

Eliduc

Marie de France

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translated by Isabel Butler

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Now will I tell you all the matter and story of a most ancient Breton lay, even as I have heard it, and hold it for true.

In Bretaine dwelt a knight, brave and courteous, hardy and bold; Eliduc was his name, methinketh, and in all the land was no other man so valiant. And he had for wife a woman wise and honourable, of high parentry and goodly lineage. Long they lived together, and loyally they loved one another; but at length it fell that by reason of strife the knight went to seek service abroad, and there he grew to love a maid, daughter to a king and queen; Guilliadun was the name of the damsel, and she was the fairest of that realm. Now Eliduc's wife was called among her own folk Guildeluec, and from these twain the lay hath taken the name of Guildeluec and Guilliadun of old it was called Eliduc, but now is its title changed, in that the adventure from which the lay is drawn turneth upon the two dames. Now even as it befell so will I recite it, and tell you all the truth thereof.

Eliduc had for liege lord the king of Britain the Less, who showed him much love and favour, and to whom he gave faithful service.

Whenever the king must needs be absent, it was given to him to guard the land, and hold it by his prowess. Yet even better fortune befell him, for he was made free to hunt in the king's forest, nor was there any forester therein so bold he dared gainsay him, or speak him grudgingly.

But as often falleth through other men's envy of our fortune, he was estranged from his lord, and so slandered and belied, that without hearing he was banished from the court, though on what grounds he knew not. Ofttimes he besought the king not to give ear to calumny, but to show him justice, in that he had long served him with right good will; yet ever the king would give him no answer.

Now when Eliduc saw he could win no hearing, he must needs depart. He went back to his own house, and called all his friends together, and told them of the wrath of the king, his liege lord, whom he had served as best he might, never should the king have borne him hate. But as the villein saith in proverb when he chideth his plowman, "Lord's love is no fief"; so is he wise and discreet who keeps faith with his liege lord, yet spendeth his love on his good friends. Now the knight was minded to abide no more in that land, but would, he said, cross the sea and go into the kingdom of Logres, to solace himself there for a space. His wife he would leave in his domain, and bade his friends and liegemen that they guard her loyally.

So he abode by this judgment, and prepared him full richly for the journey; but his friends were right sorrowful that he should depart from them. He took with him ten knights, and his wife conducted him on the way. At parting with her lord she made exceeding great dole, but he assured her he would keep good faith with her. With that she left him, and he held straight on his way till he came to the sea, and passed over it, and came into Totness.

In that land were divers kings, and between them was war and strife.

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One dwelt near Exeter, full puissant, but an old man and an ancient. No heir male had he, but only a daughter yet unwedded; and in that he would not give her in marriage to his neighbor, that other made war upon him, and laid waste all his land, and besieged him in his castle; nor was there among those within any man who dared issue out to risk onset and battle. When Eliduc heard thereof, he was fain to go no farther, but er, full puissant, but an old man and an ancient. No heir male had he, but only a daughter yet unwedded; and in that he would not give her in marriage to his neighbor, that other made war upon him, and laid waste all his land, and besieged him in his castle; nor was there among those within any man who dared issue out to risk onset and battle. When Eliduc heard thereof, he was fain to go no farther, but to abide in that land wherein was war, and to seek service with, and help as best he might, the king who was so harried and hard pressed and beset. Wherefore he sent messengers thither, and by letter showed the king how he had issued out of his own land and stood ready to his aid; furthermore, he prayed him to make known his pleasure herein, and if he would have none of him, to grant him safe conduct through the land, that he might seek service elsewhere.

Now when the king saw the messengers, he looked on them kindly and made them good cheer. He called his constable to him, and bade him straightway make ready an escort to bring thither the knight, and prepare a hostel where he and his men might lodge, and furthermore, bade give and grant them as much as they would spend for a month. The escort made them ready, and set out to fetch Eliduc; and he was received with great honour, for right welcome was he to the king. He was given lodging in the house of a burgesse full discreet and courteous, who gave up to his guest his own fair tapestried chamber. Eliduc bade the board be well set forth, and invited all needy knights that lodged in the town to share his victual. And moreover, he commanded his men that none be so forward that he take either gift or denier for the first forty days.

