

The Knight of the Two Swords
(Li chevaliers as deus espees)
(lines 1-1042)

translated by

Ross G. Arthur and Noel L. Corbett

I. King Arthur's Court

King Arthur had held his land for a long time without the cost of war and had made all his enemies subject to his will; he was happy, the Queen was happy, and the court was full of good cheer. Then the good and worthy King decided to hold the greatest, most splendid court he had ever held—and he was accustomed to magnificent courts! That was what he most desired, and what he most liked to do, the better to attract and bind to himself the hearts of his knights. He loved and cherished them so much that, if he could have had his way, none of them would have ever left his side. They were forever receiving noble and precious gifts from him, for he wasn't mean or stingy in that respect. He sought riches so as to honor them, and not from any hope of personal gain. His hands were never lacking splendid gifts to bestow, and the more he gave—this fine and generous man—the more he would receive. I can assure you that, far from impoverishing him, largesse brought King Arthur ever-increasing wealth. He was so brave and high-minded that nothing he could do for honor's sake seemed to him the least bit onerous or inconvenient. Even the most ordinary days of the week, when his retinue was the smallest, seemed like another king's Easter celebrations. {36}

One day he summoned his bailiffs and his clerics—and he had a great many of them—and when he saw them gathered there before him, he gave his orders at once, telling them to spread the word to everyone under his dominion, to all those who held fiefs or lordships from him, that they should not fail to come to Cardueil at Pentecost to keep him company. Anyone who did not appear could be sure he would forfeit his entire fief, without clemency or pardon, and lose the King's love as well. {50}

When the feast-day arrived, the barons assembled from many a land, as they were supposed to, and just as they had been required to do, to join the King in fellowship. After he had heard Solemn Mass in the great church, along with the Queen and all the other knights, ladies and damsels—and there were many beautiful ones in attendance—the King returned to his lodgings. When the time was right, he asked that the water be poured for washing, and so it was done without delay; every

young lord leapt to his feet and hurried to fetch a basin or a towel. The King washed before all the others did—the noble queen as well—and then they sat down side by side at the dais in the great hall. They wore their crowns regally, as befitted such a noble occasion. In keeping with the pomp and the ceremony of that high feast-day, ten kings wore their crowns. I really must name all ten of them for you. {76}

First, in great splendor and magnificence sat King Lot of Orcany, the father of Sir Gawain. Next to him was King Urien, the father of Sir Yvain. Tor's father, King Arés, was seated next in line, beside King Yder, a wise and judicious man; he was always delighted to appear at court with the other knights, whenever the occasion was right. Then came King Amangon of Greenland; as the whole court knew, he was the father of Lady Guinloie, Sir Gawain's faithful sweetheart and lover. The father, who knew this very well, loved him with all his might. The handsome Caradoc, King of Vannes, was seated next in rank; then came the worthy and courteous Anguise, the lord and King of Scotland. Next to him was King Bademagu, from whose land no stranger has ever returned, or ever will. If memory serves me well, King Estrangaré, who held the city of Pelle, was seated next, and King Bruant, who was known as "Four-Beards," Lord of the Lost City, sat and dined beside him. {110}

These ten kings were seated at King Arthur's table, all wearing their crowns, just as I have told you. The three hundred and sixty-six knights sat at the Round Table, all except for three who were out travelling the world, in pursuit of adventures to test and prove themselves; and because of this the King was very pensive. Sir Gawain was one of the three, the second was Tor, and the third was Girflet. The food was all ready and waiting to be served; Kay oversaw the tables on that day, along with Bedevere the constable and Lucan the wine-steward; these three men were in charge of the table-service. Kay had it announced that no one except knights, high clerics, noble maidens, ladies and damsels—no matter how valiant they might be—would be allowed to sit and eat within the great hall, and these people were to be left to eat in complete peace. It was estimated that at least ten thousand people dined in the hall that day, not counting the servants. {136}

