishes pleases me;
But speak no more of the matter,
For the reason, or the crime rather,
I will say naught of, but to those
Who know how the affair arose.'

'Does any know of it but you two?'
'Yes, truly, lady.' 'Well, your name
Fair sir, now tell me that very same,
And then you are quite free to leave.'
'Quite free, lady? I must say nay,
For I owe more than I can pay.
Yet I ought not to hide, I own,
The name by which I may be known.
Word of the knight of the lion
You may hear, tis of me alone.
By that title I would be called.'
'By God, fair sir, I cannot recall
That I have e'er seen you before,
Nor heard this name of yours?'
'Lady, from that you may see,
It is not widely known indeed.'
The lady returned to her theme:
'Once more, if it doth not seem
Displeasing to you, please stay.'
'Lady, I'd dare not linger a day,
Unless I knew, of a certainty,
Her goodwill encompassed me.'
'Then may God grant, fair sir,
That all you endure and suffer,
He of His grace may turn to joy!'
'Lady, God hear, and thus employ
Such grace!' he said. Then silently:
'Lady, tis you that holds the key.
You possess though you know it not
The casket wherein my joy is locked.'

So I'll neglect it, and pass along
To the morrow when they did ride,
And journeyed on till they espied
The castle wherein King Arthur
Had lodged a fortnight or longer.
Now, the elder sister lodges there
Who has stolen her sister's share;
For she has kept close to the court,
Waiting her sister's advent, in short,
Who's on her way, and drawing near.
Yet the elder sister feels little fear,
Doubting the younger has on hand
Any knight who could withstand
The prowess of my Lord Gawain.
And only a day doth now remain,
Of the forty that were decreed;
And by law and justice, indeed
The inheritance is hers alone
And she can claim it as her own,
Once that certain day has passed.
And yet more might be done, at last,
Than she e'er believed or thought.
Humble are their lodgings, sought
Outside the castle, for the night,
Where none who know them might
Recognise them; if lodgings they
Take there within then many may,
And for that they do not care;
Their lodgings thus are mean and bare.
As morn is breaking they emerge,
But then with the dawn shadows merge,
Until the sun shines clear and bright.
I know not how many days might
Have passed since my Lord Gawain
Had vanished, and all would fain
Have news of him, all of the court,
Except she whose cause he sought
To defend, that is, the elder sister;
For she knew he had hidden near,
But three or four short leagues away.
When he returned, on that day,
None who knew him at court
Recognised him, as they ought,
For he was wearing strange armour.
Openly, thus, the elder sister
Presented him to all the court,
As one whom she had brought
To defend her cause though she
Had wronged her sister utterly.
She said to the king: 'Now, Sire
The time allotted has expired,
Tis almost noon, this is the day.'

And I, for witness it now you may,
 Am ready to maintain my rights.
 If my sister could produce a knight
 To fight for her then we should wait.
 But, God be thanked, she is too late,
 She neither sends word, nor is here.
 Tis plain, she will not now appear,
 And all her trouble was for naught,
 While I have my champion brought
 Prepared till this hour, at your sign,
 To prove my right to what is mine.
 I've proved it thus, without a fight.
 And I may now, as is my right
 Enjoy my inheritance in peace;
 And no account of its increase
 Henceforth to my sister give;
 And sad and wretched may she live.'
 But King Arthur who well knew
 That the lady great wrong did do,
 As disloyal to her younger sister,
 Said: 'It is the custom, my dear,
 In royal courts, i' faith, to wait
 While justice doth yet deliberate,
 Until the king decides the case.
 We'll grant her a little grace,
 For I think she may yet appear,
 And we shall see your sister here.'
 Before the king's speech was done,
 He beheld the Knight of the Lion,
 And saw the younger sister too.
 Alone, they advanced, these two,
 Having left the lion, out of sight,
 There, where they'd passed the night.
 THE king had the maid in view,
 And at once her face he knew,
 And he was filled with delight
 To see her there beside the knight;
 In his concern for what was right,
 Holding she was wronged quite.
 Full of joy, at seeing her near
 He called out to her, loud and clear:
 'God save you! Approach, fair maid!
 The elder heard him and, afraid,
 Turned about, and saw the younger,
 And the knight too, whom her sister
 Had brought, to aid and support her;
 And her face turned black as thunder.
 The maiden was welcomed, in short,
 And, before the king and his court,
 Cried: 'King, if my rightful claim
 Can by a knight be here maintained
 Then it shall be so by this knight;

