

Aucassin and Nicolette



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Introduction

The manuscript, in medieval French, of the ‘*chantefable*’ of *Aucassin* is late thirteenth century. The author is unknown. The piece was clearly intended for acting out, and the manuscript itself contains musical phrases in trochaic mode, written in troubadour style showing notes and intervals but not rhythm.

Readers interested in further comment on *Aucassin*, might enjoy reading Walter Pater’s essay of 1872 in his collection ‘*The Renaissance*’ entitled ‘*Two Early French Stories*’. He highlights, in beautiful prose, the subversive note of individuality which flows through *Aucassin* and which the letters of Heloise, the Tristan and Iseult legend, and Troubadour poetry all share, perhaps deriving from Provence, and Arabic influence, perhaps also from ‘Celtic’ oral tradition, perhaps to a great degree original. It is the note of secular life and love, and resistance to convention, that surfaces many times in France in the Middle

Ages, is muted somewhat by the ruthless Albigensian Crusades against Provence, but perhaps fuels the vigour of the later Silver Renaissance, and leads on to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

Regardless of the value of that view, *Aucassin*, and Pater's '*The Renaissance*' in its entirety, are well worth reading in their own right, for their sweet music.

It Is Of Aucassin and Nicolette

I.

Who would like to hear a song,
of a tale of ancient times,
of two little children, fair,
Nicolette and Aucassin,
of the great pains they endured,
of the deeds that he achieved,
for his love and her bright face,
gentle the song, sweet to speak
well founded, and of courtesy.
There is no one so dismayed,
so sad, or in such evil state,
ill with illnesses so deep,
who'll not be healed if they hear,
and be renewed again by joy,
it is so sweet.

II. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

That the Count Bougars de Valence made a war
on the Count Garin de Beaucaire so great so

marvellous and so mortal that not a single day dawned that he was not at the gates, and the walls, and the barriers of the town with a hundred knights and ten thousand soldiers on foot and on horse, so that he burned his land and devastated his country and killed his men.

The Count Garin de Beaucaire was old and frail: he had outlived his time. He had no heir, no son or daughter, except one young boy: he was such as I will tell you.

The young man had the name of Aucassin. He was fair and elegant and tall and well formed of leg and foot and body and arms: he had blonde and tightly curling hair, and light laughing eyes and a clear oval face and a high well-shaped nose. And he was so gifted with good qualities that he had nothing ill or lacking good in him: but he was so seized by Love, that conquers all, that he did not wish to be a knight, or take up weapons, or go to the jousts, or do anything he should.

His father and mother said to him:

“Son, now take up your weapons, and mount your horse, to defend your land, and aid your men: if they see you among them, they’ll better

defend their bodies and their possessions and your land and mine.”

Father, said Aucassin, what are you saying now? May God give me nothing I ask of him when I am a knight, neither to mount a horse, nor to go to charge and fight, there where I may strike a knight or others me, if you do not give me Nicolette, my sweet love, I love so much.

Son, said his father, this cannot be. Let Nicolette be, for she is a prisoner who arrived from a foreign land, the Viscount of this town bought her from the Saracens, brought her to this town, raised her and baptised her and made her his godchild, and will give her one of these days to some bachelor who will earn his bread for her with honour: you have nothing to do with it. And if you wish for a wife, I will give you the daughter of a king or a count. There is no man so rich in France that you shall not have his daughter if you wish.

Well! Father, said Aucassin, now where is there such high honour on earth such as Nicolette my sweetest friend has, that she might not be well placed there. If she were Empress of Constantinople or Germany, or Queen of France

or England, she would be placed low enough there, she is so noble and courteous and debonair, and gifted with all good qualities.”

III. NOW THEY SING.

Aucassin was from Beaucaire,
from a castle fine to dwell in.
From Nicole, the beautiful,
no man could deflect him,
so his father never ceased
nor his mother their complaint:
“Come! Fool, what do you do?
Nicolette is gracious, kind?
She, surrendered from Carthage,
purchased from a Saracen:
since it’s marriage that you wish,
take a wife of higher station.
Mother, that I could not do:
Nicolette is debonair:
her limbs elegant, her face,
her beauty frees my heart,
it is right that I love her,
who is so sweet.

IV. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

When the Count Garin de Beaucaire found that
he could not deflect Aucassin his son from love

of Nicolette, he went to the Viscount of the town who was his man, and said to him:

“Sir Count, now send away your godchild Nicolette! For that land is accursed from which she came to this country! Since through her I will lose Aucassin, who will not become a knight, nor do what he should do: and know truly that if I had her, I would burn her in the fire, and you likewise should have great fear for yourself.

Sir, said the Viscount, it pains me that he goes and comes and speaks with her. I have bought her with my coins, so have I raised her and baptised her and made her my godchild, and will give her to some bachelor who will earn his bread for her with honour: your son Aucassin has nothing to do with this. But since this is your will and your pleasure, I will send her to such a land and such a country that he will never set eyes on her again.

Take care! Said the Count Garin: great evil may come to you.”

They parted.

And the Viscount was an immensely rich man, having a fine palace beside a garden. He placed

Nicolette in a chamber in an upper floor and with an old woman for society and company, and he placed there bread and meat and wine and whatever they had need of: then he made the door fast so that none could enter or leave, except that there was a window onto the garden, quite small, through which a little air came.

V. NOW THEY SING.

Nicole is fast in prison
in a vaulted chamber there
fashioned with the greatest care
marvellously painted.
There the young girl leaned
on the marble window-sill:
she had hair of gold
and eyebrows sweetly made,
clear her oval face:
none more lovely seen.
She gazed through the garden
and saw the open rose,
and the birds that called,
then the orphan cried:
“Ah me! Alas, a captive!
Why am I in prison placed?
Aucassin, noble sire,
I am your friend indeed,
and you do not hate me:
for you I’m in prison placed
in this vaulted chamber
where I lead so harsh a life:
but, through God, Mary’s son,

I shall not be here for long,
if that I can achieve.”

