

The Jewel

In the days when Arthur the king ruled in Logres—so the tale tells—there lived a count upon the Pictish March named Palamon. He had served long under King Arthur in his wars, a doughty knight and wise in counsel, but now he dwelt in his great castle far from the court of Camelot, guarding the realm against the savage Picts of the north. There Palamon lived in honor and plenty, surrounded by valiant knights and squires, men-at-arms, menservants and maidservants, ever vigilant for the good of Logres.

Count Palamon's wife had died, alas! many years past, leaving him an only daughter, named Amanda. So much had Palamon loved his wife that he resolved not to marry again, and so Amanda grew up as his only child, the apple of his eye and the joy of his age. And indeed she grew into a maiden beautiful to behold, and likewise known for courtesy and virtue.

Before she died, Amanda's mother had given her a most precious jewel, a diamond perfect and flawless, big as an almond. The little girl kept it about her, and played with it as children do, little recking its value, but marveling at the way the sunlight played in its facets. When she was old enough to understand that it was her mother's gift, she treasured it therefore all the more, and often wore it on a little chain about her neck.

When Amanda grew to the age when maidens think of love, her father thought it time to begin to find her a husband, that he might betroth her ere some accident of war befall him. And when he had taken counsel with Father Boniface, his chaplain and a learned clerk, he called his daughter to him.

"It is full time, beloved daughter," he said, "that we find some nobleman, young or old, to whom you may be betrothed, that you not come to woman's estate friendless and undefended; for who knows whether I shall be here or no?"

"O father, dear father," replied the girl, "speak not of such things; you will long enjoy this castle and the company of those who love you."

"You speak as a simple child," he replied. "Of the chances that may hap in war none can say. Even the strongest knight will soon be felled by death, for man is mortal, short of life and born to sorrow."

"So I have heard the clerks say," said Amanda sadly, for she knew his words were true.

"Yet not of this will we speak," said the count, beginning again. "We needs must speak of your marriage as befits a gentlewoman. I have no marriage purveyed for you now, and I would be most careful of you, for you are my only child." And here he sighed—and who would not?—for his daughter was very dear to him.

"I know nothing of men and their ways," said Amanda. "I would be ruled by you in this as in all things."

"And yet I would not rule you," said the count. "Nor would I betroth you to a knight you did not love. For truly peace and concord, love and fellowship between man and wife are the surest guardians of virtue and strengths of the lineage."

"I have heard the poets sing much of love, and yet I know it not," said the girl. "How shall I know if I do love or not?"

"Alas, my daughter, that no man can say; and yet all know when they do love."

"Then will I know too?" she asked eagerly.

“Leave all in the hands of God,” replied her father. “We may speak of this more anon.”

And so he went; but Amanda now burned with curiosity, and with longing to know love. She knew not what sort of knight she might love, but to love she longed, musing by day and dreaming by night.

One night as she lay in her bed she dreamt a dream. It seemed that before her stood a beggar boy, all in rags, with sores upon his body and with twisted arms and legs. He cried out piteously, “An alms for the love of God, for I am starving and homeless! For the love of God, an alms!” Amanda’s heart was moved to compassion, and she reached for the little bag of coins she always carried, from which she was wont to give alms; but it was not there. And still the beggar boy cried out, “An alms, for the love of God!” Amanda thought, “I will give him the brooch I have upon my dress; that is precious.” But when she reached for it, it was not there. And still the beggar boy cried out, “An alms, for the love of God!” Then thought Amanda, “I have only one precious thing about me, the jewel my mother gave me,” and she drew the chain off her neck and gave it to the boy. As he took the jewel, a wondrous sight! His limbs straightened, his stature grew, his rags became a robe glowing wonderfully white. Amanda could hardly look upon him for the splendor of his countenance. And yet she knew him from the wounds in his hands and side, and the crown of thorns upon his brow.

“My Lord and Savior, be honored forever,” she exclaimed, falling at his feet.

