

Marie de France

Eliduc

translated by

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Now will I rehearse before you a very ancient Breton Lay. As the tale was told to me, so, in turn, will I tell it over again, to the best of my art and knowledge. Hearken now to my story, its why and its reason.

In Brittany there lived a knight, so courteous and so brave, that in all the realm there was no worthier lord than he. This knight was named Eliduc. He had wedded in his youth a noble lady of proud race and name. They had long dwelt together in peace and content, for their hearts were fixed on one another in faith and loyalty. Now it chanced that Eliduc sought his fortune in a far land, where there was a great war. There he loved a Princess, the daughter of the King and Queen of those parts. Guillardun was the maiden's name, and in all the realm was none more fair. The wife of Eliduc had to name, Guildeluec, in her own country. By reason of these two ladies their story is known as the Lay of Guildeluec and Guillardun, but at first it was rightly called the Lay of Eliduc. The name is a little matter; but if you hearken to me you shall learn the story of these three lovers, in its pity and its truth.

Eliduc had as lord and suzerain, the King of Brittany over Sea. The knight was greatly loved and cherished of his prince, by reason of his long and loyal service. When the King's business took him from his realm, Eliduc was his master's justice and Seneschal. He governed the country well and wisely, and held it from the foe with a strong hand. Nevertheless, in spite of all, much evil was appointed unto him. Eliduc was a mighty hunter, and by the King's grace, he would chase the stag within the woods. He was cunning and fair as Tristan, and so wise in venery, that the oldest forester might not gainsay him in aught concerning the shaw. But by reason of malice and envy, certain men accused him to the King that he had meddled with the royal pleasaunce. The King bade Eliduc to avoid his Court. He gave no reason for his commandment, and the knight might learn nothing of the cause. Often he

prayed the King that he might know whereof he was accused. Often he begged his lord not to heed the specious and crafty words of his foes. He called to mind the wounds he had gained in his master's wars, but was answered never a word. When Eliduc found that he might get no speech with his lord, it became his honour to depart. He returned to his house, and calling his friends around him, opened out to them this business of the King's wrath, in recompense for his faithful service.

"I did not reckon on a King's gratitude; but as the proverb says, it is useless for a farmer to dispute with the horse in his plough. The wise and virtuous man keeps faith to his lord, and bears goodwill to his neighbour, not for what he may receive in return."

Then the knight told his friends that since he might no longer stay in his own country, he should cross the sea to the realm of Logres, and sojourn there awhile, for his solace. His fief he placed in the hands of his wife, and he required of his men, and of all who held him dear, that they would serve her loyally. Having given good counsel to the utmost of his power, the knight prepared him for the road. Right heavy were his friends and kin, that he must go forth from amongst them. Eliduc took with him ten knights of his household, and set out on his journey. His dame came with him so far as she was able, wringing her hands, and making much sorrow, at the departure of her husband. At the end he pledged good faith to her, as she to him, and so she returned to her own home. Eliduc went his way, till he came to a haven on the sea. He took ship, and sailed to, the realm of Totenois, for many kings dwell in that country, and ever there were strife and war. Now, near to Exeter, in this land, there dwelt a King, right rich and strong, but old and very full of years. He had no son of his body, but one maid only, young, and of an age to wed. . Since he would not bestow this damsel on a certain prince of his neighbours, this lord made mortal war upon his fellow, spoiling and wasting all his land. The ancient King, for surety, had set his daughter within a castle, fair and very strong. He had charged the sergeants not to issue forth from the gates, and for the rest there was none so bold as to seek to storm the keep, or even to joust about the barriers. When Eliduc was told of this quarrel, he needed to go no farther, and sojourned for awhile in the land. He turned over in his mind which of these princes dealt unjustly with his neighbour. Since he

deemed that the aged king was the more vexed and sorely pressed in the matter, he resolved to aid him to the best of his might, and to take arms in his service. Eliduc, therefore, wrote letters to the King, telling him that he had quitted his own country, and sought refuge in the King's realm. For his part he was willing to fight as a mercenary in the King's quarrel, and if a safe conduct were given him, he and the knights of his company would ride, forthwith, to their master's aid. This letter, Eliduc sent by the hands of his squires to the King. When the ancient lord had read the letter, he rejoiced greatly, and made much of the messengers. He summoned his constable, and commanded him swiftly to write out the safe conduct, that would bring the baron to his side. For the rest he bade that the messengers meetly should be lodged and apparelled, and that such money should be given them as would be sufficient to their needs. Then he sealed the safe conduct with his royal seal, and sent it to Eliduc, straightway, by a sure hand.

