

THE FAIR UNKOWN
(LE BEL INCONNU)



RENAUD DE BEAUJEU

Translated into English by

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With illustrations by Moritz Ludwig von Schwind

POETRY IN TRANSLATION

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The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)



“ *A lovely head of pure blonde hair,
No man’s, no woman’s, showed as fair,
Whereon a coronet of gold,
Many a precious gem did hold.*

LIST OF CHARACTERS



Agolans, King of Scotland.

Aquins d'Orbrie, present at Arthur's court.

Arthur, King of Britain.

Amangon, a king present at Arthur's court.

Augustel, King of Scotland, brother to Lot and Urien. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Baladingan, the knight of. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Ban, King of Gomoret. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Bedivere, of Normandy. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Bliobliëris, the knight who guards the Perilous Ford.

Blanches Mains (la Pucelle á), the Maid of the White Hands, and Lady of the Isle of Gold.

Blanchemal la Fey, mother of Gingalain.

Blonde Esmerée, the Queen of Wales. She rules the realm whose capital is Senaudon (Caer Seint, or Segeint, the Roman Segontium, near Carnarfon in Snowdonia?).

List of Characters

Braimant, a giant slain by the young Charlemagne (under the pseudonym Mainet)

Briés de Gonefort, present at Arthur's court.

Bruians. King of the Isles. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Brun de Bralant. A knight. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Cadoalant. A king. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Cadoc. A king. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Canaan, King of Baradigan. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Caradoc, present at Arthur's court.

Caraés. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Carentins, present at Arthur's court.

Clarie, a maiden rescued from the giants, the sister of Saigremors.

De Baladingan, the Chevalier de Baladingan, present at Arthur's court.

Dinaus, present at Arthur's court.

Elias, a duke. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Enauder, a king present at Arthur's court.

Erec of Estregalles, the son of King Lac. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Erians, present at Arthur's court.

Evrain, the Cruel, a knight defeated by Gingalain.

Flores, a duke. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Florien, a king at Arthur's court.

Gales le Chauve, present at Arthur's court.

Galouain, a count. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Gandalus, a knight. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Gaudin, King of Ireland. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Gawain, nephew to King Arthur, and father of Guinglain.

Geldras, King of Dunelie (speculatively, Dublin). Present at the tournament at Valedon.

List of Characters

Gerins de Chartres, present at Arthur's court.

Giflet, the son of Do, the owner of the sparrowhawk.

Gingalain, the hero of the tale, the son of Gawain and Blanchemal the Fey.

Goalan, a king and member of King Arthur's inner council.

Gornemant (or Gormans) de Gohort (or Gorhout). Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Graislemiers de Fin Posterne (or Grahelens). Present at the tournament at Valedon. Brother to Guingamor.

Gringras, King of Wales, now deceased, the father of Blonde Esmerée.

Guerrehés, present at Arthur's court.

Gué Périlleux, a knight. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Guingamor. Brother to Graislemiers. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Guinlain of Tintagel, present at Arthur's court.

Guivret, King of the Irish. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Gunes, a knight of Cirencester. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Hardi, le Laid, of Cornwall. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Haute Montagne, the lord of. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Hélie, the maiden who seeks aid for her lady at Arthur's court, servant to Esmerée. Cousin to Margery of Scotland.

Helin the White (le Blanc), the lord of Graies, and supporter of Blioblieries, the knight who guards the Perilous Ford.

Hoel (Hywel), King of Gohenet. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Hoel of Nantes. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Kahadinst, Duke of Lanprebois. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Kay, the Seneschal to King Arthur.

Keus d'Etraus, present at Arthur's court.

Lancelot of the Lake. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Lanpars, the lord of Castle Galigans. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Lindesie. A king. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

L'Orguillous ("The Pride") de la Lande. The knight who contests the theft of a hound.

List of Characters

Lot, a king at Arthur's court, brother to Urien and Augustel.

Mabon, one of the pair of enchanters who persecuted Blonde Esmerée.

Mainet, Charlemagne's pseudonym in the fragmentary chanson de geste 'Mainet'

Malgiers le Gris, the knight who defends the bridge at the Golden Isle.

Margery, sister to King Agolans of Scotland, and the maiden involved in the adventure of the sparrowhawk. Cousin to Hélié.

Mark, King of Cornwall. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Melian de Lis. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Montescler, Li Sors de (or Le Roux, 'the ginger-haired'). Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Mordred. A king, present at the tournament at Valedon.

Morholt, a 'giant' of a knight, Iseult's maternal uncle, slain by Tristan, in a duel in Cornwall.

Norgalles, Duke of. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Oduïns, a count present at Arthur's court.

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

Oliver, friend and comrade to Roland, in the epic 'Song of Roland'.

Perceval, of Wales. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Randuras (or Raidurains). Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Red Castle, (La Cité Rouge), the king of the. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Riciers, a count present at Arthur's court.

Robert, the squire whom Gawain assigns to the Fair Unknown.

Roland, nephew to Charlemagne and hero of the epic 'Song of Roland'.

Rose Espanie ("The Rose in Bloom"), the ugly lady loved by Giflet, the owner of the sparrowhawk.

Saies, the chevalier of, supporter of Bliobliëris, the knight who guards the Perilous Ford. His horse is named Gramadone.

Saigremors, a knight, the brother of Clarie.

Segures, brother to Mordred. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

The Fair Coward, a knight at Arthur's court.

The Knight of the Ill-Fitting Coat, a knight at Arthur's court.

List of Characters

Tidogolains, the dwarf who accompanies the maiden Hélié.

Tor, the son of King Arés. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Tristan, the maternal nephew of King Mark of Cornwall, legendary lover of Iseult in the tale of 'Tristan'.

Truerem, the Count of, Lord of the Dark Isle (l'Île Noire). Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Urien, a king at Arthur's court, brother to Lot and Augusel.

William of Salebrant, a supporter of Bliobliëris. The knight who guards the Perilous Ford.

Yder, a knight. Present at the tournament at Valedon.

Yseult the Fair. Queen of Cornwall, wife to King Mark. She was beloved of Tristan.

Yvain, King of Lindezie, present at the tournament at Valedon.

PART I



“ *When evening quenched the sun’s last ray,
They came to a clearing midst the trees,
The perfume of whose grass did please.*

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Little is known for certain of Renaud de Beaujeu whose one major work is *Le Bel Inconnu*, 'The Fair Unknown', composed in the late-twelfth or early-thirteenth century in rhyming couplets. He may have been that Renaud de Bâgé (or Baugé), lord of Saint-Trivier and Cuisery, born in 1165, died 1230, who was the third son of Renaud III, lord of Bâgé (Bâgé-le-Chastel, Aisnes) from 1153 to 1180. The latter died fighting against the lords of Beaujeu and the counts of Mâconnais, who resented the powerful seigneurie of Bâgé. Renaud's poem survives in a single manuscript: Chantilly, Bibliothèque du Château, 472 (*134ra-153 bis ra*).

An Arthurian romance, it relates the adventures of the knight Gingalain, the Fair Unknown, who is torn between the love of two women, la Pucelle a Blanches Mains ('The Maid of the White Hands') of the Golden Isle, and Blonde Esmerée ('The Fair and Radiant One'), Queen of Wales.

LE BEL INCONNU

THE AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

She who in her power, holds me,
A tale of love, sans treachery,
Inspires me to write, in verse,
And so, a romance I rehearse,
A fine tale of high adventure.
Loving her beyond all measure,
That history I now commence.
God's aid e'er brings us wit and sense,
And so, I will not fret, but show
The skill and learning that I know.

THE COURT OF KING ARTHUR AT CAERLEON

At Caerleon, beside the sea,
The king was crowned, publicly,
Before the court he commanded,
In August, as he'd demanded.
Great was the court of Arthur there,
As was that city rich and fair.
When all the barons were in place,
There shone many a noble face;
Great was the court assembled so,
As he'd ordained, a mighty show,

And great the joy upon that day;
You might have heard the jongleurs play
On bagpipe, harp, and viol there,
And sweet words filling all the air,
As the singers sang their songs
Of fine adventure, righted wrongs.
There was many a valiant knight,
Brave and handsome to the sight.
Naught but the truth I tell to you,
For every word of this tale is true.

THE ROLL-CALL OF NOBLE KNIGHTS

King Lot, King Urien, as well
As their brother, King Augustel,
Whom Arthur greatly loved, were there.
Hoel, Florian, that kingly pair,
Briés de Gonefort, and Tristan,
Gerins de Chartres, and Erians,
Gawain, and Bedivere, that day,
King Enauder, and Count Riciers;
Erec was there, King Lac's bold son,
Lancelot of the Lake made one,
Gales le Chauve, and Guerrehés,
And Tor, the son of King Arés,
Dinaus and Count Oduins,
And Caradoc, and Carentins;

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

Mordred was there, and Segurés,
Of Baladingan, the Chevalier,
King Mark, too, and king Amangon;
There, the Fair Coward made one,
He of the Ill-Fitting Coat, see,
Keus d'Estraus, Aquins d'Orbric,
And Guinlain, he of Tintagel,
Free of ire, to whom life seemed well;
Kay, too, the Seneschal, was there,
He called for folk water to bear
That they might wash their hands, that host,
Of knights and ladies, the hall did boast.
Water was called for, through the court,
And promptly that water was brought.
All washed their hands, and sat to dine.
Bedivere filled a cup with wine,
And served the King, while Sir Kay
Saw to the meal, midst that array.
All of the tables he observed,
To see that all were nobly served.
Many a fine young man had he,
And of brave knights full many,
Many he had to aid him well,
So claims the tale that I retell.

**AN UNKNOWN KNIGHT APPEARS
AT THE FEAST AND ASKS A BOON**

Behold a stranger now appeared,
Upon his steed, the king he neared,
And all of azure was his shield,
A lion ermine graced that field.
Before the king he rode outright,
Seeming a true and proper knight.
Saluting the king, thereafter
He then greeted every other.
The king saluted him, also,
Who in responding proved not slow,
And said to the young knight: 'Descend!
'Rather,' said he, 'an ear, now, lend.
Arthur, I come to view your court,
For, right or wrong, a boon is sought;
The boon I seek, now grant to me;
Will you do so, and willingly?
Grant me a boon without a thought;
One so noble, refuses naught.'
'I will grant it, indeed,' said he,
The youth thanked him, courteously.
The valets ran to remove his gear,
And guard it, while the knight drew near.

**GAWAIN WELCOMES THE KNIGHT
AND SEATS HIM AT HIS SIDE**

Gawain the courteous then brought
A rich mantle fit for the court,
Since the knight but a tunic wore;
And fine he looked, that bachelor.
Said King Arthur: 'Behold, a knight!
One it seems that knows how to fight.'
All those who looked on, cried also,
That none so handsome did they know.
His hands he washed and, after that,
Gawain seated him; down he sat.
Forever the soul of courtesy,
Gawain dined in his company.

**ARTHUR SENDS BEDIVERE TO
ASK THE STRANGER'S NAME**

The king addressed Sir Bedivere:
'To the unknown knight draw near,
He who of me a boon did claim,
And ask him what might be his name.'
'I shall do so,' said Bedivere,
And, in a moment, he drew near.
'Sir,' said he, 'the king demands,
Prays you, yet, in a word, commands,

That you should tell me your true name;
And you shall prosper by that same.’
The knight replied: ‘Why, truth be known,
A name I lack, but that alone
My mother gave to me, *Dear Son*,
As for my father, I’ve known none.’
Bedivere returned to the king,
Who sought the news he did bring,
‘And his name?’ ‘Sire, he has none,
Nor has heard such from anyone,
Except that his mother called him
Dear Son when she addressed him.’
‘I’ll grant him a name;’ Arthur said.
‘Since he nor I know whence he’s bred;
Yet a beauty but seldom seen
Nature has granted him; I mean
That glowing beauty, that is his,
And since he knows not who he is,
I shall call him the *Fair Unknown*,
And he shall go by that alone!’

AN UNKNOWN MAIDEN AND A DWARF NOW APPEAR

When these events had come and gone,
Ere the tables were cleared, anon
A maiden arrived at the court,
Fair in form and face, lacking naught

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

Of beauty, and in samite dressed;
Her beauty eclipsed all the rest.
A face white as the lily blows,
Her cheeks as crimson as the rose,
A smiling mouth, and eyes blue-grey,
White shapely hands she did display,
A lovely head of pure blonde hair,
No man's, no woman's, showed as fair,
Whereon a coronet of gold,
Many a precious gem did hold.
Upon a dappled grey she rode,
No queen a finer steed bestrode;
With fine silk the saddle was clad,
With hyacinthine gems it had
Been adorned in every part,
And rich enamels, with rare art:
What of its harness shall be told?
The bit was wrought of purest gold,
Precious stones studded the bridle,
Gold stirrups hung from the saddle.
A dwarf accompanied the maid,
No fool or villain there displayed,
But noble and courtly was he,
Well-formed, and nigh as fair as she,
And he no other fault possessed
But being shorter than the rest.
His robe dyed scarlet, trimmed with vair,

The dwarf had elegance to spare,
His robe indeed made to measure,
He was a most splendid creature.
In his hand a whip he bore,
And drove the palfrey on before,
Upon which the maid was riding.
She halted, and greeted the king,
Then all the company together,
Saluting one, and next another.
The king saluted her in turn;
Many a fair glance she did earn.

THE MAIDEN ADDRESSES KING ARTHUR

To the king, the maid said, clearly:
'Arthur, hearken now and hear me.
The Daughter of King Gringras bade
Me greet you, for she seeks your aid,
Finding herself now in great need.
A single knight would serve, indeed,
One knight alone would rescue her:
For God's sake, let her not suffer,
Noble king; sore her grief and pain,
Deep is her sorrow, great her bane.
Send her such a knight as will
The need she has for aid fulfil,
The best you have here at your court;

For God's sake, help her as you ought.
Alas! What grief my lady knows!
Great honour he shall earn that goes
To her aid, and saves her from this,
And dares the trial of the Cruel Kiss.
Yet the courage that he will need
Is greater than was e'er decreed.
A lesser man that seeks this trial
Will grace his bier in no long while.
She who sought aid for her lady,
Went by the fair name of Hélie.

THE FAIR UNKNOWN CLAIMS THE RIGHT TO ATTEMPT THE TRIAL

The king looked all about his court
To know which knight this trial sought:
But none claimed the priority,
For all were filled with fear lest he
Commanded that they undertake
The quest, and set their life at stake;
All, that is, but the Fair Unknown,
Who rose to the challenge alone.
Instantly leaping to his feet,
The king's eye his gaze did meet.
'Sire,' cried he, 'grant my boon to me:
I would bear help to the lady;

The boon you promised I demand,
Thus, to aid her, at your command.’

ARTHUR RELUCTANTLY AGREES

Then said the king: ‘I may not send
So young a knight as you, my friend,
Too great a trial it would prove.
Stay here with us, I shall approve
Some other.’ Came the swift reply:
‘Yet your word you may not deny,
I seek the boon you promised me,
And claim the quest, for, certainly,
Being a king, you should not fail
To honour it, lest the lie prevail.’
The king answered the youth: ‘Then go,
Since you desire adventure so.
Another gift you’ll have of me,
For a companion you shall be
Of the Round Table, this I say,
And serve your king in every way.’

BUT THE MAIDEN, HÉLIE, DEMURS

The maid could not but answer no,
And cried aloud: ‘He shall not go!
Upon my life, it shall not be.

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

I asked the best, not such as he,
And yet the worst you grant, although
The knight's true worth you cannot know.
I care not for him, for, in truth,
The one you grant is but a youth;
I wish the bravest and the best,
Whose chivalry all do attest.'
'Fair friend, I gave my word,' said he,
'And must not break it, wilfully.
I am a king, and must not fail
To keep it, else but lies prevail.'

**SHE CURSES THE COMPANY
OF THE ROUND TABLE AND DEPARTS**

She cried aloud: 'Behold I go,
My mission fails, and all is woe!
Ill to the Round Table I say,
And all around it that display
Reluctance their aid to offer!
Ah, my lady here's no succour,
None will help you; such is plain.
No wonder if I show my pain,
For Arthur will not aid us now,
Rather he doth us disavow.
Come dwarf, let's hence,' the maiden cried,
And from the court the pair did ride.

Away she went, behind her came
The dwarf, Tidogolains by name.

**THE FAIR UNKNOWN FOLLOWS
HÉLIE AND THE DWARF**

When the youth saw her depart,
He kept not silent for his part,
But his armour he did demand,
And Gawain, at the knight's command,
Soon had his suit of armour brought;
Swiftly he donned it, as he'd sought.
His greaves he laced, and all the rest,
And on his head his helmet pressed,
Then mounted on his steed anew;
Gawain lent him a bold squire too,
To bear for him his shield and lance.
The Lord, on high, his quest advance!
Once he'd taken leave of the king,
And the rest, of whom jongleurs sing,
He issued swiftly from the court,
Upon the joyful quest he'd sought.
As for the squire, Robert by name,
Prudent, yet lively, was that same.

HE PURSUES AND OVERTAKES THE PAIR

Through the vale he galloped at speed,
To overtake the pair, indeed
So swift the Fair Unknown did ride,
He soon was at the maiden's side.
On hearing him, she turned her head:
'Where are you off to, now?' she said.
'I go with you,' the youth replied,
'Show me no scorn, upon your side,
Since there is no good reason why.
Show me mercy, fair maid, say I.'
She answered: 'By the Lord on high,
Who made the world, I would deny
You the right to accompany me,
Yet lack the power, as I now see.
You are too young a knight I know,
And that is why I scorned you so;
The journey you could not endure,
Nor the battles and wounds and more
Survive, that you'd experience,
Nor win the day, should you go hence.
Better if you, at once, return;
Do so, I pray, scant shame you'll earn.'
The youth, at once, gave his reply,
'Fair maid, as long as life have I,
I will not turn about,' said he,

‘You must suffer my company.’
Then cried the dwarf: ‘Humour him still,
Let him ride with us, if you will.
One should not scorn a man or blame
His ardour, knowing not that same:
The more foolish you think a man,
The more God honours he that can.
Here’s a fine knight, it seems to me;
If God should aid him, mightily,
He may show as great a valour
As e’er man had of the Creator.’
Yet the fair maiden still did pray
The youth to be upon his way;
He listened not, but on did go,
Not wishing as a coward to show.

THE PERILOUS FORD

On they went, at a goodly pace,
Till they came to a dolorous place;
The Perilous Ford was its name,
For most dangerous was that same.
On the opposite bank, they saw
That there the open meadow bore
A shelter in the Gallic style,
Of fresh-cut branches, yet not vile,
While before it a shield did show,

All gold above, all silver below.
In this lodge was a noble knight,
Vying at chess, with much delight,
With two young men, both seated there
Who a like pleasure seemed to share.
Thus, he awaited some adventure;
Many a knight had met his measure
Whom he had slain before the ford;
Scant mercy his foes he did afford.
Bliobliëris was his name,
Fierce and villainous was that same.
A hardier knight none did view.
He said to the youths: 'Be off with you;
Bring me my charger, speedily,
For a knight approaches, as you see;
Bring my armour and weapons too,
For I would seek to take issue
With this fellow, who leads a maid;
Upon the ground, I'll see him laid.'
The two young men hastened away,
Mutely, his order to obey;
His greaves they soon brought to the knight,
And bound those greaves upon him tight.
He crossed himself, and rose, and then
The brought the rest, full swiftly again,
Buckled his hauberk, laced his helm,
That others he might overwhelm;

Over his hauberk, ere they ceased,
Went a silk surcoat from the East.
Next, his charger was brought, apace,
Upon which he mounted with grace;
His coat of arms its carapace,
Displayed, he set his shield in place,
And lowering his lance to its rest,
Took position as he thought best,
So that, ere any crossed the ford,
Each of a joust would be assured.

HÉLIE TRIES TO PERSUADE THE FAIR UNKNOWN TO RETREAT

When the maiden perceived him there,
She called to her knight to beware:
'Look that way, sir, see what I see,
And cease to follow after me;
Beyond the ford, there is a knight,
Upon his steed, armed for a fight.
If you advance, then, to my mind,
A fierce battle you'll surely find.
If like a fool, you do, my friend,
Your life will soon be at an end.
Should you ride on, I say to you,
Death is the only end in view,
I merely give you sound advice.'

But the Fair Unknown thought not twice:
'Fair maid,' he said, 'I'd not retreat
If all the world lay at my feet;
While there is life yet in my breast,
I'll not turn back, nor seek to rest;
Were I to be deterred by this,
Naught would it show but cowardice.
Over the ford then we shall go,
If he then seeks to land a blow,
If he would joust, then joust we will,
And, of jousting, he'll have his fill.'

THE TWO COMBATANTS ADDRESS ONE ANOTHER

Then his squire, before the battle,
He called, to tighten his saddle.
The straps once tight, he grasped his shield,
And lowered his lance for the field.
He passed the ford, and issued out:
But soon was halted, by a shout
Raised by this Blioblieris.
'Good sir,' he cried, 'what folly is this?
Ill was your deed, to pass the ford,
And, that maiden, passage afford!
To cross the stream was mere folly,
And for that I'll charge you dearly.
I defy you! Be on your guard!

I shall attack, and press you hard,
For none may pass the ford, I say,
Without a battle, come what may.’
The Fair Unknown had heard the shout,
And answered, turn and turn, about,
Yet gently: ‘Good sir, let us pass,
We cannot stop to speak, alas,
But must continue on our way;
King Arthur sends us here today,
To succour a lady, full of woe;
And if a lass conducts me so,
’Tis she that is that lady’s maid;
’Tis she that sought King Arthur’s aid,
He for whom I pursue this quest;
May God grant that I pass the test!’
‘Though,’ came answer, ‘a man of mettle,
You’ll not pass without a battle;
Such the custom, observed by all
Of my lineage, whate’er befall,
And so, for seven years, have I
Made full many a knight to sigh,
And many a worthy noble, here,
I have beaten, and slain, I fear!’
The youth replied: ‘’Tis villainy:
I’ll guard my life, as best may be.
And since I’ll find no mercy here,
I’ll not wait for it to appear.’

Then each retired from the other;
Both were ready to charge together.
When they had turned their steeds about,
The gazed a moment, gave a shout,
And spurred their chargers o'er the field;
Now, who would be the first to yield?

THE FAIR UNKNOWN DEFEATS BLIOBLIERIS

Bliobliëris in the fight
Struck fiercely at the younger knight,
Whose shield he broke, yet his sharp lance
Was shattered in that bold advance.
The Fair Unknown, he faltered not,
But struck the other, fear forgot,
Pierced the hauberk, o'er the shield,
The lance-tip in his flesh concealed,
And bowed him to the saddle low;
From the stirrups his feet did go,
Such that he could not keep his seat,
But pressed the earth, his fall complete.
Yet, right swiftly, he rose again,
Undaunted still, despite the pain.
He set his hand upon his sword,
Regained his breath, his fall ignored,
And struck once more with his sharp blade,
And with such force the blow he laid

Upon the youth's steed, slew it straight;
Now they stood equal, before Fate.
Sword against sword they battled so,
Dealing each other blow on blow,
Upon the helmet and the shield,
With naked blades their skill revealed.
Up from their helms the bright sparks flew,
To fill the air; more than a few.
Great was the battle that they fought,
And yet before they end, he sought,
Blioblieris felt his strength
Ebbing away, the blood, at length,
That flowed from his wound, weakened him,
He could do naught; his sight grew dim.
The Fair Unknown, relentlessly,
Struck at the knight, and suddenly
Upon his helm unleashed a blow
That sent him to his knees; the flow
Of blood was such he could not rise,
Nor guard himself in any wise.
His wound went deep; in God's name,
His life from the youth he did claim,
Praying, with all his might that he
Might live, to serve him, utterly.
'I'll be your prisoner if you wish,
For you cannot but gain by this.'
'Go,' said the youth, 'to Arthur's court,

And tell instead of how we fought.’
The other promised, without delay,
To seek the court that very day,
As his prisoner, before the king;
Swearing he’d do that very thing.

ROBERT, THE DWARF, PRAISES THE FAIR UNKNOWN

Once the battle was fought and won,
The dwarf rejoiced at what was done:
‘You were wrong,’ he said to the maid,
‘In scorning the youth and his blade.
One that deserves our true esteem,
Should not be put to scorn, I deem.
He has helped us to pass the ford,
Too slight the credit you afford.
He is brave, so show him honour,
And pray that God preserves his valour,
So, he may serve you, for your part.’
The dwarf possessed a generous heart.
‘Said the maiden: ‘Well has he wrought,
Yet he must learn, or else be taught
That if he chooses to follow us,
He’ll not return victorious,
He will be slain, and sad twill be,
For his courage is plain to see.’
On, hearing this, the Fair Unknown

Replied to her, and to her alone,
That naught could force him to retreat,
Until his quest was deemed complete.
Said the maiden: 'Then, lead the way,
For night descends, and we delay.'
Robert, the dwarf, had seized the horse,
When the other was downed by force,
And led that steed to this fair knight,
Who's own had been slain in the fight.
And then he brought both shield and lance;
The youth had mounted, in advance.
There being nothing left to fear,
The three rode on, filled with good cheer,
Leaving the loser there to sigh,
As if, of his wound, he must die.

BLIOBLIERIS AWAITS HIS LOYAL COMRADES

His two young men bore him away,
And, in the shelter, there he lay.
Freed from his armour, he yet bled,
Finding scant rest upon his bed.
Blioblieris lay and sighed;
His sore pain he could scarce abide.
He thought of his companions, three,
Whose names I'll give you readily:

Helin the White, the lord of Graies,
And the good chevalier of Saies,
And then William of Salebrant;
Brave was he, and most valiant.
Loyal companions were they,
That ever his orders would obey.
These three, whom I have named aright,
Had sought adventure, and that night
Having found it, were now returned.
By day they had much honour earned,
But when the evening shadows fell,
They, swiftly, so the tale doth tell,
Headed for the Perilous Ford,
That dangerous passage doth afford.
Bliobliëris awaited
Those knights for combat created,
Nor was he destined for dismay;
Should adventure cause no delay,
That night, at the ford they'd appear,
The knights I have named for you here.

HE TELLS THE THREE OF HIS DEFEAT

The daylight faded, the shadows fell,
The dark of night the sun did quell,
And, each one armed upon his steed,
Those valiant knights returned indeed.

To their lord they came, at a bound,
Whom in much distress they found
Suffering greatly; much he grieved,
Deep was the wound he had received.
Greatly they wept beside the ford,
Yet, in this manner, spoke their lord:
'Grieve not now, but think on vengeance,
Need have I of your assistance.
A knight there was that passed the stream,
The best of warriors he did seem,
For, in the joust, he conquered me,
And now his prisoner I must be;
I found him a most chivalrous knight,
A squire he leads, and I had sight
Of a fair maiden, who rode behind
A dwarf, escorting her, you'll find.
That knight toppled me to the ground,
Then pursued his course, onward bound;
Yet, ere he did so, revealed his name,
For the Fair Unknown is that same.
So deep a stroke he dealt, I fear,
That it pains me that name to hear;
Follow him, my companions true,
And slay the man that you pursue,
Or capture him; if he'll surrender,
Lead him here, true thanks I'll render,
His captive I'll no longer be.'