“Rise, daughter,” he replied. “Receive back this jewel, which you have not withheld from the love of your God.” And he held out the jewel, it now shone as with the light of all the stars.

“Guard it carefully,” he continued. “And do not give it lightly, for with it goes your heart. Keep it pure and unstained for the one whom you will love.”

“And how will I know him, Lord?” asked Amanda, surprised that she was even able to speak.

“I will make that clear to you, for I know your heart’s desire. Stay ever close to me, and I will guide you.” And then he was gone.

Amanda awoke, and lo! it was dream. She arose from her bed and went to the place where the jewel lay within its coffer, and looked at it. It seemed that it shone more beautifully in the morning sun than ever before, as if it still shone with some light of its own. She clasped it to her, and drew the chain around her neck.

“I will wear this ever in my bosom,” she vowed to herself, “until I give it to the one whom I shall love.”

From that day she wore it, although within the bodice of her gown, that none might see it. Yet all remarked that it seemed her eyes glowed with a new light, and her beauty bore a new radiance.

In those days there came to the court of count Palamon a young squire from the court of Camelot, well-reported for a virtuous and trusty lad, soon to be fit for knighthood. Of his birth or parentage he said nothing, but it seemed he came from some foreign land. Nor did any, unless it were count Palamon himself, know his true name, but men called him Corfidel, the Faithful Heart. In all deeds of arms he distinguished himself, so that the count soon took him for squire of his body when he went out against the heathen Picts. When he was not on campaign or exercising, he sat and played the harp, singing betimes strange songs in outlandish tongues or telling of the deeds of chivalry of Logres. Well too he loved to sit and hear Father Boniface, and even served him at Holy Mass as if he were

some clerk or choirboy. Amanda wondered at this, seeing him serve so at Mass, and asked if he were dedicated to the clergy.

“No indeed,” he replied. “But I love to hear Father Boniface speak of Our Lord and of his chivalry, the blessed saints that sit and feast at his table in Heaven. If I attend my lord your father when he rides to battle, may I not attend our heavenly Lord without damage to my honor?”

“Truly it is no damage to your honor; but are you not a monk?”

“That I am not, nor can I be,” he replied, laughing. “Someday I must take me a wife, and with good will I shall do it, too.”

At this Amanda blushed, though she knew not why. Withal she thought it passing strange, and unseemly in a knight, that he should mix in sacred things; and so she went her way. Corfidel too had thoughts he could not speak; for already he loved her, but knew not how to tell it.

In the autumn of the year, there came a knight to the castle of the Pictish March. Truly his retinue was wondrous to behold, for he had a score of servants, and horses and mules laden with burdens rich and rare. Carpets from the east, gold and jewels in great store, robes of the finest silk—one would have thought him a merchant come from far Cathay.

“My name is Sir Saradoc,” he told the count when he had come into his hall. “I bid you do me the honor to accept these small gifts.”

“Truly your gifts are rich,” replied the count. “They are beyond the poor deserving of this castle. I pray you, why do you bring them here to me?”

“Though they are rich, my lord, they are but a small part of my wealth. For I have broad lands in Logres, yielding richly. A wealthier vavasour you will not find in all the kingdom, I think. But here is my errand. I hear you have a daughter, as yet unbetrothed; fame of her beauty and courtesy have reached to Camelot and Caerleon, to all the courts of Logres, and, I think, abroad as well. I have come to lay my wealth at her feet and yours, if I may but venture for her hand.”

“Indeed, Sir Saradoc, you ask a thing of me more precious than gold and jewels, nay, more than all the wealth of all the kingdoms of the world. She is my only child, dearer to me than life. Still, if your wealth can win her love, then she is yours. If she love you not, all the gifts that you could give will not avail with me. If you desire this venture, then accept the hospitality of this poor house. We have not the wealth of Constantinople, but what we have is before you.”

Thus they did agree, that Sir Saradoc should stay awhile within the castle, to win, if he might, Amanda’s love.

