

Marie de France

Eliduc

translated by

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I will tell you the story of a most ancient Breton lay, even as I have heard it, and as I believe it to be true.

There dwelt in Brittany a knight called Eliduc, who was noble and courteous, brave and high-hearted—indeed, the most valiant man in the realm. He had married a lady of high lineage, a gentle dame, and of good discretion; and with her he lived a long time in faithful love. But at last it happened that he sought service in a war abroad, and there came to love a damsel called Guilliadun, daughter to a king and queen, and withal the fairest maid in her land. Now Eliduc's wife was called Guildeluëc; and from these two, the lay is named *Guildeluëc and Guilliadun*. It hight *Eliduc* at first, but the name has been changed because the story has to do chiefly with the two ladies. And now I will tell you truly how the adventure befell, whereof the lay was made.

Eliduc was very dear to his lord, the King of Lesser Britain, and rendered unto him such faithful service that whenever the king must needs be absent, he for his prowess was made warden of the land. And still better fortune befell him, for he had the right to hunt in the royal forests, so that no forester dared gainsay him or grudge him at any time. But for envy of his good fortune—as befalls others often-times—he was brought into disfavour with his lord, being so accused and slandered that he was banished from court without a hearing, yet knew not wherefore. Again and again he entreated the king to show him justice, and not hearken to false charges, inasmuch as he had served him with good will.

Since the king would hear nothing of it, he must needs depart, so went home, and summoning all his friends, told them of the king's anger—'twas an ill return for his faithful service! As the peasant says in proverb, when he chides his ploughman, "Lord's favour is no fief"; so he is wise and prudent who, with all due loyalty to his lord, expends his

love upon his good neighbours. The knight said further that he would not remain in the land, but would journey over sea to the realm of Loengre, and there take his pleasure for awhile.

His wife he would leave in his domain, commending her to the charge of his vassals and his friends. In this purpose he remained, and arrayed himself richly, his friends grieving sorely at his departure. He took ten knights with him, and his wife conducted him on the way. When it came to the parting she made exceeding great lamentation; but he assured her that he would keep good faith with her. Thereupon he set forth, held straight on his way until he came to the sea, crossed over and arrived at Totnes.

There were many kings in that land, and they were at strife and war with one another. Among them was one who lived near Exeter, a puissant man but of very great age. He had no son to inherit after him, but only a daughter of an age to wed; and because he would not give her in marriage to his neighbour, this other was making war upon him, and laying waste all his land, had even besieged him in a castle so closely that he had no man who dared make sally against the foe, or engage in mêlée or combat.

Upon hearing of this war, Eliduc decided to go no further, but to remain in the land, and aid as most he might this king who was so wronged and humiliated and hard-pressed. So he sent messengers with letters to say that he had departed from his own country and was come to help the king; but if the king did not wish to retain him, the knight asked for safe-conduct through the realm, that he might go further to seek service.

The king looked kindly upon the messengers, and entertained them well. Calling his constable, he gave commands straightway that an escort be prepared to conduct the knight thither; and that hostels be made ready where the strangers might lodge; and he further set at their disposal as much as they would spend for a month.

The escort was arrayed and sent for Eliduc, and he was received with great honour, for he was passing welcome to the king. He was lodged with a kind and worthy burgess, who gave up to him his fair tapestried chamber. Here Eliduc had a splendid feast served, and invited the needy knights who sojourned in the city. Furthermore, he admonished all his

men that none be so forward as to take gift or denier for the first forty days.

On the third day after his arrival, there arose cries in the city that the foe were come and spread throughout the land, and would advance to the very gates and assail the town.

Eliduc hearing the clamour of the frightened folk, armed himself at once. and bade his comrades do likewise. There were forty mounted knights dwelling in that town (though some were wounded and many had been captured); and when they saw Eliduc mounting his horse, all who were able came out of their hostels armed, and went forth from the gate with him, waiting for no summons.

“Sir,” they said, “we will go with you, and do as you shall do.”

He made answer: “Gramercy! Is there none among you here who knows a narrow pass meet for an ambush, where we may take them unawares? True, if we await them here, we shall probably fight, but to no advantage, if any knows better counsel.”