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

His heart was treacherous, you see.
They replied: 'He shall not pass by,
If we find him; for he shall die,
Or be captured, then you may do
As you wish with him, tis your due.'
With that, they mounted the saddle.
Eager for vengeance, and for battle,
Away the three companions sped;
Their hearts on treachery had fed.
Vengeance most willingly they sought,
Could the knight be but found, and caught.
May God guard him now from the foe!
Scant mercy will that trio show,
Should they find the unknown stranger;
His life indeed is in danger.

**THE FAIR UNKNOWN AND HIS
COMPANY REST IN A CLEARING**

As for him, he rode on, all day.
When evening quenched the sun's last ray,
They came to a clearing midst the trees,
The perfume of whose grass did please.
The maiden mused awhile, then said,
Summoning him who rode ahead:
'Sir, let us rest here, for the night,
For this meadow's fair to the sight;

There may be harm in riding on,
Of house or village, there is none
Less than a day's journey from here,
And this is our best lodging, I fear.'
The knight most willingly obeyed
The counsel offered by the maid.
They lodged there in the open air;
God preserve them in this affair!
Naught had they to eat for supper,
And the night air they must suffer.
Robert, being a faithful squire,
Answered to his master's desire
To be quit of his armour, he'd
Soon helped him, and seen to his steed.
Between themselves, the dwarf and he,
For the dwarf was full of courtesy,
Set themselves the steeds to guard,
That their journey be not marred.
Robert was loyal, valiant too,
And well apprised of what to do.

THEY HEAR CRIES IN THE NIGHT

The day waned and the darkness fell;
The company slept for a spell;
The moon was high, the Fair Unknown,
Slept in the grass, much like a stone,

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

While the maiden rested nearby,
Her head on her arm, without a sigh.
Close together the pair did sleep;
A nightingale the watch did keep.
The knight awoke, most suddenly,
And upon his elbows leant he;
From the forest, a cry he heard,
Four bowshot-lengths away; he stirred;
A woman's voice it seemed to be;
In rapid need of help was she:
Cries and sobs and plaints arose,
As from one that torment knows,
Great the woe that betrayed her,
As she invoked the Creator.
That gentle voice he heard clearly,
As again she begged for mercy.
From out her sleep, the maiden woke;
To her, the Fair Unknown, now spoke:
'Ah, fair maid, do you hear a cry?
I know not who doth weep and sigh.'
'Tis a phantom,' replied the maid,
'A breeze but sighing in the glade,
Give not a thought to such a sigh,
Sleep now, and it will pass you by.'
He at once answered the maid:
'It called on God, as if afraid,
And seemed a cry for help, to me,

Thus, it prayed to God for pity.
I would go aid this creature now,
If help it needs, then help I vow
And shall do all within my power.
Some noble spirit there doth cower.’

THE MAIDEN SEEKS TO DETER THE KNIGHT FROM INVESTIGATING

She replied: ‘Well, you shall not go!’
In such terms, her ire she did show:
‘If tis adventure you would find,
To many a harsh one, be resigned;
Upon our road, in broadest day,
Such you will meet; so, do not stray.
For, before my mistress you greet,
With far more than you wish you’ll meet,
And, I believe, you’ll seek no other;
More than you can bear you’ll suffer.
Much you’ll endure, if you survive,
If God’s grace keeps you yet alive,
More than has any knight yet born.’
He replied: ‘Put me not to scorn,
But suffer me, fair maid, this to do.’
‘As to that, I care not a sou,
She said: ‘whether you go or not,
Tis not for me, who am forgot.

Ne'er my counsel will you believe,
Till the hour that I see you grieve.
Against my will you journeyed here,
Nor will obey it now, tis clear.'
But he replied: 'Nay, let me go,
And see who cries for mercy so.'
Then he called for Robert, the squire;
To mount his charger his desire,
And Robert, waking, now took heed
Of his command, and brought the steed.
He crossed himself, our knight, and then
Mounting swiftly now, once again,
He braced himself, and grasped his shield,
And then his lance, to take the field.
The maiden mounted, equally,
Thinking it but certain folly
To remain there undefended,
While upon him she depended.
She, and then the dwarf, did so,
He being loyal as we know,
And all rode on, Robert ahead.
Along the forest trail they sped,
The dwarf leading; in that wise
They neared the place whence came the cries.
Riding through the trees, until
Those cries the air about did fill,
They saw a vast and roaring fire,

And halted; flames were mounting higher;
Robert pointed towards the blaze,
On which they looked, with some amaze,
Before their cave two giants stood,
Huge and ugly, boding no good.
One had hold of a lovely maid,
Who had she not been so afraid
Would have seemed the loveliest
Ever, but now was much distressed.
Much she wept and did complain,
And cried out like to one in pain,
For tightly the giant embraced her,
And so, by force, sought to take her;
While she cried out with every breath,
To such a fate preferring death.
At the far side of that same fire,
The second giant, full of ire,
Turned a spit, and prepared to eat,
Scattering pepper o'er the meat.
He wished to dine, but yet delayed
While his comrade clasped the maid
And sought with her to do his will.
Our knight, who at the sight was still,
Called to the other maid, Hélie,
Who was of his own company,
And pointing to the captive there,
In the giant's grasp, she young and fair,

Said he would rescue her, for he
Was sure to gain the victory.
Said she to him: 'You wish to die?
For die you surely will, say I,
If with those giants you would fight,
Full fierce are they, my valiant knight.
This pair have ravaged all the land,
Till not a dwelling-place doth stand,
Still whole, a day's ride all around;
Tis why we slept upon the ground.
All is destroyed, the folk they've slain,
O'er all, dominion they maintain.
That man will be killed, by and by,
That doth not, from such devils, fly.
Fight them not, then, but turn and flee.
Ride on, sir knight, and let them be.'

THE FAIR UNKNOWN ATTACKS THE GIANTS

But the knight refused to hear her
And set his life at a venture.
Bravely spurring his charger on,
Towards the giants he was gone.
As he galloped, he gave a cry:
'Set free the maid, prepare to die!'
He drove his steed at the giant
Who yet showed himself defiant,

The one, I mean, who held the maid.
A thrust into his breast conveyed,
The lance-tip piercing to the heart,
The giant's eyes from his head did start;
Stone dead he fell, into the fire.
The second charged now, filled with ire,
From his neck his club hung, below,
The knight sought to evade the blow,
And was untouched despite its force.
The club slid down to strike his horse,
While carrying the shield away,
And fell to the ground; there it lay.
And yet the knight was all unharmed,
As though his very life was charmed.
He'd defended himself so well,
And his steed, as if by a spell,
That neither the horse was slain
Nor the knight, who attacked again.
He whom the Lord seeks to guard,
Never shall be harmed or marred.
That day, the Lord, in His mercy,
Protected the knight, most surely.

**HAVING SLAIN THE FIRST GIANT,
HE BATTLES WITH THE OTHER**

The giant ran to retrieve his mace.
Full of anger, with crimson face.
Viewing his friend dead in the fire,
Vengeance was now his sole desire.
If he failed of that he was nought;
The savage club he swiftly sought.
But the knight spurred on his steed,
And struck the giant, hard indeed,
For his lance pierced the other's side.
The giant turned, his arms held wide,
Seeking to grasp the knight, but he
Wheeled, and retreated instantly,
For his company he wished not,
Nor the combat which was his lot.
The giant took up his club again,
Wounded and shivering with pain.
He thought to take his vengeance yet,
And ran at the knight, in a sweat,
His club upraised to strike him hard,
But still the knight was on his guard,
And urged his steed the other way,
Such that the blow but went astray.
Better to flee, than bide a blow,
No need then to counter the foe!

In truth, the club caught in a tree,
And struck the thing so forcefully
It shattered its trunk, root to crown,
Bringing all of its branches down.
The mace shot from the giant's hand,
And wherever that mace did land
He that caught it had met with ill!
The Fair Unknown attacked him still,
Striking the giant with his sword,
A heavy blow he could scarce afford,
For it landed on the skull, sank then
Down to the teeth, and out again,
Such that the giant breathed his last.
The knight rejoiced, the danger past.
He sheathed his sword; the giant fell,
To the grass below, and all was well.

THE DWARF PRAISES HIM, AND HÉLIE SEEKS PARDON

The knight descended from his steed.
Robert, his squire, then took the lead
In removing the youth's armour,
From his head the helm, and after
Unbuckling his sword, and then,
His head now being free again,
Swiftly unlacing the ventail,
And drawing off his coat of mail.

The dwarf had retired midst the trees,
Where he had felt far more at ease,
Beside him was Hélié the maid,
Who had appeared most afraid,
On viewing the fierce battle there,
Terrified by the whole affair.
Now to the maiden the dwarf said:
'You were wrong, for nobly bred
Is this youth, to scorn the knight;
It seems to me the lad can fight;
I think, indeed I now believe,
Having seen him our plight relieve,
Battling with Blioblieris,
And now winning the day in this,
That here is a man of merit.
Give credit if the cap doth fit.
Speak ill and repent at leisure;
None can deny the man's a treasure.'
'Dear friend,' said Hélié, 'if I said
Aught that was ill, I'll go instead
And seek for mercy of him now
For judging wrongly I'll allow.'

HÉLIE APOLOGISES TO THE FAIR UNKNOWN FOR MISJUDGING HIM

With that the fair maid made her way
To the young knight and, straight away,
Slid from her palfrey to the ground,
And saluted him with ne'er a sound:
But next sought forgiveness for all
The scornful words that she'd let fall,
For she repented; he'd proven true,
And reparation thus was due.
Said he in answer to the maid:
'I pardon you; be not afraid;
Since forgiveness you ask of me,
Why then, forgiven you shall be.'
The lovely woman bowed her head,
And thanked the knight for what he'd said.
She lingered; warmth such kindness breeds;
While Robert tended to the steeds.
Beside the fire, they rested so:
At daybreak, they would up and go.

THE MAIDEN HE HAS FREED TELLS HER TALE

Now the fair maiden sought the knight,
She whom he'd freed after the fight,
Slaying the giants who'd attacked her,

And who'd sought to make her suffer.
She was a noble maid, her face
Of fresh hue, and one full of grace,
For her colour she'd recovered
Once from harm she was delivered.
'Sir,' said she, 'you quench all strife,
Your aid indeed has saved my life;
You've rescued me from pain and woe,
From the giants who harmed me so,
From torment and captivity,
Your servant ever I shall be.'
She threw herself down at his feet,
He raised her, as was only meet,
While from her eyes the tears did pass.
He seated her, upon the grass,
Beside him, and then sought to know
How the giants had seized her so,
And brought her to that very place.
The which her loveliness did grace;
Asking her, next, to tell her name,
Both who she was, and whence she came.
Said the maid: 'I'll tell all to you,
And all that I shall say is true.
Truly, my name it is Clarie;
Naught do I hide from you, you see,
And Saigremors is my brother.
Twas from the house of my father,

That the giant abducted me,
Seizing my person suddenly.
There, in the garden, at first light,
I took a walk, for my delight;
The giant had hidden by the gate,
Which had been unguarded of late,
Thence he took me, and brought me here,
Where his companion did appear,
Yet o'er them both you did prevail;
The truth I tell you, without fail.'

ROBERT AND THE DWARF FIND PROVISIONS IN THE GIANTS' CAVE

Robert and the dwarf had, meanwhile,
Found in the giants' cave, a pile
Of thirty loaves, with napkins too,
Cups, salted ham, and not a few
Roasted chickens, both fat and fine,
And many a good flask of wine.
Both were overjoyed at the sight;
They now could dine, to their delight.
The two giants the knight had slain,
Who'd dealt the land about such pain,
Had brought those provisions there
Which the company now might share.
In that cavern they'd dwelt of late,

Until they met their sudden fate.
As folk will cry: 'Who tends the vine,
By Saint Martin, drinks not the wine.'
Robert was swiftly sent to say
That they would dine in style that day:
'You'll have,' he said, 'all that you wish;
And a clean napkin, beside your dish.'
The knight replied: 'Do you speak true,
Have we a decent meal in view?'
Said Robert: 'Yes, most certainly,
For we've discovered, as you'll see,
The larder that those giants filled,
The very same that you have killed.'
The Fair Unknown rose to his feet,
And led the maidens, as was meet,
By the hand, to where they might dine.
Robert would serve the meat and wine.
The dwarf brought water for them all,
To wash their hands, as in some hall;
The napkins on the grass were spread
The maidens sat; the nobly-bred
And courteous knight was opposite,
Who with a smiling face did sit.
The dwarf and Robert served the food,
The latter skilled, with grace imbued,
At once seneschal, and sutler,
Master-of-horse, and their butler,

Chamberlain, it seemed, and squire;
He served according to desire,
And, in the tasks he owned, did well,
Though to the dwarf a fair share fell.

When they had dined at their leisure,
In that meal taking much pleasure,
The dwarf removed the napkins; then
The two young maidens rose again,
While the pair who'd served the rest
Sat down and, likewise, dined with zest,
The maidens serving them, in turn.
For food not chatter they did yearn,
And when the pair had eaten well,
To the horses they sped, pell-mell,
And fed them on the grain and straw
The giants had amassed before,
By raiding all the country round.
Robert, who insufficient found,
Of the fodder liked by his steeds,
Looked about him, to meet their needs,
And saw a scythe, and well-pleased
That tool he hastened to, and seized.
When he'd entered on the meadow,
And set himself fresh grass to mow,
He saw three valiant knights appear,
Upon their swift steeds; drawing near

In right good order, on they came;
Heavily armoured were those same.
They were the three companions who
I've previously named to you:
Helin the White, the lord of Graies,
Then the good chevalier of Saies,
The third William of Salebrant;
Brave was he, and most valiant.
After the Fair Unknown, rode they,
To take him prisoner, or to slay.

ROBERT RAISES THE ALARM, AS THREE KNIGHTS APPEAR

Now, Robert, on seeing the three,
Turned straight about, and chose to flee.
O'er the clearing he swift did pass,
To where the knight lay on the grass,
Opposite the two maidens there,
Both so charming, young and fair.
Robert roused him, and quietly
Said: 'My lord, arm, now, instantly.
To defend yourself, be ready,
And think on fighting well this day,
My lord, let nothing you dismay,
For here upon their steeds come three
Bold knights-in-arms, that seem to me
Such as, in truth, but take or slay

Those that they meet upon the way.
Soon they'll be here, so take thought,
Lest you are killed, or swiftly caught.'
To the maidens, returned the knight,
And told them of the coming fight,
But Robert cried: 'Be not disgraced;
For God's sake, arm yourself in haste!
It grieves me that you linger here,
At any moment they'll appear.'

HÉLIE WINS TIME FOR THE FAIR UNKNOWN TO ARM HIMSELF

His master wished now he was armed,
Lest the five of them be harmed,
But ere he'd the chance to prepare
The three knights were upon them, there,
Hard by the cliffs at Valcolor.
Their leader now his quarry saw,
And cried to the others: 'That, is he!'
Then to the knight: 'Come, list to me,
You have caused us both shame and ill,
Passing the Perilous Ford at will!'
Now had the knight been caught or slain.
If Hélié had not expressed disdain;
Right bold was she, that lovely maid;
She called to their leader, unafraid.

'In God's name, good sir,' cried Hélié
'What mean you by this villainy?
Attacking an unarmed man, indeed!
Ill the reproaches you will breed
If one that is unarmed you fight.
Beware, if you be an honest knight
Of doing that which dishonours you,
Naught worse than this I ever knew.
Let the man arm himself, say I;
That request you should not deny!
Unless God aids him here, I see
No way he can counter all three:
While if he arms, honour you'll gain,
Should you defeat him, such is plain.
Where one is sure to win the day,
Fairness should surely be in play!
The knights had halted; William led.
'There's truth in what the maid has said;
'Let him arm, for it matters not,'
Cried he, 'captivity's his lot.'
'Let him do so,' his friends replied,
'Fair request shall not be denied.'
Then the trio drew back some way,
Till o'er them the shadows did play.

The End of Part I of 'Le Bel Inconnu'

PART II



“ Took herself to a tower on high,
All her ladies hovering nigh,
To watch, from the windows there,
The passage of this whole affair

**THE FAIR UNKNOWN PREPARES TO
FIGHT THE COMPANY OF THREE**

Bright was the light from the fire,
And the moon, still rising higher;
As yet far distant was the day.
The Fair Unknown donned straight away
His hauberk, and his helm; Hélie
Bore him his sword: 'Take care,' said she,
'Not to forget my mistress now;
Throughout the fight, recall your vow;
God grant you both strength and vigour,
To aid her, and her realm thereafter.'
He mounted then to ride to battle,
Leaping swiftly to the saddle;
The other maid held up his shield,
He slung it, ready for the field,
About his neck; he took his lance,
Praying to God, ere his advance,
To bring him much honour that night,
And protect him amidst the fight.
Upon their knees, the maidens prayed,
And to the Lord above conveyed
Their hopes that He would graciously
Guard their knight, and grant victory,
While the latter, spurred on his steed,
And fearing naught, galloped at speed,

Towards the company of three.
William was first, well-armed was he,
To ride to meet him; he came alone,
For the custom then, as is known,
Was that when a fight was begun,
Gainst many, they fought one by one
Against their common adversary,
And he encountered each singly;
Whereas, in this decadent age,
Whence chivalry departs the stage,
Twenty-five will attack one man,
And seek to slay him if they can;
So customary is such a maul,
The practice is observed by all;
Thus, the scythe passes o'er the field,
And, ever, fresh grass it doth yield;
Every manner of thing doth change
Into some other, new and strange;
Nobility and loyalty,
Pity, valour, and courtesy,
Honesty, and largesse, depart,
And every man takes his own part,
Doing whate'er lies in his power
To betray folk, at this ill hour.
Yet I'll say no more; let that be;
Here is one knight, against but three.

WILLIAM OF SALEBRANT ADVANCES TO MEET HIM

I return to the Fair Unknown,
Who rode onto that field alone,
And to meet him, in war well-versed,
William of Salebrant entered first.
Alone he came, entirely so,
Without companion, gainst the foe,
For no assistance there had he,
He rode a steed from Gascony,
Equipped to fight, as he knew how.
They met together fiercely now.
Against the foe's shield struck each lance;
Steel and wood broke, in that advance.
Violently they met together,
One must die there, or the other.
William's lance slid o'er the boss,
The tip that tough metal did cross,
Good and strong where it did land,
The lance shattering in his hand.
Two fine warriors were they.
The Fair Unknown finer that day,
For his lance-blow pierced the shield,
The plate beneath likewise did yield,
William, stone dead, fell from his steed,
Beyond all pain, as fate decreed.

THE NEXT TO JOUST IS HELIN THE WHITE

The next to joust was the lord of Graies,
Parting thus from the knight of Saies.
On seeing his companion fall dead,
To strike a blow at the foe he sped,
A mighty blow that cracked his shield,
And sent part tumbling to the field,
The hauberk it nigh shattered too,
Yet, by good fortune, passed not through,
But slid away; no wound it made,
And left the Unknown undismayed.
He in his turn had struck, with force,
Helin the White, in his swift course,
The lance striking him on the chest,
Splitting the hauberk o'er his breast,
Such that Helin, willing or no,
Over his horse's rump did go,
And on the ground below did sprawl,
Breaking his right arm in the fall.
Two he'd tumbled from the saddle,
But one remained to wage battle.
At the fall of the lord of Graies,
Fierce anger gripped the knight of Saies,
That fine knight and combatant,
One in battle most competent.
Armed, on Gramadone his steed,

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

Incensed at the doer of that deed,
His furious face with crimson marred,
Over the ground he sped full hard.
Once the Fair Unknown was aware
Of his coming he faced him there,
And since both were galloping fast,
Fierce was their meeting at the last.
They came together with such force
That each man tumbled from his horse.
Yet from the earth they rose again,
His deadly gaze each did maintain,
Setting his hand upon his sword,
Of polished steel; with one accord,
Upon each helm a fierce blow fell,
Making the steel ring like a bell.
Blow upon blow the two knights dealt,
Swift and often, painfully felt;
Violently they fought, without cease,
Full often driven to their knees.
Their helms were dented everywhere,
Their shields shattered beyond repair.
Yet each kept his weapon in play,
Without rest, till the break of day.

**THE FAIR UNKNOWN THEN
DEFEATS THE KNIGHT OF SAIES**

Dawn arrived, and the sky grew bright,
Impatience seized the Unknown knight.
The lord of Saies he struck once more,
Who looked to defend, as before,
But his horse, stumbling o'er the ground,
In an instant, the earth had found.
The Fair Unknown was upon his foe,
Who tugged at his leg trapped below,
Seeking to free himself again;
He thought to rise, but all in vain,
For he was seized till he'd render
Himself defeated, and surrender,
While the other so grasped the knight
He could not now prolong the fight.
His foe's helm the youth did unlace,
And once the knight could see his face,
The Fair Unknown said he must die
If he failed to yield; with a sigh,
The lord of Saies saw all was lost,
And now was forced to count the cost,
And since he wished to live, clearly,
He, most humbly, begged for mercy.
To this, the Fair Unknown replied:
'If you would live, then you must ride

To Arthur's court, and to that same,
Swear yourself captive, in my name.
And rest a prisoner there; if not,
To lose your head shall be your lot.'
At once, the knight of Saies, he swore
That he would go, his word was sure,
Without delay, to Arthur's court.
He having sworn as had been sought,
The two maidens were filled with joy,
For each could now their steed employ,
And so, the battle reached its end.
The sun its light o'er all did spend
Its force; the lord of Saies arose,
Mounted his horse; the Unknown chose
That time to ask why they were there,
And had provoked the whole affair;
He and his two companions, who
Had fought, what end had they in view?

THE PARTIES GO THEIR SEPARATE WAYS

'Sir,' said the lord of Saies, 'I'll tell
The whole matter, as it befell.
I am,' said he, 'the lord of Saies,
He who lies there the lord de Graies,
Helin by name, wounded sorely,
And set to lose an arm, surely;

William of Salebrant is he
Whose death's a mighty grief to me.
We were sent here by our master,
And thus, have met with disaster;
Blioblieris is our lord,
Whom you met at the Perilous Ford,
He whom you conquered readily.
And he had sent us forth, you see,
To take your person or to slay.
Ill the news I must now relay!
When I return, and he doth know,
Greatly it will increase his woe.
Those who would avenge their honour
Oft are cursed with deeper dolour,
As he that seeks to mount the sky,
Meets but a greater fall thereby.⁷
The lord of Saies his steed did find,
And bore Helin the White behind.
The Fair Unknown asked him to lead
Clarie to her home; he agreed.
This news the maid received with joy,
Her happiness without alloy.
For their part, the dwarf and Hélié,
The squire Robert, loyal was he,
And the Fair Unknown, his master,
Set forth on the road, together.
Towards the Ruined City rode they:
What they encountered, I shall say.

THE AUTHOR, RENAUD, SPEAKS OF TREACHERY IN LOVE

Now list to me, the truth I tell,
No ill seek I; let all be well
In love. Though others soon forget,
I cannot, and must love her yet.
I would not quit her now say I,
God save me ever from the lie.
Those that repent of love e'er say
Among themselves, upon a day:
'To betray a woman is no sin.'
Yet such but holds a lie within:
Rather, my soul, the sin is great!
Would you thus wish to mar her fate?
Would you seek to move a lover,
Yet lack all intent to love her?
Speak to her in a loving way,
That she her honour might betray?
Beg her sweetly both day and night,
That you may steal her heart outright?
God save us! For you, she will lose
Her friends, her husband; you abuse
Her trust, yet having wrought your will,
Deceive her, though she loves you still.
Evil to those who practise so,
And forever work women woe!
Those who call themselves wise in love,

Ever do false and traitorous prove.
I'd rather show but foolishly,
Than be disloyal to such as she.
What to call her that my heart moved?
Is her name not the 'well-beloved'?
To call her so, the truth would be,
Not 'my love' of a surety;
For she cares not for me, say I.
Alas! Of my love for her I'll die;
For her my song, my endeavour,
At her mercy, thus, forever.

HÉLIE ACQUIRES A LITTLE HUNTING-DOG

Yet to the Fair Unknown, I turn;
For, from fair Hélié, he did learn
Of an adventure, as she did ride
Through all that wasteland at his side.
And, as the knight gazed all around,
A stag he saw, on open ground;
Six noble points each antler bore,
Its tongue hung down; it ran before
Their company along the road,
For all to see; its panic showed.
Before the hounds and brachs it went;
Those hunting dogs, upon its scent,
Pursuing swiftly, as on they led;

A little brach behind them sped,
Whiter than is the driven snow,
Yet black as pitch its ear did show
Upon the left; while its right side,
Showed a black marking beside
Of like deep hue; little was she,
An ermine in size, truthfully,
Or a little smaller, maybe,
So fair a brach, you ne'er did see.
It passed before Hélie the maid,
And halted in the road, dismayed,
Having a thorn caught in its paw.
Down upon it the maiden bore,
And, to catch it, set foot to ground.
She swept the brach up, at a bound,
And then, remounting hastily,
Returned to join the other three.
The brach she'd carry now, she said,
To her mistress, and rode ahead.

A HUNTSMAN APPEARS WHO LAYS CLAIM TO THE BRACH

Behold, a huntsman now appeared,
Upon his steed; the maid he neared,
His hunting-horn at his command,
A spear gripped in his other hand.
His hounds he followed; I should note,

Dressed in a short brown hunting-coat,
His form was handsome; boots he wore,
He galloped o'er the forest floor.
When he saw the maid seize the hound,
And then, returning o'er the ground,
Concealing it beneath her cloak,
He thought it sinful, and no joke,
And swift towards the maid he sped,
'Fair friend, release my dog,' he said,
'Set her down, and leave her to go,
She is not yours to handle so;
After the others let her run.'
The maiden turned; the thing now done,
She cried he should not have the hound,
The brach was fair, and fairly found,
And she would bear the bitch away,
For her mistress; twas but a stray.
But he replied: 'My maiden fair,
No good will come of this affair;
Give me the dog, tis mine by right.'
'No, no,' cried she, 'tis mine by right;
Tis a brach you shall see no more;
Whate'er you say, tis mine for sure.'

HE SEEKS REDRESS FROM THE FAIR UNKNOWN

The huntsman's anger having grown,
He called out to the Fair Unknown:
'Sir, halt, and tell this maiden nay,
She shall not bear my hound away.'
The knight asked of her, yet in vain:
'Sweet friend let him have her again.'
She answered: 'Speak of it no more,
He shall not have her, that's for sure.
Let him follow that stag of his
For soon he'll know not where it is;
I shall not render him the hound.'
'Sir,' said the huntsman, 'you are bound
To see the brach released to me,
Ask that the maiden set her free;
Let me but have the dog, anew,
Naught else shall I request of you.
She hides behind your valour, so,
'Tis you I ask: let the brach go;
She will not bear the hound away
If you refuse your aid, I say.'
The Fair Unknown at once replied:
'I cannot help but take her side,
For naught in the wide world, in this,
Would I do other, 'twere cowardice.
But tis fine by me, should she choose

To free the brach, and not refuse.
Come, render him the dog, fair maid.'
But Hélié answered, unafraid:
'Tis mere folly that you both speak,
He shall not have what he doth seek.'