And he my thanks doth earn outright,
 Whom I have brought to this affair,
 Though he hath business elsewhere,
 A knight so courteous and debonair;
 Yet he's taken such pity on me,
 He has set aside, as you can see,
 All other affairs for my own.
 Let courtesy and right be shown
 Now, by this lady, my sister dear,
 Whom I love with a love sincere,
 By yielding me what is my right,
 So betwixt us peace shine bright;
 For I ask of her naught that's hers.'
 'Nor do I ask aught of my sister's,'
 The elder said, 'for she has naught
 Nor shall; and naught is the import
 Of her words, and naught the gain.
 Now may she wither away in pain.'
 Then the younger sister, since she
 Was wise in the ways of courtesy,
 And was prudent too and charming,
 Replied: 'Grief to me it doth bring,
 That two such gentlemen should fight,
 On our behalf, to prove what's right.
 Though tis a small disagreement,
 I may not renounce my intent,
 For I am left in too great need;
 So I'd be grateful to you indeed
 If you would render me my share.'
 The elder sister replied: 'Whoe'er
 Would do so must surely be mad.
 May I with fire and flame be clad,
 Before I seek to improve your lot!
 The rivers will run boiling hot,
 The sun elect to shine at night,
 Before I will renounce this fight.'
 'God, and the right I claim in this,
 In which my trust both was and is,
 Always, until this present hour,
 May they both now lend their power
 To one whose kindness and pity
 Is offered thus in service to me;
 Though I know not who he may be,
 And he doth know no more of me!'
 ONCE their words were at an end,
 They led out the knights to defend
 Their two causes, amidst the court.
 And everyone a place there sought,
 In the way folk are accustomed to
 Whenever they've a wish to view
 A fine battle between two knights.
 But these two who are set to fight,

Who've shown love to one another,
 Have failed to recognise each other.
 Do they still love each other now?
 Both 'Yes,' and 'No', do I avow.
 And I will prove both to be true
 In revealing my reasons to you.
 In truth then my Lord Gawain
 As his companion loves Yvain,
 And Yvain him where'er he be;
 Even here if he knew 'twere he,
 He would now make much of him
 And he would give his life for him;
 As he would give his life, Gawain,
 Before harm came to Lord Yvain.
 Is that not Love, entire and fine?
 Yes, certainly. Is there no sign
 Of Hate being equally present?
 For one thing is indeed apparent,
 This day they'd both wish to devote
 To flying at one another's throat,
 Or in wounding the other so
 He the depths of shame might know.
 I'faith, tis wondrously revealed
 That in one heart may be concealed
 Faithful Love and mortal Hate.
 Lord, how in one dwelling-place
 Can things which are such contraries
 Reside, as twould appear do these?
 For in one dwelling, it seems to me
 There cannot lodge two contraries.
 Since they could not appear together
 In that dwelling, in any manner,
 Without some quarrel being aired
 If each knew the other was there.
 But as the body has several members,
 As lodgings have several chambers,
 Such might well be the case here:
 I think Love's chosen to disappear
 Into the depths of a hidden room,
 While Hate has chosen to assume
 A seat high up, above the scene,
 So as to be both heard and seen.
 For Hate now is mounted on high,
 And pricks and spurs so to outfly
 Love, with ease, as oft may prove,
 While Love indeed fails to move.
 Ah, Love! Where art thou now?
 Reveal yourself, regard the crowd
 That the enemy brings against you;
 Enemies makes of your friends too.
 For enemies are these two friends,
 Who love each other to holy ends,

