



JOHN AND BLONDE

IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT the person who seeks honor attains it, and the one who strives for little comes to little.¹

This is on my mind because of certain persons who know nothing but idleness and make no effort to better themselves or rise out of poverty. There is a sort of man who stays at home and is barely able to afford salt,² whereas if he went abroad he could acquire esteem, friends, and wealth. And whoever misses all this through laziness must be looked down upon by anyone respectable. We have all seen men who, if they had not stirred from their place, would never have been as well thought of as they are and would not have gained so much sense or so many possessions; for everyone shows his ability better in a country other than his own and in so doing comes to great good. When a poor gentleman remains at home for a single hour, he ought to have his eyes put out; he is only a burden to himself and to all his relatives who love him, and the others call him a wretch and avoid his company. Anyone who continues in such a life is slack in gaining respect and unfortunate and pitiable. Let him turn monk to save his soul, or else let him attend to bettering himself! If he says, "I don't know where to go," he should be roundly blamed, for every day we hear that good people are needed overseas or in Morea,³ or in many other distant countries. The man this tale is about had no inclination to being idle, but went off to a foreign land to win advantage and honor. Honor he sought, to honor he came.⁴ Here is how it happened.

In France there was a knight who as long as he bore arms had been very valiant; but with age coming upon him he stayed at home. He was well regarded by his neighbors for his hospitality. His wife was an excellent lady by whom he had six children: two daughters and four sons living.⁵ He had land that would have brought him in a good five hundred pounds a year,⁶ if the income had been free of debts and mortgages. But in his youth, by engaging in tournaments, he had incurred expenses and was now doing his best to pay them off. His holdings were at Dammartin.⁷

His eldest son was named John; he was bright, well mannered, tall, handsome, and about twenty when the story begins. This John wished to

acquire honor. His aging mother, his indebted father, his sisters, his brothers too—they were all there together. One day it occurred to him that he was wasting his time. There were plenty of people serving his father without him; and so, having an active nature, he formed the project of going off to England. He did not want to dissipate the land that his father was imprudently holding; instead, if he could, he would win a larger estate for himself.

Just as he had thought it out, so he did it. He told his parents about the venture he had in mind. They could not dissuade him from it no matter what they said, much to their distress. John proceeded to make ready for his journey; he was eager to go. One sturdy horse, and just twenty pounds, and one lad to follow him: he would take along so much and no more. If he had wished, he could have had far more, but he said it was enough and too much. Then he spoke to his friends and took leave of them all. He kissed his brothers and sisters and left them weeping for him. At that he departed with his serving lad, called Robinet.⁸ He left his father and mother overwhelmed with sorrow and departed from his native region like a man in a hurry. He scarcely stopped before reaching Boulogne. There he followed out his plan, seeking until he found a vessel, a merchants' ship; on this he crossed the "stream,"⁹ and so he arrived at Dover. He did not wish to spend more than one night there, but was on horseback at daybreak. He took the road toward London.

As he was riding along, he caught up with an earl who had had some business at the sea and was now traveling to London, where the Parliament of the English was held. John inquired of this man's retinue who he might be and learned that he was the Earl of Oxford, a rich fortified town. Hearing this, John promptly rode up to him and greeted him in his French. And the Earl, who could understand French well (he had been in France to learn it),¹⁰ without any hesitation welcomed him and inquired when he had left France and what brought him to England. John said: "Sir, indeed I shall tell you the truth about myself. I am a poor gentleman who has no master but God. And so I crossed the sea to know whether I could find someone who would accept my service and would treat me according to what he thought of it." "By my faith!" said the Earl, "it is a noble spirit that makes you look for a master. If you like, you will be my man, a squire of my house." "Many thanks, sir, I want nothing else. You show me great courtesy in adding me to your household." "What is your name, my friend?" "Sir, John is the name I was given." "John," said the Earl, "dear friend, I retain you very gladly as squire from now on." John expressed his gratitude.

This is how John was taken into service; and he conducted himself in such a way that before they reached the city all his companions thought well of

him. In London they had a fine, well-furnished lodging, where the Earl stayed as long as the Parliament lasted. The Earl ate with the King; and John, who knew very well what to do, served before him faultlessly. When it came to waiting at a great lord's table no one could have found a servant more polite, more pleasing, or more capable in every way.

When the Parliament broke up the Earl left for Oxford. They all traveled with much enjoyment, making few stops on the way. On arriving they were well received by the Countess, who loved and trusted her husband. And the Earl told her about the sense, the merit, and the goodness of John, his new retainer. This account was very pleasing to the lady. She said: "Sir,¹¹ if he is as you say, so help me God! I entreat you to put him with our daughter, to serve her, if that would be agreeable to him. For we have no other children, and it is now high time for her to have her own squire who can carve before her."¹² "Truly, lady," the Earl answered, "I think this is good advice. If he is willing to be in her service he will improve his standing with me; and I shall know it shortly."

Thereupon he summoned John, who was nearby, his only thought being to follow his lord closely so as to carry out his wishes. At the call, he approached. "John," said the Earl, "we have decided, the Countess and I, that, if it pleases you, I am to ask you to be in my daughter's service. Be sure that if you use your good sense in attending her, you will gain my favor and that of the Countess. Now do not mind doing this, since I ask it for your own benefit." "Sir," John replied, "I well understand your goodwill. Here I am, ready and eager to obey you; you have done me great honor just by making the request. Now may God grant me to do such service as to earn the good opinion of you both!" The lady said: "That is well said." And the Earl thanked him heartily for it. Then they brought him before their daughter, who did no shame to Nature, and told her that as squire they wished to give her this Frenchman. The young lady readily agreed; and so John changed from his first service. Thereupon the tables were brought out and set upon the trestles;¹³ the Earl sat down first and then the others as they liked. And John served by carving for his graceful young lady.

The damsel's name was Blonde. This was very apt, for in all the world no woman was so fair-haired. I hope that you will not mind if I speak of her a little. Her hair seemed to be of fine, shining gold, so long that she could twine it twice around her head. Her ears were lovely, white, and delicate. Her forehead was white, smooth, and unlined, her eyebrows brown, narrow, and shapely. Her nose was perfect. And her eyes! bright, clear, shining; and her glance was so engaging that there is no one, however ill, whose health would

not return if he encountered it. Her cheeks were redder than roses, the skin beside them whiter than new-fallen snow; the colors were so subtly intermingled that you could not tell which one predominated. Nature—or God Himself—had fashioned her mouth, small and well proportioned, with full red lips and small, white, perfect teeth. When she opened her mouth to speak, an odor as sweet as balm came from her breath. Someone who could kiss her just once would never again feel any distress. Her chin was white and slightly cleft. Below this her throat was tender and white, long and rounded, so transparent that when she drank red wine anyone looking closely could see the wine being swallowed. As to her body, I shall gladly describe what I can see of it, for no one should be slothful in praising a good and beautiful woman. The arms of this young lady were long and well placed; her hands were lovely, and so were her fingers, long, delicate, and straight. She was slender in waist and flanks; you could have enclosed her in two gloves. She was somewhat broader in the chest (a feature that did not diminish her beauty). Her small, developing breasts stretched her gown a little, making it all the more becoming; they were firm and youthful. She was tall and straight and slender, well made in feet and legs, neither too plump nor too thin. She was then only eighteen years old.¹⁴ In her talk she was prudent and pleasant. (When she spoke French, though, you could tell that she was not born in Pontoise.) She was sensible, modest, and courteous, so much so that no one seeing her in the morning would incur mischance throughout the day unless by thought alone, such virtue God had given her. To such a mistress John was assigned. (Let him watch out that no harm comes of it! But I believe that he will not be on his guard, not enough to avoid great suffering, as much as his heart will be able to endure.)

Such, and even more beautiful than I am relating, was Blonde, the Earl's daughter. She would sit at the table, waited on by John, whose person was noble and pleasing. He would take great pains to serve well so as to merit the approbation of them all. For he did not serve only his lady, but here and there, up and down: knights, ladies, squires, varlets, boys, and messengers. For each one he wished to do what was wanted, and by doing so he gained everyone's goodwill. He knew just how to notice the moment when he should serve and honor each diner while not neglecting the shapely Blonde. After eating they would wash their hands,¹⁵ then go off to amuse themselves as they pleased, in the forest, on the riverbank,¹⁶ or in other sorts of diversions. John would go to whichever he chose, and then when he liked he would often go to play in the Countess's chambers with the ladies, who wanted him to teach them French. As a courteous and mannerly person, he

would do and say whatever they were pleased to ask of him. He knew a good deal about society games, chess, backgammon, and dice, with which he entertained his young lady, and he showed her how to play many a game. He also helped her to speak better French than when he had come to her, and for that she liked him very much; and he exerted himself to do everything that he believed might please her. For a while he was very much at ease; it seemed to him that everyone thought well of what he did, said, and wished. But for all that, no contempt or pride ran in him. He did not care to impress others, but concentrated on serving better, putting even the envious to silence through his good sense, so that they could not find fault with him. If he had led such a life for a long time his affairs would have gone very well; but Love changed his situation and brought him up shorter than a wolf in a trap. Tristan¹⁷ never suffered from it as this man was to do in a short while.

One day Blonde was sitting at the table; John was to carve before her, as was his custom. But the person who means to leap sometimes takes a fall.¹⁸ John happened to glance at the one whom by now he had been seeing for more than eighteen weeks. But he had never before had such difficulty in tearing his eyes away; his young lady's beauty drew them by force. He was so preoccupied by the struggle that he forgot about carving, until she said to him: "John, carve! You are daydreaming!" Then John recollected himself, and carved, and was much ashamed at what she had said, for never before, while serving, had he needed to be prompted as had happened now, and he wondered what had caused it. After her words he kept his eyes lowered, not daring to raise them again as long as that meal lasted. Yet he would gladly have looked at her more than ever, for he was struck by the bow of Love;¹⁹ he had fallen into such a desire that from it he was to have many great torments.

He did not look at her again; he kept from it until the next day when she was seated at dinner. Then he was attentive to serving her as usual; but the desire from which he suffered made him raise his eyes to her, the cause of his passion. He regarded her so intently that he disregarded everything else. In this he did not know how to guard his good sense, for through this foolish regarding he was like to die without recovery. From this regard he fell into such a reverie that he forgot about carving. Seeing him abstracted like that, Blonde decided to reprove him for it, and so she told him to hurry up and carve; but he did not hear her at once. Then she said again: "John, carve!" Are you asleep here, or are you daydreaming? Please give me something to eat, and don't dream anymore!" At this John heard her and jumped just like a man awakening with a start. He was astonished at what had happened. Much embarrassed, he seized his knife and meant to carve properly; but he

was so distracted by his thoughts that he cut into two of his fingers. The blood spurted from them and he got to his feet.²⁰ Blonde saw this and was greatly distressed. John asked another squire to carve before his lady,²¹ then went off to his chamber, not at all himself. A damsel, sorry that he was hurt, bound up his fingers with a kerchief. Then he lay down. He did not dare return to where Blonde was being served, for fear of losing all his good sense and self-control. His heart swung this way and that.

Now John had a mark of Love; it was his first bit of gain. Pale and lying on his bed, he took to complaining of Love. "Oh, my!" he said. "How is it that I cannot keep my wits about me as I used to do? I see now that I was being foolish when I was twice corrected by my lady, for whom I was taken into service. And, God! Am I in her bad graces because I didn't serve her properly? I believe so. What good does it do me if my heart so dominates my eyes that they cannot keep from staring at her foolishly? Isn't her rank different from mine? Is it Love that has struck me? Love? No, it's Hate that my eyes have bestowed on me. My eyes! I am attacked by them, the eyes that ought to keep faith with me. Through their treason I shall shortly meet my death. For I've set my heart in such a place that, if I were to die for it, I should not let a word escape my mouth. And so I am affected by a poison that is perilous for me, a poison that can draw me so much that it kills me, and yet pleases me, and that I do not want ever to leave me. I'd rather die than renounce the pain I feel. If I must die for my lady, I do believe that God will put my soul in Paradise with the martyrs, for I shall be a martyr of Love. Alas! If only I had had enough self-control to be able to serve her, I ought well to have stopped at that. Am I not with her every day? Don't I have her company in play, in feasting, and in residence? What more do I want? Folly, surely. Fortune has a grudge against me and wants to bring me to such a pass that I lose what comfort I have, wants to make me die in misery. If the Countess or the Earl, or she whom I must serve, notices how it is with me, I shall not deserve their favor. They will consider me a silly dreamer and banish me at the rope's end. And I well know that they will not be able to do otherwise, for never did a man love as foolishly as I do. And I ought well to call myself foolish, loving in a sphere from which no good can come to me. If the King had no wife, he would gladly take my lady, for she will be Countess of Oxford. I shall never have anything worth what she will possess. And even if she had no treasure except for her beauty alone, still a realm would be too small for what she deserves. For I see that God has chosen to give her in one heap what others throughout the world have in moderation and measure. Nature never had anything to do with it; God Himself formed

her. She has the form of all beauty. It was for my misfortune that I saw her form thus formed, for it will be the death of me. Now there is nothing for it but to suffer as long as I can endure life. And when death comes, let it come! I can make no other bargain." This is the to-and-fro that John was in.

When those who were in the hall had eaten and then washed their hands, the ladies rose and went to sit in their chambers. But Blonde went to see John. She found him on his bed; but as soon as he saw her he quickly got to his feet. "John, are you badly hurt?" she said. "How is it with you?" "Truly, lady, yes," he said. "I don't know what happened to me. I have cut myself to the bone. But I don't care about this wound; I believe I have another illness, for I am quite downhearted. I couldn't eat yesterday or today. I feel such an oppression that I don't know what to do." "Indeed, John, I am sorry for it," said courteous Blonde. "Abstain from meat, and ask for whatever you want until you are well cured." "Lady," said John, "many thanks." Then he said to himself: "Lady, you carry away the key to my life and to my health, which has left me." But Blonde did not hear these words, for he kept them close behind his teeth.

Then she, the cause of his suffering, took leave and went from the chamber. Hurting in every limb, he escorted her with his look until she disappeared. And when the wall removed her from his sight, he fell unconscious on the bed. His lad, seeing this, believed him about to die. But by and by, from the bottom of his heart, John drew a sigh. Just then came ladies whom Blonde had sent, to see what they could do for him. They thought to serve him a well-prepared capon with expensive herbs in the broth; but he could not manage it, to their dismay. They promptly told Blonde that John could no longer eat. "Indeed," she said, "I can do nothing more. His illness distresses me very much, for he has served me wonderfully well." And John, mastered by Love, was day and night in such pain that he could no longer stay on his feet; he had to take to his bed altogether. Nothing he saw pleased him. Love assaulted him so cruelly that, now cold, now hot, dreaming at one moment and lamenting at another, he was obliged by Love to toss and turn repeatedly. He ate little, slept little, hoped little for comfort, thought little of his lot, believed he would win little of his undertaking, little believed he would achieve his desire. He could not take wine or food except when his lady ordered him to do so. As long as she was close to him, a bit of joy came to him; and when she went away, his joy turned to grief.

The Earl and the Countess heard reports of his distress and were much troubled. They went to see him and asked him what was the matter. But rather than telling them the truth about his malady, he simply said that his

heart was constricted by some disease or other that oppressed him greatly. The Earl sent for his physician and entreated him to take care of John and set him on the road to recovery. The master answered that he would do what he could to carry out his orders. Then promptly he felt John's pulse, then looked at his urine;²² but he did not know, or guess, anything about his illness, and so he said that he was at a loss. Thereupon those who were anxious about John went away, and he remained on his bed, where he had little pleasure. He was in this plight for five weeks. He suffered so much that he was nothing but skin and bones; he could scarcely form his words any longer. He expected only death, not that he thought to have any comfort from it.

Blonde, seeing him at such a point, wondered what it could mean that no physician knew how to cure him. One day she remembered the look for which she had considered him a dreamer, the day he had cut his fingers when she checked him in his reverie. After that she noticed that when she came near him he looked at her so gladly that he took notice of nothing else. For this, had she known anything about love, she would have recognized his malady. She did have an inkling that he had formed an attachment to her; but she did not believe that anyone could suffer such distress because of love, and so she became very curious about his affliction. One day she came alone to see him and to sit on the edge of his bed; and with what strength he had he heartily welcomed her. "John," she said, "good friend, tell me what has put you in such a state. I want to know; do tell me. By the faith that you owe me I beg you not to conceal it. Tell me boldly, for I pledge to you loyally that if I can seek out a cure for you, you will not be ill any longer."

When John heard her declare that she would search for a remedy for him if she had the power, a little strength returned to him, for he believed that she could heal him if it pleased her. But he had such fear of failing that he dared not take the leap toward speech, but said: "Many thanks, dear lady! Your words are very sweet to me. But I see no way that I am to be cured of this sickness, and I lack the boldness or the sense to say a word about the medicine that would put an end to this bedridden state of mine. Nevertheless there *is* medicine. If it pleased a certain person that she might wish to save me, she might well bring me out of this illness; but I shall never dare to tell her. I shall die through foolishness." "John, good friend, you will not. You will reveal to me what the matter is. I have never before entreated anything of you; now I entreat this for your own good. Tell me your malady, and I swear to you upon my life that if I know what is afflicting you I shall exert myself to heal you." "Will you, lady?" "Yes, truly. Now speak straightforwardly."

"Lady, I do not dare." "Yes, you will, indeed. Once and for all, I wish to know it." "Do you wish that, lady? And so you will know—it is through you that I am stricken."

No sooner had he said this than he fainted on the spot and remained unconscious for a long time. Now Blonde knew the reason for his illness and distress. She understood that if in her words she showed disdain for what he had told her, he would die rather than recover. And so she began to think how he might be saved. She held him between her lovely hands until he awoke from his faint and began to sigh. He would have approached death if he had waited a little longer for her to give some answer. But she said to him: "Friend! Since it is because of me that you are put in such danger, danger of death, I want to give you comfort. But now be sensible and think about getting better! For as soon as you are cured, know that you will be my good friend."²³ "Shall I, lady? Are you speaking the truth?" "Yes, friend, be sure of it." "Indeed, lady, then I shall be cured. No other illness had touched me." "Then eat, my dear friend! Let your heart be set at rest!" "Lady, I shall do as you wish. Since it pleases you, I shall eat." Thereupon Blonde went away, but returned quite soon. She had food brought to him, and John took to eating again.

After John had heard the comforting words that had turned death away, in a short time he was on the mend. The Earl was not at all sorry at this; the Countess and the other members of the household were extremely happy. And Blonde, by treating him kindly, speeded his healing. Within eight days²⁴ he was up, though he had been much affected; the hope of having a sweetheart made him promptly recover. As soon as he could get about he took to carving before his lady; and she comforted him so much (without his obtaining any more from her) that she restored him to full health. The lovely Blonde did all this because she did not want him to lose his life on her account. But when she saw him in health again she said no more about it. She believed that she had brought him to such a state that henceforth he might keep well; and so she dropped the subject, not wanting to be considered foolish. She was not yet touched by love.