**THE HUNTSMAN RETIRES
TO HIS LODGE TO ARM HIMSELF**

The huntsman turned his steed about,
Ground his teeth, and then gave a shout:
'You may be assured of this, sir knight,
You shall not have her without a fight.'
He was himself of no low birth,
And so was the last man on earth,
To let them bear his hound away.
His arms and armour were that day
In his hunting lodge, built nearby.
That lodge the knight had made, say I,
Not too far from the forest chase.
Whene'er he would the forest grace,
There he would take his rest at night.
Being now determined to fight,
To that place he did swift repair,
And his men-at-arms met him there.
'Go swiftly, my squires, bring my steed,
And of arms and armour, I have need.'

In a trice, his men now ran to do
All he asked, and right quickly too.
Then one of them laced his greaves tight,
Made sure his helmet sat aright,
And strapped his good sword to his side.
Swift, he mounted, all set to ride,
Ready to sell his life dearly,
Or regain the hound swiftly.
About his neck he hung his shield,
Levelled his lance, and took the field.
Forth he rode now in full armour.
’Twould bring him shame and dishonour
If he let them carry away
His hound, and failed to make them pay.

HE RETURNS, ARMED, TO ISSUE HIS CHALLENGE

At the gallop, he crossed the wood,
Riding where the going was good,
For he had ridden that path before,
And, when the Fair Unknown he saw:
’Sir knight, sir knight,’ full loud he cried,
’Foolish you are, if you let slide
This theft, and steal my brach away!
Believe you me, dearly you’ll pay.
Retract, or with you twill go hard;
I defy you; be on your guard!’

On hearing the huntsman's loud cry,
The Fair Unknown raised his shield high,
And gripped the lance hard in his hand,
Spurring his steed on o'er the land.
Commending himself to the Lord,
He met the charge with lance and sword.
Well-armed were they on either side,
Raising their shields, as they did ride,
Spurring their horses on again,
Lowering their lances, not in vain.
Denting their shields and hauberks too,
Fiercely they collided those two,
Straining their stirrups with the force,
Shattering their lances in mid-course.
Scant friendliness was there on show,
Their lance-shafts broken at a blow.

THE FAIR UNKNOWN DEFEATS THE KNIGHT, ORGUILLOUS DE LA LANDE

Sword in hand they met together,
Their helms rang; one then the other,
Attacked his man, and retreated,
Neither wished to be defeated.
The horses sweated, the knights toiled,
Fine swordsmen both, they ne'er recoiled.
Hard was the fight, and fierce each blow,

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

Their helmets, in pieces, fell below,
And both their shields were cut in two.
Wearied were they, yet fought anew,
Though the strongest tire, in the end.
These, when they could no longer depend
On their skill, nor could this conceal,
Dropped their blades of Viennese steel,
And in their arms gripped each other.
Their steeds shied from one another,
Slipped their saddles, the straps breaking,
While, both knights, their seats forsaking,
Fell to the ground, like sacks of coal,
Praying to God to leave them whole.
The huntsman sought to rise once more,
The Unknown dragged him to the floor,
And laid him flat upon his face,
Then sought to hold his foe in place,
Who was solid and agile too,
Seeking to raise himself anew.
The other would not let him rise,
But gripped him in similar guise,
And brought his man to earth again,
Removed his helm, thus to unlace
His ventail, and revealed his face.
He saw his own blade, on the ground,
That had lodged there, whole and sound,
And retrieved it, while gripping still

The huntsman quite against his will,
And would have beheaded that knight
Had he not, yielding, quit the fight.
The huntsman, indeed, saw no way
To escape his fate, and thus did pray
Humbly for mercy, crying that he
Would serve his pleasure, willingly.
The other said: 'You cannot flee,
But must now my prisoner be,
And go, as such, to Arthur's court,
And tell the king that I, in short,
Send you to him, his captive now,
As thanks, in that he did allow
The boon that is my present quest,
To aid a lady, at her behest,
Who is in need.' The knight replied:
'I shall; in whose name do I ride?'
'That, my friend,' said he, 'you shall know:
The Fair Unknown charges you so.'
Once his sworn promise he had heard,
The Fair Unknown added a word:
'Sir,' said he: 'You have learnt my name,
Thus, yours, in return, I now claim.'
The knight replied to his demand:
'I am l'Orgillous de la Lande,
And, ere the month is out, I will
Acquit myself, and my oath fulfil.'

They took leave of one another,
And mounted their steeds together.
The huntsman returned whence he came,
But without the hound he did claim,
While the Fair Unknown went his way,
With Robert, who joy did betray,
And the dwarf too, and the lady,
Down the high road, riding swiftly.

THE COMPANY REACH A STRONGHOLD NAMED BECLEU

Their journey was full long that day;
And as the sunlight ebbed away
They issued from a leafy wood,
In a great castle's neighbourhood.
The castle was both strong and fair,
Becleu its name; a river there,
Made its passage about the wall,
Yielding of fish a goodly haul.
Flowing strongly from its source,
It ran a navigable course,
For those who headed there to trade.
Mills, in plenty, the banks displayed,
Water meadows on either side,
And cultivated fields beside,
While, on the far bank, they could see
Vineyards, for two good leagues or three.

A moat this stronghold did surround,
Its width was great, its depths profound,
And the walls above rose on high,
Their towers reaching to the sky.
The Fair Unknown reined in his steed,
And called to Hélié, who slackened speed;
He pointed to the castle ahead,
Towards which she now turned her head;
They gazed, agreeing it showed fair,
For no count's, no king's, could compare.
Towards the stronghold now they veered,
As evening fell, and Vespers neared.

THEY MEET THE FAIREST OF MAIDENS ON THE WAY

They met a maiden on the way,
Young and fair, dressed in fine array,
For dress and robes of silk she wore,
No finer the world ever saw.
Her pelisse, lined with swansdown,
Was bordered with ermine around,
And squirrel fur, in wedge-shapes cut;
The body of it sable, it put
All other ladies' furs to shame;
No other land had seen the same.
Noble she was, and those who saw her,
Swore none had ever seen fairer;

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

Her brow broad, clear her complexion,
Lily-white, upon inspection;
Her arched eyebrows a little dark,
Delicate, fine, each well-formed arc;
Her cheeks red as the summer rose,
Sweet mouth, trim teeth, a faultless nose,
None of greater beauty had heard,
Incomparable, in a word.
Her hair was blonde, and shone brightly,
Like purest gold, restrained lightly
By a ribbon of silver, there,
For bare-headed she took the air.
Her eyes were blue-grey, her brow high,
White her hands, in form naught awry,
For none lovelier had any maid,
Yet she seemed sad, and much dismayed,
Wringing her hands, plucking her hair,
Sorrowful, as if in despair.

**THE FAIR UNKNOWN GREETES
THE MAIDEN WHO SEEMS FULL OF WOE**

From the castle came the maid,
And the Fair Unknown conveyed
His greeting to her as they met,
Which she returned; her eyes were wet,
As she responded to him though,

Like one who bears a weight of woe.
‘Why are you weeping, my fair maid?’
He asked her, as his course he stayed,
‘Tell me the reason; I would know.’
She said: ‘I cannot but do so.
Deprived of joy, I weep and pray,
For I have lost, this very day,
All that I love most on this earth;
From that source my tears have birth.
I weep for my love, whom I have lost;
He is slain, and I count the cost.
My heart is breaking now with grief,
Alas, how shall I find relief?’
On hearing this, he pitied her,
And so went on to ask of her,
How this lover of hers had died,
If some other he had defied
In combat, or in other wise
Was slain: the maiden, midst her sighs,
Raised her eyes, and made reply:
‘Sir, the lord of this town nearby,
One who is most cruel and proud,
To him my lover’s head has bowed.
In that castle a bird has he,
A sparrowhawk well-mewed, you see,
That, on the green, beside the church,
On a platform of gold doth perch.

She who doth obtain the bird,
Upon her as a prize conferred,
Will be deemed the fairest of all;
Yet, before that same might befall,
She must be accompanied by
A knight who thinks her, to his eye,
More lovely than any other
And claims her so, as her lover;
For he who of that place is sire,
Challenges all who do aspire
To the hawk, in his own love's name,
Lauding the beauty of that same,
Saying that none else can compare,
And offering to do battle there.
Sir, the friend whom I preferred,
Went with me there, to win the bird.
But when the hawk I sought to take,
The castle's lord, for his love's sake,
Challenged him his life to spend.
My knight then cried to me: "Depend,
On me; be of good cheer, my love,
For I shall, in a brief while, prove,
That you are fairer than this maid
Whom he praises; be not afraid."
He angered the other thereby,
Who said that claim he would deny.
And so, the combat then began.

He slew my love, the better man
Who had sought to do me honour,
And so, I pine in grief and dolour.
Those that in the fortress do dwell,
Swear, on the bones of Saint Marcel,
Whose relics lie within the town,
That they themselves ne'er will frown
On any who fights their master,
Nor will attack him thereafter,
If their lord should be slain; no fear
Or doubt need that knight, tis clear,
Harbour, for they'll do him no ill;
He may depart, whene'er he will.'

HE OFFERS TO AVENGE THE DEATH OF HER LOVER

The knight then questioned her again:
'Great thanks, no doubt, the man would gain
Who won the sparrowhawk, your due,
And avenged your lover for you.'
The maid replied: 'Sir knight, tis so;
Great were the gratitude I'd show;
True thanks the knight would have of me,
That avenged his death, certainly:
He who took vengeance for his death
Might ask what he would, in a breath,
Whate'er it might be.' Thus, spoke she,

And he replied, most earnestly:
'Come with me, then, I pray, fair maid,
I swear you shall not lack for aid,
Till I've avenged your lover lost,
And won the hawk, whate'er the cost.'
'May God who made the world,' she said
'Defend your life, in what lies ahead!
If you can win the hawk, indeed,
Much honour you'll win by that deed.
For great the prowess you must show;
Great is the task, I'd have you know.
Gladly I'll accompany you there;
God guard you from ill, in this affair!'

**THE MAIDEN, MARGERY, GOES
WITH HIM TO VIEW THE SPARROWHAWK**

The maid, who was named Margery,
Then turned her steed's head, instantly.
Towards the castle they did ride,
Crossed the drawbridge, and passed inside,
Then rode to the green, where Margery
Led him to the hawk, for all to see,
And so, a crowd followed after,
Citizens, knights, and guards, as ever;
Women and maidens, from every side,
Gathered, and to each other cried

One question; who this knight might be
That sought the hawk, and who was she!
Many replied: 'We know him not,
But war would seem to be his lot;
His helm is dented; many a fight
He has waged, that valiant knight.
Many a time he has met the foe,
His targe has suffered many a blow,
Many a blade has struck that shield,
His armour has seen many a field.'
And all, with great assurance, cried:
'That he is brave, can't be denied;
But, by the Lord, who is that fair
Young maid who accompanies him there,
And the other who follows?' 'Why she,
That rides ahead, that maid must be
The one for whom the bold knight died
Slain by our master, in his pride,
This morning, after Mass, that sought
The sparrowhawk; though hard he fought,
Our lord it was that did prevail.'
All then cried: 'Tis she without fail.'
They followed where that trio led,
The pair of maids, the knight ahead,
Till they reached the sparrowhawk,
Perched there, beside a garden-walk.
There, was a fair and pleasant green,

A fruit-tree in the midst was seen,
That blossomed throughout all the year.
The golden platform, did appear,
On which was perched the bird of prey.
The green was round, in every way
Perfect, and a good bow's shot wide,
True and level, on every side.

**SHE TAKES THE HAWK, AND THE LORD
OF THE CASTLE, GIFLET, APPEARS**

The hawk was perched there, silently,
And as soon as the knight did see
The bird, to Margery he cried:
'Come, fair friend, be at my side,
I wish to claim the bird for you,
For such is no less than your due.
Beauty, you own, sagacity,
True courage, and nobility,
A graceful form, and a lovely face;
Take the bird then from its place.'
Riding swiftly towards it, she
Took the sparrowhawk, willingly.
Then, at the gallop, from his abode,
On the iron-grey steed he rode,
Came its master, silver his shield,
Scarlet roses on that plain field,

Raw cinnabar, their shade of red.
He gave his Gascon steed its head,
A fine horse, and great was its worth,
Gripping his shield; of noble birth
Was this lord, well-armoured he came,
A wreath of roses crowned that same,
About his helmet, which was fine.
His steed's coat too was, by design,
Wrought with red roses o'er the silk,
That matched the others of that ilk,
And well they looked: with him there came
His love, the 'Rose in Bloom', by name,
Mounted on a handsome palfrey,
Yet it bore a maid most ugly,
For she was fat and wrinkled too!
None but deplored, upon review,
His opinion that she was fair;
All were astonished gazing there
That Love had stolen his wits so;
No man's so safe from loving though,
That he may not lose his judgement.
Such are Love's powers of enchantment,
He even makes the foul seem fair,
As could be seen in this affair.
At the gallop his lordship came,
Towards the maid, who thought to claim
The sparrowhawk, and loud he cried.

Her right to seize it he denied.
The Fair Unknown, angered outright,
Advanced and called out: 'Why, sir knight,
Say you she should not gain the prize?
Is she not beautiful and wise?
Fairer than her I have not seen;
And, as her champion, I mean
To claim for her the sparrowhawk,
If you'll but cease your idle talk.'
The other answered: 'Hers tis not;
My lady's beauty you have forgot,
Which is far greater, as you see;
No maid born could more lovely be,
Without a shadow of a lie;
And I shall prove in battle, say I,
That none but her shall own the bird,
For I defy you, in a word.'

THE FAIR UNKNOWN DEFEATS HIM IN COMBAT

They spurred on their steeds in fury
Their sharp lances at the ready,
And fiercely they met together;
Each split the shield of the other,
Broke the strap that held his saddle,
And was unhorsed in the battle.
But neither warrior came to harm;

Each rose and, flexing his right arm,
With his sword of Viennese steel,
Full mighty blows commenced to deal.
Against their helmets they did ply,
Their blades, till sparks began to fly.
With trenchant strokes from his good sword
Each the other did pain afford,
For so forceful was each firm blow
Upon the helm, it brought but woe,
And so often these fierce strokes fell,
They severed the laces there as well.
Ferocious was the battle there.
The Fair Unknown a blow did dare,
So swiftly dealt, with all his force,
It knocked the other from his horse;
To such a blow did he give birth,
The warrior, stunned, fell to earth,
In a most rough and stony place,
And sprawling flat upon his face,
Bruised all his visage with that fall.
Our knight upon his helm did haul,
So violently the laces broke,
And loosed the helm ere he did choke;
His foe had not the strength to rise,
Which he was forced to realise,
And, to his grief, was forced to say:
'I'll not deny you've won the day.'

Then said the Fair Unknown, who still
Stood over him: 'Know now my will,
You're not quit of obligation;
Tell me your name and your station,
And swear my prisoner to be,
Then ride to Arthur's court, that he
May acknowledge your surrender.'
The fallen knight his oath did render,
And then, at once, declared his name:
'Giflet, am I, one known to fame
In these parts; Giflet, son of Do;
The people here address me so.
Yours am I now, myself I render
Captive, and respect your valour.'
Thus, that lord spoke, with good grace,
Rose, and the pair did then embrace.
Giflet, the son of Do, then led
Them to his hall, riding ahead,
Praying them, most courteously,
To accept his hospitality,
Offering them, to their delight,
A pleasant dwelling for the night.
And, in that castle, they did stay,
Well-lodged, until the break of day.

**MARGERY DEPARTS FOR SCOTLAND;
HÉLIE GIFTS HER THE LITTLE BRACH**

At dawn of the following day,
As the sun rose upon its way,
The Fair Unknown was swift to rise,
And armed himself in warlike guise,
Then they took to the road once more.
Giflet, the son of Do, before
Them, led the company.
At our knight's side rode Margery.
He asked of her, that he might know,
Where the maiden wished to go.
To Scotland said she, to her father;
King Agolans was her brother.
On her fist perched the sparrowhawk,
That now was hers, as they did talk;
Twas most dear to her; the Unknown,
Once to her lineage she did own,
Learning she was a king's daughter,
Called to Giflet, and asked the other
To send for a knight to escort
The lady to her father's court;
And Giflet said his man would see
Her safely to her own country;
What was requested, he would do;
And then he wished them all adieu.

As for Hélié, she recognised
The maiden, once she realised,
That she'd been raised in Scotland, for
She had seen her there long before;
Indeed, a near cousin was she,
And more than delighted to see
The maid now bore the sparrowhawk.
'Cousin,' said she, as they did talk,
'If only you'd said who you were,
And where you were born, earlier!
You go that way, and I go this,
Yet, that we be friends, is my wish.
Though we may always be apart,
Yet I shall love you, in my heart.
You bear the sparrowhawk with you,
And shall have my little brach too.
None fairer have they in Cornwall;
This creature's the fairest of all,
And was gained in fierce battle too,
Just as the hawk was won for you.'
Next, she gave her every detail,
And then the brach, to end the tale.
They shed a tear or two together,
And so took leave of each other.
The Fair Unknown rode on once more;
The dwarf near to Hélié did draw,
Then led her palfrey to the trail;

And I'll continue, without fail,
To tell you all that's known to me
Of the Fair Unknown's history.

**THE FAIR UNKNOWN AND HIS COMPANIONS
REACH A NOBLE CASTLE**

So, they travelled on their way,
Till evening fell; at close of day,
A mighty castle came in sight,
None finer could the eye delight.
Rich it was, and strong, and fair,
Well-sited on a headland; there,
Against its foot, the bold waves beat,
And, making its defence complete,
An inlet on the other side
Protected it, filled by the tide.
That brave castle was fine indeed;
High walls, its builders had decreed
Both tall and strong, circled it round;
No lily flower might be found,
Nor stretch of snow, quite as white
As those walls seemed to the knight,
For wrought of the whitest marble,
They enclosed all that fair castle;
More than a bowshot-length in height,
No engine could contest their might,

Nor harm a tower or battlement;
No grappling iron, nor missile sent.
So high were those great walls and strong,
That all assault must fail ere long.
A hundred towers of red marble
Rose within that splendid castle,
Of such great beauty, every one,
They shone as brightly as the sun.
A hundred Counts dwelt in that place,
And each a crimson tower did grace;
Thus, they defended every side.
A lordly palace, lofty and wide,
Wrought by enchantment, therein lay,
But wrought of what, no man could say.
For that palace within the castle
Had walls that resembled crystal,
And all was harmonious there,
Well-proportioned the whole affair;
The roof was covered with silver,
And with fine mosaics, all over.
Brighter than is the sun, upon
Its summit, a red garnet shone,
And threw forth such a glow at night
A summer's day revealed less light.
Twenty towers did the site encase,
You've never seen so fine a place.
And those towers were deepest blue,

No finer turrets could one view.
Thither, many a merchant came,
With fine goods and wares to his name;
Thither his merchandise he'd bring,
O'er the sea, and its praises sing,
And those products, of all the earth,
But added to that town's rare worth.
To the trade that through it flowed
The castle's prominence was owed,
And that stronghold the folk did style
The Castle of the Golden Isle;
And in that palace dwelt a maid,
Her looks the finest e'er displayed.
The seven liberal arts she'd learned,
And all enchantments, and had earned
Deep knowledge of the stars on high,
By gazing on the midnight sky.
Both white magic and black she knew,
Wondrous her understanding too.
Mistress was she of all that place;
Noble of heart, and fair of face.
The Maiden of the White Hands she
Was named, I say, with certainty,
And great the beauty of that maid.
The Fair Unknown his steed now stayed.

THEY SEE A TENT PITCHED OUTSIDE THE WALLS

He called to the maiden, Hélié,
She whom he led in company,
And pointed to the castle there,
And the light that shone so fair,
From the palace, and then a tent,
Its grand dimensions evident,
Pitched there, between them and the town,
And next the causeway that led down
To a bridge that crossed the water,
That they must, it seemed, ride over,
With this pavilion at the head.
To its palisade their road led,
One wrought of pointed stakes, they found,
Sharp above and beneath the ground.
On each stake a head was planted,
O'er its brow a helm was canted;
Every stake held a helmet laced,
For a pierced head each stake thus graced.

WITHIN THE TENT IS AN ARMED KNIGHT

In the tent was an armoured knight,
Donning his greaves, and set to fight.
There, in both summer and winter,
He waited on the one adventure,

For his role was painful and sad,
Cruel and weighty the task he had.
Once he perceived the Fair Unknown,
Clad in steel plate, he gave a groan,
And laced the helmet on his head,
Then to the field his horse he led;
By his side hung a good sharp blade.
This knight was suitor to the maid
Who ruled the castle; head to toe
He was armoured against the foe,
And his charger was clad the same.
Towards him that brave knight came
Who had been named the Fair Unknown;
At his side rode Hélie alone.
Thus, they neared the pavilion,
Wishing to pass it, and ride on.
But he within the palisade,
Most fiercely their passage stayed:
'If you would ride this way', said he,
'You must first do battle with me,
Since I the road to you shall bar;
Or else must linger where you are.'
To the Unknown said the maiden:
'Tis the truth, such is the custom;
Any knight that is conquered here
Is swiftly put to death, I fear.
His head is cut from his body,

With the helm; as testimony,
Head and helm, once severed, are set
On a stake still empty as yet,
Next the others, displayed before
The bridge, amidst those many more.⁷
Full one hundred and forty-three,
Were the Kings and the Counts, that he
Had slain, that knight, for the lady,
Whom, indeed, he sought to marry.
For five years the knight had loved her,
Yet had failed to win her over.
If he survived but two years more,
Of wedding her he could be sure.
This was the promise she had made:
If he defended the palisade
Full seven years, she would be his,
Or else he must fail of his wish.

THE CUSTOM OF THE PLACE EXPLAINED

Such was the custom; when her knight
Perished, defeated in the fight,
The lady took as her suitor
He who had proved the conqueror,
And he was forced to serve, in turn,
For seven years, so he might earn
The lady's hand; thus, he maintained

The custom, till it might be gained.
If for seven years he endured,
He wed that lady he adored,
And became her lord and master;
In such manner, one might win her.
She well knew, without a lie,
The husband that she gained thereby
Was worthy to have gained her hand;
Such was the trial she did command.
And yet she said she'd rather die
Than wed the one now standing by,
For whom she'd not the least desire,
And whose reputation was dire.
The man had served two years only,
Yet in that time behaved badly;
Perverse and brutal was the knight,
Lawless, faithless, a wicked wight.
For these traits she hated him so,
That, hating him, she wished him woe,
And though he achieved the term entire,
So greatly did his presence tire,
That she'd ne'er give herself, said she,
Nor this man, as her husband, see;
Naught there was, in this world entire,
Could make her bow to his desire.
He was hated by others too.
In that castle before their view,

None there was who'd suffer woe,
Should that rascal be now brought low.
That was the wish of great and small;
They loved him not, and sought his fall.
Rather they served him, out of fear;
Naught for his sake, though, was done,
Since the rascal was loved by none.

THE KNIGHTS APPROACH ONE ANOTHER

The knight, leading his steed, came on;
Red was its silk caparison.
Peerless that cape, with two hands, white
As hawthorn flowers, sewn in samite,
Skilfully cut and placed thereon;
With rare art were those emblems done.
His buckler was of purest green,
With two white hands upon it seen;
A pair of gloves adorned his helm,
His skill the brave did overwhelm.
As he came, he leapt to the saddle
Foot in stirrup, his steed did straddle,
While a squire offered up his shield
Another his lance, and took the field.
He was powerful, adept at war,
None had his strength, to be sure,
Nor could equal his blows in force,

Nor so skilfully ride a horse.
He galloped o'er the open ground,
Then, to the tent, he turned around,
Where the Fair Unknown now waited,
Thinking to fell one lightly rated.
As the Unknown viewed him there,
One who did for a fight prepare,
He knew there was no other way
But to battle with him that day.
A savage combat he must endure,
No other passage there he saw.
About his neck he hung his shield
And ere advancing o'er the field,
He seized his lance, and gripped it tight,
Then rode towards the other knight.
'Sir,' called out the Fair Unknown,
'I would ask of you, one man alone,
To let us ride upon our way;
You must not our journey delay.
Seek not our passage to arrest,
King Arthur granted me this quest.'
'What arrogance!' cried the other,
As they gazed at one another,
'You may not pass; my office here
I hold from my lady, be it clear?'
'Good sir,' the Fair Unknown replied,
'For all the world, would I not ride

A course intended but to slay!
I have no choice, it seems, this day,
Since I can do naught to amend
Your office here, except contend.
As I must pass, I'll do your will,
And defend myself, with all my skill.⁷
Each man displayed his defiance;
They set themselves at a distance.
The castle was now left empty,
For young and old, knight and lady,
Many a clerk, and many a squire,
All possessed by the same desire,
Came forth now to view the battle.
Taking place before the castle,
Hoping to see its champion fall,
For greatly was he loathed by all,
And greatly was his death desired.
The lady, whom his presence tired,
Took herself to a tower on high,
All her ladies hovering nigh,
To watch, from the windows there,
The passage of this whole affair,
She that could not but hate the man,
Gazed on, thus, as the fight began.

The End of Part II of 'Le Bel Inconnu'

PART III



“ He balted not till he had found
The entrance to the mighty hall,
Where at each window in the wall,
Upon its sill, sat a minstrel

THE FAIR UNKNOWN FIGHTS MALGIERS LE GRIS

The warlike pair prepared to fight;
The one and then the other knight
Spurring on his steed with vigour,
Both were men of mighty valour.
Swiftly on their steeds they sped,
To meet each other, head-to-head.
Swiftly they met together there,
As lightning courses through the air;
No savage wind as fast doth blow,
As each galloped to meet the foe.
Lowering their lances as they came,
Upon their foe's shield struck that same.
Breaking the steel, splitting the wood,
Each man with his spear made good.
Through both shield and hauberk went
The tip, driven with fierce intent.
Solid their lances were and strong,
Such that both men fell headlong,
Horse and rider thrown to the ground,
The latter neath the former found.
Both were toppled in their course,
So fierce were the blows, dealt with force.
They lay there, stunned, upon the earth,
By that to which their lance gave birth;
Nor could each charger rise betide,

Though its master lay beneath its side.
All those who that fierce joust beheld,
Were stunned by how the pair excelled;
None had ever a better seen,
A finer, or more praised, I mean.
As soon as they revived once more,
They set to fighting, as before,
From his sheath each man drew his blade,
And many a blow they conveyed.
Their shields were now broken and scarred,
Their helmets both dented and marred,
Their hauberks pierced, their iron mail;
Each man did the other assail.
On their helms they struck such blows,
That bright sparks from the metal rose;
Often, they fell upon their knees.
Up to Our Lord now went the pleas;
The folk pledged alms, and many a vow,
If but their knight was made to bow.
Their master, in turn, thought that they
For his swift victory did pray,
And that for him their prayers were said,
When they all simply wished him dead!
Love of force is of scant avail,
For in dire need all aid may fail;
Better to love those whom one rules,
For Fortune oft renders us fools.

AND DEFEATS HIM, TO THE JOY OF THE POPULACE

The Fair Unknown brandished his blade;
Upon the other a stroke he laid.
He well knew how to wield a sword;
A blow to the neck it did afford.
Sliding somewhat, it cut right through
The helm's laces, which fell in two,
And, with the helm no more in place,
All revealed were the head and face.
Thus, he struck next upon the crown,
His foe, staggering, tumbled down,
For the sword had shattered his skull,
While the blade, being driven full
Through the bone, had passed on beneath
And cleft as far as the man's teeth.
For joy the people cried aloud,
Never was so happy a crowd,
Not since Adam was created;
Not one there but was elated.