With that love, nor false nor faint,
 Precious, worthy of many a saint.
 Here Love proves utterly blind,
 And Hate is sightless too we find,
 For if Love had recognised them,
 He would them have obliged them
 Never to attack each other
 Or do harm to one another.
 Thus, in this matter, Love is blind
 Discomfited, to error consigned;
 And those who are Love's by right,
 Love knows not in broad daylight.
 And e'en though Hate cannot state
 Why each the other doth so hate,
 Hate would see them both frustrate
 The other through such mortal hate.
 No man loves another, or could,
 Who'd do him harm, and draw blood,
 Seek his death, or see him shamed.
 How then? Would my Lord Yvain
 Kill his friend, my Lord Gawain?
 Yes, and he the other, the same.
 Would then his friend, my Lord Gawain
 With his own hands slay Yvain,
 Or do some worse thing instead?
 No, I swear not; as I have said,
 Neither would his true friend disarm,
 Nor bring him shame, nor do him harm,
 For aught with which God graces man,
 Or the Empire of Rome doth command.
 And yet I cannot help but lie,
 For one can plainly see, say I,
 That with lances thus they hover
 Ready to attack each other.
 And each would strike his friend
 And wound him though he defend,
 And work him woe without restraint.
 Gainst whom shall he lodge complaint?
 Who has the worst then of the fight,
 When conquered by the other knight?
 For if they now should come to blows
 The fear is great, I would suppose,
 That each will fight against his friend,
 Till one of them the fight shall end.
 Could Yvain claim, in all reason,
 If he is worsted, that tis treason;
 That he has been hurt or shamed
 By a man that he'd have named
 As a friend, one who has never
 Called him aught but that ever?
 Or if injury were done Gawain,
 Would he be right to complain,

He had therefore been betrayed,
If he were shamed in any way?
No, for he'd know not by whom.
Now, they grant each other room,
Prepared for their joint encounter.
At the first shock the lances shiver,
Though they are ashen and strong.
Neither uttered a word thereon,
Yet if they had exchanged a word,
Their meeting had proved absurd.
Neither lance nor sword, we know,
Would have dealt a single blow.
They'd have kissed and embraced,
Rather than each other have faced.
Yet as they face each other now
Their swords win naught, I vow;
Nor their helms nor their shields,
Which are dented as they yield;
While the keenness of each blade,
They blunt, the steel they abrade.
Many a harsh blow they pledge,
Not with the flat, with the edge,
And the pommels deal such blows
On the neck, and about the nose,
And on the cheeks and brow too,
That the skin is black and blue
For, beneath, the blood gathers.
And their chain-mail shatters,
While the shields are so unsound,
Beneath them dire harm is found.
So hard they labour, courting death,
They can scarcely catch their breath;
And so hotly they strive to win,
That every emerald and jacinth
That upon their helmets is inset,
Is crushed to shards at their onset;
While the two so pound away
With the pommels, both are dazed,
Almost braining one another.
Their eyes in their sockets glitter,
The heavy fists are firmly squared,
Solid the bones, and strong the nerves;
They strike each other about the face
As long as they can grip their blades,
Which offer them both good service,
While they wield them in their fists.
WHEN a long while they'd striven,
Till their helms were wholly riven;
And they with the steel had flailed
Fiercely enough to split their mail,
The shields too frail now to contest,
Both drew back a little, to rest;

To let the blood cool in their veins,
And so restore their breath again.
And yet they do not long delay,
But attack, strongly as they may,
More fiercely even than before;
And all confess they never saw
A pair of more courageous knights:
'It is no manner of game this fight;
Their cause each strives to assert,
And their worth and true deserts
Will ne'er be rendered completely.'
The two friends heard them, surely,
And knew that all spoke together
Of reconciling sister to sister,
Yet had failed to devise a way
To pacify the elder that day,
Nor placate her in any manner;
While the intent of the younger
Was but the king's word to obey,
Not contradict him in any way.
Yet the elder is so stubborn here
That even the queen, Guinevere,
And the lords also, and the king,
Most courteous in everything,
All side with the younger sister.
To the king requests are proffered,
That he, despite the elder sister,
Might grant title to the younger,
At least a third or a quarter part;
And might these two knights part
Who had displayed such courage;
For it would do the court damage
If one should now the other injure,
Or deprive him of any honour.
Yet now the king declares that he
Is unable to achieve a peace,
For the elder is such a creature
As desires not peace, by nature.
All this was fully understood
By the two knights who stood
Against each other there, while all
Marvelled at so equal a battle,
For none knew nor could attest
Which was worst, and which was best.
Even the two who are in the fight
Where pain wins honour as a knight,
Marvel now, and are taken aback,
That both prove equal in attack;
Such that each man wonders who
Is matched with him and doth pursue
Such fierce combat, while the light
Fades, and day draws on to night.