And they said: “Sir, i’ faith, in the thicket hard by yonder wood is a narrow road, by which they usually return when they have been plundering, riding unarmed on their palfreys. Again and again they repair thither, thus putting themselves in jeopardy of speedy death, so that they might easily be overcome and put to shame and worsted.”

Eliduc answered: “Friends, I give you my word that he who does not venture often where he expects to lose shall never win much, nor attain to great renown. Now ye are all the king’s men, and should keep good faith with him. Come with me where I shall go, and do as I shall do; and I promise you faithfully that ye shall come to no harm as long as I can aid you. If we gain anything, it will be to our glory to have weakened our foes.”

They took his pledge, and guided him to the forest, where they placed themselves in ambush along the road until the enemy should return. Eliduc commanded in all things, devising and explaining how they should leap out suddenly with loud cries.

As soon as the enemy had come to the narrow pass . . . Eliduc shouted to his comrades to do worthily. And they gave hard blows, sparing not at all, so that the foe, taken by surprise, were quickly confused and scattered, and in a little while vanquished. Their constable

was captured and so many other knights that the squires had much ado to take charge of them. Five-and-twenty were the men of this land, and they took prisoner thirty of those from abroad, and as much armour as they would. 'Twas a marvellous booty; and the knights returned home rejoicing in their exploit.

The king, meanwhile, was on a tower, in great fear for his men, and complaining bitterly of Eliduc, for he supposed, or at least dreaded, that through treason he might have led the knights of that city into danger. And when these came back all in array, and all encumbered with booty and prisoners, so that they were many more at their home-coming than when they went forth, the king did not know them, and so was in doubt and suspense. He gave commands that the gates be closed, and that soldiers be stationed on the walls to shoot, and to hurl darts at them. But all this was needless, for they sent a squire spurring in advance, to tell of the stranger's achievement. how he had vanquished the foe, and how nobly he had borne himself—there never was such a knight!— and how the constable had been captured, and nine-and-twenty others, besides many wounded and many slain.

The king rejoiced marvellously at these tidings, and descended from the tower to meet Eliduc, and to thank him for his good service. He in turn delivered up his prisoners; and divided the booty among the other knights. For his own use he kept only three horses that he liked especially. All his share he distributed and gave out among the prisoners as well as among the other folk.

After this feat of which I have told you, the king greatly loved and cherished him, and for a whole year retained him in his service, and likewise his comrades. Moreover, after taking his oath, he made him warden of the land.

Now Eliduc was courteous and discreet, a goodly knight, and strong and open-handed; hence, the king's daughter heard him talked of and his virtues recounted. Accordingly, by one of her trusty chamberlains she prayed and commanded him to visit her, that they might have friendly speech together, and become acquainted—indeed, she marvelled greatly that he had not come to her before!

Eliduc answered that he would most gladly go to make her acquaintance. Attended by a single knight, he mounted his horse and

rode to her bower, where he sent the chamberlain before, and followed when his coming had been announced.

With sweet courtesy, with gentle manner and with noble bearing, he spoke as one skilled in speech, and thanked the fair lady Guilliadun, in that she had been pleased to summon him to her presence.

She took him by the hand, and they sat down together upon a couch, speaking of many things. She looked at him attentively, studying his face, his stature and his bearing, and said to herself, "There is no fault in him." And all at once, as she was praising him in her heart, Love flung his dart at her, bidding her love the knight, whereupon she grew pale and sighed. But she would not put her thought into speech, lest he hold her too lightly.

He tarried there a long while, but at last took leave—though she granted it unwillingly— and returned to his hostel. He was right pensive and sadly distraught for thinking of the fair princess, how she had so sweetly called him, and how she had sighed.

His only regret was that he had been in the land so long, and had not seen her often. But even as he said this he repented, minding him of his wife, and how he had promised to keep good faith with her.