He had stayed within the castle a month, as all marveled at his wealth and courtesy. With Amanda he oft fell to talking, at some feast or while the knights and squires pursued their martial sport. She was filled with admiration at the tales of his lands, and imagined to herself what a great lady she could be, within his rich castles. Little did she mark how, the more she talked with Sir Saradoc, the less did Corfidel desire to speak with her; ere this they would often talk and jest together. And as autumn drew on, and men looked for the first signs of frost upon the fields, it fell that on an evening in the hall, Sir Saradoc spoke to Amanda and asked her for her love.

“I know not what to say,” the girl replied. “Pray leave me one day, that I may take counsel with my friends—and with my own heart. Tomorrow my father holds a feast within the hall; after that I will say you yea or nay.”

As she went to her bed, she thought much of the great riches this vavasour might offer; and yet her heart misgave her some. And as she slept she dreamed a dream.

It seemed that she sat beside Sir Saradoc within a castle more richly decked than any she had seen. Rich hangings covered the walls, and they sat on cushions of the finest silk. Of silk too were their robes, adorned with gold and silver threads, curiously embroidered. Before them lay a feast on plate of gold and silver, dainty dishes filled with spices. A perfume as of sandalwood and cedar filled the air. About the table reclined some scores of men, dressed not as knights—rich burgesses, perhaps, or merchants. And as she sat before this company, it seemed that she drew from her bosom the jewel, and gave it to Sir Saradoc. He held it in his hand and there it became as a stone in a ring about his finger. Laughing aloud, he held it up to the assembled company, and said,

“My great wealth has purveyed much, but see what I can purchase now!”

Amanda blushed, as she heard the men laugh, and looking down saw that her rich robe was gone, and she was naked, her shame exposed to all that company.

And she awoke, and lo! it was a dream.

At the feast that day, Sir Saradoc looked at Amanda with a look of hope, but she dared not look at him, for she knew not what she might say when he called on her to speak. But as they sat at table, in the midst of the meal, a messenger rushed in, his clothing torn and bloody.

“My lord count,” he exclaimed, ere even he had caught his breath, “the Picts are upon us! The raiding party is but a few furlongs from the castle.”

“How have they come so close?” demanded the count. “Have the watchers been careless of their duty?”

“I know not,” gasped the messenger. “It may be some guile, or witchcraft perhaps. But they slew some of the watchers, and carry their heads on spears as they come.”

“Let every knight arise,” ordered the count, “and arm himself at once. We must ride forth, not stopping to finish our meal. Sir Saradoc, my guest, you need not join us; but if you will, we have need of every able knight.”

At this Sir Saradoc grew pale, but he rose with the others.

“I will come,” he said, and called to his squire to saddle his horse.

Already the men-at-arms were gathering, the squires assembling equipment, the knights buckling on swords, the grooms leading forth horses from the stable. There was no time for Sir Saradoc to speak to Amanda, nor had she any mind to think on love in that present danger. The host was ready in a moment, and out they rode against the enemy. After sundown they returned, having slain some of the Picts and set the rest to flight. Of the fighting men, some were wounded; Corfidel had a wound in his side where he had been grazed by an arrow. Amanda with the other ladies of the castle set about to nurse the sick. She looked about for Sir Saradoc, but did not see him. She asked Corfidel, as she tended his wound, if he had been slain or captured.

“No indeed,” he replied, but he would say no more.

The company was still awake when Sir Saradoc returned to the castle. As he slipped into the hall, some knights arose, anger in their faces. But the count stepped between them, and addressed Sir Saradoc thus:

“False and craven knight, you shall bide no more within these walls! None compelled you to ride with us, but once you came, you were pledged to stay through any chance of battle. Yet at the first sight of the foe, you turned and fled. Have you a word to say in your defense?”

Sir Saradoc hung his head. "It was my horse, that was ever wont to shy," he began, but the knights in the hall began to growl as they were wolves at the sight of blood. The count bade them to silence.