VI. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

Nicolette was in prison, as you have heard and understood, in that chamber. The cry and the news went through all that land and all that country that Nicolette was lost: some said she had fled the land, and some that Count Garin de Beaucaire had murdered her. Whoever had joy in it, Aucassin had no pleasure in it, so he went to the Viscount of the town, and said to him: “Sir Viscount, what have you done with Nicolette my sweetest friend, the thing in all the world I love the most? Have you snatched her away and stolen her from me? Know truly, if I die of it, vengeance will be demanded of you: and that would only be just, since you have slain me with your two hands, for you have stolen the thing in this world I most love.

Noble sir, said the Viscount, leave all that. Nicolette is a prisoner that I brought from a foreign country, I bought her with my wealth from the Saracens, so have I raised her and baptised her and made her my godchild, so have

I nourished her, and will give her one of these days to some bachelor who will earn his bread for her with honour: you have nothing to do with this. Take the daughter of a king or a count instead. Besides, what do you think you would have gained, if you had made her your mistress and taken her to your bed? Little indeed would you have won there, since your soul would be in Hell for all the days of this world, so that you might never enter Paradise.

What have I to do with Paradise? I don't wish to enter, but to have Nicolette my sweetest friend that I love so much: for only those people I will tell you of go to Paradise. There go the old priests and the old cripples and the limbless ones who squat all day and night in front of those altars and in those ancient crypts, and those in their old worn cloaks and their old tattered habits, whoever are naked and barefoot and shoeless, whoever are dying of hunger and thirst and cold and misery: they go to Paradise: with them I have nothing to do. But to Hell I will go, since to Hell the fine scholars go, and the lovely knights who are slain in the jousts and in the great wars, and the good soldier and the noble

man: with them I would go: and there go the lovely courteous ladies who have two or three lovers as well as their lords, and there go the gold and the silver and ermine and miniver, and there go the harpers and singers and kings of this world: I will go with them, so that I have Nicolette my sweetest love with me.

Surely, said the Viscount, you speak in vain, since you will never see her again: and if you spoke to her and your father knew of it, he would burn both her and me in the one fire, and you likewise should have great fear for yourself. This pains me," said Aucassin. So, sadly, he left the Viscount.

VII. NOW THEY SING.

Aucassin went on his way
all sad and dismayed:
none could comfort him
about his love, her bright face,
none give him good counsel.
Towards the palace he is gone:
he climbs the stairway there,
enters his chamber,
there he begins to weep
and exhibit his great grief
and mourn for his love.
“Nicolette, sweet to stay,
sweet to come and sweet to go,
sweet to please and sweet of speech,
sweet to laugh and sweet to play,
sweet to kiss, sweet to hold,
I am so in thrall to you
and taken with such pain
I cannot think to stay alive,
sweet sister, friend.

VIII. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

While Aucassin was in his chamber and was lamenting his love Nicolette, the Count Bougars de Valence, who wished to complete his campaign, did not neglect it, but had called up his men, and drew near the castle to storm it. And the cry arose and the noise, and the knights and the soldiers armed themselves and ran to the gates and walls to defend the castle, and the citizens climbed to the battlements, hurling down stones and sharpened stakes.

Meanwhile the assault was fierce and violent, and the Count Garin de Beaucaire came to the chamber where Aucassin was showing his grief and lamenting Nicolette his sweetest friend that he so loved.

“Ah! Son, he said, how cowardly and miserable you are, seeing that they assault your castle so much the more easily and more fiercely: and know, if you lose it, that you are destitute. Son, take up your weapons and mount your horse and defend your land and aid your men and go to the combat: you need strike no man nor others strike you, if you go among them, they will defend their possessions and their bodies and your land

and mine: and you are so big and so strong that you will do well, and do what is right.

Father, said Aucassin, what are you saying now? May God give me nothing I ask of him when I am a knight, neither to mount a horse, nor to go to charge and fight, there where I may strike a knight or others me, if you do not give me Nicolette, my sweet love, I love so much.

Son, said his father, this cannot be: I had rather endure being destitute and lose everything I have than that you should have her as mistress or wife."

He turned away, and when Aucassin saw that he was going, he called to him:

"Father, said Aucassin, come now: I will make a true bargain.

And what is that, noble son?

I will take up arms, I will go to the combat, on such a condition as this, if God delivers me safe and sound, that you allow me to see my sweet friend Nicolette so that I may speak two words or three to her and that I may kiss her one single time.

I agree," said his father.

He promised it and Aucassin was content.

IX. NOW THEY SING.

Aucassin agreed the kiss
he would have on his return:
for a hundred thousand marks
would not make one so content.
Demanding his prized gear,
his man has readied him:
he donned a coat of double mail
and laced his helmet on his head,
girt on his gold-hilted sword,
mounted on his war-horse then
took the small shield and the lance:
glanced down at his two feet,
in the stirrups seated firm:
with his aspect truly pleased.
Thinking of his love,
he spurred his war-horse on:
it galloped most willingly:
straight to the gate he went
to the mêlée.

X. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

Aucassin was armed and on his horse, as you
have heard and understood.

God! How the shield was seated about his neck and the helm on his head and the sheath of his sword on his left thigh! And the young man was tall and strong and noble and elegant and well made, and the horse on which he sat was swift and lively, and the young man had guided him well through the gate.