On the other hand, the maid, as soon as she beheld him, loved him more than any other in the world, and wished to have him for her lover. All the night she lay awake, and had neither sleep nor rest. On the morrow morning she arose, and going to a window, called thither her chamberlain and showed him all her state, saying:

"By my faith, 'tis ill with me! I am fallen into evil case! I love the stranger knight, Eliduc, so that I have no rest at night, nor can I close my eyes in sleep. If he would return my love and be my betrothed, I would do all his will, and he indeed might win great good therefrom, for he should be king of this land! But if he will not love me. I must die of grief for very love of his wisdom and his courtesy!"

When she had said what she would, the chamberlain whom she had called, gave her excellent counsel—let no man think ill of it!

"Lady," he said, "since you love him, send to him and tell him so. It were well, perhaps, to send him a girdle or riband or ring, and if he should accept it gratefully and be joyous at the message, you would be

sure of his love. There is no emperor under heaven who, if you would love him, ought not to be right glad!"

And when the damsel had heard this counsel, she answered:

"How shall I know by my gift whether he will love me? Never have I seen knight— whether he loved or hated—who had to be entreated to keep willingly the present one sent him. I should hate bitterly to be a jest to him! Still, one may know somewhat by his manner—make ready, and go!"

"I am all ready," he said.

"Give him a golden ring, and my girdle. Greet him from me a thousand time!"

The chamberlain turned away, leaving her in such state that she all but called him back; but yet she let him go, and began to lament in this wise:

"Alas! now is my heart captive for a stranger from another land! I know not if he is of high degree, yet if he should go hence suddenly, I should be left mourning. Foolishly have I set my heart's desire, for I never spoke with him save yesterday; and now I have sent to entreat his love. I think that he will blame me—yet if he is gentle, he will show me grace. Now is everything at hazard, and if he cares not for my love, I shall be in such sorrow that never again in my life shall I have joy!"

While she was thus bemoaning herself, the chamberlain hastened and came to Eliduc. As had been devised, he greeted the knight according to the maiden's bidding, and gave him the little ring and the girdle. Eliduc thanked him, put the gold ring on his finger, and girt himself with the girdle. But there was no further speech between them, save that the knight proffered gifts, of which the chamberlain would have none.

Returning to his lady, whom he found in her bower, he greeted her on the knight's part and thanked her for her present.

"Come," she said, "hide nothing from me. Will he love me with true love?"

"As I think," he answered. "The knight is not wanton, but I hold him rather as courteous and discreet in knowing how to hide his heart. I greeted him from you and gave him your gifts, whereupon he girt himself with your girdle, drawing it close about him. and put the little ring on his finger. Nor said I more to him, nor he to me."

“Did he not receive it in token of love? If not, I am undone!”

He answered: “By my faith, I know not; yet, hearken to me, unless he wished you well, he would have none of your gifts.”

“You speak folly!” said she. “I know well that he does not hate me, for I have never wronged him in aught, save in loving him tenderly; and if for that he hates me, he deserves to die! Never by you, or by any other, will I ask anything of him until I myself speak to him and show how love for him sways me. But I know not whether he remains?”

The chamberlain answered: “Lady, the king has retained him under oath to serve faithfully for a year; hence, you may have time enough to show him your pleasure.”

When she heard that he would remain, she was exceeding joyful and glad at heart. She knew nothing of the sorrow that came upon him as soon as he had beheld her, for his only joy was in thinking of her, and he held himself in evil case since he had promised his wife, before he left his domain, to love none but herself. Now is his heart in sore conflict, for he would fain keep his faith, yet in no wise may he doubt that he loves the maiden Guilliadun, so sweet to gaze upon and to speak with, to kiss and to embrace. But he would not seek her love, since it would be dishonourable to his wife, and to the king as well.

For all this, he was so tormented for love that he mounted his horse presently, and rode away with his companions to the castle. But the reason of his going was not so much to speak with the king as to see the maiden, if he might.

Now the king was risen from dinner and entered into his daughter’s bower, where he was playing chess with a knight from oversea; and from across the chess-board the princess was watching the game.

As Eliduc came forward, the king showed him great favour, and bade him sit by his side; then, turning to his daughter, he said, “Damsel, acquaint you with this knight, and show him all honour; for there is none more worthy among five hundred!”