"Your horse? Rather his rider! I have seen many horses shy, but never as this one. Gather your servants this night and depart, or any man here will have leave to slay you."

Sir Saradoc turned and went from the hall without speaking a word. None saw him go, and all were glad of his going.

On the morrow, Amanda came to where Corfidel lay abed, bringing a plaster with herbs for his wound. As she dressed it, they spoke of Saradoc who was gone.

"I ween he was no knight," said Corfidel, "but some merchant who had purchased arms for gold." But Amanda was silent, for very shame that she had even heard his suit.

"Does you wound pain you much?" she asked at last.

"It is not grave," he replied. "I would gladly suffer a thousand wounds, to have them so well tended. The true wound is not one made by any Pictish arrow."

"And what is that?" she asked, her voice trembling a little.

"The wound of love, lady," he replied. "Know that I love you, and cannot be healed until you love me in return."

"O speak to me not of love," she said. "I thought that I might love that craven—how can I then know my heart? I cannot speak of it. If you do, I will look on you no more." In truth, she despised him in her heart, for he was, as it is said, too common to her eye. And so she left him, going in great confusion of heart.

Corfidel soon rose from his bed and once again rode with his lord. Many a day they went out against the foe, until he was vanquished and the marchlands were once again safe.

In this they had the aid of a new knight, a stranger who came among them in the autumn. He was a warrior bold and strong, who had fought the heathen in the East. His face was dark from the sun of those parts, and his face and arms bore the scars of battle. None knew his name, for he said he had a vow not to tell it. On his shield he bore a red swan on gold, and therefore he was called the Knight of the Red Swan. Although his ways were strange, the count was glad of his aid, and by Shrovetide the enemy was driven far away.

The Knight of the Red Swan had two servants, dark uncouth men from the East, who kept a pavilion outside the castle, where their master slept most nights. When the men asked him why they did not enter the castle, he replied that his servants were paynim, and would enter no Christian house. In truth the Knight himself was seen but rarely at divine service. The count inquired of this as once they sat at table in the hall.

"I am unused," he replied, "Through long campaigning in the field, where clerks are far behind, yea even Christian folk."

But Corfidel, who stood beside his lord, said, "Our lord king Arthur, when he is on campaign, ever has his chaplain with him, for he says that otherwise God's blessing on his arms is forfeit."

A sharp look came over the Knight's dark face. "What knowest thou of campaigning in the East, clerkling? Speak rather when thy beard has grown."

Corfidel's hand moved as if to his knife, but he thought better of it, and kept silence as befits a younger to an older man.

Amanda heard his words, and to her they were good. For beside the outlandish tales of the Knight of the Red Swan, Corfidel's clerkly ways were as insipid as an egg

without salt. She loved to hear him speak of his adventures in the East, his deeds of daring in the face of the paynim foe, to hear tales of the many strange and wonderful sights and countries he had seen there.

Truly this knight was no craven, as he proved all that winter in his own body against the Picts. As Corfidel stayed close by the count in the heat of battle, as befits a squire, the strange knight rode far ahead, winning glory for himself, and rich plunder beside. Ever he was wont, after some fight, to bestow on her some curious Pictish brooch or bracelet, taken from the body of some chieftain. Soon Amanda's heart thrilled at the sight of him, and she longed for his approach. When peace came, and the promise of spring, she passed even more time in his company, marveling at his tales. Corfidel grew jealous and silent, but little did she care. Nor did she think much on the jewel she carried ever in her bosom.

On the eve of May, the Knight spoke to her in the hall.

"Tomorrow is the day of May, when all the maidens go a-Maying. Will you go too, lady?" At this she nodded.

"Come early to my pavilion, bringing your garlands," he said. "Precious gifts and great honor will I give, for I count you the fairest maiden in all Logres."

At this she nodded again, and said, "Sir, I will come."

But as she went to her bed, her mind was confused and doubtful.

That night in her bed, Amanda dreamed a dream.

