

# MADISON CAWEIN

ACCOLON OF  
GAUL, WITH  
OTHER POEMS

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**Accolon of Gaul,  
with Other Poems**

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# Madison Julius Cawein

## Accolon of Gaul, with Other Poems

### PRELUDE

WHY, dreams from dreams in dreams remembered! naught  
Save this, alas! that once it seemed I thought  
I wandered dim with someone, but I knew  
Not who; most beautiful and good and true,  
Yet sad through suffering; with curl-crowned brow,  
Soft eyes and voice; so white she haunts me now: —  
And when, and where? – At night in dreamland.  
She  
Led me athwart a flower-showered lea  
Where trammeled puckered pansy and the pea;  
Spread stains of pale-rod poppies rinsed of rain,  
So gorged with sun their hurt hearts ached with pain;  
Heaped honeysuckles; roses lavishing beams,  
Wherein I knew were huddled little dreams  
Which laughed coy, hidden merriment and there  
Blew quick gay kisses fragranting the air.  
And where a river bubbled through the sward  
A mist lay sleepily; and it was hard  
To see whence sprung it, to what seas it led,  
How broadly spread and what it was it fled  
So ceaseless in its sighs, and bickering on  
Into romance or some bewildering dawn  
Of wisest legend from the storied wells  
Of lost Baranton, where old Merlin dwells,  
Nodding a white poll and a grand, gray beard  
As if some Lake Ladyé he, listening, heard,  
Who spake like water, danced like careful showers  
With blown gold curls thro' drifts of wild-thorn flowers;  
Loose, lazy arms in graceful movement tossed,  
Float flower-like down a woodland vista, lost  
In some peculiar note that wrings a tear  
Slow down his withered cheek. And then steals near  
Her sweet, lascivious brow's white wonderment,  
And gray rude eyes, and hair which hath the scent  
Of the wildwood Brécéliand's perfumes  
In Brittany; and in it one red bloom's  
Blood-drop thrust deep, and so "Sweet Viviane!"  
All the glad leaves lisp like a young, soft rain  
From top to top, until a running surge  
The dark, witch-haunted solitude will urge,  
That shakes and sounds and stammers as from sleep

Some giant were aroused; and with a leap  
A samite-gauzy creature, glossy white,  
Showers mocking kisses fast and, like a light  
Beat by a gust to flutter and then done,  
From Brécéliande and Merlin she is gone.  
But still he sits there drowsing with his dreams;  
A wondrous cohort hath he; many as gleams  
That stab the moted mazes of a beech;  
And each grave dream hath its own magic speech  
To sting to tears his old eyes heavy – two  
Hang, tangled brilliants, in his beard like dew:  
And still faint murmurs of courts brave and fair,  
And forms of Arthur and proud Guenevere,  
Grave Tristram and rare Isoud and stout Mark,  
Bold Launcelot, chaste Galahad the dark  
Of his weak mind, once strong, glares up with, then,  
– The instant's fostered blossoms – die again.  
A roar of tournament, a rippling stir  
Of silken lists that ramble into her,  
That white witch-mothered beauty, Viviane,  
The vast Brécéliande and dreams again.  
Then Dagonet, King Arthur's fool, trips there,  
A waggish cunning; glittering on his hair  
A tinsel crown; and then will slightly sway  
Thick leaves and part, and there Morgane the Fay  
With haughty wicked eyes and lovely face  
Studies him steady for a little space.

I

"

**THOU** askest with thy studious eyes again,  
Here where the restless forest hears the main  
Toss in a troubled sleep and moan. Ah, sweet,  
With joy and passion the kind hour's replete;  
And what wild beauty here! where roughly run  
Huge forest shadows from the westering sun,  
The wood's a subdued power gentle as  
Yon tame wild-things, that in the moss and grass  
Gaze with their human eyes. Here grow the lines  
Of pale-starred green; and where yon fountain shines  
Urned in its tremulous ferns, rest we upon  
This oak-trunk of God's thunder overthrown  
Years, years ago; not where 'tis rotted brown  
But where the thick bark's firm and overgrown  
Of clambering ivy blackly berried; where  
Wild musk of wood decay just tincts the air,

As if some strange shrub on some whispering way,  
In some dewed dell, while dreaming of one May,  
In longing languor weakly tried to wake  
One sometime blossom and could only make  
Ghosts of such dead aromas as it knew,  
And shape a specter, budding thin as dew,  
To haunt these sounding miles of solitude.  
Troubled thou askest, Morgane, and the mood,  
Unfathomed in thine eyes, glows rash and deep  
As that in some wild-woman's found on sleep  
By some lost knight upon a precipice,  
Whom he hath wakened with a laughing kiss.  
As that of some frail, elfin lady white  
As if of watery moonbeams, filmy dight,  
Who waves diaphanous beauty on some cliff  
That drowsing purrs with moon-drenched pines; but if  
The lone knight follow, foul fiends rise and drag  
Him crashing down, while she, tall on the crag,  
Triumphant mocks him with glad sorcery  
Till all the wildwood echoes shout with glee.  
As that bewildering mystery of a tarn,  
Some mountain water, which the mornings scorn  
To anadem with fire and leave gray;  
To which some champion cometh when the Day  
Hath tired of breeding on his proud, young head  
Flame-furry blooms and, golden chapletéd,  
Sits rosy, trembling with full love for Night,  
Who cometh sandaled; dark in crape; the light  
Of her good eyes a marvel; her vast hair  
Tortuous with stars, – as in some shadowy lair  
The eyes of hunted wild things burn with rage, —  
And on large bosoms doth his love assuage.