THE PEOPLE CONDUCT HIM TO THE PALACE

The knight he'd slain so violently
By name was Malgiers le Gris.
The people bore his corpse away,
And then did their allegiance pay.

‘Sir,’ said they, ‘a whole realm you’ve won,
The land, the people; everyone,
Will obey you; no realm is worth
More than our realm upon this earth.
To you our loyalty is due.
Great love our Lord has shown for you.
For you have slain the finest knight
That ever sat a horse aright,
And so have brought us joy this day.
Now, my lord, but ride this way,
View your people here arrayed,
And you may see the fairest maid
That ever was, and love her too,
Please God, and wed her; tis your due.’
They presented him with a steed,
And once he’d mounted, they did lead
The knight to the castle he could see,
Where he was received, handsomely,
A cross before him in procession,
Met with joy by every baron,
Led to the palace, with honour,
And relieved there of his armour.

THE LADY OF THE GOLDEN ISLE

Came the entrance of the lady;
None had e’er seen such a beauty,

So fair she was without equal,
So lovely that it seemed a marvel.
Her beauty shed as great a light
As the bright moon, amidst the night,
Issuing from the clouds around;
So, she entered, there to confound
The Fair Unknown; that valiant knight,
Drew back a little at the sight.
So skilfully had Nature wrought,
And granted her such charms, unsought,
That fairer brow and fairer face
Ne'er, on Earth, did fairer grace.
Whiter was she than a lily,
And yet her face shone full brightly,
Lit by the colour of her cheeks:
Bold he that such a lover seeks.
A smiling mouth, clear eyes of grey,
Of small white teeth, a sweet array,
A shapely form, her lips bright red,
Or rather crimson, I'd have said,
Those lips demanding to be kissed;
Arms made to embrace, a neat wrist,
All these had she, with hands as white,
And neck, as is the lily bright.
Her body graceful, blonde her hair,
She was the fairest of the fair.
All in samite was she dressed,

More tastefully than all the rest,
Her robe trimmed with ermine, sewn
In chequered squares for her alone,
And skilfully that work was done,
And envied there by many a one.
Her hair was drawn back on her head,
And all adorned with golden thread;
With a chaplet of roses crowned,
Most becoming, it spread around.
A jewel clasped her mantle to.
As the lady sailed into view,
A noble vision she did seem;
None fairer ever seen in dream.
Smilingly, she entered the hall,
And to the Unknown, first of all,
She progressed, so as to extend
Her arms about his neck: 'My friend,
You have conquered, yours I shall be,
And ne'er will part from you,' said she.
A gift now I would grant to you,
For much ill has been wrought, tis true;
And the gift I shall give this day
I'll grant indeed without delay.
The custom, whereby the road below
Is guarded, I would have you know
Is at an end; through you, sir knight,
The need for such is ended quite

And I shall make a lord of you,
My realm I give, and my love too.
For husband I'll take you, fair sir,
I know none that seems worthier.⁷
He thanked the lady profusely.
She took him by the hand, sweetly,
Seating him on a couch, by her;
All of brown silk was its cover,
Brought, it appears, from Thessaly.
Many a lord there they could see,
On every side, each there by right.
The lady thought now how she might
By ruse or art retain him there;
An anguish twas, beyond compare.
Her heart she'd given to this man.
None spoke a word nor speech began,
Except those two, who, in full measure,
Shared sweet words that gave them pleasure.
She said she would present him to,
And, ere nightfall, he'd converse too
With the princes of her domain,
Since he proposed her hand to claim,
And when a week had passed by, she
Would wed; thus, scant delay there'd be,
And all the country round must know,
That, to their wedding, all might go.

HÉLIE WARNS THE FAIR UNKNOWN

Evening fell, and water was brought;
They washed their hands, and all the court
Sat down to eat, and the lady,
(Knowing and learned was she),
Seated the Unknown by her side,
With Hélié on her other side.
All showed the Unknown great honour;
The lady took it upon her
To serve him with both love and care,
Wishing to give him pleasure there.
Great was their joy, in all the town,
Both young and old, coat and gown.
When they'd eaten, at their leisure,
Hélié rose to walk a measure,
And signalled to the Fair Unknown.
To him her thoughts she would make known.
Summoning him to her side,
This warning to him she supplied:
'Sir knight, a word I'd say to you,
And, what I say, that same is true;
This lady fair has gathered here
All her barons, it would appear,
To tell them she with you would wed,
And, if you dare refuse, instead
Of taking leave of her, you'll be

Held here, in close captivity.
Sir knight, be true to honour yet,
And so, my mistress, ne'er forget.'
The knight replied: 'Upon my life,
I shall not take the maid to wife!
Counsel me, then; what shall we do?'
'Flee,' said the maid, 'yet quietly too;
We'll slip away tomorrow morn,
Quitting this place soon after dawn.
All that we need I now discern;
To my lodgings I shall return,
Which are in the town nearby.
You'll need the cover of a lie.
With Robert all this I will share,
He can cope with such an affair.
He will have your steed in hand
And at the break of day, as planned,
We will have the steeds before
The palace at the guarded door
That leads to the chapel nearby.
Rise, ere the sun is in the sky;
Your arms and armour, for our part,
We shall bring; thus, we'll depart.
Yet when first your face you show,
You must say to the church you go;
Give the guard that sound excuse,
And your passage he'll not refuse.'

Her wise counsel he praised, and then
They sought out the others, again;
He sat down at the lady's side,
And there his thoughts took care to hide.
The maiden soon sought leave to go
And rest in her lodgings, below.
The lady told her that she might
Sleep there, in the palace, that night;
But though every effort she spent,
Naught could change Hélié's intent.
Robert bore away the armour,
And the maiden followed after.

THE LADY VISITS HIM AT NIGHT

A bed for the Fair Unknown was made,
With soft and precious quilts o'erlaid,
Fairer than any seen before;
Of this, would you hear me say more?
In his room they'd prepared the bed,
Fairer than any, as I have said.
The gold and silk there, cost, I'm sure,
A hundred silver marks or more;
The coverlet they did employ,
Neath which he'd lie, a source of joy.
When he took leave of the lady,
She said: 'My dear friend, I, truly

Long for the moment you are mine.’
Her tender speech he thought divine.
It seemed she would not let him go,
She clasped her arms about him so,
Embracing the youth so sweetly,
Ere parting from him, discreetly,
And retiring to her chamber;
No fair maiden born was fairer.
Then all withdrew, both great and small,
The cooks, and serving-men, and all.
The knight to his chamber, was led,
The fire was lit that faced his bed,
To grant the guest both warmth and light,
And all then retired for the night.
The Fair Unknown lay pensively
Watching the door, when suddenly
The lady entered; thus, he thought,
To find the pleasure that he sought.
Her hair uncovered, flowing free,
Clad in a silk mantle was she,
Of pure green, with ermine trimmed;
The maiden’s beauty was undimmed.
Of purest gold was each tassel
That served to tie that fair mantle;
Its sable collar rose to embrace
The lower portion of her face,
Its black enhancing the pure white

Of her face, in the flickering light.
Hid by but a slip, she drew nigh;
Whiter than the snow that doth lie
Upon the branch was its whiteness,
Dazzling the sight with its brightness;
And yet the flesh was whiter still
That this silken garment did fill;
Beneath it, pale limbs did appear,
Though partly hid, as she drew near,
While, against the legs' pure white,
The silk seemed darker in the light.
Entering the room where he did lie,
Upon the bed she turned her eye,
And asked herself if he yet slept.
The whole palace its silence kept.
'Is he asleep?' to herself, she said,
'Has he taken himself to bed?'
He heard her whisper, and replied.
Head raised, her question he denied,
Answering: 'Lady, I sleep not.'
Swiftly she drew towards the spot,
She whose form was noble and fair.
Her arms revealed now to the air,
She leant above him where he lay;
Willingly, at each other, gazed they.
Her breasts and neck, they seemed as white
As hawthorn flowers, to the knight.

Over the youth she thus did bend,
Whispering to him: 'My dear friend,
I so desire your company;
May God soon show his grace to me.'
She pressed her breast against his own,
Bare flesh to flesh, while the slip alone
Was all there was between the pair.
Joy seemed at hand, in that affair.
She bent her face towards his face,
And gently did the knight embrace,
Then: 'My dear friend,' said the lady,
Love-sickness, tis, that has seized me;
To see you, now's my sole pleasure,
Know, I love you beyond measure.
Hence, I could no longer refrain
From seeing, holding you again.'
He viewed her tenderly, at this,
And sought to steal but one sweet kiss,
Yet the lady drew back, and said:
'You please me not; for love has led
To this display of lechery;
At such time as you marry me,
And not before the rite is due,
I'll abandon myself to you.'
Then she parted from him, saying:
'To God, I commend you,' in leaving
By the door through which she came;

To her room, retreated that same.
Stunned, he surely now perceived
He was but mocked, and sore deceived!

**HE SLEEPS BADLY, AND AT
DAWN PURSUES HÉLIE'S PLAN**

Once the lady had departed,
He cursed at fate, broken-hearted,
That had failed him so grievously.
Love tormented him savagely,
But wearying, at last, he slept.
In dream he saw the maid, and wept;
She that had made his heart beat so,
Within his arms did sweetly show.
He dreamt he saw her all that night,
And, in warm embrace, held her tight,
And did so till the break of day.
But then he rose, and went his way.
Swiftly he sought the guarded door,
His plea the guard could not ignore,
And to the chapel now sped he,
Where he found the maiden, Hélié,
The dwarf beside her, and his squire,
Who held the steed's reins for his sire.
He sought his arms, and his armour,
Robert laced his helm; his charger

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

He now mounted, the Fair Unknown,
And ere any knew they had flown;
All four took to the highroad there,
As the bright sun rose through the air.
Hélie sang as she rode along;
Great the joy she expressed in song.
The dwarf led on; she rode behind.
Through wood and plain, the four did wind;
Towards the Ruined City, they rode,
Till Vespers, when the horses slowed.

THE CASTLE OF GALIGANS

Above a bridge o'er the water,
A fortress stood, beyond a river.
Well-founded towers, of ancient date,
Surrounded that whole estate,
Its keep protected by high walls.
There were many mansions and halls,
In that castle, close by a wood.
Its lord ruled all that neighbourhood,
And many of its folk were wealthy,
Of broad estates they held many.
Vineyards, woods and plains they saw;
Rich was that country to be sure,
Fine produce and stores a plenty
Filled the larders of that city.

Galigans was the castle's name,
And fair and pleasant was that same.
Of the maiden: 'What shall we do?'
Asked the knight, 'Fair maid, think you
That we may lodge there for the night?'
Her answer was swiftly in flight:
'No, we may not, sir knight!' said she,
I've no wish to ride there, and see.
Of good deeds therein, I've heard nil;
Who seeks lodging may meet with ill.
The custom of the castle is this,
As I well know, and vile it is,
That none may offer lodging there,
Nor hospitality may share,
Except the castle's lord alone
Who treats that honour as his own.
Lanpars is his lordship's name,
Tis the custom of that same,
That he will never lodge a knight
Upon a steed, armed for a fight,
Unless they first joust together,
And seek to overcome the other;
For only if God takes good care
Of him who seeks a lodging there,
And he unseats the lord, will he
Offer him hospitality.
But if Lanpars defeats the knight,

Humiliation's his, outright,
And the latter, without his steed,
Must suffer pain and shame indeed,
For all the castle's populace,
Hound that stranger from the place.
Great lumps of filth and mud they bear,
On slimy sticks, to that affair,
Pots full of cinders and ordure,
And all that's of vilest nature,
They hurl at the defenceless knight,
Till he is almost lost from sight.
Great is his grief who enters there.
Rather to the woods we'll repair,
Better to lodge beyond its walls;
Not a knight but that fate befalls.
Many have come, yet all have failed
Against them all, he has prevailed.
For that reason, we should not go,
Sir knight,' said she. 'Though it be so,'
The Fair Unknown replied, 'we must,
While God will ever aid the just.
Your words of warning are in vain.
Fret not, nor seek you to complain,
If I should ask a lodging there,
And a joust with this fellow share,
Who thinks his practice will deter
The bold and well-armed traveller;

Thus, he may avoid lodging him.
I'd measure myself against him.
So let us enter, and have no fear.'
Said the maiden: 'God see us clear!
If tis your wish, then let us go;
May the Lord's name protect us, though!'

THE FAIR UNKNOWN ENTERS THE CASTLE AND ENCOUNTERS ITS LORD, LANPARS

To the castle came that company,
And entered in, quite fearlessly,
And through the main street they did ride,
Folk gathering from every side,
Who, when they saw them, stood to jeer,
While all most hostile did appear.
Their vile sticks they loaded, and then
Filled up their pots of filth again,
And dipped cloths in noisome ordure,
Set to show the knight dishonour.
They all laughed and joked together,
Twas scarce worth debating whether
This fellow could escape their lord,
Who swept all comers from the board.
Seeing the crowd swirl all about,
Robert, as he rode, pointed out
That the tall keep towered ahead,

And to its door the street now led.
There its lord was playing chess,
With one whose king was in distress.
Lanpars rose on seeing the knight.
His greying hair was streaked with white;
His robe a rich but simple affair,
Bordered by black sable and vair;
Light shoes he wore on his feet,
And, to render his garb complete,
His belt bore transverse silver bands,
The artful work of skilful hands.
Here was a knight of noble mien,
Of a distinction rarely seen.
The Fair Unknown gave him greeting,
Without from his steed descending,
Lanpars responded courteously:
'Welcome to you, sir knight! said he,
'I doubt not you seek lodging here;
That you're in need of it, tis clear.
You may do so, most willingly,
According to the custom; with me
You must joust, and if you should win,
Why then, you all may lodge herein.
But if I strike you from your horse,
Then you must steer another course,
For without lodging you must go,
And be humbled, to your great woe.'

THE COMBATANTS PREPARE TO DO BATTLE

The Unknown willingly agreed,
Fearing naught. Lanpars in the lead,
They entered a vast vault below,
Wherein they might exchange a blow.
Beneath the castle, there, the knight
Intended them to hold their fight;
By custom, thus it was he fought.
A carpet to that place men brought,
Which they unrolled upon the floor.
Then Lanpars' armour there they bore.
He seated himself on one side,
Where a leopard might be descried,
In brownish hues, depicted there,
And thus, he armed for that affair.
Greaves of steel the lord did don,
Of worth, and fair to look upon,
Whiter than the hawthorn flower.
Once clad, according to his power,
To him his warlike steed was brought.
The saddle then that warrior sought,
Who fully armed, in all his pride,
Had many a combatant defied.
His shield he took, and to the hall
Two youths bore lances, at his call,

Long and solid, trim and square.
Once the lads had brought them there,
Each man chose, from those they bore,
That which seemed to suit him more.

THE DUEL COMMENCES, AND LANPARS IS UNHORSED

They parted, and then turned around.
Spurring their steeds on, o'er the ground
They sped, their steeds flying swiftly,
And each with his lance struck fiercely
Such a blow, with lance at the tilt,
Both spears were shattered to the hilt.
The two warriors met together,
Neither unseating the other,
For both were strong, and skilled as well,
And managed such that neither fell.
When they'd completed this first turn,
They sought not a reprieve to earn,
But seized another lance, then sped
To renew the fierce joust, instead,
And in fresh encounter, swiftly,
With levelled lances, met fiercely,
With such true vigour, and such force,
Their lances shattered in mid-course,
The splinters flying through the air
Like darts, and falling everywhere.

They both knew how to joust, that pair!
Robert chose a new spear with care,
As each man called out for a third,
Then, to his master, said a word,
Having chosen the better lance,
As faithfully he did advance:
'Sir, for the love of God,' said he,
'Son of the virgin maid, Marie,
Their pots and sticks, forget you not;
Fail now, and ill shall prove your lot.
Many are there that think to revile
And shame you, in a little while.
The streets are packed now with them all,
The rich and poor, the great and small.'
'My friend,' said the youth, 'have no fear,
The Lord above will aid us here!'
And then he turned without delay
And, once more, galloped to the fray,
Encountering the other, who
Struck at him, their joust to renew.
Lanpars dealt the leading blow,
Which through the other's shield did go,
The tip piercing and lodging there,
While a host of shards filled the air,
The shaft splintering, but the youth,
Seemingly untroubled, in truth,
Struck Lanpars on his gilded shield

Of which the gleaming wood did yield.
His own lance, both solid and strong,
Sent the other tumbling headlong,
Quitting the stirrups in a trice,
And somersaulting once or twice.
Yet Lanpars arose from the dirt,
Being neither stunned nor hurt,
And thus addressed the Fair Unknown:
'Sir, descend; I was fairly thrown.
You have won lodgings for the night,
And shall have them; it is your right.'

HÉLIE EXPLAINS THE REASON FOR THEIR QUEST

To this the Fair Unknown agreed;
A young nobleman took his steed
And other squires then drew near
To relieve him of all his gear,
And then bold Lanpars to disarm,
Who took fair Hélié by the arm,
And clasped her in his embrace,
And conversed so, and kissed her face.
Each of them displayed their joy,
That both knights had escaped annoy.
Being seneschal, you should know,
To her mistress, he honoured her so.
Then he asked her of her mission.

Thus, she replied to his question:
‘I went to seek King Arthur’s court,
At Caerleon; his aid I sought
For my mistress, and yet was pained
That no more than this youth I gained,
Who chose, but now, to joust with you.
And yet he suits me well, tis true,
And serves me faithfully, I say,
For so I’ve proven, on the way;
Fine the deeds he has sought to do;
And there’s none better, in my view.
Come show him now every honour,
For he’s a knight full of valour.’
Lanpars was pleased by all she said
Of the youth, and to him he sped,
And offered him his praise in turn,
And the welcome courage doth earn.
‘Sir,’ said he, ‘much have you endured,
And laboured hard here, in accord
With my wishes, and laboured well;
Now rest, and bid all pain farewell.’

LANPARS ACCOMPANIES THEM ON THEIR WAY TO THE RUINED CITY

He led them where they sat to dine.
The squires came bearing bowls of wine,

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

And many a dish of varying sort,
Such as would grace the finest court.
After they'd dined at their leisure,
And drunk of wine a fair measure,
The youth sought rest; then, in the morn,
Went to Mass at the break of dawn.
Then back to the hall they all fared,
Where their breakfast had been prepared,
For which Lanpars' cook had supplied,
Fat capons, and other birds beside.
The Fair Unknown sat at table
Just as long as he felt able,
Renewed his strength, then rose with speed
And left them, to saddle his steed.
Lanpars at his side did appear,
And spoke privately in his ear,
Telling him that, he too would go,
For he'd encounter many a foe,
And have need of arms and armour.
The youth armed, and clad his charger,
And declared that he was ready
To depart, with his company.
Then the squires led to each their horse,
And all were mounted, in due course.
Lanpars went with them, and beside
The maiden, Hélié, he did ride,
Deep in friendly conversation,

While the dwarf performed his station,
Leading the fine palfrey she rode,
For whom she made a lightsome load.
While all three conversed together,
The Fair Unknown led them ever,
With Robert, his squire, at his side,
Listening to them; though occupied,
Marvel not if he rode in fear,
Lest some sudden danger appear.

AND COUNSELS THE FAIR UNKNOWN AS TO THE PLACE

Travelling till evening, they came,
Through a forest, and past that same,
In sight of the Ruined City.
None had they seen of such beauty,
Though in ruins that city stood.
Between two torrents in full flood,
It was sited, and they could see
Much of its former majesty:
The broken towers, spires, mansions,
The great keep, above its dungeons,
The palace shining yet, in splendour,
The steeples clustering together.
On viewing the vast city there,
All, halting, were obliged to stare,
Then dismounted; of a sudden,

Lanpars wept, as did the maiden.
Then armour was borne forth outright,
With which to arm the Unknown knight.
His greaves of steel they swift did lace,
(Strong deer-hide straps held them in place)
Secured his hauberk front and back,
And then, to guard him from attack,
Settled his helmet on his head.
Bold Lanpars turned to him, and said:
‘Sir knight, tis time for you to leave,
None may your burden now relieve,
For any that kept you company,
There, would meet with little mercy.
As you enter in that city,
Its walls wrought in antiquity,
You’ll see the towers and entrance doors;
The mansions, with their many floors,
And craftsmen’s workshops set below;
The palace windows, shattered though,
For all’s now ruined that you’ll view;
But none you’ll find to welcome you.
Follow the main street, as you ride,
Turn not your steed to either side,
Until you reach, midst the city,
Its palace, of like antiquity,
Wrought of marble; once that you win,
Follow the way; it leads therein.

The hall you'll find is long and wide,
Vast the portal that leads inside.
You may readily view the place,
A thousand windows pierce its face;
And at each a minstrel doth stand,
With an instrument in their hand,
All dressed in rich attire, and lo,
Before each a candle doth glow.
Combined in truest harmony,
They play the sweetest melody.
As soon as they behold you there,
A welcome to you they'll declare.
You must reply: "God curse you all!"
Ere you enter that mighty hall.
Forget not to pronounce the curse,
Ere your adventure you rehearse;
And, as you love your life, beware
Of entering a chamber there,
That you will see beyond the hall,
Its door set in the farthest wall,
But, in the centre, take your stand
And await what fate may demand.
Come, mount your steed without delay,
And hasten to be on your way.'

THE FAIR UNKNOWN ENTERS THE CITY

The Fair Unknown his steed attended,
And to God his friends commended,
While they commended him likewise,
Although the tears filled their eyes,
As they now watched the knight depart,
His leaving had so moved each heart.
They feared they'd not see him again.
Now protect him, Lord, who doth reign
O'er this world! The maid wept freely,
Lanpars weeping as profusely.
Robert slumped down, the dwarf also,
Grieving, letting the reins hang low,
Causing the horses to roam free.
The Fair Unknown rode anxiously,
Until the city he drew near.
He crossed the river that ran clear
Beneath the bridge upon that side;
Its stream, there, swift attack denied.
Five moated leagues of walls arose
That yet those ruins did enclose,
And still they towered, strong and high,
Their cut stones stretching to the sky,
Their marble bright o'er the water.
Bonded close with solid mortar,
In diverse colours shone the stone,

Beasts and flowers upon it shown;
Yellow and brown, blue and green,
Stone well-set, with a subtle sheen.
And every thirty yards along,
A turret stood, both tall and strong,
Such that he that on one did stand,
Might call to those on either hand.
None were present in the city,
For the whole fortress was empty.
He crossed himself at the sight,
And then he entered in, the knight,
For open was the castle gate.
The street ahead was long and straight,
He rode on, glancing to each side,
Great windowed mansions he espied,
Their columns tumbled to the ground.
He halted not till he had found
The entrance to the mighty hall,
Where at each window in the wall,
Upon its sill, sat a minstrel,
Before each a lighted candle;
And each one held an instrument,
The whole in one harmony blent.
At one window played a harper,
A lyre sounded from another,
Next the pipes, then a vielle,
A fiddle, and a chalumel;

One sang like a siren, as clear,
A citole accompanying; near
To these a minstrel blew a horn;
By another a flute was borne.
One sang a lay of love; he saw,
A tambourine and a tabor,
Bagpipes, flageolet, psaltery,
Trumpets long and short, saw he,
While every minstrel did their best
To play in concert with the rest.

AND ENCOUNTERS AN ARMED KNIGHT

When the Fair Unknown they espied,
In a loud voice, as one, they cried:
'God save, God save the chevalier,
King Arthur's man, who doth appear
In this hall, in the lady's cause!
His fear might have given him pause,
Yet nonetheless the knight replied,
And in doing so all dread denied:
'May the Creator curse you all,
And upon you great trouble fall!
Then he galloped, without delay,
Down the great hall, upon his way.
A minstrel stood behind the door,
Who in his hand held a tabor,

And after him the door he did close.
In the hall, a great light arose,
From the candles burning bright
Before the minstrels; and the knight
Saw that the hall was rich and fine,
And at its centre, as by design,
Stood a great table, all complete,
Supported upon seven feet.
To it the knight did now advance,
And halted, leaning on his lance;
There he awaited his adventure.
A knight came from a dark chamber,
All fully-armed from top to toe;
His charger was armoured also.
About his neck hung a green shield,
Lacking an emblem on its field.
Dappled the steed that did advance,
Heavy the knight's steel-tipped lance.
When the Fair Unknown he saw,
He spurred his mount as if to war,
Our knight likewise, as he came on,
Spurred towards him, whereupon,
Each galloping towards the other,
With a crash they met together.
High on the shields their lances struck
With such blows that, through ill-luck,
Both of them tumbled to the ground;

Yet both were up again, at a bound,
Each man drawing his trenchant sword;
Many a stroke did those blades afford,
Falling briskly on helm and shield,
Though neither skilful knight would yield,
Neither would grant the other ease;
Oft they were beaten to their knees.
The stranger saw twas of no avail,
And that the Unknown must prevail;
Finding he was so brave a knight,
Twas unwise to prolong the fight.
He soon withdrew towards the door
From which he had advanced before.
That warrior the darkness swallowed,
As, swiftly, the Unknown followed,
And was about to pass the door,
When he saw, high above the floor,
Two axes raised, above his head,
Precisely poised to strike him dead.
In a trice he turned and withdrew,
Ere those axes could cut and hew.
He halted in the midst of the hall,
Waiting to see what might befall,
Though it was now devoid of light;
Even his steed was lost to sight.
He prayed then to the Lord apace,
Seeking deliverance from that place;

Escape from dishonour he sought,
And the shame that dishonour brought.
While he prayed and lamented so,
A minstrel scurried to and fro,
Lighting the wax candles once more,
Till all was as bright as before.
The minstrels to their labour bent,
Each one sounding his instrument,
As they had done prior to the fight.
Now that the hall was filled with light,
Naught remained to cause him fear,
From the chamber none did appear.
He ran to catch the reins again,
Seeing his mount its legs regain.
Retrieving his lance from the floor,
He took position, as before,
Mounted upon his steed anew,
Ready for aught that might ensue.

A SECOND KNIGHT APPEARS, OF GIANT STATURE

From the chamber issued a knight,
Of giant stature, and armed aright,
Armoured indeed from head to toe,
As was the powerful steed below.
Of great worth was that stallion,
With eyes that bright as crystals shone;

A horn on its head bore that same,
And from its nostrils came forth flame.
None so agile was seen before,
Breathing smoke and sparks galore.
As large and strong was its master,
Vast in form, and fierce in nature.
Thundering on, the warrior came;
In black armour was clad that same,
While, pounding the paving below,
Galloped a charger far from slow.
So heavily its four hooves struck,
The very stones beneath it shook,
And sparks of fire filled all the air,
Its hoofbeats echoing everywhere.

AND THE PAIR ENGAGE IN A FIERCE DUEL

Seeing him pound o'er the pavement,
The Unknown stared, in amazement,
And to the King of Glory did pray
To grant him victory that day.
Fiercely then he spurred his steed
Towards the challenger at speed,
As towards him the other rode,
Who that fierce stallion bestrode.
Each sturdy lance landed with force,
As the warriors met in mid-course.

