

Doon

translated by

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“Doon”: many people know this lay. There is scarcely any good harpist who doesn’t know how to play the melody. But I wish to tell you and recount to you the adventure because of which the Bretons named this lay “Doon.” It is my belief, if I recall correctly, that in Edinburgh, which is in the North, there once dwelt a maiden, who was exceptionally courteous and beautiful. She held the land as her inheritance—and there were no other lordships there—and she dwelt in Edinburgh; that was the place that she loved very much. Because of her and because of her damsels, it was called the Castle of the Maidens.

The maiden I am telling you about became proud because of her wealth and power; she disdained all the men of the country. There was not one of such great worth that she would be willing to love him or take him or to cause him to pay court to her: she was not willing to put herself in servitude under the pretext of marriage. All the gentlemen of the land often came to her to beseech her: they wanted her to take a lord, but she refused them completely. She would never take a lord, she said, unless he would do so much for her love that he would be willing to travel in a single day from Southampton, which is by the sea, right to the place where she was: she told them that she would take that man; in this way she thought to free herself; and these men left her alone: but it could not remain like that.

When the men of the country heard this—I’ll tell you the truth about it—many of them put themselves to the test along the roads they were supposed to travel. They quickly mounted large horses that were strong and good for travelling, because they didn’t want to be slowed down. Most of them could not endure it or complete the day’s journey. There were some of them who arrived successfully, but they were tired and exhausted. When they had dismounted and had come up to the castle, the maiden would come up to meet them, and would honor them

greatly; then she would have them taken, alone, into her chambers to rest. She would have beds made up for them, to kill them and entrap them, with fine coverlets and bedclothes. Those who were worn out and tired went to bed, and fell asleep: sleeping in the soft bed, they would die. The chamberlains would find them dead and would report it to their lady; she was extremely happy about it, because she was revenged on them.

The story was carried far and wide about this haughty damsel. In Brittany across the sea, a knight heard tell of it who was hardy and valiant, wise, courteous and venturesome. This vassal's name was Doon. This man had a good horse, named Bayard, which was very swift; he wouldn't exchange it for two castles. Because of his confidence in this steed, he would be willing to undertake this task, for the maiden and for the land, to find out if he would be able to win her. As soon as he could, he crossed the sea, and arrived in Southampton. He sent to the damsel and informed her by his messenger that he had arrived in the country, and that she should send her representatives to him who would tell her the truth, on the day which he had named to them . . . (*a line is missing*) When she saw his messengers she sent willingly to him; she named and set the day when he would come into her country.

It was a Saturday morning when Doon set out on the road. He travelled so much that by evening he had completed his day's journey and had come to Edinburgh; he was welcomed with great joy. There wasn't one of the knights and servants, great or small, who didn't honor him and serve him and treat him very well. When he had spoken to the maiden, they took him into a chamber to rest when it was pleasing to him. The knight ordered them to find dry firewood for him and to bring it into the chamber and then to leave him to rest, for he was exhausted from the journey. They did what he desired. He shut the door and closed himself in; he did want any of them to spy on him. He made a fire with a flint, approached the fire, and warmed himself. He never lay down, all night long, in the bed which was prepared. For if a tired and exhausted man wanted to lie in that good bed, misfortune could soon befall him from it. He who lies more uncomfortably regrets it less and is restored more quickly.

In the morning, when day broke, he went to the door and opened it, lay down in the bed, covered himself, and, as it felt good to him, he fell asleep. Those who were supposed to guard the room thought that they would find him dead; but they saw that he was completely content, and, among themselves, they are pleased and happy. At the first hour of the day he arose, and dressed and wrapped himself up. He went to talk to the maiden and to ask for what had been promised. The maiden replied to him: "My friend, it cannot be like that; it will be necessary for you to exercise your body and your horse some more. In one day, you must travel as much as a swan is able to fly: then I will take you, without contradiction."