When John had served her for a month and saw that she was silent and did not care to speak of love, he was at a loss. He wept, he sighed profoundly, he did not know what to say or to do, or how to understand his situation. "Alas!" he said. "Does my lady forget the promise that she made to me in my illness? Didn't she say that she would be my sweetheart if I recovered? Yes, indeed, and from that joy recovery came to me. I don't know whether or not it was a deception, for she is keeping her promise badly.

Perhaps she regrets it, or perhaps she said it so that my health might return, believing that if it did I should be at peace. This is no good; I'm in such a state that I must know, once and for all, whether I'll be able to have her love. It is not right that *she* should ask *me* about it. Perhaps she holds me in contempt because I don't dare to speak of it. I want to go straight to her to ask for what she promised me." With that he went out from his chamber to where he observed her in a meadow, making a chaplet. John came up to her and wished her good day. She answered briefly: May God give him good fortune! With that they both fell silent. John was so abashed before her that he was afraid to utter a word, yet he considered himself a fool. He thought he would ask her, straight out, whether she would keep her promise to him. He opened his mouth to say this, then closed it again, for in this matter all true lovers are cowards. Nevertheless in the end there escaped from his mouth one phrase, full of sighs. "Lady," he said, "a promise—do you remember it?—one that you made to me in my illness, one by which you brought me back to health?" "Yes, John, very well indeed, but I made it for your own good. You were dying through foolishness; now don't go back to that! My intention was to cure you; that is why I restored you to health, for you were out of your right mind. Now keep your wits better! If you take pains to serve me, you may be in a fair way to improve your position. But now do not on any account imagine from now on that I am to give you my love; I'd be lowering myself too much."

What John heard nearly broke his heart. Weeping, he said this much: "Lady, I knew very well that I was in no way suitable for you, and so if it hadn't been for your prompting, no word would have been uttered; I'd rather have died, and that would have been the end of my aspiration. Now I am back at the beginning. I don't at all wish to dispute with you; and as to giving and refusing, as to everything, I offer you great thanks. Truly, I prefer to die for you than to have comfort from any other woman. I wish to say nothing more except that I shall be in worse martyrdom before eight days have passed than I was earlier in twenty-eight. For the relapse is worse than the first affliction." After these words, he departed in tears, and Blonde went off in another direction.

John returned to his chamber. All his limbs were trembling so hard that he had to go straight to bed. He could neither eat nor drink, but grieved and felt sorry for himself. When he was not overheard he kept lamenting, saying: "Alas! Why did she cure me, only to hurt me again? And how did I ever believe that she would tell me the truth? If she had consulted me about it I am sure I should not have advised her to debase herself so far as to bestow

her love in such a place. Death, now come soon! For I see well that I am wasting my time, when the promise that restored my health is broken. She made me a pledge without fulfilling it; this is how a person may comfort a madman. Now there is nothing for it except to die, since living gives me pain. I am quite in despair; I no longer hope for anything good. Ah, me! Eyes, you have betrayed me and attacked me with such a love that I shall know death. Ah, Love! When you wish to consent to the death of your follower, your worth is the less, by Saint Amant!”²⁵

Thus John relapsed. His heart was so affected that he cared for nothing. He could not eat; and whatever might happen, Love stormed him so hard that night and day sleep was impossible. The Earl, hearing of this, was displeased, but he could do nothing about it. The Countess gave orders to serve John so well that he would lack nothing. But he was easy to serve, for his eating was very limited. His trouble so mastered him and afflicted him that he became unable to speak. The news that John was dying spread throughout the household. His lad wrung his hands over it, as did the personnel of the house, who were very fond of him. At this point Blonde, in bed, heard John's lad cry out, lamenting his master. No one ever made greater mourning. Blonde called a maid. “What is it that I hear?” she said. “Lady, it is Robin who is wringing his hands because John is dying. Already he has lost the power of speech.” Hearing this, Blonde was dismayed, for privately she knew very well what his mortal illness was and why he had it. She was aware that she could have given him encouragement, to forestall death; if there had been that much pity in her she would have cured him of this illness. Now she began to be remorseful.

Just as soon as Love felt that Blonde was at all amenable to her, she assembled all her power, great and strong, and then came to assail Blonde from all sides. These are the powers that came with Love.²⁶ First arrived Pity, which stabbed Blonde to the heart, for it greatly hated that Pride of hers that was causing the death of the one who was true toward Love. Therefore it stuck her so forcefully that it brought down all her Pride, so that it never arose in her again. After Pity came Generosity, which in turn assailed her and stirred her up, shaking and constricting her so much that it planted itself in the very place where Hardness of Heart used to be, before it fled the field. After Generosity came Reason, which held her in a tight grip because of the Unreason she was committing in letting a faithful lover die through her fault. But Reason showed her so many reasons that she no longer agreed with Unreason but wholly sided with Reason. Thus Unreason departed and Reason set itself in its place. Reason was followed by Remonstrance, which

showed the grievousness of killing a man wrongfully; this Remonstrance bit her hard. Finally came Love herself, reproaching Blonde about the unseemliness and ugliness of what had been done to Love's servant. But Love would be avenged for this if she could. Striking Blonde with all her power, she brought down Hatred and False Promise and Quarreling. They fled, driven away by Love, which took their place.

Now Blonde was well unbound from that which had bound her. She was bound with new bonds, by which her pride was brought down. When she felt herself to be thus caught, she could only lament, and said: "John, my very dear friend, I am the one who has brought you to death through great presumption, through pride and vanity. You have been my lover, and I your hater, so that as a result you are to die. Alas! It is useless for me to think of curing you, for the time has passed. I myself have brewed the misery that I shall always have, for it is I who have hurt you. I am your murderer. How empty of reason I am! Alas! How have I killed the one who loved me more than himself? Alas! Truly, I did not imagine when I had restored him by my words that later he would relapse. I see now that I could not better betray him, or myself, for the person who does not keep his promises dishonors himself. I made him a promise and did nothing further; by doing so I sent him back to death. To death? God! Will he die, then? No misadventure such as mine would be, ever happened to a woman, for I believe that I should die after him. It would serve me right; for the spark that touched his heart, the one that will be the end of him, came from me. And the woman or man who kills another is killed in turn through judgment. Thus I am guilty of his death. Evil, changeable wealth, it is you that I must hate above all things! You have contributed to my betrayal; if it were not for you, my heart would not have been too proud to help him. My wealth has harmed both him and me. When my dear friend came to me to ask whether he could have my love, I answered him only with pride. I used to be full of it. But God never wished to suffer pride to last long, and so He has brought down my own and struck my heart with pity. But if pity had seized me sooner it would have been a great courtesy, for I'd still have been able to aid the one who needed it.

"Now I see that women have a custom, a very disagreeable one: when they can possess something good they do not wish to take it, but give it so long a leash that the good thing entirely passes them by; and then when it has gone they are very sorry for not keeping it. So it is with me. For if I had kept John as my faithful lover I should not now be having so much pain. Isn't he good-looking, and a nobleman? Because he was not so noble a man as I am a woman, I have killed him. Truly, I have done him great wrong, for if he

were king of two or three realms and I were as poor a woman as any in this kingdom, I believe that he would make me queen. So it is wrong of me to harbor hatred. Hatred! Do I hate him at all? No, truly, I am his friend. His friend? I have showed it badly, by consenting to his death. Consenting? My very dear friend John, why have I given you so much suffering? Aren't you the most handsome, the most agile, the quickest, the best-serving and most sensible man who ever issued from our lineages? Yes, indeed, that is my opinion—but I come to it too late. Now there is only one thing to do: I must know whether my power can cure you; and if it cannot, in the end I shall want to die for you."

Thus Love mastered Blonde, her frame of mind much changed from what it had been on the previous morning. Weeping, sighing, empty-hearted, she was so oppressed by Love in her bed that she got up quietly and dressed in an ermine cape. In the palace at that hour there was no lady or maid who was not asleep. With no further delay Blonde slipped out of her chamber and entered the one where John was lying. A lamp with a glass shade gave her a little light.

There was no one there but Robin, who rose when he saw his lady coming and greeted her. He had perceived love in John's complaints, and knew that all his suffering came from nothing else. Blonde called him by name and asked him about his master's condition and what his illness could be. "Lady," he said, "you know very well; you have asked me to no purpose. You know the death that is touching him. I fear that God will reproach you for it. Nevertheless I can tell you this: he has never told me of his martyrdom; but I well understand from his sighs that for your love he will be a martyr, for he is already so hard pressed that he is near death." Then he wept, and she turned away, going to John's bed. She sat on the edge of it and put her hand on his forehead and then on his pulse to feel his veins, which were scarcely throbbing any longer. His eyes were closed, his body rigid, his flesh cold in many places. Over his heart there was a little warmth, which kept it alive. When she felt him to be in such a state, such grief stabbed her in the heart that she could barely say: "Friend, I am the one who has brought you to this through my pride; but because I want to make amends for the misdeed that I have done you without reason, I come here to see you at this hour. But speak to me quickly!" John heard her, but had lost the power of speech. His suffering had brought him down so much that he could not answer her immediately. His silence so distressed Blonde that she fell fainting on the bed, her head on John's chest. By this she caused him much affliction; he well understood how it was with her but was unable to utter a single word.

Gladly, if he had been able, he would have spoken to his friend; but he could not do it yet, not yet. Thereby he broke her heart; for when she came to herself, more than five hundred times she called herself a miserable wretch, the most pitiable thing alive. In anguish she grieved, saying: "Alas! Alas! Poor me! What can I say or do, when I see the one who was my faithful lover drawing toward death? Ah! Wicked, disloyal heart! I can blame nothing else but you. You committed great villainy when you refused to retain your faithful friend in your household! You made me very unfaithful when you denied him my love! It was a bad day for me when I told him that he would not have a jot of it. Now, heart, I well know that you would wish this matter might be done over again, but you will not have your wish, no more than he can have his. When he wanted you, you did not want him, and so you gave him anguish. Now you want him, but in vain; you will have nothing of what you want. He is dead through your refusal. You must suffer such a martyrdom for him as he has done for you. So you will, by the faith I owe you! You will die for it, I hope. A curse on Death if it lets you live after him the space of a week! Even this would be a long delay."

Blonde mourned so much that never in all the world did a woman come closer to dying out of love. Before she left off she thrice lost pulse and breath because of her pain, so that I believe she would have died there if it had not been for Robin. He kept fanning her with a kerchief and supporting her head when she was sinking to the floor. (Later, Robin had good land because of this.) John well heard his friend, who grieved unrestrainedly, and understood from her lament that she was not false or insincere. Although he was still so ill, his heart was a little better for it. He gave a sigh and opened his eyes. Blonde, perceiving this, fell silent and drew close to him and gave him a remedy that restored his speech. Sick as he was, she kissed him with her charming mouth. This kiss brought such sweetness to John's heart and strengthened it so greatly that speech returned to him, and he said: "Many thanks, sweet lady. You have put my soul back into my body, my soul that because of you is so stricken that it's a wonder it is not extinguished."

"My very dear friend," Blonde replied, "Will you ever be able to return to health, understanding that all the days of my life I shall want to be your faithful friend?" "Sweet lady, truly I don't know. You have put me to so harsh a test that recovery will be difficult. Nevertheless I think your power so great that, if it pleases you, I believe this illness will leave me. But for pity's sake, if I can recover, do not again send me toward death! Nevertheless, according to your will I wish to rejoice or suffer." "Dear friend, do not fear suffering. From this moment I am yours. By this kiss that I give you I make

of myself a gift to you forever—in the way that you will hear: you will not enjoy my body except for embracing and kissing. That far I am willing to gratify you; but you will gain nothing else until we shall be able to be joined in marriage. You must agree to this.” John was not discouraged by such words, but said: “Many thanks! Lady, many thanks for this! My heart would be much at fault if I asked for more. Unless another man is to have you, I shall have to await the proper moment.” “Dearest friend, have no fear, for I give myself to you so entirely that no other man, ever, by any means will have either my body or my heart. Set your mind at ease.” At this word she kissed him tenderly.²⁷ This took away much of John’s distress. Her sweet breath comforted him so gently that it drove away Despair and filled him with Sweet Hope. Removing all pain from his heart, Hope lodged close to it a guest called True Comfort. By this sweet guest, Discomfiture, Sad Thought, and Despair were all cast out of John’s heart and True Comfort took their place. After this Blonde said: “My dear, you must take to eating to restore your health.” “Lady, at your order.” Thereupon, quickly Robin and his lady spread out a tablecloth. Blonde gave him a cold chicken accompanied by juice from green grapes. Nor did she let Robin touch it, but with her lovely hands she served him, and so he was well all the sooner. And John, who needed it, took to eating gladly.

When he had consumed as much of the chicken as pleased his beloved, she removed the cloth, and through the night she stayed with him. To bring him quickly back to health she wished to be there until daybreak; but then she had to leave. She said: “John, very dear friend, because of the light that has come in here I must leave you; for if anyone passed this way and perceived how it is with us, we could have difficulties. I agree to concealing our love, for in good concealment is great sense, and we obtain a good advantage in hiding our feelings carefully. For as soon as you are up you will be with me very often. By reason of being in my service you can frequently be in my company and so, at our pleasure, we shall be able to grant to each other what it pleases us to do and no living soul will know it. And when we see our moment we shall go further. Concerning what I have promised you, never fear about it, but now concentrate on getting well and do not be downcast anymore. I shall often come back to see you; I shall keep away as little as I can.” “Lady,” John said, “I willingly accept your wish and your words.”

At that Blonde left him. She kissed him gently at parting, then got up from beside him, leaving him in far less distress than when she arrived. She returned to the bed from which she had been roused by Love, who had troubled her so much. Quite naked she got into bed again²⁸ and, full of joy, fell

asleep. And John was for his part transported with happiness. Not having slept for eight days, he had been deprived of rest. But now he took to repose, and the comfort that had been restored to him hastened his recovery. When he awoke at terce his meal was ready. He was served by two damsels, both delighted to see that he ate well and seemed a good deal better than usual, for they had believed that when they arrived they would find him dead. Now they saw him comfortable and seemingly in good spirits except for being weak. At this change they were extremely glad and served him eagerly.

The news did not wait; it soon spread throughout the house that John was over his sickness. Then the Earl set forth, and the Countess and her maids, of whom she had many lovely ones. But all the beauties in the world were worth nothing beside that of Blonde, who went off with her mother and added her beauty to that of the group. The whole household went to see John, whom they all liked, in order to know whether it was true that he had recovered. They found him sitting up in bed. Courteously, together, the Earl and the Countess spoke to him. "John," they said, "how is it with you? Do you think that this illness is leaving you?" "Sir, yes," he said, "if it pleases God. The illness has turned away from me; I have been restored to health." All those who cared about him were very happy at this answer, for on the previous evening no one had believed that he would ever again utter a word. Blonde, seeing him on the mend, was much relieved. When they had stayed there for a while they took leave of John and left the chamber. John remained in his bed, where he would not stay much henceforth.

Evening and morning Love showed John the kind of game she plays with her own. He had many bad and many good things from it: the bad ones through fear of failing, the good ones through hope of possessing what Love made him desire so much that he could not live without it. After his beloved's change of heart, healing continued apace, for Blonde many times assured him of what she had promised. She would often return to see him, alone. And by night, for fear of tale bearers who stir up all kinds of trouble, she would come to visit John and cheer and entertain him. She came and went so much that John returned to health, and even better health than he ever had before. Tired of lying abed, he got up and resumed his duties, which he would not exchange for anything. At meals he served before his sweetheart, and gladly. The Earl and all members of the household were happy when they saw that he was himself again; and he served them well, earning their goodwill by it. And he was so good-looking, so well bred, and so affable, that everyone honored and congratulated him. His beloved felt

great joy, seeing that he made himself agreeable to all, both nobles and commoners; this caused the love of him to grow in her heart. Never afterward did she have second thoughts about loving him; she consented fully to her lover's will.

They were both filled with a sense of well-being when they could steal away from the others and be together; no one could believe the sweetness of it. When the others (whose notice they meant to avoid) were asleep in the palace, the lovers did not much miss their own sleep, for then they had both place and time to snatch their moments of happiness. It was then that Love united them; then they would kiss and embrace and speak tenderly to each other. Blonde called him "sweet friend," the name she had given him, and he called her "sweet lady." After these terms of endearment they would kiss each other. They took pleasure in all the games of Love, except one that Faithfulness disdains; this, they postponed until such time as, legitimately, they would achieve what they desired. (Many lovers are betrayed by impatience; they do not restrain themselves until the right moment and so their love goes badly, for at the same time they are ensnared by lust and detected through pregnancy. For anyone who is filled with foolish haste spoils his enjoyment.²⁹ What these two lovers did, they enjoyed; so pleasant to them were kissing, embracing and touching, talking, loving actions, and the gratification that they had together, arm in arm, that they consoled themselves as to the rest and conducted themselves in hope. When the time and place would come, and if in love there are other games than those I have mentioned, they would discover them.)

Circumstances regulate behavior.³⁰ Their love was not so safe that they did not need to keep a very careful watch; for if they were detected, they would be cruelly betrayed. If the Earl knew of their situation they would soon have a great deal of trouble; and so they had to be wary so that no one might perceive from their behavior the love that had taken form in their hearts without ever being deformed. It was fitting that they should conceal all signs of love; and so, very wisely, they did. When they had their private moments they did not worry about anyone arriving except for Robin, who always served them faithfully and well. (And no harm came to him for that; he knew well how to conceal their feelings, and from this he afterward had great advantages.) And the lovers, on most nights, had their delight together. They had all the more opportunity for this because everyone knew that John was obliged to serve her. For this reason he could better approach her and speak to her in all circumstances. They often played at backgammon and at other enjoyable games. But when people had gone away and they remained

alone, they rushed to embrace each other and to savor the exchange of kisses. When they could gratify themselves with embracing and kissing, life was sweet for them, and joy softened their hearts. Often they held each other entwined closely in their arms; and then when they brought their faces together it really seemed to each of them that they made an exchange of hearts. With John's heart Love enriched Blonde, who was his true friend. Yet Love did not leave her own heart to her but carried it back to John, who very gladly relinquished his own heart, since he had her own in *his* keeping. And if anyone asks how they could make exchange of their hearts, I shall tell you. I call "their hearts" their wills; and their wills were so grafted onto a common desire that of two hearts they made one will; for he wanted nothing that she did not want, and she wanted nothing that displeased him. They were both of one desire, and thus they could exchange their hearts; and if anyone understood this differently, he would not grasp the truth.

Thus they led a pleasant life, each striving to give the other greater joy. They played at love's rivalry and had much of what afforded them pleasure. For two years they carried on so, without ever being detected. But the life they had was offensive to Fortune, who is cruel toward many people; and she employed all her power, being envious and malevolent, to take away their contentment and plunge them into distress. (But they both kept themselves so firmly in one single will that, in spite of her blows, Fortune could not bring them down.) Now you will hear what befell them and what news came to them.