Part III

Neither shield deflected the stroke,
The wood was shattered, the straps broke.
Both hauberks opened at the blow,
Into the flesh each lance did go.
So mighty was each blow, perforce,
The other tumbled from his horse,
Though, neither wounded mortally,
They leapt to their feet, instantly.
And ran to their lances on the ground.
Yet both lay in pieces, they found.
They left them broken on the floor,
From out the sheaths their swords did draw,
And, striking with the naked blade,
On helm and plate, their skill displayed.
Far fiercer was the battle there
Than was that old Cornish affair,
Where Tristan did fierce Morholt slay,
Roland and Oliver's affray,
Or that twixt Mainet and Braimant.
Twixt knight and giant combatant,
No greater duel e'er met the eye,
Though fought beneath an open sky.

The End of Part III of 'Le Bel Inconnu'

PART IV



“ *A fine and pleasant hostelry,
I found when we were in this town,
A lodging-place of fair renown,
Where we stabled our horse before.*

THE FAIR UNKNOWN SLAYS THE GIANT KNIGHT

The duellists were bruised entire,
Their blows so great, dealt with such ire,
Both were exhausted by the fight,
And wounded sorely was each knight.
Great was their woe and weariness,
Yet neither yielded, nonetheless.
The Fair Unknown wielded his blade
And greatly his foe he dismayed,
Sending his helmet through the air,
Who disengaged from the affair.
He sought to flee, his head now bare,
But such a blow our knight dealt there,
The stroke so weighty and so full,
It shattered his enemy's skull;
His iron cap was split thereby,
The blade it failed thus to defy,
And so, the skull was split in two,
And down he fell, his limbs askew.
A thick and hideous smoke arose
From out the mouth, and from the nose.
The Fair Unknown thrust at the knight
With his sword, dreading the sight;
And, to prove if he lived or no,
Set his hand on the chest below;
All had melted to vile mucus,

Black, foul to smell, and hideous;
All his form it did disfigure,
A witness to his evil nature.
He crossed himself, the Fair Unknown,
And sought his steed, now quite alone,
For, swift, the minstrels fled away:
Each thrusting at their window-bay
With such force, as they did retire,
It shook the palace walls entire;
So violently they fled apace,
The doors banged, rattling in place.
Long, it was, ere the noise abated;
Ill the echoes thus created.
The candles too were swept away;
Upon the hall deep darkness lay.
Indeed, naught could the Unknown see,
Drowned in that vast obscurity.
Scarce could he stand as the place shook,
Forced to the ground as the blows struck
The window frames, the doors as well;
It seemed both earth and heaven fell.
He crossed himself, fearing evil,
Calling on God to keep the Devil
From harming him, then rose again
And forced himself, as if in pain,
To seek the table in empty space,
Groping awhile about the place,

Ere, by chance, he struck the thing
With both his hands, and there did cling.
The sounds, they brought him grave annoy;
All his will did the youth employ
To counter his fear; to God he prayed,
Begging that He might send him aid.
'Dear Lord,' he cried, 'what dare I say?
'Tis martyrdom to suffer this way;
This pain it seems will never end,
Nor light return, nor day ascend.
I know I cannot long endure,
Nor can I see the outer door,
Nor find my steed, and yet, I say,
Why do I feel such deep dismay?
Nought is there here that I should fear,
Nor is it right that a chevalier
Should be dismayed, whate'er arise,
If he be armed, in any wise.
Whate'er the ills that might appear,
A man that loves must show no fear.
Should I not bend my every thought
To serving her whom I have sought,
The Lady of the White Hands; she
I must love, not fail, where'er I be.
I would go now, beg her mercy,
Were I but free of this misery;
I shall yet see her, if God please,

And then to serve her never cease.
Already Love grants strength to me;
I dread naught that a man may see.’

A SERPENT APPEARS

From an opening there shone a light,
A serpent appeared, gleaming bright,
Casting a glow, as from a fire,
Lighting the palace hall entire,
So great the brightness that it shed,
From the place all shadows fled;
No man has ever seen the like;
Its head was raised as if to strike,
Its crimson mouth sent forth a flame,
Great and hideous was that same,
Far wider about its middle
Than is the largest wine barrel.
Its two vast eyes glittered and shone,
As if twin garnets glared upon
The hall; it slid, without a sound,
From out the opening, to the ground.
In length it stretched twenty-four feet;
Its tail coiled thrice and, all complete,
No man had e’er seen a greater.
God ne’er created the colour
Of those scales, or that vile glow;

Gilded the beast seemed below.
It slithered now towards the knight,
Who crossed himself at that foul sight.

THE CRUEL KISS

The knight upon the table leant,
The serpent nearing with intent,
And watched that demon as it came,
Ready to lunge at him and maim;
But ere he could draw his sword,
And a proper defence afford,
The monstrous snake inclined its head,
And bowed before the knight instead,
In a gesture of humility,
And so, he sheathed his blade. Said he,
To himself: 'I may strike that not
That yields itself upon the spot.'
The serpent slid towards the knight
Giving no sign it sought to fight.
He thought to draw his blade, once more,
To strike it as it crossed the floor,
Yet the serpent bowed down again,
Its gesture of submission plain,
And so, the knight deferred the blow.
At once the serpent reared and, lo,
To his mouth it raised its muzzle,

Its every action still a puzzle;
He drew his blade then, with a frown,
Yet once again the snake bowed down,
In a gesture of humility.
He looked it over, cautiously,
Yet struck it not, no move made he,
Nor shifted his gaze, for the knight
Could not but marvel at the sight
Of those crimson jaws glowing bright.
Thus, absorbed in contemplation,
The Unknown maintained his station.
Then the serpent, with a low hiss,
Upon his mouth planted a kiss,
And, having done so, turned away.
The Fair Unknown, his sword in play,
Made as if to strike the creature,
Deeply troubled by its gesture,
But the snake bowed down once more,
Then slid away across the floor,
And once it reached the further wall,
Vanished completely from the hall,
The opening there was swiftly sealed;
No further monster was revealed,
Nor any sign of ill adventure,
Except the hall was dark as ever.
The Unknown mused upon the kiss;
It seemed that all had gone amiss:

‘Lord God above, what should I make
Of this Cruel Kiss? Some foul mistake
It seems, yet one presaging woe.
I am betrayed by this strange foe.
The demon has enchanted me,
Though the kiss I had unwillingly.
Little my life’s worth, now,’ said he.
A voice cried out, then, stridently,
Revealing his lineage to the air,
For none other was listening there,
And that high tone it did maintain:
‘Hark now, son of my lord Gawain,
I know well that this fact is true,
That there is none the like could do,
Performing a great deliverance,
Surviving every circumstance,
The Cruel Kiss, and the combat, thus,
That proved so harsh and perilous.
In this world there exists no knight
So brave, so steadfast, in a fight,
And in all else, such now is plain,
Except yourself and your sire, Gawain.
No other could deliver the maid,
From the great trouble on her laid;
A lady, though in strangest guise,
You have saved; one noble and wise.
Wrongly did King Arthur name you,

The Fair Unknown twas he called you;
You were baptised as Gingalain,
Your father is that same Gawain.
All your history I'll tell to you:
Blanchemal le Fey gave birth to you.
Armour, I gave you, and your sword,
Ere I sent you to that great Lord,
Arthur, I say, who, for his share,
Granted to you this whole affair,
The boon of rescuing the lady.
You quest ends here: in victory.'
With this the voice faded away,
Having ended all it would say,
While the knight remained, filled with joy,
By the words the voice did employ,
Having revealed, that very same,
Who his sire was, and his own name.
And so, my tale, to speak aright,
Is of Gingalain, the valiant knight;
A tale that, sung on every shore,
Throughout the ages shall endure.

GINGALAIN SLEEPS, THEN WAKES TO A LOVELY SIGHT

Gingalain was full wearied now.
Upon the table his head did bow.
With his shield beneath his head,

He lay there, sleeping like the dead.
So weary was he, twas no joke;
He slept long, yet at last awoke,
And he did so with great delight
For all the hall was filled with light.
A lady stood at his head, alone.
More beautiful than any known,
Such was that lovely woman there,
Her colour fresh beyond compare.
There's ne'er a clerk could portray
Her mouth, her lips; no, none, I say,
Owns the power to describe her.
She was a work wrought by Nature;
And none so lovely had She made,
In eyes and lips, in form displayed,
Beauty that every eye commands,
Except for her of the White Hands,
Whom no maid alive could equal,
At whose beauty all did marvel.
And yet, I dare affirm this maid
Lacked in naught, if all be weighed.
Nature had wrought her every part
Forming her with consummate art.
She wore a mantle of pure green,
And none finer was ever seen;
Rich was that mantle, and most fair.
Two sable tassels, made with care,

Fastened it; its collar was fine,
White ermine worked in rare design.
The cloth of which that cape was made,
Both quality and strength displayed,
And it was so skilfully wrought,
It could not be damaged by aught;
'Twas the work of a Fey, and she
Dwelt on an isle in the Frozen Sea.
Of the same was the tunic made,
In which the maiden was arrayed,
Of rich worth, artfully wrought,
Trimmed with ermine, fit for a court.
Five ounces of gold, of a surety,
Were used in its embroidery,
And four ounces of silver net;
With many a jargoon it was set,
While other stones of great power,
O'er the gold, made up its dower.

**THE MAIDEN, WHO IS BLONDE ESMERÉE,
QUEEN OF WALES, TELLS HER TALE**

Gingalain, on seeing her there,
Bowed his head, and gave her fair
Greeting, at which she did the same:
'Sir, upon me you now have claim,
Said the maid, 'and with good reason,

Through freeing me from my prison,
That serpent-form breathing fire.
My dear lord, I am yours entire.
Daughter am I of King Gringras,
Whom Death has reft from me, alas.
And I am that same lady who
Sent the maiden, that follows you,
To King Arthur's noble court,
Where his aid for me she sought.
You have delivered me from woe;
Full many a week have I grieved so,
In that form being forced to dwell;
How it came about, I shall tell.
Once Death took my father from me,
Two months had passed, twas nigh-on three,
When to court came an enchanter,
Accompanied by his brother.
As two minstrels they presented,
And that day the pair enchanted
All those dwelling in the city,
A good five thousand; completely
Maddening our folk, one and all.
The high turrets they made to fall,
Those two, and brought the belltowers low,
And, a marvel, the earth below
Split side to side and flung on high
Great boulders soaring to the sky,

That struck upon one another,
Then dropped to the ground together.
Sir, it seemed that all things fell,
The heavens and the earth as well.
So great was the enchanters' power
The folk all fled, that very hour;
None could oppose them, certainly.
And then they sought to enchant me:
They made me touch a certain book,
And, lo, a serpent's form I took.
Long did they keep me in that state.
When they would speak with me, of late,
They came to me, increased my torment
By lifting that vile enchantment;
Mabon who held the most power,
Addressed me for many an hour,
Urging me to grant him my heart.
Seeking to wed me; all his art,
And fine speeches he did employ,
Claiming he'd free me from annoy,
While, if I'd not be his lover,
I would remain a serpent ever;
Here I would suffer endlessly,
For none would come to set me free,
Except the most courageous knight
Of Arthur's court, a man of might;
And now I know it to be true,

For none are mightier than you,
Unless it be your sire, Gawain,
That every virtue doth maintain.
The crowd of minstrels whom you saw
After you passed the palace door,
Were all part of the enchantment,
Conjured to seem malevolent.
The knight that you first fought, that same
Was Evrauns the Cruel by name;
The other was that vile Mabon,
Who the enchantment cast upon
Myself; and when you struck him dead
You ended all my pain and dread,
For all their work was then undone,
And their enchantments, every one.
The serpent that then kissed your lips
Was but myself, in dark eclipse,
She whom you treated with respect,
And whose kiss you did not reject.
No other way but through that deed,
Through kissing you, could I be freed.
All I have said, without exception,
Is true; herein lies no deception.
Now I tell you another thing,
Of all my realm you shall be king.
Wales is the name of my country,
Whose rulership devolved on me,

While this city you came upon,
Was called, by all folk, Senaudon,
But, once Mabon the place did maim,
The Ruined City was its name.
It is my capital, and three
Bold kings owe it their fealty.
Great is the realm, and the land
Is rich indeed, that you'll command,
For, I pray you, since tis your right,
Having thus conquered all, sir knight,
To take me for your wife, and so,
As our true king be crowned also,
For they know, all in this castle,
How you've saved me from dire peril.'

**GINGALAIN FEIGNS A WILLINGNESS
TO WED HER, AND ALL THE COMPANY REJOICE**

He knew how to feign agreement,
'Fair maid, I willingly consent
To wed you, if Arthur agrees,
For ever that king I must please.
I shall go and ask him, readily,
For it would be but villainy
To marry without permission.
I would not be in that position.
Rather I shall seek his counsel,

And only wed if it be well,
If it be so, upon my life,
I'll willingly take you to wife.'
Thus, the marriage he delayed,
While also appeasing the maid,
Who thought him to be her lover.
He turned to see Hélie enter
With Lanpars accompanying;
Then the rest of his following,
Robert his squire, behind the pair,
With the dwarf; joy all did share,
The four all smiles on entering.
Conceive then the loud rejoicing!
All gathered, once more, together,
They warmly embraced each other,
Not a one there but felt delight,
And clasped the victorious knight.
Hélie and Lanpars, of those four,
Joyed to see their mistress once more,
While Robert much relieved appeared
On seeing him for whom he'd feared.
When all had expressed their pleasure,
The four turned, in equal measure,
To removing his armour apace.
Robert the helmet did unlace,
While, once his armour was removed,
Cut and bruised his body proved,

For he'd received so many blows,
From his crown down to his toes,
That he was bleeding everywhere,
Covered in wounds from that affair.
When they'd bathed his weary flesh clean,
They bandaged him and, having seen
To all, led him to a chamber
Where were garments without number;
Silks and brocades they did unfold,
Adorned with Alexandrine gold,
And fur-trimmed mantles, vair and grey;
Gold and silver about them lay.
That chamber was fit for a king,
And the bed a most regal thing.

THE CITY IS CLEANSED OF ENCHANTMENT

Now it behoves me to relate,
Though briefly, lest I tempt fate,
(For naught here should be forgot,
And twould go ill if I did not)
Succinctly then, within reason,
How ever great lord and baron,
Abbot, and bishop, and prince too,
Of that Welsh realm, arrived to view
The knight who'd saved their lady,
Once they'd all heard the story

Of how the rescue came about.
For, to allay their every doubt,
None delayed but swiftly sought
To share the joy of it, at court.
All the people now gathered there,
At the news of that great affair,
Hastening to see their lady,
Great was the crowd now, and noisy.
Archbishops, bishops, abbots, all
The clergy gathered at the call,
And through the streets made progression
Chanting, bearing, in procession,
Crosses, censers, reliquaries,
Tall banners, and rich draperies;
Many a relic they did bear,
As the bells sounded everywhere.
The city streets, as they progressed,
With holy water, too, they blessed.
Those friends of God, those saintly men,
Blessed the city, and cried 'Amen'.
Once Mass had been celebrated
In the largest church, they vacated
That place and at the citadel,
Prayed again that all might be well,
Springling holy water once more
That all might be both cleansed and pure,
And from every enchantment free

Produced by Mabon's sorcery.
Then to the palace they returned,
Having fresh right of entry earned.
Once the palace was blessed, delight
Overcame them all, at the sight,
Of their lady, whom, to their cost,
They had considered all but lost.
Great was the joy among them then
At viewing their queen once again,
She of the free and open air,
Her manner ever sweet and fair.
Great was the love her lords did show,
For her absence had brought them woe,
She who was so noble and wise,
While she spoke lovingly likewise:
'My lords,' she said, 'come list to me;
What shall I do for such as he,
Who has endured for me such pain,
No knight finer from here to Maine?
You all must show him honour,
For he's a man of true valour.
Noble is he, this Gingalain,
Whose sire is the faithful Gawain
Nephew to the great King Arthur
Who rules as far as Spain or farther.
Advise me now how I should show
The greatness of the debt I owe?'

All the lords called out, as one:
‘Noble lady, let this be done;
Accept him as your spouse; indeed,
He saved your life by his true deed.
We wish him now to be our lord;
None better could this world afford.’
‘My lords, if it please him,’ said she,
‘Then more than happy shall I be;
What pleases him, needs no amends,
Now go and speak to him, my friends:
If he will wed me, have no fear;
I shall love him, and hold him dear.’
Three noble Dukes swift departed,
To speak to him; with them started
Four Counts whom she called upon;
Lanpars, with Hélie, followed on;
While three abbots, and bishops two,
That brave company did pursue.

GINGALAIN IS ASKED FORMALLY IF HE WILL MARRY THE QUEEN

They came to where Gingalain lay,
At his side, Robert, night and day,
And, on entering the chamber,
Greeted the brave knight together.
To their greeting he then replied;

Courtesy ruled on either side.
He raised himself to listen then,
Feigning to be nigh sound again,
While they sat down, about the bed.
A lord the conversation led,
As emissary, having been
Selected to speak for the queen.
'Good sir, but hear me out,' said he,
'My lady, and all her company,
Do, through myself, a thing offer
That will bring to you much honour.
Accept without hesitation,
Delay, or procrastination,
Our lady's hand in marriage now,
And dukes, princes, and barons, vow
That they'll obey you loyally,
Without treason or villainy.
All live but to do your pleasure,
To serve you, and show you honour.
Wealthy, powerful, you shall be,
And not one baron shall you see,
In all this land, that will not do
Whatever you command him to.
So, take our lady for your wife,
Who'll devote to you her life,
For great the honour you shall know;
All our folk pray you will do so,

Trusting to you the realm entire;
That you should rule is their desire.
All of the land you shall possess,
For they will grant you nothing less
Than everything, forest and plain,
The rivers, with all they contain,
And gyrfalcons and sparrowhawks,
And peregrines, and fierce goshawks,
And fine steeds, and silver and gold
That you may give to those you hold
In affection, that honour you,
And so, reward all who prove true.
And when you ride to the tourney,
The finest arms you will carry,
And wear the armour that best suits
A royal knight in such pursuits,
And by your side many a knight
Will go well-armed to the fight.
For you may ever rest secure
In their support, in peace and war.
Now grant me, good sir, your reply
So, I may repeat it, by and by,
To the queen, to whom I am bound;
She loves you with a love profound.'

HE GIVES AN EVASIVE AND CONDITIONAL REPLY

This answer came from Gingalain,
Who yet could scarce his strength maintain,
And was most pale: 'Sir, I render,
Thanks to you, and every other,
For all that I have heard you say.
I shall not hide from you, this day,
That I would gladly marry so,
But first to Britain I must go,
And there beg leave of King Arthur,
Otherwise, I may not wed her;
For if to this the king says nay,
It would prove but folly, I say,
To marry without his consent.
Tis as his envoy he has sent
His nephew; he must needs agree
To my marriage; for he chose me,
Amidst his court, knowing me not,
And ne'er shall that boon be forgot.
I pray my lady will thank the king,
For the succour that I could bring.
Through him she's delivered from woe,
And to his court now she should go,
There to do King Arthur honour,
For the grace bestowed upon her.
By his command have I wrought all,

And so, to him the rule should fall.
A noble boon he granted me,
Adding me to his company.
In good faith I ask that the queen
At Arthur's court should soon be seen,
Her loyalty, there, to tender,
And her deepest thanks to render.
Honour and favour she shall gain,
And, if a husband she'd obtain,
Then I shall take good counsel there,
And, by his will, seal the affair.
And so, indeed, tis my counsel,
That she prepares her apparel
To visit his court, in rich guise,
With many a nobleman likewise.
And, if she'll journey to his court,
Let her do so swiftly, in short.'

BLONDE ESMERÉE PREPARES TO TRAVEL TO ARTHUR'S COURT

All this the lady agreed to do,
All Gingalain had asked her to:
Thus, she would go to Arthur's court,
And thank him for the aid she'd sought.
She set the date when she would go:
In a mere seven days or so.

Once the word had gone to and fro,
The emissaries prepared also,
And took their leave of Gingalain,
Whom they left feeble and in pain,
Commending him to God's good care.
To him the surgeons did repair,
Sent by the queen to tend the knight,
For he was precious in her sight.
Throughout the length of his stay
She honoured him in every way.
Before the lady left that place
For Arthur's court, there came apace
To the city, those folk once more,
Who had paid her fealty before,
At least those who were safe and sound,
And still in riches did yet abound,
And they brought her silver and gold.
Shall not the tale be swiftly told?
All the city was soon restored,
And welcomed there many a lord.
The queen summoned a rich escort,
To go with her to Arthur's court.
In her chamber she did address
The clothes she'd wear, and then no less
Attention gave to her equipage;
Honour, she'd seek, at every stage
Of that journey; her company

Held thirty cities in fealty.
Blonde Esmerée, which was the name
That queen had been granted by fame,
Prepared to wed, filled with desire
For one who'd won her heart entire.

**GINGALAIN RECALLS THE LADY
OF THE ISLE OF GOLD**

While he waited for the lady,
The knight rested in the city.
After a fortnight he was healed,
Yet fate another ill revealed.
Love possessed his every thought,
A whirlwind of unrest it brought.
He who'd never sighed with love,
The worst of sufferers did prove,
All for the Maid with the White Hands;
He was made pale by love's demands.
Since he had left the Isle of Gold
Of which I previously told,
He had not forgotten the maid;
Not once did the memory fade,
Of going without taking leave,
Of having laboured to deceive.
From the dawning of that day,
His heart was sore wounded, I say,

And, since then, he'd longed for her so,
That heart had redoubled its woe.
The joy seemed double he had known,
And the signs of love she'd shown,
And many a time it seemed he saw
Her face in dream as, once before,
It had bent low above his head,
As he lay there upon the bed
In the palace, in that chamber.
A cape her shoulders scant cover,
She bare-footed in her chemise,
In such semblance as could but please,
Appearing as when she had come
To his bed, and he was struck dumb.
Now the thought his mind tormented;
On a day, he thus lamented:
'Alas, I know not what to do!
What is this pain that hurts anew?
It must be love, or so it seems,
For I have heard: not as in dreams
A lovely woman should be loved.
The thing is true, for now tis proved
By my feelings for that fair maid
For whom I die, a man dismayed.
Great honour she did me, that fey,
Whom I fled at the break of day;
'Twould have been better far to die

Than, like a villain, thus to fly
From the one that I so desire.
Now I repent that deed so dire.
Now my whole heart is full of woe.
I scarce dare ask, Lord, here below,
For Your pardon; yet what to do?
I die of love, that much is true.
For there is none can aid my plight,
Nor can I now forgive my flight.
Rather, a sad death I must die,
No ease I win, but only sigh.
Yet, be silent! 'Tis ill you speak!
Go now to her, and mercy seek;
Grant not your heart to suffer so,
Until you lack the means to go,
Through enduring the pain too long.
Depart now while yet you are strong,
Or indeed you will surely die,
For no good will be got thereby.
There's no escaping such desire.'
With that thought, he summoned his squire.

HE SEEKS COUNSEL OF HIS SQUIRE

His advice he sorely needed;
Any counsel would be heeded.
The squire to his lord did go,

Who told him briefly of his woe.
‘Robert,’ he said, ‘now counsel me,
For I suffer most wondrously;
I cannot sleep or even rest,
Such the thoughts that my mind invest,
Thoughts of her that I did behold
When visiting the Isle of Gold.
She torments me, death lies therein;
She of the White Hands I must win,
For I desire her wondrously;
Oft love stirs me, and will slay me.
Love brings me anguish without end;
Long have I suffered so, my friend.
What shall I do, since you are wise?
Till now such ills I did despise,
But she will prove the death of me.’
Said Robert: ‘You make mock of me!
Whene’er I spoke to you of love,
Ever the jester you did prove.’
‘This is no jest!’ cried Gingalain,
‘If ever I mocked Amor, tis plain,
He is wreaking his vengeance now;
His darts slay me; neath them I bow.’
Robert replied: ‘Praise to the maid,
She that has, thus, your heart waylaid!
Though I know naught of chivalry,
He lacks valour, it seems to me,

That never once desires to love,
Ere his heart too old doth prove;
Nor should one grant that man a prize,
Who ne'er for Amor lives and dies.
Sire, be not dismayed if Amor
Had made you subject to his law;
He loves brave fellows, for his part;
Slow to strike rascals with his dart.
For that reason, be not dismayed;
Traverse Love's passage, unafraid,
And I'll counsel you, man to man,
In all, as wisely as I can.
Now, if you'll listen to me closely,
When the queen is good and ready,
To depart for King Arthur's court,
And to her the mules are brought,
Her palfrey, and her other steeds,
And with the royal robes she needs
You see them loaded, and with gold
As much as the panniers will hold,
Let her depart whene'er she will,
But you, keep to your lodgings still,
And arm yourself, in privacy,
Then take to the road, instantly.
When you re-join the queen that day,
To whom this realm honour doth pay,
Speak sweetly, and her ear command

And then your leave of her demand.
Say you'll go with her no further,
But must go to meet another,
With whom you have business to do,
And cannot linger, but will pursue
The matter as swiftly as you can;
To meet her at court is your plan.
And when you have won her leave,
Ride as fast as man can conceive;
Return, and we will make our way,
Galloping hard, both night and day,
Till we come to the Isle of Gold
Where your love you may behold.'
'Fair friend, what's this you say to me?
Dare I own the effrontery,
To return to that lovely maid,
She that I fled, and so betrayed?'
Robert replied: 'Why yes, you may,
And tell her of your deep dismay.
He who seeks not mercy to claim,
He must forever bear the blame;
He who from great pain doth suffer
Must show his wound to the healer.
'He,' folk say, "that feels great hunger,
Must seek bread, if he'd live longer".
How, indeed, can she know your heart,
If you tell her not, nor play your part?

You must tell her how you suffer
From the love you possess for her.
Forgiveness you will swiftly find;
After tears, joy's not far behind.'
Gingalain said: 'Tis long to wait;
Before the queen departs in state,
Three days at least must yet pass by,
And yet, ere they do, I must die,
If I ease not my suffering here.'
'Sire, hide your heart, and own no fear.
Let naught the loving mind dismay,
For you will win her heart, I say.'