Upon her father’s command, the maiden turned joyfully to greet Eliduc; and they sat afar off from the others. Love so overcame them that she dared say no word to him and he could scarce speak to her. Yet he thanked her for her gift, which was to him the dearest thing he had. Thereupon she said that she was glad at heart: she had sent him the ring

and the girdle because she loved him so well that she would willingly take him for her husband; and if this might not be, of a truth, never would she have living man! But now, let him show his heart!

“Lady,” he said, “I thank you for the grace of your love, which fills me with joy! That I stand so high in your favour, makes me glad beyond the telling, yet the future rests not with me, for, although I am bound to remain a year with the king, having given my oath not to depart until his war is ended, after that, I ought to return to my own land without delay, if you will grant me leave.”

The maiden answered: “My friend, gramercy! So very wise are you and courteous, that ere that time you will have devised what you will do with me. I love and trust you above everything.

Thus they accorded well, and at that time spake no more. Eliduc returned to his dwelling full of joy; for he had dealt honourably and yet might speak with his lady as often as he would, and between them was the fulness of love’s joy.

Accordingly, he entered into the war with such zeal that he seized and took captive the lord who fought against the king, and set free all the land. For his prowess, for his wit and for his largesse, he was praised far and wide, and fair fortune befell him.

Now while these things were happening, his own lord had sent three messengers forth from the land to seek him; for he was harassed in war, endangered and hard bestead, so that he was losing all his castles, and all his land was being wasted. Often had he repented of banishing Eliduc, through foolish hearkening to evil counsel; and the traitors who had accused and slandered and wronged the knight, he had cast out of the land, and into exile sent for ever. And now in his sore distress he sent for his vassal, commanding and adjuring him by the bond of homage between them, to come to his lord’s aid in this time of sore need.

At these tidings Eliduc was sorrowful for the maiden whom he loved passing well, and who loved him with all her heart. His hope and intent was that their love might continue to show itself in the giving of fair gifts and in speaking together, without foolish trifling or dalliance; but she thought to have him for her lord, if she might keep his love, for she knew not that he had wife.

“Alas!” he cried, “that ever I came here; too long have I been in this land! Would I had never seen it! I have come to love the princess Guilliadun so dearly, and she loves me so well, that if we must part, one of us will die, or perhaps both! And yet I must go, for my lord has summoned me by letter, and I am bound to him by oath; and then again—my wife! Now it behoves me to take heed, for I must depart without fail, and if I were to wed my love, the Church would interfere. Everything goes ill with me! God—how hard is this parting! But whoever deem it wrong, I will always deal rightly with her, doing her will and following her counsel. The king, her father, has peace now, and looks for no further war; hence, for my lord’s need I must ask leave before the end of my time for abiding in this land. I will go speak to the maid, and show her all my case; and when she has told me her will, I will do it as far as I may.”

He tarried no longer, but went at once to the king to ask leave, relating to him what had happened and reading the letter from his lord, who was so hard-pressed. And when the king heard that Eliduc might in no wise remain, he became sorrowful and troubled in thought, and offered largely of his possessions, one-third of his heritage and of his treasure; if only Eliduc would remain, he would give him cause to be grateful all his life.

“Pardieu,” said Eliduc, “since my lord is now so oppressed, and has summoned me from afar, I must go hence for his occasions, nor in any wise remain. But if you have need of my service, I will return to you gladly with a strong force of knights.”

For this the king thanked him, and with all courtesy gave him leave to depart, setting at his disposal all the treasures of his mansion, gold and silver, dogs and horses, rich and beautiful silk. Of these took he measurably. Thereupon he added to the king, as was fitting, that he would like to say farewell to his daughter, if it pleased him. The king answered, “With all my heart,” and sent forward a page to open the chamber door.

Eliduc went with him, and when the lady saw the knight, she called him by name, and said he was six thousand times welcome. He asked her counsel in this matter, briefly showing the need for his journey; but ere he had told her all, or taken leave, or even asked it, she turned pale and

swooned for grief. Seeing this, Eliduc began to lament, and kissed her often, weeping sorely, and held her in his arms until she had recovered from her swoon.