All the ladies and gentlemen were nobly seated and they enjoyed themselves immensely, dining in a spirit of good cheer. I don't think that

anyone will ever again see so many fine people all gathered together in one place! After Kay had had the first course served to everyone, in his usual expert manner, the King bowed his head and fell into deep thought, for he was greatly troubled. From one end of the hall to the other, he saw the tables adorned with so many beautiful people, so many damsels, ladies and knights, and it seemed to him that they were far more intent on good fellowship than on filling their stomachs; he beheld the ten kings seated near him, all wearing their crowns in his honor; and because of this he thought, all the more apprehensively, that he had never before seen so many beautiful people assembled at any court of his without some adventure arriving. And, as a matter of fact, he had never held such a splendid court and failed to see some adventure present itself. Totally absorbed by these thoughts, he left his meal untouched; and the ten kings took note of this. {165}

Suddenly, a knight mounted on a great palfrey came riding up at a gallop. He was quite without armor, and clad in a crimson scarlet which suited him marvelously well; he was wearing a finely-tailored coat and mantle, fully lined with supple fur, and trimmed around the edges with precious black zibeline. {174}

He did not come into the hall on horseback, but stopped and dismounted outside. A boy ran up to steady his stirrup, and the knight told him to wait there a little while and look after his horse. He looked all around the hall and thought to himself that any man who had all these followers must be quite a remarkable person indeed. Then he directed his gaze to the head of the hall and saw the dais where the King, the Queen and the ten crowned kings were sitting. He recognized King Arthur immediately. And even though he had never seen him before, he could tell exactly who he was, because it seemed that far greater honor was being paid to him than to any of the others. He looked so much like the lord and master that there was no doubt about it in his mind. {198}

The knight made his way into the hall, where he was closely scrutinized by one and all; he was tall, handsome, bright and well-dressed. He walked right up to the King and stated his business impudently: "King," he said, "I am a messenger from King Ris of Outre-Ombre, and I offer you no greetings." {207}

Pensive though he was, the King looked up—never losing his composure—and told him to deliver his message, leaving out nothing of what he had been instructed to say, for he wanted to hear every last word of it. {213}

The messenger was unperturbed when he heard the King's command. "My lord," he said, "King Ris, a man of great wealth and power, sends you word that nine years have elapsed since he first set out from his country. In those nine years he has defeated nine kings by sheer force and acts of prowess; they have all done homage to him, and he has enlarged each of their fiefdoms. None of them has left his company; rather, they are now serving him with all their households. He has cut off every one of their beards, to make the lining of a mantle for his sweetheart. In addition to the lining, she has also asked him to make the trim out of your beard, and he has promised her everything she wants, right down to the very last detail. {234}

"And so he sends you word through me, because he considers you to be the greatest and the noblest king in the world—after himself, that is—that as a mark of his esteem for you he will make the mantle's tassel from your beard. He wants you to come and meet with him, and he wants you to hold your land from him; he will increase it for you. If you do not agree to this proposal, he will come into your land with such a mighty army, and with such overwhelming force, that he will never leave until he has totally dispossessed you and appropriated your entire realm as his own. He will not depart until he has taken your Queen and given her to the King of Northumberland, who has asked to have her. In addition to all this—as befits a man at war with you—he sends word that he has already entered your land with ten thousand of his finest knights, not counting the pillagers, to do battle in any way they please. Be further advised that he has the Queen of Cardigan under siege; he will not soon leave that place, not for the power of any man alive, and not until he has taken all of her land." {264}

The King heard the messenger out; he was angered in his heart and greatly humiliated by the man's words. He wondered how anyone could possibly send him such an insulting message. He felt great shame on account of the barons who were gathered there in his company. The messenger kept on prompting him for his answer, and in due course the

King replied: "Knight, I understand the outrageous words you have spoken here today, in the presence of all my noble subjects. You may advise your lord to try his hand at some other scheme. He will have to wait a long time before he gets my beard to put into some mantle! And if indeed he has the castle of Cardigan under siege, I am greatly troubled by that. Tell him that before he departs I will treat him to the sight of such a company—and to so many banners and ensigns flying—that nothing will avert fierce strife between us—unless he manages to find some way out—and he will learn just how powerful I am. Truly, I will never be happy again until I have remedied the shame and offence he has done me through this message, and corrected his insolent behavior." {293}