HE EXECUTES ROBERT'S PLAN

So Gingalain endured three days,
While suffering Love's ills always,
And then a fourth, until, at morn,
At the very first break of dawn,
Upon the fifth, Blonde Esmerée
Prepared to set out on her way,
And with no small host before her;
Each noble astride his charger.
Next her companions rode on,
With a peregrine, or gyrfalcon,
A goshawk or a sparrowhawk
Upon their fists; at a slow walk,

The beasts of burden came after,
With many a trunk and coffer,
Destined to show the wealth of Wales,
Gold and silver cups, rich bales
Of cloth, and spoons and bowls of gold,
From all her treasury did hold.
Then the queen mounted her steed;
Great was her own escort indeed,
A hundred knights in company,
And all equipped most sumptuously.
Thus, they issued from Senaudon,
The queen and her lords, every one.
With them their spare horses they led,
Fine palfreys, and chargers pure bred.
They issued forth from the city,
While Gingalain armed, silently.
As the queen set out, she sought
For Gingalain amidst her court,
But no trace of him could she see.
'The Lord help me, my lords,' said she,
Where is my friend, and spouse to be?
None about her knew, or could say,
She halted, questioning them away.
At last, looking towards the city,
They saw him armed, riding swiftly,
With his squire Robert at his side.
They gazed, their eyes open full wide,

Wondering why he should arm that day;
Towards the queen he made his way.
When Blonde Esmerée saw him there
She turned her steed, at him did stare,
Then questioned the knight, at some length;
What need for this display of strength?
Why arm, thus? What had he to say?
Gingalain answered, straight away:
'My friend, I cannot go with you;
There's a matter I must pursue.
Most urgent business it is indeed.
But, when all is done and agreed,
I'll follow you at once to court,
Nor shall I be delayed by aught.
Greet King Arthur there, for me,
And grant me leave, willingly.'
Said the queen: 'Have mercy, sire!
You doom me to sorrow entire.'
'Lady, to God, I commend you;
Go I must; may He defend you,
You, and all your fair company.'
He parted from them instantly,
Though not without a deal of pain,
And took to his own road again.
They grieved as the knight turned to go,
But none felt such a weight of woe
As did the queen, who paled at this,

For parting so was ne'er her wish,
And oft she shed a tear and sighed,
Saddened, as onwards she did ride,
Dismayed was she, and troubled so,
Yet nonetheless the maid did go
Upon her way to Arthur's court,
Though mournful, and alive to naught.
Shortly I will tell the story
Of the queen's onward journey,
But first I'll tell of Gingalain,
Who galloped swiftly o'er the plain.
The Lady of the White Hands, he,
Most anxiously, desired to see.
The sight of her was his great need,
And so, the road seemed long indeed.

AND ARRIVES AT THE CITADEL OF THE ISLE OF GOLD

All that day till the evening hours
He journeyed, ere he saw the towers
Of the keep of the Isle of Gold,
Having ridden thirty leagues all told.
On the outworks he cast his eye,
The walls before him strong and high.
And quite enough to give one pause.
If the folk as far as Limours
Had besieged it for thirty years

Their toil had but ended in tears.
Great was the beauty of that place,
Though, as to that, I seek your grace,
Having described it all, elsewhere.
To be brief, there was none so fair.
Gingalain, on viewing that sight,
Felt his heart swelling with delight.
He had long held the keep in view,
And now came to its walls anew;
All about that place lay the sea.
Towards the Isle of Gold, rode he,
That fine and wave-begirt stronghold.
And there a fair host did behold.

HE THEN MEETS WITH A HUNTING PARTY

As towards the group he did draw,
Ladies, knights, young maidens, he saw,
Bearing sparrowhawks, fierce merlins,
Tercels, goshawks, and peregrines,
Since a-hunting that host did go.
His joy he could not help but show,
For his beloved he could see
Amidst that noble company;
Upon a white palfrey she sat,
Ambling slowly, though, as to that,
Its white showed spots of black also;

O'er its neck a gold mane did flow.
She was the Maid of the White Hands;
The harness straps, in Moorish lands
Were wrought, with artistry untold,
Of a hundred little scales of gold;
Thus, as the palfrey ambled by,
They tinkled softly neath the sky,
More sweetly than a harp or rote.
None ever heard a sweeter note
From the rebec or the vielle.
What can one say of the saddle
Upon which the fair lady sat?
An Irish master had wrought that,
So fine, and of such value too,
That to describe it's hard to do;
It was made of gold and crystal,
All encrusted with enamel.

AND ADDRESSES THE MAID OF THE WHITE HANDS

The maid was fair and much esteemed,
Her unbound hair behind her streamed
As she rode; she'd doffed her mantle,
And had taken to the saddle
In a riding coat trimmed with gold,
The day's weather not proving cold;
Fine was the cloth, embroidered o'er.

A little hunting cap she wore,
To hide her pale brow from the sun;
Many-coloured, twas richly done,
In green and brown, and blue, and white,
Shading her visage from the light,
While birds in gold were there portrayed;
A thing of worth, skilfully made.
Her hair flowed free, as I have told,
Gleaming more brightly than pure gold;
Loosely it flowed behind her head,
Looped by a single golden thread.
With shapely hips, a slender waist,
Her whole form was by beauty graced.
Long sleeves her hands revealed below,
Whiter than hawthorn flowers that blow.
What could any bold clerk say more
Of that maid than I've said before,
Other than this: no maid wiser
Dwelt in this world, nor one nobler
Of heart; none fairer e'er was known;
Nature wrought her to shine alone.
The sparrowhawk on her wrist, she bore,
Moulted thrice, the maid did adore.
Gingalain knew her from afar,
For she shone bright as any star.
He doffed his helm, and bared his face,
And then saluted her, with grace:

'Lady,' said he, 'I'd speak with you,
That my inmost thoughts you may view,
If you were pleased to turn aside.'
'May God defend us!' she replied.
Wishing to tell her all, the knight
Now placed himself upon her right.
'Lady, come, lend to me an ear,
Joyful am I to see you here;
That you slay me, I cannot hide.
Mercy, I beg of you!' he cried.
'For God's sake take pity on me,
Relieve my suffering, and be
No crueller towards me today,
On account of aught I may say.
For Love will not let me alone
Till all the truth to you I own;
Ashamed am I, though all in vain;
Love doth assault me, and constrain
My heart, and leads me as he will.
Lady you may be sure, until
I die, your prisoner I shall be,
To be hung, burnt, slain or set free.
My feelings I cannot conceal.
Whether you list to my appeal
Or no, the power is wholly yours;
My life's now subject to your laws.'
'Who may you be?' archly, she asked.

‘Lady,’ said he, ‘a true knight, tasked
With serving you, since first he saw
Your face, and then viewed it no more.’
‘And should I know you then?’ said she.
‘Lady, I shared your company,
When I lodged in your palace here,
Ere I was forced to leave, I fear,
To aid the daughter of King Gringras;
On which quest I went forth, alas.
Twas then your hand you offered me,
Though I departed, foolishly,
That I might bring another aid.
Since then, my love for you, fair maid,
Has oft brought torment to my heart;
Scant repose have I, for my part.’
‘What!’ she cried, ‘are you not that man
Who behaved as ill as any can,
And my feelings did so outrage,
Scorning myself, my lineage,
By fleeing from the keep at dawn,
Without taking leave, one ill morn?
And yet I did you great honour,
Myself, my realm, love forever
Offering you, with all my heart.
Twas a vile insult on your part!
Think not lightly of that affair.
If I’d not loved you, for my share,

I'd have treated you as vilely,
And punished you, without mercy,
For the shame you brought upon me
Through offending me so deeply.
Your error leaves you in danger.
A duke, a prince, or some other
Lord or knight, of this fair country,
Will prove so keen to act for me,
That, whether it be right or wrong,
He'll strike you dead before too long,
Should he discover where you are.
You're the maddest of all, by far,
Who dare to return to this court,
And seek to speak to me of aught.
I loved you deeply; which I recalled
Full oft, and though, in truth, appalled,
Restrained myself, sought not your shame,
Recalled that love and, in Love's name,
Still loved no other man but you;
And had I not, then vengeance true
I had wrought; that alone is why
I chose that you should live, say I.
Yet I warn you that, in no wise,
Shall I be thus taken by surprise,
Again, and set my heart on you;
But shall to my own self be true.
Hearing her speak so, Gingalain
Grew pale; his face revealed his pain,

His visage dimmed, his eyes less bright,
His brow, and cheeks, and lips, showed white:
Feebly, he said: 'What? Is it thus?
Will you be less than generous,
And show no mercy? Then I must die.
No longer can I endure, say I.
No comfort is there now for me,
You render death a certainty.
On you a weight of sin must fall
For wounding me beyond recall.
Since no escape now can I see,
Nor ease to end my misery,
I'll end my life here in this land.
You are my death; for, understand,
Such is my need to have you nigh,
That in your realm I seek to die.
Little I care you wield the knife,
Tis through you, I forgo this life.'

HE LODGES WITHIN THE CITY; ROBERT CONSOLES HIM

They'd talked so long in this manner,
That they reached the city together.
When they came to the portal, she
Rode within, while her company
Of knights and ladies did the same;
There entered many a fair dame.
Dismounting then, beyond the wall,

They sought their dwellings one and all.
Meanwhile, our hero, Gingalain,
Gazed upon the palace in vain.
Not a word to him did any say;
A foolish part was his to play.
He knew not what he ought to do,
Left there, without an end in view.
‘Robert, where shall we go?’ said he.
‘The day goes ill, as you can see;
And here are we, without a plan.
Go find us lodgings, if you can.’
Robert replied: ‘Now list to me:
A fine and pleasant hostelry,
I found when we were in this town,
A lodging-place of fair renown,
Where we stabled our horse before.
The host was courteous; to be sure,
Nor will we lack for decent fare.
Said Gingalain: ‘Then lead us there.’
Onwards rode the squire and knight,
And were welcomed, with delight,
At that hostelry; be not surprised,
For Robert was soon recognised;
They lodged in comfort there, that night,
Though his lord shared not his delight,
Amor had caught him in his net,
And he did naught but grieve and fret,
Pained by love for that fair lady.

Thus, to his squire, he said, sadly:
‘Robert, what is to do? Alas,
Shortly the gates of death I’ll pass;
Amor but wishes to see me die.’
This was his loyal squire’s reply:
‘What did the lady say to you,
When you her lovely face did view?’
‘Truly, no comfort found I there;
It seems that death must be my share.
Indeed, she said to me, that same,
That she’d have brought on me great shame,
If, that is, she’d not, for her part,
Once loved me, and with all her heart.
She thought of it oft, she did own;
What restrained her, was that alone.’
‘Sire,’ said Robert, ‘be not dismayed,
For here another tale’s conveyed,
In her saying she once loved you;
Love may yet be kindled anew.
I’d take solace from her reply;
Her love may waken, by and by.
Her response bodes well for you.
Fret not, but keep your aim in view,
I deem the words she did employ
Enough to fill your heart with joy.
Could I speak to her, tis my view
She’d not be slow to pardon you.’

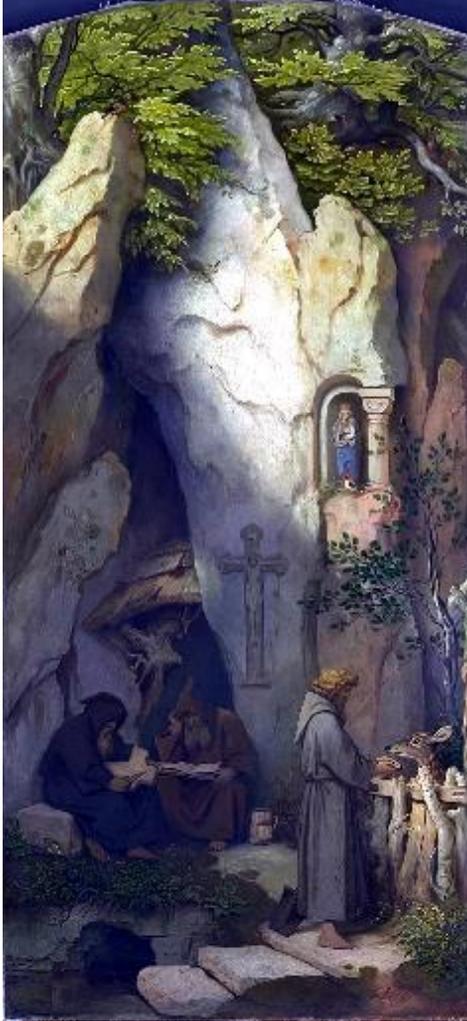
GINGALAIN IS TORMENTED BY LOVE

So Gingalain, for many a day,
Waited, though suffering alway,
Hoping to have sight of his love.
Ever empty his hopes did prove;
He saw her not, whate'er he tried.
The little he owned he applied
To the problem, all he possessed.
Many a one there he addressed,
Offering gifts to any that might
Accept such things to aid a knight.
He gave, traded, borrowed, and spent,
Till all was gone, with that one intent.
For two full weeks he laboured so;
And from him all his wealth did flow;
All his equipment too he sold.
Truly Love had him in his hold,
Such that he neither slept nor ate;
An ill port had he reached of late.
Love governed one so oppressed
That though he pondered without rest
On some means of speaking to her,
None could he find, that sad lover.
Of Love, that all his thoughts constrained,
Night and day our hero complained.
Love it was denied him repose;
Woeful thoughts did his mind enclose.

He neither ate nor slept, for still
He was led about, at Love's will.
Greatly was he anguished thereby;
On his bed Gingalain did lie,
Thinking himself about to die.
Unable to rise, he could but sigh,
Tremble, and shake, and weep ever.
Greatly did Love's martyr suffer.
He tossed and turned, all day and night,
Lay on his left side, then his right,
In the manner of every lover.
Ill the foe that I did discover,
In the one I've sought to embrace.
From the moment I saw her face,
My heart was never free of her,
Nor can it be, although I suffer.
Though my death she seeks, endlessly,
More than aught is she worth to me.
Never have I done her a wrong,
Except in loving her too long,
And yet, through that, she works me ill,
In that my heart must seek her still,
That finds her here within each day.
Listen, then, to what I shall say
Of Gingalain, dying, through Love,
That his enemy, thus, did to prove.

The End of Part IV of 'Le Bel Inconnu'

PART V



“ *Every single thing God had made,
Skillfully wrought, and there displayed.
In the walls there were windows too,
To allow the warm sunlight through*

**A MAIDEN APPEARS, AN EMISSARY
FROM THE LADY OF THE ISLE OF GOLD**

Robert kept watch o'er his master,
Which added to his own pallor,
Seeing him tormented by Love,
Which oft him to tears did move.
Made anxious by Gingalain's hue,
His lord's needs he did then pursue.
For great was the knight's wretchedness,
Enfeebled, saddened to excess.
Words of solace he went seeking;
And had scarcely finished speaking
When a fair maiden made entry
To their rooms, in the hostelry.
She was a most well-mannered maid,
Hallmarks of virtue she displayed,
Clad in a mantle lined with vair;
Brocade, with gold threads everywhere.
Noble the maid was, and she wore
A fine robe, of two halves they saw;
One part was silk, of purple hue,
The other flowery; the fur too
Lining her cape was of two kinds,
As if its maker was of two minds,
One rich vair out of Hungary,
The other ermine, both fine to see.

O'er the purple lay the latter,
O'er the flowery silk the former.
A sable trim too had the cape;
Rich was the fur about her nape.
As for the mantle's fair brocade,
It too was most artfully made,
For all the workmanship was rare;
Never was there seen, anywhere,
A finer robe than that she wore;
They went well together, they saw.

SHE SUMMONS GINGALAIN TO HER MISTRESS

Gingalain, on seeing the maid,
Bowed low, and a welcome conveyed,
While she returned the compliment:
'May God, who is omnipotent,
Grant you all your heart may desire,
From her that made it so aspire.
Sir, my lady sends you greeting;
'Tis she whom you came here seeking,
The lady who rules o'er this city;
One in a hundred thousand is she.
These garments she has sent to you,
And asks that you visit her; do
So, I beg you, without delay,
As soon as you are well, and may.'

Gingalain heard her joyfully;
‘I am completely cured’, cried he.
‘For I’m rid of my ills entire
Since I’ll see her whom I desire.
There’s naught now from which I suffer,
Since she would have me recover.
God be praised that, through His grace,
She now wishes to view my face!
Blessed be the lady, and this news;
My pain is eased, whate’er ensues.’
He expressed his joy to the maid,
And soon was in fine robes arrayed,
Silken garments that she had brought,
Full ready to appear at court.
The rich clothing suited him well,
Though his pallor, hard to dispel,
Still painted all his face with woe.
His cheeks were pale, yet, even so,
One might search for many a year
Before one found a chevalier,
As brave, wise, handsome, I believe.
The maiden took him by the sleeve,
And said to him: ‘Come now, away,
To see my lady, for we delay.’
‘With pleasure.’ Gingalain replied,
And, with the maiden at his side,
Took to the street that, by and by,

Led to the palace, there, on high.
On entering, they hurried through,
And by a door issued forth, anew,
Into a garden, where his eyes
Saw much indeed to praise, and prize.
Marble the walls that closed it round,
Upon which, in relief, was found
Every single thing God had made,
Skilfully wrought, and there displayed.
In the walls there were windows too,
To allow the warm sunlight through;
In solid silver they were set,
No nobler sight the eye ere met;
None was as fine, or rich, or fair.
God made never a tree, that there
Had not been found, midst the array,
Had one but searched it all, I say.
There were laurels in quantity,
Many a fig and almond tree,
Many a sycamore and pine,
Palm, and medlar, in its design,
Pomegranate, and oleander,
Planted there, with every other.
Its riches yielded liquorice,
Spices, incense, all that there is,
For God tree, herb or root ne'er wrought
That to that place had not been brought:

Zedoary, and pyrethrum,
Galingale, cloves and cinnamon,
Spikenard, pepper, cumin too,
Came of the wealth that therein grew.
The roses there were without peer,
Bringing forth flowers all the year.
And midst that garden could be heard
The song of many a tuneful bird.
Calandra-larks, amidst its vales,
Orioles too, and nightingales,
Thrushes, and blackbirds, sang away,
Nor ever sought their song to stay.
Such perfumes rose there, at all hours,
From those herbs, and from those flowers,
That any there would not think twice
Ere claiming: 'Here, lies paradise'.

**THE LADY OF THE WHITE HANDS
WELCOMES GINGALAIN TO HER GARDEN**

Gingalain, and the lovely maid
Whom he accompanied and obeyed,
Walked midst the garden till they came
To a fair place within that same,
Where the lady he'd longed to see,
Neath the shade of an olive-tree,
Was surrounded by her young maids

And ladies, in their silk brocades.
The sight was one that brought him cheer.
The lady, seeing him draw near,
Rose to greet him as he did so.
Not she, that set Paris aglow,
Helen, fairer than any seen,
Not Byblis, nor Iseult the Queen,
Lavinia of Lombardy
That Aeneas wed in Italy,
No, nor Morgan le Fay, surely
Possessed a tenth of her beauty.
As well compare her to anyone
As the pale moon to the noon sun;
There was not her equal on Earth,
That to no fairer ere gave birth.
Great was her fame that fair lady.
Gingalain bowed to her humbly.
When he appeared before her face,
The lady welcomed him with grace,
And next acknowledged the young maid,
Then, taking his bare hand, conveyed
The wish that he should sit by her,
On a cushion with silk cover.
Opposite the maids were arrayed;
Admiration that throng displayed,
All there gazing at their lady,
For they knew naught of rarer beauty.

Said the lady: 'How are you, now?'
'Both well and ill, I must avow,
My lady; through you, I suffer pain,
May God grant that never again
Shall I pass a fortnight as ill
As that gone by; I feel it still.
And yet, may I suffer like this,
As long as it may be your wish'.
'Come, now!' cried the lady, 'Sir knight,
Have you naught better to recite?
What can the cause of your woe be?
I'm sure tis naught to do with me.
Rather you seek to insult me here,
As you did once before, I fear.
As for me, should I lose your love,
If you as faithless were to prove
Once more, my life too I would lose.
Tis I, not you, Love doth abuse.'

GINGALAIN REPLIES TO HER ADMONISHMENT OF HIM

The youth reddened on hearing this;
Crimson grew those cheeks of his.
He seemed as handsome as before,
Indeed, no knight on any shore
Could equal him in form and face;
In all the world none matched his grace.

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

He was valiant, courteous, wise,
And replied in eloquent guise:
'Lady, have you not made me pay
Most dearly for my sin that day
Of failing to take leave of you,
Obliged my quest to then pursue?
My lady, gentle and debonaire,
Will not one who is sweet and fair,
Take pity on a poor knight who
Is pledge to do all he can do,
Whatever indeed that may please,
To win pardon, and ne'er shall cease.
My heart is yours, indeed tis true,
If your faith in me you'll renew,
Amor shall stand my guarantor;
For, lady, I shall die, for sure,
If you'll not take pity on me.
Delivered to death I shall be,
Should you seek not to ease my woes,
And through your kindness bring repose.'
The lady gazed at him a while,
And he at her; each did beguile
The other; two hearts were as one;
In truth, when all is said and done,
The maid loved him, as at the start,
Though she'd tried to hide her heart.
With all her heart she loved the knight,

Though she'd concealed her love from sight.
Indeed, their hearts were so on fire,
They owned but one heart, one desire.
Each o'er the other sorrowed more
Than Tristan and Iseult had before.
What can one say of such a tale?
Grace and beauty will e'er prevail.

THE LADY RELENTS

The lady gazed at his handsome face,
And then declared: 'No small disgrace
You brought upon yourself, despite
Your wit and prowess as a knight.
Yet this sole fault I here reprove,
Your ignorance of how to love.
Ill you wrought by your clumsiness,
Though many a virtue you possess,
For I confess this truth to you,
(May God recompense me anew,
If ever faith in Him I've shown)
I'd have loved more than any known,
If you had but known how to love.
But now, if you do so approve,
I'd have you sojourn here with me.
I find, in you, true nobility,
And I would have you dwell on high;

Too long were you there below, say I.
Here, above, tis far pleasanter,
And then, twill suit your health better.’
Gingalain, ever courteous,
Replied to his fair lady thus:
‘Do you mock me, lady?’ said he.
‘Were I sure you spoke truthfully,
And from the heart, as you do live,
Then there is naught that God could give,
That would bring me greater joy,
Than all my powers to employ
In serving you; I’d have you know
Most willingly to such I’ll go,
For I shall find no joy elsewhere.
Lady, are these true words you share?’
‘Sir, I mock not, nor speak amiss.’
He thanked her then, on hearing this.
Her speech an end to woe had spelt,
And, in his heart, great joy he felt.

**THEY DINE, THEN RETIRE TO REST;
THE LADY ISSUES A WARNING**

Directly, from the garden, they
Into the palace, made their way,
A place of beauty, and delight.
Tables were laid there, in plain sight,

For supper; forth went the commands
For cool water to bathe their hands,
And then they all sat down to eat.
Bread and wine, all that was meet,
Every kind of delicious fare,
All they might wish, was offered there.
When the court had dined at leisure,
Eaten, and drunk, in full measure,
They rose, expressing their delight,
For it was now quite late at night,
And time for folk to seek their rest.
Knights, and ladies, the paths addressed
That led to their dwellings below,
While Gingalain, now free of woe,
Rejoiced that he alone might stay,
Close to his lady, at end of day.
Many a pleasant word was said.
The chamberlain made up a bed,
For Gingalain in the great hall,
And twas not an ill one at all;
Silken sheets from Byzantium,
Fit for a king to lie upon,
And silk coverlets had that bed,
On seeing which, the lady said:
'My friend, on silken sheets you'll lie,
That might honour a king, say I,
So quit them not, for I implore

You not to flee me as before.
In my own chamber I shall be,
The door ajar, but list to me:
Though I should close it not this night,
Because I do, think not you might
Dare to enter. I'll say, once more,
I forbid it, though near the door,
Your bed doth lie; attempt it not,
Let not my warning be forgot;
Enter not my private chamber,
Lest I should fear I'm in danger.
Do naught, except at my command.
I go; I leave you in God's hand.'
'And I you, lady,' he replied;
Then they retired on either side.

GINGALAIN LEAVES HIS BED AT MIDNIGHT

Into her chamber went the lady,
His gaze pursuing her closely
Ere she vanished from the light,
Reluctant to lose her from sight.
Then he lay down upon his bed;
Unquiet were the thoughts in his head,
Such that he could not sleep or rest,
Wide awake, and woeful at best.
Often, he gazed towards her door,

Hoping to look on her, once more,
Hoping that she'd leave her chamber,
Visit his bed, as you'll remember
She had done when he first was there;
Her absence left him in despair.
Great were his woes, Gingalain,
He could scarce be still, for heart's pain,
Gazing, endlessly, at the door,
Which stood half-open as before.
Often, he stirred, then sat upright,
As if he would visit her that night.
Then of his action did repent,
And inwardly questioned his intent.
'Lord God,' said he, 'what shall I do?
Go, or stay as she asked me to?
She told me that I must not go,
Yet it seems to me, even so,
That she wished I might do so still.
Lord, if I only knew her will!
If I stay, then I think that she
Will, in truth, think little of me.'
Often, he rose, as if to go,
But then, within himself, said no.
To go or not? Thus, he remained,
As in his bed, he oft complained.
Saying full often: 'Now, I will;
Then, 'No, I'll not,' conflicted still.

Thus, he was restrained by Love,
Who, yet, was urging him to move,
And, in the end, pressed him to go;
Amor, it was, that tortured him so.

**HE TRIES TO ENTER HER ROOM,
BUT IS POSSESSED BY AN ENCHANTMENT**

He raised himself, though, from his bed,
And slipped a shirt over his head,
Then approached the door, silently,
As midnight neared; yet, suddenly,
As he went towards her chamber,
He could neither move nor enter,
But found himself on a plank of wood,
Above a mighty torrent in flood,
That like a tempest raged and roared;
A wretched foothold it did afford,
He could nor advance nor retreat;
Twas hard enough to keep his feet.
Great now was his desire indeed,
To cross the plank, and great the need,
Viewing the water there below
That shook that quivering plank so.
He felt he was falling, and did well
To grip the plank hard, as he fell,
Such that his body hung below,

Dangling above the torrent's flow.
Little wonder if he knew fear;
His grasp was weakening, twould appear.
He thought he'd surely fall and drown,
And cried aloud, ere he tumbled down:
'God, on high, save me! Help me, now!
Death's nigh without aid, I avow.
Come, succour me, some noble friend;
On this plank, I may not depend!
I cannot grip it for long, say I,
Leave me not here, to fall and die!'

ROUSED FROM HIS VISION, HE RETURNS TO BED

Throughout the palace, people stirred;
His cries were by the servants heard,
Torches and bright candles they brought,
And the source of the trouble sought.
They found Gingalain, after a search,
Clinging to a sparrowhawk's perch,
Fearful, it seemed, of falling down,
Crying that he would so, and drown.
To that perch, and with all his might
Lest he should perish, clung the knight.
As soon as he saw the servants there,
The river vanished into thin air.
All the enchantment now did fade,

And so, ashamed now and dismayed,
And most wearily, did Gingalain
Return, in woe, to his bed again.
His shame was great, and his anger.
The servants mocked at the danger
He'd perceived, and at all they'd seen;
Thought he: 'Enchanted, I have been',
And, from shame, said nary a word.
The servants, thinking him absurd,
Retired to rest; he lay on his bed,
By Love tormented, as I've said.
He could find no repose at all,
But simply lay there in the hall,
Much dismayed by his travails,
The wind departed from his sails.
Yet he still gazed upon the door,
Love tormenting him, as before.
'Dear God,' he sighed, 'what have I seen?
What troubled me? Where have I been?
This was some work of trickery.
I know she's there, whom I would see,
She who makes me endure such ill;
Why should I not speak to her still?
Even if I must count the cost,
And, in doing so, my life be lost,
Should I not, thus troubled, devise
A means to reach her where she lies?

Wretch that I am, why go I not?
Though success was scarcely my lot
When I attempted it before;
I returned, ashamed, to be sure.
And yet tis wrong to say I failed,
Twas but enchantment that prevailed,
I ought not, thus, to yield my ground,
But try again, till she be found,
And see if I may speak to her,
Not merely lie here, and suffer.'