“Pardieu,” he said, “my sweet love, try to bear what I tell you. You are my life and my death, and in you is all my comfort! And though I must needs return to my land, and have already taken leave of your father, I counsel that there be troth-plight between us, and, whatsoever befall me, I will do your will!”

“Take me with you,” she cried, “since you will not stay longer! Or if you will not, I must kill myself, for never more shall I have joy or content!”

Eliduc answered tenderly that indeed he loved her with true love: “Sweet, I am bound to your father by oath, from now until the term which was set, and if I took you with me, I should belie my faith to him. I promise you faithfully and swear that if you will grant me leave and respite now, and set a day afterwards, and if you wish me to return, nothing in the world shall hinder me, if I be alive and well. My life is all in your hands!”

When she perceived his great love, she granted him a term, and set a day when he should come and take her with him. In bitter grief they exchanged gold rings, and with sweet kisses parted. Eliduc went down to the sea, and with a good wind was quickly across.

Upon his return his lord rejoiced greatly, and likewise his friends and his kinsmen and many other folk; and above all his good wife, who was so fair and wise and gentle. But he was always thinking upon the love that overmastered him; and showed no joy or pleasure at all—indeed, he might never be glad again until he saw his beloved.

He kept his secret well; and yet his wife grieved in heart, and often mourned by herself, for she knew not what this might be. Again and again she asked him if he had not heard from some one that she had been false to him or had sinned against him while he was out of the land. She would most gladly prove her innocence before his folk, whenever he pleased.

“Wife,” he said, “I charge you with no sin or misdeed whatsoever. But in the land where I have been, I promised and swore to the king that I would return to him, for he has great need of me. If my lord had peace,

I would not stay here eight days longer. I must endure great anxiety before I may return, yea, never until that time shall I take pleasure in anything that I see; for I would not break my pledge.”

With this the lady let be. He went to his lord and so much aided and supported him that by his counsel the king saved all the land.

But when the time appointed by the maiden drew near, he made ready for his departure; and having brought the enemy to terms, he arrayed himself for the journey, and likewise those he would take with him. These were only his two nephews whom he loved especially, the trusty chamberlain who had brought the message, and his squires; he had no desire for other comrades. These few he made promise and swear to keep silence on this undertaking.

He put out to sea at once, and was quickly across in the land where he was so eagerly expected.

Now, for prudence sake, Eliduc took lodging far from the harbour that he might not be seen or recognized, and arrayed his chamberlain to bear word to the princess, that he had kept her command, and was now arrived; and when the darkness of evening had fallen, she should come forth from the city with the chamberlain, and he himself would meet her.

The chamberlain changed his dress for disguise and went on foot all the way to the city where the king’s daughter was. He devised a means to be admitted to her bower, and greeting the maiden, said that her lover was come. Upon hearing these tidings she was all startled and confused, wept tenderly for joy, and often kissed the messenger. He said further that at eventide she must go with him, for all the day he had been planning their flight. In the darkness of evening they set out from the city, the chamberlain and herself—no more than they two. She had great fear of being seen, for she was clad in a silken robe, delicately embroidered with gold, and had wrapped about her only a short mantle.

But her lover had come to meet her, and was awaiting them a bow-shot’s length from the gate, by the hedge that enclosed a fair wooded park. When the chamberlain brought her up, he dismounted to kiss her; and they had exceeding great joy together. Soon, however, he placed her on a horse, mounted, took the reins, and rode away at full speed. When they arrived at Totnes harbour, they embarked at once, he and his own men only, and the lady Guilliadun.

At first they had a favouring breeze to waft them across, and calm weather; but even as they were nearing the shore, there came a storm at sea, and a wind arose before them, which drove them far from their haven, broke and split their mast and tore all their sail. Devoutly they called on God, on St. Nicholas and St. Clement, and Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, that she entreat her Son to save them from death, and bring them safe to land. One hour backwards, another forwards—thus they coasted along, for they were in the heart of the tempest. And presently one of the sailors cried aloud:

“What shall we do? Lord, you have here with you the one for whose sake we perish! We shall never come to land, for you have a lawful wedded wife, and yet bear away this other, against God and the law, against right and honour! Let us cast her into the sea, and we may arrive at once!”