One day when they were sitting at the table there appeared a messenger who came before the Earl and in French began his tale. "Sir," he said, "I have been searching for a young man who, I have been told, is staying with your daughter. This young man's name is John. I bring him news; it is on this errand that I arrived from the sea at the port. If you please, have him sent for so that I can speak to him." The Earl answered: "Gladly." A squire went and found him serving in front of Blonde.³¹ "John," he said, "I come looking for you. A messenger from your land is asking the Earl about you. Come now, and you will hear his tale." Hearing this, John greatly feared losing Blonde. He went to the Earl. When the messenger saw him, he promptly recognized him. "John," he said, "I am sent to you by your father—may God give him greater joy than he had when I left! He was ill when I set out to come here, I tell you truly. His physicians were saying that he was in peril of death. I left your two sisters and your three brothers in much distress. For it is another hard piece of news, and one which I regret, that I bring you: your mother is dead. And so the members of your

family send word that you are to come away immediately, or else it will go badly for you. You are obliged to do homage to the King for the land of Dammartin.³² You must leave tomorrow morning.”

When John had heard these unwelcome tidings, he went out weeping. Many people took note of the messenger from France. From the top to the bottom of the palace ran the news he had brought; each one told it to the next. It circulated until it reached Blonde, who was sorry on her lover's account. The Earl was very concerned, and also the Countess, be sure of it, and all the others of the household, for they understood that there was no question henceforth of his remaining. And John, to mourn, went into his chamber. All his limbs ached for anguish, and propping himself on his elbow in bed he gave himself over to lamentation. He grieved deeply for the death of his mother and for his father's illness; but this was as dewdrops compared with the sorrow for the coming separation from his sweet friend. He was overtaken by such a set of trembling fears of losing her that he did not know how to comfort himself. He said: “Alas! Alas! what can I do? Now joy is at an end, when I must part from the one I cannot live without. Part? Alas! Is it certain? I'm speaking plain nonsense. If I parted from her, I know that within eight days I should die. Before I returned to my country, I'd be dead of grief. Therefore, if I love my life, I must not part from her. And so here I must remain. Remain? I haven't the power to do it; remaining is out of the question. What would they say, the people here, the Earl and the others of the household, who have heard the news? They would perceive how it is with me; for this they would perhaps put me to death, and my lady would be shamed. Alas! Therefore I shall not stay. It is better for me to die alone than that we both be put to shame. Staying or leaving—I don't know how to choose the better way, for I'll be destroyed if I go and ill-treated if I stay. Fortune, you did great wrong when you set me in so high a place only to make me descend so soon. You have turned my gold to ashes. . . .³³ From joy and gladness you have thrust me into such despair that I have no more hope of any good. Joy cannot return to me if my lady does not show me the way. Ah! God, when shall I speak with her? This day is so distressful to me; I cannot talk to her before night, when they will all be asleep in here. Tonight I must ask her advice about my predicament. She must counsel me if she wants me to go on living. There is nothing for it; I must hold out until it is night.”

Into such suffering and lamentation John had fallen in a brief time. But the Earl wanted to comfort him; the Countess came to cheer him up, and also her daughter. John's grief pierced Blonde's heart, but she dared not give

any sign of it for fear that someone might guess how it was with her. And her father commiserated with John on his mother's death. He supposed that no other trouble touched him; but John was sickened by a poison. Nevertheless as best he could he had to comfort the others. He perceived from his friend's looks that she was troubled in her heart. If for John the night was slow in coming, Blonde did not believe that the hour would ever come when she could speak to him alone. At last the day passed; the night came. There being nothing else to do, they all went to bed throughout the palace. There remained neither woman nor man who was not sleeping the first sleep except for John and Blonde.

When they were sure that all the others were asleep, they got up, both he and she, without making any disturbance. John came to his young lady, who was familiar with all the arrangements. Wisely: they did not stay indoors, lest someone overhear them, but went into an orchard where there were many lovely pear trees. The weather was mild, as it is in summer. There was a good deal of light, for the clear moon shone on them, a pleasing sight. John and Blonde stopped under the most beautiful pear tree in the world. They sat down, both weeping, for their hearts were full of distress. Mouth to mouth they leaned on their elbows, arms around each other's waists. Before they could speak they had to satisfy each other with five hundred delicious kisses, an occupation that seemed very sweet to them. There did not remain eye or face that the mouth did not trace; but their sweet faces were wet from the tears they were shedding. At last John spoke to Blonde, saying:

"Sweet lady, from you comes the life that sustains my heart, without your will I cannot live nor do I wish to; from your graciousness all health came to me, with such great comfort and joy that I could not begin to tell of it—what can I do or say about the suffering, the martyrdom I have at this parting? You have heard the news that I must go to my own country. Alas! News that disconcerts me so much that I don't know what to do. I must find counsel in you or I am destroyed. For I have indeed lost everything at one stroke if it does not please you to find some means by which I can take comfort again. Remaining here is perilous, and for me leaving is too cruel; I cannot decide either on going or on staying. If counsel does not come from you, my heart must prepare for death."

"My dearest friend," Blonde answered, "it is every bit as cruel to me, the news of this parting, as it is to you, so help me God! For I have given you my heart so entirely that, as long as I live, in no way will another man possess it.³⁴ This separation that I see we must make is so grievous to me that no one would believe how miserable I am. If you are distressed about me, I am also

about you; for, so dear God help me! If you have given your heart to me, you for your part are my true beloved; and I have showed you signs of this in promises, in words, in acts. And I shall do still more, for because of your love I shall leave everything behind and cross the sea for your sake. I see clearly that our union cannot be possible in any other way. And if you should stay here longer you would shame me and yourself also. Now I shall tell you what I have thought of, a plan for solving our problems and helping us bear our sadness. You will go away to your land to pursue and win your advancement. But I want to fix you a term—one for which I shall shed many tears because it will seem far off to me. And since I do not know what will happen to you, I want to stipulate such a term that you will have the opportunity to do all that you must. Now do not fail, for any hardship, to return here at dusk one year from this night and be sure to bring along a palfrey that does not whinny from fright, and on it a saddle for riding, a lady's saddle. And do remember, when you are about to come to me, that we are to have quick passage to the sea so that we do not stop on the shore; for we'd soon have trouble if we were followed there. And be sure that, just at nightfall, you will find me under this pear tree. But come from outside the town, so that no one may notice this stratagem. At the bottom of the garden is a gate that will be open if I can manage it; by that gate you will be able to get in here. Then there will be no question of staying; I shall go to France with you and never part from you afterward. Be sure to retain all this so that you can be here on that day, for after it I couldn't be certain about this way of proceeding. I still fear a long term. My heart suspects that the Earl will want to give me in marriage; but I love you so much that before the day I have fixed no one will take possession of me. But now think about setting to work as I have said, if you want to deal with love."

"Lady," said John, "many thanks. I understand you very well. Please God, I shall do just as you say; I'll neglect it on no account. Still the term you propose seems to me very far off. If I could be a dove every time I wished, I'd be with you very often³⁵—but this cannot be; our next meeting must happen otherwise. My failing to come on the day you have specified would be a bitter torment, for that will be the day of true comfort. Overstaying it would be the death of me." After such words the two lovers kissed each other so sweetly that a hundred times seemed to them only one. They were out there under the moon until they perceived the coming of dawn, and there could be no tarrying. They felt greatly disappointed. "Ah! God!" said John, "what misery! The night has been so short! Now we must think of other things; we must return to the palace." "You have spoken very truly, my

dear; we cannot stay here any longer." Their hearts were tender with sorrow when they came to the point of leave-taking. John said: "Adieu, my dear." His eyes were scarcely smiling, but were filled with tears; and so it was with Blonde. Weeping thus they returned, holding each other by both hands until they came back to the gate through which they had come. Now walking together was out of the question; and so they exchanged kisses and commended each other to God.

Thereupon they separated. They returned to their own beds and lay down for appearance's sake, without any hope of sleeping. They had plenty of other concerns, with what Love represented to them. The day appeared; the sun rose. John, however reluctantly, put on his clothes and boots and got ready. Attentive to serve him, Robin had already put on his saddle. And the Earl, who greatly liked and esteemed John, got up, for he knew of his departure and very much regretted it. Knowing that entreaty was useless, he did well in one regard: he had had two palfreys laden with silver coins, fine and large palfreys, and had them given to John. And then he came to speak to him and make him free of his power. "John," he said, "if you come back from France to England, you will be seneschal of my land, and complete master of my household, for your ways please me very much. I turn over to you whatever is mine and grant you the power to take it." "Sir," said John, "many thanks. I receive such words with goodwill. If it pleases God, in time I shall return and take more of what is yours." "Truly," said the Earl, "this pleases me well!" (He did not understand what it was that John meant by this; but he would come to know it.)

At that John took leave of the Earl. Then, before mounting, he went to take leave of the Countess. If I wished to attend to everything, to relate how he took leave of each one, I shouldn't finish if I spent all day at it. Still I don't want to be silent concerning one person, one who was grieved by John's setting forth. Blonde did not hide her feelings so well that people could not perceive her sadness at his departure; but everyone believed that it was because he was in her service. (And so he was without a doubt, and would be, wherever he might go.) Blonde gave him jewels: belts, clasps, and rings, which he would give to his friends. Then, weeping, he said farewell. His horse awaited him at the steps; there he went and mounted and was off. But his heart remained behind, much grieved at this journey. Robin led away one sumpter, and another was led by the messenger who had told John the unwelcome news. Thereupon they went their way until they emerged from Oxford. Blonde stayed in the palace, much downcast because of John's leave-taking. (She would fear losing him before she

could ever hold him; and he would fear failing before he could ever claim her.) Now for a time we shall leave off telling you of Blonde, and shall speak of John.

After John had left Oxford he passed swiftly through mountains and valleys, and forests long and wide, until he came to Dover. He dismounted at a lodging but did not make a long stay there, for the next day just at daybreak they embarked in a ship. Before noon they arrived at Wissant. Having no reason to remain there, they kept on riding at an amble for some days until one evening they came to Dammartin. John dismounted at the manor house where his father was still lying a-bed. The news that John had arrived was quickly announced. His brothers went to meet him and welcome him heartily. Similarly the two damsels, his sisters, who were very lovely, rejoiced over their brother. But John wept for his father, who lay gravely ill. There was to be no recovery, but he was still capable of speech; and John proved his sense of duty toward him by having him make such legacies that his soul was in true peace.³⁶ But before he passed away to death he questioned his son about his situation, and John told him something of it. He did indeed inform him that he believed he would gain a large part of what he desired across the sea, in England.

When his father heard this, he gave thanks for it to the true God. Then he charged him with his will, concerning which John acted loyally in the division with his brothers. After this the father lived only briefly before passing from this mortal world. Grief for him wore John out; his sisters and his three brothers also lamented their father. He was buried without delay when the high mass had been sung. The children returned home; all the neighbors comforted them, and also their relatives, who were there; for the family had the highest lineage that was known in that region. They all mourned until they had to attend to other things. (From mourning nothing can be obtained except grief and mischance. The way of the world is such that all die, the one and the other. The one must therefore not mock the other. Long ago it was said, it seems to me: the dead with the dead, the living with the living.³⁷ As long as each person can live, let him do the best he can, and let him keep himself in such faithfulness that for his soul's sake he may come to a good end!)

Once his father was dead, John had to take hold of himself. On his friends' advice he went off to the King at Paris, for the homage that he had to do him. The King inquired about his situation. From what he learned about it he thought well of John and proclaimed him free of his relief. If John had been minded to serve him, the King would have retained him gladly; but

John's thoughts were on another matter. Nevertheless he exerted himself to place with the King his three brothers, handsome and well behaved. (They served him gladly until he later made them knights and gave them wives and land. Thus everyone should seek his own good.)

After John had seen to all this, with the King's leave he departed from him and also from the Queen, who would gladly have retained his two sisters if he had wished. This, though, did not suit him; he wanted to keep them with him. He also thought that, if he could have his sweet friend at Dammartin, they would keep her company. He returned to Dammartin, but made a very short stay there. Instead, he went riding about the region, going everywhere to see his friends; and to establish good relations he went to keep company with the best. He took them with him to Dammartin and went to great lengths to honor them. Although he had brought back a good deal of money from England, he had soon spent it. He paid his father's debts and satisfied all his creditors. His sisters kept his household so well that there was none such in the region; and he strove as much as he could to have his neighbors' friendship. He did so much by manner and good sense that from the sea to Sens there was no squire better loved or more esteemed for goodness.

But whatever life he led, love still remained in his heart. Don't think that he forgot the day he had fixed with his beloved. All that year there were not three days that did not to him seem a month. Never before had he known so long a year; awaiting its end gave him great distress. But nevertheless with much difficulty he let elapse so many weeks that at last it was time to leave. And so John saw to the readying of a palfrey that ambled so well, in all the world there was nothing like him. One morning something he had ordered arrived from Paris: a sidesaddle with short hangings, padded with cotton, and a rich bridle of silk. No one knew what he meant to do with them except Robin, who knew how matters stood; but he was so discreet about his master's doings that he betrayed him to no one. When John had everything needful he awaited the coming of the day when it would be time to set out. He knew well how long it would take him to get to his beloved. But now we shall leave off telling you about him and shall turn to Blonde, who was innocent of false love.

Here the tale relates that not long after John had departed, so strong a fever took hold of the Countess of Oxford that she passed away from the world. The Earl wore himself out with mourning. Blonde, very much affected, was more overcome than all the others. The Countess was laid in the earth in her proper place, as was suitable for such a lady. After her death the Earl of Gloucester made inquiries about the mind and manners of the lovely and

courteous Blonde, for he regretted not having asked for her long since. This Earl was lord of much land, a third of it in England. He came to the Earl of Oxford and talked to him until a day was fixed for him to be betrothed to Blonde—before John was to return! Lovely Blonde soon learned of this and had much heartache from it, for she had set her intentions elsewhere. And so she was far from pleased by what many people were saying, who in their talk were giving her a man for whom she did not care in the slightest. She did not at all have such a heart as many women in the world have, whose feelings keep shifting as the weathercock turns with the wind. Such women are called “Trust-her-not.” Blonde did not wish to be one of them.

Her father came to her one day and said: “Daughter, soon you will be Countess of Gloucester, if it pleases you to be so. I have set the day of the betrothal; now let us set the wedding day.” He really believed that this news would be agreeable to his daughter. And it was so bitter to her that she answered: “Sir, for God’s sake, let be! I do not wish to marry now. For God’s sake, I ask you for a postponement.” Her father, irritated, told her that she would have a husband, and without any long delay. Thereupon he left without saying anything more; and Blonde remained in grief and distress, for fear of losing John.

“Alas!” she said. “Dear friend, what a miserable state you will be in when you learn that another man will have me! Have me? Indeed, he will not! I am quite disconcerted and at odds with true love when I said just now that someone else would have me. So help me God! That one who wants me would empty the sea before he could have my company. And how can I get out of it? I see my father besotted with the idea; he wants me to take that man in marriage. He left me in indignation because I even asked for a delay. Now I well see that good thinking is called for, if I want to save my true friend from death. Isn’t he to come for me and carry me away from this land with my consent? I’d be killing kill him intentionally if I gave myself to anyone else. If this man here has more money and more land than the one who is to come for me, shall I then let my friend die of grief as his reward? Indeed not! For no treasure is as good as a good body, and there cannot be a happier life than that of lover and sweetheart. Therefore I’d make a bad bargain if I lost a handsomer and better man, and also true love, for wealth. I will not change my situation, not for any coercion that anyone might use against me. I haven’t got the power, and I don’t want to! I suffer at the very thought of it. If John were dressed in sackcloth and this man in the richest fabric that could be made, of gold thread, my friend would still be more handsome. In him I see nothing to blame, no reason why I should not love him. He is

sensible, good-looking, and courteous—and a nobleman, a French one. His French speech is worth more than Gloucester's riches. The joy of holding him in my arms outweighs the county of Gloucestershire. I know this much of John and of his nature: I cannot have a better man. What do I care about riches and possessions? Two kisses of love are worth more than a purse full of coins. We shall have plenty to live on. But how shall I keep free of this other man, until John comes and takes me to his own country? From now until the day that I set for him there remain, I think, only four months in all. If I could bring it about that my friend's fixed day should come before this man secures me, I'd care little about his arrogance once I had crossed the sea. Now there is nothing for it, except that I must make this agreement cleverly."

Blonde was in great distress out of her love of John. In anguish of mind she fretted and complained. But she dissimulated before her father, who one day came back to see her. He had her sit down beside him to know whether he could bring her around to being willing to accept the Earl of Gloucester. "Daughter," he said, "what can this be, that you do not want to take as husband the greatest man in England?" "Sir," she said, "so I shall. Since it pleases you, I shall take him. But I asked for a delay because it is only a short time ago that my lady mother died. This is what makes me sad. This is why I asked you for a postponement, not because I am not ready to do your will. I did it only on account of the festivities, which I wanted to put off; and I entreat you about this again." The father, who was a decent man, saw merit in the reason that his daughter put before him for wanting the postponement. He said: "Daughter, when will you want to be thinking about his betrothing you? Provided that too long a term does not cause problems, I shall put off that day in order to indulge your wish." "Sir," she answered, "in five months." "Indeed, my child, in three. That is still a very long postponement. A person can day-dream at leisure and to no purpose, while he might act to his advantage. And I should commit an offense toward him, if I fixed such a far-off day with him or held him to his word. You must name a closer date; you will not have that long a stay." "Sir, then let it be in four months; that day will be my choice." "Daughter, do you wish it so?" "Yes, sir, I beg of you." "And you will have it. But know well that you would not have a different day for anything. Four months from today by our agreement he will come into this palace to betroth you. The next day you will be wed, without any more delay." "Sir," she said, "I accept, since I can make no other arrangement." Her situation was very much constrained, for the day that John had accepted was that very day precisely, and she could make no further postponement. And the Earl took a messenger and wrote a letter informing the Earl of Gloucester that the day he

had fixed with him for Blonde could not be so soon, but that without any further problem he was to come to the palace in four months; he, the Earl of Oxford, would be ready to keep his pledge to him. After that day he would not request another. Let him come and get her and take her away!

When the letter was sealed he delivered it to the messenger, who did not dawdle but soon arrived at Gloucester. When the other Earl received this news, it was most gratifying to him, for on the day specified he thought to accomplish his desire. (Now he thought he held in his hand something from which he was far removed. It would not go as he believed; John would play a trick on him.) He gave enough money to the messenger to make him rich all his life. The messenger gladly took the money and then set out on the return trip, traveling hard and fast until he was back in Oxford. There he related to his lord how the Earl had greatly rejoiced at what had been communicated to him. On hearing this, the Earl of Oxford was much pleased. But Blonde was scarcely happy, for the time agreed upon was too close. (Now let John be sure not to delay! For much can be lost in a short while. If he tarried too long, he would have a loss that would be plain to his heart, which would be stabbed with great grief. Let him take good care lest he come too late! But I know him to be so sensible that he will avoid this misfortune.)