Now do not believe that he thought to capture oxen or cattle or goats nor to strike others or others strike him. Not at all! He never considered it: on the contrary he thought so much of his sweet friend Nicolette that he forgot the reins and what he should be doing: and the horse that had felt the spurs carried him amongst the press, launching him deep among his enemies: and they grasped him with their hands from every side, so that he was taken, and despoiled of shield and lance, and they led him away a prisoner still living, and went along now questioning by what death he should die.

And when Aucassin heard them:

“Ah! God, he said, sweet creature! Are these are my mortal enemies who take me from here and who will strike off my head? And when my head shall have been cut off, I may not speak to

Nicolette my sweet friend who I so love. Yet I still have a good sword and I sit on a well-rested horse: if I do not defend myself for her sake let God never aid her if she loves me not more!”

The young man was tall and strong, and the horse he sat was fiery: and he put hand to sword, and began to strike out to right and left and cut through helmet and nosepiece and gauntlet and arm and made a massacre around him, like a wild boar when the dogs attack it in the forest, and such that he threw ten knights to the ground and wounded seven and shot living from the press and rode back at the gallop, sword in hand. The Count Bougars de Valence heard tell that they were hanging Aucassin his enemy, so he came there: and Aucassin did not recognise him: he held his sword in his hand, and struck him on the helm so that he broke his head open. He was so dazed that he fell to the ground: and Aucassin grasped his hand and took him and led him captive by the nosepiece of his helmet and delivered him up to his father.

“Father, said Aucassin, see here is your enemy who has so warred on you and done you wrong:

the war has lasted twenty years now, nor could anyone end it.

Noble son, said the father, you should do as you have begun, not things dreamed of in folly.

Father, said Aucassin, don't go lecturing me, but fulfil my bargain for me.

Bah! What bargain, noble son?

What! Father, have you forgotten it? By my head! Whoever forgets it, I will not forget, I hold it so in my heart. Did you not make a bargain with me, when I took up arms and went into battle, that if God delivered me safe and sound, that you would allow me to see my sweet friend Nicolette so that I might speak two words or three to her. And you agreed that I might kiss her one single time. And I wish you to fulfil it for me.

I? Said his father: now God never aid me, if I hold to that bargain: and if she were here now I would burn her in the fire, and you likewise should have great fear for yourself.

Is that the last of it? Said Aucassin.

So help me God, said his father, yes.

Truly, said Aucassin, I am greatly saddened when a man of your age lies.

Count of Valence, said Aucassin, I have taken you prisoner.

Sir, indeed, said the Count.

Give me your hand, said Aucassin.

Sir, willingly." He placed his hand in his.

"Promise me this, said Aucassin, that on no day that you have life will you cease to cause my father all the harm and trouble that you can, against his person and his possessions.

Sir, by God, he said, do not make fun of me: but set a ransom for me: you will not ask of me gold or silver, war-horse or palfrey, ermin or miniver, hound or hawk, that I will not pay you.

How is this? Said Aucassin: do you not understand that I have taken you prisoner?

Sir, yes, said the Count Bougars.

Then may God aid me not, said Aucassin, if I do not send your head flying if and you do not swear this.

In God's name! He said, I will swear to whatever pleases you."

He promised him: and Aucassin made him mount a horse, and he mounted another, and conducted him to the best of his ability to safety.

XI. NOW THEY SING.

Now when Count Garin knew
of his child Aucassin
that he would not forsake
Nicolette, the fair of face,
he placed him in a cell
in a vault underground
made of marble grey and hard.
When Aucassin came there
he was sad, as none before:
taken so with his grief
as you now can hear:
“Nicolette, lily flower,
sweet friend fair of face,
you are sweeter than the grape
or the sop soaked in the cup.
One day a pilgrim came,
he was born in Limousin,
sick with delusions he,
lying in a bed,
in the last distress,
sick with great sickness:
you passed before his bed,

lifted your dress's train,
and the ermine-bordered hem,
the white linen smock,
so as to show your limbs:
the pilgrim he was cured
sound and sane, as none before:
raised himself from his bed,
returned to his own country
sane and sound and healed.
Sweet friend, lily flower,
sweet to go and sweet to come,
sweet to play and sweet to laugh,
sweet of speech and sweet delight,
tender kiss and tender touch,
no one cannot love you.
I'm a prisoner for you
in a vault underground
where I make grievous moan:
and now I must die
for you, my love.”

XII. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

Aucassin was placed in prison, as you have heard and understood, and Nicolette for her part

was in her chamber. It was summertime, the month of May when days are warm, long and bright, and the nights calm and serene. Nicolette lay in her bed one night, and saw the moon shining brightly through her window and heard the nightingale singing in the garden, and she thought of Aucassin her friend that she loved so much. She began to reflect on the Count Garin de Beaucaire who hated her like death: and she thought she should stay there no longer, lest she be denounced and the Count Garin knowing of it, he should make her die some evil death. She sensed that the old woman who was with her slept: she got up, she put on a very fine tunic of silk cloth that she had, and took her sheets and towels, and tied them to one another, and made as long a rope as she could, and tied it to a window-column: and she climbed down into the garden, and took her skirt in her hands, one before and one behind, and lifted them from the dew that she saw thick on the grass, and she went down the garden.

She had blonde and tightly curling hair, and light laughing eyes and an oval face and a high well-shaped nose, and her lips were redder than the

cherry or the rose in summertime, and her teeth white and neat: and she had firm little breasts that lifted her dress as if they were two ripe nuts: and she was so slim in the flanks that you could have enclosed her in your two hands: and the flowers of the daisies that the toes of her feet crushed, that lay beneath the pressure of her feet above, were quite dark against her feet and legs, so white was the young girl.