The messenger went back to mount his horse and departed, going on his way in haste. You may be sure that no one there provided him with an escort; instead, everyone agreed that no one had ever sent such an arrogant and insulting message to such a noble king, or committed an outrage in more urgent need of redress. The King asked that all of his men be summoned without delay. It was to be proclaimed everywhere he had even the slightest power that no man able to defend himself should dare remain behind; everyone was to be in readiness at Cardueil within forty days. The outraged seneschal sent the word out far and wide, in keeping with the good King's orders. {312}

II. King Ris and the Lady of Cardigan

We will leave the King now, for we must say a few words about the messenger. He made his way back in great haste, like a man on an important mission, riding at high speed, feeling quite insecure, and keeping a sharp lookout for his personal safety. He kept on going until he emerged from a great forest right before Cardigan; he had left King Ris there a few days earlier, but now he couldn't find him. He stopped dead in his tracks, quite dumbfounded, wondering where he could have gone, the King who had been laying siege to the city. He didn't know if King Ris had captured it or not, and he was quite perplexed. And then, not far away, he saw a monk riding along on a mule. He approached him and asked if he knew anything about the King who had been besieging

the city. The monk replied that the King and his men had taken the town by force, along with the lady inside, and that he had imprisoned her knights and all the inhabitants. "And because of that, my friend, you will understand that they've all left here and taken up residence inside the city. That's everything I know about it." {343}

"May you have good fortune, dear lord!" the messenger said; then he left, riding off smartly toward the city. He got there before long, but didn't speak to a soul, and no one said a word to him. It was well past the hour of nones when he reached the great hall. He dismounted—there were plenty of men waiting there to take his horse—and went inside, passing through many halls and galleries thronged with knights. The meal was already prepared and King Ris most nobly [...], and they were all dining together. The King was seated at the dais eating his meal, and the messenger greeted him with these words: "My lord, God bless both you and your companions!" {362}

When the King heard this, he replied at once: "Knight, did you meet with King Arthur? Do you know if he will hold his land from me and pay me homage? And did you deliver the message about my wanting to have his beard?" {368}

"Yes indeed, my lord, I told him everything. And I can tell you right now, just as he told me, that you will have to wait a long time for it, and you will be greatly discomfited before you get a single hair from his beard, or secure his homage, or acquire his land. Indeed, you will be ravaged by war before he ever holds land from you! He will not fail to come and confront you with his army, wherever he may find you. He will never be happy until he redresses this offense. And I can tell you that he is very confident of getting satisfaction." {382}

"He is not a very wise man," said King Ris, whereupon the messenger fell silent and departed. The King was infuriated and pondered the matter for a long while, for he hadn't gotten exactly what he wanted. {388}

As the King was considering this situation, an unbelievably small dwarf burst into the hall; he had come in haste from far away, riding and at great speed on a mule whiter than the new-fallen snow. In his hand he held a silk whip with an ivory handle, engraved with a trefoil emblem; the craftsman had obviously taken great pains with it. He was wearing a

coat and a mantle of silk, dyed bright crimson like a summer flower and trimmed with green sendal. Right away he dismounted, and went to take out a pair of shackles that had been carefully wrapped in a fur mantle; their links were made of gold and the cuffs were all of crystal. Trundling along the ground, the dwarf approached the King, carrying the shackles in his hands. Then he spoke these words: "King, may God save you! I have come to you from the Lady of Iceland, your sweetheart. Through me, she sends you her greetings, and commands you to take these shackles and with them to keep your covenants with her as you must, and just as you have promised her. For she intends to keep her agreements with you so that nothing is left wanting." {420}

When the King heard what the dwarf had to say – though he was still deeply engrossed in thought – he replied: "May good fortune come both to my lady and to you!" Then he took the shackles and placed them beside the King at the head of the table. And the dwarf said to him: "My lord and King, what news shall I give my lady from you?" {429}

"Tell her quite frankly," he said, "that never in all my life have I wanted anything so much as to fulfill her every wish. Greet her for me as the lady to whom my heart belongs." And with that the dwarf took his leave and departed. As soon as he saw him disappearing in the distance, King Ris once again returned to his thoughts. {440}