Time had so run on that John left France, he and Robin; he did not want to take along any other companion. He told his sisters that he would return in good time, that nothing would delay him; but they were to keep the house in such trim that on his return it would be so fine, so comfortable, so noble that it might please everyone. They assured him that they would carry out his instructions wholeheartedly. John kissed them and then departed; he was impatient to see Blonde. Robin led away the fine palfrey. The two of them took to the road and traveled fast until they came to the sea. There they scarcely halted, but crossed it in a ship, not stopping until Dover. Then John spoke to the captain: "Friend, do you want to make some money?" "Yes, indeed, sir, gladly." "You will have," he said, "as many coins as you wish to take from me, provided that you await me on this shore night and day. I shall not be too long; within eight days I'll return here. Take ten pounds that I have here, as compensation for the wait." Pleased, the other man took them, and then promised to do his will.

Now John had assurance. Thereupon he left the captain and rode day and night until he came to London. He dismounted at a lodging that was comfortable and handsome. Robin, useful and quick, put his horses into the stable. John meanwhile emerged from the house; in front of him, across the

street, he saw a great retinue dismounted: squires, men-at-arms, knights, clerks, priests, serving boys, and horse drivers. John was curious about who they were, what they wanted, where they were going. He advanced upon a squire, who knew something of the language of France. "Who may these people be?" he said. "It is," said the other, "the Earl of Gloucester, who comes to busy himself in London. And tomorrow without staying longer he will go off to betroth a woman, the most beautiful in this kingdom. In fact the day for this fell some time ago, but her father canceled it; he informed the Earl that he should wait for four months, and then he should come to his house and take her away, and he would divide his land with him. Now, this Thursday falls the day, and so no long stay here is worth anything. There is only tomorrow between the two days. He might well be so slack that he would lose the beauty of the world." "What is her name?" "Her name is Blonde."

When John heard Blonde named he promptly took to shedding tears. He had been a happy man on going to the squire, but he departed from him very troubled. Sadly he went to his lodging, where he found his lad Robin. He said to him, weeping: "Robin, we have wasted our journey. I have fallen from so high to so low! I am the most miserable person that can either live or die. There has been weighed out for me, at the heaviest, misadventure and mischance. Never before did a wretch have such a fate. Fortune has mocked me, has thrown me quite under her wheel, but without my being able ever to rise again." "Sir, if you don't mind, tell me the cause of this trouble. Distress comes to many a man of worth, and also it often happens that people fear something that is quickly disposed of." "Robin, it's true. Now I'll tell you why I am so heavyhearted." Then and there he told him the squire's news, word for word. When Robin heard about the counterorder that was made early on, he said, "You don't know how to grasp any comfort; you always expect to lose. You heard that the first day chosen was put off for four whole months. You know, I believe my young lady obtained such an alteration for your sake; for it strikes me that your situations fall together quite exactly at a single point. I infer from this that she can't get a longer delay. Now, don't be discouraged and don't put off your journey, for I believe you will find her. My heart tells me that you will have her." "Robin, said John, "many thanks, for you have given me good comfort. But if my beloved has had a change of heart, she has brought death upon me."

Thereupon Robin served their supper. The hour was late. John ate, then went to bed, there being nothing else to do. But that night he watched the other lodging, having no desire for sleep. He sighed the night away.

Uneasiness troubled him a great deal; and he kept remembering Blonde's great beauty and the delight he had had with her. Then he would think himself betrayed and would say: "Wretch, what does it matter what I have had, if I lack it now? The more I hoped, the more cruelly I'd die if I lost her now. Women's hearts are so changeable that they are soon brought around; and so I fear that she has forgotten me. And this would be no wonder, for she is by no means my equal. How could she refuse an earl for a man of whom no one takes any account? People would impute it to madness. What does my ruin matter to her? What does it matter? It *must* matter, if she looks at it properly; for she promised me, I well remember, that she would love me so well that for my sake she would cross the sea. She set a day for me to come and fetch her, and so I came back into this country, for the day comes around this Thursday. But as to that promise—if she doesn't wish to keep it, it will be the death of me, and she will have killed me very unjustly, for she well knows the pain I feel. Truly, now I am doing her wrong, when I believe that she is unfaithful. And it is right for me to be remorseful at the very thought; for my heart is too unstable. I ought not to have believed, on any account, remembering how matters seemed at our separation, that she had withdrawn her love from me. Didn't Robin tell me just now (please God that he was a true seer!) that she must have postponed the betrothal day entirely out of love for me? Yes, and I must believe it, for no lover ought to mistrust his beloved without a real reason. I shall have to make amends to her; then let the penalty be of her choosing! I shall not be in despair until I know the truth; but I'll go off in the company of that man who goes to betroth my beloved. And I'll watch his actions until I come close to the place where the day of my well-being is, the day about which I've had many bitter thoughts."

Thus John kept sleepless vigil through the night. He rose and got ready just as soon as the dawn came; and Robin was already up and had saddled his horses. Similarly the Earl of Gloucester got himself quickly on the road. He did not want to make a long stay there, being very impatient for the hour when he would have his beloved in his possession; therefore he set out early. The throng of his people was very large, and John soon joined them; nevertheless they did not have his friendship. They rode rapidly until they emerged from London. The Earl of Gloucester noticed John (but did not know who he was, never having seen him before), and he had the whim to ask him where he was going, where he came from, and how. Because of John's clothes, which he saw to be French, he gathered that he had been born around Pontoise; and so he wanted to speak French to him, but his language kept turning into English.³⁸ John greeted him first, and he promptly

answered: "Friend, well be you come! How was your name call?" "Sir," he said, "my name is Walter; I was born near Montdidier." "Walter! Devil! That was foolish name. And where you want to go soon? That lad was he your people, who was mounted on good horse?" "Yes, sir, he is in my service. He keeps that palfrey for me." "Want it you to sell? I buy, if you want to give reasonable. It be very good take money." "Sir, I shall sell it gladly," said John, "for I am a merchant. If you wish to have this one, I shall want to take as much as I desire of your possessions. Otherwise, I shall not sell it, not at any price." "Nay, by crown of God, nay, nay! What the Devil! This will be too dear. In you is good, complete fool. I no more want it, you keep quiet." "Sir," said John, "I can no more." The Earl laughed and joked a great deal about the possessions asked of him. (Nevertheless if he were to hand them over and to give him everything he had, he would still not have obtained the palfrey, for John loved it as well as himself; upon it he hoped to mount Blonde and bring about his own happiness.) With that they dropped the subject and attended to the journey.

Toward prime came a shower that annoyed the Earl greatly, since he was dressed in clothes of green silk, and so was wet through before the rain ended. And never, for protection, did he have sense enough to put on any outer wrap, and there was no one who offered him one. John observed this and laughed; and the Earl, who saw him laughing, entreated him to tell him "By faith he owes all French, for what thing was given laugh." John said: "I shall tell you, without lying by a single word. If I were as rich a man as you are, I'd always carry with me a house in which I could take shelter, and so I shouldn't get dirty or wet, as you are." The Earl laughed at this response and said to his followers: "Companions, have you hear very best foolish French that you can ever look, who wanted me for me to shelter make carry with me my house? Have you hear good rascal?" "Sir," each of them answered him, "know you, all true French are more foolish than a silly sheep." John well heard their words, but he never gave a sign. All the English went mocking him, saying: "In him is very good fool." John was silent, he did not answer a word.

In such raillery they rode along until they approached a river that had to be forded. The Earl was pleased to rush first into the ford. But he did not know the best crossings, and so he strayed so far from the right path that he nearly drowned. He fell into a hole and was brought down from his horse by the water, which surprised him by its current; and he swallowed some of it (and little do I care!). He would have died there if a fisherman had not come along in a boat and been quickly hailed by the Earl's men, for they dared not

go to their lord's rescue because they feared the water. But the fisherman promptly came up to the Earl, who was having a drink. (But he would scarcely get drunk; there was more water than wine there.) The fisherman put him in his boat, much to the Earl's relief. They went in search of the horse, which was floating downstream. With the boat hook they caught it by its reins, then navigated until, with some difficulty, they emerged onto land on the far side. And the Earl's men went looking for the ford until they found it, and crossed over very smoothly.

John and Robin likewise crossed the ford prudently. On the other side they came up to the Earl, much embarrassed because his belt and shirt and tunic were in such a state that they would never be useful to him again. His packhorses, with his other clothes, were well behind him; if he wanted to wait for them without changing to dry clothing, he might well shiver with cold. And so he made one of his knights take off his shirt and tunic, and the Earl quickly put them on. And the knight went wringing out the clothes that had been around the Earl, then put them on without delay. (Thus he had no lack of cool clothing.) Thereupon they remounted and promptly set on their way. The Earl did not say much about what had happened to him. In order to forget his misadventure he took to mocking John again about the house he had spoken of. But his mockery soon came to an end, for John told him something that made him laugh. "Sir," he said, "I wish once again, by your leave, to teach you one of my bits of wisdom." "Yes," answered the Earl, "all time say you what you wants." John said:

"Sir," he said, "know without a doubt that if I could lead such a retinue as you do, owing to your means, never, truly, should I cross such dangerous water without a bridge; I'd take my bridge with me, a good, solid one. Then I'd cross with confidence." All the Englishmen who heard this made great sport of it. The Earl, who believed John to be touched in the head, enjoyed it very much; they all thought him a good fool. And John, hearing himself made fun of, did not answer a word. Mocking him, they rode on until they approached Oxford, for they were in great haste. The company had made a very long day's journey, not having stopped for dinner or for anything else, since the Earl did not dare let pass the hour when he expected to obtain his beloved. On this account he traveled so swiftly all day that before nightfall he saw Oxford, where Blonde's father awaited him. It was beginning to get dark.

When John, who knew the paths, saw himself close to Oxford, he promptly took leave. The Earl strongly reproved him for it, saying that, if he wished, he would enter the Earl's service. John replied that this would not

happen today, for he had to go elsewhere. "And where you want to turn then? Might see it already was night. You come stay with me today. Either you tell me your business or no turn you I give." "Sir," he said, "rather than remain, I shall tell you why I am turning away. Last year, fairly nearby, I noticed a very fine sparrow hawk; I was so eager to have it that I set up a trap for it. I am going to see whether I have caught it. Now I have informed you of my business." At this, all the Englishmen who heard him mocked him and laughed at him very much. And the Earl said: "Good friend, you will be mad, by Saint Badoul! Your setting-up was all rotten; no can last until now either trap or little bird. You keep quiet, come you to watch festivity of the fairest little pig of which man can kiss snout. Tomorrow you can see her wed to me, if you wants to go." "Sir," he said, "without further delay I shall go ahead to see to my trap. If it pleases God, I shall arrive at the wedding in time, before she is given to you." The Earl said, "Go you then fast! I no more keep you from wasting time." Thereupon John left the throng that was stupidly mocking him.

But he who laughs at another has the laughter turn back upon himself.³⁹ So it was with the Earl. For, as I find it in the tale, he was so devoid of sense that he was confident of very soon having Blonde. She, though, had only one heart, and had given it to someone else. This was evident; for Blonde, true and loving, had been in much distress of mind for many a week. She was very fearful of losing her beloved, on whom she had set her heart. But when it came to the last moment, when she knew that the Earl was coming and that her father had invited and assembled all his relatives, then her heart was in the balance. Yet she still had a little hope because she saw that it was time for her lover to appear, and so she stole away from the ladies who were crowding the palace. She filled a little case with jewels, not wanting to carry away any other trousseau. Taking the case, she went off alone, straight to the pear tree where they had taken leave of each other and fixed the day of John's return. But he was not yet there, and this was greatly troubling to Blonde. She went to open the little gate through which he was to come and listened attentively for sounds of his arrival. But John still did not appear, and so she was very much afraid. She returned under the pear tree, sad and dismayed. She sat down, deeply pensive, and debated with herself.

"Alas!" said poor Blonde. "Love, you have so overcome me, and now you make me wait about here and perhaps waste my time! I do say that I am wasting my time, if the one my heart hopes and weeps for does not come within this hour. Alas! If he delays a little too long, I know that he will have lost me. For when that Gloucester man comes, there will be no place, high

or low, where I shall not be hunted for. Then I'll be harshly scolded by my father and called a fool when I'm found alone here. Even that wouldn't matter to me if he were willing to leave it at that; but he will make me take another leap that could not possibly please me: to take as husband a man other than the one I love. To take? He won't do it against my wishes! Yes, he will, and too bad for me! Too bad for me? Now I'm talking nonsense. If it's as bad as that for me, let me say when it comes to the critical moment: 'Sir, I don't want you!' The priest who would marry me upon such words would be a great fool.⁴⁰ But it would be madness to say them. I can do no more. Ah! God! If only my beloved would come soon, cautiously and secretly, just as I told him last year, I'd be free of this misery. Could he for some reason have forgotten me and given his love to someone else? Yes, perhaps; I fear this also because I am too far away from him. What! Would he then not come at all? Shall I, loverless, be a lover? That would really be a betrayal. Now I am being foolish. Wasn't he about to die for me? Ah! I must not believe it of him, that his love might ever be false. Then why does he delay? I believe that it must trouble him, but he may well be prevented by illness or imprisonment. God keep him from that, by His name! For my heart so gives itself to him that without him I do not believe I shall ever have joy. If he comes, I'll go away with him; if he does not come, for love of him I shall say that I do not want any husband. This cannot please my father, but I can do nothing about it. There is too great ardor and too great power in love."

As Blonde was fretting she pricked up her ears and heard the one she longed for so much riding up the path. And John was hurrying along; he for his part had been in great fear of losing Blonde, such fear that he was all atremble as he headed toward the pear tree. Under it he saw his beloved, who never before was so happy as when she saw him coming. John did not say much, but dismounted and greeted her. "My sweet heart, found again!" "My very dear friend," Blonde answered, "above everyone else in the world, you are welcome here!" Then they brought their faces close together and kissed each other; and this greatly eased their hearts. But they had no inclination to wait very long. John went to get the palfrey that Robin had brought up, all saddled and bridled. He set his beloved upon it, then mounted without further delay. He took in his arms the little case, the richest from there to Baghdad; it was all full of rings and clasps set with many precious stones.

Thereupon they emerged from the garden, moving off as quickly as they could. They came to the fields and were on their way. Don't suppose that they even considered going by the highway. In order to avoid trouble they followed the most obscure paths. John well knew all the wooded areas, for he

had traversed them many a time; now the knowledge was useful to him. If they had taken the open road, they would have been pursued. They acted more prudently. That night they rode so far before daybreak that they would have been very hard to find. But during the day they did not dare to ride; they stayed in the woods. There, Robin was of great service to them; he would go off seeking food for them in the villages along the woods, and then he would return to wherever he had left them, either in the forest or in a hedged enclosure. He fetched oats for the horses, and to the two true lovers he brought cakes, white bread, and chicken pies. This certainly did not go to waste. John always carried wine with him in two kegs. With these supplies, they would spread out an embroidered cloth on the green grass; then they would eat under the branches. And their horses would graze on the grass they found, fine and thick; they were so well looked after by Robin that, as far as he was able, they lacked for nothing. After the lovers had eaten all they wanted of the pies, they would go off enjoying themselves, caressing each other. As to embracing and kissing, neither held back; all day long they kissed and embraced and spoke to each other tenderly. Their love was sweetened by the verdure and by the sound of the thrushes and the nightingales and the other birds of the woods, which in their Latin would sing to them evening and morning.⁴¹ This was far from displeasing the true lovers, who delighted in hearing them. With the other joys of love they would have no trouble in spending the day. And Robin was on guard lest anyone come that way and notice them, for they would promptly be betrayed. When nightfall was approaching, the lovers would remount and would ride toward the sea, which they greatly desired to cross. (But if God does not take pains on their behalf, they will have a hard time of it before they are in the ship; for the Earl of Gloucester will scarcely have a soft heart when he learns that Blonde is out of the palace.)

Now the tale relates that when the two Earls, of Gloucester and of Oxford, came together they made much of one another. The whole company, the arrivals and those who were already there, greeted each other. Then they all entered the hall, which was large and handsome and well swept. Many a table was set up there, ready for them. But if he could, the Earl of Gloucester wanted to see his beloved before starting to eat. He asked her father to send for her, and so he promptly did. He called two knights. "Go," he said, "and bring my fair and courteous daughter."⁴² Off they went, finding this no hardship. They came into the chambers where the ladies were and asked for Blonde, so as to escort her to her father. This was not bitter news to the ladies; indeed they were glad at it. (But by and by they would be

dismayed.) They were still not aware that Blonde was out of their keeping. Not seeing her with them, they sent her maids into the alcoves to look for her. There the maids went without losing a moment and searched for her here and there, but none of them found her.

The two Earls, awaiting her, were busy talking of other things. They believed that she was staying so long because she was adorning her lovely self with fine and costly garments. The Earls seated themselves, and Gloucester began telling about the behavior of (the unknown) John. And so he gave an account, saying:⁴³ “Sir Earl, never before be fool so good like a French who comed today with me, and saided strange things. It sprinkled well in morning, so that well was wet finally my gown that I has put on. For this he saided to me: if he was so rich, he will make carry a house for him to shelter. And more he saided to me too. I wanted buy sorrel palfrey, which was toward him led, fine rein, fine saddled. When he be asked for to sell, he saided to me he will want to take his will of wealth that I have; but I made him answered: Nay! He be much laughed for such words. But, by crown of God, more fool will he be afterward of another business. When I rode for great care that I had to approach this one,⁴⁴ I rode ahead first, until in a river I plunged me; but in a great hole steps my horse, and will have fallen; nearly I will have drank too much. A fisher got me to the bank right other side of the river beyond, and my spotted palfrey. Then came my people all sorry for what will have come to me. All my clothing was soon take off; took drier from a knight, who began to dry mine. Then I had mounted without more stay. Then talked the good French fool to me, and saided such strange thing: if he will be of wealth my equal, all time, when he will want to travel, he will bring bridge for himself, then will be crossed over without fear. Then we all laughed him and had very good time, then I goes off at amble without stop. All laughed at this fool French, but in time shall I have laughed more. When he comed near this village, parting from me he asked; but I wanted not to give it if he saided not to me his going. So he saided to me a good foolishness: that it was a year all complete that he had set up in an orchard a fine trap for a sparrow hawk, and he will go see if it will be caught. Know you well that then I was laughed, and I saided to him this: ‘Good friend, your set-up was all rotten. But come you with me to play, and you will see wed beautiful little pig.’ Never he wanted to come, but had left himself great speed. I shall not know more what became of him. Now you knows how all happened.”

While Gloucester was relating all this to the other Earl, the knights were on their way back, having had Blonde sought for here and there, high and low; but no one was able to find her. Many a lady was grieved at this. They

all considered themselves tricked; much disconcerted, they said over and over: "Alas! How badly we have kept her, the one who is now required of us! What can have become of her? In here there is not a shadow's space where she has not been looked for. Where can she be hidden? She must be playing hide-and-seek with us for fear of this marriage." So they kept saying, the young girls, the ladies, and the damsels. The two knights, much troubled, promptly repaired to the place where the Earls were sitting. "Sir," said the better speaker, "if you wish to delay eating until Blonde comes, I fear that you will become very hungry. No one knows where she may be. In all the chambers there is no place where the ladies have not looked for her, and they are very much dismayed on her account. Every chamber has been searched; they have looked for her and called her everywhere, and yet they have no information. She has lost her wits."