She came to the garden door, and opened it, and went out among the streets of Beaucaire keeping to the shadows, since the moon shone very brightly, and went along till she came to the tower where her lover was. The tower was cracked here and there, and she huddled by one of the pillars, and wrapped herself in her mantle, and she put her face against a crevice in the tower, that was old and venerable, and heard Aucassin who inside there wept and uttered words of deep grief and lamented his sweet friend whom he loved so much. And when she had listened enough, she began to speak.

XIII. NOW THEY SING.

Nicolette, the bright of face,
leaned against the pillar there,
heard Aucassin in tears
and lamenting his true love:
then she spoke, told her thoughts:
“Aucassin, noble, brave,
true young man of honour,
what is this sadness for,
these laments and tears,
when you cannot have me?
Since your father hates me
both your parents truly.
For you I’ll cross the sea,
and seek another kingdom.”
She cut a lock from her hair,
pushed it down inside.
Aucassin, the noble, took it,
and honouring it deeply,
he kissed it and took it,
and placed it in his breast:
and began to weep again,
all for his love.

XIV. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

When Aucassin heard Nicolette say that she wished to go to another country, he had only grief within him.

“Sweet, lovely friend, he said, do not leave me, for then I would have my death of you: and the first man who saw you if he could he would take you also and place you in his bed, and make you his mistress. And after you have slept in some man’s bed, if it is not mine, do not think that I will hesitate to find a dagger with which to pierce my heart and kill myself. No, look, I would not hesitate: but I would run until I saw a wall or a grey rock, and strike my head so hard against it that I would make my eyes start from my head, and dash out all my brains: I would still prefer to die that kind of death than to know that you were sleeping in some man’s bed, if it were not mine.

Ah! She said, I do not think you love me as much as you tell me: but I love you more than you do me.

Well! Said Aucassin, fair sweet friend, it cannot be that you love me as much as I do you. Woman cannot love man as man does woman: for a woman’s love is in her eyes and in the tips

of her breasts and in the toes on her feet: but a man's love is planted in his heart, from which it cannot pass."

There where Aucassin and Nicolette spoke together, and the town watch patrolled, was all one street: they carried swords beneath their capes, for the Count Garin had ordered them to kill her if they found her. And the watchman who was in the tower saw them coming, and heard them going along talking of Nicolette and that they threatened her with death.

"God! He said, how great the shame of this lovely young girl's death, if they kill her! And it would be a great charity, if I could tell her, so that they do not realise, and she takes care: for if they kill her, then Aucassin my noble youth would then die, whose death would bring great shame."

XV. NOW THEY SING.

The watchman was a man of worth,
valiant, courteous, and wise:
he began to sing a song
that was sweet and beautiful.
"Young girl of noble heart,

of person elegant and nice,
with your gleaming golden hair,
eyes so light, and laughing face:
easily in your look one sees
that you to your lover speak
who is fit to die for you.
I will say and you must hear:
from the traitors guard yourself
they who come to seek you here,
naked swords beneath their capes:
they are threatening you indeed,
they will quickly do you ill,
you must take care.”

XVI. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

“Ah! Said Nicolette, may the souls of your father and your mother be in blessed repose, since you have spoken to me now so nobly and courteously. If God pleases, I will protect myself, and God protect me!”

She drew her cloak about her in the shadow of the pillar, until they had passed by: and she said farewell to Aucassin, and went along until she came to the wall of the castle. The wall was broken and had been repaired with a hurdle, and

she climbed over, and carried on until she was between the wall and the moat: and looking down she saw the moat was very steep and deep, and she was filled with fear.

“Ah! God, she said, sweet creature! If I should allow myself to fall I will break my neck, and if I stay here, I shall be taken tomorrow, and they will burn me in the fire. Yet it would be better to die here than that all the people should view me tomorrow as a spectacle.”

She crossed her brow, and let herself slide down into the moat, and when she came to the bottom, her lovely feet and her lovely hands that had never thought they could be wounded were bruised and grazed and the blood ran freely from them in a dozen places, and yet she did not feel either pain or grief because of the great fear she had. And if she had difficulty in entering, she had still more in leaving. She thought to herself that it was no good waiting, and found a sharpened stake that those inside had hurled down in defending the castle, and cut out one step after another, and climbed with great effort until she was out. Now the forest was two crossbow shots away, extending thirty good

leagues in length and breadth, and it contained wild beasts and snakes: she feared to enter it lest they might kill her, and yet she knew that if the watch found here there, they would take her back to the town to be burnt.

XVII. NOW THEY SING.

Nicolette, the bright of face
climbed from out the moat,
and then she began to grieve
and called out to Jesus:
“Father, king of majesty,
I know not where to go:
if I enter the dense wood
I’ll be eaten by a wolf
a lion or a wild boar,
of which there are so many:
yet if I wait for break of day,
someone may find me here
fires will be set alight
where my body will be burnt:
but, by the God of majesty,
still I would rather choose
to be eaten by a wolf
a lion or a wild boar,
than to try the city:
I will not go.”

XVIII. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

Nicolette grieved greatly, as you have heard: she commended herself to God, and went on until she came to the forest. She did not dare enter in deeply because of the wild beasts and the snakes, and she hid in a thick bush: and sleep took her, and she slept until six in the morning of the following day, when the shepherds issued from the town and drove their beasts between the wood and the river, and led them to a place by a beautiful spring at the edge of the forest, spread out a cloak, and set their bread out on it. While they ate, Nicolette woke to the cries of the birds and the shepherds, and hurried to them.

“Good children, she said, God aid you! God bless you! Said one who was more forthcoming than the others.

Good children, she said, do you know Aucassin, the son of the Count Garin de Beaucaire?

Yes, we know him well.

May God aid you, good children, she said, tell him that there is a creature in this forest that he should come hunting, and if he can take it, he should not give away a limb of it for a hundred gold marks, nor for five hundred, not for anything he has.”