Now three days after his coming, a cry arose in the city that their enemies were upon them, and overspread all the land thereabouts, and pressed up to the very gates, for that they would assail the town. Eliduc heard the noise of the folk, who were sore dismayed, and forthright he armed himself, and his comrades likewise.

Now though many a man had been slain and many a one made prisoner, fourteen mounted knights were yet left in the town, and when they saw Eliduc get him to horseback, they hastened to their lodgings to arm themselves; and with him they issued out of the gate, without waiting for summons. "Sir," they cried to him, "we will go with thee, and what thou dost we likewise will do." "Gramercy," he made answer.

"Now is there none among you who knows of some hidden way or ambush where we may take them unawares? If we await them here, it may be we shall do battle with them, but to no purpose, if any have better counsel." And they made answer: "In faith, sir, near this wood through a bed of reeds runneth a narrow cart-road, whereby they are wont to take their way back. When they have won their booty they will repair thither; oftentimes they ride there unarmed upon their palfreys, and so put themselves in jeopardy of speedy death; right soon could we do them damage, and hurt and annoy." And Eliduc answered them:

"Friends, I give you my word, he who doth not often venture where he thinketh to lose, will never win much, nor achieve high honour. Ye are all the king's liegemen, and ye should keep good faith with him. Come with me where I shall go, and what I do, do ye in likewise; I pledge you my faith, ye shall suffer no hurt so long as I can help you in aught. And if it chance we win somewhat, the damage we do to the foe will be turned to our praise." Thereupon they all made pledge, and thereafter drew towards the wood.

Thus they took ambush near the roadside until those others should return; and Eliduc commanded his men, and showed and devised to them how they should cry out upon their foes, and how they should spur against them. So when the outlanders drew near to the pass.... Eliduc cried his cry, and called to his comrades, and bade them do their best.

Rudely they laid on with their swords, and spared no whit, that their enemies were all abashed,—speedily were they broken and scattered, and within short time vanquished. Their constable was taken, and likewise many another knight, and Eliduc's men gave them into the charge of their squires. Twenty-five were they of the town, and thirty they captured of those without; eagerly they seized upon the armour, and good booty had they therein. So they returned again, and glad were they in that they had well prospered.

The king was upon a tower, dread because of his men; and much he complained of Eliduc, who, he feared, had brought his knights into jeopardy through treason. And now they draw near, riding close ranked and laden with spoils. Many more were they at the return than at the outgoing, wherefore the king knew them not, but was full of fear and misgiving. He bade the gates be closed, and commanded his folk that they mount the walls to draw

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their bows and cast down missiles,—but of this there will be no need. Eliduc had sent before a squire spurring fast, who now made known the adventure to the king, and told him of Eliduc, how he had vanquished the besiegers, and how bravely he had borne himself; he had wounded many and slain many, and had taken captive their constable and nine—and—twenty more,—never was there such a knight. Great joy had the king of these tidings; he left the tower and rode out to meet Eliduc, and thanked him for his well doing. And Eliduc on his part gave over the prisoners to the king, and divided the armour among the knights; his own share he dealt out to the prisoners and other folk, nought kept he for his profit save three of the horses he had heard well praised.

After the deed whereof I have told you, he was loved and cherished of the king, who retained him in his service a whole year, and his comrades likewise. And Eliduc gave his oath to the king, and was made warden of the land.

Eliduc was wise and courteous, a comely knight, brave and free-handed. So it fell the king's daughter heard him named, and his valour recounted; and she sent one of her own chamberlains to him, to pray and entreat that he come to her for talk and for disport, that they might learn to know one another,—much she marveled that he had not yet sought her. Eliduc made answer he would go, gladly would he make her acquaintance. So he mounted his horse, and taking with him one knight, goeth forth to speak with the damsel. But when he was about to enter her bower, he sent the chamberlain before, and lingered somewhat, delaying until the man returned again.