When Eliduc came in answer to the summons, he was received with great honour by the King. His lodging was appointed in the house of a grave and courteous burgess of the city, who bestowed the fairest chamber on his guest. Eliduc fared softly, both at bed and board. He called to his table such good knights as were in misease, by reason of prison or of war. He charged his men that none should be so bold as to take pelf or penny from the citizens of the town, during the first forty days of their sojourn. But on the third day, it was bruited about the streets, that the enemy were near at hand. The country folk deemed that they approached to invest the city, and to take the gates by storm. When the noise and clamour of the fearful burgesses came to the ears of Eliduc, he and his company donned their harness, and got to horse, as quickly as they might. Forty horsemen mounted with him; as to the rest, many lay sick or hurt within the city, and others were captives in the hands of the foe. These forty stout sergeants waited for no sounding of trumpets; they hastened to seek their captain at his lodging, and rode at his back through the city gate.

"Sir," said they, "where you go, there we will follow, and what you bid us, that shall we do."

"Friends," made answer the knight, "I thank you for your fellowship. There is no man amongst us but who wishes to molest the foe, and do

them all the mischief that he is able. If we await them in the town, we defend ourselves with the shield, and not with the sword. To my mind it is better to fall in the field than to hide behind walls; but if any of you have a wiser counsel to offer, now let him speak."

"Sir," replied a soldier of the company, "through the wood, in good faith, there runs a path, right strict and narrow. It is the wont of the enemy to approach our city by this track. After their deeds of arms before the walls, it is their custom to return by the way they came, helmet on saddle bow, and hauberk unbraced. If we might catch them, unready in the path, we could trouble them very grievously, even though it be at the peril of our lives."

"Friends," answered Eliduc, "you are all the King's men, and are bound to serve him, faithfully, even to the death. Come, now, with me where I will go, and do that thing which you shall see me do. I give you my word as a loyal gentleman, that no harm shall hap to any. If we gain spoil and riches from the foe, each shall have his lot in the ransom. At the least we may do them much hurt and mischief in this quarrel."

Eliduc set his men in ambush, near by that path, within the wood. He told over to them, like a cunning captain, the crafty plan he had devised, and taught them how to play their parts, and to call upon his name. When the foe had entered on that perilous path, and were altogether taken in the snare, Eliduc cried his name, and summoned his companions to bear themselves like men. This they did stoutly, and assailed their enemy so fiercely that he was dismayed beyond measure, and his line being broken, fled to the forest. In this fight was the constable taken, together with fifty and five other lords, who owned themselves prisoners, and were given to the keeping of the squires. Great was the spoil in horse and harness, and marvellous was the wealth they gained in gold and ransom. So having done such great deeds in so short a space, they returned to the city, joyous and content.

The King looked forth from a tower. He feared grievously for his men, and made his complaint of Eliduc, who—he deemed—had betrayed him in his need. Upon the road he saw a great company, charged and laden with spoil. Since the number of those who returned was more than those who went forth, the king knew not again his own. He came down from the tower, in doubt and sore trouble, bidding that the gates should

be made fast, and that men should mount upon the walls. For such coil as this, there was slender warrant. A squire who was sent out, came back with all speed, and showed him of this adventure. He told over the story of the ambush, and the tale of the prisoners. He rehearsed how the constable was taken, and that many a knight was wounded, and many a brave man slain. When the King might give credence thereto, he had more joy than ever king before. He got him from his tower, and going before Eliduc, he praised him to his face, and rendered him the captives as a gift. Eliduc gave the King's bounty to his men. He bestowed on them besides, all the harness and the spoil; keeping, for his part, but three knights, who had won much honour in the battle. From this day the King loved and cherished Eliduc very dearly. He held the knight, and his company, for a full year in his service, and at the end of the year, such faith had he in the knight's loyalty, that he appointed him Seneschal and Constable of his realm.

Eliduc was not only a brave and wary captain; he was also a courteous gentleman, right goodly to behold.

That fair maiden, the daughter of the King, heard tell of his deeds, and desired to see his face, because of the good men spake of him. She sent her privy chamberlain to the knight, praying him to come to her house, that she might solace herself with the story of his deeds, for greatly she wondered that he had no care for her friendship. Eliduc gave answer to the chamberlain that he would ride forthwith, since much he desired to meet so high a dame. He bade his squire to saddle his destrier, and rode to the palace, to have speech with the lady. Eliduc stood without the lady's chamber, and prayed the chamberlain to tell the dame that he had come, according to her wish. The chamberlain came forth with a smiling face, and straightway led him in the chamber. When the princess saw the knight, she cherished him very sweetly, and welcomed him in the most honourable fashion. The knight gazed upon the lady, who was passing fair to see. He thanked her courteously, that she was pleased to permit him to have speech with so high a princess. Guillardun took Eliduc by the hand, and seated him upon the bed, near her side. They spake together of many things, for each found much to say. The maiden looked closely upon the knight, his face and semblance; to her heart she said that never before had she beheld so comely a man.