"He, coming thither in that haunted place,  
Stoops low to quaff cool waters, when his face  
Meets gurgling fairy faces in a ring  
That jostle upward babbling; beckoning  
Him deep to wonders secret built of old  
By some dim witch: 'A city walled with gold,  
With beryl battlements and paved with pearls,  
Slim, lambent towers wrought of foamy swirls  
Of alabaster, and that witch to love,  
More beautiful to love than queens above.' —  
He pauses troubled, but a wizard power,  
In all his bronzen harness that mad hour  
Plunges him – whither? what if he should miss  
Those cloudy beauties and that creature's kiss?  
Ah, Morgane, that same power Accolon  
Saw potent in thine eyes and it hath drawn

Him deep to plunge – and to what breathless fate? —  
Bliss? – which, too true, he hath well quaffed of late!  
But, there! – may come what stealthy-footed Death  
With bony claws to clutch away his breath!  
And make him loveless to those eyes, alas! —  
Fain must I speak that vision; thus it was:

"In sleep one plucked me some warm fleurs-de-lis,  
Larger than those of earth; and I might see  
Their woolly gold, loose, webby woven thro', —  
Like fluffy flames spun, – gauzy with fine dew.  
And 'asphodels!' I murmured; then, 'these sure  
The Eden amaranths, so angel pure  
That these alone may pluck them; aye and aye!  
But with that giving, lo, she passed away  
Beyond me on some misty, yearning brook  
With some sweet song, which all the wild air took  
With torn farewells and pensive melody  
Touching to tears, strange, hopeless utterly.  
So merciless sweet that I yearned high to tear  
Those ingot-cored and gold-crowned lilies fair;  
Yet over me a horror which restrained  
With melancholy presence of two pained  
And awful, mighty eyes that cowed and held  
Me weeping while that sad dirge died or swelled  
Far, far on endless waters borne away:  
A wild bird's musick smitten when the ray  
Of dawn it burned for graced its drooping head,  
And the pale glory strengthened round it dead;  
Daggered of thorns it plunged on, blind in night,  
The slow blood ruby on its plumage white.

"Then, then I knew these blooms which she had given  
Were strays of parting grief and waifs of Heaven  
For tears and memories; too delicate  
For eyes of earth such souls immaculate!  
But then – my God! my God! thus these were left!  
I knew then still! but of that song bereft —  
That rapturous wonder grasping after grief —  
Beyond all thought – weak thought that would be thief."  
And bowed and wept into his hands and she  
Sorrowful beheld; and resting at her knee  
Raised slow her oblong lute and smote its chords;  
But ere the impulse saddened into words  
Said: "And didst love me as thy lips have spake  
No visions wrought of sleep might such love shake.  
Fast is all Love in fastness of his power,  
With flame reverberant moated stands his tower;  
Not so built as to chink from fact a beam



Of doubt and much less of a doubt from dream;  
*Such*, the alchemic fires of Love's desires,  
Which hug this like a snake, melt to gold wires  
To chord the old lyre new whereon he lyres."  
So ceased and then, sad softness in her eye  
Sang to his dream a questioning reply:

"Will love grow less when dead the roguish Spring,  
Who from gay eyes sowed violets whispering;  
Peach petals in wild cheeks, wan-wasted thro'  
Of withering grief, laid lovely 'neath the dew,  
Will love grow less?

"Will love grow less when comes queen Summer tall,  
Her throat a lily long and spiritual;  
Rich as the poppiéd swaths – droned haunts of bees —  
Her cheeks, a brown maid's gleaning on the leas,  
Will love grow less?

"Will love grow less when Autumn sighing there  
Broods with long frost streaks in her dark, dark hair;  
Tears in grave eyes as in grave heavens above,  
Deep lost in memories' melancholy, love,  
Will love grow less?

"Will love grow less when Winter at the door  
Begs on her scant locks icicles as hoar;  
While Death's eyes hollow o'er her shoulder dart  
A look to wring to tears then freeze the heart,  
Will love grow less?"