At these words Eliduc in his wrath all but hurt the fellow. “Thou dastard!” he cried, “wretch! foul traitor! be still! If I could leave my lady, you should pay dearly for this!”

He held the princess in his arms, soothing her as best he could both for her terror of the sea and for her woe in hearing that her lover had wife in his own land. But she fell forward in a swoon, and continued in that state, all pale and colourless, neither reviving nor breathing. He thought of a truth that she was dead, and fell into bitter grief. He arose and went to the sailor who had spoken, struck him with a gaff and stretched him prone, then hurled him overboard, head foremost into the sea, where the waves swept the body away. Thereupon the knight took the helm, and so steered the ship and held it firm, that he made the haven and came to land; and when they were arrived safely, he cast anchor and put down the gangway.

And still the maid lay with the look of death upon her, so that Eliduc in his heavy grief longed to lie dead by her side.

But he asked counsel of his comrades as to whither he should take her, for he would not part from her until she should be buried with great honour and fair service, as became a king’s daughter, in holy ground. His men were all perplexed and had nothing to say, so the knight bethought him what he should do. He remembered that near his dwelling, itself so close to the sea that it could be reached by mid-day, in the great forest

which stretched round about it for thirty leagues, a holy hermit had had a cell and chapel for forty years. Now since he knew this good man, he resolved to take the maid thither and bury her in his chapel; and to give enough land to found an abbey, and to place therein a convent of monks or nuns or canons, who should pray for her unceasingly, "God grant her sweet mercy!"

So he had his horses brought, mounted with his men, and taking oath of them not to betray him, rode away on his palfrey with his lady in his arms. They journeyed straight on, until they came to the chapel in the wood, where they knocked and called, but found no one to answer, or to open to them, so that Eliduc must needs make one of his men climb over the wall to unbar and open the door. Within they found the new-made tomb of the holy man, who had died eight days before. At this the knight was sorely troubled and distressed; and when his men would have made the lady's grave, he put them back, saying:

"This must not be until I have taken counsel with the wise folk of the land, as to how I shall sanctify the place for abbey or for monastery. Let us lay her before the altar here, and commend her to God."

He bade them forthwith bring robes and prepare a couch, on which he placed the maiden whom he thought dead. But when he came to the parting, he thought to die of grief. He kissed her eyes and her face, saying: "Dear, please God, never more will I bear arms or live out my life in the world! Fair love—alas, that you ever saw me; sweet dear—alas, that you came with me! Pretty one, now had you been queen perhaps, were it not for the true love and loyal, with which you loved me. My heart aches sorely for you! On the day that I bury you I shall put on the cowl; and at your tomb day after day cry out anew my grief!"

At last he left the maiden, and made fast the door of the chapel; and then he sent a messenger to his dwelling to announce to his wife that he was on his way home, but was weary and travel-worn.

Upon hearing these tidings she rejoiced greatly, and, arraying herself to meet her lord, received him in all kindness; yet she got but little joy of him, for his looks were so forbidding that none dared accost him, and he spoke no loving word.

He was two days in the house; and after mass in the morning went forth alone on the road to the forest chapel, where the damsel lay. He

found her neither revived nor seeming to breathe, yet he marvelled in seeing her still white and red, with no loss of her fair colour, save that she was a little pale. In his bitter anguish he wept and prayed for her soul; and having prayed, returned home.

One day, when he went forth from the church, his wife set a squire to watch him, promising to give horse and arms if he would follow his lord and see where he went. And as she bade him, he followed unperceived through the wood, saw Eliduc enter the chapel and heard his mourning. When the knight came out again, the squire returned to his lady, and told her of all the cries of grief and lamentation that her lord had made in the hermitage. All her heart was stirred, and she said:

“Let us go at once and search through the hermitage. My lord must go, I think, to the king’s court. This hermit has been some time dead, and though I know well that my husband loved him, he never would do thus for his sake, nor feel such lasting grief.”

For the time she let be; but that same day, after noon, when Eliduc went to the king’s court, she came with her squire to the hermitage. When she entered the chapel, and saw the bed with the maiden, who was like a fresh-blown rose, she put aside the robes and gazed upon the slender body, the long arms, and white hands with graceful fingers slim and shapely, and then she knew verily why her lord was in such grief. Calling the squire, she showed him the marvel.