Her eyes might find no blemish in his person, and Love knocked upon her heart, requiring her to love, since her time had come. She sighed, and her face lost its fair colour; but she cared only to hide her trouble from the knight, lest he should think her the less maidenly therefore. When they had talked together for a great space, Eliduc took his leave, and went his way. The lady would have kept him longer gladly, but since she did not dare, she allowed him to depart. Eliduc returned to his lodging, very pensive and deep in thought. He called to mind that fair maiden, the daughter of his King, who so sweetly had bidden him to her side, and had kissed him farewell, with sighs that were sweeter still. He repented him right earnestly that he had lived so long a while in the land without seeking her face, but promised that often he would enter her palace now. Then he remembered the wife whom he had left in his own house. He recalled the parting between them, and the covenant he made, that good faith and stainless honour should be ever betwixt the twain. But the maiden, from whom he came, was willing to take him as her knight! If such was her will, might any pluck him from her hand?

All night long, that fair maiden, the daughter of the King, had neither rest nor sleep. She rose up, very early in the morning, and commanding her chamberlain, opened out to him all that was in her heart. She leaned her brow against the casement.

“By my faith,” she said, “I am fallen into a deep ditch, and sorrow has come upon me. I love Eliduc, the good knight, whom my father made his Seneschal. I love him so dearly that I turn the whole night upon my bed, and cannot close my eyes, nor sleep. If he assured me of his heart, and loved me again, all my pleasure should be found in his happiness. Great might be his profit, for he would become King of this realm, and little enough is it for his deserts, so courteous is he and wise. If he have nothing better than friendship to give me, I choose death before life, so deep is my distress.”

When the princess had spoken what it pleased her to say, the chamberlain, whom she had bidden, gave her loyal counsel.

“Lady,” said he, “since you have set your love upon this knight, send him now—if so it please you—some goodly gift—girdle or scarf or ring. If he receive the gift with delight, rejoicing in your favour, you may be assured that he loves you. There is no Emperor, under Heaven, if he

were tendered your tenderness, but would go the more lightly for your grace."

The damsel hearkened to the counsel of her chamberlain, and made reply,

"If only I knew that he desired my love! Did ever maiden woo her knight before, by asking whether he loved or hated her? What if he make of me a mock and a jest in the ears of his friends! Ah, if the secrets of the heart were but written on the face! But get you ready, for go you must, at once."

"Lady," answered the chamberlain, "I am ready to do your bidding."

"You must greet the knight a hundred times in my name, and will place my girdle in his hand, and this my golden ring."

When the chamberlain had gone upon his errand, the maiden was so sick at heart, that for a little she would have bidden him return. Nevertheless, she let him go his way, and eased her shame with words.

"Alas, what has come upon me, that I should put my heart upon a stranger. I know nothing of his folk, whether they be mean or high; nor do I know whether he will part as swiftly as he came. I have done foolishly, and am worthy of blame, since I have bestowed my love very lightly. I spoke to him yesterday for the first time, and now I pray him for his love. Doubtless he will make me a song! Yet if he be the courteous gentleman I believe him, he will understand, and not deal hardly with me. At least the dice are cast, and if he may not love me, I shall know myself the most woeful of ladies, and never taste of joy all the days of my life."

Whilst the maiden lamented in this fashion, the chamberlain hastened to the lodging of Eliduc. He came before the knight, and having saluted him in his lady's name, he gave to his hand the ring and the girdle. The knight thanked him earnestly for the gifts. He placed the ring upon his finger, and the girdle he girt about his body. He said no more to the chamberlain, nor asked him any questions; save only that he proffered him a gift. This the messenger might not have, and returned the way he came. The chamberlain entered in the palace and found the princess within her chamber. He greeted her on the part of the knight, and thanked her for her bounty.

“Diva, diva,” cried the lady hastily, “hide nothing from me; does he love me, or does he not?”

“Lady,” answered the chamberlain, “as I deem, he loves you, and truly. Eliduc is no cozener with words. I hold him for a discreet and prudent gentleman, who knows well how to hide what is in his heart. I gave him greeting in your name, and granted him your gifts. He set the ring upon his finger, and as to your girdle, he girt it upon him, and belted it tightly about his middle. I said no more to him, nor he to me; but if he received not your gifts in tenderness, I am the more deceived. Lady, I have told you his words: I cannot tell you his thoughts. Only, mark carefully what I am about to say. If Eliduc had not a richer gift to offer, he would not have taken your presents at my hand.”