**HE IS THWARTED AGAIN, AND
VOWS NOT TO REPEAT HIS ERROR**

More determinedly than ever,
He gazed at the lady's chamber.
Amor had granted him fresh heart
And he was ready, for his part,
Once all was quiet, to try once more;
He rose, and went towards the door.
Suddenly, the whole ceiling's weight
Seemed to crush him; a cruel fate.
What pain his lady seemed to wish
Upon him! What new trial was this?
Such torment twas, and no mistake,
He thought his very bones would break.
So heavy was the load, at first

He felt his burdened heart might burst.
With all the strength he could muster,
Our knight called aloud for succour:
‘Aid me my friends, help me now,
For I am dying, I avow!
Upon my shoulders, the roof rests;
Its vast weight my endurance tests.
Where are you? For I’ll surely die,
If you should come not, by and by.’
In haste the servants rose once more,
Lit the candles, and there they saw
Gingalain, seemingly quite mad,
His pillow over his head, a sad
Case of illusion; on they came,
While he buried his head in shame
On seeing them, and, to the floor,
Now hurled the pillow that he bore,
Saying not a word to those around,
Failing to voice a single sound.
Silently, he bowed his head low,
And lay down again, full of woe,
Feeling both foolish and ashamed,
Though, in truth, twas Amor he blamed;
Amor goaded and tormented.
To himself, our knight lamented:
‘Alas!’ he cried, ‘perverse as ever!
The door’s still open to her chamber,

And yet I cannot enter there.
Enchanted seems this whole affair,
And I am shamed at every turn.
What have I done such woe to earn?
Dear God, why was I then so bold,
Ignoring all that I was told?
My lady said that I must not,
Nor her injunction be forgot.
Defying her I thought so to do,
And my own desire to pursue.
All that do wrong believe they're right.
The reasoning I now indict,
That led me to oppose her wish,
And prove rebellious in this;
For the thoughts my mind doth enclose,
Lead not to virtue or repose.
Twice have they brought shame upon me,
If I choose not the contrary
Path, a third time I'll be shamed.
Rather by death I'd be claimed
This night than do the like again,
For so to do will bring but pain.
To be but twice shamed, as before,
Is better than three times or four.'
Not to approach her room, he swore,
Yet still he gazed towards her door.

GINGALAIN IS SUMMONED BY THE LADY

As he did so, he saw a maid;
Noble the form and face displayed
By the light of the candle she bore,
In her right hand; from out the door
Of the chamber the maiden came,
And to his bed approached that same.
She drew the curtain a little way,
And, pleasantly, to him did say:
'Are you sleeping, sir?' Gingalain
Replied: 'Greetings to you, tis plain
That I sleep not; what is't you wish?'
Said she: 'Great good will come of this.
For my lady has sent me here,
And doth summon you to appear.
Through myself, she now invites you
To her room, where she awaits you.
Fair sir, go now, and speak with her;
She holds you to be her lover.'
'Fair maid,' said he, 'is this a dream?
And is naught here as it might seem?'
'What, sir!' exclaimed the lovely maid,
'My lady's message I've conveyed,
And would lead you to her embrace;
'Twas you desired to view her face.
This dream is one you shall possess;
Come, for she summons you, no less.'

HE ENTERS THE LADY'S CHAMBER

Gingalain felt intense delight.
Donning a fur-lined robe, our knight
Now leapt from his bed, joyously,
Knowing, his love, he soon would see.
'Fair maiden,' he cried, 'lead the way!
Sweet friend, let there be no delay;
Noble creature, come, of your grace,
Deign to add speed to this slow pace.'
The maiden smiled at his command,
And gently took him by the hand,
Then led the way towards the door
He'd sought to navigate before.
On entering, at once, he found
Sweet fragrance scented all around,
Sweeter than incense, pyrethrum;
Sweeter, even, than cinnamon.
Such virtue had that fair odour
That any who was in that chamber,
For even a brief while, in pain,
Felt, in a moment, sound again.
Bright candles, lit there, did suffice
To make it seem true paradise.
Of gold and silver, every treasure,
That room held a goodly measure.
Rare silken clothes it held as well,

Of greater value than I can tell;
Many there were, of diverse sort,
Striped taffetas, dress fit for court,
Eastern silks, many a brocade,
After many a fashion made,
Flowery ones; full many a fair
Silken cloth he gazed on there.
High was the chamber and noble,
Silk drapes from Constantinople
Adorned the ceiling overhead,
While precious stones, beneath his tread,
Of many a kind, paved the floor.
Emeralds, sapphires, there he saw,
Many a rare chalcedony,
Many a bright gleaming ruby.
Their colours were intense indeed;
Thereon, its maker had decreed
Flowers and birds most artfully wrought;
For, though throughout the world you sought,
On land or sea, you'd fail to find
Any creature you called to mind,
Beast, fish, serpent, all that's known,
That was not on that pavement shown.
The lady on her bed did lie.
None richer was ever seen, say I;
I could tell you the nature of it,
Without the truth being forfeit,

Yet to hasten the joy, indeed,
Of which the knight was so in need,
I'll not seek to describe that bed,
But, lest I weary, press on instead.

THE PAIR FULFIL THEIR EVERY DESIRE

The maid who held Gingalain's hand
Led him to the bed, close did stand,
And in her most courteous manner,
Being a gracious maiden ever,
She addressed her mistress there:
'Behold, the knight, now in my care,
Whom I have led here as you see!
Grant him a moment, willingly,
Of your good grace, for love of me.
Treat him well, and with honesty.'
The lovely lady at once replied:
'I'll honour your request, fair guide,
And treat him well, for love of you,
Go now, and leave me so to do.'
'Take him then; the knight I render.'
The lady, with a look most tender,
Took his hand; once at her side,
His delight he could scarcely hide.
No man e'er felt such keen delight;
The joy he longed for was in sight.

The Fair Unknown (Le Bel Inconnu)

By each other the lovers lay,
And, once close together, I say,
Most sweetly did the pair embrace,
Lips met, and limbs did interlace.
Each, of the other, had their due.
Kisses could scarce content those two,
For each would more and more impart
Of that which doth delight the heart;
Those loving kisses, unconstrained,
From the heart drew all that pained,
And filled the heart with deepest joy.
Amor led them far from annoy.
Their eyes were turned to gazing quite;
While each now clasped the other tight.
Their hearts were bent on their desire,
Each would claim the other entire.
So greatly each for the other cared,
What each would do, the other shared.
Who knows what they did, he and she?
I was not there, nor aught did see;
But next to her lover sweetly laid,
She could scarcely be called a maid.
That night great solace did afford,
For the long wait that they'd endured.

RENAUD COMMENTS ON HIS OWN CASE

Gingalain had his wish and more,
For he possessed what he'd longed for;
While the lady was scarce dismayed,
But sweetly commanded and obeyed.
For all the ills, and woes, he'd felt,
Which Love to Gingalain had dealt,
She, as his recompense, was sent.
And nor do I of my love repent,
Nor show the least disloyalty
Towards Amor, nor my fair lady,
Who, in a day, could reward me
With more than I deserve; for she
Who can grant a man such delight,
Should be loved, and loved outright.
He that would serve a lady, though
He suffers at length for doing so,
Should not forsake her for an hour;
For the ladies possess such power,
That when they offer recompense,
All our woes, and every offence
We've long suffered, is swift forgot.
God made them such, it is our lot
To serve the virtues He instilled
In them, the beauty that He willed;
For God formed men, I do believe

To honour them, and not deceive,
And do all that they may command.
A lout he that takes not the hand
Offered him, for all virtues flow
From them; he's a fool thinks not so.
Lord God above us, send them joy!
Hear this prayer, that I oft employ:
May those that speak ill of the sex,
And 'fin amour', with scant respect,
Be cursed forever, and rendered mute;
Lord God, their lies ever refute!
By their falsehoods flown afar
They but show just what they are,
Who labour so to spread those lies.
Ah, Lord above, that such despise,
When shall I see her, I love so,
And seek my pleasure here below?

GINGALAIN RECALLS THE INCIDENTS THAT NIGHT

Of Gingalain I've more to tell,
For whom all that he did was well;
Between his arms he held his love,
Midst kisses that she did approve,
Both at ease; though he did recall
All that had happened in that hall,
The sparrowhawk's perch, the pillow,

And wondered at it happening so.
Thinking of how he'd hung, or bowed,
He could not help but laugh aloud.
While the fair lady, at his side,
Hearing him laugh, sweetly cried:
'My love, what entertains you so?
Tell me the cause, for I would know.
But now you laughed aloud; say why.
Dear friend, come give me your reply.
Hide this not, but indulgence lend,'
Gingalain answered: 'My sweet friend,
I merely laughed aloud in wonder
At the marvels that saw me blunder
Of which none saw the like before,
In the hall there, beside your door,
All that happened to me this night,
When all slept, though my ease was slight,
As I lay abed, so troubled, I fear,
I could not sleep, for you were near.
I was so full of thoughts of you,
I tossed and turned, and turned anew,
Till I fell from my bed indeed,
As love and my passion decreed.
That desire, it was, drove me here,
Though I was enchanted, tis clear,
For at first, when I sought your door,
Here was a plank, and not the floor.

Above the torrent's foam, I hung,
Loud it roared, but tightly I clung,
For I had fallen in such a way
That I yet gripped the plank, I say,
Though I feared I must fall again.
That I was set to drown was plain.
Greatly afraid that I would die,
I was forced for succour to cry.
All the servants hastened there,
And the end of that sad affair,
Was their seeing me swing and squawk,
Where once perched a sparrowhawk.
A second ill I then endured,
Heavier still, as a harsh reward,
For seeking to reach your chamber,
A greater anguish than ever.
'Tis truth I tell; 'twas scarcely fun;
Lady, know you why this was done?
Tell me the reason, if you know,
For, this night, I was spellbound so.'
'My love,' she said, 'the reason why
You suffered so, I'll not deny,
For the enchantment all was mine,
Your troubles came by my design,
Because of the shame brought on me
When you once chose to up and flee.
For that reason, the thing was done,

That you might learn (and everyone)
To guard yourself throughout your life
From scorning the sex, maid or wife,
For if you do such wiles employ
Think not that it will bring you joy.
He who betrays a maid, that same
Will meet with but trouble and shame.
Be on your guard against it then,
And so should all other true men.

SHE EXPLAINS HER KNOWLEDGE OF THE MAGIC ARTS

Now I'll tell you, if you desire,
How twas I managed to acquire
Such knowledge of the magic arts.
My father was king in these parts;
Powerful, courteous, wise was he,
And had no heir apart from me.
He loved his daughter so truly,
The liberal arts were my study:
Arithmetic, geometry,
Necromancy, astrology,
And the others of the seven.
I learnt of the lights in heaven,
And studied with such firm intent
I understand the firmament,
The motions of the moon and sun,

And all that is by magic done,
And all that the future may hold.
I knew of you, and learnt, of old,
That when you visited that day
You'd seek not to prolong your stay.
I knew then you'd abandon me,
For I divine all that shall be,
Yet knew it mattered not a jot,
(Though success would prove your lot,
In pursuing your bold affair,
Since you would win great honour there)
For still, within my heart, I knew
That your love would yet prove true,
And that as soon as e'er you might,
You would return to me, sir knight.
Through my science I learned all this;
Long ere we were fated to kiss,
I loved you, ere you were a knight,
Long ere you were before my sight,
For I knew that in Arthur's court
No better man could e'er be sought,
Except that faithful lord, your sire.
Your virtues fuelled my desire;
For that reason, I loved you then,
Met your mother time and again,
Simply that I might see you there,
And that your presence I might share.

Your mother, twas, dubbed you a knight,
Then sent you to the court outright;
There, obeying her strict command,
This royal boon you would demand:
That, whatever might be at stake,
The next quest you must undertake.
I knew that quest would be my own,
This adventure, that you alone
Were destined to pursue, you see,
For tis our mutual destiny.
Through my prescience, twas, I knew
This, the course you must pursue.
And so, dear heart, twas I that sent
Hélie to court, with one intent,
Telling her that she should seek aid
From King Arthur, for me, a maid,
For I was sure, from all I'd learned,
From all my science had discerned,
That you would undertake the quest
And, ere you saved me, never rest.
To obtain your aid, I did so do,
Born of the love I hold for you.
And sweet friend, it was mine, also,
That voice you heard, after the foe,
Mabon, you slew, and then did take
The Cruel Kiss; all for my sake.
My voice it was that, like a sage,

Pronounced your name and lineage,
To grant you peace and calm, outright,
And help you win some rest, that night.
Then all the country learned that you
Had freed their lady, while I knew
I owed it to many a party,
That had supported their lady,
To seek to win you to my side,
And have you take me as your bride.
God be praised, I possess you now!
And, from now on, I here avow,
We shall have peace, and shun discord;
And know this fact, my gentle lord,
As long as you have faith in me,
All you wish you'll gain instantly,
But if you e'er should cease to trust,
Then lose me, my fair lord, you must.'

**GINGALAIN CONFIRMS HIS LOYALTY, AND
HER NOBLEMEN ASSURE HIM OF THEIR**

'Speak no more, my lady,' said he,
Not for all the world shall you see
Me prove so foolish as to lose
My own heart, and thereby refuse
Your strict commandment to obey,
Nor cause you pain in any way.'

With this their speech was at an end.
At dawn, when the sun doth ascend,
The church bells rang; and at first light,
From out the bed, arose the knight.
His lover rose and, with one intent,
To Saint Mary's church they both went,
There to repent of all trespass,
While the lady chanted the Mass.
Once the Mass was ended, they
Back to the palace made their way,
And the lady sent messages,
To her dukes, counts, and marquises,
Summoning them all to the court,
There to divert themselves and sport,
For her partner she'd now regained,
Whom she had longed for, she explained.
Once the lords of the realm were there,
Her thoughts the lady sought to share:
'My lords,' she said, 'now list to me:
This valorous knight that you see,
Is he whom I have long desired.
Those that to serve me have aspired
Should now be pleased to serve him too,
And what he asks of them should do;
For, in all the world, none is found
In whom more valour doth abound,
And I'd have his commands obeyed.'

They cried all honour would be paid
To the knight, and they would afford
Him due respect, as her true lord.
Now Gingalain of joy was sire,
For he had won his heart's desire.

WE RETURN TO BLONDE ESMERÉE, ON HER WAY TO ARTHUR'S COURT

I'll tell now of Blonde Esmerée.
From Wales, her realm, upon a day,
She had set out for Arthur's court.
A journey of four days had brought
The queen to a passage from a wood,
Where four knights on horseback stood,
Each on a palfrey not a charger,
Without shields or weapons, rather
They were emerging from a field
Their purpose there simply revealed,
For each bore a fine sparrowhawk,
And of the hunt was all their talk.
Once the queen had reached the four,
She greeted them; that noble corps
Saluted her in return, and all
Who accompanied her, great and small.
She addressed them in this manner:
'My lords, where go you hereafter?'

And who you are I fain would know,
If a queen may pose the question so.’
‘We journey to King Arthur’s court,
My lady, as we, prisoners, ought,
For we are all sworn so to do,
And to that oath we must be true.
Each of us has given his word
To a brave knight who, so we heard,
Goes to rescue a lovely maid;
To the Fair Unknown we have paid
Homage, for so the knight is named,
That victory o’er us all has claimed.
We come not all from the same place;
Yesterday, we came face to face
With each other, upon this scene.
Of what realm are you, fair queen?’
‘By God in heaven, my lords,’ said she,
‘Know this for a truth, come list to me,
I am that maid he went to save.
Your captor, bravest of the brave,
Rescued me, with force and vigour,
Through his prowess and his valour.
A fine knight is that knight, indeed,
Strong in battle, a friend in need.
Yet tis wrong to speak of that same
As you have done; tis not his name.
He was baptised as Gingalain,
His father being Lord Gawain.

He has demanded that I render,
At the court of his King Arthur,
Thanks, for what ne'er can be repaid;
Since twas the king that sent his aid.
For that, he bids me do honour,
To the king, his lord and master.
To this same court he soon returns
If, from God, a safe path he earns,
Though I know not where he is now.
Tis good to meet with you, I avow.
We might ride together, I deem,
For noble lords are you, twould seem.'
They answered: 'We shall do your will,
If tis in our power to serve you still.'

SHE REACHES LONDON, WITH THE FOUR KNIGHTS SHE HAS MET

They thus proceeded on their way.
The queen did much delight betray
At having met the four; those same,
I'll now recall to you, by name.
Blioblieris, he made one,
Brave and courteous, scorned by none;
The lord of Saies was another;
The third I need scarce discover,
Orguillous of la Lande was he,
That, o'er many, gained victory.

The fourth was Giflet, son of Do;
All four respected by the foe.
They traversed a wide plain that led,
To England; riding straight ahead.
They followed the road, up and down,
Which led them on to London town,
Where, at present, King Arthur lay.
Before arriving there that day,
The queen had sent servants ahead
To secure lodgings, in her stead.
Richly furnished they were to be.
These servants met her, dutifully,
And led here where she might alight.
Those four, and every other knight,
Dismounted and escorted her,
To a fine tapestried chamber,
Where she might recover and rest.
Then in a costly robe she dressed,
Rich and fine, from the Orient.
Depicted there, for ornament,
Was every creature there may be
Upon the land, or in the sea.
Crocodiles, leopards, and lions,
Flying serpents, fiery dragons,
Eagles, and every other bird,
Parrots, of every kind averred,
All were there portrayed in gold;
A work of art, in every fold.

Of rare sable was her mantle,
Richly wrought, most comfortable;
Of a strange pelt was its border,
A sea creature's, its sweet odour
Sweeter by far than cinnamon.
God has made no finer a one,
Than that creature; upon the shore
It feeds on herbs, and furthermore
It yields a powerful antidote
Against every poison of note,
And should be on one's person borne,
To be taken both night and morn;
Its virtues more than I can tell.
Around her waist she wore, as well,
A silken belt in gold brocade;
Most elegantly twas displayed,
And suited that most graceful queen,
Who to advantage now was seen.
If one had searched the world entire
No other maid could one set higher.
There was naught foolish in her speech,
True courtesy her words did teach.
Her looks were full of tenderness.
No other maid did e'er possess
A quarter of the beauty there,
Nor with that lady could compare.

The End of Part V of 'Le Bel Inconnu'

PART VI



“ They reached the Castle of Pucelles.
When to that great chateau they came,
They saw, issuing from that same,
A host of knights in proud array.

**BLONDE ESMERÉE, THE QUEEN OF WALES,
ADDRESSES KING ARTHUR**

The queen, and her lords, in fine array,
Towards the court now made their way.
In his palace she found the king,
His knights about him in a ring,
Many a king, and duke, and count;
Beyond number their whole amount.
Upon seeing the queen enter,
King Arthur rose up to greet her,
And, to honour her, he did bow,
As much as kingship doth allow.
All the barons there rose as one,
Long twas ere their greetings were done.
King Arthur took her by the hand;
She sat beside him; at his command,
All fell silent; when there was heard
Nary a sound from them, nor word,
The lady spoke thus, courteously:
'Sire,' she began, 'list now to me,
Whose dear father was King Gringras:
To me, in desperate plight alas,
You sent a knight, the Fair Unknown.
He was called by that name alone
Here in Britain, yet Gingalain
Is he, the son of my Lord Gawain

And Blanchemal la Fay; on a plea,
 You sent the knight to my country,
 That he might bring me welcome aid.
 Skill and courage he there displayed,
 And from great torment set me free.
 Sire, I render thanks, here, to thee,
 For sending him on such a quest,
 And at my servant's sole request.
 I am your servant, Sire, forever,
 And tribute you shall lack never,
 From out the realm of Wales, I mean,
 Of which I am indeed the queen.
 I beg you, king of noble birth,
 Famed, as you are, o'er all the Earth,
 To permit your knight, Gingalain,
 To wed me, and the kingship gain;
 My lords and I, seek it, this day,
 Deny it not to us, I pray.
 In Wales, I parted from the knight,
 Of whom I since have lacked all sight.
 He must return here, that is plain,
 Yet I fear too long he doth maintain
 A presence elsewhere, by design,
 And heeds another voice than mine.
 Mayhap he is detained by war,
 For glory he ever seeks, tis sure.'

WHO THEN CONVENES A PRIVATE COUNCIL

The king, having heard her story,
In his delight, embraced the lady;
Then to his knights he did repeat
The substance of her tale complete,
With his thoughts upon the matter.
Gawain felt joy, as the father
Of this knight that her love had won,
As he Blanchemal la Fay's had done;
Great joy was felt by all the court.
Then those four his presence sought
Whom she had met upon the road.
The king a glance on them bestowed.
They rendered themselves prisoners there,
As Gingalain had made them swear.
While great the joy all there expressed,
To many a regret they confessed
That Gingalain was absent yet.
The King was troubled and did fret,
As did Gawain, and all the court,
Fearing for one who'd bravely fought.
Arthur arose, and then withdrew,
Taking, with him, his chosen few,
For certain lords he thus did call
To private counsel; from the hall,
Lord Gawain went first, pursuing

The path of the departing king,
After him came King Goalan,
Together with my lord Tristan,
Kay, the Seneschal, followed on,
Gales le Chauve, and King Amangon,
And other chosen lords went too.
The King addressed them then, anew:
'My lords,' said he, 'what, in a word,
Shall we do, as to all we've heard?
How shall we his presence regain?
Were we to lose him, great the pain.
Not for aught would I wish it so,
Nor shall I feel pleasure, I know,
Until we see the lad once more.'
Amangon answered from the floor:
'Sire,' said he, 'you but speak aright;
Twere ill to lose so fine a knight.
Great the damage that it would bring.
This counsel I would give my king:
Though he lies in some place apart,
The lad yet love's the warrior's art;
Proclaim it is the royal intent
To hold, full soon, a tournament.
Once Gingalain has heard the news
Such a challenge he'll not refuse;
He'll not miss a tourney for aught,
Eagerly, he will ride to court,

And take part in the tourney here.
Announce it, and he must appear.
This I counsel; as for the queen,
Let her wed him; her realm, I ween,
Is large, and rich her treasury;
A powerful ally he would be.
I was once in that fair country,
And captured there in a tourney,
And yet Gringras acquitted me
Of any ransom, and set me free.
Let the queen rest the while, say I;
Through the Marches, the news let fly,
Of this tourney; as for the four,
Their service here you may ensure,
Amidst your court.' The king agreed;
Twas wise counsel all did concede.

A TOURNEY IS PROCLAIMED

With this the session was complete,
The counsellors rose to their feet,
And returning, behind the king,
That counsel to the court did bring.
He ordered the tourney proclaimed,
And prepared, while a date he named.
Twixt the chateau of Valedon
And that of Pucelles, there, upon

The level plain, it would be fought.
Tristan, the fairest in that court,
Neath Valedon, the joust would start,
While Montescler's king, for his part
Would lead the other party there.
The date was set for the affair;
A month from then it was to be.
The king, departing, instantly
Sent messengers throughout the land,
Crying the news, on every hand;
About the Marches, word he sent,
And through the realm, of his intent.
The lady, asked to be his guest
At court, was happy thus to rest.
The four knights, rendered prisoners, too,
Remained, amidst his retinue.

GINGALAIN DECIDES TO ATTEND

Gingalain, meanwhile, by the side
Of his beloved did reside,
In the Isle of Gold; she was all his,
And he had all a man might wish.
When the time weighed heavily
Off to the wooded chase went he.
In hunting fowl he'd wield a bow,
By lake and river, to their woe.

Or he would hunt his prey on land.
Then, his love was ever at hand;
In her, all he might wish he found,
In her, such virtues did abound,
That all that he had longed for so,
Or ever dreamed, he now did know.
In the palace was he, one day,
When he heard a minstrel relay
The news of the coming tourney,
At Pucelles, and rejoiced greatly.
A great event the joust would be,
And, in his mind, he instantly
Determined: to the joust he'd go,
Though twas his heart that told him so.
He asked for leave of the lady,
Who, on hearing of the tourney,
Said: 'My love, you shall not go;
I'll not permit you doing so,
I'll not approve it, nor consent;
I'd know but sorrow if you went.
For I understand, through my art,
All the stars tell, and, for their part,
They say, if you attend this tourney,
Then you must, forever, lose me;
For there awaits you a lady
Whom Arthur would have you marry.'
'Be calm, my love,' replied the knight,

‘By all the saints in heaven bright,
No other woman would I wish
But you, nor would I lie in this.
Lady, but grant me leave to go,
And my return shall not be slow.
Tomorrow morn, tis my intent
To take the road, should you consent,
For if I leave not then, I say,
I cannot be there, on the day.’
She said: ‘My dearest love, I see
That you are bent on leaving me,
To journey to this tournament,
A deed of which you may repent.
It seems I am not dear to you;
Tis your desire you now pursue.
I can do naught; then, woe is me;
False was your show of loyalty.’
Naught could persuade the knight to stay;
He’d soon return, was all he’d say.
He was on fire for the tourney,
Eager to undertake the journey;
For, he had lacked the chance to fight
Many a day, that valiant knight.
He longed for the joust, to excess;
Was there ever such foolishness!
Gingalain then summoned his squire,
And told him of his fond desire,

And that he must polish his armour,
Ready the harness, and on his honour
Be ready to rise before twas dawn,
And saddle the horses, on the morn.
Robert was pleased, and set to work,
Nor did the lad his labour shirk.
Evening fell, and twas dark above.
Our knight lay down beside his love.
He lay beside her all that night,
While each in each took their delight.
Since he must rise before the dawn,
And leave her the very next morn,
He chose to sleep beside the lady;
Betraying her in his heart already.
Who sees the good and does the ill,
Of repentance shall have his fill.

**HE FINDS HIMSELF MAGICALLY
TRANSPORTED TO A WOOD**

For when, at dawn, Gingalain woke,
The scene had altered, at a stroke,
He found himself in a woodland ride,
His arms and armour at his side,
And his head resting on a shield.
His steed the morning light revealed
Tethered there; Robert at his feet,

Opening his eyes, his sleep complete,
Holding the packhorse reins tight,
Head on a tree-trunk, met his sight:
Quite defenceless the knight lay there:
Such the reward that sinners share.
Their eyes on each other they laid,
For greatly were the pair dismayed.
Gingalain saw ill had been wrought,
Each the other's gaze now sought.
'What think you of this?' asked the knight,
'How are we here, thus, at first light?
I lay down in another place,
Where the bed my love did grace.
Now I find myself in a wood,
And naught now seeming as it should.
Came you here, in truth, this night?'
'Nay,' cried Robert, 'I slept aright
In my bed there, and yet I too
Find myself waking here, with you.'
'Robert, an ill fate this doth prove!
I have scarcely cherished my love.
She told me I must lose her so,
If to the tourney I would go.
I've lost her, through my foolishness,
Alas!' said he, 'and lack all redress.
Now I shall grieve for evermore.'
Then Robert did his master implore:

‘Sire, there is naught that you can do.
Our own affairs we should pursue.
Great good may come of the tourney,
Grieve not now, but rather journey.’
‘Gingalain answered: ‘Let us go.’
Donning, his spurs as he did so,
While the squire gathered his armour;
Then he mounted on his charger
And they entered a path nearby,
And rode along till, by and by,
They met with a pilgrim who showed
The pair of them the direct road
By which to reach the tournament.
Gingalain was in great torment,
And rode his steed most fretfully;
Plagued by trouble and woe was he,
For his love seemed lost forever,
And her absence he must suffer.