And in her hair wept softly and her breast  
Rose and was wet with tears; like as, distressed,  
Night steals on Day rain sobbing thro' her curls.  
"Tho' tears become thee even as priceless pearls,  
Weep not for love's sake! mine no gloom of doubt,  
But woe for sweet love's death such dreams brought out.  
Nay, nay; crowned, throned and flame-anointed he  
Kings our twin-kingdomed hearts eternally.  
Love, high in Heaven beginning and to cease  
No majesty when hearts are laid at peace;  
But reign supreme, if souls have wrought as well,  
A god in Heaven or a god in Hell.  
Yea, Morgane, for the favor of his face  
All our rich world of love I will retrace:

"Hurt in that battle where thy brother strove  
With those five kings thou wot'st of, dearest love,  
Wherein the five were worsted, I was brought

To some king's castle on my shield, methought, —  
Out of the grind of spears and roar of swords,  
From the loud shields of battle-bloody lords,  
Culled from the mountained slain where Havoc sprawled  
Gorged to her eyes with carnage, growling crawled; —  
By some tall damsels tiremaids of some queen  
Stately and dark, who moved as if a sheen  
Of starlight spread her presence; and she came  
With healing herbs and searched my wounds. A dame  
So marvelous in raiment silvery  
I feared lest some attendant chaste were she  
To that high Holy Grael, which Arthur hath  
Sought ever widely by hoar wood and path; —  
Thus not for me, a worldly one, to love,  
Who loved her even to wonder; skied above  
His worship as our moon above the Main,  
That passions upward yearning in great pain,  
And suffers wearily from year to year,  
She peaceful pitiless with virgin cheer. —  
Ah, ideal love, as merciless as fate!  
And, oh, that savage aching which must wait  
For its fulfillment, tortured love in tears,  
Until that beauty dreamed of many years  
Bends over one from luminous skies, so grand  
One's weakness fears to touch its mastering hand,  
And hesitates and stammers nothings weak,  
And loves and loves with love that can not speak!  
Ah, there's the tyranny that breeds despair;  
Breaks hearts whose strong youth by one golden hair  
Coiled 'round the throat is sooner strangled dumb  
Than by a glancing dagger thrust from gloom  
Of an old arras at the very hour  
One thought one safest in one's guarded tower. —  
Thus, Morgane, worshiping that lady I  
Was speechless; longing now to live, now die,  
As her fine face suggested secrets of  
Some passion kin to mine, or scorn of love  
That dragged heroic humbleness to her feet,  
For one long look that spake and made such sweet.  
Ah, never dreamed I of what was to be, —  
Nay! nay! how could I? while that agony  
Of doubtful love denied my heart too much,  
Too much to dream of that perfection such  
As was to grant me boisterous hours of life  
And sever all the past as with a knife!

"One night a tempest scourged and beat and lashed  
The writhing forest and vast thunders crashed  
Clamorous with clubs of leven, and anon,

Between the thunder pauses, seas would groan  
Like some enormous curse a knight hath lured  
From where it soared to maim it with his sword.  
I, with eyes partly lidded, seemed to see  
That cloudy, wide-wrenched night's eternity  
Yawn hells of golden ghastriness; and sweep  
Distending foams tempestuous up each steep  
Of furious iron, where pale mermaids sit  
With tangled hair black-blown, who, bit by bit,  
Chant glimmering; beckoning on to strangling arms  
Some hurt bark hurrying in the ravenous storm's  
Resistless exultation; till there came  
One breaker mounting inward, all aflame  
With glow-worm green, to boom against the cliff  
Its thunderous bulk – and there, sucked pale and stiff,  
Tumbled in eddies up the howling rocks  
My dead, drawn face; eyes lidless; matted locks  
Oozed close with brine; tossed upward merrily  
By streaming mermaids. – Madly seemed to see  
The vampire echoes of the hoarse wood, who,  
Collected, sought me; down the casement drew  
Wet, shuddering fingers sharply; thronging fast  
Up hooting turrets, fell thick screaming, cast  
Down bastioned battlements trooped whistling off;  
From the wild woodland growled a backward scoff. —  
Then far away, hoofs of a thousand gales,  
As wave rams wave up windy bluffs of Wales,  
Loosed from the groaning hills, the cohorts loud,  
Spirits of thunder, charioteered of cloud,  
Roared down the rocking night cored with the glare  
Of fiery eyeballs swimming; their drenched hair  
Blown black as rain unkempt back from black brows,  
Wide mouths of storm that voiced a hell carouse  
And bulged tight cheeks with wind, rolled riotous by  
Ruining to ruinous cliffs to headlong die.

"Once when the lightning made the casement glare  
Squares touched to gold, between it rose her hair,  
As if a raven's wing had cut the storm  
Death-driven seaward; and a vague alarm  
Stung me with terrors of surmise where hope  
As yet pruned weak wings crippled by their scope.  
And, lo, she kneeled low, radiant, wonderful,  
Lawn-raimented and white; kneeled low, – 'to lull  
These thoughts of night such storms might shape in thee,  
All such to peace and sleep,' – Ah, God! to see  
Her like a benediction fleshed! with her  
Hearing her voice! her cool hand wandering bare  
Wistful on feverish brow thro' long deep curls!