When the Earls heard this news, it was scarcely to their liking. The one of Gloucester was so grieved that he could not have been more so. And the one of Oxford was sensible; he had well understood the messages with which John had befuddled the other man. He had lived in the world a long time and saw into this matter clearly; and so he began to explain to his guest: "Sir Earl, this matter is scarcely good for your purposes, for I believe that my daughter's heart is empty of love for you and that she loves someone else. And I think she is going off with that very man you have seen. He has deceived you cleverly. My guess is that it is a squire, John, who was in her service a good while. He is sensible and clean-living, courteous and well formed. He took leave of me because of news that reached him, at which he scarcely rejoiced: news about his father being ill, and about his mother having died. For this reason he returned to France, where he was brought up. Now I believe that he came back to seek for Blonde. He has made the finest gain in this world, if he can cross the sea again. Now I see that love is a powerful thing, when my daughter exchanges you thus for a foreign lad. Truly, I never had an inkling of their love; but now I know it, of that you can be sure. For it was at her request I set the first day, that was put off; and I believe that she had already fixed this very day with her friend. She was badly guarded, since she has thus slipped away. And nevertheless it is very hard to keep watch over a woman. May a bad flame burn me if anyone alive can manage to do it, once she is stirred up with love! John made fun of you this morning; you did not understand his Latin.⁴⁵ When you haggled over the palfrey, you mocked him severely for saying that he would like to take for it however much of your possessions as he wished. By this you ought to have understood that he had no desire to sell it. He was right, for on it he is

taking away my daughter and is even now rejoicing about it. Afterward, as for the shower that came up and that would of course wet the silk clothes you had on, he did not value you at a straw because, when you saw the rain, you did not put anything over yourself: a horse-cloth or cape or something else to cover your gown. Therefore he said to you that if he were as rich as he thought you to be, in order to shelter himself from rain he would have a house carried along; that was to say a horse-cloth or a cape; but all you did was laugh.

“Later, when you had fallen into the river as you related to me just now, you ought not to be much pitied; for it was through your own foolishness. John did allude to this, but he reproved you very subtly for it when he went on talking about the bridge that he would cause to be brought with him, so that he could cross a stream without trouble. This was doubtless to say that a rich man ought not to enter a river or a difficult crossing without someone’s having gone before him. He should send ahead some of his people, and afterward he can direct his own mount toward where the best place turns out to be; thus he can cross in the easiest way. Through his good sense he spoke such words to you, and he was treated as a fool. Then when he left you, and you gave him the choice of coming along with you or informing you of his business, he promptly told you the truth; for he had set a trap for my daughter a good year ago. For this reason he told you that last year he had set up a trap for a sparrow hawk and that he was going off to see whether he had caught it. The trap signifies the love he has for his beloved, for whom he was to come on the day he had fixed with her. My daughter is the sparrow hawk. He is no fool, that squire; he told it all to you very cleverly. For as a man sets a bird to catch another bird, just so must one set one’s love to have another’s love. He would have very little sense, the man who loved no one, if he wished to be loved by someone. Now I see clearly that he loved my daughter and she loved him, and she feared me so much that she has slipped away from us and joined her lover.

“My dear Earl, I am extremely sorry because of the agreement I had with you; but I can do nothing else. If you can manage to get her back, then catch her and lead her away with you. And if the one who has taken her away can have crossed the sea before you can recover her, I shall never seek to reprove him, for he is sensible, and a nobleman, and will never lack for assets. But now let us eat; and if you like, you set out in the morning. If you left now, you would not know where to go. For, be sure of it, they are going by the side roads and the most diverse ways, so as not to be noticed. Cunningly, they have deceived you. If you cannot catch up with them, it will be necessary to

give up this wedding. I say no more. He who has her, let him have her! If you have her, I am not sorry; and if he has her, it must be accepted, since it cannot be otherwise."

Now the Earl of Gloucester grasped how matters stood. He was so inflamed by anger that for a good while he could not answer, but at last he replied: "Alas! Unhappy! I have lost all, my sweet beloved, fair little pig! But I will follow her so quick that I will catch her in the sea. I will make watched all the ports so they will be able to be caught. Then I will make hanged on two stakes the bad robber French who has sent my heart so sad. Then I will make Blonde to repent of pain that she made me feel. Must make great penitence for my sadness, for my heaviness. Before she can make up with me, must be that she see the rope close around neck her friend; then I will be well venged on her. Then in strong prison I will put him until he will well have paid his great foolish and his misdeed. I will well know how to venge me for act." (Now may God and His commandments be the guard of those true lovers! For they are in very real danger; if they are taken prisoner, they will be badly treated.)

Thereupon the Earls took their seats, for appearance's sake, without eating. In the palace that night there was not a knight, man-at-arms, lady, or damsel who could empty a plate. They were so upset, all the women and men, that there was not a sound in the hall. Some out of grief, some out of fear, they all were silent. The tables were taken away fairly soon; afterward there was no long talk, but throughout the palace they went to bed. But whoever might sleep, there was no question of sleeping for the man of Gloucester; he was as sad as could be. All night long he had strange fantasies, debating within himself about what kind of death and in what torment he would want to make John die—and he had not yet got hold of him! It was said long ago, and I do not doubt it, that if someone seeks another's harm, the harm turns back upon him.⁴⁶ Those who are threatened live on, it is said:⁴⁷ it would not be right that threatened people should die. (If John had managed to have weapons with him,⁴⁸ he would have been very hard to capture, for he was taking away with him such a treasure as he would not soon surrender unless he were dead or in prison.)

To return to my story: before daylight the Earl, eager to go looking for Blonde, got up without delay. He had his knights awakened. If only you had seen saddles being put on those warhorses, and the girths tightened! Their horses were as well cinched as if they were going boar hunting. As soon as they could the knights got ready, mounted, and were off. In that company there were a good hundred wicked and senseless men; they repeatedly

threatened John with hanging. (Now may God defend him and his beloved Blonde and confound all their enemies, who were following them fast toward the sea!) From Oxford there was no movement on the part of Blonde's father or his people, for to him this chase was neither handsome nor noble. He was so full of courtesy that in his heart he did not wish that John should be discovered and taken prisoner, for the young man had proved himself well. He had a good opinion of him; and because he had crossed the sea again, the Earl knew that it was through the force of love. The ladies who had come for the festivities went away without losing time. They left Oxford in dismay. Thus the court broke up. This was a celebration in reverse: there was more weeping than laughter.

As for those who had set out to shame John if they caught sight of him, they never slackened in their pursuit. They went so far by roads and by fields, as best they could, that of two days' travel they made one; at night they rode by moonlight. They hurried along until they reached the sea, where they set guard on all the ports. At each port they put four spies, who night and day watched for the lovers. And in preparation for bringing John down, if he tried to defend himself, they had great axes to split him open. To make sure that John might know nothing of this, and might not notice anything, the Earl and his knights went to lodge in Dover. He trusted in his spies, stationed in all the ports, outfitted in good doublets, and armed with sharp axes. (God keep the lovers from harm! They will have to pass by them in peril.) Now I must leave the Earl's story for a little, and tell about the lovers.

These two kept on riding by night and staying still by day, until they approached so close to Dover that not a league remained. They halted in a great and ancient forest because daylight had come. John, who was uneasy for fear of losing his beloved more than he was for his own life, had sense enough to keep watch. He soon called to Robin and said: "Good friend Robin, now quickly go your way, cautiously, by hidden paths. I shall so whiten your face with an herb I know well, that no one would recognize you for anything. Then you will go in haste to speak to the captain who is waiting for us and tell him that he is to lose no time in preparing his ship and his things so that we may, this very night, climb aboard a little before midnight and then cross the sea. And be on the lookout to notice anyone awaiting us for our harm. I do think that, if the Earl is able, we must pass through his hands. He may well be in such a hurry that perhaps he has got ahead of us, for we have made some detours by riding along winding roads. This is why I want you to pay attention to whether anyone is keeping watch for us. If you see anything that makes you uneasy, arrange matters so that you get

armor for me to arm myself with, then go back to ambling along and come back here at nightfall. And keep a close watch on yourself, so that no one knows what you are about, for otherwise we'd soon have trouble. If God granted that we should get across the Channel, we'd fear them very little." "Sir," said Robin, "have no fear. I'll do all this. But disguise me, for I want to be off. It worries me to stay here so long."

Thereupon in the woods John picked the root of an herb, and with the pommel of his sword he crushed it and mixed it with water. Then he so besmeared Robin with the juice that in the whole world, up or down, there lived no man who would not believe that he was suffering from a high fever. His face was paler than dull wax, and all wrinkled. Breaking off the branch of an apple tree, he made himself a staff to lean on. Now he might go wherever he wanted, without ever being recognized. Then he took leave, and went away. It seemed to him that he was late in setting out; the sun had already risen.

John and Blonde remained in the woods. That morning they labored in a very lovely place in the forest until they made a shelter out of fine green branches and flowers, because of the heat, and strewed it with lily of the valley. Then John said, "My dear, now I propose that we eat inside our bower on the blossoms and the rushes. We still have two pies; they will not go to waste." "My very dear one, I agree." Then they kissed each other on mouth, forehead, nose, and face, in sign of agreement, and sat down on the rushes. They spread a white cloth, finely embroidered, upon the lily of the valley. On their heads they had green garlands. John opened the pies and offered some to his beloved. She ate and he served her, but for all that he did not neglect to eat as well. Their two hearts were so held by one leash that she wanted nothing that he did not want; he did not want anything that distressed her. Their dinner was interrupted by what was more pleasing to them: that is, by delicious kisses; such an occupation was very sweet to them. They both talked about love; and the hobbled horses grazed, down in the grassy area. When the lovers had eaten the pies and drunk some of the wine, of which they had had a good quantity, they folded up their cloth again. Then they headed off, lightly dressed, hand in hand, to enjoy themselves in the woods and to hear the song of the nightingales. If I thought about it all of today and tomorrow, I could not relate the pleasure and joy that Love taught them to have. Anyone who disdains Love scarcely has a good heart, whatever torment may come from it, since for all its ills Love makes compensation to true lovers who act rightly, so that in the end they come to such happiness that all troubles are forgotten. So indeed it appeared to these two who were alone in the forest, and all that they

did have pleased them so much that they desired nothing except to escape those who would separate them if they could; nothing else weighed upon them. (If they had reached France, they would have had love's joy, perfect and everlasting.) When they had enjoyed themselves a little they returned to their bower, where it was pleasant and cool. There too they continued to take pleasure in kissing and embracing, sweetly conversing. (But I make no recital of anything more, so as not to spoil my story. There are few now who would abstain once they had come to such a dish; for nowadays there is more of evil, little and less of true love.) Now we shall turn to speaking of Robin, who was on the road toward the sea.

Once Robin had left the spot where his master had whitened his face, he kept going until he came to Dover, from which he saw the sea. As soon as he entered the town he encountered four knights whom he had seen with the Earl. He was clever enough to recognize them. Leaning upon his staff, he went along the streets; he saw clearly that John was being watched for. He moved without hurrying. At a slow pace, face lowered, he went on until he left the town and entered the port. He appeared to be a man in poor health; it looked as though he had been ill much longer than a year and a half. Near the port in an angle of the rocks he saw the Earl and his armed men. He had to pass near them if he wanted to get to the captain. Therefore he limped heavily with one foot; one eye open, the other squinting, his head low and his back high, he said to the Earl: "God save you!" He pretended to speak with difficulty. "Sir," he said, "for thirty weeks I have been ill with quotidian fever; I still have it two days out of three. I am a poor man from France. I no longer have money of any sort with which I may return to my country, but I shall die here in misery if you, for the holy Paternoster, do not give me something." The Earl looked at him as did his followers; it seemed to none of them as if he could live four days longer. The Earl handed him twelve sterling coins, and each of his knights gave him six silver pennies. (In this matter Robin was no fool; he gained a good forty sous. Although he detested them heartily, he took their money. With his mouth he thanked them in God's name, but such generosity touched him very little; he would have liked their misadventure better than their benevolence.)

Thereupon he took leave and went away, not stopping before he reached the shore. Squinting with one eye, he came up to the captain who was awaiting them. "Sir," he said to the captain, "I should like to entreat you to take me across this sea, for I am downhearted on this side of it."⁴⁹ Not for one day have I ever been well here. You may set whatever price you like, for I have money, some of which I'll gladly give you." "Friend," answered the captain,

"I don't yet know when the people I promised to wait for will come. I don't mean to attend to others before I know whether the man who paid me in advance will want to have my ship. He urged me to stay for him, and so I'll wait at least as long as I promised."

When Robin had heard the captain and was sure that he could trust him, he said: "There is a lot of goodness in a worthy man. You are to know that I'm the lad who crossed to this shore along with the man who entreated you to wait for him. He has sent me here to learn whether you were keeping your promise and were still waiting." "Now you have said something outrageous," said the captain, "by my faith! He had no one with him but a lad who was called Robinet. He was leading a palfrey alongside him. He was far more hale and hearty than you are. And so it was foolish of you to say that, for you are not the same person; it looks as if you are going to die before you see the third day." "Yes, I'm the same one," said Robin, "good master. You must know how things stand with us. My master has many enemies, and they are watching for us, be sure of it. And to keep us from being noticed or recognized he tinted me like this with an herb that he picked in a wood. He sends me to you, and entreats you, as a man he trusts, that the ship be furnished and ready to go across immediately, a little before midnight. On the horse I was leading before he is now escorting a young lady whom he doesn't want everyone to see. And he sends you this word through me: if you take him across in good faith, you will have so much money that you will never be poor. For once you transported him, he would have little fear of his enemies. He believes in you because of the promise that was made in his agreement with you. Now kindly help us in good faith, for we need it badly. Down this port I see certain people who want him dead."

This news was highly pleasing to the captain. For the promise of money, he received Robin very well, saying that he would indeed help them and would not fail them on any account. Robin thanked him for this. Then the captain took him into his ship covertly and showed him that nothing was lacking for the crossing. In the vessel there were good, solid pieces of armor; Robin chose some of these and put them aside. Now he awaited only the coming of evening, so that he might steal away from people and rejoin John. The captain made him comfortable; on that day Robin lacked nothing by way of drink and food. He inquired where the Earl of Gloucester stayed at night; and the captain told him promptly: "In the town up above. If someone gave a shout here, it would be heard in his lodging; and yet it's a good league by road from here up to there."⁵⁰ Down here in the port he leaves four spies equipped with armor; and in the morning, before daybreak, the Earl and his

men return. Also, through great effort, he causes watch to be kept in all the other ports. No ship can move without the spies wanting to know beforehand who are the people who are going overseas. They have inquired of me myself what I was waiting for so long here. And I told them immediately, like someone who wasn't on his guard: for a squire, whom I am very impatient about; but he paid me his money and entreated me to wait. Since they heard this the spies have never gone away, but lie—it's a great nuisance—so close by every night that no one comes here without their knowing it, and they greatly threaten someone or other. I well believe, by what I hear, that it is John they are threatening, and so I very much fear that they may give him trouble. He can come here only by passing through them, and they are wicked and cruel. And there is something else: each one carries a horn at his neck. As soon as the Earl hears the horns sounded, he will come running in this direction. And so John is in great danger if he comes, for he is a dead man if the Earl gets his hands on him. But, so God keep me from harm! he didn't waste the money he courteously entrusted to me; on this occasion courtesy will be repaid. When evening comes on, I'll engage the spies in talk. Then you will slip off behind us, and afterward you will tell John that, if he comes here tonight, he won't find me unprepared. As far as armor is concerned, say that I'll never fail him for anything. If no more than those four come here, we'll bring down their pride." When Robin heard this his heart was joyful. He told the captain so much and so acquainted him with his master's good character that the other man was very willing to be on his side.

Generosity is good, and so is courtesy; they have been helpful to many people. Just as the captain had advised, so Robin did. He rested in the ship, not daring to go out during the day. And when evening came, the Earl and his men quietly returned to their lodging. The four spies remained behind at the Earl's order, to do shame to Blonde. In the middle of the port, close by the ship that they suspected, they concealed themselves in a little hollow. The captain, from on board his ship, perceived them clearly and pointed them out to Robin. "Now there is no more need for delay, Robin," he said. "It's high time you went back to your master; and I am going off to be with those men until you have gone past." Robin said: "Now use your wits."

At that, the captain left. He came up to those who were keeping watch, taking along a keg of strong and inebriating wine produced on the Rhine. "Sirs, may Jesus aid you!" said the captain. "If you please, my heart is much troubled that you have already lain here for three nights and haven't drunk with me. I'm bringing you a keg of wine; now let's finish it off!" The watchers heard these words gladly, for they were willing drinkers. Even if there had

been two barrels, not a cupful would have escaped. And from the pinewood ship Robin departed all laden with good, solid armor. While the others were busy talking, he took to slipping around behind them. Here God aided Robin, for the spies had no eyes to notice him, absorbed in drinking as they were. But he was seen by the captain, whose heart was filled with joy when he saw him pass by. He kept the spies distracted until he knew what business they were on and why they were intent on keeping watch. And when he had learned everything from them he promptly took his leave. With their goodwill he departed and entered his boat, where there were many oars.⁵¹ Then he called his oarsmen around him and said: "Men, have no doubts or fears for anything that you hear tonight, but equip yourselves with weapons, all of you. Guard the ship, if I am not in it, so that you let no one enter. A worthy man has great need of me, and I shall want to help him." "Sir," they said, "we'll gladly do whatever is called for."

Following these orders, the sailors quietly made their preparations throughout the ship. Each man armed his head and body and took in his hand a halberd, cutting and well sharpened. The ship would be well defended if anyone came forward to attack it, for there were no good-for-nothings aboard. There were twenty men, young and strong, who would always guard the ship, along with the stouthearted captain. But at this point I say no more about them. I want to tell about Robin, very glad to have got past the spies, whom he had feared.

After Robin had escaped, he did not pause on his way until returning to the lovers, who had been very anxious because he was away so long. Now here he was, so laden with canvas and iron that he said: "Here's an infernal game, carrying such a big load on foot!" John immediately unloaded him, then said: "Now, never mind, Robin. If we get to Dammartin, such efforts will be rewarded. But tell me about the news you have heard. Is there anyone in the port on watch for us to do us harm?" "Yes, indeed," Robin answered. "The Earl and all his men are in lodging so close to the sea that they can easily hear the speech of four spies who are in the port, armed to put you to death. But there is this in your favor: the captain will help you, the one to whom you gave the ten pounds. You never used money better." Then he told him how he was joyfully received by the captain, once he was recognized. There followed the account of how he had deceived the Earl and all his retainers, so that he got six sterling coins from each man in the troop. He concluded by relating how, thanks to the good captain, he had come back. "Because he gave them something to drink," he said, "he held their attention so much that I've come back to you, for they didn't notice

me.” When Blonde heard the news, her body went atremble with fright, for now she knew without a doubt that her beloved would have a fight. Therefore she said to him: “My dearest friend, you have put yourself into peril for me, and I am very sorry for it. I have great fear of your death, for from what I understand, we have our enemy in the port. My dearest friend, let’s not go! If you should lose your life there, my heart would break with grief. It wouldn’t live for another day.” “My sweet friend,” said John, “don’t be afraid! Since I have a ship, and armor, the way is quite safe for me. If we remained on this side, we’d be detected in the end, and I’d never have of you the most joyous joy, the one from which I’ve been abstaining until I can marry you. Set your mind at rest, and be sure of this, once and for all: I have no fear of all my enemies. But help me to arm quickly; for if I do not take you out of this country in spite of them, I’ll think little of myself. In need one knows one’s worth.”⁵² A man who takes his beloved with him must not dread any hardship. Come, my armor! I wish to arm myself; I suffer with the contempt I have for them.”