And they gazed at her, and she looked so beautiful that they were amazed.

Will I tell him? Said he who was more forthcoming than the others: to the devil with him who speaks of it now, or who tells him! It's dreams you talk of, there is no such valuable creature in the forest, no deer, or lion, or wild boar, whose limbs are worth more than two or three deniers at the most, and you speak of great value. To the devil with him who believes you. You are a fairy and we do not care for your company, but take your way.

Ah! Good child, she said, do so. The creature is such medicine that Aucassin will be cured of his malady: and I have five sous here in my purse: take them and tell him: and within three days let him come to the chase, and if he finds nothing in three days, let him never be cured of his wound. By my faith, he said, we will take the deniers, and if he comes here we will tell him, but we will not go and seek him.

As God will! She said.

She said farewell to the shepherds and went on.

XIX. NOW THEY SING.

Nicolette, the bright of face
parted from the shepherds then,
and she took her way
deep among the leafy wood
following an ancient path,
till she came to a place
where seven tracks diverged
that ran through the land.
Then she bethought herself
that she would prove her friend
if he loved her as he said.
She took the lily flowers
and the grasses of the fields,
and the leaves of trees too,
she made a dainty lodge,
no one would ever see.
Swore to God who does not lie
if Aucassin came by
and did not for love of her
rest there for a little while
she'd no longer be his friend,
nor he love her.

XX. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

Nicolette had made the lodge, as you have heard and understood, very pretty and very dainty, and had covered it well front and back with flowers and leaves, and she placed herself near the lodge in a thick bush to see what Aucassin would do.

And the cry and the news went through all that land and all that country that Nicolette was lost: some said she had fled the land, and some that Count Garin de Beaucaire had murdered her. Whoever had joy in it, Aucassin had no pleasure in it. And the Count Garin his father brought him from the prison, and invited the knights of the land and the ladies, and said he would hold a rich feast, by which he thought to console Aucassin his son.

When the feast was at its height, Aucassin was leaning on a balustrade all sad and downcast: whoever lead the joy, Aucassin had no desire for them, since he saw nothing that he loved. One knight looked at him, and came to him, and called to him:

“Aucassin, he said, I have been sick of that same malady you have. I will give you good counsel, if you wish to hear me.

Sir, said Aucassin, many thanks: I would value having good counsel.

Mount your horse, he said, go and amuse yourself in the lengths of the forest: and see the flowers and the herbs, and hear the birds sing: perhaps you will hear such words as will make you better.

Sir, said Aucassin, many thanks: so I will do.”

He stole from the room, descended the stairs, and came to the stable where his horses were: he put on the saddle and bridle, set his foot in the stirrup, and rode till he came to the fount, and found the shepherds at three in the afternoon: they had spread a cloak on the grass, and were eating their bread and creating much loud mirth.

XXI. NOW THEY SING.

Now the shepherds all were
gathered
Martin and Esmeret,
Frulin and Johan,
Robin and Aubriet.
One said: “Good companions,
God help Aucassin,
by my faith, that fine young man :
and the girl in the tunic
who has hair that’s blonde,
bright of face, and clear of eye,
who gave us the deniers
with which we’ll buy cakes,
knives and sheathes
flutes and horns
clubs and pipes,
God make him well!

XXII. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

When Aucassin heard the shepherds, he thought
of Nicolette his sweetest friend who he so loved,
and so considered that she had been there: and

he pricked his horse with the spurs, and came to the shepherds.

Good children, God aid you!

God bless you! Said he who was more forthcoming than the others.

Good children, he said, repeat the song you sang just now.

We will not tell it, said he who was more forthcoming than the others.

To the devil with him who sings it for you, noble sir!

Good children, said Aucassin, do you not know me?

Yes we know well you are Aucassin our young lord, but we are not yours, we are the Count's.

Good children, do so, I beg you.

Oh, God's heart! He said: why should I sing for you, if it does not please me, when there is no rich man in this country, save the presence of Count Garin, if he found my oxen and cattle and ewes in his pastures or his wheat, that I wouldn't put out his eyes for his audacity in having dared to chase them? And why should I sing for you if it does not please me?

God aid you, good children, do so: and take ten sous that I have in this purse.

Sir, we will take the deniers, but I will not sing it you since I swore not: but I will recount it to you if you wish.

By God, said Aucassin, I'd prefer it recounted than not at all.

Sir, we were here sometime between six and nine this morning, and ate our bread by this fount, as we are doing now, and a girl came by, the loveliest thing in the world, so that we doubted whether or not she was a fairy, and she brightened all our wood: and she gave us something of hers so that we made a bargain, if you came here, we were to tell you to go hunting in this forest, where there is a creature which if you could take her you would not give away one of her limbs for five hundred silver marks, nor for anything you had: for the creature has such medicine, that if you can take her, you shall be cured of your malady: and within three days you must have taken her, and if you have not taken her, you will never see her again. Now hunt if you wish, or if you wish let it go, for I have acquitted myself towards her.

Good child, said Aucassin, you have said enough, and may God let me find her!"

XXIII. NOW THEY SING.

Aucassin heard the words
of his tender-hearted friend,
they went deep inside his heart.
Left the shepherds in his haste,
entered in the deepest wood:
made his charger travel fast:
galloping, carrying him.
Now he spoke these few words:
“Nicolette, of tender heart,
for you I enter in this wood:
I do not chase the deer, the boar,
but follow the trails for you.
Your clear eyes and tender heart,
your sweet smile and your soft
words
have wounded my heart to death.
If God please, that Father strong,
I will see you before long,
sister, sweet friend.