Then with gentle bearing, frank courtesy, and right noble cheer he addressed Guilliadun that fair damsel, as one ready of speech, and gave her his thanks for that it had pleased her to call him to speak with her.

The damsel hath taken him by the hand, and side by side they sat upon a couch, speaking of many things. The maiden looked at him long, at face and body and bearing, and to herself she said: "He hath in him no fault"; greatly she commended him in her heart. And love sent thither his messenger, who commanded her that she love the knight, and caused her to sigh and turn pale. Yet she would not speak her thought, lest he should misprize her.

He tarried there a long space, then asked leave to go away; sorrowfully she granted it, and he hath departed and returned again to his hostel. Heavy was he and full of thought, and sore disquieted by reason of the fair damsel, the daughter of the king his lord, for that she had so sweetly summoned him, and that she had sighed. Much it misliked him that he had been so long in the land, and yet had not often seen her; but when he had so thought, much he repented him, and he called to remembrance his wife, how he had pledged him to keep good faith with her, and to live loyally.

Now when the maiden had seen him she would fain have had him for her lover; none had ever seemed to her so goodly, and if she may she will bind him fast to her. Thus she lay awake all night long, and neither rested nor slept. On the morrow she rose early, and went to the window, and called to the chamberlain, and showed him all her thought.

"By my faith," saith she, "it goes hardly with me, I have fallen into an evil plight, for I love the new man of arms, Eliduc, the good knight. No rest had I this night, nor once closed my eyes in sleep. If he will but love me in very love, and give himself to me, I will do all his desire, and he shall win great good thereby, for he shall be king of all this land. But if he will not give himself to me, I must die in great dolour, for love of his wisdom and courtesy." When she had said what she would, the chamberlain gave her true counsel,—let none blame him therefor.

"Lady," saith he, "if you love him, send to him and tell him. And it were well done to give him a girdle, a ring, or a scarf; if he receive it gladly, and if he have joy of the sending, you may be sure of his love. There is no emperor under heaven who would not be rejoiced if you chose to love him." When she heard his counsel, the damsel made answer: "But how shall I know by my gift whether he hath desire to love me? I never yet saw knight who, whether he loved or hated, had to be prayed in like matter, or would not willingly keep the gift sent him. Much would it mislike me that he should scorn me. Yet none the less, can one learn somewhat from a look; so make yourself ready and go." "I am ready now," saith he. "Take him a ring of gold, and give him my girdle, greet him from me a thousand times!"

Thereupon the chamberlain set forth, but the damsel was in such a plight that well nigh had she called him back to her; yet none the less she let him go, and thus began to lament her: "Woe is me, how is my heart taken captive by a man from a strange land. I know not even if he be of high kindred, and belike he will go hence suddenly, and I shall be left unhappy. Foolishly have I set my heart. Never till yesterday did I speak with him, and now I would beseech his love. I fear lest he scorn me; yet if he be courteous, he will show me grace. Now have I

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set all at adventure, and if he desire not my love I shall be in an evil plight. Never in all my life shall I know joy."

Now while she made lament the chamberlain went on in all haste until he came unto Eliduc. Privately he gave him greetings from the damsel, and offered him the ring and the girdle. The knight said him thanks; the golden ring he put on his finger, and the girdle he bound about him. Nought else said he to the varlet, nor asked him aught, save that he offered him somewhat of his own treasure, but the youth would take nothing, and went his way and returned again to his lady. In her chamber he found her, and gave her the knight's greetings and thanks for her gift. "Say on," saith she, "and hide nought from me; will he love me in very love?" "So I believe," he answered; "but the knight is not light minded, rather I deem him to be wise and courteous, one who knoweth well how to hold his own counsel. I gave him your greetings and your gifts; your girdle he bound about him; tightly he girt it around his waist, and the ring he set on his finger. Nought else said I to him, or he to me." "And he did not take it for love? If this be so, I am undone."