GINGALAIN AND ROBERT ARRIVE AT THE CASTLE OF PUCELLES

They rode over moorland and plain;
By wood, vale, river, did maintain
Their passage through many a place,
And journeyed at so swift a pace,
And kept to the true course so well,

They reached the Castle of Pucelles.
When to that great chateau they came,
They saw, issuing from that same,
A host of knights in proud array.
Gingalain sought, without delay,
To follow them, seeking the field,
Eager his lance and sword to wield.
There rode the flower of chivalry.
Yvain, the king of Lindezie,
Led a hundred and forty, there,
In full armour, to that affair.
Augustel, King of Scotland, he,
Neath the shade of a lofty tree,
Had armed himself, he too led
A hundred and forty, helm on head.
Hoel of Gohenet hove in sight,
Upon his charger, eager to fight,
And with him a hundred knights went
Mounted, armed, to the tournament.
There, the King of Baradigan,
Canaan his name, a valiant man,
Rode fully-armed to the tourney,
In his company full eighty.
King Ban of Gomeret was there,
A hundred and eighty in his care.
The King of the Red Castle led
A hundred more; he rode ahead

Of King Guivret, from bog and fen
Leading his band of Irishmen.
Geldras the king of Dunelie,
Was there, with knights in quantity;
Four hundred men he did afford,
And every one held him their lord.
Le Laid Hardi of Cornwall too,
As ever, was present to the view;
A hundred knights in company,
Well-armed, he brought from his country.
Kahadinst, there, one might see,
Of Lanprebois the duke, was he.
Le Roux of Montescler was there,
With gleaming helm at that affair,
His crest atop, his pledge made sure,
To lead his party, as in war;
Seven hundred knights he led,
And all by him were armed and fed.
Perceval of Wales came to fight,
That valiant and courtly knight.
The chevalier of Baladingan
Richly-armed, was that nobleman,
His wish to fight did thus declare,
Against Le Roux of Montescler,
While Lancelot of the Lake, he
Armed beneath a hornbeam tree.
Duke Elias could there be seen,

That ever a fine knight had been
 Although his hair was turning grey,
 A true judge, who e'er saw fair play;
 He of the Haute Montagne too,
 With his mighty host, one could view.
 The Count of Truerem, the lord
 Of the Dark Isle, was there aboard
 His white charger; none could find
 A better warrior midst mankind.
 Graisleliers de Fine Posterne
 Had armed himself, in his turn,
 Nigh to his brother, Guingamor;
 None did love their brother more.
 And Randuras was present there,
 His virtues many, at that affair.
 And Yder was there, armed also,
 On a steed iron-clad gainst the foe,
 While Gandalus was at his side;
 Together those brave knights did ride.
 Gornemant of Gorhout would fight
 Beside Lancelot, and the knight
 Of Lis, Melian; both had brought,
 Of knights, a numberless cohort.
 Most splendid was that company.
 Arthur was of the other party.
 Midst his British lords, he made one
 Of those who rode for Valedon.

A mighty host he'd raised again,
For there were quite two thousand men.
King Gaudin of Ireland was there,
Noble was he, and for his share
Five hundred he brought to battle.
There too was King Mark of Cornwall,
With seven hundred valiant knights,
Used to the joust, and its delights.
King Amangon was in the field,
A thousand men his host revealed.
King Bruians of the Isles also,
Displayed five hundred knights or so.
On sorrel, or bay, or piebald steed
They rode; none finer, folk agreed.
Bold as a leopard was their king,
Though miserly in everything;
While King Yder gave to his men
All he won, ever and again;
Poor was his armour, nonetheless,
Great the extent of his largesse.
One hundred and sixty men had he,
And ne'er a one was cowardly.
Blonde Esmerée, as queen, had sent
A hundred men with like intent
Noble knights of her country,
To bear their arms at the tourney,
And they were in brave Lanpar's care,

He charged with gaining honour there.
Arthur's nephew, Gawain, they saw,
None better in both joust and war;
King Mordred too, and his brother
Segures; while Gunes, another
Brave knight, born in Cirencester,
Rode on Gawain's right, as ever.
And the wealthy Duke of Norgalles
Was there, and Erec of Estregalles,
While Bedivere of Normandy
Made one of that fair company.
Flores was there, from his rich court
Sixty-three Frenchmen he had brought.
Hoel of Nantes was there, I deem,
Arming himself beside a stream.
Already armed were Caraés,
And Tor, the son of King Arés.
Tristan rested in the saddle,
Fully-armed, prepared for battle,
Having pledged to mount this tourney.
His lady's sleeve he did carry.
Ysult the Fair that emblem sent,
Thus, his breast it did ornament.

THE TOURNAMENT AT VALEDON COMMENCES

Mounted, he waited to commence,
His host behind, their count immense.
Of the Round Table though beside
Most were on King Arthur's side.
When fully-armed was each baron,
On the plain, beneath Valedon,
Many a bright helm could be seen,
Many a banner decked the scene,
Many a steed, sorrel or bay,
Piebald, dappled, was on display,
Many a bright shield glittered there,
Many a pennant stirred the air.
Upon those helms the crests did dance.
Hauberks gleamed, and many a lance
Painted with azure or with gold.
Surcoats fluttered, silk fold on fold.
Many an emblem, or a sleeve,
Was worn, by some fair lady's leave,
Many an upraised sword revealed
King, count, or marquess, on that field.
Ne'er was so great an assembly;
The sun shone o'er that company,
O'er that place, and far and wide.
Le Roux of Montescler they spied
Advancing o'er the level ground,

The first that had his courage found,
And with him twenty knights or more,
That upon Tristan would make war.
Then, the latter made his advance,
His shield slung low, gripping his lance,
With many a brave knight at his back.
When each saw the other attack,
They raised their shields in defence,
As would any man of sense,
And spurred their chargers to the fight.
Tristan struck, while the other knight
Landed his lance-blow with such force,
His lance was shattered in its course.
Tristan's blow on the other's shield,
Sent his foe tumbling to the field,
His lance having endured the blow,
Though splinters struck the ground below.
The other's mount he captured too.
Then all the followers of Le Roux,
Swept to the rescue of their lord,
And rode at Tristan, with one accord;
That knight did his defence maintain,
Though his mount beneath was slain.

A GENERAL MELEE ENSUES

To bring Tristan help and succour,
All his party charged, together,
Gainst those of Roux de Montescler;
Many a blow was given there,
From full many a sword and lance.
In the course of that swift advance,
The chevalier of Baladingan
Fought well, in bringing every man
To the succour of this Lord Roux,
While to him great honour was due,
Landing many a powerful blow.
His skill in the joust he did show,
When King Yder on his proud horse
Charged against him, with all his force,
And defended himself full well,
Cornered there in a grassy dell.
Many he grounded in that battle,
Leaving many an empty saddle,
Many a knight was beaten low.
Nor was he captured by the foe,
For the troops of Brun de Bralant
A refuge to Lord Roux did grant;
One hundred and forty his force,
Towards Yder he'd set a course.
Great the shock as at each other

Both sides charged, and met together.
Many a standard fell to earth;
Many a lord, of rank and worth;
Many a knight lost many a steed;
Wrought was many a splendid deed.

GINGALAIN JOINS THE CONTEST

Gingalain to the fray drew near,
Having armed himself at the rear.
Viewing the ranks, at one he spied,
Kay the Seneschal, he did ride,
Who was about to join the fight,
Striking the shield-arm of that knight,
And with such a degree of force
Sir Kay was toppled from his horse.
At King Yder rode Gingalain,
And struck at the shield-arm again,
The lance-blow pierced the shield through,
Although the lance-shaft broke in two.
With what remained, blow upon blow
The knight delivered, even so,
On every helm that he could reach,
Seeking the serried ranks to breach,
And ever struck with such great force,
He toppled the foe from his horse.
He'd charge, leave all in disarray;

Where'er, he wished, he'd carve a way.
Great was the tourney fought that day,
Kings, dukes, and counts battling away.
King Mark of Cornwall, with all his men,
Advanced amidst the fray, again,
King Hoel, on the other side,
With a hundred horsemen did ride
Against him, while both were seen
To scatter the knights in between.
Shield they broke, and helms sent flying,
The shields in pieces left lying.
King Bruians added the weight
Of his company, its numbers great,
With those that Gaudin did command,
His five hundred from Ireland.
Bruians attacked towards the right,
While Gaudin on the left did fight,
The pair, encircling the ground,
Did the brave King Hoel surround,
And toppled that king from his horse.
Many a knight was ta'en by force,
Many a blow dealt and received.
Many were of their mounts relieved,
While, o'er the plain, the others sped,
Or to the fields and woodlands fled.
But Gingalain did yet advance,
Urged on his steed, lowered his lance,

And struck King Gaudin on his shield,
Which, with the force of it, did yield.
Then King Bruians spurred his steed,
Gallop'ing o'er the ground at speed,
Towards our hero, Gingalain,
Who did a like advance maintain.
Their lances, both weighty and strong,
Struck each other's shields, ere long,
Such that the steel lance-tips sought
To pierce the plate in which they fought,
But so fine was each man's armour,
That, in fighting for their honour,
It was neither pierced nor shattered;
Gainst the steel the lances clattered,
Splinters showering through the air,
While neither man in that affair
Was unseated. Now Gingalain,
Grasped his sword and charged again,
Changing course, spurring his steed,
Brandishing his bright blade, at speed,
To strike bold Mordred on his helm,
With a blow that sought to overwhelm,
Made him bow to his horse's neck,
But failed to hurl him to the deck,
Then abandoned him, in the field,
And turned to split another's shield.
He defended himself stoutly, too,

With his sword, gainst no small few.
Often, he charged amidst the press,
Such his defence, his deeds no less,
Such the blows he dealt so fiercely,
They turned the course of the tourney,
For he rallied those who'd fled, again,
At the foot of a low hill, on the plain;
Many a blow their charge ensured,
Dealt with the lance, or with the sword.

THE FIGHTING SWIRLS AROUND KING HOEL

Great was the battle on that field.
King Bruians forced many to yield,
Towering midst the British party;
And had captured Hoel, swiftly,
Had not King Cadoalant been there,
Three hundred strong at that affair,
Beside the King of Lindesie,
With as numerous a company,
For neither king did courage lack,
But sprang, at once, to the attack.
There many a shield was split in two,
Many a knight unseated too;
Spoils were won, and as many lost,
Blows exchanged, at no small cost;
Many the lances shattered, I say,

And saddles emptied, on that day,
The beleaguered in time relieved,
And King Hoel's rescue achieved.
Twas near a cliff, in a meadow,
The combatants dealt blow on blow,
Where many a joust took place,
And swordsmen battled face to face.
Twixt the ranks of knights, Gingalain
With shield and lance, upon the plain,
Was mounted on a dappled horse
He'd taken from a knight by force
Of arms, and left him on the ground.
Leading the foremost rank he found,
Erec, whose arm could do no wrong,
Riding a steed both swift and strong,
His lance lowered, his shield raised high,
Seeming prepared to do or die.
Straight towards him rode Gingalain,
Shield high, lance lowered again.
Spurring the steeds each rode upon,
The two combatants thundered on.
Fiercely to the attack they rode,
And such power and skill they showed,
That each man pierced the other's shield;
Their lances many a shard did yield.
Their horses clashed together as well,
Yet neither of the warriors fell,

Despite the fierceness of their advance.
Brave Gingalain now seized a lance
Brought to him by Robert his squire,
And, wheeling his steed, heart afire,
Found King Cadoc, on the attack,
With a host of Britons at his back;
One hundred and forty, strong and true,
Following after, now filled his view,
They had aimed to strike from behind,
And seeing him there, with one mind
They spurred their steeds o'er the ground,
Towards a fierce encounter bound.
Since Cadoc rode there in the lead,
Toward him our knight drove his steed,
Striking the king, then, with such force
The lance toppled him from his horse,
For it caught that knight in the chest,
And down he went, heels over crest.
But Cadoc's men, their faces dour,
Countered our knight with all their power,
Swiftly, from left and right, they came
And, ere he could escape, that same
Found himself neath many a blow,
Aimed at his shield, and helm also,
At his breastplate, and his steed;
Right beleaguered was he indeed.
Like a leopard he played his part,

Defending himself with force and art,
While they gathered to seize the knight;
Yet they met with one who could fight,
That a painful lesson did teach
To all who came within his reach,
Such that they sought not to remain,
Nor learn more of this Gingalain.

GINGALAIN IS RESCUED BY GELDRAS AND GUIVRET

Gingalain was surrounded quite
When brave King Geldras joined the fight,
With a hundred and twenty men
Of his large force, and there again,
Ireland's King Guivret, at his side,
Led a hundred fine knights beside
That answered to that worthy king.
Swiftly, fresh succour they did bring
To the place where Gingalain fought,
Urging their hosts on as they sought
To engage; fiercely, all did strive.
King Amangon saw them arrive,
A leader of the British party,
With a hundred in company;
King Ban de Gomeret also,
With a good hundred knights in tow,
The whole force that he'd gathered there;

And both now joined in the affair.
A pair of kings on either side,
To the cruel encounter did ride.
Believe me, men broke many a shield
With their stout lances on that field,
Where many a knight lost his horse,
Unseated, and captured perforce.
There, King Amangon fell to earth
With many another of great worth.
Nor his seat could King Geldras keep,
But, overthrown, lay in a heap.
There, all joined in the one melee,
In mass tourney, and wild affray.
There, from every quarter, they rode;
Many the blows that they bestowed
On each other, with lance and sword,
Striving to win some fair reward,
A prisoner for ransom, or a steed,
Performing many a valiant deed.
Gingalain criss-crossed the plain,
Mounted upon a steed from Spain,
Charging the Britons; to and fro,
Wielding his stout sword, he did go.
Knights he captured, and horses too
But often rendered those anew,
On seeing some ally in need,
To whom he then would grant the steed.

(All that he gained, with lance and blade,
Funded some ransom or crusade)
Most feared the man, and thus did balk,
Like starlings before a sparrowhawk.

EREC, GALOAIN, AND LANPARS RENEW THE ATTACK

Erec, though, charged time and again.
Gingalain wheeled his steed amain,
Rode twixt the ranks, to cry him nay,
But met Count Galoain mid-way.
He loosened the rein of his steed,
And struck him such a blow indeed
Upon the shield, above his chest,
That the Count was winded at best,
While the shield was pierced and split;
Freed from his Frisian steed, he bit
The dust, and lay there on the ground.
A second foe Gingalain found,
And gave his shield such a rattle
He failed to hold to reins or saddle,
While being forced to meet the earth,
As to splinters the lance gave birth.
Gingalain now wielded his blade,
And yet another charge he made,
Between the ranks, over that plain.
Lanpars too charged time and again,

Leading his knights, midst the tourney;
A hundred strong the company
Granted him by Blonde Esmerée;
Trusting him to lead them that day.
He'd equipped them well for the field,
Worthy of the power he did wield,
And well he discharged his command,
The first to charge, with lance in hand,
And the last to retreat, as ever;
Deeds they wrought in the grand manner.

KING ARTHUR IS PROMPTED TO ENGAGE

King Arthur had not yet been seen
At this tourney, upon the green,
Rather the powerful monarch rested,
Ready-armed, while men were tested
In the field, and others took part,
Though such things were dear to his heart,
Four hundred knights at his command.
None were finer, you understand,
Than those beneath Arthur's banner,
Even the least great in valour.
To him came riding a young knight
Galloping post-haste from the fight.
Once there, to the king he revealed
That all had entered upon the field

Except King Augusel alone,
Wise, noble, worthy of his throne.
All the others had joined the fray.
'A knight I saw,' the youth did say,
'A white lion-ermine in view,
Upon his shield of azure hue:
The knight battles so valiantly
That he rides ever to victory.
Like some leopard the hunters fear,
None dare attack him, twould appear.'
The king knew it was Gingalain,
That such an emblem did maintain,
For such he'd borne when first at court,
And with such valour e'er had fought.
He thought aright, for it was he,
Who had indeed fought valiantly.
Arthur would brook no more delay,
Deciding, thus, to enter the fray.
Then girths were tightened, helms laced,
Swords slung, breastplates embraced,
Belts were fastened, banners raised high,
Prepared all comers to defy.
When they were ready for the field,
All mounted, raising lance and shield,
Then ranged themselves in order so
As to meet the ranks of friend turned foe.
Then King Arthur charged at full pace;

Towards the press he turned his face,
Followed by all, as he rode to war.
There were two trumpeters in his corps,
Bearing their trumpets, which they blew
At their loudest, and onwards flew.
As the king, and his troops, charged in,
It seemed the ground shook with the din.

AND LEADS HIS MEN TO THE CHARGE

Arthur, on entering the battle,
Charged the King of the Red Castle,
Striking him high upon the shield,
Such that his saddle he did yield,
And downwards to the earth was gone.
The lance broke, but the king rode on,
While his bold company, still sound,
Toppled a hundred to the ground.
There, the valiant Britons seized
Both men and horses, as they pleased.
Many a knight they forced to render
His good sword, and so surrender,
Then, lances lowered, on they sped,
To meet the serried ranks ahead,
Dealing great blows, with lance and sword,
Shields held high, as onward they poured.
Arthur's company wrought so well,

Many of their adversaries fell,
Unhorsed, and discomfited too,
By those that to Arthur held true.
Many they captured that would flee,
Disadvantaged, when, suddenly,
The King of the Scots, Augusel,
Charged headlong from a wooded dell,
A hundred and forty at his back
Riding, at speed, to the attack.
King Augusel lowered his lance,
And struck Flores, a duke of France,
In the chest, a blow of such force
It toppled the duke from his horse;
While the king's company rode in,
And downed many amidst the din.
The king, without a moment's rest
To the thick of the fighting pressed.
He and his men wrought valiantly,
And changed the face of the tourney;
Through their efforts, saving the day.
Flutes and trumpets sounded away,
Above the fallen, as blow on blow
Each rider landed upon his foe,
On shield, or helm, or on armour,
Seeking to down him, by sheer valour.
Stout lances broke, and shields were bent,
As they struck home, with fierce intent;

Breastplates shattered, and shields were bent,
Or split in two, in a swift descent.
Saddles were emptied, knights fell low,
As each, on each, dealt blow on blow.
Strong blades were shattered, and reins broke,
One lost, one gained, at a single stroke.
One sought to force a surrender,
Another sought swift aid to render,
Many a blow was taken and dealt,
As they charged each other full pelt.
Great was the melee, and the sound
Of lances breaking, o'er that ground,
Of blades snapping, as steel rang out,
Many a cry, and many a shout.
The ranks were broken on every side;
Shrilly, the flutes and trumpets cried,
As lances splintered, and blades too,
And from the ranks men broke anew.
Dense was the press, loud the melee;
As if God's thunder filled the day.

GINGALAIN DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF

Gingalain, advancing once more,
Drove his steed at bold Saigremors,
Striking high on his gilded shield,
And toppling the knight to the field,

So great the force of that fierce blow,
He could not help but plunge below.
Gingalain left him on the ground,
Then unseated the next he found.
Gawain distinguished himself also,
Taking full many of the foe,
Giflet too, and Blioblieris;
Who won many a joust in this,
Though he'd lost at the Perilous Ford.
L'Orgillous too, and Saies' brave lord,
Fought so well, and in such manner,
No two knights could have wrought better.
But none came near to Gingalain
Who outdid the rest on that plain;
All he met with he overcame,
All eyes his many deeds did claim,
For he passed before every eye
As he conquered, and charged on by.
So fiercely he wielded his sword
That all the world did praise afford:
The knight was assured of the prize,
The tourney, and the fame likewise.
Evening came, for the glowing sun
Its full course o'er the sky had run.
King Augusel rode o'er the plain
To our knight, and seizing his rein
Asked that he dine with him that night,

And lodge there till the morning light.
Such his persuasive courtesy,
Gingalain thanked him graciously,
And both then went away to dine.
They sat down to their meat and wine,
As soon as the board was prepared,
For their squires had the labour shared
Of finding provisions as decreed,
And all that their masters might need.
They slept well throughout the night,
Arising with the morning light,
When the church bells rang on high,
Then to the Mass went, by and by,
While the squires groomed each charger,
Re-tipped lances, cleaned their armour,
Then saddled and bridled each mount,
Tightened the straps to good account,
Readied the greaves, restored laces,
Polished their helms, patched the places
Where their stout shields had been dented,
Till all seemed fittingly presented.
After the Mass, their lords returned,
(Much praise had their squires earned)
Donned their armour and made ready,
To gather again for the tourney.
The morning sun mounted the sky,
They rode to the field by and by,

Kings and counts and knights, I say,
Making a fine and bold display.
Many a pennant, many a banner,
Fluttered there, as, in lordly manner,
Those knights the path of honour sought,
Swiftly engaged, and bravely fought.
Displaying their skill and prowess,
As they the tourney did address.
Never had such fierce blows been seen,
Such gains, such losses, on any scene.
What more can I tell of that fight?
If he had proved the finest knight
The day before, now Gingalain
Did far finer a course maintain,
For none had ever witnessed so
Brave an effort gainst any foe.
Of that day too he won the prize,
As all witnessed before their eyes.
At eve, to an end the tourney drew.
Bruians won great honour too;
Arthur sent to the whole host, though,
Lanpars, and Giflet the son of Do,
To request that all grant Gingalain
The greatest prize, and ascertain
Whether that knight had left the field;
Once the king had his wish revealed,
Those two knights disarmed, and went;

To seek Gingalain their intent.
They found him with King Augustel,
Conversing, in peace, for a spell;
With great joy they greeted the knight,
Each to each expressing delight.
After giving their joy full rein,
Lanpars, Giflet, and Gingalain
Mounted fresh steeds again, and sought
To make their way back to the court.
Travelling swiftly towards that same,
Ere long, to Valedon they came.
In that castle they found the king;
Arthur arose, on recognising
Gingalain, and embraced the knight.
You may conceive the courts' delight.
He was welcomed most joyfully,
Men pledged to serve him, courteously,
Kissed and clasped the youth outright,
And sought to keep him in their sight.
With joy they all spoke together,
Praising one deed or another,
Talking at length of the tourney,
Some foolishly, and others wisely.
Many a gift was granted there,
To mark that glorious affair;
Many won mantles at that court,
Ermine-trimmed, for those who'd fought,

And lined with silk, or lined with vair;
Tunics and cloaks beyond compare.
Others received both silver and gold,
In well-struck coins, a wealth untold.
Palfreys were granted, many a steed,
And fine those creatures were indeed.
Robes of silk were disbursed too,
Of many a rich and splendid hue.
Great was the joy at court that night,
And richly-dressed each valiant knight.
Some wore vair, and some wore grey,
A triumph it seemed, a true feast-day;
Every squire had fresh livery,
And all that host were a sight to see.

KING ARTHUR AND THE COURT JOURNEY TO LONDON

They spent the night at Valedon.
At early morn the king was gone
Upon the road to London straight,
Where Blonde Esmerée lay, of late.
Gingalain accompanied Arthur,
Who was overjoyed to recover
His grand-nephew; on they went
And soon achieved of their intent,
For, to London, they swiftly came
And won fair welcome in that same.

When Queen Esmerée saw her knight,
She was filled with deepest delight,
And warmly clasped her Gingalain.
The King took their hands, and made plain
His pleasure in granting both their due,
Seating himself between the two.
Certain lords he chose to summon,
The first being King Amangon,
Then King Bruians and Gawain,
Tristan, and the lesser Yvain,
Lanpars, Kay, and Saigremors,
Gales le Chauve, and a handful more.
Said King Arthur: 'Now list to me!'
Then, Gingalain, he, courteously,
Addressed: 'Fair nephew,' the king cried,
'The joy, within, I cannot hide,
At finding you so skilful and brave,
For twas a fine display you gave;
Glad am I to recover you,
Long having wished your face to view.
For you great honours are in store;
Now I seek of you one thing more:
Take in marriage this fair queen.
A fairer realm few men have seen
Than hers; take her to wife, my son,
And of crowned monarchs thus make one
Blessed with power and authority.

Tis right that you gain such as she,
 For from peril, you freed the maid,
 With skill in arms not oft displayed.
 For this lady, pain you endured;
 Of a fair wife you are assured,
 And one of noble parentage,
 For she lacks naught in lineage,
 As in beauty she lacks for naught,
 And all is beauty at her fair court;
 And then you are her sole desire,
 For she would take you as her sire.
 The king and his lords did so plead
 That Gingalain swiftly agreed.
 He thought the queen lovely and wise,
 And she had touched his heart likewise.
 Arthur said he would see him wed,
 And place the crown upon his head,
 But Blonde Esmerée wished to see
 That act reserved for her own country,
 Where the pair might bear together
 Those crowns her father and mother
 Had once worn; this request she moved
 And Gingalain said he approved,
 And begged the king that it might be
 In Wales; to this he did agree,
 And he would honour them both there;
 They then took their leave, to prepare,

And so, where all did now delight,
In London town, they passed the night.

**THEY DEPART FOR WALES, TO SEE GINGALAIN
AND ESMERÉE MARRIED THERE**

Next morning, at the break of day,
Gingalain, and Blonde Esmerée,
And King Arthur arose and dressed,
While the squires their steeds addressed.
What more is there to tell? In short,
Once mounted, forth ventured the court,
And from England they made their way,
King Arthur leading that fair array.
By hill and dale, they did journey,
Through the Marches of that country,
Till to the land of Wales they came.
Welcomed joyfully to that same,
The host rode in grand procession
Into the city of Senaudon.
Throughout all Wales the news had spread
That their lady was to be wed,
And would take for her sire no less
Than he who'd saved her from distress.
Thus, the marriage pleased them greatly.
A message was sent by the lady
To all the barons throughout the land,

That they should come, at her command,
To Senaudon. And, I may say,
Since God made the very first day,
And this world of ours conceived,
No man has been so well-received
As Gingalain was in that place:
For all desired to view his face,
All there wished him for a master,
And to do King Arthur honour.
With all this may you rest content,
For to be brief is my intent:
There, Gingalain, of whom I tell,
Was crowned, and was married as well.
That pair, the crowned king and queen,
Were fair as any two ever seen;
Great, were they held, in memory,
And so known throughout history.

RENAUD'S ENVOI

Here my romance draws to an end.
Fair one, to whom my thoughts e'er tend,
Renaud de Beaujeu prays that he
May likewise be held in memory,
By one whom he will love always,
Nor can she deny him that, I say.
If it should please you, he will speak,

Or now be mute, and silence seek.
If you but show him fair seeming,
For you, Gingalain he will bring
To life, and he shall find once more
She that he loved, and lost before,
And hold her naked in his arms,
Else lack forever her sweet charms,
And ne'er find that lover again.
No greater vengeance, I maintain,
Than this, on Gingalain could fall,
To his misfortune, the worst of all,
That of him I may speak no more;
Unless fair welcome goes before.

The End of Part VI, and of 'Le Bel Inconnu'



ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Anthony Kline lives in England. He graduated in Mathematics from the University of Manchester, and was Chief Information Officer (Systems Director) of a large UK Company, before dedicating himself to his literary work and interests. He was born in 1947. His work consists of translations of poetry; critical works, biographical history with poetry as a central theme; and his own original poetry. He has translated into English from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese and the European languages. He also maintains a deep interest in developments in Mathematics and the Sciences.

He continues to write predominantly for the Internet, making all works available in download format, with an added focus on the rapidly developing area of electronic books. His most extensive works are complete translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*.