“It pleases you to jest,” said the lady. “I know well that Eliduc does not altogether hate me. Since my only fault is to cherish him too fondly, should he hate me, he would indeed be blameworthy. Never again by you, or by any other, will I require him of aught, or look to him for comfort. He shall see that a maiden’s love is no slight thing, lightly given, and lightly taken again—but, perchance, he will not dwell in the realm so long as to know of the matter.”

“Lady, the knight has covenanted to serve the King, in all loyalty, for the space of a year. You have full leisure to tell, whatever you desire him to learn.”

When the maiden heard that Eliduc remained in the country, she rejoiced very greatly. She was glad that the knight would sojourn awhile in her city, for she knew naught of the torment he endured, since first he looked upon her. He had neither peace nor delight, for he could not get her from his mind. He reproached himself bitterly. He called to remembrance the covenant he made with his wife, when he departed from his own land, that he would never be false to his oath. But his heart was a captive now, in a very strong prison. He desired greatly to be loyal and honest, but he could not deny his love for the maiden—Guillardun, so frank and so fair.

Eliduc strove to act as his honour required. He had speech and sight of the lady, and did not refuse her kiss and embrace. He never spoke of love, and was diligent to offend in nothing. He was careful in this, because he would keep faith with his wife, and would attempt no matter

against his King. Very grievously he pained himself, but at the end he might do no more. Eliduc caused his horse to be saddled, and calling his companions about him, rode to the castle to get audience of the King. He considered, too, that he might see his lady, and learn what was in her heart. It was the hour of meat, and the King having risen from table, had entered in his daughter's chamber. The King was at chess, with a lord who had but come from over-sea. The lady sat near the board, to watch the movements of the game. When Eliduc came before the prince, he welcomed him gladly, bidding him to seat himself close at hand. Afterwards he turned to his daughter, and said,

“Princess, it becomes you to have a closer friendship with this lord, and to treat him well and worshipfully. Amongst five hundred, there is no better knight than he.”

When the maiden had listened demurely to her father's commandment, there was no gayer lady than she. She rose lightly to her feet, and taking the knight a little from the others, seated him at her side. They remained silent, because of the greatness of their love. She did not dare to speak the first, and to him the maid was more dreadful than a knight in mail. At the end Eliduc thanked her courteously for the gifts she had sent him; never was grace so precious and so kind. The maiden made answer to the knight, that very dear to her was the use he had found for her ring, and the girdle with which he had belted his body. She loved him so fondly that she wished him for her husband. If she might not have her wish, one thing she knew well, that she would take no living man, but would die unwed. She trusted he would not deny her hope.

“Lady,” answered the knight, “I have great joy in your love, and thank you humbly for the goodwill you bear me. I ought indeed to be a happy man, since you deign to show me at what price you value our friendship. Have you remembered that I may not remain always in your realm? I covenanted with the King to serve him as his man for the space of one year. Perchance I may stay longer in his service, for I would not leave him till his quarrel be ended. Then I shall return to my own land; so, fair lady, you permit me to say farewell.”

The maiden made answer to her knight,

“Fair friend, right sweetly I thank you for your courteous speech. So apt a clerk will know, without more words, that he may have of me just what he would. It becomes my love to give faith to all you say.”

The two lovers spoke together no further; each was well assured of what was in the other’s heart. Eliduc rode back to his lodging, right joyous and content. Often he had speech with his friend, and passing great was the love which grew between the twain.

Eliduc pressed on the war so fiercely that in the end he took captive the King who troubled his lord, and had delivered the land from its foes. He was greatly praised of all as a crafty captain in the field, and a hardy comrade with the spear. The poor and the minstrel counted him a generous knight. About this time that King, who had bidden Eliduc avoid his realm, sought diligently to find him. He had sent three messengers beyond the seas to seek his ancient Seneschal. A strong enemy had wrought him much grief and loss. All his castles were taken from him, and all his country was a spoil to the foe. Often and sorely he repented him of the evil counsel to which he had given ear. He mourned the absence of his mightiest knight, and drove from his councils those false lords who, for malice and envy, had defamed him. These he outlawed for ever from his realm. The King wrote letters to Eliduc, conjuring him by the loving friendship that was once between them, and summoning him as a vassal is required of his lord, to hasten to his aid, in that his bitter need. When Eliduc heard these tidings they pressed heavily upon him, by reason of the grievous love he bore the dame. She, too, loved him with a woman’s whole heart. Between the two there was nothing but the purest love and tenderness. Never by word or deed had they spoiled their friendship. To speak a little closely together; to give some fond and foolish gift; this was the sum of their love. In her wish and hope the maiden trusted to hold the knight in her land, and to have him as her lord. Naught she deemed that he was wedded to a wife beyond the sea.