"By my faith," saith he, "I know not. Yet hear me; if he had not wished you well, he would have had nought to do with your gifts." "Ye speak folly," saith she, "I know right well he doth not hate me, for never have I done him any ill, save that I love him bitterly, and if he hate me for this, then is he worthy of death. Never again by you or any other will I ask him aught till I may have speech with him: I myself will tell him how I am constrained by love. But I know not if he is to abide here." "Lady,"

the chamberlain maketh answer, "the king hath bound him by oath to a year's loyal service. Thus you will have time in plenty to make known your pleasure to him."

When she heard the knight was to stay she rejoiced greatly, right glad was she of his sojourn. But nought knew she of the trouble he endured since seeing her; never knew he joy or delight save only as he thought of her. And for this he deemed himself given over to evil, in that before he left his own land he had promised his wife to love none save her only. Now is his heart in sore torment; he would fain keep faith, yet can he not withhold him from loving the damsel, Guilliadun, who was so fair to see and hold speech withal, to clip and kiss. Yet hath he resolved not to seek her love, deeming that dishonour, in that he would keep faith with his wife, and in that he was in the king's service. In sore distress was Eliduc. But now he tarries no longer; he mounts his horse, and calls his comrades to him, and goeth to the cast to speak with the king. And if he may he will see the damsel likewise; it for this chance he went.

The king had risen from meat, and entered into his daughter's chamber; and now he played at chess with a knight from over sea, and thereby taught his daughter who sat on the other side of the board.

Eliduc came forward, and the king made him fair semblance, and gave him a place at his side. "Damsel," he saith to his daughter, "you should in truth know this knight, and do him great honour, for among five hundred you will find none better." Now when the maid heard her father's command, she was right glad; and she riseth and calleth to her the knight, and they sat together apart from the rest. Both were kindled with love; she dared not speak to him, and he feared to address her, save to thank her for the gift she had sent him,—none had he ever had so dear and goodly. She answered the knight that of this she was right glad, for she had sent him the ring and the girdle in token she had given herself to him, for she loved him with such a love that she longed to make him her lord; and if she might not have him, one thing she knew of a sooth, never would she have living man,—now let him make known his will. "Lady," said he, "grateful am I for your love, and great joy have I therein; that I am so prized by you maketh me dearly glad, and on my side there will be no withholding. Yet though I remain a year with the king—for I have given him my word not to depart until his war is ended—thereafter I must go back into my own land, for I would not longer remain here, if I may have my leave of you." "Friend, good thanks to you," the damsel maketh answer. "Before that time you, who are so wise and courteous, will well devise what to do with me; I love and trust in you beyond all living creature." Thus they came to good accord, and at that time spoke no more together.

Eliduc goeth to his hostel glad at heart, in that he hath well prospered. Often may he have speech with his friend, and great is the love between them. And thereafter he so bestirred himself in the strife that he seized and captured him who had made war upon the king, and brought peace to all the land. Greatly was he honoured for his prowess, wisdom and largess; and high fortune was his.

Now in time already past, the king of Bretaigne, his liege lord, had sent three messengers from out his land to seek him, in that he was beset and beleaguered and harried and pillaged; many of his castles were taken, and all his land laid waste. Right often he repented him that he had parted with Eliduc; ill counsel had been his when that

he looked askance upon him. But now the traitors who had slandered and accused him had been banished from the land, and exiled forever; and now he conjured him by his great need, and summoned and besought him by the faith he owed as liegeman and by the oath of his vassalage, that he come now to aid him, for right great was his need.