They have fought, and fight, so long.
That neither man waxes as strong,
Their bodies tire, the arms weary.
While warm blood, trickling slowly
From many a wound to the ground,
There beneath their mail runs down.
They are both in such distress,
No wonder if they wish to rest.
They feel no further urge to fight,
Partly because of the fall of night,
Partly through mutual respect,
Reasons that lead them to effect
A truce, and swear to keep the peace.
Yet, ere they leave the field, these
Two shall disclose their identities,
And affirm their love and sympathy.
MY Lord Yvain it was spoke first,
Yvain, the brave and courteous;
Yet his good friend knew him not
From his speech, since he had got
Such a deal of blows his blood
Was sluggish and, though he stood,
His speech was both low and faint,
His voice yet subject to constraint.
'Sir,' said he 'night doth approach,
I think nor blame nor reproach
Accrues to those parted by night.
But, for my part, I say, sir knight,
I admire you, and much respect you;
Never in my life have I so rued
A contest, so suffered in a fight,
Nor ever thought to see a knight
Whom I would so seek to know.
You grasp both how to land a blow
And how to employ your strength.
No knight I have fought at length
Has dealt me such blows as those.
Against my will, I took the blows
That I've received from you today.
My head felt every blow, I say.'
'By my faith,' said my Lord Gawain,
'I am no less mazed and faint
Than you are, but rather more so;
Twill please you I think to know
If I but tell you the simple truth,
Of what I lent you, in good sooth,
You have rendered full account,
Adding interest to that amount;
For you were readier to render it
Than I to receive the half of it.
But now, however that may be,
As you wish to know from me

By what name I may be called,
I'll not hide it from you at all;
Son of King Lot am I, Gawain.'
On hearing this, my Lord Yvain
Is sorely troubled and amazed,
And, by anger and sorrow mazed;
To the earth his sword he throws,
From which the blood yet flows,
And then his shattered shield also,
And down from his horse he goes,
Crying: 'Alas! What mischance!
How, through mutual ignorance,
We have battled with each other
Not recognising one another!
If I had known that it was you
I would never have fought with you;
Before e'er dealing a single blow
I'd have yielded, as you well know.'
'How so,' cries my Lord Gawain,
'Who art thou then?' 'I am Yvain,
Who loves you more than any man
In all the world doth love, or can.
For you have loved me always,
And honoured me, all my days.
And now, in this business too,
I'd make amends and honour you,
For I offer complete surrender.'
'So much to me you'd render?'
Said the noble Lord Gawain,
'Surely twould bring me shame,
To let you thus seek amends.
The honour is not mine, my friend,
But yours, to whom I thus resign it.
'Ah! Speak, fair sir, no more of it!
What you have said can never be;
For I can endure no more you see,
I am so wearied from the fight.'
'Surely, your wounds are but light,'
His friend and companion replied,
'While I'm sore overcome,' he sighed,
'And I offer that not in flattery,
For there's no stranger, equally,
To whom I would not say the same.
Rather than suffer further pain.'
So saying, Gawain descended
And to each other they extended
Their arms in friendly embrace,
Each swearing to the other's face
Twas himself who'd met defeat,
Their protestations incomplete
When the king and his knights
Joining them, to assess their plight,