When he had pondered long enough and meditated for quite a while, King Ris looked out across the meadow toward the forest which, as it happened, was not very far away. He asked if anyone saw what it was he had been gazing at so intently. His companions answered right away, saying: "What is it you see, my lord? Do tell us!" {450}

He replied at once: "Do you see that forest, so close to us, and those lofty walls just visible over the treetops?" {454}

And they replied: "We do indeed, my lord. What is it you are trying to tell us?" {456}

"What you see out there is the Gaste Chapele," the King observed. "No one has ever gone there and returned to tell about it, so they say. But a few days ago I took leave of my army, just as daylight was failing and it was growing dark. I was armed, so I thought to myself that I would go and see the chapel. I set out on my own, and rode until I got there; then I dismounted and walked right up to the altar, never

hesitating. On it I saw an image of Our Lady, Holy Mary. A lamp was burning brightly before it as a sign of veneration, but no man or woman was keeping watch over it. As soon as I saw it, I removed the steel sword from my side and fell to my knees. When I had said my prayers, I took off my coat, and before I left, I fashioned an altar-cloth from it. Then I mounted my horse and left the chapel, for God had blessed me with His kindness. It would take me a long time to tell you everything that happened to me on the way back. I imagine you would scarcely believe me if I told you about it, so I won't even bother, but there is much in it that you would find disturbing. {489}

"I speak these words as the noblest king alive. I have never gone back on my word, and never would I do so. And so I declare that if any man alive, knight or soldier, lady or damsel, were bold or valiant enough to carry these precious chains to the Gaste Chapele—these shackles which I just now promised to put on King Arthur and send him as a prisoner to the Queen of Iceland, she who desires this and commands this of me..., and I am the very man who will do it, for then my lady will truly assure me of her love straightaway—and if that man pledged to go there all alone and return by night, and if he brought me back a piece of the cloth made from my emblazoned coat which I placed on the altar, then when he returned he would receive whatever he might ask me for: anything at all, without an argument." {515}

"We have often heard of the Gaste Chapele, my lord," said the knights, "but we have never heard tell of anyone coming back from there; that is why no one dares to go near it. And so, despite the fact that there are perhaps some nine hundred knights here, there is not a single one of them—no matter how bold or hardy he might be—who would ever venture to do what someone else might do in his place." {525}

"No matter," said King Ris; "You may be sure I didn't tell you the story hoping to find anyone who would dare to go there; that would be sheer folly." {530}

Standing before the King was a tall and well-bred maiden. She was young—not more than twenty years of age—and as beautiful as a young lady could possibly be; she was also graced with courtesy and good judgment which, like beauty, are precious qualities. She was wearing a dark purple dress adorned with gold trim and embroidery. She was

delicate and marvelously attractive, but quite dejected. She must have been very beautiful when happy, because she was so pretty when sad. She had been crying, and for good reason: she was serving before the King against her will, and she was greatly upset about it. {546}

She had paid close attention to the King's words, that anyone who carried out his instructions concerning the shackles would not be denied anything he might ask for. She thought it over carefully, then said to herself: "Oh God, what shall I do, when I can neither see nor imagine any deliverance for my land? It will be much too late by the time King Arthur raises an army on my behalf. I have lost my land for certain, and he will never manage to defend or restore it. All things considered, there is nothing to do but to take a chance myself. These knights are not interested in performing such a perilous exploit! In any case, no matter what happens to me on the return journey, and no matter how things may turn out, I will venture to undertake this mission. I'm not the least bit concerned for my personal safety." Then she said: "My lord and king, would you kindly repeat for my benefit what you said just a while ago." {572}

"Gladly," he said, "by my head!" Then he repeated absolutely everything he had said before. And the maiden, who already knew what this was all about, declared: "My lords, you know perfectly well that the King does not go back on his word in anything he says, not under any circumstances; indeed, he has never done so in all his life." {580}

"And what do you mean to suggest by that, young lady?" they asked. {581}

"You will find out soon enough," the beauty answered. Then she turned to the King and said: "My lord, listen to me: give me back my mule right away, for I want to set out on the journey this very night, without delay. I will place the shackles on the altar; of that you may be sure." {589}