Eliduc heard the message, and he was full heavy of heart because of the damsel, for he loved her sorely, and she him so much it might not be more. But between them was no lightness or folly or wrong doing, and their love showed itself only in speech and sweet customs and goodly gifts. Her hope and thought was that he should be wholly hers, and that she would hold him to her; for she knew nought of his wife. "Alas," saith he, "ill have I done; too long have I tarried in this region, and on an ill day saw I this land. Here have I loved a maiden, Guilliadun the king's daughter, right sorely, and she me. If I needs must part with her, one of us will die, or both mayhap. And yet it behooves me to go; my liege lord hath sent for me by letter, and conjured me by my oath, and so hath my wife likewise. Now it beseems me to have care. I may not longer abide here, but must needs depart. Were I to marry my love, christianity would not suffer it; all paths lead to ill; on all sides lieth sorrow. God!

how she feareth the parting. But I will deal fairly with her, let whoso will blame me; I will do her will, and act according to her counsel. The king her father hath fair peace; no man, I think, will again make war upon him; and so because of my liege lord's need, I will ask leave of him before the day of the term set for my service, and I will go to the damsel and make known to her this matter; she shall tell me her desire herein, and I will fulfil it as well as in me lieth."

The knight tarried no longer, but goeth to ask leave of the king. He speaketh and telleth all the story, and showed and read him his liege lord's letter that had summoned him at need. The king heard the summons, and that the knight would abide there no longer, and he was right grieved and sorry. He offered him good share of his havings, the third part of his heritage, and what was left of his treasure. "If you will but abide here," he saith, "I will do so much for you that you will thank me all the days of your life." "In God's name," saith the knight, "in that my liege is so hard pressed, and hath sent to me from afar off, I must go to him in his need; nor will I in any wise abide here at this time; but if you again have need of my service, I will gladly return unto you, and with good force of knights." For this the king gave him thanks and sweetly granted him leave. And the king further made him free of all the goods of his household, gold and silver, horses and dogs, and stuffs of silk goodly and fair; and of all these he took in measure.

Then he said courteously to the king that with his leave he would gladly go speak with his daughter. "Right willingly," the king made answer, and sent with him a damsel to open the chamber. So Eliduc goeth to speak with the maiden, and so soon as she saw him she called him to her, and gave him greeting a thousand times. He showed her his affair, and briefly maketh known to her his going; but before he had told her all, or had asked leave of her, she lost her colour, and swooned for very sorrow. Now when Eliduc saw her swoon, he began to make lament; many times he kissed her on the mouth, and weepeth right tenderly; and he took her and held her in his arms until she recovered her senses. "In God's name, sweet friend," saith he, "suffer me to speak to you for a little; you are my life and my death, and in you lies all my comfort, wherefore now I would take counsel with you because of the faith that is between us. 'Tis for dire need that I return into my own land and have asked leave of your father; yet will I do your pleasure herein, whatsoever may befall me." "Take me with you," saith she, "sith ye will not remain here; or if you will not have it so, then will I slay myself, for without you never shall I know joy or gladness." Eliduc answered her gently, for much he loved her with true love: "Fair one, I am of a truth pledged by oath to your father's service until the day when our term was set, and if I take you with me now I shall belie my faith. But truly I swear and promise you that if you will grant me leave, and appoint a respite, and name a day when you would have me return to you again, nothing in the world shall keep me from you if I be a living man and sound. My life is wholly in your hands." When the damsel heard his great love, she appointed a term, and named a day when he should come and take her away with him. Great sorrow they made at parting; they exchanged rings of gold, and sweetly each kissed the other.

Then Eliduc rode down to the sea. The wind was fair and the passage short; and when he was come into his own land again, his liege lord rejoiced and made merry. So did his friends and kinsmen, and other folk likewise, but more than all others his good wife who was so fair and wise and valiant. But always he was sad because of the love by which he was held captive, and never for any thing he saw would he show joy or gladness; never will he be of good cheer till he see his sweet friend again. Well he guarded his secret and ever he kept his own counsel.

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His wife was grieved at heart and knew not what it might mean, and to herself made great lament. Often she asked him if he had heard any say that she had misdome while he was out of the land; willingly would she clear herself before his people, whensoever it should please him. "Lady,"

saith he, "none hath accused you of fault or misdeed. But in the land where I have been I have given oath and pledge to the king that I will return to him again, for that he hath right great need of me. If the king my lord were at peace I should not abide here eight days. Sore travail must I endure before I can return thither, and never shall I know joy or gladness until I have so done, for I would not belie my oath." Thereafter the dame let be.