And finding them joined in amity,
 Desired to know how this could be,
 And who these two knights were
 Who such mutual joy did aver.
 'Gentlemen,' said the king, 'tell me
 What has brought about such amity
 Between you both, this rare accord
 After the enmity and discord
 You have exhibited all day?'
 'Sire, your request I now obey,'
 Replied his nephew, Lord Gawain,
 'The cause of conflict and the pain
 That thus ensued, of that I'll tell,
 Since you attend us here as well,
 To hear of it, and know the truth.
 It is right to inform you, in sooth,
 That I, sire, your nephew, Gawain,
 Failed to recognise twas Yvain,
 My companion, fought with me,
 Till God was pleased, thankfully,
 To prompt him to ask my name.
 Once I replied, and he the same,
 We knew the other, but not until
 We both had fought to a standstill.
 Already we had fought for long,
 And if we had continued strong
 And fought on as furiously
 It would have gone most ill for me;
 He'd have slain me, upon my life,
 Given injustice caused this strife,
 And given also Yvain's prowess;
 Much better it is, I now confess,
 My friend defeats me than kills me.'
 Rising to this claim, and fiercely,
 My Lord Yvain replied, in one:
 'God aid me, my dear companion,
 You are in error in saying so.
 Let my Lord the King, now know,
 That I was defeated in the fight,
 And surrendered, as well I might.'
 'No, I.' 'No, I.' Thus they dispute.
 And both are so courteous, in truth,
 That each the honour and the crown
 Grants the other, and lays it down.
 Neither gives way to the other here,
 But strives to make King Arthur hear,
 And all the people gathered round,
 That defeated, he yields the ground.
 Yet, after indulging them, a little,
 The king ended the loving quarrel.
 For he indeed took much pleasure
 In what he heard, and the measure

Of these friends in warm embrace,
 Though while fighting face to face
 They had wounded each other too.
 'My lords,' said he 'twixt you two,
 Lies great affection, as can be seen
 By each conceding defeat, I mean;
 So place yourself now in my hands
 And I'll arrange, as I have planned,
 That in great honour you'll be held
 And I'll be praised by all the world.'
 Then they both swore, most willingly,
 To obey his wish, and loyally
 Accept all that he chose to say.
 And then the king said, that today
 He'd resolve the cause, and justly.
 'Where now,' he asked, 'is that lady
 Who forcibly, by her command,
 Has seized her own sister's land?'
 'Sire,' cried the elder, 'here I am.'
 'Are you there? Well then, advance,
 You who claimed the inheritance.
 For some time now have I known
 That you your sister's right disown,
 But she'll no longer be denied,
 For you the evidence supplied;
 You must now resign her share.'
 'Ah, sire,' she answered, 'if I there
 Spoke a thought, unwise, absurd,
 Do not now take me at my word.
 For God's sake, do not harm me!
 You are the king, and should be
 Wary of every wrong and error.'
 'And that is why I wish to render
 To your sister what is her right;
 Against the wrong I'll ever fight,'
 Said the king, 'You will have heard
 How both your champion and hers
 Have left the matter in my hands.
 You'll not have what you demand.
 For its injustice is obvious.
 Each claims that his was the loss,
 Seeking so to honour the other.
 But upon that I will not linger,
 Since the judgement lies with me.
 Either you obey me promptly,
 In regard to what I pronounce,
 Willingly, or I shall announce
 My nephew it was that met defeat.
 That would all your cause unseat;
 Yet I would do so, against my will.'
 He would never so have done, still
 He said it to see whether she would

In fear of him, perform the good,
And render to her sister, at once,
Her share of the inheritance;
For the king quite clearly saw
That she would surrender naught,
Despite aught that he might say
Unless force or fear won the day.
And due to her doubt and fear
She replied: 'Sire, it is clear,
I must yield to you, for my part,
Though indeed it grieves my heart.
But I will do what yet grieves me,
My sister shall have what she seeks,
As her share; and I will advance
As guarantor of her inheritance,
Your own self, to reassure her.'
'Then, swiftly, restore it to her,'
Said the king, 'and let her now stand
As your vassal, and from your hand
Receive her share, and then may you
Love her, and she to you prove true,
As her lady and her sister.'
Thus the king resolved the matter,
While the younger received her share
And thanked the king for all his care.