"Ah, maiden, hold your tongue!" he said. You have proposed a reckless escapade. There are many very worthy knights here who dare not undertake this mission, and yet you want to put yourself in mortal danger! Just forget about it; you couldn't find a better way to hasten your own demise, and I would find that a great shame." {597}

“If you had been so concerned for me the other day, my lord, you would not have taken my city and all my people away from me! You would be wrong to doubt my resolve: I am determined to go to the chapel.” {603}

“No!” exclaimed the King, “I don’t like this proposal one bit, but since I cannot go back on my word, there is really nothing I can do about it. Nevertheless, mark my words and bear this in mind: I greatly fear that some evil may befall you, and that would be a great misfortune. Truly, this is a foolhardy exploit.” {610}

All of the knights said, without exception: “Do stay here, young lady, and try some safer undertaking.” {613}

“Ah, my lords, please don’t be upset,” she replied, “but I will not stay here and do nothing!” {615}

At once the King ordered the tables to be cleared, and so it was done. Then he went to relax in his lodgings and summoned his seneschal, ordering him to saddle up the young lady’s mule. He did so right away, and before long night began to fall. The King took note of this and had the maiden summoned. “Young lady,” he said, “it is time for you to leave now, whenever you are ready.” {629}

“My lord,” she said, “it is indeed time for me to go.” Then she mounted up—it was getting rather late—and the King mounted up too, along with a good hundred knights. They escorted her from there to the main gate, not expecting to see her again as long as they lived—either dead or alive—and everyone said that it was a great loss. {638}

III. The Adventure of the Gaste Chapele

The King left the maiden there, and she rode on toward the forest. She struck the mule with the whip, and it did not hesitate or falter. Covering her head with her mantle, the maiden rode straight into the forest. The night was exceedingly sinister and so murky and black that she could scarcely make out the ears of her mule. She kept on whipping it in earnest and before long she entered a dense thicket, full of brambles and thorns, laden with blackberries and cornel-fruit. Her face was all scratched and her dress was torn to shreds; red blood streamed from her body in many places. With the utmost difficulty she kept on riding until

finally she reached a meadow. Then she commended herself to Almighty God and called upon Our Saviour. Never in all her life had she felt greater dread than at that moment. She was afraid because she heard bears and lions roaring all about her, and other beasts making so many strange and unusual noises that there is not a woman so brave—nor any man, for that matter—who would not have gone completely mad before escaping. {673}

Before that terror passed, a mighty noise of thunder arose, and such a blaze of lightning that it seemed the very heavens and earth would collide and shatter. Then she heard a mighty wind blowing so strong that it uprooted huge oak trees in several places, and carried them along before her as she rode. The beautiful maiden was so frightened and distressed that she had absolutely no idea of how to protect herself. She thought she had been very reckless indeed to have undertaken this journey, and would gladly have changed her mind if she could have, for there was no way she could have anticipated anything like this. {691}

Then the wind grew still and she saw an immense fire rising before her, burning so high it seemed to reach the sky, and spreading wider than a crossbow's range. She gazed right into the midst of it, and saw two black men running about in the roaring inferno, tossing around a dead man's head. She could not avoid them; they came so close to her that she barely escaped getting burned. After this, she was filled with dread; and then she heard a voice so full of anguish that no one could ever describe its sorrow or its lamentation. Thanks to the brilliance of the flames, she could see a knight in full armor approaching, all alone and without a squire. {713}

He was grieving bitterly over a lifeless knight he was carrying across the front of his saddle; the dead man was armed, but wore neither helmet nor shield. The knight lamented at the man's misfortune and fainted repeatedly over the body. The young lady urged her mule to a brisk pace and it carried her so fast that she soon lost sight of the knight; and she kept to her chosen path until she saw the chapel. She did not go past it; instead, she dismounted and led the mule inside as quickly as she could. All of the terrors she had experienced before were nothing compared with those she felt now, and so she made the sign of the cross, confessed her sins, and earnestly called upon Our Lord and His Mother.