“Alas,” said Eliduc, “I have loitered too long in this country, and have gone astray. Here I have set my heart on a maiden, Guillardun, the daughter of the King, and she, on me. If, now, we part, there is no help that one, or both, of us, must die. Yet go I must. My lord requires me by letters, and by the oath of fealty that I have sworn. My own honour

demands that I should return to my wife. I dare not stay; needs must I go. I cannot wed my lady, for not a priest in Christendom would make us man and wife. All things turn to blame. God, what a tearing asunder will our parting be! Yet there is one who will ever think me in the right, though I be held in scorn of all. I will be guided by her wishes, and what she counsels that will I do. The King, her sire, is troubled no longer by any war. First, I will go to him, praying that I may return to my own land, for a little, because of the need of my rightful lord. Then I will seek out the maiden, and show her the whole business. She will tell me her desire, and I shall act according to her wish."

The knight hesitated no longer as to the path he should follow. He went straight to the King, and craved leave to depart. He told him the story of his lord's distress, and read, and placed in the King's hands, the letters calling him back to his home. When the King had read the writing, and knew that Eliduc purposed to depart, he was passing sad and heavy. He offered the knight the third part of his kingdom, with all the treasure that he pleased to ask, if he would remain at his side. He offered these things to the knight—these, and the gratitude of all his days besides.

"Do not tempt me, sire," replied the knight. "My lord is in such deadly peril, and his letters have come so great a way to require me, that go I must to aid him in his need. When I have ended my task, I will return very gladly, if you care for my services, and with me a goodly company of knights to fight in your quarrels."

The King thanked Eliduc for his words, and granted him graciously the leave that he demanded. He gave him, moreover, all the goods of his house; gold and silver, hound and horses, silken cloths, both rich and fair, these he might have at his will. Eliduc took of them discreetly, according to his need. Then, very softly, he asked one other gift. If it pleased the King, right willingly would he say farewell to the princess, before he went. The King replied that it was his pleasure, too. He sent a page to open the door of the maiden's chamber, and to tell her the knight's request. When she saw him, she took him by the hand, and saluted him very sweetly. Eliduc was the more fain of counsel than of claspings. He seated himself by the maiden's side, and as shortly as he might, commenced to show her of the business. He had done no more than read her of his letters, than her face lost its fair colour, and near she

came to swoon. When Eliduc saw her about to fall, he knew not what he did, for grief. He kissed her mouth, once and again, and wept above her, very tenderly. He took, and held her fast in his arms, till she had returned from her swoon.

“Fair dear friend,” said he softly, “bear with me while I tell you that you are my life and my death, and in you is all my comfort. I have bidden farewell to your father, and purposed to go back to my own land, for reason of this bitter business of my lord. But my will is only in your pleasure, and whatever the future brings me, your counsel I will do.”

“Since you cannot stay,” said the maiden, “take me with you, wherever you go. If not, my life is so joyless without you, that I would wish to end it with my knife.”

Very sweetly made answer Sir Eliduc, for in honesty he loved honest maid,

“Fair friend, I have sworn faith to your father, and am his man. If I carried you with me, I should give the lie to my troth. Let this covenant be made between us. Should you give me leave to return to my own land I swear to you on my honour as a knight, that I will come again on any day that you shall name. My life is in your hands. Nothing on earth shall keep me from your side, so only that I have life and health.”

Then she, who loved so fondly, granted her knight permission to depart, and fixed the term, and named the day for his return. Great was their sorrow that the hour had come to bid farewell. They gave rings of gold for remembrance, and sweetly kissed adieu. So they severed from each other’s arms.

Eliduc sought the sea, and with a fair wind, crossed swiftly to the other side. His lord was greatly content to learn the tidings of his knight’s return. His friends and his kinsfolk came to greet him, and the common folk welcomed him very gladly. But, amongst them all, none was so blithe at his home-coming as the fair and prudent lady who was his wife. Despite this show of friendship, Eliduc was ever sad, and deep in thought. He went heavily, till he might look upon his friend. He felt no happiness, nor made pretence of any, till he should meet with her again. His wife was sick at heart, because of the coldness of her husband. She took counsel with her soul, as to what she had done amiss. Often she

asked him privily, if she had come short or offended in any measure, whilst he was without the realm. If she was accused by any, let him tell her the accusation, that she might purge herself of the offence.