It seemed that she stood before the pavilion of the Knight of the Red Swan, holding in her hand a single flower, a lily white and fair. He stood before her and took it gently from her hand. Then he took her hand and led her into the pavilion. When they had passed the door, he seized her in both his hands. Tearing open the bodice of her gown, he took the jewel from about her neck, breaking the chain. He laughed as he threw it to the ground, and trampled it in the dirt. She knew not what he would do next, but before her eyes the tent seemed to spin and she fell into a swoon.

Then she awoke, and lo! it was a dream.

Trembling, her hand crept to the jewel about her neck.

It was still there on its chain. She lay still in her bed as rosy dawn set all the stars to flight.

When her maid came into her chamber, to ask if she would go a-Maying, she replied, "I will not go; rather I will to Holy Mass, and then to my prayers." And so she did.

That day, count Palamon held a tournament for all his knights, and any that might come. He himself sat by to watch, his daughter and his squire by his side. The Knight of the Red Swan rode boldly up to claim some token of Amanda. But she would give him nothing.

"Behold the deeds that I will do this day," he said to her. "Then will you no longer be dangerous to me."

Truly he proved himself that day the finest fighter on the field, for hardly had the day passed noon, but he had unhorsed every knight there. As he turned in triumph before all that assembly, a new knight rode up to the field. His horse and armor were dusty as if he had come from a long journey, and on his shield he bore a pelican drawing blood from his own breast.

"Can this be Sir Bors?" exclaimed the count.

"It is indeed," replied Corfidel, "unless I much mistake. For he bears Bors's arms: a pelican in his piety."

“Well met, noble knight of the Round Table!” called the count to the new arrival. “What errand brings you here to the Pictish March?”

“I am in quest of a felon knight,” replied Sir Bors. “And here I find him, in the field before your castle.”

“And who is this?” asked the count.

“This man here,” said Sir Bors, pointing out the Knight of the Red Swan. “A false knight, a deceiver and dissembler, whom the knights of the Table have outlawed and whom our noble king has banned.”

“This knight has served me well,” protested the count, amazed. “All this winter long he has fought the Picts most bravely and with great skill.”

“Yet false he is, and felon.” At this the knight had ridden close by to hear the words the men spoke. “Yea, thou I mean, thou felon knight. Thou art none other than Sir Euric the Black, under the ban of the Church for thy crimes. I charge thee for a seducer of maidens and wives, who hast besmirched thy knighthood with adulteries and fornications, and soiled thy hands with the blood of noble ladies.”

“Thou liest, hound of the King Arthur,” said the knight, “And thy blood shall pay for it.”

“Do you deny your name?” asked the count.

“Nay, not my name,” replied Sir Euric. “But I am no felon.”

“With what crimes do you charge him? These are heavy words.”

“Lord count,” replied Bors, “Who can name all his crimes? He carried off the daughter of the count of South Wales, and abandoned her in shame. Further he carried off the wife of the castellan of Glastonbury, and killed her when she would not yield to his vicious importunities. With fair words and presents he seduced the three virgin daughters of Count Merovagius, and left them all with child. Moreover, we have report that in lands beyond the sea, in Ireland, Neustria, Benwick, and Spain, he has committed seductions, felonies, and murders.

“Therefore, thou false vicious felon, ere this sun is one hour older, I shall prove upon thy body the truth of these words.”

Amanda, looking on, was filled with fear for the danger into which she had so lately come, and shame that she had ever hearkened to Sir Euric.

Without any further words, then, the two adversaries took their places in the lists. So hard rode they at one another that when they met they both fell from their horses to the ground. Then they joined in combat sword to sword. The blows fell hard, so that it was a wonder either could stand. Sir Euric struck mighty blows against Sir Bors’s shield, but that knight replied with yet greater fury, until he struck so hard upon Sir Euric’s helmet that his head was cloven to the shoulders and he lay dead upon the ground.