Eliduc, meantime, was with his lord; much he aided and strengthened him, and the king acted ever after his counsel and maintained all the land. But when the term drew near that the damsel had appointed, he set himself to make peace, and brought all his enemies to accord. Thereafter he made him ready to set forth, together with such folk as he desired to take with him,—his two nephews whom he greatly loved, his squire, and one of his chamberlains, who was in the counsel of those twain and carried their messages. He had no care for other folk, and these he made swear and promise to keep his counsel.

He tarried no longer, but took the sea, and speedily won the other shore, and came into the country where he was so sore desired. Eliduc was right cunning, and took lodging far from the haven, for that he desired not to be seen or known or discovered. He made ready his chamberlain and sent him to his love, and made known to her that he had come, well had he obeyed her commandment; and he bade her that night, when all was dark, that she should issue out of the city, together with the chamberlain, and that he would meet her. The messenger changed his garments and set forth on foot in all haste; straight to the city he went where dwelt the king's daughter, and he so sought and contrived that he entered into her chamber. He gave greeting to the damsel and told her that her love had come. When she heard the news she was sore abashed and shaken, full softly she wept for joy, and many a time she kissed the messenger. He told her how at dusk she was to go with him; and all day they were together and devised well concerning their going. At night when it was wholly dusk, the youth issued out of the city and the damsel with him, and none other save those two only.

She was dressed in stuff of silk but scantily broidered with gold, and all wrapped about in a short mantle; in great fear was she lest she be seen.

A bow's shot from the gate was a wood enclosed by a goodly paling, and beside it her friend awaited their coming. Thither the chamberlain brought her, and the knight lighted down from his horse and kissed her; great joy was theirs at being together again. Then he set her upon his horse, and mounted likewise, and took the reins and rode off in all haste.

They came unto the haven of Totness, and entered into the ship forthright; no other company was there save only Eliduc's followers and Guilliadun his friend. The wind was fresh and fair and the weather serene.

But when they were about to come to land, there was a storm upon the sea, and a head wind arose that drave them far from the haven, and broke and splintered their masts, and tore all their sails. They called devoutly upon God and Saint Nicolas and Saint Clement, and Our Lady, Saint Mary, that she beseech aid of her son, that he save them from destruction and suffer them to come into the haven. Now forward and now back, so are they driven along the shore; right sore was their peril.

Then one of the shipmen cried aloud: "What can we do? Sir, here within you have with you her by reason of whom we perish; never shall we reach land. You are married to a loyal wife, yet besides, you carry with you this other, against God and the law, against right and faith and justice. Let us cast her into the sea, then shall we straightway come to shore." Eliduc heareth what he saith and is well nigh burnt with anger.

"Dog," he saith, "foul traitor, say not so a second time. If I could leave my love I would make you pay dear." But even then he was holding her in his arms, and was giving such comfort as he might against the sickness she had from the sea, and for that she had heard her lord had a wife other than herself in his own land. She turned all pale and fell down in a swoon, and so she remained, and neither revived nor breathed forth even a sigh. And those who helped her friend bear her thence thought of a truth that she was dead. As for him he made great sorrow; and sprang to his feet and ran swiftly towards the sailor who had spoken, and struck him with an oar that he felled him flat, then he seized him by the leg and cast him over the ship's side that the waves bore away his body. Then after he had cast him into the sea he took the helm, and so guided and directed the boat that he brought her into the haven and came to land; and when she rode safe, they lowered the bridge and cast anchor.