To see her rich throat's carcaneted pearls  
Rise as her pulses! eyes' large influence  
Poured toward me straight as stars, whose sole defense  
Against all storm is their bold beauty! then  
To feel her breathe and hear her speak again!  
'Love, mark,' I said or dreamed I moaned in dreams,  
'How wails the tumult and the thunder gleams!  
As if of Arthur's knights had charged two fields  
Bright as sun-winds of dawn; swords, spears and shields  
Flashed lordly shocked; had, – to a man gone down  
In burst of battle hurled, – lain silent sown.  
Love, one eternal tempest thus with thee  
Were calm, dead calm! but, no! – for thee in me  
Such calm proves tempest. Speak; I feel thy voice  
Throb soft, caressing silence, healing noise.'

"Is radiance loved of radiance? day of day?  
Lithe beam of beam and laughing ray of ray?  
Hope loved of hope and happiness of joy,  
Or love of love, who hath the world for toy?  
And thou – thou lov'st my voice? fond Accolon!  
Why not – yea, why not? – nay! – I prithee! – groan  
Not for that thou hast had long since thine all.'  
She smiled; and dashed down storm's black-crumbled wall,  
Baptizing moonlight bathed her, foot and face  
Deluging, as my soul brake toward her grace  
With worship from despair and secret grief,  
That felt hot tears of heartsease sweet and brief.  
And one immortal night to me she said  
Words, lay I white in death had raised me red.  
'Rest now,' they were, 'I love thee with *such* love! —  
'Some speak of secret love, but God above  
Hath knowledge and divinement.'... Passionate low,  
'To lie by thee to-night my mind is': – So  
She laughed; – 'Sleep well! – for me? why, thy fast word  
Of knighthood, look thou, and this naked sword  
Laid in betwixt us... Let it be a wall  
Strong between love and lust and lov'st me all in all.'  
Undid the goodly gold from her clasped waist;  
Unbound deep locks; and, like a blossom faced,  
Stood sweet an unswayed stem that ran to bud  
In breasts and face a graceful womanhood.  
And fragrance was to her as natural  
As odor to the rose; and she a tall,  
White ardor and white fervor in the room  
Moved, some pale presence that with light doth bloom.  
Then all mine eyes and lips and limbs were fire;  
My tongue delirious throbbed a lawless lyre,  
That harped loud words of laud for loveliness,

Inspired of such, but these I can not guess.  
Then she, as pure as snows of peaks that keep  
Sun-cloven crowns of virgin, vanquishing steep,  
Frowned on me, and the thoughts, that in my brain  
Had risen a glare of gems, set dull like rain,  
And fair I spake her and with civil pain:

"Thine, sweet, a devil's kindness which is given  
For earthly pleasure but bars out from Heaven.  
Temptation harbored, like a bloody rust  
On a bright blade, leaves ugly stains; and lust  
Is love's undoing when love's limbs are cast  
A commonness to desire that makes unchaste;  
And this warm nearness of what should be hid  
Makes love a lawless love. But, thou hast bid; —  
Rest thou; I love thee, how, — I only know:  
But all that love shall shout "out!" at love's foe.'  
And turning sighed into my hair; and she  
Stretched the broad blade's division suddenly.  
And so we lay its fire between us twain;  
Unsleeping I, for, oh, that devil pain  
Of passion in me that strove up and stood  
A rebel wrangling with the brain and blood!  
An hour stole by: she slept or seemed to sleep.  
The winds of night came vigorous from the deep  
With storm gusts of fresh-watered field and wold  
That breathed of ocean meadows blueely rolled.  
I drowsed and time passed; stealing as for one  
Whose drowsy life dreams in Avilion.  
Vast bulks of black, wind-shattered rack went down  
High casement squares of heaven, a crystal crown  
Of bubbled moonlight on each monstrous head,  
Like as great ghosts of giant kings long dead.  
And then, meseemed, she lightly laughed and sighed,  
So soft a taper had not bent aside,  
And leaned a soft face seen thro' loosened hair  
Above me, whisp'ring as if sweet in prayer,  
'Behold, the sword! I take the sword away!'  
It curved and clashed where the strewn rushes lay;  
Shone glassy, glittering like a watery beam  
Of moonlight in the moonlight. I did deem  
She moved in sleep and dreamed perverse, nor wist  
That which she did until two fierce lips kissed  
My wondering eyes to wakement of her thought.  
Then spake I, 'Love, my word! is it then naught?  
Nay, nay, my word albeit the sword be gone! —  
And wouldst thou try me? rest thou safe till dawn!  
I will not thus forswear! my word stands fast!' —  
But now I felt hot, desperate kisses cast

On hair, eyes, throat and lips and over and over,  
Low laughter of 'Sweet wretch! and thou – a lover?  
What is that word if she thou gavest it  
Unbind thee of it? lo, and she sees fit!  
Ah, Morgane, Morgane, then I knew 'twas thou,  
Thou! thou! who only could such joy allow."