XXIV. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

Aucassin rode through the forest from place to place and the charger carried him speedily. Don't imagine the brambles and thorns spared him. Not at all! On the contrary they tore his clothes so that he had trouble tying them onto what was left whole, and the blood poured from his arms and sides and legs in thirty or forty places, so that behind the young man you could have followed the drops of blood that fell to the grass. But he thought so much on Nicolette his sweet friend, that he felt no pain or grief: and he went all day through the forest like this but heard no news of her: and when he saw that evening was falling, he began to weep because he had not found her.

He rode all along a grassy way, looking before him in the midst of the way, and saw a young man such as I will tell you of. He was tall and strange and ugly and dreadful: he had a great hairy head blacker than charcoal, and was more than a plain hand's width between his eyes, and had huge cheeks, and an enormous flat nose and great large nostrils and thick lips redder than steak and huge teeth yellow and ugly: and he was shod with shoes and leggings of ox-hide

tied with lime-tree bark to just behind the knee, and he was covered with a two-sided cloak, and was leaning on a huge club.

Aucassin hurried towards him, and was sorely afraid when he regarded him.

Noble brother, God aid you!

God bless you! He said.

As God aids you, what do you here?

What is that to you? He said.

Nothing, said Aucassin: I asked it for no good reason.

But why do you weep, he said, and grieve like this?

Surely, if I were as rich a man as you are, all the world could not make me weep.

Bah! Do you know me? Said Aucassin.

Yes, I know well that you are Aucassin, the Count's son, and if you will tell me why you weep I will tell you what I am doing here.

Surely, said Aucassin, I will tell you most willingly: I came this morning to hunt in the forest, and I had a white greyhound, the most handsome of this age, and I have lost him: for that I weep.

Hear! He said, by the heart our Lord had in his breast! How you weep for a stinking hound? The devil take him who ever esteems you more, when there is not a rich man in this land who if your father demanded ten or twenty or thirty of him, would not give them willingly and be content. But I am forced to weep and be sad.

And why you, brother?

Sir, I will tell you. I was hired by a rich farmer to pull his plough, with the four oxen I had. Now three days ago I had a great misfortune, so that I lost Roget the best of my bullocks, the best at the plough: and I have been looking for him, and have neither eaten nor drunk these three days past: and I dare not go to town, since they'll put me in prison, since I have nothing with which to repay: of all I had in the world I have no more than you see on my back. I have an unfortunate mother, who had no more than a miserable mattress, they have taken it from under her back, and she sleeps on plain straw, and it pains me much more than about myself: for possessions come and go: if I've lost them today, I will gain them another time, and I'll pay for my ox when I can, I won't weep about that. And you weep for

a filthy hound? Devil take him who ever esteems you!

Surely, you are a great comfort, noble brother: may you be blessed! And what was the value of your bullock?"

Sir, they asked twenty sous of me: I can't get it reduced by a half-denier.

Now take twenty I have in my purse, said Aucassin, and pay for your ox.

Sir, he said, great thanks, and may God let you find what you seek!"

He parted from him: Aucassin rode off. The night was lovely and calm, and he went along till he came (...*to a place where seven tracks diverged that ran through the land, where Nicolette had made her lodge, very pretty and very dainty, and had covered it well...*) inside and outside and front and back with flowers, and it was so lovely it could not be more so. When Aucassin saw it, he stopped dead, and the rays of the moon shone into it.

"Ah! God, said Aucassin, Nicolette my sweet friend was here, and she made this with her lovely hands: for the sweetness of it and for love I will dismount and rest here this night long."

He took his foot from the stirrup to dismount, and the war-horse was big and tall: he was thinking so much of Nicolette his sweetest friend that he fell so heavily on a stone that his shoulder sprang from its place. He felt himself to be badly hurt, but he forced himself as well as he could to fasten his horse, with his other hand, to a thorn, and turned himself on his side until he got into the lodge on his back: and he looked through a hole in the lodge and saw the stars in the sky, and saw one brighter than the others, and began to say:

XXV. NOW THEY SING.

Little star, I see you,
whom the moon draws to herself:
Nicolette is with you,
my little friend with golden hair.
I think God wished to have her
for the (...*brightness of her eyes..*

.....
.....
.....)

whatever came of falling back,
from being on high with you:
I would clasp you tight.
Though I were a king's son,
you would suit me well,
sister, sweet friend.”

XXVI. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

When Nicolette heard Aucassin, she came to him, for she was not far away: she entered the lodge, and threw her arms around his neck, and kissed and embraced him.

“Sweet noble friend, it is well I have found you!

And you, sweet lovely friend, well it is I find you!”

They held each other and embraced, and their joy was lovely.

“Ah! Sweet friend, said Aucassin, I hurt my shoulder greatly just now, and yet I feel neither pain nor grief, since I have you.”

She felt him everywhere and found that he had his shoulder out of joint: she massaged it so with her white hands and pulled on it, as God willed who loves lovers, that it fell back in place: and then she took flowers, and fresh herbs and green leaves, and she fastened them over it with a piece of her tunic: and he was completely healed.

“Aucassin, she said, sweet noble friend, take counsel as to what you should do: if your father searches this forest tomorrow and they find me, whatever happens to you they will kill me.

Surely, sweet lovely friend, I would be the more grieved at it: but, if I can, he will never take you.”

He mounted his horse and set his love before him, kissing and embracing her, and they reached the open fields.

XXVII. NOW THEY SING.

Aucassin, the noble, fair,
the handsome, the amorous,
has ridden from the deep wood,
with his love in his arms
before him on his saddle-bow:
he kissed her eyes and her brow
and her mouth and her chin.
She put a question to him:
“Aucassin, sweet noble friend,
what land are we going to?
Sweet friend, how should I know?
I care not where we go,
to forest or to desert place,
as long as I’m with you.”
They passed the valleys and the hills
and the towns and villages:
came to the ocean with the dawn,
and went down onto the sands
near to the shore.