Then she went and quickly concealed herself and her mule behind the altar, because the knight was not very far behind; in fact, he was now approaching the Gaste Chapele. {740}

You may be sure that he was grieving as much as a man possibly could. He dismounted in front of the chapel, took the dead knight in his arms, and placed the body up against the door. Then he went and tethered his horse to a tree, set his shield against it and returned to the body, still in tears. He began fainting over and over again; he was so anguished and distraught that he really didn't know what he was doing; even so, he embraced the dead knight sorrowfully and carried him inside the chapel. Right away he removed his gauntlets, drew his sword and began to dig a grave as best he could in front of the altar. Next he took the knight's body, as was his duty, and laid it to rest. Then he fainted once again, grieving so much that it seemed he truly loved this man more than anyone else in the world, and would have liked to end his own life right there and then. {765}

Then he climbed down into the grave with the body so as to complete his task, saying: "My lord, now I must do what you asked me to as you were leaving this mortal life. I must not overlook anything I can do to remedy this evil." He took the knight's good sword, fastened it to his side and, through his tears, he said: "Dear sweet lord, I envy you your death [...] any man or woman who might find you, or disinter you, or ungird your sword. Once he has it girded on, may it never be removed, except by someone as valiant at arms, as handsome and as replete with noble qualities as you have truly been, or unless he is destined to become such a man." Then, securing the sword to the body and covering it with earth, he said: "Dear lord, I leave you here now, the finest man who ever lived, the best man who ever bore a shield or lance. As you were without a doubt the best, the most handsome, the most virtuous and the most valiant knight in the whole world, I ask God to have mercy on the soul whose mortal remains lie buried here in the earth!" {798}

Then he wept and fainted once again; when he regained consciousness, he put his helmet and his gauntlets back on and departed. From the tree, he picked up his shield by the straps, and hung it round his neck; then he mounted his horse and set off on his way, weeping constantly. {806}

The knight departed from the chapel. The maiden had overheard everything; cautiously, listening for any sound, she ventured out from behind the altar and went outside the chapel, to make certain he was gone. She heard a great clamor of people who seemed to be drawing near, lamenting so vigorously that no one had ever heard the likes of it. It was hard for her to keep from weeping out of pity for them, for she could not remember ever having heard any lamentation which stirred even half as much compassion in her heart. She wept most sweetly, and wondered who this noble lord could be, this man for whom everyone was grieving so intensely. She would have liked to find out, if she could have, but she just let the matter stand. If they could have had their way, these people—riding along beating their palms together and expressing their profoundest grief—would surely have preferred to die. They met the returning knight and asked him through their tears: “Seneschal, where is our lord?” {835}

The knight could not utter a single word, but fainted right there on his horse; he would have fallen to the ground had they not rushed over to catch him. When he came to, he answered them, as best he could, but feebly, like a man crushed by sorrow. He told them he had done everything he possibly could, overlooking nothing of what the knight had commanded him to do while he was still alive; then he declared that there was nothing more anyone could do now. They asked him to take them back so they could visit the grave where the knight lay buried. “No, I will not do that,” he answered, “for he said that after I had buried him, I was to find you if I could, and have you all return home. And he also asked me to tell you all to pray Almighty God to release his soul from torment.” {856}

“Were those his very words?” they asked. {857}

“Indeed they were,” he replied. {858}

“Then we will certainly respect his wishes and not go against any request he made during his lifetime.” With that, the company dispersed, overwhelmed by sorrow, and the seneschal went along with them. {864}

The maiden clearly heard them leaving and was much relieved at this, for she had thought she might be taken prisoner. She approached the altar with the shackles in her hands, fell to her knees, and placed them on the altar right in front of the image; but they didn’t stay there very long;

instead, they drifted up into the air in the very midst of the church. She was astonished and afraid for her life. Praying to God and His Mother to give her courage, she seized the shackles once again and quickly restored them to their place. She was extremely pleased, for this time they didn't budge an inch, and her heart was overjoyed. Then she looked at them sweetly, like one who has seen to every detail. She noticed the cloth that King Ris had put on the altar, fashioned from his coat, and for the first time she could see for herself and know that he had truly been there; everything was exactly as he had described it. Fearlessly, the maiden tore off a piece of the cloth and fastened it to her belt, thinking that now she had successfully accomplished her mission. {895}