"And, oh, unburied passion of that night;  
The sleepy birds too early piped of light;  
Too soon came Light girt with a rosy breeze,  
Strong from his bath, to wrestle with the trees,  
A thewy hero; and, alas! too soon  
Our scutcheoned oriel stained was overstrewn  
Of Dawn's air-jewels; then I sang a strain  
Of sleep that in my memory strives again:

"Ethereal limbed the lovely Sleep should sit,  
Her starbeam locks with some vague splendor lit,  
Like that the glow-worm's emerald radiance sheds  
Thro' twilight dew-drops globed on lily-beds.  
Her face as fair as if of graven stone,  
Yet dim and airy us a cloud alone  
In the bare blue of Heaven, smiling sweet,  
For languorous thoughts of love that flit and fleet  
Short-rainbow-winged about her crumpled hair;  
Yet on her brow a pensiveness more fair,  
Ungraspable and sad and lost, I wist,  
Than thoughts of maiden whom her love hath kissed,  
Who knows, thro' deepening eyes and drowsy breath,  
Him weeping bent whiles she drifts on to death.  
Full sweet and sorrowful and blithe withal  
Should be her brow; not wholly spiritual,  
But tinged with mortal for the mortal mind,  
And smote with flushings from some Eden wind;  
Hinting at heart's ease and a god's desire  
Of pleasure hastening in a garb of fire  
From some dim country over storied seas  
Glassed of content and foamed of mysteries.  
Her ears two sea-pearls' morning-tender pink,  
And strung to harkening as if on a brink  
Night with profundity of death and doubt,  
Yet touched with awfulness of light poured out.  
Ears strung to palpitations of heart throbs  
As sea-shells waver with dim ocean sobs.  
One hand, curved like a mist on dusking skies,  
Hollowing smooth brows to shade dark velvet eyes, —  
Dark-lashed and dewed of tear-drops beautiful, —  
To sound the cowering conscience of the dull,  
Sleep-sodden features in their human rest,

Ere she dare trust her pureness to that breast.  
Large limbs diaphanous and fleeced with veil  
Of wimpled heat, wove of the pulsing pale  
Of rosy midnight, and stained thro' with stars  
In golden cores; clusters of quivering bars  
Of nebulous gold, twined round her fleecily.  
A lucid shape vague in vague mystery.  
Untrammelled bosoms swelling free and white  
And prodigal of balm; cupped lilies bright,  
That to the famished mind yield their pure, best,  
Voluptuous sleep like honey sucked in rest."

Thus they communed. And there her castle stood  
With slender towers ivied o'er the wood;  
An ancient chapel creeper-buried near;  
A forest vista, where faint herds of deer  
Stalked like soft shadows; where the hares did run,  
Mavis and throstle caroled in the sun.  
For it was Morgane's realm, embowered Gore;  
That rooky pile her palace whence she bore  
With Urience sway; but he at Camelot  
Knew naught of intrigues here at Chariot.

## II

**NOON**; and the wistful Autumn sat among  
The lurid woodlands; chiefs who now were wrung  
By crafty ministers, sun, wind and frost,  
To don imperial pomp at any cost.  
On each wild hill they stood as if for war  
Flaunting barbaric raiment wide and far;  
And burnt-out lusts in aged faces raged;  
Their tottering state by flattering zephyrs paged,  
Who in a little fretful while, how soon!  
Would work rebellion under some wan moon;  
Pluck their old beards deriding; shriek and tear  
Rich royalty; sow tattered through the air  
Their purple majesty; and from each head  
Dash down its golden crown, and in its stead  
Set there a pale-death mockery of snow,  
Leave them bemoaning beggars bowed with woe.  
Blow, wood-wind, blow! now that all's fresh and fine  
As earth and wood can make it; fresh as brine  
And rare with sodden scents of underbrush.  
Ring, and one hears a cavalcade a-rush;  
Bold blare of horns; shrill music of steel bows; —  
A horn! a horn! the hunt is up and goes

Beneath the acorn-dropping oaks in green, —  
Dark woodland green, a boar-spear held between  
His selle and hunter's head, and at his thigh  
A good, broad hanger, and one fist on high  
To wind the rapid echoes from his horn,  
That start the field birds from the sheavéd corn,  
Uphurled in volleys of audacious wings,  
That cease again when it no longer sings.  
Away, away, they flash a belted band  
From Camelot thro' that haze-ghostly land;  
Hounds leashed and leamers and a flash of steel,  
A tramp of horse and the long-baying peal  
Of stag hounds whimp'ring and – behold! the hart,  
A lordly height, doth from the covert dart;  
And the big blood-hounds strain unto the chase.  
A-hunt! a-hunt! the *pryce* seems but a pace  
On ere 'tis wound; but now, where interlace  
The dense-briered underwoods, the hounds have lost  
The slot, there where a forest brook hath crossed  
With intercepting waters full of leaves.  
Beyond, the hart a tangled labyrinth weaves  
Thro' dimmer boscage, and the wizard sun  
Shapes many shadowy stags that seem to run  
Wild herds before the baffled foresters.  
And treed aloft a reckless laugh one hears,  
As if some helping goblin from the trees  
Mocked them the unbayed hart and made a breeze  
His pursuivant of mocking. Hastening thence  
Pursued King Arthur and King Urience  
With one small brachet, till scarce hear could they  
Their fellowship far-furthered course away  
On fresher trace of hind or rugged boar  
With haggard, hairy flanks, curled tusks and hoar  
With fierce foam-fury; and of these bereft  
The kings continued in the slot they'd left.  
And there the hart plunged gallant thro' the brake  
Leaving a torn path shaking in his wake,  
Down which they followed on thro' many a copse  
Above whose brush, close on before, the tops  
Of the large antlers swelled anon, and so  
Were gone where beat the brambles to and fro.  
And still they drave him hard; and ever near  
Seemed that great hart unwearied; and such cheer  
Still stung them to the chase. When Arthur's horse  
Gasped mightily and lunging in his course  
Lay dead, a lordly bay; and Urience  
Left his gray hunter dying near; and thence  
They held the hunt afoot; when suddenly  
Were they aware of a wide, roughened sea,