XXVIII. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE

Aucassin had gone down together with his love, as you have heard and understood: he took his horse by the reins and his love by the hand, and began to walk along the shore (*....and they came to a boat with some merchants aboard, sailing nearby...).*

He made a signal to them and they came to him, and were close enough to take them on board the boat: and when they were on the high seas, a great and marvellous storm arose, and drove them from place to place, until they arrived in a foreign land, and entered the port of the castle of Torelore. Then they asked what land this was, and they said that it was the land of the King of Torelore: then they asked what sort of man he was, and if there was war, and they said: “Yes, great wars.”

Aucassin took his leave of the merchants and they commended him to God: he mounted his horse, his sword about him, his love before him, and went on till he came to the castle: he asked where the King was, and they said that he was brought to bed with child.

“And where is his wife?”

They said that she was with the army and she had led out all the country: and Aucassin heard this, and it seemed a great wonder: and he came to the palace and he and his love dismounted: and she held his horse and he went up to the palace, his sword about him, and went on till he came to the chamber where the King was brought to bed.

XXIX. NOW THEY SING.

Aucassin went in the room
he the noble, courteous:
and he came to the bed,
where the King was lying:
there he stopped in front of him,
and spoke: hear what he said:
“Say, fool, what do you do?”
The King said: “I bear a son:
when my months are complete
and I am restored again,
I shall hear the Mass once more,
as my ancestors have done,
and renew the mighty war
against my old enemies:
and not leave them.”

XXX. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

When Aucassin heard the King speak in this way, he took all the sheets that were over him, and threw them around the chamber: he saw a stick before him, took it, turned, and used it, and beat the King almost to death.

“Ah! Noble sir, said the King, what do you ask of me? Have you lost your senses, beating me in my own house?

By God’s heart! Said Aucassin, wretched son of a whore, I will kill you if you do not swear to me that no man in your land shall ever again bear a child.”

He affirmed it: and when he had so sworn:

“Sir, said Aucassin, now take me to where your wife is with the army.

Sir, willingly”, said the King.

He mounted his horse, and Aucassin mounted his, and Nicolette remained in the Queen’s chamber. And Aucassin and the King rode till they came to where the Queen was, and found them warring with rotten crab apples and eggs and fresh cheeses: and Aucassin began to watch, and marvelled at it greatly.

XXXI. NOW THEY SING.

Aucassin halted straight
leaning on his saddle-bow,
and began to gaze around
at this fierce rustic battle:
they had carried to the fight
cheeses fresh as they might be
nicely rotted crab apples,
and mushrooms from the fields:
he who muddied the ford most
was accounted first of them.
Aucassin, the valiant, brave,
halted there and gazed at them,
and laughed and laughed.

XXXII. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

When Aucassin saw this wonder, he went to the King, and spoke to him.
“Sir, said Aucassin, are these your enemies?
Yes, sir, said the King.
And do you wish me to take vengeance on them for you?
Yes, do so, willingly.”

And Aucassin took his sword in hand, and threw himself among them, and began to strike out to right and left, and killed many of them. And when the King saw he was killing them he grasped his bridle and said:

“Ha! Noble sir, do not kill them so fiercely.

What? Said Aucassin, do you not wish me to take vengeance for you?

Sir, said the King, you have done too much: it is not our custom to kill one another.”

They turned and fled: and Aucassin and the King returned to the castle of Torelore. And the people of the country said to the King that he should cast Aucassin from the land, and keep Nicolette for his son, since she seemed a lovely woman of high birth. And Nicolette heard them, and was unhappy with this, and began to speak.

XXXIII. NOW THEY SING.

Sir, King of Torelore
said the lovely Nicolette,
your people take me for a fool:
when my sweet love holds me
and finds me soft and tender,
then I am in such a state
dance or jig or roundel
harp, rebec or viol
or games around the table,
are not my wish.”

XXXIV. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE

Aucassin was in the castle of Torelore, and Nicolette his love, in great ease and great delight, since he had with him his sweet friend Nicolette whom he loved so much. While he was in such great ease and in such delight a Saracen fleet came over the sea, and assailed the castle, and took it by force: they took the possessions, and they led away the men and women prisoners: they took Nicolette and Aucassin, and they tied Aucassin hand and foot and threw him

into one boat and Nicolette into another: a tempest arose at sea that parted them.

The boat where Aucassin was went over the sea so that it arrived at the castle of Beaucaire: and the people of the country ran to the wreck, and found Aucassin, and recognised him. When the people of Beaucaire saw their young lord, they were full of joy, for Aucassin had been at the castle of Torelore for three years, and his father and mother were dead. They led him to the castle of Beaucaire, and did him all homage, and he held his lands in peace.

XXXV. NOW THEY SING.

Aucassin has found his way
to his city of Beaucaire
the country and the kingship
he holds without dispute.

I swear by God in majesty
that he goes in greater pain
for Nicolette the bright of face
than for both his parents who
have gone to their last rest.

“Sweet friend, the bright of face,
I have you not nor seek you:
God has never kingdom made
over sea or on the land,
where I might think to find,
or search, for you.

XXXVI. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE

Now we will leave Aucassin, and speak of
Nicolette.

The ship where Nicolette was was the King of
Carthage's, and he was her father, and she had
twelve brothers, all princes or kings. When they
saw Nicolette was so beautiful, they bore her

great honour and made much of her, and demanded endlessly who she might be, since she seemed so noble a woman and of high birth. But she could not tell them who she was, since she had been taken away as a little child. They sailed till they arrived before the city of Carthage, and when Nicolette saw the walls of the castle and the country she recognised that she had been raised there and stolen away as a little child, but she was not so tiny a child that she did not well know that she was the daughter of the King of Carthage and that she had been raised in the city.