“Wife,” answered Eliduc, “neither I, nor any other, charge you with aught that is against your honour to do. The cause of my sorrow is in myself. I have pledged my faith to the King of that country, from whence I come, that I will return to help him in his need. When my lord the King has peace in his realm, within eight days I shall be once more upon the sea. Great travail I must endure, and many pains I shall suffer, in readiness for that hour. Return I must, and till then I have no mind for anything but toil; for I will not give the lie to my plighted word.”

Eliduc put his fief once more in the hands of his dame. He sought his lord, and aided him to the best of his might. By the counsel and prowess of the knight, the King came again into his own. When the term appointed by his lady, and the day she named for his return drew near, Eliduc wrought in such fashion that peace was accorded between the foes. Then the knight made him ready for his journey, and took thought to the folk he should carry with him. His choice fell on two of his nephews, whom he loved very dearly, and on a certain chamberlain of his household. These were trusted servitors, who were of his inmost mind, and knew much of his counsel. Together with these went his squires, these only, for Eliduc had no care to take many. All these, nephew and squire and chamberlain, Eliduc made to promise, and confirm by an oath, that they would reveal nothing of his business.

The company put to sea without further tarrying, and, crossing quickly, came to that land where Eliduc so greatly desired to be. The knight sought a hostel some distance from the haven, for he would not be seen of any, nor have it bruited that Eliduc was returned. He called his chamberlain, and sent him to his friend, bearing letters that her knight had come, according to the covenant that had been made. At nightfall, before the gates were made fast, Eliduc issued forth from the city, and followed after his messenger. He had clothed himself in mean apparel, and rode at a footpace straight to the city, where dwelt the daughter of the King. The chamberlain arrived before the palace, and by dint of asking and prying, found himself within the lady’s chamber. He saluted the maiden, and told her that her lover was near. When

Guillardun heard these tidings she was astonished beyond measure, and for joy and pity wept right tenderly. She kissed the letters of her friend, and the messenger who brought such welcome tidings. The chamberlain prayed the lady to attire and make her ready to join her friend. The day was spent in preparing for the adventure, according to such plan as had been devised. When dark was come, and all was still, the damsel stole forth from the palace, and the chamberlain with her. For fear that any man should know her again, the maiden had hidden, beneath a riding cloak, her silken gown, embroidered with gold. About the space of a bow shot from the city gate, there was a coppice standing within a fair meadow. Near by this wood, Eliduc and his comrades awaited the coming of Guillardun. When Eliduc saw the lady, wrapped in her mantle, and his chamberlain leading her by the hand, he got from his horse, and kissed her right tenderly. Great joy had his companions at so fair a sight. He set her on the horse, and climbing before her, took bridle in glove, and returned to the haven, with all the speed he might. He entered forthwith in the ship, which put to sea, having on board none, save Eliduc, his men, and his lady, Guillardun. With a fair wind, and a quiet hour, the sailors thought that they would swiftly come to shore. But when their journey was near its end, a sudden tempest arose on the sea. A mighty wind drove them far from their harbourage, so that their rudder was broken, and their sail torn from the mast. Devoutly they cried on St. Nicholas, St. Clement, and Madame St. Mary, to aid them in this peril. They implored the Mother that she would approach her Son, not to permit them to perish, but to bring them to the harbour where they would come. Without sail or oar, the ship drifted here and there, at the mercy of the storm. They were very close to death, when one of the company, with a loud voice began to cry,

“What need is there of prayers? Sir, you have with you, her, who brings us to our death. We shall never win to land, because you, who already have a faithful wife, seek to wed this foreign woman, against God and His law, against honour and your plighted troth. Grant us to cast her in the sea, and straightway the winds and the waves will be still.”

When Eliduc heard these words he was like to come to harm for rage.

“Bad servant and felon traitor,” he cried, “you should pay dearly for your speech, if I might leave my lady.”

Eliduc held his friend fast in his arms, and cherished her as well as he was able. When the lady heard that her knight was already wedded in his own realm, she swooned where she lay. Her face became pale and discoloured; she neither breathed nor sighed, nor could any bring her any comfort. Those who carried her to a sheltered place, were persuaded that she was but dead, because of the fury of the storm. Eliduc was passing heavy. He rose to his feet, and hastening to his squire, smote him so grievously with an oar, that he fell senseless on the deck. He haled him by his legs to the side of the ship and flung the body in the sea, where it was swiftly swallowed by the waves. He went to the broken rudder, and governed the nave so skilfully, that it presently drew to land. So, having come to their fair haven, they cast anchor, and made fast their bridge to the shore. Dame Guillardun lay yet in her swoon, and seemed no other than if she were really dead. Eliduc’s sorrow was all the more, since he deemed that he had slain her with his hand. He inquired of his companions in what near place they might lay the lady to her rest, “for I will not bid her farewell, till she is put in holy ground with such pomp and rite as befit the obsequies of the daughter of a King.” His comrades answered him never a word, for they were all bemused by reason of what had befallen. Eliduc, therefore, considered within himself to what place he should carry the lady. His own home was so near the haven where he had come, that very easily they could ride there before evening. He called to mind that in his realm there was a certain great forest, both long and deep. Within this wood there was a little chapel, served by a holy hermit for forty years, with whom Eliduc had oftentimes spoken.