And near the wood the hart upon the sward  
Bayed, panting unto death and winded hard.  
Right so the king dispatched him and the *pryce*  
Wound on his hunting bugle clearly thrice.

As if each echo, which that wild horn's blast  
Waked from its sleep, – the quietude had cast  
Tender as mercy on it, – in a band  
Rose moving sounds of gladness hand in hand,  
Came twelve fair damsels, sunny in sovereign white,  
From that red woodland gliding. These each knight  
Graced with obeisance and "Our lord," said one,  
"Tenders ye courtesy until the dawn;  
The Earl Sir Damas; well in his wide keep,  
Seen thither with due worship, ye shall sleep."  
And then they came o'erwearied to a hall,  
An owlet-haunted pile, whose weedy wall  
Towered based on crags rough, windy turrets high;  
An old, gaunt giant-castle 'gainst a sky  
Wherein the moon hung foam-faced, large and full.  
Down on dank sea-foundations broke the dull,  
Weird monotone of ocean, and wide rolled  
The watery wilderness that was as old  
As loud, defying headlands stretching out  
Beneath still stars with a voluminous shout  
Of wreck and wrath forever. Here the two  
Were feasted fairly and with worship due  
All errant knights, and then a damsel led  
Each knight with flaring lamp unto his bed  
Down separate corridors of that great keep;  
And soon they rested in a heavy sleep.

And then King Arthur woke, and woke mid groans  
Of dolorous knights; and 'round him lay the bones  
Of many woful champions mouldering;  
And he could hear the open ocean ring  
Wild wasted waves above. And so he thought  
"It is some nightmare weighing me, distraught  
By that long hunt;" and then he sought to shake  
The horror off and to himself awake;  
But still he heard sad groans and whispering sighs,  
And deep in iron-ribbed cells the eyes  
Of pale, cadaverous knights shone fixed on him  
Unhappy; and he felt his senses swim  
With foulness of that cell, and, "What are ye?  
Ghosts of chained champions or a company  
Of phantoms, bodiless fiends? If speak ye can,  
Speak, in God's name! for I am here – a man!"  
Then groaned the shaggy throat of one who lay

A dusky nightmare dying day by day,  
Yet once of comely mien and strong withal  
And greatly gracious; but, now hunger-tall,  
With scrawny beard and faded hands and cheeks:  
"Sir knight," said he, "know that the wretch who speaks  
Is but an one of twenty knights here shamed  
Of him who lords this castle, Damas named,  
Who mews us here for slow starvation keen;  
Around you fade the bones of some eighteen  
Tried knights of Britain; and God grant that soon  
My hunger-lengthened ghost will see the moon,  
Beyond the vileness of this prisonment!"  
With that he sighed and round the dungeon went  
A rustling sigh, like saddened sin, and so  
Another dim, thin voice complained their woe: —

"He doth enchain us with this common end,  
That he find one who will his prowess bend  
To the attainment of his livelihood.  
A younger brother, Ontzlake, hath he; good  
And courteous, withal most noble, whom  
This Damas hates – yea, ever seeks his doom;  
Denying him to their estate all right  
Save that he holds by main of arms and might.  
And thro' puissance hath he some fat fields  
And one rich manor sumptuous, where he yields  
Belated knights host's hospitality.  
Then bold is Ontzlake, Damas cowardly.  
For Ontzlake would decide by sword and lance  
Body for body this inheritance;  
But Damas dotes on life so courageless;  
Thus on all knights perforce lays coward's stress  
To fight for him or starve. For ye must know  
That in his country he is hated so  
That no helm here is who will take the fight;  
Thus fortunes it our plight is such a plight."  
Quoth he and ceased. And wondering at the tale  
The King was thoughtful, and each faded, pale,  
Poor countenance still conned him when he spake:  
"And what reward if one this battle take?"  
"Deliverance for all if of us one  
Consent to be his party's champion.  
But treachery and he are so close kin  
We loathe the part as some misshapen sin,  
And here would rather dally on to death  
Than serving falseness save and slave our breath."