Blonde, not daring to contradict him, readied his armor. First he put on shoulder pads stuffed with silk. On his head he put a basinet, strong, well attached, new, and handsome. After that he donned a hauberk; there was no better one from there to Merc. Around his waist Blonde bound a sash that she herself had woven; then she laced on his head a rolled-up piece of fabric, of Welsh work, not sparing her lovely hands in serving him. It was as though she had spent her life at such tasks, she knew so well how to undertake them. He must not be fainthearted, the man who is waited on by such a servant. On top of his hauberk he put on a doublet; there could be none better. Over that he belted on his sword, which was sharpened and cutting. Then he embraced his beloved, kissed her, and said: “Now be quite easy, sweet friend, and fear nothing; for I assure you of this: if we find anyone who wishes us harm and if I do not wet my sword in his body, I never hope on any day to have joy of your love.” “My dear friend,” answered Blonde, “Now may the King of the world keep us!” By then Robin had armed himself with a doublet of double thickness; he had an iron cap on his head and at his belt a steel knife. Then he untied the horses and brought them before John.

John helped his beloved up on her horse, then he mounted without delay. With that they speedily set out. The moon was shining, so that they saw fairly clearly around them. They went along at a rapid amble until coming to the port. Blonde and Robin kept close to John, who was between them. They went on until they saw those who were awaiting them for no good purpose. When the spies heard them coming they quickly jumped to their

feet. One of the four seized Blonde by the rein and said to her: "Lady, you will stop here, by my soul! The man who took you in charge was a fool; he'll die a bad death tonight." John said to him: "You're lying! If you don't feel my sword, I'll never value myself in the slightest." Thereupon he drew it and dealt that man such a blow on the head that the blade did not stop before reaching his chin. Then he said: "Back, scoundrel! It was villainous to lay a hand on my beloved!" When the other three saw that one stark dead, they attacked John vigorously; and John so avoided their blows that he made two of them miss him. The third one gave such a blow that he took off a piece from the bottom of the fine-mailed hauberk. He would have cut off his knee if John had not had on an iron knee cop. The ax went into the ground just like a devil from Hell. John's heart constricted. He struck the man so angrily with his sharp sword that on the spot he brought down both arm and ax. When the ruffian saw that he had lost one of his arms, he fled from the skirmish. Seizing his horn, he sounded it with such force that he made himself heard up in the lodging where the Earl was. When the Earl, not yet asleep, heard the horn call, he realized that John was at the port; he shouted for his weapons. Then they all armed themselves without losing time.

Meanwhile at the port John had much to do. Of the two spies who were still fit for combat, Robin, knife in hand, came at one and struck him in such a way as to bring him down dead—but so quietly that after the blow he did not cry out, for he was stabbed in the heart. At the same time the sea captain heard the horn and grasped that John was under attack. He quickly emerged from his ship and came running to the horn blower; with the halberd he was gripping he made the man's head fly off. "Scoundrel," he said, "now you can sound your horn! However it may go with John, I think no good will ever come to you!"

When the fourth man, who was still alive, saw all his companions killed, he ran off, and in fleeing he sounded a short note with the horn at his neck. But now John thought it would be foolish not to make that man pay dearly for his horn blowing. He began to spur his horse and pursued him as fast as he could. He soon caught him up and so struck him on the head that his sword went through the middle of the brain and down to the teeth, so that the man dropped dead on his face. Then John sped back toward his beloved. And the captain came up to them, greeted them, and said: "John, I've come here to help you. You have done well to start with; but now come away without waiting! Come! It won't be long before the Earl and his men arrive, for they have surely heard the horn calls." John thanked him much for the aid he had from him; so, profoundly, did Blonde. Then they swiftly set on their way.

Before they could get to the ship, the Earl of Gloucester came spurring along on Morel, his fiery warhorse; there was no better racer in the country. Farther than a man could shoot with a bow, the Earl put himself in front of all his men, sword in hand, shield at neck. John, seeing him, thought him foolish to separate himself from his followers. "I believe," he said, "he imagined that I'd flee in fright when I saw him come galloping like that. May I never enjoy love if I don't go at him in this encounter!" At these words he wheeled his horse around and turned his sword in front of him. He set the pommel on his saddlebow, with the well-sharpened point forward. Then at full speed he cut across against the other man, who had a shield. But John had neither helm nor shield, or such a horse as the Earl had, although his nag was good.⁵³ At this point Blonde felt great fear. If she had had all the wealth in the world, she would gladly have given it provided that it would go well with her beloved. The two warriors on the beach quickly reached each other. Neither of them was fainthearted about striking. The Earl hit John first; the whole doublet was not so useful to him that the sword did not pass through. It broke through his stout hauberk and sliced down his side so that it took off some of his skin; if the weapon had been well sharpened, that would have been the end of John. And John had fixed his sword so straight that—through the top of the shield and through the hauberk the Earl had on, and right through all his other wrappings—he pierced him with it, a hand's span beyond the shoulder. Such was the force of the blow that, over the rear saddlebow and over his horse's rump, the Earl was thrown to the ground. His helm struck the earth so hard that it was nearly crushed in upon him. He was badly hurt. And John took the good Morel, which ran faster than a swallow flies, and promptly leapt into the saddle. Now he was far more secure than if he had been surrounded by good walls. He made up his mind that on no account would anyone come to harm him without being killed. Just then along came Robin; he was holding the Earl's sword, which he had found on the beach. He would have cut off the Earl's head, but for his men, who came up quickly. Robin mounted his master's horse. When Blonde saw the Earl in such a state, badly wounded on the beach, she said: "Sir Earl, you will not obtain the love you have looked for. A better man than you has sought it out. You were a fool when you jousting with my friend. So it goes. It's good that things have gone badly for you; for seldom has a rich earl and knight been seen deigning to joust with a squire. I am very glad that my friend has got himself on your horse." The Earl heard Blonde very well, but answered her not a word; pain kept him from saying anything. And John, angry, promptly returned to him with the good captain beside him; and Robin was coming up behind.

The Earl would have been close to death if his men had not approached at full speed. They were much alarmed when they saw their Earl in such a state, in distress and shame. To rescue him, both the foolish and the wise came spurring. The best-mounted man got there first; but the one who lagged behind was wiser than the one in front, for John was ten times fiercer on account of his beloved. Seeing her near him, and fearing to lose her, he was as ferocious as a lion. He pricked Morel with his spurs. He so assailed the first man with his sword that he cut off his head, and struck the second on the hand so that he made it fly far away. He killed the third and knocked down the fourth. Just as beasts in a clearing flee for fear of the wolf, these men quit the spot where John was on the attack, because of the great blows with which he was slicing their flesh and bones. The captain caught a warhorse and mounted with the stirrup. From those who were no longer alive he and Robin had taken spurs and used them. They came rushing toward the skirmish in the spot where they saw John, who that night was hard pressed because the Earl's men were increasing in numbers; more and more of them kept coming. There were a good hundred of their enemies, prepared and furnished with arms; and John was only one of three. The situation was very dangerous. Twenty of the Earl's men guarded their master, who did not remount because of his injury. The blood coming from his wound was running down his body, to the great dismay of his men. And John was fighting with the others; he threw down flat many a dead man. He was much aided by the captain, who had a halberd in his hand; with two blows he killed two of them. And Robin, on his master's horse, received many a blow on his neck and his head that night. Yet if the enemies had not feared John more than they did those two, they would soon have put them to death. But they so dreaded his blows because of the heads he had cut off that they did not dare encounter him. From a distance they kept throwing lances at him,⁵⁴ which made numerous holes in his hauberk and even wounded him in his body, drawing blood in four places. But these were not mortal wounds; he was little concerned about them. With the spurs he put Morel to a run; he dashed to where he saw the greatest throng just as the wolf does at beasts when he is starving. And they fled from him in all directions.

While they were battling thus, twenty of them made their way toward Blonde, whom they saw alone in the middle of the plain. One of them took her by the rein, and the others by dint of much noise were driving off her palfrey. They went away at full speed toward the town. When she saw herself captured, she was more dismayed than she had ever been. She cried aloud: "Holy Mary! Beloved, now you have lost me!" Hearing his sweetheart, John

well understood that she was in danger. He seized a lance, then gave free rein to Morel, which took great strides. John raced until reaching the men who meant to lead off his beloved. He shouted at them: "You will not take her away, wicked traitors, slanderers!" With the lance he struck the first one, piercing his body so that, dying, he did not cry out, but promptly fell to the ground. Then John drew his pointed sword and with it cleft the second man to the teeth, so that he fell facedown to the ground. With the third blow he killed the third. Meanwhile Robin and the captain came up, both spurring after him. Before they joined him he had already brought down four men. And each of his two supporters as they approached made one enemy lie on the shore. John scarcely rested; to the one who was holding his beloved by the rein he gave such a stroke with his sword that he cut through his thigh. The other man let go of the rein, willy-nilly, falling stunned to the beach. Then John said in reproach: "Vassal, it is a mistake to believe that any true lover near or far could fail his beloved in need. It was an evil hour when you laid a hand on her; you have your proper reward for it." All the others who saw such blows fled and left Blonde. And John came back to his beloved and told her not to be dismayed. She answered: "I am, though; here are too many of those I hate. By the love we have together, I beg that we get to the ship as soon as possible." When he heard himself entreated in the name of love there was no more respite; they went off toward the ship without delay. But after John followed some sixty men, threatening him with death.

Just at the moment when they came to the water, the sixty pressed them so hard that John was made to suffer much pain and distress. For Robin and the captain were loading their warhorses onto the ship and were putting Blonde aboard also; and John was defending himself quite alone. He received and gave many strokes, cutting off heads and arms. But when the lovely one was in the ship, the captain, very happy, shouted to his boatmen: "Now, quick, men, we must run to aid John; he is fighting alone on the beach." They had wanted to come long since, they answered, "but in order to have the ship guarded you made us stay here." At that they jumped out of the boat and quickly came to John, whom they saw doing such exploits as were never seen before. Just as when a wild boar, set upon by dogs, holds out until he slays most of them, so John on the beach exposed himself to danger against his enemies. He killed so many that I believe God did it all, did it because He did not wish their love to come to an end, for it was faithful and good and God rewards all that is good. That night John killed twenty of his opponents, by count, as I find in the tale, not including those whom the others killed or wounded.

Now the boatmen came up, all gripping halberds with cutting steel points. Among them were the good captain and Robin. When they were all at the melee, there were twenty-three of them, and they caused much consternation. So vigorously did they attack, those on this side, that their enemies fell back. There was an exchange of many blows; horses were killed and knights brought to the ground, some dead, others wounded. Many pommels, many hands were cut off. Back as far as where the four spies had been concealed at the beginning, our men drove them. This was all to the good for Robin, for there he had hidden the little case when he saw the first skirmish. He had covered it with sand, but now he uncovered it. Then he said softly to John: "Sir, return toward the ship. My lady has remained alone, terrified for your sake." John said to him: "You speak truly. I do not want to stay here any longer." Thereupon they returned at a walk. But their enemies were so weary and so crushed by the fighting that they greatly hoped it would end. They would hunt the lovers no more this year; they were too much afraid of John's strokes. He was coming at a slow pace toward the sea and keeping in the very rear to defend the boatmen if anyone should attack from behind. He was still on Morel, whose hide was pierced, to my knowledge,⁵⁵ in thirty places.⁵⁶ That night he had been very serviceable to John, enabling him to do much damage to his enemies. Thereupon, in good order, they entered the ship one after the other. The fight had lasted so long that it was already full morning.

When Blonde saw the return of the one for whom she had felt such anxiety, she was quite reassured, but was much amazed that he had no mortal wound; she saw that he was spattered all over with blood, his own and others'. She removed his armor quickly; then very gently she washed his face with water, and with warm wine bathed his wounds, of which he had ten all told. (But he would soon be healed, for they were by no means mortal.) When he had bindings on his wounds, he borrowed a set of clothes from the captain, for he had left his own in the woods. Robin took off his body protection also; then they removed the whitening from his face, for he still had it stained from the day before. And the sailors set their sails to the wind and busied themselves so that they could depart quickly and smoothly. The wind swelled the sails and carried them all away rapidly. Now they no longer gave a rap for those they had left on the beach, who felt nothing but vexation.

The Earl was filled with anger so great that no one could express it when he saw that he had lost Blonde and that his men were dead or overthrown and he himself was injured. He had the living load up the dead and carry them into the church. He caused masses to be sung for them and afterward

had them buried. For his own healing and that of the other wounded he sent for physicians. He had the wound in his shoulder probed and dressed, which it needed badly. Then he had himself carried in a litter back to his part of the country, for no one advised him to pursue John into France. His men said: "When so much we have lost this side, we would very soon lose on the other. They are debbils and demons fight on side French. May debbils go to them! Let you your little pig marry. You find plenty little pig; not have more toward this one desire." "You says well," said the Earl. "Nay! Demons they are, and I have nothing to do with." (In the same way Reynard got no blackberries; when he had failed in every way and saw that he would not have any, then he said that he did not care about them.⁵⁷ The Earl of Gloucester behaved just the same: when he saw that there was no help for it, he said that he didn't care.) Hurting and beaten and dismayed, he kept his mind on traveling, until they came back into their own territory. Thus the Earl lost Blonde. I'll say no more about him but shall turn to the lovers, who were in the ship, joyful to have escaped alive from the assaults of their enemies.

Now the tale relates that in good time they came to the beach of Boulogne. The two lovers disembarked, and once in the town they entered the best lodging they knew. The good captain, who had been of such service to them, stayed there with them. They thanked him, telling him over and over that they would reward him well. And because of their injuries they sent for a physician in Boulogne. This man, after examining and probing their wounds, said that there was no danger. He bound on such dressings that in the course of the four days that John stayed in Boulogne, he was quite healed and well able to ride. Then there was no question of delaying. He paid the physician what was desired, and he assured the captain that he would promptly send back to him four large measures of coins. The captain thanked him for this very much.

One morning as the sky brightened John had got ready. He had not put on an old set of clothes, for he had bought a new one. Blonde, for her part, quickly got on her horse. When all three of them had mounted they set out on their way; now there was nothing to trouble them. The captain remained behind, and his boatmen with him. The two lovers hastened along so much that they took lodging right at Hesdin, a fine fortified town in Artois. John, always mannerly, served his beloved very well, and they lacked for nothing. The next day, beginning at first light, they traveled on, sleeping that night at Corbie, a noble walled town. On the following day, early and speedily, they took the straight road until in the evening they came to Clermont, where they were made comfortable. They had so much joy and pleasure in keep-

ing each other company, in embracing and kissing, that I couldn't tell the tenth part of it if I had given it long thought. They had meat and fish in plenty and good wine at their pleasure. As soon as the night had passed and they saw the day break, John commanded Robin to go ahead swiftly to Dammartin to tell the news to his sisters and to get the house ready.

With such words they mounted. John won his host's goodwill by paying him handsomely. They emerged from Clermont without delaying; and at that point Robin left them. (He was well mounted on Liart, and John was still riding Morel.) Robin made good speed until he came to Dammartin and did not slow down until he found the two sisters, who rejoiced when Robin had given them an account of the good sense, the beauty, the goodness of Blonde, whom John was bringing with him. At this news the girls were happier than ever before. They had the apartments swept and cleaned, from top to bottom. Then they invited relatives and cousins, and also their near neighbors, as John had ordered. (He himself had sent for all three of his brothers, who were at Paris with the King, asking them to come tomorrow, before daybreak.) Robin was neither slow nor stingy, but sent for fish and meat, and wines of Auxerre and Orléanais, which are good to drink in all months. ...⁵⁸ Afterward he went to attend to other matters. He knew well how to manage everything; he had tables set up on trestles, sent for bread from the baker, sought out pantler and butler, just as he had seen it done at court. After that he hastened to the kitchen, where there were plenty of servants who had sharpened the cooks' knives for the preparation of roasts. Meanwhile people started arriving, according to how close they lived; and they all kept asking Robin for news. He told them enough to bring them much joy, for they were pleased at John's good fortune. And what were John's sisters doing? They were adorning and dressing themselves; as quickly as they could they prepared to receive Blonde with honor; and they had promptly ordered from a cloth merchant thirty lengths of silk, and tailors with them, to make sets of clothes without delay. And so, all joyful, with gay hearts, they awaited John and his beloved, who did not hasten too much on their way because they wanted to find everything in readiness when they arrived. So they would; everything was now ready.

Toward vespers the townspeople came out eagerly to meet and welcome them. Those who were on horseback soon encountered John and his beloved and loudly wished them welcome. Each of them kept saying: "May the King of this world give joy to John and to Blonde! We very much love and cherish the man who brings into this country a young lady of such beauty; the whole realm will be enhanced by it." So they all were saying, men

and women. And Blonde kept replying to the groups: May God give them good adventure! Thus at a gentle pace they went along, greeting and talking, until they came to the house. More than thirty knights reached out their arms to help the beauty dismount easily. John's two sisters arrived and promptly welcomed him, their hearts full of rejoicing. The meeting of them all was so fine that it ought well to be remembered.

Thereupon they entered the hall, which was handsome and clean and well swept. Many tables were set up there. Blonde was taken away by John's two sisters, who were at pains to serve her, into the chambers to change her clothes. She put on a set that was very noble, made of fine cloth, richly dyed; then she returned to the hall, which was full of knights and men-at-arms. There was much talk among them of the beauty they saw in Blonde; they were all saying that there was no equal to it in all the world. Thereupon they sat down to supper. If anyone wished to describe their dishes, he would make too long a pause. John served and honored them all; he well knew how to go about it, since he had learned all forms of honor. He gave them so much wine and so many dishes that he had never before served so many. When they had finished supper, it was dark. Afterward they danced carols all night until day was about to break; then they went to rest until it was broad daylight.

Now John needed to wait no longer before taking his beloved in marriage. His brothers came from Paris early in the morning, and by so doing added to the general joy. Their hearts were far from saddened when they greeted Blonde and saw her to be so beautiful. By then the altar had been prepared for the singing of the mass. I don't know who went to tell the minstrels about this celebration, but to my knowledge more than thirty of them soon put in an appearance. There were more than a hundred knights and a good two hundred fair ladies, as well as young girls and damsels; and there would have been still more if the celebration had been postponed. But John did not dare delay it further; he still feared some impediment.