“To this holy man,” he said, “I will bear my lady. In his chapel he shall bury her sweet body. I will endow him so richly of my lands, that upon her chantry shall be founded a mighty abbey. There some convent of monks or nuns or canons shall ever hold her in remembrance, praying God to grant her mercy in His day.”

Eliduc got to horse, but first took oath of his comrades that never, by them, should be discovered, that which they should see. He set his friend before him on the palfrey, and thus the living and the dead rode

together, till they had entered the wood, and come before the chapel. The squires called and beat upon the door, but it remained fast, and none was found to give them any answer. Eliduc bade that one should climb through a window, and open the door from within. When they had come within the chapel they found a new made tomb, and writ thereon, that the holy hermit having finished his course, was made perfect, eight days before. Passing sad was Eliduc, and esmayed. His companions would have digged a second grave, and set therein his friend; but the knight would in no wise consent, for—he said—he purposed to take counsel of the priests of his country, as to building some church or abbey above her tomb. "At this hour we will but lay her body before the altar, and commend her to God His holy keeping." He commanded them to bring their mantles and make a bed upon the altar-pace. Thereon they laid the maiden, and having wrapped her close in her lover's cloak, left her alone. When the moment came for Eliduc to take farewell of his lady, he deemed that his own last hour had come. He kissed her eyes and her face.

"Fair friend," said he, "if it be pleasing to God, never will I bear sword or lance again, or seek the pleasures of this mortal world. Fair friend, in an ill hour you saw me! Sweet lady, in a bitter hour you followed me to death! Fairest, now were you a queen, were it not for the pure and loyal love you set upon me? Passing sad of heart am I for you, my friend. The hour that I have seen you in your shroud, I will take the habit of some holy order, and every day, upon your tomb, I will tell over the chaplet of my sorrow."

Having taken farewell of the maiden, Eliduc came forth from the chapel, and closed the doors. He sent messages to his wife, that he was returning to his house, but weary and overborne. When the dame heard these tidings, she was happy in her heart, and made ready to greet him. She received her lord tenderly; but little joy came of her welcome, for she got neither smiles in answer, nor tender words in return. She dared not inquire the reason, during the two days Eliduc remained in the house. The knight heard Mass very early in the morning, and then set forth on the road leading to the chapel where the maiden lay. He found her as he had parted, for she had not come back from her swoon, and there was neither stir in her, nor breath. He marvelled greatly, for he

saw her, vermeil and white, as he had known her in life. She had lost none of her sweet colour, save that she was a little blanched. He wept bitterly above her, and entreated for her soul. Having made his prayer, he went again to his house.

On a day when Eliduc went forth, his wife called to her a varlet of her household, commanding him to follow his lord afar off and mark where he went, and on what business. She promised to give him harness and horses, if he did according to her will. The varlet hid himself in the wood, and followed so cunningly after his lord, that he was not perceived. He watched the knight enter the chapel, and heard the cry and lamentation that he made. When Eliduc came out, the varlet hastened to his mistress, and told her what he had seen, the tears and dolour, and all that befell his lord within the hermitage. The lady summoned all her courage.

“We will go together, as soon as we may, to this hermitage. My lord tells me that he rides presently to the Court to speak with the King. I knew that my husband loved this dead hermit very tenderly, but I little thought that his loss would make him mad with grief.”

The next day the dame let her lord go forth in peace. When, about noon, Eliduc rode to the Court to greet his King, the lady rose quickly, and carrying the varlet with her, went swiftly to the hermitage. She entered the chapel, and saw the bed upon the altar-pace, and the maiden thereon, like a new sprung rose. Stooping down the lady removed the mantle. She marked the rigid body, the long arms, and the frail white hands, with their slender fingers, folded on the breast. Thus she learned the secret of the sorrow of her lord. She called the varlet within the chapel, and showed him this wonder.

“Seest thou,” she said, “this woman, who for beauty shineth as a gem! This lady, in her life, was the lover of my lord. It was for her that all his days were spoiled by grief. By my faith I marvel little at his sorrow, since I, who am a woman too, will—for pity’s sake or love—never know joy again, having seen so fair a lady in the dust.”