"May God deliver you for mercy, sirs!"  
And right anon an iron noise he hears

Of chains clanked loose and bars jarred rusty back,  
The heavy gate croak open; and the black  
Of that rank cell astonished was with light,  
That danced fantastic with the frantic night.  
One high torch sidewise worried by the gust  
Sunned that lorn den of hunger, death and rust,  
And one tall damsel vaguely vested, fair  
With shadowy hair, poised on the rocky stair.  
And laughing on the King, "What cheer?" said she;  
"God's life! the keep stinks vilely! and to see  
So noble knights endungeoned hollowing here  
Doth pain me sore with pity – but, what cheer?"

"Thou mockest us; for me the sorriest  
Since I was suckled; and of any quest  
To me the most imperiling and strange. —  
But what wouldst thou?" said Arthur. She, "A change  
I offer thee, through thee to these with thee,  
And thou but grant me in love's courtesy  
To fight for Damas and his livelihood.  
And if thou wilt not – look! thou seest this brood  
Of lean and dwindled bellies specter-eyed,  
Keen knights erst who refused me? – so decide."  
Then thought the King of the sweet sky, the breeze  
That blew delirious over waves and trees;  
Thick fields of grasses and the sunny earth  
Whose beating heat filled the red heart with mirth,  
And made the world one sovereign pleasure house  
Where king and serf might revel and carouse;  
Then of the hunt on autumn-plaintive hills;  
Lone forest chapels by their radiant rills:  
His palace rich at Caerlleon upon Usk,  
And Camelot's loud halls that thro' the dusk  
Blazed far and bloomed a rose of revelry;  
Or in the misty morning shadowy  
Loomed grave for audience. And then he thought  
Of his Round Table and that Grael wide sought  
In haunted holds on demon-sinful shore;  
Then marveled of what wars would rise and roar  
With dragon heads unconquered and devour  
This realm of Britain and pluck up that flower  
Of chivalry whence ripened his renown:  
And then the reign of some besotted crown,  
A bandit king of lust, idolatry —  
And with that thought for tears he could not see:  
Then of his greatest champions, King Ban's son,  
And Galahad and Tristram, Accolon:  
And then, ah God! of his dear Guenevere,  
And with that thought – to starve and moulder here? —

For, being unfriend to Arthur and his court,  
Well wist he this grim Earl would bless that sport  
Of fortune which had fortun'd him so well  
To have to starve his sovereign in a cell. —  
In the entombing rock where ground the deep;  
And all the life shut in his limbs did leap  
Thro' eager veins and sinews fierce and red,  
Stung on to action, and he rose and said:  
"That which thou askest is right hard, but, lo!  
To rot here harder; I will fight his foe.  
But, mark, I have no weapons and no mail,  
No steed against that other to avail."

"Fear not for that; and thou shalt lack none, sire."  
And so she led the path: her torch's fire  
Scaring wild spidery shadows at each stride  
From cob-webbed coignes of scowling passes wide,  
That labyrinth'd the rock foundation strong  
Of that ungainly fortress bleak of wrong.  
At length they came to a nail-studded door,  
Which she unlocked with one harsh key she bore  
Mid many keys bunched at her girdle; thence  
They issued on a terraced eminence.  
Beneath the sea broke sounding; and the King  
Breathed open air that had the smell and sting  
Of brine morn-vigored and blue-billowed foam;  
For in the East the second dawning's gloam,  
Since that unlucky chase, was freaked with streaks  
Red as the ripe stripes of an apple's cheeks.  
And so within that larger light of dawn  
It seemed to Arthur now that he had known  
This maiden at his court, and so he asked.  
But she, well-tutored, her real person masked,  
And answered falsely; "Nay, deceive thee not;  
Thou saw'st me ne'er at Arthur's court, I wot.  
For here it likes me best to sing and spin  
And work the hangings my sire's halls within:  
No courts or tournaments or gallants brave  
To flatter me and love! for me – the wave,  
The forest, field and sky; the calm, the storm;  
My garth wherein I walk to think; the charm  
Of uplands redolent at bounteous noon  
And full of sunlight; night's free stars and moon;  
White ships that pass some several every year;  
These lonesome towers and those wild mews to hear."  
"An owlet maid!" the King laughed. But, untrue  
Was she, and of false Morgane's treasonous crew,  
Who worked vile wiles ev'n to the slaying of  
The King, half-brother, whom she did not love.

And presently she brought him where in state  
This swarthy Damas with mailed cowards sate...