But Guilliadun still lay in a swoon and seemed as one dead. Eliduc made right great sorrow and was full fain

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of death likewise. He asked of his companions what counsel they could give him as to where he might carry the damsel, for he would not part with her, and she should be buried in holy ground with great honour and high estate, in that she was a king's daughter, and such was her right. But his comrades were all abashed and could in no wise counsel him. So Eliduc set himself to think to what spot he should bear her. His house was so near the sea he might be there at the hour of meat, and round about his house lay a forest a good thirty leagues of length. Therewithin dwelt a hermit, and near his cell he had a chapel; forty years had he dwelt there, and Eliduc had oftentimes spoken with him. To him, he saith, he will bear the damsel, and bury her there in the chapel, and he will give of his land enough to found an abbey, and to establish there a convent of monks and nuns and canons, who every day shall pray for her that God grant her sweet mercy. Then he let bring the horses, and bade all mount, but first he had them all give oath that they would keep his secret. Thereafter they set out, and he himself bore his love before him on his palfrey.

They followed the highroad so long that they entered into the forest and came to the chapel; there they knocked and called, but found none to answer or open to them, and at last the knight sent one of his men forward to unbar the door. Eight days before, the holy hermit, that perfect one, had died, and within they found the new made tomb. Right sorry was Eliduc and sore troubled; his comrades would fain have made ready a grave wherein he might lay his friend, but he thrust them back, saying: "This shall not be until I have taken counsel with the wise folk of the land how I may sanctify this place with abbey and minster.

Meanwhile, we will lay her before the altar and commend her to God."

So he let bring his cloak, and straightway a couch was made whereon they laid the damsel, and left her as one dead. But when the knight came to depart he thought to die of sorrow. He kissed her eyes and face: "Fair one," saith he, "may it not be God's will that I bear arms henceforth, or live the life of the world. Fair friend, on an ill day did you set eyes on me, and on an ill day you followed me, sweet love. Fair one, a queen you were, and the love with which you loved me was loyal and true. Right sore is my heart for you, and that day whereon I shall bury you I will receive the order of monkhood; and each day will I lay my sorrow upon your tomb." Therewith he departed from the damsel and shut behind him the door of the chapel.

He sent a messenger to his house, and let his wife know he was coming, but was weary and spent. When she heard the tidings she was right glad thereof, and made herself ready against his coming. Right fairly she received her lord, but little joy had he thereof, for he made no good cheer, nor said any fair word; and no one dared ask him aught.

Two days he spent in the house in this manner: early in the morning he heard mass, and then set forth on the highway, and rode to the chapel in the wood where lay the damsel. He found her ever in the swoon, and ever she gave forth no sigh, nor revived, nor recovered her wit; yet it seemed to him a great marvel that she was still so red and white, and save that she was a little pale had not changed colour. Right bitterly he wept for her, and prayed for her soul; and when he had made his prayer, he returned home again.

One morning as they came from mass his wife had him watched by one of his servants, and she promised the varlet if he rode far, and saw whither her lord went, she would give him horse and arms. The youth did her commandment; he entered into the wood, and followed after the knight in such wise that he should not be seen. Well he watched, and saw how he entered the chapel, and heard the lament he made there; but before Eliduc issued forth, he returned again to his lady. All he had heard he told her: the grief, the noise and the outcry her lord had made in the chapel hermitage. All her heart was moved thereby, and she saith:

"Let us go straightway, and seek through the chapel. My lord, methinketh, will ride forth soon, for he goeth to the court today to speak with the king. The hermit died a while ago, and I know that my lord loved him well, yet never for him would he make such sorrow." So at that time she let the matter be.

That same day past noon, Eliduc goeth to bold speech with the king, and his wife setteth forth with the varlet, who bringeth her to the hermitage; so she entered into the chapel, and saw the bed of the damsel who was like unto a fresh rose; she turned back the coverlet, and saw her slender body, her fair arms and white hands, and her long, smooth, delicate fingers. Now she knoweth the truth, and why her lord maketh such sorrow. She calleth to her the varlet, and showed him the wonder:

"See now this woman who is like unto a gem for beauty. She is the love of my lord, and 't is for her he maketh such lament, and by my faith, I marvel not thereat, sith so fair a woman hath perished. What for pity and what for love, I shall never know joy again." Then she began to weep and make lament for the maiden.