He asked for a postponement until Bayard had recovered and he himself had rested: the time was set for the fourth day. Doon set out on his journey. Bayard travels, the swan flies; it's a marvel that he doesn't injure it. The swan could not fly as well as Bayard could travel. That night they came to a place, to a castle which was splendid. He was well lodged there and his horse was well cared for. He stayed there as long as he pleased, and, when he wanted to, he left and went to Edinburgh and asked for what had been promised. She could not put him off any longer; she summoned all her barons. On their advice, she took Doon and made him lord of her country.

When he had married the maiden, he held court, both large and beautiful, for three days. On the fourth, he arose in the morning, his horse was brought to him, and he commended his wife to God, for he wants to return to his own country. The lady cries and shows great grief because her lover is going away. She begs for mercy from him, sweetly, but that doesn't do her any good. She cries to him please, to remain, and tells him that he is betraying her.

He is unwilling to hear her at all, for he's eager to leave. "Lady," he says, "I will go away. I don't know if I will find you again. You are pregnant by me, and I believe that you will have a son. You will keep my golden ring for him: when he is big, you will give it to him, and order him to guard it well. By the ring, he will be able to find me. Send him to the King of France: let him be fostered and educated there." He offers the ring; she takes it; he leaves at once, and waits no longer; he has gone

away, and remains no more. She is very sad, and laments greatly; she was pregnant, it is true.

At the time when her son was born, her friends were very joyful about it. She guarded him and cherished him until the boy could ride a horse and go out fishing and hunting in the woods. She gave his father's ring to him and ordered him to guard it. The lad was outfitted and sent to the King of France; he took plenty of gold and silver and spent it most lavishly. He made himself popular at court because he was generous in giving; he was a very accomplished man. He was in France for such a long time that the King made a knight of him, and he travelled to tournaments, seeking renown both far and wide. He never heard of any task without wanting to be there first; he was very popular with the knights. He was an exceedingly worthy man; there was no man so valiant in the country. He had a great company of knights.

The lad went to Mont Saint Michel in Brittany tourney; he wanted to get to know the Bretons. However much he jousted, there wasn't a single man that he didn't defeat by his skill. His father was on the other side. He was extremely impatient to joust with the lad; lance raised, he entered the lists: he expected something good from him. The two of them rode at great speed, and great strokes were struck; the son knocked down the father: if he had known that it was his father, it would have grieved him that he did so. But he didn't know that it was, and Doon did not recognize him; he wounded him grievously in the arm.

When the tournament was breaking up, Doon sent for the lad to come to him to talk, and he came there without delay, and Doon began to speak to him. "Who are you, dear friend," he said, "who knocked me off my horse?" The young lad replied, "Sir, I really don't know how it happened: those who were there know." Doon heard him, and called to him "Show me your hands," he said, "quickly!" The lad was no common man; he takes off his gloves quickly, shows and extends his two hands to him. When he saw the young lord's hands, on his finger he recognized the ring which he had given to his wife; his heart was very joyous and happy. By the ring which he had seen he had surely recognized his son, knew that he was his own son, whom he engendered.

In everyone's hearing, he said to him: "Lad, I recognized well when you jousted with me today that you were of my lineage; there is great

chivalry in you. Never before because of a knight's stroke have I ever fallen from my horse, nor will any other ever knock me down nor give me such a powerful stroke. Come kiss me, I am your father. Your mother is very proud; I won her at the cost of great effort. When I had taken her, I went away and I have never seen her since. I entrusted this gold ring to her and said that she should give it to you when she sent you to France."

"Sir," he said "that is true." They kissed and embraced each other and felt great joy. They went together to a lodging-house. They left for England; the son took the father to his mother, who loved him greatly and desired him strongly. She received him as her lord; then they lived in great honor.

Of him and of his good steed, and of his son, whom he held most dear, and of the day's journeys he travelled for the lady whom he loved, the Bretons made the melody of the lay that is called "Doon."

Source: *Les Lais anonymes des XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, ed. Prudence Mary O'Hara Tobin (Geneva: Droz, 1976), pp. 324-331.