King Urience that dawning woke and found  
Himself safe couched at Camelot and wound  
In Morgane's arms; nor weened he how it was  
That this thing secretly had come to pass.  
But Accolon at Chariot sojourned still  
Content with his own dreams; for 'twas the will  
Of Morgane thus to keep him hidden here  
For her desire's excess, where everywhere  
In Gore by wood and river pleasure houses,  
Pavilions, rose of rock for love carouses;  
And there in one, where 'twas her dearest wont  
To list a tinkling, falling water fount, —  
Which thro' sweet talks of idle paramours  
At sensuous ease on tumbled beds of flowers,  
Had caught a laughing language light thereof,  
And rambled ever gently whispering, "love!" —  
On cool white walls her hands had deftly draped  
A dark rich hanging, where were worked and shaped  
Her fullest hours of pleasure flesh and mind,  
Imperishable passions, which could wind  
The past and present quickly; and could mate  
Dead loves to kisses, and intoxicate  
With moon-soft words of past delight and song  
The heavy heart that wronged forgot the wrong.  
And there beside it pooled the urnéd well,  
And slipping thence thro' dripping shadows fell  
From rippling rock to rock. Here Accolon,  
With Morgane's hollow lute, one studious dawn  
Came solely; with not ev'n her brindled hound  
To leap beside him o'er the gleaming ground;  
No handmaid lovely of his loveliest fair,  
Or paging dwarf in purple with him there;  
But this her lute, about which her perfume  
Clung odorous of memories, that made bloom  
Her flowing features rosy to his eyes,  
That saw the words, his sense could but surmise,  
Shaped on dim, breathing lips; the laugh that drunk  
Her deep soul-fire from eyes wherein it sunk  
And slowly waned away to smouldering dreams,  
Fathomless with thought, far in their dove-gray gleams.  
And so for those most serious eyes and lips,  
Faint, filmy features, all the music slips  
Of buoyant being bubbling to his voice  
To chant her praises; and with nervous poise  
His fleet, trained fingers call from her long lute  
Such riotous notes as must make madly mute

The nightingale that listens quivering.  
And well he knows that winging hence it'll sing  
These aching notes, whose beauties burn and pain  
Its anguished heart now sobless, not in vain  
Wild 'neath her casement in that garden old  
Dingled with heavy roses; in the gold  
Of Camelot's stars and pearl-encrusted moon;  
And if it dies, the heartache of the tune  
Shall clamor stormy passion at her ear,  
Of death more dear than life if love be there;  
Melt her quick eyes to tears, her throat to sobs  
Tumultuous heaved, while separation throbs  
Hard at her heart, and longing rears to Death  
Two prayerful eyes of pleading "for one breath —  
An ardor of fierce life – crushed in his arms  
Close, close! and, oh, for such, all these smooth charms,  
Full, sentient charms voluptuous evermore!"  
And sweet to know these sensitive vows shall soar  
Ev'n to the dull ear of her drowsy lord  
Beside her; heart-defying with each word  
Harped in the bird's voice rhythmically clear.  
And thus he sang to her who was not there:

"She comes! her presence, like a moving song  
Breathed soft of loveliest lips and lute-like tongue,  
Sways all the gurgling forests from their rest:  
I fancy where her rustling foot is pressed,  
So faltering, love seems timid, but how strong  
That darling love that flutters in her breast!

"She comes! and the green vistas are stormed thro' —  
As if wild wings, wet-varnished with dripped dew,  
Had dashed a sudden sunbeam tempest past,  
– With her eyes' inspiration clearly chaste;  
A rhythmic lavishment of bright gray blue,  
Long arrows of her eyes perfection cast.

"Ah, God! she comes! and, Love, I feel thy breath,  
Like the soft South who idly wandereth  
Thro' musical leaves of laughing laziness,  
Page on before her, how sweet – none can guess!  
To say my soul 'Here's harmony dear as death  
To sigh wild vows, or utterless, to bless.'

"She comes! ah, God! and all my brain is brave  
To war for words to laud her and to lave  
Her queenly beauty in such vows whereof  
May hush melodious cooings of a dove:  
For her light feet the favored path to pave

With oaths, like roses, raving mad with love.

"She comes! in me a passion – as the moon  
Works madness in strong men – my blood doth swoon  
Towards her glory; and I feel her soul  
Cling lip to lip with mine; and now the whole  
Mix with me, aching like a tender tune  
Exhausted; lavished in a god's control.

"She comes! ah, Christ! ye eager stars that grace  
The fragmentary skies, that dimple space,  
Clink, and I hear her harp-sweet footfalls come:  
Ah, wood-indulging, violet-vague perfume,  
Art of her presence, of her wild-flower face,  
That like some gracious blossom stains the gloom?

"Oh, living exultation of the blood!  
That now – as sunbursts, the almighty mood  
Of some moved god, scatter the storm that roars,  
And hush – her love like some spent splendor pours  
Into it all immaculate maidenhood,  
And all the heart that hesitates – adores.

"Vanquished! so vanquished! – ah, triumphant sweet!  
The height of heaven – supine at thy feet!  
Where love feasts crowned, and basks in such a glare  
As hearts of suns burn, in thine eyes and hair,  
Unutterable with raveled fires that cheat  
The ardent clay of me and make me air.

"And so, rare witch, thy blood, like some lewd wine,  
Shall subtly make me, like thee, half divine;  
And, – sweet rebellion! – clasp thee till thou urge  
To combat close of savage kisses: surge  
A war that rubies all thy proud cheeks' shine, —

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