“See,” she said, “this woman, like a jewel in her fairness! She is my lord’s friend, for whom he is all sorrowful. I’ faith, I wonder not, since so lovely a woman is dead! As much for pity as for love, I shall never again have joy!”

She began to weep and make moan for the maiden. As she sat lamenting by the bedside, a weasel ran from under the altar, and because it passed over the corse, the squire struck it with his staff and killed it. He threw it upon the floor, but it lay there only while one might run a league, before its mate sped thither and saw it. And when, after running about the dead weasel’s head, and lifting it with its foot, the little creature could not get its mate to rise, it gave signs of grief, and sped out of the chapel among the herbs in the wood. Here it seized in its teeth a flower crimson of hue, and returned at once to place it in the mouth of its

mate. Within the hour the weasel came to life. When the lady saw this, she cried to the squire,

“Stop it! strike it, good lad! Let it not escape!”

He threw his staff so that the weasel dropped the flower; whereupon the lady rose and picking up the pretty blossom, placed it in the maiden’s mouth. And presently, as she waited there, the damsel revived and breathed, saying as she opened her eyes, “Dear God, I have slept long!”

The lady gave thanks to God, and asked the maid who she was, and she answered:

“Lady, I am of Logres, daughter to a king in that land. I loved dearly a good knight, Eliduc, and he brought me away with him; but he did wrong in beguiling me, for he has a wedded wife, and neither told me of her, nor ever made sign of such a thing. And when I heard speak of this wife, I swooned in my grief; and he, most unknighly, has abandoned me all desolate in a strange land. He has betrayed me, though I know not why. Foolish is she who puts her trust in man!”

“Fair maid,” answered the other, “there is no living thing in all the world that can give him joy! One may say truly that since he believes you dead, he has fallen into strange despair; every day he has come to look upon you, though deeming to find you lifeless. I am his wife, and indeed my heart is heavy for him. Because he showed such great grief, I longed to know whither he went, came after him, and found you. I have great joy in finding you alive; and will take you back with me and restore you to your friend. As for myself, I will release him from his vows, and veil my head!”

Thus the lady comforted her and took her away, at the same time sending a squire to go for his lord. He journeyed until he came to him, and greeting him courteously, told him what had befallen. Thereupon Eliduc waited for no companion, but mounted at once, and rode home that selfsame night. When he found his lady alive he rendered thanks sweetly to his wife, and was more glad than he had ever been before. Again and again he kissed the maiden and she him most tenderly, and they had passing great joy together.

When his wife saw their happiness, she accosted her lord and asked his leave to depart and be a nun in God’s service; further, she asked him to give her part of his land whereon she might build an abbey, and said

that he should marry the one whom he loved so much, since it was neither well nor fitting to maintain two wives, nor would the law permit it.

Eliduc granted this, and parted from her in all kindness, saying that he would do all her will, and would give her of his land. Thus near the castle in a boskage hard by the chapel and the hermitage, she built her church and monastic dwellings, and added thereto land enough and rich possessions, so that she might be well content to live there. When it was all finished, she veiled her head, and took with her thirty nuns to establish the new order of her life.

Eliduc wedded his lady; and on that day held feast with great honour and splendid service. They lived together many a year in perfect love, giving alms largely and doing much good, until at length they turned them to God wholly.

Thereupon, with good counsel and care, Eliduc built a church also near the castle but on the other side, and bestowed upon it the greater part of his land, and all his gold and silver. He placed there men of good religion to establish the order of the house; and when all things were ready, after no long delay, he gave himself also to the service of God Omnipotent. He placed his beloved lady with his former wife, by whom she was received honourably as a sister, was admonished to serve God, and instructed in the rules of the order. Together they prayed God to show sweet mercy to their friend; and he prayed for them, sending messengers to know how it was with them and how each did. Much they strove, each singly, to love God with good faith, and so made a fair ending, by the grace of the True and Holy God.

The chivalrous Britons of olden time made a lay of the adventure of these three, that it might not be forgotten.