She was going to mount up right away, but scarcely had she reached the door when she remembered the sword girded to the knight who lay buried in the chapel. She said to herself that she would never leave it behind out of cowardice, not even if it meant losing her life. She secured her mule once again and began scraping away at the earth with her hands, throwing it aside until she reached the body; then she set about removing the sword, and quickly got it loose. She was very happy once it was hers, for she believed the knight who had fastened it on to be a very worthy gentleman. She covered up the body once again and prayed God to take pity on the knight's soul; then she girded on the sword, untied her mule and mounted up. She was certain she had forgotten nothing, and then she recalled the words of the man who had attached the sword to the dead knight as securely as he could. So she did her best to take it off, but now she simply couldn't get it loose; then she understood that it would take some worthy man to unfasten it. She thought that if she ever managed to complete her task and return to Cardigan—whatever might happen to her on the way back—she would never have as her master anyone but the man worthy enough to remove the sword from her side. {932}

She genuflected before the church, made the sign of the cross, and set out across the meadow. She rode quickly, going wherever the mule carried her, until she reached the woods. She passed through them with great difficulty, for branches tore at her face and hands—her dress was ripped to shreds—so that red blood gushed out from her wounds; but she paid little heed to any of that. When she had traversed the forest, she

went right up to the gate of the city; she did not have to ask for it to be opened, for she found ten knights waiting for her there, on the King's behalf. When they saw her, they made the sign of the cross at least a hundred times. They were truly astounded, and marvelled at seeing her again: they had never heard tell of any man who had managed to keep his word, or who had ever returned from the Gaste Chapele. And all of them said to her: "Welcome back, my lady!" {955}

"And may you have good fortune too, my lords," she responded. "Please take me to the King, as is only right and proper." {959}

"We will do so gladly," they replied, and they took her straight to where King Ris lay sleeping. {962}

She appeared before the King with great self-assurance. It was very bright inside because of the many candles burning there, and the King woke up when he heard all the commotion. He was every bit as astonished at the sight of this maiden with a sword girded on as were the men leading her in. The sword was so tightly fastened to her waist that her side was aching from it. When the King saw the young lady, he recognized her right away, even though the flesh of her hands and face had been badly torn by brambles, and her dress as well. He gazed intently at the beauty, because he had never before seen a damsel or a lady wearing a sword. {981}

The maiden stepped forward and declared: "May God save you, my lord and king!" {983}

And he replied as a courteous man should: "May God grant you joy, young lady." {985}

"I have come from the Gaste Chapele, my lord; if you don't believe me, you can examine the tokens you asked me to retrieve for you." Then she knelt down and handed him the piece she had taken from the altar cloth. {991}

Then he knew that she had truly been there, for he recognized the evidence. "Alas," he said, "now my pain and suffering will increase for the rest of my days! Now I have lost my sweetheart! I know for certain that this woman will want me as her husband, and I will lose my beautiful sweetheart!" {999}

At that the maiden burst out laughing and said: "Are you really so afraid of that? No," she went on, "have no fear. I will not long for you,

nor will I ever have you as my own, so don't ever get yourself upset over that." {1005}

When the King heard her say these words, he was greatly relieved and declared: "Maiden, ask for anything you wish and it will be granted at once." {1009}

"Then get out of bed right now and I'll tell you what it is I want." The King knew that he was obligated to do exactly as she wished. He got up right away, like a man unaccustomed to going back on his word. She said that she wanted him to restore her city to her, to release all her imprisoned men, and to compensate her for all her losses, according to the evidence furnished by all those who had any knowledge of the situation. Then she wanted him leave her town and swear to her never again to set foot on her land, or to do her any harm. {1026}

King Ris granted her everything she asked—though it must have caused him grief—like a man who could never bring himself to lie. He departed from the town, taking all his knights with him. The sun had already risen and the day was growing bright and clear; King Ris wasted no time, commanding his seneschal to set everything right according to the maiden's instructions: all the people of her realm were to be promptly freed and compensation made for their losses, as set forth in their sworn oaths. The King departed, and everything was done just as he commanded. {1042}

The full translation of this romance—12,353 lines long—is available in *The Knight of the Two Swords: A Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Romance*, trans. Ross G. Arthur and Noel L. Corbett (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996) ISBN 0-8130-1439-5