“You have been delivered, my Lord, from a great peril,” said Sir Bors to the count. “For no gentlewoman, nay, nor wench, would have been safe within your castle if he had bided any longer here. You have a daughter, I think; look well to her, for he would surely have sought the jewel of her fair maidenhood.”

At this the count looked sharply at Amanda.

“Nay, father,” she stammered—though she blushed for very shame—“by my faith he never touched me, though fair words spoke he oft.” And the count believed her, as well he might.

That evening Amanda remained in the chapel after Vespers had been sung. She knelt before the rood whereon the image of the blessed Savior hung, and wept bitter tears for her folly.

“What peril to have listened to his words! Woe is me that I should have thought to love so false a knight! Alas, when will I love one who is true?”

At this she drew from her bosom the jewel on its chain, and held it up before the rood. Full many a tear fell upon it, yet it seemed to glow as with a light within. She thought she heard a voice come from the rood, or from the jewel, she could not tell:

“He will come to you with my Name.”

And all was silent. She looked about her, and she was alone.

As she walked to her chamber, she heard a distant voice singing to the sound of the harp. It was Corfidel, and he sang a song of love:

*Remains within my heart some drop of spirit
Distilled in love's alembic? Dreams gave brought
Its song so sweet and far; still I can hear it
Echo on the sere stones cold with thought.
If, too importunate, I have not riven
The vial that holds that essence in your heart
That melts the dry and warms the cold, once given,
And makes the spring to come and life to start—
O pour it out, and on us both shall rise
The life of light you hide behind your eyes.*

Sir Bors stayed a week within the castle, in high honor both for his own deeds, for he was of the noblest knights of Logres, and for the sake of noble court of king Arthur. Ever he seemed deep in counsel with the count, but to what policy they would not say. Amanda took but small delight in all this time, for her heart was downcast, so shamed she felt. One morning as she walked upon the parapet, she came upon Corfidel.

“Lady, may I speak to you?” he asked. “You seem most melancholy.”

“So indeed I am,” she replied. “For I have been the most foolish of maidens.”

“Think not of it,” he said, and walked beside her awhile. Then he spoke again.

“I ride tomorrow to King Arthur's court,” he said. “Sir Bors will take me thither to be dubbed a knight.”

“May your have great honor and fame in arms,” she said, almost smiling. She might have spoken more, but kept silent.

“It has ever been my desire to be a knight,” he said. “And full glad I am that it is the great Sir Bors who brings me to court. For truly his fame extends throughout Logres and to the lands beyond, not only for skill in arms, but for devotion and virtue as well. Who does not know the fame of Bors and his wife Elaine, the very paragons of wedded love and chastity? Truly this is the reason he was sent to pursue that felon.”

Amanda made no reply to this, but walked beside him in silence.

“Ah, lady,” he continued, “were I wed to you, it would ever be my study to be so loyal and devoted to you. For as Christ is my Savior, I love you from the heart. Can you but love me in return?”

At this Amanda's heart beat hard within her, and she felt herself grow faint. She thought she heard again the voice from the rood. The thought that Corfidel would leave

the castle made her think more tenderly of him than she had, imagining that she might be parted from him forever. Then she thought of his fidelity, beside the perfidy of the knights that she had lately seen.

“If you can love so poor and foolish a maiden as I am—” she said, and as she did she drew from her bosom the jewel on its chain. Taking it from about her neck, she laid it in his hand. “Receive this token of my love, for all that it is worth.”

“It is more precious to me than my life,” he said, and put it safe within his tunic. It seemed that his eyes glowed with some light from within.

“Now I may tell you my true name,” he said. “I am Conrad, king’s son of Neustria, sent to Logres to learn the profession of knight, for my father is a close ally of the Arthur the king. All his kingdom one day will be mine, and you, lady, shall be my queen.”

Then he took her gently in his arms and kissed her in the sweet sunshine of the spring morning.

And so their faith was plighted, one to the other. And as the tale tells it, they were soon wed, and reigned long in Neustria as king and queen, having riches and honor, and fame before all who heard of them.