Blonde was soon ready. She had a well-cut gown of cloth-of-gold, with a mantle over her shoulders. Its clasps were easily worth ten marks. Her beautiful hair was loose, softly caught in a braid. Whoever dressed it so was not at all negligent; it had been brought down to her waist and was more beautiful than I described it when I first spoke about her. I don't wish to give another account, except to say that her beauty brightened every place where she came. Her hair was bound by a circlet of shining gold. On her breast she had a brooch, one of those she had brought with her; the King did not have a richer one. She had a belt and an alms purse; as long as the world endures,

the equal of the set would never be found. It was worked with gold and precious stones and pearls as large as peas. Whoever made it spent more than a month at it; to my knowledge it was worth a hundred pounds. Then the priest appeared at the high end of the chapel.⁵⁹ He called John and Blonde by name, then asked them, each in turn, whether they wished to be lawfully joined. If it were not usual to speak so, each of those two would have thought the priest a fool for asking that question, for there was nothing that could please them so much, nothing for which they had such desire; and so they promptly answered that they wished it wholeheartedly. Saying this gave them no trouble. Thereupon each of them took the vow of this alliance.

They were married; they went off to the church and heard the service. After the mass they returned and dressed for dinner. The knights stopped Blonde and led her away to be seated at table. As for their dishes suffice it to say that they had a fine meal. Afterward there were viols, bagpipes, harps, and flutes, which made sweeter melodies than had ever been heard before. Then they all hastened to the round dances, where many verses were sung. Considering the number of people John had there, he behaved well and nobly on that day. (In time, if he could, he would have more, for he wanted to be made a knight at the hand of King Louis: no small matter.) A wedding feast so hastily arranged was never better ordered; all who were present had what they wished, and nothing troubled them. There was rejoicing all day long; many a song was sung. When vespers came, they had supper, then went back to dancing until well into the night. At last the dancing broke up; they drank and went off to bed—which John much desired to do. The priest blessed their bed; then with great delight John's two sisters bedded the one in whose heart love was always fresh. John did not make a long delay, but carefully watched for his moment.

When John had seen to everything and done what pleased them all, and knew that Blonde had retired, don't think that this was disagreeable to him. With a joyful heart he came into the chamber, which he emptied of the others without giving offense. No lady or maiden remained there except the one whom John greatly desired. He hurried to undress, then slipped into bed beside his beloved and took her in his arms. Now came the union that they had desired so many times. Now they had the final step of love from which they had always abstained. No self-control was needed any longer; in every way they knew perfect joy and had their will entirely. Now nothing caused their hearts to suffer. As much as they had desired the game of love, which they had kept back, so much more they now had delight. Blonde gave herself so entirely to John that she lost the name of maiden. She did not care

about that in the slightest, for she had preserved it until the right moment. And John often came close to her, often embraced and kissed her, had no more memory of discomfort, no longer remembered any pain. Love served them such sweet dishes that in a short while they were masters of the game that they had never known before, for Love and Nature taught them. They were not inclined to hasten too much. To begin early and play slowly and after one game take the next: Love well knew how to teach them this. From Love they had well-matched play; they would not make such bids that it mattered to them which one would win. They held themselves entwined in each other's arms, mouths kissing, hearts joined; at this they were no longer apprentices. Each had such joy of the other that I couldn't relate it, and couldn't be believed except by lovers who have known the torments of love and then the joys; they will not disbelieve me. No one can understand a tale of love who doesn't know what it means; but everyone may well know that the more a person longs to have something—and it happens to come to pass as wished—the more it is treasured by the desirer when he has it. Therefore, whoever has heard this tale, if he has well understood the ills, the great pains and travails and fears had by those two who have now come to enjoyment, he must well know that they have great delight. They rejoiced together so much that they did not remember to sleep until the day came. Then they got up promptly. . . .⁶⁰ John's sisters helped Blonde to rise and prepared her very well. Then they went to hear mass, which pleased them much.

When mass had been sung the midday meal was ready; and so they all sat down, ladies and knights together. Along the tables they had plenty of delectable wines and foods. After dinner they went to dance, and danced until nones. Then the guests had to attend to other things. Having taken leave of Blonde and of John, whom they loved dearly, they went away to their own homes. John retained ten knights and his brothers, who were very dear to him. These men would keep him company and honor his beloved and stay with them and join his household.

Now John was with Blonde and was the happiest man in the world; there was nothing to worry him. And Blonde, whose heart was void of all malice and full of goodness, was for her part so happy that she lacked for nothing. In the daytime they had fine company; and at night they had so sweet a time that there is no one who could tell it and no clerk who could write it. There was nothing that troubled them anymore except the longing for peace with the good Earl of Oxford. They would want to strive hard for this. On another matter, a great desire of John's was to be a knight. When he had stayed eight days with his beloved, John said that if it pleased her he wanted

to go speak to the King. "For I want to request him from my heart to send a message to your father in England, exhorting him for God's sake to be reconciled with you and also with me. If he is entreated by the King about this, I believe that he is so good and worthy a man that we shall soon have his pardon. Afterward, however much it costs me, I shall pray the King to come at Pentecost to do me honor and to join the festivity. On that day I'll want to have a great celebration, for he will make me a knight and also my brothers, who are so dear to me."

Blonde granted this request willingly. Thereupon, having taken leave, John set out. He went off to Paris, where he found King Louis.⁶¹ He dismounted at his own lodging, then passed along to the court. He did not appear there poorly: he had ten knights with him, and also his brothers. He went straight to the King and promptly greeted him, and the King graciously said: "John, welcome! I am happy at your good fortune. I have been told the news: you have married your beloved, after at first being in her service." "Sire, you were told the truth, upon my soul! Through her great graciousness she has brought me out of the distress that would have caused my death if she had not taken pity on me. But I come to you as to the lord to whom I owe faith and honor, and I pray that you send to Oxford and entreat my lord, if he bears us ill will, for pity's sake to set it aside. If I have acted badly toward him, I did it in self-defense. I had to act as I did, or else lose my life. On the other hand, he was most generous when I left him; and he also gave me leave, if I should ever return, to help myself boldly from what he possessed. I wished to thank him for this, and so I immediately answered: if it pleased God, I should come back and take more of what was his. In this I have kept my word to him, for it has so happened that I've brought his daughter away to France, with great difficulty, and taken her in marriage. Otherwise I'd have died, for all my comfort lies in her. Now I beg you to request of him that, if he is angry with me for this deed, he overcome his resentment and give us his grace and his love. After this, I request that at Pentecost, when many great celebrations take place, you will be so good as to come to Dammartin. On that day I'll want to hold a festival. Furthermore, I ask this much: that you make me a knight, and also knight my three brothers here, who are very eager for it. Gracious King, may this affair please you!"

The King answered: "John, my friend, God has placed so much goodness in you that I am not sorry at your honor. I wish to grant your request; and further for your advantage I give you in perpetuity, upon homage, the town of which you bear the name; you will have Dammartin of my gift. Now it is my will that you be count of it. You will also have Plailly, which will be

profitable, and Montméliant in addition; it is worth six thousand pounds and more. The land I have here named will be written in the letter that will go to England; my seal will attest to the Earl that you are lord of Dammartin. He must no longer be angry with you for taking away his daughter, for she has bestowed herself well." Hearing this, John was so happy that he knelt at his feet; he would have kissed his shoe,⁶² but the King raised him up. The King promptly took his homage for the land specified, and afterward gave him seizin of it with a glove by which he gave it over.⁶³ John did not fail to thank the King for this. (The good sense that God had put in him made him have friends among good people.) The King promptly called the man who carried his seal and ordered him to seal such letters as John would desire: a charter of the county that the King had granted him, and a letter of entreaty to the father of John's beloved. This was done, since the King had said it: soon written and sealed. Then he called two knights who were among his counselors and told them that they were to go off to England and carry his letters to Oxford. They were to assure the Earl that his daughter had come to a good port in France, for she was held dear by worthy people and also was Countess of Dammartin. "Tell him that he is to rejoice, for his daughter is well situated." The knights, to whom this task was agreeable, said that they would carry out this order willingly; they were happy at John's honor. As for the names of those who were sent abroad, the one was called Sir Guy, the other Sir William. There were not two men in the kingdom who could convey a message better. They prepared for their journey that evening, for in the morning they would set out.

At this point the wise and courteous King went to have supper. John, who had all the qualities required, served before him at the table; and his brothers, who still were part of the King's household, also served up and down. They all had a great profusion of good wines, good meat, good fish. After supper until nightfall they went for enjoyment along the Seine. John needed no instruction; he knew well, that night, how to be companionable with the knights William and Guy, who would go as messengers for him. When the hour came they went to bed.

In the morning William and Guy lost no time; they woke up, put on their boots, and got ready. Their boys and squires promptly loaded their packhorses. And John and his companions had already climbed into the saddle, for he wanted to go along part of the way to keep them company. Then they set out, emerging from Paris early and riding through Saint-Denis; they did not stop before Luzarches, where their dinner was waiting. For they had sent ahead one of their cooks, practiced in this, who had

prepared everything for them; they had a meal to their liking. After dining they set out on their way. And John still escorted them until they emerged from Luzarches.

As soon as they were outside the town, the two knights out of kindness urged John to turn back. John replied that since it pleased them, he would leave them at that point. Thereupon he called Robin, who had a well-saddled horse, and told him to go with the knights as far as the sea and to say to the faithful captain that he was to take them across without harm and bring them back again. On their return, the captain was without fail to come with them to Dammartin at Pentecost. Robin answered that he would indeed tell him all this and would gladly go with the knights. Thereupon John took leave. But before that he urged them repeatedly: let them say to his lord,⁶⁴ on his behalf, that he begged mercy of him, in God's name. They said that they would indeed tell him this.

Thereupon they separated; off went the two knights toward the sea, and John set out for where love drew him. They all took the road to Dammartin, but John sent his brothers ahead to prepare the keep of which the King had made him a gift. They hastened so much that they came to Blonde at a gallop and related everything to her: the love, the honor, and the graciousness that the King had shown to John. They caused her much pleasure when they told her that she would be Countess of Dammartin without a promise,⁶⁵ that the King had sent to England in order to procure peace for her, and that at Pentecost he himself would come and make all the brothers knights. When Blonde had heard this welcome news, very softly she thanked God for it, for she well knew that He had aided her. She had such joy in her heart that it cast out all distress. And John's brothers went on to the castle and greeted the man who was there representing the King.⁶⁶ Courteously they gave him a letter in the King's name. The castellan took it and saw inside it that the King ordered him to yield to John of Dammartin the whole town and the castle. And so he did, and was pleased to do so. The news soon spread and became generally known that the town was given to John. This was very agreeable to all, for by all he was loved. In time he would be called lord.

Then John came to the castle, which was handsome, clean, and large. His beloved ran to meet him when she saw him come into the courtyard. And John entwined her in his arms and kissed her more than thirty times. Afterward they entered the hall, which was clean and tidy. The supper had been prepared by the cooks, who had made haste. After supper until night they enjoyed themselves, then went to bed when it was time. And that night John related to his beloved news that was pleasing and good to her. They had

so much to talk about and so much love to work out that, if there had been three nights in one, they would not have been weary of playing. They were much gratified by the play that Love represented to them. Toward daybreak, in great contentment, they fell asleep in each other's arms and slept until terce. Then they got up, dressed, and went to the church to hear God's service. They had great faith in God and greatly profited from it, for God increased their love every day and multiplied their honors. (The person who holds to Him is wise, for there is no good that does not come from God.)

When they had heard mass John did not want to put things off; he conveyed to relatives and cousins and also all his neighbors that at Pentecost they were to come to him to do him honor, and with them their daughters and wives. He sent for so many knights and ladies that, when they all came, there would be great joy and much noise. Afterward John, wishing all to be arranged properly, took thought for those who would serve at his feast. He prepared his cooks, butlers, provisioners, and pantlers. As a well-informed man, he knew how to assign their duties. He made himself esteemed by his good sense. Before Pentecost came, the countryside made him many presents: one person, fat oxen; another, pigs. From many sides great deliveries were made; and John supplied both fowl and venison, so much that there was abundance. Having had great preparations made, John no longer awaited anything but the day of Pentecost, which was near. But here I leave off telling about him; I must say something about the two knights who were going off across the sea to England to seek peace for John and Blonde.

According to the story, on the day's journey after John had separated from them, they rode as far as Clermont and stayed there that night. The next day they lay at Corbie, a well-situated town, and at Hesdin on the third day, but did not remain there long. They hurried on their mission so much that on the fourth day they came to Boulogne, dismounting at the lodging where John had stayed. But Robin went on to the sea; he searched here and there until he caught sight of the captain who had been of great assistance to them. He was very happy to find him, and the captain quickly recognized him. In his master's name Robin greeted him, then conveyed John's request: that he be present at the knighting ceremony and that he transport with his ship the two messenger knights. "Gladly," said the captain, pleased with the order. At that they went to where the knights were taking their ease in their lodging. Robin said to them: "Here is the man who will convey you without any trouble." The knights were very pleased that it was all arranged so soon. By then the food was ready, and they had supper; then they went to bed. At daybreak they all got up without dallying. The messengers and their equipment

smoothly went off to the ship. Then Robin asked leave of them. They gave it, courteously entreating him to be sure to tell their master not to be uneasy about the message. Robin said that he would indeed tell him so. Then he prepared to ride, and set out. He lost no time, evening or morning, until he reached Dammartin. To his lord he gave his report of the messengers, and of the captain, who would not fail to return with them. John and Blonde were very glad at this news.

As for the messengers, they entered the high sea in the vessel, which quickly took them across. Truth to tell, they dined at Dover, just at midday. The captain remained at the seashore, saying that he would await their return. Thereupon the messengers went off. Through plains and through high woods full of shadows they rode as far as London, arriving in two days. But they made no long stay there. They lay one night in the town; the next day, when they saw the light, they remounted their horses and rode so far through hills and valleys that they spent the night at six leagues from Oxford. In the morning, refreshed, they were soon back on their road. Before terce they entered the town and asked of a townsman, who could speak French, whether the Earl was in his castle. The townsman said: "Yes, indeed." At that they moved on until they came to the castle. Their stirrups were quickly held by squires who gathered down below.⁶⁷ Because the arrivals seemed to them to be French, the English squires thought they would hear news. The French knights' palfreys were stabled by their squires and their attendants; the table was soon pointed out to these men.⁶⁸ And the messengers, side by side, went in to the great palace. They found the Earl talking of his daughter to a friend of his.

In came the two messengers. Sir William took it upon himself to speak. "Sir," he said, "in the name of Him Who is the Lord Omnipotent, greeting is sent you by Louis, who is called lord of France, and by one by whom you are beloved, your son-in-law, and by your daughter, who honors our land through having entered it. For by the witness of the region, she has so much beauty and virtue that it could not be related; and John is so courteous that he has not his equal in Artois."⁶⁹ The King knows there to be so much goodness in them both that he does not wish to suffer on any account that you be at odds with them. If John has, without your consent, taken away the one who loves him, by rights he must not be blamed for it; this was done by the power of ardent love. Now they send the request that out of friendship you have pity on the two of them. And the King of France informs you that he has bestowed on them the gift of the county of Dammartin. By the faith that I owe to God and Saint Martin, I saw John take seizin of it and do homage.

And furthermore I give you to know this: the good King cherishes John so much that he will knight him at Pentecost, which is not long from now, and his three brothers as well. Now he and the King entreat that you may be so gracious as not to harbor resentment against those who desire to act rightly. And to make you more certain, here in my hand are the letters that my lord sends to you."

The Earl took them, spread them out, and perused them, knowing how to read. He saw them to be just as the knights had related, and was lifted up in joy. He responded: "Sirs, you have a very courteous king. He imparts seemliness and very great nobleness, and I shall do his will. Since my daughter is married, separating her from her husband would be cruel. Deep love has made them do this. They had to leave the country in much peril, as I understand. John had great difficulties at the seashore and gave a good account of himself, according to the reports; for with two others he overcame a hundred.⁷⁰ He himself, alone, in one night killed more than eighteen men. It seems to me that his good sense and his prowess should be counted in his favor. I have never, after hearing of it, borne anger against him. And even if today I still bore it, I should pardon him for the sake of your King, who has so noble a heart that he has made a countess of my daughter. So help me God! I am not at all displeased. Out of joy I wish to go with you. I shall go to John's knighting and shall never afterward part from the two of them, but all my life hereafter will be spent in their company. There will be no discord; always we shall have a common purse. Be welcome, both of you! You are retained with me until the preparations are made for the journey I am to undertake. We shall keep to the program so punctually that we'll all be there at Pentecost." Thereupon he called two squires. "Conduct these knights to the chamber next to the chapel," he said, "and make sure to serve them well." They obeyed his command. The knights went happily away to the chamber to take their boots off; and the Earl immediately had two goblets carried to them, none so rich from there to Baghdad; in each there were ten gold marks. Afterward he also sent them complete sets of clothing, of scarlet cloth, and good, expensive furs. In these garments they dressed themselves, and then emerged from their chamber. They returned to the palace and to the Earl, who was ruled by nobleness. They thanked him very much indeed for what he had sent them.

By this time dinner was ready, and so they sat down. But if someone wanted to list and describe what was served, it would make for too long a tale; they had many delectable dishes before the tables were taken away. For three days the messengers stayed in great ease. During this time the Earl was

intent on having his journey prepared, for he wished to stay no longer at home. He sent for as many as thirty knights, who would go with him. Valuable horses, fine sumpters laden with silk and with money—he wanted, if possible, to have a good eighty of them, half sumpters, the other half riding horses. God! So much cloth-of-gold, so many silken stuffs, so much sterling money, and so many prepared ermine skins he had bundled up and packed, there would have to be talk forever afterward of the fine presents that he would make. When everything was ready, he said to the messengers: When they wished they would all set out on the road. This was very pleasing to them, and they answered that it was high time to move. The Earl, not knowing the date or the hour of his return, was exceedingly prudent and left his land in such hands that no one might win anything there through warfare. Then, with great cheer, he departed from Oxford one morning, having with him thirty knights and more than sixty squires. The knights did not at all ride like peasants; their bridles and saddles were all alike. On account of the dust, they had matching goat-hair cloaks lined with red silk. It seemed indeed as if they were going to a feast, for they entertained themselves while riding, one by telling fine tales and another by singing songs.

I shall not relate their daily travels. They went by hills and valleys until they came down to the sea. There they did not stay long, for the captain had already made arrangements for them. He had picked out a good ship there, and into it he supervised the loading of sumpters and warhorses, nags, pal-freys, and money. In his own ship, which was very solid, he embarked the Earl of Oxford and all his company. The captain was delighted when the messengers related to him the response that they had had from the Earl, who had set out to give John honor and joy. The captain was very glad of it; going eagerly to the Earl, he gave him an account of the amazing feat through which John had crossed over. At this the Earl greatly marveled. "Surely, he must have been very weary," he answered. "He suffered much hardship in order to take my daughter across the sea. And because you aided him and saved their lives, I give you fifty silver marks." This was very pleasing to the captain.