Eliduc

Now as she sat weeping beside the bed, a weasel issued out from under the altar and ran thither, and in that it had passed over the body, the varlet struck it with his staff and killed it. He cast it aside, but before a man might run a league, its mate sped thither and saw the spot where it lay. The small beast ran about the head of its fellow, and stirred it gently with its foot, and when it failed to rouse that other, it seemed to make great sorrow, and issued out of the chapel and sought among the herbs of the wood. There it seized in its teeth a flower, all bright red of colour, and sped quickly back, and placed the blossom in the mouth of its dead mate, in such wise that, lo you, it forthwith came to life. The lady saw this and cried to the boy: "Stop it, throw your staff, good youth, let it not escape you." So the varlet threw and struck it, that it let fall the blossom. The lady riseth and taketh it, and speedily returneth again, and layeth the flower upon the lips of the maid who was so fair. And when it had rested there a little space, she breathed forth a sigh and revived, and thereafter opened her eyes and spake: "God! how I have slept," saith she.

Now when the dame heard her speak, she gave thanks to God, and asked the maid who she was; and she made answer: "Lady, I am of Logres, daughter to a king of that land. Greatly I loved a man of arms, Eliduc, the good knight. He carried me away with him, but he sinned in that he deceived me, for that he is married to a wife, yet never told me, nor made any sign thereof. When I heard speak of his wife I must needs swoon for the sorrow that I had; and churlishly he hath left me all uncounselled in a strange land; he hath betrayed me, yet wherefore I know not. Great is her folly who setteth her trust in a man."

"Fair one," the dame answered her, "there is nought living in all the world that can give him joy,—this I can tell you of a sooth. He thinketh you to be dead, and he is so out of all comfort that it is marvel to see.

Each day he cometh to look on you, and deemeth you lifeless beyond all doubt. I am his wife, and my heart is heavy for him; because of the grief he showed I wished to know whither he went, and I followed after him and found you; great joy have I that you are on live. I will take you with me and give you back to your friend. For my part I will cry him quit of all, and will take the veil." In this wise the dame comforted her, and led her away.

The lady made ready her servant and sent for her lord. The boy rideth until he findeth Eliduc; he greeted him courteously and told him all the adventure. The knight mounteth a horse, nor stayeth for any squire, and that same night he reached his own house. When he found his love living, right sweetly he thanked his wife. Full joyful was Eliduc, never on any day was he so glad; often he kissed the maid, and she him right sweetly, and together they made great joy. When his wife saw their countenance, she bespoke her lord, and asked and besought his leave that she might depart from him, for that she would fain be a nun and serve God. And she besought him that he give her part of his land whereon to found an abbey; and further, she bade him take to wife the maid he so loved; for it is not meet or seemly that a man maintain two wives, nor will the law suffer it. Eliduc accorded to her wish, and took leave of her in all gentleness, saying he would do her will in all things, and would give her of his land.

In a boscage, not far from the castle and hard by the chapel and the hermitage, she established her church and let build her houses; wide lands and goodly possessions her lord joined to these, that she may have good maintenance there,—well will she have wherewithal to live. And when all was well brought to an end, the lady let veil her head, and thirty nuns with her, and there took up her life and her order.

Eliduc wedded his love; with great honour and rich service was the feast held on the day he married her. Long they lived together, and right perfect was the love between them. Many deeds of goodness and of alms they did, until at last they turned them wholly to God. Then near the castle upon the other side, Eliduc let build a church, and added thereto the more part of his land, and all his gold and silver; and men of good religion he placed there to maintain the house and the order. And when all was made ready he delayed no longer, but he, together with his wife, surrendered themselves to the service of God omnipotent.

The lady whom he held so dear he placed with his first wife, who received her like a sister and did her great honour, and furthermore admonished her to serve God, and instructed her in the rules of the order. Together they prayed God for sweet mercy for their love, and he on his part prayed for them. Ofttimes he sent his messengers to know how it was with them, and what comfort each had. And all three strove to love God with good faith, and all made a right fair ending, by grace of God the true and holy.

In olden time, the Bretons of their courtesy made a lay of these three for remembrance, that of men they be not forgotten.