So the wife wept above the body of the maiden. Whilst the lady sat weeping, a weasel came from under the altar, and ran across Guillardun’s body. The varlet smote it with his staff, and killed it as it passed. He took the vermin and flung it away. The companion of this

weasel presently came forth to seek him. She ran to the place where he lay, and finding that he would not get him on his feet, seemed as one distraught. She went forth from the chapel, and hastened to the wood, from whence she returned quickly, bearing a vermeil flower beneath her teeth. This red flower she placed within the mouth of that weasel the varlet had slain, and immediately he stood upon his feet. When the lady saw this, she cried to the varlet,

“Throw, man, throw, and gain the flower.”

The servitor flung his staff, and the weasels fled away, leaving that fair flower upon the floor. The lady rose. She took the flower, and returned with it swiftly to the altar pace. Within the mouth of the maiden, she set a flower that was more vermeil still. For a short space the dame and the damsel were alike breathless. Then the maiden came to herself, with a sigh. She opened her eyes, and commenced to speak.

“Diva,” she said, “have I slept so long, indeed!”

When the lady heard her voice she gave thanks to God. She inquired of the maiden as to her name and degree. The damsel made answer to her,

“Lady, I was born in Logres, and am daughter to the King of that realm. Greatly there I loved a knight, named Eliduc, the seneschal of my sire. We fled together from my home, to my own most grievous fault. He never told me that he was wedded to a wife in his own country, and he hid the matter so cunningly, that I knew naught thereof. When I heard tell of his dame, I swooned for pure sorrow. Now I find that this false lover, has, like a felon, betrayed me in a strange land. What will chance to a maiden in so foul a plight? Great is that woman’s folly who puts her trust in man.”

“Fair damsel,” replied the lady, “there is nothing in the whole world that can give such joy to this felon, as to hear that you are yet alive. He deems that you are dead, and every day he beweeeps your swoon in the chapel. I am his wife, and my heart is sick, just for looking on his sorrow. To learn the reason of his grief, I caused him to be followed, and that is why I have found you here. It is a great happiness for me to know that you live. You shall return with me to my home, and I will place you in the tenderness of your friend. Then I shall release him of his marriage troth, since it is my dearest hope to take the veil.”

When the wife had comforted the maiden with such words, they went together to her own house. She called to her servitor, and bade him seek his lord. The varlet went here and there, till he lighted on Eliduc. He came before him, and showed him of all these things. Eliduc mounted straightway on his horse, and waiting neither for squire or companion, that same night came to his hall. When he found alive, her, who once was dead, Eliduc thanked his wife for so dear a gift. He rejoiced beyond measure, and of all his days, no day was more happy than this. He kissed the maiden often, and very sweetly she gave him again his kiss, for great was the joy between the twain. The dame looked on their happiness, and knew that her lord meetly had bestowed his love. She prayed him, therefore, that he would grant her leave to depart, since she would serve God as a cloistered nun. Of his wealth she craved such a portion as would permit her to found a convent. He would then be able to wed the maiden on whom his heart was set, for it was neither honest nor seemly that a man should maintain a wife with either hand.

Eliduc could do no otherwise than consent. He gave the permission she asked, and did all according to her will. He endowed the lady of his lands, near by that chapel and hermitage, within the wood. There he built a church with offices and refectory, fair to see. Much wealth he bestowed on the convent, in money and estate. When all was brought to a good end, the lady took the veil upon her head. Thirty other ladies entered in the house with her, and long she ruled them as their Abbess, right wisely and well.

Eliduc wedded with his friend, in great pomp, and passing rich was the marriage feast. They dwelt in unity together for many days, for ever between them was perfect love. They walked uprightly, and gave alms of their goods, till such a time as it became them to turn to God. After much thought, Eliduc built a great church close beside his castle. He endowed it with all his gold and silver, and with the rest of his land. He set priests there, and holy layfolk also, for the business of the house, and the fair services of religion.

When all was builded and ordered, Eliduc offered himself, with them, that he—weak man—might serve the omnipotent God. He set with the Abbess Guildeluec—who once was his dame—that wife whom he loved so dearly well. The Abbess received her as a sister, and welcomed

her right honourably. She admonished her in the offices of God, and taught her of the rules and practice of their holy Order. They prayed to God for their friend, that He would grant him mercy in His day. In turn, he entreated God for them. Messages came from convent and monastery as to how they fared, so that each might encourage the other in His way. Each strove painfully, for himself and his, to love God the more dearly, and to abide in His holy faith. Each made a good end, and the mercy of God was abundantly made clear to all.

Of the adventure of these three lovers, the courteous Bretons made this Lay for remembrance, since they deemed it a matter that men should not forget.