Exchanging such words, they sailed until arriving at Boulogne, where they emerged from the ship onto the shore. Without any damage they had their horses brought out and the other equipment with them. Promptly the cooks went into the town to take lodging and engaged one so fine that there was nothing to be compared with it. Then came the Earl and all his people, in a splendid procession; many a man left his task to see them pass through the city. And the Earl dismounted at the lodging, more than a hundred

people being there when he got down, and with him the two knights, Sir William and Sir Guy. These two stayed close to him, for they were much in the Earl's favor; both for John's sake and for the King's, he honored them as much as himself. By the time their boots had been pulled off, the tables were ready, and so the company had supper with great pleasure. After this, while their beds were being made up, they listened to minstrels playing viols, for they never stayed anywhere without such folk; they had a half dozen, who gave them much delight. They enjoyed themselves until nightfall, and then went to bed.

That night they were very comfortable. In the morning they arose early and soon were on the road again. And they had the captain mount a palfrey that the Earl had given him, a very good one. (In a place he chose, he had already put the money that had been promised to him at sea. Never since that day was he anything but rich; nor was he ever again a captain except when he wanted to transport his rightful lords, the Earl or John. Afterward, all the days of his life, he was in their home and part of their household.) Having seen to his own affairs, the captain too set out; before dinner he caught up with the Earl, who, however, was not riding slowly. On that day they all dined at Montreuil, and then went on as far as Hesdin. The next day at daybreak they all remounted promptly. Then the two messengers came up to the Earl with this information: "Sir," said Sir William, "You have entered the kingdom where you will make many people happy.⁷¹ From here to Clermont there are, as you know, only two days' easy riding, and then there remain only twenty more leagues to where the feast will be held. On Friday, with no stopping, you will arrive at Clermont by nightfall, and the next day will be the eve of Pentecost. And I tell you this much: that on that day, before noon, you will be able to see John and Blonde, who will be the happiest people in the world when they learn of your coming. It cannot be known too soon, a piece of news that can give joy. And so we entreat you to let us hurry ahead along this road to cheer your daughter and John, for they will be very joyful when they hear that you are approaching."

The Earl answered that this pleased him very much. And so the two knights took leave immediately and went spurring off. With them went the captain, who would have been sorry to remain behind; and squires to serve them went along as well. On that day's journey they exerted themselves so much and went so far, by hills and valleys (they did not spare their horses), that of two days' journeys they made one. Before the moon rose that night they came to lodging at Clermont, the castle of which is on a hill. That night they rested there, and the next day arose early and rode on. They rode at such a

rapid amble that they came to Dammartin a good while before terce. At the castle they got down at the mounting block and started up the steps.

John and Blonde were coming back from the church, where they had heard the service of that High King in whom there is no fault. John recognized the messengers immediately; he rushed toward them and embraced them. He spoke courteously to them and asked: "What news?" They answered: "Fine and good. The Earl of Oxford is on his way here. You will easily have his pardon, for he loves you more than anything born; he considers his daughter well bestowed. He is coming to see you in great state. The Count of Blois has nothing so valuable as the treasure that he is bringing. His retinue is scarcely common; in it there are thirty knights and more than sixty squires, so many palfreys and so many sumpters and so much rich and expensive accoutrement that the abundance of it is overwhelming, so that we cannot reckon it up. And toward us he has been generous; he has given us ten gold marks and fine clothes and adornments; our relations never had anything like them. And so be happy; he will not delay, but will arrive tomorrow before midday." "John," said the captain, "for my part I must thank you very much, for he has given me fifty marks. He has well rewarded me for the good deeds I did you when crossing over to this side. Now be glad, for he is coming here."

John and Blonde listened to what the messengers related; now their joy was doubled. They were so happy that I couldn't tell it. They made much of the knights, and of the captain too, whom they loved. Now Blonde was reassured, since she was reconciled with her father. The news quickly spread through the town that their lady's father was coming. One person said to the other: "Now we must have the town cleaned up."

Then you should have seen the unfolding of linen cloths and the covering of streets with them, so closely that no one saw the clouds,⁷² and along the sides, from the windows, the hanging of so many counterpanes at the houses, so much cloth-of-gold and so much scarlet cloth, not lined with matting but with squirrel fur and ermine! Around Dammartin there was not a girl, boy, townsman, or townswoman whose heart did not rejoice when they saw their town looking so fine. "This festival is not a halfhearted thing," said those who saw the preparations, for John's people were making great efforts to get ready. Near the tower in an orchard they set up many pavilions. Others busied themselves as was needed. God! How Robin applied himself in preparing his own affairs, how he put his whole heart into having everything go well! (Such a lad is rare nowadays; they would rather go to the tavern or to the brothel than put their hearts into serving faithfully, and few are

now known to be deserving. Robin did not at all wish to be like such folk, but served, and from this there came to him nothing but advantages. This is how a sensible person raises himself up.)

All that day they were active at Dammartin. The next day at dawn they recommenced their labors and worked through a great part of the morning; they had done everything before terce. As soon as that hour was past, the people who were to come crowded in from all sides. If anyone then had heard horses whinnying, carts unhitching, ladies dismounting, lodgings being occupied everywhere, and minstrels assembling, he would have been amazed. With the knights who were there John went to meet the King, and Blonde went along on a well-behaved palfrey. They encountered the King outside the town and greeted him very appropriately. Lovely Blonde, the most sensible woman in the world, made him from her heart so happy a face that she did indeed seem to the King without equal in the world; he marveled at her beauty.

When John had made much of the King, and had heard that the Queen was approaching with a great train, he and Blonde broke away from the King and went to meet her. She had many maidens with her, and in her suite there were more than twenty carts. Then up came Blonde. Seeing her coming, the Queen had her conveyance stopped and had Blonde get in with her. I couldn't relate to you how agreeable the meeting of these women was; they were very soon of one mind. And John here and there went from train to train greeting ladies and knights. Those who had made their way to the Earl in England came up to the King without pausing to rest and promptly delivered to him the answer that the Earl had given, adding that he would arrive before midday. The King was very glad of it. He quickly called John and said that he would go to meet him, all the others accompanying him. John thanked him for this very much. At that they left the town. And the Queen, learning of it, felt great joy on account of Blonde's father. She had all her carts turn around, for she wanted to go to meet him. If then anyone had seen, along the files, the turning of horses and palfreys on which knights were sitting, he would have said, I promise you, that there were two thousand knights, besides the people of the town who had all come out. By her lady's leave Blonde then remounted her palfrey. More than thirty ladies, by count, mounted to keep her company. While riding they sang songs, and the knights responded. Thus they went along at a walk toward the man who was not delaying, for it seemed to him that the hour of arriving at Dammartin would never come. He had left Clermont early and had ridden through the morning. A little before terce had passed he perceived the great trains that

were all advancing to meet him. They were making the plains resound with their rejoicing. Seeing them all, the Earl said to his people that never before had he beheld so fine a throng. His own people heartily agreed with his words. The Earl knew that they were all coming his way to give him joy.

They rode until one train joined the other. The King soon learned who the Earl was, and the Earl was promptly informed of who was the King, and also the Queen. There was nothing but greetings and friendship. On both sides they dismounted, including the King and those who were with him. They made the Earl very welcome. "Good Sir Earl," said the King, "you have acted most courteously in coming into our country. For fear of you your daughter and son-in-law were dismayed, they who now are not the least among our nobility; for because of their sense and goodness I have given them a county. If they have acted badly toward you, the power of love made them do it. They both ask your pardon." Thereupon the Earl's daughter and John fell to their knees before the Earl; with clasped hands they begged his forgiveness. "Sir, for the sake of God!" said Blonde, "I'd never have known joy in this world if my beloved had died through me. Before he had comfort from me, he *was* going to die, as you well know. Love has pursued us so long that our hearts are united. We shall have cast out all care if we can succeed in keeping your goodwill."

"Sir, for the sake of God!" said John, "If it pleases you to take amends for any wrong that I have done to you, I am at your mercy. For if you put me to death, you could not do worse than the separation of me and my beloved would have done. I was forced to do all this; otherwise I'd have had to die. When you placed me in her service you put me in peril of death. But through her nobleness she has rescued me from all distress. If we had your goodwill, we'd not ask anything further. And so I beg you to bear a good heart toward us, and dispense with anything else." The Earl answered: "Now, rise! It troubles me greatly to see you so long on your knees. If it were for nothing except the sake of the King, who entreats me for this reconciliation, I should not refuse it. From my heart I put aside all anger and turn over to you all that I have." At that he lifted them up and kissed them, thereby greatly easing their hearts. As to John's two sisters and his three brothers, if I had this whole year to do it I couldn't relate the manner or the graciousness or the cheer they showed among themselves. The Queen, too, brought love and compassion, turning all anger into concord.

Thereupon they mounted their horses again and rode until they entered the town. More than ten thousand townswomen, wearing their best, had come out to greet the trains of the King, their lord, and the Queen. There you would have heard many trumpets and little horns, many drums, many

great Saracen horns, many zithers and bagpipes. It is no wonder if people were amazed at the hangings, the instruments, the other preparations, the trumpets that announced the procession, the dances that the lads put on. So many instruments were sounding that the whole town reverberated. All the streets were strewn with green grass. In such recreation and joy they kept on their way until at the castle they dismounted at the mounting block. More than four hundred men reached out their hands to hold the stirrups of their lord. Then you would have seen the halls fill up. The ladies went to the chambers and alcoves to change their clothes, and the knights went to the palace. The dinner was already prepared in the pavilions. Then they stayed no longer; the trumpeters sounded the water for washing, and there the knights assembled. The King came to the pavilions, holding Blonde by the fingers, and the Queen held the Earl's. After them, too many to count, were coming knights, ladies and maidens, priests, clerks, townspeople, and damsels.

The King took the Earl with him to wash their hands, thereby doing him honor. After them, the ladies and knights washed their hands. The King had the Earl eat at his table, and Blonde beside him. As to the Queen, without giving offence she called those who best pleased her. Afterward, generally, they all sat down; never, at one dinner, have I seen so many. Then the dishes were brought in. There were more than twelve pairs of them; I wish to make no further mention of the matter. John and his brothers served; they served everywhere, everywhere were attentive that no one lacked for anything. The diners had lost interest before the tablecloths had been removed and they had washed their hands. After this, the minstrels rushed to play the viols. And John, in order to be made a knight, went off to get into a little water,⁷³ and so did his brothers and twenty others. Whoever wished was to become a knight; so it pleased the King and the Earl. There were twenty-four by count.

After bathing they put on overgarments on top of the gowns of white linen. The Earl laced on John's sleeves,⁷⁴ then put a mantle over his shoulders; and Blonde busied herself very well in dressing his brothers. At night they went to keep vigil, as was proper, in the holy church, which was decorated with many a good and beautiful hanging. All night long a minstrel played his viol before the future knights so that the hours might not be tedious for them. The King and all the other people who were pleased to do so lay down in fine and well-made beds. And those who wished kept company that night with the squires who were to be knighted. Very expensive was the light that burned all night before them. The Earl did not move from among them, nor did his daughter; until daylight they remained with John. And John thanked God much for the honor that He had done him. The

more John's power increased, the more he humbled himself. As soon as the night was over and they perceived the dawn, they had a mass sung and then went off to rest. They slept until after sunrise. Then they promptly got up, as did the King and all the knights. It was time to hear mass. And Blonde, who caused rejoicing in those who laid their eyes on her, for they could have nothing better to look at, on that day dressed herself so well and was adorned with such great beauty that just like the sun when it rises in the crimson morning and brightens the dark air, so did the beautiful and wise lady illuminate the places around her. I could say so much about her, about her loveliness and goodness, that I'd relate nothing more.

It must not be displeasing to anyone if I bring my tale to a close. All the men and women went to the service that was done that day in holy church. When the mass had been sung, John's sword was buckled on by the King, who made him a knight. And afterward he struck him a blow on the neck, and so he immediately did to his brothers.⁷⁵ I have never yet told you their names but now I shall, for it is appropriate. The firstborn after John was always wise and prudent, strong, agile, and clever, and his name was Sir Robert.⁷⁶ The next one, not so tall, was named Sir Tristan. The youngest was strong and aggressive; his name was Sir Manessier. All these were knighted by the wise and courteous King, who for love of them knighted more than twenty others. He gave them everything that was suitable. Then they returned to the pavilions, for it was dinnertime. And so after washing they seated themselves for a sumptuous dinner made for them. Of meats there were so many dishes that I cannot tell the number; the multitude of pigs, oxen, game, fowls, and fish was overwhelming. There they all saw dishes in great plenty, and good wines, as much as they liked.

Sir John sat beside the King on that day, and his brothers with him; and with the Queen sat Blonde, the loveliest woman in the world. The servants hurried about; at each course the trumpets sounded. There were ladies serving; they were adorned with cloth-of-gold and went singing before each course. Everywhere there was such joy that it seemed to everyone that no man alive ever saw anything like it. But this was still nothing. When they had eaten, such music began that none more beautiful was ever heard; the pavilions resounded with the instruments that were there. When they had listened to them for a time, the ladies hurried off to dance. There was many a lady in finery, many a song sung; there, with a great bustle, much apparel was changed. Never was there so fine a dance. When it ended, it was time for vespers, and they went to hear them. Afterward they came back to have supper. From then until night they again had joy and pleasure. If anyone had seen the wax torches

throughout the pavilions, row on row, he would not have thought, by the look of things, that wax was sold by weight; it seemed instead that it was given away. Although the night was dark, they saw around them very clearly. It was close to dawn when they broke off dancing, but at last they separated; they could not go on forever. They all went to lie down until it was day.

That night John made a lady of her who before was a damsel.⁷⁷ They were on the way to all pleasures; always they were in growing joy. However reluctant they were, they had to get up in the morning because of those who wanted to take leave. Sir John exerted himself in entreating them to stay, but it could not be; everyone wanted to return home. By dint of great effort he kept the King and the Queen with him. And to those who were leaving, the Count⁷⁸ gave jewels of many kinds according to their merit and rank; for this, each one much esteemed and liked him. They kept the King with them for four days. Their stay was most pleasant: they went to the rivers with falcons and to the forests for game. The good Earl of Oxford was invited by the King to enjoy himself in his forests and in his castles; of all this he wished him to make free. The Earl thanked him for this, and added that never in his life would he parted from his son-in-law. He was well on in years; he would be with him, when he wished, in France, and in England when he liked. Sir John was very happy when he learned of this. And, God! What great joy Blonde had in seeing that her father agreed to whatever they would wish to do; nothing could please her so much.

On the fifth day in the morning King Louis and his people left Dammartin. This was far from pleasing to the Count and the Earl, for if they could they would very gladly have retained him. For three leagues' distance they escorted him. Off with him went the new knights who were the Count's brothers, for they had been of the King's household as long as they were squires. (So they continued as knights, until he rewarded them well, giving them wives and land; from this they were rich and powerful and always helpful toward their brother.) The Count and the Earl, and Blonde with them, took leave of the best king who ever was; he gave it to them and freely conferred his power upon them. Thereupon they separated and returned to Dammartin, while the King went off to Corbeil. I wish to speak about him no more, but to return to the two lovers, who had the leisure to remain in festival, in amusement, and in joy. They had no enemies.

The Count and the Earl were at Dammartin; they were of one dwelling and one purse. What was pleasing and agreeable to the one, the other would promptly present to him. They led a good and honest life and were at pains to honor God. Similarly, lovely Blonde was free of all vices, having no

inclination towards evildoing. Always she kept in a good way of life with her beloved, who was faithful, full of goodness, and devoid of evil. At the end of the year he married his two sisters to two great lords: the elder to the Count of Saint-Pol (who was wise and prudent), and to a brother of his the younger sister was married richly. Robin and his good captain—he wanted to marry them also. At Dammartin there were two townswomen who were rich and well mannered, were worthy to be chatelaines; they were full sisters and had much land and movable property. John brought about the marriage of these two: of the elder to Robin the clever, and of the younger to the captain. Out of his own wealth he gave these two men many coins; and they were masters of his household, for they never wearied of serving him. Then of lovely Blonde the Count had four children, the loveliest in the world (from whom later great advantage and great honor came to their lineage).

When John and Blonde had been at Dammartin for two full years, they went away to see their land of Oxford in England. There they were received with joy. The Earl of Oxford lived with his daughter a good ten years like a man of worth and with a joyous heart. After his death for a good thirty years John was Earl of Oxford and Count of Dammartin in Goële. He had two counties and a lovely wife. They did much good between the two of them. They never knew what it was like to be alone; they always had a fine household and one well instructed according to God's law. They relieved poor nuns, they married poor women, to good men wanting to seek honor they gave both money and land. They greatly honored Holy Church. Never in any way would they commit acts of villainy or arrogance. They were always of one mind. God granted them so many good things that their love did not fade, but grew and multiplied. They loved each other so much with a good heart that never, for any cause, did the one do to the other anything painful. And if some distress came upon them, one of them so comforted the other that the distress was borne lightly. On good terms with the Kings of whom they held land, they behaved faithfully toward them. They were loved by the common people, whom they treated as they ought. They were compassionate to the poor, giving them abundantly of their possessions. When they would come to stay in France they would make the whole country happy; and similarly in England. So they continued for a long while, until God, who will be without end, caused them to come to a good end.

By this romance all those who want to reach out toward honor and avoid shame can understand that everyone should practice self-control and exert body and heart so as to come to high esteem. I mean that each one should

seek honor—not through dishonest dealing but by controlling himself with his good sense, and serving with good breeding, and acting loyally, and being courteous and gentle, and knowing how to behave with all people, and speaking good words. For there are some persons who commit folly deliberately—or else a bad disposition draws them on until they engage in slander. A man who follows such a way of living is bad company. Whoever has such a tongue, may the evil fire burn him! For it stings worse than a lizard. Furthermore, whoever wants to rise high must so master body and heart as to be capable of keeping silent until speaking is appropriate. And also he must have good manners. And if it happens that he has a master, he must learn his character, for so do all sensible men. If he sees that his master is good and discerning, let him follow him to the end. And if he sees him to be unprincipled, then, I tell you this for truth, he should sensibly withdraw from him and keep away from his affairs.

Nor, for the sake of employment, let anyone neglect what he is most obliged to do: this is to fear and love God and to hate evil. A person who would neglect God for anyone would make too foolish a servant. For no one by any means can come to good if God does not grant it. It is well to hold fast to all loves that can lead to a good end. And if something of value is acquired, we should keep close in our hearts the will to spend wisely. For everyone, truly, should understand that nothing in the world is a heritage by right. If the wise person acquires something, afterward he should dispose of it well. Otherwise let him not lay a finger on anything that may belong to this world; for because of it he might fall into such ways that he would be cast into Hell, where he would have suffering without end. John through his astuteness won his beloved, and possessions in great plenty; but from the earth they took away nothing except what they gave away for God's sake. They acted as they should, for they never wearied of doing good. Now let the wise person take note of this, for he who sails well comes to a good port. It is wrong to be too idle. Now let everyone be astute in spending well and acquiring well, so that the Enemy may not put us away!

He prays badly who forgets himself.⁷⁹ Therefore I shall not forget to entreat that you kindly pray God to guard Philippe de Remi and give him a share of Paradise. For he was the one who wore himself down until he completed this tale. Here ends the story of John and Blonde. Never were there truer lovers in the world, nor will there be, as I hope. I know no more of it, to tell the truth.