XXXVII. NOW THEY SING.

Nicolette, the brave and true,
has arrived at the shore,
sees the walls and buildings there
sees the streets and palaces:
calls herself unfortunate:
vainly was I nobly born,
royal daughter of Carthage,
cousin of a high Emir!
A savage people holds me here,
Aucassin, noble, true,
gentle honourable man,
your sweet love urges me
and beckons me and torments me.
May God of the spirit grant
I might yet hold you in my arms
and that you might kiss my brow
and my mouth and my cheek,
noble young man.”

XXXVIII. NOW THEY SAY AND TELL AND RELATE.

When the King of Carthage heard Nicolette so say, he put his arms around her neck.

“Sweet gentle friend, he said, tell me who you are: and do not be afraid of me.

Sir, she said, I am the daughter of the King of Carthage and was stolen away as a little child, full fifteen years ago.”

When they heard her so say, they well knew she spoke the truth, and they made a great deal of her, and they led her to the palace with great honour, like the daughter of a king. They wished to give her a nobleman, a king of the Paynim, but she did not wish for a husband. She was there for three or four whole days. She considered by what means she might seek out Aucassin: she found a viol, and learned to play, till one day they wished to marry her to a rich Paynim King. And she ran away at night, and came to the sea-port, and lodged with a poor woman near the shore: she took a herb and stained her head and face, so that she was all black and discoloured. And she told her to make a tunic and mantle and shirt and leggings, and took on the guise of a minstrel: she took her viol, and came to a mariner and spoke such to him that he took her aboard his boat. They hoisted sail, and sailed over the high seas till they

reached the land of Provence. And Nicolette set out, taking her viol, and went playing through the countryside until she came to the castle of Beaucaire, where Aucassin was.

XXXIX. NOW THEY SING.

At Beaucaire beneath the tower
Aucassin sat one day
on a platform made of stone
round him each noble man:
saw the grass and the flowers
heard the song of little birds,
remembering his love
of Nicolette the brave
whom he had loved so long:
giving out sighs and tears.
See Nicolette on the stone
take her viol, take her bow:
now she spoke, showed her thought.
“Listen to me, noble men.
those above and those below:
may it please you hear a song
of Aucassin, a noble man,
and Nicolette the true?
So long lasting was their love
he searched for her in forest deep:
from Torelore to prison fast
Paynim took them one day.
Of Aucassin is nothing known,

but Nicolette the true
was released in Carthage,
for her father loves her well
who is king of that kingdom.
He wants to give her to a king
a noble, treacherous Paynim:
Nicolette is troubled so,
since she loves a young man
of the name of Aucassin:
I swear in God's name
she'll take no nobleman,
is she have not her love,
she so desires.”

XL. NOW THEY SAY AND THEY TELL AND RELATE.

When Aucassin heard Nicolette sing so, he was delighted, and drawing her aside he asked her: “Sweet noble friend, said Aucassin, do you know anything of this Nicolette of whom you have sung?

Sir, yes, I know her for one of the noblest creatures, and the gentlest and the truest who ever was born: and she is the daughter of the King of Carthage, who took her when Aucassin was taken, and carried her off to the city of Carthage until he knew for certain that she was his daughter, and made much of her: and he wishes every day that he might give her to a nobleman one of the highest kings of all Spain: but she would rather let herself be hung or burnt than take him however rich he might be.

Ha! Sweet noble friend, said the Count Aucassin, if you would return to that country and were to say to her that she come and speak with me, I would give you more of my possessions than you would dare to ask or take. And know that for love of her I would not take a

wife, however highly born, on the contrary I wait, for I will have no wife if it is not her: and if I knew where to find her, I would not have to question you now.

Sir, she said, if you do this, I will go search for you and for her whom I love dearly.”

He gave his word, and then had her given twenty livres. She left him, and he wept for the sweetness of Nicolette: and when she saw him weeping:

“Sir, she said, do not be dismayed, because in a little while I shall have her brought to this town, and you will see her.”

And when Aucassin heard her, he was delighted. And she left him, and took herself into town to the house of the Viscountess, for the Viscount her godfather was dead. She lodged there, and told her so much as might reveal of her affairs so that the Viscountess remembered and knew well that it was Nicolette and that she had raised her: so she made her wash and bathe and rest there for eight whole days. Nicolette took a herb that is named celandine, and anointed herself with it, and she was as lovely as she had been at any time before: and she dressed herself in rich

silken robes, of which the lady had plenty, and she sat in a chamber on a cushion of silken cloth, and called the lady and told her to go for Aucassin her love. And she did so, and when she came to the palace she found Aucassin weeping and lamenting Nicolette, his love, as to why she delayed so long: and the lady called him and said:

“Aucassin, do not madden yourself any longer, but come along with me and I will show you the thing you love most in this world, for it is Nicolette your sweet love, who has come from a far country seeking you.”

And Aucassin was happy.

XLI. NOW THEY SING.

When he heard, now, Aucassin,
of his love, the bright of face,
that she was in the land,
he was happy, never more so.
With the lady he set off
to the house, without delay:
into the chamber they went,
where Nicolette was seated.
When she saw her love,
she was happy, never more so,
sprang to her feet to meet him.
When Aucassin saw her now,
he held her in both his arms,
sweetly he took her in,
kissed her eyes and her face.
The night left them so,
till at the dawn of day
Aucassin married her,
made her lady of Beaucaire:
then they lived for many years
and enjoyed their delights.

Now to their joys Aucassin
and Nicolette as well:
my *chantefable* has an end,
no more to tell.

The End of ‘Aucassin and Nicolette’

